Politically Unbecoming

Critiques of "Democracy"
and Postsocialist Art from
Europe

Anthony Gardner

M.A., LLB (Hons) (Melb)

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Volume One

Declaration

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and, to the best of my knowledge, it contains no material previously published or written by another person, or substantial proportions of material which have been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma at UNSW or any other educational institution, except where due acknowledgment is made in the thesis. Any contribution made to the research by others, with whom I have worked at UNSW or elsewhere, is explicitly acknowledged in the thesis. I also declare that the intellectual content of this thesis is the product of my own work, except to the extent that assistance from others in the project's design and conception or in style, presentation and linguistic expression is acknowledged.

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Abstract

This thesis presents a theoretical and historical account of the means by which artists have responded to politics of democracy since the late-1980s. Three questions guide the direction of this analysis. Firstly: why, during its apparent apotheosis in recent years, have numerous artists critiqued democracy as the political, critical and aesthetic frame within which to identify their work? Secondly: how have artists undertaken this critique? Thirdly, and most importantly: what aesthetic and political discourses have artists proposed in lieu of the democracy that they critique?

Particular case studies of art from Europe help us to address these questions, for Europe has been an important crucible for vociferous, and often fraught, arguments about democracy in recent aesthetic, philosophical and political discourses. The first chapter of this thesis rigorously contextualises these discourses in relation to historical mobilisations of democracy since the Iron Curtain's collapse. Relying on writings by Pat Simpson, Slavoj Žižek, Alain Badiou and others, I chart the significant imbrications of political ideology, philosophy and what I call 'aesthetics of democratisation' from the end of European communism, through the democratisations of postcommunism to the militarised democratisations of Iraq and Afghanistan after 2001. Notions of democracy shift and change during this period, becoming what Žižek calls a problematic 'transcendental guarantee' of assumed values and self-legitimation.

These shifting values in turn propel the concurrent critiques of democracy that are the subjects of the five subsequent chapters: Ilya Kabakov's 'total' installations; Neue Slowenische Kunst's mimicry of the nation-state during the 1990s; Thomas Hirschhorn's large-scale works from the late-1990s onwards; Christoph Büchel and Gianni Motti's collaborative ventures; and the co-operative practices of Dan and Lia Perjovschi. Through examination of the artists' installations and voluminous writings, and based largely on archival research and interviews, this thesis explores how these artists' aesthetic politics emerge from the remobilisation of nonconformist art histories, through self-instituted contexts and alternative models for art production, exhibition and interpretation. These models, I argue, counter our usual understandings of art practice and its politics in Europe. They cumulatively assert 'postsocialist aesthetics' as an impertinent, yet urgent, prism through which to analyse contemporary art.

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Introduction

Genesis of the Thesis, Basis in a Myth

This thesis about art, democracy and some of the tangled relations between them begins with a story of scandal. It begins in 1994, when two European curators – Jan Åman from Stockholm and Viktor Misiano from Moscow – first drafted an exhibition that, though modest in resources, was ambitious in design. Sustained across two years of meetings, dinners and discussions, Åman and Misiano's aim was to develop convivial relations between Eastern and Western European artists in ways that would not have been thinkable, let alone possible, less than a decade beforehand. Together, the curators aspired to weave networks between art scenes that, for over forty years, had been almost entirely isolated by Cold War geopolitics. Where once there had been hostility, scepticism and even paranoia about the unknown, there would now be co-operation and friendship. Where political and physical barriers had stood to keep cultures and peoples apart, a platform for dialogue would emerge to unite them once again. These were undoubtedly lofty ambitions. Through processes of joint decision-making and collaborative art practices, the exhibition would emblematise (or so the curators hoped) the cultural conditions of Europe in the 1990s. More importantly still, they would *enact* the conditions of what Misiano called 'a new Europe': a Europe of physical, intellectual and other forms of exchange conducted between residents of a continent that he believed was no longer bisected by ideology; a Europe that had become 'post-ideological' following the collapse of Soviet communism between 1989 and 1991.[1]

After two years of preparation, the number of exhibition venues had contracted to one – the Färgfabriken cultural centre in Stockholm, of which Åman was the director – while the initial list of artists from Sweden and Russia had expanded to include Maurizio

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[1] Viktor Misiano, 'Interpol – The Apology of Defeat', in Eda Čufer and Viktor Misiano (eds.), *Interpol: The Exhibition that Divided East and West* (Ljubljana: IRWIN and Moscow: Moscow Art Magazine, 2000), p.44; and Misiano, 'Viktor Misiano's Response to the Letter to the Art World', *ibid*, p.25.

Cattelan from Italy and the New York-based artist, Gu Wenda. An emigrant from Shanghai, Gu identified himself as a hybrid of China and the United States, communism and capitalism. This hybridity characterised his installation for the exhibition as well, an installation designed to fill the Färgfabriken's central hall as its main attraction. For *United Nations: Sweden and Russia Monument* (1996, fig.i.1), Gu had collected hair from people across Sweden and knitted into it sheets that, when strung together, formed the walls of an eighty-four foot-long tunnel running through the gallery. A rocket, borrowed from the Swedish Royal Air Force, hung to one side; a flag lay suspended above the installation. According to Gu, 'this work [would] stand as a referee of cultural confrontation' between "East" (Russia) and "West" (Sweden), occupying a privileged and somewhat mystical position beyond these divisions.[2] In reality, however, Gu's political symbolism was strained, or even dubious. The lack of any non-Swedish assistance, in either the installation's preparation or the materials used, disregarded the exhibition's remit of cultural co-operations between Sweden and Russia. And despite the reference to the United Nations in the work's title, it was the distinctively blue and yellow flag of the European Union – a union that, in 1996, still excluded most formerly-communist countries – that Gu wove into the installation's design.

Nonetheless, as artists and curators applied the final touches to their works, and despite the usual frustrations associated with installation and preparation – from funding disappointments to ego management – the Färgfabriken gave the appearance of being a sign, a positive symptom, of productive collaboration between the re-united blocs of Europe. Consternation among many of the artists about Gu's symbolism, and particularly his filtration of international unity through predominantly Western tropes, seemed to have subsided; cross-cultural dialogues had indeed developed, between people and artworks alike.[3] But within hours of the first guests arriving, and in the many vigorous debates that have occurred in the years since, it became clear that the exhibition would be a marker of very different political and aesthetic circumstances to what was initially intended.

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[2] Wenda Gu, 'The Cultural War', in *ibid*, p.39.

[3] This is reflected in many of the comments by the exhibition's participants, in *ibid*, pp.5-19.

For in Stockholm on February 2, 1996, two of the Russian participants, Oleg Kulik and Alexander Brener, transformed this ambitious exhibition into a significant complication for contemporary art. Their actions were stark. Kulik, while performing as a dog during the vernissage, savaged an audience member, Lennart Lindqvist, and was arrested by police (fig.i.2). Brener destroyed Gu's centrepiece, tearing it to the ground before fleeing the scene (fig.i.3). Retaliation came within a week on the part of eighteen non-Russian critics, curators and artists. In an open letter dispatched to numerous international art periodicals and institutions, and published in such journals as *Flash Art*, they condemned Brener and Kulik for presenting 'hooliganism and skinhead ideology' and 'an attack against art, democracy and freedom of expression'.[4] The parties' ensuing and often bitter exchanges further eroded the exhibition's purpose of manifesting a convivial alternative to Cold War polarities. As the old East-West axes awoke from their slumber of repression, the exhibition, titled *Interpol*, sank into contemporary art infamy.

While *Interpol* provides the genesis of this thesis – as both a spur for my initial research, and an introduction to the analyses that follow – this is not because the exhibition has become a mythic event in contemporary art circles, as Misiano argues, in which hyperbolic rhetoric of 'terrorist bombings' and 'world-saving hair' has often outweighed scholarly analysis.[5] Nor does *Interpol*'s significance reside in the frequent reduction of Kulik's and Brener's actions to symptoms of communist decay: pseudo-ethnographic symptoms that have included the artists' alleged reclamation of the Soviet Union's former power; that their acts were, in Gu's words, a 'reflect[ion of] the reality of Russia today – politically, economically and socially degenerated, a chaotic, frustrated society';[6] or that they mimicked the rampant and often aggressive individualism that emerged in

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[4] 'An Open Letter to the Art World', in *ibid*, p.23.

[5] Viktor Misiano, 'Myth of the Interpol', in *ibid*, pp.16-19. The two further quotations are taken from the same catalogue. The first claim is Gu's, in 'The Cultural War', in *ibid*, p.40; the second recrimination belongs to one of the Swedish participants, Carl Michael von Hausswolff, recounted in 'Interpol as I Remember It Now', in *ibid*, p.13.

[6] Gu, *ibid*, p.40.

postcommunist states like Russia during their rapid neoliberalisation in the early-1990s.[7] Instead, *Interpol* makes explicit a fundamental, if still overlooked, paradox within contemporary art discourse. This paradox emerges from the parties' seemingly incommensurable stances sharing the same justification: that their actions were taken in the name of democracy. On the one hand, the open letter's signatories refused to recognise this 'attack against… democracy', with "democracy" implicitly defined as an enriching and convivial compromise between two poles that was the curators' initial aim – an optimistic "third way", we might call it, that disavowed disagreement.[8] Conversely, Brener claimed that his dissent was '[r]adical democracy in action', an argument that, though taken to an extreme, has its roots in the writings of various political theorists, such as Chantal Mouffe and Ernesto Laclau, that this thesis also investigates.[9] Despite their significant differences, then, both parties relied on the signifier "democracy" as a means to trump and dismiss the actions of the other. It was at once a site of disputed meaning *and* a means to justify one's actions through an apparently universal arbiter; a contested signifier *and* one thought capable of prevailing automatically over the arguments of others, as though immune from challenge and deconstruction despite that contestation. In short, it was "democracy" that had become something of a myth and not, *contra* Misiano, *Interpol* itself.

This paradox is the focal point of my research – a paradox in which "democracy" is invoked as the ideological justification for different or even antinomic intents, as seemingly the only political discourse through which to argue those intents, and as a signifier of disputed yet indisputable politics that demands reflexive analysis and its

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[7] Misiano, 'Myth of the Interpol', in *ibid*, pp.17-18; Joseph Backstein in Kathrin Romberg, Joseph Backstein and Johanna Kandl, 'It's a Better World: Russian Actionism and Its Context', in Joseph Backstein and Johanna Kandl (curators), *Secession: It's a Better World: Russian Actionism and Its Context*, exh. cat. (Vienna: Secession, 1997), pp.11-12. For a critical analysis of these pseudo-ethnographic readings, see Pat Simpson, 'Peripheralising Patriarchy? Gender and Identity in Post-Soviet Art: A View from the West', *Oxford Art Journal*, 27/3 (2004), pp.396-398.

[8] On artistic and political 'compromise' as a curatorial goal, see Misiano, 'Interpol – The Apology of Defeat', in Čufer and Misiano (eds.), above n.1, p.43. On "third way" politics as a compromise between polarities, see Anthony Giddens, *The Third Way: The Renewal of Social Democracy* (Malden: Polity Press, 1999).

[9] Alexander Brener, 'Ticket that Exploded', in *ibid*, p.10.

placement within quotation marks. My premise is that this paradox is central to comprehending how art has engaged with politics since the late-1980s. To an extent, the perception of "democracy" as an all-pervasive frame for thinking through contemporary politics is neither novel nor surprising. The conservative American writer Francis Fukuyama, for instance, infamously argued that the Iron Curtain's demise not only revealed liberal democracy to be victorious in the Cold War, but that it spelled the end of any ideological conflict with "democracy" and thus the 'end of history'.[10] What *is* surprising is that, even as Fukuyama's critics voice their disapproval of his theory, many still support its fundamental claim by invoking "democracy" as the ultimate goal of their critique. Indeed, "democracy" has become *the* master signifier of global geopolitics. In the aftermath of both the Cold War and the terrorist attacks on the United States on September 11, 2001 – better known as the events of 9/11 – "democracy" has served as a signifier legitimising whatever is conducted in its name: from the neoliberalisation of the world's economies that is endorsed and enforced by organisations such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, to the numerous mass protests held in opposition to that economic globalisation; and from the war in Iraq that began in March 2003, to its various critiques as a unilateralist and anti-democratic invasion. Each position claims to promote and enact the "democracy" that is lacking elsewhere, whether in another country or one's own national government. On the level of discourse, at least, "democracy" has emerged as universal after all, with a presumed ethical value that is difficult to counter and a consensus as the only legitimate model of politics remaining after 1989. But as this political ideology has become hegemonic to the point of being mistakenly mythologised as post-ideological, discourses of "democracy" have also become entwined in a Gordian knot, with radically opposed agenda finding their rationalisation in the same co-optable signifier.

As the example of *Interpol* suggests, the field of art has not been immune from entanglement in such knots of "democracy" either. This is particularly true when art has intersected with geopolitical tropes or agenda, an intersection that has grown increasingly

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[10] Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (London and New York City: Penguin, 1992).

important in contemporary art practice and discourse. British critic Claire Bishop, among others, has accurately diagnosed this intersection through her notion of art's 'social turn', in which much recent practice has sought to intervene in existing social relations, to regain social relevance, amid contemporary globalisation.[11] Yet this is not a strictly contemporary phenomenon. Historians of American modernism, for example, have long revealed how art can be a weapon of the state in the midst of times of crisis. As Serge Guilbaut and others have proven, this was central to the reception of American Abstract Expressionism during the Cold War, both within the United States and especially abroad. Works such as Jackson Pollock's drip paintings, along with commentaries championing the "liberty" of their production, were important tools for promoting and propagandising American ideologies of "freedom" and "democracy" to international audiences. They became, as Guilbaut has written, emblems in America's push for global hegemony at the height of Cold War tensions, 'beneath [whose] humanitarian phraseology [lay] the mailed fist of imperialism'.[12] I propose that such strategic uses of art and humanitarian language have propelled the politicisation of art beyond the Cold War as well. The proliferation of similar tropes of "freedom" and "democracy" during more recent waves of globalisation, as well as global imperialism, must be understood in relation to Cold War histories and their lingering effects into the twenty-first century.

It is for this reason that the entanglements between art and politics that Guilbaut analysed in the late-1970s are also, to a large degree, the focus of this thesis. My task is to understand why a number of artists, and especially European artists, have critiqued those discourses as the political, cultural and aesthetic parameters within which to identify their work. This could be considered a provocative analysis. To return to *Interpol* once more, questioning prevalent notions of "democracy" risks condemnation as anti-democratic and

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[11] Claire Bishop, 'The Social Turn: Collaboration and Its Discontents', *Artforum*, 44/6 (February 2006), pp.178-183.

[12] Serge Guilbaut, *How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art: Abstract Expressionism, Freedom and the Cold War*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1983), p.191. See also Max Kozloff, 'Abstract Painting During the Cold War', *Artforum*, 11/9 (May 1973), pp.43-54; and Eva Cockroft, 'Abstract Expressionism: Weapon of the Cold War', *Artforum*, 12/10 (June 1974), pp.39-41.

unethical: a case of either you are with the "democratic West" or against it.[13] However, in art (as in politics), this simplistic binary thinking ignores the stakes of disagreement, stakes that inform the three central questions that are investigated in this thesis. Firstly, why would certain artists be sceptical of appeals to "democracy" since the collapse of European communism? Secondly, how have artists undertaken their critiques? And thirdly, what alternative aesthetic and political discourses have artists proposed in lieu of the "democracy" that they critique?

These questions frame my analysis of a selective range of artists working from the 1980s to the early twenty-first century, and who spent their formative professional years in either Eastern or Western Europe. From Ilya Kabakov to Thomas Hirschhorn and Dan and Lia Perjovschi, each of the artists examined here has intended to re-evaluate art's relations to "democracy" in ways that, though initially appearing impertinent, may well be of utmost importance. As we shall see, their critiques of art's channelling in one political direction – a direction that has increasingly become an excuse for political expediency, exclusivity and even neo-colonialism – instead proffer an array of productive and alternative aesthetic politics that can develop through art, for art and thence perhaps from art. By analysing these critiques, this thesis seeks to move beyond Alexander Brener's predicament of how to articulate disagreement without sublating it within pre-determined ideological terms. It is precisely this sublation into readymade categories and their historical and geopolitical signifieds, in other words, that I believe the artists in this thesis have sought to counter.

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[13] If this reductive discourse has returned to familiarity in the lexicons of many national polities since 2001, it is equally resurgent within academic disciplines such as political science, as John S. Dryzek and Leslie Holmes, among others, have pinpointed: see John S. Dryzek and Leslie Templeman Holmes, *Post-Communist Democratization: Political Discourses across Thirteen Countries* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp.14-15.

Definitions, Disagreements, Argument and Methodology

While this thesis' aims can be considered both pressing and provocative, the research paths to which they point are potentially mired in complications. Foremost among these is the fact that any analysis of "democracy" after the Second World War will encounter discourses so vast and diffuse as to be practically impossible to grasp in full. This is especially evident with the post-9/11 invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq, the "democratisations" of which have been shadowed by an ever-burgeoning industry of academic and popular literature that risks bursting bookshelves at their hinges. Yet these are but two examples in a series of postwar "democratisation" programmes that – conducted in Latin America, Asia, Europe and Africa – have been so expansive as to spawn their own branch of political science and anthropological studies. This is the enormous field of Transitology, which takes as its subject the political and economic transitions of nation-states from one form of government (usually authoritarian) toward capitalist "democracy". As important analysts of the field such as Valerie Bunce and Katherine Verdery have recognised though, Transitology is not a neutral discipline: it often assumes a teleological progression driving political change.[14] The reality of variations between different countries shifting away from political and economic regimes tends to become lost, hidden beneath assumptions that such transitions will always be transitions to liberal democracy. Conclusions are formed and judgments made about a country's or a culture's presumed progress on the road to "democracy" before fieldwork data have been sufficiently analysed. As both Bunce and Verdery argue, any study of "democracy" and of cultures in "transition" must thus be particularly attentive to results that may deviate from disciplinary norms, for such unexpected results can sometimes lead to alternative trajectories of cultural transformation. We must therefore be open and

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[14] Valerie Bunce, 'The Political Economy of Postsocialism', *Slavic Review*, 58/4 (Winter 1999), pp.756-793. See also Katherine Verdery's analyses of Transitology's teleological language in Katherine Verdery, 'Theorizing Socialism: A Prologue to the "Transition"', *American Ethnologists*, 18/3 (August 1991), pp.419-439; and Michael Burawoy and Katherine Verdery, 'Introduction', in Michael Burawoy and Katherine Verdery (eds.), *Uncertain Transition: Ethnographies of Change in the Postsocialist World* (Lanham and Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers Inc, 1999), pp.1-17.

receptive to such alternatives so as to identify, in Bunce's words, how 'diversity [can] be the cause for the generation, as well as the testing, of theory'.[15]

This thesis adheres to the spirit of remaining open to a subject's difference from ideological presumptions. But in order to do this, in order to test as well as generate theories without being overwhelmed by the range of subjects and differences in contemporary art, it is necessary to delimit the thesis' scope. As a consequence, I have chosen to examine "democracy" in relation to specific case studies within postsocialist art from Europe. This narrowed scope raises two further points that require immediate attention. The first relates to borders: why limit myself to Europe? On one level, Europe has proven to be an unparalleled crucible for vociferous, and often fraught, arguments about "democracy" in recent aesthetic, philosophical and political discourses. Its particular histories at the centre of the Cold War, communism and cultural restructuring have revealed complex engagements between art and politics that have not, as yet, been fully examined. At the same time, though, it is difficult not to perceive this geographical focus as rebuilding arbitrary borders and frames that the artists in this thesis, among many others, have fought hard to cross or tear down. My act of delimitation, in other words, threatens to reinforce the kind of pre-determined constraints that the artists have sought to contest. By analysing their works, however, this thesis seeks to cross and exceed those borders, highlighting them in order to articulate how more mobile understandings of aesthetics and politics have emerged within certain examples of contemporary art. Through these processes of mobilisation, artists and aesthetics alike have prised open new modes of dialogue between cultures, contexts and histories in the wake of the Cold War.

This leads to the second point to consider and which relates to terminology: why do I refer to *postsocialism* and not the seemingly interchangeable term *postcommunism*?[16] The

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[15] Bunce, *ibid*, p.793.

[16] This exchangeability is evident in the writings of anthropologists such as Bunce and the art criticism of Jana and Jiri Sevčik and Rastko Močnik, among others: see Bunce, *ibid*, pp.756-793; Jana and Jiri Sevčik, 'Mapping Czech Art', in IRWIN (eds.), *East Art Map: Contemporary Art and Eastern Europe* (London: Afterall, 2006), pp.181-188; and Rastko Močnik, 'EAST!' in the same volume, pp.343-348.

reasons are philosophical and geopolitical. While the Soviet bloc existed, communism referred to the political parties that (at least in Europe) governed the nations to the east of the Iron Curtain. Socialism was instead a political philosophy that communist parties claimed to promote and, moreover, a philosophy of great relevance beyond communist governments as well. As theorist Peter Osborne claims, socialist philosophies were equally pivotal to countries and cultures west of the Iron Curtain – to politics opposed to capitalism and the oppression it can engender, to politics that sought instead the equitable redistribution of wealth across society and thus, potentially, the emancipation of society from socio-economic subjugation.[17] The 1980s in the West, however, were largely characterised by the subjugation of socialism to neoliberal economic policies, most notably under the governments of Margaret Thatcher in Great Britain, Ronald Reagan in the United States or Bob Hawke in Australia. Under their political authority, socialism's tenets of state-based mediations of markets, industries and welfare services gave way to the apparent extrication of the state from the regulation of capitalist markets, the mass privatisation of state-owned industries and organisations, and rhetorical claims that a free market was equivalent to (indeed, created) a free populace.[18] "Postsocialism" therefore refers to a condition beyond the geographical borders of countries that underwent decommunisation. It refers to a period that began roughly in the early- to mid-1980s and that was marked, as the political scientist Chris Hann argues, by 'the general loss of faith in socialism as an "ideological system"' on both sides of the Iron Curtain, whether as official party politics or as an alternative to capitalism's ever-expansive, colonising intent.[19]

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[17] Among numerous similar arguments, see Peter Osborne, *Socialism and the Limits of Liberalism* (London: Verso, 1991).

[18] I say 'apparent extrication' because, as Slavoj Žižek rightly notes, the state still needed to authorise and regulate the deregulation of markets, institutions and industries. Neoliberalism is thus premised on a paradox of its own: it requires the state to intervene in and sanction the withdrawal of state intervention in capital markets: see Slavoj Žižek, 'The Prospects of Radical Politics Today', in Okwui Enwezor (ed.), *Democracy Unrealized: Documenta 11_Platform 1* (Ostfildern-Ruit: Hatje Cantz, 2002), pp.67-85.

[19] Chris Hann, 'Farewell to the Socialist "Other"', in C. M. Hann (ed.), *Postsocialism: Ideas, Ideologies and Practices in Eurasia* (London and New York City: Routledge, 2002), p.6.

This non-localisable condition signifies "postsocialism" as an appropriate marker for this thesis. If "postcommunism" has gained much currency in contemporary art history and criticism, particularly in the writings of Boris Groys, Robert Fleck or Eda Čufer,[20] it is because of the disciplines' increasing focus on (and thus visibility of) artists from Central and Eastern Europe. This is an undeniably important shift in contemporary art discourse, a development with which this thesis is thoroughly in dialogue. My argument seeks to expand that dialogue, though, by reconsidering these writers' influential arguments in relation to artists from *across* Europe rather than a particular part of it. Not all of the artists considered here lived under communist governments; the term "postcommunist" is thus too limited for my analysis. This also means that, unlike some recent and significant writings on art from decommunising countries, we cannot conflate the descriptors of "postsocialism" and "postcommunism". Such a conflation, as practised by theorists such as Aleš Erjavec and Marina Gržinić, is ultimately too imprecise;[21] a distinction needs to be made between communism as lived in the Eastern bloc and socialism as a broader, international philosophy. My use of 'postsocialism' thus takes a much more expansive view of the possible ramifications of socialism's apparent collapse. It also hints toward as yet unanalysed correlations and influences *between* "Eastern" and "Western" European artists that lie at the core of this thesis. As I contend here, we can no longer maintain the still-prevalent view that Eastern European artists have been passive to stylistic and discursive trends that first emerged elsewhere, or that "Western" artists and art networks have been unaffected (aesthetically, discursively, infrastructurally) by "non-Western"

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[20] See, for example, Boris Groys, 'Beyond Diversity: Cultural Studies and Its Postcommunist Other', in Enwezor (ed.), *Democracy Unrealized*, above n.18, pp.303-319, as well as Part 2 of Boris Groys, *Art Power* (Cambridge MA: The MIT Press, 2008), pp.149-182 especially; Robert Fleck, 'L'art après le communisme', *Y aura-t-il un deuxième siècle de l'art moderne? Les arts visuels au tournant du siècle* (Nantes: Éditions Pleins Feux, 2002), pp.47-72; Eda Čufer, 'Enjoy Me, Abuse Me, I Am Your Artist: Cultural Politics, Their Monuments, Their Ruins', in IRWIN (eds.), above n.16, pp.362-376.

[21] See Sibelan Forrester, Magdalena J. Zaborowska and Elena Gapova (eds.), *Over the Wall/After the Fall: Post-Communist Cultures through an East-West Gaze* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2004), in which the editors' introduction refers consistently to 'postsocialist cultural studies' (at pp.1-35), while the anthology's title pinpoints its actual subject matter as 'postcommunist cultures'. See also Aleš Erjavec, *Postmodernism and the Postsocialist Condition: Politicized Art under Late Socialism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003); and Marina Gržinić's writings on postcommunist art practice, which she analyses through discourses of 'postsocialism' as a strictly Eastern European phenomenon: see *inter alia* Marina Gržinić, *Fiction Reconstructed: Eastern Europe, Post-Socialism and the Retro-Avantgarde* (Vienna: edition selene, 2000).

practices. More productive scholarship can instead develop from recognising artists'
mutual reframings of art discourse and art practice across supposed borders.

This reconsideration of (certain aspects of) Eastern and Central European art as *actively*
influential on practices *across* Europe – and, of course, vice versa – points to a further
presupposition in which this thesis intervenes: the pigeon-holing of this art to strictly
Eastern and Central European contexts, a treatment of art that often operates on the level
of ethnography. We have already noted this trope in relation to Oleg Kulik's and
Alexander Brener's destructive actions at *Interpol*; it is, however, a surprisingly recurrent
trope in art historical analysis more generally. According to many writers, art from
postcommunist Europe either risks dissolving into a melancholic nostalgia for the
communist past, or its potential critiques are limited solely toward Soviet ideologies or
aesthetics of Socialist Realism. In the former instance, art from postcommunist contexts
is invariably dismissed for being insufficiently mournful, as not "learning from" the
experiences of communism and thus as unable to integrate "properly" into networks of
capitalism and its discontents. This is, to a large degree, the view of American historian
Charity Scribner in her well-known book, *Requiem for Communism*.[22] In the latter
instance, epitomised by debates at two conferences held in 2006 (in Lithuania and
Romania),[23] the aesthetic and political critiques that Eastern and Central European art
may instigate are implicitly irrelevant beyond communism and postcommunism. Its
critiques are indigenous, bound by regional borders and histories, and incommensurable
beyond them. At best, as *Interpol* arguably reveals, when the art's ideological critiques
are transposed to another context, they are deemed merely reactionary gestures against a
loosely defined understanding of "the West".

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[22] Charity Scribner, *Requiem for Communism* (Cambridge MA: The MIT Press, 2003). For a parallel
critique of ethnography in contemporary art, see Hal Foster, 'The Artist as Ethnographer', in Hal Foster,
The Return of the Real (Cambridge MA: The MIT Press, 1996), pp.171-203.

[23] 'Art and Politics: Case Studies from Eastern Europe', Conference held at the Art Institute, Vytautus
Magnus University, Kaunas, Lithuania, 26-27 October 2006; 'Legitimating Cultures, Cultures of
Legitimacy', Conference held at the University of Bucharest, 23-25 November 2006, author's notes.

This thesis works against such ethnographic delimitations of art from communist and postcommunist eras. I argue instead that the critiques of hegemonic ideologies that numerous artists elaborated in their practices from these periods – especially those practices labelled 'nonconformist', that were opposed to the governance of art in the interests of the state – are vital to broader, postsocialist art contexts. This can be seen through explicit relations of influence, particularly on the level of form. But it is also apparent in a shared questioning of how art engages with, and responds to, political philosophies and praxes – in short, a questioning of what art's politics may be. This is not to assume that art has a direct political potential, shaping governmental decision-making in domestic or foreign affairs. Such an assumption is highly debatable, especially given the hyper-commodified leisure and advertising markets of iconic images, large-scale exhibitions and often equally large-scale artworks that the art historian Terry Smith calls the contemporary 'iconomy'.[24] Rather, postsocialist art from Europe asserts more indirect, highly self-reflexive inquiries into the institutional and theoretical parameters that enframe audiences' engagements with artworks – including the political claims made through those discourses, and how such claims filter, promote or challenge similar assertions in the greater stakes of geopolitical agenda. These critical inquiries can provide important insights into contemporary art and politics' often mutually expedient uses of each other since communism's collapse. At the heart of these uses lies the paradox of "democracy", both as an ideological hangover from the Cold War *and* as a utopian ambition for the future, as an apparent politics of equality *and* as potentially maintaining asymmetries of power within changing contexts of cultural production. It is the diversity of artistic responses to this paradox that I explore throughout my argument and its attempt to provide a more accurate account of postsocialist art's testing and generation of politics since the 1980s.

This diversity is reflected in the six chapters of this thesis. The opening chapter seeks to define the still-elusive term "democracy", by providing a critical review of the relevant literature in art discourse and cultural theory since the collapse of socialism. The first

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[24] Terry Smith, *The Architecture of Aftermath* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2006).

section of this chapter identifies and analyses what I label an 'aesthetic of "democratisation"' that dominated, but was not limited to, Western European art discourse from the mid-1990s on. Key figures include French critics and curators such as Nicolas Bourriaud, Paul Ardenne and Joëlle Zask, Scandinavian critics including Tere Vadén and Mika Hannula, and the British critic Claire Bishop. I argue that a cohesive aesthetic conjoined their projects, despite particular differences between them. This aesthetic was governed by the same aim: the "democratising" potential of an audience's intersubjective encounters, as catalysed by and within artworks. Aesthetic notions of "democracy" since the Cold War are underpinned by a literalist understanding of participation and competition in relation to art. Furthermore, I argue that in the case of installation and, to a lesser extent, participation-based performance, this aesthetic posits "democracy" as not just a political claim but a purportedly ontological condition drawn from the mediums' open forms.

These critics' belief that "democratisation" in art is always inherently desirable yet unrealisable derives, in part, from the concurrent turn to "democracy" in cultural theory. As I claim in the second section of Chapter One, many theorists across the humanities' political spectrum appealed to "democracy" as the foundational process and goal of their theories. I seek to explain points of correlation (whether formal, utopian or ideological) that cut across the *prima facie* differences between the works of post-structuralists such as Chantal Mouffe, post-Althusserians including Jacques Rancière and more avowedly conservative critics like Francis Fukuyama. More importantly, the recurrence throughout art and cultural theory of particular key terms – including participation, hegemony and competition – should not be seen within an alienated vacuum of "theory". As I explain in the third section of Chapter One, these terms echo the palliative veil of "democracy" within neoliberal politico-economic rhetoric throughout the 1990s. I rely on important arguments made during this historical period of "democratisation" by a variety of critics, such as Giorgio Agamben, Mario Tronti and Slavoj Žižek, to show how the attempted re-appropriation of "democracy" from the grip of imperialism has risked buttressing and legitimising the very politics it seeks to challenge. By reviewing the 'aesthetics of "democratisation"' through this historical lens, we can recognise how it exemplifies the

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'political expediency of culture' that the Latin American theorist, George Yúdice, identifies as a pivotal phenomenon within the nexus of globalisation and contemporary modes of imperialism.

The 'aesthetic of "democratisation"' proves to be a fundamentally problematic means of addressing postsocialist art from Europe. It is thus imperative that we identify alternative aesthetics that, while being critical of over-determined claims to "democracy", can still provide constructive models for art history. This is the cumulative project of the case studies in Chapters Two to Six. Three concerns are common to each of the artists analysed. First, each relies on literal forms of participation between audience members and artworks. Yet whereas the 'aesthetic of "democratisation"' perceives participation as fundamental to art's "democracy", the artists I examine recast it in a different light. Though this recasting is, at first glance, a highly critical or even negative exercise (whether filtered through actions of withdrawal, expressions of anomie or self-criticism), it should not be dismissed as melancholic or simply reactionary. It instead provides a precise critical engagement with certain tropes of "democracy" and the cultural presumptions and imbalances of power that those tropes can maintain and obfuscate. Second, each artist reframes discourses and formal artistic signifiers of "democracy" within contexts of geopolitical propaganda, through images from the so-called 'War on Terror' or in relation to imminent presidential elections. Third, each of the artists refuses to identify the resultant critical yet productive aesthetics they produce within the nominalism of "democracy". In most cases, the artists assert idiosyncratic nomenclatures through which to frame their practice, such as "dizzydence" for the Perjovschis, or "emptiness" for Kabakov. When viewed collectively, these idiosyncratic frames form connected singularities that, by withdrawing from readymade signification, pull back from normative drives toward hegemonic ideology. In other words, these practices do not dispense with the deconstructive rationales underpinning many contemporary (and particularly poststructuralist) conceptions of "democracy". They do, however, seek to unravel themselves from those conceptions' ideological harness. [25]

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[25] A similar position has been consistently argued by the post-Gramscian philosopher Stuart Hall since the 1970s: see for example Stuart Hall, *The Hard Road to Renewal: Thatcherism and the Crisis of the Left*

Chapters Two and Three analyse "democracy" as it pertained to politics of identity from the late-1980s through the 1990s. Chapter Two provides a revisionist examination of the early 'total' installations by the Soviet artist, Ilya Kabakov, with particular focus on his exhibition *Ten Characters* from 1988. Commentators on Kabakov's works have invariably extolled his 'total' installations as simulations of Soviet communal life that are critical of Soviet ideology. This chapter proffers a different argument: that Kabakov's installations and his published texts provide critical reflections upon claims to the 'democratic power' (in the words of one writer) of both Kabakov and installation practice in general. Relying on Kabakov's own philosophical writings, and their comparison with Louis Althusser's and Gilles Deleuze's critiques of ideology, I argue that 'total' installations such as *Ten Characters* (and others designed primarily for Western rather than Soviet viewers) assert an aesthetic of withdrawal from this 'democratic power'. Withdrawal is fundamental to a proper understanding of Kabakov's theory of "emptiness" – a theory that offers a crucial alternative to Western art discourses of "democracy" as a construction of identity and ontology at the Cold War's close. Equally importantly, Kabakovian "emptiness" offers an important basis from which to investigate subsequent artworks that critique the 'aesthetic of "democratisation"' that I identified in Chapter One. It is an alternative aesthetic that Kabakov's practice, remobilised from his late-communist era background in Moscow, in part catalyses.

A similar approach emerges in Chapter Three, which presents a comparative analysis of two attempts to create new contexts for art making, exhibition and interpretation in Europe during the 1990s. The first is Manifesta, a European art biennale presented in a different city each time it takes place, and which aims to bring different European artworlds together under the banner of "democracy". The second is the work of the art group NSK, or Neue Slowenische Kunst. NSK has also sought to create new infrastructural models for art's production and reception, especially through the pseudo-nation-state that it developed after the break-up of Yugoslavia and which it called the

(London and New York City: Verso, 1988). I refer to (and largely follow) Hall's critical analyses of "democracy" in more detail in Chapter One.

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Država v Casu, or the *State in Time*. As I argue in this chapter, NSK perceived "democracy" in art as primarily a politics of amnesia, ignoring the nonconformist histories of postcommunist Europe so as to advance what NSK considered problematic agenda. In its stead, NSK established a different kind of politics, a 'retro politics' that remobilised complex histories within an itinerant, independent "state" of art. On the one hand, the mobilities at play in the *Država v Casu* – developed from forms of withdrawal or 'exodus' from "democracy" (a point I elaborate through the philosophies of Jean-Luc Nancy and Paolo Virno) – have ensured that as many audiences as possible, from diverse parts of the world, can come in contact with NSK's archive of nonconformist histories. On the other hand, and much like Kabakov's migrationary aesthetics, the mobilisation of these histories – through the form and content of NSK's works – underscores the group's development of a postsocialist, rather than strictly postcommunist, aesthetic.

Chapters Four and Five examine the influence of Kabakov's and NSK's aesthetics in the early-2000s, and across the spectral Iron Curtain that still haunts contemporary European art discourses and practices. In Chapter Four, I analyse the de-idealisations of "democracy" that Paris-based artist, Thomas Hirschhorn, has asserted within large-scale sculptures such as 2004's *Swiss Swiss Democracy*. These sculptures serve as stages in which audiences' anomic gestures and Hirschhorn's remobilisation of unexpected art histories – discourses drawn in part from the writings of Benjamin Buchloh, but which I consider Hirschhorn's own 'retro politics' – coalesce to re-examine art's investments in "democracy" during the latter's transformation into a militarised politics. These processes of de-idealisation also drive a second aspect to Hirschhorn's work: his creation of an autonomous, collaborative art practice that, he asserts, counters politics of "democracy" with 'making art politically'. While these dual processes raise significant problems of their own – problems that I work through in subsequent chapters of this thesis – they nonetheless pose equally significant re-evaluations of contemporary European art practice, driven by a return to alternative art histories, nonconformist politics and postsocialist aesthetics.

This is also true of the main subject of Chapter Five: the collaborative work of two artists based in Switzerland, Christoph Büchel and Gianni Motti. My particular focus here is a site- and context-specific installation they made for the inauguration of Bucharest's National Museum of Contemporary Art in 2004. Hidden deep in the Museum's basement and driven by an excess of "democratic" content, this installation cannily withdrew from the rhetoric of "democracy" that subtended the Museum's inauguration and made it a deeply problematic affair. As I elucidate in this chapter, central to these problems was the selection of key figures from Western European art circles (including Nicolas Bourriaud) so as to "legitimise" the Museum's dismissal of Eastern European art practices and theories. Büchel and Motti, by contrast, refused to identity with these politics of legitimation. Their installation instead presented a "wrong" rather than a "right" sense of politics, a "wrongness" that I analyse in relation to the work of Miwon Kwon and Jacques Rancière. Considered through this prism of the "wrong", Büchel and Motti's installation reveals the artists' own long-term mobilisations of postsocialist aesthetics and, in this instance, its unravelling of how invitations to international exhibition venues can operate as forms of political expediency on the part of museum administrators and governments.

These four chapters stress how postsocialist aesthetics have critically reflected upon and repudiated "democracy" as the master signifier of contemporary art practice. However, we should not lose sight of the highly constructive and productive projects that also develop within – indeed, cannot be divorced from – this critical aesthetic. Chapter Six's main focus, the work of Bucharest-based artists Dan and Lia Perjovschi, epitomises this dual emphasis of self-reflexive postsocialism. The Perjovschis' individual practices echo the work of other artists in this thesis, in their scepticism toward particular tropes and types of exclusion within contemporary art. At the same time, the Perjovschis have attempted to establish new ways of thinking about and making artwork, redistributing art historical archives, knowledge and skills to emerging scholars, curators and artists from Romania and beyond. These two streams of practice comprise the Perjovschis' theory of "dizzydence" – a dissidence toward the increasingly dizzying array of received discourses, signifiers and politics to which the putatively globalised artworld is expected to cater in order to be accorded "relevance". Through dizzydence and detective-like

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research, the Perjovschis present an alternative model of re-engaging the past within the present – a model I connect with other projects such as Walid Raad's and Gerhard Richter's, and which draws from theories of the image archive or 'atlas' espoused in the early twentieth century by the German art historian, Aby Warburg, and more recently by Buchloh. Unlike Warburg's and Buchloh's methodologies, however, the Perjovschis have also aimed to redress gender imbalances in art practice and discourse – imbalances that I suggest are one of the main weaknesses of postsocialist aesthetics and which, following the British scholar Pat Simpson, can be considered a form of 'Europatriarchy'.

Such correlations between past and present forms of Europatriarchy reveal another significant concern for the Perjovschis, one that they share with artists such as Hirschhorn or Büchel and Motti. This is an awareness that postcommunist "democratisations" cannot be separated from more recent problems of "democracy" as mobilised since the events of 9/11. As these five artists' works suggest, there is a steady continuum coursing between Cold War ideologies of "democracy", through the postcommunist 1990s, into the twenty-first century. In response, the Perjovschis and others have returned to artistic precedents from the late-communist and postcommunist periods – including the work of Kabakov and NSK – to suggest a counter aesthetic politics to "democracy". In each artist's practice, this goes by a different name: dizzydence, making art politically, retro politics and so on. Analysed cumulatively, as distinct yet connected projects, these aesthetic reanimations and political critiques identify the development of an important alternative discourse to those which currently govern contemporary art. This is the development of a postsocialist aesthetic that is locally attuned and globally mobile, critical yet productive, and which pivots on the charge of history within more contemporary contexts.

"Politically Unbecoming" as Postsocialist Tactic

In the (recent) past, we may have been right to categorise art from "transitional" Europe as weighed down by the burden of trauma, as symptomatic of or therapeutic after the collapse of Soviet communism. There may have been some accuracy to the belief that art

from Eastern and Central Europe was of limited importance beyond the dust-trails left behind by the Iron Curtain – that that art related strictly to Eastern bloc contexts in terms of influence if not appeal. And especially after *Interpol* in 1996, we may even have been justified in thinking that all European artists aspired to "democracy" as both the process and the purpose of their practices. Yet we should also recall Giorgio Agamben's warning about appeals to (and the appeal of) certain signifiers in a historical period that is anything but post-ideological. As Agamben has written:

> In the same way in which the great transformation of the first industrial revolution destroyed the social and political structures as well as the legal categories of the ancient regime, terms such as *sovereignty, right, nation, people, democracy* and *general will* by now refer to a reality that no longer has anything to do with what these concepts used to designate – and those who continue to use these concepts uncritically literally do not know what they are talking about.[26]

This need for criticality – not just to ideology as a discourse, but to ideology as it was practised in Europe (and globally) after the fall of communism – is the foundation of the self-reflexive, postsocialist art from Europe that this thesis investigates. I propose that, rather than fulfil stereotypical perceptions or reify prevalent expectations of what contemporary European practices should be like or become, the artists in this thesis enact an inverse aesthetic tactic. That aesthetic is *politically unbecoming*, a description which can be understood in at least two senses. First, as the unravelling and withdrawal from pre-set and over-determined signifiers that constellate contemporary, political art practices – most notably, as not becoming "democratic" during the highly ideologised, post-Cold War period. And second, that that process of dis-identification is itself "unbecoming" in the sense of an apparent indecency for not subscribing to the propriety of "democracy". Through processes of *unbecoming*, these artists instead propose a range of self-instituted theories through which to understand, but not contain, the various politics of their practices. None of the discourses proffered by these artists aspires to or creates a hegemonic frame for art practice; this is part of their significance and their politics for art. Their self-determined singularity is such that while they may appear empty or meaningless to others, the forms of audience and philosophical engagement

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[26] Giorgio Agamben, 'Notes on Politics', *Means without Ends: Notes on Politics*, trans. Vincenzo Binetti and Cesare Casarino (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), pp.109-110. Italics in the original.

they refer to are actually extraordinarily active. This is the basis for Ilya Kabakov's subtle reasoning, as we will see presently. It also propels the ambitions of this thesis as a whole. We must now attend to what exactly that activity entails and how we are to understand postsocialist art from Europe, quite literally, on its own terms.

Chapter One:

Assumptions of "Democracy" and Postsocialist Critique

Discursive Shifts

The momentous headline was worthy of the event. Splayed across an image of people helping each other scale the Berlin Wall, and set against an impeccably blue sky, *Time* magazine heralded a new reality for Europe: 'Freedom!' (fig.1.1). Freedom to climb the Wall without fear of being shot down by East German guards. Freedom for East Berliners to traverse a border resolutely closed to them since 1961. And the hope that even greater freedoms – of speech, of political association, of individual decision-making – would soon come to Eastern Europeans still locked within totalitarian communist regimes. In the months and years that followed the East German government's decision on November 9, 1989 to relax its restrictive border policies, and as some of these freedoms became everyday realities again, it also became clear that 'Freedom!' was not limited to decommunising states. Opened borders and new economic policies within those states sparked emergent freedoms and markets for large-scale investment, mainly from the United States and the European Community (later the European Union, or E.U.). New tourist destinations, from Budapest to Prague, appeared in travel brochures for Europe. And at the forefront of these developments were contemporary art curators and collectors travelling back-and-forth across the remains of the Iron Curtain, eager to reveal Eastern European art to fresh audiences and to promote convivial images of open, trans-continental dialogue and exchange – a model of 'Café Europa' to challenge the regulated enclosures of 'Fortress Europe'.[1]

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[1] The term 'Café Europa' is derived from the editors' introduction in Sibelan Forrester, Magdalena J. Zaborowska and Elena Gapova (eds.), *Over the Wall/After the Fall: Post-Communist Cultures through an East-West Gaze* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2004), p.21. For elaboration of this eagerness on the part of Western European art professionals, see Alexander Tolnay, 'East/West Artistic Exchange in a Changing Europe', *Kunst & Museumjournaal*, 4/2 (1992), pp.38-39.

After the early-1990s, these two curatorial foci – on Eastern European art practice, and the inherent hospitality and openness of a reconceptualised sense of "Europe" – were crucial frameworks for presenting contemporary European art. They were also in conceptual tension. On the one hand, exhibitions devoted to Eastern European practice became increasingly common in museums across North America and especially Western Europe, driven (as one collector claimed) by a fascination with the collapse of Soviet communism and capitalism's eastward expansion.[2] The list of titles was long, encompassing some of the most renowned exhibitions of the period: *Beyond Belief: Contemporary Art from East Central Europe* (Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, 1995); *After the Wall: Art and Culture in Post-Communist Europe* (Moderna Museet, Stockholm, 1999); *L'autre moitié de l'Europe* (Jeu de Paume, Paris, 2000); and three exhibitions spearheaded by a troika of renowned Western curators – Peter Weibel's *In Search of Balkania* (co-curated with Roger Conover and Eda Čufer, Neue Galerie, Graz, 2002), René Block's *In the Gorges of the Balkans* (Friedericianum, Kassel, 2003) and Harald Szeemann's *Blood and Honey: Futures in the Balkans* (Essl Museum, Vienna, 2003). Despite the exhibitions' diverse content, however, the claims made of Eastern European art were surprisingly uniform. In *Beyond Belief*, for example, 'East Central Europe remain[ed]… an empty screen on which almost anything can be projected'.[3] In *After the Wall*, curator David Elliott identified Eastern European art as 'a form of therapy… to relieve [the region] from the burden of its trauma', a stance similarly held by Szeemann who limited Balkan art to 'documents [of] suffering and the desire for emancipation'.[4] Such projections of trauma, emptiness and therapy, in other words,

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[2] Karlheinz Essl, 'Editorial', in Harald Szeemann (curator), *Blut und Honig: Zukunft ist am Balkan*, exh. cat. (Vienna: Sammlung Essl, 2003), p.9. Curator and editor Roger Conover has argued further that the influx of such exhibitions 'can also be read as institutional and governmental apologies for decades of neglect and ignorance' of Eastern Europe, especially given the general lack of Eastern European art in major exhibitions (such as Jan Hoet's *Documenta 9* of 1992, in which only eight of the 186 artists came from the former Eastern bloc): Roger Conover, 'Against Dictionaries: The East as She is Spoke by the West', in IRWIN (eds.), *East Art Map: Contemporary Art and Eastern Europe* (London: Afterall, 2006), p.354.

[3] Laura J. Hoptman, 'Seeing is Believing', in Laura J. Hoptman (ed.), *Beyond Belief: Contemporary Art from East Central Europe*, exh. cat. (Chicago: Museum of Contemporary Art, 1995), p.2.

[4] See respectively David Elliott, 'Introduction', in Bojana Pejić and David Elliott (eds.), *After the Wall: Art and Culture in Post-Communist Europe*, exh. cat. (Stockholm: Moderna Museet, 1999), p.11; and Harald Szeemann, 'On the Exhibition', in Szeemann (curator), above n.2, p.28.

tended toward cultural stereotyping, reducing art from Eastern Europe to being merely representative or symptomatic of the region's weakened geopolitical contexts after 1989. This circumstance was particularly noted by critics including Piotr Piotrowski and Igor Zabel: at the same time as displays of Eastern European art became more popular west of the old divide, the perceived relevance of that art was limited geographically and historically to the frames and effects of communism.[5] These exhibitions thereby comprised a kind of exotic Othering of one context by another, of one context for another, exemplifying the important division that curator Gerardo Mosquera has outlined between curating and curated cultures, in which the former determines the representations, stereotypes and criteria by which to interpret the latter.[6]

On the other hand, however, lay the second curatorial focus which, though related to the renewed interest in Eastern European art, was its conceptual counter-model. In lieu of the presumed localism of Eastern European practice, the reconceptualisation of the signifier "Europe" gestured toward an optimistic universalism, grounded in the new realities of European reunification. According to Wim Beeren, the curator of *Wanderlieder* at Amsterdam's Stedelijk Museum in 1991, "Europe" symbolised 'a better design for society' based on free movement across national borders.[7] "Europe" also provided a seemingly neutral, open signifier of change and hope in *Europa Europa* (Bonn, 1994),[8] while 'an uncodified experience' of a Europe without borders was the explicit goal of the

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[5] Piotr Piotrowski, 'Central Europe in the Face of Unification', *ArtMargins* (28 January 2003), available at http://www.artmargins.com/content/feature/piotrowski2.html [accessed 6 January 2006]; reprinted in Mária Hlavajová and Jill Winder (eds.), *Who If Not We Should At Least Try to Imagine the Future of All This? 7 Episodes on (Ex)changing Europe* (Amsterdam: Artimo, 2004), pp.271-281; Igor Zabel, '"We" and the "Others"', in Pejić and Elliott (eds.), above n.4, pp.110-113.

[6] Gerardo Mosquera, 'Some Problems in Transcultural Curating', in Jean Fisher (ed.), *Global Visions: Towards a New Internationalism in the Visual Arts* (London: Karla Press and InIVA, 1994), p.135.

[7] Wim Beeren, Untitled Preface, in Wim Beeren (curator), *Wanderlieder*, exh. cat. (Amsterdam: Stedelijk Museum, 1991), backflap.

[8] Bonn Kunst- und Austellungshalle, *Europa Europa: Das Jahrhundert der Avantgarde in Mittel- und Osteuropa* (Bonn: Kunst- und Austellungshalle, 1994); see also Piotrowski, in Hlavajová and Winder (eds.), above n.5, pp.273-274.

first Manifesta biennale exhibition in Rotterdam in 1996.[9] This aestheticisation of a pan-European unity was not, of course, a new focus in art. Joseph Beuys, for instance, had invoked his body and various props (such as blackboards and a walking-staff) as conduits for European reunification during the Cold War in his *Eurasia* projects of the late-1960s; in the early-1980s, the former West German government employed Harald Szeemann to create an (ultimately unrealised) exhibition about European cultural integration.[10] Nor was this turn to "Europe" specific to art and exhibitions. Instead, its impetus was driven as much by similar reframings in critical and cultural theory – most notably by the French philosopher Jacques Derrida, and his belief that hospitality and openness buttressed new conceptions of "Europe" – as by the E.U.'s own need to reframe its borders eastwards.[11] Nonetheless, if "Europe" signified expansive concepts of openness, movement and mutability in art discourse, then *Eastern* Europe's relation to it was decidedly ambiguous. It was simultaneously included within, and excluded from, the parameters of "Europe": included by virtue of catalysing and geopolitically framing "Europe's" expansive re-signification; yet excluded from that re-signification given the curatorial limitation of Eastern European art to the purported trauma of its origins. The new freedom of "Europe", it seemed, still had its limits.

To an extent, such curatorial conceptualisations of "Europe" persisted into the twenty-first century. For European Kunsthalle spokespeople Bernd Kniess and Meyer Voggenreiter, for example, "Europe" remained an important means of signifying the openness and 'behavioural models for politics, participation, and social responsibility'

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[9] Rosa Martinez *et al*, *Manifesta 1: Rotterdam: The Netherlands, 1996*, exh. cat. (Rotterdam : Manifesta Foundation, 1996), p.7. The conception of "Europe" as an 'uncodified experience' can be contrasted with *In Search of Balkania*, which was staged in the Austrian city of Graz precisely because of its 'bordertown' status, a status that reinforced the notion of borders that *Manifesta 1* was designed to challenge: see Roger Conover, Eda Čufer and Peter Weibel (eds.), *In Search of Balkania: A User's Manual*, exh. cat. (Graz: Neue Galerie Graz am Landesmuseum Joanneum, 2002), p.2. I will return in Chapter Three to Manifesta and its ultimately troubled relations to European borders.

[10] Jürgen Harien, 'From the Black Square to the White Flag', in IRWIN (eds.), above n.2, p.386.

[11] See, for example, Jacques Derrida, *The Other Heading: Reflections on Today's Europe*, trans. Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael B. Naas (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992). See also Étienne Balibar, *We, the People of Europe? Reflections on Transnational Citizenship*, trans. James Swenson (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003). For a parallel discourse in art and culture, see Johannes Birringer, 'A New Europe', *Performance Art Journal*, 75 (2003), pp.26-41.

espoused of European contemporary art and its institutions.[12] By the late-1990s, however, such conceptualisations as these were already becoming superseded by another signifier of even greater universality, albeit one that remained pivotal to European geopolitics. That signifier was "democracy". It was a shift signalled, as we observed in the introduction to this thesis, in the 1996 exhibition *Interpol*: discourses of 'a new Europe', to recite curator Viktor Misiano's words, were replaced by self-justifying appeals to "democracy" as the exhibition's political frame. This discursive shift was, of course, ultimately beyond the *Interpol* curators' control. It nonetheless paralleled a more conscious curatorial preference for universalised discourses of "democracy", rather than the specificities of "Europe", identified in a number of other exhibitions from the late-1990s onwards. This was certainly explicit in the titles of such exhibitions as *Wounds: Between Democracy and Redemption in Contemporary Art*, a sister exhibition to *After the Wall* held at Stockholm's Moderna Museet in 1997, and in Bruno Latour's highly sophisticated *Making Things Public: Atmospheres of Democracy* (ZKM, Karlsruhe, 2005).[13] It was a shift epitomised most of all, though, in the commentaries accompanying

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[12] Bernd Kniess and Meyer Voggenreiter, 'Topoi: Policies of Assertion', in Markus Miessen and Shumon Basar (eds.), *Did Someone Say Participate? An Atlas of Spatial Practice* (Cambridge MA: The MIT Press, 2006), pp.187-188. For a comparative view, and one that generally maintains a perception of "Europe" through a primarily Western European lens, see the writings of the Italian art and architecture group Multiplicity. See, for example, Stefano Boeri/Multiplicity, 'An Eclectic Atlas of Europe', in Okwui Enwezor (ed.), *Democracy Unrealized: Documenta 11_Platform 1* (Ostfildern-Ruit: Hatje Cantz, 2002), pp.209-229, in which Multiplicity analyses 'the idea of Europe as a cultural entity rather than a geographical continent', a culture governed by 'forms of openness to transformation' and where 'uncertainty transforms into innovation'. This idealised view of societal uncertainty in Europe parallels similar views presented in Multiplicity, *USE: Uncertain States of Europe: A Trip through a Changing Europe* (Milan: Skira, 2003).

[13] David Elliott *et al*, *Wounds: Between Democracy and Redemption in Contemporary Art*, exh. cat. (Stockholm: Moderna Museet, 1997); Bruno Latour (ed.), *Making Things Public: Atmospheres of Democracy*, (Karlsruhe: ZKM and Cambridge MA: The MIT Press, 2005). These were but two of a number of exhibitions taking "democracy" as its subject (usually in the form of advocacy) in the mid- to late-1990s. Others included Ljubljana-based curator Zdenka Badovinac's more critical exhibition, *Democracies*, for the third Tirana Biennale – see Zdenka Badovinac, 'Demokracitë/Democracies', in Institute of Tirana Biennale, *Bienalja e Tiranjës 3: Tabu Molisëse*, exh. cat. (Tirana: Institute of Tirana Biennale, 2005), pp.135-201 – and other exhibitions to which I will refer later in this chapter and this thesis. As American art historian Noit Banai has argued further, other exhibitions in this "democratic" vein include Olafur Eliasson's *The Weather Project* at London's Tate Modern in 2005, as well as numerous exhibitions in the United States, including *The Art of Democracy: Tools of Persuasion* at the Cargill Gallery, Minnesota, in 2004: Noit Banai, 'Public of Sensation, Public of Spectacle: Olafur Eliasson and the Democratic Debate', Paper presented at the 2008 College Art Association Conference, Dallas, United States, 23 February 2008, author's notes.

the European Biennale, Manifesta. As noted earlier, "Europe" set the agenda for *Manifesta 1* in 1996; "democracy" was not mentioned once throughout the catalogue. By 1998's *Manifesta 2*, though, "democracy" had become a significant referent, whether in relation to the 'openness' of art events that 'aimed to widen and democratise the artistic scene', or as 'the decentralisation of culture in order to create contact between artists and their potential viewers'.[14] By 2000, the Manifesta Board Members had also changed their primary reference point, such that:

> Foremost among Manifesta's objectives have been responding, as appropriate, to new forms of artistic practice, experimenting with new curatorial methods and developing new audiences for contemporary art. All this was to be achieved through the development of open-ended, democratic procedures, which emphasised the values of collaboration and interactive communication.[15]

"Europe" was no longer the conceptual foundation of Manifesta, as had been argued of the inaugural biennale in 1996. Instead, as one of *Manifesta 3*'s co-curators Francesco Bonami declared, these 'open-ended, democratic' curatorial processes were the actual font for conceiving 'the contemporary European condition'.[16]

The opening chapter of this thesis takes its cue from this shifting discourse, from "Europe" to "democracy", to examine the growing fascination during the 1990s with "democracy" as art's conceptual foundation and limit. My initial focus lies on how this shift was espoused in curatorial commentary and, as I will argue here, to an even greater degree in art criticism of the period. How was "democracy" defined within these forms of art discourse? Was it defined in correlative or vastly different, and thus perhaps unstable, ways? And how can we understand this shift toward "democracy" through a broader analysis of the historical and contextual circumstances surrounding and potentially informing it? This particular mode of analysis, of historicising these appeals to

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[14] See respectively Lejla Hodžić, 'Bosnia and Herzegovina', in Robert Fleck, Maria Lind and Barbara Vanderlinden (eds.), *Manifesta 2: European Biennial for Contemporary Art/Luxembourg*, exh. cat. (Luxembourg: Casino Luxembourg, 1998), p.220; and Mats Stjernstedt, 'Sweden', in *ibid*, p.262. See also Octavian G. Esanu, 'Moldova', in *ibid*, p.249, for similar curatorial claims in this catalogue.

[15] Manifesta Board Members, 'Preface', in Francesco Bonami *et al* (curators), *Borderline Syndrome: Energies of Defence: Manifesta 3* (Ljubljana: Cankarjev Dom, 2000), p.9.

[16] Francesco Bonami, 'The Former Land', in *ibid*, pp.11-14.

"democracy", is strikingly absent from the extant critical accounts of contemporary art's discourses and commentaries. Given their turn toward explicitly political intents, however, such an approach is absolutely crucial, especially in relation to how those political intents were defined in other disciplines and, most particularly, in actual geopolitics of the time.

Two particular contentions are central to my analysis here. The first concerns how "democracy" was believed to operate within (primarily European) art after 1989. I propose that specific formal and conceptual tropes recur throughout the key arguments made for art's "democratic" potentiality since the early-1990s, despite *prima facie* differences and conflicts between them. These recurrent tropes (or even shared conventions) allow us to categorise the main tenets of an 'aesthetic of "democratisation"' that is relatively cohesive in form, function and purpose. My analysis of this aesthetic feeds into the second contention that I propose here: that, as was the case with conceptualisations of "Europe", art's discourses of "democracy" found their impetus, definition and validation in similar turns to "democracy" by many contemporaneous political philosophers. Similarly, this alignment should also be considered in terms of the burgeoning 'democracy promotion industry' that political scientist Peter Schraeder identifies as a driving force behind dominant modes of geopolitical rhetoric and international relations since the Cold War's close.[17] If the historical contextualisation of contemporary art's "democratic" turn has generally been ignored in its commentaries, then so too has proper analysis of the numerous intersections – and potential slippages – between cultural, theoretical and geopolitical discourse after the Cold War. However, two further reasons stand out for embarking on this kind of analysis. First, because the shift from "Europe" to "democracy" entailed a referential shift from a primarily geographical entity to an explicitly political ideology of great historical dispute – or, as I will argue, a conceptual shift from quantitative space to qualitative understandings of "values". And second, because the substitution of "Europe" with "democracy" may not have removed the exclusions – particularly of Eastern European art and culture – that critics such as

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[17] Peter J. Schraeder, 'Making the World Safe for Democracy', in Peter J. Schraeder (ed.), *Exporting Democracy: Rhetoric vs Reality* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2002), pp.218-227 especially.

Piotrowski and Zabel claimed were maintained in the name of a supposedly inclusive "Europe". Critical accounts of "democracy" – and particularly of how its rhetoric subtends and potentially legitimises less fulsome economic and political intents – are thus essential to teasing out the assumptions and problematics underlying the aesthetics of "democratisation" at a time of "democracy's" apotheosis in political and cultural discourses.

Aesthetics of "Democratisation"

While curatorial commentary developed its rhetorics of "Europe" and "democracy", other sectors of the artworld foregrounded another significant, and related, debate: how to combat the seemingly paradigmatic crises in art practice and criticism in the 1990s. How could artists break free of the spiral of postmodern endgames that, though highly marketable in New York or London in the late-1980s, appeared shallow and unpalatable to Western economies undergoing recession in the early-1990s?[18] And could art criticism renew its consequence, relevance and influence as the primary mediator between artists and audiences – a status that, though once long-held, had ostensibly been surrendered to new waves of dealers and curators attempting to revive a hagiographic marketing of art by voiding criticality?[19] In the words of American art historian James Meyer, this general malaise in criticism meant that 'you [critics] don't know who the audience is, and you have no sense that the criticism will "matter", that it will be read'.[20] This did not

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[18] The key text on postmodern endgames in Western art is David Joselit and Elisabeth Sussman (curators and eds.), *Endgame: Reference and Simulation in Recent Painting and Sculpture*, exh. cat. (Boston: Institute of Contemporary Art, 1986). For a slightly different approach to artistic endgames played out in London, under the reign of the Young British Artists, see Julian Stallabrass, *High Art Lite: British Art in the 1990s* (London: Verso, 1999). Reference to this market-driven crisis was also made by a critic to whom I will refer in more detail presently, Nicolas Bourriaud: see Bennett Simpson, 'Public Relations: Bennett Simpson Talks with Nicolas Bourriaud', *Artforum*, 39/8 (April 2001), p.48.

[19] This was one of the few points of agreement between the American artist and critic Andrea Fraser and the American art historian Benjamin H. D. Buchloh in an important roundtable on the 'present conditions of art criticism': see George Baker *et al*, 'Roundtable: The Present Conditions of Art Criticism', *October*, 100 (Spring 2002), pp.200-228, especially 202-203.

[20] James Meyer in *ibid*, p.222.

necessarily mean, though, that criticism was condemned to its own endgame of self-victimisation, however frequently its crisis was diagnosed in symposia and publications. The drive for art and criticism to matter once more – whether culturally, socially or politically – instead found a form of fulfilment in a somewhat paradoxical source: the writings of a French curator whose profession aligned him with criticism's apparent *bêtes noires*. That curator was Nicolas Bourriaud. While Bourriaud's writings provided a frequent touchstone for the repoliticisation of art and art criticism after the late-1990s, they also met frequent (and often hostile) critique. Almost without exception, however, critics and followers of Bourriaud ignored the historical context within which his publications garnered their international renown, and arguably the renewal of art criticism into the twenty-first century. This ignorance in part resulted in both Bourriaud and his critics relying on the same metaphors and signifiers to explain the politics of art from the 1990s on. The purpose of this section of Chapter One is to recognise what those signifiers were, and also how Bourriaud's writings underwent their own conceptual reframing after the mid-1990s.

In the catalogue essay for his influential 1996 exhibition, *Traffic*, Bourriaud presented a list of characteristics that he believed underpinned contemporary art practice, and which consolidated similar lists he had developed in earlier writings for journals such as *Documents sur l'art*, *Flash Art* and *Art Press*.[21] For Bourriaud, artists including Jason Rhoades, Gillian Wearing and Kenji Yanobe 'work[ed] within the same practical and theoretical horizon – the realm of relationships between people'.[22] By focusing on social relationships, Bourriaud asserted, artists sought to highlight new models of 'exchange [and] interactivity [between the artwork and] the onlooker… and communication

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[21] See, for example, Nicolas Bourriaud, 'Philippe Parreno: Real Virtuality', *Art Press*, 208 (December 1995), pp.41-44; Nicolas Bourriaud and Jens Haaning, 'Interview', *Documents sur l'Art*, 8 (1995), np; and Nicolas Bourriaud, 'The Work of Art in the Age of Ecological Recycling', *Flash Art*, 167 (November-December 1992), pp.60-63.

[22] Nicolas Bourriaud, 'Space-Times of Exchange', trans. Simon Pleasance and Fronza Woods, in Nicolas Bourriaud (curator), *Traffic*, exh. cat. (Bordeaux: CAPC, 1996), np. All quotations in the remainder of this paragraph are drawn from this unpaginated essay. Furthermore, readers should note that, unless otherwise stated, all translations presented in this thesis from languages other than English have been made by the author.

processes in their tangible dimension as tools for linking human beings and groups to one another'. These artworks did not need to be literally interactive, in the sense of requiring audience members to touch or physically manipulate an object, to fit Bourriaud's horizon. An artwork's implicit dialogue with or directive toward the viewer, based on either the work's form or content, could also suffice – as in Wearing's photographic series *Signs that Say What You Want Them to Say and Not Signs that Say What Someone Else Wants You to Say* (1992-1993, fig.1.2), which Bourriaud exhibited in *Traffic* and which showed people presenting the artist, and by extension the viewer, with messages addressed to them. Nonetheless, 'contact and tactility', Bourriaud claimed, were particularly crucial to his models of 'flexibility' and their insistence on 'openness ushered in by any dialogue'. Two goals were thus at stake with such 'relational' artworks, as Bourriaud labelled them. First, to transform the normative (and presumably passive) contemplation associated with the art *viewer* into a more active experience of being a 'neighbour and interlocutor' engaged in physical and other communicational activities with and within artworks. And second, to repair the social relations between people whom Bourriaud believed had become alienated from each other because of neoliberal capitalism's withering of social welfare in the name of privatisation, its individual-oriented ideologies of consumerism and (according to Bourriaud's abstract assertion) 'the ideology of mass communications'.[23] By contrast, intersubjective 'negotiations, bonds and forms of co-existence', as catalysed by a relational artwork's formal and spatial properties, would transform art into models of space and time for audiences to experiment with and develop new modes of communication, engagement and 'interhuman experiences'. In short, relational art would provide a momentary rupture – a 'social interstice' in Bourriaud's words – within the daily traffic of information, images and services that underwrote late-capitalist economies, so as to resist those economies and provide 'new "possibilities of life"'.

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[23] The reparative potential of art was elaborated by the director of the contemporary art centre in Bordeaux (the CAPC) where *Traffic* took place. He claimed that 'the will of many artists is well distinguished to give shape to ideas expressing what we are the most deprived [*sic*], or what we so badly initiate: the relation with the other, with the others': see Jean-Louis Froment, 'The Shortage', in *ibid*, np.

Bourriaud's invocation of tropes such as interactivity and openness mirrored, and thereby suggested his adherence to, the normative characterisation of "Europe" in the 1990s. However, his goal was much broader, more *global*, given his selection of artists from Asia and North America as well as the geographical confines of Europe. More importantly, Bourriaud envisaged relational art as an updating of Marxism for the 1990s, rather than notions of "Europe" – a revision informed by the awareness that immaterial social relations such as communication, negotiation and inter-subjective exchange had replaced the more material social relations of production that Marx identified as crucial to nineteenth century modes of industrial capitalism.[24] Like the Marxian philosopher and 1960s' activist, Guy Debord, Bourriaud was not fatalistic about the centrality of these immaterial relations to contemporary capitalism and social alienation. Rather, this centrality meant that by creatively re-fashioning those relations, misusing them for what Bourriaud saw as altogether different purposes – a strategy that Debord called *détournement* – audiences and artists could open pockets of resistance and 'new "possibilities of life"' at the very heart of capitalism itself.[25] This refashioned Marxist resistance to capitalism consequently informed 'the right ways', according to Bourriaud, 'of substantiating an exhibition in relation to the cultural context and in relation to art history as it is being updated today'.

In 1998, when his previously published essays were anthologised and revised under the title of *Esthétique relationnelle*, Bourriaud made explicit these hitherto implicit allusions

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[24] For in-depth analysis of the historical transition from material to immaterial social relations, see *inter alia* Paolo Virno, *A Grammar of the Multitude: For an Analysis of Contemporary Forms of Life*, trans. Isabella Bertoletti, James Cascaito and Andrea Casson (New York City: Semiotext(e), 2004); and Manuel Castells, *The Information Age: Economy, Society and Culture: Volume 1: The Rise of the Network Society* (Malden: Blackwell Publishers, 2000), especially chapter 4 on the transformation of work and the emergence of service industries: pp.201-326. For Bourriaud's more specific, if brief, investigation of the effects of service economies and other forms of immaterial social relations on art and culture, see Nicolas Bourriaud, *Post-Production: Culture as Screenplay: How Art Reprograms the World*, trans. Jeanine Herman (New York City: Lukas & Sternberg, 2002).

[25] Debord's text on *détournement*, from which Bourriaud drew his analysis of the 'new "possibilities of life"', can be found in Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (New York City: Zone Books, 7th ed., 2002), pp.144-146 especially. Toni Ross has also evaluated Bourriaud's turn to Debord, albeit without mention of *Traffic*: see Toni Ross, 'Aesthetic Autonomy and Interdisciplinarity: A Response to Nicolas Bourriaud's "Relational Aesthetics"', *Journal of Visual Art Practice*, 5/3 (2006), pp.167-181.

to Marxism by directly citing Debord and Marx within his theoretical frame.[26] The overarching aim of relational art, he elaborated, was 'to "heal" the disastrous effects of homogenisation, that violence wielded by the capitalist system towards the individual'.[27] In order to elucidate this aim, Bourriaud extended the range of relational art's characteristics. Alongside key terms familiar from his essay for *Traffic* – such as experimentation, flexibility, social exchanges, dialogue and interactivity[28] – Bourriaud argued that relational works were 'convivial, user-friendly artistic projects [that were] festive, collective and participatory'.[29] A Felix Gonzalez-Torres candy spill, for example (fig.1.3), could lure its audience into taking any number of candies offered in the spill's open display – both to savour the communion-like experience of taking and eating the gifted candy, and to remind recipients of their communal responsibilities to other audience members, whose opportunities to engage physically with the spill would diminish in line with the diminishing quantity of the candies.[30] Collective acts of participatory engagement, as proposed by an artwork's form and display, could thereby induce new behavioural responses to art, whether in opposition to the alleged passivity of simply beholding pictures and/or as ensuring that one took responsibility for one's actions so as to 'learn… to inhabit the world in a better way'.[31] These two considerations – the act of engagement and the contingent behavioural change – underpinned a new characteristic within Bourriaud's lexicon, one that he reiterated throughout *Esthétique*

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[26] See, for instance, Nicolas Bourriaud, *Esthétique relationnelle* (Dijon: Les Presses du Réel, 1998), pp.16 (for Marx) and 89 (for Debord). Translated as Nicolas Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, trans. Simon Pleasance, Fronza Woods and Mathieu Copeland (Dijon: Les Presses du Réel, 2002), pp.16 (Marx) and 85 (Debord). Subsequent references to Bourriaud's book will be made to its English translation.

[27] *Ibid*, p.98.

[28] *Ibid*, pp.9, 43, 41 and 43 respectively.

[29] *Ibid*, p.61.

[30] It should be noted in passing, however, that not all Gonzalez-Torres candy spills operate in this way. At a Parisian cultural festival called *Nuit Blanche* held in 2006, and co-curated by Bourriaud, Gonzalez-Torres' spill *Untitled (Placebo)* (1991) became a site of aggression: children and adults threw candies as violently as possible into the crowds gathered around the work, resulting in minor injuries to some participants. With the dissipation of 'responsibility' as outlined in the text above, another – quite different – understanding of participants' responsibilities to others emerged: *Nuit Blanche*, Paris, 7 October 2006, author's notes.

[31] Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, above n.26, p.13.

relationnelle, and which was ultimately interchangeable with the relational: that art provided forms of 'encounters'.[32] Encounters between audience members, as well as between audience members and artworks, could transform relational art into 'free areas' or 'micro-utopias' within public space,[33] Bourriaud argued, such that 'new formations' of activity could emerge to breach our normal 'uniformity of behavioural patterns'.[34] These encounters could include dialogues between people in front of works, or 'animals and human beings bumping into each other in galleries acting as test-tubes for experiments to do with individual and social behaviour'.[35] Of greater significance for Bourriaud, though, was that these encounters were 'not resolved beforehand', despite artworks 'regulat[ing] inter-human encounters' through their form and spatial layout.[36] Relational artworks were instead 'crucibles where heterogeneous forms of sociability are worked out', so as 'to destroy any *a priori* agreement about what is perceived'.[37]

The cumulative effect of these relations – of dialogue, openness, exchange, encounters and so on – was what Bourriaud called a 'behavioural economy' catalysed by and within artworks.[38] This behavioural economy was not simply the production of a new Marxist sensibility on the audience's part. Paralleling the discursive shift we noted with Manifesta, Bourriaud introduced another referential frame that was entirely absent two years earlier in *Traffic*. Relational art was now informed by '*democratic* concerns'.[39] These concerns were formal – in the sense that artists used materials, such as video, that

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[32] *Ibid*, pp.15, 18, 22 and especially 28-30, where Bourriaud outlines the importance to contemporary art of '[m]eetings, encounters, events, various types of collaboration between people, games, festivals and places of conviviality, in a word all manner of encounter and relational invention' (at p.28).

[33] *Ibid*, pp.16, 31 and 70.

[34] *Ibid*, pp.21 and 9.

[35] *Ibid*, p.40.

[36] *Ibid*, pp.58, 48.

[37] *Ibid*, pp.31, 80.

[38] *Ibid*, pp.102-104.

[39] *Ibid*, p.57. Italics in the original.

were accessible to a general public ('the democratisation of the picture-production') – but most importantly, these concerns were behavioural.[40] Looking back in an interview in 2005, Bourriaud claimed that the forms and formations produced through encounters were "democratic" because they were not closed in on themselves or bound by their frame in ways that he considered 'totalitarian', but extended out to 'the viewer to complete them'.[41] The 'micro-utopias' of relational art could thereby create 'functional model[s]', 'patterns' and 'angelic programme[s]' of "democracy" that, by sustaining the lessons learnt through encounters, could 're-form… a lost political territory': the apparent deficit of "democracy" within neoliberal capitalism.[42] In other words, relational art's forms, encounters, exchanges and resistance to capitalism were all subsumed within, because inherent to, the *behavioural economy of "democracy"* directed at the audience – an 'engineering', in Bourriaud's words, of "democratisation".[43]

To an extent, Bourriaud's invocation of "democracy" as the over-arching frame and goal of relational art was not a novel approach within cultural discourse by 1998. In the early-1970s, for example, numerous artists had sought to instigate "democracy" directly within the public sphere, by using art to trigger collaborative political discussion between artists and audience members. These discussions were often framed within institutionalised festivals of art, as with David Medalla's establishment of the Art Festival for Democracy at London's Royal College of Art in 1974, or Joseph Beuys' *Bureau for Direct Democracy* at Harald Szeemann's *Documenta 5* of 1972. Such historical precedents were not, however, Bourriaud's concern in *Esthétique relationnelle*.[44] He instead appealed

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[40] *Ibid*, p.77.

[41] Interview with Nicolas Bourriaud, 6 July 2005, author's notes. Bourriaud's retrospective analysis can be found in published excerpts from this interview: see Anthony Gardner and Daniel Palmer, 'Nicolas Bourriaud Interviewed', *Broadsheet: Contemporary Visual Art + Culture*, 34/3 (September-November 2005), pp.166-167.

[42] Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, above n.26, pp.71, 61, 36 and 101 for the respective quotations.

[43] *Ibid*, p.81.

[44] This is not to say that Bourriaud has completely ignored the historical foundations of relational aesthetics since he published *Esthétique relationnelle* in 1998. His 2003 book, *Formes de Vie*, delves into a conception of modernism as governed by the rubric 'make your life a work of art'. Beginning with the three figures of the alchemist, the dandy and the portrait of Dorian Gray, Bourriaud traced a genealogy to

directly to, and subsequently became part of, the renewed significance of cultural forms to the promotion of "democracy" in the 1990s. Two particular contexts were crucial. First, Bourriaud transposed into art commentary the utopian rhetoric of "democracy" circulating in contemporaneous debates about new media and the Internet. As early as 1983, media theorists such as Ithiel de Sola Pool claimed that communications through electronic and digital networks decentralised control from one particular source or body; this decentralisation in turn rendered all participants within a network capable of freely, and thus "democratically", communicating with each other.[45] Other writers in the mid-1990s, such as Steven Jones, perceived online communication as a means to foster and consolidate civic networks offline, educating participants in the virtues and freedoms of "democratic" affiliations via Internet-based multi-user domains.[46] And for the French media theorist Pierre Lévy, such educational skills, together with the Internet's networked sharing of information between millions of potential users across the globe, ensured the attainability of a worldwide "democratic" and 'collective intelligence'.[47] Indeed, Lévy's thesis was central to Bourriaud's, particularly in terms of what Bourriaud saw as 'the emergence of collective forms of intelligence and the "network" mode in the handling of artistic work' in the 1990s.[48] A mutually affirming feedback loop was thus established between new media and contemporary art discourses. Relational aesthetics provided the much-rhetoricised "democracy" of digital practices with an empirical grounding in 'models of action within the existing real'.[49] Relational aesthetics thus

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relational aesthetics and contemporary rejections of social and aesthetic homogenisation. Key artists within this genealogy included Marcel Duchamp, Allan Kaprow and Joseph Beuys: see Nicolas Bourriaud, *Formes de Vie: L'art moderne et l'invention de soi* (Paris: Denoël, 2003).

[45] Ithiel de Sola Pool, *Technologies of Freedom: On Free Speech in an Electronic Age* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1983). For a more recent iteration of the inherently "democratic" potential of Internet and new media networks, see Julian Stallabrass, *Internet Art: The Online Clash of Culture and Commerce* (London: Tate Publishing, 2003), especially pp.82-112.

[46] Steven G. Jones, *Cybersociety: Computer-Mediated Communication and Community* (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 1995).

[47] Pierre Lévy, *Collective Intelligence: Mankind's Emerging World in Cyberspace*, trans. Robert Bononno (New York City: Plenum Trade, 1997).

[48] Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, above n.26, p.81. See also Bourriaud, *Postproduction*, above n.24, pp.82-83 for another invocation of Lévy's writings.

[49] Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, *ibid*, p.13.

opened itself up as a form of research and development – we can remember here Bourriaud's claim that the audience served as 'test-tubes for experiments' – to quantify and legitimise new media rhetoric beyond the digital domain. In return, Bourriaud's new concept sought its own legitimation through the popularity and plenitude of that rhetoric. And while digital media theorist Douglas Schuler has argued that '[i]n the mid-1990s the media were filled with talk about "electronic democracy", an idea that now seems quaint and antiquated in the e-commerce stampede',[50] the dot.com boom after 1995 only furthered the topical (and economic) viability of Bourriaud's digitally-inspired claims for art's "democratic" networks.

The second context was more localised: the French domestic policy of 'Cultural Democratisation', first conceived by Culture Minister André Malraux in 1945 and actively endorsed by all French Republican governments since. Initially, Cultural Democratisation involved state funding for, and intervention in, the dissemination of cultural activities, events and works to all regions of the Republic. According to Malraux, the French populace would only understand the importance of art and culture to civic well-being if encountered directly; as the historian David Looseley has argued further, the dissemination and accessibility of art to all French citizens was thus crucial in inspiring 'national cohesion, creating a sense of belonging to a community of shared values which transcend divisions'.[51] Cultural Democratisation consequently hinged on a dialectic of immediacy and education, one that continued unabated into the 1990s under the French Cultural Ministry of Jack Lang.[52] Under Lang, the spontaneity and individual

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[50] Douglas Schuler, 'Reports of the Close Relationship between Democracy and the Internet May Have Been Exaggerated', in Henry Jenkins and David Thorburn (eds.), *Democracy and New Media* (Cambridge MA: The MIT Press, 2003), p.69.

[51] David L. Looseley, *The Politics of Fun: Cultural Policy and Debate in Contemporary France* (Oxford: Berg Publishers, 1995), p.36. For an analysis of American equivalents to France's policy of cultural democratisation and ideologies of accessibility, see Nancy Einreinhofer, *The American Art Museum: Elitism and Democracy* (London: Leicester University Press, 1997).

[52] For a more in-depth analysis of Cultural Democratisation's history, see Jean Caune, *La culture en action: De Vilar à Lang: Le sens perdu* (Grenoble: Presses Universitaires de Grenoble, 1992) and Jean Caune, *La démocratisation culturelle: Une médiation à bout de souffle* (Grenoble: Presses Universitaires de Grenoble, 2006).

creativity of all French audience members were to be nurtured – and ultimately harnessed for national political interests of social harmony. At the heart of this policy were characteristics that were equally pivotal to the cultural forms of "democratisation" within Bourriaud's aesthetics: a politics of fun, sociability and utility that could '"liberate initiatives", "create events" and "invent encounters"', as Looseley has recounted, and which existed at 'the junction… between art and its social insertion', as the French writer Jean Caune also notes.[53] The criticism that relational aesthetics was a form of '"anti-institutional" institutional[ism]' was therefore partially accurate yet also misplaced.[54] It did not *become* institutionalised through Bourriaud's role (from 1999 to 2006) as co-director of one of France's most important contemporary art centres, the Palais de Tokyo in Paris.[55] It was already thoroughly serving French Republican cultural policy, indeed advancing it beyond national borders *via* its allusions to digital "democracy" and inclusion of artists from Asia and around the North Atlantic. Bourriaud's appointment to the Palais de Tokyo simply confirmed an already existing reality to his writings.

Bourriaud's shift from a (quasi-)Marxist to a "democratic" referential frame was thus not operating in a contextual vacuum. Nor was he alone in turning to "democracy" to describe the process and goal of 'encountering' art. Bourriaud was one of a number of critics mounting similar arguments through similar tropes and who, when analysed together, can be seen as establishing an increasingly prevalent aesthetic of "democratisation" in Western European art discourse from the late-1990s onwards.

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[53] See Looseley, above n.51, p.169 and Caune, *La culture en action*, above n.52, p.359. For another analysis of Bourriaud's own 'politics of fun', see Hal Foster, 'Arty Party', *London Review of Books*, 25/23 (4 December 2003), pp.21-22, where Foster claims that relational aesthetics marks a shift in art's 'politics' from 'the party à la Lenin to a party à la Lennon'.

[54] Matthew Jesse Jackson, 'Managing the Avant-Garde', *New Left Review*, 32 (March-April 2005), p.115.

[55] Or indeed his subsequent employment as curator for some of Europe's leading institutions in the early twenty-first century, such as the first Moscow Biennale (2005), the Biennale de Lyon (with the Palais de Tokyo's co-director Jérôme Sans in 2005) or Bucharest's National Museum of Contemporary Art from 2004 on. I return to the significance of Bourriaud's involvement in the Bucharest Museum in more detail in Chapter Five.

The French sociologist of art, Joëlle Zask, was one of these figures working parallel to Bourriaud, though her work was informed more by French policies of Cultural Democratisation and the work of the American philosopher John Dewey than by relational aesthetics specifically. Two contentions were central to Zask's argument. The first was that creative relations of experimentation and experience were always present in art, from its production (artists' manipulation of materials) through its exhibition (experimentation with modes of display) to its reception (viewers' creative analysis of artworks, in the presence of artworks and in dialogue with them).[56] Artworks thereby became, in her words, a type of 'proposition' and 'encounter',[57] catalysing viewers' creativity and liberty through their participation with art and its environments of display. Zask's second point followed on from these formal relations. Art's proposition or encounter was primarily educational: viewers learnt about artists', and their own, acts of experimentation in relation to art. More specifically, viewers learnt that such experimental participation could catalyse and affirm their individual responses to art (as based on individual characteristics of age, gender, life histories and so forth, as well as on new experiences moulded by an artwork's form and display).[58] For Zask, then, encountering art was a process of creativity and self-affirmation on the part of audience members. Or, as she described it, art cultivated the 'individuation' of viewers, thereby justifying the amount of tax revenues spent on art and culture in France precisely because such individuation, based on creative participation with socially-educative works, was *an enactment of individual and participatory citizenship*.[59] This educative enactment would not only repair the 'deficiency of individuation' that, she argued, was paradigmatic of contemporary (French) society. It also determined a work's value, its social importance

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[56] Joëlle Zask, *Art et démocratie: Peuples de l'art* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2003).

[57] *Ibid*, p.12; see also Joëlle Zask, 'Démocratiser l'art?', *Parachute*, 111 (June-August 2003), p.135.

[58] Zask, *Art et démocratie*, above n.56, pp.55-87.

[59] *Ibid*, pp.15-30 and 143-183 ; Zask, 'Démocratiser l'art?', above n.57, pp.133-139. Zask's theories largely followed the work of John Dewey, a philosopher of art and education's centrality to the furtherance of democracy and whom Zask had studied in her previous book, *John Dewey, philosophe du public* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1999); see also John Dewey, *Art as Experience* (New York City: Milton, Blach and Co, 1934) and John Dewey, *Democracy and Education: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Education* (New York City: The Macmillan Company, 1916).

and worth, according to art's ability to catalyse the viewer's individuation and sense of citizenship within a democratic nation like France.[60]

Equally importantly, Zask's theories asserted such socially "valuable" art to be an *inherently* "democratic" practice. By instigating and affirming citizenship, she claimed, art's models of participation mirrored and reinforced 'participation [as the means] by which democracy defines itself and finds its legitimation'.[61] Zask's understanding of art's "democracy" consequently relied on two characteristics, both of which she shared with Nicolas Bourriaud: first, participation and experimentation as contingent upon the encounter between viewer and artwork; and second, the social benefits of this participatory encounter. It is important to recognise, however, that Zask's categorisation of art's "democracy" was riven by an internal conceptual tension – and one again shared by Bourriaud. On the one hand, "democracy" signified that which could not be pre-determined or controlled by audiences: for Zask, forms of experimentation that were contingent upon participating in artistic encounters, and which sparked new models of social and individual creativity; and for Bourriaud, the emergence of new behavioural patterns through participation and interactivity that, as I cited earlier, aimed 'to destroy any *a priori* agreement about what is perceived'. On the other hand, this was not experimentation for its own sake but experimentation with highly directed purposes: to "democratise" the audience through their experiences with art, as induced by an artwork's form (and, by extension, an artist's intentions). This "democratic" purpose was thus, in effect, a directive to (rather than a dialogue with) art's audiences. It comprised a subtle kind of pre-determination that assimilated easily within (or advanced) state-endorsed policies of Cultural Democratisation, whether as a means of 'control[ling] social conditions in view of the individuation of all' (per Zask),[62] or through the 'engineering' of a new 'behavioural economy' (per Bourriaud). To invert the terms of Zask's aforementioned assertion, then, it was not simply participation that defined

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[60] Zask, *Art et démocratie*, above n.56, p.58.

[61] *Ibid*, p.151.

[62] *Ibid*, p.199.

"democracy", but "democracy" – in its various designations – that served to define and legitimise participation within contemporary art.

This relatively circular logic of definition and legitimation between art and "democracy" was not limited to French cultural commentary. Though they made no reference to Bourriaud in their book *Rock the Boat*, the Scandinavian critics Tere Vadén and Mika Hannula relied on the same descriptors – of contemporary art's formal 'openness' and the audience's 'participation' and 'encounter' with it – to advocate art as inherently or even ontologically "democratic".[63] The experience of being with an artwork in a particular place and time – what they called the artwork's 'locality' – similarly provided lessons about intersubjective relations that 'must be translated and presented in such a way that it is reachable and readable' beyond that locality.[64] Pre-determination was also rejected: the 'negotiations', 'loving conflict', 'compromises' and 'democracy' that were spawned by and operative within artworks, they argued, 'cannot be controlled by participants'.[65] As we saw with Bourriaud and Zask, then, Vadén and Hannula conceived art as "democratic" in a number of different ways at once: through the processes of audience negotiations and participation with and within artworks; due to a work's open form that prompted or proposed that participation; in terms of the audience's lack of control and determination in those negotiations; and ultimately as what they called 'the values or systems of values' through which art and one's encounter with it could be considered socially 'meaningful'.[66] In short, "democracy" was a catch-all signifier defining the means, ends, reflexive evaluations and subtle directives of engaging with art. It was also highly prescriptive within Vadén and Hannula's discourse, driven by repetitions of the word 'must' that served to exclude as well as to direct – whether that be the view that 'politics must be augmented and enriched through loving conflict', that that conflict

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[63] Tere Vadén and Mika Hannula, *Rock the Boat: Localized Ethics, the Situated Self and Particularism in Contemporary Art* (Cologne: Salon Verlag, 2003), pp.11-15, 32-52 and 155 especially.

[64] *Ibid*, p.135.

[65] For Vadén and Hannula's assertions against control, see *ibid*, pp.13 and 65; for their frequent assertions to 'negotiation', 'loving conflict' and 'compromises', see *inter alia* pp.9, 13, 51-52, 66 and 157.

[66] *Ibid*, p.52.

'must remain on the level of non-violence', or the instruction (which was somewhat paradoxical given its content) that 'elements of surprise, undecidability and risk must be present, or the possibilities [for democratisation] are severely reduced'.[67] Any artistic engagement beyond those limits – even if formally compatible with the openness and participation that Vadén and Hannula perceived as intrinsically "democratic" – was thereby excluded from their valuation of art as 'a certain kind of romanticism that is based on hope [and] better ways of being'.[68] "Democracy" within Vadén and Hannula's formulation of art had become a description for vaguely defined and potentially moralistic "values": of exclusive romanticisms, of pre-determined (if still remarkably abstract) notions of meaningfulness, and of proscribed deviations from particular politics.

By the early-2000s, these tropes had become widespread, conventional signs for determining "democracy" in contemporary art. The literature historian and aesthetic theorist Thomas Docherty, for example, identified 'aesthetic democracy' as an 'encounter' with art driven by unpredictability in an audience's response – an encounter, he argued further, that successfully enacted "democracy" as a form of political autonomy by disavowing any relation to contemporary 'states of affairs' and geopolitics.[69] For French critic Laurent Goumarre, art's 'invention of democracy' entailed experiences free of any extant models or conventions – even as he returned to conventions of audience co-production and interactive participation as the means by which that 'freedom' would emerge.[70] Delhi-based art critic Geeta Kapur characterised the installations of Vivan Sundaram as "democratic" in similar ways as well. Sundaram's installations created spaces within which audiences could engage in tactile and 'hands-on practice', Kapur

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[67] *Ibid*, pp.69, 81 and 135 respectively.

[68] *Ibid*, p.158.

[69] Thomas Docherty, 'The Aesthetic Event' in Pavel Büchler and Nikos Papastergiadis (eds.), *Ambient Fears: Random Access 2* (London and Concord: Rivers Oram Press, 1996), pp.129-142; and Thomas Docherty, *Aesthetic Democracy* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006). Docherty's claim to the political autonomy of "democracy" is taken from the latter text, p.159.

[70] Laurent Goumarre, '"Deceptual Art": Contemporary Art as Coproduction' in Paul Ardenne, Pascal Beausse and Laurent Goumarre, *Contemporary Practices: Art as Experience* (Paris: Dis Voir, 1997), pp.120-121 especially.

argued, such that simply playing with or moving through an artwork was 'a designation of the citizen' within the installations' 'stage… [for] a democratic encounter'.[71]

Perhaps most surprisingly, though, a number of Bourriaud's harshest critics also returned to the very nexus that was instrumental to his work – a nexus of audience participation, unpredictability, "democracy" and "values" – reiterating its paramountcy in art's politics so as to express their seemingly distinct critical positions. Writing in 2004, both English critic Claire Bishop and the French art historian Paul Ardenne denounced relational aesthetics as a reified, institutionalised model of art practice and discourse: Bishop aligned relational aesthetics with the curatorial commonplace of seeing the art museum as a laboratory for behavioural experimentation, while Ardenne claimed that it had become a form of 'prostitution' in its solicitation of artists and the public to its 'offers [of] good will'.[72] In lieu of Bourriaud's institutionalised utopianism, both Ardenne and Bishop sought alternative discourses within contemporary art, albeit discourses that largely rehearsed Bourriaud's formal tropes. For Ardenne, certain (particularly Western European) postwar artists were united in forming a 'contextual art', an aesthetic dominated by interventions within social spaces such as city streets or shopping centres. Ardenne proposed that artists such as Daniel Buren and Carsten Höller produced meeting-points between artists and audiences within these social contexts – whether in

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[71] Geeta Kapur, 'Dismantled Norms: Apropos Other Avant-Gardes', in Caroline Turner (ed.), *Art and Social Change: Contemporary Art in Asia and the Pacific* (Canberra: Pandanus Books, 2004), p.93.

[72] Claire Bishop, 'Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics', *October*, 110 (Fall 2004), pp.51-53 especially; and Paul Ardenne, *Un art contextuel: Création artistique en milieu urbain, en situation, d'intervention, de participation* (Paris: Flammarion, 2nd ed., 2006), pp.187-206, quotations taken from p.205. Bishop, unlike most critics, provides a rare exercise of contextualising relational aesthetics within contemporary art discourses. She rightly sees Bourriaud's invocation of art as a 'crucible' and 'micro-utopia' as tying into other curatorial commentary on art and museums as social laboratories for experimenting with new behavioural models: see, for example, Hans Ulrich Obrist and Barbara Vanderlinden, 'Laboratorium' in Hans Ulrich Obrist and Barbara Vanderlinden (eds.), *Laboratorium*, exh. cat. (Antwerp: Antwerpen Open, 1999), pp.16-23 and, though unmentioned by Bishop, Froment, above n.23, np. Bourriaud, in response, rejected Bishop's criticisms as 'conservative' and Ardenne's as 'not bring[ing] any significant light on today's artistic landscape', such that Bourriaud could not take Ardenne's work seriously: Interview with Nicolas Bourriaud, 6 July 2005, author's notes. For very different critiques of relational aesthetics – through notions of fracture and disagreement, and autonomy in the writings of Marx and Adorno respectively – see Brian Holmes, 'De l'interaction en art contemporain', *Parachute*, 95 (July-September 1999), pp.52-54; and Stewart Martin, 'Critique of Relational Aesthetics', *Third Text*, 21/4 (July 2007), pp.369-386.

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the act of pasting posters onto roadside hoardings, or by encouraging passers-by to participate in the creation of a temporary public artwork (figs.1.4-1.5) – in order to reconsider how such spaces can be used to reknit social relations. Through direct participation with art, or chance and experimental encounters with artists, audiences could produce 'direct and democratic expressions' that were the linchpin of their 'relational adventure' with art.[73] This was not, according to Ardenne, simply a repetition of Bourriaud's relational aesthetics. Instead, audiences' 'democratic expressions' could intervene in concrete public contexts rather than (as Ardenne saw it) Bourriaud's abstractions of the social that were contained safely within art institutions. Beyond this shift in the location of an artwork's staging, however, there was little to distinguish Ardenne's 'contextual art', dictated by artists' and audiences' site-specific interventions and what he called 'the democratic pact smuggled in by the artist',[74] from Bourriaud's earlier theories.

Bishop's critique was more trenchant. As with the British critic John Roberts before her,[75] Bishop identified a lack of critical forms of antagonism in Bourriaud's advocacy of harmonious collective relations designed to create a 'better world'. '[B]etter art', she argued, instead analyses the quality of the relations produced rather than simply celebrating the forms that relations take, and 'expos[es] that which is repressed in sustaining the semblance of this harmony'.[76] Through antagonistic acts of participation – such as Santiago Sierra's use of immigrant or third-world labourers as a means to reproduce and reveal their exploitation by first world countries and corporations, or his

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[73] Ardenne, *ibid*, p.70; Paul Ardenne, 'Experimenting with the Real: Art and Reality at the End of the Twentieth Century', in Ardenne, Beausse and Goumarre, above n.70, p.41.

[74] Ardenne, *Un art contextuel*, *ibid*, p.75.

[75] John Roberts, 'The Labour of Subjectivity, the Subjectivity of Labour: Reflections on Contemporary Political Theory and Culture', *Third Text*, 16/4 (December 2002), pp.383-384; Ardenne's claims in *Un art contextuel* that relational aesthetics was too 'cosy' and lacked vigorous debate, were also published prior to Bishop's text in 2004: Ardenne, above n.72, pp.197ff.

[76] Bishop, above n.72, p.79 c.f. Bishop's questioning of this presumption that 'better politics' make for 'better art' on p.77. For a similar argument published at roughly the same time as Bishop's, see Julian Stallabrass, *Art Incorporated: The Story of Contemporary Art* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), pp.176-182.

barring of viewers from entering the Spanish pavilion at the Venice Biennale if they did not have a Spanish passport (fig.1.6) – artists could reveal contemporary capitalism's limits and exclusions, according to Bishop.[77] In so doing, Bishop claimed that 'relational antagonism' could advocate 'better democracy', such that even an artist's exclusion or exploitation of others could be justified according to 'the democratic notions it upholds, and how these are manifested in our experience of the work'.[78] Bishop's account of "democracy", in other words, entailed a somewhat problematic logic of legitimation. Provided that the intention behind an artwork was "democratic", then potentially any antagonistic act conducted in its name, regardless of how exclusionary its effects may be, could be dignified as a 'better' form of politics in art. And as a marker of 'better' politics and 'better' aesthetics, "democracy" ultimately determined how an artwork's qualities – its characteristics, as well as its ethical and political meaning or value – could be adjudged relative to other artworks. "Democracy" was thus no longer a modality of state politics; it was an inherent marker of goodness, of quality, through which to legitimise an author's claims that their actions or intentions were "democratic".

It is consequently important to recognise that Bishop's 'relational antagonism' in many ways epitomised, rather than countered, the aesthetic conventions of "democracy" and "democratisation" already advocated by other, primarily Western European critics and which I have analysed in this section. All of these critics relied upon particular formal characteristics and tropes: a renewed interest in social relations as art forms in themselves; acts of audience participation and 'encounters' with artworks – often, though not exclusively, installations – as the basis for analysis;[79] a work's 'open' form or display that sparks that encounter (whether that be candies proffered as gifts to the public, or, as

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[77] Bishop, *ibid*, p.74.

[78] Bishop, *ibid*, pp.77, 78. Many of Bishop's ideas were borrowed from the writings of the American art and architecture historian, Rosalyn Deutsche, as well as from Deutsche's own use of theories from 1980s' political science, including two political scientists (Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe) whose work I analyse in greater detail in the next section of this chapter and in Chapter Two: see Rosalyn Deutsche *Evictions: Art and Spatial Politics* (Cambridge MA: The MIT Press, 1996).

[79] For Bishop's own invocation of the 'encounter' (argued in relation to her destabilising 'encounter' with a Sierra work), see Bishop, *ibid*, p.73.

in one of Bishop's examples, Sierra's street vendors trading their wares across Venice's *piazze*); and the implicit and explicit means by which an artwork – and by extension an artist – directs and thus presumes certain effects of that encounter.

However, for *us* to presume that these forms are inherently "democratic" is, as Bishop rightly claims, inaccurate.[80] Encounters, engagements and participatory acts between artworks and their viewers can be directed to ends other than "democracy" – such as metaphorising "Europe", as occurred in the early-1990s, or as establishing "love", as Thierry de Duve asserted in his analysis of such encounters in his 2002 exhibition, *Voici*.[81] Given such alternative endpoints, the uniform turn to "democracy" by the numerous critics analysed throughout this section, from Bourriaud to Bishop, suggests that what was at stake in this increasingly dominant aesthetic was not so much accord about its formal conventions, though this was undoubtedly important. The crux of this aesthetic instead lay in how it was characterised within contemporary art criticism and commentary, particularly in relation to the purposes that it was claimed to bring into effect. These were characterisations common to all of the critics' analytical models, transcending the specific differences and disputes between them. Three such characterisations stood out above all: first, that the 'encounter' could destabilise normative, and compel alternative, perceptions of social relations – whether cosily or critically; second, that art's catalysis of any alternative, and not pre-determined, politics was "democratic" *sui generis*; and third, that "democracy" entailed the only politics of value by which critics defined and legitimised (or could legitimise) their conception of participation within contemporary art. Through these forms of instrumentalism, art was increasingly claimed to provide a beneficent "democratisation" of society – and one which could be equally beneficent to art criticism, especially given its need to regain

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[80] *Ibid*, p.78.

[81] Thierry de Duve, *Look: 100 Years of Contemporary Art*, trans. Simon Pleasance and Fronza Woods, exh. cat. (Ghent: Ludion and Brussels: Palais des Beaux Arts, 2002); for a philosophical genealogy of this different understanding of 'the encounter' in contemporary art, see Peter Milne, 'Community, Globalization and the Logic of Encounter: The Artwork after Husserl, Lefort and de Duve', *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Art*, 3/2 (2002), pp.103-116.

relevance after the various endgames of the 1990s with which I introduced this section of the chapter.

For Bourriaud in particular, this renewed social relevance was the foundation for the 'planetary success', as he called it, of relational aesthetics.[82] I would suggest, however, that this assessment is only partially accurate. Such aesthetics of "democratisation" paralleled, and in part traded on, the equally strong – and ultimately quite problematic – appeals to "democracy" in two other social spheres: political philosophy on the one hand, and geopolitical rhetoric on the other. As we will see in the remainder of this chapter, the resultant networks of legitimation between art, cultural and political discourse were precisely 'the right ways', as Bourriaud claimed in his essay for *Traffic*, 'of substantiating an exhibition in relation to the cultural context and in relation to art history as it is being updated today'.

Conflicts and Consensus: Political Philosophies of "Democracy"

Contemporary art discourse's indebtedness to political philosophy was the focal point of two key symposia held in 2001. Titled 'Democracy Unrealized', these symposia formed the first of the five platforms of *Documenta 11*, Okwui Enwezor's sprawling programme of theoretical discussions that culminated in a large-scale art exhibition in Kassel, Germany, in 2002.[83] 'Democracy Unrealized' was ultimately not a forum for analysing different discourses and practices of "democracy" within art projects, however – art professionals comprised only 25% of the symposia's speakers – so much as a means of informing art commentators and practitioners about the most pressing debates on

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[82] Interview with Nicolas Bourriaud, 6 July 2005, author's notes.

[83] Platforms one through four were symposia mounted across the world: 'Democracy Unrealized' in Vienna and Berlin (2001); 'Experiments with Truth: Transitional Justice and the Processes of Reconciliation' in New Delhi (2001); 'Créolité and Creolization' in St Lucia (2002); and 'Under Siege: Four African Cities Freetown, Johannesburg, Kinshasa, Lagos' in Lagos (2002). The fifth platform was the usual focus of Documenta, the Kassel exhibition. 'Democracy Unrealized' took place in two cities at two different times in 2001 (March and October) due to the terrorist acts in America on September 11, 2001, so as to determine what effects, if any, those attacks had had on the state of theorising and debating "democracy".

"democracy" within political science and philosophy. What emerged from these discussions was a paradox: a general consensus among speakers that "democracy" was not a politics of harmony, but a politics of conflict.

Two models of "democracy" were particularly subjected to criticism. The first was a model of liberal democracy advocated by the American political scientist, Francis Fukuyama. For Fukuyama, conflict about political and economic ideologies no longer existed after the Soviet Union's collapse. The 1990s instead witnessed liberal democracy's definitive triumph over communism (indeed, over any politico-economic ideology), such that we had entered a 'Promised Land' of individual freedom, representative government and capitalist economics that Fukuyama considered central to this triumphant understanding of "democracy".[84] The 'end of history' was apparently nigh – at least in the sense of "history" as a perpetual series of conflicts to assert ideological hegemony on a global scale. And in lieu of this conflictual, dialectical history would emerge consensus and homogenisation (or so Fukuyama gleefully asserted): a universal drive to "democracy", as spread through the triumphant West's globalising capitalist markets. The second model critiqued in 'Democracy Unrealized' was one that equally advocated consensus as its *raison d'être*: the model of deliberative democracy generated from the writings of John Rawls and particularly Jürgen Habermas.[85] Whereas Fukuyama saw "democracy" as developing its hegemony through a process of elimination, deliberation entailed reasoned and rational communication between parties to a political dialogue. This criterion of "rationality" rested on two further (though largely implicit) criteria: the first, formal; the second, procedural. On the one hand, discussants needed to be recognised as legitimate parties to the dialogue – not only as having a

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[84] Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (London and New York City: Penguin Books, 1992), pp.xv, 42-48, 135-137. Capitalisation in the original.

[85] See, for example, John Rawls, *Political Liberalism* (New York City: Columbia University Press, 1993); Jürgen Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms: Contributions to a Discourse Theory of Law and Democracy*, trans. William Rehg (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1996). For elaboration of some of the key tenets of deliberative democracy beyond Habermas's own writings, see Seyla Benhabib (ed.), *Democracy and Difference: Contesting the Boundaries of the Political* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), particularly Benhabib's essays advocating and extending Habermas's work (pp.3-18, 67-94) For one of the most direct critiques of deliberative democracy in *Democracy Unrealized*, see Upendra Baxi, 'Global Justice and the Failure of Deliberative Democracy', in Enwezor (ed.), above n.12, pp.113-132.

relevant interest in the matters to be discussed (such as conservation groups *vis-à-vis* environmental matters), but also as having a history of engaging with other parties in a reasonable manner, so as to validate a discussant's "rational" identity. On the other hand, for the communication itself to be recognised as "rational" and reasonable, the discussants needed to pre-determine and mutually authorise the deliberation's procedural steps. These two supplementary criteria of rationality thereby sought an equitable mediation of power within the deliberation. However, they also risked the exclusion of "illegitimate" parties or processes that could threaten or disrupt deliberations – from extreme cases such as anarchist organisations or violent dissidence, to more nuanced situations involving parties deemed "illegitimate" or "minor" by a dominant power (for reasons of class, gender, race and so on) or the possibility of alternative procedures that could, for example, include those minorities within deliberations.

The potentially exclusionary foundation of deliberative democracy was not, however, the primary reason for its critique in 'Democracy Unrealized'. Critics instead focused on the Habermasian belief that, through reasoned dialogue, one party would ultimately persuade the other party or parties to their point of view – to seek a consensus, in other words, through communication. The finality of a "democratic" consensus was anathema to the majority of speakers at 'Democracy Unrealized'. For the radical democratic theorist Chantal Mouffe – whose writings underpinned the work of many of the symposia's participants – the Habermasian emphasis on supposedly impartial, deliberative procedures was actually 'the triumph of a moralizing liberalism… through rational moral procedures'.[86] For Mouffe, the inducement of consensus through pre-determined formal procedures both eradicated any kind of political dissent within "democracy", and treated those procedures as transcendent and morally enforceable on whoever sought to engage in political discussion.[87] By contrast, Mouffe's *radical* democracy, as articulated in both 'Democracy Unrealized' and her numerous expositions since the mid-1980s, conceptualised dissent as an ongoing, open-ended process of interpreting principles of

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[86] Chantal Mouffe, 'For an Agonistic Public Sphere', in Enwezor (ed.), above n.12, p.88.

[87] *Ibid*, pp.89-92.

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liberty and equality – as 'an ethics not of harmony but of *dis-harmony*' within a given discourse.[88] In a 1985 collaboration with Ernesto Laclau (a political philosopher to whom I will return in more detail in Chapter Two), Mouffe specifically identified *antagonism* rather than consensus between political discussants as central to her conception of "democracy".[89] Antagonistic debate about principles of "democracy" opened up the range of interpretations of what "democracy" could be. The effect was threefold: "democracy" was an institution grounded in the 'radical pluralism' of these various interpretations;[90] this radical pluralism 'foreclose[d] any possibility of a final reconciliation, of any kind of rational consensus, of a fully inclusive "we"';[91] and antagonism thereby provided for a politics of 'radical indeterminacy' about how to define and interpret political signifiers and procedures at the heart of "democracy".[92] "Democracy", in other words, had not been achieved strictly through Cold War victory, nor through trust in highly administered deliberations; it was instead a politics grounded in micro-level interpretive frictions that perpetually deepened, rather than dissolved, the core liberal democratic principles that were the subject of disharmonious interpretation.[93]

The threefold effect of Mouffe's theorisation of antagonism resonated beyond the domain of political science. To an extent, the alterity produced through antagonism formulated "democracy" in much the same way as we saw in the previous section on the aesthetic of "democratisation": as an open-ended, indeterminate encounter with others that aimed to

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[88] Chantal Mouffe, 'Which Ethics for Democracy?', in Marjorie Garber, Beatrice Hanssen and Rebecca L. Walkowitz (eds.), *The Turn to Ethics* (New York City and London: Routledge, 2000), p.93 (italics in the original). See also *inter alia* Chantal Mouffe, 'Decision, Deliberation and Democratic Ethos', *Philosophy Today*, 41/1 (1997), pp.24-29 (especially p.27).

[89] Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* (London: Verso, 2nd ed., 2001 (1985)). Readers should note that I will analyse the work of Laclau and another significant philosopher of "democracy", Jacques Derrida, in detail in Chapter Two, hence their absence from the accounts provided in this chapter.

[90] *Ibid*, p.167.

[91] *Ibid*, p.xvii.

[92] *Ibid*, p.188.

[93] *Ibid*, p.176.

destabilise the socio-political status quo. This pluralist model of "democracy" proved equally influential for two other speakers at 'Democracy Unrealized', whose predominant focus was "democracy" within art. For Okwui Enwezor, a radicalised understanding of "democracy" maintained its contemporary relevance, and countered its Fukuyama-style triumphalism, by being 'a fundamentally unrealizable project'.[94] Any threat of ideological closure and a totalising politics would thereby be avoided, according to Enwezor, by seeing "democracy" as unrealisable and this notion of unrealisability as itself "democratic". This argument was similarly advocated by the media theorist Oliver Marchart, who held that the effectiveness of "democracy" arose from its being a promise or an incentive for societal progress, a goal to which one could always aspire yet never achieve, such that it '*necessarily* remains *unrealizable*'.[95] Such claims extended far beyond the frame of 'Democracy Unrealized' as well. As we have already seen, the conceptualisation of antagonism within "democracy" was also crucial to Claire Bishop's articulation in 2004 of 'relational antagonism' as 'better democracy' within contemporary art, for instance, and her attempt to shore up art's investment in "democracy" so as to reinscribe art with political "value".

Whereas Bishop ultimately asserted a kind of synonymity between antagonism and "democracy", we must be careful to recognise that this was a misreading of Mouffe's own elaboration of radical democracy after 1985. As Mouffe made clear in a publication from 2000, *The Democratic Paradox*, antagonism and "democracy" were not one and the same thing. Antagonism occurs between enemies who do not share the same core values and thus 'have no common symbolic space'.[96] Mouffe instead aligned her politics with 'agonism': a difference of opinion between people who share the same principles and 'common symbolic space', and who can thus be classified as *adversaries* within an

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[94] Okwui Enwezor *et al*, 'Introduction', in Enwezor (ed.), *Democracy Unrealized*, above n.12, p.14.

[95] Oliver Marchart, 'Enacting the Unrealized', in *ibid*, p.253. Italics in the original.

[96] Chantal Mouffe, *The Democratic Paradox* (London: Verso, 2000), p.13.

ideological and/or symbolic field rather than enemies between such fields.[97] In other words, antagonism *per se* was a process of disagreement that could, if unchecked, result in hostilities between enemy parties; Mouffe's radically democratic agonism instead qualified and limited antagonism to 'some common ground… a shared adhesion to the ethico-political principles of liberal democracy'.[98]

This qualification was important for a number of reasons. First, it clarified Mouffe's 'aim of democratic politics [which was] to transform *antagonism* into *agonism*'.[99] But this clarification in turn raised a contradiction. On the one hand, Mouffe claimed antagonism to be a *political* practice that broke away from what she called *politics*, defined as the institutional ordering and domestication of hostility and disagreement found in (among other things) deliberative democratic philosophies. 'Politics', she claimed, sought 'to defuse the potential antagonism in human relations' and "democracy" alike; 'the political' – antagonism – instead aimed to reinvigorate "democracy" through open-ended debate and its destabilisation of any form of consensus.[100] On the other hand, as Mouffe argued in 'Democracy Unrealized', antagonism's transformation into agonism was itself an act of defusing; the aim of this transformation was 'to defuse the potential of hostility that exists in human societies' by subsuming the political within already extant values and principles of liberal democracy that agonism sought to deepen.[101] If politics entailed the defusing and domestication of political antagonism, then the latter's transformation into agonism – which, we must remember, was 'the aim of democratic politics' – risked becoming a parallel form of domestication: a domestication, according to Mouffe's logic, into a deepened 'politics' of (liberal) "democracy".

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[97] *Ibid*, pp.13-14. For a parallel appraisal of 'democracy without enemies' – albeit one that seeks to invigorate Western "democracy" by means that do not include antagonism or adversarialism – see Ulrich Beck, *Democracy Without Enemies*, trans. Mark Ritter (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1998).

[98] Mouffe, *ibid*, p.102.

[99] *Ibid*, p.103. Italics in the original.

[100] *Ibid*, p.101. Mouffe subsequently elaborated the differentiation between 'politics' and 'the political' in Chantal Mouffe, *On the Political* (Abingdon and New York City: Routledge, 2005).

[101] Mouffe, 'For an Agonist Public Sphere', in Enwezor (ed.), above n.12, p.90.

This leads us to the second reason for perceiving the qualification of 'political antagonism' as important. Whereas antagonism was engaged by enemies, *adversaries* – or as Mouffe called them elsewhere, 'friendly enemies' – debated each other within agonism.[102] The qualification and quality of *friendliness* thus constituted a form of legitimacy and potential exclusion, much as we saw in relation to deliberative democracy.[103] Recognition as an adversary required assimilating within, and confining dissent to, pre-set parameters of particular "democratic" values or principles. Agonism was thus a form of politics within limits; any dissent about those limits – such as about where the limits of friendliness lay, who assigned those limits and why – was seemingly outside Mouffe's agenda. Furthermore, agonism's containment within pre-determined parameters risked calcifying "democracy" into a specific series of principles to always adhere to, regardless of whether those principles had qualitatively changed or been appropriated for "non-democratic" interests (a particularly important concern as we will see later in this chapter). Substantive questions about whether certain principles were indeed still "democratic", or even whether other principles outside the initial domain of "democracy" could be reconsidered as being in its interests, were thus potentially "illegitimate" as well.[104] Agonist "democracy" was consequently a means to fortify (rather than destabilise or politicise) the extant limits and comfort zones of "democracy", and to disregard any potential limitations it may have had.

We should also consider a third important aspect to Mouffe's qualification of political antagonism. Mouffe had long argued that radical democracy was grounded in indeterminacy and the destabilisation of extant political signification. The result of this indeterminacy was 'to instate a new hegemony' (as she argued in *The Democratic Paradox*), to create an 'alternative to the current hegemonic order' ('Democracy

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[102] Mouffe, *The Democratic Paradox*, above n.96, p.13.

[103] Mouffe advocates the importance of legitimacy to her conceptions of radical democracy in *ibid*, p.102.

[104] On this point, see also Peter Osborne, 'Radicalism without Limit? Discourse, Democracy and the Politics of Identity', in Peter Osborne (ed.), *Socialism and the Limits of Liberalism* (London and New York City: Verso, 1991), p.215.

Unrealized') and 'a new mode of institution of the social' (*Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*).[105] That is, Mouffe stressed that pluralised interpretations of linguistic signifiers, of core principles and values, and of discourse itself, would thereby open up and radically alter existing forms of life, transforming them into forms of agonist democracy.[106] The "democratising" potential of political indeterminacies, she claimed, 'cannot be reduced to a positive ground explaining them';[107] yet that was precisely what the containment and domestication of antagonism within agonism did. Indeterminacy was redetermined and restabilised by the proper name of "democracy". It was an 'alternative to the current hegemonic order' (as outlined by Fukuyama and others) that appealed to and deepened the same nomenclature, principles and symbolic authority of that order. "Democracy" thereby risked becoming a curiously totalising political philosophy, as Peter Osborne had already noted of Mouffe's writings in 1991.[108] For it was a philosophy simultaneously encompassing three different political projects, all now located within the limits of agonism: the 'current hegemonic order' that one should destabilise; a politics grounded in the pluralised and indeterminate processes of that destabilisation (the 'very condition of ["democracy's"] possibility', as Mouffe wrote elsewhere);[109] *and* the 'new hegemony' instated by those processes. "Democracy" for Mouffe was thus the goal and limit for legitimate political action, whereas those limits themselves – and whether any alternative or actually radical politics existed beyond them – were not in question.

Mouffe was not alone in advocating "democracy" as a radical alternative to contemporary political hegemonies. Indeed, "democracy" became a rallying cry for many critical theorists in the 1990s. And while the presumed inherent beneficence of "democracy" was not in question, what "democracy" entailed and how it could be catalysed and signified

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[105] Mouffe, *The Democratic Paradox*, above n.96, p.120; Mouffe, 'For an Agonist Public Sphere', in Enwezor (ed.), above n.12, p.92; Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, above n.89, p.155.

[106] Mouffe, *The Democratic Paradox*, *ibid*, p.67. Mouffe explicitly notes that this argument is Wittgensteinian in origin.

[107] *Ibid*, p.139.

[108] Osborne, above n.104, p.218.

[109] Mouffe, 'Which Ethics for Democracy?', above n.88, p.92.

certainly were. For two other speakers at the 'Democracy Unrealized' symposia, Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, "democracy" was the name under which a new socio-political revolution would take place.[110] In their influential writings, Hardt and Negri declared that the self-interested, neoliberal capitalism of transnational corporations (a capitalism they called 'Empire') had superseded nation-states and industrial entities such as factories as the dominant processors of social governance in the second half of the twentieth century.[111] Empire's propellant was not (or, rather, not necessarily) material forms of labour, such as factory or agricultural work, that Karl Marx had examined in the nineteenth century.[112] Empire instead expropriated and exploited predominantly "hidden" or immaterial forms of labour – from relatively cheap labour in economically poor locations across the globe, to more ephemeral and digitally-based labour as found in service economies and leisure industries or as managed through information and communications technologies. For Hardt and Negri, however, increased social subordination and exploitation were not inevitable consequences of these immaterial networks owned and run by neoliberal Empire. Those people whose labour, leisure and communications were expropriated by Empire – and whom Hardt and Negri called 'the multitude' – could also exploit those immaterial, transnational networks for their own subversive and anti-Empire intent.[113] That intent, Hardt and Negri claimed, was to create a networked revolution across the globe that would end Empire's global reign. In its place, the multitude would introduce a globalised 'democracy without qualifiers':[114] a broadly defined 'rule of everyone by everyone' that would thereby resurrect an eighteenth century definition of "democracy" within twenty-first century societies.[115]

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[110] Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, 'Globalization and Democracy', in Enwezor (ed.), above n.12, pp.323-336.

[111] Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge MA and London: Harvard University Press, 2000).

[112] See, for example, Karl Marx, *Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy*, trans. Martin Nicolaus (London: A. Lane, 1973).

[113] Hardt and Negri, *Empire*, above n.111, pp.97ff, 393-413.

[114] Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire* (London: Penguin, 2nd ed., 2004), p.237.

[115] *Ibid*, pp.100, 232.

Hardt and Negri's and Mouffe's claims to "democracy" are clearly not identical. First, Hardt and Negri did not believe that "democracy" was unrealisable. For them, the urgency of countering Empire, and its global governance through neoliberalism and war, demanded that the multitude, 'the only social subject capable of realizing democracy', should 'fully realize' the globe's projected salvation through "democracy".[116] And second, whereas Mouffe's radical democratic theories risked being reduced to a formalist project – in the sense that political antagonism and agonist struggles could be seen (and, as we noted earlier, were seen) as synonymous with "democracy" – Hardt and Negri's conception of "democracy" was undoubtedly formalist. The multitude's networked organisations were, they claimed, 'less a means and more an end in itself' of "democracy" – an echo in many ways of the new media rhetoric of 'digital democracy' referred to earlier in this chapter.[117] And while Hardt and Negri denounced any inevitable surrender of the multitude to Empire and its networks, they nevertheless assumed that substantive social change would itself inevitably emerge through and as a result of Empire's organisational forms.[118]

Yet, despite these differences, Mouffe and Hardt and Negri did agree on one fundamental point: that the new and radically alternative politics that would replace Empire's dominant political ideologies could only be understood and signified as "democracy". That is, once again, the same political signifier and ideology that Francis Fukuyama

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[116] *Ibid*, pp.100, 90.

[117] *Ibid*, p.83.

[118] As the French philosopher Alain Badiou quipped, Hardt and Negri's belief that 'capitalist Empire is at the same time the stage for an unprecedented communist deployment… has the advantage of allowing people to believe that the worse everything gets, the better things are going': Alain Badiou, 'Fragments of a Public Diary on the American War Against Iraq', trans. Kristin Ross, *Contemporary French and Francophone Studies*, 8/3 (Summer 2004), p.229. Peter Osborne has also critiqued Hardt and Negri's politics of the multitude as a formalist exercise, one based on a faith that network formations will inevitably deliver the politics they desire: Peter Osborne, 'After the Postcolonial and Empire', Paper presented at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney, 8 July 2006, author's notes. For a similar scepticism about the supposedly inherently revolutionary potential of the multitude, global capitalist networks and immaterial labour – and a scepticism from within Negri's own circle of radical philosophers in Italy – see Paolo Virno, *A Grammar of the Multitude*, above n.24.

(whose work both Mouffe and Hardt and Negri explicitly rejected) had claimed was the dominant political ideology in the age – and the service – of Empire after 1989. On one level, then, Hardt and Negri's advocacy of "democracy" as the multitude's revolutionary politics could be seen as Mouffean agonism in action, as a form of discursive dissent towards Fukuyama's thesis. On another level, they also reinforced "democracy" as a potentially circular and totalising politics, in which the only means to counter "democracy" was with "democracy" – either as a 'democracy without qualifiers' or, at best, a "democracy" distinguished by the weak (and largely unsubstantiated) qualification of 'real democracy'.[119]

This potential circularity of "democracy" and its containment of political antagonism to an extent underscored the work of two other significant contemporary philosophers, Alain Badiou and Jacques Rancière. Unlike Hardt and Negri, both Badiou and Rancière recognised that "democracy" was an increasingly slippery term after the 1980s, one largely determined in the interests of neoliberal states and parliamentary bureaucracies. For Badiou, "democracy" was a term so polysemous as 'to question the extent to which it can still be useful in philosophy'.[120] In his words, "democracy" was concurrently 'the word that supposedly unites the collapse of the socialist States, the putative well-being enjoyed in our countries and the humanitarian crusades of the West'.[121] It was also, he argued further, a discourse 'bound by tradition to the State and to the form of the State', such that it was inseparable from the State's regulations of economic markets and everyday life (or what he called the State's strategies of 'capital-parliamentarianism').[122] Rancière was less concerned than Badiou about "democracy's" geopolitical 'parliamentarianism'. In his 2005 book *La haine de la démocratie*, he instead perceived "democracy" as overly invested in discourses of populism, consumerism and specific

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[119] Hardt and Negri, *Multitude*, above n.114, p.312.

[120] Alain Badiou, *Metapolitics*, trans. Jason Barker (London: Verso, 2005), p.77.

[121] *Ibid*, p.78.

[122] *Ibid*, pp.78, 80, 84. Italics in the original.

debates about pedagogy within French education systems in the 1980s.[123] Nonetheless, despite the concerns they registered about "democracy" as a master political signifier – especially given its increasingly problematic connotations within Western societies in terms of local consumerism or global crusades – both Badiou and Rancière still invoked "democracy" to signify the rupture of Statist regimes and their ordering of the social. Badiouian "democracy" comprised any politics that resisted or withdrew from being articulated within or by the State. What remained after that withdrawal, Badiou asserted, was a void within the State, within the social, within language and thus within representation – a void that ruptured the State's totalising logics and forms of governance, and presented them as fallible and fractured.[124] Furthermore, he claimed that such politics could not be inscribed *ex post facto* with a 'proper name' or a readymade signifier (such as Marxism or communism); that inscription would ultimately realign and re-present the political void within Statist discourses and their logics of representation, and thereby reconfirm those logics 'as guarantor[s] for the understanding of… "politics"'.[125] At the same time, however, by invoking "democracy" as the means to signify that politics, Badiou not only sought to reframe that polysemous signifier and to inform it with yet more meaning, as a paradoxical resistance of the State through a Statist term. He also guaranteed its political surety through the extant political and representational authority of "democracy", as a paradoxically Statist sublation of an apparent resistance to the State.

This was also true of "democracy" according to Rancière's definition. For him, "democracy" signified that which ruptures the hegemonic ordering (or 'policing', in Rancière's lexicon) of all aspects of life – of what can be seen, heard, thought, understood and thereby taken into account as proper to hegemonic modes of governance.[126] More specifically, he conceived "democracy" as arising through processes

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[123] Jacques Rancière, *La haine de la démocratie* (Paris: La Fabrique éditions, 2005).

[124] Badiou, *Metapolitics*, above n.120, pp.85-93.

[125] *Ibid*, p.11.

[126] See, for example, Jacques Rancière, 'Ten Theses on Politics', *Theory and Event*, 5/3 (2001), Thesis #4. For a glossary of Rancière's lexicon, see Jacques Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics*, trans. Gabriel

of *dissensus* against, or *disagreement* with, the police by those who have been ignored as "improper" and thus have, according to the police, no part to play in the political.[127] In order to play a part, to be heard and thus to be political, those who have been ignored must intervene in normative systems of social relations and representations, Rancière argues, and rupture them with their own dissenting representation. But to articulate that new mode of representation, and for it to be recognised by the police order, that entire system of social relations must be reconfigured. Rancièrean "democracy" thus comprised both the demand that one's hitherto ignored voice be heard, and the hegemonic order's structural change as induced by that dissenting voice. Furthermore, as the rupture of normative modes of governance, "democracy" was itself ungovernable and unnameable:[128] it was not a formal system of voting ('where one vote is equal to another just as a cent is worth a cent'),[129] but instead 'the primary limitation of the power of authorial forms which order the social body'.[130]

Once again, though, the attempted reclamation of "democracy" from Statist paradigms was not without its problems. First, those who wanted to be heard and to play a part were, for Rancière, still required to seek recognition from the hegemonic order that had ignored them in the first place. That is, one still needed to appeal to the police's authority, to reaffirm that authority, in order to reconfigure it – and thereby to remain structurally subordinate to its powers of recognition. And second, if Rancièrean "democracy" was ungovernable and unnameable, then his assignation of "democracy" as the proper name for that politics opened itself up to contradiction. While Rancière may have provided yet another understanding of what "democracy" could be, he did not in any way rupture its

Rockhill (London and New York City: Continuum, 2004 (2000)), pp.83-92. For a succinct overview of Rancière's politico-aesthetic philosophy, see Gabriel Rockhill, 'Translator's Introduction: Jacques Rancière's Politics of Perception' in *The Politics of Aesthetics*, *ibid*, pp.1-6.

[127] Jacques Rancière, *Disagreement: Politics and Philosophy*, trans. Julie Rose (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1999 (1995)).

[128] Rancière, 'La politique ou le pasteur perdu' ('Politics and the Lost Pastor'), in *La haine de la démocratie*, above n.123, pp.40-57.

[129] Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics*, above n.126, p.55.

[130] Rancière, *La haine de la démocratie*, above n.123, p.52.

status as the paramount – indeed, given the range of interpretations analysed throughout this chapter, the *only* – signifier for a seemingly viable, radical and *unnameable* politics after the collapse of Soviet communism. By Rancière's reckoning, then, any disruption of the policing authority of the signifier – and not just the signified – would still exemplify and reaffirm "democracy" even in the attempt to disrupt it. To cite Badiou's own awareness of this conundrum, '[i]t is forbidden, as it were, not to be a democrat' when articulating "radical" politics.[131]

What are we consequently to make of these distinct political philosophies of contemporary "democracy"? The cumulative analysis presented in this chapter suggests that "democracy" is an ontologically pluralist conception of the political, a conception driven by conflict as to how to ensure the ongoing efficacy and legitimacy of "democracy" in the Cold War's wake. This battle, played on the level of meaning and how to conceptualise what "democracy" stands for, confirms Chantal Mouffe's belief that agonism is the cornerstone of "democracy": that friendly antagonism between liberal, deliberative, radical and other theories of "democracy" serves to deepen and fortify "democracy's" principles. Yet trying to define what those principles actually are is an almost impossible task, and one that exposes discourses of "democracy" to claims of circularity. Is "democracy" a political conception of individual freedom, representative government and capitalist economics (per Fukuyama), of reasoned consensus (per Habermasian deliberative democrats), of radical indeterminacy and contained disharmony (Mouffe), a neo-formalist 'rule of everyone by everyone' (Hardt and Negri) or an ungovernable, unnameable rupture of the police order or the State (Rancière and Badiou) – or, indeed, any of these principles, *provided they are argued in the name of "democracy"?* It is precisely this dilemma that underpins the politico-psychoanalytic philosopher, Slavoj Žižek's, surmisal that 'the only way to define "democracy" is to say that it contains all political movements and organizations which legitimize themselves as "democratic"'.[132] By this logic, then, political philosophical conceptions of "democracy"

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[131] Badiou, *Metapolitics*, above n.120, p.78.

[132] Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (London and New York City: Verso, 1989), p.98.

are perhaps best understood not as pluralist, as Mouffe claims, but as something else: a circular politics that, despite the remarkably diverse ways in which philosophers have broached the topic, have all sought self-affirmation and self-validation through the label of "democracy".

By saying this, I do not intend to conflate or collapse these very different understandings of what "democracy" may mean after the Cold War; the vastness of those differences clearly makes such an approach erroneous. What I *do* want to pinpoint, however, are strong parallels in terms of how these writers have invoked "democracy" to frank the contemporary importance and relevance of their distinct politico-philosophical conceptualisations. This process of how one assigns or signifies the relevance of a political philosophy is the foundation of Žižek's belief that "democracy" is defined as a circular and easily co-optable logic, in which "democracy" is defined through the presentation and legitimation of one's politics as "democratic". Yet if this Žižekian deduction is correct, then it raises further complications that we must address immediately. The first is that, even though Mouffe, Badiou *et al* have sought to reclaim "democracy" from the likes of Fukuyama and to provide it with alternative meaning, we should not confuse that process with the ostensibly similar strategy of reclamation, resignification and self-legitimation that the French philosopher Michel Foucault labelled 'reverse discourse'.[133] For Foucault, as for numerous philosophers, activists and artists engaged in Identity Politics after the late-1980s, 'reverse discourse' operates where signifiers (such as 'homosexual' or 'queer') are reclaimed from their initially pejorative intent and given alternative, self-affirming and self-legitimating signification. This is not the case with "democracy" though. As analysed throughout this section, "democracy" is – and through the 1980s and 1990s, was – a normatively legitimising rather than pejorative term. Hence its invocation across philosophy's political spectrum: not as epitomising 'reverse discourse' but rather (as Žižek again notes) as a 'transcendental guarantee'.[134] "Democracy" legitimises the hermetic hermeneutic debate conducted in its name. In

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[133] Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality Volume 1: The Will to Knowledge*, trans. Robert Hurley (London: Penguin Books, 1998), p.101.

[134] Slavoj Žižek, *Iraq: The Borrowed Kettle* (London and New York City: Verso, 2004), p.87.

return, the authority of the signifier "democracy" is not reversed but *reinforced* – albeit by so many signifieds that it becomes (as Stuart Hall attested in 'Democracy Unrealized') 'so proliferated, so loaded down with ideological freight, so indeterminate… that it is virtually useless'.[135]

However, if "democracy" has become a politics of circularity that trades on the authority of the signifier, that does not mean that it is 'virtually useless'. "Democracy" instead becomes a politics of principle *qua* authoritative (and thus potentially moralising) values rather than of principles *qua* foundational tenets. That "democracy" is a politics of "value" is, we must remember, the lesson that contemporary art discourses learnt from broader theoretical debates played out in pedagogical platforms such as 'Democracy Unrealized'. But as both art critics and philosophers have sought to repoliticise their disciplines through the principle of "democracy", they have paradoxically risked those disciplines' further depoliticisation. This entails a further complication emerging from the circular definition of "democracy". The apparent need to give a name to the 'unnameable' and to re-determine the 'indeterminate' is not so much an explication as a *resublimation* of radical politics – and not just within the extant ideological frame of "democracy".[136] By effectively asserting "democracy" as the only ostensibly viable signifier for articulating politics, Mouffe, Badiou, Rancière and Hardt and Negri – as well as the art theorists from earlier in this chapter – ultimately, and ironically, confirmed Fukuyama's claim that "democracy" *had* triumphed after the collapse of Soviet communism. It was, as Fukuyama argued, the 'only… competitor standing in the ring as an ideology of potentially universal validity',[137] encompassing and capturing the full spectrum of political agenda from bureaucratic Statism to its 'ungovernable' rupture. It would be a mistake, then, to perceive the triumphalism of "democracy" as occurring solely through historical processes of ideological elimination. It also emerged through

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[135] Stuart Hall, 'Democracy, Globalization and Difference', in Enwezor (ed.), above n.12, p.21.

[136] For a parallel analysis of the resublimation of the defetishised and the "unspeakable" – of abjection in relation to the signifier "woman" – see Rosalind Krauss, 'Cindy Sherman: Untitled', in *Bachelors* (Cambridge MA: The MIT Press, 1999), pp.150-151.

[137] Fukuyama, above n.84, p.42.

political philosophers' own rejection of the very *possibility* of alternative politics that *could indeed* be 'unnameable' and 'indeterminate', politics that could test "democracy" on the level of the signifier as well as the signified.[138] Consequently, by articulating politics of resistance that resolutely refused to resist the dominant political signifier of "democracy" itself, with all its 'ideological freight' as Hall claimed, these writers ensured that "democracy" became 'simultaneously too empty and too full' – a signifier too easily co-opted to legitimise whatever political action was conducted in its name.[139]

The easy co-optability of "democracy" was precisely what Hall referred to when, standing before his peers at 'Democracy Unrealized', he criticised 'the hollowing out of democracy at the very moment of its apotheosis'.[140] But while the description was apt, Hall did not direct it to contemporary political philosophy or, for that matter, art criticism. His main target was geopolitical rhetoric, the rhetoric of Empire, and its own conscription of "democracy" for politically expedient uses, both before and immediately after the 9/11 terrorist attacks in the United States. The aptness of Hall's description across all three discourses was not coincidental, though; it instead pinpointed the important parallels between them, and particularly their shared attempts at self-legitimation through the hollowed signifier of "democracy". It is those efforts at legitimacy that I now want to address in this chapter, both to understand the geopolitical investment in "democracy" after 1989 and to reassess art's alignment with it.

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[138] Katherine Verdery has made a similar argument in relation to political science: see Katherine Verdery, 'Theorizing Socialism: A Prologue to the "Transition"', *American Ethnologist*, 18/3 (August 1991), p.429.

[139] Hall, above n.135, p.21.

[140] *Ibid*, p.25.

Apotheoses and Assumptions – "Democracy" and Postsocialist Critique

Iraq after 2003

When the so-called 'Coalition of the Willing' invaded Iraq on March 20, 2003, its forces were armed not only with guided missiles and rounds of ammunition, but with significant justifications for the invasion. To recapitulate the key justifications proffered by the Coalition, and particularly its leader, the United States: Iraq possessed weapons of mass destruction (or WMDs) that purportedly posed an imminent threat to the United States and other nations; Iraq had not complied with Resolution 1441 of the United Nations Security Council demanding Iraq's disarmament of WMDs, which non-compliance necessitated immediate Coalition intervention, according to its members, to ensure disarmament; Iraq was harbouring and supporting leading members of terrorist organisations, most notably al-Qaeda;[141] and the Coalition needed to enact 'regime change' in Iraq by overthrowing its President, Saddam Hussein, so as to 'free the Iraqi people'.[142] In the ensuing years, many of these justifications proved to be unfounded. Iraq could not comply with Resolution 1441 because it did not possess WMDs and thus could not disarm what it did not have; Saddam Hussein was 'not directly cooperating' with al-Qaeda as claimed;[143] in April 2007, United States armed forces erected walls around particular Baghdad suburbs so as to limit contact between certain Shi'a and Sunni populations and to mitigate the civil war that had emerged in lieu of 'Iraqi freedom'; and although then-National Security Advisor for the United States, Condoleezza Rice, claimed that invading Iraq was 'critical to re-establishing the bona fides of the Security

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[141] See, *inter alia*, The White House, 'President Bush Outlines Iraqi Threat', Speech Delivered at the Cincinnati Museum Center – Cincinnati Union Terminal, Cincinnati, Ohio (7 October 2002), available at http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2002/10/20021007-8.html [accessed 18 April 2005].

[142] See, *inter alia*, The White House, 'President Discusses Beginning of Operation Iraqi Freedom', President's Radio Address (22 March 2003), available at http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2003/03/20030322.html [accessed 15 April 2005].

[143] R. Jeffrey Smith, 'Hussein's Prewar Ties to al-Qaeda Discounted', *The Washington Post* (6 April 2007), p. A01.

Council',[144] the lack of Security Council support or authorisation for the invasion brought its legality into question.[145]

While many of the reasons buttressing the Iraqi invasion lost their power of legitimation after March 2003 – most notably through factual inaccuracy and distortion – one particular justification maintained its seemingly inviolable force: that a sovereign state could be invaded militarily so as to "democratise" its populace. According to American President George W. Bush, militarily-engineered "democratisation" was 'a new policy, a forward strategy of freedom in the Middle East'.[146] It was a policy that, according to White House reports, would have at least three effects. The success of "democratisation" in Iraq would 'send forth the news, from Damascus to Teheran' in a hoped-for domino effect of "democratisation" across Arab states.[147] Middle Eastern "democratisation" would thereby protect the Coalition's national security and other strategic interests abroad – whether by disengaging the threat of terrorism allegedly harboured in countries such as Iraq and that could strike Coalition nations, or by ensuring the spread of neoliberal political and economic influence through new 'development, free markets, and free trade to every corner of the world', as the Bush administration asserted in its first National Security Strategy released in 2002.[148] (It was thus under the rubric of "democracy" that the American interim governor of Iraq, Paul Bremer, declared Iraq to be 'open for business' on May 26, 2003 – less than one month after Bush stood aboard the USS Abraham Lincoln and prematurely declared the invasion to be a 'Mission

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[144] Cited in Bob Woodward, *Plan of Attack* (New York City: Simon & Schuster, 2004), p.308.

[145] See *inter alia*, Antony Angie, 'On Critique and the Other' in Anne Orford (ed.), *International Law and its Others* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp.390ff; Attorney General Lord Goldsmith, Advice to the British Prime Minister on the legality of the 2003 Iraq War, released 28 April 2005, available at http://www.number-10.gov.uk/files/pdf/Iraq%20Resolution%201441.pdf [accessed 8 March 2007].

[146] The White House, 'President Bush Discusses Freedom in Iraq and Middle East', Speech Delivered at the United States Chamber of Commerce, Washington D.C. (6 November 2003), available at http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2003/11/20031106-2.html [accessed 19 March 2005].

[147] *Ibid*.

[148] The White House, *The National Security Strategy of the United States of America: September 2002* (Washington: The White House, 2002), p.v.

Accomplished'.[149]) And thirdly, the militarised spread of "democracy" globally – as well as the justification of that militarism as serving "democracy" – would ensure the United States' (and by extension the Coalition's) 'military and moral commitments', as Bush asserted in late-2003.[150] In short, these commitments were not simply inextricable, as Bush implied, but dialectical: militarised intervention on an international level would bolster particular national and neoliberal interests abroad while simultaneously – and, according to then-Under Secretary of State for Global Affairs, Paula Dobriansky, more importantly – securing those interests domestically.[151]

Two important factors need to be recognised about the American-led Coalition's invocation of "democracy" and "democratisation" after 2001. First, "democratisation" in this instance was decidedly not the gradual grassroots reformation of society from within, or 'bottom-up' "democratisation", as advocated by cultural theorists such as Arjun Appadurai or even, to an extent, Hardt and Negri.[152] It was instead a top-down policy of societal change that was imposed by fiat, as the American political scientist Jack Snyder has argued.[153] For both critics and champions of this policy, such as Snyder or political scientist Stanley Kurtz respectively, "democratisation" thereby became a contemporary form of imperialism, imposed upon nation-states like Iraq so as to subjugate them to

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[149] As occurred on May 1, 2003, in a speech delivered as a live television address to the United States: see The White House, 'President Bush Announces Major Combat Operations in Iraq Have Ended', Press Release (1 May 2003), available at http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2003/05/20030501-15.html [accessed 4 May 2003]. For Bremer's quote, see *inter alia* Wendy Brown, 'Neo-liberalism and the End of Liberal Democracy', *Theory and Event*, 7/1 (2003), §26.

[150] The White House, 'President Bush Discusses Freedom in Iraq and Middle East', above n.146. For a similar viewpoint made in relation to Afghanistan and 'humanitarianism and compassion [as] key driving forces behind our [foreign] policy', see comments made by the then-Under Secretary of State for Global Affairs in Paula J. Dobriansky, 'The Diplomatic Front of the War on Terrorism: Can the Promotion of Democracy and Human Rights Tip the Scales?', Heritage Lecture #724, The Heritage Foundation (21 December 2001), available at http://www.heritage.org/Research/NationalSecurity/HL724.cfm [accessed 8 July 2006].

[151] Dobriansky, *ibid*.

[152] Arjun Appadurai, 'Grassroots Globalization and the Research Imagination', in Arjun Appadurai (ed.), *Globalization* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2001), pp.1-21.

[153] Jack Snyder, 'Empire: A Blunt Tool for Democratisation', *Daedalus*, 134/2 (Spring 2005), pp.59ff.

regulation by other, Coalition nations.[154] As Snyder in particular was aware, the imposition of "democratisation" was therefore inherently paradoxical. If "democratisation" was the ostensible remodelling of socio-political praxis after the overthrow of totalitarian regimes (Saddam Hussein's Ba'ath Party in Iraq, the Taliban in Afghanistan in late-2001), then to "democratise" by force was – as even a former Republican Party adviser, Jeane Kirkpatrick, had once attested – a kind of 'totalitarian temptation'.[155]

Nonetheless, the relationship between "democratisation" and imperial action in early-twenty-first century Iraq was arguably more complex than the synonymity proposed by Snyder and Kurtz. It was a complexity noted by other political scientists, including Wendy Brown and Jonathan Monten, and which provides the second factor for us to consider. The key to this, as Brown claims, is that "democracy" and "democratisation" were primarily used as 'legitimating rhetoric' for the American-led invasion, vindicating it while other justifications collapsed.[156] We must particularly remember here that the explicit "democratisation" of Iraq was not foremost among Bush's initial ambitions for the invasion. As Bush made clear in a radio address immediately after its commencement, the invasion's three primary stakes were Iraq's WMD disarmament, regime change and the consequent "freedom" of the Iraqi populace from Saddam Hussein.[157] By the end of 2003, however, in speeches delivered to *inter alia* the U.S.-

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[154] Snyder, *ibid*; Stanley Kurtz, 'Democratic Imperialism: A Blueprint', *Policy Review*, 118 (April-May 2003), pp.3-20.

[155] Jeane Kirkpatrick, 'Politics and the New Class', *Society*, 16/2 (January-February 1979), p.48. For Snyder's recognition of this paradox, see Snyder, above n.153, p.59.

[156] Wendy Brown, above n.149; Jonathan Monten similarly examines the use of "democracy" as a form of 'vindicationism' for (primarily the United States') neoliberal economic-military interests in Jonathan Monten, 'The Roots of the Bush Doctrine: Power, Nationalism, and Democracy Promotion in U.S. Strategy', *International Security*, 29/4 (Spring 2005), pp.112-156. Comparable arguments can also be found throughout Colin Mooers (ed.), *The New Imperialists: Ideologies of Empire* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2006).

[157] The White House, 'President Discusses Beginning of Operation Iraqi Freedom', above n.142. This is not to say that "democracy" was entirely absent from the U.S. administration's rhetoric: in an address made to the American Enterprise Institute in February 2003, Bush claimed that democracy was not inconsistent with Islam and thus was possible in Iraq and the Middle East in general. However, the brevity with which Bush addressed "democracy" in this speech – particularly compared with his more extensive references to WMDs and Saddam Hussein's tyranny in Iraq – suggests that "democracy" was a much lesser concern than

funded National Endowment for Democracy and London's Whitehall Palace, and in later documents such as the *National Strategy for Victory in Iraq* (2005), the "democratisation" of Iraq had become – predominantly *ex post facto* – the paramount and oft-declared justification for the Coalition's actions.[158] "Democracy", in other words, was thought to provide the necessary vindication that other justificatory claims were no longer capable of providing. "Democracy" and "democratisation" were thus not necessarily imperialistic *per se*, in the sense of militarised action, but rather a "softer" *kind* of imperialism – a *cultural* imperialism, in which dominant (Western) cultural terms were used to attract others to, and persuade them of, the purportedly positive attributes of dominant states.[159]

In part, these 'others' whom Bush and his Coalition colleagues sought to attract were clearly the Iraqi people themselves – to persuade them that the invasion of Iraq and the collapse of Saddam's totalitarian regime would catalyse the freedoms of speech, political association, individual decision-making and the market that "democracy" has long signified, and which Saddam had largely denied while governing Iraq since 1979. Indeed, we could even follow Monten's claim that, in the apparent absence of any counter-ideology after Saddam's fall, the Coalition deemed its military "victory" *ipso facto* "democratisation" – a (mistaken) belief that partially explains both the Coalition's

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disarmament and 'regime change': see The White House, 'President Discusses the Future of Iraq' (26 February 2003), available at http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2003/02/20030226-11.html [accessed 17 May 2005].

[158] The White House, 'President Bush Discusses Freedom in Iraq and Middle East', above n.146; The White House, 'President Bush Discusses Iraq Policy at Whitehall Palace in London', Royal Banqueting House, London (19 November 2003), available at http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2003/11/20031119-1.html [accessed 19 March 2005]; see also, among numerous other documents, The White House, 'President Bush Addresses United Nations General Assembly', The United Nations, New York City (23 September 2003), available at http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2003/09/20030923-4.html [accessed 19 March 2005]. For documents after 2003, see *inter alia* The White House, *National Strategy for Victory in Iraq* (Washington D.C.: White House Press Office, 2005).

[159] Two excellent texts explore cultural imperialism in depth, with specific case studies that incorporate many of the examples raised in this chapter: see John Tomlinson, *Cultural Imperialism: A Critical Introduction* (London: Pinter Publishers, 1991); and Bernd Hamm and Russell Smandych (eds.), *Cultural Imperialism: Essays on the Political Economy of Cultural Domination* (Peterborough: Broadview Press, 2004).

inadequate post-invasion agenda and the Bush administration's belief that U.S. troop levels would fall from 140,000 to 30,000 by November 2003.[160] Yet this assumption that "democratisation" had become a "mission accomplished" equally revealed that the Coalition's target audience was not primarily the Iraqis. It was not their mission that was being proudly celebrated across the banner on the USS Abraham Lincoln. Instead, cultural imperialism also – and perhaps more importantly – operated internally, back to the Coalition members, their citizens and that frequently cited abstraction called the 'international community'. By strategically appealing to "democracy" as an apparently victorious politics, the Coalition sought to persuade these states and their citizens to justify the invasion: to validate, absolve and make unchallengeable – or, in Bush's terminology, to transform into a 'moral commitment' – the putatively positive and "democratic" attributes of imperial action.

This conscription of "democracy" as a form of internally-directed cultural imperialism, as a form of 'democratic morality' to use Wendy Brown's apt description,[161] extends the substantial problems we saw earlier regarding contemporary political philosophy and its *prima facie* criticality toward neoliberal intents. This is not just because the Coalition and the aforementioned critical philosophers both appealed to "democracy" as the sole signifier for their radical politics (though as noted earlier, we should not misrecognise critical philosophy's appeals to "democracy" as a form of Foucauldian reverse discourse). The problem lies instead in the logic and purpose of that appeal – that is, in how and why they both rhetoricised their politics as "democratic". As is evident from the preceding pages, neoliberal geopolitics and much critical philosophy replicated each other's strategic employment of "democracy" as the means to consign "value" and legitimating rhetoric to *whatever* politics were conducted in its name. That is, both perceived "democracy" as a readymade signifier to be co-opted at will; both identified the hollowed and hallowed "value" of "democracy" as the stake of self-legitimation; and thus both sought the co-optation of "democracy" as the means to persuade and attract others to their

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[160] Monten, above n.156, p.145.

[161] Brown, above n.149, §41. Emphasis removed from the original.

political agenda. This mutual replication may suggest a universal appeal to "democracy" – an appeal located across the political spectrum, from the seemingly radical left (as with Badiou and Negri) to the evangelical right (as with members of the Bush administration). But it is a universalised logic that, however involuntarily or paradoxically, risks legitimising and thus supplementing the very process – the very politics – by which the other invokes "democracy": as the legitimation of a politics of self-legitimation. The problem lies, therefore, not in what "democracy" signifies, nor necessarily in the lack of critical questioning about how "democracy" signifies, but in the shared assumption and affirmation of how it is *made to signify*.

It was for this reason that various philosophers, including Negri's colleague Mario Tronti and even Alain Badiou himself, began in the early-2000s to dispute their discipline's invariable invocation of "democracy". For Badiou, the polysemy, "radical" openness and presumed anti-essentialism of "democracy" that he championed in the 1990s had limited relevance after the Iraqi invasion; instead, "democracy" had become a 'gloss' for politics of domination and regulation.[162] It was, he claimed, a game of sophistry 'providing propaganda for naked power' and an attempted 'ethical legitimization… to cover up… imperial violence'.[163] Furthermore, "democracy" had become for Badiou a 'point of force, politically and subjectively, in present dominant societies':[164] politically in its 'rule over all bodies' (such as those of the Iraqis, but also those of the Coalition forces in their invasion for "democracy");[165] and subjectively in its regulation of all political language, such that '[i]t's impossible for [any reactionary politics] to declare itself nondemocratic'.[166] On this point, Tronti agreed: political philosophy found its endpoint,

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[162] Alain Badiou, 'Fragments', above n.118, p.238.

[163] *Ibid*, pp.228, 225.

[164] Alain Badiou and Lauren Sedofsky, 'Matters of Appearance', *Artforum*, 45/3 (November 2006), p.248.

[165] Alain Badiou, 'Democratic Materialism and the Materialist Dialectic', *Radical Philosophy*, 130 (March-April 2005), p.21; this text is a translated excerpt from a wider analysis of what Badiou sees as the problem of early-twenty-first century "democracy" in Alain Badiou, *Logiques des mondes: L'être et l'événement: Tome 2* (Paris: Seuil, 2006), pp.9ff especially.

[166] Badiou and Sedofsky, above n.164, p.248.

its exhaustion, on the shores of "democracy" precisely because there lacked any viable politics beyond it.[167] Philosophy had thus curtailed its own political potential beyond the bounds and the extant legitimacy of "democracy", a legitimacy that Tronti perceived as driven more by economics than politics.[168] Indeed, as Badiou's and Tronti's conclusions suggested, because of its political self-limitation, political philosophy not only provided a "soft", sophistic gloss for dominant neoliberal power, but was ultimately supportive and symptomatic of the cultural imperialism of contemporary, universalised "democracy".

For Tronti in particular, as two of his commentators Angela Mitropoulos and Brett Nielson note, 'democracy [has come] to be so incarnated in its present condition [of serving cultural imperialism] that it is no longer possible to recuperate the symbolic order once invoked by the word'.[169] This thesis shares that belief and the need to articulate an alternative politics to the contemporary hegemon of "democracy". It is a belief similarly shared by numerous European artists working during and after the 1990s, as I will show in the following chapters. But while the need for a new political discourse may appear most urgent in the wake of the Iraq invasion, we should not forget that the apotheosis and cultural imperialism of "democracy" is not strictly a post-2001 phenomenon. This explains my turn to artists and writers who provided productive critiques and alternative politics to "democracy" before 2001. It is also implicit in the arguments made by Tronti, as well as by Jonathan Monten and especially Wendy Brown, for whom the roots of "democracy's" apotheosis lie in two earlier periods from which it consequently cannot be divorced. The first is the Cold War politics of freedom that, as we saw in the introduction to this thesis, Serge Guilbaut identified as a 'humanitarian phraseology [beneath which

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[167] Mario Tronti, 'Per la Critica della Democrazia Politica' in Marcello Tari (ed.), *Guerra e Democrazia* (Rome: Manifesto Libri, 2005): this text is not yet available in languages beyond Italian but was analysed extensively in Angela Mitropoulos and Brett Nielson, 'Cutting Democracy's Knot', *Culture Machine* (2006), available at http://culturemachine.tees.ac.uk/Articles/neilson.htm [accessed 23 January 2007].

[168] As Mitropoulos and Nielson note, a similar claim to the exhaustion of politics and its self-enclosure is made by the French philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy: see Mitropoulos and Nielson, *ibid* and Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Sense of the World*, trans. Jeffrey Librett (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), p.103.

[169] Mitropoulos and Nielson, *ibid*.

lay] the mailed fist of imperialism'.[170] And the second, which is perhaps more potent because more recent, is neoliberalism's eastward mobilisation after the collapse of Soviet communism. It is to the latter context in particular that I will now turn, so as to flesh out further the historical underpinnings of both contemporary 'democratic moralism', to recite Brown's claim, and the various critical engagements with "democracy" that are central to this thesis.

Postcommunist Precedents

As we have already seen, the fall of the Berlin Wall connoted various endpoints and beginnings: the end of totalitarianism and the launch of 'Freedom!' across Europe; the end of history for Fukuyama and the possibility of convivial, trans-European dialogue and exchange; and, with the imminent "democratisation" of former Communist states, the possibility in Europe of the 'end of ideology' famously theorised by Daniel Bell in 1960.[171] One culmination of this 'end of ideology', as Monten claimed, was the assumption that the downfall of Saddam's totalitarian regime was *ipso facto* "democratisation". As I have shown in this chapter, this was a problematic political assumption; it was not, however, a new one. It derived from two trajectories that stood out in the first decade of postcommunism's history.

The first relates to the period of Shock Therapy in countries such as Poland and the Soviet Union immediately after 1989. A policy crafted by Harvard economist Jeffrey Sachs and quickly endorsed by the then-G7, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (or IMF), Shock Therapy entailed the socio-political and economic restructuring of various decommunising states into Western-based markets as quickly as possible. Three particular strategies underpinned Shock Therapy. First, the radical *liberalisation* of national economies that had previously been controlled by the state, such

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[170] Serge Guilbaut, *How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art: Abstract Expressionism, Freedom and the Cold War*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1983), p.191.

[171] Daniel Bell, *The End of Ideology: On the Exhaustion of Political Ideas in the Fifties* (Glencoe: Free Press, 1960).

that subsidies for Eastern European industries were largely prohibited, as were the centralised regulation of citizens' wages, inflation rates and the costs of goods and state-owned assets. Second, the swift and cheap *privatisation* of those assets so as to incite foreign investment in economies that were spiralling into massive debt because of the shocks of economic and political liberalisation and consequent hyper-inflation. And third, the "*democratisation*" of decommunising polities as, in effect, the means to describe those processes of liberalisation and privatisation.[172] On one level Sachs himself, along with other Shock Therapy supporters such as Anders Aslund, perceived "democratisation" to be interchangeable with privatisation: market reform toward Western neoliberal models would, according to Sachs, create a 'democratically based rise in living standards'.[173] This in turn would reinforce Sachs' beliefs that '[t]he purpose of economic assistance [and reform] is *political*' and that 'the market revolution has gone hand in hand with a democratic revolution'.[174] "Democracy" and "democratisation" for Sachs thus signified the means 'to consolidate a global capitalist world system' spreading eastwards after 1989.[175] On another level, the invocation of "democracy" also entailed a highly strategic form of justification, as Aslund in particular spelled out. "Democracy" lent political legitimacy and credibility to Shock Therapy for two key reasons: as a means ultimately (and paradoxically) to ensure that 'economics must gain superiority over politics', as had occurred in many Western polities; and to provide a discursive palliative of "freedom" to counter Shock Therapy's increasingly destructive effects in

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[172] See, *inter alia*, Jeffrey Sachs, *Understanding Shock Therapy* (London: Social Market Foundation, 1994). Further descriptions and analyses of these three strategies within Shock Therapy can be found in Brown, above n.149, §27; and Katherine Verdery, 'Whither Postsocialism?' in C. M. Hann (ed.), *Postsocialism: Ideas, Ideologies and Practices in Eurasia* (London: Routledge, 2002), p.20; and especially Peter Gowan, 'Neo-Liberal Theory and Practice for Eastern Europe', *New Left Review*, 213 (September-October 1995), pp.3-60.

[173] Sachs, *Understanding Shock Therapy*, *ibid*, p.25.

[174] Jeffrey Sachs, 'Consolidating Capitalism', *Foreign Policy*, 98 (Spring 1995), pp.60, 50 for respective quotations; see also Anders Aslund, 'The Case for Radical Reform', *Journal of Democracy*, 5/4 (1994), p.63; M. Steven Fish and Omar Choudhry, 'Democratization and Economic Liberalization in the Postcommunist World', *Comparative Political Studies*, 40/3 (March 2007), pp.254-282, where the authors hold that '[t]he claim that economic liberalization stands in tension with, or is unrelated to, democratization in the postcommunist region is untenable'; c.f. the opposite conclusion found in John Marangos, 'Was Shock Therapy Consistent with Democracy?', *Review of Social Economy*, 62/2 (June 2004), pp.221-243.

[175] Sachs, 'Consolidating Capitalism', *ibid*, p.50.

decommunising states – most notably, escalating inflation and unemployment, declining wages and the rapid erosion of savings.[176] In other words, if neoliberalism stood for destructive socio-economic shock, then "democracy" provided the therapy in the early-1990s.

The question thereby arises: to whom was this therapeutic, legitimising rhetoric of "democracy" directed? The obvious answer was: to the decommunising states themselves.[177] "Democracy" could be identified as a qualitative recognition of those states' integration into markets and politics no longer ruptured by the Iron Curtain, and as a consequent reminder of the benefits – social, political and especially economic – that commentators like Sachs hoped would accrue because of Shock Therapy. Furthermore, "democracy's" political importance during the early-1990s appeared to continue its similar status in Eastern and Central Europe *before* 1989. In the 1980s, for example, '*demokratizatziya*' had been the frequent rallying cry for political dissidence toward – and, from 1987, internal reform of – the Communist party within the Soviet Union.[178] But while Sachs and the communist-era dissidents shared a *prima facie* similar nomenclature, Sachs explicitly disallowed any of the dissidents' own proposals regarding

[176] Anders Aslund, 'Lessons of the First Four Years of Systemic Change in Eastern Europe', *Journal of Comparative Economics*, 19/1 (1994), p.31. The quotation is taken from Anders Aslund, *Post-communist Economic Revolutions: How Big a Bang?* (Washington: The Center for Strategic and International Studies, 1992), p.169. For outlines of the socio-economic effects of Shock Therapy, see *inter alia* Vladimir Kollontai, 'Social Transformations in Russia', *International Social Science Journal*, 159 (1999), p.119; Jon Wiener, 'Capitalist Shock Therapy', *The Nation*, 250/25 (25 June 1990), p.891 (detailing the forty percent drop in real wages during the first five months of Shock Therapy in Poland after its implementation on 1 January 1990); Gowan, above n.172, pp.16-28.

[177] On this point, see, for example, the many critical essays in Jochen Hippler (ed.), *The Democratisation of Disempowerment: The Problem of Democracy in the Third World* (London: Pluto Press, 1995), as well as Ghita Ionescu, 'The Painful Return to Normality', in Geraint Parry and Michael Moran (eds.), *Democracy and Democratization* (London: Routledge, 1994), pp.118-120. For a more recent reiteration of this treatment of Eastern and Central Europe as the primary audience for discourses of "democracy", see George W. Bush's speeches in Eastern Europe in 2005 to celebrate VE Day, where he lauded postcommunist states' embrace of "democracy" as 'progress'. Whether this was away from totalitarianism or from the seemingly inherent evils of the socialist past remained, however, unclear: see The White House, 'President Visits Europe', Press Release, available at http://www.whitehouse.gov/infocus/europe/2005/may/ [accessed 22 May 2005].

[178] See, for example, Laurence Whitehead, 'Democracy and Decolonization: East-Central Europe', in Laurence Whitehead (ed.), *The International Dimensions of Democratization: Europe and the Americas* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), pp.358-371; and Robert Horvath, *The Legacy of Soviet Dissent: Dissidents, Democratisation and Radical Nationalism in Russia* (London: Routledge, 2005), pp.1-8

postcommunist transformation. Most notable among these was a union, called the Comecon Pact, that would provide a temporary buffer within which decommunising countries could *gradually* establish new laws, policies and markets that hybridised a resurgent capitalism with the communist past's legacies.[179] Sachs, however, rejected this gradualist approach. In his provocatively titled essay 'What is to be Done?' (1990), Sachs declared it to be a '"third way" [and] chimerical "market socialism" based on public ownership or worker self-management', and spelled out instead his unshakeable aim to 'go straight for a western-style market economy' and "democracy".[180] As a palliative for Shock Therapy, "democracy" thus provided the pivotal legitimising trope of neoliberal expansionism in the early-1990s (a situation that, as we saw earlier, recurred in the 2003 invasion of Iraq). Moreover, Shock Therapists' self-legitimation through "democracy" also enacted a number of significant disavowals. These included the rejection of any self-managed politico-economic system in Eastern and Central Europe – indeed, the rejection of any alternative to "democracy" as the legitimising discourse of globalising neoliberalism – such that the meaning of "democracy" was shifted away from that provided by the dissidents of the 1980s. As Slavoj Žižek has argued, the legacy of communist-era dissidence thereby became a quickly fading memory, a 'vanishing mediator' between Communist Party rule and neoliberal "democracy", while the dissidents themselves 'literally *became invisible* the moment the new system established itself'.[181]

The primary audience for discourses of "democracy" immediately after 1989 was thus not Eastern and Central Europe but rather the capitalist West. This was Žižek's contention, and one which influenced numerous theorists emerging from and critiquing

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[179] Gowan, above n.172, pp.54ff.

[180] Jeffrey Sachs, 'What is to be Done?', *The Economist*, 314/7637 (13 January 1990), p.21.

[181] Slavoj Žižek, *Tarrying with the Negative: Kant, Hegel, and the Critique of Ideology* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993), pp.182, 186 and 231 (for 'vanishing mediator'), and 228 (specifically in relation to post-1989 social politics). (Emphasis in the original.) As Žižek has claimed in another text, he borrowed the term 'vanishing mediator' from Fredric Jameson: see Slavoj Žižek, *For They Know Not What They Do: Enjoyment as a Political Factor* (London: Verso, 1991), p.182. Jodi Dean has also provided a strong analysis of Žižek's use of Jameson's term in relation to post-1989 politics in Europe: see Jodi Dean, 'Žižek against Democracy', *Law, Culture and the Humanities*, 1 (2005), pp.162-164.

postcommunist conditions in the 1990s. For Žižek and his critical postcommunist

followers, the Iron Curtain may have come down, but a mirror had emerged in its place –

a mirror produced by the West, for the West and distorted by the ideological assumption

that decommunisation and "democracy" were conflated. Instead of observing the actual

conditions of decommunisation and Shock Therapy, postcommunist critics argued, the

West saw instead its own idealised reflection. What it saw – and perhaps only wanted to

see – was a desire for "democracy" on the part of Eastern Europeans and thus a reliance

on the West which could beneficently provide it; a West that was consequently 'worthy

of love', according to Žižek;[182] and the emergence of a new regime of "democracy", a

virginal "democracy" presumably untouched by neoliberalism and that was '"pure"…

unspoiled by empirical disillusions… [and] unsullied', in the words of the Slovenian

theorist Rado Riha.[183] To a large extent, this realisation that the West was the primary

audience for Shock Therapy's "democracy" was confirmed by Sachs' advocates. One

important figure to whom I will return in Chapter Three, the Wall Street marketeer

George Soros, claimed that "democratising" states could 'now provide the West with the

inspiration it has lost'.[184] It was an 'inspiration' that required investment, though –

foreign investment from entrepreneurs such as Soros, who could profit from "rescuing"

decommunising countries (and Shock Therapy itself) from impending socio-economic

catastrophe.[185] Though that inspiration was ultimately self-interested, the impression that

foreign investment in Eastern and Central Europe would advance "democratisation"

softened its imperialist undertones. Neo-colonial interests – such as Sachs' belief that

Shock Therapy served 'U.S. long-term strategic goals', or *The Wall Street Journal*'s

identification of 'Klondikes beckoning from Bucharest to Berlin' – could instead be

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[182] Žižek, *Tarrying with the Negative*, *ibid*, pp.200-207 especially.

[183] Rado Riha, *Reale Gescehnisse der Freiheit: Zur Kritik der Urteilsckraft in Lacanscher Absicht* (Vienna: Turia & Kant, 1993), pp.14-15; for similar arguments by other postcommunist scholars, see *inter alia* Maria Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), p.188; Renata Salecl, *(Per)versions of Love and Hate* (London and New York City: Verso, 1998), p.106.

[184] George Soros, *Underwriting Democracy* (New York City: The Free Press, 1990), p.92.

[185] As early as 1991, one journalist, Jon Wiener, had already recognised this difference between presumed (Eastern European) and actual (Western European and North American) audiences for rhetorics of "democracy": see Jon Wiener, 'Yeltsin's American "Advisers"', *The Nation*, 253/21 (16 December 1991), p.780.

deemed altruistic or even humanitarian.[186] The conflation of charitable "democratisation"

and neoliberal capitalism was thus a value-laden incentive for increased Western

investment in decommunising countries. Indeed, it was a *necessary* incentive given

Sachs' absolute reliance on that investment as the only means by which those countries

could pull out of Shock Therapy and function within global capitalist markets.

Postcommunist critics argued further, however, that if the Iron Curtain was replaced by a

mirror in which the West perceived itself and its opportunities in idealised form, it was

invariably still a barrier for inhabitants on the mirror's other side.[187] This was, in one

sense, a literal barrier. Whereas Western European and North American passport holders

were able to cross freely over national borders and into decommunising states, the latter's

inhabitants still needed to undergo the costly, time-consuming bureaucracy and managed

surveillance of visa applications.[188] The restrictive conditions imposed on

decommunising states were more widespread than visas alone though. Shock Therapy

had made those states utterly reliant on, and subservient to, the possibility of Western

investment. This subservience was made deeper still by one of the most significant

effects of Shock Therapy – an effect that continued throughout the 1990s, long after the

relatively short lifespan of Sachs' destructive policy.[189] This was the conditionality often

attached by investors to potential funds, and which was made most evident in the

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[186] Sachs, 'Consolidating Capitalism', above n.174, p.61; 'Gold Rush: Capitalists Jam Poland… Money is Pouring In', *The Wall Street Journal* cited in Wiener, 'Capitalist Shock Therapy', above n.176, p.893. Political scientist Ellen Meiksins Wood has made similar arguments about the strategic use of discourses of civil society in Eastern Europe in 1989 and early-1990, in which '[t]he replacement of socialism by an indeterminate concept of democracy, or the dilution of diverse and different social relations into catch-all categories like "identity" or "difference", or loose conceptions of "civil society", represent a *surrender* to capitalism and its ideological mystifications': see Ellen Meiksins Wood, 'The Uses and Abuses of "Civil Society"', in Ralph Miliband, Leo Panitch and John Saville (eds.), *Socialist Register 1990* (London: The Merlin Press, 1990), p.79.

[187] See for example Žižek, *Tarrying with the Negative*, above n.181, pp.222ff; Edi Muka, 'Albanian Socialist Realism or the Theology of Power' in IRWIN (eds.), above n.2, p.134.

[188] This point has also been made by the Austrian curator, Robert Fleck, in Robert Fleck, *Y aura-t-il un deuxième siècle de l'art moderne?: Les arts visuels au tournant du siècle* (Nantes : Éditions Pleins Feux, 2002), pp.51ff.

[189] For an analysis of Shock Therapy's downfall as an active programme in decommunising states, see Marangos, above n.174, pp.221-243.

unilaterally-determined conditions demanding significant long-term structural and cultural adjustment by Eastern Europeans. What this conditionality provided was not only a selective and coercive "integration" of decommunising states into already developed (and thus readymade) capitalist institutions, as argued by Žižek and other theorists such as Marina Gržinić and Šefik Šeki Tatlič.[190] It also continued the conflation of Western economic interests and "altruistic" aims, of discourses of "democracy" and differential relations of power across Europe, that Shock Therapy had instigated immediately after 1989.

The years following Shock Therapy inform the second historical trajectory for us to consider. Sachs envisaged that European integration after 1989 would require more than transformation on the part of decommunising countries alone. Western European polities and organisations would also need to change their economic and political protocols, such as removing subsidies for Western industries or eliminating tariffs on imports from Eastern Europe.[191] Western Europe, however, took a much more protectionist approach to integration: decommunising states would receive investment strictly according to the West's pre-determined, and largely non-negotiable, criteria and conditions for that investment.[192] As specified, for example, in the so-called Copenhagen Criteria for membership to the European Community (later the *acquis communautaire* for the E.U.), countries seeking (Western) European investment and integration needed to satisfy three categories that were defined and determined by existing Community/Union members: that future members could guarantee democracy, that they could establish and maintain a

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[190] On Žižek and the 'struggle for one's place' as either "inside" or "outside" the Western capitalist system, see Žižek, *Tarrying with the Negative*, above n.181, p.222. Similar arguments about inclusion and exclusion can be found in Marina Gržinić, 'On the Re-Politicisation of Art through Contamination', in IRWIN (eds.), above n.2, pp.477-486; and Šefik Šeki Tatlič, 'Post-Modal Reproduction of Power', *Art-e-Fact: Strategies of Resistance*, 3 (2004), available at http://artefact.mi2.hr/_a03/lang_en/theory_tatlic_en.htm [accessed 18 December 2006].

[191] Sachs, 'What is to be Done?', above n.180, p.24.

[192] According to Peter Gowan, this protectionist stance largely emerged because of the lack of incentives for Western European organisations and corporations to undergo their own post-1989 transformations: see Gowan, above n.172, pp.11-13. See also Padma Desai, 'Beyond Shock Therapy', *Journal of Democracy*, 6/2 (1995), pp.102-112, where Desai claims that 'the advanced industrial countries led by the United States would participate in Soviet economic transformation only on their own terms' (at p.104).

privatised market economy and, as Gorm Rye Olsen states, that they could show 'adherence to the aims of the political, economic and monetary union'.[193] These categories were again, for the most part, self-interested. Western Europe's aims were to maintain – and, where possible, increase – its politico-economic competitiveness within global markets. Consequently, many of the grants for Eastern European aid were delivered not to Eastern Europe directly, but to Western European corporations wanting to take over newly-privatised Eastern European industries.[194] The promotion of "democracy" was not part of E.C. or E.U. policy until after 1989, and even then it took a marginal role compared with the promotion of privatisation, suggesting that "democracy's" role was primarily symbolic rather than substantive.[195] As many commentators have argued, making aid and investment conditional upon symbolic criteria of "democracy" was ultimately not so much to assist decommunising countries along difficult paths toward new politics. The main aim of conditionality was instead to regulate the behavioural transformation of decommunising countries according to Western bureaucratic norms and terms – a regulation derived from, but extending well beyond, Sachs' policies for Shock Therapy – so as to cause minimal disruption to Western European protocols, living standards and drives to globalise their domestic industries.[196]

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[193] Gorm Rye Olsen, 'The European Union: An Ad Hoc Policy with a Low Priority', in Schraeder (ed.), above n.17, p. 137.

[194] As occurred under the European Community's and Union's PHARE, TACIS and CARDS programmes to assist in the restructuring of Eastern European economies (PHARE initially in relation to Poland and Hungary, and later expanded to eight other decommunising countries; TACIS to the Commonwealth of Independent States, a political union formed after the break-up of the Soviet Union; CARDS to Balkan states): see Gowan, above n.172, pp.34ff.

[195] Olsen, above n.193; Ulrich Sedelmeier and Helen Wallace, 'Policies Towards Central and Eastern Europe' in H. Wallace and W. Wallace (eds.), *Policy Making in the European Union* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), pp.361-365; David Kennedy, *The Dark Sides of Virtue: Reassessing International Humanitarianism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), pp.169-197. Even Jacques Rupnik, a relatively conservative supporter of Western-driven "integration", acknowledged that 'EU entry tends to be evaluated in terms of economic costs and benefits. It is no longer associated with the idea of a victory for democracy': Jacques Rupnik, 'Concluding Reflections', *Journal of Democracy*, 15/1 (January 2004), p.77.

[196] This has been acknowledged across the political spectrum, from harsh critics to neoliberal conservatives such as Jiri Pehe, who asserted that the *acquis communautaire* could change postcommunist behaviour and 'prove… useful by giving easterners a set of standards by which they could measure the[ir] shortcomings': Jiri Pehe, 'Consolidating Free Government in the New EU', *Journal of Democracy*, 15/1 (January 2004), pp.36-37 especially. For similar views, see Rupnik, *ibid*, 78; and Jan Zielonka, 'Challenges of EU

This can be equally argued of other organisations beyond Western Europe, which also made behavioural and institutional engineering a condition for the receipt of development aid. In the early-1990s, the World Bank and the IMF shifted their structural focus from economic to political governance, by pinning loans to Western European and North American expectations of "democratisation".[197] On one level, these organisations' shift toward political redevelopment contradicted their previously narrow purposes of allocating funds and loans without recourse to political criteria (indeed, in the case of the World Bank, this move explicitly countered the Bank's charter that prevented tying foreign aid to political conditions).[198] It was also a somewhat ironic shift given neither organisation espouses "democracy" as even a formal model of self-governance: directors of the World Bank and the IMF are appointed rather than elected, while countries receiving funding do not hold referenda to determine whether to have funding conditions imposed upon them.[199] On another level, however, making aid conditional upon given norms of "democratisation" rendered the latter a form of soft duress toward decommunising states and of self-vindication for the funders. While it is correct to say that financially beleaguered countries throughout the 1990s accepted the political conditions attached to funding, we must also remember that those countries rarely had

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Enlargement', *Journal of Democracy*, 15/1 (January 2004), pp.22-23. For a contrasting (and quite cynical) analysis, see Jochen Hippler, 'Democratisation of the Third World after the End of the Cold War', in Hippler (ed.), above n.177, pp.15-22 especially.

[197] Most notably, formal criteria of elections, privatisation and deregulation espoused by a conservative U.S. organisation called Freedom House. As John Dryzek and Leslie Holmes note, the Freedom House standards are questionable because, while '[r]anking countries on scales of democracy and freedom such as those produced by Freedom House has its uses… such rankings imply that there is a single scale to be ascended, and that ascent can eventually be completed': see John S. Dryzek and Leslie Templeman Holmes, *Post-Communist Democratization: Political Discourses Across Thirteen Countries* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p.257.

[198] This can be found in Article III, Section 4 of the World Bank Charter: for analysis of this contradiction, see *inter alia* Béatrice Hibou, 'The World Bank: Missionary Deeds (and Misdeeds)', in Schraeder (ed.), above n.17, pp.173-175.

[199] Susan George, 'The World Bank and the Concept of Good Governance', in Hippler (ed.), above n.177, pp.207ff; Devesh Kapur and Moisés Naím, 'The IMF and Democratic Governance', *Journal of Democracy*, 16/1 (January 2005), pp.95, 101.

any option but to accept them in order to acquire much-needed financial support.[200] This was especially true given that funders would stop loans to states seeking a self-managed, self-determined path to decommunisation – as occurred with Romania when it sought an alternative political programme to the "democratisation"-privatisation conditionality prescribed by the IMF and the World Bank.[201] As Žižek claims, questions of 'who will be admitted "inside", integrated into the developed capitalist order, and who will remain excluded from it' – as well as how and why that "integration" takes place or not – are consequently central to any analysis of the way "democracy" is invoked, promoted and used to justify political intents.[202]

In keeping with many of the examples seen throughout this chapter, then, from art criticism to political philosophy and from Shock Therapy to the Iraq invasion, the purported ends of promoting "democracy" and "democratisation" during the 1990s often legitimised (or in some cases, excused) the means put to that purpose. One conclusion that we can reach from this contention is that the period of Shock Therapy's aftermath consequently provides an important bridge between the collapse of Soviet communism and the invasion of Iraq – a bridge that, as Wendy Brown asserts, identifies the latter as in many ways a hangover from the Cold War.[203] This is not to say, though, that the aftermath of Shock Therapy simply signifies an interregnum between these two "triumphs" of "democracy", as though it were irrelevant to historical analysis except as a period of connection or relative social stabilisation between the Cold War and the War in

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[200] Kapur and Naím, *ibid*, p.95; Marangos, above n.174, pp.225, 229, where Marangos claims that '[a] heavy dose of conditionality would ensure the "correct" response by the borrowing governments' (at p.229); Valerie Bunce, 'The Political Economy of Postsocialism', *Slavic Review* 58/4 (Winter 1999), p.757. C.f. *inter alia* Franz Nuscheler and his relatively naïve belief that, because decommunising countries signed condition-bound documents such as the 'Charter for a New Europe' in November 1990, they had complete agency in directing their political and economic futures: Franz Nuscheler, 'Democracy: A Fragile Export' in Hippler (ed.), above n.177, pp.222ff.

[201] Gowan, above n.172, p.34.

[202] Žižek, above n.181, p.222.

[203] Brown, above n.149, §§23, 27, 28.

Iraq.[204] It was instead a volatile period of often fraught and problematic politics as well, a period governed, as art historian Pat Simpson has astutely diagnosed, by politics of 'Europatriarchy': politics in which the entrenchment and authorisation of the West's attempts at social engineering made decommunising states both peripheral and subservient to their Western "masters".[205] This was Simpson's crucial sociological observation, and it is shared by my analysis thus far. Integration into "democracy" during Europatriarchy was rarely a case of establishing convivial, transcontinental and mutual exchange. Instead, through the conditional and selective incorporation of decommunising states into agonistically shared political principles or "values", such integration became the main means to reassert borders and hierarchies between geographical regions, between polities and ultimately between peoples.

As Simpson has argued further, understanding how Europatriarchy operated in the 1990s has great art historical significance as well. While "democracy" promotion within Europatriarchy frequently served to subordinate and exclude Eastern European interests, it also affected the reception of Eastern European art during the same period. As we can recall from this chapter's introduction, this was the perception of art critics such as Piotr Piotrowski and Igor Zabel, for whom similar effects of subordination and exclusion underlay the rhetoric of a putatively inclusive "Europe". What Simpson's argument suggests, then, is that the discursive shift from "Europe" to "democracy" (most particularly in the domain of geopolitics) did not eradicate exclusivity so much as reiterate and entrench it within a slightly varied frame. Discourses of "democracy", in other words, simply shifted the terms of reference within which cultural hierarchies and modes of exclusion could be mapped out in Europe in the 1990s, so as to mitigate as

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[204] For a critical analysis of presumptions that the 1990s comprised a period of social stabilisation, or 'normalisation' as it has also been labelled, see Bojana Pejić, 'The Dialectics of Normality', in Pejić and Elliott (eds.), above n.4, pp.16-27.

[205] It should be noted that Simpson's concept of 'Europatriarchy' comprises more than regional subservience alone. It also alludes to the increased subordination of women *within* decommunising states – a crucial point to which I will return in Chapter Six of this thesis. See Pat Simpson, 'Peripheralising Patriarchy? Gender and Identity in Post-Soviet Art: A View from the West', *Oxford Art Journal*, 27/1, 2004, pp.389-415. Art critic Andaluna Borcila uses the similar descriptor 'pedocracy' to describe this period: see Andalunda Borcila, 'How I Found Eastern Europe: Televisual Geography, Travel Sites and Museum Installations', in Forrester *et al*, above n.1, pp.42-64.

much as possible any deleterious effects that the collapse of communism could have on Europe's dominant polities, markets and cultural identities.

This is an exceptionally important point, and one that recurs throughout this thesis. For present purposes, however, I want to note that Simpson's observations raise two further considerations that are also central to my argument. The first is methodological. In formulating her diagnosis of Europatriarchy, and in responding critically to its conditions, Simpson insisted upon returning to and elaborating the many dissenting opinions penned by postcommunist writers during the 1990s about "democracy", "integration" and other cultural rhetoric of legitimation. Central among these writers was Slavoj Žižek, whose views and influence we have observed throughout preceding paragraphs regarding "democracy" as a mirror and a barrier. While Simpson grounded her argument in Žižek's earlier analyses, she did not reiterate them uncritically. She instead transformed and critiqued them in turn, so as to reveal and move beyond the limitations of his claims. (Most notable here was Žižek's own firmly integrated status within Europatriarchal discourses, Simpson observed, both as a celebrated "representative" or voice of postcommunism and because he, like many of the writers he critiqued, largely eradicated any consideration of gender from his analyses of Western-centric politics.)[206] Despite these limitations – or rather, because of the need to push beyond them – Simpson raised an important methodological model that I intend to repeat in this thesis. That model is a critical and dialectical engagement with early postcommunism: a process of returning to postcommunist critiques of geopolitical praxis and cultural discourse, while extending and transforming those critiques for the purpose of more contemporary analysis. What Simpson has articulated, in other words – alongside more implicit engagements with

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[206] Simpson, *ibid*, pp.392, 414. We could also add to Simpson's criticisms the frequent inconsistencies within Žižek's political project, which ultimately serve to weaken his critiques of contemporary Euro-American power. I am thinking particularly of his wavering critique of "democracy" that veers between hostility and the promotion of 'the Christian-democratic legacy… that today… is more precious and worth fighting for than ever' after the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. For the latter, see Slavoj Žižek, 'Was Will Europa?' in Hlavajová and Winder (eds.), above n.5, pp.191-192 especially; for the former, see *inter alia* Žižek, *Tarrying with the Negative*, above n.181, pp.200-222 especially; and his belief that the refusal or inability to critique "democracy" constitutes a 'post-ideological' *Denkverbot* or prohibition on critical thinking, in Slavoj Žižek, 'Post-Politics: The Post-Political *Denkverbot*', in Pejić and Elliott, above n.4, pp.92-96.

postcommunist analysis, such as Tronti's or Badiou's – is the possibility of extending postcommunist thinking beyond its supposedly localised parameters of Eastern Europe in the 1990s. As I outlined in the introduction to this thesis, this is a process that allows us to reconsider the importance of postcommunist debates within different historical and geographical contexts – to redirect those debates toward the asymmetries of power maintained and vindicated by "democracy", both within and beyond Europe's border, since the 1990s. In so doing, Simpson and others have raised the possibility of articulating a nascent *postsocialist* critique of "democracy" beyond the limits and limitations of postcommunism: a critique, that is, of returning to particular analytical precedents from the past, and of remodelling them so as to re-evaluate the politics and aesthetics of the contemporary.

Art is central to this nascent critique, as Simpson also makes clear. This is the second point to note from her observations. If "democracy" has underpinned Western cultural imperialism after both 1989 and 9/11, then we need to take stock of how culture itself has responded to this predicament. This can take the form of critical engagement, as I argue in the following chapters. But it can also mirror the symptomatic support of cultural imperialism that we saw in relation to much political philosophy, and with which writers such as Tronti and Badiou have taken issue in their own variations of postsocialist analysis. I thus want to extend Simpson's argument by returning to art discourse on the other side of the mirror from Simpson's subject matter: to the Western European side, and more specifically to the aesthetic of "democratisation" that emerged in Western Europe after the mid-1990s, at the high point of Europatriarchal claims to "democracy" and its geopolitical investments. A better understanding will thereby emerge of why and how certain artists have critiqued the cultural imperialism of "democracy" in art since the Cold War.

Critiquing Art's "Democracy"

It is worth refreshing our memories of the aesthetic of "democratisation's" two key tenets, as articulated by critics such as Nicolas Bourriaud, Joëlle Zask and others. The first is its reliance on particular formal conventions: namely, social relations as art forms in themselves; audience participation and 'encounters', especially within art installations, as the primary basis for analysing art; a work's open form or display as sparking that encounter; and the various means by which artworks (and artists) thereby direct that encounter. As I noted earlier in this chapter, though, it is the second tenet – the aesthetic's instrumentalised purpose – that is most important: that the encounter with art could destabilise normative, and impel alternative, politics within social relations; that these politics were "democratic" *sui generis*; and that that endpoint of "democracy" to art's politics of openness, participation and the encounter would frank the relevance of art (and art criticism) into the twenty-first century. One of "democracy's" central values was thus to synthesise and legitimise *prima facie* conflicting agenda within art criticism. It was a value that replicated – and as both Claire Bishop's critique and the 'Democracy Unrealized' symposia suggested, internalised – similar agenda within contemporaneous political philosophy's broad "democratic" agonism. As this chapter has further shown, however, such models of self-legitimation cannot be divorced from contemporaneous geopolitical rhetoric either. For if the aesthetic of "democratisation", like its philosophical counterpart, has limited its seemingly alternative politics to troped values of "democracy" – if it has sought to deliver "legitimate" social effects to art – it has also risked delivering art to the legitimising self-interests of Empire. Indeed, we could say that it is *risk itself* that is disavowed in this web of "democracy" promotion. Whether in philosophy, politics, or political philosophies of art, "democracy" serves as a master signifier by which to prevent any rupture of extant symbolic orders, to re-assert and juridify principles of "value" and – to return to Žižek – 'to domesticate this open-endedness through the imposition of a fantasmatic landscape'.[207] Moreover, by domesticating open-endedness, encounters with art, philosophy and culture are not only

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[207] Slavoj Žižek and Glyn Daly, *Conversations with Žižek* (Cambridge and Oxford: Polity Press, 2004), p.6; see also Žižek, above n.181, pp.210, 217.

made to have a "legitimate" signification; we could also argue that they are made to internalise, or at least be symptomatic of, Empire's cultural imperialism and how it makes "democracy" signify.

It is often in the minutiae of the aesthetics of "democratisation" that we can recognise the full force of this synergy: in Bourriaud's assumption that any self-avowedly non-'totalitarian' art or discourse was *ipso facto* "democratic", as he claimed in an interview with the author; in Zask's reaffirmation of Western (and primarily French) citizenship through art's "democratic" 'propositions'; in Vadén and Hannula's "democratic" 'romanticism' and reparation of social ties localised, they believed, to Western Europe. But most of all, we can recognise this synergy in the specific ways that artistic encounters are given meaning: in the management (by artists, but especially by critics) of audiences' supposedly indeterminable responses. From Bishop's advocacy of Santiago Sierra's carefully managed exclusion of viewers as 'better democracy', to Paul Ardenne's support for 'the democratic pact smuggled in by the artist' when he or she engages with an audience, the recipients of art's "democracy" are harnessed in the interests of a particular politics that is externally driven and treated as universal. The regulation of others and of audience encounters is best epitomised, though, in the leading exponent of this aesthetic: in Bourriaud's relational aesthetics and his championing of audiences' behavioural change as engendered by art – that is, in art's 'behavioural economy' of "democratisation". By explicitly attributing a social 'engineering' of "democracy" to his aesthetic, Bourriaud sought to endow art with invaluable social application. In so doing, however, he made it equally explicit that the aesthetic of "democratisation" should not be seen as serving "democracy" promotion industries and cultural imperialism on a discursive level alone. It also serves them by regulating bodies: by interpellating audiences as embodying a particular political ideology, and through engineering behavioural change on the socio-cultural level of the audience and its encounters with art. In the process, this aesthetic risks replicating the "soft" coercion and engineering of behavioural change conducted geopolitically in the name of "democracy", both within Europatriarchy and during its aftermath. It was thus not only art criticism that had internalised and become symptomatic of cultural imperialism, according to Bourriaud's

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formulation. By transforming artistic encounters into micro-level forms of research and development for "democracy" promotion, he – and arguably the aestheticians of "democratisation" more generally – intended art audiences to internalise it as well.

For Bourriaud and his colleagues, this transformation of contemporary art and its audiences into resources for societal change may well have been an important means for art and criticism to (re)gain social consequence. Michel Foucault, by contrast, reserved a particularly pertinent term for this kind of cultural resourcefulness. This was not 'reverse discourse', a term that we have considered inappropriate for culture's self-legitimation through the extant political authority of "democracy". Instead, the aesthetic of "democratisation" was an exemplary form of Foucauldian 'governmentality': in its formation of subjects and their management toward particular political ideals; in its regulation of bodies, behaviour, encounters and language so as to create "new" social organisations; and thus in its fusion of social governance, mentality and corporeality so as to promote particular socio-political "values".[208] It is this funnelling of conduct toward specific "values" – what Foucault called the 'conduct of conduct'[209] – that both Wendy Brown and George Yúdice acknowledge lies at the heart of contemporary Empire and cultural imperialism. This can operate domestically, as Yúdice in particular notes, to make culture a socio-political resource.[210] As Western neoliberal states withdraw from the public sphere, culture has renewed its social utility by filling in the gaps left behind. Yet, by willingly replacing the state as the provider of social services and political "values", culture also potentially advocates and maintains the neoliberal status quo. It is a

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[208] See Graham Burchell, Colin Gordon and Peter Miller (eds.), *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), especially Michel Foucault, 'Governmentality', at pp.87-104. The curators of *Documenta 12*, Roger M. Buergel and Ruth Noack, are among the few curators and historians to contextualise art practice in relation to governmentality. In 2000, Buergel curated an exhibition in Hanover titled *Governmentality: Art in Conflict with the International Hyper-Bourgeoisie and the National Petty-Bourgeoisie*, while Buergel and Noack jointly curated a series of exhibitions, held between 2003 and 2005, under the title of *The Government* (at the University of Lüneburg, MACBA Barcelona, Miami Art Central, Vienna's Secession Museum and Rotterdam's Witte de With art centre). See, *inter alia*, Roger M. Buergel and Ruth Noack, *Die Regierung: Paradiesische Handlungsräume*, exh. cat. (Vienna: Secession, 2005).

[209] Foucault cited in Burchell *et al*, *ibid*, p.2.

[210] George Yúdice, *The Expediency of Culture: Uses of Culture in the Global Era* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003). See also Brown, above n.149, §2, 17-28.

circumstance emblematised by the aesthetic of "democratisation": an aesthetic that hinges on renewing political 'participation' within contemporary society; an aesthetic that seeks legitimacy by repairing "democracy" amid the so-called deficit of "democracy" (or, more accurately, its hollowed apotheosis); and an aesthetic that, by legitimising "democracy" as the only politics of "value" (in the dual sense of worth and principle), ultimately placates the possibility of any alternative politics emerging in its place.

Just as important is the fact that 'governmentality' can operate in terms of international as well as domestic relations. We should remember here that, at the same time as "democracy" has provided the key means for militarised neoliberalism to legitimise and moralise – to 'governmentalise' – its foreign policies, the aesthetic of "democratisation" has undergone a global exportation of its own. As Bourriaud attested of his own theory, the aesthetic of "democratisation" has achieved 'planetary success' to such a degree that it has become, in Okwui Enwezor's less effusive language, 'doctrinaire'.[211] Yet the centrifugal spread of a predominantly Western European aesthetic suggests more than just the sweeping stylistic success implied by Enwezor. It also hints at the pressures on the part of artists, critics and art institutions to conform to this dominant aesthetic – a circumstance that has been particularly true in Eastern Europe after 2000, and which Alexander Brener to an extent pre-empted in his invocation of "democracy" at *Interpol* in 1996. On the one hand, there is the need to speak a dominant language in order to garner recognition from a "globalised" art world still resolutely centred in North Atlantic markets. This partially explains a shift in Viktor Misiano's thinking about contemporary Russian art, for example: in the late-1990s, amid the success of Bourriaud's book, he identified Russian practices as quintessentially relational; by 2006, following Claire Bishop's critique of Bourriaud, however, Misiano reconsidered Russian art to be emblematic of antagonistic "democracy".[212] On the other hand, we should also consider

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[211] Okwui Enwezor, 'The Unhomely: Phantom Scenes in Global Society', in Okwui Enwezor (ed.), *The Unhomely: Phantom Scenes in Global Society: 2nd International Biennial of Contemporary Art of Seville*, exh. cat. (Seville: BIACS, 2006), p.14.

[212] See, *inter alia*, Viktor Misiano, 'Confidential Community vs. the Aesthetics of Interaction', *Sekcja: Magazyn Artystyczny* (2006), available at http://www.sekcja.org/english.php?id_artykulu=18 [accessed 19 August 2006], in which Misiano re-evaluates and articulates the 'relational' basis of earlier work on 'the institutionalisation of friendship': see, for example, Viktor Misiano, 'The Institutionalization of

the frequency with which the aestheticians of "democracy" – and most notably Bourriaud – have been endorsed as board members by new Eastern European art institutions (including, but not limited to, the Moscow Biennale of Art, Bucharest's National Museum of Contemporary Art and Kyiv's Pinchuk Art Centre, where Bourriaud worked as a curator after leaving the Palais de Tokyo). As I analyse further in Chapter Five, such appeals to art's "democracy" are not simply aesthetic; they also attempt to show that "peripheral" artworlds – and perhaps more importantly, their government and entrepreneurial sponsors – are more "democratic" than presupposed. The consequence of these two views, however, is ultimately the same. Whether viewed as peripheral opportunism or as reflections of subordination – or, more accurately, as an inextricable conjunction of the two – the 'success' of the aesthetic of "democratisation" and the ostensible need for self-legitimation through it suggest the continuation of Europatriarchal governmentality well into the twenty-first century.

This does not mean that all artists working within Europe have succumbed to the lure of governmentality. If post-Cold War Europe has proven an important site for the cultural imperialism of "democratisation", and if the aesthetic of "democratisation" has proven symptomatic of its conditions, then we now need to examine European art practices that posit important alternatives to them. That is the task for the remainder of this thesis. At the heart of that task is an ongoing analysis of the relationships between geopolitics and art, as well as of politics specific to art that have played out between art practice, criticism and galleries. Central to that analysis is a sustained re-evaluation by artists of "democracy" as art's frequently purported and unqualified goal. As this chapter has shown, such claims to art and criticism's "democracy" risk easy subsumption within the cultural imperialism those claims may be seeking to resist. They can also ignore important questions that always need to be asked when an artist, critic or institution claims to be working in the name of "democracy": for which contexts is that claim made?

Friendship', in Eda Čufer (ed.), *Transnacionalia: Highway Collisions between East and West at the Crossroads of Art: A Project by IRWIN* (Ljubljana: KODA, 1999), pp.182-192. These can be contrasted with Misiano's repudiation of relational paradigms in favour of antagonism: see, for example, Viktor Misiano, '"Zones of Contact": From "confidential zones" to "operational zones"', in Charles Merewether (ed.), *Zones of Contact: 2006 Biennale of Sydney*, exh. cat. (Sydney: Biennale of Sydney, 2006), pp.205-210.

for which publics? for whose politics?[213] And if, as one writer for the American journal *October* argued, 'democratic resistances… must inform any left art criticism worthy of the name',[214] then is such a resistance really still possible after the end of the Cold War and particularly the invasion of Iraq?

The task is further complicated by presumptions that, if there is any alternative to "democracy" today, it can only be found in transnational terrorist organisations or in neo-nationalist insurgencies such as those found in former communist states or the Middle East.[215] As I argued in the introduction to this thesis, however, such binary oppositions ignore the possibility of productive, non-fundamentalist disagreements with "democracy" as the endpoint of politics. For the artists whose work I analyse in the following chapters, disagreement with "democracy" is not a case of dismissing all of the benefits, or even all of the complex processes of dissent, debate or antagonism that "democracy" has historically provided.[216] It is more about building upon some of those benefits while re-

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[213] These questions are, in many ways, a retort to Bruno Latour's belief that contemporary politics centres on legitimate forms of representation, and that that politics of representation and of 'making things public' has as its endpoint an 'object-oriented democracy': see Bruno Latour, 'From Realpolitik to Dingpolitik or How to Make Things Public', in Bruno Latour (ed.), *Making Things Public*, above n.13, pp.14-41. Despite the self-reflexivity of Latour's analysis, he largely ignores key questions that need to be asked in a period of "democracy's" apotheosis and neoliberal resignification. These are, for the most part, questions about power – a topic with which Latour is loathe to engage: who determines (a) representation's legitimacy, who constitutes that public to whom things are represented, and are there potential power imbalances between that public and someone who needs to engage in (readymade?) modes of representation in order to be seen? On Latour's dislike for questions of power, particularly in a potentially abstract Foucauldian sense, see Bruno Latour: *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

[214] Yates McKee, 'Suspicious Packages', *October*, 117 (Summer 2006), p.101.

[215] It is a presumption expressed in, for example, Michael McFaul, 'Democracy Promotion as a World Value', *The Washington Quarterly* 28/1 (Winter 2004-2005), p.150, and throughout Vladimir Tismaneanu, *Fantasies of Salvation: Democracy, Nationalism and Myth in Post-Communist Europe* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998). For a more reflexive awareness of this binary supposition, see Dryzek and Holmes, above n.197, pp.14-15.

[216] It is a disagreement that Alain Badiou, even in the 1990s, also proffered to his readers when he claimed that "democracy", even if it had become highly questionable as a political philosophy, 'is a word that encapsulates a complex history, and the benefits it harbours cannot be dismissed just like that': Badiou, *Metapolitics*, above n.120, p.7. This is reflected later in this thesis as well, for I will return to the important early work of Jacques Rancière in Chapter Five as a means of elucidating the critiques of "democracy" presented in the work of Christoph Büchel and Gianni Motti. In other words, despite potential problems or contradictions in philosophical arguments about "democracy", we cannot simply dismiss the general importance of work such as Rancière's, or theories of "democracy" outright.

evaluating "democracy" during its conscription by Empire; and of rejecting its culturally imperialist authority without seeking recourse to romanticised definitions of "democracy" from a mythic past (as attempted in the work of Hardt and Negri). To an extent, this project finds parallels in the critical work conducted by theorists such as Slavoj Žižek and Angela Mitropoulos and Brett Nielson, who respectively encourage us to 'summon up the courage to abandon "democracy" as the [contemporary] Master Signifier" and 'to either accept democracy for what it is or to seek another politics'.[217] It also finds impetus from political scientists who have sought to describe alternative politics rather than simply oppose existing ones. Most significant here is Michael Denning, who has sought to assert his difference from normative, neoliberalised invocations of "democracy", albeit through a tentatively different term: "the Democracy".[218]

The artists considered in this thesis have been less tentative in their disagreements, withdrawing from the nomenclature of "democracy" while putting forward alternative political agenda. These agenda are not designed to alter political formations of "democracy" in terms of political parties, suffrage and so on. The artists share less hubristic aims: to redirect art's theorisation away from existing political formations; to ensure that it cannot be harnessed and legitimised by hegemonic ideologies; and thus to resist art's investment in cultural imperialism. As we have observed in this chapter, these aims equally underpin the important work of Wendy Brown and Pat Simpson, two writers who have returned to early-postcommunist critiques of "democracy" so as to articulate new *postsocialist* politics after the invasion of Iraq. It is a methodology that, however unknowingly, reiterates that already established in contemporary European art, in which early-postcommunist practice serves as a crucial model for re-evaluating and redressing the problems and assumptions of art's "democracy". Understanding how and why artists have done this is the central task of this thesis, a task that begins with the work of Ilya

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[217] Slavoj Žižek, *Welcome to the Desert of the Real* (London and New York City: Verso, 2002), p.78; Mitropoulos and Nielson, above n.167, np.

[218] Michael Denning, 'Neither Capitalist nor American: The Democracy as Social Movement', in Amy Schrager Lang and Cecilia Tichi, *What Democracy Looks Like: A New Critical Realism for a Post-Seattle World* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2006), pp.245-258.

Kabakov and his critical philosophy of "emptiness", so as to elucidate this alternative politics of art.

Chapter Two:

An Aesthetic of Emptiness: Ilya Kabakov's *Ten Characters*

> *So many people in the West think that everything that has happened to Russians in the 20th century is not relevant to the West because Russians – well, are just different…*
> Boris Groys[1]

> *The apartment is filled with myths.*
> Ilya Kabakov[2]

In April 1988, one of New York's leading commercial art galleries, Ronald Feldman Fine Arts, underwent an overhaul. Instead of the gallery's normally pristine "white cube" space, visitors encountered a starkly different environment that few would have experienced before: a translation of two communal apartments from the Soviet Union, with ten small rooms fanning out from two corridors snaking through the venue. Each of the apartments' walls was painted grey and brown or coated in dark wallpaper, an unrelenting dullness matched by the low-level lighting that barely permeated the space. And in lieu of the gallery's usually reverent silence was the soundtrack of a man softly intoning old Russian romance songs to himself, his melodies interrupted on occasion by other people's voices and at other times by his own coughs and mumblings.

The rooms themselves laid bare the cramped conditions of ten people living communally, an apparent index of the repressive decay and dying days of the Soviet Union at the end of the 1980s. A vacant desk and a series of postcards glued to the wall in specific

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[1] Boris Groys and Ilya Kabakov, 'Interview on Igor Spivak', in Ilya Kabakov *et al*, *An Alternative History of Art: Rosenthal, Kabakov, Spivak*, exh. cat. (Cleveland: Museum of Contemporary Art Cleveland and Bielefeld: Kerber Verlag, 2005), p.268.

[2] Ilya Kabakov, '"Ten Characters" 1988', in Zdenek Felix (ed.), *Ilya Kabakov: Der Text als Grundlage des Visuellen: The Text as the Basis of Visual Expression* (Köln: Oktagon Verlag, 2000), p.364.

classifications presented the highly ordered world of *The Collector* (1988, fig.2.1).[3] Written records of eavesdropped conversations and statements were pinned around the room of *The Man who Collected the Opinions of Others* (1988, fig.2.2), while pieces of garbage had been painstakingly collated, labelled and divided into taxonomic hierarchies by *The Man who Never Threw Anything Away* (1988, fig.2.3). This was one of numerous rooms filled with waste, a central theme throughout the apartments. Rubbish hung from sixteen cords of string tethered in parallel rows across one room (*Sixteen Ropes* [1984-1988, fig.2.4]). In another, three large paintings, their style reminiscent of Socialist Realist illustrations, stood abandoned by the "untalented artist" who made them (*The Untalented Artist* [1988, fig.2.5]). And while each of the rooms was exposed to the viewers wandering through the corridors, the rooms' occupants were nowhere to be seen. One man had flown into space from his Soviet poster-strewn apartment, leaving only the catapult and a gaping wound in the ceiling as traces of his departure (*The Man who Flew into Space from his Apartment* [1985-1988, fig.2.6]). Another man had flown into an all-white monochrome he had painted on the wall, with the chair from which he had seemingly flown standing forlornly in the centre of the room (*The Man who Flew into his Picture* [1981-1988, fig.2.7]).

At first glance, Ilya Kabakov's first exhibition in America, *Ten Characters* (1988), would seem to confirm one of the most commonly-held beliefs outside the Soviet bloc at the end of the Cold War: that Eastern Europeans yearned to flee the dismal conditions of communism for the West's "democratic" embrace.[4] This was certainly one way of

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[3] Titles and dates are taken primarily from the comprehensive catalogue raisonné of Kabakov's installations: Toni Stooss (ed.), *Ilya Kabakov: Installations 1983-2000: Catalogue Raisonné: Volume 1: Installations 1983-1993* (Düsseldorf: Richter Verlag, c.2003). There remains conflict, however, between the various Kabakov monographs as to the actual dates of his works. See, for example, Iwona Blazwick *et al*, *Ilya Kabakov* (London: Phaidon Press, 1998), which frequently conflicts with the Stooss catalogue regarding particular installations' titles and dates. Given Kabakov's long-term collaboration with Toni Stooss on the catalogue raisonné, historians should treat its chronology as the primary point of reference.

[4] For an elaboration of this, and other, common presumptions during and after the Cold War, see pp.74ff of this thesis. Readers should also note that *Ten Characters* was exhibited in full on four occasions: at the Feldman Gallery, 30 April to 4 June, 1988; the Institute for Contemporary Art, London, 23 February to 23 April 1989; the Kunsthalle Zürich, 2 June to 30 July 1989 (though *The Man who Flew into Space from his Apartment* was missing from that exhibition); and the Hirshhorn Museum, Washington D.C., 7 March to 3 June 1990: Stooss (ed.), *ibid*, p.132.

reading the installations' narratives of exodus and escape, buttressed as they were by Kabakov's own biography of emigration from Moscow to the West just one year earlier. This reading was also implicit on a formal level, in terms of Kabakov's decision to present a series of installations for his first major exhibition outside the Soviet Union, rather than the illustrated albums for which he was best known in Moscow art circles. For Kabakov's first New York dealer, Ronald Feldman, this was a particularly canny decision, revealing a desire to impress Western art markets by conforming to the resurgent popularity of installation within them at the time.[5] For the New York-based critic and Soviet émigrée Margarita Tupitsyn, it equally ensured that audiences could wander freely through the 'democratic… form' of the installation, 'a magic crystal in which everything can be surveyed' because of its exposure to the viewer's gaze and his or her seemingly unrestricted movement through the work.[6] In that process of meandering through the space, visitors could also feel a certain reassurance from the image of Soviet decrepitude, given what it indirectly reflected: the West's creature comforts that Kabakov had recently come to experience first-hand.

These were interlocking rather than isolated concerns, presaging in many ways the aesthetics of "democratisation" that we analysed in the previous chapter. For if Kabakov's presentation of communist decay appeared to reflect the superiority of Western "democracy" and security in the late-1980s, then that position was potentially reinforced by Kabakov's use of installation as his preferred medium – a medium that Tupitsyn (among others) considered quintessentially or even ontologically "democratic", due mainly to visitors' capacities for physical engagement and movement through it. Critics overwhelmingly shared these views throughout the first years of Kabakov's exhibitions in Western Europe and America. What the lead critic for *Art in America*, Eleanor Heartney, saw as the 'dismal world of socialist poverty' reflected in Kabakov's

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[5] Interview with Ronald Feldman, 11 January 2007, author's notes.

[6] Margarita Tupitsyn in Ilya Kabakov, Margarita Tupitsyn and Victor Tupitsyn, 'About Installation', *Art Journal*, 58/4 (Winter 1999), p.66.

early installations was also, for Tupitsyn, 'profoundly simulate[d]' in *Ten Characters*.[7] According to *The Washington Post*'s Jo-Ann Lewis, *Ten Characters* was 'as close as you're likely to get to the life of the artist as it was lived and miraculously surmounted in Moscow's cramped communal apartments', while *The Guardian*'s Tim Hilton believed it would 'put us in direct touch with current Moscow thinking'.[8] Kabakov's work, in other words, was invariably cast as an ethnographic index and an unveiling of what had long been hidden behind the Iron Curtain. Even when critics complicated such views – and there were very few occasions when this took place – their interpretations generally followed one of two courses. Either Kabakov's installations confirmed that the West's myths about horrific Soviet living standards were actually true – such that, as Timothy W. Luke noted, '[t]he effect [of Kabakov's work] meets the viewer's "expectations" about Soviet life, as they might have been drawn in the 1980s by patronizing American commercials highlighting the lack of choice and shoddy quality of goods in the USSR's stores and shops'[9] – or they engendered explicitly active modes of reception, as a counter to Kabakov's presumed index of Soviet anomie. This second approach was implicit in Margarita Tupitsyn's interpretation of *Ten Characters*; it was epitomised, however, by an argument made by Andrew Renton in *Flash Art*, that '[w]e come upon each scene as an intruder in an unfathomable imagination. We leave as participants'.[10] When read

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[7] Eleanor Heartney, 'Nowhere to Fly', *Art in America*, 78/3 (March 1990), p.177 (in which Heartney reviews Kabakov's *My Mother's Life II* [1989], an installation also exhibited at the Ronald Feldman Gallery, New York); Margarita Tupitsyn, 'Ilya Kabakov: The Simulation of a Soviet Communal Apartment in Soho', *Flash Art*, 142 (October 1988), p.116.

[8] Jo-Ann Lewis, 'Cubicles of Cramped Souls', *The Washington Post* (7 March 1990), p.B1. Hilton's text is a review of the exhibition 'Novostroika', presented at the Institute for Contemporary Art in 1989, for which Kabakov was the headline artist: Tim Hilton, 'Portraits of Mother Russia', *The Guardian* (1 March 1989), p.46.

[9] Timothy W. Luke, 'Ilya Kabakov: Soviet Life', in *Shows of Force: Power, Politics and Ideology in Art Exhibitions* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1992), p.139. See also Hank Burchard, 'Cell Blockbuster', *The Washington Post* (9 March 1990), 'Weekend' section, p.53, in which Burchard calls *Ten Characters* 'a witty affirmation of individualism' as opposed to communalism or Soviet communism.

[10] Andrew Renton, 'Ilya Kabakov: Riverside Studios, London', *Flash Art*, 147 (Summer 1989), p.160. See also a much later article looking back on Kabakov's early practice, but which articulates similar claims to Renton's: Svetlana Boym, 'On Diasporic Intimacy: Ilya Kabakov's Installations and Immigrant Homes', *Critical Inquiry*, 24/2 (Winter 1998), p.504, in which Boym insists upon the interactivity of Kabakov's installations. While there may initially have been grounds for a belief in the participatory qualities of *Ten Characters*, as we will see later in this chapter, Kabakov carefully ensured that such qualities were made much more complex than his critics allowed.

together, these two lines of argument clearly asserted that Kabakov, like his characters, had somehow escaped the gloom of communism so as to direct his 'strange kind of democratic power' toward audiences that could appreciate it most.[11]

What emerges from this discursive history, then, is that if Western (and particularly American) cultures had been reduced to tropes of wealth, freedom and "democracy" during the Cold War – a position that Serge Guilbaut and other historians have critically analysed since the 1970s[12] – then those tropes were equally at play in art criticism and its interpretive framing of artworks in the late-1980s. Yet the problem with such ideological assertions was not just that they maintained the cliché of a stable and essentialist national ontology (one that naturalised, as "ontological", ideological discourses based on geopolitical hostility).[13] They effectively veiled the more nuanced examination of ideology that lay at the heart of *Ten Characters*, and which is the subject of this chapter. Crucial cues existed in the installation to suggest that an alternative reading was at stake, one that runs parallel to the view expressed by the American critic and curator, Robert Storr, that 'Kabakov's art is in its context as pointedly political as any being made today'.[14] While Storr restricted Kabakov's politics to the context of art production in the Soviet Union prior to *glasnost* and *perestroika*, I propose that it is within Western contexts of art production and reception that a more accurate understanding of Kabakov's politics emerges.

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[11] Hilton, above n.8, p.46.

[12] Serge Guilbaut, *How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art: Abstract Expressionism, Freedom, and the Cold War*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1983). See also Max Kozloff, 'Abstract Painting during the Cold War', *Artforum*, 11/9 (May 1973), pp.43-54; Eva Cockroft, 'Abstract Expressionism: Weapon of the Cold War', *Artforum*, 12/10 (June 1974), pp.39-41. For similar analyses made in the field of political science, see, for example, Geraint Parry and Michael Moran (eds.), *Democracy and Democratization* (London and New York City: Routledge, 1994).

[13] For a critique of the naturalisation of ideology through ontological discourses, see Susan Buck-Morss, *Thinking Past Terror: Islamism and Critical Theory on the Left* (London and New York City: Verso, 2003), pp.64-65.

[14] Robert Storr, 'Dislocations', in *Dislocations*, exh. cat. (New York City: The Museum of Modern Art and Harry N. Abrams Inc., 1991), p.23.

This argument runs counter to the near-consensus governing Kabakov's practice in the West: namely, to cite the American critic Matthew Jesse Jackson, that Kabakov has strictly portrayed and critiqued '"communal Soviet life"... in an outrageous, exotic medium'.[15] However, three key factors asserted in Kabakov's own writings about his work underpin the very different (even revisionist) analysis proffered in this chapter. The first provides a direct response to Storr, for Kabakov has argued that his 'works can be examined only in one context, in the context of Western contemporary art practices'.[16] This is *prima facie* a strange assertion for Kabakov to make. He had, after all, constructed some of the specific rooms that comprised *Ten Characters* in the years before he emigrated to the West in 1987. These include the work that is pivotal to this chapter and which Kabakov describes as 'perform[ing] the role of a meta-description of the whole [installation]': *The Man who Flew into Space from his Apartment*.[17] Furthermore, Kabakov first conceived his premise of narrating the lives of ten characters in a communal apartment while working in his Moscow studio in the early-1970s. The first of Kabakov's resultant projects, *Ten Albums* (1972-1975, fig.2.8), comprised ten narrative texts and their accompanying illustrations that detailed the protagonists' desire to escape from enforced communal conditions; set alongside them were secondary characters' opinions about those desires and, in some cases, eventual getaway. Kabakov would occasionally read the narratives to his peers and friends in his apartment, during "underground" or "Apartment Art" gatherings held in this private environment so as not to raise the ire of Soviet authorities (which generally repressed such "unofficial" gatherings, artworks and displays of art).[18]

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[15] Matthew Jesse Jackson, '"Alternative" Artists @ "Alternative" Institutions', in Ilya Kabakov *et al*, *An Alternative History of Art*, above n.1, p.212. To an extent, this interpretation of Kabakov's work as contained to Soviet conditions can also be found in Boris Groys' monograph on a particular installation from *Ten Characters*: see Boris Groys, *Ilya Kabakov: The Man who Flew into Space from his Apartment*, trans. Fiona Elliott (London: Afterall Books, 2006).

[16] Ilya Kabakov, *On the 'Total' Installation*, trans. Cindy Martin (Ostfildern: Cantz Verlag, 1995), p.268.

[17] Kabakov, '*The Man who Flew into Space from his Apartment*', in Stooss (ed.), above n.3, p.99.

[18] See, for example, David Ross, 'Between Spring and Summer', in David Ross (ed.), *Between Spring and Summer: Soviet Conceptual Art in the Era of Late-Communism*, exh. cat. (Tacoma: Tacoma Art Museum, 1990), pp.22-23. For a more specific contextual discussion of the Soviet authorities' uses of force to quell 'underground' art exhibitions, including the use of bulldozers to destroy a particular display in Moscow in September 1974, see Margarita Tupitsyn, 'Sots Art: The Russian Deconstructive Force', in New Museum

Examining *Ten Characters* within a Western contemporary art context, as Kabakov proclaims, would thus seem inapt, potentially ignoring the conditions within which the work's narrative was conceived and parts of it constructed. It may also open Kabakov to the criticism – made by some of his peers still living in Russia – that his installations *did* indeed support the myth of Western triumphalism at the Cold War's close, and that the installations *did* provide indexical traces of Soviet disintegration so as to appeal strategically to Western tastes and wallets.[19] However, such a view privileges a kind of ethnographic decoding of *Ten Characters* that Kabakov has vehemently rejected, for it maintains preconceptions of Soviet social conditions that obfuscate his installations' other 'metaphorical' purposes.[20] Moreover, while the narrative format and certain individual rooms were conceived prior to 1988, Kabakov's technique of entirely transforming the given space and time of an exhibition into his own narrative cosmos – what he calls the 'full-valued [and] self-contained world' of the '"total" installation'[21] – is specific to his post-emigration practice. The 'total' installation is a different medium from the albums or smaller, non-environmental installations; it is, for Kabakov, a "Western" form of production because its construction is finalised and, more importantly, experienced in the West.[22]

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of Contemporary Art, *Sots Art*, exh. cat. (New York City: New Museum of Contemporary Art, 1986), p.5. We will return to this so-called 'Bulldozer Exhibition' later in this chapter.

[19] See, for example, the opinions presented by Anatoly Osmolovsky, in 'In Search of a Critical Position', *Third Text*, 17/4 (December 2003), p.416. On rare occasions, Kabakov's own claims support Osmolovsky's allegation that Kabakov is servile to Western expectations. An example is Kabakov assertion in 1992 that 'I want to show that [Soviet] hell to the residents of paradise' (by which he presumably means Western audiences): Boris Groys and Ilya Kabakov, '"With Russia on your Back": A Conversation between Ilya Kabakov and Boris Groys', *Parkett*, 34 (1992), p.37.

[20] See Robert Storr, 'An Interview with Ilya Kabakov', *Art in America*, 83/1 (January 1995), p.62. Kabakov also opposes his practice to an 'ethnographic curatorship' that maintains 'the colonial system for which the center of the world is located in Europe and America': Ilya Kabakov, Margarita Tupitsyn and Victor Tupitsyn, 'Dialogue: Two-by-Three', in Ilya Kabakov *et al*, *An Alternative History of Art*, above n.1, p.208.

[21] Kabakov, *On the 'Total' Installation*, above n.16, p.256. We will return to the importance of the quotation marks around the word 'total' later in this chapter.

[22] By comparison, Kabakov has argued that reading the albums, drawings and other objects he created in the Soviet Union through a "Western" context is mistaken: 'these groups of paintings, drawings, objects become rather ordinary, mediocre "Western" production, falling rather easily into familiar frames and categories, which in essence means their annihilation'. See *ibid*, p.268.

The centrality of experience within Kabakov's work and its political potential is reinforced by his own arguments, made frequently since the late-1980s, that everything in his installations 'is calculated for the viewer's reaction... everything is constructed, intended for the perception of the viewer'.[23] This includes the series of blockages, interruptions, barriers and withdrawals that, as we shall see, Kabakov both presented and narrativised in *Ten Characters*. These blockages to, and withdrawals from, an expected engagement between installation and viewer reveal a critical position that remains inadequately addressed by Kabakov's commentators. And while I argue that the critiques sought by Kabakov emerge through the viewers' physical engagement with the artwork, this engagement is significantly different from the problematic theories of audience participation identified in the previous chapter.

The second aspect of Kabakov's work that this chapter addresses is an extension of the first. '[T]he context of Western contemporary art practice' to which *Ten Characters* responded includes both the physical context of the artwork's reception (the audience's engagement with it) and the critical framing in which such engagement was asserted and established. For Kabakov, '[i]t is precisely criticism and the impossibility of making a choice between the materiality or otherwise of the world that constitute the essence and the experience of the installation itself'.[24] If both Kabakov's installation and one's experience of it were indeed "critical" on a political level, as Storr and others suggest, then I contend that these politics responded to the assumptions made by his Western critics that the installation's form and reception were fundamentally "democratic". Indeed, by mythifying Kabakov's presumed appeal to "democracy", critics enforced the very 'impossibility' of perceiving *Ten Characters* properly as an attempt to deconstruct such myth-making rhetoric. This deconstructive turn is, however, crucial to understanding Kabakov's installation, especially given his claim (made in 1995) that

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[23] *Ibid*, p.275.

[24] Boris Groys and Ilya Kabakov, 'A Dialogue on Installations', in Boris Groys, Ilya Kabakov and Kölnischer Kunstverein, *Das Leben der Fliegen/The Life of Flies* (Ostfildern: Edition Cantz, 1992), p.265.

'[f]reedom and the casualness of what was surrounding the visitor in this place – a victory of democratic society – seemed to me to be fatal.... I dreamed about some sort of contact between my works and the viewer that would be more significant, fuller'.[25]

Central to this 'fuller' contact was a third factor to be addressed in this chapter: Kabakov's reliance in his writings on a concept of Пустота, or what we can roughly translate as "emptiness".[26] For Kabakov, "emptiness" was not to be understood as a nullity or a void – 'a "vacant place" in the European meaning of the word', he claimed – but rather 'as an extraordinarily active volume'.[27] How "emptiness" can be 'extraordinarily active', and what it signifies for a critical engagement with *Ten Characters*, informs the first two sections of this chapter. Through a reading of "emptiness" in terms of state ideology (its primary reference point for Kabakov) and the series of blockages and interruptions noted earlier, I seek to explain how the experience of *Ten Characters* critically withdrew from two particular myths that, to allude to Kabakov's epigraph to this chapter, filled the apartments in Ronald Feldman's gallery. The first is the mythified ontology of Western "democracy" at the end of the Cold War; the second, that of Kabakov's own identity as an artist appealing to those myths, as his critics suggested during the collapse of Soviet communism. Before we can reach these analyses, though, we must try to define precisely what Kabakov meant by "emptiness" – or, to be more accurate, to understand how Kabakov's conception of the term was in many ways thoroughly unstable and even indefinable.

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[25] Kabakov, *On the 'Total' Installation*, above n.16, p.268.

[26] Readers should note that I have used quotation marks around the work "emptiness" to highlight both its status as a trope and, as we will see throughout this chapter, in awareness that Kabakov's notion of "emptiness" does not signify a vacuum, as it does in general English-language usage.

[27] Ilya Kabakov, 'On Emptiness', in David Ross (ed.), above n.18, pp.53-54.

On the (Non-)Definition of "Emptiness" in Kabakov's Writings

One reason why this task of definition is more difficult than it may initially seem is because Kabakov is one of a number of artists from Eastern Europe whose work can be studied through the conceptual prism of emptiness. Kabakov's discourse, however, was very different to the senses of absence or isolation often used to explain contemporary art from the region, as exemplified in research conducted by the Australian artist and critic, Charles Green. For Green, emptiness was a crucial means of understanding the physically exhausting endurance tests performed in the 1970s and 1980s by the former-Yugoslav artist, Marina Abramović, and her collaborative partner Ulay. The 'physical and mental dysfunction' induced by hours-long performances – the excruciating pain caused by torturous bodily acts such as complete stillness, more literal inflictions of violence, or both – drew the artists away from their audiences and into themselves in an act of 'self-absorption and inaccessibility', Green claimed.[28] The artists thereby sought a state of liberation from individual subjectivity, language and bodily materiality, a liberation that they intentionally derived from various Buddhist practices of meditation and theories of emptiness 'as the stratum underlying phenomenological existence'.[29] This is a persuasive analysis of Abramović and Ulay's performances on Green's part, driven by the artists' curiosity about other cultures and especially non-Christian religions. The applicability of such a Buddhist conception of emptiness to Kabakov's installations is inappropriate, however, for though parallels have been drawn between Kabakov and Buddhism, Kabakov has confessed his general ignorance of Buddhist philosophies and, by extension, the need to find an alternative means of understanding his concept of "emptiness".[30]

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[28] Charles Green, *The Third Hand: Collaboration in Art from Conceptualism to Postmodernism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), p.174.

[29] *Ibid*, p.176.

[30] On the parallels made between Kabakov and Buddhism, see for example Boris Groys and Ilya Kabakov, 'Interview', in Kabakov *et al*, *An Alternative History of Art*, above n.1, p.217. For Kabakov's claim that he was not addressing Buddhism in his work, see Ilya Kabakov, '*The Man who Flew into his Picture*', in Stooss (ed.), above n.3, p.148. It should be noted, however, that Kabakov (together with his wife, Emilia, with whom he began collaborating after *Ten Characters*) subsequently engaged with Buddhism in various installations in the early-2000s. The most prominent example is the Kabakovs' *Manas* (2007), an installation designed for the Robert Storr-curated 52nd Venice Biennale and which presented narratives of a fictional city, a utopia called Manas, located in Northern Tibet. According to the Kabakovs' descriptions,

A different kind of problem surfaces in the work of another artist-critic, the American Paul Krainak, who has also considered tropes of absence and emptiness in Eastern European installations, and particularly those by the Slovakian artist Daniel Fischer. For Krainak, the silences and blacked-out spaces of emptiness in Fischer's multi-sensory installations serve as residual effects of late-communism. They are ongoing and private (and thus potentially melancholic) markers of self-censorship and 'coded silence' within the '[r]egimentation, confinement and deterioration' of Eastern Europe, both before 1989 and since.[31] In short, Krainak reinforces an ethnographic foundation to Fischer's trope of absence, one that clearly conflicts with Kabakov's explicit and continued rejection of ethnography as an interpretive frame. As Kabakov himself makes clear, then, neither Buddhist philosophies nor the maintenance of ethnographic stereotypes (however well-intentioned) adequately define his own philosophy of "emptiness".

Two of Kabakov's most astute critics have, however, noted very different understandings of "emptiness" in his work. For the Soviet émigrée and cultural theorist, Svetlana Boym, 'Kabakov cherishes emptiness' because it provides the 'metaphysical limits of collective control' in his installations.[32] It exceeds and curtails forms of authorial determination, whether that be Kabakov's own (such as over how an installation will be interpreted and experienced by his audience) or other people's (such as his critics' consensus as to how the installation *should* be experienced). Robert Storr, by comparison, views Kabakov as

Manas was a paradisiacal city on Earth in which residents could commune with the cosmos; on certain occasions as well, another city, a heavenly doppelganger of Manas, could be seen hovering above its Earth-bound formation: see Robert Storr (curator and ed.), *Think with the Senses, Feel with the Mind: Art in the Present Tense: La Biennale di Venezia: 52 Esposizione Internazionale d'Arte: Volume 1*, exh. cat. (Venice: Marsilio, 2007), pp.170-171.

[31] Paul Krainak, 'Cryptographic Art of Bratislava: Configurations of Absence in Post-Communist Installation Art', in Sibelan Forrester, Magdalena J. Zaborowska and Elena Gapova (eds.), *Over the Wall/After the Fall: Post-Communist Cultures through an East-West Gaze* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2004), pp.200, 204.

[32] Svetlana Boym, *Common Places: Mythologies of Everyday Life in Russia* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1994), p.161.

'the architect of emptiness':[33] it informs his identities as an exile from both his Ukrainian birthplace and his long-term Moscow residence, and as a quasi-nomadic artist journeying across the (predominantly Western) world to install his works. "Emptiness" is, according to this view, synonymous with a homelessness that is based on the artist's biography and emblematised in the portable format and often temporary exhibition of his installations. Storr's interpretation, in other words, dispels the poststructuralist refrain of the 'death of the author' so as to reinforce an inextricable link between art and biography – a problematic relation to which I will return later in this chapter. Nonetheless, his insistence on Kabakov as an *architect* of "emptiness" pinpoints one of the concept's most significant characteristics: its predominantly spatial allusion within Kabakov's writings and early 'total' installations.

Despite the differences between these two critics' understandings of "emptiness" – Boym sees it as structural, Storr as identity-driven – they echo each other in their view that "emptiness" is a productive and affirmative foundation to Kabakov's practice. Yet if we are to assert a productive potential to "emptiness" as emerging from the experience of Kabakov's installations – as this chapter argues as well, albeit differently from either Boym or Storr – we should also recognise how this may conflict with Kabakov's initial explanations of "emptiness" *vis-à-vis* his work and life within overwhelmingly ideological state systems. The key to this lies within Kabakov's philosophical tracts, in his own accounts of "emptiness" that, though difficult to grasp, direct us to a fuller understanding of the term.

The most relevant explanations provided by Kabakov appeared in 1990 – that is, roughly contemporaneous with *Ten Characters'* exhibition in the West – in his significant but rarely-analysed essay, 'On Emptiness'. Published in the catalogue for the Tacoma Art Museum's exhibition *Between Spring and Summer: Soviet Conceptual Art in the Era of Late-Communism*, 'On Emptiness' is a frequently cryptic parable that outlines the

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[33] Robert Storr, 'The Architect of Emptiness', *Parkett*, 34 (1992), pp.42-45. An extended version of this essay appears as Robert Storr, 'L'architecte du vide', in Nadine Pouillon (curator and ed.), *Ilya Kabakov: Installations 1983-1995*, exh. cat. (Paris: Centre Georges Pompidou, 1995), pp.13-16.

relations between people who inhabit cities, islands and other spaces imbued with "emptiness". Kabakov provides no precise definition of his concept, other than as a sense of 'stateness' that is 'incomprehensible… and inaccessible… by meaning [and which] demands… the execution of its own "governmental aims," known only to it, which are fixed, promising only mercy in return'.[34] This is undoubtedly a roundabout and abstract definition of "emptiness", the amorphousness of which veers more towards being a non-definition of the term, as 'incomprehensible… and inaccessible' as Kabakov declared "emptiness" to be in general. Nonetheless, beneath Kabakov's veil of metaphor lies an understanding of "emptiness" as – at least on one level – a virtual realm of state ideology. Though it executes 'governmental aims', "emptiness" can be neither contained nor specifically related to particular state institutions (such as the Soviet Communist Party or other institutional authorities including the State Security Committee [or 'KGB']). It is instead ideology introjected to the level of the psyche, as a form of self-policing behaviour that 'creates a peculiar atmosphere of stress, excitedness, strengthlessness, apathy, and causeless terror'.[35] It is also projected toward others, for 'all communications and links' with others – all forms of relation, whether communicative or paranoiac, policing or personable – 'belong also to this... stateness'.[36] "Emptiness", in other words, is ideological control executed less through specific state institutions than through affect, whether "destructively" (through terror, senses of dislocation or fears of disobedience) or "productively" (through the excitedness of satisfying what we perceive to be the expectations of stateness, or to receive its mercy).

In this sense, Kabakov's concept of "emptiness" bears a striking resemblance to Louis Althusser's analysis of ideology and 'ideological state apparatuses'. For both writers, the repressive and regulatory authority of the state should be understood as exceeding any containment within particular institutional formations (such as government, the army or police forces). That authority instead operates more generally and effectively through

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[34] Kabakov, 'On Emptiness', above n.27, p.58.

[35] *Ibid*, p.55.

[36] *Ibid*, p.58.

people's internalisation of it, through learning how to function within the rules and expectations of social propriety such that one's behaviour, communication with others, fears and desires ultimately reflect and reproduce the state's authority over all aspects of the social.[37] Despite the similarities between them, though, it is important to recognise that Kabakov provides a notable extension to Althusser's theories from the late-1960s. For Kabakov, ideologised affective relations between people are not necessarily anchored back to specific institutions (or an institutional 'base', as Althusser argued in his Marxist lexicon). Their seemingly unanchored spheres of operation within "emptiness" are thus arguably more reminiscent of another philosophical analysis, first published the same year as 'On Emptiness': Gilles Deleuze's discourse on 'societies of control'.[38] Both "emptiness" and 'societies of control' are governed (to use Kabakov's phrase) by 'invisibility, endlessness, uncloseability [and] immeasurability':[39] the first in terms of ideologies of stateness, the second due to the computerised, corporatised and increasingly virtual economies of the post-Fordist West. For Deleuze, 'societies of control' remediate the societies of sovereignty and discipline analysed by the Althusser-inspired Michel Foucault. Whereas disciplinary societies were powered by specific institutions (such as the crown, the church, the factory or the school), computerisation and corporatisation have floated that power beyond institutional borders and transformed it into 'a spirit, a

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[37] Louis Althusser, 'Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses: Notes Towards an Investigation', in *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, trans. Ben Brewster (New York City: Monthly Review Press, 2001 [1971]), pp.85-126. A somewhat parallel argument in relation to postwar consumer capitalism in the West, rather than the state, can be found in Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (New York City: Zone Books, 7th ed., 2002), in which Debord famously outlines how '[t]he spectacle is *capital* accumulated to the point where it becomes image' and that '[t]he spectacle… is a social relationship between people that is mediated by images' (at pp.24, 12 respectively, Debord's emphasis). Similar arguments about ideology and language can also be found in the work of Michel Pêcheux: see Michel Pêcheux, *Language, Semantics and Ideology: Stating the Obvious*, trans. Harbans Nagpal (London: MacMillan, 1982). For an excellent – and, as always, counter-intuitive – critique of Althusser's theory of ideological state apparatuses, see Slavoj Žižek, 'The Spectre of Ideology', in Slavoj Žižek (ed.), *Mapping Ideology* (London and New York City: Verso, 1994), pp.1-33.

[38] Gilles Deleuze, 'Postscript on the Societies of Control', *October*, 59 (Winter 1992), pp.3-7; first published as 'Post-scriptum sur les sociétés de contrôle', *L'autre journal*, 1 (May 1990) and in Gilles Deleuze, *Pourparlers* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1990), pp.240-247. All quotations from this source are taken from the text's English translation. It should also be noted that Kabakov was not aware of either this particular essay or other writings by Deleuze. The relation between the two is, therefore, based on their separate, intuitive observations of the social rather than studied analysis of each other's work.

[39] Kabakov, 'On Emptiness', above n.27, p.56.

gas' of limitless expanse.[40] Its fuel is no longer the institutionalised labour of subjects or workers in the West (as Deleuze notes, production is increasingly relegated to the world's poorest markets which consequently have cheaper labour).[41] Instead, control operates through the desires of, and affective relations between, people who are perceived as service providers and mere data or markets to be tapped, rather than as autonomous individuals *per se*. Societies of control are thus dispersive, uncontainable and largely unquantifiable. They inhabit a virtual realm of (economic) power that finds its ideological equivalent in Kabakov's initial conception of "emptiness".

According to this reading, then, Boym's claim that 'Kabakov cherishes emptiness' appears perversely supportive of the same ideological frame from which he had supposedly "fled" in 1987. Yet it would be wrong to perceive either "emptiness" or the 'societies of control' as inherently totalising, infallible or nihilistic. Recourse to Deleuze's complementary theories can again provide a useful frame for Kabakov's discourse of "emptiness" here. For Deleuze, the virtualisation of control – particularly as induced by digital technologies – opens it to new forms of danger and dissidence through jamming, piracy and viruses.[42] Implicit within Deleuze's analysis is the realisation that viruses can corrode control from within, immanently threatening the apparent 'soul' of contemporary corporations.[43] A similar potential for danger emerges within "emptiness", as that which is also immanently corrosive. For Kabakov, this danger is encapsulated in the subtle ambiguity of his concept: "emptiness" is not simply a totalising state, but also defined as 'the other, antithetical side of any question. It is the inside, the opposite, the eternal "no" beneath everything small and large, whole and individual, intelligent and mindless – all which we cannot name and which has a meaning and a name'.[44] In other words, Kabakov declares that there *is* an antithesis to the totality of "emptiness", one that

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[40] Deleuze, above n.38, p.4.

[41] *Ibid*, p.6.

[42] *Ibid*.

[43] *Ibid*.

[44] Kabakov, 'On Emptiness', above n.27, p.54.

can still negate or critique its ideological control. This critical "no" exists 'inside [and as] the opposite' to "emptiness". And while we may not be able to categorise this response, it still has 'a meaning and a name' of its own: that name, however, is also "emptiness".

"Emptiness" must therefore be understood as ambiguous in both its operation (as that which cannot be measured or contained) and its definition. It simultaneously signifies the virtual control of ideology and its immanent critique; or, to return to Kabakov's own words, "emptiness" is both a '"construction", organisation [and] the destruction and annihilation' of that construction from within.[45] Two points immediately arise from this ambiguity. The first relates to uncertainty: an uncertainty in determining whether that 'organisation' of "emptiness" is the organisation of totalising ideology or an organised form of critical corrosion. The one may easily be mistaken for the other, and thus may potentially annihilate the other: this is the paradox of "emptiness". At the same time, this lack of clarity and certainty in either the ontology or the definition of "emptiness" is precisely Kabakov's (and our second) point. "Emptiness" always has two dimensions that may be 'opposed... to one another', but that will also always collapse and fold into each other.[46] The effect is that "emptiness" is at once constructive, destructive and inherently *deconstructive*. It creates within itself a destabilising fission, one induced by the ambiguity of "emptiness" on the level of language (that is, how to define the concept) and of experience (how to determine whether one's relation to "emptiness" maintains its ideological force or says 'no' to it).

To summarise Kabakov's philosophy: If "emptiness" signifies the active yet unquantifiable forces of stateness, it is also the deconstructive fissure within that stateness. It is the 'eternal "no"' inside and opposite to stateness, a negation that (like stateness itself) exceeds any attempt to contain or quantify it. The 'no' of "emptiness" thus cannot be pinned down into readymade categories of understanding, especially if those categories have already been determined or authorised by the very same force of

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[45] *Ibid*, p.55.

[46] See *ibid*, p.54, where Kabakov claims that "emptiness" 'lives and exists not by its own power, but by that life which surrounds it, which it transforms [and] collapses into itself'.

stateness that that 'no' exceeds. Any definition of "emptiness" must instead be as ambiguous and unstable as the state of "emptiness" itself. This definition must recognise the basis of "emptiness" within totalising forms of ideology *and* its critical potential in relation to those forms; must register its actual existence yet not attempt to contain or name it as such. It must be a definition that is also, concurrently, a non-definition of sorts.

To perform this admittedly complicated task is to recognise that "emptiness" is not a vacancy or a void; as noted in the introduction to this chapter, Kabakov claims that these 'European' notions of emptiness are inadequate and irrelevant to his works. Nor can it be reduced to either Robert Storr's concept of homelessness or Svetlana Boym's notion of a 'metaphysical limit'. Although Boym in particular acknowledges the 'no' of "emptiness", she does not fully consider its metonymic relation to virtual flows of ideology. "Emptiness" – whether constructive, destructive or deconstructive – is instead an 'extraordinarily active volume... equal to that of affirmative existence';[47] it is an active yet destabilising force that threatens the very ideological totality of which it is a part. Kabakov's recourse to *volume* here is also crucial, for it alludes to the two prisms through which "emptiness" should be understood in relation to his works: the linguistic (volume *qua* text) and the experiential (volume *qua* space). As I will argue in the next section of this chapter, these two prisms serve as the basis – however unstable – for understanding Kabakov's early installations and particularly *Ten Characters*, as well as the ambiguous yet active politics of "emptiness" within them.

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[47] *Ibid.*

On "Emptiness" in Kabakov's Art

The Empty Museum *and* Before Supper

If critics have largely misconstrued the complexities of "emptiness" in Kabakov's practice, this is due in part to its often literal presentation in his early installations in the West. In 1993, for example, and in collaboration with his wife Emilia, Kabakov created *The Empty Museum* by removing sixteen Old Master paintings from the Staatliche Hochschule für Bildende Künste in Frankfurt (fig.2.9). Spotlights remained trained on the bare red walls of the gallery in which the paintings had previously hung, while two high-backed, double-sided couches promoted comfortable contemplation of the seemingly unfilled space. If, as Kabakov claims, both the audience and 'the walls... were anticipating the arrival and arrangement of paintings', then those expectations would not be met.[48] Instead, the Kabakovs provided an 'unexpected substitution' of painting with musical refrains (from Johann Sebastian Bach's *Passacaglia* of 1717) which seeped through the room.[49] And while this substitution may seem merely aesthetic, especially given the artists' desire 'to show the possibilities of such a substitution – of paintings by sound',[50] I would argue that it pointed to something else as well, something more substantial and resonant for this chapter. By sitting back in the couches, viewers could contemplate both the absent presence of the music and the present absence of the paintings, the one folding into and interchangeable with the other in the apparently "empty" gallery. The Kabakovs' process of substitution, in other words, imbued the viewers' surrounds with an active dynamic of "emptiness", one that was not necessarily based on the gallery's formal lack of paintings but on how that lack was instead filled with an unseen and unexpected presence.

This active dynamic was not unfamiliar to Kabakov's practice. One of his first installations outside the Soviet Union, *Before Supper* (1988, fig.2.10), presented a

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[48] Ilya Kabakov, '*The Empty Museum*', in Stooss (ed.), above n.3, p.438.

[49] *Ibid*, p.441.

[50] *Ibid*.

monochromatic expanse of white enamel paint framed by a series of small drawings.[51] Three Socialist Realist-style paintings hung on each side of the frame, while a seventh painting served an overtly utilitarian purpose, as a table replete with plates and cutlery standing before the "empty" monochrome. In a curious *mise-en-abyme*, each of Kabakov's small drawings also depicted frames surrounding a white monochrome. Although the drawn frames could be seen as simply ornamental and waiting to be filled with a photograph or another drawing, this was not Kabakov's intention. He has argued instead that each drawing:

> has its own subject, its own intrigue. So what, as a result, is before us: a frame for a future drawing or a ready, finished drawing? The answer is two-fold.... [The viewer] can think that there is emptiness before him [*sic*] and that he [*sic*] is being played with, taken for a fool, offered "nothing", emptiness to look into. Or he [*sic*] can think that before him [*sic*] there really is a drawing, a genuine one consisting of a depiction around the edges and emptiness in the center.[52]

Though both options suggest that each monochrome was in fact empty – whether as a taunt or as a drawn frame surrounding nothing – this reading would be premature. Kabakov provided a third option to consider: one 'should look only at these edges of drawings and then look back at the drawings themselves separately, scrutinizing the subjects presented'.[53] The comment is again cryptic, yet decipherable. The "emptiness" that he presented was still a drawing or a depicted subject itself, one that Kabakov insisted that we scrutinise, while the frame served as the edge of that drawing. Recognising this form of "emptiness" as already filled with an actively-created subject thus required an understanding that one's initial expectations would not be met except in an unexpected way. What appeared to be blank and waiting to be filled with a drawing was already a drawn subject, suspending the pre-conception that "emptiness" equates to nothingness.

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[51] *Before Supper* was shown at the Opernhaus in Graz, Austria, in March 1988, and again at the 1988 Venice Biennale.

[52] Ilya Kabakov, '*Before Supper*' in Stooss (ed.), above n.3, p.131.

[53] *Ibid.*

Kabakov's *mise-en-abyme* – between the large enamel monochrome and the drawings that framed it, each of which also contained a monochromatic "emptiness" – ensures that we cannot reduce the enamel painting to a mocking or enclosed nothingness either. According to Kabakov's logic, it too potentially presented a subject to be recognised and scrutinised, rather than simply a vacant space. And while the enamel square initially resembled another, more infamous white square in Russian art history – Kasimir Malevich's *Suprematist Composition: White on White* (1918) – Kabakov's artistic conceptions of "emptiness" were not a mere repetition of Malevich's Suprematist mysticism.[54] Two significant differences stood out, both of which are central to our understanding of "emptiness" in Kabakov's artworks. First, Malevich's well-known search for the 'zero sum', or essential core, of painting required the elimination of all pictorial composition that would supplement and thereby detract from that essentialism. The resultant reduction of painting to white-on-white created a *tabula rasa*, a blank screen onto which viewers could project their fantastical perceptions (as László Moholy-Nagy argued in retrospect).[55] Kabakov, however, emphasised the pictorial characteristics of his "empty" compositions: they were depictions requiring scrutiny so as to elucidate their subject. Their "emptiness" was thus not a *tabula rasa* but already active, already full, and requiring recognition as such. They were, in other words, screens demanding reflection rather than screens for (self-)projection.

The second difference pertains to Malevich's call for a revolution in painting to match, or even surpass, the social upheaval of the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917.[56] By 'sail[ing]

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[54] My point contrasts with the continuity between Kabakov and Malevich argued in Barrett Watten, 'Post-Soviet Subjectivity in Arkadii Dragomoschenko and Ilya Kabakov', *Postmodern Culture*, 3/2 (1993), paragraph 10.

[55] László Moholy-Nagy, *The New Vision and Abstract of an Artist*, trans. Daphne M. Hoffmann, (New York City: George Wittenborn, 4th ed., 1947), p.39. By calling *White on White* a 'projection screen', Moholy-Nagy sought to conflate Malevich's Suprematism with the 'new vision' he associated with certain examples of avant-garde film and which literally required a projection screen so as to be seen by audiences. See also Branden W. Joseph, *Random Order: Robert Rauschenberg and the Neo-Avant-Garde* (Cambridge MA: The MIT Press, 2003), pp.36-38.

[56] On the parallels and differences between Malevich's claims for revolution and those of Lenin in the late-1910s, see Susan Buck-Morss, 'On Time', *Dreamworld and Catastrophe: The Passing of Mass Utopia in East and West* (Cambridge MA: The MIT Press, 2000), pp.42-95.

into the chasm... [and] the white, free depths' of Suprematist painting, Malevich believed that viewers could transcend their present lives and enter his own brand of utopian liberation: as he wrote in 1919, '[i]nfinity is before you!'[57] Kabakov's enamel square, by comparison, drew such revolutionary calls for transcendence into doubt. On the one hand, the monochromes' "emptiness" was decidedly uncertain: they still appeared blank and void despite Kabakov's claims that they were, or presented, drawn subjects. A sharp distinction consequently emerged between what the artist claimed he depicted (and that he insisted viewers should see) and the monochromes' resolutely blank appearance. One's relation to the "empty" monochrome, its denotations and connotations, was thereby riddled with ambiguity – a defining attribute of Kabakov's theory of "emptiness" in his writings. On the other hand, by surrounding his "emptiness" with Socialist Realist paintings – the artistic pawn of Stalinist and post-Stalinist totalitarianism in the Soviet Union – Kabakov directly located the white square within ideologies of stateness. For as both Kabakov and his influential colleague Boris Groys have argued, totalitarianism can be defined as the enactment of abstract utopias, of putting those utopian designs into practice. This potentially includes Malevich's own call to enact a transcendental revolution through encounters with his art – a call that, Groys argues, directly informed the development of Stalinist stateness.[58] Indeed, Groys' critique of political and artistic utopianism is one that Kabakov, by surrounding and contextualising his Malevich-style white square with icons of stateness, implicitly seemed to support.

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[57] Kasimir Malevich, catalogue of the 'Tenth State Exhibition: Non-Objectivity, Creation and Suprematism (1919), cited in John Milner, *Kazimir Malevich and the Art of Geometry* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), pp.171-172 and Buck-Morss, *ibid*, p.49. Note that a different translation – in which 'eternity' replaces 'infinity' – appears in John Bowlt (ed.), *Russian Art of the Avant-Garde: Theory and Criticism* (New York City: Thames and Hudson, 2nd ed., 1988), p.145.

[58] For Kabakov's view of utopianism, see the interview between Ilya Kabakov and Nadine Pouillon, 'Le musée: Temple ou décharge' in Pouillon (curator and ed.), above n.33, p.22. Kabakov claims that all enactments of utopia lead to totalitarianism and that, because all societies seek to enact small or global utopias, so we can say that each one of us is Communist. Groys directly links the Russian avant-gardes' calls for utopian revolution to Stalin's attempt to make of the Soviet Union a *gesamtkunstwerk*, or 'total artwork'. According to Groys, the latter co-opts and makes explicit the totalitarian desires implicit within the former. See Boris Groys, *The Total Art of Stalin: Avant-Garde, Aesthetic Dictatorship, and Beyond*, trans. Charles Rougle (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992 [1988]). For a contemporaneous yet very different understanding of the co-option of the historical avant-garde by later cultural and political projects – and particularly the hollowed repetition and institutionalisation of historical avant-garde practices by later, neo-avant-gardism – see *inter alia* Peter Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, trans. Michael Shaw (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984).

More pertinent to this thesis, though, is the possibility that Kabakov's contextualisation also identified his own monochromatic "emptiness" within the totalitarian connotations and stateness of Socialist Realist painting. Whether "emptiness" was correspondent with stateness (by virtue of the signifiers' physical proximity) or corrosive of it (through their formal difference) was, however, unclear. This was deliberate on Kabakov's part. What it reinforced was that "emptiness" in these artworks, as in his writings, was an ambiguous and active dynamic: it was potentially both nothingness and a subject to be scrutinised, imbued with stateness and yet also the suspension of statist tropes and designs. Most importantly, if Malevich's *White on White* alluded to an uncritical utopianism – one that could revolutionise society through the art encounter – then the ambiguities of active "emptiness" promoted a critical reflection on art's investment in utopianism and what that investment could ultimately enact: an all-encompassing, totalising or even totalitarian sense of stateness.[59]

Ten Characters

Within weeks of *Before Supper*'s exhibition, Kabakov was in New York transforming the "white cubes" of Ronald Feldman Fine Arts. But while Feldman's gallery was undergoing its overhaul, so too was the New York art scene after its fattening through the 1980s by market-friendly art, from Neo-Expressionism and Transavangardia to Neo-Geo and Simulationism. The scourge of HIV/AIDS had drawn (certain sectors of) that art scene to crisis: because of the death of colleagues, lovers, friends and family; because of the possible truth to the claim, made in a poster by the activist art group Gran Fury in 1988, that 'with 42,000 dead, art is not enough'; and because of the Reagan Administration's ongoing failure to respond quickly, adequately and courageously to that

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[59] Amei Wallach makes a similar, though problematic, argument in Amei Wallach, 'Ilya Kabakov Flies into his Picture', *Art in America*, 88/11 (November 2000), p.147. For Wallach, both Malevich and Kabakov are interested in 'whiteness' and 'emptiness' as equivalent to 'holy light'. While Kabakov argues that "emptiness" is a form of ideological totality – which could thus also apply to Christianity in general, or, at more of a stretch, Russian Orthodoxy in particular – Wallach does not take this "definition" into account. Instead, he asserts a spirituality to Kabakov that exists alongside, and as a possible alternative to, Kabakov's presentations of Soviet bureaucracy.

scourge. For the activist art collaboration Group Material, inadequate socio-political (and artistic) leadership against HIV/AIDS signified that 'the state of American democracy was in no way ideal'.[60] Public participation in political decision-making was weak, they claimed, and 'degenerated into passive and symbolic involvement'.[61] Neoliberalism under Reagan's presidency had significantly reduced social welfare and social justice, while 'the current of "official" politics precluded a diversity of viewpoints' that were '"inclusive", "multicultural", "nonsexist", and "socially relevant"'.[62] Conventional models and mediums of art, as well as conventionally passive modes of spectatorship, were thus no longer thought to be sufficient; what Group Material advocated, together with critics David Deitcher and Brian Wallis and other artists including Yvonne Rainer, was a model of activist and "unofficial" art that they called 'social aesthetics'.[63] As characterised in Group Material's influential projects gathered under the banner of *Democracy* at New York's Dia Art Foundation in 1988 (figs.2.11-2.12), 'social aesthetics' was overtly political in content, presented primarily through installations and intended to 'encourage greater audience participation through interpretation' and inclusivity across disparate and particularly minority backgrounds and subjectivities.[64]

In retrospect, it is clear that social aesthetics became an extraordinarily influential model of 'identity politics' in art by the early-1990s. Its foundation in "inclusive" installations

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[60] Group Material, 'On Democracy', in Brian Wallis (ed.), *Democracy: A Project by Group Material: Dia Art Foundation Discussions in Contemporary Culture: Number 5* (Seattle: Bay Press, 1990), p.1.

[61] *Ibid.*

[62] *Ibid.*

[63] David Deitcher, 'Social Aesthetics', in *ibid*, pp.13-43. As Deitcher notes (at p.18), the term was first coined by the late curator, Bill Olander, in a 1982 exhibition, 'Art and Social Change', at Oberlin College. While working at New York's New Museum of Contemporary Art, Olander had been pivotal to the presentation of one of the first, and most influential, artworks dedicated to increasing awareness about, and fighting against, HIV/AIDS: ACT UP's *Let the Record Show* (1987). The installation, presented in the Museum's window overlooking Broadway, made AIDS awareness a priority in both the public sphere (that had hitherto been largely ignorant and/or silent about HIV/AIDS) and an often equally silent artworld. For the important histories of queer politics, activist art, ACT UP and its artistic division, Gran Fury, see, *inter alia*, Douglas Crimp, *Melancholia and Moralism: Essays on AIDS and Queer Politics* (Cambridge MA: The MIT Press, 2002), especially pp.33ff.

[64] Group Material, above n.60, p.2.

attained institutionalisation in the 1993 Whitney Biennial (the so-called 'politically correct Biennial').[65] Its politics of "inclusion" similarly threaded through the cultural collaborations between artists, curators and marginalised communities that defined 'New Genre Public Art' in the same period – a genre of art that, as Miwon Kwon has cogently argued, ultimately reinforced those communities' status as marginal so as to legitimise their "inclusion" within art's renewed social purpose.[66] In 1988, however, the situation was different. The cornerstones of social aesthetics – installation, participation, intersubjectivity, inclusivity, democracy – were perceived as urgent rather than reified, requiring broader application within New York art circles rather than inviting its cynicism. Consequently, to exhibit in New York as an "unofficial" installation artist from the Soviet Union – a label already attached to Kabakov in a series of *Flash Art* articles by Margarita Tupitsyn and others before 1988,[67] and affirmed through his sponsorship by the same long-time New York dealer as other Soviet "unofficial" artists like Vitaly Komar and Alexander Melamid – was to enter, almost by default, the discourse of New York's own "unofficial" art scene. That Kabakov's Western supporters of his early 'total' installations should have invoked the rhetoric of social aesthetics in their criticism is thus not surprising: New York's "unofficial" politics could contextualise, translate and create expectations of Kabakov's installations and their political potential for his new audiences.

Yet if those expectations provided *Ten Characters* with a readymade interpretive frame, that frame proved ineffective in articulating the installation's actual politics. At the heart of these politics was a nuanced conception of "emptiness" that combined its visual and contextual display in *Before Supper* with the phenomenological engagement that would

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[65] See, for example, Elisabeth Sussman (ed.), *1993 Biennial Exhibition*, exh. cat. (New York City: Whitney Museum of American Art and Harry N. Abrahams Inc., 1993). For an insightful critique, see Charles A. Wright Jr., 'The Mythology of Difference: Vulgar Identity Politics at the Whitney Biennial', *Afterimage*, 21/2 (September 1993), pp.4-8.

[66] Miwon Kwon, *One Place after Another: Site-Specificity and Locational Identity* (Cambridge MA: The MIT Press, 2002), pp.104-137.

[67] See, for example, Margarita Tupitsyn, 'Ilya Kabakov', *Flash Art*, 126 (February-March 1986), pp.67-69; Claudia Jolles and Viktor Misiano, 'Eric Bulatov and Ilya Kabakov', *Flash Art*, 137 (November-December 1987), pp.81-83; Victor Tupitsyn, 'Ideology Mon Amour: The Scenario of Simulation', *Flash Art*, 137 (November-December 1987), pp.84-85; and Achille Bonito Oliva, 'Neo-Europe (East)', *Flash Art*, 140, (May-June 1988), pp.61-64.

later characterise *The Empty Museum*. And while "emptiness" remained difficult to fully conceptualise, this was only partially because *Ten Characters* did not quite fit the expectations of "unofficial" art in New York. It was also due to the diverse ways in which "emptiness" emerged throughout the exhibition.

The most overt was the absence of the apartments' inhabitants, such that one's movement through their rooms was akin to anomic actions of trespass and voyeurism rather than intersubjective engagement.[68] Such movement assumed, however, that viewers could enter the rooms in the first place, for those belonging to *The Man who Flew into Space from his Apartment* and the resident who had constructed *Sixteen Ropes* were effectively barred: the first by wooden slats across the threshold that prevented anyone from properly seeing the catapult and thus repeating the man's escape (or so Kabakov's accompanying narrative claimed) (fig.2.13);[69] the second by the rows of objects strung low across the room so that full entry into it was extremely difficult. Other rooms generally lay vacant and exposed like theatre stages at interval, their implicit "hands-off" display common to conventional gallery-hangs and crime scenes alike.[70] And while two rooms suggested that acts of participation might be possible, neither case satisfied the grammar of a 'social aesthetic', either because participation was severely limited (sitting on the chair of *The Man who Flew into his Picture*) or simply infantilising (tugging at a piece of string so as to "save" a man from drowning in *The Man who Saved Nikolai Viktorovich* [1988, fig.2.14]). Considered together, these factors – of barriers, "hands-off" disengagement and curtailed participation – provided a second example of "emptiness" that, like the mysteriously disappeared inhabitants, emerged as an absence made present to the viewer.

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[68] On this point, I agree with Robert Storr's observation that the characters were substituted with objects and that 'things that one discovers are traces of actions which, in turn, evoke the absent [residents]': Storr, 'L'architecte du vide', above n.33, p.15.

[69] A translation of this narrative, originally in Cyrillic, is recorded in the catalogue accompanying the exhibition of *Ten Characters* in London: see 'Golosov's Story' in Ilya Kabakov, *Ten Characters*, trans. Cynthia Martin (London: ICA, 1989), p.14.

[70] As Ronald Feldman has subsequently remarked, this hands-off quality was reinforced midway through the exhibition, when Feldman Gallery staff, together with Kabakov, decided to stretch ropes across the entrances to all of the installations' rooms, foreclosing even the possibility of physically accessing the spaces: Interview with Ronald Feldman, 11 January 2007, author's notes.

Ten Characters did not ultimately provide the direct touch or contact with the apartments and their residents that his earliest commentators in the West alleged, nor the participatory engagement and interaction increasingly expected of an "unofficial" installation in New York. It worked against those expectations by presenting instead a series of dioramas marked by a certain distance and filled with the failed possibility of encounter.

Consequently, if this installation *was* a translation of Soviet communal apartments to the SoHo gallery precinct, as many of Kabakov's pundits proclaimed, then that translation had left a remainder of absence, an "emptiness", present at its core. Something, or someone, was perpetually missing. This leads us to a third consideration of "emptiness" in *Ten Characters*, for translations and remainders were present throughout the installation. These translations were not just of rooms and objects ostensibly taken from or simulating everyday life in the Soviet Union; they were also evident in the English-language texts pinned outside each of the characters' chambers, describing the characters' lives and translating the numerous Cyrillic narratives that Kabakov presented on ledges, desks and walls within the characters' rooms (fig.2.15). For the most part, these narratives were also a kind of translation: they presented a series of conflicting accounts made by other residents of the communal apartment, detailing a room-owner's life, habits, irritating actions, disappearance and so on in ways that veered between the mundane, the spiteful and the simply outlandish.[71] On one level, these conflicting hearsay "testimonies" made impossible the task of discerning the "actuality" of a resident's life from a neighbour's fiction or bias: the translation of one character's subjectivity through another's only ever revealed the "impurity" of translation, the potentially destabilising gap between "actuality" and partiality. On a second level, these texts translated the "actual" appearance of the rooms and their props into sites of fabulation. Could we really believe that a man flew into the 'chasm... [and] the white, free depths' of his pale painting, or – *contra* Malevich – should we maintain a knowing distance from that

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[71] The most pertinent examples are the textual accompaniments to *The Man who Flew into Space from his Apartment*: see Kabakov, *Ten Characters*, above n.69, pp.13-14.

claim?[72] Could we, like Kabakov's narrator, simply dismiss the Socialist Realist paintings of the Untalented Artist, in the knowledge that that artist was (perhaps) Kabakov himself? As the Dutch critic, Frank Vande Veire, has perceptively noted (though of another installation by Kabakov), 'the attempt to make a smooth synthesis between image material and annotations leads to a gap, an internal void':[73] we may, or may not, be able to trust what we see.

What this 'internal void' in *Ten Characters* revealed was more than the inherent "failure" of the translational act.[74] It revealed that translation – whether cultural or linguistic – always provides an unwitting remainder, as Jacques Derrida and others (including Kabakov) have observed: an uncertainty about the similitude and differences between an original and its translation; an idiom or an idea the nuances of which escape capture in another tongue; a potentially different (because culturally habituated) relationship with words and objects between one person and another.[75] Translation may even interrupt a text and rupture its cohesion so as to tease out a word's meaning. A seemingly minor yet telling example could be found in 'Golosov's Story', a narrative accompanying *The Man who Flew into Space from his Apartment*. The tale's poetic flow was broken by, *inter*

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[72] Ilya Kabakov, '*The Man who Flew into his Picture*', in *ibid*, pp.7-8. The quotation to which I am referring belongs, as we saw earlier, to Malevich.

[73] Frank Vande Veire, 'Ilya Kabakov: The Exhibition as Installation', *Kunst & Museumjournaal*, 4/2 (1992), p.43, in which he chiefly examines Kabakov's installation *The Life of Flies* (1992) in Cologne.

[74] If, by "success", we follow Jacques Derrida's rule-of-thumb: 'the transfer of an intact signified through the inconsequential vehicle of any signifier whatsoever': Jacques Derrida, 'What is a Relevant Translation?", trans. Lawrence Venuti, *Critical Inquiry*, 27/2 (Winter 2001), p.195. On the 'epistemic failure of translation', see Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, 'Questioned on Translation: Adrift', *Public Culture*, 13/1 (2001), p.21.

[75] See, for example, Derrida's discussion of 'the mournful experience of translation', whereby any attempt to 'convert' a signified through 'any signifier whatsoever' comes at the cost of a greater sense and context of the signified's "meaning": in Derrida, *ibid*, pp.199ff. Svetlana Boym has made a similar and compelling argument in relation to the inadequacy of translating the Russian word for 'everyday routine and stagnation' (*byt*) into English. What is lost is not just the lived experience of *byt* in the Soviet Union, but its opposition to *bytie* (very roughly translated as 'spiritual being'), as well as its basis in cultural understandings of chaos and contingency: see Boym, above n.32, p.30. According to Kabakov's speculations, Russians and Westerners perceive differently, for Westerners (due to capitalist-enforced individualism) fixate on objects whereas Russians (because they are generally unable to afford objects) relate to space: Kabakov, *On the 'Total' Installation*, above n.16, pp.243-244. Regardless of the accuracy or reductivism of these speculations, what we can glean from them is Kabakov's belief in cultural differences that resist translation.

alia, the addition of '(housing maintenance commission)' to elucidate the common Russian acronym 'ZhEk'. The prosaic description of the acronym's "meaning" both disrupted the fabulatory intent of the narrative and released a remainder, one that served, yet paradoxically interrupted and marked the limits and limitations of, English-language comprehension. It provided a momentary, active rupture and suggestive evasion of signification – a form of active "emptiness", or better still, Пустота – on a textual level.[76]

Of arguably greater importance, though, was the fact that Kabakov pushed translation, the remainder and the internal void of "emptiness" beyond the level of discourse (in the sense of inter-linguistic or inter-textual translation) and into a spatial register. By mounting the Cyrillic exegeses within the dioramas, Kabakov identified them as objects that, much like the chairs or the music stands that dotted the installation, were crucial to the appearance and character of each room. This was a vital component of Kabakov's design. By transforming text into a visual object, he has argued, the one could be understood as no different in significance or effect to the other, or even as interchangeable with the other: 'the possibility emerges to have the word and the image as equals'.[77] Incorporated as part of an internally coherent "Soviet" space, then, these textual objects were central to how one was to "read" (both narratively and phenomenologically) the possible traces of its inhabitants. The English-language texts, however, lay outside the characters' rooms and in a different space from the Cyrillic. In order to interpret and engage with their narratives, English-language viewers needed to stand away from the rooms, to place a small spatial distance between the self and the Soviet, and in the process, to create a sense of cultural and physical alienation from the environments surrounding them.[78] As a consequence of this process of distancing, these

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[76] 'Golosov's Story', above n.69, p.14.

[77] Ilya Kabakov, 'Concealment', in Felix (ed.), above n.2, p.241. See also Kabakov, Tupitsyn and Tupitsyn, 'Dialogue: Two-by-Three', above n.20, p.209, where Kabakov claims that '[f]or me language has always been not only a verbal, but a visual concept'. We should also remember Kabakov's substitution of painting and sound in *The Empty Museum* as a similar equalisation of different media.

[78] Boris Groys has made a similar point in relation to the linguistic alienation of non-Russian speakers within Kabakov's installations, arguing to Kabakov in an interview that: 'you make lavish use of Russian texts, which are, as a rule, incomprehensible to the Western viewer.... [They] are directly accessible only to

viewers' engagements with the spaces and their readings of the narratives were always slightly awry, set slightly apart from the incorporation of Cyrillic text within the Soviet "simulation", and thus always slightly deferred.

This deferral was clearly not a folly or a fault on Kabakov's part, especially given his notorious desire to control all aspects of the space and one's engagement with it (from the use of lighting or sound to direct viewers through rooms, to the location of text so that viewers must stoop down or stand *en point* to read Kabakov's narratives).[79] Nor was it something that emerged "naturally", as simply an incommensurability between Russian and English, the "West" and the "East". Kabakov presented it as more complex and deliberate. Deferral created subtle means of distancing the characters' rooms and stories from the non-Russian reader. Strategic gaps thereby emerged within the installation – literally through acts of translation from Russian to English, and from the Soviet Union to SoHo – as spatialised remainders of sorts that delicately disrupted the cohesive and transparent appearance of "Soviet life" for the non-Soviet viewer. The remainder itself could not, however, be easily signified as either "Soviet" or "non-Soviet"; it arose instead through contact between these two categories, sitting at and setting the limits of translation. It was, in other words, aporetic in the sense evoked by Jacques Derrida, as pertaining to 'the essential incompleteness of translating... [because] this remainder... always exceeds meaning and the pure discursivity of meaning'.[80] By exceeding both 'meaning' and containment within expectations that could provide it with 'meaning', the remainder emerged as an internal void or "emptiness" within, but that was to be understood as distinct from, that limiting discourse.

the Russian viewer': Boris Groys and Ilya Kabakov, '"With Russia on your Back"', above n.19, p.35. The spatial relation of alienation, however, is missing from Groys' analysis.

[79] Each element is treated separately and in detail in the fifteen lectures that comprise Kabakov's *On the 'Total' Installation*, above n.16. They could also be seen throughout *Ten Characters*, such as having to stoop down or squat to view the small illustrations and text that spanned the floor of the room belonging to *The Short Man* (1988).

[80] Jacques Derrida, *Aporias*, trans. Thomas Dutoit (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993), pp.9-10.

The question consequently arises, as it did for Derrida as well, '[c]an one speak – and if so, in what sense – of an *experience of the aporia*?'[81] If *Ten Characters* provided an answer, it was again a complex and multifarious one, for it was by experiencing "emptiness" that one experienced the aporetic. On one level, "emptiness" was an *interruption*. It interrupted the experience of roaming uninhibitedly through the "simulated" Soviet apartments, whether by asserting non-Russian readers as alien to the dioramas or through the implicit and explicit barriers to the characters' rooms. In short, it interrupted the easy assimilation of both the installation and one's experience of it within certain preconceptions of what life within a Soviet communal apartment was like or, conversely, what the experience of an "unofficial" Soviet installation was expected to be like. On another level, "emptiness" proposed a strategic detachment or withdrawal from such preconceptions *through* interruption: through the blockages to rooms that withdrew them from one's expected entry; through the ten characters' absence and withdrawal from their interaction with the viewers; and through the displacement and withdrawal of Cyrillic texts and "Soviet" space from their English-language translation. As a process both narrativised within *Ten Characters* and experienced by its viewers, withdrawal asserted "emptiness" as fundamentally active – not as a state of loss within the installation, but as the strategic communication of disengagement *with* the viewer that was directed *to* the viewer.

The effect was twofold. First, *Ten Characters* was not, as Claire Bishop has claimed, a 'dreamscape' through which one freely wandered and freely associated so as to relocate the experience of being in a Soviet communal apartment within one's own memory.[82] That relocation within one's pre-established sense of self potentially colonises the

[81] *Ibid*, p.15. Italics in the original.

[82] Claire Bishop, *Installation Art: A Critical History* (London: Tate Publishing, 2005), pp.16-17. Kabakov has, on occasion, agreed with this position. See, for example, comments to this effect in an interview with Yusuke Nakahara, 'Dialogue on C. Rosenthal', in Ilya Kabakov *et al*, *An Alternative Art History*, above n.1, p.139. It should be remembered, however, that Kabakov frequently contradicts his own comments across the series of interviews with him and texts by him. For example, in an interview with Robert Storr, Kabakov claims that such freely associated presumptions are anathema to his project because viewers inaccurately 'believe that they are seeing an ethnographic depiction of Russia', one that confirms 'that a Western audience has a preconceived understanding of Russian society and culture': see Storr, 'An Interview with Ilya Kabakov', above n.20, p.62.

experiences of another within one's desires and one's sense of being or ontology (an approach that echoes the relatively reductive criticism from the late-1980s that we saw in this chapter's introduction).[83] Active "emptiness" instead served to interrupt that dream: as Kabakov himself argues, while the audience is pivotal to his works, 'the viewer should not forget that before him [*sic*] is deceit and that everything has been made "intentionally"… the total installation is a place of halted action'.[84] The effect of this 'halted action' in *Ten Characters* was more akin to Brechtian *verfremdung* or – more precisely again – the waking from a dream, a withdrawal from (rather than the confirmation of) an expected state of being. Paramount to *Ten Characters*, then, was not so much the relocation of "the Soviet" to either a SoHo gallery or within one's memory, but the experiential *dis*location of viewers' expectations, a perpetually deferred engagement catalysed and signified by the gaps – the remainders, the 'internal voids', the uncertainty, the "emptiness" – within the installation.

The second effect is more complex, for this dislocating experience of "emptiness" in turn created another kind of uncertainty, one that lay between the "actuality" of what one saw and the partiality of what one had expected. Indeed, it was through partiality – through the expectations of direct engagement with this "unofficial" artist's work – that "emptiness" emerged. We must remember here that those expectations were also twofold. On the one hand, the apartments' seemingly transparent poverty 'me[t] the viewer's "expectations" about Soviet life' (to reiterate Timothy W. Luke's comment), thereby confirming both Soviet decrepitude and, as its converse, Western fortune. On the other hand, Kabakov was perceived as countering Soviet totalitarian conditions through his use of installation as a 'democratic' medium (*per* Margarita Tupitsyn) – a medium that thereby located him within New York's definition of a socially-relevant art practice that was "unofficial" and political. This was, as we have seen, a pressing concern for the city's art commentators: social aesthetics underpinned an aesthetic, "democratic" and "unofficial" opposition to the "official" politics of the Reagan administration. Yet if the

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[83] Jill Bennett provides an important account of the problems associated with such a 'relocation' and the various means by which certain contemporary artists resist it: see Jill Bennett, *Empathic Vision: Affect, Trauma, and Contemporary Art* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), pp.118-123.

[84] Kabakov, *On the 'Total' Installation*, above n.16, p.246.

stakes of these aesthetics were crucial to revalorising "democracy" on a domestic front, their application to international art – and particularly art from America's Cold War adversary, the Soviet Union – was less clear-cut. For though the importation of *Ten Characters* within that localised, politicised aesthetic may have reinforced the latter's scope and its potentially universal applicability, it did little to explicate the work's actual complexities. Instead, that process of importation or even assimilation revealed a fundamental problem, one analysed by Slavoj Žižek and which we examined in the previous chapter: that the West's fascination with Eastern Europe was predominantly narcissistic. To recite one of Žižek's central claims: 'It is as if democracy, which in the West shows more and more signs of decay and crisis and is lost in bureaucratic routine and publicity-style election campaigns, is being rediscovered in Eastern Europe in all its freshness and novelty. The function of this fascination is purely ideological'.[85] This, in the end, was also true of the assimilation of Kabakov's work within the key tenets of social aesthetics: by locating "unofficial" politics of participation, installation and "democracy" within Kabakov's installations, well-intentioned commentators such as Margarita Tupitsyn and others ultimately used his work as a means to confirm the ends and efficacy of a New York social aesthetic. Or to put this another way, what the conscription of *Ten Characters* within social aesthetics' discourses revealed was the vulnerability of those aesthetics to an ideological fascination with non-Western sources as well, reducing both the work and "democracy" to merely ideological rhetoric for the purposes of self-confirmation. *Ten Characters* was thus, in effect, a pawn in a domestic dispute about "democracy", one that sought to determine the work's meaning through its ideologised preconceptions and thus its partiality.

The context of *Ten Characters'* exhibition was therefore imbued with a form of stateness, though not in the sense usually associated with Kabakov's work – namely, the repressive conditions of the post-Stalinist Soviet Union from which Kabakov had emigrated. There is certainly strong grounding to this latter view, especially given Kabakov's frequent allusions to the Soviet state as the central context within which "emptiness" emerges and

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[85] Slavoj Žižek, *Tarrying with the Negative* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993), p.200.

which it seeks to deconstruct. As we saw in *Before Supper*, Kabakov's enamel squares of active "emptiness" were surrounded by and contextualised within Soviet stateness in the form of seven Socialist Realist-style paintings. In *Ten Characters*, however, stateness was precisely the discourse of "democracy" that surrounded, and sought to explain, both the installation and one's experience of it. From the installation's exposure of "Soviet life" to the desire for direct, even participatory, engagement with the rooms and their inhabitants, and from the work's form to the experience of encountering that form – all were conceived by critics as confirming Kabakov's and the audience's 'strange kind of democratic power', to repeat Tim Hilton's phrase. And while the appeal to rhetorical notions of "democracy" can certainly be viewed as a utopian gesture, we must remember that it was such utopian ideology (in the guise of Malevich's 'infinity') that framed Kabakov's aesthetic of "emptiness" in *Before Supper*. This may, in part, explain the lack of Socialist Realist paintings around the almost identical white painting in *The Man who Flew into His Picture*: literal examples of Soviet stateness were no longer necessary, replaced with the more subtle context- and site-specificities of "democratic" stateness and its ideological assertions. In other words, "emptiness" was no longer specific to Soviet stateness; it instead 'inhabits the place in which we live', as Kabakov wrote in 'On Emptiness' in 1990, 'from "sea to shining sea"'.[86]

That Kabakov was aware of the ideological frame within which he found himself working is clear from two further comments he made soon after *Ten Characters*. In 1992, in an interview with Boris Groys, Kabakov argued that '[i]t is precisely criticism and the impossibility of making a choice between the materiality or otherwise of the world that constitute the essence and the experience of the installation itself'.[87] Two readings are implicit in this comment. The first reiterates our argument thus far: the ideologised

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[86] Kabakov, 'On Emptiness', above n.27, p.54. Kabakov's allusion here is to *America the Beautiful*, a song of American patriotism whose lyrics were written by Katharine Lee Bates in the late nineteenth century, and which has since become an idiom for America itself: see Patricia Ann Palmieri, *In Adamless Eden: The Community of Women Faculty at Wellesley* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995).

[87] Boris Groys and Ilya Kabakov, 'A Dialogue on Installations', above n.24, p.265. Note that this quotation creates another conflict within the Kabakov literature, for Kabakov has claimed (somewhat disingenuously) that '[b]ecause of … my difficulties with the English language, I don't have an adequate understanding of how the public reacts here': Kabakov in Storr, 'An Interview with Ilya Kabakov', above n.20, p.62.

identification of Kabakov's art and one's experience of it within a rhetorical frame of Western "democracy" made difficult (if not quite impossible) any differentiation between what one saw (the installation's 'materiality' or "actuality") and the partiality of what one might have expected from the art encounter. Hence Kabakov's second comment, made in retrospective summation of his work to 1995: 'Freedom and the casualness of what was surrounding the visitor in this place – a victory of democratic society – seemed to me to be fatal'.[88] As we saw in the introduction to this chapter, more was at stake for Kabakov than simply confirming 'a victory of democratic society': 'I dreamed about some sort of contact between my works and the viewer that would be more significant, fuller'.[89] Here lies the second reading of 'criticism' in Kabakov's statement from 1992. 'Criticism' is both the literalness of an art criticism imbued (despite itself) with a sense of stateness *and* the 'eternal "no"' of "emptiness" that emerges within stateness, but as its deconstructive fissure and critical refraction. Both 'constitute the essence and the experience of the installation itself', as what Kabakov has called 'a double action – [the] experiencing of [an] illusion and simultaneously the introspection on it'.[90]

Consequently, if "emptiness" emerged in *Ten Characters* through the partiality of stateness – through the interruption of, and withdrawal from, direct engagement in the very process of that engagement, and through the subsequent inhabitation of destabilising aporias – it conformed with the ambiguous (non-)definition of "emptiness" and its immanent corrosion or deconstruction of stateness that we saw in Kabakov's writings and contemporaneous installations. There is, however, an even greater urgency to Kabakov's theoretical and practical models of active "emptiness" than consistency across his oeuvre. Three key factors stand out. First, ideology – whether Soviet communist or Western democratic – is more than philosophical; it is, as the American historian Kristin Ross also recognises, 'the thorough way in which our reflexes have been conditioned by…

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[88] *On the 'Total' Installation*, above n.16, p.268.

[89] *Ibid*.

[90] Kabakov, as quoted in Robert Storr, 'A World Apart', in Toni Stooss (ed.), *Ilya Kabakov: Installations 1983-2000 Catalogue Raisonné: Vol. 2: Installations 1994-2000* (Bern: Richter Verlag, 2003), p.13.

dominant narrative forms and models'.[91] Second, Kabakov suggests that this conditioning of one's reflexes – including one's reflexive 'experiencing of [an] illusion' – fortifies the experience of any potentially totalising ideology. As recently as 2005, Kabakov has argued that totalitarianism and "democracy", particularly as filtered through art, are not in opposition but more parallel than we might like to believe. Both ideologies are articulated through what Kabakov calls 'icons': the illusionary scenarios of joyful domesticity and labour or the adulation of governmental leaders in Socialist Realist propaganda, or the 'free maneuvering, swimming in a large swamp or sea of the possible' that Kabakov decries, yet his critics champion, in "democratic" art.[92] '[T]he experience of totalitarianism', according to Kabakov, 'is not a local experience of unfortunate countries doomed to be buried and forgotten, but rather it is the destiny and model of any society, no matter how democratic it considers itself to be'.[93]

By withdrawing from readymade conditions of meaning, "emptiness" – whether narrativised, formal or experiential – posits an alternative and deconstructive relation to ideology. This is the third implication of active "emptiness", the connotations of which we now need to consider more closely. For Kabakov, "emptiness" becomes a form of what he has called 'sabotage', an action that can spark critical introspection on ideology and 'the acquisition of a positive justification for one's moral position. It is not just inertia'.[94] "Emptiness" is, in other words, an active form of disruption, of critical sabotage or even *dissidence* in its refusal to conform (in the case of his 'total' installations) to the ideological authority of "democratic" stateness. To recognise forms of dissidence in Kabakov's practice is, I contend, a vital means of understanding his work and its critical potential, especially from the late-1980s onwards. At the same time, it can also draw us into particularly treacherous terrain: despite the contrary claims made by many of his supporters, Kabakov has explicitly rejected any identification as a dissident

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[91] Kristin Ross, *May '68 and its Afterlives* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), p.203.

[92] Kabakov in Groys and Kabakov, 'Interview on Igor Spivak', above n.1, p.265.

[93] *Ibid*, p.267.

[94] *Ibid*.

artist.[95] Nonetheless, there is a significant difference between labelling Kabakov himself as dissident and recognising dissidence within his art. Analysing the effects of this difference, as well as unpacking the implications of "emptiness" and its dissidence to "democracy", are the two key tasks that face us in the final section of this chapter.

From Dissidence to Non-Identity

While an aesthetic of withdrawal characterised Kabakov's practice before his emigration from the Soviet Union, this should not be conflated with the markedly different aesthetic in his 'total' installations. Kabakov's abstention from Soviet ideology was a fundamentally private activity. As is well-known, Kabakov's public façade as an official artist illustrating state-sanctioned children's books gave way, once he had withdrawn behind the closed doors of his state-sponsored studio, to the creation of "unofficial" works that potentially threatened that same authority. Yet, hidden behind those doors, the works were equally withdrawn from both public view and the public context of ideological stateness. Only a select circle of friends – primarily other figures within the 'Moscow Conceptualist' movement such as Andrei Monastyrskii from the art group Collective Actions, or Pavel Peppershtein from Medical Hermeneutics – were privy to their exhibition.[96] Similarly, only one of his installations was shown in the Soviet Union outside his studio: *The Ant* (1983) at the Moskovskii Obedinennyi Komitet Kudhozhnikov-Grafikov.[97] He did not present work in the so-called 'Bulldozer

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[95] See Renee Baigell and Ilya Kabakov, 'Ilya Kabakov', in Renee Baigell and Matthew Baigell, *Soviet Dissident Artists: Interviews after Perestroika* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1995), p.142. We have already encountered various examples of critics' belief in Kabakov's own dissidence (usually to Soviet conditions) in the writings of Jo-Ann Lewis and Tim Hilton (see above n.8). Jamey Gambrell has similarly argued that Kabakov 'refus[ed] to function within the limits set by the Soviet cultural bureaucracy, to submit [his] creative impulses to state regulation': Jamey Gambrell, 'Disappearing Kabakov', *Print Collector's Newsletter*, 26/5 (November-December 1995), p.171.

[96] See, for example, Peppershtein's discussion of Kabakov's practice in Claudia Jolles *et al*, 'Kabakov's Twinkle', *Parkett*, 34 (1992), pp.66ff.

[97] Another installation, *The Fly with Wings* (1984), was designed for display at Moscow's Pushkin Museum, but first shown in Londonderry, Northern Ireland, in 1990: '*The Fly With Wings*', in Stooss (ed.), Vol. 1, above n.3, pp.60-65.

exhibition' on September 15, 1974 – in which government bulldozers razed a public exhibition staged by various artists from the country's "unofficial" Apartment Art scenes[98] – because he 'was afraid and considered it dangerous. Others had more courage'.[99] Nor did he take part in the public calls for social, political and economic reform of the Soviet Union that were spearheaded by dissident intellectuals such as Andrei Sakharov or Sergei Kovalyov.[100] Citing this history, and Kabakov's absence from it, is not to condemn Kabakov for not being "political enough". Rather, it identifies the key (though frequently overlooked) difference between the "unofficial" and the "dissident", Kabakov's installations in the Soviet Union and those in the West and, consequently, the inaptness of applying biography to his artwork.[101] That difference is between withdrawal as a self-determined private act and withdrawal as a *demonstration*, in the dual sense of the term evoked (once again) by Derrida: as a *public* gesture of *non-violent refusal*.[102]

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[98] The exhibition was organised primarily by the Lianozovo Group, but was supported by numerous other "unofficial" and, later, Western artists (especially after the group was discouraged by a Moscow City Council official from showing their work in a disused space in the Moscow suburb of Cheryomushki). For a brief history of the exhibition (as well as the second, state-sanctioned open exhibition on September 29, 1974), see Michael Scammell, 'Art as Politics and Politics in Art', in Alla Rosenfeld and Norton T. Dodge (eds.), *Nonconformist Art: The Soviet Experience 1956-1986* (New York City: Thames and Hudson, 1995), pp.53-54; see also Margarita Tupitsyn, 'Sots Art', above n.18, pp.4-5. As we noted earlier, the generations of artists exhibiting in apartments have since been labelled the 'Apartment Art' (or 'Apt Art') movement, a history of which has been compiled by Margarita Tupitsyn in her 'U-turn of U-topian', in David Ross (ed.), above n.18, pp.35-51.

[99] Baigell and Kabakov, 'Ilya Kabakov', above n.95, p.145.

[100] For an analysis of the socio-political 'dissident' movements in the Soviet Union – and their undermining after 1991 – see Robert Horvath, *The Legacy of Soviet Dissent: Dissidents, Democratisation and Radical Nationalism in Russia* (London and New York City: Routledge, 2005).

[101] This view contrasts with, for example, Ralph Crozier, 'The Avant-Garde and the Democracy Movement: Reflections on Late Communism in the USSR and China', *Europe Asia Studies*, 51/3 (May 1999), pp. 483-513, in which Crozier conflates dissidence and unofficial, nonconformist art in the USSR in the 1980s. My position can also be compared here with the synergy between artwork and biography in Robert Storr's reading of Kabakov as 'the architect of emptiness' that I outlined above: see pp.103-104 of this thesis.

[102] Jacques Derrida, 'Force of Law: The "Mystical Foundation of Authority"', in Drucilla Cornell *et al* (eds.), *Deconstruction and the Possibility of Justice* (London and New York City: Routledge, 1992), p.34. I have used 'demonstration', rather than 'strike' as found in this text, to "translate" the French word '*manifestation*', so as to provide a more adequate invocation of the publicity and protest implicit in Derrida's term. Maria Gough has similarly analysed El Lissitzky's use of 'demonstration' to describe his *Proun Room* (1923), Dresden *Raum für Konstruktive Kunst* (1926) and Hannover *Kabinett der Abstrakten* (1927-1928). The particular connotations she raises in this important essay are 'political protest;… the

If Kabakov's works were not dissident until after his emigration – until after he was able to take advantage of, and publicly deconstruct, the "freedom" of exhibition in the West – this was less a case of the artist biting the hand that had come to feed him than a necessity derived from the contextual contingencies of exhibition outside the Soviet bloc. Kabakov perceived that, in order to acquire recognition from the financial and discursive markets of Western art, artists needed to make their identities as public, accessible and transparent as possible. This was equally applicable to artists coming from international art's so-called peripheries (such as Eastern Europe) as from its trans-Atlantic centres. For Kabakov, Bruce Nauman's performative tirades and screams of 'no-no-no-no-no' while dressed in an infantilising clown-suit (as in his videos *No No No* [1985] or *Double No* [1988]) highlighted the need for artists to 'yell louder and louder' lest they remain ignored within the 'total void' of a highly selective Western artworld.[103] Public modes of address rather than private modes of withdrawal were thus crucial, according to Kabakov, to his new context of display. Yet if context transformed Kabakov's political strategies from gatherings with friends toward public demonstrations of dissidence, it also opened his work to a new vulnerability. By setting the stage on which dissidence could occur, Kabakov potentially enforced his politics in a manner similar to the operations of stateness that his works sought to deconstruct. Kabakov's risk, in other words, was to limit dissidence to a one-way process determined by him alone; the viewer who set dissidence in train arguably became, as Kabakov himself has noted, a '"victim"' of his subtle management of audience movement and dissident gestures, and another manipulable character in his text.[104] It was on this basis, for example, that Matthew Jesse

unfolding… of an explanation or reasoned argument… and projection (such as, for example, slide projection)': Maria Gough, 'Constructivism Disoriented: El Lissitzky's Dresden and Hannover *Demonstrationsräume*', in Nancy Perloff and Brian Reed (eds.), *Situating El Lissitzky: Vitebsk, Berlin, Moscow* (Los Angeles: Getty Publications, 2003), p.89.

[103] Kabakov and Groys, '"With Russia on your Back"', above n.19, p.35.

[104] Kabakov, *On the 'Total' Installation*, above n.16, p.245. The quotation marks within the quotation belong to Kabakov, for reasons that I will elucidate presently.

Jackson deemed Kabakov's art 'neo-managerial'[105] – a kinder evaluation than the Russian artist Anatoly Osmolovsky's declaration that Kabakov created an 'imperialist art which subordinates consciousness and does not allow it to free itself from the chain of visual narratives imposed by the artist'.[106]

However, something more than an imposed politics was implied by the quotation marks around Kabakov's term '"viewer"', as by those around '"total"' in Kabakov's conception of the '"total" installation'. Not everything functioned under his complete control in his artworks; something or someone could always slip through his net. Despite their initial appearance, barriers could still be crossed: viewers were still physically capable of ducking under the objects hanging from the sixteen ropes tied across a room, or of leaping over the boards blocking the apartment of *The Man who Flew into Space*. The barrier was metaphorical rather than stringent for, as Kabakov has admitted, 'one can easily breach my barriers. They pertain more to the desire to protect oneself rather than actually effective protection'.[107] As a consequence, the installation's form may have been a guide to movement and to meaning but did not totally determine it, just as a viewer was not necessarily a victim of Kabakov's intent, but a '"victim"'. Such chance actions could be *considered* – both by Kabakov within his managerial calculations and by the viewer, who could make an informed and considered decision about the effects of breaching a possible taboo and a signified barrier – but they could not *ultimately* be controlled, signified or accounted for by an external authority. They existed in the "emptiness" beyond – as actively dissident to – pre-determined signification.

For Derrida, this potential breach of a barrier that one is negated from crossing is another aporetic experience, as symbolised for him in the active and negative signifieds of the French word '*pas*' (meaning both a 'step' and 'not').[108] The conclusion for our reading of

[105] Matthew Jesse Jackson, 'Managing the Avant-Garde', *New Left Review*, 32 (March-April 2005), pp.105-116.

[106] Osmolovsky, above n.19, p.418.

[107] Kabakov in Kabakov and Pouillon, above n.58, p.25.

[108] Derrida, *Aporias*, above n.80, pp.6-8.

Ten Characters is slightly different: such chance actions posit the installation as a node for *multiple* and potentially *conflicting* operations of dissidence. The viewer could be dissident to Kabakov's authorial expectations, which equally sought dissidence toward Western ideological authorities (and which, as we saw in relation to New York "unofficial" art and the Reagan administration, could also be in conflict with each other). Yet as the Dutch historian Ernst van Alphen observes, a viewer's desire to cross a threshold can also satisfy a desire to conquer obstacles and 'to intrude on a space that is not yours'.[109] By this reckoning, people's breaching of barriers and intrusions into Kabakov's rooms could be seen as a kind of conquest, and a subordination of his "Soviet space" to one's "Western freedom". The difficulty thus arises, as it did in Kabakov's philosophies, of discerning ideological authority and control – Kabakov's, one's own or that of stateness generally – from dissidence and critique within *Ten Characters*. The installation becomes a site of perpetual and immanent antagonisms between competing ideologies, authorities and dissidences; it becomes, that is, an 'extraordinarily active volume' through the fullness of competing, conflicting and destabilising conceptions of "emptiness".

There is, however, a further risk associated with this broadened meaning of "emptiness" as a kind of dissidence to external authority. This risk operates on the level of political philosophy rather than praxis. The temptation is to assimilate "emptiness" within initially parallel theories, emerging primarily and concurrently from Western Europe, of immanent and perpetual deconstruction and antagonism. Some of these theories were central to my analysis in the previous chapter, highlighted by the work of Chantal Mouffe and her examinations of antagonism, agonism and how hegemonic authorities can be deconstructed within her philosophies of radical democracy. It is the work of her colleague and collaborator, Ernesto Laclau, that is of more particular significance here though. For Laclau, antagonism and perpetual deconstruction are central to the 'empty signifier' that underpins his own, important theories of radical democracy. Initially,

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[109] Ernst van Alphen, *Art in Mind: How Contemporary Images Shape Thought* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), p.92.

"emptiness" and empty signifiers appear complementary: both, to use Laclau's words, 'emerge if there is a structural impossibility in signification as such, and only if this impossibility can signify itself as the structure of the sign'.[110] (In the early eighteenth century, that signifier might have been *Terra Australis*, a place named but not yet "found" by Europeans; for Kabakov, as we have identified, it is "emptiness" as a form of interruption and active dissidence toward being contained within pre-set expectations, whether they be those of stateness or Kabakov's quasi-managerial authorship.) According to Laclau, the empty signifier does not yet have an adequate or coherent meaning because it has not yet been absorbed into dominant ideological thinking and frames of reference. It stands instead – and much like Kabakov's invocations of the remainder released through translation – at the limit of those frames, showing ideology where its limits lie. The difference between Kabakov and Laclau, however, is that Laclau (following Claude Lefort) treats this emptiness not as already 'extraordinarily active', but in a state of passivity: it has not actively sought to exist at those limits, but rather is found there as a void or a nullity waiting to be filled, controlled and contained by signification. And it is through this containment that a particular ideology can emerge as hegemonic. For Laclau, competing ideologies vie to fill that passive emptiness with their particular signification, to provide the signifier with a new ideological usage that will, potentially, become convention. Once the empty signifier is filled, its new usage can stand in for, and speak on behalf of, those other ideologies competing to fill the signifier with their particular signifieds. Yet this does not end the antagonism between ideologies and their will to hegemony, a will to assert their own discursive meanings within, and identities through, the signifier. The ongoing competition between ideologies and the signifieds they seek to impose on and through an empty signifier ensures, for Laclau, that any hegemony remains precarious: the empty signifier could easily be filled by a different signified from its current normative usage.[111]

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[110] Ernesto Laclau, *Emancipation(s)* (London: Verso, 1996), p.37.

[111] *Ibid*, pp.40-46. See also Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, (London: Verso, 2nd ed., 2001 [1985]). For a parallel analysis of the empty space and signifier of "democracy", see Claude Lefort, *The Political Forms of Modern Society: Bureaucracy, Democracy, Totalitarianism*, trans. John B. Thompson (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1986) and Claude Lefort, *Democracy and Political Theory*, trans. David Macey (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1988).

This is the foundation for Laclau's understanding of radical democracy: it is a competition to see which signifying system can colonise an 'empty signifier' and become (however temporarily) hegemonic. It was precisely this kind of competition that we saw at play in New York art circles in the late-1980s as well, between a "democratising" social aesthetic and the Reagan Administration's perceived hollowing-out of the term. As we can recall, this New York-based antagonism signalled a struggle over what "democracy" meant and stood for, marking a desire on the part of social aestheticians to intervene in the normative meaning of "democracy" and push the term toward their competing discourses. When read through a Laclauian frame, then, this struggle reveals both a radically democratic competition to fill and transform a contested and empty signifier, and a will to hegemonise the empty signifier of "democracy" itself. For rather than signify passivity to existing political agenda under Reaganism, "democracy" under social aesthetics signified direct participation and activism within – and thus a desire to redirect – American politics. Laclau's political philosophy consequently proves extremely useful for explaining antagonisms within *domestic* politics of "democracy" and identity.[112]

But as we also saw earlier, such domestic forms of antagonism could not be readily translated to an *internationalist* discourse without that hegemonic will slipping into and supporting the self-confirmation of "Western democracy" at the Cold War's close. It was toward this hegemonising logic that, we must remember, Kabakov was ultimately dissident. As both the context and the content of *Ten Characters* showed, "democracy" in the late-1980s was not just a process of establishing hegemony, but already a singular Cold War ideology seeking hegemony within international politics. If a new understanding of "democracy" was, to follow Laclau's logic, a radicalisation of politics in the establishment of a new hegemony, it still maintained both the name of the old authority and, as a consequence, the authority of the old name. That is, it still asserted the

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[112] Indeed, as Laclau notes throughout *Emancipation(s)*, he is primarily a philosopher of identity politics. See, for example, Laclau, above n.110, pp.2-3 and especially 'Universalism, Particularism and the Question of Identity', pp.20-35.

empty signifier of "democracy" as the discrete telos of deconstructionist antagonism; as Laclau claimed in 1985 (together with Chantal Mouffe), his task was '*not… to renounce liberal-democratic ideology, but on the contrary, to deepen and expand it*'.[113] On one level, then, Laclau maintained the self-confirmation of "democracy" identified by Žižek and others as central to its narcissistic politics at the end of the Cold War: as an arguably tautological radical democratisation of "democracy". On another level, Laclau's model of democratic hegemony mirrored and reinforced the same logic by which the hegemony of "democracy" was already developing in relation to Eastern Europe (and its artists). Both Laclauian radical democracy and actually existing "democratisation" became hegemonic by speaking through and for the non-hegemonic: the former by filling the 'empty signifier' of discourse, the latter by assimilating decommunisation within "democracy" and its endpoint of international politics. And while the context- and critic-driven expectations of *Ten Characters* equally sought to speak for, and determine one's experience of, the work – through its labels as "unofficial", political, potentially participatory and thus, it seemed, "democratic" – it was against these expectations and their entrenchment of "democracy's" authority that *Ten Characters* operated. "Emptiness", unlike Laclau's empty signifier, was that which could not be translated into a specifically "democratic" identity. It actively withdrew from being harnessed within the latter's nomenclature.

Laclau was not, of course, the only philosopher whose discourse of "democracy" proved somewhat problematic when viewed through the lens of contemporaneous international politics. This was a circumstance that we analysed in depth in Chapter One, especially in relation to other radical theorists of "democracy". It also marks a distinction between the otherwise remarkably similar philosophies and intents of Kabakov and Derrida. Both identified deconstruction as crucial to the articulation of a gap, an aporia, within the logic of hegemonic ideology. The consequent interruptions of, and critical reflections upon, that logic – whether theoretical in the case of Derrida, or experiential in the case of Kabakov – were thereby intended to frustrate the actualisation of any ideologically-

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[113] Laclau and Mouffe, above n.111, p.176. Italics in the original.

charged 'infinity' (or, to use Derrida's phrase rather than Malevich's, 'infinite promise').[114] Deconstruction could thus be understood, Derrida argued, as a spectre of sorts: it haunts hegemony as its immanent impossibility, as that which perpetually threatens hegemony with 'failure, inadequation, disputation, disadjustment'.[115] Indeed, it was a spectre whose return was made all-the-more urgent after the collapse of Soviet communism. If liberal democracy had triumphed after 1989 so as to spell the end of history, as Francis Fukuyama proclaimed, then Derrida retorted by demanding that we trawl through the shattered remnants of the past, including what vestiges and memories remained of Marxism, so as to bring those remnants back to presence in the present. The ill-forgotten spectres of Marx would thereby disrupt the perception that Western economics and politics had triumphed over communism and brought ideological conflict to an end; they would haunt and deconstruct liberal democracy's apparent attainment of global hegemony and the putative end of history. They would insist that a new politics was possible, Derrida suggested, one derived through deconstruction and uncanny hauntings, and from which a counter-ideology could take form to put Fukuyama-style triumphalism out of joint.

Derrida labelled that politics 'democracy-to-come', a politics that was ultimately inseparable from deconstruction. For Derrida, neither postulation was itself deconstructible. Both created and developed through ruptures within dominant modes of ideology so as to create a new hope: the hope for a non-purposive ontology and thinking, and for a radically open-ended counter to hegemonic promises of utopia here-and-now. Any attempt to make a promise hegemonic or to make it totalitarian through actualisation would always be subject to deconstruction, Derrida claimed, and thus to imminent and immanent failure. By contrast, 'democracy-to-come' was impossible to enact; it remained an unfulfillable and open-ended promise, a 'strange concept of messianism without content, of the messianic without messianism'.[116] Indeed, this open-endedness would

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[114] Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (New York City and London: Routledge, 1994), p.65.

[115] *Ibid*, pp.64-65.

[116] *Ibid*, p.65.

ensure that neither deconstruction nor 'democracy-to-come' could be enclosed within hegemony's determination of signification or will to enact its ideological promises: open-endedness could not be accounted for in hegemony's 'calculation of [its] program'; democracy was always 'to-come'.[117]

As we have identified in this chapter, Kabakovian "emptiness" similarly refused to be made accountable within hegemonic calculations. It perpetually withdrew from ideological expectations, whether through the viewer's potential to breach Kabakov's barriers or other managerial ploys within *Ten Characters*, through the literal absence of the characters themselves, or through the complex deferrals from translation and deconstructions of certain expectations. Yet, as we have also seen throughout this analysis, it was primarily identification through the open signifier of "democracy", and sublimation within its residual Cold War politics, that "emptiness" interrupted and withdrew from. Derrida may have been playfully disrespectful toward "democracy" as the clarion call for neoliberalism, but his avowedly alternative politics nonetheless remained relatively shackled to the extant authority of "democracy". Indeed, despite his deconstruction of contemporary discourses of "democracy", he still declared its authority to be inviolable and 'undeconstructible'.[118] This inviolability underlined the 'quasi-messianism' of "democracy", as Derrida described his theorem: the unquestionable, and thus transcendental, hope (or, more pertinently, faith) in its political potential, a politicised faith that fed off, and fed back into, the West's 'anxious, fragile' sense of self after both communism and socialism.[119] Derridean 'democracy-to-come' and international discourses of "democracy" were thus more parallel than Derrida perhaps anticipated.[120] This was especially true given the former was driven by a 'quasi-messianism' that, as identified in Chapter One, also underpinned the "democracy"

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[117] *Ibid*, p.168-169.

[118] *Ibid*, p.59.

[119] *Ibid*, p.168.

[120] *Ibid*, p.59, where Derrida tries to distinguish 'democracy-to-come' from the signifier's 'current concept and from its determined predicates today'.

evangelised by neoconservative and neoliberal governments *vis-à-vis* Eastern Europe after 1989 and the Middle East after 2001 (and which, as of 2008 and despite claims to being a 'mission accomplished', remains to-come in Iraq and Afghanistan).[121] And in a similar vein to the various political philosophies outlined in the previous chapter, Derrida asserted his "democracy" as both the means and the end of deconstruction and its 'disadjustment', its dissidence, to hegemonic thinking. According to such logic, then, dissidence to "democracy" is potentially impossible because dissidence is itself "democratic". In other words, even Derridean "democracy" is vulnerable to becoming a unitary and self-confirming totality; its collapse of means and end legitimises both "democracy" and the "democratic" acts of deconstruction and dissidence in advance, as Slavoj Žižek again asserts.[122] Any attempt to deconstruct "democracy" thereby risks fortifying the hegemonic embrace of deconstruction within "democracy", opening deconstruction to being incorporated once more within the self-confirmation of "democracy".

If Laclauian and Derridean conceptions of "democracy" have ultimately maintained the representational authority of the signifier they sought to deconstruct – have maintained, as I mentioned earlier, both the name of the old authority and the authority of the old name – then "emptiness" provides an important alternative theory of deconstruction immanent to art from Eastern Europe. Though it retains the vitality of deconstruction for art and social politics, "emptiness" rejects the framing, or *a priori* naming, of deconstructive aesthetics within extant and politically reified terms of reference. By determining deconstruction to be both the process and purpose of "democracy", Laclau

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[121] It is also worth noting here that Jacques Rancière has similarly reiterated this quasi-messianism in his critiques and confluences with dominant notions of "democracy" in the early twenty-first century. Throughout his book *La haine de la démocratie*, Rancière advocates 'the word of democracy' (*'le mot de démocratie'*) – a starkly Christian implication given its resonance with the messianic 'word of God' (*'le mot de Dieu'*): see Jacques Rancière, *La haine de la démocratie* (Paris: La Fabrique editions, 2005), pp.10, 1, 42, 58, 66 and 97.

[122] See Slavoj Žižek in Judith Butler, Ernesto Laclau and Slavoj Žižek, *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality* (London and New York City: Verso, 2000), pp.124-127. See also the analysis of Žižek's relation to this retroactive legitimation in Jodi Dean, 'Žižek against Democracy', *Law, Culture and the Humanities*, 1 (2005), p.175. Giorgio Agamben makes similar observations in *Means without End: Notes on Politics*, trans. Vincenzo Binetti and Cesare Casarino (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000 [1996]), pp.57ff.

and Derrida have arguably foreclosed the possibility of deconstructing "democracy" itself or of examining how discourses of "democracy" can exemplify 'conceptual imperialism' (to use philosopher Deborah Cook's phrasing).[123] That is, their theories in effect circumvent analysis of how conceptualisations of dissidence can be subsumed within an ostensibly affirmative yet potentially perverted representation of identity (and most particularly that of the West at the Cold War's end). "Emptiness", however, maintains the critical aesthetics and politics of both deconstruction and dissidence, insisting upon its strategic withdrawal from such a geopolitically reified harness of representation. Its active negativity – that which actively refuses to be pinned down within hegemonic and 'quasi-messianic' rubrics and logics – refuses to confirm the geopoliticised connotations of poststructuralist "democracy", however unwitting those connotations may be. What Kabakov has asserted instead, then, is a deconstructive discourse that does not continue to appeal to the normative and the reified, that cannot be easily or affirmatively represented, and cannot be named or tamed within extant geopolitical rhetoric.

While the negation of extant representational models is evident in the concept of "emptiness", it was particularly explicit in *Ten Characters*. We have already considered how both the installation and "emptiness" were dissident in terms of expectations (that is, on the level of the signified); we should also consider this dissidence on the level of the signifier, of representation itself. *Ten Characters* did not provide readily identifiable, pre-determined representations of "Soviet space", "Soviet characters" or even "the viewer", but literal traces of their withdrawal *from* representation. The empty chair in *The Man who Flew into his Picture* and the destroyed ceiling and vacant catapult of *The Man who Flew into Space* narrativised this process of self-absenting from, and abstention toward, being represented for "Western" interests. The various dislocations sparked by the spatialised deferral of English-language translations from Cyrillic texts and "Soviet" space, as well as the ungovernable gestures of the viewers' chance actions, equally defied representation within and management by external authorities. What Kabakov called the 'double action' of "emptiness" was thus, as I argued earlier, more complex than an

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[123] Deborah Cook, 'From the Actual to the Possible: Nonidentity Thinking', *Constellations*, 12/1 (2005), pp.21-35.

outright rejection or ignorance of "democratic" signifiers. It comprised the apparent satisfaction of demands for legible representation – for 'making things public' as Bruno Latour has desired in his understanding of "democracy",[124] and which Kabakov perceived as generally befitting exhibition in the West – in order to bring absence and withdrawal to public presence. "Emptiness" became, in Kabakov's words, the visible 'transform[ation] of being into its antithesis' and the 'transferring of active being into active non-being':[125] an anti-sublimatory rejection of identity and 'being' as defined and deemed recognisable within Western discourse.

The effect of this withdrawal was clearly not a fetishistic lack of identity, nor (unless perceived solely through Western points-of-view) a nihilistic dissolution of 'being' *tout court*. As Victor Tupitsyn has also noted, the effect can be better understood as the strategic signification of *non-identity*, of 'active non-being', in terms of that discursive authority.[126] For Tupitsyn, following Theodor Adorno, non-identity emerges as a rupture immanent to the parameters and predeterminations of identity that are set by external authorities, as a refusal to conform to those parameters from within. Such contingent relations, he argues, are pivotal to understanding "unofficial" art's withdrawal from post-Stalinist Soviet bureaucracy, and the consequent creation by "unofficial" artists of their own self-determined forms of communalism. (The most obvious example here is the creation of close-knit artistic circles with their own communal styles, as evident with the Moscow Conceptual Circle of the 1970s and 1980s, in which Kabakov was a key figure.) Non-identity equally underpins 'generational conflict' between artists, as Tupitsyn calls a new artistic movement's attempt to dissociate itself from historical or contemporary vogues in practice.[127] In short, such dissociations, withdrawals and productive

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[124] Bruno Latour, 'From Realpolitik to Dingpolitik or How to Make Things Public', in Bruno Latour (ed.), *Making Things Public: Atmospheres of Democracy*, (Karlsruhe: ZKM and Cambridge MA: The MIT Press, 2005), pp.14-41.

[125] Kabakov, 'On Emptiness', above n.27, p.54.

[126] Victor Tupitsyn, '"Nonidentity within Identity": Moscow Communal Modernism, 1950s-1980s', in Rosenfeld and Dodge (eds.), *Nonconformist Art*, above n.98, pp.70-100.

[127] *Ibid*, p.96.

deconstructions operate within normative models of discourse and praxis, but as an alternative to the means by which (in Adorno's words) 'the particular is dictated by the principles of perverted universality'.[128]

According to Tupitsyn, this notion of 'perverted universality' and non-identity in Kabakov's work is, once again, limited to particular Soviet conditions. As I have argued throughout this chapter, however, non-identity has had a much broader applicability within Kabakov's philosophies and practice. If this emerged in the withdrawals and other forms of "emptiness" within *Ten Characters* or *The Empty Museum*, it especially came to the fore in a 1993 installation that Kabakov created for the Hamburger Kunsthalle, and which he titled *NOMA or the Moscow Conceptual Circle* (fig.2.16). In a manner reminiscent of *Ten Characters*, *NOMA* did not present a simulation of a "Soviet" space but an allegory of the living quarters of Kabakov's friends within the Moscow Conceptual Circle. And as with *Ten Characters*, only traces of the Circle were apparent: the artists themselves had seemingly disappeared from the scene. All that remained was a series of studio spaces and pedestals atop which Kabakov presented 'key "word concepts" which are in circulation in this circle', along with their 'pseudo' (rather than absolute) definition for the viewer.[129] These words included 'absence', 'empty action', 'non-integration' and 'kolobok', with the last term defined by Kabakov as '[a]n apt image of one who doesn't want to be recognized, named, assigned some specific role, to some specific place, and instead slips away from all of this'.[130] This was clearly a fitting description for the artist-characters who had slipped away from view and whose names had been replaced by these various 'word concepts'. It equally defined Kabakov's very

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[128] Theodor Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, trans. E. B. Ashton (New York City: Continuum, 1973), p.344.

[129] Ilya Kabakov, '*NOMA or the Moscow Conceptual Circle*', in Stooss (ed.), Vol.1, above n.3, p.488. The definitions' qualification as 'pseudo' belongs to Kabakov.

[130] *Ibid*, p.491. As Kabakov also noted in this definition, 'kolobok' (or Колобок) derives from Russian fairy tales about a round cake that escapes from its maker, as well as a series of other animals, before being devoured by a fox. The full implications of why Kabakov turned to this tale – as well as its dénouement of the character's destruction by a fox – are unfortunately beyond the scope of this chapter. For present purposes, though, I direct the reader to the catalogue produced in conjunction with *NOMA*'s exhibition in 1993: Ilya Kabakov, *NOMA oder der Kreis der Moskauer Konzeptualisten*, exh. cat. (Hamburg: Cantz Verlag, 1993).

use of a seemingly abstruse term (especially for many of the Hamburger Kunsthalle's visitors) to describe the unrecognisable and non-identifiable. Two particular concerns were consequently implicit in *NOMA*. The first was the assertion, according to Kabakov, of 'a network of self-descriptions' through which the NOMA circle had defined its cosmos and discourse – definitions that thereby suggested the inadequacy of the Hamburg audience's extant conceptual frames to name and identify NOMA's interests.[131] In other words, kolobok (and according to its description, the artists) could only be recognised and identified on its (or their) terms; as Adorno has also argued of non-identity, externally determined conceptualisations could not adequately identify nor 'exhaust the thing conceived'.[132] Something more, something self-determined, lay within the apparently unrecognisable – and thus potentially "empty" – signifier than the constraining 'specific role' assigned to it by others.

This leads us to the second implication of non-identity within *NOMA* and, indeed, "emptiness" itself. If artists exhibiting in the West needed to 'make things public' – whether those things be one's identity (as we saw with Bruce Nauman) or gestures of withdrawal and refusal – then practitioners from the art industry's geographical "peripheries" bore an additional burden according to Kabakov. As he contended in 1992, '[a]n Other is not allowed to be complex: all of the content which that Other might propose is quickly and almost automatically reduced to a very elementary formula which the viewer… usually possesses ahead of time – a formula of the type'.[133] The argument is, by now, familiar from similar views held by the British artist and critic, Rasheed Araeen: the emergence of identity politics in the West in effect restricted "peripheral" artists to the presumed specificities of their "peripheral" backgrounds and to be representative of those backgrounds.[134] For Kabakov, this formula could be broken by

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[131] Both quotations are taken from Kabakov, '*NOMA*', in Stooss (ed.), *ibid*, p.489.

[132] Adorno, above n.128, p.5.

[133] Kabakov and Groys, '"With Russia on your Back"', above n.19, p.35.

[134] Rasheed Araeen, 'New Internationalism, or the Multiculturalism of Global Bantustans', in Jean Fisher (ed.), *Global Visions: Towards a New Internationalism in the Visual Arts* (London: Kala Press, 1994), pp.3-11. An updated and more infamous version of this essay is Rasheed Araeen, 'A New Beginning: Beyond Postcolonial Cultural Theory and Identity Politics', *Third Text*, 50 (Spring 2000), pp.3-20.

publicly withdrawing from it and, equally importantly, by asserting a self-determined, non-identifiable and thus actively "empty" content in its place. One manifestation of this was kolobok as a substitute for the formulaic identities and types recognisable in non-NOMA discourse. Another was "emptiness" rather than anticipated models of participation and intersubjective engagement in such installations as *Ten Characters*. A third was Kabakov's broader conception of "emptiness", as a deconstructive and potentially destabilising substitute for the reified politics of "democracy" articulated within contemporaneous poststructuralist discourse. At stake in Kabakov's philosophical and artistic works, therefore, was the possibility of a reception with an Other that was not already determined by pre-existing categories, whether they be formulae of a type (as dominated the West's international art relations) or categories typical of the West's domestic debates about what "democracy" and identity politics stood for. At stake, in other words, was the possibility of an identity that may have been unrecognisable within dominant Western discourses and nomenclature, but was neither hollow nor empty nor an identity waiting to be filled by Western stereotypes. It was instead an identity that, in the words of curator Zdenka Badovinac, could assert 'the complexities of an active, non-Western Other'.[135]

This extraordinarily active non-identity is confirmed by Kabakov's relation to his own authorial position. We have already seen two examples of how this position was perpetually destabilised: through the multiple voices of the ten characters and other, conflicting hearsay accounts presented in *Ten Characters* that overwhelmed any recognition of a singular authorship;[136] and through the viewers' potential to override his 'total' managerialism. A third can be found in Kabakov's continual identification of himself as a 'Soviet artist', both before his emigration and after the official dissolution of

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[135] Conversation with Zdenka Badovinac, 14 June 2006, author's notes.

[136] Compared with, for example, Barrett Watten's argument that, throughout his installations, Kabakov presents a subjectivity and voice that remains singular despite its allusions to postmodern tropes of schizophrenia: Watten, above n.54.

the Soviet Union in 1991.[137] To perceive this as a nostalgic yearning for a dissolving ontology would be erroneous; nor does it provide a means to re-confine Kabakov's practice within his biography. This self-identification is instead performative: it is a signifier in the process of *unbecoming*, its intelligibility unravelling in line with the Soviet Union's devolution. On one level, then, Kabakov's individual non-identity parallels (but does not determine) his concept of "emptiness" and its own aesthetic and political 'unbecoming', in both senses of the term that I outlined in the introduction to this thesis. That is, 'unbecoming' as the withdrawal from and strategic non-identification with the West's hegemonising identity-markers of "democracy"; and 'unbecoming' in the sense of refusing the moral enforcement and undertones of "democracy" in contemporary discourse.

On another level, Kabakov's identification of and within "emptiness" significantly revises our understanding of the politics of art emerging from Eastern Europe. If, as the post-Habermasian scholar Axel Honneth argues, the 'recognition of difference' emerged as a key cultural agendum after the demise of socialism,[138] we must remember that that 'difference' was largely based on identity constructs provided or authorised by the West: "black", "gay", "lesbian", "Aboriginal" and so on. By appealing to that authority, one's "identity" could be made both public and affirmed. The cost, however, was that identity was not defined through one's own agency; self-determination was always lost in the translation necessary for recognition. To an extent, this is the lesson learned from other politico-cultural attempts to (re-)define one's identity, such as the uncontainable fluidity

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[137] See, for example, Kabakov's self-identification in 1995 as 'Soviet' (rather than 'Russian') in Baigell and Kabakov, above n.95, p.147.

[138] Axel Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition: The Moral Grammar of Social Conflicts*, trans. Joel Anderson (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1995). The American political philosopher Nancy Fraser has disputed Honneth's championing of 'recognition' as crucial to postsocialist politics; she argues that 'recognition' must work together with the social politics of 'redistribution' (that is, of redistributing social, political and financial opportunities to people deprived of them): see Nancy Fraser, *Justice Interruptus: Critical Reflections on the 'Postsocialist' Condition* (New York City and London: Routledge, 1997), especially pp.11-39. Kabakov's project does not adequately address 'redistribution' as outlined by Fraser. That social politics is, however, central to a number of artists' projects that lie at the intersection of art and social welfare, an excellent analysis of which is provided by Grant Kester in his elaboration of 'dialogical aesthetics': see Grant Kester, *Conversation Pieces: Community and Communication in Modern Art* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: The University of California Press, 2004).

of "queer" since the 1980s in particular. Kabakov's active "emptiness" provides a parallel yet alternative politics of recognition, one that asserts the need to recognise non-identity as an active entity in and for itself, identifiable on its terms and contingent upon its histories. Recognising the non-identity of Kabakovian "emptiness" thus requires the recognition that not all limits to discursive and cultural authority can be reabsorbed into the hegemonising intent of "democracy". It is that assertion that locates within "emptiness" an important and active force: a force of withdrawal from, and dissidence toward, dominant political and cultural predicates that can 'disguis[e] the ongoing asymmetries of global power', as Jan Nederveen Pieterse and Bhikhu Parekh eloquently claim,[139] and which asymmetries have arguably been maintained within the rhetoric and authority of "democracy" at the Cold War's close and since.

Spectres after Marx

As this chapter has shown, Kabakov's entwined politics and aesthetics of "emptiness", and their drive toward non-identity, provided a number of dissident and deconstructive relations to "democracy". These counter-relations did not identify "democracy" as a political process of suffrage, for example; nor were they entirely opposed to the deconstructivist discourses of "democracy" articulated by poststructuralist philosophers such as Ernesto Laclau and Jacques Derrida. Rather, the crux of "emptiness" lay in Kabakov's conception of "democracy" as a rhetorical frame through which identity and representation were demarcated according to geopoliticised ontologies in the late-1980s. It was on this basis that his politics ultimately differed from those of Laclau, Derrida and others. Whereas they understood "democracy" as a politics of apparent open-endedness, Kabakov perceived that the politics of representation lurking within any discourse of "democracy" could instead threaten to subordinate artistic strategies, and artists themselves, to other kinds of demands. Most notable here were demands that artists identify themselves and their work within externally-determined interests, thereby

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[139] Jan Nederveen Pieterse and Bhikhu Parekh (eds.), *The Decolonization of Imagination: Culture, Knowledge and Power* (London: Zed Books, 1995), p.10.

rendering them subservient to particular formulae of identity expected of artists exhibiting in the West.

"Emptiness" rejected such readymade and pacifying conceptions of identity, representation and being. Its critiques were directed to the legibility and legitimacy of signification. Its questions confronted how identity itself was made to fit hegemonic prescriptions and proscriptions of representation, whether of the ties binding "unofficial" art to "democracy" during the late-1980s in New York or of an Other being deemed representative of (to the point of simulating) a presumed cultural background. As shown by the various non-identities of "emptiness" – as a signifier withdrawing from representation, as the deconstruction of external authority and as a new (non-)definition for both – the very nomenclature associated with one's encounters with both art and an Other needs to be reconsidered, lest it maintain or even further the 'ongoing asymmetries of global power'. Appealing to an undeconstructible yet hollowed authority of "democracy" may thus no longer be an appropriate means for grounding those encounters, especially given the concept's triumphalism throughout Western discourses in recent years. What may instead be required is not recognition of a reconfirmed identity, or even the treatment of identity as an 'empty signifier' waiting to be filled, but something else. At stake is the recognition of modes of non-identity – such as Kabakovian "emptiness" and its withdrawal from subsumptive and hegemonising logics – as well as understanding why such constructs have been misrecognised in the first place.

As the following chapters of this thesis propose, the productive withdrawals and political unbecoming of active "emptiness" provide a complex and crucial frame through which to analyse similarly politicised practices in contemporary art from Europe. Indeed, in the practices of Thomas Hirschhorn or Christoph Büchel and Gianni Motti, Kabakov's work serves as a cornerstone for re-evaluating how and why "democracy" has become one of the most cited, though least analysed, discourses in contemporary art. As we will see, these artists have returned to Kabakov's installations and philosophy from the years straddling the collapse of the Iron Curtain, drawing productively from their critiques of

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identity and "democracy" so as to advance a new aesthetic in contemporary art. That aesthetic is one that I have suggested can be considered *postsocialist*, driven by the remobilisation of certain nonconformist precedents from the late-communist and early-postcommunist periods so as to critique more contemporary relations between art and politics. It is an aesthetic that can already be noted in Kabakov's work as well, albeit in nascent form, for Kabakov also returned to the aesthetics and politics of late-communist nonconformity – of Apartment Art and the Moscow Conceptual Circle – as the font for his conceptualisations of "emptiness". This was not, of course, a mere translation or simulation of nonconformist aesthetics for audiences in New York, Hamburg and other cities; those aesthetics were instead significantly transformed in their remobilisation to different geographical and historical contexts. The same is true, I want to argue, of the postsocialist remobilisation of Kabakov's work from one context of "democracy" to another, from the claims of social aesthetics and identity politics at the end of the Cold War to the related yet nonetheless distinct politics of "democracy" more than a decade later.

This approach can again find parallels in the work of Jacques Derrida, for whom the return to a seemingly obsolete and shattered past could electrify a new politics, a new means to confront the totalising hegemony of "democracy" after socialism. For the artists in this thesis, however, such politics do not take form through a quasi-messianic 'democracy-to-come', but through resistance to discourses of "democracy" past, to-come or actually existing. Nor do they return specifically to Derridean spectres of Marx as the basis for that resistance. Rather, their spectres existed long after Marx, in the era of nonconformist art practices from the 1970s and 1980s that included Ilya Kabakov. These spectres after Marx offer an alternative art history to that which has become increasingly reified, and its problems arguably dispelled, in the name of "democracy" since the 1980s. At the same time, the rehabilitation and transformation of these spectres has ensured that subsequent artists have addressed and potentially redressed some of the concerns associated with those spectral practices. These include problems with "emptiness" itself, which has not been followed piously or to the letter by subsequent artists (and which piety would simply affirm "emptiness" as a hegemonic political aesthetic despite its

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inherent negativity toward hegemonic intents). One of the key reasons for this lack of piety is that Kabakov's 'total' installations have, as we must acknowledge, one crucial failing. Though their strategic withdrawal from certain discourses, politics and signification within the West has reacted, in part, to New York-centric debates about "democracy", Kabakov's installations have also tended to collapse complex differences within Western art and politics into a monolithic identification of "the West" that can be deconstructed in locales as diverse as New York, Hamburg and London. In other words, Kabakov has threatened to re-articulate (albeit in an inverse way) the same problematic that his installations proposed to deconstruct: the subsumption of particularisms within an assumed universality.

This is but one of the many concerns that the other artists in this thesis have attempted to confront in their own deconstructions of "democracy", its rhetoric and integrationist logics. By incorporating spectral art practices within more contemporary contexts, these artists have sought – with varying degrees of success – to counter or suspend the monolithic conceptualisation of "the West" from which Kabakovian "emptiness" has suffered. This is especially evident as art has become highly reactive to particular events, whether they be art-institutional (such as a museum's inauguration or a biennale's vernissage), geopolitical (whether in Eastern Europe or in the Middle East and elsewhere after 9/11), or comprise a confluence of art and geopolitics. It is one such event that I want to highlight in the next chapter of this thesis, an event that drew significant criticism from art audiences in Europe, as well as a particularly hostile response on the part of at least one artist whose actions we have already considered: Alexander Brener. Despite its hostility, however, Brener's response can also direct us fruitfully toward another nascent form of postsocialist aesthetics, of late-communist aesthetics remobilised in later contexts for the purpose of critiquing "democracy", that emerged soon after Kabakov's demonstration of *Ten Characters* in New York.

Chapter Three:

Altered States and Retro Politics: Manifesta and NSK

> *The novelty of the coming politics is that it will no longer*
> *be a struggle for the conquest or control of the State,*
> *but a struggle between the State and the non-State (humanity).*
> Giorgio Agamben[1]

> *As far as art, according to definition, is subversive in relation to the existing*
> *establishment, any art which today wants to be up to the level of its assignment*
> *must be a state art in the service of a still-non-existent country.*
> Slavoj Žižek[2]

In the previous chapter, I charted some of the political, aesthetic and conceptual ramifications developing from an explicit form of expatriation: namely, Ilya Kabakov's exodus from the Soviet Union to the United States in the late-1980s, and the subsequent withdrawal from conceptions of "democracy" that underpinned his alternative theory of "emptiness". This chapter builds on that analysis by returning us to Europe so as to examine expatriation and exodus in a different light, through the different prism of the nation-state and its concurrent renewal and dissolution in Europe during the 1990s. The historical context for this chapter is therefore crucial. It is also, to an extent, familiar from the exposition I traced in Chapter One. For this was a decade marked in equal measure by hope and anomie, by euphoria coupled with despair: a history governed by the renewed possibility of trans-European conviviality and exchange, yet tempered by the return of civil war and ethnic cleansing to European soil; a context of Central and Eastern European peoples struggling for independence from totalitarian communist states, but who found their struggles largely remediated in the interests of Europatriarchal

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[1] Giorgio Agamben, *The Coming Community*, trans. Michael Hardt (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), p.85.

[2] Slavoj Žižek, 'Es gibt keinen Staat in Europa', in IRWIN, *Zemljopis Vremena/Geography of Time* (Umag: Galerija Dante, 1994), np.

bureaucracies and corporations; a decade driven by the dual resurgence of neo-nationalism and postnationalism during Europe's supposedly postideological infancy.[3]

These phenomena, though diverse, should not be considered distinct from each other. They were instead parallel means by which to counter, or to compensate for, Europe's states of flux after the collapse of Soviet communism – as means to re-imagine communities by containing them within new borders, and to restabilise the state through the bureaucratisation of identity and territory alike.[4] Such "re-imaginings" clearly subtended the bloody battles for secession that were waged throughout decommunising Europe – we can think here of Transdniestr's war against Moldova so as to re-align the population's cultural and political identities more closely with the then-still-communist Russia; or conversely the Chechen conflicts for independence *from* Russia since the mid-1990s – and which found perhaps their most destructive form in the camps and killings endorsed by Serbian, Croatian and Bosnian bureaucracies in the name of ethno-nationalist purification.[5] At the same time, the European Community responded to

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[3] Readers may recall here the discussions about whether the 1990s marked a period of 'post-ideological' thinking in Europe (and elsewhere), and to which I referred in the Introduction to this thesis and in Chapter One: for engagements with these debates in art discourse, see *inter alia* Victor Misiano, 'Interpol – The Apology of Defeat', in Eda Čufer and Viktor Misiano (eds.), *Interpol: The Exhibition that Divided East and West* (Ljubljana: IRWIN and Moscow: Moscow Art Magazine, 2000), p. 44; and Slavoj Žižek, 'Post-Politics: The Post-Political *Denkverbot*', in Bojana Pejić and David Elliot (eds.), *After the Wall: Art and Culture in Post-Communist Europe*, exh. cat. (Stockholm: Moderna Museet, 1999), pp.92-96.

[4] Benedict Anderson's theories about nation-states as 'imagined communities' were thus prescient in relation to the devolution and often aggressive reconstruction of nationhood in Europe after 1989: see Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983). This prescience was further marked by the republication of Anderson's book in 1991, at the same time as some of the more hopeful and also more vindictive state responses to decommunisation began to emerge in Europe.

[5] The leading philosophical account of the bureaucratisation of identity for the purposes of state sovereignty is Giorgio Agamben's extraordinary book *Homo Sacer*, written during – though for the most part only obliquely alluding to – the Balkan Wars of the early- to mid-1990s, and first published in Italian in 1995: see Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998). See also Giorgio Agamben, *State of Exception*, trans. Kevin Attell (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), in which Agamben extended his philosophical analysis of sovereignty and the constitution of the state through the suspension of its laws, and which he wrote during (but again only obliquely referred to) the United States' suspensions of civil liberties both domestically and abroad amid the War on Terror. For a specific investigation of 'states of exception' in the context of art – albeit an investigation that focuses explicitly, almost exclusively and thus far too narrowly on the United States' actions during the War on Terror – see Okwui Enwezor (curator and ed.), *The Unhomely: Phantom Scenes in Global Society*, exh. cat. (Seville: Bienal Internacional de Arte Contemporáneo de Sevilla, 2006).

decommunisation through its own – though much less violent – process of "re-imagining" itself and its citizens as well. If decommunisation increased the Community's potential to expand from being a primarily Western European polity to a trans-continental and thus postnational state, it was an expansion conducted through another calculated bureaucratisation of identity. This was the bureaucratisation explicitly praised by Jürgen Habermas in his hymn to Europe as a 'postnational constellation', a formation that he identified in three key respects. First, in the encapsulation of a state and its population's identities by territorial borders, albeit expanded to the edges of the continent rather than the limits of a nation; second, in that postnational population's libidinal investments in the values and regulations juridified in the *acquis communautaire*, which Habermas hoped would one day be enshrined in a European constitution; and third, in the possible formation of a "united states of Europe" to counter the global powers of neoliberal corporations and America alike.[6] In other words, alternative forms of bureaucracy – in terms of territory, identity and "values", and in the contemporaneous but divergent interests of vengeful nationalism and aspiring postnationalism – became the primary stakes in replacing once-solid but rapidly devolving state structures across Europe after 1989. Or as philosopher Étienne Balibar remarked in a wry twist on Hegel, '[*e*]s *gibt keinen Staat in Europa*': 'there is no state in Europe, only national and supranational forms of statism and bureaucracy'.[7]

This chapter responds to such geopolitical fixations on the state, its collapse and concomitant rejuvenation by examining critical revaluations of statism and bureaucracy conducted for art, and even as art, in Europe in the 1990s. At the outset, we should

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[6] Jürgen Habermas, *The Postnational Constellation: Political Essays*, trans. Max Pensky (Oxford: Polity Press, 2001), especially pp.58-129. For discourse on the 'united states of Europe', see *inter alia* Ernest Wistrich, *The United States of Europe* (London: Routledge, 1994); and also, though in a more quizzical vein, Multiplicity, *USE: Uncertain States of Europe: A Trip through a Changing Europe* (Milan: Skira, 2003).

[7] Étienne Balibar, *We, the People of Europe? Reflections on Transnational Citizenship*, trans. James Swenson (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), p.157. The original formulation that Balibar rephrased and reframed was Hegel's belief that '*Deutschland ist kein Staat mehr*', or 'Germany is no longer a state', written in 1801 in response to Germany's constitution. I also want to note here that, throughout the discourse on Europe after 1989, the terms 'transnational', 'postnational' and 'supranational' were used interchangeably; it is a convention that recurs throughout this section of the thesis.

recognise that this was not a new phenomenon; such revaluations were not introduced to art practice as a result of decommunisation *per se*. In 1971, for instance, squatters occupying military barracks in Copenhagen declared the site a cultural territory independent of the Danish government. This new 'free-state', called Christiania, developed its own permanent residency programme, an autonomous economy centred on artistic activities and soft-drug use, and a micro-state free of automobiles and weapons. 1971 also saw the creation of Fluxus artist Robert Filliou's *La République Géniale*, a republic located not in spatial territory but in the mind, in which citizens could develop their 'genius' (to use Filliou's term) outside the state-based over-regulation of thinking and creativity that Filliou associated especially with universities.[8] The early-1990s, however, presented not just renewed opportunities for alternative models of infrastructure for art, but also their necessity. On the one hand, new venues and networks for art creation, education and exhibition needed to be constructed, especially in decommunising countries where the state had sponsored and regulated official art according to strict ideological criteria, and where cultural infrastructure had therefore collapsed together with the state. On the other hand, though, this vacuum raised opportunities for new connections and collaborations to emerge between art professionals across Europe as a result of new infrastructural models, as a form of trans- or postnationalism within culture that could be independent from statist bureaucracies of ethno-centrism or Europatriarchy.

This chapter focuses on two important examples of such alternative art infrastructures: the itinerant European biennale called Manifesta (analysis of which expands upon the brief exposition provided in Chapter One); and the NSK State created by the Ljubljana-based art group Neue Slowenische Kunst, or NSK. Manifesta and the NSK State initially presented similar infrastructural models of transnational engagements. By the late-1990s,

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[8] These two examples of 'free-states', along with myriad other 'do-it-yourself states', were presented in two exhibitions by curator Peter Coffin: in *We Could Have Invited Everyone* (co-curated with Roger Blackson and held at the Andrew Krups Gallery in New York in 2005); and *ÉTATS (Faites-le vous-même)*, held at Paris' Palais de Tokyo in early-2007. For further information on Christiania, see www.christiania.org [accessed 12 August 2007]. For Filliou's desires for an experience-based education that seceded from the regulated pedagogy of universities, see Robert Filliou, *Teaching and Learning as Performing Arts* (Cologne: Kaspar König, 1970); and Hannah Higgins, 'Teaching and Learning as Art Forms: Toward a Fluxus-Inspired Pedagogy', *Fluxus Experience* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), pp.187-208.

however, NSK provided a number of significant counterpoints to Manifesta, all of which were foregrounded during Manifesta's troubled third instalment (called *Manifesta 3*) in Ljubljana in 2000. These related to Manifesta's increased institutionalisation during the 1990s, but more specifically to its growing disregard for the effects of Europe's pre-1989 history on contemporary art practice – to its implicit treatment of 1989 as the "year zero" for its amnesic programme of "democracy". By contrast, the reanimation of such histories in the present was crucial to NSK's aesthetic politics, both procedurally – through what NSK called its 'retro' politics – and in terms of the NSK State's overarching purpose: the establishment of transnational infrastructures for art through an altered and inherently unstable state formation. As we will see, the NSK State presented a form of exodus *within* Europe from normative politics *of* "Europe", an exodus that promoted an alternative aesthetic politics to postcommunist neo-nationalism and "democracy" alike, and whose influence leading into the twenty-first century offers another important frame for this thesis.

Instituting Manifesta, Manifesting Institutions

Conceiving Manifesta

Mid-way through the press conference for *Manifesta 3*, in Ljubljana's Cankarjev Dom on June 22, 2000, Alexander Brener took to the stage with a spray-can and a disruptive intent. It was an intent that appeared to substantiate the biennale's central theme of 'Borderline Syndrome – Energies of Defence', a psychological disorder between psychosis and neurosis, and between introjected anxieties and projected aggression, that the curators believed lay at the heart of trans-European relations.[9] In large block letters,

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[9] As a number of the writers in the *Manifesta 3* catalogue asserted, the curatorial theme was derived from Otto F. Kernberg's studies of borderline disorders in the 1970s (published in English as Otto F. Kernberg, *Borderline Conditions and Pathological Narcissism* (New York City: Jason Aronson, 1985)). Slavoj Žižek presented his own account of 'borderline syndromes' in the *Manifesta 3* catalogue, and specifically in relation to 'pathological narcissism': see Slavoj Žižek, '"Pathological Narcissus" as a Socially Mandatory Form of Subjectivity', in Francesco Bonami *et al*, *Borderline Syndrome: Energies of Defence: Manifesta 3*, exh. cat. (Ljubljana: Cankarjev Dom, 2000), pp.234-255.

Brener scrawled 'DEMOLISH NEOLIBERALIST MULTICULTURALIST ART-SISTEM (*sic*) NOW!' across the projection screen behind the curatorial team, and 'FORGET EUROPA' along the conference table (fig.3.1). Amid both jeers and cheers, and following Brener's ejection from the Dom by security, his partner Barbara Schurz began pleading to the audience for help while tossing copies of the couple's anti-Manifesta manifesto into the air. After conducting some spray-painting of her own across the curators' name plaques, she too was ejected from the room (fig.3.2).[10]

In a sense, Brener and Schurz's actions were decidedly unsurprising. They continued a series of similarly caustic interventions by Brener since the mid-1990s that went far beyond the act with which I opened this thesis, in which he destroyed Gu Wenda's installation for the 1996 exhibition *Interpol*. Brener had also defecated before a Van Gogh painting in Moscow's Pushkin Museum in 1994; he had spray-painted a green dollar-sign over Kasimir Malevich's painting *White Suprematism* (1922-1927) in Amsterdam's Stedelijk Museum – and received a ten-month jail sentence in 1997 as a consequence; and had disrupted the opening speeches for Manifesta's inaugural edition in Rotterdam in 1996, standing beside one of *Manifesta 1*'s corporate representatives and loudly delivering judgments as to the absurdity or plausibility of the sponsor's claims.[11] Nor did the manifesto's content differ markedly from previous publications by Brener.

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[10] *Manifesta 3* Video Documentation, held at the International Foundation Manifesta Archives, Amsterdam; viewed 20 October 2006. According to one report, the damage caused by Brener and Schurz totaled 15,000DM: see Herwig G. Höller, 'Eastward Expansion of the Western European Art System: *Manifesta 3* in Ljubljana', *Život Umjetnosti*, 34 (2000), p.85, sourced from the *Manifesta 3 Press Folder*, International Foundation Manifesta Archives, Amsterdam.

[11] According to Brener, his initial intention was for each of the artists in *Manifesta 1* to boycott the exhibition, a proposal that all of them rejected despite Brener claiming that he 'was expecting that they would actually sit down and discuss this possibility': see Brener in Eda Čufer (ed.), *Transnacionala: Highway Collisions between East and West at the Crossroads of Art: A Project by IRWIN* (Ljubljana: KODA, 2000), p.159. For further details about Brener's actions, see *inter alia* Inke Arns, *Objects in the mirror may be closer than they appear! Die Avantgarde im Rückspiegel zum Paradigmenwechsel der künstlerischen Avantgarderezeption in (Ex-)Jugoslawien und Russland von den 1980er Jahren bis in die Gegenwart*, PhD thesis (Berlin: Humboldt University, 2004), pp.240-252; Viktor Misiano, 'An Analysis of "Tusovka". Post-Soviet Art of the 1990s', in Gianfranco Maraniello (ed.), *Art in Europe 1990-2000* (Milan: Skira, 2002), p.170; for specific analysis of Brener's action in the Stedelijk Museum, see Pat Simpson, 'Conflicting Theologies: Artistic Authenticity and the Case of Alexander Brener', in Peter Martyn and Piotr Paszkiewicz (eds.), *Art-Ritual-Religion* (Warsaw: Institute of Art of the Polish Academy, 2003), pp.131-143.

The couple's assertions – most notably, that Manifesta transformed art into 'unified cultural gestures and empty representations' so as to placate corporate sponsors, and that '[t]he selection of the artists is… dictated by the corrupt interests of a handful of curators, dealers and bureaucrats, whose information about the actual artistic life in several countries is fragmented and superficial' – maintained the anti-capitalist and anti-establishment agitprop infused with paranoia that Brener had already circulated in journals such as *Moscow Art Magazine*.[12] What *was* surprising, however, was the broad level of support shown toward the couple's criticisms of Manifesta's politics within (but by no means limited to) the Slovenian press and local art networks. In many of the articles and editorials responding to *Manifesta 3* and carefully archived at Manifesta's Amsterdam headquarters, writers continually questioned the curatorial presumptions that they perceived underlay Manifesta's first exhibition outside the Low Countries.[13] Of particular concern were presumptions about the alignment of Ljubljana with mental illness (such that, according to *Manifesta 3* curator Francesco Bonami, the city required curatorial intervention as 'a therapy in progress'),[14] and about the reinscription of borderlines bisecting Europe more than a decade after the Berlin Wall came down.[15] In

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[12] Alexander Brener and Barbara Schurz, Untitled pamphlet distributed at *Manifesta 3* (2000), *Manifesta 3 Archive Box*, International Foundation Manifesta Archive, Amsterdam. For examples of Brener's agitprop writing before 2000, see *inter alia* Alexander Brener, 'The Dream of Democratic Culture', trans. Chris Anderson, in Joseph Backstein and Johanna Kandl (curators), *Secession: It's a Better World: Russian Actionism and its Context*, exh. cat. (Vienna: Secession, 1997), p.22; and Alexander Brener, 'The End of Optics', in Viktor Misiano (ed.), *Moscow Art Magazine Digest 1993-2005* (Moscow: Moscow Art Magazine, 2005), pp.29-31. Brener and Schurz's rejection of capitalism and the 'sterile and lifeless hub of united Europe' in the name of 'freedom' and 'radical democracy' extended beyond *Manifesta 3*: see Alexander Brener and Barbara Schurz, *Demolish Serious Culture, or What is Radical Democratic Culture and Who Does it Serve?* (Vienna: edition selene, 2000) (quotations taken from pp.76 and 91 respectively); and their paean to art as 'completely unacceptable, un-recognizable, unpredictable' in Alexander Brener and Barbara Schurz, *The Art of Destruction* (Ljubljana: Blossom vs Fruit Samizdat, 2004) (quotation from p.99).

[13] The first two instalments were held in Rotterdam in 1996 and in Luxembourg in 1998: see Rosa Martinez *et al*, *Manifesta 1: Rotterdam, The Netherlands, 1996*, exh. cat. (Rotterdam: Manifesta Foundation, 1996); and Robert Fleck *et al*, *Manifesta 2: European Biennial for Contemporary Art/Luxembourg*, exh. cat. (Luxembourg: Casino Luxembourg-Forum d'Art Contemporain, 1998).

[14] Francesco Bonami, 'The Former Land', in Bonami *et al*, above n.9, p.11.

[15] See, *inter alia*, editorials by Zdenko Vrdlovec and in Slovenian newspapers such as *Mladina* and *Delo* in the *Manifesta 3 Press Folder*, International Foundation Manifesta Archives, Amsterdam. See also Harry Liivrand's agreement with Zagreb-based curator Janka Vukmir that 'the choice of topic itself already comes ten years too late, and actually demonstrates the ambivalence of the communication process between Western Europe and the former Eastern block [*sic*]' in Sara Arrhenius *et al*, 'Has the Title Stolen the

two symposia staged alongside *Manifesta 3*, and convened by the Ljubljana-based art group IRWIN and the International Association of Art Critics, similar concerns emerged about the 'moderation' of non-Western European artists by Western art institutions through the pretence of a unified, inclusive Europe – a critique of 'moderation' that the *Manifesta 3* curators subsequently dismissed as 'territorial'.[16] The breadth of critical and even hostile responses to Manifesta was perhaps all the more unexpected given that, as the International Foundation Manifesta's Executive Director Hedwig Fijen has recounted, 'the main point about Manifesta was… to reach out to artists from the East [of Europe] like Brener'.[17] Its initial ambit was precisely to counter the institutional mediations and territorial presumptions that, in 2000, were frequently directed against it. The question to ask, then, is: were these criticisms justified, or were they an instance of the self-victimisation that I have been disputing throughout this thesis, yet which was often argued of postcommunist cultures after 1989?

The answer lies, I believe, in an analysis of Manifesta that builds upon the examination presented in Chapter One – of Manifesta's shifts from discourses of "Europe" to politics of "democracy" – but which looks more closely at Manifesta's history, its goals and its sources of influence. Since its conception in 1991, Manifesta's founders and board members have attempted to create exhibition models for young or relatively unknown European artists to present their work to a wide public, but in ways distinct from extant "mega-exhibition" formats. These new models were intended, on one level, to fill the vacuum created by the demise of other biennial exhibitions designed to showcase younger artists – most notably the Biennale de Paris and Venice's Aperto (which closed

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Show? Three Views of Manifesta 3 from Three Different European Ports', *NU: The Nordic Art Review*, 2/5 (2000), p.79; and Herwig G. Höller's reiteration of a claim made in *Mladina* that '*So much life and adrenalin, like Brener injected at the press conference, we don't find in Ljubljana's exhibitions at Manifesta*', in Höller, above n.10, pp.84-85 (italics in the original).

[16] Eda Čufer, 'Reflections on M3', *Platforma SCCA*, 2 (December 2000), available at http://www.ljudmila.org/scca/platforma2/edaang.htm [accessed 10 April 2006]; Annie Fletcher, 'Manifesta 3', *CIRCA Art Magazine*, 93 (Autumn 2000), p.63.

[17] Conversation with Hedwig Fijen, Amsterdam, 20 October 2006, author's notes.

in 1985 and 1993 respectively).[18] Manifesta would also, its founders hoped, counter particular problems they associated with exhibitions such as Documenta or the Venice Biennale. These perceived problems included the excessively bureaucratic infrastructures of such exhibitions, an aesthetic over-determined by a single curator, the rigid binding of institutions to one location or city (such as Venice's Giardini or the city of Kassel for Documenta), and – as was particularly relevant for the Venice Biennale and its national pavilions – reliance on the vested interests of national cultural bodies wanting to present their preferred artists and artworks rather than those preferred by exhibition curators.[19] By contrast, Manifesta sought new exhibition formats and the creation of new contexts that hinged on informality and institutional independence. Informality would emanate, the board believed, from the 'interactive workshop' of dialogue and dissent between the multiple voices brought together from across Europe to form a curatorial team.[20] Direct forms of contact and exchange were consequently central to the Manifesta model, resisting the highly mediated bureaucracies of Documenta or the Venice Biennale and their usual subordination of art practice to a particular curatorial programme.[21] In lieu of those bureaucracies would emerge a process more closely aligned with how contemporary artists actually practised: an 'open-ended and self-developing process', as

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[18] This was the key argument presented by one of *Manifesta*'s founders and inaugural board members, Henry Meyric Hughes, in Henry Meyric Hughes and Catherine Millet, 'Manifesta sur une ligne de faille/Art on the Fault Lines', *Art Press*, 259 (July-August 2000), pp.44-45; see also René Block *et al*, 'How a European Biennial of Contemporary Art Began', in Barbara Vanderlinden and Elena Filipović (eds.), *The Manifesta Decade: Debates on Contemporary Art Exhibitions and Biennials in Post-Wall Europe* (Cambridge MA: The MIT Press, 2006), pp.189-190.

[19] Henry Meyric Hughes in Meyric Hughes and Millet, *ibid*, p.44. Though Meyric Hughes chastised Eastern European states in particular for presenting such vested 'official' interests, the often very close and already-existing relationships between the state, a national commissioner, a curator and the curator's preferred artists – and questions of nepotism that can arise from those relationships – is, of course, not a strictly Eastern European phenomenon.

[20] Meyric Hughes in Meyric Hughes and Millet, *ibid*, 46; Manifesta Board Members, 'Preface', in Bonami *et al*, *Borderline Syndrome*, above n.9, p.9.

[21] Such directness was already envisaged by *Manifesta*'s founders in meetings during 1993, at which time they perceived such unmediated curatorial relations to serve 'as a stimulus to the free exchange of people, ideas and works of art': see 'Manifesta: The Pan-European Art Manifestation', in 'Foundation European Art Manifestation' (1993), 'Origins and Contents' Archives Box, International Foundation Manifesta Archive, Amsterdam, as cited in Thomas Boutoux, 'A Tale of Two Cities: Manifesta in Rotterdam and Ljubljana', in Vanderlinden and Filipović (eds.), above n.18, p.207. For an extension of these ideas in relation to the first edition of *Manifesta*, see the editors' comments in 'Declining and Becoming', in Martinez *et al*, *Manifesta 1*, above n.13, p.7.

argued by one of *Manifesta 4*'s curators, Iara Boubnova, by which contemporary art and curatorship could become integrated 'through and in search of shared values'.[22] Such resistance or independence from exhibition models like Documenta's was made most explicit, though, by Manifesta's definitive feature: its migration to a new city for each edition. This oft-championed 'nomadism' and 'flexibility' clearly mimicked the mobility of (at least some) artists across national borders within Europe (whether for art production, exhibition or other purposes).[23] More importantly, it uprooted the biennale format from its usual anchorage to a central hub, so as to create transversal networks between and within different locales every two years. The goal was thus not to metaphorise but to construct, to *manifest*, a Europe without internal borders. That is, Manifesta would form a 'bridge to "former Eastern Europe"' so as to provide 'one of the few platforms accessible for Eastern European artists', as Francesco Bonami and Hedwig Fijen argued respectively.[24] In the process, it would enact 'integration' (to recite one of Manifesta's buzzwords) across those bridges and through those platforms in much the same way that curatorial and art practices were 'integrated' within Manifesta.[25]

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[22] Iara Boubnova as cited in Alexander Kiossev, 'Iara Boubnova Interviewed', in Stéphanie Moisdon Trembley *et al*, *Manifesta 4: European Biennial of Contemporary Art*, exh. cat. (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2002), p.131.

[23] For examples of *Manifesta* curators' and board members' turn to discourses of nomadism and flexibility, see *inter alia* Hedwig Fijen and Jolie van Leeuwen, 'Project Officer Manifesta 1', in Martinez *et al*, *Manifesta 1*, above n.13, pp.24-35; International Advisory Board Manifesta 2, 'Preface', in Fleck *et al*, *Manifesta 2*, above n.13, p.5; Manifesta Board Members, 'Preface', in Bonami *et al*, *Borderline Syndrome*, above n.9, p.9; Viktor Misiano in Urša Jurman and Sabina Salamon, 'Interview with Viktor Misiano', *Platforma SCCA*, 2 (December 2000), available at http://www.ljudmila.org/scca/platforma2/misiano.htm [accessed 10 April 2006].

[24] Bonami in Bonami *et al*, *Borderline Syndrome*, above n.9, p.11 ; Hedwig Fijen, 'Manifesta: History and Concept', originally published in *Art Kaleidoscope* (February-May 2002), available at http://www.manifesta.org/manifesta4/en/press/pressm16.html [accessed 21 August 2006]. For further commentary on Manifesta as a 'bridge' – a point to which I will also return presently – see Mária Hlavajová, 'Towards the Normal: Negotiating the "Former East"', in Vanderlinden and Filipović (eds.), above n.18, p.153. It should also be noted that though one of *Manifesta 1*'s curators, Andrew Renton, declared Manifesta to be a strictly metaphorical space in which to reconceive European relations, this claim sits at odds with those made by Fijen and board members René Block and Katalin Néray that Manifesta was not merely metaphorical or conceptual but designed to re-create and 'to manifest rather than just document the new situation in Europe' after 1989: see René Block *et al*, 'How a European Biennial of Contemporary Art Began', in Vanderlinden and Filipović (eds.), above n.18, p.192; compared with Andrew Renton, untitled essay in Martinez *et al*, *Manifesta 1*, above n.13, pp.75-78.

[25] The catalogue for *Manifesta 5* (in Donostia-San Sebastian in 2004) is particularly noteworthy here: see, for example, the multiple references to integration in Hedwig Fijen, 'Decoding Europe?', in Marta Kuzma

The aim to construct a new exhibition infrastructure capable of spanning still-disparate contexts and aesthetic practices across Europe was undoubtedly important and laudable. But to claim that it was independent of national interests or established institutions was not entirely accurate. Although Manifesta's conception in 1991 emerged through frustration with the pervasive nationalism of the Venice Biennale in particular, it was an initiative still resolutely dependent on the nation-state from the outset. It was founded and originally funded through the Dutch Foreign Ministry's cultural department, and convened by the commissioners for particular national pavilions at Venice: most notably the Dutch Pavilion commissioners Gijs van Tuyl and Els Barents, but also those for Germany (René Block), the Nordic countries (Svenrobert Lundquist) and Great Britain (Henry Meyric Hughes).[26] When Manifesta's founders eventually decided, in November 1993, to include non-Western European curators as members of what would soon be its board, it again turned predominantly to commissioners for Venice's national pavilions – to Katalin Néray (commissioner for Hungary from 1986 to 1990, and Director of Budapest's Ludwig Museum), Anda Rottenberg (commissioner for Poland between 1993 and 2001, and Director of the Zachęta National Gallery in Warsaw) and Lilijana Stepančič from Ljubljana's Soros Center for Contemporary Art, the only initial board member who was not a pavilion commissioner.[27]

Of greater significance, however, were the proposed models of funding for the exhibitions and artists. Artists' costs – such as travel, production expenses and *per diems* – were expected to be borne by funding bodies located within an artist's country of

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and Massimiliano Gioni (curators), *Manifesta 5: With All Due Intent*, exh. cat. (Donostia-San Sebastian: Centro Internacional de Cultura Contemporanea, 2004), pp.15-17.

[26] See especially Meyric Hughes' comments in Meyric Hughes and Millet, above n.18, pp.43-44; this history is raised very briefly (and then passed by equally swiftly) in Block *et al*, above n.18, p.189.

[27] The Manifesta founders' continued investment in national commissioners is a fact rarely – and, in the case of Rottenberg, never – mentioned in the extant literature on Manifesta: the sole exception is the brief mention of Néray's commissioning duties (though without mention of Manifesta) in Henry Meyric Hughes, 'Were We Looking Away? The Reception of Art from Central and East Central Europe at the Time of the Cold War', in Museum Moderner Kunst, *Aspekte/Positionen: 50 Jahre Kunst aus Mitteleuropa, 1949-1999*, exh. cat. (Vienna: Museum Moderner Kunst-Stiftung Ludwig Wien, 1999), pp.47-58.

residence, while prospective host-cities for Manifesta were to indicate how the state (primarily national governments or city councils) would be able to fund the biennale for which they were bidding.[28] This last point was particularly crucial, for if Manifesta's nomadism distinguished the biennale on a conceptual level, it also had important pragmatic effects. This was especially evident in the mid-1990s, according to Meyric Hughes, when there was less likelihood of renewed funding for Manifesta as a young enterprise than if it were a proven ongoing concern. Financial responsibility could therefore rest largely with local sponsors and states willing to realise Manifesta as a "one-off" venture, such that funding responsibilities could be distributed throughout Europe rather than continually borne by select organisations.[29] Yet while such expectations were clearly pragmatic in developing Manifesta's "alternative" format, they also carried certain detractions. Manifesta's average budget of over one million euros per edition meant that, for the most part, only relatively wealthy organisations and locales could afford to stage the event. The emphasis on existing financial and organisational capabilities was reinforced by the competitive bidding process between the biennale's prospective hosts. Even if a city presented a brief best reflecting Manifesta's avowed politics – of destabilising normative hierarchies between Eastern and Western Europe, or of drawing cultural attention to supposedly "peripheral" European regions – that bid was invariably trumped by more prosperous competitors. '[S]ometimes feasibility won out over wish-fulfillment', Fijen claimed, such that Budapest's offer to host *Manifesta 3* lost to the more stable economic environment of Ljubljana, Tallinn lost to the Basque resort city of Donostia-San Sebastian for *Manifesta 5*, and Warsaw to the €1,600,000 bid by Europe's economic hub Frankfurt for *Manifesta 4*.[30] Europe's economic realities in the 1990s may thus have proven Meyric Hughes' argument that 'it would be some time

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[28] On the first point, see Hedwig Fijen's comments in René Block *et al*, above n.18, p.195; on the second point, see *inter alia* Mária Hlavajová, 'Towards the Normal', in Vanderlinden and Filipović (eds.), above n.18, p.161; Marina Gržinić, 'On the Re-Politicization of Art through Contamination', in IRWIN (eds.), *East Art Map: Contemporary Art and Eastern Europe* (London: Afterall, 2006), pp.479-480.

[29] Meyric Hughes in Meyric Hughes and Millet, above n.18, pp.46-47.

[30] Fijen in Block *et al*, above n.18, p.198. Details about Frankfurt's successful application to host *Manifesta 4* can be found in Marina Sorbello, 'Even Younger, Even More Interdisciplinary and Perhaps Less Involved in the Market', *The Art Newspaper*, 126 (June 2002), p.30.

before it would be economically feasible for us to hold Manifesta outside the prosperous regions of Western Europe'.[31] Yet they also revealed the Manifesta organisers' reluctance to move far beyond the established financial and state institutions from which Manifesta sought independence, or to create alternative cultural infrastructures within the decommunising regions that needed them most, and thus arguably an unwillingness to transform their discourse into action.

Indeed, such arguments have informed some of the more acerbic critiques of Manifesta since the late-1990s. For Charlotte Bydler and Okwui Enwezor in particular, Manifesta did not establish alternative models for pan-European aesthetics, relations or politics, but in fact quite the opposite. By remaining locked almost entirely within Western European centres, by treating non-Western regions as seemingly incapable of hosting and promoting its "universal" agenda, and by relying on national sponsors when necessary for its postnational politics, Manifesta simply reiterated, these critics argued, the very processes by which the European Union operates.[32] Rather than manifest forms of independence, Bydler claimed, Manifesta primarily aestheticised 'a European Union discourse in the art world' such that, in Enwezor's words, 'it entrenches itself as an extension of Brussels' cultural policy'.[33] For both these critics then, as well as numerous others, Manifesta did not *resist* the national, statist or highly bureaucratic determinations of Documenta or Venice. It was instead closely aligned with a state enterprise of a much vaster kind: with the European Union's own, equally nomadic programme for exhibiting and celebrating culture across the continent, a programme launched in 1985 and called the European Capitals of Culture.[34] The comparison was not without justification.

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[31] Meyric Hughes in Meyric Hughes and Millet, above n.18, p.46; see also Hughes' comment that 'we had to accept that only the major financial centers with an adequate infrastructure and a stable political administration could offer us the support for a sustained burst of activity' in Block *et al*, *ibid*, p.197.

[32] Charlotte Bydler, *The Global Art World Inc.: On the Globalisation of Contemporary Art* (Uppsala: Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis, 2004), pp.142-156 especially; Okwui Enwezor, 'Tebbit's Ghost', in Vanderlinden and Filipović (eds.), above n.18, pp.175-186.

[33] Bydler, *ibid*, pp.209-210; Enwezor, *ibid*, p. 184.

[34] Alongside Bydler's and Enwezor's analyses, see Marina Gržinić, 'On the Re-Politicisation of Art through Contamination', in IRWIN (eds.), *East Art Map*, above n.28, pp.479-483; Šefik Šeki Tatlič, 'Post-Modal Reproduction of Power', *Art-e-Fact*, 3 (2004), available at

Though Hedwig Fijen vehemently disputed the claim, Meyric Hughes admitted that 'the idea of the European Cultural Capitals… also played a part in our early discussions' about Manifesta's formation.[35] During the 1990s (and since), both events took place in different European cities for each edition. Both programmes selected host-cities according to their abilities to assimilate into the pre-established criteria, set by a centrally administered board, of how to conceive a contemporary state of "Europe" and its culture. And both, Bydler and Enwezor have suggested, left unquestioned the specifically Western European conceptualisation of the European state after communism. According to Enwezor, this was a conception of Europe in which the West 'barricades itself behind the idealism of European nationalism'; for Bydler, it championed a 'mobile liberal utopia' of nomadic people, artworks and ideas that may have been familiar to Western Europeans, but which was denied in practice to many Eastern European artists because of visa restrictions, as we saw in Chapter One.[36] As a consequence, these two celebrations of culture across Europe may not have challenged typical forms of Europatriarchy in the 1990s; rather, they threatened to remobilise and reify Europatriarchy in the name of the "new" European state.

The pertinence of such criticisms cannot be underestimated. They clearly demonstrate both the fallacy of Manifesta's claims to independence from the state, and its close parallels to problematic European politics as analysed in Chapter One. Nonetheless, these criticisms are also potentially overstated. They ignore the central role played by Manifesta in establishing strong pan-European networks between curators and art centres,

http://artefact.mi2.hr/_a03/lang_en/theory_tatlic_en.htm [accessed 9 September 2006]; and the views of Slovenia's then-Minister for Culture Jožef Školč, 'Investments in Creativity are Worthwhile', *Slovenia Weekly* (8 February 2000), np, sourced from the *Manifesta 3 Press Folder*, International Foundation Manifesta Archives, Amsterdam.

[35] Meyric Hughes in Block *et al*, above n.18, p.196; compared with Fijen in *ibid*, p.194. For Fijen, 'this has never been a true comparison. Manifesta was not initiated by the EU'. Technically, she is correct: the European Union did not exist in the early-1990s, but was still called the European Community. The comparison can, however, be justified on grounds such as conceptual affinity rather than whether the bodies or states that fund an enterprise belong to the European Union or the European Community.

[36] Enwezor, above n.32, p.184; Bydler, above n.32, pp. 147, 263. On visa restrictions during the 1990s, see p.76 of this thesis and Robert Fleck, *Y aura-t-il un deuxième siècle de l'art moderne?: Les arts visuels au tournant du siècle* (Nantes : Éditions Pleins Feux, 2002), pp.51ff.

while dismissing the importance of encouraging state (rather than just corporate) funding to support those networks in the long-term. Furthermore, strict comparison with the European Union also ignores a more explicit influence upon Manifesta's formation, one of significance for this thesis and which was more problematic for the biennale by the time of its staging in Ljubljana. That influence was the network of Soros Centers for Contemporary Art (or SCCAs) that spanned Central and Eastern Europe during the 1990s, a network that I now want to traverse briefly given Fijen's insistence on its foundational importance for Manifesta's formal structure and its initial 'bridge' to artists and curators working in decommunising countries.[37]

Networking with Soros

The SCCAs were among the foremost cultural initiatives to emerge in postcommunist Europe during the 1990s. Instigated by a leading American speculator on stock and currency markets, George Soros, and subsidised between 1991 and 1999 through his Open Society Institute (or OSI), the SCCAs presented numerous benefits to a diverse range of contemporary art practitioners.[38] The Centers initially served as cultural repositories, as archives for catalogues, documents and other materials related to recent and current art practices in Eastern Europe. These archives, along with easy access to the SCCAs' photocopiers and Internet terminals, provided a wide and unsupervised dissemination of cultural information – a lack of supervision that stood in direct contrast to the highly restricted (or, at best, highly surveilled) access to Eastern European archives

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[37]Conversation with Hedwig Fijen, Amsterdam, 20 October 2006, author's notes. These notes confirm a number of similar comments made by Fijen about Manifesta's reliance on the SCCA network as a model, including her view that 'the Manifesta biennial [would not have developed] without the crucial support from such a powerful organization', see Fijen in Block *et al*, above n.18, p.195. Former Manifesta curator and SCCA director in Bratislava, Mária Hlavajová, has also attested to the close affiliations between *Manifesta* and the Soros network: see *ibid*, pp.155-156.

[38] For further information about some of these benefits, see Anne-Marie Rocco, *L'incroyable histoire de George Soros: Milliardaire spéculateur et mécène* (Mesnil-sur-l'Estrée: Éditions Assouline, 1999), pp.113ff; Fleck, above n.36, p.57; and, among a series of hagiographic biographies, see George Soros, Byron Wien and Krisztina Koenen, *Soros on Soros: Staying Ahead of the Curve* (New York City: J,Wiley, 1995), pp.111-175 especially; Michael T. Kaufman, *SOROS: The Life and Times of a Messianic Billionaire* (New York City: Knopf, 2002); and Robert Slater, *Soros: The Life, Times, and Trading Secrets of the World's Greatest Investor* (Burr Ridge: Irwin Professional Publishing, 1996).

before 1989. By the mid-1990s, the SCCAs were also actively engaging with the development and production of contemporary art practices. They offered funding for artists and critics to buy computers, cameras and video equipment for professional use, while OSI grant schemes encouraged Eastern Europeans to conduct graduate study in the United States, and Americans and Western Europeans to host training courses in Eastern Europe. In addition, the SCCAs staged annual exhibitions of contemporary art, providing funds for the artworks' production, curatorial fees and the creation of glossy catalogues at a time when few artists or other cultural organisations in Eastern Europe could afford to produce such publications.

The SCCAs' hallmark, however, was their structure. Each Center was connected in an institutional network, with curators and administrators often working together in teams to create and distribute projects across the network. Through teamwork and programmes linked across cultural and national borders, Soros intended his Centers to promote a vibrant form of resistance to postcommunist destabilisations, strengthening professional and intellectual ties throughout the region. To an extent, this model derived from and replicated the rhizomatic formats of digital media, the Internet and the World Wide Web, for the Centers were interconnected through a central node (based in Budapest) in order to provide these transnational relations between distinct cultural contexts. The Soros network also affirmed much of the contemporaneous rhetoric about digital media and the Internet, for its form was often lauded as inherently "democratic", a means to assert open access to, and a broad dissemination of, cultural information and contacts to anyone within the network.[39] Such claims were not incidental, for among Soros' objectives – as influenced by the writings of Karl Popper, Friedrich Hayek and others – was the creation of a global 'open society' after communism, and the delivery of "democracy" to Eastern

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[39] A typical example comes from the director of Chişinau's SSCA, Octavian G. Esanu, when he claimed among other things that '[t]he democratisation of the artistic message became broader with the establishment of the Soros Centre [*sic*] for Contemporary Art': Octavian G. Esanu, 'Moldova', in Fleck *et al*, *Manifesta 2*, above n.13, p.249. For similar claims made about *Manifesta*, see *inter alia* Meyric Hughes in Meyric Hughes and Millet, above n.18, p.46. Such views should, however, be contrasted with Tom Holert's cynicism toward the SCCAs' construction of "democratisation" as a capitalist enterprise: Tom Holert, 'The New Normal', *Artforum*, 44/6 (February 2006), p.83.

Europe.[40] Yet these objectives should not be mistaken as altruistic either. As Soros'
ombudsman Annette Laborey explained, Soros 'abhors charity…. He works as an
investor and looks for what will give the best result'.[41] That result in Eastern Europe was,
above all, financial. Like many of Soros' other private enterprises, the SCCAs were
expected to return healthy profits to his New York base, which calculated and verified the
Centers' prospects as primarily financial, rather than social, concerns.[42] Soros' Hayekian
investment in culture, and especially younger artists and writers, was not just about
cultivating "democracy" *per se*, but about entrenching new neoliberal markets together
with "democracy". His chief goal was to return long-term financial benefits to his
organisation, and ultimately to complement Jeffrey Sachs' concurrent strategies of Shock
Therapy that I examined in Chapter One and which Soros thoroughly endorsed.[43] Rather
than an actualisation of the Internet's rhizome and its "democratic" potential, then, the
SCCA network differed only marginally from Soros' other corporate groupings.
Budapest served as a regional base from which the SCCAs branched out like franchises
in Eastern Europe's other capital cities: all were answerable to corporate headquarters in
New York.

This conflation of the rhizomatic network and top-down decision-making, and of
"democratic" and corporate investments, had – I reiterate – important consequences in
postcommunist Europe, especially in terms of providing an infrastructure for
contemporary artists amid general state collapse. Yet this conflation also attracted
significant acrimony within contemporary art circles, and even from some of the SCCAs'

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[40] George Soros, *Underwriting Democracy* (New York City: The Free Press, 1990); Soros, Wien and
Koenen, above n.38, p.34; George Soros, *Open Society: Reforming Global Capitalism* (New York City:
Public Affairs, 2000), pp.117ff; and for Soros' tuition in the theories of Popper, Hayek, Alfred North
Whitehead and others while studying at the London School of Economics, see Kaufman, above n.38,
pp.63ff.

[41] Cited in Rocco, above n.38, p.99.

[42] *Ibid*, pp.99-106.

[43] Soros, *Underwriting Democracy*, above n.40, p.31.

own directors.[44] There was, after all, an hypocrisy associated with Soros' ventures – a 'calm[ing of] his Popperian conscience', in critic Georg Schöllhammer's words – given they were financed through the rampant neoliberalism and currency devaluations that had sent many decommunising countries spiralling into financial disaster in the first place.[45] It was the more micro-level effects of this conflation on local cultural practices, however, that were of greatest concern for the SCCAs' critics. Russian curators such as Olesya Turkina, Viktor Mazin and Viktor Misiano, for example, perceived the SCCAs' spread throughout postcommunist Europe as a 'neo-conservative' and neo-colonial gesture.[46] The Soros network, they suggested, presumed that all postcommunist cities lacked a viable cultural infrastructure or strong arts education. It thus ignored both the long histories and ongoing importance of Moscow's many alternative arts circles so as to 'try to teach you how to do real shows', as Misiano commented wryly, and to impose its own "democratic" framework.[47] Criticism of the SCCAs' consequences for art practice was equally vociferous. Although SCCA directors had (for the most part) arm's length contact with Soros, they were still generally bound by the Centers' – and Soros' – overarching objectives, with investments in art and (its) "democracy" targeted as so-called 'strategic priorities' to fulfil those objectives.[48] That targeting – from determining what should be

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[44] Mária Hlavajová, the former Director of the SCCA in Bratislava, provides a significant condemnation of the SCCAs' overwhelming self-interest and 'stifl[ing] of opportunities to create new models for conceptualizing and theorizing art and cultural production in the [postcommunist] region': Hlavajová, 'Towards the Normal', above n.24, pp.163-164. Another former SCCA Director, Călin Dan from Bucharest, has similarly critiqued the SCCAs' 'social engineering' strategies dictated, he argues, through the OSI and through Soros' 'dictatorship of goodwill': see Călin Dan, 'The Dictatorship of Goodwill', Text submitted to nettime.org (10 May 1997), available at http://www.nettime.org/Lists-Archives/nettime-l-9705/msg00050.html [accessed 16 October 2007].

[45] Schöllhammer, the editor-in-chief of Vienna's main contemporary art journal called *Springerin*, provides a series of scathing commentaries on Soros' strategies in Georg Schöllhammer, 'Art in the Era of Globalization: Some Remarks on the Period of Soros-Realisms', *Art-e-Fact*, 4 (2005), available at http://artefact.mi2.hr/_a04/lang_en/theory_schollhammer_en.thm [accessed 23 April 2006].

[46] Olesya Turkina and Viktor Mazin, 'Russia', in Fleck *et al*, *Manifesta 2*, above n.13, p.258.

[47] *Ibid*, pp.257-258; Viktor Misiano, in Jurman and Salamon, 'Interview with Viktor Misiano', above n.23.

[48] The description of art and democracy as 'strategic priorities' stems from an advertisement for Soros' Open Society Institute (here, labelled a 'Foundation') in the catalogue for the first Tirana Biennale in 2001: in Giancarlo Politi *et al*, *Tirana Biennale 1: Escape*, exh. cat. (Tirana: Giancarlo Politi Editore, 2001), p.497. This claim has also been repeated to me by a number of former SCCA directors, including Irina Cios and Călin Dan (both from the SCCA Bucharest) and Melentie Pandilovski (SCCA Skopje): Conversation with Irina Cios, Melbourne, 25 August 2007, author's notes; Conversations with Călin Dan, Melbourne, 25

funded, to what should be shown in the annual exhibitions and canonised in catalogues – in effect directed those practices toward a narrow range of mediums, styles and content that symbolised Soros' purposive intents in postcommunist Europe: toward new media, installation and large-scale photography, as were increasingly common in key Western markets such as New York or Basel; toward art focused on constructive social relations; and, as revealed by even a cursory examination of the catalogues, toward the general erasure of the artists' specific cultural contexts, of the very different environments of Zagreb, Moscow or Bratislava for example, so as to present more abstract and thus potentially "universal" frames of artistic reference. The effect, as Belgrade-based theorist Miško Šuvaković notoriously contended, signified an almost-blanket artistic dependence on Soros funds in the region. Through this dependence, he argued further, a 'Soros aesthetic' began to emerge, signalling a transformation from Socialist Realism to 'Soros Realism' as an "official" aesthetic across the entirety of the Soros network, and despite Eastern Europe's many cultural differences.[49] The fact that the resultant aesthetic uniformity largely replicated key trends in contemporary Western art markets was, perhaps, not a coincidence: it ensured postcommunist art's easy assimilation within those markets, thereby suggesting the success of Soros' philosophies of 'open information' and "democracy" within postcommunist cultures.

Such dependence on the Soros model was most apparent within Eastern European contexts; it was not, however, restricted to those contexts alone. As the main cultural

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August 2007 and Adelaide, 31 August 2007, author's notes; Conversation with Melentie Pandilovski, Adelaide, 31 August 2007, author's notes.

[49] Miško Šuvaković, 'Critical Phenomenology of Artwork: The Status, the Functions and the Effects of the Artwork at *Manifesta 3*', *Platforma SCCA*, 2 (December 2000), available at http://www.ljudmila.org/scca/platforma2/suvakovicang.htm [accessed 10 April 2006]; and Miško Šuvaković, 'The Ideology of Exhibition: on the Ideologies of Manifesta', *Platforma SCCA*, 3 (2002), available at http://www.ljudmila.org/scca/platforma3/suvakovicengp.htm [accessed 10 April 2006]. Both essays were reprinted (together with another text written for an earlier volume of *Platforma SCCA*) as Miško Šuvaković, 'Discourses of Manifesta: Critical Readings of the Discourses of an International Exhibition', *Art-e-Fact*, 4 (2005), available at http://artefact.mi2.hr/_a04/lang_en/theory_suvakovic_en.htm [accessed 23 April 2006]. See also Gordana Vasiljević, 'Iz Socrealizma u Sorosrealisam', *Danas* (11 January 2001), p.19; and note also Robert Fleck's despair at what he perceived to be the increasingly homogeneous practices of Eastern European art during the Soros era: in Robert Fleck, 'Art after Communism', in Fleck *et al*, *Manifesta 2*, above n.13, pp.194-195, which analysis Fleck elaborated in Fleck, *Y aura-t-il un deuxième siècle de l'art moderne?*, above n.36, pp.47-72.

organisation to emerge in the region after communism, the Soros network became the primary port-of-call for many curators, critics and journalists wanting to forge 'bridges' to Eastern Europe. As recollected by Roger Conover, co-curator of the 2002 exhibition *In Search of Balkania*, the SCCAs would provide lists of, or facilitate contact with, artists whom the SCCAs perceived were best suited to a curator's or writer's interests – and who were usually supported through Soros funds, exhibitions and catalogues.[50] On one level, then, dependency was a dual entanglement brimming with presumptions. While Eastern European art circles were largely dependent on Soros' direct and indirect determinations about what postcommunist "transition" should entail, Western administrators were equally dependent on Soros' Centers to mediate engagement with their non-Western counterparts. This mediation was, in turn, filtered through the SCCAs' presumptions about what those administrators wanted to see: namely, practices familiar from Western markets and thus "indicative" of postcommunist "progress". On another level, however, the SCCAs' status as both a transcultural mediator and, in effect, a dealer of its "official" aesthetic meant that the Centers were 'the new Eastern power brokers', as Conover argued, whose professional services risked easy slippage 'from intellectual exchange to insider trading'.[51] That slippage was not specific to 'Western curators lacking the confidence or curiosity to do their own looking', as Conover argued further though.[52] It also related to curators and administrators, from both Eastern and Western Europe, whose primary task was precisely to undertake such 'looking' but who turned to the Soros network as a mirror and a consolidation of their own "independent" model for a pan-European art infrastructure. This, I believe, was the case with Manifesta, whose dependence on the SCCAs ultimately risked reifying its very partial sanction of Eastern European art even after the Soros network's demise in 1999.[53]

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[50] Roger Conover, 'Against Dictionaries: The East as She is Spoke by the West', in IRWIN (eds.), *East Art Map*, above n.28, pp.349-361.

[51] *Ibid*, p.354.

[52] *Ibid*.

[53] While 1999 is the date associated with Soros' withdrawal of funding for his SCCAs, this did not mean that either Soros or the OSI withdrew from some Eastern European cities. The aforementioned advertisement in the catalogue for the first Tirana Biennale shows that, even in 2001, the OSI was still publicising its central cultural role in some postcommunist cultural contexts: see above n.48.

That dependence was, in a number of ways, clearly structural. First, while the biennale's nomadism stemmed in part from the E.U.'s Cultural Capitals policy – and also, we could argue, from an overly optimistic view of contemporary capitalism and its liberal traversals of borders and territories – the desired long-term effects of a trans-European curatorial network, linked through a central and ostensibly non-state foundation, more closely matched those of the Soros network. Second, all but one of the Eastern European curators for the first six Manifesta biennales – and despite the Manifesta rhetoric to trans-European equity, only five of those biennales' twenty curators were based in Eastern Europe – was a Soros Center director.[54] Curators from other institutions or engaged in alternative art circles in Eastern Europe were largely ignored. And third, most of the artists practising in decommunising countries were sourced and funded almost entirely through the SCCAs as a substitute for national state sponsorship.[55] As this last point suggests, Manifesta's dependence on the Soros network was also fundamental in terms of the biennales' content. This primarily related to which artists were sourced and how, so as to confirm (in Henry Meyric Hughes' words) 'what Western audiences wanted to see'.[56] It was also evident in less overt ways too, such as the replication of the SCCAs' programmes of public forums (what the Manifesta board called 'a series of… "open" and "closed houses"') that occurred in a number of SCCAs and other art centres for *Manifesta*

[54] The five curators based in Eastern Europe up to the cancelled *Manifesta 6* project were: Viktor Misiano and Katalin Néray (*Manifesta 1*); Mária Hlavajová (*Manifesta 3*); Iara Boubnova (*Manifesta 4*); and Marta Kuzma (*Manifesta 5*). Anton Vidokle, co-curator of *Manifesta 6*, identifies himself as a New York-based artist (where he has lived since 1981), while Adam Budak, co-curator of *Manifesta 7*, was the first non-Soros curator from an Eastern European state since Misiano in 1996. Having said that, we should credit Manifesta for beginning to look beyond European borders for potential curators after *Manifesta 5* – to Cairo and New York for *Manifesta 6* (Mai Abu ElDahab and Vidokle respectively) and to New Delhi for *Manifesta 7* (Raqs Media Collective).On this point, I disagree with Okwui Enwezor, who based part of his vehement opposition to Manifesta on the grounds that '[i]n accordance with [its] limiting national model, all its curators have been, without exception, ethnically European': Enwezor, 'Tebbit's Ghost', above n.32, p.184.

[55] Among other examples, see Hlavajová, 'Towards the Normal', above n.24, p.156; Fijen in Block *et al*, above n.18, p.195. I would, however, dispute Fijen's claim (on p.195) that funding through the SCCAs – rather than through Eastern European state or Western arts bodies – 'avoid[ed a] "colonial" attitude' toward artists from postcommunist Europe.

[56] Meyric Hughes in Meyric Hughes and Millet, above n.18, p.44.

1, and the installation (for *Manifesta 2*) of an 'infolab' of resources about many artists based in Eastern Europe, as derived primarily from the SCCAs' archives.[57]

But while the SCCAs' influences on Manifesta were readily discernible in terms of the biennale's structure and content, I would argue that the Soros network's most important influence lay in a slightly different direction: in the direction of Manifesta's philosophical agenda, and specifically its redirection from discourses of "Europe" to a more "universal" politics of "democracy" in the late-1990s. As I argued in Chapter One, this shift was potentially related to the contentious appeals to "democracy" within contemporary art circles after *Interpol*, the exhibition co-curated by Viktor Misiano immediately before he co-curated *Manifesta 1*. It was also, to a large extent, a symptom of the persistent rhetoric of "democracy" in European and global geopolitics after 1989. Most significantly, though, these effects should be seen as complemented, or even consolidated, by Manifesta's increasingly close affiliations with the "independent" Soros network during the 1990s. This was especially true after *Manifesta 1*, for the exhibition's success proved that the biennale could indeed be a viable ongoing concern, and assured the Manifesta board that affiliations with other institutions could be cultivated with an eye to the long-term. It was a cultivation evidenced in the growing resonance between Manifesta and the political discourses espoused by Soros and his Centers. Most notable here was the increased reference in Manifesta's catalogues to its investment in "democracy": as explained earlier, after no mention in the catalogue for *Manifesta 1*, "democracy" became a central point of reference for *Manifesta 2* and especially *Manifesta 3*.[58] This was not a loose conception of "democracy", but one largely tethered to its conceptualisation within the Soros network. The connection was reinforced, in the late-1990s, by the Manifesta board's desire to reformat the biennale's administrative structure, a desire which resulted in Manifesta's legal registration as the International Foundation Manifesta in the Netherlands in April 1999. For Mária Hlavajová, this act threatened to unravel Manifesta's claims to independence from the state: legal registration as a foundation

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[57] Manifesta Board Members, 'Preface', in Bonami *et al*, *Borderline Syndrome*, above n.9, pp.9-10.

[58] See Chapter One of this thesis, especially pp.25-26.

meant that Manifesta soldered itself to the laws of the European Union, and revealed its ambitions for recognition as itself a form of official bureaucracy. Consequently, Hlavajová claimed, Manifesta 'lost some of its early informal character… [and thus] may have succumbed to the seduction of power'.[59] That registration had a further and more particular purpose, however, which was to establish Manifesta and its emergent "democratic" interests as 'an independent corporate identity', as the Foundation's board asserted in 2002.[60] Like the SCCAs, then, Manifesta's conception of "democracy" was explicitly aligned with both neo-statist (and specifically Europatriarchal) bureaucracies and corporate capitalism. This alignment emerged in another extremely important way as well, one that I now want to analyse in some detail. The key to this lies in certain presumptions and omissions conducted in the interests of "democracy", and which resonated across both the Soros network and, especially after 1999, Manifesta. This shared relation also returns us to *Manifesta 3*, for it was in Ljubljana in 2000 – one year after Manifesta's corporate registration and the so-called 'independence' of Eastern Europe from Soros sponsorship[61] – that these correlations reached a point of culmination and received, as we have already seen, some of their most significant criticisms.

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[59] Hlavajová, 'Towards the Normal', above n.24, p.164. We could also speculate as to the timing of Manifesta's registration as a 'corporate identity', which occurred just months before Soros' significant decision to withdraw funding for the SCCAs. In hindsight, Manifesta's 'corporate' registration not only reinforced the parallels between the two networks; it also provided a buffer of institutional stability for the infrastructures and cultural politics threatened with destabilisation by Soros' decision, and ensured that Soros' programmes had an institutional afterlife into the twenty-first century. As it turned out, those fears of destabilisation were largely unfounded: the Soros network quickly re-branded itself as the network of International Centers for Contemporary Art, which it registered as a legal entity soon after – curiously enough, in the Netherlands as well.

[60] Board of the International Foundation Manifesta, 'Preface of the International Foundation Manifesta', in Moisdon Trembley *et al*, *Manifesta 4*, above n.22, p.12; the first and very brief reference to the Foundation's legal registration appears in Manifesta Board Members, 'Preface', in Bonami *et al*, *Borderline Syndrome*, above n.9, p.9.

[61] See, for example, comments made by Barbara Borčić, a Ljubljana-based curator working at the city's SCCA: Barbara Borčić, 'Manifesta 3 in Relation to the Host City Ljubljana and its Contemporary Art Scene', in *SCCA Platforma*, 1 (2000), available at http://www.ljudmila.org/scca/platforma1/bb2.htm [accessed 10 April 2006].

Reconceiving Manifesta

These correlations can be understood in two significant respects. The first relates to territory. Although the *Manifesta 3* curators dismissed criticisms against them about territorialist presumptions, that dismissal was, I think, disingenuous. Not only was their Manifesta biennale the first to step tentatively outside the vicinity of its Dutch base, and beyond the relative safe-havens of Rotterdam and Luxembourg; it was also the first to be branded with a specific curatorial theme, albeit one that profited explicitly (perhaps opportunistically) from the assumed geopolitical characteristics of the host-city, Ljubljana.[62] This was not a literal form of profit, as with Soros' OSI seeking financial gain from its new infrastructures within decommunising states, but a parallel kind of trade: a thematic trading on Ljubljana's supposed location at the border between two Europes, a border that the curators sought to bridge and a rift they sought to salve by declaring the city a metonym for Europe's broader cultural condition – its "illness" – of a 'borderline syndrome'.[63] The clear intention was to evince Manifesta's interest in transnational engagement and exchange, and to show that art and its "democracy" was – as it was for many in the Soros network – the cure to the contagion of postcommunist effects that it had thematised: to present art as a 'therapy in progress', to reiterate Francesco Bonami's claim. The problem was, however, that this "contagion" was largely of the curators' own making. The many site- and theme-specific works selected for the exhibition and located throughout the city – from Stalker's translation of a barbed wire border into a helix-shaped play-tunnel (*Transborderline* [2000, fig.3.3]), to Šejla Kamerić's division of one of Ljubljana's main bridges into two halves designated "EU"

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[62] It was not the last either. *Manifesta 5* in 2004 similarly traded on its host-city's presumed connotations, on Donostia-San Sebastian's status as the Basque capital and thus of separatism within Europe. The *Manifesta 6* project in Nicosia also sought to respond to local geopolitics, and particularly the various divisions between Turkish and Greek Cypriots on either side of the 'Green Line' running through Cyprus. The demise of *Manifesta 6* in 2006, just months before its opening, was clearly an act of willful politics on the Greek Cypriot government's part, as Hedwig Fijen accounted to me. The (arguably opportunistic) use of the Green Line for the frontispiece to *Manifesta*'s Christmas card in 2005, however, would not have improved that difficult political position: Conversation with Hedwig Fijen, Amsterdam, 20 October 2006, author's notes.

[63] For the different viewpoints expressed about this point, see the four curators' catalogue essays in the *Manifesta 3* catalogue: Bonami *et al*, above n.9, pp.11-23.

and "OTHERS" (*EU/OTHERS* [2000, fig.3.4]), and Marcus Geiger's repainting of a busy public pathway in garish pink pigment (*Untitled* [2000]) – ensured that Ljubljana *became* symptomatic of the curatorial premise. Curatorial intervention in the cityscape in effect transformed Ljubljana into the city that *Manifesta 3*'s curators – and its target Western audience jetting in from afar – 'wanted to see': a city, a state and a section of Europe suffering psychological disorder. The consequence, then, was a certain kind of hypocrisy, or a calming of Manifesta's own Popperian conscience: the reparative potential of the curators' artistic and "democratic" bridge to '"former Eastern Europe"' was only possible once the curators themselves had abstracted and distorted Ljubljana into the very symptom it sought to heal.

More important, however, was the fact that while this abstraction of Ljubljana endowed *Manifesta 3* with an apparent thematic and geopolitical relevance, it also came at a significant expense – and one shared with the SCCAs. For though *Manifesta*'s newly "democratic" intent was to provide local art circles with alternative infrastructural frameworks and new exhibition opportunities, it largely ignored the thriving alternative arts scenes that existed in Ljubljana and which had, for at least two decades, provided such frameworks and opportunities beyond the narrow confines of the city's state-run museums. Independent galleries such as P74, Kapelica and ŠKUC – indeed, the entire longstanding network of artist-run venues in Ljubljana – were bypassed by Manifesta, which instead co-ordinated the event primarily with representatives from the Slovene Ministry of Culture, and with state-run venues such as the Cankarjev Dom.[64] Manifesta's

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[64] Significant debate occurred within Ljubljana's art circles about this disavowal of the city's independent arts venues. See, for example, Marina Gržinić's claims that both the Slovene government and Manifesta had 'kidnapped' Ljubljana's art history for political interests: Gržinić, 'On the Re-Politicisation of Art', above n.28, pp.479-480. See also the series of interviews conducted with many of the directors of these independent arts venues and published in the first issue of *Platforma SCCA*, including: Gregor Podnar, 'Gregor Podnar, ŠKUC Gallery', *Platforma SCCA*, 1 (2000), available at http://ljudmila.org/scca/platforma1/gregor02.htm [accessed 10 April 2006]; Jurij Krpan, 'Jurij Krpan, Kapelica Gallery', *Platforma SCCA*, 1 (2000), available at http://ljudmila.org/scca/platforma1/krpan02.htm [accessed 10 April 2006]; Tadej Pogačar, 'Tadej Pogačar, Galerija P74', *Platforma SCCA*, 1 (2000), available at http://ljudmila.org/scca/platforma1/tadej02.htm [accessed 10 April 2006]. One of *Manifesta 3*'s Ljubljana-based co-ordinators, Igor Zabel, also questioned the lack of dialogue between Manifesta and Ljubljana's arts venues, for which he blamed both sides of the debate: Igor Zabel, 'Igor Zabel, Co-ordinator of the *Manifesta 3*', *Platforma SCCA*, 1 (2000), available at http://ljudmila.org/scca/platforma1/zabel02.htm [accessed 10 April 2006].

decision to engage almost exclusively with the state and its cultural institutions was perhaps understandable: although the Manifesta board selected Ljubljana as the biennale's host in part because of these strong independent art networks, it was the Slovene government that made the application to host the biennale.[65] The effects, however, were considerable. On the one hand, the curators' aims to manifest "democracy" within Ljubljana did not inject or support independent art networks within the city; it instead resolutely relied on and supported extant state-run institutions, as well as the leading administrative and curatorial figures within them. In short, it re-entrenched the status quo.[66] On the other hand, the Slovene government's budget of nearly €500,000 for *Manifesta 3* precipitated funding reductions for local arts centres such as ŠKUC and P74 the following year.[67] According to P74 director Tadej Pogačar, 'this was not only a missed opportunity' for Manifesta to collaborate with Ljubljana's already-existing independent arts circles; 'it even harmed their long-term commitment to the development of the art scene here'.[68] Indeed, it threatened to undermine the very kinds of independent

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[65] According to Gržinić, the timing and purpose of the Slovene Ministry of Culture's decision to apply for *Manifesta 3* were crucial. As noted in an earlier footnote, the Ministry made its application to the *Manifesta* board in 1997, concurrent with its hosting of festivities for the European Union's Cultural Capitals programme and which, Gržinić has speculated, was designed to support Slovenia's application to join the European Union. For Gržinić, then, the state's application to host *Manifesta 3* was also an attempt to fortify its E.U. application. Despite the persuasiveness of Gržinić's claims, they remain speculative and largely unsupported in the existing secondary literature on *Manifesta 3*: see Gržinić, *ibid*, pp.479-480; as well as her claim that *Manifesta 3* 'was a sign of the approval of the international community, a kind of Schengen agreement in art and culture, demonstrating… that Slovenia could play the game', in Marina Gržinić, untitled commentary in Vanderlinden and Filipović (eds.), above n.18, p.207.

[66] According to Borut Vogelnik from IRWIN, for example, Ljubljana's hosting of *Manifesta 3* 'was very, very positive in terms of a network for [established curators such as] Igor Zabel': see Borut Vogelnik, as cited in Boutoux, 'A Tale of Two Cities', above n.21, p.209;. Jan Verwoert has similarly questioned the mutual investments and support between the Slovenian state and *Manifesta 3*, noting that the exhibition's opening ceremony in a palace owned by former Yugoslav President Tito 'added to the impression that the authorities perceived "Manifesta" to be a prestigious state event': Jan Verwoert, 'Manifesta 3', *Frieze*, 55 (2000), p.114.

[67] In 2007, Tadej Pogačar argued further that funding for independent galleries such as P74 still had not increased to pre-2000 levels, despite more than seven years having passed since *Manifesta 3* took place: Interview with Tadej Pogačar, Ljubljana, 8 November 2007, author's notes. Further details about the Slovenian state's funding cuts after *Manifesta 3* can be found in Podnar, above n.64. Information about the funding breakdown for *Manifesta 3* can be found in 'Mobitel – Major Sponsor of Manifesta 3', *Slovenia Weekly* (28 September 1999), sourced from the *Manifesta 3 Press Folder*, International Foundation Manifesta Archives, Amsterdam.

[68] Tadej Pogačar, as cited in Boutoux, 'A Tale of Two Cities', above n.21, p.211.

programmes and organisations that, at least rhetorically, *Manifesta* aimed to introduce and promote in localised contexts across Europe.

This disavowal of Ljubljana's independent art circles points to a second, further correlation between the SCCAs' and Manifesta's conceptions of "democracy": an understanding of "democracy" as related to time or, more precisely, to history. By rebuffing those art circles in the interests of "democratisation", *Manifesta 3*'s curators equally rebuffed the established and important histories of venues such as ŠKUC. In some cases, these histories reached back to the late-1970s, to the months immediately before the death (in 1980) of the Yugoslav President Josip Tito. It was during this period that Ljubljana's independent and student-run art networks began to develop fully, enabling young and/or nonconformist artists, musicians and writers to produce and present their works outside the state's "official" strictures.[69] The struggle between the Yugoslav state and these networks of nonconformity during the 1980s in particular was, some have argued, a major reason for the state's gradual opening up to heterogeneous discourses in the public sphere, and eventually to the state's implosion under the fracturing weight of political plurality.[70] One could be forgiven for thinking, then, that collaboration with those art networks would provide Manifesta with historical foundations and parallel politics to its own "democratic" programme. That programme, however, was pointed in another direction: toward a future disclosed in exchanges, encounters and networks in the present, and from a present dictated by the new – new and emerging artists, new curators for each edition of this new biennale, a heavy focus on new media, 'a new Europe' as *Manifesta*'s board often iterated, and thus a Europe

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[69] Marina Gržinić, 'Art and Culture in the 80's: The Slovenian Situation', in IRWIN (eds.), *NSK Embassy Moscow: How the East sees the East* (Koper: Loža Gallery, 1993), pp.32-38; Marina Gržinić, *Situated Contemporary Art Practices: Art, Theory and Activism from (the East of) Europe* (Ljubljana: ZRC Publishing, 2004), pp.121-122. For an account of the fractured, formative development of Ljubljana's independent art scene in the late-1960s and early-1970s, especially in relation to the Ljubljana-based art group OHO, see Moderna Galerija, *OHO* (Ljubljana: Moderna Galerija and Frankfurt am Main: Revolver für aktuelle Kunst, 2nd ed., 2007).

[70] Aleš Erjavec, 'Introduction' and 'Neue Slowenische Kunst – New Slovenian Art: Slovenia, Yugoslavia, Self-Management, and the 1980s', in Aleš Erjavec (ed.), *Postmodernism and the Postsocialist Condition: Politicized Art under Late Socialism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), pp.1-54, 135-174; Alexei Monroe, *Interrogation Machine: Laibach and NSK* (Cambridge MA: The MIT Press, 2005), pp.160-176, 209-211.

unsullied and uninterested in the communist past but built instead on 'uncodified experience[s]' that were to be neither rationalised nor deconstructed, as *Manifesta 1*'s curators noted from the outset.[71] It seemingly did not matter whether an artist or curator had, before 1989, conformed to the state or not, or which state that happened to be. The point was to erase as many traces from the past as possible in Manifesta's new interests of "democracy". The point, as *Manifesta 5* curator Marta Kuzma declared, was to spark a rupture from all histories with 'an evental site that anticipates a future'.[72] The point was not to be compromised. Nor was this a point specific to Manifesta. As we saw earlier, the SCCAs sought a similar fissure in its objective of redirecting decommunising Europe toward neoliberal "democracy". The Centers' construction of new cultural infrastructures that in effect disregarded existing independent art scenes such as those in Moscow, their overwhelming preference for funding specifically new media and young artists' projects, even their archive of catalogues and ephemera derived almost exclusively from art events after 1989 – all suggested a new official aesthetic of "democracy" designed to condemn the past to irrelevance and to treat Central and Eastern Europe as a literal investment for the future. "Democracy", in other words, emerged as an amnesic cultural politics for Manifesta and the Soros network alike, a politics in which 1989 signified a kind of "year zero" – or 'zero position' in Marina Gržinić's words – for the triumphalism of the "new European" regime,[73] and a politics in which *Manifesta*'s general disinterest in Ljubljana's cultural and political histories was in many ways exemplary.

Alexander Brener and Barbara Schurz's vehement critiques of *Manifesta 3*, performed on-stage in spray-paint and text as I noted at the start of this section, may therefore not have been far off the mark. Since its conception in 1991, Manifesta has held many undeniably important objectives, whether they be to create cultural infrastructures independent of national or transnational states, or to champion little-known artists from across Europe by presenting their work in major group exhibitions. By the time of its

[71] Rosa Martinez *et al*, 'Declining and Becoming' in Martinez *et al*, *Manifesta 1*, above n.13, p.7.

[72] Marta Kuzma, 'The Staged Matrix', in Kuzma and Gioni (curators), *Manifesta 5*, above n.25, p.39.

[73] Gržinić, *Situated Contemporary Art Practices*, above n.69, p.11.

instalment in Ljubljana in 2000, though, Manifesta – as well as the Soros network that heavily influenced it – had largely transformed those objectives into problematic politics. Its independent foundations had transmogrified into a self-identified transnational corporate organisation. Its attempts to model alternative infrastructures for art threatened the survival of similar efforts already existing in locations like Ljubljana. Even its significant support of young artists was remoulded through ideologies of "newness" and amnesic "democracy". As a consequence, Manifesta may indeed have become but another exponent of the neoliberalist art system, as Brener and Schurz decried.

Nonetheless, while we can pinpoint an element of accuracy in the artists' critiques of Manifesta, this should not give the impression that the *manner* of that critique can provide for fruitful analysis. Their decidedly destructive response did not reveal a productive model for conceiving the 'coming politics', in Giorgio Agamben's words, of the 'struggle between the State and the non-State' that Manifesta proved was central to European art in the 1990s.[74] Instead, that response found itself easily recuperated by the very system it sought to undermine. Although the artists' acts of vandalism were clearly intended to be disruptive, they ultimately emblematised *Manifesta 3*'s problematic curatorial theme of psychological (and especially postcommunist) instability. The years since *Manifesta 3* have also seen those actions devolve into a mere account of scandal, an anecdote relayed to visitors to Manifesta's Amsterdam headquarters, where one of the spray-painted name plaques sits very proudly on display (fig.3.5).[75] In the process, Brener and Schurz have revealed a certain prescience to words of caution directed to Brener in 1996 by Borut Vogelnik from the art group IRWIN. By embodying particular stereotypes of postcommunism, and through reduction to an infamous anecdote, the artists' actions confirmed (as Vogelnik had warned) that '[t]he art world expects you to act on [that] symbolic level. That's what it wants from you'.[76] Their destructive acts, in other words, highlighted the predictability of symbolic aggressions toward new and increasingly

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[74] Agamben, above n.1, p.85.

[75] Conversation with Hedwig Fijen, Amsterdam, 20 October 2006, author's notes.

[76] Borut Vogelnik, in Čufer (ed.), *Transnacionala*, above n.11, p.160.

Europatriarchal institutions like Manifesta – a predictability self-consciously manifest, of course, in the very theme of 'Borderline Syndromes'.

There is, however, a more productive alternative to Manifesta's self-professed 'corporate identity' that I believe we can address here, one that can also be identified and located (though only partially) in Ljubljana. That alternative is the work of the art-collective Neue Slowenische Kunst (or NSK), a group founded in Ljubljana in the early-1980s and whose practice is the subject of the second part of this chapter. As I will argue in the pages that follow, NSK's alternative to Manifesta lies in a particular aspect of the group's practice: in the critiques of amnesic politics and statist bureaucracies that emerged through an enduring and nomadic project of NSK's own. This is a project haunted by communist and nonconformist pasts alike, that combined the critical and the constructive in highly complex ways, and which is called the *NSK Država v Casu*, or the *NSK State in Time*.

A Tale of Two States?

Back in Time

The large-scale dissolution of Europe's communist states after 1989, and the subsequent hypostases of bureaucratic statisms, marked a significant turning-point for NSK as much as it did for many other artists and cultural organisations across the continent. This turning-point did not, however, result in NSK following the paths officiated by the SCCAs or Manifesta and their attempts to reconstruct postcommunist European art in their own image. NSK's turn was instead internal, comprising the recomposition and redirection of its structure and philosophies in light of postcommunist realities. For in 1991, in the same year that Slovenia gained its national independence and that Manifesta was conceived, and just before George Soros launched his new investment strategies, NSK underwent a substantial transformation. Throughout the 1980s, NSK had developed its reputation as an organisation intent on critiquing the nationalist rhetoric and rigid

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bureaucracy of the Yugoslav state; by the end of 1991, that organisation had become a self-declared state of its own. The purpose of this reconstruction, I want to argue, was twofold. First, to provide informed critiques of what NSK member Miran Mohar called art's 'global coding' according to stereotypical presumptions and territorial markers such as "East" and "West" that persisted into the 1990s.[77] And second, to develop and articulate NSK's aesthetic, conceptual and political autonomy from that 'coding' – to map an aesthetic politics that did not disavow but reflected and reflected *upon* postcommunist histories, that could be treated as an equally legitimate aesthetic frame as the 'coding' it critiqued, and yet which did not succumb to isolationism as a panacea for postnationalism. Such ambitious objectives, as well as the decay of the Yugoslav state that it had deconstructed throughout the 1980s, necessitated NSK's radical overhaul. As another NSK member, the aforementioned Borut Vogelnik, ruminated in 2005, NSK's methods in the 1990s were 'directed towards different problems, articulated in a different way' from those of the previous decade.[78] As Vogelnik argued further, though, the recontextualisation of art's 'coding' through reflection upon both European communism and decommunisation could not occur through a practice that radically ignored its own histories. NSK's apparently different methodologies still had their roots in the past: '[t]he NSK State is a formalization of our practices and experience from the eighties', Vogelnik asserted, and 'can be followed in continuity from their very beginning'.[79] We must therefore recall that beginning in order to understand fully the alternative and altered states, as well as the reconstructions of itself and of how to interpret contemporary European art, that NSK presented by the late-1990s.

NSK began in 1984 as a collective of numerous cultural organisations and groups based in Ljubljana, of which five were particularly active: the graphic design studio Novi

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[77] Miran Mohar in IRWIN (eds.), *NSK Embassy Moscow*, above n.69, p.105.

[78] Borut Vogelnik as cited in WHW and IRWIN, 'A Vehicle, a Tool and an Artefact', in Kunsthalle Fridericianum, *Kollektive Kreativität/Collective Creativity* (Frankfurt am Main: Revolver für aktuelle Kunst, 2005), p.240.

[79] Borut Vogelnik as cited in, respectively, Čufer (ed.), *Transnacionala*, above n.11, p.127; and WHW and IRWIN, *ibid*, p.240.

Kolektivizem; the Department of Pure and Applied Philosophy, a group of philosophers led primarily by Peter Mlakar and connected to Slavoj Žižek's then-small but influential circle for Lacanian psychoanalysis; a theatre group focused on myth and religion and initially called the Theater of the Sisters of Scipion Nasice;[80] an Industrial Rock band called LAIBACH; and the art group IRWIN.[81] Each of these organisations served as a discrete department within the collective, performing specific functions that were mapped in the mid-1980s in a series of flow charts (or 'organigrams' as NSK called them [fig.3.6]), and which were reiterated in NSK's official bulletins as late as 1994. LAIBACH, for example, was the provider of NSK's 'ideological foundation'; IRWIN was the collective's chronicler or biographer 'recording NSK archetypes on canvas and in history', while the theatre explored NSK's interests in ritualised politics and aesthetics.[82] Furthermore, each individual and group member was bound by a series of duties enshrined in NSK's constitution (or 'internal book of laws'). These duties governed the collective's presentation as a harmonious whole through the 'renunciation [of] personal tastes, judgements and beliefs', and demanded among other things that members become comrades by 'cherish[ing]… friendly and brotherly love'.[83] NSK, in other words, was not just a collective but a highly-regulated and highly-bureaucratised art machine that mimicked the similarly bureaucratised and 'comradely' Yugoslav state – that worked,

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[80] As the group intended in 1983, the theatre's inaugural name had a lifespan of just four years. In 1987, it was renamed the Cosmokinetic Theater Red Pilot, and later the Cosmokinetic Cabinet Noordung: Monroe, above n.70, pp.89-94.

[81] Readers familiar with NSK's work will know that the names LAIBACH and IRWIN are often written in lower-case letters (as occurs throughout, for example, Inke Arns (ed.), *Irwin: Retroprincip: 1983-2003* (Frankfurt: Revolver für aktuelle Kunst, 2003)). However, the convention in many of NSK's own documents, both during and since the 1980s, was for all letters to be capitalised – a move in keeping with the capitalisation of the acronym NSK and one that arguably reflects NSK's and IRWIN's long-held belief in the power of certain forms and modes of naming (a point to which I will return presently; for immediate purposes, see comments by Borut Vogelnik and Miran Mohar in Čufer and IRWIN (eds.) *NSK Embassy Moscow*, above n.69, pp.91-92; and Čufer (ed.), *Transnacionala*, above n.11, pp.126ff. I have consequently followed the latter convention and capitalised LAIBACH and IRWIN throughout this thesis.

[82] Neue Slowenische Kunst, 'What is NSK?', *NSK Bulletin*, 1 (1994), np; available at http://www.nskstate.com/state/whatis.php [accessed 8 August 2007]. See also Eda Čufer and IRWIN, 'Concepts and Relations', in IRWIN, *Zemljopis Vremena*, above n.2, np. 'Organigram' was shorthand for 'organisational diagram': Monroe, above n.70, pp.106-108.

[83] Neue Slowenische Kunst, *The Internal Book of Laws: Constitution of Membership and Basic Duties of NSK Members* (Ljubljana: NSK, 1985), §11 and 5 respectively; available at http://www.nskstate.com/state/laws.php [accessed 8 August 2007].

NSK claimed, 'in the image of the State' and whose repetitions of it could, perhaps, be mistaken for affirmation.[84]

That image was ultimately not articulated in the Yugoslav state's self-interest, however. As is well-documented, NSK did not slavishly illustrate state ideals in the manner of Socialist Realism. Rather, it self-consciously and controversially combined such illustrations with images from earlier totalitarian regimes, suggesting in the process an ideological continuum between post-Tito Yugoslavia and its oppressive antecedents. LAIBACH's German-language lyrics that praised the state throughout the 1980s, as well as the band's extravagant and exhilarating rally-like concerts and its members' olive militarised uniforms replete with black ties and polished army boots (fig.3.7), consistently looped libidinal investments in its music and the state through the wounds of Yugoslavia's occupation by the Nazis during World War Two.[85] In 1987, the NSK department Novi Kolektivizem won a poster-design competition to celebrate one of Yugoslavia's major public holidays, Youth Day (fig.3.8); only after the competition results were announced – and the collective's poster deemed the best exponent of the state's ideals – was the poster's image declared an appropriation from a pro-fascist painting of 1936 and belatedly withdrawn from the competition.[86] And from their 1984-1985 *Was ist Kunst?* series onwards, IRWIN created paintings that appropriated symbols valorised by the state as nationalistic – such as images of deer or peasant grain sowers – and combined them with historical imagery that was simultaneously redolent of utopianism and totalitarianism (fig.3.9). Most notable here were various images from Kasimir Malevich's Suprematist period that symbolised for NSK– as they did for Ilya Kabakov in the previous chapter (and perhaps Alexander Brener earlier in this chapter) –

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[84] Eda Čufer and IRWIN, 'NSK State in Time', in Laura Hoptman and Tomá Pospiszyl (eds.), *Primary Documents: A Sourcebook for Eastern and Central European Art since the 1950s* (Cambridge MA: The MIT Press, 2002), p.301. For a defence of LAIBACH and IRWIN from claims that they affirmed not only the Yugoslav state but Yugoslav fascism, see Slavoj Žižek, 'Why are Laibach and NSK not Fascists?', republished in the same anthology, pp.285-288. For an analysis of mimicry contemporaneous with and parallel to that of NSK, see Homi K. Bhabha, 'Of Mimicry and Man', *October*, 28 (Spring 1984), pp.125-133; and Homi K. Bhabha, 'Sly Civility', *October*, 34 (Winter 1985), pp.71-80.

[85] Žižek, *ibid*.

[86] Monroe, above n.70, pp.95-98.

Russian revolutionaries' hopes for social change, as well as art's sublation into statist propaganda soon after the events of 1917.[87] NSK in the 1980s was thus decidedly not affirming the state, but sought to deconstruct its heroised codings by replicating those codes and conflating them with past totalitarian symbols. As LAIBACH declared in 1982, as though anticipating NSK's overarching critical methodology, '[a]ll art is subject to political manipulation... except that which speaks the language of the same manipulation'.[88] For only by speaking that same language – only by libidinally investing in quasi-constitutional regulations, or in industrial hymns to the state within the stimulation of the rock concert; only by winning a nationalistic design competition; and only by building an art group's career on the continual replication of nationalistic symbols – could the totalitarian potential within that language be embodied, exceeded and revealed.[89]

Two particular points are essential to draw from this all-too-brief account of NSK's history before 1989. The first relates *to* history – or, more specifically, to NSK's critical methodology and its foundations *in* history. The almost-totalising embodiment of "official" ideology was one, certainly crucial aspect of NSK's deconstruction of the state. However, the explicit force of that deconstruction would not have been possible without the parallel invocation and re-engagement of particular aesthetic and political languages from the past. NSK's dialectical relations between the past and the present in the 1980s – between the re-animation and recontextualisation of historically problematic signifiers within the present, and the concomitant recontextualisation of the present through that

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[87] Interview with Miran Mohar, Andrej Savski and Borut Vogelnik from IRWIN, Ljubljana, 9 November 2007, author's notes. For my earlier elaboration of this particular resignification of Suprematism, see pp.109-111 of this thesis, and Boris Groys, *The Total Art of Stalin: Avant-Garde, Aesthetic Dictatorship, and Beyond*, trans. Charles Rougle (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992).

[88] LAIBACH, 'LAIBACH: Ten Items of the Covenant', in Hoptman and Pospiszyl (eds.), above n.84, pp.294-296.

[89] A number of writers have made similar claims about the work of individual departments within NSK. Inke Arns and Sylvia Sasse, for example, have elegantly described IRWIN's works as forms of 'subversive affirmation': Inke Arns and Sylvia Sasse, 'Subversive Affirmation: On Mimesis as a Strategy of Resistance', in IRWIN (eds.), *East Art Map*, above n.28, pp.444-455. And in response to LAIBACH's paeans to the state, Slavoj Žižek articulated the political potential within acts of 'over-identification' with the state that are not ironic but are so exaggerated as to enact critical dis-identification from it: Žižek, 'Laibach and NSK', above n.84, pp.285-288.

problematic past – were the real crux of NSK's practice. It was this methodology that threaded NSK's departments together, through a unifying 'system of thought' above and beyond those departments' disparate styles and forms or their formal bureaucratised connections, as NSK's Roman Uranjek asserted in retrospect.[90] Indeed, it was this methodology that provided NSK's 'supreme substance', a substance that it elliptically defined in its constitution as the organisation's 'immanent consistent spirit… occupying the uppermost position in the hierarchy of NSK'.[91] And it was a methodology that, despite slight name changes between NSK's departments, was consistently labelled 'retro': a 'retro-avant-garde', according to LAIBACH; a 'retrogarde' for the Sisters of Scipion Nasice; a 'retro principle' in IRWIN's words; and what we might call an overarching 'retro politics' for NSK in general, a politics that reached back and 'buil[t] on reinterpretations, re-creation[s] of past models', as IRWIN once wrote, so as to deconstruct and disaffiliate from the state of the present.[92]

The second point to consider relates to an important by-product of these retro politics. Although NSK's methodology was undoubtedly deconstructive, the desired outcome was thoroughly constructive. Disaffiliation from the state, NSK argued, was a means to identify the organisation's independence and autonomy from "official" ideologies with which it disagreed. Indeed, self-sufficiency and autonomy were the main reasons why organisations like LAIBACH and IRWIN combined to form NSK in the first place. 'The principle in the early 1980s', IRWIN claimed, 'was to achieve a "critical mass" by grouping together. In that way, we could make our own context':[93] a self-defined and self-determined context in which art production, exhibition and interpretation could be

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[90] Roman Uranjek in Čufer and IRWIN (eds.), *Transnacionala*, above n.11, p.41.

[91] Neue Slowenische Kunst, *The Internal Book of Laws*, above n.83, §8. This point was confirmed in an interview conducted with three of the artists in IRWIN: Interview with Miran Mohar, Andrej Savski and Borut Vogelnik, Ljubljana, 9 November 2007, author's notes.

[92] IRWIN, 'Retro Principle: The Principle of Manipulation with the Memory of the Visible Emphasized Eclecticism – The Platform for National Authenticity' (1984), in Hoptman and Pospiszyl (eds.), above n.84, p.300; see also IRWIN, 'The Program of Irwin Group' (1984), in Arns (ed.), *Irwin:Retroprincip*, above n.81, p.148.

[93] IRWIN as cited in Thibaut de Ruyter, 'Irwin: Apprendre à se moquer du monde/Learning to Make Fun of the World', *Art Press*, 302 (June 2004), p.31.

conducted without assimilation into Socialist Realism's parameters. NSK's attempts to create that context were primarily and intentionally aesthetic; their ramifications, however, went much further. By refusing definition within the Yugoslav state's ideologies, as represented in Socialist Realism, NSK suggested that multiple systems of thought could co-exist within the one state – a state that, in the 1980s, was still restrictively governed by single-party politics.[94] NSK's claims to an autonomous existence, in other words, potentially threatened the anti-democratic foundations of post-Tito Yugoslavia. This is not to say, though, that NSK's structure or politics could then be branded as "democratic" themselves. "Democracy" – and particularly its signification in the 1980s, as NSK saw it, in terms of dissidence[95] – was a label the organisation also rejected. "Democracy" was but another readymade form of state politics, one largely alien to the cultures in which NSK worked except as communism's presumed flipside, and which would also threaten NSK's autonomy if the organisation were assimilated within its discourse. 'We have never wanted to operate in the sense of dissident artists', NSK members declared in 1990, a rejection of the label of "dissident" that another NSK stalwart, Dušan Mandić, reiterated in 1996.[96] NSK's retro politics instead attempted to demarcate contexts that were distinct from *any* existing political significations – as a self-realised aesthetic context that was neither national nor international in scope, but

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[94] It should be noted here that Yugoslavia's political system was unique in the communist bloc. Unlike the extraordinarily rigid and totalitarian politics of the Soviet Union or Romania in the 1970s and much of the 1980s, Yugoslavia was governed under the mantra of 'self-management socialism', a putatively looser and (some have argued) more open form of politics than that found in other communist states at the same time. This was, in large part, because of Yugoslavia's geographical distance from Moscow and its adjacency to "Western" countries like Italy. Nonetheless, and like much of the Eastern bloc, Yugoslavia was still a highly policed and single-party state, whose "socialism" may have been "self-managed", but was no less panoptical because of that: see *inter alia* Aleš Erjavec, 'Neue Slowenische Kunst', above n.70, pp.135-174; James Simmie and Jože Dekleva (eds.), *Yugoslavia in Turmoil: After Self-Management?* (London: Pinter Publishers, 1991).

[95] See, *inter alia*, NSK members' discussion about and against being considered dissident in 'Private Conversation in Zion National Park', in Čufer and IRWIN (eds.), *Transnacionala*, above n.11, pp. 124-126; and the reiteration of this scepticism about the label of "dissidence" in Monroe, above n.70, p.112; Inke Arns, 'Irwin Navigator: Retroprincip 1983-2003' and 'Mobile States/Shifting Borders/Moving Entities: The Slovenian Artists' Collective Neue Slowenische Kunst (NSK)' in Arns (ed.), above n.81, pp.11, 24.

[96] See Marina Viculin and IRWIN, 'Interview' (1990), in Arns (ed.), ibid, p.245; and Dušan Mandić in Čufer and IRWIN (eds.), *ibid*, p.125 respectively.

intentionally limited to those departments and affiliates willing to uphold the aesthetic principles set down in NSK's 'internal book of laws'.

In short, these two historical aspects of NSK's practice presented a highly sophisticated programme of withdrawal from the Yugoslav state while physically remaining within Yugoslavia. This was a form of exodus or expatriation from and within Yugoslavia that, in many ways, pre-empted the very similar politics of exodus raised by Italian philosopher Paolo Virno in the mid-1990s. Much as Virno would later describe, NSK rejected being 'put-to-work' in the state's interests.[97] Instead, NSK's replication and interrogation of state ideology through its retro politics prompted both an 'engaged withdrawal' and a 'constructive defection' into an autonomous sphere of self-organisation – an organisation that, as Virno would later advocate, 'not only violates the laws, but also challenges the very foundation of their validity'.[98]

The collapse of those laws after 1989 may consequently be seen as a kind of perverse realisation of NSK's deconstructive programme. The destructive capacity of that collapse, however, was undoubtedly unprecedented. The state's fragmentation and the resultant neo-nationalist genocides not only threatened to destroy the welfare of many of the former-Yugoslavia's constituent nations. On another (and arguably more trivial) level, NSK's constitutive reliance on those laws for its "autonomy" equally threatened to destroy the organisation and its aesthetic politics.[99] According to Slovenian art historian

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[97] Paolo Virno, 'Virtuosity and Revolution: The Political Theory of Exodus', in Michael Hardt and Paolo Virno (eds.), *Radical Thought in Italy: A Potential Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), p.196; Paolo Virno, *A Grammar of the Multitude*, trans. Isabella Bertoletti, James Cascaito and Andrea Casson (New York City: Semiotext(e), 2004), pp.68ff.

[98] For Virno's calls for 'engaged withdrawal' and 'constructive defection', see Virno, 'Virtuosity and Revolution', *ibid*, pp.197, 205; Virno, *A Grammar of the Multitude*, *ibid*, pp.70-71; and, more generally, Branden Joseph, 'Interview with Paolo Virno', *Grey Room*, 21 (Fall 2005), pp.27-37. For the closing quotation, see 'Virtuosity and Revolution', p.198; a close reiteration of this claim can also be found in Paolo Virno, 'About Exodus', trans. Alessia Ricciardi, *Grey Room*, 21 (Fall 2005), p.20, where Virno argues that 'to desert means to modify the conditions within which the conflict is played instead of submitting to them'.

[99] We should also note here that this inability to contemplate the effects of violating state laws and 'challeng[ing] the very foundation of their validity' equally haunts Virno's theories. Indeed, that lack of contemplation threatens to devolve those theories' importance into a mere romanticism that resolutely requires the political status quo so as to maintain its significance.

Aleš Erjavec, this is in a sense what happened. The dissolution of Yugoslavia, he claimed, equally diminished NSK's significance to art history in the 1990s.[100] I would argue against this view, though, for it ignores the important effects that emerged from NSK's various remobilisations after 1991. The first, as already mentioned, was NSK's transformation from an art organisation to the NSK State, so as to replicate the new state formations emerging throughout Europe during decommunisation. The NSK State subsequently underwent another remobilisation in 1992, a literal mobilisation in that it began travelling across national borders for the purposes of exhibition as a State.[101] Member departments of NSK had travelled frequently and widely before 1992: LAIBACH had toured Europe and America since the mid-1980s; IRWIN had journeyed to many cities across the globe including Sydney for the 1988 Australian Biennale and, soon after, New York for a residency. But it was the State's month-long stay in Moscow in May 1992, upon an invitation from three Moscow-based curators including Viktor Misiano, that proved particularly significant to NSK's redevelopment. For it was in Moscow that international audiences were introduced to the new form of the NSK State – through the first embassy of the *NSK Država v Času* – and to the adaptation of its retro politics of exodus to the ideological contexts and codings of the new states of Europe.

History Repeating

The Moscow invitation was an anomaly within the rising tide of amnesia sweeping Europe by the early-1990s, for it was premised on an apparent anachronism. It involved staging an exhibition in a Moscow apartment, as part of a year-long series of such projects, so as to reiterate within early-postcommunist contexts the models of Apartment Art that had been central to Eastern Europe's nonconformist practitioners in previous decades. Such histories were familiar to NSK members, including IRWIN to whom the

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[100] Aleš Erjavec, 'Neue Slowenische Kunst', above n.70, p.170.

[101] See also Borut Vogelnik's comments that 'NSK's movement is already enabled by the mere osmosis between NSK as a group and NSK as a state': cited in Eda Čufer, 'The Symptom of the Vehicle', in Arns (ed.), above n.81, p.194.

invitation was initially directed, given their frequent exhibition and discussion of art in private apartments in Ljubljana and elsewhere during the 1980s.[102] Those histories proved central to the *NSK Embassy Moscow* as well. During the *Embassy*'s month-long existence, NSK and guests including Misiano, Marina Gržinić and Moscow-based philosopher Valeri Podoroga repeated many of the activities that had underpinned past Apartment Art. They delivered lectures, held forums and critically examined a wide range of subjects, such as IRWIN's paintings from the *Was ist Kunst?* series that dotted the rented apartment, as well as past and future understandings of Apartment Art itself (fig.3.10). This series of discussions and lectures was the main thrust of NSK's work. Instead of a merely nostalgic or hollow repetition of nonconformist practices, NSK and the Moscow curators sought to re-evaluate the importance of Apartment Art in Moscow and Ljubljana before 1989, using Apartment Art-style conversations to tease out the correlations and differences between the cities' "unofficial" aesthetics. In so doing, participants could determine whether Apartment Art could or even *should* be revived 'to offer another model of [art's] internationalization', as Misiano and his colleagues had suggested in their initial invitation to IRWIN.[103]

Among the many conclusions reached during that month, three stood out as affecting the NSK State the most. The first was that if Apartment Art – or indeed, any model from the history of Eastern European art practices – were to be revived, it could only be in a knowingly remediated form to fit changed times. That is, if postcommunist art practices, perspectives and histories were to avoid being ignored or eradicated in the new Europe, or the so-called "new world order", then they needed to be interrogated and recontextualised in relation to that order. This did not mean that they were to be

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[102] *Was ist Kunst?* was first shown in a Ljubljana apartment in 1985, an exhibition hang partially replicated in Moscow; IRWIN also claimed that the idea of working within a remodelled form of Apartment Art stemmed from their sharing of an apartment during their New York residency in the late-1980s. See Marina Gržinić, 'Transcentrala of Exorcism', in IRWIN, *Zemljopis Vremena*, above n.2, np; and Miran Mohar's comments in 'Summary of the Discussion: Two Concepts: Apt-Art and Irwin-NSK Embassy Moscow', in Čufer and IRWIN (eds.), *NSK Embassy Moscow*, above n.69, p.53.

[103] Lena Kurlandzeva, Viktor Misiano and Konstantin Zvezdochtov, Correspondence to IRWIN, 15 February 1991, in IRWIN (eds.), *NSK Embassy Moscow*, *ibid*, p.7. For an analysis of the purported 'hollowing-out' of past practices in later periods, I direct readers again to Peter Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, trans. Michael Shaw (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984).

assimilated into normative transnational and neoliberal systems. Rather, the continued relevance of those practices was to be analysed and engaged through perspectives from both within and outside local contexts. This was a pivotal determination realised during the Moscow discussions and enshrined in one of the *Embassy*'s main outcomes, an art-treaty of sorts called the 'Moscow Declaration' that NSK and other *Embassy* participants signed on May 26, 1992. Two principles drew particular attention in the Declaration. First, that '[t]he history, experience and time and space of Eastern countries of the 20th century cannot be forgotten, hidden, rejected or suppressed'; and second, that '[t]he former East does not exist any more: the new Eastern structure can only be made by reflecting on the past which has to be integrated in a mature way in the changed present and future'.[104] The 'new Eastern structure' of art making and exhibition, in other words, was to be derived from both experience and analysis of the present and the recent past.

This was exemplified in practice by the *Embassy* and its remediation of Apartment Art as a 'live installation', according to NSK member Eda Čufer.[105] What Čufer meant by her deceptively complex description was that the *Embassy* was not a typical example of 1980s' Apartment Art, but a reproduction of its settings and its methods, a space in which the experiences and memories of nonconformist pasts could be recirculated, restaged and critically examined. The *Embassy* was thus a quasi-simulation that set the apartment's familiar intimacy within brackets for analysis, with participants role-playing their own recent histories in an uncanny replication of past aesthetic politics. As some of NSK's other members later recounted, this process induced a momentary shock of self-consciousness and dislocation: a shock of seeing and performing in the re-evaluation of one's past, and thereby of reviewing oneself as though anamorphically from the perspective of another.[106] That sense of dislocation in turn allowed for a space of

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[104] NSK *et al*, 'Moscow Declaration', reprinted in *ibid*, p.46.

[105] Eda Čufer, 'Introduction', in *ibid*, p.3.

[106] Interview with Miran Mohar, Andrej Savski and Borut Vogelnik, Ljubljana, 9 November 2007, author's notes. For Savski in particular, the experience of the *NSK Embassy Moscow* was 'like seeing yourself on film'. This was not the first time anamorphosis had emerged in the work of NSK or one of its departments. The late Ljubljana-based critic Igor Zabel briefly noted the appearance (perhaps, curiously, the reproduction) of anamorphosis in IRWIN's 1984-1985 painting *The Resurrection of the Sisters of Scipion Nasice*: see Igor Zabel, 'Two Essays on Space, Time, and Utopia' in Zdenka Badovinac (ed.), *Marjetica*

reflection and feedback on those lived histories and their equally lived restaging, as a means to transform those subjective histories into an object of investigation. And while that investigation was conducted in the shared interests of re-establishing the international relevance of Eastern European art, it too was dislocated by the differing views and perspectives brought by participants from the markedly different contexts of Slovenia and Russia. NSK members found themselves presenting and discussing their practice to audiences largely unfamiliar with it, while some Russian participants dismissed Ljubljana and its art scenes as too "Western" because of the city's geographical distance from Moscow.[107] The 'new Eastern structure' was thus not informed by a rigidly defined aesthetic based on a single regional identity. It sought instead to dislocate any such rigidity, presenting experiences and individual analyses that occasionally conflicted so much that, in Viktor Misiano's words, 'communication hardly remains possible'.[108]

The second conclusion to emerge from the *Embassy*'s month-long discussions was that, for this dislocated aesthetic structure to be considered equal with other interpretive frames during the unequal times of the 1990s, it required an appearance of formal legitimacy. Borut Vogelnik was particularly vocal in this regard. 'A well-developed theory would give us the legitimacy to name various phenomena', he believed, because '[t]he West has built its monopoly in art by its strategies of naming, by its launching of "isms"'.[109] This was not, he argued further, 'because we would want to oppose the West, but because we are looking for a real space for operation', one that recognised Eastern European art's spectral histories and that could be autonomous from and parallel to other

Potrč/Padiglione NSK – Irwin: 45 Esposizione Internazionale d'Arte: Padiglione della Slovenia, exh. cat. (Ljubljana: Moderna Galerija, 1993), np.

[107] For example, Aleksandr Yakimovich, 'The Cultural Codes of Totalitarianism', in IRWIN (eds.), *NSK Embassy Moscow*, above n.69, p.23; Anatoly Osmolovsky cited in 'Summary of the Discussion: Following the Lecture of Aleksandr Yakimovich', *ibid*, p.29; Oleg Kulik cited in 'Summary of the Discussion: Two Concepts: Apt-Art and Irwin-NSK Embassy Moscow', *ibid*, pp.59-60.

[108] Viktor Misiano in 'Summary of the Discussion: Following the Lecture of Aleksandr Yakimovich', *ibid*, p.31.

[109] Borut Vogelnik in 'A Conversation with Iosif Bakshtein', *ibid*, p.91.

aesthetic theories.[110] In part, that drive for a legitimate yet autonomous logic underpinned NSK's creation of contexts distinct from state-sponsored art in the 1980s. It had also propelled the formulation of 'Eastern Modernism', a theory that IRWIN first presented in the catalogue for their 1991 exhibition, *Kapital*, to describe contemporary art from postcommunist Europe.[111] NSK's practice was clearly a crucial component of Eastern Modernism, especially given IRWIN's status as an equally vital department of NSK. Nonetheless, NSK's particular 'space for operation' sought the appearance of legitimacy not (just) through an 'ism', as Vogelnik claimed, but most obviously in the form of a state and its literal space for operation: the embassy. The move was undoubtedly counter-intuitive, and one paralleled by Manifesta's similar shift seven years later in 1999. As was the case with the European biennale, NSK's explicit alignment with extant state bureaucracies, so as to authorise and legitimise its "independent" aesthetic practice and transnational mobilisation, seemed inherently contradictory. This was certainly true of Manifesta: as we can recall, the biennale's formal registration and institutionalisation as a self-proclaimed 'corporate identity' effectively eviscerated its (by then, quite weak) claims to provide an independent infrastructure for art practice and exhibition. If NSK's alignment with state formations was equally strategic, however, it was for antithetical reasons. Its legitimation through the state and as a state was, unlike Manifesta, emphatically not an endpoint, but rather a point from which to begin the corrosion of resurgent European statism – in art as much as politics – from within. Understanding how to enact that corrosion was central to the third conclusion to be reached from the NSK State's excursion to Moscow, a conclusion that hinged on territory and temporality. For if the new European states – and, by the late-1990s, both Manifesta and the SCCAs – increasingly disavowed history for the sake of specific territorial interests, NSK responded by corroding territory with time.

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[110] Borut Vogelnik in 'A Conversation with Yuri Leiderman', *ibid*, p.108; see also Vogelnik's claim in 1996 that '[n]aming is important. The act of naming puts you in a position of authority': Vogelnik in Čufer and IRWIN (eds.), *Transnacionala*, above n.11, p.126.

[111] IRWIN, *Kapital*, exh. cat. (Edinburgh: Co-Laborator, 1991).

At first glance, this seems like an odd claim to make. In a sense, the NSK State's relocation to Moscow, and to other cities in Europe and Asia thereafter, was resolutely territorial, occupying spaces internationally for the development of NSK embassies (as with Moscow in 1992, Ghent in 1993 and Sarajevo in 1995), or consulates (Florence in 1993; Umag, Croatia in 1994 [fig3.11]). NSK space was often demarcated by other signifiers typical of internationally-recognised nation-states as well. The NSK State had its own flag, for instance, which adorned the exteriors of each embassy and consulate from Moscow onwards. In the *NSK Garda* series (1993–), NSK raised its flag in such locations as the former-East German army's training ground in Suhl (1993), and in Zagreb (2000), Graz (2001) and Priština (2002, fig.3.12); on each occasion, the flag was guarded by officers from local armies, whose armbands bore NSK's insignia of a black cross appropriated from Malevich.[112] Civilians could apply for NSK passports after the 1993 opening of an NSK passport office in Amsterdam – and could only access the symposia and rock concerts in the *NSK Staat Berlin* (1993, fig.3.13) upon presentation of an NSK passport or visa (both, fortunately, available at the entrance to Berlin's Volksbühne theatre that the NSK State occupied).[113] Even Marina Abramović was claimed as NSK territory in the 1998 photograph *Namepickers* (fig.3.14), in which the NSK armband-clad Abramović lay prostrate on a bed and surrounded by the artists of IRWIN in various states of undress.

As this last example suggests, however, if the NSK State appeared to be absolutely territorial in intent, it was an appearance that NSK sought to make fragile at the same time through the absurdity of many of its territorial occupations. The Umag consulate, for example, conducted State operations from a gallery director's domestic kitchen amid the

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[112] In Kyoto in 2003, Japanese salary-men replaced members of the armed forces, reflecting the limited capacity of the Japanese armed forces under international law after World War Two, and as a tongue-in-cheek sign that Japanese actual army was its commercial workforce. An excellent analysis of the *NSK Garda Kyoto* can be found in Gržinić, *Situated Contemporary Art Practices*, above n.69, p.18.

[113] Neue Slowenische Kunst, 'NSK Staat Berlin', available at
http://www.nskstate.com/state/events/berlin.php [accessed 8 August 2007]; Neue Slowenische Kunst, 'NSK Staat Berlin', in Arns (ed.), above n.81, p.39. Other NSK insignia and statist symbols included postage stamps that could not be used outside the NSK State – and thus could not, in effect, be used at all – calendars and even scarves bearing the Malevich cross: see *inter alia*, Steven Heller, 'Art of the State', *Print*, 57/3 (May-June 2003), pp.46-47.

flurry of meal preparations.[114] The professional guards' daily duties were redirected to defend flags that often stood in unexpected locations – an apartment block forecourt in Priština, or a rooftop in Zagreb – and for no apparent reason, given no other State activity was taking place nearby. More importantly, though, that fragility was accentuated by the very brief lifespans of the State's formal manifestations. The NSK passports usually expired within days of their acquisition, transforming bureaucratic utility into an art souvenir with calculated rapidity.[115] NSK's territorial occupations were often similarly brief: whereas the *NSK Embassy Moscow* survived for a month, the *NSK Staat Berlin* existed for four days, the Amsterdam passport office for three and the claim to Abramović for the duration of the photo-shoot. As its revised name of the *Država v Casu* suggested, the NSK State was not so much a state of territory as a state that existed in a limited span of time, lasting only as long as the discussions and presentations given by the State's participants.[116]

This was not the only sense of time to corrode normative notions of the state. Of equal importance were the various reanimated anachronisms that informed the *Država v Casu* and which violated the new Europe's seeming imperatives – dare we follow Virno and call them 'laws'? – for postcommunist states to radically disavow all facets of their past for a shared "democratic" future.[117] The remodelling of 1980s' Apartment Art into the

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[114] Marina Gržinić in particular has labelled the location of a (pseudo) consulate in a busy family kitchen as 'scandalous': see Gržinić, 'Transcentrala of Exorcism', above n.102, np.

[115] This point can still be argued despite or alongside claims that, even after their expiration, the NSK passports maintained their utility in certain unexpected and extraordinary circumstances. Most notable here are claims, made after the *NSK Embassy Sarajevo* in 1995, that some people used NSK passports successfully to cross national borders, and thereby flee the genocide and property destruction occurring within Bosnia at the time: see Monroe, above n.70, p.255. These claims were confirmed by IRWIN members during a 2007 interview with the author: Interview with Miran Mohar, Andrej Savski and Borut Vogelnik, Ljubljana, 9 November 2007, author's notes. As Vogelnik argued further – in both amazement and incomprehension – the vast majority of requests for NSK passports after 2000 were no longer coming from art collectors or museums, but from members of the Nigerian public who had learned of the passports' existence through NSK's website.

[116] Or, in their own slightly more cryptic words, the NSK *Država v Casu*'s 'borders are in a state of flux in accordance with the movements and changes in its symbolic and physical collective body': Eda Čufer and IRWIN, 'NSK State in Time', in IRWIN, *Zemljopis Vremena*, above n.2, np.

[117] This focus on anachronisms is surprisingly bypassed in accounts by two of NSK's pre-eminent biographers, Inke Arns and Marina Gržinić. Both Arns and Gržinić have instead claimed that the *Država*'s

NSK Embassies in Moscow and elsewhere was certainly the most explicit of these anachronisms, but it was not an isolated example. That very process of re-modelling past aesthetics was itself anachronistic, for it was a process that marked a return to and a replication of NSK's own nonconformist aesthetic politics that it defined in the 1980s as 'retro' – a past politics of reinterpretation and reanimation that was in turn reanimated within the much-changed circumstances of postcommunist Europe. In other words, what NSK began to perform was a calculated restaging of the historical, a remobilisation of their past 'retro politics' or what we might even call a retro politics of 'retro politics'. Much like the reanimations in the *NSK Embassy Moscow* of Apartment Art histories or in NSK's earlier practice, this return to retro politics suggested that a continuum existed between past and present objectives. It was a continuum with a twist, though, for the main purpose of this reanimation was no longer to suggest an ideological continuum between past and present forms of state or geo-politics (between Nazism and communism, for example, or between communism and postcommunism). Instead, the continuum was of NSK's own objectives across time and contexts. This could be seen as a formal continuity, in that both modes of retro politics involved formally simulating historical aesthetics as well as the logic of the state: by simulating both Suprematism and Nazism as well as Yugoslavia's political bureaucracy in the 1980s; and in the 1990s by concurrently simulating resurgent postcommunist statisms and aesthetics from late-communism. More importantly, this continuity could be seen through NSK's continuous purpose of deconstructing the state and its conditions of disavowal, its determined amnesia, precisely *through* those historical formations and their ongoing relevance to more contemporary socio-political situations.

These still-relevant histories rested on a further crucial difference, however, a difference marked by content as much as context. The key to this was that the *Država v Casu* did

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dematerialization through time hinged on its replication of tropes from new media and the Internet – tropes which thereby threaten to consign the *Država* to philosophical alignment with the Soros network and its amnesic neoliberalism and which consignment, I believe, largely counters the *Država*'s critical programme: see Grzinić, *Situated Contemporary Art Practices*, above n.69, pp.13-21; Gržinić, *Fiction Reconstructed: Eastern Europe, Post-socialism and the Retro-Avantgarde* (Vienna: edition selene, 2000), pp.203-218; Inke Arns, 'Irwin (NSK) 1983-2002: From *Was ist Kunst?* via "Eastern Modernism" to *Total Recall*' (2002), in Arns (ed.), above n.81, pp.89-91.

not present an absolute repetition of NSK's retro agenda from the 1980s. During that period, we can remember, NSK returned to what it perceived as overtly traumatic aesthetics from the distant past – from Nazi occupation or the wake of 1917 – as the basis for its explicit critique and implicit reconstruction of social conditions for aesthetic production. Reconstruction, in other words, was chiefly a by-product of NSK's critique of the Yugoslav state's aesthetics. By the 1990s, NSK's focus had changed. Through the revival of a different kind of history, one largely excluded under postcommunism and late-communism alike, NSK began to emphasise reconstruction as the *Država*'s primary goal, rather than a by-product of critique. That history belonged to late-communist nonconformity – and more precisely, to the various *potentialities* contained within nonconformity toward late-communist oppression. These were the explicitly constructive potentials of creating autonomous aesthetic contexts that were, as we saw earlier, both self-defined and self-determined in the 1980s. They were also potentials that emerged in different locations and in different ways throughout communist Europe (as Apartment Art, as 'retro politics'), but whose shared histories and perspectives of autonomy could be grouped together under postcommunist histories. Most significant, though, was a third potentiality that could arise from bringing these distinct yet parallel pasts and their self-determined aesthetics into conversation in a later period of history. For through this process of conversation and conjunction, through informed critique of dominant social conditions, new forms of constructive autonomy and nonconformity could potentially develop potency in the 1990s.

This was not, of course, nonconformity to defunct local communisms, but rather nonconformity transposed to Europatriarchal ambitions – ambitions that NSK's peripatetic State replicated in order to undo, to unravel or, as Paolo Virno and Jean-Luc Nancy might say, to 'unwork' in a number of ways.[118] This was, after all, a State whose legitimacy was formalised through consular offices but unworked through brevity and absurdity, and a State that haunted amnesic codings with late-communist spectres of

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[118] See the aforementioned references to Virno, above n.97 and 98; Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Inoperative Community*, trans. Peter Connor, Lisa Garbus, Michael Holland and Simona Sawhney (Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 1991).

trauma and hope. Similarly, the State's autonomy as a 'new Eastern structure' may have been informed by international perspectives and histories of nonconformity, but the differences between these historical perspectives often led to vehement disputes between the *Država*'s participants to the point of miscommunication. Consequently, the *Država* was a State whose members were not connected by amicability of friendship *per se*, as Viktor Misiano claimed,[119] but by yet another anachronism: by *comradeship* revivified through a shared forum for communicating and analysing one's historical experiences that had become dislocated in time, excluded by Europatriarchal pressures in politics and culture, and that had been equally excluded under late-communism as well. In other words, what the *Država* formalised was a comradeship driven by the perpetual destabilisation of a coherent identity – what we may even call a comradeship driven toward *non*-identity, following the analysis of Ilya Kabakov's work in Chapter Two – but within which lay still-unrealised potential. The potential, as Borut Vogelnik described it, of being 'excluded from the excluded'.[120]

Vogelnik's words were carefully chosen. They clearly signified the double displacement of nonconformist histories, their dual exclusion from both the communist past and postcommunist amnesia toward any pre-1989 history. At the same time, 'exclusion from the excluded' was emphatically not the same as exclusivity or inclusion either, whether that be separatism from other social or aesthetic situations throughout Europe or assimilation into them. To be 'excluded from the excluded' thus indicated a refusal of both one's exclusion from the status quo and assimilation within it. It signified a more complex position of articulating another, self-instituted position that was distinct from, yet thoroughly engaged with, dominant social, aesthetic and political conditions. The *Država* exemplified this more complex understanding of doubled exclusion. Its exodus from Europatriarchal conditions was, like NSK's exodus within Yugoslavia, a withdrawal conducted through engagement with those conditions and, more concretely, with people from contexts as diverse as Moscow, Florence and Berlin. Its exodus was, as a

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[119] Viktor Misiano, 'The Institutionalization of Friendship', in Čufer (ed.), *Transnacionala*, above n.11, pp.182-192.

[120] Borut Vogelnik, 'The Retroavantgarde' (2000), in Arns (ed.), above n.81, p.214.

consequence, a kind of fieldwork research designed to inform NSK of other locales and perspectives and, through that research, to enrich NSK's own contexts of production – to create an autonomy that was informed of and by parallel contexts of art making and interpretation, but not subsumable within them. Nonetheless, while this informed autonomy allows us to recognise how NSK functioned collectively in the early-1990s – to locate its dislocations, in a sense – it still leaves an important question unanswered: what exactly was the critical potential of being 'excluded from the excluded'? Did it have a purpose beyond establishing a space for postcommunist artists and writers to discuss their particular histories, or to rail against Western discourses, actions and interventions within postcommunist Europe?

For the industrial-rock group LAIBACH, the answer to this last question was predominantly negative. To an extent, LAIBACH's music videos from the mid-1990s showed a continued association with NSK and its redevelopment through dialogue, diplomacy and the *Država v Casu*. LAIBACH concluded its clip for *The Final Countdown* (1994), for instance, with an animated image of hundreds of *Država* passports hurtling through space toward an imagined (a literally non-existent and extra-terrestrial) *NSK Embassy Mars*. It also continued to hold performances as part of NSK's *Embassies* in Berlin in 1993 and Sarajevo in 1995. In its music, however, LAIBACH rejected models of diplomacy so as to vehemently condemn Western offensives in postcommunist Europe. Throughout the 1990s, LAIBACH often replicated the West's commerce in reprising old pop songs, appropriating tracks such as Europe's *The Final Countdown* (1986) or Zager and Evans' 1969 chart-topper *2525*, and remixing them with a techno backbeat, gravelly singing and lyrics connoting war so as to suggest fascist undertones to Western fashions and commercial interventions. The songs were often presented in concerts that continued LAIBACH's aesthetic from the 1980s of Nuremberg-style rallies, with band members donning the same Nazi-era uniforms but singing in English rather than German as the new language of aggression. Most overtly, however, LAIBACH presented its 1994 CD *NATO* as an attack on selective Western military involvement in the former-Yugoslavia and its escalation of war there in the name

of humanitarian and "democratic" intervention.[121] The CD's sleeve-notes (fig.3.15), for instance, provided an obituary for NATO as 'an alliance designed to prevent aggression or repel it', and declared dead NATO's 'indefinite duration' of 'seek[ing] to promote stability, security and well-being in the North Atlantic area'. The CD's penultimate track was the reprise of Zager and Evans' *2525*, but with lyrics revised to lament the global destruction of territory and diplomacy through war during the 1990s (and which included LAIBACH's apocalyptic forecast that 'in the year 1999, war destroys the last skyline'). Its final track was based on Stanislav Binički's *Marš na Drinu (March on the River Drina)*, a Serbian war anthem remixed by LAIBACH with industrial drumbeats and bass as a nihilistic declaration that the Balkan Wars had become mere pop entertainment for audiences outside the conflict zone.[122]

LAIBACH's dismissal of Western interventionist rhetoric and actions within decommunising Europe was, however, at odds with other NSK departments. It particularly conflicted with the philosophy of IRWIN, which assumed most of the

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[121] A number of political scientists and other writers would not necessarily have disagreed with LAIBACH's view of NATO intervention in the former-Yugoslavia in the 1990s. Peter Gowan has been arguably the most vociferous critic of NATO's interventions in Europe. Gowan declared NATO's role in the Balkans to be governed by Western countries' self-interest, with Croatia's and Serbia's claims to national independence (and acts of ethnic cleansing) serving as pawns in broader international relations between the pro-Bosnian United States and leading member countries of the European Union, such as the pro-Croatian Germany. 'The story of Western involvement in the region', Gowan concluded, 'is obscured by a poisonous Western imperial propaganda… [whose aim is] to use the region as a theatre for their power-politics'. By contrast Zoltan Barany, writing in the conservative *Journal of Democracy*, declared NATO intervention to be a democratising force throughout decommunising Europe, and NATO accession to be a reward for countries' neoliberal democratisation. See Zoltan Barany, 'NATO's Peaceful Advance', *Journal of Democracy*, 15/1 (January 2004), pp.63-76; compared with Peter Gowan, 'The NATO Powers and the Balkan Tragedy', *New Left Review*, 234 (March-April 1999), pp.83-105. See also legal theorist Anne Orford's scathing critique of NATO intervention in Anne Orford, *Reading Human Intervention: Human Rights and the Use of Force in International Law* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003). A number of similar views to Gowan's have also emerged in contemporary art historical writing: see, for example, Boris Buden, 'Saving Private Havel', in Pejić and Elliott (eds.), *After the Wall*, above n.3, pp.97-99; David McNeill, 'The Sincerest Form of Flattery', in Artspace, *IRWIN: Like to Like*, exh. cat. (Sydney: Artspace, 2004), p.10.

[122] This line of argument was affirmed by members of IRWIN during an interview with the author, especially in relation to LAIBACH's performance of *Marš na Drinu* at the *NSK Embassy Sarajevo* in the midst of the Balkan Wars. As the IRWIN interviewees claimed, that performance was particularly controversial, given the song's derivation from a Serbian war anthem and its anti-NATO intent, played out in the midst of Serbian and NATO interventions in Bosnia in the early- to mid-1990s: Interview with Miran Mohar, Andrej Savski and Borut Vogelnik, Ljubljana, 9 November 2007, author's notes.

responsibility for the *Država v Casu* by the mid-1990s. For LAIBACH, it seemed, any alternative to NATO and Europatriarchal involvements in Eastern Europe, whether socio-economic or military, necessitated criticism of those involvements to the point of hostility: LAIBACH actively opposed, so as to exclude themselves from, such interventions, even going so far as to represent their extra-territorial separation from the grounds of Europatriarchy by journeying to Mars in *The Final Countdown*. For IRWIN, by contrast, simple acts of negation, criticism and exclusion were insufficient. Rather than maintain a binary of exclusion and assimilation, IRWIN's members sought to displace themselves from both positions, to be 'excluded from the excluded' so as to articulate a third, self-instituted position that could unwork binaristic thinking. It was this alternative approach – at once critical and constructive, doubly excluded yet self-determined – that underlay IRWIN's thinking in the 1990s, and whose potentialities became most prominent within the *Država* once IRWIN assumed its leadership. Two concerns were particularly at stake in this approach, both of which I will address in the final section of this chapter. The first was to remobilise the *Država*'s informed autonomy beyond Europe's coastline, to transform its deconstructive and reconstructive scope into a global rather than a strictly European phenomenon. It was with this scope in mind that NSK declared, in its 'Thesis of the NSK State' and in mimicry of similar comments made by LAIBACH in 1982, that '[e]very art is… in the service of global authority, except that which subjects global authority to its own rule'.[123] And it was with the aim of critiquing art's servitude to 'global authority' – its 'global coding' as Miran Mohar called it, or 'internationalism in contemporary art' in the words of Eda Čufer[124] – that led to the *Država* becoming literally mobile, travelling across the United States from Atlanta to Seattle as a new 'live installation' titled *Transnacionala* (1996, fig.3.16). The second manifestation of NSK's potential comprised the creation of a collection of modernist and contemporary art from Central and Eastern Europe. As we shall see, although these two concerns may initially seem very different, they were in fact inextricable. Both were

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[123] Neue Slowenische Kunst, 'Thesis of the NSK State', §3, available at http://www.nskstate.com/state/thesis.php [accessed 8 August 2007].

[124] Miran Mohar in IRWIN (eds.), *NSK Embassy Moscow*, above n.69, p.105; Čufer cited in 'Discussion at the Castle', in Čufer (ed.), *Transnacionala*, above n.11, p.19.

oriented toward simultaneously localised and globalised contexts of art making and analysis; both entailed the public presentation rather than just the private discussion of the *Država v Času*'s autonomy; and both explicitly revealed that autonomy as an alternative to some of the problematic enfoldings of aesthetics and politics identified in this thesis.

Travelling, Collecting, Recollecting

Transnacionala was in many ways a reframing of the *NSK Embassy Moscow* on the highways of America. Over the course of a month in June-July 1996, IRWIN and Eda Čufer, along with filmmaker Michael Benson and three artists from Moscow (including the ubiquitous Alexander Brener), crammed themselves into two 1970s-style campervans and travelled across the United States. Along the way, the artists conducted discussions between each other and with people from different American cities about the conditions in which local and postcommunist art were produced and interpreted (fig.3.17). As with the Moscow *Embassy*, the aim of *Transnacionala* was not to assimilate a particular context of production within the discursive frames of another. Nor was it about the mediation of art practice or artistic identity by others, whether politically – and especially in terms of nationality or news events such as the 1989 revolutions – or through what Čufer called 'a curator-formulated concept'.[125] Instead, *Transnacionala* approximated a sociological study of subjectivity based on direct, face-to-face conversations with others in the campervans and in galleries across America. Three particular purposes stood out. First, to dispel the artists' own presumptions about contemporary America and what IRWIN called its 'myth making that had determined our ideas and dreams of America since childhood'.[126] Second, to engage with audience members' perceptions about Eastern European art practice and social conditions, so as to review those lived conditions in an anamorphic way through the perspectives of others (a technique familiar, as we saw

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[125] Eda Čufer, 'Notes after Interstate', in Čufer (ed.), *ibid*, p.9.

[126] IRWIN, 'IRWIN Live and Transnacionala: A Journey from the East to the West Coast', in Mary Jane Jacob and Michael Brenson (eds.), *Conversations at the Castle: Changing Audiences and Contemporary Art* (Cambridge MA: The MIT Press, 1998), p.68.

earlier, from the anamorphic perspective of Apartment Art engaged in the Moscow *Embassy*). And third, to dispel and to shift (or, to borrow another term from Nancy, to *interrupt*) any of the audience members' inaccurate or mythified presumptions about IRWIN's practice, the artists' identities or postcommunist contexts of production.[127]

This mutual shift in perspective through direct rather than mediated engagement found one outlet in a work that IRWIN first showed in Atlanta to inaugurate *Transnacionala*, and which it called *IRWIN Live* (1996, figs.3.18-3.19). Upon entering the gallery, audience members came across a sculptural tableau in which the five members of IRWIN hung precariously from the ceiling by metal threads, each facing upwards to look at their paintings screwed to the ceiling plane. Viewers in turn needed to retrain their perspective away from the wall and toward the ceiling as well if they wanted to perceive IRWIN's work properly. This was a largely symbolic presentation of IRWIN's intents, a literal dramatisation of the artists and their audiences sharing a retrained perspective in order to perceive the practice and artistic context of another. As the inaugural work of *Transnacionala*, however, *IRWIN Live* pinpointed the aims and presented the entrée to IRWIN's month-long road-trip. For it was the enactment of similar kinds of perceptual shifts through the public forums themselves that provided *Transnacionala*'s conceptual hinge, one that ultimately worked against some of the dominant interpretations made to date of NSK's work.

Of particular relevance here are the analyses of *Transnacionala* provided by Viktor Misiano. While Misiano shares my belief that the crux of NSK's project lay in its forums, our conclusions about their effects are almost diametrically opposed. As late as 2006, Misiano declared these forums to be a site of convivial interaction through which to build bridges and relationships between participants. Through 'acts of voluntary group therapy' and the mere existence of communication between people from different social backgrounds, Misiano claimed, the *Država v Času* 'fully meets the criteria [Nicolas]

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[127] For Nancy's discourse on 'myth interrupted' as a process of 'unworking', see Nancy, *The Inoperative Community*, above n. 118, pp.43-70. For a parallel analysis of Ilya Kabakov's aesthetic politics of "emptiness" as a kind of interruption, see pp.119-120 of this thesis.

Bourriaud provides for relational aesthetics'.[128] Misiano's implicit desire – to endow NSK's aesthetic theories with legitimacy through the filter of relational aesthetics, or even the international fever for relational aesthetics, as I examined in Chapter One – was certainly well-intentioned. However, his submission of NSK to Bourriaud's concepts rested on an inaccurate understanding of the *Država*, and ultimately undermined the very purpose of the State and its forums. The reason I say this is that these forums presented neither 'group therapy' nor the building of social relations, but something altogether different: a series of information sessions or meeting-points, in which individuals from both IRWIN and the audience could provide pedagogical demonstrations about their contexts and histories of art production. It was under this rationale that IRWIN delivered lectures on its practice and on contemporary art in Eastern Europe more generally, explaining the nonconformist stance that the *Država* sought to formalise. In return, audience members communicated the experiences of art making and interpretation within their own locales. These presentations were not always met with curiosity or pleasure. As the videos and published transcripts from the presentations and subsequent debates document, audiences often responded tersely and even antagonistically to the presentations, expressing uncertainty about their content, disagreement with their presumptions or, perhaps, frustration with the differences between speaker and listener. Audiences in Richmond, Virginia, for example, were cynical about NSK's desired autonomy and queried its idealism; in Seattle, Brener presented a slide lecture in Russian and was then accused of engaging in terrorist activities.[129] What the *Transnacionala* participants shared was decidedly not an amicable 'therapy' session revelling in communication for the purpose of social networking, as Misiano has suggested. What they shared was, for the most part, a direct demonstration of one's self, one's histories and experiences, beyond the trappings of myth – a shared exposure of difference from the

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[128] Viktor Misiano, 'The Institutionalization of Friendship' above n.119, p.191; Viktor Misiano, 'Confidential Community vs the Aesthetics of Interaction', *Sekcja: Magazyn Artystyczny* (2006), available at http://www.sekcja.org/english.php?id_artykulu=18 [accessed 6 February 2007]. These claims were largely repeated in Viktor Misiano, 'Curatorial Practice: From "Confidential Communities" to "Operational Communities"', Lecture, XL AICA Conference: 'Critical Evaluation Reloaded', Palais de Tokyo, Paris, 17 October 2006, author's notes.

[129] See the various audience responses in Čufer (ed.), *Transnacionala*, above n.11, pp.53-54 and 171-173 respectively.

identity-based presumptions that those myths can create, and of the differences between contexts made contiguous by an unavoidably globalised artworld. What the forums revealed, then, were presentations of diversity or even disparity between participants, and a desire, as Eda Čufer later recollected, to 'resist… any attempt at assimilat[ing *Transnacionala*] into experiences beyond itself'.[130]

When analysed through the prism of relational aesthetics, the degrees of difference and indifference within *Transnacionala* were disastrous: as Čufer further reflected in 2000, '[t]he public, except in very few places, did not care much about us and we did not care much for the public either'.[131] The creation of convivial relations was not *Transnacionala*'s point, though. The forums' process and purpose were clearly distinct from the aesthetic theories that Bourriaud had also begun to demonstrate in 1996.[132] Moreover, Misiano's *post facto* attempt to legitimise the *Država* through assimilation with relational aesthetics was inconsistent with the forums' conceptual push for nonconformity. His account was largely antithetical to the forums' presentations of autonomy and their provocation of perplexed responses, which were precisely about *not* being able to locate the artists within predetermined forms of knowledge. Furthermore, Misiano ignored the highly tactical itinerary that NSK took through America: a trek that steadfastly ignored established gallery systems in New York or Los Angeles so as to travel through regional and remote locales from Georgia through Virginia and Arizona to Washington State. That itinerary was, perhaps, a means to inform NSK of regions of contemporary art production that were, like postcommunist Europe in the mid-1990s, largely peripheral to or excluded from contemporary art's global centres. But that journey – and, more specifically, NSK's antagonistic assertions of autonomy within and toward those "excluded" regions – had an even greater importance: to impress resolutely that NSK's 'exclusion from the excluded' operated globally and not just within Europe. That is, that NSK and the *Država v Casu* could have an international scope and relevance and

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[130] Eda Čufer, 'Notes after Interstate', in *ibid*, p.9.

[131] Eda Čufer in Joanne Richardson *et al*, 'Interview' (2000), in Arns (ed.), above n.81, p.242.

[132] As we can recall from Chapter One, Bourriaud first exhibited his discourse of 'relational aesthetics' in *Traffic* at the CAPC Bordeaux in 1996: see pp.29-31 of this thesis.

yet remain 'outside the established international institutional networks', as Čufer lectured

to her audience in Atlanta; that it could provide an alternative global aesthetic to what

"international" contemporary art normally stood for, of who was included as

"international" and why.[133]

The reasons underpinning that question of "why" were as geopolitical as they were

aesthetic. Indeed, aesthetics and geopolitics were inseparable in this regard, forming a

synthesis of which NSK's members (and particularly its instigators from IRWIN) were

highly aware and highly critical in *Transnacionala*. Their criticisms were not targeted

specifically toward such discourses as relational aesthetics; in 1996, Bourriaud's theories

were still little-known outside France. Rather, IRWIN's critiques of "internationalism"

related to a more general phenomenon in which, according to Miran Mohar, much

contemporary art opportunistically reflected and reinforced extant geopolitical hierarchies

between global contexts.[134] Nonetheless, despite Mohar's claims about the generality of

this condition, he still identified a particular symptom of the unary "internationalism"

between art and politics. It was a symptom with which we are now familiar: namely, the

European biennale Manifesta, the first edition of which was held in Rotterdam during the

same months – June and July 1996 – that *Transnacionala* took place. And it was in

relation to *Manifesta 1* that Mohar made the following claim:

> The Western art world behaves just the same as purely political bodies like the
> European Community. The only artists or countries which can be admitted are the
> ones which won't cause instability in the system. The only difference is that the
> EC's strategy is consciously and openly political, while the art world's is not.[135]

Mohar's understanding of the mirroring, or even the filtration, of geopolitical exclusions

and power asymmetries within contemporary art, and especially within Manifesta, was

prescient indeed. It predated by four years the similar and frequently-made criticisms

about Manifesta's controversial journey to Ljubljana. And while Mohar's claim was

largely consistent with NSK's longstanding critique of the marriage between art and the

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[133] Eda Čufer in 'Discussion at the Castle', in Čufer (ed.), *Transnacionala*, above n.11, p.19.

[134] Miran Mohar in *ibid*, p.125.

[135] *Ibid*.

state, his particular insight was based chiefly on IRWIN's first-hand experience of the biennale. This was due not only to *Manifesta 1*'s occurrence at the same time as *Transnacionala*, but because it included among its exhibits – however paradoxically in retrospect – videos sent to Rotterdam by IRWIN from their trans-American journey.

IRWIN had gladly accepted the invitation to participate in *Manifesta 1*, made at the behest of Misiano as one of the exhibition's curators. IRWIN's opinion of the biennale changed, though, upon reflections induced by a variety of factors during the course of *Transnacionala*. One such factor was the geographical distance between Europe and America, a shift in context that some IRWIN members later claimed sparked a re-evaluation of the ways that art was produced, exhibited and interpreted back in Europe.[136] This contextual shift was intensified by the varying presentations and presumptions about their art encountered by IRWIN throughout their journey, and by the growing realisation that these presumptions were based chiefly on the artists' nationality (or what IRWIN called the artists' 'symbolic exchange value' within international relations).[137] As a consequence of these factors, IRWIN grew increasingly suspicious of Manifesta's intents as well, believing that similar presumptions were at play in a biennale that ostensibly intended to reach out to artists from postcommunist Europe like IRWIN.[138] Indeed, as *Transnacionala* progressed through the United States, reports emerged (and became the subject of discussion between the campervans' occupants) of pressure from *Manifesta 1*'s non-Eastern curators to limit the effect of Eastern European artists upon the exhibition – reports that included Mohar's account of criticisms directed toward Misiano and Katalin Néray by their Manifesta colleagues for inviting "too many" postcommunist artists to the exhibition, and Brener's assertion that another *Manifesta 1* curator, Hans Ulrich Obrist, had pressured IRWIN to 'prevent me from making another scandal at Manifesta'.[139]

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[136] Interview with Miran Mohar, Andrej Savski and Borut Vogelnik, Ljubljana, 9 November 2007, author's notes.

[137] IRWIN, 'IRWIN LIVE and Transnacionala', in Jacob and Brenson (eds.), above n.126, p.69.

[138] Interview with Miran Mohar, Andrej Savski and Borut Vogelnik, Ljubljana, 9 November 2007, author's notes.

[139] See Čufer (ed.), *Transnacionala*, above n.11, pp.125 and 133 respectively. IRWIN have since attested to the veracity of Brener's claim, adding that 'we didn't want to do it' despite Obrist's pressures and

The lesson that NSK, and specifically IRWIN, drew from the experiences of *Manifesta 1* and *Transnacionala* was that art accorded "international" and "contemporary" relevance through explicitly Western pressures risked dissolution into homogenising discourses of art and geopoliticised aesthetics. The effects of this lesson lasted long after *Transnacionala*'s conclusion. In 2005, for example, IRWIN rejected Manifesta as a viable forum for artists practising in European cities such as Ljubljana, Priština or Sarajevo because 'the very system meant to support artists from the East has impoverished them, and they have been encouraged to accept the "international style" as the only horizon in the framework by which they are able to be critical'.[140] To critique and resist that impoverishing "internationalism", then, required more than dismissing it out-of-hand (as LAIBACH arguably did), or simply *discussing* the potential for an independent aesthetic politics or art infrastructure, as occurred with the *NSK Embassy Moscow*. If the West's investments in "internationalism" and Manifesta's "independent" model had failed postcommunist artists, then the task was to present an infrastructure that could support those artists and that was indeed independent philosophically and practically, aesthetically and politically. What was required was an infrastructure that was internationally engaged but not "internationalist", and that could shift the parameters of interpretation and recognition away from the pre-determined and toward the self-determined.[141] It was a task whose practicality was mobilised, and whose philosophical foundations were enacted, by *Transnacionala*. And it was a philosophy that, in keeping with the 'Thesis of the NSK State', was 'aim[ed] at expelling the political language of

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persuasion: Interview with Miran Mohar, Andrej Savski and Borut Vogelnik, Ljubljana, 9 November 2007, author's notes.

[140] IRWIN, Untitled commentary in Vanderlinden and Filipović (eds.), above n.18, p.259.

[141] Slavoj Žižek – again arguably in response to NSK – has made similar claims about maintaining belief in politics and cultural thought that can serve as alternatives to the hegemonic *Denkverbot* of the post-Cold War and especially post-9/11 era. See for example his claim that 'the truly free choice is a choice in which I do not merely choose between two or more options WITHIN a pre-given set of co-ordinates, but I choose to change this set of co-ordinates itself': Slavoj Žižek, 'Can Lenin Tell Us About Freedom Today?', in IRWIN (eds.), *East Art Map*, above n.28, p.492; Slavoj Žižek, 'The Leninist Freedom', in *On Belief* (London: Routledge, 2001), pp.113-124,

global structures from the language of art', the primary target of which was – quite explicitly – "democracy".[142]

I do not mean the word 'target' here in the same way that Manifesta, the Soros network or relational aesthetics understood "democracy" to be art's political *goal* or 'behavioural economy', as Bourriaud stressed. Nor do I mean it in the sense invoked by Misiano in his 2006 reflections on the *Država v Času*, which he believed created 'the primary experience of democracy' and even 'a sphere of absolute democracy' between participants.[143] If Bourriaud's "democratic" agenda for relational aesthetics was, as I explained in Chapter One, exemplary of art discourse's opportunistic appeal to geopolitical rhetoric in the 1990s, then Misiano's submission of the *Država* to relational "democracy" in 2006 was doubly opportunistic. It petitioned the (by then) international paradigm of Bourriaud's theories *and* rhetorics of "democracy" so as to garner NSK's international legitimacy. It was also a somewhat ironic recuperation of NSK's express nonconformity within readymade aesthetic and political models, especially given Misiano's desire for the Muscovite aesthetic of Apartment Art 'to offer another model of [art's] internationalization', as he wrote to IRWIN before the *NSK Embassy Moscow*.[144] Most importantly, though, Misiano's political assignation was – like his assimilation of the *Država* within relational aesthetics – ignorant of the various cues that showed that "democracy" was not the *Država*'s goal but the subject, the target, of its critical unworkings. These cues were occasionally implicit, as with the reanimations of nonconformist histories since the 1980s – histories that withdrew from communism and the "democracy" of dissidence, that consistently sought 'exclusion from the excluded', and whose reanimation throughout the 1990s violated the amnesic imperatives of

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[142] Neue Slowenische Kunst, 'Thesis of the NSK State', above n.123, §8.

[143] For respective quotes, see Viktor Misiano, '"Zones of Contact": From "Confidential Zones" to "Operational Zones"', in Charles Merewether (ed.), *Zones of Contact: 2006 Biennale of Sydney*, exh. cat. (Sydney: Biennale of Sydney, 2006), pp.205-210; and Viktor Misiano, 'The Institutionalization of Friendship', in Čufer (ed.), *Transnacionala*, above n.11, p.186. For a critique of such discourses in the context of the 2006 Biennale of Sydney, see Anthony Gardner, 'The Atrocity Exhibition', in Reuben Keehan and Natasha Bullock (eds.), *Zones of Contact: A Critical Reader* (Sydney: Artspace, 2006), pp.13-18.

[144] Kurlandzeva, Misiano and Zvezdochtov, Correspondence to IRWIN, above n.103.

"democracy" throughout postcommunist Europe (and, perhaps, America). But there were also numerous *explicit* cues that showed that NSK's critique was specifically of "democracy". One such cue can be found in the route taken by the *Država* for its *Transnacionala* trek across America. That route overtly symbolised an alternative political agenda, for if the incursion of neoliberal "democracy" in Europe took an easterly trajectory, then NSK sought to counter it by travelling west across the United States from Atlanta to Seattle. Another cue could be found in the artists' own words: in Borut Vogelnik's reflections from 2000, for example, on the forfeiture of nonconformist histories under postcommunism in which '[a]ll the big expectations about a democratic art system… were destroyed when we found out that these expectations were not linked to reality. We realized that the previous situation, sitting in these private apartments, was much more important for forming a community'.[145]

It was in NSK's forums, though, that the *Država* presented its non-"democratic" community most pointedly. This was the central aim of *Transnacionala*. NSK's demonstrations of nonconformist aesthetics and histories, its unravelling of what it considered the audiences' "internationalist" geopolitical and interpretive presumptions about postcommunist art, and its creation and escalation of disjunction in the meetings between diverse subjectivities – all of these actions sought to repel readymade political parameters and 'to transcend sociological discourse and establish conditions for aesthetic discourse'.[146] The effects of those actions, as discerned in previous pages, revealed that NSK's aims may well have been successful: the frequent frustrations between speakers and listeners, and the occasional breakdown of communication between *Transnacionala*'s participants, suggested the inability to locate the artists or their inter-subjective engagements within pre-set interpretive parameters. In other contexts, NSK have called the formation of their aesthetic community through politics of disjunction and unworking a type of 'madness'.[147] In Jean-Luc Nancy's philosophical discourse – a

[145] Borut Vogelnik in Joanne Richardson *et al*, 'Interview' (2000), in Arns (ed.), above n.81, p.242.

[146] IRWIN, 'IRWIN Live and Transnacionala', in Jacob and Brenson (eds.), above n.126, p.69.

[147] See *inter alia* comments made by Eda Čufer and Borut Vogelnik about the documented responses and experiences to NSK in the videos for the earlier work *Transcentrala*, in Čufer, 'The Symptom of the

discourse that has lurked throughout my analysis of NSK as an implicit and haunting influence – such unworkings of normative political identities, through the interruption of myth and toward a communitarian non-identity with myth, would be labelled an 'inoperative community'.[148] In *Transnacionala*, however, NSK gave that process of community formation a different label again: that of 'communication noise', the static produced when what is communicated and produced cannot be 'place[d] within an established context of reception',[149] but through which a community's aesthetic politics could be presented internationally. This was a politics not of "democracy", but rather a spectral 'retro politics' of nonconformist aesthetics past and present: an alternative aesthetic politics that sought global legitimacy and equality not through other discourses, but through a self-determined art of 'Eastern Modernism'. And while Slavoj Žižek has declared that such an art could only be deemed successful if it were 'a state art in the service of a still-non-existent country',[150] NSK showed this position to be erroneous in one crucial regard. Rather than an art serving a still-non-existent country, their work served a state that was too mobile and perpetually destabilising to *ever* actually exist – a state corroded by varying notions of time and which found a temporary locus in the *Država v Casu* until its gradual, formal demise after 1996.

That demise was neither absolute nor disastrous, however, for the *Država* maintained a kind of afterlife in various guises. One such guise was the *NSK Garda* series that

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Vehicle', in Arns (ed.), above n.81, p.194. Vogelnik's elaboration on madness in the same text further reveals the conceptual purpose behind it: 'If you ascribe madness to someone you always do it from a certain point of view, i.e. from the point of view of non-integration, incapability of penetration, from the point of view of strangeness'. We can also think here of a similar formulation, in philosophy rather than the experiences of art, of this disjunctive meeting: of what Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari called 'disjunctive synthesis', and which Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri defined succinctly as that which 'simultaneously connects and cuts, attaches and separates': see Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Robert Hurley *et al* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1977), pp.13-14; and Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire* (London: Penguin, 2005), p.241.

[148] Nancy, above n.118.

[149] IRWIN, 'IRWIN Live and Transnacionala', above n.126, p.73; Čufer, 'Notes after Interstate', in Čufer (ed.), *Transnacionala*, above n.11, p.10.

[150] Žižek, 'Es gibt keinen Staat in Europa', above n.2, np.

continued into the early-2000s and that, as we saw earlier, bore the hallmarks of the *Država*'s aesthetic and political agenda (from the marking of international territory with NSK insignia, to the protection of that insignia by professional guards, and the unworking of territorialism through the State's often brief and absurd re-existences). Another and arguably more important guise, though, was the redirection of IRWIN's own practice after 1996. If the IRWIN-led *Transnacionala* project set in train the international presentation of NSK's non-"democratic" aesthetic politics, then that presentation found more concrete and constructive form in IRWIN's actions from the late-1990s on. In keeping with *Transnacionala*, these actions were pedagogical at their core. One example was IRWIN's organisation of international conferences *as artworks*, as 'live installations' themselves, within which participants could articulate and debate the differences, contiguities and influences between 'Eastern Modernism' and "internationalist" art. It was as part of this project that IRWIN organised a conference we addressed earlier in this chapter: the conference coinciding with *Manifesta 3* and which contested the mediation of Eastern European art by "democratising" institutions like Manifesta. That critique, we might recall, was ironically dismissed as 'territorial' by *Manifesta 3*'s curators. In light of my subsequent analysis of NSK, however, the stakes of that conference should be understood in another, more complex way. It served as a platform for IRWIN to debate and to demonstrate its autonomy from the politics of institutions such as Manifesta, and particularly the distinct lack of independence from Europe's post-1989 statisms that those institutions embodied.

Conferences such as this one provided a thematic parallel to another, and perhaps the most well-known, demonstration of IRWIN's autonomous aesthetic politics after *Transnacionala*. This second kind of action was IRWIN's charting of a specifically postcommunist art canon, including its post-1945 influences and context-specific interpretive frames, which the art group presented online and in CD and book formats as the *East Art Map* (1999–, fig.3.20).[151] To an extent, the *Map* reiterated some of the

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[151] IRWIN (eds.), *East Art Map*, above n.28. The influence of the *East Art Map* in part accounts for the rapid growth in publications devoted to art from Central to Eastern Europe since 2000, among which can be included Dubravka Djurić and Miško Šuvaković (eds.), *Impossible Histories: Historical Avant-Gardes, Neo-Avant-Gardes and Post-Avant-Gardes in Yugoslavia 1918-1991* (Cambridge MA: The MIT Press,

significant benefits of the SCCAs, for like the Soros Centers in the early-1990s, the *Map* provided easy access to a catalogued and documented history of Eastern and Central European art and its analysis. The *Map*'s primary focus, though, was the nonconformist histories – of art circles such as Ljubljana's student-run networks, individuals like Kabakov or Ion Grigorescu, and groups including IRWIN and Collective Actions – that the SCCAs often disavowed in the interests of new media, new artists and new "democratic" markets. The *Map*'s goal, in IRWIN's words, was to transform 'the underground into a legal art history' because – as IRWIN had learnt from experience – 'History is not given. It has to be constructed'.[152] This goal similarly informed the third constructive action that IRWIN undertook after 1996: to transform itself from a contemporary art collective into a collector of contemporary art from across Europe and America, including work by Marina Abramović, Sophie Calle, Marjetica Potrć and Andres Serrano (fig.3.21).[153] For IRWIN, that collection would provide a concrete display of the aesthetic and art historical trajectories that NSK and IRWIN had, for nearly two decades, discussed in apartments and other quasi-private spaces. Moreover, IRWIN intended it to actualise the long-held potential for a patronage of European art within

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2003); Zdenka Badovinac (ed.), *Body and the East: From the 1960s to the Present* (Cambridge MA: The MIT Press, 1999); Hoptman and Pospiszyl (eds.), *Primary Documents*, above n.84; and Zdenka Badovinac and Peter Weibel (eds.), *2000+ Arteast Collection: The Art of Eastern Europe* (Vienna: Folio Verlag and Innsbruck: Orangerie Congress, 2001). Another major factor in this extraordinary documentation of historical and contemporary Eastern European art has been Roger Conover's support for such publications at the MIT Press, where he is chief editor.

[152] IRWIN, *East Art Map – A (Re)Construction of the History of Contemporary Art in Eastern Europe*, poster, 2002, reprinted in Artspace, *IRWIN: Like to Like*, above n.121, detachable insert. IRWIN's claim that 'History is not given' became a motto of sorts for the artists, and informed other projects by them, including another symposium about the future of the *East Art Map* in Leipzig in October 2005: see Marina Gržinić, Günther Heeg and Veronika Darian (eds.), *Mind the Map! History is not Given: A Critical Anthology Based on the Symposium* (Frankfurt am Main: Revolver Archiv für Aktuelle Kunst, 2006).

[153] The collection was co-ordinated by IRWIN and Zdenka Badovinac and first exhibited at the Moderna Galerija in Ljubljana in 1996: Email correspondence with Zdenka Badovinac, 2 October 2007 and 14 June 2008. As Badovinac noted further, IRWIN also played a minor role in the establishment of another collection of Eastern Europe art, the *Arteast 2000+* collection housed at the Moderna Galerija, and for which IRWIN was able to provide the museum with a sponsor. It should also be stressed here that the collection reflected a degree of narcissism on IRWIN's part. Serrano's photography (in this instance, his *Frozen Sperm II* of 1990) may initially seem an odd choice for the collection. A key reason for its inclusion, though, was a personal and professional connection between IRWIN and Serrano: the year before the collection was displayed in Ljubljana, the American artist had created a flattering portrait of IRWIN, titled *The Mystery of the Black Square* (1995). If the relationship between Serrano and IRWIN was not necessarily long-held, it was at least mutually supportive.

postcommunist Europe, and for a contemporary art canon that was international in focus yet derived from interpretive frames informed specifically by postcommunism's histories and present contexts. At stake, in other words, was a 'logic of collecting' to counter and revise Euro-American canons of art that historians have too often considered universal, as Inke Arns has argued following Boris Groys.[154] In that process of actualisation, the collection would present the new-found possibilities of a culture of collecting from postcommunist Europe: a collecting culture that sought independence from Europatriarchal infrastructures and the amnesic politics they had thus far endorsed, and yet a culture still driven by transnational consultation and collaboration with artists, collectors, curators and writers from across Europe and beyond.

Perhaps most importantly, though, this was a collection donated by IRWIN, together with the artists whose works it had collected, to Sarajevo's Museum of Contemporary World Art in 1997. The so-called 'Ljubljana Collection' became part of the museum's *Ars Aevi 2000* collection, which was initiated in 1992 on the hope that war would end by the year 2000 in Sarajevo and throughout the fractured states of the former-Yugoslavia.[155] There was no doubt that that donation had senses of guilt and expiation attached to it: in Borut Vogelnik's words, '[t]he idea that artists would donate their work was understood as a possible compensation for their (our) inaction' during the Balkan Wars.[156] Nonetheless, it was a gesture that ultimately went far beyond expiation. On the one hand, it provided the Sarajevo museum with a collection that it could put to future use without conditions and as it saw fit, such as to lure tourists and investment to the city, as has since occurred, or even to acquire additional funds through de-accessioning if necessary. On the other hand, that condition-free donation provided an important reminder of how culture, like other practical programmes and like the initial impetus behind the *NSK Embassy Moscow* in 1992, can help to reconstruct the infrastructures of destabilised societies – and can do so without imposing upon those societies a future indebtedness or subordination to donor

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[154] Inke Arns, 'Irwin Navigator', in Arns (ed.), above n.81, p.14; Boris Groys, *Logik der Sammlung: Am Ende des musealen Zeitalters* (Munich: Hanser, 1997).

[155] See the Ars Aevi Collection website at www.arsaevi.ba [accessed 10 August 2007].

[156] Borut Vogelnik, 'Instrumental Politics' (2003), in Arns (ed.), above n.81, p.201.

organisations or states. And in presenting Sarajevo with an important art collection of its own, IRWIN presented art's "internationalism" with equally important reminders as well: that constructive actions could indeed result from critiques of "democracy"; that exodus from normative postcommunist politics in the 1990s did not automatically equate with separatism or nihilism; and that a supposedly "excluded" or forgotten city like Sarajevo was as central to the production, interpretation and exhibition of art, and to alternative and constructive infrastructures for art, as the "internationalist" networks that had hitherto ignored it.

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In the following chapters, I want to follow IRWIN's and NSK's leads and analyse why and how certain artists based in Europe have critiqued "democracy" since the late-1990s. The constructive potentials stemming from that critique are an important factor in my analysis, and I will return to them in particular depth in Chapter Six on the work of Dan and Lia Perjovschi. The next two chapters, however, seek to understand the extent to which late-communist and postcommunist discourses such as "emptiness" and retro politics have informed critical engagements with "democracy" in European centres usually considered unfazed by postcommunism and its aesthetic influence.

Central to this analysis is a re-evaluation of the art historical relations between Eastern and Western Europe, a re-evaluation inspired by the similar intentions underpinning IRWIN's *East Art Map*. As IRWIN lamented in their introductory essay to the *East Art Map* book, 'little has been done in the way of making serious comparisons between the Eastern and Western European context for art production. In this area, a no-man's-land continues to exist that divides one half of the continent from the other'.[157] This is certainly true of contemporary art history and criticism, and it is a circumstance that I want to begin to correct in this thesis. It is less true, however, of art itself. A number of contemporary artists from across Europe and beyond *have* returned to precedents from

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[157] IRWIN, 'General Introduction', in IRWIN (eds.), *East Art Map*, above n.28, p.14.

the late-communist and postcommunist eras, including IRWIN and NSK, as the conceptual and formal foundations for their work. Santiago Sierra's *Wall Enclosing A Space* (2003), for example, barred entry to the Spanish Pavilion at the 2003 Venice Biennale to all visitors except those bearing Spanish passports – an action that clearly replicated the impossibility of entering the *NSK Staat Berlin* at the Volksbühne theatre in 1993 without a valid NSK passport or visa. Another example is Atelier van Lieshout's establishment of its own micro-state, called *AVL-Ville*, in the port of Rotterdam in 2001 (fig.3.22). Like the *Država v Casu*, *AVL-Ville* presented an over-identification with the bureaucratic formations and regulations of European nation-states after 1989: it created its own currency, flag and book of laws for internal governance, as a means to replicate those nation-states and to demarcate itself from them. And as with the *Država*, *AVL-Ville* was designed to interrogate and corrode idealised formations of the nation-state through that process of replication. Among other things, *AVL-Ville* produced bombs and other weaponry to protect itself from possible incursions on its "territory" by Dutch police (though it refused to use those weapons when Dutch authorities shut *AVL-Ville* down in November 2001 for, of all things, not having a licence to serve alcohol to visitors).[158] A third example of this return to nonconformist precedents lies in Marina Abramović's *Seven Easy Pieces* (2005, fig.3.23), in which Abramović performed a new work and re-staged six other works from the performance art canon, including her own *Lips of Thomas* (1975). Over the course of seven hours, Abramović ate a kilogram of honey, drank a litre of (specifically) Balkan wine, incised her skin with the five-pointed star of communism, vigorously flogged her naked body with a whip and stood at attention, smiling and waving a white flag, to the tune of a Russian lament called *Slavic Souls*. *Lips of Thomas* initially signified its own quite shocking form of over-identification with

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[158] Another example of Atelier van Lieshout's replication and interrogation of contemporary political and corporate formations is its proposed creation of a telemarketing call centre that is also a slave labour camp called *Slave City* (2006). Not only would slaves be put to work to bring the camp an estimated 7.8 billion euro profit, but their organs would also be recycled for use by non-slaves outside the camp once the slaves had become too exhausted to work any more. *Slave City*, in other words, was an exaggerated or wild form of bureaucratic and machinic efficiency, without any semblance of ethics and whose primary goal was the corporation's financial profit: see *inter alia* Jennifer Allen (ed.), *Atelier van Lieshout* (Rotterdam: NAi, 2007). It should also be noted that, in another text, Jennifer Allen has also related *AVL-Ville* to relational aesthetics, a comparison that unravels in light of AVL's dystopian engagement of social and bureaucratic relations: see Jennifer Allen, 'Up the Organization', *Artforum*, 39/8 (April 2001), pp. 104-110.

communist politics, for Abramović performed a willing subordination and scarification of the body to communism and its symbolism, and risked personal injury as a consequence. Abramović's re-enactment of that performance at the height of the Iraq War, during its attendant and all-encompassing hysteria of "democracy", suggested a similarly libidinal and injurious politics at play in the early-2000s – a politics allusively signified and critiqued through Abramović's return to her past performance art, and which revealed the ongoing potential of 'retro politics' to unravel dominant political discourses well beyond either communist or postcommunist Yugoslavia.[159]

These three examples alone suggest that artworks from late-communist and postcommunist periods, and particularly their critical relations to the state, remain extremely potent in contemporary art practice. The reasons for this potency will be examined in the following two chapters, which analyse the work of three artists rarely associated with postcommunism. Chapter Five explores the conceptual and installation practices of Christoph Büchel and Gianni Motti. The next chapter of this thesis, however, focuses on the Paris-based artist Thomas Hirschhorn and what he calls his 'de-idealisations' of "democracy" – a process that emerges through another type of installation practice, and whose backdrop extends from the NATO-led occupation of Kosovo and bombardment of the Balkans, to the occupation of Iraq and the slaughter of thousands of its civilians.

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[159] For further examination of this series of re-performances and their aesthetic politics, see Anthony Gardner and Charles Green, 'The Second Self: A Hostage of Cultural Memory', *A Prior*, 16 (Spring 2008), pp.228-247.

Chapter Four:

Autonomy, Yes! "Democracy", No! Thomas Hirschhorn's Displays of Making Art Politically

> *For a long time… I [have] revolt[ed] against Democracy, and direct Democracy. I revolt against the use of Democracy. I want to show with [my exhibition]* Swiss Swiss Democracy *that there is no "Democratic" ideal…. I want to give form to the end of the Idealisation of Democracy.*
> Thomas Hirschhorn[1]

Readers familiar with Thomas Hirschhorn's practice and its critical reception may be puzzled by this statement. In conversation, Hirschhorn has claimed that he has consistently sought to critique 'the holy cow of Democracy' since the late-1990s.[2] At the same time and with equal consistency, however, critics and curators have branded Hirschhorn's work exemplary of how "democracy" can be constructed within the field of art. His use of everyday materials such as cardboard, packing tape and cheap disposable trinkets has underpinned claims that Hirschhorn presents 'an antihierarchical and more democratic mode of display', in which objects are 'democratically selected' and bear 'an intrinsically democratic virtue'.[3] His method of entirely transforming institutional, private and public spaces by filling those spaces with the detritus of everyday life, by covering walls and floors with photocopied images and hand-painted cardboard – by staging alternative worlds that are at once formally chaotic and conceptually confusing – has led

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[1] Thomas Hirschhorn, Preparatory Notes for *Swiss Swiss Democracy*, held in the *Swiss Swiss Democracy* Archives, Bibliothèque du Centre Culturel Suisse, Paris, viewed 14 December 2006, author's notes. Many of the pages from these preparatory notes were subsequently reprinted in Michel Ritter *et al*, *Centre Culturel Suisse 2003-2005* (Paris: Centre Culturel Suisse, 2006), np. Curiously, however, the page on which Hirschhorn wrote this statement was not reprinted in the Centre's monograph.

[2] Conversation with Thomas Hirschhorn, 15 September 2006, author's notes.

[3] For respective quotations, see Frances Stracey, 'The Caves of Gallizio and Hirschhorn: Excavations of the Present', *October* 116 (Spring 2006), p.96; Hamza Walker, 'Disguise the Limits: Thomas Hirschhorn's *World Airport*', in James Rondeau *et al*, *Thomas Hirschhorn: Jumbo Spoons and Big Cake: The Art Institute of Chicago; Flugplatz Welt/World Airport: The Renaissance Society at the University of Chicago*, exh. cat. (Chicago: Art Institute of Chicago, 2000), p.22; and Patricia Falguières, 'Merzing the World', in CAC Malaga, *Thomas Hirschhorn: United Nations Miniature*, exh. cat. (Malaga: CAC Malaga, 2003), p.75.

writers like Okwui Enwezor to muse that Hirschhorn 'creates a kind of democratic space in which the work exists, an alternative, public sphere around which the notion of sculpture… can be constituted in a democratic sense'.[4] Furthermore, the increasing importance of visitors' physical participation with Hirschhorn's works has often induced their categorisation within discourses familiar from Chapter One of this thesis. In the words of one critic, Hirschhorn's is 'a fundamentally democratic art' that propels the emergence of 'the multitude' as espoused by Antonio Negri; for another critic, Hirschhorn's art proposes a Mouffean 'radical democracy as it is affected by globalization'; and for numerous others, his practice fits squarely within Nicolas Bourriaud's theory of relational aesthetics, the goal of which (as we identified earlier) is a new 'behavioural economy' of "democratisation".[5]

Judging by the commentaries surrounding his work, Hirschhorn would appear to be the quintessential artist of "democracy", an artist absolutely 'in tune', as one curator has argued, 'with the democratic age'.[6] Hirschhorn's own claims suggest the inadequacy of that political interpretation, however: "democracy" may not be the ideal way to conceptualise Hirschhorn's practice, but a politics that he intentionally reacts against. Such inadequacy is reinforced by subtle shifts in Hirschhorn's work as well, shifts that are the subject of this chapter and which emerged in the late-1990s alongside the artist's proclaimed revolt against "democratic" idealism.

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[4] Okwui Enwezor and Thomas Hirschhorn, 'Interview', in Rondeau *et al, ibid*, p.27.

[5] See respectively Stéphanie Sauzedde, 'Au centre de l'oeuvre de Thomas Hirschhorn: La notion de multitude', *Plastik*, 4 (Autumn 2004), pp.148-149; Jean-Philippe Uzel, 'Thomas Hirschhorn et la démocratie radicale', *Parachute*, 111 (June-August 2003), p.66 (italics removed from the original); and for Hirschhorn's framing specifically within relational aesthetics, see *inter alia* Sauzedde, pp.141ff; Falguières, above n.3, p.81; Nicolas Bourriaud, 'L'art et la propagande', *Beaux Arts Magazine*, 236 (January 2004), p.33. The number of writers who categorise Hirschhorn's art as intrinsically "democratic" extends far beyond those mentioned here. Other examples can be found in Claire Bishop, 'Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics', *October*, 110 (Fall 2004), pp.74-79; Simon Sheikh, 'Planes of Immanence, or the Form of Ideas: Notes on the (anti-) Monuments of Thomas Hirschhorn', *Afterall*, 9 (2004), p.97; Gregory Volk, 'Shock of the News', *Art in America*, 94/6 (June-July 2006), p.172; and Paul Schmelzer and Thomas Hirschhorn, Interview at the Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, October 2006, available at http://blogs.walkerart.org/offcenter/2006/11/06/audio-blog-thomas-hirschhorn (accessed 15 August 2007).

[6] Falguières, above n.3, p.75.

Two of these shifts are particularly relevant here, neither of which has received substantial attention in the existing literature.[7] The first is conceptual. Throughout the 1990s, Hirschhorn focused on two main subjects: an expression of apparent fandom and memoriam for artists, philosophers and novelists active during the early- to mid-twentieth century in particular; and critical reflections of, and arguably upon, globalised consumer culture and its domination of everyday life.[8] Hirschhorn's renowned series of altars, monuments and kiosks that he began in 1995, and which he dedicated (at least in the works' titles) to figures such as Liubov Popova, Piet Mondrian and Georges Bataille, make up the former trajectory. The latter comprises the integration within his sculptures of logos, remnants and refuse from consumer capitalism that, exaggerated in size and number, threaten to overwhelm those sculptures like a viral swarm. We can think here of the elephantine *Jumbo Spoons and Big Cake* that overran much of the Art Institute of Chicago in 2000 (fig.4.1), or *Very Derivated Products* (1998, fig.4.2) in which disposable umbrellas, metres of plastic wrapping and a surfeit of stickers bearing brands like Michelin mingled with the designer diaries and other expensive wares usually sold in the space where the sculpture was located: the giftshop of the Guggenheim SoHo Museum in New York. At the same time as these works culminated his overt engagement with signs of consumer capitalism, and as his series of altars and kiosks drew to a close, Hirschhorn also began to introduce new images to his practice. In 1998's *Ein Kunstwerk, Ein Problem* (fig.4.3), he integrated photographs of contemporary warfare into his sculpture by mounting images from twenty different global conflicts and social 'problems' onto twenty large panels, and then surrounded the panels with abstract statuettes covered in

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[7] For an exception, see my essay 'On the "Evental" Installation: Contemporary Art and Politics of Presence', in Jaynie Anderson (ed.), *Crossing Cultures: Conflict, Migration, Convergence* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2009 (forthcoming)).

[8] As Benjamin H. D. Buchloh in particular has recognised, these two subjects or trajectories should not be understood in isolation. They were instead highly connected, a point that I will reinforce in the following paragraph. For Buchloh's insights about the relations between memorialisation and consumption in Hirschhorn's work, see two very similar articles published at roughly the same time: Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, 'Cargo and Cult: The Displays of Thomas Hirschhorn', *Artforum*, 40/3 (November 2001), pp.108-115, 172-173; and Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, 'Detritus and Decrepitude: The Sculpture of Thomas Hirschhorn', *Oxford Art Journal*, 24/2 (2001), pp.41-56.

blue plastic.[9] Subsequent works, many of which I will examine in this chapter, continually returned to images of war: of children bearing rifles and grenade launchers, of the global protests held on February 15, 2003, against the then-imminent war in Iraq, or of bodies torn apart by bombs and bullets in war-ravaged regions of the Middle East, Chechnya or the former-Yugoslavia.

Hirschhorn's turn to images of war could be understood as a continuation of his artistic analysis of advertising and commodification, in which the spectacle of 'distant suffering' (to cite the economist and media theorist Luc Boltanski) becomes another exemplum of contemporary image-based capitalism, relayed along vectors of globally networked television.[10] This assumption would be partially correct. In a number of sculptures from the early-2000s (including *Camotopia* [2006] or *Utopia-Utopia = One World, One War, One Army, One Dress* [2005, fig.4.4]), Hirschhorn displayed shop-front mannequins dressed in army fatigues, as though warfare had become merely another passing fashion in life.[11] However, I contend that the introduction of such imagery constitutes a more pressing reflection in Hirschhorn's practice from the late-1990s onwards: a shift from art's investment in globalised consumer culture, toward art's implication within global geopolitics and especially geopolitical rhetoric. On one level, this shift in focus corresponds with the period when, according to Hirschhorn, he began to revolt against "democracy". On another level, it also coincided with the broader re-evaluation of "democracy" that I mapped out in Chapter One, in which "democracy's" signified shifted from a political ideology localised, for the most part, to Western countries like the United States and became an ideological justification for military actions and interventions internationally. '[A]rt and the art world cannot be removed from the larger world',

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[9] Few analyses were written about this work when it was exhibited in the Frankfurt gallery Portikus. For exceptions, see Philippe Vergne, 'Thomas Hirschhorn, You Are So Annoying!', *Parkett*, 57 (1999), p.140; Catherine de Smet, 'Relier le monde: Thomas Hirschhorn et l'imprimé', *Les cahiers du musée national d'art moderne*, 72 (Summer 2000), p.43.

[10] Luc Boltanski, *Distant Suffering: Morality, Media and Politics*, trans. Graham Burchell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

[11] This is the argument made, among others, by David Joselit in a review of Hirschhorn's works from late-2005: David Joselit, 'Thomas Hirschhorn', *Artforum*, 44/7 (March 2006), pp.284-286.

Hirschhorn declared in 2000[12] – including, I will argue, the increasingly problematic use of "democracy" to excuse and legitimise globalised warfare.

This leads to the second, more formal shift to note in Hirschhorn's work. His makeshift altars or large-scale sculptures from the 1990s were often allegorical displays about contemporary phenomena. *Jumbo Spoon and Big Cake*'s over-sized utensils, nominally dedicated to such figures as Rosa Luxemburg or to interests like fashion and the Chicago Bulls basketball team, represented hypertrophic conditions of consumption; the cardboard and plastic aeroplanes lined up along an improvised runway in *World Airport* (1999, fig.4.5) symbolised individual countries, the liveries of whose national airlines were crudely painted across Hirschhorn's models; the globalised economic and political ties between these nations, or the inextricability of revolutionary writers from their transformation into current political fashions, were made literal through cords of aluminium foil (or 'ramifications', as Hirschhorn called them) connecting these symbols to each other.[13] While these works rank among the most important in Hirschhorn's career, they were also among the last in his allegorical mode. By the end of the 1990s, literal representations of global interconnection were disappearing and other aesthetic forms were emerging in their stead. As noted above, often-gruesome photographic imagery replaced other forms of allusion and contextualisation; people's participation with the artworks became a central procedural motif; and the works themselves increasingly resembled those from twentieth century art histories, just as Hirschhorn's self-presentation as an artist increasingly and self-consciously mimicked the personae adopted by certain artists from the recent past, most notably Joseph Beuys.

As we shall see in the following pages, these two shifts in Hirschhorn's oeuvre are themselves inter-related. They provide a dual basis of critique from which the artist has asserted his alternative aesthetic politics: his self-defined, well-known but frequently misunderstood practice of 'making art politically'. This practice should not be mistaken

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[12] Enwezor and Hirschhorn, above n.4, p.29.

[13] As cited in Walker, above n.3, p.23. See also *inter alia* Hal Foster, 'An Archival Impulse', *October*, 110 (Fall 2004), pp.5-6.

for an artistic model of "democracy"; rather, it emerges precisely from Hirschhorn's disengagement from that political frame. Nor can it be easily reduced to a single style, artistic process or aesthetic form on Hirschhorn's part. 'Making art politically' instead comprises two trajectories of its own, both of which were pivotal to *prima facie* distinct works realised in 2004: the productive, collaborative construction of the *Musée Précaire Albinet*, a follow-up project of sorts to Hirschhorn's renowned contribution to *Documenta 11* called the *Bataille Monument* (2002), in which people from a Parisian *banlieue* worked with Hirschhorn to make and monitor the precarious museum; and the more critical processes of de-idealisation found in *Swiss Swiss Democracy*, an exhibition staged in Paris' Centre Culturel Suisse that became a cultural and political *cause célèbre* because of the controversy it catalysed. For Hirschhorn, the productive aspects of his practice – what he calls its 'affirmations' and 'autonomy' – cannot be dissociated from their critical or subversive foundations: both 'must prove [their] existence in today's reality', he claims.[14] Nor can examination of this affirmative autonomy and its operation be divorced from the intent of his pre-2000 work. The shifts in Hirschhorn's practice are not ruptures, but part of his complex ongoing engagement with what Benjamin Buchloh has called 'the inevitable imbrication of artistic practice within the very centre of ideological interests'.[15] It is this engagement – in which contemporary artworks and their reception are implicated within 'the larger world' – that remains central to Hirschhorn's work leading into the twenty-first century, albeit within more specific and political contexts than the consumer capitalism broadly condemned by Buchloh. Indeed, as I will argue further, this engagement underpins the still-unrecognised relations that emerge between Hirschhorn's art and specific postcommunist precedents – precedents that we have examined in the previous two chapters, and which presented nascent forms of the postsocialist art that Hirschhorn's work has, in turn, advanced.

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[14] Thomas Hirschhorn, 'dada is important to me', in Guido Magnaguagno *et al*, *Kurt Schwitters: MERZ – A Total Vision of the World* (Bern: Benteli Publishers, 2004), p.152.

[15] Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, 'Thomas Hirschhorn: Layout Sculptures and Display Diagrams', in Alison M. Gingeras *et al*, *Thomas Hirschhorn* (London: Phaidon, 2004), p.57.

De-idealising "Democracy"

The day after its opening on December 4, 2004, and in the weeks that followed, *Swiss Swiss Democracy* emerged as one of the most notorious art exhibitions of the new millennium's first decade (fig.4.6). Images of Hirschhorn and his work accompanied front-page articles in the tabloid and broadsheet press of Switzerland, the country of Hirschhorn's birth. A number of Swiss politicians and newspaper editors demanded the resignation of Michel Ritter, the Centre Culturel Suisse's director, for supporting Hirschhorn's show. The Swiss Senate voted twice – the second time successfully – to cut one million Swiss Francs from the budget of the Centre's state sponsor, a Swiss organisation called Pro Helvetia. And in a range of newspapers (most particularly those associated with Switzerland's right-wing politics), cartoonists lampooned Hirschhorn for his apparently anti-Swiss agenda (fig.4.7), including Hirschhorn's highly publicised decision not to exhibit in Switzerland for as long as extreme right-wing politicians remained in power.[16]

The government and press responses to *Swiss Swiss Democracy* were extraordinary, especially given the general lack of such public interest in contemporary art. The responses were not, of course, directed toward any analysis of the work's formal structure, which resembled similar layouts exhibited in earlier and much less

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[16] The relevant images and articles can be found in the substantial Revue de Presse Folder, *Swiss Swiss Democracy* Archives, Bibliothèque du Centre Culturel Suisse, Paris. The Swiss newspaper *Le Matin* was the first to condemn Hirschhorn and the Centre Culturel Suisse for staging the exhibition, presenting a brief critique in its online edition on 5 December 2004: 'L'exposition qui tétanise Berne', *Le Matin*, available at http://www.lematin.ch/nwmatinhome/nwmatinheadactu/actu_suisse/edito_-_la_democratie.html (accessed 24 November 2005; no longer accessible). Further journalistic attacks subsequently appeared in, among other sources, the German-language newspaper *Blick* ('Star-Kunstler verhöhnt die Schweiz', *Blick* [6 December 2004], p.1) and in Jacques Poget, 'Éditorial', *24 Heures* (8 December 2004); Jean-Marie Adatte, 'Halte à l'obscurantisme', *L'Impartial* (22 December 2004), p.36 ; and Laurent Wolf, 'L'art contemporain: Pourquoi tant d'hostilité?', *Le Temps* (16 December 2004), pp.15-18. For the circumstances of Pro Helvetia's budget cut – representing 10% of the foundation's annual sponsorship from the Swiss government, and which was eventually determined by a vote of 22 to 19 in the Senate – see Jeff Rian, 'Swiss Diss', *Artforum* 43/6 (February 2005), p.68; and especially Alan Ridine, 'Swiss Democracy: A Critique and an Uproar', *International Herald Tribune* (4 January 2005). And for Hirschhorn's assertion that he would boycott exhibiting in Switzerland – a decision that replicated curator Robert Fleck's earlier refusal to work in Austria because of the election of the right-wing politician Jörg Haider and his Freedom Party to the Austrian national parliament – see Thomas Hirschhorn, 'I WILL NO LONGER EXHIBIT IN SWITZERLAND', *Swiss Swiss Democracy Journal*, 1 (5 December 2004), np.

controversial works by Hirschhorn. In fact, *Swiss Swiss Democracy* seemed entirely benign when considered on this level, for it involved a near-total remodelling of the Centre Culturel Suisse's interior from a series of "white cubes" into what Hirschhorn called 'another space… another world' (figs.4.8-4.9):[17] a world surrounded by sheets of blue, yellow and pink cardboard that Hirschhorn and eight assistants had tacked to walls and covered in photocopies and graffiti; a world of intellectual reflection and discussion where visitors could sit in a library filled with political texts, or in an auditorium to hear the philosopher and frequent Hirschhorn collaborator Marcus Steinweg talk about "democracy", or in a bar or a television lounge or any of the eight sections or 'elements', as Hirschhorn called them, that made up the exhibition's structure.[18] Nor were the press and public responses directed toward Hirschhorn's potentially contentious challenges to "democratic" concepts within this other world, whether as graffitied quotations about "democracy's" virtue and vices – including such statements as 'art is the antithesis of democracy' and 'democracy has goodness for those who know how to profit from it' – or in the vernissage invitation, which bore the heraldic shields of three Swiss cantons below one of the infamous images of torture committed in Iraq's Abu Ghraib prison (fig.4.10). Whereas Hirschhorn declared in the exhibition's press conference that this image 'show[s] how in the name of democracy one can commit torture',[19] the press found controversy in another source altogether. That controversy rested on two gestures presented in one of the work's eight central elements, a stage-play of the myth of William Tell performed by Lyon-based dramaturge Gwenaël Morin and his acting troupe. For in the exhibition's specially-designed theatre, one performer pretended to vomit after being ordered to vote, while another mimicked the act of a dog urinating on an image of the

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[17] Thomas Hirschhorn, '8 Lettres = 8 Projets', *Swiss Swiss Democracy Journal*, 46 (26 January 2005), np.

[18] Thomas Hirschhorn, Preparatory Notes for *Swiss Swiss Democracy*, *Swiss Swiss Democracy* Archives, Bibliothèque du Centre Culturel Suisse, Paris.

[19] Thomas Hirschhorn, *Swiss Swiss Democracy* Press Conference, Recording from 7 December 2004, *Swiss Swiss Democracy* Archives, Bibliothèque du Centre Culturel Suisse, Paris, viewed 14 December 2006, author's notes. The graffiti throughout the exhibition were taken 'from politicians, scientists, ethnologists', none of whom Hirschhorn formally sourced: Thomas Hirschhorn, Jade Lindgaard and Jean-Max Colard, 'Mission: "Tenir le siège"', *Les Inrockuptibles*, 472 (15-21 December 2004), pp.14-17. Other examples of the graffitied quotations, cited in this article, included 'democracy is evil, democracy is death', 'as long as there are dictatorships, I will not have the heart to critique democracy', 'love of democracy is firstly a state of mind' and 'democratic despots exist'.

ultra-nationalist politician, Christoph Blocher, whose anti-immigration and anti-E.U. policies had elevated him to the position of Switzerland's Justice Minister in early-2004.

Swiss Swiss Democracy is a significant artwork for this thesis, though not because of its controversial reputation. Nor am I interested in the accuracy or otherwise of the media accounts of these two theatrical gestures and their apparent denigration of Switzerland's political process of direct democratic voting.[20] Despite the various references to specifically Swiss contexts – such as the performance of William Tell and his mythologised liberation of the Swiss peoples, the exhibition lounge's small screens that showed live broadcasts of Swiss national television, or even the work's double-barrelled title – *Swiss Swiss Democracy* was not an exhibition about Swiss politics alone. 'I did not make a critical exhibition about Swiss democracy', Hirschhorn declared, but rather an exhibition in which the machinations of localised politics were associated with broader political critique: 'It's a critical exhibition about democracy in general',[21] he continued, and especially (as I want to argue here) about "democracy" in the context of Iraq's invasion by the 'Coalition of the Willing' in March 2003.

How do we know this? How can we determine that this recontextualisation of local political forms within a more globalised sphere of "democratisation" was really Hirschhorn's goal? For the most part, Hirschhorn made this clear through his own

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[20] One of the main disputes about *Swiss Swiss Democracy* was whether these two "anti-democratic" actions involved literal or performed acts of vomiting and urination. In the *Blick* and *Le Matin* articles, the journalists presumed these acts to have actually occurred, when in fact they were merely simulated. For further information about this dispute, see *inter alia* Laurence Perrillat, 'Swiss Swiss Democracy', *Idea: Arts+Society*, 20 (2005), np; and Nicolas Trembley, *Swiss Swiss Democracy Experience* (2005), a video artwork that documents Hirschhorn's sculpture as well as various audience and media responses to it. For a very different – but factually and conceptually erroneous – denigration of *Swiss Swiss Democracy*, and its alleged fixation on identity at the expense of interrogating contemporary political formations, see Christian S. G. Katti and Bruno Latour, 'Mediating Political "Things" and the Forked Tongue of Modern Culture: A Conversation with Bruno Latour', *Art Journal*, 65/1 (Spring 2006), pp.107, 114-115.

[21] Hirschhorn, Lindgaard and Colard, above n.19, p.16. In Hirschhorn's version of the interview, published in the *Swiss Swiss Democracy Journal*, he declared that the title of the exhibition derived from 'a market expression, the [notion of] "Win-Win"'. Though he left the relationship between politics and 'market expressions' open on this count, we could speculate that the correlation between 'Swiss Swiss' and 'Win-Win' related to dominant geopolitics and their intersections with neoliberal markets, and potentially to parallel notions of 'mission accomplished' as well: see Thomas Hirschhorn, Untitled Interview Draft with Jade Lindgaard and Jean-Max Colard, *Swiss Swiss Democracy Journal*, 6 (10 December 2004), np.

discourse, and his references to Iraq rather than Switzerland as his main analytic frame. 'In Iraq', Hirschhorn stated in an interview for the French magazine, *Les Inrockuptibles*:

> dictatorship was combated, beaten, and President Bush wanted to put democracy in its place. And what do I see? Scenes of torture. Thus it's possible that one tortures in a democracy, or in the name of democracy. These images of torture in Iraq rightly allow us to critique the notion of democracy.[22]

Marcus Steinweg expressed similar views in his inaugural lecture for *Swiss Swiss Democracy*, the first of fifty lectures that Steinweg gave in the work's auditorium and which Hirschhorn intended to spark discussion among audience members about how to de-idealise "democracy":

> Democracy is what beings positively refer themselves to. Democracy legitimises nearly everything. It is, in many ways, the principal CAUSE OF LEGITIMATION. And as such, it creates a sort of absolute taboo. Art and philosophy increasingly agitate themselves in the name of democracy or the idea of democracy. It's the reason why the only adequate attitude in the face of the IDEAL OF DEMOCRACY would eventually be the REFUSAL OF THIS IDEAL.[23]

These comments can clearly be aligned with my own analysis in Chapter One, of the connected agitations and legitimations of "democracy" in contemporary art, philosophy and geopolitics. Both Hirschhorn and Steinweg, in other words, were highly aware that discursive appeals to "democracy" in art and philosophy could not be divorced from the reformulations of "democracy" occurring on the ground in Iraq or in White House press conferences. Hirschhorn's attempts to de-idealise "democracy" were more than just discursive, though. They were also apparent within and through the artwork itself. The

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[22] Hirschhorn, Lindgaard and Colard, *ibid*, p.16. See also, among other sources, Thomas Hirschhorn and Jean-Marc Angeloz, 'Hirschhorn: La démocratie peut produire la torture', *L'Objectif* (22 December 2004-13 January 2005), np; and Thomas Hirschhorn, *Swiss Swiss Democracy* Press Conference, Recording from 7 December 2004, *Swiss Swiss Democracy* Archives, Bibliothèque du Centre Culturel Suisse, Paris, author's notes.

[23] Marcus Steinweg, 'DÉMOCRATIE ET NON-DÉMOCRATIE', *Swiss Swiss Democracy Journal*, 1 (5 December 2004), np (capitalisation in the original). Steinweg's text was first delivered as a lecture in the *Swiss Swiss Democracy* auditorium on 4 December 2004. Hirschhorn was clearly influenced by this lecture by Steinweg, for he repeated many of its key points in an interview with Florence Broizat from *Télérama Sortir*: 'I want to de-idealise democracy so that we can finally question it. It's become an unattackable subject! In its name, all can be legitimised… [as with] what is happening in Iraq…. I refuse that. I think that it is essential to critique the deviant uses of democracy'. See Florence Broizat, 'Effervescence démocratique', *Télérama Sortir* (22-28 December 2004), located in the Revue de Presse Folder, *Swiss Swiss Democracy* Archives, Bibliothèque du Centre Culturel Suisse, Paris.

key to this – in a parallel but decidedly distinct way to that noted by conservative Swiss journalists and politicians – was gesture, and especially how certain micro-gestures of engagement with the opinions and subjectivities of others were staged within aesthetic and political contexts. Visitors could sit in the *Swiss Swiss Democracy* library and read analyses of "democracy" by authors from Plato to Claude Lefort. They could flip through the newspaper, called the *Swiss Swiss Democracy Journal*, that Hirschhorn and his assistants produced on-site each day and which presented media responses to the work alongside transcripts of Steinweg's lectures, other philosophers' exegeses on "democracy" and background information on Hirschhorn's past practice (fig.4.11). They could also debate "democratic" ideals with other visitors in the bar or TV lounge, or with Hirschhorn himself who was always present and roaming through the artwork. Yet these relational gestures were continually haunted by contexts of war, invasion and death. Hirschhorn had mounted photographs of Iraqi corpses throughout the space, often next to videos of carnage committed in the name of "democracy"; the videos' sound-bleed from one room to another, and the perpetual spectral presence of Iraq's dead, ensured that the voices and images of war-zones continually sought inclusion in any of the discussions conducted within *Swiss Swiss Democracy*.

To an extent, Hirschhorn had already signposted this parallel between localised engagements and global political agenda in the invitation to the exhibition's opening. As I pointed out earlier, Hirschhorn juxtaposed "representative" images of Switzerland and Iraq on a torn piece of cardboard, with drips – perhaps symbolising tears or blood – and the words 'I ♥ Democracy!' scrawled below the images in biro. This technique of juxtaposing *prima facie* different types of images, so as to correlate their meanings, was itself familiar from Hirschhorn's long-standing use of collage and photomontage in his sculptures and especially his image-archive, or 'atlas', called *Les plaintifs, les bêtes, les politiques* that was the source of many of Hirschhorn's later projects (fig.4.12-4.13).[24]

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[24] This archive was first published as an artist's book in 1995 as Thomas Hirschhorn, *Les plaintifs, les bêtes, les politiques* (Geneva : Centre Genevois de Gravure Contemporaine, 1995). Buchloh's discussions of this repository of images, or atlas – including its relation to Gerhard Richter's similar atlas of images as a source for his paintings – is easily the most sustained and detailed account to date in English: see especially Buchloh, 'Thomas Hirschhorn: Layout Sculptures and Display Diagrams', above n.15; and Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, 'An Interview with Thomas Hirschhorn', *October*, 113 (Summer 2005), pp.77-

Les plaintifs' collaged images of fashion models, animal slaughter and the word 'Vichy', for example, or of armed soldiers and maimed civilians, established a neo-dadaist dialectic in which the images' individual contexts and connotations changed and became correspondent or synthesised through juxtaposition. And much like the biro-designs on the *Swiss Swiss Democracy* invitation, Hirschhorn often expressed his own opinions about these correspondences in *Les plaintifs*, usually on the same cardboard scrap or notebook page as his pasted montages. Among these opinions were potentially ironic comments such as 'thank you for everything', as he inscribed beside the collaborations between celebrity and slaughter (or, indeed, 'I ♥ Democracy!' on his invitation); declarative statements like 'no not that!', as he wrote about the causal link between civilian wounds and war; or rhetorical questions posed to prospective readers about why he found images like Soviet-era montages of Stalin so beautiful, despite their propagandistic intent.

Swiss Swiss Democracy expanded upon *Les plaintiffs*, however, insofar as Hirschhorn sought to transpose two-dimensional montage into more complex volumetric and temporal dimensions. Central to this process were Hirschhorn's imbrications of graffiti, texts and images throughout the Centre Culturel Suisse. Each photograph or declaration about "democracy" was contextualised by others, creating a swarm of juxtapositions and unexpected correspondences between different representations of "democracy". Each wall and every surface, in other words, resembled a blown-up page from *Les plaintifs*, transforming the Centre into a walk-in, three-dimensional version of the artist's atlas. This transformation, in turn, set the stage within which participants' actions and momentary interactions could take place, contextualising those activities and embroiling them within the work's flux of "democracy", its ideals and the destruction conducted in its interests. What this meant in practice was that participants' gestures were inextricable from the aesthetic sphere enveloping and contextualising them. They too were juxtaposed

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100. The term 'atlas' to describe Hirschhorn's archive was first raised by Philippe Vergne in 1999: Vergne, above n.9, p.139. For a different conceptualisation of *Les plaintifs*, one which points to a dialectic of reproducibility and site-specificity in Hirschhorn's books and sculptural practice, see Smet, 'Relier le monde', above n.9. I will return to the importance of the atlas as a theoretical device in greater detail in Chapter Six.

or correlated with the surrounding sprawl of imagery, text and other forms of discourse, much like the other aesthetic elements at play within Hirschhorn's three-dimensional transposition of *Les plaintifs*. On one level, then, this inter-relation of gesture and context paralleled, or more accurately *extended*, the ways that photographs and text served as inter-related elements within Hirschhorn's image-archive. What had been two-dimensional in *Les plaintifs* became three-dimensional through the photographs and texts, as well as the gestures and contexts, presented in *Swiss Swiss Democracy*. Hirschhorn's neo-dada collages were thus the structural and conceptual foundations of his much larger sculpture. Indeed, we could even say that the collaged invitation to *Swiss Swiss Democracy*'s opening, with its correspondences between representations of local and global politics and agenda, provided both a literal and a conceptual way to enter the work's meaning.[25]

On another level, *Swiss Swiss Democracy* also showed that representing the connections between objects and ideas – through the motif of foil ramifications that were central to Hirschhorn's sculptures during the 1990s, as I noted above – was no longer relevant to his practice. Ramifications had disappeared entirely from the appearance of his work, replaced with more subtle ways of linking disparate elements. Instead of creating trails of aluminium foil throughout the exhibition, Hirschhorn connected gesture and discourse through an all-enveloping context, 'another world' as he described it, of images and writing. This shift from literal representations of connection, to an all-encompassing stage or sphere of contextualisation, was registered in Hirschhorn's discourse as well. By the early-2000s, he no longer spoke of ramifications in relation to his practice. His works now hinged, he declared, on a process that he called *implication*. This was a process in which audience engagement and other relational gestures in his work became implicated within broader contexts than those contained to art, contexts that were signified in *Swiss*

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[25] It should be noted that Hirschhorn's own discourse about dada is contradictory. On the one hand, he is the author of a short article titled 'dada is important to me', in which he stipulates the influence of dada on his practice (referred to above n.14); on the other hand, he has also claimed that 'I love chaos and I love trash and I love Dada – but none of it applies to my work': see Michael Stoeber, 'Beauty is the Will for Truth: A Conversation with Thomas Hirschhorn', *Sculpture*, 26/3 (April 2007), p.32. These contradictions do not, however, affect my reading of *Swiss Swiss Democracy* here.

Swiss Democracy by images and discourses of war and Hirschhorn's reaction against the 'tortures [committed] in the name of democracy'.[26]

Hirschhorn's turn to strategies of implication is important for a number of reasons, but one in particular stands out: the distinction Hirschhorn has asserted between implication and participation in art. 'Rather than triggering the participation of the audience, I want to implicate them', Hirschhorn has argued. 'I want to force the audience to be confronted with my work. This is the exchange I propose. The artworks don't need participation. It's not an interactive work. It doesn't need to be completed by the audience'.[27] Hirschhorn's distinction is curious but not inexplicable. His desire to de-idealise "democracy" at the same time as he rejected definitions of his work as participatory or interactive reveals an understanding that "democracy" and participation had become profoundly, perhaps even inherently, linked in contemporary art. Of particular concern here was Hirschhorn's awareness of (and, to an extent, his incorporation within) Nicolas Bourriaud's theories of relational aesthetics. By 2004, as we are now well-aware, Bourriaud's description of "democracy", audience participation and relational interaction in art was a thoroughly established and institutionalised aesthetic discourse internationally and in Paris, the city in which Hirschhorn staged *Swiss Swiss Democracy* and where his studio was based. For Hirschhorn, though, such idealised conceptions of "democracy" as Bourriaud's were highly problematic. This was made especially clear in an interview with curator Alison Gingeras. When she attempted to position his practice within Bourriaud's theories, Hirschhorn responded immediately and explicitly: '[w]hat I'm criticizing about participatory and interactive installations', he stated, 'is the fact that the artwork is judged as being a "success" or "failure" according to whether or not there's participation. I now see this kind of work as totally delusional'.[28] Hirschhorn's 'implication' of relational

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[26] I have referred to the last quotation earlier in this chapter: see above p.224. For Hirschhorn's references to 'implication', particularly once audience engagement becomes an important aspect of his practice, see *inter alia* Hirschhorn in Alison M. Gingeras, 'Interview', in Gingeras *et al*, above n.15, p.26; and Hirschhorn in Craig Garrett, 'Thomas Hirschhorn: Philosophical Battery', *Flash Art*, 37 (October 2004), p.93.

[27] Hirschhorn in Gingeras, 'Interview', *ibid*, pp.25-26.

[28] *Ibid*, pp.27-28. For Gingeras' leading proposition, see *ibid*, p.26. In a similar vein, Hirschhorn cited one of the key terms from Bourriaud's book so as to distinguish his practice from Bourriaud's theories: 'I am

gestures within *Swiss Swiss Democracy* can thus be seen as an attempt to differentiate his work from Bourriaud's, to exceed the ways that relational aesthetics and its effects on contemporary art discourse were reducing audience engagement to signs of an artwork's "quality". More importantly, though, 'implication' also suggested subtle correspondences between art's presumed use-value – its ability to enforce "democratisation" through participation – and "democracy's" own, similarly presumed use-value (what Hirschhorn called 'the deviant uses of democracy') beyond the space of art.[29]

Given the predominant focus of commentators on Hirschhorn's work, we could be forgiven for identifying *Swiss Swiss Democracy* as an anomaly in a career otherwise devoted to the artistic promotion and construction of "democracy". But these strategies of implicating audience engagement within highly politicised contexts – especially those engendered by photographic imagery – were not new for Hirschhorn, despite the very recent introduction of the term 'implication' to his interviews and writings. There was, in fact, a very strong coincidence between the period when Hirschhorn claims to have begun critiquing 'the holy cow of Democracy' and the French-language publication of Bourriaud's anthology in 1998. In that year, Hirschhorn took his first steps toward his models of implication with *Ein Kunstwerk, Ein Problem*, one of his earliest sculptures to integrate photographs of recent conflicts (including those in Palestine, Northern Ireland and Gulf War-era Iraq). Audiences, however, struggled to make their way through the sculpture to see the images because its layout was cramped and crammed with objects.[30] Visitors' engagement with the work was intentionally made problematic at the same time

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against terms like "Micro-Utopia"', Hirschhorn wrote in 2006, 'I am sceptical about many theories of Utopia…. Utopia has to be confronted, to be problematized with Reality': Thomas Hirschhorn, 'Utopia', Artist's Statement distributed as a pamphlet in *Re* (2006), 2nd Seville Biennale of Contemporary Art, Seville. For examples of Hirschhorn's work being contained within discourses of relational aesthetics, see the list of texts (including Bourriaud's essay from *Beaux Arts Magazine* called 'L'art et la propagande') in above n.5.

[29] Hirschhorn in Broizat, above n.23.

[30] In the words of Philippe Vergne, 'The spatial arrangement prevents easy movement through the work; one has to try and go around the problems without jostling the sculpture. The center of the space is inaccessible, and any overall view of the whole is impossible': Vergne, above n.9, p.140.

as specific global 'problems' began to replace Hirschhorn's previous conceptual foci, such as commodity culture or the quasi-memorials of his kiosks.

Ein Kunstwerk, Ein Problem presented a somewhat tentative integration of audience engagement and imagery of war. Two years later, with the exhibition of *United Nations Miniature* (2000, fig.4.14) at the Biennale de Lyon, that integration and implication of the audience became much more substantial. Hirschhorn's display initially seemed typical of his allegorical phase. Across the gallery floor, Hirschhorn had crafted models of eleven distinct war-zones throughout the world, from East Timor and Rwanda to Bosnia and Kosovo, each of which was "monitored" by miniature United Nations flags, tanks and pale-blue buildings along the modelled regions' edges. As with Hirschhorn's kiosks or other displays like *Jumbo Spoons and Big Cake*, audiences could physically engage with *United Nations Miniature* by flipping through philosophical texts and photocopied reports dotted around the work. However, such gestures were overwhelmed – particularly during the first few days of the sculpture's exhibition – by the pungency of burnt wood, charred paper and melted plastic from which the war-zones were modelled. Weak forms of participation and engagement were ultimately overborne by the stench of violence – a canny artistic parallel to criticisms brought against NATO and the United Nations itself for their own limited engagement in the genocidal wars of the 1990s in the former-Yugoslavia.

A limited engagement, that is, until a conflict that occurred just prior to Hirschhorn's conception of *United Nations Miniature* and that appears to have affected his conceptual practice substantially: the NATO bombardment of Belgrade that sought to bring an end to the Balkan Wars in 1999. We must remember here that it was during this conflict that the conspicuous oxymoron 'humanitarian militarism' – short-term warfare in the name of long-term peace and "democracy" – emerged as a primary means of legitimising extremely violent actions. As numerous legal analysts have stressed since 1999, apparently ethical discourses of "democratisation", human rights, multiculturalism, peace and protection were invoked by NATO, the United Nations and various national governments and NGOs to justify eventual military intervention in the former-Yugoslavia

– and the devastation of Belgrade – on the part of Western forces.[31] The conflict thereby marked a significant turning-point from invoking national self-defence as the justification for warfare, to excusing it under the banners of humanitarianism and international – or, in the case of NATO, North Atlantic – norms of "democratisation", as a compassionate palliative armed to disengage dissent. The conflict signalled a shift for Hirschhorn's practice as well. Not only did *United Nations Miniature* present one of his first clear correlations between audience engagement and contemporary imperial force; the work also suggested Hirschhorn's recognition – admittedly long after Ilya Kabakov or NSK reached similar viewpoints – that broadly defined conceptions of humanitarianism and "democratisation" were underwritten by increasingly ulterior and problematic purposes from which art was not immune. "Democracy", in other words, was no longer simply an electoral process, nor an ideology localised to specific nation-states or art practices. It had also become a marker of value, a signifier that justified the "success" or "failure" of participatory actions and short-term forms of engagement.

This was the conceptual frame in which Hirschhorn situated many of his large-scale sculptures in the years immediately preceding *Swiss Swiss Democracy*. For *Chalet Lost History* (2003, figs.4.15-4.16), for example, Hirschhorn transformed the two floors of Paris' Galerie Chantal Crousel into a makeshift country lodge, replete with cardboard wall-panelling hand-drawn to resemble wood. Within the "chalet", Hirschhorn presented refrigerators and pedestal fans, piles of empty beer cans, a television lounge showing pornographic movies, and thousands of photographic reproductions: photographs of the global protests in February 2003 against the invasion of Iraq that would occur the following month; of the aftermath of wayward missiles once the invasion started; and of families mourning the American soldiers killed in action. Audience engagement again

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[31] See, among other articles in a special issue of the *Harvard Human Rights Journal* devoted to this topic, Vasuki Nesiah, 'From Berlin to Bonn to Baghdad: A Space for Infinite Justice', *Harvard Human Rights Journal*, 17 (2004), pp.75-98; as well as Anne Orford, *Reading Humanitarian Intervention: Human Rights and the Use of Force in International Law* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004). In the previous chapter, I referred to parallel debates in non-legal journals about the intervention: see, for example, Peter Gowan, 'The NATO Powers and the Balkan Tragedy', *New Left Review*, 234 (March-April 1999), pp.83-105, c.f. the advocacy of NATO presented in Zoltan Barany, 'NATO's Peaceful Advance', *Journal of Democracy*, 15/1 (January 2004), pp.63-76.

played a significant role. Visitors could sit and discuss the work while watching video footage of copulation. Or, in corners throughout the "chalet", they could pick up and souvenir empty Budweiser beer cans, or five-pound notes emblazoned on the recto with hieroglyphs and the words "Central Bank of Egypt" but whose verso was entirely blank. The contextualisation of these implicated actions was clear: the bombing of Baghdad that was – at least for people outside the city – a prime-time television spectacle, an invasion that had become "legitimised" in the interests of "democratisation" rather than the search for weapons of mass destruction, and which had sparked thefts from Baghdad's archaeological museum of fridges, fans and ancient relics: the loss of history in the chaos of war.[32] Within this context, visitors engaged in their own anomic gestures, from idly imbibing pornographic videos, to purloining the empty cans and counterfeit currency that lay carefully piled in corners like a candy spill by one of the forebears of Bourriaud's relational aesthetics, Felix Gonzalez-Torres.

In *Chalet Lost History*, the utopian potential of participation and "democratic" actions was staged, frustrated and denied through anomie and little gestures of theft. The strategy paralleled Hirschhorn's contribution to an exhibition titled *Common Wealth* that was held in London's Tate Modern at the same time as *Chalet Lost History*, for which he again isolated "democracy" from utopianism. Hirschhorn presented two separate works for *Common Wealth*: the *U-Lounge* (2003, fig.4.17), a sociable library where visitors could mingle, read and pilfer forty-four texts by Marcus Steinweg on philosophical conceptions of community; and *Hotel Democracy* (2003, fig.4.18), a rickety model of a two-storey hotel that audiences were not allowed to touch and which comprised forty-four small rooms, each wall-papered with images from a different global conflict. These were not, as a critic for the museum's own *TATE Magazine* argued, 'media images relating to struggles for democracy around the world',[33] but included photographs of marching members of the Ku Klux Klan and skinheads wearing face masks – hardly strong

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[32] Galerie Chantal Crousel, *Chalet Lost History* Exhibition Press Release, 2003; Thomas Hirschhorn, *Chalet Lost History* Preparatory Notes, reprinted in *Swiss Swiss Democracy Journal*, 46 (26 January 2005), np.

[33] Mark Rappolt, 'Studio: Thomas Hirschhorn', *TATE Magazine*, 7 (September-October 2003), p.38.

emblems of such struggles. Nor could "democracy" be conflated with utopianism (which the "U" in *U-Lounge* symbolised), for the two works were deliberately staged in separate gallery spaces. If relational gestures of reading, reflection and interacting with others were potentially utopian – or 'micro-utopian', as Bourriaud had famously argued[34] – then the physical isolation of those gestures from Hirschhorn's model hotel meant that they were not to be conflated with "democracy". Similarly, while the "democracy" staged in the hotel was untouchable – much like all utopian ideals are often claimed to be unrealisable, out-of-reach and untouchable – Hirschhorn made sure that it was an ideal inseparable from the violence, death and destruction presented in the wallpaper imagery of the hotel's rooms.[35] For Hirschhorn, then, "democracy" and ideals of relaxed discussion and learning were distinct or even antithetical politics; at the very least, as his Tate Modern works suggested, the one could not be subsumed within the other.

When analysed together, these sculptures from the late-1990s up to and including 2004's *Swiss Swiss Democracy* reveal Hirschhorn's sustained critique of "democracy" and its shifting discourses. This was signified most strongly through Hirschhorn's integration within his sculptures of images rarely seen in his earlier displays: namely, photographs and models of contemporary warfare and the destruction generated in the name of "democratisation". These images in turn set the stage on which other important developments in Hirschhorn's practice played out: most notably, his increasing focus on how people physically engaged and connected with his work, and on how these images of war established distressing political contexts of the larger world in which people's small,

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[34] Nicolas Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, trans. Simon Pleasance, Fronza Woods and Mathieu Copeland (Dijon : Les Presses du Réel, 2002), pp.31, 70.

[35] For an example of the 'unrealisability' of utopian ideals, such as "democracy", see Okwui Enwezor (ed.), *Democracy Unrealized: Documenta 11_Platform 1* (Ostfildern Ruit: Hatje Cantz, 2002); and for an example of the destructive effects when utopian ideologies are realised, see Boris Groys, *The Total Art of Stalin: Avant-Garde, Aesthetic Dictatorship, and Beyond*, trans. Charles Rougle, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992 (1988). This brief list of anomic participatory actions could also include a number of works made after *Swiss Swiss Democracy*. In *Superficial Engagement* (2006), for example, photographs of maimed and dismembered corpses in Iraq covered walls and vitrines within New York's Barbara Gladstone Gallery. Hirschhorn provided a wooden stump into which audience members could hammer nails, a gesture that, as James Westcott astutely observed, ensured that 'one's own behavior and that of others becomes the main event, and cannot possibly answer the horror on display' in the photographs that surrounded the wooden stump: James Westcott, 'Gut Feeling: Thomas Hirschhorn's *Superficial Engagement*', *TDR: The Drama Review*, 51/2 (Summer 2007), p.174.

momentary gestures were implicated. The seemingly minor role of these gestures, especially within the overwhelming and all-encompassing 'other world' of his sculptures, in part explains why critics and commentators often overlooked them. Nonetheless, these gestures had a crucial critical impact, as we have seen throughout this chapter so far. They subtly – perhaps too subtly, as it turns out – revealed Hirschhorn's dissatisfaction with relational aesthetics and its effects within contemporary art, especially the conflation of "democratisation" and audience participation or engagement with artworks. Hirschhorn's calculated staging of relational gestures and their implication within contexts of war were thus the basis for his 'revolt against the uses of Democracy', as he proclaimed in the epigraph to this chapter. And it was precisely this strategy of contextualisation that underpinned Hirschhorn's sustained attempt to problematise and de-idealise the growing belief that audiences' engagements with artworks were profoundly or even inherently "democratic". As Hirschhorn later reflected, his aim was not to naturalise ideology through audiences' actions, nor to make art unconsciously complicit with dominant political discourse. 'I have to make theory confront practice',[36] he proposed in a knowingly ambiguous way, in a dual proposition perhaps of making aesthetic theory confront practices of war, and of confronting theories of "democracy" with his own artistic practice.

Not all of Hirschhorn's confrontations and strategic gestures were overlooked, of course. If the de-idealisation of "democracy" and contemporary aesthetic discourse was too subtle in much of his practice, it became *too* confrontational for some commentators in *Swiss Swiss Democracy*. And while the sculpture's critics and their condemnation of Hirschhorn's politics may, in light of my analysis, have provided an unexpectedly astute focus on the importance of gesture in his work, that condemnation ultimately said more about the sculpture's explicitness than it did about his practice as a whole. Indeed, one of the most important factors in Hirschhorn's sustained revolt was ignored by commentators on both *Swiss Swiss Democracy* and his work more generally. This related to

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[36] Thomas Hirschhorn, 'Utopia-Utopia = One World, One War, One Army, One Dress', in Nicholas Baume, Ralph Rugoff *et al*, *Thomas Hirschhorn: Utopia-Utopia = One World, One War, One Army, One Dress*, exh. cat. (Boston: ICA and San Francisco: CCA Wattis Institute for Contemporary Arts, 2005), p.13.

Hirschhorn's extension of his critique beyond strictly contemporary theories, practices or aesthetics of "democratisation". His work also staged a complex evaluation of political aspirations and legacies within art history, especially within histories of European modernist art, and most particularly the politics and influence of Joseph Beuys. Hirschhorn's evaluation of these legacies is my subject in the following pages, a subject that also allows us to tease out connections with the postcommunist practices and critiques of "democracy" that we considered earlier in this thesis.

Thomas Hirschhorn's Retro Politics

Hirschhorn's relationship to Joseph Beuys is, to say the least, ambivalent. It is a relationship noted (if not fully understood) by many critics, and which Hirschhorn has also taken great pains to articulate. 'Joseph Beuys helps me', Hirschhorn argued in the forty-seventh edition of the *Swiss Swiss Democracy Journal*, because Beuys had taught him that 'art works for the creation of a new man…. Joseph Beuys understood art's responsibility for man's becoming'.[37] This was not a typical form of teaching: Hirschhorn never studied directly under Beuys, either in the German academic system or in the Freie Internationale Universität that Beuys established with Heinrich Böll in the 1970s. Beuys' influence was more indirect, manifesting itself through the artworks that Hirschhorn saw in exhibitions such as the Centre Pompidou's 1994 retrospective and in Beuys' published writings that Hirschhorn read voraciously. Indeed, it was through discourse that Beuys had the greatest influence on Hirschhorn, as suggested when Hirschhorn remade Beuys' book *Jeder Mensch ein Kunstler* into a five-foot-high sculpture as part of his 2003 *Emergency Library* of books that Hirschhorn claimed 'I cannot do without'.[38] And it was through discourse, especially Hirschhorn's own discourse of the early-2000s, that these influences became most evident. His oft-repeated claim that his practice hinged on energy relays between artist, work and audience rather than conventional notions of

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[37] Thomas Hirschhorn, Untitled Artist's Statement, *Swiss Swiss Democracy Journal*, 47 (27 January 2005), np.

[38] Thomas Hirschhorn, 'Artist's Choice: *Emergency Library*, 2003', in Gingeras *et al*, above n.15, p.113.

artistic success or monetary value – a claim that quickly turned into a mantra of 'Energy, yes! Quality, no!' – alluded specifically to Beuys' belief that art was a healing force and a battery to recharge society.[39] The term 'battery' also became Hirschhorn's preferred description for his large-scale sculptures, especially those in which human interaction and audience implication could 'produce resistance and friendship'.[40] Furthermore, Hirschhorn's conviction that art could only affect society by affirming itself as art, rather than as social work, drew directly from Beuys' own distinctions between social work and social sculpture, a distinction that Beuys believed could create 'the TOTAL ARTWORK OF THE FUTURE SOCIAL ORDER'.[41]

Hirschhorn's artworks from the late-1990s onwards equally drew from Beuys' practice, and particularly the *Office for Direct Democracy by Referendum* that Beuys staged at Harald Szeemann's *Documenta 5* in 1972 (fig.4.19). The photographs and other reproductions that Hirschhorn taped to the walls of his sculptures initially seemed to be art historical allusions to the *affichages sauvages*, or "wild posters", that Daniel Buren pasted throughout Paris during April and May 1968. They more specifically referred,

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[39] See, for example, Hirschhorn in Francesco Bonami, 'Thomas Hirschhorn: Energy Yes, Quality No', *Flash Art*, 216 (January-February 2001), pp.90-93. Hirschhorn has admitted that these four words became 'programmatic' in his own writings and interviews, if only – as we will see shortly – to confront Beuys' legacy directly: see Buchloh, 'An Interview with Thomas Hirschhorn', above n.24, p.92. The title of this chapter is clearly derived from this programmatic mantra.

[40] These sculptures included *Swiss Swiss Democracy*, the *Bataille Monument* for 2002's *Documenta 11* and *24h Foucault* staged in the Palais de Tokyo in 2004: Conversation with Thomas Hirschhorn, 15 September 2006, author's notes. Other references by Hirschhorn to his work's status as a 'battery' can be found in *inter alia* Garrett, 'Thomas Hirschhorn: Philosophical Battery', above n.26, p.92; Thomas Hirschhorn, *24h Foucault*, Preparatory Notes, July 2004, republished in Claire Bishop (ed.), *Participation: Documents of Contemporary Art* (London: Whitechapel Gallery and Cambridge MA: The MIT Press, 2006), p.155; and Trembley, *Swiss Swiss Democracy Experience*, above n.20, in which Hirschhorn stated that 'Everyday, we produce something. Everyday, the battery is recharged'.

[41] For some of Hirschhorn's many comments distinguishing his 'affirmations' from 'social work', see Thomas Hirschhorn, 'Installation: About the *Musée Précaire Albinet*', *Modern Painters*, 17/2 (Summer 2004), p.55; Thomas Hirschhorn, '*Bataille Monument*', in Claire Doherty (ed.), *Contemporary Art: From Studio to Situation* (London: Black Dog Publishing, 2004), p.137; and – in direct reference to Beuys' influences – Hirschhorn, Untitled Artist's Statement, *Swiss Swiss Democracy Journal*, above n.37, np. The Beuys quotation comes from Joseph Beuys, 'I am Searching for Field Character' (1973), in Bishop (ed.), *ibid*, p.125 (capitalisation in the original). For a rigorous analysis of Beuys' affirmation – and ultimately his institutionalisation – of social sculpture rather than social work, see Claudia Mesch, 'Institutionalizing Social Sculpture: Beuys' *Office for Direct Democracy through Referendum* Installation (1972)', in Claudia Mesch and Viola Michely (eds.), *Joseph Beuys: The Reader* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2007), pp.198-217.

though, to the photographs and other reproductions of famous women that Beuys and his staff taped to the *Office*'s walls in 1972, as symbols of people who had suffered social oppression and whose representation in the *Office* was intended to contextualise and foment new discussions about society. Similarly, Hirschhorn's perpetual presence in his sculptures, particularly the *Bataille Monument* and *Swiss Swiss Democracy*, and his on-site fielding of questions about his politics was more than simply playing the role of the works' 'concierge', as Hirschhorn has argued to me.[42] It was also more than a necessity sparked by thefts from earlier sculptures such as his *Deleuze Monument* (2000), whose existence was cut short by acts of participatory vandalism when exhibited on the outskirts of Avignon.[43] Instead, Hirschhorn's actions deliberately mirrored Beuys' at *Documenta 5* – for like Hirschhorn thirty years later, Beuys remained within his *Office* during the exhibition's duration, answering visitors' questions about art's investments in "democracy" or the forms of community that the artist proposed through his work. The stakes for both artists thus seemed similar: to devise a social sculpture originating in speech, a sculpture that used discussion to debate and even to dismantle the social status quo, and that located such debates within contexts of oppression signified by the photographs on the walls. In the words of critic Jean-Philippe Uzel, Hirschhorn's 'political function can very definitely be placed [as] a continuation of the work of Joseph Beuys'.[44]

Hirschhorn himself was more circumspect, however. 'I am not sure about this comparison [with Beuys]', he told Alison Gingeras in 1998, except insofar as both artists sought to implicate art and its reception within contexts of the larger world: 'for me Beuys liberates the term "sculpture" from aesthetic volumes'.[45] Beyond that, the

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[42] Conversation with Thomas Hirschhorn, 15 September 2006, author's notes.

[43] For documentation about what Hirschhorn called the 'aggression' committed against the *Deleuze Monument*, and its subsequent de-installation, see the photocopied artist's book Thomas Hirschhorn, *Deleuze Monument: La Beauté Avignon 2000: Les Documents* (Paris: Thomas Hirschhorn, c.2000).

[44] Uzel, above n.5, p.68.

[45] Hirschhorn in Alison Gingeras, 'Permanently Entwined: Aesthetic Practice and Political Engagement: A Conversation with Thomas Hirschhorn', in Alison Gingeras and Chisenhale Gallery, *Thomas Hirschhorn: London Catalogue*, exh. cat. (London: Chisenhale Gallery, 1998), p.5.

differences were significant. The goal of Beuys' social sculpture, especially as manifest through his *Office*, was for people to participate directly in political decision-making; direct dialogue and social engagement, for Beuys, would thereby 'realize what has not yet appeared in history, namely, democracy… the basic democratic order as people would like it, according to the will of the people'.[46] As we have already seen, Hirschhorn engaged similar processes of direct dialogue, but for starkly opposed ends. In *Swiss Swiss Democracy*, Hirschhorn's aim was not only a critical demarcation of his practice and audience engagement from "democracy"; it was also, as we noted in this chapter's introduction, to 'revolt against Democracy, and direct Democracy' – a form of direct Democracy that could easily be limited to Swiss national politics and the election of the ultra-nationalist Christoph Blocher were it not for Hirschhorn's very calculated repetition of Beuysian strategies. By contextualising that repetition within Swiss and international corruptions of political formations, Hirschhorn 'implicated' Beuys, his practice and his ideals in much the same way as he had 'implicated' audiences and de-idealised their relational gestures. Art's history thereby became a third force in Hirschhorn's confrontation between theory and practice.

The reasons driving this implication of Beuys are complicated, and extend beyond the many attempts by art historians since the early-1980s to discredit or even to ridicule Beuys' politics, his self-generated mythologies and romanticised shamanism.[47] Hirschhorn conceived Beuys' politics and utopian social engagement as serious and

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[46] Beuys cited in Joseph Beuys and Dirk Schwarze, 'Report on a Day's Proceedings at the *Bureau for Direct Democracy* (1972)', in Bishop (ed.), above n.40, pp.121-124. For an excellent critique of Beuys' (arguably hollowed-out) concept of "democracy", as well as the sources for Beuys' politics, see Stefan Germer, 'Haacke, Broodthaers, Beuys', *October*, 45 (Summer 1988), pp.63-75.

[47] The most well-known example of this is Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, 'Beuys: The Twilight of the Idol', *Artforum*, 18/5 (January 1980), pp.35-43; for a milder rebuke, see Thierry de Duve, 'Joseph Beuys, or the Last of the Proletarians', *October*, 45 (Summer 1988), pp.47-62. As is well-known, many of these critiques, or rather dismissals, of Beuys emerged in American journals such as *October* and *Artforum* in the wake of the 1979 Beuys retrospective at New York's Museum of Modern Art; an overarching desire to differentiate American-based postmodernism from certain forms of European late-modernism – even on the part of de Duve, who remained in Europe after the publication of his essay – appears to be a key motivation in these critiques. Readers should also note that Buchloh retreated somewhat from his vitriolic attack on Beuys in a later text: Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, 'Reconsidering Joseph Beuys, Once Again', in Gene Ray (ed.), *Joseph Beuys, Mapping the Legacy* (New York City: DAP, 2001), pp.75-90.

earnest aspirations. He also understood, though, that such utopian ideals risked subsumption and dissolution within the social status quo that they initially seemed to protest. This was certainly Hirschhorn's view of Beuys' advocacy of a "democratising" social sculpture which 'led to defeats as we know', according to an interview with Benjamin Buchloh.[48] In particular, Hirschhorn perceived that Beuys' utopian aspirations were defeated when transformed into the actual policies of political parties, as occurred when Beuys became a candidate for West Germany's Greens party. By seeking endorsement within the widely-recognised political institution of the Greens, Beuys harnessed his aesthetics within already-existing forms and parameters of political organisation. Confined to the status quo of political mobilisation, in other words, Beuys' actions potentially devolved his art and utopian rhetoric into tools, if not propaganda, for extant political institutions and ideologies. Or, as Hirschhorn himself asserted while standing beside his *Bataille Monument*:

> with his engagement [of joining the Greens], Beuys showed the limits of this approach… there is a great difference with what I do. What interests me is not to go into politics, not to do it at all. Beuys did it in a generous, superb manner, and also to show, I think, that it's not the path to follow. Now, more than twenty years later, it's this art lesson that I've learnt, even if I wasn't his student.[49]

That lesson, as Hirschhorn called it, was not restricted specifically to Beuys' endorsement as a Greens candidate, though, nor to his self-imposed delimitation within existing political formations. It also related, I believe, to a 'defeat' of utopian gestures and rhetoric that was broader than, but included, Beuys' particular actions: a 'defeat' resulting from the harnessing or recuperation of such utopian intents within dominant – and especially more contemporary and more destructive – political and cultural conditions. This was, as we have seen, the case with Hirschhorn's implication of Beuys in *Swiss Swiss Democracy*: an ambivalent turn to Beuysian appeals for "democracy" at a time and within contexts of the destructive reiteration of those appeals to justify invading Iraq. But Hirschhorn's implications also included utopian movements and artists beyond Beuys

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[48] Hirschhorn in Buchloh, 'An Interview with Thomas Hirschhorn', above n.24, p.77.

[49] Hirschhorn in Fabian Stech, 'Thomas Hirschhorn – L'art est affirmation (2002)', *J'ai parlé avec* (Dijon: Les Presses du Réel, 2007), p.60.

alone. We can think here, for example, of the coloured cardboard that enswathed – or, to translate Hirschhorn's own term literally, 'englobed' ('*englober*') – *Swiss Swiss Democracy*, and whose pink, yellow and blue tones were also used for the paper-stock of the *Swiss Swiss Democracy Journal*.[50] According to Hirschhorn, these were 'democratised colours… economic colours', because the artist Joseph Philippe – whose paintings Hirschhorn displayed in the bar of his sculpture – had found them to be the cheapest colours available in his local paint store.[51] The connotations of these colours were more specific again, though, and especially for Parisian audiences, for they also comprised the trinity of colours used by Yves Klein in the 1950s. Blue, yellow (or, rather, gold) and pink were the basis for Klein's transcendental, cosmological and utopian aesthetic that – or so Klein and his leading commentator Pierre Restany urged – could resonate with the audience and create a 'mutation of planetary sensibility' through colour.[52] By englobing his critical implications with colours that simultaneously signified "democracy" and Klein's utopian cosmologies, Hirschhorn indicated a slightly less utopian outcome to those ideals: namely, their recurrence within a parallel 'mutation of planetary sensibility', a militarised mutation conducted for a global utopia of "democracy". For Hirschhorn, Klein's – and Beuys' – utopias were failed projects because of the apparent recuperation of their ideals within dominant political praxes. Hirschhorn's aim with *Swiss Swiss Democracy* was consequently to de-idealise both relational aesthetics and a canon of "democracy" within art history, and especially late-modernist art history from Europe.

This was not the first time that Hirschhorn's work invoked the failure of utopianism within contemporary conditions. His ramifications – the foil connections between

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[50] Thomas Hirschhorn, Preparatory Notes for *Swiss Swiss Democracy*, held in the *Swiss Swiss Democracy* Archives, Bibliothèque du Centre Culturel Suisse, Paris.

[51] *Ibid*, and also Thomas Hirschhorn, Untitled Artist's Statement, *Swiss Swiss Democracy Journal*, 42 (21 January 2005), np.

[52] Pierre Restany, *Yves Klein: Fire at the Heart of the Void* (New York City: Journal of Contemporary Art Editions, 1992), pp. 49-53; quotation located at p.52. I do not cite Restany here to suggest my agreement with his ideas about Klein (or rather his apologia for Klein), but simply because he was Klein's leading commentator during the 1950s, a writer in whom Klein frequently confided and whose (often bizarre) ideas were largely devised in consultation with Klein.

disparate elements in *World Airport* and other sculptures, and which Hirschhorn later replaced with implications – were symbols, he told Okwui Enwezor, for 'failures, the failures of utopias… [because] a utopia never works. It is not supposed to. When it works, it is a utopia no longer'.[53] Nor was *Swiss Swiss Democracy* the first of Hirschhorn's sculptures to identify the reiteration of modernist utopianisms as a driving force within contemporary dystopias. As Buchloh recognised, with characteristic astuteness and overstatement, sculptures like *Very Derivated Products* at the Guggenheim SoHo revealed how 'the travesty of failed utopian aspirations sparks negative epiphanies'.[54] The revolutionary potentials of plastic in a modernising world, or past ambitions and desires associated with consumer goods or establishing small businesses, were transformed into an overwhelming glut of discarded umbrellas and plastic kitsch, logos for big-brand corporations and a monstrously-proportioned mess of capitalism. Beside this mess, as though paralleling its past ideals, stood pedestal fans from which small red flags fluttered, 'conjur[ing] up lethal memories of the not too distant past when utopian aspirations had deteriorated to the military parades of the May Day celebrations in Red Square'.[55]

Buchloh's insights stood noticeably and significantly against the predominant views of Hirschhorn's work, for they were among the first to recognise Hirschhorn's ambivalence toward utopian ambitions. But if Buchloh perceived that his broader argument about past utopianisms becoming contemporary failures was an original insight on his part – and his lack of references to other sources on this point, in any of his publications on Hirschhorn, suggests that he did – then he was unfortunately mistaken. As we noted in Chapter Two, the argument had already been made by Boris Groys, whose book *The Total Art of Stalin*

[53] Enwezor and Hirschhorn, above n.4, p.35.

[54] Buchloh, 'Detritus and Decrepitude', above n.8, p.54; and Buchloh, 'Cargo and Cult', above n.8, p.173.

[55] *Ibid*. This process also found parallels in Hirschhorn's atlas *Les plaintifs, les bêtes, les politiques* which charted such historical shifts as the transformation of Rodchenko-style montage into Stalinist propaganda and thence into contemporary advertising for celebrities or Chanel – all of which Hirschhorn labeled with ambivalent acknowledgements of their beauty and which, to cite Buchloh again, equally highlighted 'the catastrophic outcome of what was once a utopian design culture': Buchloh, 'An Interview with Thomas Hirschhorn', above n.24, p.92.

focused precisely on such reifications and devolutions of Soviet avant-garde practices within Stalinist social engineering, including the May Day parades to which Buchloh referred.[56] Similarly, a number of artists had also already reiterated and re-evaluated those failures within their practices. Most pertinent among them were artists familiar from my analysis in Chapter Three, artists who developed their critiques in the mid-1980s (that is, at roughly the same time as Groys was writing his book), but in a different part of Europe. These were the artists of NSK in Ljubljana, and especially its sub-department IRWIN, for whom the critical reanimation of past utopian strategies was a vital concern. Indeed, this was the very basis of NSK's retro politics that, as we can recall, built on re-creations of past aesthetic models so as to deconstruct and disaffiliate from the state of the present.

Hirschhorn's models of implication raise crucial, if still-unrecognised, conceptual parallels with NSK. Both identified how past utopian ideals and imagery had become reified within what they perceived to be problematic, perhaps even totalising, contemporary social conditions. Both responded by reanimating important artistic precedents made problematic by those conditions – such as Malevich's Suprematism or early-Soviet photomontage in the case of NSK; or Beuys, Klein and similar forms of montage for Hirschhorn – so as to critique and differentiate their own work from those precedents and the reasons for their problematisation. And both ultimately directed their deconstructive focus toward the same politics, albeit during different historical periods and thus toward different referents and slightly different drives behind "democratisation". Hirschhorn's theories and practices of implication – and particularly, for current purposes, the implication of such modernist figures as Beuys – thereby suggest the development of a retro politics of his own, one operating in curiously parallel ways and for similar reasons to NSK's.

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[56] Groys, above n.35. Given the renown of Groys' book, and its publication in German and English well before 2001 when Buchloh's first publications on Hirschhorn appeared, it is unlikely that Buchloh was unaware of Groys' argument. It remains surprising, however, that Buchloh did not refer to Groys in these or later publications on Hirschhorn.

This has not gone unnoticed by the members of IRWIN, who have admitted a strong interest in Hirschhorn's work because of its correlations with their practice.[57] Nor do I think it coincidental on Hirschhorn's part, for his work has, on occasion, made stark reference to that of NSK. In 1996, for example, Hirschhorn produced a series of *Artists' Scarves* that, across striated woollen backgrounds, bore the names of twentieth century artists including Blinky Palermo, Kurt Schwitters or Piet Mondrian (fig.4.20). According to Buchloh, Hirschhorn sought to conflate popular cultural forms of supporting major sports teams – emblematised in the striped woollen scarf – with the striped designs of Daniel Buren, such that Hirschhorn articulated 'a grotesque mass cultural echo of the fate of Daniel Buren's radical critique' and its recuperation within major cultural institutions.[58] That critical reflection of mass cultural insignia, institutional support and artists' scarves had already appeared just three years earlier, though, in the 1993 *NSK Staat Berlin*, where the Slovenian group sold scarves bearing the Malevich cross at their embassy-cum-rock concert – as a sign of Malevich's fate under communism and as a tongue-in-cheek self-appraisal after communism's collapse.[59] Even more stark are Hirschhorn's and Steinweg's assertions that works like *Swiss Swiss Democracy* are in essence 'organigrams', derived from a 'plan, organigram, map, schema' on cardboard and paper and transformed into three-dimensional reality.[60] As I claimed earlier in this chapter, Hirschhorn's transposition of two-dimensional schema into other dimensions highlighted how his sculptures' foundations lay in forms of neo-dadaist montage, especially those found in the artist's atlas called *Les plaintifs, les bêtes, les politiques*. That transposition can, however, be recognised as equally derived from postcommunist artists such as those in NSK, for whom the organigram was the fundamental structural principle of their organisation and one which held its many departments together in their collective critique of dominant social and political conditions. Indeed, the many different

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[57] Interview with Miran Mohar, Andrej Savski and Borut Vogelnik, Ljubljana, 9 November 2007, author's notes.

[58] Buchloh, 'Cargo and Cult', above n.8, p.172.

[59] See Chapter Three of this thesis, p.190, n.113.

[60] Hirschhorn and Steinweg, as cited in Marcus Steinweg, 'Conférence 28', *Swiss Swiss Democracy Journal*, 28 (5 January 2005), np.

elements that made up Hirschhorn's large-scale sculptures and which were the collective base for his critical implications – elements that included his bars and auditoria, lounges and libraries – are perhaps better understood as *departments* rather than elements *per se*: as analogues to NSK's collectivised and organigrammed departments, and thus as reinforcing the specifically postcommunist foundations of Hirschhorn's practice since the late-1990s.

Given Hirschhorn's calculated references to prior art practices, and his own version of retro politics, the question to ask now is: What *purpose* did the remobilisation of these postcommunist precedents serve? One purpose was clearly conceptual. NSK provided Hirschhorn with an art historical base that was distinct from the late-modernist utopianisms of Beuys or Klein – ideals that, to reiterate, Hirschhorn identified as ultimately recuperated within (or even as) the self-legitimating force of "democratic" militarism. By contrast, NSK's work represented a very different trajectory of art historical significance, one that could not be so easily aligned with what had become the aesthetic, political and "democratic" status quo. In addition, NSK's history offered Hirschhorn readymade forms of critical potential that had already been directed toward critiques of "democracy", its easterly enforcement and its problematic entanglements since the late-1980s. For Hirschhorn, then, NSK's postcommunist practice arguably presented an alternative canon of influence, one that could be deemed surprising because largely ignored by such critics as Buchloh or indeed practically anyone outside postcommunist Europe (a circumstance that IRWIN lamented in their *East Art Map*).[61] At the same time, that influence nonetheless set a grounding for Hirschhorn's critical methodologies, for NSK had already identified the urgency, possibility and viability of critiquing "democracy" within European contexts and amid its spread ever-eastward.

These precedents served a further purpose in Hirschhorn's work, and it is an important if subtle purpose to note because it related to a specific problem raised by Hirschhorn's invocations of art's diverse (even conflicting) histories within more contemporary

[61] IRWIN, 'General Introduction', in IRWIN (eds.), *East Art Map: Contemporary Art and Eastern Europe* (London: Afterall, 2006), p.14.

contexts. By reanimating NSK's aesthetics alongside his reanimation of Beuys, Klein or other utopian artists, Hirschhorn opened up the possibility that he was implicating NSK in much the same way that he implicated others. The problem, in other words, was that Hirschhorn's work could be misconstrued as being as critical of NSK as it was of Beuys or Klein, and that NSK's practice was more a target for Hirschhorn's critiques than a source of critical potential. There was, however, one significant difference between these reanimations. Hirschhorn's invocations of Beuys, Klein or Mondrian were gestural or "decorative", manifest through performed acts of fielding questions, through artists' names printed on scarves, or images – including images of death and oppression that we may not ordinarily call "decorative" – that he taped to walls. His invocations of NSK were, conversely, structural. They served as the ground against which he figured, or on which he staged, his other and generally more critical implications: a literal if woolly ground in the case of the scarves, against which he figured the artists' names; or the structural organigram forms and elements or departments in which *Swiss Swiss Democracy* and its myriad de-idealising gestures played out. NSK's postcommunist precedents consequently provided both a readymade form of critical potential, and a readymade form *for* critical potential – a structural form to foreground his own critical engagements with the past and the present, and with the interweaving of political praxis and art history.

NSK's work was not the only source that Hirschhorn drew upon for this structural purpose. In the early-2000s, his sculptures often bore explicitly Kabakovian foundations as well. The 'other worlds' that Hirschhorn presented in *Chalet Lost History* and *Swiss Swiss Democracy* – as well as later works such as *Utopia-Utopia* and 2006's *Superficial Engagement* at the Barbara Gladstone Gallery, New York – involved the near-total transformation of gallery spaces and museum rooms. These works were 'total environment[s]', as the Press Release for *Swiss Swiss Democracy* declared.[62] Or, to be more precise, almost-total or "total" environments in which – much like Kabakov's similar and earlier "total" installations that we analysed in Chapter Two, such as *Ten*

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[62] Centre Culturel Suisse, *Swiss Swiss Democracy* Exhibition Press Release, 2004.

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Characters – the only parts of the galleries to maintain their original appearance were the ceilings. Everything else, from the walls to the lighting to the galleries' layouts, were carefully redesigned to simulate spaces at once familiar yet staged and in which – again reminiscent of *Ten Characters* – critiques of "democracy" could function.

Hirschhorn remodelled Kabakovian structures in other ways as well. In late-2001, he exhibited a rickety sculpture that filled the small gallery of La Salle de Bains in Lyon. Titled *Maison Commune* (or *Communal House*, fig.4.21), the work comprised sixteen small rooms spanning two storeys of the model house-cum-apartment block, a model whose walls were removed to let viewers see directly inside. What they saw were rooms '"personalised"', in Hirschhorn's words, so that '[t]he spectator knows that it resembles different apartments inhabited by different people. There is no-one in the house nor any figurine or small human model',[63] only more photographic reproductions of people from across the world bearing arms and grenade launchers ready for war. On one level, *Maison Commune* clearly reiterated Kabakovian forms, especially the form of *Ten Characters*, for Kabakov similarly removed the walls of his modelled communal apartments in order to heighten visitors' senses of voyeurism as they peered into the personalised yet uninhabited rooms. On another level, *Maison Commune* was also an obvious precursor to 2003's *Hotel Democracy* and its own rickety series of empty rooms personalised with images of weapons and warmongering. If, as Hirschhorn argued of *Maison Commune*, it was not the defence of specific causes but the violence of bearing arms that was "communal" in contemporary society, then it was a communality that Hirschhorn explicitly identified with militarised "democracy" in his later hotel.[64] And if Kabakov's "total" installations provided the structural basis for *Maison Commune*'s assertions of anomic communality and the domestication of war, then they similarly subtended *Hotel Democracy*'s inflection of "democracy" with death and his dislocation of "democracy" from utopian ideals – a "utopianism", that we might remember, Hirschhorn staged in his separate *U-Lounge*, with its spaces for conversation sparked in part by Marcus

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[63] Thomas Hirschhorn, *Maison Commune* Preparatory Notes, republished in *Swiss Swiss Democracy Journal*, 35 (13 January 2005), np.

[64] *Ibid.*

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Steinweg's philosophical pamphlets distributed throughout the work. And in these texts, Steinweg advanced his, and perhaps Hirschhorn's, conceptions of what "utopia" (or at least social and aesthetic ideals) might still be in the face of contemporary "democracy": a perception of people without predetermined identities and without preconceptions as to other people's identities; a meeting-point whose politics similarly lacked pre-determination; and a politics which could thus 'affirm an "enormous and terrible emptiness"… as a kind of ontological deviation… as something which interrupts the totality of an ordered system or body'.[65] Steinweg's reference to emptiness here was primarily to Deleuze. Considering my analysis in preceding pages, though, I think that we can argue a more suggestive correspondence with Kabakov's very similar conception of emptiness: a conception of that which refuses absorption within existing forms of discourse, social ordering or 'stateness', as we saw Kabakov claim in Chapter Two; of a sense of something 'enormous and terrible' emerging because of the deconstruction of that stateness; and of the consequent affirmation of non-identity that can develop through these processes of deconstructing ideology and ontology.

These are very suggestive comments by Steinweg and I will return to them shortly as a way of thinking through the affirmative effects of Hirschhorn's practice. For present purposes, however, it is worth reflecting on how, since the late-1990s, Hirschhorn's persistent revolt against "democracy" has emerged in concert with an equally persistent remodelling of postcommunist aesthetics. At once conceptual and structural, subtle yet pragmatic, Hirschhorn's foundations in the work of Kabakov and NSK have provided him with both a precedent for that revolt, and a literal platform on which to de-idealise art and politics present and past. Indeed, these postcommunist aesthetics provide the basis for Hirschhorn's own retro politics: the reanimation of often conflicting art histories through which to critique other, more contemporary conflicts. These retro politics, I have suggested, underpin Hirschhorn's strong desire for an alternative art historical frame from the Euro-American canon – a canon with which commentators have invariably aligned

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[65] Marcus Steinweg, 'The Community of Singularities', one of Steinweg's forty-four philosophical texts distributed in Thomas Hirschhorn's *U-Lounge*. The citation here is from Gilles Deleuze, 'Bartleby, or the Formula', *Essays Critical and Clinical*, trans. Daniel Smith (London: Verso, 1998), pp.68-90.

his work, and from which he has carefully sought distinction. Yet these remobilised retro politics also reveal something more than mere correlations or affinities between Hirschhorn's practice and those of Kabakov and NSK. What they reveal is a tactical *continuum* between Hirschhorn's work and its postcommunist precedents, one that has hitherto gone unnoticed by Hirschhorn's advocates and critics alike but which is absolutely central to Hirschhorn's work. On the one hand, it is a continuum that hinges upon shared aims, and especially a shared critical focus on "democracy". On the other hand, this shared or remobilised focus articulates another continuum as well, and one of which Hirschhorn was undoubtedly aware. It reveals a continuum between the specific contexts to which he, Kabakov and NSK responded: a continuum, that is, between the social, cultural and especially political forms of self-legitimation and self-perpetuation in Europe in the first decade after communism, and those that emerged in the early-twenty-first century. Implicit in Hirschhorn's approach was thus a belief that this continuum was not solely a matter for political science and philosophy, as was our concern in Chapter One. It was a matter for art history and practice as well.

This was arguably the most important purpose underlying Hirschhorn's postcommunist turn. If Europe's pasts and present, and its artists from "East" and "West", were frequently interwoven in Hirschhorn's practice after 1998, this was not to indicate a communality grounded in "democracy". That may have been the normative assertion in contemporary curatorship, criticism and political rhetoric, as we have seen throughout this thesis and this chapter, but it was not Hirschhorn's own position. Instead, his sculptures up to and including *Swiss Swiss Democracy* suggested that European contexts and artists did not share a common bond, so much as a common bondage, in the name of "democracy": a connection grounded in the failure of past utopianisms, in the violent recuperations of utopian ideals within contemporary contexts, and in the asymmetries of power maintained and legitimised through those ideals. Hirschhorn was thus not an artist 'in tune with the democratic age', to cite curator Patricia Falguières, but rather an artist in tune with a very different development. The development, as I defined it in Chapter One, of *postsocialist art*: namely, an art that returns to nonconformist practices from the recent past – especially, in this instance, to early-postcommunist critiques of "democracy" – so

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as to remobilise and reanimate those critiques beyond the period and geography of postcommunism.

To identify Hirschhorn's practice after 1998 as postsocialist is, I propose, a more accurate way to register the significance of his works from the period, and their critical, historical and aesthetic grounding, than existing commentaries have so far provided. Nonetheless, while we can define his aesthetic critiques as postsocialist in the sense outlined here, it is important to recognise that his work cannot be defined solely as critical. If the reanimation of postcommunist critiques of "democracy" established an important foundation for works like *Swiss Swiss Democracy*, I want to conclude this chapter by arguing that Hirschhorn's postsocialist critique was precisely a *foundation* from which to generate a discourse, an aesthetic and a politics that were critical *and productive* at the same time. This was a position shared once again with NSK, for whom critiques of "democracy" were insufficient in and of themselves. Those critiques, however, drove NSK's construction of an alternative infrastructure for art collecting and analysis, an autonomous infrastructure generated within and for postcommunist contexts. The same can be argued of Thomas Hirschhorn, I suggest, whose retro politics and critiques of "democracy" similarly drove the production of an autonomous aesthetic politics for and from his art. 'Art can have its own politics. That was the point of *Swiss Swiss Democracy*', Hirschhorn has claimed: a politics sparked by de-idealisations of "democracy" or revolts against "democracy", certainly, but one which could still be productive, affirmative and not pre-determined.[66] For Steinweg, commenting suggestively in his pamphlet for the *U-Lounge*, this was the basis for 'affirm[ing] an enormous and terrible emptiness', an autonomous ideal that can arise by not identifying with existing forms of stateness. For Hirschhorn, it was the basis for what he called 'making art politically': an aesthetic grounded in critique, but which affirmed art's distinction from normative political ideals; and for which, in Hirschhorn's slyly combative words, '[i]t is [also] important to say that this exhibition is producing

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[66] Conversation with Thomas Hirschhorn, 15 September 2006, author's notes. See also Enwezor and Hirschhorn, 'Interview', above n.4, p.35, where Hirschhorn similarly argues that 'I do not believe that the process of making art can exist without taking a critical position'.

something. It's like a battery. Everyday, we produce something. Everyday, the battery is recharged'.[67]

Making Art Politically

Hirschhorn's comments about generating something so as to recharge the battery of *Swiss Swiss Democracy* were made expressly about the work's newspapers, which Hirschhorn and his assistants produced daily on-site so as to catalyse discussion about "democracy", political philosophy and Hirschhorn's prior practice. This desire to produce forms that could be engaged with directly and potentially taken away was just one manifestation of a much larger interest for Hirschhorn: an interest in making forms that did not conform to established criteria of "quality" or measures of "meaning". Instead, Hirschhorn insisted upon different standards of art practice that were conceptually and formally self-determined, and which he generated as a result of, and through, his processes of critical distinction from aesthetic norms. 'My problem is: how to take a position?' he reflected in 2007. 'How to give form to this position… beyond cultural, political and aesthetic conventions?'[68] The task of making "unconventional" forms, of giving form to nonconformity, was thus the productive potential that Hirschhorn perceived could be generated from critique. Indeed, it was a task that stood at the core, as the ultimate goal, of Hirschhorn's practice – a task of 'making art politically', as he frequently intoned, rather than making "political art".[69]

This distinction was crucial for Hirschhorn, because he believed that "political art" merely confirmed the socio-political status quo. Regardless of whether it served or

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[67] Nicolas Trembley, *Swiss Swiss Democracy Experience*, above n.20.

[68] Thomas Hirschhorn, 'Dis Pourquoi!? Dis Pourquoi!?', *Cahiers du musée national d'art moderne*, 100 (Summer 2007), p.131.

[69] See, for example, Enwezor and Hirschhorn, above n.4, p.29; Stoeber, 'Beauty is the Will for Truth', above n.25, p.33. According to Hirschhorn, the phrase was another form of remodelling, one derived from filmmaker Jean-Luc Godard's assertion that 'the problem is not to make political films, but to make films politically': cited in Stoeber, p.33.

denounced existing ideology, "political art" according to Hirschhorn reinforced the unimpeachable significance and social dominance of that ideology. It could not propose modes of being or thinking except in response to, and thus in the service of, ideological prescriptions.[70] By contrast, 'making art politically' did not reject ideological critique altogether; such critiques clearly remained central to Hirschhorn's work. But it did reject notions of "critique for critique's sake" so as to propose means of making art forms and ways of conceiving those forms that were beyond normative thinking, and that were thus potentially taboo, unbecoming and even untouchable.[71] This was not a physical form of the untouchable, as we saw with *Hotel Democracy*: Hirschhorn's refusal to let audience members physically contact his "hotel" was one means of de-idealising "democracy", of disrupting the frequently-voiced view that haptic participation was the genesis of art's "democratic" potential. Nor was 'making art politically' to be confused with "democracy" in general, as Claire Bishop in particular misunderstood.[72] The untouchability that Hirschhorn affirmed was chiefly conceptual, but it was a conceptual frame not ordinarily touched upon or considered in histories of contemporary art because deemed obsolete, irrelevant, or simply not yet envisioned. And in many cases, the untouchable politics that Hirschhorn sought were taboo precisely because they *exceeded* "democracy".

This sense of presumed irrelevance or the taboo was arguably another purpose driving Hirschhorn's reanimation of forms and critiques from postcommunism, a historical frame

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[70] Enwezor and Hirschhorn, *ibid*, pp.29-35.

[71] For Hirschhorn's affirmation of conceptual taboos, see *inter alia* Emmanuelle Lequeux and Thomas Hirschhorn, 'Thomas Hirschhorn: La Suisse par la face nord', *Le Monde, Aden* (22 December 2004), p.22; and also Marcus Steinweg's inaugural lecture for *Swiss Swiss Democracy*, cited earlier in this chapter: Marcus Steinweg, 'DÉMOCRATIE ET NON-DÉMOCRATIE', above n.23, np. Hirschhorn has further elaborated on the conceptually 'untouchable' in his practice, in relation to *Concretion Re* (2007) and works leading up to it during the early-2000s: 'I want to try and produce a work that does not avoid what is negative. I want to produce a work that is open to what isn't positive. I want to work on something that isn't negative, but that confronts what isn't given, what cannot be touched, what isn't positive. Through my work, I want to touch what can't be touched. I want to work on the edge of the untouchable': Thomas Hirschhorn, *Concretion Re* Exhibition Press Release and Artist's Statement, Galerie Chantal Crousel, 2007.

[72] Bishop, 'Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics', above n.5, pp.75ff; see also Claire Bishop, *Installation Art: A Critical History* (London: Tate Publishing, 2005), pp.124ff; and Uzel, above n.5, especially pp.62-71.

largely ignored outside its spatio-temporal borders because supposedly immaterial beyond them. As I proposed in the previous section, Hirschhorn's display of these readymade forms of and for critical potential – especially in the North American and Western European spaces in which he invariably exhibited – was as much a political determination as an aesthetic one. This proposal is confirmed by Hirschhorn's notion of 'making art politically', in which the process of aesthetic selection – of which forms to make or build from, of returning to the "immaterial" or "irrelevant" within a particular gallery or non-postcommunist context – cannot be divorced from politics. Art making and aesthetic selection, for Hirschhorn, are not just equivalent to political determinations: they can be inherently political processes.

It was for this reason that Hirschhorn refused to define his works as "installations", preferring instead such seemingly obsolete expressions as 'sculpture', 'display', 'layout' or simply 'work'. Whereas Hirschhorn perceived "installation" as being 'an insider, contemporary-art term', less-fashionable or less-topical taxonomies of sculpture and display had a more 'pragmatic resonance', he claimed.[73] This was more than a nostalgic determination on the artist's part. The rather quaint and distant echoes of pragmatism associated with 'display' or 'work' could be recalled and then liberated – much as Beuys had 'liberate[d] the term "sculpture" from aesthetic volumes', as Hirschhorn told Gingeras in one of his few approbations of Beuys – or reanimated within more contemporary social and aesthetic conditions.[74] Similarly, Hirschhorn was not playing mere semantic games. "Installation" was particularly problematic for Hirschhorn's practice, as it was for Ilya Kabakov from the late-1980s on, due to the term's connotations of supposedly more active forms of audience engagement than other media (painting, drawing, photography) allowed. By frequently inviting physical participation and interaction, or by decentralising visitors' senses of proprioception and self within its staged environments, installation was – or so critics including Bishop, Martin Jay or Julie

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[73] See respectively Enwezor and Hirschhorn, above n.4, p.28; and Gingeras, 'Permanently Entwined', above n.45, p.5.

[74] Gingeras, *ibid*.

Reiss have urged – the "democratic" medium *par excellence*.[75] Indeed, such critical analyses suggested installation to be an *ontologically* "democratic" medium, the escalating interest in which since the 1980s has coincided neatly with the burgeoning "democracy" industry in international politics and in the service of global capital.[76] By contrast, if Hirschhorn's works appeared to resemble installations in all but name, then the de-idealisations within them, and especially within a work like *Swiss Swiss Democracy*, were an acutely directed means to exorcise installation of its "democratic" ontology. Or, more precisely, to denaturalise and deconstruct that ontology and reveal it as ideology, as part of Hirschhorn's broader aim to 'refuse to deal with established definitions. I'm trying to destabilize them. I'm trying to contaminate them'.[77] Hirschhorn's description of his work as "work" consequently sought to defend his practice from the conceptual parameters within which "installation" was contained – to replace "installation" with a distinct and self-defined notion of art-making, one that could push Hirschhorn's practice into different political and conceptual registers.

[75] See Bishop, *Installation Art*, above n.72, in which Bishop advocates a history of installation as a "democratic" medium and whose proponents include Allan Kaprow and his interest in John Dewey, Beuys and direct democracy, Robert Irwin and his "democracy" of the senses and sensations, Helio Oiticíca's use of installation to counter Brazilian dictatorship in the 1960s and, ultimately, Thomas Hirschhorn's practice of 'making art politically'. See also Julie Reiss, *From Margin to Center: The Spaces of Installation Art* (Cambridge MA: The MIT Press, 2001), especially pp.15ff; and Martin Jay, 'Somaesthetics and Democracy: Dewey and Contemporary Body Art', *Journal of Aesthetic Education*, 36/4 (Winter 2002), pp.55-69. Other examples in this vein include Alexander Alberro, 'Periodizing Contemporary Art', Paper delivered at the 32nd Congress of the Comité Internationale d'Histoire de l'Art, Melbourne, 18 January 2008, author's notes; Haeyoung Youn, 'Considering Do-Ho Suh's Installation Art within the Context of Asian Democracy', *The International Journal of Arts in Society*, 1/6 (2006), pp.97-106; the anthology of essays on Krzysztof Wodiczko's public displays of video and other art installations in Krzysztof Wodiczko, *Critical Vehicles: Writings, Projects, Interviews* (Cambridge MA: The MIT Press, 1999); and Rosalyn Deutsche's comments in particular in Rosalyn Deutsche, Hans Haacke and Miwon Kwon, '*Der Bevölkerung*: A Conversation', *Grey Room*, 16 (Summer 2004), pp.60-81. As noted earlier in this thesis, Deutsche presents a more thorough examination of public art installations (and especially critical writings about public art) in Rosalyn Deutsche, 'Agoraphobia', *Evictions: Art and Spatial Practice* (Cambridge MA: The MIT Press, 1996), pp.269-327.

[76] My wording here specifically addresses Rosalind Krauss' sketch of how installation art is 'complicit with a globalization of the image in the service of capital': Rosalind Krauss, *"A Voyage on the North Sea": Art in the Age of the Post-Medium Condition* (Cambridge MA: The MIT Press, 1999), p.56. Although Krauss correctly notes installation's almost-umbilical ties with global capital, she does so by seemingly mistaking installation as a provider of primarily imagistic (rather than phenomenological or proprioceptive) sensations.

[77] Hirschhorn in Gingeras, 'Interview', in Gingeras *et al*, above n.15, p.15. See also Stech, above n.49, p.56, where Hirschhorn similarly calls for 'the refusal of criteria' in relation to his work.

This capacity for self-determined art-making was a further ground for Hirschhorn's admiration of Kabakov, whose highly-wrought narrative microcosms meant that he was solely responsible for and (in Hirschhorn's words) 'in full possession of his means'.[78] It was a self-possession and responsibility to which Hirschhorn aspired as well, and that propelled his careful elaboration of the historical foundations and contemporary contextualisation of works including *Chalet Lost History*, *Hotel Democracy* and *Swiss Swiss Democracy*. It also drove a second and equally significant part of Hirschhorn's practice, one that initially seemed antithetical to works like *Swiss Swiss Democracy* but which was, more accurately, its complement. For if *Swiss Swiss Democracy* appeared to be overwhelmingly destructive in its revolt against "democracy", then Hirschhorn's *Bataille Monument* and *Musée Précaire Albinet* (figs.4.22-4.23) seemed wholly constructive, in that Hirschhorn undertook the creation, maintenance and monitoring of these sculptures together with the inhabitants of the racially-divided and socio-economically disadvantaged suburbs where the sculptures were located. Both aspects of Hirschhorn's work were predicated, however, on exceeding interpretive parameters of "democracy": the *Bataille Monument* 'was not a question of representation, of a social project, of democratic representation, but of an artistic project';[79] the *Musée Précaire* 'does not work towards justice or democracy. The *Musée Précaire Albinet* does not want to show what is "possible" or "impossible" [and is] not serving a cause'.[80] By exceeding those parameters, both aspects sought to make art autonomous from them, whether discursively or – as I believe was the case with the *Bataille Monument* and the *Musée Précaire* – through collaborative processes of art's actual making.

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[78] Thomas Hirschhorn, Untitled Artist's Statement, *Swiss Swiss Democracy Journal*, 36 (14 January 2005), np.

[79] Hirschhorn in Thomas Wülffen, Thomas Hirschhorn and Marcus Steinweg, 'Beyond Mission Impossible', *Janus*, 14 (Summer 2003), p.31.

[80] Thomas Hirschhorn, 'About the "Musée Précaire Albinet", About an Artists' [*sic*] Work in Public Space, and About the Artists' [*sic*] Role in Public', Artist's Statement distributed as a pamphlet in *Re* (2006), 2nd Seville Biennale of Contemporary Art, Seville. This excerpt was also published in Thomas Hirschhorn, 'A propos du *Musée Précaire Albinet*, à propos d'un travail d'artiste dans l'espace public et à propos du rôle de l'artiste dans la vie publique', *Le Journal des Laboratoires d'Aubervilliers*, 2 (2004), p.62. See also Thomas Hirschhorn and Les Laboratoires d'Aubervilliers, *Thomas Hirschhorn: Musée Précaire Albinet, Quartier du Landy, Aubervilliers, 2004* (Paris: Editions Xavier Barral, 2005), np.

To an extent, such collaborations were a necessity given these were extremely large projects requiring copious amounts of administration, extensive sourcing of materials and weeks-long periods of construction. This was evident to Hirschhorn well before the *Bataille Monument*'s development for *Documenta 11* in 2002. His reprisal in early-2001 of the *Skulptur Sortier Station* (1997, fig.4.24) was also an onerous task, due chiefly to its similarly large size and because its display was not in the Centre Pompidou, which owned the work, but at the entrance to Paris' Stalingrad *métro* station.[81] On the one hand, Hirschhorn's contextual allusion to a victorious communism that would soon sour was once again quite calculated (in this instance, a reference to the pyrrhic victory of Stalin's Soviet army over Nazi forces in the gruelling Battle of Stalingrad of 1942-1943). On the other hand, the sculpture's off-site location in such a busy pedestrian thoroughfare as a train station entrance necessitated large teams of assistants to construct and monitor the work, if only to placate the Pompidou and its insurers. From a base of soured victory, then, Hirschhorn established professional and collegial networks between himself, young workers for Paris' railway company (the RATP), and students from neighbouring high schools and colleges, all of whom were paid eight euros an hour to help prepare, re-create and invigilate the sculpture together. And through the building of these networks, Hirschhorn's assistants not only helped to construct his project, but collaboratively generated their own photographs, videos and other art-forms about the process.[82]

These methods of constructing and then further generating discussion or artworks were equally crucial to Hirschhorn's later public sculptures and their postsocialist distinctions from "democracy". For the *Bataille Monument*, for example, Hirschhorn worked with more than twenty inhabitants of the Friedrich Wöhler housing estate, the sculpture's

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[81] Hirschhorn first exhibited his *Skulptur Sortier Station* in the German city of Münster as part of the *Münster Skulptur Projekte* in 1997.

[82] Thomas Hirschhorn and François Piron, 'Ne pas s'économiser: Conversation', *Trouble*, 1 (Winter 2002), especially pp.57-59. On Hirschhorn's payment of eight euros per hour to his assistants because, among other things, 'I hate volunteerism in the art world', see Euridice Arratia, 'Thomas Hirschhorn: My Work is Work', *Tema Celeste*, 105 (September-October 2004), pp.66-71.

location in Kassel's outer suburb of Nordstadt.[83] During the work's five-month existence, Hirschhorn and his team constructed and then operated, monitored and eventually de-installed its various departments: a plastic tree-like sculpture that served as a local meeting-place; a topographic map of Bataille's work and a library with books about Bataille and his key themes including 'words' and 'sex', as well as 'sport'; an *imbiss* run by a local family (fig.4.25); a website and a television studio from which inhabitants could create videos about whatever subject they chose, and which were subsequently broadcast through Kassel's public-access television channel; a taxi service shuttling people between the estate and *Documenta 11*'s main venues (fig.4.26); and workshops about art, Bataille, writing and reflection that were conducted by Hirschhorn and more established collaborators such as Manuel Joseph and Marcus Steinweg. Hirschhorn adopted similar strategies with his *Musée Précaire* two years later as well. Thirty-nine residents of the Landy quarter of Aubervilliers, a suburb in Paris' outer-north, helped Hirschhorn to create, maintain and de-install a temporary museum made of plastic and wood (fig.4.27). Each week for eight weeks, artworks by Duchamp, Malevich, Mondrian and other European and American modernists were borrowed from the Centre Pompidou's collection and exhibited on-site.[84] Art workshops were held for children on Wednesdays, and writing workshops on Thursdays; public debates about such topics as Arab-Jewish tensions in the neighbourhood took place on Fridays (fig.4.28), followed on Saturdays by conferences about art with curators and critics; and on Sundays, Hirschhorn and his crew would travel throughout Paris and close the week with a communal meal in the *Musée*.

Neither the *Bataille Monument* nor the *Musée Précaire* were projects serving "democracy", as noted earlier, despite their obvious investments in local social politics

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[83] Hirschhorn, '*Bataille Monument*', above n.41, especially pp.135-137. See also the artist's book about the project: Thomas Hirschhorn, *Bataille Maschine* (Berlin, Merve Verlag, 2002).

[84] Displays of Duchamp's, Malevich's and Mondrian's works occurred in the first three weeks after the *Musée Précaire* opened. The five subsequent artists whose works were exhibited in the *Musée* were Salvador Dalí, Joseph Beuys, Le Corbusier, Andy Warhol and finally Fernand Léger: see Hirschhorn and Les Laboratoires d'Aubervilliers, *Musée Précaire Albinet*, above n.80. It should also be noted that Aubervilliers was the location for Hirschhorn's studio at this time as well.

and community discussion; nor were they forms of social work, according to Hirschhorn, because they were not fulfilling perceived needs in Nordstadt or Aubervilliers.[85] Although Hirschhorn worked in conjunction with local residents, this was not to affirm how art could be of service to society: Hirschhorn has explicitly rejected that position as a unilateral and patronising 'edification' of people that ignores their individual agency, subjectivities and responsibilities.[86] Rather, Hirschhorn asked others to help him with his project, so as to engage people in the service of art-making: 'My guideline was: as the artist, I am not asking, can I help you? What can I do for you? Instead, as the artist, I am asking, can you and do you want to help me complete my project?'[87] And at a fee of eight euros per hour, many local residents were seemingly eager to oblige.

For Hirschhorn, though, there was a significant distinction at play in his conception and creation of art. By enlisting the social in the service of art-making, and not the other way around, Hirschhorn ensured that his focus was squarely on art – on the establishment, support and betterment of art, and not of community or society *per se*. Hirschhorn thus sought to affirm the importance and vitality of art *as* art: a vitality devised by Hirschhorn, for which he was chiefly responsible and which, because of the massive scale of his undertaking, necessitated the assistance of others to turn that vitality into specific art forms. What Hirschhorn sought, in other words, was to create a praxis of art that was instigated and authorised by him, and whose politics and aesthetics were not determined externally or legitimised through already-established conceptual frames but through a logic asserted by Hirschhorn as exceeding those frames. That logic was, of course, 'making art politically'. And while it would be easy to understand that logic in terms of the works' literal making, especially the collaborative process of their construction and

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[85] Hirschhorn, '*Bataille Monument*', above n.41, especially p.137; Hirschhorn and Les Laboratoires d'Aubervilliers, *ibid.*

[86] Conversation with Thomas Hirschhorn, 15 September 2006, author's notes.

[87] Hirschhorn, '*Bataille Monument*', above n.41, p.137. Hirschhorn was not, of course, the only artist to make such requests of others. As Paul Ardenne has noted, both Group Material in the United States and especially the French artist Jean-Baptiste Farkas made remarkably similar appeals to audiences and other artists, including Sarkas' request 'Come, help me realise the content of my exhibition': Paul Ardenne, *Un Art Contextuel: Création artistique en milieu urbain, en situation, d'intervention, de participation* (Paris: Flammarion, 2006), pp.61-62.

the involvement of local residents from different cultural and racial backgrounds,[88] this was not quite Hirschhorn's focus. His main goal was to generate an understanding of art that was self-determined, self-defined and self-authorised; to make an art through, in relation to but ultimately in excess of prevailing politico-aesthetic criteria; in other words, to make an art that was autonomous.

This was clearly not the conception of autonomy championed by such formalists as Clement Greenberg, of an art contained by medium-specificity and thereby rendered self-sufficient or vacuum-sealed from everyday life.[89] To cite Hirschhorn again:

> The term "Autonomy" is – for me – not the interpretation of self-sufficiency because self-sufficiency is partial and dogmatic. The "Autonomy" which interests me is the autonomy of courage, the autonomy of assertion, the autonomy to authorize myself, the autonomy to do something on my own – without argumentation, without explanation, without communication and without justification… [a form of] self-authorization.[90]

Hirschhorn's notion of autonomy, as a form of self-authorisation, was not encumbered by a hubristic desire to transcend social relations so much as a form produced from them. Indeed, to make art politically was to pursue self-authorisation in the very imbrication of the social and the artistic, of the generative and the critical, and of autonomy and implication. Rather than a Greenbergian notion of autonomy, then, Hirschhorn's was more Adornian, tracing a lineage that such writers as Brian Holmes or Gregory Sholette have identified as central to a number of significant art practices since the late-1990s, and especially those involved in social activism.[91] There is, however, an equally significant

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[88] Though not, for the most part, different genders: young men made up the majority of Hirschhorn's crews of assistants for both the *Bataille Monument* and the *Musée Précaire Albinet*. The few women who were involved, other than the curators or critics such as Alison Gingeras who delivered lectures on art, invariably tended the works' bars and cooked communal meals. I will return to the role of gender within works such as these, and under Europatriarchy more generally, in the final chapter of this thesis.

[89] It is because of this Greenbergian inflection that Benjamin Buchloh, for example, has (though quite incorrectly) rejected any notion of autonomy in Hirschhorn's work: see Buchloh, 'Cargo and Cult', above n.8, p.114.

[90] Thomas Hirschhorn, 'Autonomy', Artist's Statement distributed as a pamphlet in *Re* (2006), 2nd Seville Biennale of Contemporary Art, Seville.

[91] Gregory Sholette, 'Fidelity, Betrayal, Autonomy: In and Beyond the Contemporary Art Museum', *Third Text* 16/2 (2002), pp.153-166; Brian Holmes, 'Artistic Autonomy and the Communication Society', *Third Text*, 18/6 (2004), pp.547-555. Note however that Holmes has, in the past, been highly critical of

difference between Hirschhorn's and these writers' (especially Holmes') notions of autonomy. For Holmes, the activist pursuit of self-authorisation ultimately enforced a politics with which we are, by now, extremely familiar: a politics of "democracy". For Hirschhorn, of course – along with other artists such as Kabakov or NSK – that retreat to "democracy" was precisely a functionalisation of aesthetic politics that severely constrained it in scope. What they affirmed instead was very different and ultimately more self-defined: "emptiness", in the case of Kabakov; 'retro politics' for NSK;[92] and 'making art politically' for Thomas Hirschhorn – an aesthetic politics of autonomy and even artistic 'freedom', Hirschhorn claimed, that garnered form through processes of non-identification with, and the de-idealisation of, corrupted ideals of "democracy".[93]

There is a further significant difference to consider, though, between Hirschhorn's and Holmes' espousals of autonomy. Holmes' activist inflections have been consistently directed externally, as a means of countering the encroachment of neoliberalism into all domains of society, private life and the public sphere. By contrast, Hirschhorn's affirmations of autonomy were in effect *self*-affirmations, directed toward asserting his *own* capacities for authorisation and responsibility. His drive for autonomy thereby came at a cost. This was not simply for the materials holding his rigorously mundane structures together, or the price of eight euros per hour for his assistants. Rather, his autonomy came largely at the expense of the people working with Hirschhorn, or for Hirschhorn, to give

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Hirschhorn's practice and would most likely dispute this alignment of Hirschhorn's work with the types of activism that he advocates: see Brian Holmes, 'Liar's Poker: Representation of Politics/Politics of Representation', *Springerin*, 03/1 (2003), available at http://www.springerin.at/dyn/heft_text.php?textid=1276&lang=en [accessed 19 July 2006]. The Adornian basis to this return to autonomy in contemporary art and cultural analysis is perhaps most clearly recognised by John Roberts: see John Roberts, 'After Adorno: Art, Autonomy and Critique', *Historical Materialism*, 7 (2000), pp.221-239. Claire Bishop, by contrast, has explicitly rejected this Adornian basis in her analysis of autonomy in the work of Hirschhorn and other artists such as Santiago Sierra. Her reasoning, however, is based on a somewhat narrow perception of autonomy as a 'modernist refusal as advocated by Theodor Adorno': Bishop, 'Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics', above n.5, p.78.

[92] Holmes in fact identifies this "democratic" autonomy specifically in relation to NSK's *Država v Času*, an identification rendered problematic in light of the previous chapter: see Holmes, 'Artistic Autonomy', *ibid*, pp.553-555.

[93] Hirschhorn and Piron, 'Ne pas s'économiser', above n.82, p.61; Hirschhorn in Gingeras, 'Interview', above n.26, p.11.

that autonomy form: an expense driven by expectations that audience members would souvenir the empty Budweiser beer cans or counterfeit currency in *Chalet Lost History*, or Steinweg's texts in the *U-Lounge*, and thereby evaluate their actions and their new possessions' contents; or that they would reflect on the implications of militarism and "democracy", utopian ideals and political sophistry in *Swiss Swiss Democracy*, rather than simply be deflected by the horrific photographs of Iraqi corpses dismembered by bombs; or that the inhabitants of Nordstadt or Aubervilliers would willingly assist Hirschhorn in the production of his now highly-renowned sculptures in their neighbourhoods. This will, and potential wilfulness, to 'making art politically' has opened Hirschhorn to charges of entrepreneurialism and managerialism that, though dismissed by Hirschhorn, bear an element of truth.[94] His networks of friendship, resistance and artistic autonomy in works like the *Musée Précaire* were primarily contractual and not altruistic bonds. Once those contracts concluded, once his collaboratively-produced but singly-authored works came down, Hirschhorn rarely maintained contact with his assistants or followed how their experiences of 'making art politically' may have affected them beyond the sculptures' durations.

There is, as with much of Hirschhorn's carefully orchestrated practice, a purpose to this approach. If Hirschhorn could give form to his senses of autonomy and responsibility through his art and through its capacity to exceed aesthetic and political conventions, then it could also serve as a kind of template or catalyst for other people to do the same. That is, people could affirm their *own* autonomy and responsibility for their frames and forms of thinking by exceeding those conceived by others – including by Hirschhorn himself. This could happen by generating discussion about a work's themes in spaces outside the work's own, or, as was the case with *Skulptur Sortier Station*, by creating artworks from or about the processes involved in Hirschhorn's 'making art politically', and then

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[94] On Hirschhorn's "entrepreneurialism", see Graham Coulter Smith, *Deconstructing Installation Art: Fine Art and Media Art, 1986-2006* (Southampton: CASIAD Publishing, 2006), E-book, Ch.3, p.3, available at http://www.installationart.net/Chapter3Interaction/interaction03.html [accessed 17 December 2007]; on his "managerialism", see Sauzedde, above n.5, pp.136-146; compared with Hirschhorn in Hirschhorn and Piron, 'Ne pas s'économiser', above n.82, p.59.

disseminating those other artworks after the de-installation of Hirschhorn's display.[95] Another example would be the continued use of skills acquired through the construction of Hirschhorn's sculptures, such as the handling and installation of artworks that the *Musée Précaire*'s assistants developed through training programmes with the Centre Pompidou and the Biennale de Lyon in 2003-2004. Or even a refusal to collaborate with Hirschhorn, or to follow his directives, and to make one's own work instead – to assert one's own decisions and one's responsibility for them.

Hirschhorn's attempts to catalyse other people's assertions of independence as a response to, or through, his self-affirmations thus undoubtedly bear a certain kind of nobility. At their core lies a belief that other people's intents, actions and identities are developed individually, in relation to particular contingencies and contexts, and consequently cannot be pre-determined or controlled by others. But while this belief is clearly one of Hirschhorn's greatest ideals, it also verges on a romanticised hope of its own: a hope that people will follow Hirschhorn's quasi-shamanic lead and affirm senses of being that, much as Hirschhorn has somewhat paradoxically ordained, should not be *pre*-ordained. Despite its critical base, then, Hirschhorn's position may ultimately still be consistent with the utopian idealisms of figures like Joseph Beuys, idealisms that Hirschhorn has steadily critiqued since the late-1990s for their recuperation within prevailing political, aesthetic and social conditions. Moreover, the fact that other people have rarely exceeded Hirschhorn's forms, or have instead conformed to particular stereotypes – whether by stealing the pornographic videos rather than discussing Bataille in Kassel, or by continually folding his practice into discourses of "democracy" – has resulted in disappointment and even cynicism on Hirschhorn's part about other people's will to independence or their capacities for autonomy.[96] Such senses of disappointment clearly

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[95] Another example here is Nicolas Trembley's video *Swiss Swiss Democracy Experience*. Trembley's artwork, as observed earlier in these footnotes, derived from the events and processes involved in Hirschhorn's work at the Centre Culturel Suisse. Its subsequent dissemination in exhibitions including *Populism* at Amsterdam's Stedelijk Museum in 2005 suggests that it too was sparked by but exceeded the particular frames of Hirschhorn's work, as Trembley's own version of 'making art politically'.

[96] Conversation with Thomas Hirschhorn, 15 September 2006, author's notes.

highlight the fallibility or precariousness of his projects; they may also be contingent upon the very criteria of "success", "failure" and "quality" that he has previously refused.

This fallibility has been leapt upon by major institutions such as the Centre Pompidou. Despite Hirschhorn's appeals to autonomy, his frequent dependence on the Pompidou – especially by borrowing works from its collection, whether his own or other artists', and displaying them off-site – has been easily recuperated by it. Indeed, Hirschhorn's actions were quickly transformed into a marketing strategy for the Pompidou, providing proof of its ability to target audiences who might not ordinarily enter the Beaubourg building and view its collection. In the process, his works became reduced to signs of the museum's willingness to display its patrimony and extend its reach to parts of Paris that it had not previously entered or touched. And because of Hirschhorn's series of workshops and other programmes, yet against his avowed intents, the Pompidou was also able to assert its willingness to train and "edify" these newly-targeted audiences in the museum's newly-founded satellite locations.[97]

To highlight these strategies of recuperation is not to deny the importance of Hirschhorn's desire for forms of independence through his work, at least from such dominant discourses as "democracy" in art and politics. Nor should this recuperation deflect our attention from Hirschhorn's important re-evaluations of contemporary European art practice through a lens of postsocialism rather than postcommunism or other restrictive frames. His work remains a vital way of broaching and breaching still-extant divisions between "Eastern" and "Western" Europe, "democracy" and postcommunism, precisely because of its will to autonomy and to 'making art politically'.

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[97] Alfred Pacquement, 'Musée Précaire', Thomas Hirschhorn Archive, Galerie Chantal Crousel, Paris. Most of this text was published in Alfred Pacquement, 'The Precarious Museum', *TATE etc*, 2 (Autumn 2004), pp.44-47, except for a significant and illuminating section on how, because 'the Centre Pompidou is a state-run institution and was founded with the vocation of public service, we saw this [involvement in the *Musée Précaire*] was an opportunity to reach other audiences that do not usually come to us'. Considering works such as the *Musée Précaire* as off-site or satellite locations for the Pompidou raises other connotations beyond the scope of this thesis, most notably in relation to the contemporaneous negotiations and development of other 'satellite' branches of the Pompidou in Metz and Abu Dhabi, a 'franchising' of the state-run Pompidou that aligns it with private museums such as the Guggenheim and in turn with the ever-expanding privatization of state-run institutions and public utilities more generally.

The conversion of aesthetics like Hirschhorn's into marketing ploys *should* be borne in mind, though, when considering the complex relations – perhaps 'implications' is the better word to use here – between postcommunism and "democracy", and between artistic autonomy and institutional recuperation, within contemporary art practices in Europe. These complex and occasionally expedient relations have entangled other artists in their pursuit of postsocialism, especially when exhibiting in galleries and contexts quite different from those familiar to Hirschhorn. It is one such entanglement that I want to focus on in the following chapter, which takes as its subject the problematic purposes that drove the development of a new contemporary art museum in Romania's capital Bucharest, and the ways in which two artists, Christoph Büchel and Gianni Motti, responded to those purposes following their invitation to exhibit in the new museum.

Chapter Five:

"Democracy" under Destruction? Büchel and Motti, MNAC and Bucharest

As we have now recognised, Thomas Hirschhorn's practice of 'making art politically' presented a careful delineation of postsocialist aesthetics. His process of returning to, updating and thereby transforming particular postcommunist precedents attempted to re-evaluate some of the cultural and political hierarchies existing between different parts of Europe, as well as the constitution of a contemporary art canon. At the same time, however, this process was also burdened by significant limitations of its own. His assertion of autonomy existed in tension with the autonomies and expectations of other people, while state institutions such as the Centre Pompidou have ultimately found his desired autonomy easy to recuperate within their strategies of self-promotion and publicity. This chapter responds to these two particular limitations in Hirschhorn's work, as well as a third that, for the most part, remained implicit throughout my analysis of his practice: namely, that nearly all of Hirschhorn's critical engagements with "democracy" have been ensconced within, or under the auspices of, art institutions in Western Europe and North America.[1] His reiterations and even reprisals of NSK's and Ilya Kabakov's aesthetics, in other words, have been directed primarily to North Atlantic audiences – to the artworld's hubs of economic and institutional power, and their persistent dominance of putatively global art networks. Hirschhorn's unwillingness to step far beyond those audiences was undoubtedly intentional: it best accorded with his focus on art's (often superficial) engagements with "democracy" *within* globally dominant markets. Nonetheless, that unwillingness also begs a number of questions. Would exhibiting in different aesthetic and geopolitical contexts engender different complications for, and thus demand different models of, artistic reflexivity? What implications might emerge

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[1] In 2004, Hirschhorn re-presented his *Skulptur Sortier Station* in Warsaw; and in 2006, his *Ingeborg Bachmann Altar* was reprised in the Alexanderplatz U-Bahn station, which had been East Berlin's transportation hub and which still stands beside monuments to Communist-era aesthetics, telecommunications and hubris, such as the 365 metre-high Fernsehturm television tower.

when postcommunist critiques of "democracy", having been mobilised into *postsocialist* aesthetics beyond Eastern and Central Europe, return to a postcommunist country charged with "democratisation" since 1989? Would Hirschhorn's retro politics, for instance, shed their sly criticality and instead provide their own superficial imprimatur of "democracy", or a momentary spotlight from the Western markets in which he has become iconic, if exhibited in the Russian city of Volgograd, formerly called Stalingrad, rather than Paris' Stalingrad *métro* station? In short, does site-specificity still matter in an apparently globalised (art) world?

For the American art historian Miwon Kwon, the answer to the last question would be both a cautious 'yes' and a resounding 'no'. In a world of increasing nomadism, of journeying across the globe for work and leisure, or of forced migration across borders so as to escape conflict and other hardships, 'all site-specific gestures', Kwon argues, 'would have to be understood as reactive, cultivating what is presumed to be there [at a given site] already rather than generating new identities and histories'.[2] As Kwon observes further, though, lionised nomadism and its attendant frequent flyer points can also reveal a privilege granted to a select few – the few who can embody and cultivate 'a mobilized market economy (following the dictates of capital)' and whose 'privilege of mobility… has a specific relationship to power'.[3] Valorising locality in opposition to a potentially problematic globality (or indeed vice versa) is not, according to Kwon's important formulation, a worthwhile endeavour. Instead, if globetrotting artists and writers continually find themselves in the '"wrong" place' rather than the "right" place of "home",[4] then reflexivity is required about the vectors between "home" and "elsewhere", between "right" sites and "wrong", and about the reasons and expectations that propel people along those vectors in the first place.

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[2] Miwon Kwon, *One Place after Another: Site-Specific Art and Locational Identity* (Cambridge MA: The MIT Press, 2002), pp.164-165.

[3] *Ibid*, pp.165-166. We can also consider here James Meyer's discussion of the (somewhat oversimplified) binary relationship between 'lyrical' and 'critical' nomadism in contemporary art practice: James Meyer, 'Nomads: Figures of Travel in Contemporary Art', in Alex Coles (ed.), *Site-Specificity: The Ethnographic Turn* (London: Black Dog Publishing, 2000), pp.10-26.

[4] Kwon, *ibid*, pp.156-157.

Kwon's call for reflexivity equally propels this chapter and its address of the questions left open by Thomas Hirschhorn's practice. To do this, we need to redress a striking omission in Kwon's approach: her lack of engagement with a specific example of how such reflexivity operates in practice. Kwon's argument unfolds on a level of abstraction, catalysed by American author Don DeLillo's play *Valparaiso* (1999) and its fictional account of a businessman who finds himself in the "wrong" place after mistakenly flying to Valparaiso, Chile, rather than Valparaiso, Indiana. In actuality, however, artists rarely – if ever – arrive at the "wrong" place by happenstance or error. They are generally *invited* there, an invitation that frequently depends on the invitee's extant privileged status and the various expectations and purposes for which the invitation was issued. It was such an invitation that drew two Swiss-based artists, Christoph Büchel and Gianni Motti, to Romania and to a particular concentration of politics – national and international, art institutional and aesthetic – within which they mobilised precisely the kind of reflexivity that Kwon advocates but which is ghosted in her analysis. This is my argument in the current chapter. On the one hand, Büchel and Motti's response was largely specific to the site in which these politics played out: a new museum of contemporary art housed in a relic from Romania's communist past, and which provides a stark example of how inextricable art and politics, self-promotion and the autonomy of others, can be under postcommunist conditions. On the other hand, Büchel and Motti's response also provided an important extension of the postsocialist critiques of "democracy" that they had developed in the years preceding their invitation, but in quite different ways from those advanced by Hirschhorn.

This chapter therefore shifts us beyond the scope of Hirschhorn's practice and towards a specific intersection of postcommunist politics and postsocialist aesthetics. It begins by analysing the highly controversial circumstances surrounding the development of Romania's new museum and the various reasons why Büchel and Motti, among other key figures in Western European art, were invited to Bucharest to help inaugurate the museum. Part of this reasoning, as I will show in the second section of this chapter, rested on Büchel and Motti's postsocialist aesthetics that frequently resembled, though in fact

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were quite critical of, interventionist practices and aesthetics of "democratisation". Their particular response to the museum's invitation and its site-specific web of politics – manifested in an installation that took "democracy" as its subject, but which the artists hid in a museum basement – reveals an important convergence and differentiation of postcommunism and postsocialism within contexts of art. It also provides a rejoinder of sorts to Kwon's assertion that site-specific critiques cannot cultivate 'new identities' but only those presumed to be readymade on-site. Instead, as I contend in the following pages, Büchel and Motti's work proposes an even more pressing consideration: if reflexivity toward being in the "wrong" place can be conceived as political, and if the resultant politics and aesthetics can be properly understood within a frame of postsocialism, then what emerges when Western artists refuse to identify those politics through a "right" name of "democracy" within a postcommunist state? In other words, we must again ask ourselves – some twenty years after artists such as Kabakov faced the same dilemma when exhibiting in New York – what might be the productive potential of a "wrong" name in the "wrong" place?

Of People and the Parliament

On October 29, 2004, Romania's Muzeul Naţional de Artă Contemporană – also known as the National Museum of Contemporary Art, or simply as MNAC – opened in Wing E4 of Bucharest's Palace of the Parliament (fig.5.1). The event was nearly fifteen years in the making. A museum dedicated to contemporary art was first mooted by Romanian cultural and political leaders soon after the bloody revolutions of December 1989 – revolutions which saw hundreds of anti-communist and pro-democracy protesters across the country shot, tortured and crushed by tanks, and that resulted in the overthrow and notoriously hasty (and equally notoriously televised) execution of Romania's tyrannical leaders, Nicolae and Elena Ceauşescu. MNAC's location was finally announced in 2001, as the cornerstone of numerous cultural initiatives undertaken between 2000 and 2004 by Romania's Social Democratic Party-led government. The decision was particularly pressing given that Bucharest's Soros Center for Contemporary Art – one of the city's

focal points for contemporary culture throughout the 1990s – had its funding withdrawn in 1999 by George Soros' Open Society Institute, thereby threatening many of the formal exchange programmes cultivated between Romania and other European artists, curators and critics after 1989.[5] The inauguration of MNAC instead gave a clear indication of Romania's continuing desire to integrate into trans-European cultural dialogues after its communist past and despite the Soros Center's destabilisation. And as if to reinforce that desire, familiar conceptual tropes of "Europe" appeared in the publicity campaigns for MNAC, as led by the museum's two directors: a hope that 'the museum be the promoter of dialogue, a living space, malleable and polemical at the same time', according to Director General Mihai Oroveanu; and for Scientific Director Ruxandra Balaci, the conception of MNAC as 'an evolving work… a laboratory open to research in the visual domain'.[6]

Guests and champagne were not all that flowed freely after MNAC's doors opened, however. So too did criticism of the new museum, its administrators and the government for what was perceived to be the explicit exploitation of contemporary art for politically expedient purposes. Bucharest-based artist Dan Perjovschi – whose work I will examine in Chapter Six – refused to attend, despite being awarded the inaugural George Maciunas Prize that was due to be presented to him at MNAC that night. Perjovschi's protest was one of numerous others voiced by artists including Lia Perjovschi and Vlad Nanca, by critics and curators such as Cosmin Costinas and Mária Hlavajová, and in online

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[5] Conversation with Irina Cios, Director of the International Center for Contemporary Art, Bucharest, 18 August 2007. As we examined in Chapter Three, the period of 1999 to 2001 saw the closure of most of the Soros Centers for Contemporary Art throughout postcommunist Europe. In Bucharest, the Center was shut down only to be re-opened and re-branded as the 'International Center for Contemporary Art'. It should be noted, however, that an earlier version of MNAC, the Office for Exhibitions and Art Documentation, still existed to exhibit international artists in Bucharest and to assist Romanian artists exhibiting within and beyond Romania: see Nahma Sandrow, 'From People's Palace to Museum', *Art News*, 103/2 (February 2004), p.56.

[6] Cited in Laure Hinckel, 'L'ouverture du Musée National d'Art Contemporain de Bucarest: La victoire de la pensée libre sur le totalitarisme', *Le Courrier des Balkans* (27 October 2004), available at http://balkans.courriers.info/article4720.html [accessed 4 November 2004]. Balaci also claimed in a separate interview that MNAC was 'an open research lab [and] a space for the art engine': Cosmina Ionescu, 'Muzeul de Arta Contemporana – un laborator de cercetare deschis: Interviu cu Ruxandra Balaci', *Observator Cultural*, 220 (11 May-17 May 2004), republished in English at http://www.mnac.ro/interview.htm [accessed 16 February 2005].

discussion forums such as the Romanian branch of nettime.org. At the heart of these criticisms lay substantial disagreements with the purposes driving the development of MNAC. While Balaci asserted that the museum's opening would reveal the healthy state of Romania's postcommunist cultural climate in the early twenty-first century,[7] MNAC's critics believed that diagnosis to be overly optimistic and misleading. Their dissent instead suggested that Romania's cultural contexts had changed little since the dark days of the Ceauşescu era. The reasons underpinning this dissent inform the first section of this chapter, for though they have become well-rehearsed in Romanian cultural circles, they remain largely unknown beyond the country's borders.[8] These reasons also provide a significant foundation for the more broadly *postsocialist* critiques and possibilities that emerged because of MNAC's inauguration, and which are the main subject of this chapter.

Three particular reasons stood out. The first related to the museum's location, for MNAC was tucked away in the rear of Bucharest's most infamous site: the Palace of the Parliament (fig.5.2), a building more widely known for the legacy of dictatorial oppression, megalomania and violence that it signifies as the Ceauşescus' Casa Poporului (or House of the People). Planned in the immediate aftermath of the earthquake that devastated Bucharest in 1977, the Casa Poporului formed the centrepiece of Nicolae Ceauşescu's opportunistic reconstruction of Bucharest as a monument to his social and political ideologies. One-sixth of the inner city was razed under Ceauşescu's command; religious buildings were physically relocated and people displaced so as to construct

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[7] Cited in Ionescu, *ibid.*

[8] Notable exceptions to this international ignorance of the MNAC debate include the important writings of Kristine Stiles on the work of the Perjovschis, to which I will return in Chapter Six. For present purposes, see for example Kristine Stiles, 'Remembrance, Resistance, Reconstruction: The Social Value of Lia and Dan Perjovschi's Art', *Idea: Arts+Society*, 19 (March 2005), reprinted in Marius Babias (ed.), *European Influenza*, exh. cat. (Venice: Romanian Pavilion, La Biennale di Venezia, 2005), pp.574-612. Another important exception is a forum, titled 'The Museum of Conflict: Art as Political Strategy in Post-Communist Europe', that focused primarily on MNAC and which was held at the Jan van Eyck Academie in Maastricht, The Netherlands, on 12 September 2006. A follow-up symposium on 'Regimes of Representation: Art and Politics Beyond the House of the People' was held at MNAC on 11 January 2007. See Metahaven (eds.), *Regimes of Representation: Art and Politics Beyond the House of the People* (Bucharest: MNAC and Maastricht: Jan van Eyck Academie, 2007).

broad boulevards lined with apartment blocks for high-density urban residence.[9] These boulevards swept up to the monumental palace that, long after the Ceauşescus' demise, continued to instil reactions of revulsion and pride: a palace that, even during guided tours in 2006, was championed for being the world's second-largest building and for its construction from materials made only in Romania;[10] and yet a construction conducted at exorbitant cost while most Romanians suffered significant food and financial shortages, and under horrendous labour conditions that caused an unspecified number of workers' deaths.[11]

For Ljubljana-based theorist Renata Salecl in particular, the monstrous construction of the Casa Poporului attests to Ceauşescu's desire to create a fantastical world around him, a nightmarish equivalent to Disneyland in which playfulness was replaced by the panoptical gaze of the hilltop palace and its myriad windows staring down upon the populace.[12] More significantly, as Salecl shows, the building also symbolised 'the erasure of [Bucharest's] historical memory', with its overbearing presence a perpetual reminder of Ceauşescu's delusional "utopia" rather than of the city's long-eradicated pre-Ceauşescu past.[13] It was an erasure curiously repeated in the project of MNAC as well, which was expected to exorcise the palace of the pollution of its past.[14] This exorcism

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[9] This was part of Ceauşescu's policy of 'systematisation', a programme of national unification, population displacement and ethnic homogenisation that in effect resulted in the coerced relocation of rural Romanians from villages into densely packed urban centres such as Bucharest, Cluj or Iaşi. See *inter alia* Darrick Danta, 'Ceauşescu's Bucharest', *Geographical Review*, 83/2 (April 1993), pp.170-182.

[10] Guided Tour of the Palatul Parlamentului, Bucharest, 29 November 2006, author's notes. The topic of whether the Palace is actually the world's second- or third-largest building (behind the Pentagon and Chicago's Merchandise Mart) also remains a source of heated conflict, providing a vigorous discussion during the guided tour.

[11] Peter Siani-Davies, *The Romanian Revolution of December 1989* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005), pp.12ff.

[12] Renata Salecl, 'For Love of the Nation: Ceauşescu's Disneyland', in *(Per)versions of Love and Hate* (New York City: Verso, 1998), pp.79-103.

[13] *Ibid*, p.91.

[14] Cosmin Costinas, 'The Opening of MNAC', *Idea: Arts+Society*, 19 (2004), np; James Paul, 'Exorcizing Ghosts in Bucharest: Art for a New Generation', *Artfairs International* (2004) available at www.artfairsinternational.com/articles/bucharest_article.html [accessed 4 December 2006].

was not intended to occur through perpetual forms of site-specific mourning or memorial effects (although, as Mária Hlavajová observes, the site's crushing history effectively prevents artworks from ignoring it).[15] Instead, Balaci argued, the museum's 'open and flexible space' and focus on new media artworks would reflect the museum's investments in specifically *contemporary* culture and discourse, and thereby appeal to '[t]he younger generation [which] is disposed to forget the past [so as] to look to the future'.[16] Not all members of this so-called 'younger generation' agreed with Balaci's assessment, however, nor with her stereotyping of generational amnesia. Vlad Nanca, for example, rejected the idea that exorcism could be achieved through ignorance of the building's initial symbolic intent: 'there is nothing you can do to this building to make it all right', he claimed.[17] MNAC, it seemed, would merely redecorate rather than eradicate the palace's totalitarian history, remobilising its affectivity of trauma into a touristic attraction legitimised by culture.

The second, and arguably more pressing, concern stemmed from this, insofar as MNAC was not the first Romanian institution to be situated in the building for the purposes of exorcism. That honour – if we can call it that – lay with Romania's Parliament, which the incumbent government moved into the Casa Poporului (and which led to the House's name-change to the Palatul Parlamentului) in 1996. Little, if any, apprehension was raised about transforming Ceauşescu's palace into a Palace of the Parliament – perhaps because the enormous and empty Casa Poporului was the only pragmatic option for as large an institution as the national Parliament; perhaps because of the building's appropriately administrative *détournement* from totalitarian temple to the home of the democratically-elected executive; or perhaps, more cynically, because many of the

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[15] Mária Hlavajová in 'The Museum of Conflict: Art as Political Strategy in Post-Communist Europe: Forum Discussion', in Metahaven (eds.), above n.8, np. This was also evident in MNAC's solo exhibition, held in late-2006, of videos by Czech artist Martin Zet. The museum's foyer was dominated by a large projection of Zet's video *Tanecek* (2004), in which Adolf Hitler and Hermann Goering appear to dance to the funk music accompanying the video. More than two years after MNAC's inauguration, artworks responding directly to totalitarianism still dominated the museum's most public and prestigious gallery: MNAC, Bucharest, 24 November 2006, author's notes.

[16] Ionescu, above n.6; James Paul, 'They Have Hijacked Art', *The Guardian* (28 December 2004), p.G9.

[17] Cited in James, *ibid*.

government's leaders had held positions of power within the Ceauşescu regime, such that their relocation into the Palace aptly symbolised Romania's postcommunist transformation as a form of political refashioning rather than a radical rupture with communism.[18] The decision to move MNAC into the Palace of the Parliament was, by contrast, a much more controversial affair. At stake was the proximity between MNAC and the government. This proximity was clearly spatial, given the adjacency of the two institutions within the one building. It also suggested their potentially philosophical connection, one that echoed the explicit and often enforced links between the state and a supportive, subordinate culture during Romania's recent history of Socialist Realism.[19] The concern that MNAC was, and would be, similarly subject to bureaucratic governance was not without merit, as it turned out, for it was the government – and especially then-Prime Minister Adrian Năstase – that in effect unilaterally determined MNAC's location. No alternative sites were suggested; no broad consultation with the relevant arts sectors took place. Instead, according to MNAC curator Mihnea Mircan, the government 'decided they needed a museum as an electoral instrument and they said "the House of the People or nothing, or at least nothing in the foreseeable future"'.[20] Whereas Balaci believed that it was 'a very good idea of… Adrian Năstase to situate MNAC there [in the Palace]', the implied intent – which Mircan in particular perceived as 'medieval' – was

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[18] President Ion Iliescu, for example, had frequently held ministerial posts within Ceauşescu's regime, although his membership of key Romanian Communist Party committees and councils was removed in 1984: Nestor Ratesh, *Romania: The Entangled Revolution* (Washington D.C.: The Center for Strategic and International Studies, 1991), pp.48-53. Adrian Năstase, Romania's Prime Minister from 2000 to 2004, was from a younger generation of aspiring politicians and leaders who were selected to present Ceauşescu's policies at international conferences because, according to political historian Peter Siani-Davies, they were '[a]ctively promoted [to international audiences] as the acceptable face of Romanian communism': Siani-Davies, above n.11, p.198.

[19] This included the necessity for artists to join the Communist Party-sponsored Artists' Union if they wanted a studio or to exhibit publicly. The Union prided itself, among other things, on championing Nicolae Ceauşescu's nationalist cultural ideologies and his (largely image-based) personality cult that was a central part of his dictatorship. For analysis of Romania's historical tethering of culture and governmental policies, see *inter alia* Katherine Verdery, *National Ideology under Socialism: Identity and Cultural Politics in Ceauşescu's Romania* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991).

[20] Email from Mihnea Mircan to the author, 5 January 2007. Mircan's less-than-effusive assessment – astonishing given his curatorial appointment at MNAC – is confirmed by Mihai Oroveanu in an interview conducted with French sociologist, Céline Settimelli: see Céline Settimelli, *Le Musée National d'Art Contemporain de Bucarest: La contribution de l'art contemporain à la construction de "l'imaginaire national" roumain*, Masters Thesis (Paris: Université Paris VIII, 2006), p.14.

that MNAC would merely aestheticise the government's bureaucratic interests and risk relinquishing its cultural independence in the process.[21]

The third criticism of MNAC related to the museum's ambitions to be recognised as a major institution by international art circles – and more particularly, that such ambitions would be accomplished at the expense, rather than in the interests, of local art sectors and artists. This fear was largely realised in two important ways by the time of MNAC's inauguration. The first was financial. Approximately ten million euros were spent on extensively refurbishing the museum's quarters from so-called Socialist Rococo architecture into a "white cube" with wood-panel flooring and two glass-encased elevator shafts protruding from the Palace's exterior walls (fig.5.3). This sum accounted for roughly half of Romania's annual budget for all of its cultural programmes, reinforcing the suspicion that the government's self-image was of greater importance than trying to reconstruct a broader Romanian art infrastructure crippled, among other causes, by weak state funding after 1989.[22] The second concern involved the composition of MNAC's board and five inaugural exhibitions. Two of those exhibitions were devoted primarily to art by local practitioners: a retrospective of paintings by two important Romanian artists of the 1970s, Paul Neagu and Horia Bernea, that was curated by Oroveanu; and Balaci's group show *Romanian Artists (and not only) Love Ceauşescu's Palace?!*, which launched MNAC's programme of site-specific projects. However, if visitors expected these exhibitions to showcase local art in MNAC's main galleries, then they were surely disappointed: the exhibitions were relegated to the museum's uppermost floors. Pride of place was instead given to two exhibitions spearheaded by leading Paris-based curators: Hans Ulrich Obrist's exhibition of Chinese photographic installations, *Caméra*, that had been shown previously at Paris' Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville in 2002; and *Stock*

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[21] Balaci cited in Ionescu, above n.6; Mihnea Mircan in Marina Sorbello *et al*, '"Eastwards" – A Panel Discussion about the Emerging Art Markets of the New Europe', *Art Margins* (15 June 2006), available at www.artmargins.com/content/interview/sorbello.htm [accessed 12 October 2006].

[22] Sandrow, above n.5, p.56; interview with Dan Perjovschi, Bucharest, 30 November 2006, author's notes.

Zero, a quasi-opera curated by Nicolas Bourriaud.[23] Bourriaud was a pivotal figure for MNAC – as he has been for this thesis – for he was both an inaugural guest curator and a member of the museum's 'Supportive Board' alongside a suite of dominant figures in Western European art, including curator René Block, editor of the journal *Art Press*, Catherine Millet, and another Paris-based curator, Ami Barak.[24] The board's composition was thus, in Balaci's words, both 'bulletproof' and an explicit 'reference to obtain international legitimacy' for the museum.[25] But as with the first round of exhibitions at MNAC, that 'legitimacy' and appeal to specifically Western European cultural capital and authority had the effect of ignoring local practitioners, professionals and contexts: there was no Romanian presence on the putatively national museum board. According to Mircan, there was 'nothing in local institutional culture to rely on', a view reinforced by Balaci who dismissed the 'provincialism' of 'the Romanian public [that is] in its majority retrograde in the visual area'.[26]

This repudiation of Romanian interests in favour of an international (and especially Francophilic) legitimacy should not be read in isolation from the two other criticisms of MNAC. While it is easy to dismiss Balaci's assertion as self-consciously provincialist itself, such a dismissal potentially ignores how her comments reflected the government's strategic desires for legitimacy through the museum and the location determined for it. The government was clearly aware that housing a contemporary art institution in a renowned (we could even say "exotic") architectural site can be an attractive lure for foreign tourists and investment. MNAC thus provided unique opportunities to market Bucharest through its own kind of 'Bilbao Effect', the much-hyped phenomenon in

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[23] It should be noted that though *Caméra* ignored Romanian artists, *Stock Zero* did not. The Romanian-born video artist Mircea Cantor was part of Bourriaud's exhibition, along with other artists including Plamen Dejanov and Kendall Geers.

[24] The other board members were Enrico Lunghi, Director of the Casino Luxembourg Forum d'Art Contemporain; Anders Kreuger, the former Director of the Nordic Institute for Contemporary Art; and Heiner Holtappels from the Netherlands Media Art Institute in Amsterdam.

[25] Balaci in Ionescu, above n.6. Mircan has argued further that the selection of board members was 'an attempt to amass a group of credible professionals as a counterweight to all the attacks' on MNAC: Email from Mihnea Mircan to the author, 5 January 2007.

[26] Mircan, *ibid*; Balaci in Ionescu, *ibid*.

which the Spanish city of Bilbao was transformed from industrial decrepitude to cultural Mecca following the construction there of Frank Gehry's hyper-stylised Guggenheim Museum in 1997. On another level, such marketing strategies could also promote the government as a strong supporter of cultural activities, no matter how critical of it such activities may be. The government's decision consequently emphasised the good faith of its cultural and political actions – both for a domestic audience in the run-up to the next Presidential ballot, which Năstase sought to win, and for an international (and especially European) audience given Romania's desired integration into the European Union by 2007. Indeed, the two events were highly imbricated for the government, for if Romania was to accede to the E.U. as planned, then that accession depended on whether Romania could support the E.U.'s various policies and protocols, from defending human rights to promoting cultural plurality. These were policies that the Romanian government was not renowned for upholding. In fact, MNAC's apparent substantiation of the Social Democratic government's *bona fide* was desperately needed, for it deflected media, cultural and political attention from the many controversies befalling Năstase and then-President Ion Iliescu in the early-2000s, and which severely threatened its potential for E.U. inclusion: most notably, the persistent doubts about the credibility of government leaders given their close ties to the Ceauşescu regime;[27] the ongoing persecution of minority groups within Romania, especially the Roma population whose complaints against state brutality were lodged with the European Court of Human Rights in 2000;[28] and repeated allegations of corrupt business transactions on the government's part, with Năstase singled out among his Social Democratic Party colleagues for this offence.[29]

It is in this light that I want to return to and reconsider Mihnea Mircan's claim that MNAC would serve as an 'electoral instrument'. For not only did the government – and,

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[27] See above n.18.

[28] Noted in Human Rights Watch, 'Romania: Human Rights Developments', *Human Rights Watch World Report 2001*(New York City: Human Rights Watch, 2001), pp.308-309. See also Carolin Emcke, *Echoes of Violence: Letters from a War Reporter* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), pp.151-153.

[29] In 2006, formal corruption charges were brought against Năstase, who consequently stepped down as Speaker in the Romanian Parliament's lower house: see 'Prosecutors Charge Romania Ex-PM', *BBC News Online*, available at http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/4691704.stm [accessed 12 May 2007].

to reiterate, in particular Năstase – determine where the museum would be situated; it also stipulated precisely *when* the opening would occur: one month before the Presidential elections of November 2004.[30] This could be interpreted as a personal decision of Năstase's. It typified his renowned presence in, and frequent attempts to take bureaucratic control of, Bucharest's contemporary art scene throughout his Prime Ministership. It also suggested the continuation of that presence during his hoped-for Presidency. (Indeed, so prevalent were Năstase's appearances at contemporary art events that, in a parodic action from 2003 that is widely celebrated in Romanian art circles, Vlad Nanca scoured the Bucharest phonebook for an Adrian Năstase who could open an exhibition at Nanca's 2020 Gallery; a carpenter with the Prime Minister's name agreed to Nanca's request and launched the show.) But Năstase's decision was more pointedly directed to other nations – especially those such as the United States or within the E.U. to which Romania was still indebted after 1989 – for it highlighted Romania's, and especially Năstase's, investments in formal and cultural "democracy" despite the numerous allegations plaguing the government. This situation was particularly galling for Mircan. The determination of where and when to inaugurate MNAC, and arguably one of the primary purposes of the museum, was, he believed, 'to do a democratic facelift on the House of the People'.[31] That facelift was most obviously architectural, as we have already noted; it was also a clear and canny investment for the building's occupants as well. And it was a canniness matched by the directors of MNAC, whose promotion of the government's actions appeared most explicitly in articles and interviews – we can recollect here Balaci's claims that it was 'a very good idea of Prime Minister Adrian Năstase to situate MNAC [in the Palace]' – and, more implicitly, in the selection of Nicolas Bourriaud as one of the museum's most instrumental figures, as both an inaugural curator and a member of its board. For Balaci, Bourriaud's reputation provided MNAC with a "bulletproof" form of international recognition. For the purposes of this thesis, however, Bourriaud's extensive involvement in MNAC, as well as his particular status as Western Europe's leading contemporary aesthetician of "democratisation",

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[30] Mihnea Mircan, 'The Noise of Politics: *Under Destruction #1*: Gianni Motti and Christoph Büchel', *Vector*, 1 (2005), copy sent by Mircan to, and on file with, the author.

[31] Email from Mihnea Mircan to the author, 5 January 2007.

exemplified the nexus that lies at this thesis' core: a nexus between "democracy", legitimacy, art and its rhetorical frames.

We should remember, of course, that internationalist ambitions like those presented through MNAC cannot be dismissed absolutely. They can serve – and in the case of Romania, have served – diplomatically to draw attention to local artists little-known beyond national borders. They can spark confidence in new enterprises as well, such as commercial galleries that are able to provide much-needed representation for artists struggling under limited state sponsorship.[32] Nonetheless, they can also help to sweep problematic local politics under a carpet of internationalist rhetoric. Culture plays a particularly crucial role in such circumstances, one that critic George Yúdice has brilliantly analysed.[33] This role is the flipside of Yúdice's concept of 'culture-as-resource' that I outlined in Chapter One. As we can recall, this involved culture filling the gaps left by the neoliberal state as it withdraws from a domestic public sphere, and social action or welfare reform becoming managed by culture – or indeed managed *as* culture, such that the divisions between artwork and social work begin to dissolve. On the domestic level, then, the relationship between culture and the state is increasingly marked by passivity or even neglect, especially on the part of the state. However, when states seek attention or recognition from other states in our 'global era', a seemingly inverse or paradoxical investment in culture can occur. As Yúdice explains, culture today is rarely evacuated from the cultivation of international relations. Instead, culture increasingly finds itself conscripted as an expedient or surrogate for actually tackling social, political or economic concerns within a given locale. That is, the internationally-focused state frequently and *actively* markets cultural investment as *signs* of social reform, as representations of particular economic and political ambitions or accord with international regulations.[34]

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[32] This point is reinforced in Romanian contexts by Dan Popescu, the owner-manager of a commercial gallery in Bucharest called Galeria H'art, as cited in Sorbello *et al*, above n.21.

[33] George Yúdice, *The Expediency of Culture: Uses of Culture in the Global Era* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003).

[34] In Yúdice's investigations, this self-marketing (or self-colonisation) is emblematised by an exhibition held in Mexico in 1990 and called *Mexico: The Splendors of Thirty Centuries.* The exhibition's focus on art

One of the more obvious examples of this phenomenon is the ever-growing number of art biennales and other "mega-exhibitions" in places that self-consciously seek not to be "peripheral" to neoliberal markets or Western-driven political imperatives. We can think here of the Beijing, Shanghai or Moscow Biennales and the international carnivals that they provide at the expense of concerns about, for example, local human rights violations or the often-brutal crackdowns by Chinese and Russian police on public protests and dissent.[35] We can also think of how countries seeking E.U. integration have relied on culture, and particularly large-scale art exhibitions, to signify national "progress" toward the E.U.'s numerous policy standards. This was especially true of Romania, which held an unprecedented number of art biennales – six in total – in the twenty months prior to its eventual E.U. accession on January 1, 2007, including a rush of three in the five months between May and October 2006.[36] (As a point of comparison, Australia held just one "mega-exhibition", the 2006 Biennale of Sydney, in the twenty months after January 2005; the United States held two during the same period: the 2005 Carnegie International

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as 'a form of cultural brokering' and its goal of projecting an image of equality between Mexico and the United States provided an aesthetic and cultural complement to the North American Free Trade Agreement being brokered at the same time between the two countries. Despite the exhibition's projections of cultural equality, the agreement largely favoured American corporations wanting to hire relatively cheap Mexican labour and to penetrate Mexican markets made 'equal' with America through the removal of tariffs and other protectionist policies: *ibid*, pp.240ff.

[35] In-depth analysis of biennales and other large-scale exhibitions remains surprisingly scant at the time of writing. Exceptions include Charlotte Bydler, *The Global Artworld Inc.: On the Globalization of Contemporary Art* (Uppsala: Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis, 2004); Barbara Vanderlinden and Elena Filipovic (eds.), *The Manifesta Decade: Debates on Contemporary Art Exhibitions and Biennials in Post-Wall Europe* (Cambridge MA: The MIT Press, 2005); and Martin Jay's investigation of South Korea's Kwangju Biennale and its memorialisation of the 1980 massacre against pro-democracy protesters, in Martin Jay, 'Kwangju: From Massacre to Biennale', *Refractions of Violence* (London and New York City: Routledge, 2003), pp.77-85.

[36] The exhibitions were: the first Arad International Biennale of Contemporary Arts (20/5-29/5/05); the first Intercontinental Biennial of Small Graphics in the Transylvanian town of Aiud (26/6-29/6/05); the first and much larger second instalments of the Bucharest Biennale (27/5-15/06/05 and 26/5-27/6/06 respectively); the seventh Periferic Biennale in Iaşi (12/5-30/5/06); and the second Young Artists Biennial in Bucharest (14/10-16/11/06). Apart from their short durations, the most notable characteristic about these biennale exhibitions is that they are often produced by non-governmental organisations, such as META Cultural Foundation (the Young Artists Biennial), or artist-run spaces which also publish their own journals, including the Iaşi-based *Vector* (Periferic Biennale) or the Cluj-based *Pavilion* (Bucharest Biennale). The heavy involvement of non-governmental organisations in sponsoring such cultural events is also noted as a global phenomenon and 'use of culture' by Yúdice, above n.33, pp.76-83.

in Pittsburgh and the 2006 Whitney Biennial in New York.) Culture's conditions of "resourcefulness" can equally apply on a much smaller scale than behemoths like biennales, though, encompassing such events as the inauguration of particular cultural institutions and museums. This phenomenon has not gone unnoticed by critics. In fact, some of the most unexpected forums for cultural analysis have weighed in on the matter. In November 2006, for example, the in-flight magazine for European budget airline Easyjet noted that Turkey sought support for E.U. integration through a new contemporary art museum called Istanbul Modern. The museum's purpose, as the anonymous Easyjet scribe remarked, was to outline Istanbul's 'democratic and secular state' in order 'to be taken seriously as a progressive, creative hub with its eye on the future'.[37] The Easyjet writer is correct to recognise how a single museum can become resourceful in terms of international relations. Yet the argument can be pushed much further, of course, for greater consideration should be directed to why Turkey needed to be 'taken seriously' as a 'democratic and secular state' in the first place – and to what extent this entailed deflecting attention from Turkey's persistent conflict with the Kurdish populations within and outside its borders, or countering the growing fears in Europe about Turkey becoming a strict Islamist state in the early twenty-first century.

Considerations such as these have also been the driving force behind the various criticisms of MNAC, the controversial development and opening of which epitomises the politically expedient expectations put to contemporary art and culture by bureaucratic organisations like governments. For George Yúdice, along with Romanian critics including the Perjovschis and Vlad Nanca, such considerations allow us to pry open the shell of rhetoric that encases the more strategic – and potentially more ulterior – intentions that underpin the influx of new cultural institutions like MNAC. They also allow us to extend Yúdice's argument beyond his focus on relatively large-scale institutions, and toward more "micro" spheres of decision-making: of which artists are selected to exhibit in those cultural institutions, of who can best represent and legitimise a new institution at an international level, and of how individuals respond to their

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[37] 'Museum: Istanbul Modern', *Easyjet In-Flight* (November 2006), p.18.

encapsulation within an institution's politics. These responses can, as Yúdice suggests throughout his analysis, lack critical reflexivity. Indeed, it was such a lack that Nicolas Bourriaud exemplified at MNAC, for his contribution to the museum's inaugural catalogue included a question that, however important and unwittingly raised it may have been, nonetheless complemented the Romanian government's own intent: namely, '[c]an art take over the location of power, being a symbol of openness and democracy?'[38] But cultural responses can also be highly reflexive – both to an institution's political programme, including one of 'openness and democracy', and in ways that can refute any presumption that artists are passive to the political "resourcefulness" of culture.[39]

It was precisely this kind of reflexivity that buttressed the fifth of the exhibitions designed to celebrate MNAC's opening. For the first instalment of *Under Destruction*, a long-term curatorial project intended to run at the end of every year, Mihnea Mircan scoured catalogues and galleries for an artist who had a history of strong and challenging site-specific interventions, and who was thus the right artist to engage with MNAC's architectural frame and its numerous connotations. To an extent, the results of Mircan's decision proved unexpected: first, because instead of an anticipated solo show, Mircan invited two Swiss-based artists – Gianni Motti and Christoph Büchel – to work collaboratively on the project; and second, because the collaboration's site-specific response extended well beyond Mircan's broad guideline that it 'engage… the building in some way, that it has a polemic function'.[40] Instead, Büchel and Motti ventured critically into the very realms of 'openness and democracy' that Bourriaud and others claimed were inherent to art, MNAC, the revamped Palace and the "new-look" government. This

[38] Cited in BAVO, 'Let Art Save Democracy! Or, Can Relational Art also Subvert Today's Imperative to Re-stage Non-capitalist Social Relations in this So-called Post-utopian Age?' in Metahaven (eds.), above n.8, np.

[39] To an extent, this presumption still underpins Yúdice's argument and the relatively negative view he takes of all forms of culture-as-resource as they are pushed and pulled by the global tide of neoliberalism. It should be noted, though, that Yúdice does consider how specific exhibitions actively challenged the expedient parameters set for them. One specific example examined by Yúdice is *inSITE97*, an exhibition presented in San Diego, California, and the northern Mexican city of Tijuana, and which reflected critically on the notion of borders and the various forms of migration and exploitation that cross them: see Yúdice, above n.33, pp.287-337.

[40] Email from Mihnea Mircan to the author, 5 January 2007.

response should not have surprised Mircan, however. As we will see in the following pages, the reflexivity shown by Büchel and Motti was in many ways a logical extension of the artists' prior practices, both individual and collaborative. This chapter now turns to those practices, both to redress the lack of any scholarly attention to date on either artist's work, and to begin to locate the aesthetic and political trajectories that would be interwoven for *Under Destruction*.

Locating Under Destruction

I

The *Under Destruction* project was neither the first, nor the most celebrated, collaboration between Christoph Büchel and Gianni Motti. After having worked together intermittently since 2002, Büchel and Motti achieved notoriety for a highly researched proposal that they initially presented as an installation of documents in Paris in late-2004, and again in a slightly varied format at the 2005 Venice Biennale, under the title of *Guantanamo Initiative* (figs.5.4-5.5).[41] At first glance, the proposal seemed to typify the tropes of art's "democracy" that have recurred throughout this thesis, for the explicit aim articulated in the artists' documents was to transform tracts of land at Cuba's Guantánamo Bay into 'a site dedicated to the promotion of culture', one in which '[t]he artists envision the creation of a laboratory that situates culture at the center of contemporary debates' and which 'would promote exchange and dialogue'.[42] This was a misleading first glance, however. As we analysed in Chapter One, Bourriaud, along with other aestheticians of "democratisation", largely believed such 'exchange and dialogue' to be political and even "democratic" *sui generis*. By contrast, Büchel and Motti pitted

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[41] *Guantanamo Initiative* was first installed at Paris' Centre Culturel Suisse between 12 September and 31 October 2004. Coincidentally, it was the exhibition that immediately preceded Thomas Hirschhorn's presentation of *Swiss Swiss Democracy* in the same galleries.

[42] Christoph Büchel and Gianni Motti, 'Guantanamo Initiative', Poster accompanying the installation *Guantanamo Initiative*, La Biennale di Venezia, 28 September 2005, author's notes. Further citations from *Guantanamo Initiative* are taken from this poster.

art's "politics" directly against Empire's war machine, testing their limits and tempting their failure by seeing whether art could have any actual effect on the policies of militarised "democratisation" undertaken by governments, and particularly the United States government, during the 'War on Terror'. The reasons for this distinction were clear. Although the artists' proposal resembled typical negotiations for a future lease agreement and the recultivation of land, the property itself was definitely not open for inspection. Instead, as Büchel and Motti took pains to explain in a poster accompanying their installation, Guantánamo Bay had a very troubled history. It had been forcibly leased by the Cuban government to the United States in 1903 according to the Platt Amendment to Cuba's Constitution; since its 1959 revolution, Cuba had refused to cash the cheques sent from Washington as rental payment, and declared the initial contract void; and since 2002, the United States had used the site as an extra-territorial, and for the most part extra-judicial, internment camp for suspected terrorists (or, to use the Bush administration's terminology 'unlawful enemy combatants') captured by the 'Coalition of the Willing' after the events of 9/11. Alongside this potted history, as well as (presumed) copies of the uncashed cheques, Büchel and Motti presented their plan to 'reinterpret… the existing military infrastructure' as a new 'cultural base' through the prospective lease agreement between Cuba and the artists.

Given the history of Guantánamo Bay, it was hardly surprising that neither Havana nor Washington responded to Büchel and Motti's initiative, despite its apparent ratification of art's political relevance and the artists' potentially productive reclamation of the site. This lack of political response was not necessarily a failure of the installation, though, but rather its paradoxical success. What Büchel and Motti were actually investigating was less the specific history of Guantánamo Bay or the fortitude of governments, than the geopoliticised rhetoric of artistic interventions. It was an investigation that – somewhat appropriately, given the 'laboratory' aesthetics to which it referred – could only be tested in practice rather than be garnered from a history book. The guiding question was potentially rich and rewarding: could art succeed where political diplomacy to date had not? The answer was almost *doomed* to failure, however, because the methodology was skewed against such cultural rhetoric from the outset. The idea that either Cuba or the

United States would dismantle the Guantánamo camp in accordance with two artists' proposals – despite billions of dollars having been pumped into the militarised facilities, and despite the inability of mass public protests or political wrangling to shut those facilities down – was plainly ridiculous and hubristic. Consequently, if those proposals were hubristic, then so too were the rhetoric and goals of "democratic" dialogue and exchange that the proposals seemed to foster. The blatant and quite intentional impossibility of Büchel and Motti's plan thus suggested that their *actual* initiative was quite different from how it initially appeared. For what the artists ultimately proposed was a viral act of infiltrating and revealing the limits of art's "politics" in the face of governmental policies, and not the other way around.[43]

This was not a new methodology for either artist and particularly not for Motti, who had consistently practised art as a kind of virus toward its host. In many ways, Motti's oeuvre confirmed the assessment made by American art historian, David Joselit, that a viral aesthetic comprises two conceptual strains.[44] The first is the infiltration of sites that can provide power for the virus' sustenance and proliferation. In Joselit's account, these sites can be the omnipotent channels of media communications, which artists such as Nam June Paik continually manipulated through their video and televisual works to create parasitic aesthetics of disruption and feedback. This conception of 'power' was also relevant to Motti's project *Review* (2000–, fig.5.6), in which photographs of Motti appeared regularly in European newspapers – not because Motti's acts were themselves newsworthy but because, like the American photographer Weegee before him, Motti had the seemingly uncanny ability of being present at events that were then featured in

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[43] This was reinforced by the history of the website accompanying the *Guantanamo Initiative* installation and which was one of the main public sources of information about the project. The website, like the poster outlined above, called for the reclamation of the Guantánamo Bay camps for the purposes of culture. However, it was not the camps that were shut down by the artists in early 2007, but the website itself, drawing to a close the short-lived and impossible project that was the *Guantanamo Initiative*. The website had been listed at www.guantanamo-initiative.com [accessed 6 October 2005 and 24 June 2007].

[44] David Joselit, *Feedback: Television against Democracy* (Cambridge MA: The MIT Press, 2007), pp.50ff.

newspaper articles and their accompanying photographs.[45] Motti's parasitism, however, was more diffuse than Paik's because he interpreted 'power' in much more diverse ways. In *HIGGS (À la recherche de l'anti-Motti)* (2005, fig.5.7), power had a literal signification. Motti sweet-talked his way into the secretive CERN Laboratory near Geneva, where he walked for twenty-seven kilometres beside the particle accelerator that the laboratory used for its experiments with nuclear energy. Motti's stroll through the loop-shaped laboratory was itself interminably looped as a subsequent video projection, creating a deliberately plodding counterpoint to the vast amounts of power required to shoot particles through the accelerator at incredibly high speeds. In other projects, Motti infiltrated more political formations of 'power', as when he somehow managed to stand in for the Indonesian delegate at the United Nations and took part in a vote at the fifty-third session of the Human Rights Commission (*ONU*, 1997, fig.5.8), or when Motti stood outside the Colombian President's residence in Bogotá and sent him telepathic messages persuading him to resign (*Nada por la Fuerza, Todo con la Mente*, 1997, fig.5.9). Indeed, this latter project revealed the very polysemy of 'power' at the heart of Motti's viral conceptualism, for it was the power of the mind that Motti used to infiltrate the head of state.[46]

This project also directs us to the second strain of viral aesthetics according to both Joselit and Motti: the need to access a host without detection. Their opinions on the effects of this undetectability, however, are very different. For Joselit, a virus has no discernible consciousness. It cannot plan how to "infect" a host, which means that an "antibody" cannot apprehend and so preclude that viral "infection": 'the virus cannot "think"', claims Joselit, 'but can only act'.[47] Yet this, he argues further, is the hallmark of a virus' successful espionage and of its 'productive or even political effects', for it can

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[45] The main difference between Weegee's work and Motti's is that Weegee took photographs of newsworthy sites and sights, such as crime scenes and police arrests; Motti, by comparison, appeared in the newspapers' photographs, becoming a subject within rather than a maker of those images.

[46] Motti's strategies of infiltration have been briefly raised in one of the few articles on Motti's oeuvre: see Marc-Olivier Wahler, 'Gianni Motti: Au-delà du réel – The Hand of Motti', *Art Press*, 268 (May 2001), p.50.

[47] Joselit, above n.44, p.50.

only be detected once it has already struck.[48] By contrast, Motti's lack of detection, like the "politics" of *Guantanamo Initiative*, has a much more cynical edge. If the Colombian President could not receive Motti's telepathic relays in *Nada por la Fuerza*, this was not because of Motti's successful spying techniques. It was because telepathy was a ludicrous process of political persuasion in the first place. Motti could not be detected because his process could not work. But as we also saw with *Guantanamo Initiative*, this does not mean that we should reject either Motti as an unwitting failure or his work as irrelevant. Instead, the impossibility of a successful politicised telepathy suggests that something else was at stake in Motti's work. That 'something else', I believe, was a different kind of undetectability (and one that we will see presently was equally important to *Under Destruction*): a withdrawal of certain presumptions of authorship and, in particular, a disavowal of authorial responsibility.

The basis for this argument is that Motti's invocation of telepathy was not new, but rather a repetition of another artistic action: the creation of a conjoined identity between Marina Abramović and her former partner Ulay, whose performances in the late-1970s and early-1980s entailed extreme acts of joint suffering, meditation and telepathic communication designed, or so the artists claimed, to fuse themselves mentally into one artistic entity.[49] Motti's return to Abramović and Ulay's signature medium was not a *strict* form of repetition. Motti was not, after all, seeking to fuse his identity with the Colombian President's own. He was more clearly attempting to update, transcribe and test that medium within a different context, a contemporary context governed by more pressing political concerns for art than a wistful conjunction of souls. That process of transcription was again marked by a certain degree of cynicism. On the one hand, his "failure" to move, or be detected by, the President revealed the limits or even the depoliticised romanticism of the older artists' projects. On the other hand, that "failure" was not (or not

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[48] *Ibid*.

[49] On Abramović and Ulay's telepathic conjunction into a single, 'third' artist, see Charles Green, 'Missing in Action: Marina Abramović and Ulay' and 'Doubles, Doppelgängers, and the Third Hand', in *The Third Hand: Collaboration in Art from Conceptualism to Postmodernism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), pp.157-177 and 179-188; and Charles Green, 'Group Soul: Who Owns the Artist Fusion?', *Third Text*, 18/6 (November 2004), pp.595-608.

simply) the fault of Motti and his weak talents as a medium, but of the weak medium of telepathy. Responsibility for that failure could therefore be deflected onto the actual, original authors of telepathic art and their (arguably over-inflated) claims for its artistic potentiality. Motti's own artistic role in this process consequently became ambiguous, for though he was physically present in Colombia and photographed projecting thoughts toward the President, he was not the detectable "author" responsible for those actions. He was merely the interpreter of a rehabilitated aesthetic, or better still a *tester* of that aesthetic in much the same way as we understood *Guantanamo Initiative* to be a kind of aesthetic testing.[50]

Motti's negations of responsibility – or even of the self – have recurred throughout his practice. In 1997, a French university student received a grant to work with Motti for six months. Motti, in turn, sent him on a round-the-world holiday on the condition that he always wear a T-shirt declaring him to be, as the subsequent work was titled, a *Gianni Motti Assistant* (fig.5.10). But while Motti had delegated responsibility for the work's production and the global advertising of his name to the assistant, Motti himself became reclusive and disappeared entirely from public view. In a five-second video called *Va Pensiero* (2004), a man wanders behind Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi in a crowded conference room, surreptitiously and patronisingly patting Berlusconi on the head; yet while we may presume the infiltrator to be Motti, his identity remains uncertain because the video's frame crops his head from view. Even projects that appear to exaggerate Motti's authorial identity and responsibility are ultimately acts of denial. In *Revendications* (1986-1996, fig.5.11), Motti notified global press agencies that he was the cause of numerous extraordinary events, from the 1986 explosion of the Challenger space shuttle to earthquakes in France and California. If Motti's assertions of responsibility were clearly exaggerated and deniable, they also brought the artist's name

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[50] Readers should note that I deliberately leave to one side the question of whether Motti's testing of other people's aesthetics and apparent withdrawal from artistic "originality" is itself an original act, much as has been argued of the "original unoriginality" of appropriation from the 1970s to the 1990s. This analysis, though undoubtedly important, is beyond the scope of my argument. I direct readers instead to Rex Butler's thorough, Žižek-inspired investigation of appropriation in his introductory essay to Rex Butler (ed.), *What is Appropriation? An Anthology of Critical Writings on Australian Art in the '80s and '90s* (Sydney: Power Publications, 1996), pp.13-46.

to global media attention for the purposes of authorial reputation. Yet that authorial act was also a ruse. Motti had rehabilitated a little-known action by the Soviet artists Komar and Melamid, in which they claimed responsibility for earthquakes in West Germany and Iran as examples of their *Terrorist Art* (1978-1979). Consequently, even the authorship of an unbelievable claim of accountability did not belong to Motti; the plausibility of both responsibility and authorship within his practice were in effect denied.

Motti's recounting of other artists' practices within his viral and "undetectable" authorship should not be conceived as yet another example of appropriation art that, though attractive in the late-1970s, had become stale two decades later. Nor did his works typify a hollowing out or a reification of earlier art practices that the German aesthetician Peter Bürger, among others, has identified as characteristic of neo-avant-garde contexts.[51] Motti's work pointed in a different direction, one that he spelled out in a mid-career retrospective at Zurich's Migros Museum für Gegenwartskunst, and which was an unusual *mise-en-abyme* of his methodology. The retrospective, titled *Plausible Deniability* (2004, fig.5.12), presented no visual documentation of Motti's work. Instead, a bare plywood corridor wound its way through the museum, within which stood police officers dressed in riot gear and guides who recounted information to visitors about Motti's practice.[52] Despite appearances (or, more accurately, the distinct lack thereof), *Plausible Deniability* presented a precise summation of Motti's conceptualism: a curious foray into a site of power (both as a major European art museum, and a museum temporarily guarded by riot police);[53] the delegation of the work's production to others

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[51] Peter Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, trans. Michael Shaw (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984). For an important critique of Bürger's totalising evaluation of the neo-avant-garde, see especially Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, *Neo-Avantgarde and Culture Industry: Essays on European and American Art from 1955 to 1975* (Cambridge MA: The MIT Press, 2000).

[52] Curiously, given Motti's replication of other artists' aesthetics or works, this model of an empty retrospective was itself replicated (though whether consciously is unclear) by the Thai-American artist Rirkrit Tiravanija later that year. *Plausible Deniability* began in Zurich in January 2004; Tiravanija's *A Retrospective (tomorrow is another fine day)*, began at the Museum Boijmans van Beuningen in Rotterdam, The Netherlands, in December 2004.

[53] This was not the first time that Motti had used armed guards in his art. In *Blitz* (2003), a work shown at the First Prague Biennial, armed guards stared down at visitors from the top floors of Prague's National Gallery. A brief note on *Blitz* in the *Plausible Deniability* catalogue claims that 'Gianni Motti asked a detachment of passing American servicemen to make the space safe…' on the Biennial's opening day: see

(in this case, the guides); their recounting of another person's practice; and the inability to present documentation of Motti's works given that he was not necessarily (or only in a roundabout way) the works' "author" in the first place. The retrospective's title also reinforced Motti's wry relationship with politics, for 'plausible deniability' is a euphemism – particularly popular among conspiracy theorists – to describe the plausible grounds on which governmental leaders can deny responsibility for actions or omissions undertaken in their name or with their authorisation.[54] This was an apt political description for Motti's practice, in which responsibility for the success or failure of his actions could be deflected onto others, whether they be the guides or assistants producing and disseminating Motti's work, or the other artists whose aesthetics Motti rehabilitated, recounted and tested against sites of power. In another sense, plausibility and deniability also provided the very parameters for Motti's practice and his self-reflexive investigations: of whether those rehabilitated aesthetics were plausible when transcribed to new contexts; of the deniability or undetectability of Motti's "authorship" of "his" works; and thus of whether anyone – a critic, a curator, or even myself – could really make plausible assumptions about the purpose or politics of Motti's viral infiltrations. If Motti sought to deny responsibility for his actions, then surely his presumed authorisation of particular political approaches was equally under question.[55]

Heike Munder (curator), *Gianni Motti*, exh. cat. (Zurich: Migros Museum für Gegenwartskunst, 2004), p.94, ellipsis in the original.

[54] Well-known hypothetical examples include plausible syllogisms, such as when a President denies authorising torture because the country they lead is a democracy that has signed numerous treaties denouncing torture, therefore the actions authorised by the President cannot amount to torture. Another example is the denial of direct authorisation for certain actions, such as when governmental leaders deny authorising illegal actions by which they acquire political or financial gain, because the relevant authorising documents were withheld from them by other parties who subsequently take responsibility for that authorisation. The first example is raised in Susan Buck-Morss, *Thinking Past Terror: Islamism and Critical Theory on the Left* (London and New York City: Verso, 2003), p.65. The second lay at the heart of whether U.S. President Ronald Reagan was aware of, or directly authorised, or could plausibly deny involvement in the Iran-Contra Arms affair in the early-1980s: see David Bogden and Michael Lynch, 'Taking Account of the Hostile Native: Plausible Deniability and the Production of Conventional History in the Iran-Contra Hearings', *Social Problems*, 36/3 (June 1989), p.205. Another hypothetical example might be when a governmental leader denies using culture for political gain because that leader has no verifiably direct authorisation over how or why an institution's curator or director uses culture for that purpose, even if the leader does in fact acquire that gain.

[55] The plausibility of such assumptions is further challenged by Motti's repeated denial of my requests to be interviewed for this thesis – a denial that I find curiously fitting given the dialectic of plausibility and deniability I argue is pivotal to his work.

Christoph Büchel, by contrast, had invoked an aesthetic of infiltration only once, and even then in an inverse manner to Motti. Whereas Motti sought surreptitious access to power, Büchel withdrew from it with *Invite Yourself* (2002), for he auctioned his official invitation to Frankfurt's *Manifesta 4* on eBay so that the highest bidder could infiltrate the biennale in his place. This was a canny, if also a cynical, move. The market value of exhibiting at *Manifesta* – and thus the cost of officially engaging in *Manifesta*'s mantra of trans-European exchange – amounted to US$15,099, which proved a financial windfall for Büchel given the International Foundation Manifesta offered roughly half that amount per artist for production costs. Büchel's ploy induced another kind of windfall as well, for his auction was won by an American artist named Sal Randolph. Her presence prised apart one of *Manifesta*'s primary claims to uniqueness – the relatively rigid stricture that invited artists should only be based and/or born in Europe – and then tore it asunder when she invited three hundred other artists and artist-groups, mainly from North America, to take part in her subsequent *Manifesta* project.[56]

For the most part, however, Büchel staged installations rather than conceptual schemes. More precisely, Büchel overhauled entire galleries to create installations that, though occasionally derided as mere 'adventure playgrounds', were more accurately indebted to Ilya Kabakov's precedent of the 'total' installation.[57] On occasion, this indebtedness was

[56] Randolph was arguably less aware of, or at least less concerned by, the cynicism behind Büchel's auction of his free invitation to *Manifesta 4*. In an earnest article published the following year, Randolph recounted how she used her bought invitation to allow these other artists and groups to exhibit with her as part of her work *Free Manifesta* (2002). The idea that her undoubtedly valorous redistribution of exhibition opportunities, or even of a *Free Manifesta*, should stem from the high-energy greed common to eBay auctions – that is, that her professed anti-capitalist endeavour was complicit with one of the Internet's most renowned forms of capitalism – seemed to have eluded Randolph: see Sal Randolph, 'Free Words to Free Manifesta: Some Experiments in Art as Gift', *Ethics and the Environment*, 8/1 (2003), pp.61-73.

[57] For Büchel's dismissal of the criticism that his installations are frivolous 'adventure playgrounds', see Paolo Bianchi, 'Christoph Büchel: Müll triggert Ideen', *Kunstforum International*, 168 (January-February 2004), p.75. Kabakov's name has occasionally been raised by other critics as a means to locate – if, ultimately, only to popularise – Büchel's installation practice: see, for example, Vanessa Joan Müller, 'Christoph Büchel' in Markus Heinzelmann and Martina Weinhart (eds.), *Auf eigene Gefahr/At Your Own Risk*, exh. cat. (Frankfurt am Main: Revolver, 2003), p.119; Ken Johnson, 'Art in Review: Christoph Büchel', *The New York Times* (30 July 2004), Section E, p.T2; Beate Engel, 'Survival in the Waste Land', in O.K. Centrum für Gegenwartskunst, *Christoph Büchel: Shelter II*, exh. cat. (Linz: O.K. Centrum für Gegenwartskunst, 2002), np.

literal. In 1998's *Home Affairs* (fig.5.13), for example, Büchel created his own rubbish-strewn version of a particular Kabakov installation: an apartment belonging to a fictitious character who never threw anything away. In his later installations, and in ways reminiscent of Hirschhorn's works from the same period, Büchel remodelled Kabakovian aesthetics within more explicitly contemporary socio-political contexts.[58] In 2004, Büchel transformed New York's Swiss Institute into an apartment shared by an apparently very odd couple who had bisected their flat with a massive concrete wall (fig.5.14). One character was fastidiously neat. The other was slovenly and perhaps psychologically unstable: tunnels connected rooms strewn with empty Budweiser beer cans and spent bullet cartridges; fireplaces opened onto hidden passageways for visitors to crawl through; tables were liberally adorned with trophies, suggesting the character's over-identification with the "victories" perpetually rhetoricised by Western politicians during the 'War on Terror'. For *Hole* (2005, fig.5.15), Büchel similarly transformed a gallery into a maze-like 'total' installation, with visitors having to negotiate rickety ladders and confined passageways so as to reach the installation's heart. Once there, the visitors did not encounter the park benches or comfortable seating familiar from other mazes worldwide. In their place stood a mad forensic workshop and a bombed-out bus that recalled the wreckage from London's terrorist attacks on the seventh of July that year.[59]

Though Büchel's installations provided clear artistic citations to Kabakov, they did not simply or opportunistically trade on Kabakov's fame, nor on the notoriety of particular terrorist attacks in the West. Büchel instead restaged Kabakov's aesthetics as a means to

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[58] As this and the next paragraph will attest, I disagree with the claim made by one of Büchel's leading critics, Philip Ursprung, that Büchel's engagement with Kabakov is a case of Büchel 'merely quoting the latter – and thus by necessity relativis[ing] him'. Büchel's updating of Kabakovian aesthetics invokes an important political charge, one that was especially important in *Under Destruction* and upon which I will greatly elaborate in the next section of this chapter. For Ursprung's claims, see Philip Ursprung, 'Everything I Always Wanted to Say about Büchel but Didn't Dare', in O.K. Centrum für Gegenwartskunst, *ibid*, np.

[59] *HOLE* was presented in the Oberlichtsaal of the Kunsthalle Basel from 18 September 2005 to 1 January 2006. Such maze-like negotiations of cramped spaces, including rusting ladders and packed-dirt passageways, arguably reached its zenith in Büchel's *Simply Botiful* (2006), which transmogrified the Coppermill branch of art dealers Hasuer & Wirth into an overbearing and often claustrophobic variation of a refrigerator factory.

examine the effects and infiltration of contemporary events, images and rhetoric upon the psyche. This infiltration emerged on a representational level, for Büchel's works – or 'psychograms', as he called them – symbolised the physical and mental spaces inhabited by characters who, much like Kabakov's, had become affected or even unhinged by an overwhelming 'media avalanche' of images.[60] Büchel's psychograms pointed to Kabakov on a further level as well, for as with *Ten Characters*, visitors' scramblings through these convoluted representations pitched one set of wills – Büchel's and his characters' – against the visitors' own. Consequently, both Büchel and Kabakov – and indeed Hirschhorn, as we saw in the previous chapter – identified space, confinement, blockages and redirections as deliberate means of investigating how artworks can affect and even control audiences' behaviour in much the same way that mediatised rhetoric and events can.

This dialectic of culture and control emphasised another, and arguably the main, Kabakovian influence upon Büchel. As we saw in Chapter Two, a crucial impetus for Kabakov's 'total' installations was his struggle against the "soft" power of Western cultural discourse during the final years of Soviet communism. The key factor here was perception, whether in relation to one's perception of imagery and space within an installation (perception in terms of proprioception), or one's perception of other people, other cultures and consequently of oneself (as more conceptual forms of cultural perception). For Kabakov, these two forms of perception were entwined. Visitors' physical engagements with *Ten Characters* or other 'total' installations were inseparable – or so his works suggested – from the perception, or presumption, that Kabakov was staging simulacra of Soviet domesticity for the benefit of a more affluent Western "democracy". Cultural perceptions were so overwhelming and ingrained, it seemed, that they risked pre-determining how visitors would perceive and actually experience his installations – pre-conceptions that Kabakov designed his installations to reveal and counteract. This dialectic of culture and colonisation equally motivated Büchel's practice,

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[60] For Büchel's commentary on 'psychograms', see Bianchi, above n.57, p.67 and Carly Berwick, 'Fallen Angels', *ArtNews*, 101/6 (June 2002), p.92; for his allusion to 'media avalanches' (or 'Medienlawine' in German), see Bianchi, p.74.

but from the obverse position to Kabakov's: from a position of entrenchment *within* Western cultural circles and what Büchel called the West's 'paranoid construct' of ideology after 9/11.[61] On the one hand, his psychogrammatic stagings of paranoia were attempts to represent and reveal what he deemed the anomic conditions of contemporary Western subjectivity from a position *within* those conditions. On the other hand, visitors' confused burrowings through his installations were means to experience and reflect upon the anomie of that subjectivity. In other words, the installations' psychological operations upon visitors were a metaphor – and, given the media- or site-related contexts in which those operations played out, such as the London bombings and post-9/11 New York, even an *enactment* – of the conflict between one's self or one's experiences and the West's self-directed propaganda after 9/11. A metaphor or enactment, that is, of how that propaganda can infiltrate, direct and thus potentially colonise one's behaviour and one's perceptions of others and the self.[62]

Büchel's self-conscious alignment of art, perception and "soft" power extended into his collaboration with other people as well, and particularly with Motti. The two artists were initially drawn together through chance rather than conceptual affinity, for both artists held Swiss government-sponsored residencies abroad in 2001.[63] The requirement upon their return was to present an exhibition in Bern at the Herausgegeben vom Bundesamt

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[61] Cited in Bianchi, *ibid*, p74.

[62] The connection between the "soft" power of psychological operations, installation practice and Büchel's psychograms was reinforced in a later collaboration, called *PSYOP* (2005), with the Zurich-based curator Giovanni Carmine for the seventh Sharjah International Biennial. *PSYOP* presented a training room for the renowned militarised tactic of 'perception management' or 'psychological operations' common during post-World War II conflicts such as the 'War on Terror', in which thousands of leaflets are dropped from aeroplanes onto the populations of "enemy" states, persuading them (as was the case in Iraq after 2003) to disavow terrorism. As the installation's title made clear, the term could equally apply, however, to installation art and its management of viewers' perceptions as outlined in this paragraph. For further documentation from and information on *PSYOP*, see Christoph Büchel and Giovanni Carmine (eds.), *PSYOP: Post-9/11 Leaflets*, exh. cat. (Dubai: Sharjah Biennial, 2005); and Christoph Büchel, Giovanni Carmine and Marc Spiegler, '1000 Words: Christoph Büchel and Giovanni Carmine Talk about *PSYOP*, 2005', *Artforum*, 44/1 (September 2005), pp.276-277.

[63] Motti travelled to Berlin under the Swiss government's programme; Büchel traveled to New York where he exhibited, among other places, at his new dealer's gallery, Maccarone Inc. See Madeleine Schuppli, 'Artistes non Diplomatiques', in Pierre-André Lienhard *et al*, *Cadeaux Diplomatiques*, exh. cat. (Bern: Heruasgegeben vom Bundesamt für Kultur, 2002), p.23.

für Kultur reflecting their experiences. Identifying themselves, somewhat disingenuously, as mere pawns in bureaucratic programmes of international exchange, Motti and Büchel did not exhibit the work produced during their residencies. They instead unearthed and exhibited dozens of diplomatic gifts presented to Switzerland by foreign dignitaries, and which had in some instances been hidden in government storage facilities for decades. These gifts, presented in vitrines as *Cadeaux Diplomatiques* (2002, fig.5.16), included a bust of Christ attributed to Michelangelo's master, Matteo Civatali, and dated 1478, that Pope Paul VI had donated in 1969; a signed photograph of former German Chancellor Helmut Kohl from 1989; and a prayer rug, bearing the image of a Swiss politician named Adolf Ogi, that was accepted, Motti claimed, from Afghanistan's Taliban regime.[64] The exhibition was a clever, if tentative, conjunction of the artists' individual conceptual strategies as outlined in this section. The artists' self-perception as no different from any other diplomatic gift in bureaucratic exchange continued Büchel's frequent conflations of culture and state interests. Conversely, the lack of the artists' own works, and their substitution with trophies somehow raided from the government's coffers, was typical of Motti – and all the more so since that lack then deflected viewers' attention to why the Swiss government had hidden and effectively denied the gifts' existence for many years.

Less tentative was a second collaboration between Motti and Büchel that year, in which Zurich's Helmhaus gallery appeared completely bare for the staging of *Capital Affair* (2002, fig.5.17). But that bare stage did not mean, the artists claimed in a moment of Kabakovian philosophising, that the gallery was empty. Hidden somewhere in the building and awaiting discovery by a plucky and prepared treasure-hunter was a cheque for the 50,000 Swiss francs of the exhibition's budget. Just hours before the opening, though, and with reports of visitors already queuing 'equipped with screwdrivers and knives', Zurich's mayor intervened and closed the exhibition.[65] Despite that closure, the

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[64] This point was disputed, however, by the Herausgegeben's conservator, Pierre-André Lienhard, who claimed that the rug was a gift from Uzbekistan: see Antoine Menusier, 'Oh, les Beaux Cadeaux!', in Lienhard *et al*, *ibid*, p.26.

[65] The quotation is taken from Mihnea Mircan's relay of information to me from his own conversations with the artists: Email from Mihnea Mircan to the author, 5 January 2007. The claim that Zurich's mayor, Elmar Ledergerber, in effect shut the exhibition down is confirmed in Matthew Rose, 'Capital Affair Turns into Swiss Money Pit', *Flash Art* (October 2002), p.47.

artists' overt intentions suggested an expansion of their collaborative approach from *Cadeaux Diplomatiques*. The withdrawal of the artists' presence so as to delegate the work's production to others, to the gallery's visitors, was again the quintessence of Motti's practice. The work was also typical, if counter-intuitively, of Büchel's psychograms. Although it initially lacked Büchel's signature detritus and dingy tunnels, the visitors' greed-tinged curiosity and presumed willingness to perform acts of vandalism to find the cheque suggested that the visitors' actions would *create* Büchel's rubbish-strewn passages through the building. The conjectured tracts of destruction within the gallery were thus intended to produce a literal rupture of art's institutional frames and, concurrently, would provide diagrammatic trails of the visitors' compulsions – we could even say paranoia – to be the first to find "the goods". In turn, these compulsions would reveal the actual "value" of art: not as exemplary of social well-being but, as Büchel also suggested with *Invite Yourself* earlier that year, as little more than money and the insatiable hunger for it.[66]

The projected partial destruction of Zurich's Helmhaus, and especially the Zurich mayor's destruction of *Capital Affair*, drew much international media attention to Motti and Büchel's collaborative projects. It particularly attracted the MNAC curator Mihnea Mircan and his search for the right artist to engage in a destructive project of his own.[67] After much stalling, Büchel and Motti accepted Mircan's invitation to come to Bucharest as "interventionist" artists of international renown, and to present a polemical exorcism of the Casa Poporului's political and architectural traces. Upon arrival, however, the artists responded to a slightly different façade. Though their resultant installation for *Under Destruction* would again sophisticatedly enmesh their particular conceptual

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[66] By comparison, the press release for *Capital Affair* maintained the view that the exhibition was an optimistic articulation of art's productive potential, one in which '[t]he (supposed) absence of art is compensated by social contact, by the traces left behind by the public, by mental and physical activities such as the intense study of the empty galleries': Helmhaus Zurich, *Capital Affair* Press Release, August 2004. Of course, gallery press releases are designed to provide positive rhetoric about the exhibitions they publicise. Nonetheless, this particular press release was both overly-optimistic in its claims and, as my argument suggests, basically inaccurate.

[67] Mircan has confirmed that both *Capital Affair* and *Cadeaux Diplomatiques* were pivotal to his decision to invite Motti and Büchel to Bucharest: Email from Mihnea Mircan to the author, 5 January 2007.

strategies, Motti and Büchel turned to new subject matter by taking MNAC's contexts of "democracy" as their content.

II

The installation initially appeared representative of, to cite Mircan, 'the perplexed buzz of a rudimentary, nascent democracy'.[68] Two flags – one for Romania, the other for the European Union – stood alongside makeshift tables scattered in a ring around the installation (fig.5.18). Atop the tables sat posters, pamphlets and cheap television monitors, each one presenting policy speeches made by the candidates for the following month's Presidential election (fig.5.19).[69] When analysed through its photographic documentation, the work could easily be mistaken for a display of activist video art, an aesthetic that was undergoing a renaissance in the early-2000s and which frequently used television sets in similar formations to exhibit overtly political content. Most notable here are the installations of the Austrian artist-activist Oliver Ressler, especially his *Alternative Economics, Alternative Societies* (2003, fig.5.20) to which Büchel and Motti's *Under Destruction* project was, at least formally, strikingly similar: an installation that filled the entire room in which it was shown; a ring of television-topped tables; and across the televisions' screens, videotaped interviews with individuals (usually leaders of non-governmental organisations, but also philosophers and grassroots activists) who presented polemical articulations of policy and alternative visions of future anti-capitalist societies.[70] Ressler's videos were earnest documentaries distinguished by their goal: to provide information about these anti-capitalist utopias in the hope of showing, as one of Ressler's earlier videos was titled, that 'this is what democracy looks

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[68] Mircan, 'The Noise of Politics', above n.30.

[69] According to Mircan, these platforms were familiar to Bucharest's residents, for they mimicked the strategies by which at least one of the Presidential hopefuls (for the New Generation Party) presented his policies to the public: by placing a desk on the street and covering it with flyers, his photographic portrait and a cheap Romanian flag. Email from Mihnea Mircan to the author, 5 January 2007.

[70] One point of difference between Ressler's and Büchel and Motti's installations was that the former also included stretches of lettering taped across the gallery floor and which led to particular television monitors. The lettering spelled out quotations taken from the interview to which the tape directed viewers.

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like'.[71] At first glance, then, the striking visual similarities between Ressler's and Büchel and Motti's approaches to "democracy" suggested parallel politics at play.

As we noted earlier with *Guantanamo Initiative*, though, this was a deceptive first glance, and one we can begin to unpack through the significant contrasts between these artists' works. Ressler's video activism may have seemed radical in content, but the layout of its installation was largely conservative. Each television in *Alternative Economics, Alternative Societies* was equipped with headsets for viewers to engage intimately and without distraction with the videos' content. Yet this not only ensured that viewers were to be proselytised in their own passive silence; it also reified the presumed intimacy and immediacy with which commercial television ordinarily addresses its audience (and by which, as Richard Serra observed some thirty years earlier, television delivers people to the corporations that sponsor its broadcasts).[72] Whereas Ressler lacked a critically reflexive eye when it came to the relations between his pacifying medium and activist content, such reflexivity was precisely the stake of Büchel and Motti's own investigation of what "democracy" looks like – or, rather, of how it is made to appear. For though Büchel and Motti's installation suggested *prima facie* support for Romania's difficult postcommunist "democratisation", and though the artists' presence at MNAC's inauguration appeared to champion the museum's (and the government's) desires for Western European approbation, Büchel and Motti ultimately put that support into question. They hid the installation deep within MNAC's basement, a location known to very few of the museum's visitors beyond its Ceauşescu-era myths (in the 1980s, it was

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[71] The video *This is What Democracy Looks Like!* (2002) presented footage of Ressler's participation at an anti-capitalist protest (in Salzburg in 2001 against the World Economic Forum). The video included footage taken from Ressler's perspective within the jostling crowd of other anti-capitalist demonstrators, accompanied by conversations with six of the demonstrators. In other words, it should be noted that this video's format and content was quite different from Ressler's later installation *Alternative Economics, Alternative Societies*. For information about *This is What Democracy Looks Like!*, see Marina Gržinić, 'This is What Democracy Looks Like!', available at http://www.ressler.at/content/view/38/lang,en_GB/ [accessed 12 June 2007].

[72] For Ressler's belief that the medium of his messages' delivery is irrelevant, see Oliver Ressler and Zanny Begg, 'Approaches to Future Alternative Societies', interview conducted 29 January 2007 in Sydney, transcript available at http://www.ressler.at/content/view/112/lang,en_GB/ [accessed 12 June 2007]. For a critique of television's problematic impression of unmediated intimacy, see *inter alia* Joselit, above n.44, pp.139-149 especially.

presumed to be *inter alia* a hidden treasury, a torture chamber or the entrance to a tunnel to Moscow should the Ceauşescus need to flee).[73] Those visitors who did know the basement's location then had to negotiate an obstacle course of sorts, for it was accessible in only two ways: either by rickety ladders that threatened to collapse under the weight of their users; or by a freight elevator operated, according to one shell-shocked French critic, by 'an ill-tempered and unwilling operator who abandoned his passengers down below'.[74] And when those knowledgeable people willing to risk the descent finally accessed the work, they did not find the careful laying-out of separate policies expected of informed decision-making at elections. Instead, each television's volume was set at its loudest, creating such a cacophony of speech in the echoic bunker that little (if any) of it was readily discernible.

The difficulties and disruptions associated with locating *Under Destruction* were clearly crucial to its effect. On one level, they identified the installation's aesthetics and politics as distinct from – or even critical of – the surprisingly conservative passivity associated with "activist" installations like *Alternative Economics, Alternative Societies*. This was an implicit level of critique, one in which the presentation of Büchel and Motti's work served to problematise such representations of "democracy" as Ressler's. If marginalising aesthetic concerns for the sake of polemical content had become a key means of showing 'what democracy looks like', then the *Under Destruction* project proposed a different sense of politics: one based on greater degrees of reflexivity in terms of layout and

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[73] These myths about the basement were recounted during a guided tour of the Palatul Parlamentului, Bucharest, 29 November 2006, author's notes. See also Costinas, 'The Opening of MNAC', above n.14; Mircan, 'The Noise of Politics', above n.30. The selection of the basement partially arose because of Motti and Büchel's very late replies to Mircan's invitation. By the time they accepted, MNAC's main exhibition sites had already been assigned to the four other inaugural exhibitions. Nonetheless, Büchel and Motti still had a number of other sites to choose from, including the museum's lobby. The basement, which would later become one of MNAC's storage facilities, was instead favoured because, in Mircan's words, 'it is quite a fascinating place, dark, immense, [the] perfect place for any conspiracy': Email from Mihnea Mircan to the author, 5 January 2007.

[74] Richard Leydier, 'Bucarest: Ouverture du Musée National d'Art Contemporain', *Art Press*, 308 (January 2005), p.73. Mircan has confirmed these "problems" with accessing the installation for *Under Destruction*, especially during MNAC's opening, because the lift operator 'started by not understanding the job' and the museum was initally understaffed: Email from Mihnea Mircan to the author, 5 January 2007.

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audience engagement, and which was thus more active and critical *in aesthetic terms* than such brands of social activism as Ressler's were willing to provide.

On another level, this aesthetic politics of self-reflexivity and disruption had proven central to Büchel and Motti's previous works, as we have seen. It thereby suggested a transcription of the artists' prior practices to the specific contexts of MNAC, and even Romania, in late-2004. In a sense, this transcription was unexpected because the installation did not appear to typify those earlier practices, and especially not Büchel's messy psychograms. That perception shifts, however, when we consider the installation as one component within MNAC as a psychogrammatic whole. For it was a whole in which visitors' experiences *became* quintessentially Büchelian: from visitors needing to navigate the building's readymade obstacle course of wrong turns, hidden lifts and fragile ladders to reach the installation's heart; to delving deep into the Casa Poporului's bunkers and the paranoiac myths associated with them; and to the equally paranoiac screaming matches occurring between the candidates on the television screens within the installation proper. The building's aggressive and burdensome past, it seemed, had left everything and everyone within it in a state of precarious tension (a state that the lift operator's short temper could even be confused for role-playing). The influence of Motti, conversely, appeared to be more straightforward. The artists' infiltration of Romania's parliamentary building was clearly characteristic of Motti's viral aesthetic, especially given that aesthetic's usual unfolding in direct relation to Presidents, as with *Nada por la Fuerza*, or Prime Ministers, as with *Va Pensiero*. A major point of difference, though, was that the *Under Destruction* project was not a surprise "infection" of the building, but rather, to reiterate, a formal invitation to exorcise the building of its past. Nor was the installation chiefly a response to that past as the Casa Poporului, as Mihnea Mircan had anticipated. As evident from the previous paragraphs, the actual target of the artists' destructive "infection" was instead the building's incarnation as the Palatul Parlamentului. Motti's viral aesthetics thus worked in slightly different ways from what had been expected of him. These shifts in expectation were central to the installation, I contend, and ultimately served to reiterate the artists' frequent turns to postcommunist aesthetic precedents – for

Motti, Komar and Melamid and Abramović and Ulay; for Büchel, Ilya Kabakov – as the testing-ground for more contemporary relations between politics and art.

This reiteration was primarily Kabakovian as well. We could, though at a significant stretch, interpret this influence formally. The multiple, conflicting and disruptive voices of the candidates can be considered, in part, a remediation of the multiple and conflicting hearsay accounts and characterisations lurking throughout *Ten Characters*. As I analysed earlier, the conflicting descriptions of the *Ten Characters*' actions made it impossible to discern what those actions actually were and thus what "fiction" was from "fact". This could be equally applied to the *Under Destruction* project and visitors' inability to discern the content of the candidates' speeches due to high volume and sound overlay. But we should also recognise that, as a consequence of this overwhelming maelstrom of political policies, the artists' positions regarding those policies' content – and thus any authorisation they might be thought to give particular political positions during the lead-up to the election – became less clear-cut and more indiscernible as well. It was on this level, a conceptual level of authorisation rather than a formal level *per se,* that Büchel and Motti's affinity with Kabakov's aesthetics was most apparent. As we can again recall from Chapter Two, Kabakov's conceptualism, and particularly his philosophy of "emptiness", was a philosophy of withdrawal and non-identity: withdrawal from the discourses frequently attached to one's encounters with his installations and his presumed identity as a Soviet dissident artist; and, as a consequence of this withdrawal, an attempt on Kabakov's part to forge a position of non-identity in relation to those discourses, and especially to artistic discourses of "democracy". In other words, Kabakov persistently sought withdrawal from any authority or legitimacy he or his work might have given "democracy" during postcommunism's infancy. It was a tactic which, some fifteen years later and during another historical period of troubled accounts of "democracy", was equally at stake in Büchel and Motti's project and its viral relations in Romania.

For it was precisely "democratic" discourse, in its updated and extended form from that rhetoricised in the late-1980s, that the artists' installation at once "infected" and rejected. This discourse was not only evident in the upcoming Romanian elections that Büchel and

Motti relied upon for their work's content, or in "activist" installations like Ressler's from which they reflexively differentiated their own. As we saw earlier in this chapter, "democracy" also provided the very structure of MNAC, of where and when it was to be inaugurated, of which artists to exhibit and of whom to invite as curators and board members so as to authorise MNAC's legitimacy in Western Europe. Adrian Năstase's investments in MNAC suggested top-down decision-making in the name of integration and "democracy", decisions which Mihai Oroveanu and Ruxandra Balaci appeared more than willing to accommodate in their selection of figures like Nicolas Bourriaud as the museum's "democratic" authorities. It was a top-down "democratisation" that Büchel and Motti in turn exaggerated by literally burying their installation beneath the museum and its politicised displays. And yet when viewers sought to bear down upon *Under Destruction* from the fanfare above, they met the challenge of a highly inaccessible "democratic" installation – inaccessible because of the physical difficulties in trying to locate it and the excessive, indiscernible cacophony of its content and critique. As a result, if MNAC was intended to promote Romanian "democracy" to local and especially international audiences, then Büchel and Motti's installation responded by simultaneously "infecting", and implicitly and self-consciously attempting to withdraw from, that promotional rhetoric.

The artists' aesthetic of "infection" and withdrawal consequently suggested a model form of institutional critique, one directed through the installation's spatial engagements and disengagements with the museum and its architecture. At the same time, though, this aesthetic had an even more specific target, for it related to the very purpose behind Büchel and Motti's invitation to Bucharest: namely, their identification by Mircan and MNAC's directors as the "right" artists for *Under Destruction* because of their notoriety in international, and especially Western European, art contexts. Their presence at the museum's inauguration thereby risked legitimising MNAC precisely because of their extant renown in contemporary international art. However, if Büchel and Motti, like Bourriaud and others, were expected to participate in the "democratic" facelift of MNAC, its sponsors and the cultural image of Romania leading into E.U. integration, then the artists equally withdrew from that imposed and assumed representation: by making their

installation virtually inaccessible in the basement, certainly, but also insofar as that process implicitly denied any authorisation of "democracy" on the artists' part. Their aesthetic of withdrawal, in other words, was also an aesthetic of dis-identification. It signalled their refusal to support the museum's desired representation as a plausible site of power when viewed through an international gaze. In so doing, it also revealed their unwillingness to be mere pawns for international exchange and bureaucratic interests – an identification observed in *Cadeaux Diplomatiques* and which was equally active throughout Büchel's cynical intersections of culture and statist rhetoric, as well as the implausible and deniable senses of authorial responsibility in Motti's viral practice. This aesthetic of refusal and withdrawal was thus a sharply reflexive response to MNAC's micro-level politics – to the politics behind their invitation to travel from the "right" place of the artists' Swiss base to the "wrong" place of Bucharest for the museum's inauguration[75] – and to the museum's macro-level politics as well. For if Büchel and Motti were initially perceived as champions of MNAC's "democratic" potential, then their critique of that misperceived identity raised a different kind of politics in its place, one that George Yúdice calls a crucial aesthetic counter to the political expediency of culture: 'a reflexive practice of self-management vis-à-vis models… imposed by a given society or cultural formation'.[76] That is, a reflexive appraisal of art's and artists' investment in top-down and, as we observed earlier in this chapter, strategically expedient appeals to "democracy" and integration.

Three important conclusions therefore emerge from Büchel and Motti's reflexive withdrawals from "democracy". The first provides a rejoinder to Miwon Kwon's critique of site-specificity with which I introduced this chapter. Kwon's analysis focused primarily upon artists' and curators' presumptions about the concept of sites: about how a site is often categorised and interpellated according to its geographical location (particularly its distance from global "centres" like New York), or its discursive attributes

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[75] As Motti has noted elsewhere, he frequently subscribes to a Szeemann-esque description offered about his work by Frank Perrin, and which equally applies in the case of *Under Destruction*: an art practice that revolves around what happens '[w]hen invitations become forms': see Marco Scotini, 'Gianni Motti: Clarity Pact', *Flash Art*, 39 (March-April 2006), p.70.

[76] Yúdice, above n.33, p.3.

(such as the cultural, racial or political composition of its inhabitants).[77] For Kwon, such presumptions frequently rely on stereotypes that disregard and misrecognise the more complex realities, tensions and make-up of a given site. By contrast, Büchel and Motti's appraisal of the vectors between "right" sites and "wrong", of invitations and their underlying purposes, disclosed an inverse concern: a concern for how a site's administrators can equally interpellate, misrecognise and stereotype the identities of artists and their practices. In part, then, Büchel and Motti's work corresponds with Kwon's call for recognising the relations at play 'between models of nomadism and sedentariness, between space and place, between digital interfaces and the handshake' within her model of the "wrong" place.[78] However, whereas Kwon has tentatively asserted the continued relevance of site-specificity in contemporary art analysis, Büchel and Motti's work has resolutely insisted upon it. As their collaborative practice and especially their *Under Destruction* installation identify, sites remain crucial to contemporary art precisely because of their entangled micro- and macro-level politics: because of bureaucratic determinations such as whom to invite to sites and when, for example, or due to the political imperatives and imprimaturs thereby presumed of contemporary artists. Most importantly, site-specificity has maintained its significance because of the ways that some artists have consequently responded to such entanglements: not by catering to them or (as Kwon has argued of historical site-specific practices) by trading on presumptions about a given site, but in terms of how artists have reflexively and even virally critiqued assumptions about what they are thought to bring to a site, from the marketability of their presence to the presumed politics of their practice.

The second conclusion relates more broadly to the argument raised in the last two chapters, which traced the reanimation of early-postcommunist and especially Kabakovian aesthetics in contemporary installation art. This reanimation has been both formal and, to an even greater degree, conceptual and tactical. It has subtended art's reflexive critiques of "democracy" through a medium that is often assumed to be

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[77] Kwon, above n.2, pp.11-55 especially.

[78] *Ibid*, p.166.

ontologically "democratic", as we analysed in Chapter Four; and it is through such reanimations that particular artists have withdrawn from presumptions of authorial approbation for "democracy", so as to assert self-managed politics of their own. This was one of the main foundations for Thomas Hirschhorn's practice of 'making art politically' and its counter to aesthetics and discourses of contemporary "democratisation". It has equally fuelled Büchel and Motti's work, and especially their reflexive appraisal of art's engagements with "democracy" for *Under Destruction*. To an extent, this served as yet another form of aesthetic testing, as an investigation into whether Kabakov's conceptualism could still maintain its critical relevance some fifteen years after the Cold War's close. The fact that Kabakov's practice *did* maintain that relevance ultimately spoke as much about the correlations between apparently distinct contexts as about the strengths of the 'total' installation. For Hirschhorn, reanimating aesthetics like Kabakov's identified the continuations between early-postcommunist and post-9/11 contexts of "democratisation", and provided a readymade example of how art and aesthetics can critique those contexts. Büchel and Motti's turn to Kabakovian precedents in Bucharest pinpointed a slightly different correlation, one that rested on Kabakov's reflexive presence in the "wrong" place – away from "home", away from the Soviet Union – at the point of communism's collapse. As observed in this chapter, Büchel and Motti remobilised such Kabakovian reflexivity for purposes more relevant to a globalised age of art practice: so as to re-evaluate how imbrications of culture and international politics can affect the contextualisation of their works, on the one hand; and on the other, because exhibition invitations and itineraries frequently draw artists along flightpaths that parallel those of contemporary neoliberalism and the appeals to "democratisation" that have come to excuse it since 1989. Works such as Büchel and Motti's thereby reveal the continuing effects of postcommunist "democratisation" and what we earlier labelled "Europatriarchy" since the 1990s – both on postcommunist institutions, including MNAC, that still yearn for approbation from dominant cultural markets, and on artists invited to those institutions as signs of that approbation.

This is not to say that Motti and Büchel were unaware of or uninterested in the kinds of correlations that Hirschhorn made between "democracy" during the Europatriarchal

1990s and after 9/11. While Büchel and Motti's engagement with "democracy" at MNAC was undoubtedly site-specific, it should also be remembered that its withdrawal from imposed "democratic" politics was but one of two concurrent, and arguably conjoined, responses to such political intents. For at the same time as Büchel and Motti found themselves in Bucharest, they were also revealing art's politics, and its hubris, with their *Guantanamo Initiative* in Paris – a work that, we can remember, also confounded art's relationships with "democracy", especially in regard to the 'War on Terror'. When analysed together, these works' twinned investigations of art and political interest – and especially their planned concurrency – suggest that their subjects were similarly twinned. The Europatriarchal histories and postcommunist presents faced with the *Under Destruction* installation cannot be cleaved, in other words, from the seemingly more global political forces confronted in *Guantanamo Initiative*. What this means conceptually is that, while Bucharest may have been the "wrong" place for the artists, it was not necessarily the "wrong" place for their *global* critique of "democracy". Instead, Bucharest emerges as one site among many – indeed, one site among any – confronted with increasingly problematic imperatives and prerogatives of "democratisation" that are at once grounded and vectoral, site-specific and unhinged. In response, Büchel and Motti's projects have stressed the importance of an alternative aesthetic politics, one that can counter or infiltrate or "infect" those prerogatives in surprising ways with diversions, decoys and noise. What their practice, and particularly their *Under Destruction* project, proffers is thus an aesthetic that is equally grounded and mobile, one which reflexively investigates "democratic" assumptions past and present and which does not forego art's histories for the sake of contemporary political intervention. For Büchel and Motti and Hirschhorn alike, that aesthetic has entailed a calculated return to postcommunist aesthetics, albeit activated within much wider contexts than the localised politics of a postcommunist country. That is, a remobilised aesthetic better understood by the different term, with its different connotations, that has recurred throughout this thesis and which goes by the name of a postsocialist aesthetic.

"Wrong" Name, "Wrong" Place

The final conclusion to draw from Büchel and Motti's work again relates to the dual influences of Kabakov and Kwon on my analysis. Kabakov's withdrawal from identification or containment within discourses of "democracy" was not, to reiterate, a nihilistic gesture. It instead articulated an alternative and idiosyncratic politics, a self-managed political identification that pre-empted Kwon's own call to cultivate new identities through critiques of site-specificity. For Kabakov, that marker of a new *non-*identity in relation to "democracy" was his aesthetic of "emptiness": an aesthetic that was ostensibly void yet actually very rich, and through which he espoused his politics of disidentification and withdrawal. The question to ask now is: given the clear influence of Kabakovian conceptualism upon their own critiques of "democracy", do Büchel and Motti offer a parallel marker to "emptiness", one that can also encapsulate those critiques and an alternative aesthetic frame?

Their individual practices would suggest an affirmative answer: for Motti, the viral aesthetic politics of 'plausible deniability' with which he titled his (empty) retrospective; for Büchel, the self-reflexive and labyrinthine 'psychograms' of cultural imperialism. However, their work together, and particularly that in Romania, does not allow for such an easy response, for neither of these individual markers befits the collaborative practice *between* Büchel and Motti. Nor does their MNAC installation readily assist us because, as astute readers will have noted, it had no title of its own: not *Under Destruction*, which was Mircan's label for his annual project; nor was it titled *Untitled* either. The installation was completely *without* a marker, a circumstance paralleling the distinct lack of markers or signs within MNAC directing visitors to the installation's location in the basement. Büchel and Motti's desire for non-identification, for withdrawing from a misrecognised alignment with any particular politics, would thus appear absolute.

By highlighting this, I do not want to suggest that their work should consequently be conceived as apolitical, or that its critique of the "right" name of "democracy" – a critique operating virally from the basement – should be recapitulated within a 'bottom-

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up' model of grassroots democracy, for example.[79] Instead, Büchel and Motti's politics can best be understood by returning, in what may be considered a curious twist to this thesis, to a philosopher whose writings I critically examined in Chapter One. Among the contentions presented in that chapter, I argued that Jacques Rancière's later writings revealed a problematic paradox. While Rancière analysed and advocated the political rupture of hegemonic discourses (what he called the 'police order'), he still subsumed that supposedly ungovernable and unnameable rupture within "democracy's" hegemonic discursive frame. This contradiction is certainly significant, as I claimed in Chapter One. As I noted further, though, such contradictions do not therefore mean that we can neglect or reject outright the general importance of his work.[80] Instead, I believe that it is by performing our own kind of reanimation – by returning to Rancière's earlier philosophy, by reclaiming his advocacy of politico-aesthetic ruptures and then redirecting them from the contradictions and assimilations through which he would later seek to legitimise them – that a full assessment of Büchel and Motti's politics can occur.

For in 1991, prior to his "democratic" turn, Rancière spelled out a politics of the "wrong" name that the artists' installation at MNAC would strikingly reiterate. The attributes of these politics were common to all three figures. First, a disidentification from the "right" names by which the governing police order can assimilate all political actors within its interests (or, for Büchel and Motti, a withdrawal from the "democracy" that MNAC's decision-makers presumed they would reflect). Second, the consequent development of 'an impossible identification', in Rancière's words, a "wrong" identification that has 'no proper name' other than that of an outcast. And third, the demonstration of that "wrong" name not as a coherent marker of 'a self but [as] the relation of a self to an other' – as a

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[79] For examples of the 'bottom-up' discourse of democracy, see *inter alia* Thomas Carothers 'From the Bottom-Up: Civil Society', in *Aiding Democracy Abroad: The Learning Curve* (Washington D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1999), pp.207-251; and Yannis Papadopoulos, 'Analysis of Functions and Dysfunctions of Direct Democracy: Top-Down and Bottom-Up Perspectives', *Politics and Society*, 23 (December 1995), pp.421-448. For a parallel analysis, see Arjun Appadurai, 'Grassroots Globalization and the Research Imagination', in Arjun Appadurai (ed.), *Globalization* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001), pp.1-21.

[80] On this particular point, see p.89 of this thesis.

marker of relationality and reflexivity rather than essentialism.[81] For Rancière, these demonstrations produced a politics of 'subjectivisation': a politics through which new, self-determined subjectivities can emerge within and rupture the "rightness" of governing politics. In so doing, Rancière argued, these "wrong" subjectivities could assert their equality with all understandings of "rightness". Such politics, I want to suggest, were ultimately shared by Büchel and Motti's reflexive withdrawals from "democracy" in the "wrong" place of Bucharest. Those withdrawals revealed a resistance to MNAC's intended goals, especially the assumption that artists based in Western Europe would automatically, perhaps inherently, champion the "rightness" of "democracy". For Büchel and Motti, that identification was inaccurate and a presumption: it essentialised their subjectivities according to where they were based, and consequently misrecognised their work through stereotypes. The artists' response, as we have seen, was an aesthetic of withdrawal that demonstrated an alternative interpretive frame – a politics deemed "wrong" or unbecoming because of its disaffiliation with "democracy" – and thus the possibility of a new political subjectivity to counter cultural stereotypes.

On one level, then, Büchel and Motti's corrosion of "democracy" shows that not all "wrong" or unnameable ruptures of the police order's expectations can or should be subsumed within "democracy", as Rancière's later work has asserted. Those self-managed ruptures instead epitomise a politics of subjectivisation and equality, a politics whose resolute unnameability demands recognition of the inequalities potentially operative in the name of "democracy". On another level, we should also note – as Rancière did in 1991 – how that unnameable 'political subject [can exist] between names, identities, cultures and so on'.[82] This is not a 'between-ness' of aestheticised hybridity, as dominated identity politics after the late-1980s (and against which Kabakov partially

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[81] Jacques Rancière, 'Politics, Identification, and Subjectivization', in John Rajchman (ed.), *The Identity in Question* (New York City: Routledge, 1995), pp.66-68. Rancière first presented this essay as a lecture in New York in 1991, subsequently publishing it in English for the first time in Jacques Rancière, 'Politics, Identification, and Subjectization', *October*, 61 (Summer 1992), pp.58-64. I am indebted to Toni Ross for alterting me to Rancière's important essay. Another significant engagement with this particular essay of Rancière's can also be found in Joselit, above n.44, p.150.

[82] *Ibid*, p.68.

directed his politics of "emptiness"), but of new political formations working reflexively, virally and vectorally between binary poles and proper names. It is a political 'between-ness' that, though lurking throughout Büchel's and Motti's individual practices, found its culmination in the Bucharest collaboration between them: a collaboration located between "Eastern" and "Western" Europe, "home" and "elsewhere", the postcommunist past and the postsocialist present; a politics between plausibility and deniability, culture and imperialism. Indeed, a politics whose unnameability is highlighted, however paradoxically, in the only name by which to locate that collaborative project: a given name of dislocation and devolution that it virally inhabited, of "democracy" under destruction.

Chapter Six:

Dizzydence and the Archive: Dan and Lia Perjovschi

A consistent artistic methodology has emerged through the previous four chapters of this thesis and their mapping of contemporary art's postsocialist aesthetics. In order to critique "democracy" since the collapse of European communism, a number of artists have remobilised either nonconformist practices from the late-communist era or early-postcommunist precedents, so as to develop a range of autonomous aesthetic politics. In the process, these artists have sought to reveal and redress the differential power relations that exist between the "democratic West" and the "(post)communist East" – relations that continue to affect perceptions of contemporary practice, as we have seen, and which the British art historian Pat Simpson succinctly defined through her notion of Europatriarchy. Such imbalances of power only constituted part of Simpson's theory, however. Another, equally important symptom of Europatriarchy was the social subordination and marginalisation of women within postcommunist Europe throughout the 1990s. According to Simpson, this was primarily a consequence of the more geopolitical subordination of cultures.[1] As industries in decommunising countries privatised and "down-sized" in accordance with conditions attached to foreign investment, so levels of unemployment and societal uncertainty skyrocketed. In turn, Simpson contended, the potent mix of social instability, mass unemployment and changing cultural and gender roles resulted in increased aggression toward women within decommunising contexts. Art was hardly immune from such violence, as Simpson observed further: images of the body in postcommunist art frequently depicted the emasculation of men, or women in erotic display; some of these depictions were subsequently defaced or destroyed by

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[1] Pat Simpson, 'Peripheralising Patriarchy? Gender and Identity in Post-Soviet Art: A View from the West', *Oxford Art Journal*, 27/3 (2004), pp.389-415. For parallel analyses of these conditions in sociology and political science, see Katherine Verdery, *What was Socialism, and What Comes Next?* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996); and Walter M. Bacon, Jr. and Louis G. Pol, 'The Economic Status of Women in Romania', in Nahid Aslanbeigui, Steven Pressman and Gale Summerfield (eds.), *Women in the Age of Economic Transformation: Gender Impact of Reforms in Post-Socialist and Developing Countries* (London and New York City: Routledge, 1994), pp.41-55.

viewers; and many postcommunist performance artists – most infamously Oleg Kulik and Alexander Brener – engaged in acts of violence toward their viewers, their physical surroundings or even toward themselves.

The research I have presented so far would seem to confirm Simpson's theory. While Brener's aggressive actions made recurrent appearances in earlier chapters, the conspicuous absence of women within the development of postsocialist aesthetics generally – whether as artists, as subjects, or within the narrative contents of the artworks analysed – suggests a further kind of violence. It reveals a near-total disregard for matters of gender on the part of postsocialist artists, a current of marginalisation that persists across the distinctions between postcommunism and postsocialism (and which predates both, of course). This is not to say that women have been entirely excluded from the annals of contemporary European, and particularly postcommunist, practice. Curators such as Zdenka Badovinac and Mária Hlavajová, critics Marina Gržinić and Eda Čufer, and artists including Maja Bajević, Olga Chernysheva and Elena Kovylina have all made important interventions in postcommunist art, refiguring its parameters and redefining its potential in part because of their gender. Such interventions are matched by another artist, Lia Perjovschi, whose principal aim has been to counter the dual force of Europatriarchy by redressing lacunae in art history.

Her work, and especially her collaboration with others, is a crucial subject here. It prompts us to reconsider the role of gender in this thesis and, in so doing, provides important elaborations upon the postsocialist aesthetics analysed in previous chapters. It also draws us into a methodology that, though implicit throughout my earlier analysis, becomes explicit in Perjovschi's work. This methodology is derived from the resurgence of affects, knowledge and doubt that lurk within certain kinds of image archives. For the art historians Aby Warburg and Benjamin Buchloh in particular, this resurgence is a quintessential effect of the 'atlas' – a type of image archive that is inherently mutable, as we will examine toward the chapter's conclusion, and that has triggered important art theoretical concepts and methodologies in art practice worldwide. That methodology, in turn, allows us to align Perjovschi closely with other artists we might not expect in a

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thesis on postsocialist art from Europe, such as the New York- and Beirut-based Walid Raad. In order to reach such conclusions and correlations, however, we must first take stock of the final critique of "democracy" in this thesis: namely, how Lia Perjovschi conceived her alternative discourse of "dizzydence", the catalysts for that critique, and how gender figured within it.

The "Wrong" Place of Home

This shift in analytical focus does not require a shift from the context of Chapter Five. While Christoph Büchel and Gianni Motti's reply to MNAC's inauguration was a succinctly critical exercise – one that was self-reflexive and contingent at the same time – it was not the only such response to the museum. As I pointed out early in that chapter, a number of writers, curators and artists also voiced their protests against MNAC, due mainly to the knot of political purposes at the core of its formation. Foremost among these critics were Lia Perjovschi and her partner Dan, two artists for whom Bucharest (and particularly MNAC) had also become something of a "wrong" place for their practices.[2] This was for quite different reasons to the Swiss-based Büchel and Motti's. Bucharest was not a quasi-exotic location to which the Perjovschis were invited from afar. It was instead the city to which they had moved their studio early in 1990, in the expectation of new cultural, political and employment opportunities after the Ceauşescus' demise. To a large extent, those expectations did not come to fruition: the flux of postcommunism rendered the Perjovschis' base perpetually unstable. Their calls for parliamentary democracy in Romania, proclaimed with thousands of others in rallies through the streets of Bucharest, were brutally cracked down by teams of miners and mercenaries bussed into the city by the new government in June 1990.[3] Funding for

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[2] Readers should immediately note that, with occasional and appropriate exceptions, I refer to Dan Perjovschi and Lia Perjovschi by their given names throughout this chapter, so as to avoid unnecessary confusion between artists, voices and practices.

[3] Details of this mercenary crackdown (also known as the 'mineriadă' or 'mineriad') and the stark parallels between it and the December 1989 revolution can be found in Peter Siani-Davies, *The Romanian Revolution of December 1989* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005), pp.274ff and Edwin Rekosh,

culture evaporated as the state redirected its dwindling money and resources to other projects (only some of which were legal, as we saw in the previous chapter). And as foreign interest in postcommunist Europe grew through the 1990s, the Perjovschis found that Bucharest had also become a floating and unstable signifier in the minds of international curators, whose attempts to define the borders of postcommunism seemingly shifted with the seasons. As Dan Perjovschi dryly commented in a poster he made for the 2004 Cetinje Biennale (fig.6.1):

> Mid nineties I represented East Central Europe, end nineties I was coming from East Europe, at the end of the millenium [*sic*] from South East Europe and now from the Balkans. I never moved from Bucharest. That's Romania, or how Donald Rumsfeld put it, New Europe.[4]

"Home", in other words, was a space constantly defined and redefined by others. In the process, the Perjovschis claimed, a state of dependency had emerged in which local alternatives to the status quo were effectively dispelled. For Lia, the government's tight control of cultural funding, except in cases that best served its interests, resulted in the 'obedience of the intellectuals' for their professional survival.[5] Similarly, the ruthless containment of public dissent suggested that 'the [1989] revolution was stolen', a theft seemingly endorsed by the international legitimation of Romania's "new" governments.[6] The country's postcommunist condition thus appeared all too redolent with the spirit of the communist past: the situation was, for the Perjovschis, 'almost like a 1970s revival, when everything seemed to be alright, when intellectuals, trusting in the "good intentions" of those in power, became members of the Communist Party. In fact, their silence was purchased, their critical sense lost'.[7] It was this lack of criticality that the

'Romania: A Persistent Culture of Impunity', in Naomi Roht-Arriaza (ed.), *Impunity and Human Rights in International Law and Practice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), pp.129-159, especially pp.141ff.

[4] A variation of Dan Perjovschi's comments can also be found in an interview conducted at the time of his solo exhibition at New York City's Museum of Modern Art in 2007: see Roxana Marcoci, 'What Happened to Us? Interview with Dan Perjovschi', in Kristine Stiles (ed.), *States of Mind: Dan and Lia Perjovschi*, exh. cat. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), p.166.

[5] Lia Perjovschi and Elena Crippa, 'CAA – Lia Perjovschi', *Idea: Arts+Society*, 23 (2006), np.

[6] *Ibid*.

[7] Dan Perjovschi and Lia Perjovschi, *Short Guide: Art in Public Space (RO): Some Independent Positions* (Bucharest: Center for Art Analysis, 2002), p.2.

Perjovschis believed had resurfaced in its most virulent form through the development of MNAC.

Part of their antipathy toward the museum rested, as it did for others, on its politics of legitimation for the Romanian government. The lack of consultation with local art professionals about its location, the costs involved in its creation and the consequent reliance on a government that had previously been (at best) ambivalent about culture – all led to the Perjovschis' view that MNAC was 'too connected to the government, too dependent on the Ministry of Culture. And it isn't just the Ministry for culture either; its real name is the Ministry of Culture and Cults!'[8] There were more personal reasons for this antipathy, though, reasons which might initially seem ironic but which had profound repercussions. The Perjovschis were not always opposed to the construction of a contemporary art museum in Bucharest; they were instead instrumental in its development, for they were among its staunchest advocates during the mid- to late-1990s. They instigated a series of formal and informal meetings with local artists and administrators, including a large workshop in 1999, on the possibility of what such a museum could be. 'The conclusion was that it had to be a mixed institution', Dan later reflected, 'half-state, half-private, to have two means of control' so as to maintain some form of independence from the state's over-determined bureaucracy.[9] By 2001, when the government announced that the museum would finally be constructed in the form of MNAC, that conclusion was in effect rendered irrelevant. The museum would be run entirely under the auspices of the state, with much of the Ministry of Culture's (and Cults') annual budget diverted from other initiatives across Romania and pumped into the formation of this single institution. Many of the Perjovschis' long-term colleagues or friends either remained silent about this predicament, or actively championed it (such as the curator and subsequent MNAC Director, Mihai Oroveanu, or his counterpart

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[8] Interview with Dan Perjovschi, Bucharest, 30 November 2006, author's notes.

[9] *Ibid*.

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Ruxandra Balaci).[10] And while MNAC employees including Mihnea Mircan sought the acquisition of Dan's art for the museum's collection, Lia's substantial work – both as an initiator of the museum project and as an established artist – was wholly disregarded, according to Dan, because of her gender.[11] In his view, 'the people we invested a lot of feelings and energy into got sucked into a very official and lazy system. So in a certain sense, the society around us was using us'.[12]

If MNAC emblematised a kind of '1970s revival', then it was a revival tinged with the opportunism and sexism typical of Europatriarchy. Conversely, while many of their colleagues remained silent and uncritical about Romania's state of culture, the Perjovschis gave their acts of protest and withdrawal from the museum's politics a particularly public airing. Dan published his email correspondence with Mircan – initially through the popular Internet forum called nettime.org, and subsequently in print – in which he declared his hostility to MNAC and its organisers, and explicitly rejected the museum's requests to purchase his work.[13] Furthermore, neither artist attended its inauguration, despite the fact that the prestigious George Maciunas Prize was to be

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[10] Oroveanu had been a curator and director at the Bucharest gallery Etaj 3/4, a space in which the Perjovschis occasionally sought to exhibit their works (though sometimes without receiving word from Oroveanu about their applications): Lia Perjovschi and Elena Crippa, above n.5, np. Ruxandra Balaci wrote one of the first articles to appear in an international journal about Dan Perjovschi's work: see Ruxandra Balaci, 'Les petits hommes aliénés de Dan Perjovschi/The Little Alienated Man of Dan Perjovschi', *Art Press*, 250 (October 1999), pp.34-36.

[11] Interview with Dan Perjovschi, Bucharest, 30 November 2006, author's notes.

[12] *Ibid*.

[13] The emails first appeared publicly on the Romania branch of nettime.org, called nettime.ro, on 13 November 2002: see http://www.nettime.org/Lists-Archives/nettime-ro-0211/msg00036.html and subsequent emails in the thread [accessed 18 May 2007]. The print version can be found in one of the Perjovschis' self-published newspapers, called *Detective Draft*: see Dan Perjovschi and Lia Perjovschi, *Detective Draft* (Bucharest: Center for Art Analysis, 2005), p.3. Further details about the Perjovschis' undoubtedly aggressive acts – including Dan Perjovschi's personal attacks on Mihai Oroveanu for being subservient to the Romanian government, and claims that other artists responded to Mircan's emails once published online, so as to get their work included in MNAC's holdings – can be found respectively in Céline Settimelli, *Le Musée National d'Art Contemporain de Bucarest: La contribution de l'art contemporain à la construction de "l'imaginaire national" roumain*, Masters Thesis (Paris: Université Paris VIII, 2006), p.27; and Kristine Stiles, 'Remembrance, Resistance, Reconstruction: The Social Value of Lia and Dan Perjovschi's Art', in Marius Babias (ed.), *European Influenza*, exh. cat. (Venice: Romanian Pavilion, La Biennale di Venezia, 2005), pp.574-612 and Stiles, 'States of Mind: Dan and Lia Perjovschi', in Stiles (ed.), above n.4, p.84.

awarded midway through the event to Dan in honour of his practice. It was a much larger protest on the Perjovschis' part, however, that ultimately and quite literally redefined their politics – a protest that encompassed these two particular acts, and which the artists directed toward the broader postcommunist conditions of which MNAC was symptomatic.

For upon hearing that the government would build and ultimately control Bucharest's new contemporary art museum, the Perjovschis declared their opposition to 'the present state of affairs, which is, in the opinion of the majority, our "normality"'.[14] Although that 'majority' was not defined – was it the majority of Romanians or of people living elsewhere, for example, or of Romanian intellectuals or artists? – the Perjovschis' new aesthetic politics certainly were. They branded themselves "dizzydents", 'from "dizzy" in the English, because our generation was the one that created the Museum. So we had to break out of our own friendship circles and be against them conceptually'.[15] As with the other aesthetic politics in this thesis, then, the Perjovschis' hinged on its 'breaking-out', its autonomy, from cultural programmes that they found over-burdened by statist rhetoric and thus too restrictive. By taking an autonomous position, the Perjovschis claimed, art could instead preserve and 'support independent critical positions [rather than] bow before political games and state institutions'.[16] Or, as Dan subsequently remarked, '[t]he state has to grant a certain independence and autonomy, to let culture be self-governing…. Otherwise the past is too present; [state] politics have too much control'.[17]

That spectral presence of the past was especially evident in the Perjovschis' label for their agenda. If the Romanian state was staging a '1970s revival' in its re-centralised control of culture, and if their home of Bucharest had consequently become a "wrong" place of

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[14] Perjovschi and Perjovschi, *Short Guide*, above n.7, p.2.

[15] This definition of "dizzydence" comes from my interview with Dan Perjovschi, *ibid*. A similar definition can be found in Dan Perjovschi and Gabriela Adamesteanu, 'In Romănia, occidentul te consacra', *Bucurestiul Cultural*, 19-20 (23 August-29 August 2005), pp.6-8.

[16] Perjovschi and Perjovschi, *Short Guide*, above n.7, p.2.

[17] Interview with Dan Perjovschi, Bucharest, 30 November 2006, author's notes.

sorts, then the Perjovschis returned to a potent counter-history as the base, or as a precedent, for their proclaimed autonomy. Dizzydence, Lia explained in an article she wrote about her practice, was 'real dissidence, with stomach aches, with panic, but also with an attitude where you assume any risk, as the authentic dissidents did in communism'.[18] The Perjovschis' political positioning thus drew out another leitmotif in this thesis, albeit quite independently of such artists as Thomas Hirschhorn. By connecting with an alternative spirit of the past, that of the dissidence movements, the Perjovschis sought to reveal the recycling of communist-era "officialdom" within more contemporary contexts. In so doing, the artists could press their own nonconformity toward those cycles, so as to rupture culture's conditions of passivity and subordination to the political will of governments. 'In the past, we obeyed a lot; that is why we disobey now', Dan has claimed.[19] Yet this was a nonconformity transformed in the process of translation. Whereas the earlier dissidents were opposed to an easily identifiable entity – totalitarian communism – the Perjovschis perceived themselves to be in a dizzying state of independence. On the one hand, their "opponent" was less stable and clear-cut than communism; on the other, if independence were indeed possible, it required mobilisation against the very people and politics that they had previously advocated. Opposition to MNAC required rebelling against old friends. If it were the government and its yearnings for international approbation that the Perjovschis resisted, then they equally stood against the state of postcommunist flux that the government's reassertion and recentralisation of control were, in part, intended to contain. And yet if postcommunist instability was also the target of the artists' dissent, then this necessitated a withdrawal from the economic and political programmes driving that instability – programmes that the Perjovschis had moved to Bucharest to enjoy, which they had championed by protesting in the streets of Romania's capital, but which had since been commandeered in the interests of opportunism, discrimination and dependency that the Perjovschis vociferously rejected.

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[18] Lia Perjovschi, 'CAA (Contemporary Art Archive/Center for Art Analysis)', *e-cart*, 6 (August 2005), available at http://www.e-cart.ro/ec-6/caa/uk/g/caa_uk.html [accessed 16 November 2006].

[19] Interview with Dan Perjovschi, Bucharest, 30 November 2006, author's notes.

Of particular concern here was "democracy", the attainment of which had been one of the Perjovschis' core political aspirations throughout the 1980s. This continued long after the Romanian revolutions as well. From 1991 onwards, Dan was closely connected with a non-governmental organisation called the Group for Social Dialogue – an organisation founded by former dissidents to promote democracy and civil society in Romania – where he worked as a political cartoonist known as "Perjo" for the weekly newspaper, *Revista 22*.[20] He has also expressed his and Lia's preference for Romania's contemporary conditions over its communist histories: 'Democratic capitalist society is much better than a communist one. But at the same time', he emphasised, 'we cannot just take it for granted'.[21] For both artists, he maintained, "democracy" had become a central means through which ostensibly constructive rhetoric potentially masked less-than-constructive intents. This was certainly apparent on a social level. It was through the development of "democracy" that 'we see in this country what a brutal capitalism means', such that, as he stressed in a definition of "democracy" from 2005:

> All the democratic and economic achievements of Romania in recent years resemble the successes of the Romanian world-boxing champion Leonard Doroftei: After the victory we're taken to the hospital.[22]

Pyrrhic pronouncements of "democracy" were equally relevant to culture, according to Dan, and most strikingly in relation to MNAC. He believed that the museum stood as a 'symbol of what democracy is in this country today', especially given its exclusion of female artists like Lia and its construction by the government for what he called 'its own international integration and visibility'.[23] And while this phenomenon was most overt for

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[20] Further information about the Group, and especially Dan Perjovschi's work for it, can be found in Kristine Stiles' exceptional essay on the Perjovschis' practices: Kristine Stiles, 'States of Mind: Dan and Lia Perjovschi', in Stiles (ed.), above n.4, pp.6ff. For readers of Romanian, the Group's website is also extremely informative: http://www.gds.ong.ro [accessed 18 November 2006]. At the time of writing, Dan Perjovschi continues to work as a cartoonist for *Revista 22*.

[21] Interview with Dan Perjovschi, 30 November 2006, author's notes.

[22] The respective quotations are derived from my interview with Dan Perjovschi, *ibid*, and Dan Perjovschi, 'Key Words in the New Europe', in Marius Babias (ed.), *Das Neue Europa: Kultur des Vermischens und Politik der Repräsentation – The New Europe: Culture of Mixing and Politics of Representation* (Vienna: Generali Foundation, 2005), p.143.

[23] Interview with Dan Perjovschi, *ibid*. For parallel (if potentially over-determined) arguments about Eastern European desires for visibility in the West, as considered specifically in relation to the Perjovschis' practices and their contexts, see the various writings of Marius Babias, including Marius Babias, 'The New

the Perjovschis in the Romanian contexts with which they were familiar, it was also apparent for them in the U.S.-led 'War on Terror': 'There is something wrong with this world when the idea of winning hearts and minds – as the American army put it – is just to throw sandwiches at people. Then, you win nothing. And if you design it as a strategy, then there's something wrong there'.[24] Consequently, while "democracy" had been a politics for which to fight during and immediately after communism, the years since had instigated a dramatic and dizzying shift in world-view for the Perjovschis: "democracy" had become, whether on a local or international stage, a politics of 'not having a sense of responsibility' for one's actions and exclusions.[25]

The artists' riposte to these politics was dizzydence, a discursive framework through which they asserted their desired sense of responsibility and an independent position of criticism toward local and international contexts. This was an acute reformulation of the Perjovschis' theoretical stance, one impelled by their opposition to MNAC, its organisers' seemingly deliberate exclusion of Lia from the project and the museum's foundations in troubled politics of "democracy". Indeed, MNAC's creation served as a literally defining moment for the Perjovschis, radically confirming Bucharest's spiral into a "wrong" place and thus the artists' need to respond succinctly and critically to the conditions around them. Yet as a specifically contingent response to the museum – and especially as I have outlined it so far – the Perjovschis' proclamation of dizzydence also ran the risk of being a mere statement or stance *in theory*. For the artists, though, this was not the case: MNAC was part of a broader "dizziness" affecting art's production and

Europe: Culture of Mixing and Politics of Representation', in Babias (ed.), *ibid*, pp.105-122; Marius Babias, 'Self-Colonisation: Dan Perjovschi and His Critique of the Post-Communist Restructuring of Identity', in Kasper König *et al*, *Dan Perjovschi: Naked Drawings* (Köln: Walter König and Museum Ludwig, 2005), pp.19-21; and Marius Babias, 'The Incomplete Self: The Transformation of Romanian National Discourses in the Context of Europeanism', in Stiles (ed.), above n.4, pp.130-148.

[24] Interview with Dan Perjovschi, *ibid*. Dan reiterated this comment eighteen months after my initial interview with him: Conversation with Dan Perjovschi and Lia Perjovschi, Sydney, 20 June 2008, author's notes.

[25] *Ibid*. See also Lia Perjovschi's assertion that 'the time after the [1989] Revolution [reflected] our fight for a democratic society' (and which fight, it seems, the Perjovschis later transformed into a struggle of a somewhat different kind) in Kristine Stiles, 'Passages 1992-2007: Interview with Lia Perjovschi', in Stiles (ed.), above n.4, p.177. Lia has confirmed this point in later conversation as well: Conversation with Dan Perjovschi and Lia Perjovschi, Sydney, 20 June 2008, author's notes.

reception, one that they perceived as locally inflected and globally pressing, and which they had long reflected upon in their practices. Dizzydence was a politics applicable to their work in general and particularly, according to Dan, to their enduring 'interest in the mechanisms of the [art] scene and how it functions inside democracy. How the artist's status and role is recognised and used in this sense'.[26]

Our task now, as it has been throughout this thesis, is to examine how such politics emerged in practice and through art, as a form of *aesthetic* politics. One such manifestation, as we will see, can be found in the subject matter and content of the Perjovschis' artworks. However, it is their process-based methodologies that serve as the cornerstone for this chapter, and there are two important reasons for this. The first rests on the fact that these methodologies have remained remarkably consistent since the 1980s; their continuation up to and beyond the time of writing resolutely shift this thesis into the present (and potentially into the future). This transference into the present does not preclude us, though, from examining the Perjovschis' work within the history of contemporary art that I have presented in other chapters. Instead, as I will argue, their dizzydent processes pivot on complex engagements with history and transience, exclusion and remembrance. The grammar of dizzydence is that of a past continuing into the present – a present of spectral resistance, as the term "dizzydence" indicates – and which necessitates a similar shift in grammar for this chapter between the past, the present and the present perfect tense of 'they have been'. That spectral resistance also underpins the second reason to focus on the Perjovschis' processes. For it is through the artists' critical reflections on both historical and political engagement that the Perjovschis' aesthetic politics emerge most fully, I contend: a politics of dizzydent 'para-methods', as Dan calls them, through which 'different cultural tactics can generate new ideas and even confrontations' with ideologies of "democracy" and Europatriarchy.[27]

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[26] Interview with Dan Perjovschi, *ibid*.

[27] *Ibid*.

The Perjovschis and Their Para-Methods

One of the Perjovschis' para-methods emerged in tandem with their politics. At roughly the same time as they coined the term "dizzydence", they also transformed their identities as individual artists into a singular persona called "liadan perjovschi". This tactic of restructuring artistic identity was, to a large extent, familiar to art history. It instantly recalled similar tropes by artists working collectively (including IRWIN and NSK), as pseudo-corporations (such as the N.E.Thing Company in the 1960s and 1970s, or ®™ark from the late-1990s onwards), or whose partnership in life informed their metaphysical fusion through their practice (most notably, again, Abramović and Ulay).[28] For the Perjovschis, though, the development of "liadan" was less a strategic mimesis of organisational structures or a romantic collapse of identities than a more pressing form of pragmatism: an attempt to neutralise the effects of gender discrimination on their work. This was not a neutralisation of gender itself: the Perjovschis did not suspend or synthesise their identities so as to move beyond or to disavow gender altogether. Nor did they necessarily want to evoke the sense of 'between-ness', as a kind of non-identity between identities, that we saw in the previous chapter with Büchel and Motti. Instead, the *conjunction* of the Perjovschis' given names, with their given gender connotations, indicated a *shared* identity – one that maintained the artists' individualities and distinctions, but which foregrounded their mutual support for each other in their personal, professional and political endeavours.

This was a crucial marker for the Perjovschis. Identification through the signifier "liadan" enacted an important counter-measure to Europatriarchy for them, especially in terms of

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[28] Analysis of the N.E.Thing Company, created by Vancouver-based artists Ingrid and Iain Baxter in c.1965, can be found in Nancy Shaw and William Wood (eds.), *You Are Now in the Middle of a N.E.Thing Landscape: Works by Iain and Ingrid Baxter1965-1971*, exh. cat. (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Fine Arts Gallery, 1993) and Tilman Baumgärtel, 'Immaterial Material: Physicality, Corporality and Dematerialization in Telecommunication Artworks', in Annmarie Chandler and Norie Neumark (eds.), *At a Distance: Precursors to Art and Activism on the Internet* (Cambridge MA: The MIT Press, 2005), pp.60-70. Stockholm-based critic and historian Charlotte Bydler has presented a significant reading of ®™ark in relation to Internet activism and democracy: Charlotte Bydler, 'Art after Democracy: Reinventing Democracy in Art', Paper presented at the 2008 College Art Association Conference, Dallas, United States, 23 February 2008, author's notes.

reception. It made absolutely clear that neither the artists nor their works could be considered in isolation – most obviously as a result of gender hierarchies and concomitant presumptions of value – but only through their profound relation to each other. For a critic, curator or historian to recognise only one of the Perjovschis was thus to perform an act of marginalisation too visible to ignore, let alone excuse. Proper recognition of their practices instead required understanding them as inherently conjoined and even co-operative, as a common drive toward the artists' uncommon politics. "liadan" consequently hinted at the Perjovschis' inter-relations on the level of production as well, in their studio (which they also shared) and as a conceptual collaboration even when they did not literally co-create one another's works. This co-operative process was something that the artists had frequently discussed and sought to establish. Through co-operation, the Perjovschis believed, they could develop a network of support spanning their individual differences, yet which resisted strict divisions between them that could lead to the subordination of Dan's work to Lia's or vice versa. Their practices, in other words – and as implicit in the word "liadan" – rested on the indispensable input provided by the one artist on the projects instigated by the other. A shared input even when only a single author was listed, such that the Perjovschis saw themselves as being akin to each other's 'back-up singer', as Dan has recounted:[29] same tune, same stage, with one person foregrounded yet in harmony with the other.

Despite the Perjovschis' insistence on this mutually supportive framework, however, very few curators or critics actually included both of the artists together in their exhibitions or writings (Marius Babias, Zdenka Badovinac and Mária Hlavajová count among the exceptions here).[30] Rarer still has been consideration of the Perjovschis as a co-operative

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[29] Interview with Dan Perjovschi, Bucharest, 30 November 2006, author's notes.

[30] See, for example, Marius Babias (ed.), *Das Neue Europa*, above n.22 (an exhibition staged at Vienna's Generali Foundation in 2005); Zdenka Badovinac (ed.), *2000+ Arteast Collection: The Art of Eastern Europe in Dialogue with the West*, exh. cat. (Ljubljana: Moderna Galerija, 2000); and Zdenka Badovinac and Peter Weibel (eds.), *2000+ Arteast Collection: The Art of Eastern Europe* (Vienna: Folio Verlag and Innsbruck: Orangerie Congress, 2001); and Mária Hlavajová (ed.), *Cordially Invited, Episode 3*, exh. cat. (Utrecht: BAK, 2004). It is also worth noting that the theme for the second Bucharest Biennale – 'Chaos: The Age of Confusion', curated by Zsolt Petrányi – was partially derived from the Perjovschis' politics of dizzydence: see Andreea Monica Udrea, 'Bucharest's Biennial 2: Dizzydence in Age of Confusion', *Sekcja Magazyn Artystyczny* (2006), available at http://sekcja.org/english.php?id_artykulu=22 [accessed 5 July

unit with internal differentiation: only American art historian Kristine Stiles has, to date, identified this co-relation in her extensive and exemplary discussions about the artists.[31] Yet this process of co-operation and co-relation was vital for the Perjovschis, and hence to my analysis in the pages that follow, for it underscored how the artists' works provided distinct yet intertwined approaches to their politics of dizzydence. Indeed, this dual approach served as another kind of para-method for the Perjovschis, even though – to continue their musical metaphor, and as I will show in turn – their compositions would appear to be dramatically different.

Dan's main medium has, since the early-1990s, ostensibly been drawing – though not in traditional paper-and-pencil formats. For his exhibition *rEST*, staged in the Romanian Pavilion at the 1999 Venice Biennale, Dan scrawled his drawings directly onto the floor (fig.6.2). In other instances, his felt-tip pen or chalk designs have covered windows or walls, or stretched along lintels and curled around corners (fig.6.3). In fact any surface, of any colour or hue, has been open to a practice that might ordinarily be dismissed as manic scribbling were it not for the sly satire and biting commentaries that these 'naked drawings', as Dan calls them, lay bare.[32] These have occasionally involved wry reflections on artistic ambition: in one drawing, reproduced in numerous venues and titled *Group Show* (2005–, fig.6.4), an artist celebrates being in a group exhibition by trying to stand out from the crowd and blocking other figures from view. On more frequent occasions, however, his designs have presented rapid-fire caricatures or almost-cynical snapshots responding to current events world-wide. In a series from 2000, made in Ljubljana at the same time as *Manifesta 3* took place, Dan questioned the biennale's venture beyond Western Europe and the presumed visibility it would provide to Eastern

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2007]. Nonetheless, though some of Lia's drawings were reproduced in the Biennale's accompanying reader, published by *Pavilion* magazine, only Dan Perjovschi's work was included in the exhibition itself: see Zsolt Petrányi (curator) and Răzvan Ion ad Eugen Rădescu (eds.), *Chaos: The Age of Confusion: Reader of the Bucharest Biennale 2* (Bucharest: Pavilion Magazine, 2006), especially pp.152-155 (for Lia's insert) and pp.210-213 (for Dan's exhibited works).

[31] See, among many other examples, Stiles, 'Remembrance, Resistance, Reconstruction', above n.13; and Stiles (ed.), *States of Mind*, above n.4.

[32] König *et al*, *Dan Perjovschi: Naked Drawings*, above n.23.

European artists (fig.6.5). In Amsterdam in 2006, his drawings traded on more expansive cultural and political contexts: the stereotypes, quasi-authoritarian rhetoric and unequal power relations between different parts of Europe after communism and during the European Union's expansion to include such countries as Romania. These subjects ranged from the Eastern European workers vilified by Dutch (and especially British) tabloids as new Draculas bleeding local jobs dry (fig.6.6), to the privatisation of Eastern European industries and other conditions for Western aid under Europatriarchy – conditions which Dan humorously exaggerated through the imperatives listed in fig.6.7, for example: 'Open Markets; Cut Social Programs; Cut the Deficit; Sell Your Banks; Listen to Madonna; [and perhaps most damningly of all] Collect Hirst'.

Dan's posing of these matters does not equate with a simple "devil's advocate" position – 'I'm not a devil's advocate. I defend every drawing I did and do, I'm behind every one', he says – nor the militant "Euro-scepticism" or resurgent neo-nationalism that plagued much of Europe, and particularly postcommunist Europe, in the 1990s.[33] His drawings are better understood as quasi-journalistic enquiries into the various kinds of investment and conditions through which international exchange can operate. In this sense, his art practice has inherited much from his career as the political cartoonist "Perjo" for newspapers including *Revista 22* (fig.6.8). It is equally derived, though, from a highly self-reflexive and even self-effacing ethic, producing what he calls 'empathic humour' rather than bleak sarcasm.[34] On the one hand, his reputation has allowed him to benefit more than most Romanians since 1989. He has regularly flown abroad – usually together with Lia – to create his site-specific wall-drawings at the behest (and on the tab) of such institutions as New York's Museum of Modern Art in 2007 or London's Tate Modern in 2006. 'My art comes together with my physical presence and reinforces the right to travel I earned in 1989', Dan has asserted, such that 'each exhibition is a victory' over the

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[33] Interview with Dan Perjovschi, Bucharest, 30 November 2006, author's notes. For further elaboration on European neo-nationalism soon after 1989, see the introduction to Chapter Three of this thesis where this topic was a central concern.

[34] *Ibid.*

confinements of Romanian communism.[35] On the other hand, his work has recognised how such travel can engender new relations of dependency between artists and others: in one self-portrait (fig.6.9), Dan depicts himself clinging to an over-sized leg, accompanied by the plea 'Help Me; I'm Poor; I was oppressed; Give Me a Grant; A Pair of Jeans; A Chewing Gum; Something'. Indeed, a deliberately self-effacing pathos characterises many of his drawings: celebration mixes with self-deprecation, while the presence of fame is traced with fragility. This is reinforced by a more formal kind of effacement as well, for his analyses and pleas have often been intentionally ephemeral. Through the course of many of his exhibitions, and certainly at their end, his drawings fade or are scrubbed from view, much like the media events to which he responds and whose topicality dissolves as time wears on. The pen marks on the Romanian Pavilion's floor for *rEST* became scuffed by shoes and eventually indecipherable; chalk and charcoal lines lose their purchase on gallery walls as audiences brush against them (fig.6.10); venues are white-washed and primed for the next exhibition, eradicating all sign of Dan's yearned-for presence. His work is thus less a case of biting the hand that feeds than a scan of what lies up the sleeve – a dialectical practice probing the entwinements of East and West, presence and absence, self and self-othering, that has informed both his content and his process of 'mak[ing] temporary projects with permanent markers'.[36]

Two key points are particularly worth highlighting in relation to Dan's practice, however, both of which I will return to later in this chapter. The first continues our focus on Dan's process, for while his main medium has *ostensibly* been drawing, this is not necessarily the best way to characterise his work. Instead, cartoon here is both a noun and a verb, product and performance. Dan's images have invariably derived from templates first jotted in his notebooks – 'my private Wikipedia', in his words[37] – and to which he has

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[35] Ileana Pintilie, 'Drawing for Freedom: An Interview with Dan Perjovschi', *Art Margins* (24 April 2006), available at http://www.artmargins.com/content/interview/pintilie.htm [accessed 12 October 2006].

[36] *Ibid*; see also Mireille Descombes, 'La Suisse roumaine de Dan Perjovschi', *L'Hebdo* (23 November 2006), p.104. For a parallel reading of Dan Perjovschi's work through a lens of self-othering, see Marius Babias, 'Self-Colonisation', above n.23.

[37] Dan Perjovschi in Marcoci, 'What Happened to Us?', in Stiles (ed.), above n.4, p.155.

constantly referred when working (fig.6.11). He has then transferred these images to walls or other surfaces in acts of improvisation, or what he calls 'moments of pure jazz':[38] improvisations that tailor the templates for local audiences, that integrate with the surrounding flow of other drawings, and that on occasion incorporate architectural fixtures into their designs (fig.6.12). On one level, then, these notebooks have served as his archive of images to be transferred and transformed on other surfaces. On another level, this act of image transference has in effect been a process of performance, staged before his target audiences of gallery visitors and assistants (fig.6.13). Dan's work should not therefore be characterised as drawing *per se*, so much as an intermedial practice: a process existing between his notebook archive and the wall, between drawing and performance, and which can best be described as a method of reproduction or dissemination through which the image is transformed.[39]

The second point relates more specifically to content, though it again refers us to Dan's practice as thoroughly dialectical. While Dan's chief focus has been to chart the effects of Europatriarchy long after the Iron Curtain's withdrawal, he has also carefully interwoven this with another dialectical tracing – one that exceeds the spatio-temporal limits of Europatriarchy in the 1990s and which has been pivotal throughout previous chapters. This is an engagement, at once critical and vulnerable, with global geopolitics – and particularly, since 2003, with the invasion of Iraq. However, rather than directly confront geopolitical events such as the invasion, Dan has focused on the *rhetoric* subtending

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[38] Dan Perjovschi cited in Julia Friedrich, 'The Line that Speaks: Dan Perjovschi's "Naked Drawings"', in König *et al*, above n.23, p.14.

[39] Dan has himself claimed, though on only one occasion, that his site-specific drawing 'is a performance': Pintilie, above n.35. Only American critic Janet Koplos has (very briefly) touched upon the role of performance in Dan's drawings, in relation to a weeks-long work called *Anthropogramming* (1995), in which Dan drew and then erased hundreds of tiny drawings on the wall of the Franklin Furnace gallery in New York City: Janet Koplos, 'Dan Perjovschi at Franklin Furnace', *Art in America*, 84 (July 1996), pp.91-92. Dan has occasionally ventured into more literal realms of performance and body art, most notoriously by having the word '*România*' tattooed on his left bicep in Timişoara in 1993. The act scarred him with the mark of a country collapsing under neo-liberalism and neo-nationalism, and largely outcast in international art circles. It was subsequently removed as part of René Block's 2003 exhibition *Im Schluchten des Balkans*. The act of erasure became a work titled *Erased Romania*, and was funded by the Kunsthalle Fridericianum in Kassel. Further information about these performances can be found in Dan Perjovschi, 'Romania', *Idea: Arts+Society*, 19 (2004), np; and Stiles, 'States of Mind', in Stiles (ed.), *States of Mind*, above n.4, pp.78-79.

contemporary geopolitics: the rhetoric on which our knowledge of world events depends and through which – rather than despite which – *global* imbalances of power are maintained. This has included the integration of Muslim nations into "Western values", including, for Dan, the eroticisation of the naked female form (fig.6.14); or militarised declarations of freedom and paranoid nationalism in the United States, recast as figures peering through American flags as though cautiously through window blinds (figs.6.15-6.17). Central to this focus have been rhetorics of "democracy" in the wake of 9/11: the folly of seeking to build "democracy" on a site one has bombed beyond survival, or bubble-worlds of "democracy" encapsulated within an army tank (figs.6.18-6.19); or, as he entreated to his audience in a chalk drawing from 2005 (fig.6.20):

> Win Hearts Minds
> Friendly Fire
> Democracy by Force
> Fight for Peace
> Humane War
> Impose Freedom
> What the heck are we talking [about]?

By enswarming these enquiries into "democracy" with other images and their (sometimes) playful local references or critiques of Europatriarchy, Dan has made clear how locally-inflected contexts are inseparable from, or even feed into, more globally-mobile politics. This kind of correlation could equally be argued of Dan and his designs as well: he has, after all, performed his acts of image transference within (or, to reiterate, at the behest of) many of the world's richest art institutions, reproducing his images and tailoring his practice for different audiences internationally. Yet if Dan's work is potentially symptomatic of the global flows and politics he critiques, it is a charge he has continually and self-reflexively undercut. Despite his international presence signifying a celebration of "democratisation" and its 'victory' over communist restrictions, Dan has consistently remained critical of "democracy" in his drawings. Neither artists nor art, he suggests, should be passive to the state's political interests. At the same time, though, Dan's explicit critiques of "democracy" have been perpetually provisional and insistently subjective; although they can confront notions of "democracy" so as to generate new

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ideas, they cannot impose those ideas on others as some kind of objective measure for art's political potential. Instead of enforcing "democracy", then, Dan's drawings have communicated a critical counter-politics between the local and the global, one that is manifestly idiosyncratic (especially in its humour) and independent in intent, and thus entirely in keeping with the Perjovschis' discourse of dizzydence.

In Lia's work, by contrast, inverse processes and interests to Dan's would appear to be at stake. Whereas Dan has often extrapolated his critiques from local contexts to a global sphere of discourse, Lia has brought markers of the global back into the studio. Since her first international travels in 1990, Lia has collated globes, images of angels and shopping bags from across Europe and America, and re-presented them as rhizomatic assemblages called *Endless Collections* (1990–, fig.6.21).[40] The knowledge gleaned from visits to galleries, colleagues and libraries abroad has likewise re-appeared in Lia's practice: in the form of diagrams and timelines constructed to augment her and other people's knowledge of contemporary art's histories, both within and outside Romania. In such charts as her *Mind Maps* (1999-2006, fig.6.22) or her *Research File: Subjective History of Romanian Culture in the Frame of Eastern Europe and the Balkans, from Modernism to the European Union* (2000–, fig.6.23), the art history taught to Lia during her tertiary education intersects with what she now considers some of the defining (if occasionally still obscure) events in international cultural histories. Genealogies of conceptual art are mapped alongside Socialist Realist painting; Ion Grigorescu's dissident performances in Romania from the 1970s or Yoko One's *Cut Piece* (1964) co-exist in her preferred trajectories of art history with Constantin Brâncuși's sculptures from the 1910s and 1920s.

Of particular concern to Lia in these maps and especially her timelines have been events in performance and body art, and the reasons for this are both personal and political. These were media with which she experimented from the late-1980s onwards, but which

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[40] Lia's assemblage of globes has also been called *The Globe Collection*, a term preferred by Kristine Stiles in her 2007 monograph: see, for example, Stiles (ed.), *States of Mind*, above n.4, p.88. For a fairly poetic description of Lia's collections of globes, see Raluca Voinea, 'The Globes of Lia Perjovschi', *e-cart*,1 (September 2003), available at http://www.e-cart.ro/1/lia%20g/uk/gri/lia-g.html [accessed 29 June 2007].

were entirely ignored by Romanian universities under communism and thus effectively rendered taboo. In a November 1989 work titled *Magic of Gesture/Laces* (fig.6.24), for example, Lia tightly bound twelve of her colleagues together with rope, ensuring that participants had to negotiate with each other to prevent the tethers becoming tighter and more painful. This, then, was a ritualistic act of connection and constriction, of solidarity and sufferance designed to create more comfortable modes of being within circumstances of constraint. For *Annulment* two months earlier (fig.6.25), it was Lia herself who was entrapped in binds of twine and bandages, an overt metaphor for the pain and constrictions of a nonconformist artist struggling under the Ceauşescu regime. However metaphoric they may have been, these acts could not be performed in public without engaging the wrath of communist Romania's police forces, and particularly its brutal secret police called the Securitate. They were instead performed in Lia and Dan's studio (then based in the city of Oradea near Romania's border with Hungary) and usually only in front of Dan, who served as the projects' photographer. But while the privacy of the home or studio may have offered protection from the state, it also meant that this type of dissident performance – generally categorised under the label of Apartment Art, as noted earlier in this thesis – often remained unknown to other practitioners in Romania, let alone elsewhere. Indeed, as Dan recounts, this circumstance led to neither he nor Lia knowing about the term 'performance art' or its extensive histories until after the fall of the Ceauşescus:

> We had no idea that this was called performance or happenings and that it has a history. Absolutely nothing. So when the change happened in Romania and we were able to travel, this reality hit us very badly… you find out about this amazing stuff that was produced and you have no clue about it. That's the reason for the timelines. It was Lia's private kind of project.[41]

Despite their different source material, then, Lia's accumulations, timelines and diagrams have sought the same result: to redress exclusions engineered by the state under communism. The souvenirs gathered for Lia's *Endless Collections* may have been the detritus from her travels, but they equally signified the international exchange and hope denied within the enclosed despair of communist Romania. Similarly, by interspersing

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[41] Interview with Dan Perjovschi, Bucharest, 30 November 2006, author's notes.

familiar forms of local art practice among nuggets of previously disregarded information – whether they be details from the Western art canon after World War Two, or forgotten political and cultural movements from Romania and other parts of Europe – Lia has aimed to reframe the country's "official" histories within broader global contexts. In so doing, though, Lia's work has also been directed to more contemporary forms of exclusion. For her, key figures from Romanian art history, and particularly its dissident artists from the 1970s and 1980s (including Ion Grigorescu, Dan Petrescu and Geta Brătescu) continued to be forgotten by major state museums and galleries well into the twenty-first century. These institutions, she perceived, remained locked within the narrow art historical accounts received during the reign of Ceauşescu; the redeployment of these obsolete narratives was thus, in effect, a continuation of communist-era knowledge systems that was subtly enforced, yet pervasive and potentially enduring in influence. By contrast, inserting such artists as Brătescu back into cultural timelines and 'recuperating what was lost', as Lia called it,[42] was an act of research that the major state institutions were not performing, and an attempt to retrace and revise local art historical pedagogies for future audiences.

This was equally true beyond local pedagogy as well. By recuperating those forgotten artists within an *international* timeline, Lia insisted that neither they, nor Romanian art history in general, could continue to be marginalised by art professionals in other locations such as the United States or Germany. By underscoring the absolute contemporaneity of practices across the globe, Lia's diagrams demanded that diverse outputs be recognised and analysed alongside one another, on an equal footing rather than through normative teleologies of a central canon influencing "peripheral" art scenes like Romania's.[43] Through this, a more rhizomatic system of knowledge could emerge to

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[42] Lia Perjovschi in Kristine Stiles, 'Passages 1992-2007: Interview with Lia Perjovschi', in Stiles (ed.), above n.4, p.179.

[43] For a parallel focus on contemporaneity in art history, and how it can re-write previously held conceptions of so-called "centre-periphery" relations, see Terry Smith's extensive research: for example, Terry Smith, *What is Contemporary Art? Contemporary Art, Contemporaneity and Art to Come* (Sydney: Artspace Publications, 2001); and Terry Smith, 'Contemporary Art and Contemporaneity', *Critical Inquiry*, 32 (Summer 2006), pp.681-707.

redefine the foundations and flows of contemporary art: an information system that was instigated from the "periphery", which did not marginalise or subordinate the "periphery" to a canon determined by others, and which could thereby match on a conceptual level the rhizomes that Lia materialised in her *Endless Collections*. As a consequence, whereas Dan's drawings were blatantly deconstructive of contemporary political rhetoric, works such as these by Lia have been explicitly reparative in relation to local contexts, knowledges and histories. They have also been particularly reparative for Lia herself, an artist doubly displaced to the margins of art history. For if her status as a "Romanian artist" frequently defined her on the sidelines of the contemporary art canon, her private performance art background and her gender equally resulted in her exclusion from Romanian art circles and state institutions like MNAC. Her revisionist charts of local and global cultures were thus as much a means to historicise her own art practice – to relocate her work alongside art historical knowledge that she wished she had received during her formative years – as they were an attempt to foreground other practices devalued under communism and Europatriarchy, and their varying political and cultural dictates.[44]

The differences between the Perjovschis' practices would appear, from this discussion, to be vast. Dan's drawings have taken decisive bites at contemporary geopolitics, and thereby suggested a groundwork for the forging of new ideas. Conversely, Lia's accumulations of historical objects and data have implicitly confronted the conditions of her marginalisation by foregrounding new trajectories in art's histories. And whereas important art institutions world-wide have championed Dan's work, Lia's has remained relatively marginalised in both Romanian and international contexts. Despite these differences, however, the Perjovschis' dual approaches have consistently worked toward a concerted political programme – categorised after 2001 as dizzydence – with similar

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[44] We may speculate further – and it is only speculation, hence its appearance in a footnote – on whether this position of marginalisation also informs the aesthetic formation of Lia's diagrams and collections. On the one hand, the title of her *Endless Collections* suggests an allusion to another, more renowned "endless" artwork in Romanian cultural history: Constantin Brâncuşi's *Endless Column* (1938), located in the Romanian town of Târgu Jiu, near Brâncuşi's birthplace. On the other hand, whereas Brâncuşi's work stretches vertically – some might say phallically – to a height of nearly thirty metres, Lia's collections stretch horizontally and chaotically, across time and space, as though in an implicitly gendered counter-aesthetic to one of the grand masters of Romanian modernism.

dialectical concerns at their core. Both approaches have been rigorously grounded in the local and the subjective: Dan's through his idiosyncratic, empathic humour toward the political and cultural rhetoric circulated in his audiences' local contexts; Lia's through her personal collections and recollections salvaged from the dustbins of memory. Both approaches have affirmed a global reach and relevance as well, through which the Perjovschis have asserted their presence in international art markets or histories: Dan through his travels abroad, indexed by covering gallery surfaces (however provisionally) with his cartoons; and Lia by collating her own indexes of travel, in the forms of knowledge and souvenirs, so as to rechart her practice within new mappings of international culture. And it is through these processes that both of the Perjovschis have excavated the social conditions of living under different state authorities – from communism to Europatriarchy and even broader claims to "democracy" – as well as some of the problems that persist across those different states.

Seen in this light, the Perjovschis' dual approaches to dizzydence have insisted upon a shared conceptual basis: an opposition to the ways that art practice and world events are read through normative – and hence seemingly naturalised, neutral and objective – patterns of discourse or conceptions of history. In response, Dan and Lia have together advanced determinedly individual interpretations of history, quizzically analysing how art and artists function and fit (or do not fit) within it. Their shared conceptual foundations thereby suggest a shared methodology as well, and it is one that Lia succinctly defined in 1999 as a process that, though predating the label of dizzydence, has nonetheless provided the main means through which dizzydence operates. Her term for that methodology was 'detective work', as a form of 'permanent research from the perspective of an Eastern artist with [an] international career… a detective searching for sense, hidden and lost ideas, works and artists'.[45] This process of detective work was especially relevant to Lia's practice, as we have observed. By scanning and re-evaluating

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[45] Lia Perjovschi, 'CAA/CAA', in Zdenka Badovinac (ed.), *Prekinjene Zgodovine/Interrupted Histories*, exh. cat. (Ljubljana: Moderna Galerija, 2006), np; see also Lia Perjovschi and Elena Crippa, above n.5, np. The inseparability of dizzydence and detective work can be found in an email sent by Lia to Kristine Stiles, where she declares that 'I became a detective in the local/international/art-culture context and a Dizzydent from Dizzy when the Romanian Contemporary Art Museum was established in Ceausescu's Casa Poporului': email published in Stiles (ed.), *States of Mind*, above n.4, p.180.

art's histories according to her interests, relatively ignored mediums and movements – most particularly dissident and performance art – could be repositioned into historical knowledge. Detective work thus entailed reprocessing the aesthetics and especially the importance of performance and dissidence through Lia's archives. That process has equally surfaced, though in a strikingly different way, in Dan's practice too. While his journalistic probings into current events suggest a quintessential form of detective work, he has also engaged in reprocessing performance through the archive. This was the basis, as we can recall, of his 'moments of pure jazz': an intermedial method between drawing and performance, which involved him taking images from his notebook archives and transferring them onto gallery walls, windows and floors so as to make his humorous critiques public.

Indeed, we can even argue that this process of 'pure jazz' exemplifies the Perjovschis' shared input into each other's work – a shared or co-relation indicated as well through the signifier "liadan", as we noted at the start of this section. On one level, it is through these 'jazzy', improvisatory acts that Dan has questioned his investment in prevailing global circuits of culture and politics – a means of self-questioning and reflexive detective work that, he claims, stems from Lia's 'more radical attitude' and through which 'I have tried to imitate her'.[46] Yet at the same time as Dan's detective work has avowedly imitated (and reformulated) Lia's, it has also enacted in practice that which was denied Lia in the past or from which she has been excluded: namely, the international stagings of dissident performance art with which she has long concerned herself. In other words, Dan's dialectical processing of archives, performance and nonconformist intents have put the subject of Lia's research into action, as something to see rather than simply read or hear about second-hand. For Dan, the ability to put his international reputation at the service of others, to assist others, has been one of the greatest concerns in his practice. It has reinforced the inseparability of his work from Lia's and, by training a spotlight on her as well as him, has helped Lia's work counter the joint gender- and geo-politics of Europatriarchal exclusions. 'We are in many ways different', he says, 'but if you

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[46] Dan Perjovschi in Pintilie, above n.35, np.

combine us, you have a very deep view. Like a stereo view. That's how I'm Lia's back-up singer. I use my position, my international visibility, to help hers and those of others'.[47]

This mutual process of input and influence has been evident throughout my analysis of the Perjovschis' dizzydent para-methods. It also emerges in another project developed by the artists, and on which I now want to train my attention: a research-based artwork that serves as the firmest articulation, or even the culmination, of this shared process of input and its basis in detective work. It is through this particular project, as I will argue in the remainder of this chapter, that the Perjovschis have mobilised their dizzydent stances most fully within and beyond Bucharest's art circles. Equally significantly, this project reveals how dizzydence has emerged as a postsocialist aesthetic from postcommunist contexts in the early twenty-first century – and by artists based within them, rather than by artists for whom such contexts are almost entirely foreign. This is a project initiated by Lia in 1985, when she started taking notes and building research files from the many clandestine discussions and exhibitions held with colleagues in her and Dan's apartment. Dan subsequently joined this venture into Apartment Art as Lia's collaborator 'because I find it… generous and important'.[48] And though it has had several name-changes during its existence, it is a project that has most consistently been labelled the CAA.

The CAA and the Archive

In 1997, Lia formally transformed her and Dan's studio from a private site for the creation of their works, into a more public space in which to discuss art, to research its histories and to interact with peers. The space was initially given the title of the Contemporary Art Archive (fig.6.26). As with Lia's data charts and collations of objects, the CAA's archive was catalogued with a degree of idiosyncrasy: 'I organize my

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[47] Interview with Dan Perjovschi, Bucharest, 30 November 2006, author's notes.

[48] Dan Perjovschi in Pintilie, above n.35.

materials chronologically, thematically: files with artists and works from A to Z, institution[s] from A to Z, [t]heory and curatorship, art and management, art and education…'.[49] It was also an archive so brimming with information that, during its development over the previous decade, it had cluttered the Perjovschis' studios in Oradea and Bucharest as a virtual 'museum of contemporary art in files':[50] files stacked against the studio's walls, along its floors, across any available surface, and which increased in number and volume as the Perjovschis acquired more material from their global travels after 1989. Galleries and friends gave them books, images and ephemera from new and old exhibitions; journals donated yearly subscriptions. 'We got catalogues, slides, tapes, and when we didn't have any money, we Xeroxed materials from magazines', Dan recounts.[51] As information became more computer-based by the end of the 1990s, JPEG images and other electronic files began to clutter the artists' computer as well.

For the Perjovschis, the CAA was a vital means to expand their shared conceptual foundation and to re-formulate its effects. Unlike their individual practices, which regularly (though not always) produced two-dimensional forms through processes of detective work, the CAA was a three-dimensional art project within which those processes could take place. Similarly, whereas detective work had been a largely personal pursuit for the artists, the CAA was intended to be available to anyone wanting to visit the archive, as 'a place to go without having to ask permission to go'.[52] The CAA's accessibility was imperative for the Perjovschis. It spelled out a striking point of differentiation from other art archives based in Romania, especially those run by the state, in which only a selective and relatively narrow range of "official" materials were available for public view. Even when those materials were technically open to the public,

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[49] Lia Perjovschi and Elena Crippa, above n.5, np. Ellipses in the original.

[50] Interview with Dan Perjovschi, Bucharest, 30 November 2006, author's notes; see also Gallery Yujiro, *Lia Perjovschi: Chronology* Exhibition Press Release, London, 2006.

[51] Interview with Dan Perjovschi, *ibid.* As he commented further: 'Some friends and institutions gave us catalogues and information for free. Not so much the institutions in Romania, because we had more information than they did. Institutions abroad'.

[52] Interview with Dan Perjovschi, *ibid.*

researchers still required state authorisation to access them, while photocopy restrictions meant that few copies of materials could be made.[53] By contrast, the CAA's main purpose was to provide ready access to art-related information of as broad and international a scope as possible. Texts could be copied, and information and image documentation swapped freely with the Perjovschis, so as to augment the participants' knowledge and the CAA's holdings as much as possible.

In a sense, then, the CAA resembled another institution that I examined earlier: namely, Bucharest's Soros Center for Contemporary Art, whose research archive was similarly international in scope and relatively easy to use, and which offered copying facilities on-site so that researchers could take material with them. Here again, though, the Perjovschis asserted the distinction of the CAA:

> It could be seen as something like the Soros Centers – but they had the money to do this. We didn't. Nor did we want to learn the language required to access anything of Soros': catalogues, funds, anything. [The CAA] was a way to spend our own money and to show our responsibility for our own work and thinking.[54]

Though both the CAA and Bucharest's Soros Center sought to contextualise local art production within a global sphere of knowledge, the Perjovschis intended their project to provide a significant advance on Soros' models of philanthropy-for-profit and "democracy" at a price. Through open access to a wholly self-funded and self-managed archive, the Perjovschis hoped that both they and others could foster entirely independent analyses, critiques and criticisms of contemporary art and its genealogies. Their font of publications and images spanning back decades, from within Romania and beyond its borders, insisted that contemporary Romanian art could not be considered (or, for that matter, practised) in isolation from other work produced elsewhere in the world. Nor could the past be ignored in one's focus on the contemporary. The CAA's surfeit of

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[53] *Ibid*.

[54] *Ibid*. The Perjovschis' antagonism toward the Bucharest Soros Center should not be mistaken for an antagonism toward its directors, which included the artist Călin Dan in the early- to mid-1990s. As I will show later in this chapter, Călin Dan's art practice bore many similarities to the Perjovschis', and ultimately a shared antagonism toward what Călin Dan saw as 'the social engineering' strategies of Soros' Open Society Institute and Soros' 'dictatorship of goodwill': see Călin Dan, 'The Dictatorship of Goodwill', Text submitted to nettime.org (10 May 1997), available at http://www.nettime.org/Lists-Archives/nettime-l-9705/msg00050.html [accessed 16 October 2007].

information made clear that this was a project of inclusion rather than of forgetting or other wilful forms of omission. It was a space for subjective explorations into history and other people's assertions of fact, designed by the Perjovschis 'to identify and support those who think differently'.[55]

This turn to archives as a *re*turn to supposedly obsolete and forgotten histories was certainly not specific to the Perjovschis. It was instead a complex and increasingly common turn in contemporary art, and it is worth exploring this briefly to contextualise the CAA's purpose and stakes. One of these stakes was to locate the CAA within an art historical lineage of archival methodologies. Lia in particular conceived the CAA alongside other attempts by artists to curate and question history, or at least to contain it within a microcosmic space (among her cited influences were Marcel Duchamp's *Boîte-en-Valise* [1935-1941], André Malraux's "musée imaginaire" of the 1930s-1940s, and Marcel Broodthaers' *Museum of Modern Art: Department of Eagles* [c.1968-1972]).[56] Such methods have also featured prominently throughout this thesis – most notably in IRWIN's database on Eastern Modernist art called the *East Art Map*, and in their and Thomas Hirschhorn's versions of retro politics – as well as in numerous other practices concurrent with the Perjovschis'. Indeed, the CAA potentially belonged to a wide-scale trend in the late-1990s and early-2000s of subjective engagements with the archive – from Tacita Dean's fixations on obsolescence in her 16-millimetre films, to Christian Marclay's audio-visual compositions derived from snippets of old and recent movies, among numerous other projects – and whose prevalence has signalled, for many writers, a burgeoning archival industry in contemporary art practice. For Hal Foster, following his late *October* colleague Craig Owens, works such as Dean's or Hirschhorn's have developed from an 'archival impulse' through which 'to make historical information, often displaced, physically present'; for Okwui Enwezor, following the late Jacques

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[55] Perjovschi and Perjovschi, *Short Guide*, above n.7, p.2.

[56] Lia Perjovschi in Kristine Stiles, 'Passages 1992-2007: Interview with Lia Perjovschi', in Stiles (ed.), above n.4, p.177.

Derrida, contemporary art has coursed with 'archive fever'.[57] And for an array of others, the consensus has largely been the same: archival aesthetics re-emerged as one of art's key tropes, as a lingering afterimage, as the digital seemingly extinguished all that came before it. For art, the indexical presence of analogue photography or the stirring whirr of slide projectors; for society more generally, trust in personal privacy or even the flows and fallibilities of cultural memory itself. As these matters allegedly dissolved within the Internet's troves of information or in databases like Corbis, so art returned to historical archives, it was argued, to seek what glimmers of potential the past could offer 'to turn belatedness into becomingness'.[58]

These are convincing arguments, especially in relation to an artist such as Tacita Dean, who has used increasingly obsolete mediums such as celluloid to present her narratives of nostalgia (an ageing order of nuns in *Presentation Sisters* [2005]; a relic of former East German architecture about to be demolished in *Palast* [2004]). Yet such yearning trust in the index for these artists and critics – we might even call it a faith in the formative

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[57] Hal Foster, 'An Archival Impulse', *October*, 110 (Fall 2004), pp.3-22; Okwui Enwezor, *Archive Fever: Uses of the Document in Contemporary Art*, exh. cat. (New York City: International Center of Photography, 2008). Foster's reference is to Craig Owens' two-part essay on 'The Allegorical Impulse: Toward a Theory of Postmodernism', published in *October* in its issues for Spring and Summer 1980, and subsequently reprinted in Craig Owens, *Beyond Recognition: Representation, Power, and Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), pp.52-87. Enwezor's is to Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, trans. Eric Prenowitz (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), although Derrida's idiosyncratic *mélange* of Judaism, Marxism and Freudian death drives is largely absent from Enwezor's account. Other examinations of this re/turn to archives in contemporary art can be found, *inter alia*, in Ingrid Schaffner and Matthias Winzen (eds.), *Deep Storage: Collecting, Storing and Archiving in Art*, exh. cat. (Munich and New York City: Prestel and P.S.1 Contemporary Art Center, 1998); and Jean-Marc Poinsot *et al*, *Les artistes contemporains et l'archive: Interrogation sur le sens du temps et de la mémoire à l'ère de la numérisation* (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2004).

[58] The words are Hal Foster's: see Foster, *ibid*, p.22. For further examples of this concern for indexicality amid increasing digitization (which tend to veer between the mournful and the skeptical) see *inter alia* Pamela M. Lee, 'Split Decision: Pamela M. Lee on the Demise of the Slide Projector', *Artforum*, 43/3 (November 2004), pp.47-48; Hal Foster, 'The Archive without Museums', *October*, 77 (Summer 1996), pp.97-119; Allan Sekula, 'Between the Net and the Deep Blue Sea', *October*, 102 (Fall 2002), pp.3-34 and Allan Sekula, *Fish Story*, exh. cat. (Rotterdam: Witte de With, 1995). Andreas Huyssen ranks as one of the leading scholars – and to an extent, mourners – of cultural memory in a digitised age (though his rankling specifically against the digital tends to be more implicit than not): see Andreas Huyssen, 'Present Pasts: Media, Politics, Amnesia', in Andreas Huyssen, *Present Pasts: Urban Palimpsests and the Politics of Memory* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), pp. 11-29; and Andreas Huyssen, 'Time and Cultural Memory at Our Fin de Siècle', in Andreas Huyssen, *Twilight Memories: Marking Time in a Culture of Amnesia* (New York City and London: Routledge, 1995), pp.1-10.

influence of the analogue – can also betray a certain privilege when considering art from postcommunist contexts. As argued by Călin Dan and Iosif Kiraly from the Romanian art group subREAL, archives within such contexts connote broader concerns than just the cookies, counters and other digitised records on the Internet. While these archives certainly hint at the indexical presences traced through the camera or presented through the slide, they also signify an index of an altogether different kind: the ever-present list of names, addresses and files tracing one's actions under communism and one's surveillance by secret police forces such as the East German Stasi or Romania's Securitate.[59] Unlike the analogue technologies and documents eulogised by Foster and others, the past potential of these state archives was decidedly less than ideal: their contents could, through selective access by political authorities, ruin reputations and lead to people's arrest, imprisonment or, of course, much worse. Their contemporary potential has been only slightly less pernicious, according to Călin Dan. When not festering in storehouses, these archives' files have been selectively leaked to politicians or the press to damage the lives of others because of alleged communist links.[60]

Archives-as-artworks within postcommunist conditions have thus needed to engage a series of delicate negotiations: between the traumas and the memories, between the secrets and the knowledge, of both the past and the present. For subREAL, one alternative approach to the archive, and the pervasive fears they can induce, was through

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[59] subREAL (Călin Dan and Iosif Kiraly), 'Politics of Cultural Heritage (1999)', in Charles Merewether (ed.), *The Archive: Documents of Contemporary Art* (London: Whitechapel Gallery and Cambridge MA: The MIT Press, 2006), pp.113-116. Călin Dan provided further confirmation of this view of postcommunist archives in two conversations conducted with me in 2007: Conversations with Călin Dan, Adelaide and Melbourne, 31 August 2007 and 5 September 2007, author's notes. It should also be noted here that Enwezor, unlike Foster, *does* refer to the particular predicament of postcommunist archives. His scan of that predicament, however, is far too limited in scope, referring primarily to the opening of parts of the Stasi archives after 1989 and the anticipation associated with that: Enwezor, above n.57, p.37.

[60] Conversations with Călin Dan, *ibid*. Leslie Holmes has also noted how this process of releasing information about particular individuals and their alleged involvement in communist-era atrocities and surveillance – a process of naming called 'lustration' – has often been highly problematic within postcommunism. The selectiveness involved – in terms of whose files to access, and when – has made lustration among postcommunism's most potent ways to destroy the careers of one's political opponents: see Leslie Holmes, *Post-Communism: An Introduction* (London: Polity Press, 1997), pp.300-301. Clearly, this use of lustration to destroy political careers was a one-sided affair: despite the numerous and obvious ties between the Ceauşescu state and the Social Democratic governments of Ion Iliescu, few of Iliescu's ministers had their careers crushed by allegations of past complicities with communism.

aesthetic display. Between 1994 and 1999, Kiraly and Călin Dan exhibited thousands of photographs from the private stores of *Artă*, a Romanian magazine for which they worked in the late-1980s. *Artă* had been the official journal for Romania's Union of Visual Artists, the state prop through which art and artists could be supported, institutionalised and in effect regulated by communist control. Its reserves of images thus symbolised precisely the problem of postcommunist archives, as a metonym for the fears of making history public and the continued relegation of that history to inaccessibility. Under subREAL's direction, however, and in installations such as *Art History Archive: Archive Deconstruction* (1995, fig.6.27) and *Datacorridor* (1996, fig.6.28), *Artă*'s photographs were put to a different purpose. The artists hung them across walls, pillars, ceilings and cornices, as public displays akin to wallpaper. Through these displays, *Artă*'s archival images shed their original connotations and became an overload of glyphs, lacking information except as an aesthetic whole. Time then conspired with the heat and humidity raised by spectators' movements inside the installations, scattering the photographs to the ground to be unceremoniously trodden on by others.[61]

For subREAL, aesthetics of decay and even acts of vengeance against the image provided one means of countering the complex implications of the archive in postcommunism. Another, and arguably more constructive, approach to this predicament can be found in a project already examined in these pages: in the *East Art Map* developed by the Ljubljana-based group IRWIN that was a focus of Chapter Three. Rather than condemn the archive to destruction or banishment in basements, IRWIN sought to transform it into an important pedagogical data-bank once more. Assisted by other artists and historians, as well as collectors and curators, IRWIN spent much of the 1990s collating the previously unmapped histories of postwar art in Eastern and Central Europe. Artists' biographies, images of lost and recovered work, analytical and philosophical tracts about art from the region, exhibition descriptions and accompanying installation photographs – all were

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[61] For further information about subREAL's work before and since the *Art History Archive* series, see Miško Šuvaković, 'Art as a Political Machine: Fragments on the Late Socialist and Postsocialist Art of Mitteleuropa and the Balkans', in Aleš Erjavec (ed.), *Postmodernism and the Postsocialist Condition: Politicized Art under Late Socialism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), pp.127-132 especially; and Anthony Gardner, 'Footsteps in the Sand', *Broadsheet: Contemporary Visual Art+Culture*, 36/4 (December 2007-February 2008), pp.228-231.

absorbed into IRWIN's ambitious intent to define what Eastern Modernist art was and what its future might reveal. And in a final act to eradicate the archive of its secrecy, IRWIN disseminated these histories to as diverse an audience as possible, in as many mediums as possible: through lectures and conferences about their project, as artworks, in books and as a publicly available catalogue housed on the Internet.

This was an undoubtedly constructive re-appraisal of the archive. The relative ease of access that the *East Art Map* offered to researchers, and particularly researchers of Europe's dissident and nonconformist art, was central to IRWIN's endeavours. Through that access to previously displaced art movements and their politics, IRWIN could transform 'the underground into a legal art history' and show that 'History is not given. It has to be constructed', as they frequently proclaimed.[62] The dissemination of and debate about the *Map*'s contents pushed that construction further, and followed in the footsteps of their trek across America in 1996, when they presented lectures on Eastern European art and its importance in *Transnacionala*. This was a dual tactic of ingress and engagement followed, in its turn, by the Perjovschis' CAA. The Perjovschis' policy of maintaining an open door to their studio was certainly one means of ensuring the availability – at least on a local level – of their archive. For people unable to travel to Bucharest and sit with the Perjovschis' folders, however, there were other ways to enter the CAA. The artists reproduced myriad interviews, documents and images from the archive in self-published newspapers that they distributed for free in venues throughout Romania and Europe (fig.6.29), or which – as with *Detective Draft* (2005), their exposé on MNAC and the politics behind its construction – were available on the Internet.[63] The CAA hosted a series of ten three-hour-long television programmes called *Everything on*

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[62] IRWIN, *East Art Map – A (Re)Construction of the History of Contemporary Art in Eastern Europe*, poster, 2002, reprinted in Artspace, *IRWIN: Like to Like*, exh. cat. (Sydney: Artspace, 2004), detachable insert. See also my analysis of IRWIN's map-work in Chapter Three of this thesis, at pp. 208-210 especially; and IRWIN, 'Mind the Map! History is not Given', in Marina Gržinić, Günther Heeg and Veronika Darian (eds.), *Mind the Map! History is not Given: A Critical Anthology Based on the Symposium* (Frankfurt am Main: Revolver Archiv für Aktuelle Kunst, 2006), pp.10-11, as well as other texts in that anthology.

[63] Available at http://www.policiesforculture.org/artist.php?id=37&a=a&d=2006-11-07 [accessed 6 December 2006].

View (2000, fig.6.30), shown on free-to-air Romanian National Television, in which the Perjovschis and others discussed art, culture, politics and themes including globalism and its centre-periphery relations.[64] Lia even created a miniature version of the CAA, in mimicry of Duchamp's *Boîte-en-Valise* and called the *CAA Kit* (2001–, fig.6.31), that she filled with representative samples from the archive, exhibited in galleries throughout Europe and the United States, and displayed and discussed in numerous lectures held across the globe.[65]

This process of distributing files and promoting discussion from the archive was, for the Perjovschis, the CAA's most important feature and definitive of detective work in action.[66] On many occasions each month, they would host seminars, discussion groups and lectures to catalyse dialogue between participants about the archive's contents (figs.6.32-6.33). The dialogues covered innumerable topics – from performance art, to dissidence and "democracy", and the aesthetic and political relationships between Romania and other countries – all of which were aimed, in Dan's words, 'to put your questions out there, to someone who, with empathy, can answer and debate with you for hours'.[67] The Perjovschis also used their international contacts to bring world-renowned figures in art (including Claire Bishop, Kristine Stiles and artist Mike Nelson) to their

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[64] Kristine Stiles provides a sound discussion of *Everything on View*, in Stiles (ed.), *States of Mind*, above n.4, pp.9-10. This was not the first television programme to be hosted or staged in the Perjovschis' studio: in 1996, another live transmission from the studio was broadcast on Romanian National Television as part of the exhibition 'Experimentul în artă românească după 1960' ('Experimentation in Romanian Art since 1960'). Nonetheless, according to Dan, *Everything on View* was important because it 'was a response to criticisms that our past work was too private': Interview with Dan Perjovschi, Bucharest, 30 November 2006, author's notes. It should also be noted that the hosting of television programmes was an important, if not necessarily common, way for various other people to publicly disseminate information about postcommunist art practices and discourses. Arguably the most well-known example is Boris Groys, who hosted a German television programme called *The Art Judgement Show* in which he – in a self-confessed Oprah Winfrey-style – discussed the relevance of art with students and audience members: see Barbara Vanderlinden (ed.), *Boris Groys: The Art Judgement Show* (Brussels: Roomade, 2001).

[65] A near-identical understanding of Duchamp's *Boîte-en-Valise* through the conceptual prism of artistic nomadism and globalisation in the early twentieth century can be found in T. J. Demos' excellent account of Duchamp: T. J. Demos, *The Exiles of Marcel Duchamp* (Cambridge MA: The MIT Press, 2007).

[66] Interview with Dan Perjovschi, Bucharest, 30 November 2006, author's notes; Conversation with Dan Perjovschi and Lia Perjovschi, Sydney, 20 June 2008, author's notes.

[67] Interview with Dan Perjovschi, *Ibid*.

studio to present material and establish networks with emerging Romanian writers, curators and artists (some of whom, such as the critic and curator Raluca Voinea, later re-used those connections to exhibit or study outside Romania).[68] Moreover, while the CAA has been physically based in the Perjovschis' studio in their apartment, it has been an equally mobile phenomenon. The artists sponsored groups of emerging artists and writers to travel with them to international exhibitions, such as *Position Romania* in Vienna in 2002, Documenta or the Venice Biennale.[69] They have also presented series of lectures world-wide on behalf of the CAA, re-presenting their archives to inform others about art and culture in Romania, to form dialogues about their politics of dizzydence and to question its opposition to Europatriarchal exclusions, and to discuss neoliberal and militarised surges of "democracy" since 1989. In the process, the Perjovschis have briefly transformed these lecture halls and seminar rooms into the CAA's international off-shoots.

The CAA was thus more than just an archive. It was, Dan asserted, a 'voice-activated installation' generated and maintained through dialogue and gestures of engagement.[70] All forms of ideas and information – whether derived from the CAA's holdings or introduced by participants, whether conceptual or more material, spur-of-the-moment conversations or staged artworks – could be raised and discussed openly by anybody wishing to come to the CAA and its events. The aim was not to exclude anyone, anything or any debate from the CAA. The only requisites were to engage with and support other people's ideas, yet be willing to challenge all kinds of thinking (including one's own); to develop co-operative processes of detective-like research so as to generate new knowledge and new histories of art; indeed, to be as inclusive as possible in one's analytical approaches – and especially inclusive of once-forgotten movements in art

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[68] *Ibid.*

[69] In 2002, for example, the Perjovschis used 40% of the budget they received to exhibit in *Position Romania*, so as to take a group of emerging Romanian artists, critics and curators to the exhibition in Vienna's Museums Quarter: see Kristine Stiles, 'States of Mind', in Stiles (ed.), above n.4, p.85.

[70] Interview with Dan Perjovschi, Bucharest, 30 November 2006, author's notes. Dan has also called the CAA a 'voice-activated installation' in print elsewhere: Dan Perjovschi, 'Lia Perjovschi: Voice-Activated Installation', *Springerin*, Supplementary Gazette (2002), pp.4-5.

world-wide – so as to confront and rethink received knowledge. In other words, the CAA provided an extension of the Perjovschis' para-methods from their individual practices to an embrace of others. Through the improvised development of knowledge and critique in discussion, and through participants' shared support for one another's ideas, the CAA could engender itself as a co-operative unit with much internal differentiation and debate. And through these processes of mutual mentoring, the Perjovschis hoped, participants could collectively advance their understandings of art, its histories and their professional contacts with peers within and outside Romania.

Despite suggestions made by at least one critic to the contrary, this was not quite a new movement in art.[71] The Perjovschis clearly wanted to nurture long-term networks, research skills and independent thinking through the CAA.[72] Yet the perpetual questioning of all aspects of the Perjovschis' work and its place in contemporary art practice – from the problems associated with the archive after communism, to whether detective work could ever be an effective aesthetic and political methodology except for the Perjovschis themselves – all of these doubts ensured that their programme was too uncertain, too precarious and even self-effacing to be considered a movement. This is not to say that the CAA or the Perjovschis' work more generally were impotent or without purpose. Instead, what they actually attempted to spark was not a movement *per se* but alternative contexts within which art could be produced, analysed and exhibited without being subject to exclusions based on gender or geography. These were contexts developed from personal circumstance and through subjective reasoning rather than by the imprimatur and self-interest of others, and which Dan described as:

> invented by Lia with a very simple rationale. If you create an art form, an art object or an art statement and the context around you doesn't understand it, then the logical step is to turn the context around or to help it understand. Lia

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[71] Udrea, above n.30.

[72] It is also worth signalling that, because of these enduring networks and even friendships between many participants, the CAA has had at least one noticeably different effect to Thomas Hirschhorn's practice of 'making art politically'. For as we noted (and problematised) earlier, Hirschhorn only maintained connections with his projects' assistants for as long as a project existed: for further analysis of Hirschhorn's work in this regard, see pp. 259ff of this thesis.

transformed this in a form of art, working the context for her works. The context then becomes her work too.[73]

This construction of independent contexts for art and *as* art has been a recurrent subject in this thesis, but most particularly in the work of IRWIN – a practice that, as I have already suggested, the CAA followed in many important respects. Like IRWIN, the Perjovschis constructed their programme of self-contextualisation from critical positions, especially toward institutions of Europatriarchy. These institutions were arguably more diffuse and diversified for the Perjovschis than for IRWIN, though. While the disregard for postcommunist art and its relevance – or even reframing – of art historical canons remained fairly consistent from the 1980s to the late-2000s, the men in IRWIN never had to confront the sexism directed against Lia and her co-operative work with Dan. Similarly, while both groups of artists ultimately sought to counter discourses of "democracy", the Perjovschis' focus – whether in their artworks, writings or CAA discussions – was complicated by how that rhetoric after 9/11 had in part merged with or even developed from postcommunist discourses of "democratisation". On the one hand, the legitimising potential of "democracy" had been central to what the Perjovschis called the 'arrogant state institutions' (including, though not limited to MNAC) that they opposed with dizzydence.[74] On the other hand, that potential was equally at play for them in broader art discourses, as part of what they termed 'the new mythologies created by a chaotic art market' through which art's international visibility and social relevance could seemingly be garnered, and corruption and exclusion seemingly excused.[75]

If the objects of their oppositions were different – and this was due mainly to the distinct though still overlapping periods in which they worked – both IRWIN and the Perjovschis were nonetheless devoted to a similar purpose. They were, in Dan's words, 'creating an

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[73] Interview with Dan Perjovschi, Bucharest, 30 November 2006, author's notes.

[74] Lia Perjovschi and Dan Perjovschi, 'Dizzydent', Conference programme notes for 'After the "Happy Nineties": New Artistic Positionings', Bucharest, 18-19 April 2005, np.

[75] *Ibid*. The Perjovschis' engagement with more complicated discourses of "democracy" as one of these 'new mythologies' has been confirmed separately by Dan Perjovschi: Interview with Dan Perjovschi, Bucharest, 30 November 2006, author's notes.

infrastructure that relies on circulation – knowledge, people, ideas'.[76] And, I would add, the circulation of histories as well: particularly histories of dissidence movements in late-communism and, most particularly of all, the Apartment Art contexts in which IRWIN and the Perjovschis first circulated such 'knowledge, people, ideas' in the past. This was signalled in the very term "dizzydence" that the Perjovschis used to describe their politics within the vortex, or '1970s revival', of contemporary culture and its renewed indebtedness to state officialdom. It was also apparent in the CAA's historical roots: in Lia first taking notes from the clandestine discussions and exhibitions held in the Perjovschis' flat in 1985, developing in embryonic form the files that would subsequently be pored over in the CAA's own discussion events; and in performances such as 1989's *Magic of Gesture/Laces*, with Lia binding her young colleagues together in solidarity and necessary negotiation in the apartment. The apparent continuation of these foundations into the twenty-first century – in the CAA as an independent site for critical discussion and exhibition, in its creation of new co-operative networks and professional connections across the world, and as a space for recontextualising local and global art histories – thus suggests that past performance, dissidence and Apartment art were not only the subjects analysed in the CAA's seminars and forums. In a curious way, the CAA's participants were also re-enacting or inhabiting those historical practices. They were transcribing the contents of the Perjovschis' files into dizzydence in action – or, better still, *reprocessing the archive through their quasi-performances of past dissidence* – as spectral forms of resistance within contemporary contexts.

For this reason, Lia has argued that 'it [the CAA] is [A]partment [A]rt if you want' and, as expounded by Dan, that 'there is a legacy of Apartment Art in the CAA. In communist times, space for discussion didn't exist as such. In democracy, that space was also complicated. Both times, our studio has been a space to share information in new ways'.[77] These were ways, furthermore, that the Perjovschis believed had succeeded, and ultimately exceeded, IRWIN's. Whereas IRWIN sought to develop networks between

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[76] Interview with Dan Perjovschi, *ibid*.

[77] Lia Perjovschi, 'CAA', above n.18; Interview with Dan Perjovschi, *ibid*.

established figures in art from Belgrade to Vilnius – professionals who could combine their expertise to remedy misunderstandings of Eastern and Central European art – the CAA's networks have arguably been more altruistic. They have been geared primarily to emerging artists and writers, to give them opportunities that might not otherwise have been available (such as introductions to colleagues, whether established or equally emerging, local or international). In so doing, the Perjovschis have exceeded IRWIN's programme in another way as well. For as IRWIN have lamented (yet as their strictly postcommunist networks ensured), their work, and particularly their *East Art Map*, has been relatively isolationist: it has continued to separate art histories along old East-West lines.[78] The CAA, however, has largely breached that wall. The contents of its files and discussions, its debates and their re-evaluations of art's histories have regularly been engaged on both local and global levels: the one cannot be perceived without the other, as the Perjovschis have continually shown since at least 1990 and their first international travels. Furthermore, by transforming their studio apartment or seminar rooms abroad into sites for the CAA – sites filled with participants from different parts of the world, establishing face-to-face connections and independent professional networks, while testing the potentials of programmes like dizzydence – the Perjovschis have managed to mobilise their aesthetic politics within as well as beyond Bucharest. From its bases in late-communist Apartment Art and postcommunist conditions, dizzydence has become an aesthetic of potentially global reach and critique: at once inclusive on an international scale and deeply questioning of any aspiration to globalism; rigorously subjective yet globally aware; and thoroughly constructive in its new independent networks and their deconstruction of normative centre-periphery relations.

It was on these grounds that the Perjovschis perceived the greatest problems with IRWIN's work, and which they have sought to resolve with their own. They believed that IRWIN's creation of networks between recognised experts and based on facts ultimately replaced one objective account or archive of history with another. This was particularly true of the *East Art Map*, according to Dan, which he thought did not sufficiently re-

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[78] IRWIN, 'General Introduction', in IRWIN (eds.), *East Art Map: Contemporary Art and Eastern Europe* (London: Afterall, 2006), p.14.

examine the fundamental problems of how to engage with either history or archives after communism. 'It comes across as objective and scientific, and it isn't. Rethinking history never is', Dan argues. 'IRWIN are trying to create an objective context. Ours, however, is very subjective, because we don't know whether we are right, or whether it's possible to oppose what already exists'.[79] As this chapter has elucidated, it was from these foundations in uncertainty and the subjective that the Perjovschis advanced their politics of dizzydence, and particularly their critique of impositions and suppositions of "democracy" in contemporary art. Just as importantly, these foundations have also driven the artists to rethink conventional notions of the archive, and to continually re-evaluate the purpose and efficacy of their work and their reprocessing of the archive through performance-like research. We have already considered one effect of these re-evaluations: namely, the Perjovschis' redefinition of their practices as 'detective work' in 1999. Another can be found in a parallel process of reform undergone by the CAA in the same year, when Lia changed its name from the Contemporary Art Archive to the Center for Art Analysis. This was an attempt both to dispel the problematic connotations of the archive in contemporary art, and to dissociate from definitions of the archive as passive – as, in Lia's words, 'dusty files, inactivated, not manipulated by anyone'.[80] In the process, Lia's conceptual shift has also signalled the need to push our own understandings of archival aesthetics away from the inert or the insidious, as well as the impulsive or the feverish, and into a considerably different direction. This shift, I believe, can draw us with great precision toward the conclusion of this thesis. Moreover, it is a shift that has become crucial to numerous reassessments of the archive amid contemporary warfare and

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[79] Interview with Dan Perjovschi, *ibid*. For a contrary view of IRWIN's archival work as inseparable from these processes and discourses of spectralisation, see Marina Gržinić, 'Spectralization and Archives', in IRWIN (eds.), *Trzy Projekty/Three Projects*, exh. cat. (Warsaw: Centre for Contemporary Art Ujazdowski Castle, 1998), pp.53-58.

[80] Lia Perjovschi, 'CAA', above n.18. For a similar perspective on the archive and its problems (specifically in relation to the Holocaust and how to re-stimulate memory and awareness of it), see *inter alia* Ernst van Alphen, *Caught by History: Holocaust Effects in Art, Literature and Theory* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997); and Ernst van Alphen, 'Visual Archives as Preposterous History', *Art History* 30/3 (June 2007), pp.364-382. The title of the latter text derives from a parallel aesthetic theory to that which I believe the Perjovschis propose. This parallel theory is Mieke Bal's notion of 'preposterous histories' that re-emerge in the present like the irrepressible repressed, and whose return in turn reshapes our understanding of the originary past: see Mieke Bal, *Quoting Caravaggio: Contemporary Art, Preposterous History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999).

cultural reconstruction: from Beirut- and New York-based artist Walid Raad's fictionalised documents from Lebanon's civil wars; to the photographic records of torture against Iraqis in Baghdad's Abu Ghraib prison in 2003, as analysed by art historian Stephen Eisenman; and especially the influential accounts by Benjamin Buchloh of artists' sourcebooks of imagery, including Thomas Hirschhorn's image-archive *Les plaintifs, les bêtes, les politiques* that we examined in Chapter Four. And it is a specific reassessment of the archive that also finds its cues throughout Dan's and especially Lia's work since the early-1990s. For as Lia's use of globes, her duty-free shopping bags and both of the Perjovschis' world-wide travels for lectures and exhibitions on dizzydence suggest, the stakes of the CAA may not be the problems of the archive so much as the potentials of the atlas.[81]

Toward a Conclusion: Dizzydence and the Atlas

The distinctions between the archive and the atlas are subtle, yet significant. As discerned by many commentators, and as observed in preceding pages, the archive is a repository that regulates information. It is, in the words of Giorgio Agamben, an 'immovable repertoire of images', as well as files, facts and other kinds of data.[82] Its taxonomies govern the arrangement of documents and the order of knowledge, and thus the accounting of history and syntax of memory. The archive is, in short, a form of policing, whose systematisations determine what can and cannot be contained within it, what is objective and factual from subjectively gathered, and which (to cite Agamben again)

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[81] In relation to Walid Raad and his pseudo-documentary project, devised under the pseudonym of the Atlas Group, see Kassandra Nakas *et al*, *The Atlas Group (1989-2004): A Project by Walid Raad*, exh. cat. (Berlin: Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, 2006); for Eisenman's critical account of the Western art canon, its images of suffering and pathos, and their effects on reading the Abu Ghraib photographs , see Stephen F. Eisenman, *The Abu Ghraib Effect* (London: Reaktion Books, 2007); and for analysis of Hirschhorn's image sourcebook as an atlas, see Philippe Vergne, 'Thomas Hirschhorn, You Are So Annoying!', *Parkett*, 57 (1999), pp.138-140 and Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, 'Thomas Hirschhorn: Layout Sculptures and Display Diagrams', in Alison M. Gingeras *et al*, *Thomas Hirschhorn* (London: Phaidon, 2004), pp.52-53 especially. I will refer to some of these other examples of artistic atlases, and to Buchloh's various engagements with the atlas, presently in this chapter.

[82] Giorgio Agamben, 'Notes on Gesture', *Means without Ends*, trans. Vincenzo Binetti and Cesare Casarino (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), p.54.

consequently 'designates the system of relations between the unsaid and the said',[83] the excluded and the permissible, the visible and the ghosted.

On a formal level at least, the atlas is seemingly little different to the archive. As Buchloh in particular has defined it, atlases are also repositories of a kind. Their holdings, however, are predominantly images, and specifically reproductions such as photographs or sketches, that are collectively organised in tables or grids.[84] Furthermore, and unlike most archives, there is no necessary taxonomic structure to which the atlas's formats should adhere. They are instead subjectively or even arbitrarily determined, with images organised according to similar motifs, comparable thematic content, or indeed for any other reason. Most importantly of all, though, the atlas's reproductions are not intended to be banished to the dark recesses of memory, but to be themselves reproduced, transferred and transformed into other mediums. This threefold difference from the archive is confirmed in the various atlases that have come to prominence in contemporary art. For *My Neck is Thinner than a Hair: Engines* (2001, fig.6.34), for example, Walid Raad – under the pseudonym of The Atlas Group – took found photographs of the remnants of Lebanese car bombs and reframed these photographs in tabular formations, catalogued chronologically and with official stamps franking their authenticity. These tables then formed the basis for Raad's performances about the recording and re-writing of history: a series of lectures in which he provided the photographs with narratives seesawing between fiction and fact, through which Raad questioned the stability of memory and the relevance of history.[85] A similar transformation informed Thomas Hirschhorn's atlas, his

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[83] Giorgio Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz: The Witness and the Archive*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (New York City: Zone Books, 1999), p.145. Agamben's main philosophical source for this account of the archive in relation to discourse is Michel Foucault, whose book *The Archaeology of Knowledge* similarly addressed the archive as 'the system that governs the appearance of statements': Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith (London: Tavistock Publications, 1972), p.129.

[84] Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, 'Gerhard Richter's *Atlas*: The Anomic Archive', in Iwona Blazwick and Janna Graham (eds.), *Gerhard Richter – Atlas: The Reader* (London: Whitechapel Gallery, 2003), pp.99-114. As Buchloh notes, this formulation of the atlas is quite different formulation from that used between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries, when 'the term had been increasingly deployed to identify any tabular display of systematized knowledge and one could have encountered an atlas in almost all fields of the empirical sciences': Buchloh, 'Gerhard Richter's *Atlas*', p.100.

[85] The performance of memory and the document in Raad's lectures is the subject of select few texts on *The Atlas Group*: see, for example, Sarah Rogers, 'Forging History, Performing Memory: Walid Ra'ad's The

patchwork of images excised from magazines and spliced with biro markings and text in *Les plaintifs, les bêtes, les politiques*. As we saw in Chapter Four, it was by converting the principles of *Les plaintifs* – particularly its quizzical conjunctions of artistic photography and political imagery – from two dimensions to three that Hirschhorn implicated art and contemporary politics in such works as *Swiss Swiss Democracy*. And it is a process of image transference that informs one of the most renowned examples of this format: Gerhard Richter's *Atlas* project that he commenced in 1962 as a motley constellation of readymade photographic images, whose subjects invariably flow into the blurred and sometimes abstract paintings for which Richter is renowned (figs.6.35-6.36).

As these examples propose, then, the atlas is less a format or an object than it is a method. Through reproduction and transformation, the content of images and connotations of the archive can be investigated, tested and refracted into the domain of that which cannot be contained. This is a domain of the subjective and the quizzical: as it is converted to another context and medium, the archive unfolds into degrees of fiction and abstraction where questions can be demanded of the past rather than answered from its records. These can be questions about the reliability of photography to stand in for memory or history, for instance, as was the case with Raad's performances as a pseudonymous art group, re-staging the photographic archive within a narrative of possible fictions. This process of questioning has equally informed the blurring of the image – much like the blurring of once-distinct mediums, or of memory over time – into a haze of representation through Richter's process of painting. At the same time, the queries ensuing from the atlas can also relate to the implications between art, our engagements with it and histories of problematic politics, as recurred through Hirschhorn's work. The atlas thus offers a method of investigating history, both recent and distant, in which the image-archive can be reprocessed, re-evaluated and transformed through analysis.

Atlas Project', *Parachute*, 108 (October 2002), pp.68-79; and Janet A. Kaplan, 'Flirtations with Evidence: The Factual and the Spurious Consort in the works of the Atlas Group/Walid Raad', *Art in America*, 92/9 (October 2004), pp.134-139, 169.

It is this understanding of the atlas method that, in turn, allows us to re-evaluate the work of the Perjovschis as well, for it is precisely this technique of reprocessing the image-archive that has occupied much of their practice since the late-1980s. In Dan's work, this involved transferring the snapshot-like sketches in his notebooks into improvised cartoons on the wall. The reconfiguration of his archive of designs into new temporal and geographical contexts, and through a different medium, transformed those designs into new probings about how art and artists function within global politics of culture. The process was similar with the CAA. The visual and historical information in the Perjovschis' library, their folders and computer became reanimated, transformed into models of exchange and inquiry into art history's omissions and inclusions during the CAA's seminars and gatherings. The Perjovschis' para-methods of practice, in other words, should not be considered strictly archival (a circumstance that Lia in particular demonstrated when she changed the CAA's name from the Contemporary Art Archive to the Center for Art Analysis in 1999).Their para-methods were, more precisely, effects of an atlas method, one that associated the Perjovschis' work with an array of artists, from Lebanon to Germany, with whom we would ordinarily be hard-pressed to align them.

If the reasons for this diverse turn away from the archive are undoubtedly complex, they nonetheless reveal the atlas to be an increasingly global methodology – one that operates across cultures and between disciplines, yet which maintains common goals among artists and curiously shared roots. At stake in each case is the re-evaluation or even the reconstruction of cultural memory: a subjective redeployment of the archive through idiosyncratic practices, whether in painting, drawing, performance or sculpture. And while each atlas is tethered to specific social circumstances – from Lebanon in its civil war, to Germany during the Cold War, or Europe after communism – they collectively present a heterogeneous persistence of cultures and histories within contemporary practice. Despite the particularity of these foundational circumstances, then, there is a common thread between them, and it is one to which Buchloh again alerts us. As he has observed of Richter, atlases often develop during times of crisis – most particularly during periods of traumatic "transition", attendant social instabilities and forms of

ideological domination designed to curb them.[86] Richter's *Atlas*, Buchloh argues, marks his emigration from East to West Germany in 1961. It signals his move away from communism, away from family and friends, and into West German hyper-capitalism with its postwar palliatives of consumerism, its images reduced to advertising and 'the repression of the recent past' through the ever-present sparking of desire.[87] Analogous circumstances arguably underpinned the formation of other atlases as well. As Buchloh notes once more, the development of Thomas Hirschhorn's *Les plaintifs, les bêtes, les politiques* occurred, not coincidentally, within years of his emigration from Switzerland to Paris in the late-1980s: Hirschhorn's atlas was one of the most significant results of his relocation and, for Buchloh, a means for the artist to move away from the rapid disillusionment he felt with his work as a graphic designer as it also dissolved into advertising.[88] A similar circumstance can be considered in relation to Walid Raad's atlas, for it followed his migration from Beirut to New York soon after hostilities broke out in Lebanon, providing a method to re-evaluate his perception of contemporary Lebanese history as a media spectacle replayed for distant viewers. And in the case of Lia Perjovschi, her collation of images, ephemera and information serves as a distinct marker of its own: a marker for the wake of Romanian communism, in which she and Dan began travelling from one "wrong" place to another, and as they too grew disillusioned with old collegial networks and the politics for which they used to struggle. In each case, it would seem, as amnesia threatens the social and cultural memory is displaced – whether through capitalist spectacle, mediatised distance or in the name of "democracy" – so artists have turned to the atlas to remobilise remembrance: not as a static form of memorial, but as a quizzical return, a critical reflection mired in the local yet cast on global trajectories.[89]

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[86] Buchloh, 'Gerhard Richter's *Atlas*', above n.84, pp.108-110.

[87] *Ibid*, p.109.

[88] Buchloh, 'Thomas Hirschhorn', above n.81, pp.52-56.

[89] We could even label this displacement a form of taking cultural memory hostage, as I have argued elsewhere with Charles Green: see Anthony Gardner and Charles Green, 'The Second Self: A Hostage of Cultural Memory', *A Prior*, 16 (Spring 2008), pp.228-247.

The contemporaneity of these crises provides one reason why artists such as Raad or the Perjovschis have engaged with the atlas in varied yet comparable ways. There is, however, another shared root to their projects, for while the atlas has become a significant aesthetic methodology in contemporary art, its origins lie in a much earlier project. This is an atlas whose inter-disciplinarity and international focus were strikingly odd at the time of its construction – a time of similarly traumatic "transitions" in Germany between the First and Second World Wars – and which was consequently marginalised in art history for much of the twentieth century: the unfinished *Mnemosyne Atlas* devised by the founder of iconology, Aby Warburg, between 1927 and 1929 (fig.6.37). In recent years, many art historians have sought to redress this neglect of the *Mnemosyne Atlas*, whether in pursuit of new models for retrieving the past's shattered remnants, or to rethink connections between disciplines and local specificities as a counter to contemporary homogenisations.[90] However, it is a particular analysis of Warburg's atlas that, I think, can best assist us in our reformulation of the Perjovschis' CAA: an analysis developed by another pair of artist-historians, whose research was also instigated by the female collaborator.

For as Charles and Lyndell Green argue in their Buchloh-inspired study, *The Memory Effect*, contemporary atlases are invariably renewals of Warburg's own.[91] Much like its recent reprisals, the *Mnemosyne Atlas* comprised image reproductions of various subjects

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[90] Among numerous other sources, see Jill Bennett, 'Aesthetics of Intermediality', *Art History*, 30/3 (June 2007), pp.432-450 (although it should be noted that Bennett's focus is primarily on synchronic migrations of form between images, thereby displacing the crucial role of historical transmission in Warburg's *Atlas*); Georges Didi-Huberman, *L'image survivante: Histoire de l'art et temps des fantômes selon Aby Warburg* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 2002); and Sven Lütticken, '"Keep Your Distance": Aby Warburg on Myth and Modern Art', *Oxford Art Journal*, 28/1 (2005), pp.45-59. As Warburg scholar Matthew Rampley has also observed, the growing interest in Warburg flows in part from the omnipresent fixation on the (occasionally similar) writings of Warburg's better-known contemporary, Walter Benjamin: see Matthew Rampley, 'From Symbol to Allegory: Aby Warburg's Theory of Art', *The Art Bulletin*, 79/1 (March 1997), pp.41-42; and Matthew Rampley, 'Archives of Memory: Walter Benjamin's *Arcades Project* and Aby Warburg's *Mnemosyne Atlas*', in Alex Coles (ed.), *The Optic of Walter Benjamin* (London: Black Dog Publishing, 1999), pp.94-117.

[91] Charles Green and Lyndell Green, *The Memory Effect*, unpublished manuscript, on file with the authors. This manuscript derives primarily from Lyndell Green's doctoral dissertation at the University of New South Wales: Lyndell Brown, *Mnemosyne: Memory and Forgetting in Art*, PhD thesis (Sydney: University of New South Wales, 2004). I am indebted to the Greens for allowing me to read this manuscript prior to its publication.

(Native American rituals, Hellenistic sculpture, Italian Renaissance painting, 1920s' sportsmen) and derived from diverse sources (art historical texts, magazines, newspapers and so on). These reproductions were initially collaged together on different panels and boards. Warburg then remobilised them anew, using the panels as alternatives to lantern slides in his art historical lectures (a pedagogical dissemination clearly repeated in later projects such as the CAA's seminars and Raad's lecture-performances). This collaging of different types of artworks was, of course, much more than a simple compare-and-contrast methodology. As is widely known, and as the Greens reiterate, Warburg's primary interest lay in the motifs recurring between images from different times and contexts: in frozen moments of gesture that appear in "pagan" motifs from Hopi designs in New Mexico or polytheistic Ancient Greece – motifs of writhing snakes, for example, or the billowing garments of women – and which recur in such Quattrocento paintings as Sandro Botticelli's *Primavera* (c.1482-1485).[92] For Warburg, these frozen gestures – or dynamograms, as he called them – were imprints of the historical contexts and often traumatic events that engendered them, a conductor of the petrified affective charge from those events.[93] The recurrence of these dynamograms in vastly different contexts, Warburg believed, thereby released a form of pathos from the past, a transmission of an historical charge through the re-emergence of a gesture. And through this formula of recurrence and release, the "pagan" acquired an afterlife, a *Nachleben*, within what Warburg considered the staunchly Catholic context of fifteenth century Italy. This process of transmission thus ensured the survival of the historical, the forgotten, the neglected in later contexts. Yet as the Greens have elaborated, and as is often ignored in studies of Warburg's work, that transposition did not keep the charge of history intact.

[92] For a remarkable reading of the Warburgian motif of billowing garments and hair in Quattrocento art, see Georges Didi-Huberman, 'The Imaginary Breeze: Remarks on the Air of the Quattrocento', *Journal of Visual Culture*, 2/3 (2003), pp.275-289; for an equally extraordinary reading of this motif as gendered – a point to which I will return shortly in this chapter – see Sigrid Schade, 'Charcot and the Spectacle of the Hysterical Body: The "Pathos Formula" as an Aesthetic Staging of Psychiatric Discourse – A Blind Spot in the Reception of Warburg', *Art History*, 18/3 (December 1995), pp.499-502 especially. Readers should also note at this point that I have placed the word *pagan* within quotation marks as a sign that the (potentially pejorative) connotations of the pagan, the heretical or the abnormal, can only be thought as such relative to the perception that Christianity (and particularly Catholicism) provides the yardstick to determine what is socially and culturally "normal" and "appropriate".

[93] On the 'dynamogram [as] a visual inscription of primal experience… essentially traumatic and laden with fear', see also Rampley, 'Archives of Memory', above n.90, pp.104-105.

The pathos of the past was always subject to processes of entropy and change. The re-appearance of specific frozen gestures, like the rephotographed images in Warburg's atlas, always entailed a slight loss of legibility, a slight change of information, a deviation of pathos, during reproduction.[94] In other words, while the recurrence of a "pagan" gesture ensured 'the return of the repressed in the image', as Georges Didi-Huberman declares,[95] it equally ensured a process of entropic transformation, potentially devolving and certainly mutating the charge of history in that gesture.

As the Greens in particular have perceived it, then, Warburg's atlas provides a dialectical method operating in the intervals between survival and entropy. On the one hand, the *Nachleben* of the past within the present confronts or, as Didi-Huberman argues further, potentially *resists* how the later context is governed.[96] Predominant aesthetic formations, cultural discourses and political rhetorics – whether they be the Catholicism of Quattrocento Italy and its art, or more contemporary modes of amnesia – are threatened with rupture by the recurrence and renewal of apparently "abnormal", "unbecoming" or "pagan" histories. The energy released through these untimely transmissions in turn sets the spark for cultural memory's reappraisal and reconstruction, for alternative approaches to both the past and the present to develop through the gaps that these histories crack open. These are the dynamic tensions of the dynamogram, as most followers of Warburg assert: tensions that exist between different temporal and geographical contexts, and between deconstruction and reconstruction within the later period. On the other hand, however, these "pagan" gestures and their potency also undergo an overhaul in the process of transmission. Their original formations can metamorphose in appearance, much as the maidens in Botticelli's paintings mutate into divinities or flora or phantoms.

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[94] Green and Green, above n.91, pp.41-106. The only other analysis that thoroughly engages with entropy in this way is that by another important scholar of Warburg's work, Philippe-Alain Michaud, when he claims that Warburg 'used a work of Antiquity, *including its deterioration*, to express the phenomena of appearance and disappearance': see Philippe-Alain Michaud, *Aby Warburg and the Image in Motion*, trans. Sophie Hawkes (New York City: Zone Books, 2004), p.72.

[95] Georges Didi-Huberman, '*Dialektik des Monstrums*: Aby Warburg and the Symptom Paradigm', *Art History*, 24/5 (November 2001), p.622.

[96] *Ibid*, p.636.

Their meanings or affective charges may change, eroded by time, shifted by cultural comprehension or transformed in the migration from one genre or medium to another. Indeed, those charges may even present a 'radical reversal' in effect from what they initially exuded, as Warburg himself declared: Antique gestures of divinity in a sculpture are later borne by a dancing grace in a painting; motifs of trauma and pain become expressions of *jouissance* and love.[97]

If the specific subjects of past and recent atlases are undeniably different, the methodological principles at their core remain remarkably similar. This is especially true of the Perjovschis' CAA, and the *Mnemosyne Atlas* provides crucial insights into the Perjovschis' aesthetic politics as they propel along their own dynamics of survival, mutation and radical reversal. At the same time, though, perceiving the CAA as a renewal of Warburg's work, especially as outlined by the Greens, requires these understandings of the atlas to undergo a mutation of their own. The Perjovschis' atlas method does not, after all, stem from a scrupulous examination of women's bodily gestures –the rippling garments and facial expressions of nymphs and dancing graces, for example – for which some feminist scholars have rightly critiqued Warburg's *Atlas*.[98] Rather, it emerges from a different gesture of gender: that of a woman's exclusion from the very art historical lineages that Warburg, in part, initiated. Nor is the CAA simply an atlas of images. It is instead an atlas for the information age: of JPEGs as well as slides and sketches; of catalogues, dialogues and networks. And it is through these dialogues and networks that arguably the greatest difference between these two kinds of atlases can be found. The key to this is the fact that the CAA is not informed by recurrent frozen gestures. Instead, gesture has thawed, remobilised in interpersonal exchange – an exchange that responds to the image reproductions scattered throughout the Perjovschis' studio and that occurs, we must remember, as itself a contemporary reproduction of the gestures of past Apartment Art. In lieu of dynamograms and their afterlife of "paganism", then, perhaps we can

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[97] See Aby Warburg cited in Ernst Gombrich, *Aby Warburg: An Intellectual Biography* (London: Warburg Institute, 1970), pp.248-249.

[98] See, for example, Schade, above n.92; Margaret Iversen, 'Retrieving Warburg's Tradition', *Art History*, 16/4 (December 1993), pp.541-553.

speak of a new gesture from the CAA's atlas: of tactics mobilised from the past, of *dynamo-tactics*, and their own kind of "unbecoming", nonconformist or "pagan" *Nachleben* that emerges in various ways. First, as the return of supposedly obsolete dissidences to the once-sacred ideology of communism – not so as to renew those dissident struggles for "democracy" but, in a radical mutation, to enact an alternative to contemporary sacred politics that have proven to be problematic in themselves. Second, in the re-enacted gestures of past Apartment Art, and the subsequent transmission and release of its pathos. This, however, is an entropic release, one whose survival persists on what Warburg would call increasingly 'borrowed emotions':[99] not only do the lived memories of communism's traumas recede further as the years pass by, but the dates-of-birth of the emerging artists and writers assisted by this new Apartment Art are fast approaching, and will soon pass, the date of December 1989. Third, in the transformation of that dissident past, and its pathos of spectral resistance, for the purposes of reconstruction: a reconstruction of independent Romanian art scenes, as well as international networks; indeed, an artist-run politics of reconstruction through pathos that, as Kristine Stiles has argued, can be considered a form of 'mourning'.[100] And finally, in the construction of an aesthetic politics that seeks to counter the dual force of Europatriarchy and its attendant cultural hierarchies: on the one hand, through an atlas that attempts to include all manner of people, debates and ideas so as to resist Europatriarchal exclusions based on gender or geography; and, on the other, through a politics that opposes the easterly spread of imposed "democratisations" by proposing, in their stead, the alternative vectors of dizzydent exchange that Lia Perjovschi has instigated.

These dynamo-tactics are the crux of the Perjovschis' practice, and arguably the most important of what they call their para-methods. It is through the transmission and entropic release of the past, according to Dan, that their work aims to spark 'a memory *situation*:

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[99] Aby Warburg, 'The Entry of the Idealising Classical Style in the Painting of the Early Renaissance', in Richard Woodfield (ed.), *Art History as Cultural History: Warburg's Projects* (Amsterdam: G+B Arts, 2001), p.23.

[100] Stiles, 'Remembrance, Resistance, Reconstruction', above n.13.

not a storage of memory, but instead its circulation'.[101] And it is through that circulation that dizzydence emerges, is released, as a co-operative means of remembering and rethinking what art's politics might be. These dizzydent dynamo-tactics thus exist in the intervals between distinct yet inter-related positions – between the archaic and the contemporary, between the generative and the entropic, survival and decay – critically charting the motions of memory and paradox between them within new aesthetic contexts. In the process, dizzydence creates a new 'iconology of the interval', as Warburg called his method:[102] a space of the "between" that Lia in particular has declared to be the "right" home for her and Dan to practise their aesthetic politics. In her words, this is the 'interval… between East and West', as well as a 'space between [where] I situate myself as a person, as a professional, as an approach [and as] a researcher in between'.[103] As Lia has suggested, then, this interval can form a productive space of possibility and mobility, one that the Perjovschis have sought to develop and inhabit, both physically and conceptually, in the form of the CAA. Most significantly of all, it is a space they inhabit with tactics that, by shifting away from the increasingly problematised discourses of "democracy" and the archive, have facilitated instead the richer aesthetic politics of dizzydence from the atlas.

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[101] Interview with Dan Perjovschi, 30 November 2006, author's notes.

[102] Warburg as cited in Giorgio Agamben, 'Aby Warburg and the Nameless Science', *Potentialities: Collected Essays in Philosophy*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), p.100; see also Matthew Rampley, 'Iconology of the Interval: Aby Warburg's Legacy', *Word and Image*, 17/4 (2001), pp.303-324.

[103] Respective quotations from Stiles, 'Passages 1992-2007: Interview with Lia Perjovschi', in Stiles (ed.), above n.4, p.175; and Lia Perjovschi, 'CAA', above n.18.

Conclusion:

The Unbecoming Politics of Postsocialist Aesthetics

For Aby Warburg, the atlas was a method of durable force. Its rationale lay in rethinking how narratives from the past surged through the present in unexpected ways, tracking the migration of forms across space and time to haunt a new world of images. Its process was an idiosyncratic remodelling of the archive, a provisional yet potent rearrangement of its files, designed to spotlight pivotal motifs and their lingering echoes from ostensibly long-dead contexts. The atlas, in other words, was a recalibration of history, a narrative of revenants resisting their obsolescence and regaining form well after their demise. It was, as Warburg called it, 'eine Gespenstergeschichte für ganz Erwachsene': 'a ghost story for grown-ups'.[1] And like all good ghost stories, its greatest effect lay in its unsettling reception. This was due as much to matters of timing as to the charge of the narrative, as Warburg was keenly aware. While the presence of the atlas' spectres could disturb one's expectations and shake up the order of things, that presence was most keenly felt in times of "transition" and "terror". It was thus, according to Warburg, that resurgent "pagan" forces rippled through the Catholic fervour, aesthetic richness and internecine warfare of Italy as it underwent its Renaissance.[2] It was thus, according to some of Warburg's followers, that his most fervent displays of iconology emerged in the interval between the First World War and Fascism.[3] It is thus, perhaps, no surprise that, some six decades after

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[1] Aby Warburg cited in Philippe-Alain Michaud, *Aby Warburg and the Image in Motion*, trans. Sophie Hawkes (New York City: Zone Books, 2004), pp.260-261; and Giorgio Agamben, 'Aby Warburg and the Nameless Science', *Potentialities: Collected Essays in Philosophy*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), p.95.

[2] See, among myriad other sources, Warburg's analysis of the 'difficult conflict[s]' within Quattrocento Italy in Aby Warburg, 'The Entry of the Idealising Classical Style in the Painting of the Early Renaissance', in Richard Woodfield (ed), *Art History as Cultural History: Warburg's Projects* (Amsterdam: G+B Arts, 2001), pp.7-31; and especially the important anthology of Warburg's essays on European Renaissance art, published as Aby Warburg, *The Renewal of Pagan Antiquity: Contributions to the Cultural History of the European Renaissance*, trans. David Britt (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute for the History of Art and the Humanities, 1999).

[3] For example: Georges Didi-Huberman, '*Dialektik des Monstrums*: Aby Warburg and the Symptom Paradigm', *Art History*, 24/5 (November 2001), pp.621-645; Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, 'Gerhard Richter's

Warburg's death and during another period of "transition" and "terror", such ghost stories resurfaced to unsettle art's histories once more.

These are the stories recounted in this thesis. If not all of them were told through the methods of the atlas – this was a method more specific to the Perjovschis than to other artists in my analysis – they all nonetheless traced the presence of a spectre in one guise or another. Tales of failed and frustrated expectations emerged alongside aesthetics of withdrawal. The vestige of absent characters interwove with reanimations of dissidence and dynamo-tactics of dizzydence. Indeed, the sheer prevalence of these hauntings – of failure and absence, disappearance and more literal reincarnations – suggests that the years since the collapse of European communism have been under the sway of the spectral. This is an argument shared with several other writers examining the period. For some, such as Charity Scribner, these ghost stories have been accounts of regression: of melancholic nostalgia for communism that, in some cases, fuelled the development of an equally aggressive neo-nationalism and anti-Western worldview. For others, most notably Marina Gržinić and the artists from subREAL, the spectral has been a more productive force, a means to rethink postcommunist predicaments through lessons learned from the past.[4] It is a lesson equally learned from perhaps the most important analyst of the spectral outside the field of art, the philosopher Jacques Derrida, for whom postcommunist ghosts were specifically the spectres of Marx. As Derrida has argued, and as we observed in Chapter Two, the remainders of communism in the early-1990s were also a reminder of sorts: a reminder that, despite the implosion of Europe's Eastern Bloc, alternatives to a triumphalist liberal democracy were still possible, that new politics could still emerge to counter the putative end of ideological conflict and thus the end of

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Atlas: The Anomic Archive', in Iwona Blazwick and Janna Graham (eds.), *Gerhard Richter – Atlas: The Reader* (London: Whitechapel Gallery, 2003), pp.101ff.

[4] See, for example, Charity Scribner, *Requiem for Communism* (Cambridge MA: The MIT Press, 2003); Marina Gržinić, *Fiction Reconstructed: Eastern Europe, Post-Socialism and the Retro-Avantgarde* (Vienna: Edition Selene, 2000); Marina Gržinić, 'Spectralization and Archives', in IRWIN (eds.), *Trzy Projekty/Three Projects*, exh. cat. (Warsaw: Centre for Contemporary Art Ujazdowski Castle, 1998), pp.53-58; subREAL and Thomas Raab, 'Wir sind Content Provider', *Springerin*, 1/00 (April-June 2000), pp.53-55.

history.[5] For Derrida, this new politics was a quasi-messianic 'democracy-to-come'. For the spectres in this thesis, however, it was precisely in resistance to discourses of "democracy" – whether past, to-come or actually existing – that they became recharged.

Understanding why artists as diverse as Ilya Kabakov, Thomas Hirschhorn and the Perjovschis would want to dispute "democracy" within their practices was one of the main objectives of this thesis. The reasons were equally diverse, contingent upon the specific contexts in which the artists produced and exhibited their works. Even so, core reasons can still be deduced from the five case studies presented. Foremost among them was concern about correlations made on the part of many critics, curators and administrators between the politics of art and politics of the state – correlations that, though evident during and before the Cold War, grew in intensity after the late-1980s and hinged upon art's purpose (and even its ontology) being "democratic". In most cases, from Nicolas Bourriaud to his own critics including Claire Bishop, these arguments were undeniably well-intentioned, insisting upon art's social and global relevance in the wake of postmodernist soul-searching. For artists such as Kabakov or those in NSK, however, such correlations between culture and the state were all too familiar from the insidious fug of communism. On one level, they risked reducing art's politics to a uniform goal already defined, to an extent, through rhetorics of stateness (to recite Kabakov's phrasing). Yet even when those critics and curators sought to delineate "democracy" in different ways to the state, they nonetheless traded on the extant authority of the signifier to prove art's ongoing virtues. These appeals to "democracy" – even a democracy always yet never to come – were thus not a form of Foucauldian reverse discourse, a means of reversing a signifier's pejorative connotations for a more positive embrace, as I argued in Chapter One. Pejorative connotations of "democracy" do not really exist. Instead, to follow Slavoj Žižek, such appeals have treated "democracy" as a 'transcendental guarantee',[6] a hallowed myth through which to register one's perceptions of art's politics,

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[5] Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (New York City and London: Routledge, 1994); compared with Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (London and New York City: Penguin Books, 1992).

[6] Slavoj Žižek, *Iraq: The Borrowed Kettle* (London and New York City: Verso, 2004), p.87; c.f. Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality Volume 1: The Will to Knowledge*, trans. Robert Hurley (London: Penguin Books, 1998), p.101.

a trump card played most conspicuously in exhibitions such as *Interpol* with which this thesis opened.

This trump card was not, of course, specific to exhibitions. Art's burgeoning investment in such readymade politics – manifest most strongly through 'aesthetics of "democratisation"', as I have described them – was but one among the many "democracy" industries that prospered in the period after 1989. Nor were predominantly un-nuanced appeals to "democracy" specific to these aesthetics. Indeed, it was precisely such attempts to rationalise the reception and potential of political actions through the realm of myth that underpinned contemporaneous geopolitics and their self-legitimising strategies. These were strategies in which "democracy" became not only an abstract kind of use-value but also an excuse-value, a form of therapy for the various kinds of shock conducted and purportedly rendered "ethical" in its name: the shocks of rapid neoliberalisation and its attendant destruction of social welfare in decommunising countries; the shock and awe and emerging neoliberalism in parts of the Middle East amid the 'War on Terror'; a mobilisation of "democracy" ever-eastwards with a missionary, and increasingly militaristic, zeal. In the process, "democracy" became both an amorphous expression of values – in which the economic, the imperialistic and the supposedly ethical converged – and an expedient means through which deeply problematic politics could be conducted and legitimised. The apparent contemporary pertinence of "democracy", when perceived through its excuse-value, was thus actually more impertinent, indeterminate, a signifier verging on meaningless except as an ideological buffer.

The aesthetics of "democratisation" may not have been complicit with, let alone supported by, this shifting political programme: if art cared desperately about contemporary geopolitics, the feeling was rarely mutual. They were, however, enmeshed in similar use-values, and perhaps excuse-values, of "democracy" for self-legitimation. By contrast, the artists examined here have sought a different proposition. Their initially impertinent deconstructions of art's "democratic" intent may well be of utmost importance, cracking open once more what art's critical politics might be. Reflecting on *how* artists have engaged these critiques of "democracy" was another key objective in

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this thesis. One method was explicit, found in the content of the artists' writings and artworks: in Ilya Kabakov's assertions that a victorious sense of "democracy" at the Cold War's close was unfulfilling and fatal, for example; or the de-idealisations and quasi-destructions of "democracy" in the later works of Thomas Hirschhorn or Christoph Büchel and Gianni Motti. These explicit dissociations invariably framed more implicit and arguably more significant critiques in the artists' works, at the heart of which lay history. Or, rather, the multiple histories excluded in the name of "democracy", and which the artists played out and replayed throughout their practices for the purposes of sustained deconstructions. These were alternative histories of the seemingly obsolete or irrelevant – including late-communist era Apartment Art, or even the legacies of non-Western art in general – re-engaged to counter the selective amnesia and cultural hierarchies of contemporary global practice. Through their re-engagement, these histories then helped to spark alternative accounts of the present, emphasising in particular the correlations and extrapolations that exist between Cold War ideologies, postcommunist "transitions" and more recent political forces. It is sometimes easy to forget the presence of history as it circulates through more contemporary rhetoric, images, politics or practices. This is especially true given what Fredric Jameson labels our 'end of temporality', in which global media are accessible anywhere and anytime at the mere click of a mouse, and whose perpetual 'reduction to the present' has as its corollary new-found fixations on the synchronic, the affective, and the immediate perceptibilities and susceptibilities of the body.[7] For the artists in my argument, however, neither artworks nor geopolitical contexts can be divorced from the numerous histories (whether contemporaneous or more distant) that inform them. Both demand rethinking the constellation of echoes and disjunctions from the past and within the present – a constellation that Warburg would deem an effect of the atlas's dialectics between the historical and the material, and which residual proponents of Marx would call a form of historical materialism – for it is through this constellation that the conditions for contemporary aesthetic and geo-politics can be most fully understood.

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[7] Fredric Jameson, 'The End of Temporality', *Critical Inquiry*, 29 (Summer 2003), pp.695-718, quotation drawn from p.712.

Indeed, it is through these processes of reanimation and disjunction that the artists addressed the third main objective of this thesis: finding out what art has proposed in lieu of the "democracy" it critiques. This has required an empirical methodology on my part, for it is predominantly through audiences' engagements with art, and through their gestures within the presence of an artwork, that the ghosts of excluded histories have themselves returned to presence. These have included gestures of frustration and withdrawal, as with Kabakov's *Ten Characters* or Büchel and Motti's venture in Bucharest, as well as the de-idealising gestures within Hirschhorn's reclamation of the 'total' installation, and the co-operative discussions constituting the Perjovschis' or NSK's renewed Apartment Art. Although these gestures were different from artist to artist and even from work to work, their stakes were ultimately the same: to create new contexts for the reception of art that were not delimited by discourses of "democracy" and the Europatriarchal teleologies maintained within them. These were instead self-instituted contexts enacted through the remobilisation of late-communist and postcommunist precedents, with each context designed for the circulation, interpretation and exhibition of more varied art histories and aesthetic formulations. This partially elucidates why installation – whether 'total', traditional, 'live' or voice-activated – has been the predominant mode of practice for these artists. Not only have their works broken down installation's frequently purported ontology of "democracy", revealing that "ontology" to be ideology in action; they have also produced three-dimensional spaces within which these contexts can operate, actualised for at least as long as an installation's duration. This also helps to explain why many of the artists have produced extraordinarily voluminous writings and publications to accompany their practices. Through these writings, the artists' critiques of "democracy" and new aesthetic proposals have been supported, developed, circulated and experienced well beyond the installations' brief, particular existences. Writing and spatial construction must therefore be understood as distinct yet connected types of art-making for most of these artists. The writing of alternatives to "democracy" becomes an artistic medium much like installation; installation, in turn, becomes an act of theory, a (re)writing of history, a mode of philosophy made spatial. When conceived together, these two mediums between art and philosophy propel the new contexts in which the artists' alternative aesthetic politics can

exist – aesthetic politics derived for art, from art and through oft-forgotten histories refigured to unsettle art's "democracy" in this, our own time of "transition" and "terror".

What, then, are we to make of these new contexts, especially given that their unsettling of "democracy" raises some potentially thorny questions in the current global climate? It could be argued that they run the risk of extraordinary hypocrisy: it is, after all, largely because the artists live and work in stable democratic environments that they are able to perform their critiques so publicly in the first place. We should recognise, however, that this kind of argument over-determines art's scope and the artists' intents. None of these new contexts seek to install new governments or actual political systems, much less stage a bizarre kind of *coup d'état* through art: even NSK's own state, with its passports, stamps and embassies, was a self-consciously fragile and impossible entity that dissolved in time. What *is* at issue is the possibility of opening up different kinds of thinking, to breach the barriers that restrict any form of interpretation or potentiality to pre-existing signifiers. The issue, then, is art's ability to generate different modes of thought that may or may not (rather than must or must not) be of extra-artistic relevance – to generate a freedom of interpretation as much as of expression, in other words, and one which identifies the supposed boundlessness of "democracy" as a kind of binding of its own.

At the same time, this desire to raise doubts about rhetorics of "democracy", particularly in the early twenty-first century, may be perceived as problematic in itself. By disidentifying with "democracy", the aesthetic politics examined here could be misunderstood as folding all too neatly into an "anti-democratic" worldview, an opposition symbolised (at least in many media sound-bytes) by such fundamentalist organisations as al-Qaeda. Yet this objection is not without its problems as well, for it retains a naïvely polar perspective, a black-or-white dualism, that disallows more diverse conceptions of politics and art practice. It is also, unfortunately, a polarity through which we willingly regulate ourselves when we limit the politics of art (or philosophy, or culture more generally) to the proper name of "democracy", as a way of affording recognition to sometimes remarkably idiosyncratic perspectives. To do this risks ignoring more subtle and potentially productive modes of dissent between these two poles; it threatens to disregard other voices, other histories, other possibilities of being in the

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process, while maintaining exclusions of whatever does not subscribe to the status quo's authority. To reopen art's self-managed potentialities has, by contrast, been the task undertaken by artists such as Hirschhorn and the Perjovschis. Their goal, as we have seen, has been to resist art's disciplining by other disciplines and discourses, so as to evade containment within the already-conceived. Indeed, it is precisely by opening up art's potentiality, by letting ruptures of the status quo remain undisciplined – or at least potentially operative in the intervals between disciplines – that the artworks examined here can most accurately be considered both critical and *political*.

This is not of itself a new perspective; the stakes, we should remember, were similar for Aby Warburg. His *Mnemosyne Atlas* was designed, first, to show how the legacies of the "pagan" past can destabilise commonly, and sometimes naïvely, held assumptions in a later context; and second, to develop a new way of thinking about those legacies as they recur through culture. The former, as Giorgio Agamben has recognised, involved a politics of ethics, a willingness to commune with spectres rather than reject them, an 'ethical decision… of individuals and epochs regarding the inheritance of the past'.[8] The latter involved a politics of naming, of how to describe this method of reconceiving art's histories. This was a process with which Warburg constantly struggled, as Agamben again points out. While "iconology" has become the predominant means to describe the tracing of spectral gestures through history, Warburg himself settled on a more ambivalent signifier, at once idiosyncratic, autonomous and thus difficult to calcify: a 'nameless science', as he called it, of memory pushing through and rupturing the present.[9] The struggle has again been shared by the artists in this thesis. If their works reveal a similar iconology of nonconformist, dissident or "pagan" memories – of similar forms and gestures recurring since late-communism, transferred and transformed across Europe and beyond – they too have fought a politics of the signifier to match their politicised methods. And though these signifiers have not been nameless (with the exception of Büchel and Motti's collaborative work), they have nonetheless been as self-determined and singular as Warburg had intended, peculiar to the art practices and

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[8] Agamben, 'Aby Warburg', above n.1, p.93.

[9] *Ibid*, pp.89, 98-100.

autonomous contexts that underpin them: 'emptiness' for Kabakov; 'retro politics' for NSK; 'making art politically' for Hirschhorn; and for the Perjovschis, 'dizzydence'. These idiosyncratic signifiers do not play games with semantics. They are instead avowedly "improper" names, "wrong" names through which to introduce alternative frames for art's mobilisation and interpretation that exceed those of "democracy". They are signifiers for 'other worlds', as Hirschhorn has called them, within which the artists' works, critiques and subjective accounts of history can circulate.

This logic of circulation has proven to be a crucial factor in understanding how these other worlds function. While each context has provided the possibility for nonconformist histories and gestures to recur, the mobilisation of the contexts themselves has ensured that these histories attain their greatest relevance beyond late-communist and postcommunist conditions. This is a global mobilisation and dissemination conducted through exhibitions, publications, discussion tours and lectures about nonconformist practices – or even as nonconformist artworks – and through which their legacies have become part of globalised histories of art. It is through contact with this mobilisation, for example, that figures such as Hirschhorn, Büchel, Motti and others have revivified and transformed nonconformist pasts within their practices and their critiques of trajectories of power. It is through this mobilisation as well that these contexts have traced inverse vectors to "democratisation", travelling not eastward through imposition but initially westward through discussion and display, and thence into different directions again through further critical and self-critical refractions. And it is through such recalibrations and self-critical engagements that these alternative aesthetic politics have ultimately resisted becoming hegemonic or models of imposition in turn. Rather than demand a sense of uniformity or conformity to their politics, these aesthetics have consistently exposed their own limitations in the course of their migrations. If debates and discussions enabled the global dissemination of knowledge about retro politics or dizzydence, for example, they were also highly questioning or even sceptical about how effective those politics could be, and for whom. In some works – particularly Kabakov's and Büchel and Motti's – the imposition of the artist's will was replaced with demonstrations of withdrawal; in others, a context could only exist by being utterly contingent and reliant

upon the indeterminable gestures of others. Each mode of aesthetic politics, in other words, hinged on subjective engagements with history and presence, perpetually shifting in the critical meeting points between different people, perspectives and objects. Moreover, while gestures and tactics may have recurred from one practice to another, they were always transformed during their reprocessing, mutated in the very attempt at their translation. Emptiness distorted, to an extent, into a non-name of "democracy" under destruction; retro politics transformed into making art politically; dissidence became dizzydence. Each form of aesthetic politics and each critique of "democracy" was thus a singularity, depending upon the particular contexts that the artists had created. They were, as Jean-Luc Nancy might say, a plurality of singularities that, while informing one another and certainly co-existing and overlapping in space and time, remained in themselves irreducible.[10]

For Nancy, as for the artists in this thesis, the creation and communal sharing of singular 'other worlds' is the cornerstone for re-imagining contemporary conditions. Our task, as he has argued, is to deconstruct 'the great transcendent accounts of rationalism', accounts that demand a global homogeneity in commerce (neoliberalism), politics (democracy), language (English), and whose totalisation of the world is now so pervasive as to appear natural, sacrosanct or, as he describes it, 'onto-theological'.[11] Our task is to disrupt that mythical ontology by deconstructing its ideology, by unravelling and unworking how it functions – a process that he calls 'detheologisation', a shift into the seemingly "pagan", such that '[t]he withdrawal of any given… forms the heart of a thinking of creation' and the formation of new worlds.[12] In Nancy's lexicon, these other worlds do not conform to current politico-economic hegemonies that, for him, go by the English name of "globalization". Rather, their foundational unworkings and productive re-imaginings

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[10] Jean-Luc Nancy, *Being Singular Plural*, trans. Robert Richardson and Anne O'Byrne (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000).

[11] Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Creation of the World or Globalization*, trans. François Raffoul and David Pettigrew (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2007), p.41.

[12] *Ibid*, pp.51 and 69 for respective quotations. For Nancy's notion of 'unworking' in relation to myth, see Chapter Three of this thesis, above pp.193ff and 206-208; and Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Inoperative Community*, trans. Peter Connor, Lisa Garbus, Michael Holland and Simona Sawhney (Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 1991).

signify new possibilities for contemporary global relations. They inform the critical potential of what he terms *mondialisation*:[13] singular worlds formed and shared with others to create a global community of difference and which, in their distinction from revered courses and discourses of the global today, find their force by *becoming unbecoming*.

Nancy's theory of *mondialisation* is undoubtedly ambitious – it has certainly informed the ambitions of the thesis in your hands – yet it is not nearly as ambitious as the artists who have sought to actualise these other worlds briefly, precariously through their new contexts, aesthetic politics and alternative art histories. For them, however, *mondialisation* may not be the most appropriate way to understand their creation of other worlds through shared critiques of "democracy". For them, the task is not only to break open the possibility of new global politics and formations of contemporary art practice. It is also to suggest alternative histories of art that, like spectres in the night, can slip past the border guards who regulate the discipline. These are less the spectres of Marx than spectres *after* Marx: the ghosts of nonconformism, of displaced pasts from displaced peripheries, whose presence can be felt far beyond the periods and places to which they have hitherto been confined. In Europe, at least, that presence has emerged through what I have described as *postsocialist aesthetics*. These are aesthetics contingent, to a degree, upon the specific histories of Europe in recent years: from the collapse of European communism to the destabilisations undergone by postcommunist Europe; and, more broadly speaking, the collapse of ways of thinking beyond the Cold War's binaries amid surging globalisation, neoliberalisation, "democratisation", homogenisation. At the same time, though, postsocialist aesthetics have also shown how communing with spectres after Marx can spark new trans-European and even more expansive engagements between artists, artworks and art contexts. On the one hand, reanimating these spectres has impelled critical reappraisals of "democracy's" increasing political expediency, and the Europatriarchal exclusions and hierarchies maintained under its rubric. On the other, they have insisted upon replacing that rubric with more accurately, perhaps more

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[13] Nancy, *Creation of the World*, *ibid*, pp.27-28.

equitably, global art histories that can emerge between centres and peripheries, pasts and presents, presence and withdrawal. Histories, in other words, that both survive and thrive in the intervals and the vectors in-between, creating new unworkings of global myths and established artistic canons.

The postsocialist aesthetics chronicled in this thesis are just one means of rethinking art practice in relation to its histories and its contemporary conditions. While they provide a particular re-evaluation of art from across Europe, they are not the only such aesthetics emerging across the globe. Each so-called periphery or centre has its own ghost stories to tell. Each has its own reanimated histories and remobilised politics, propelled along the vectors between cultures. It is by following these trails and encountering these stories that different histories of art will emerge, intersecting with each other to create more worldly spheres of knowledge. This is already happening, as we have seen, through methods of the atlas and the potential conjunctions and disjunctions they can create between artists from Lebanon and the United States, Romania and Germany. This is only a beginning, though – a singular beginning, as Nancy would say – for rethinking contemporary art histories in difference to uniformity, to conformity and, in the instance of this thesis, to "democracy". Yet it is a beginning from which to reconsider what such art histories and aesthetic politics might be. That process requires letting the potentialities of these 'other worlds' remain self-managed and undisciplined, rather than seeking to contain them within totalising discourses. It requires imaginative and self-reflexive thinking. Most of all, it requires constantly shifting co-ordinates in the global atlas of art practice, in a continual process of aesthetic, political and potentially productive unbecoming.

Politically Unbecoming

Critiques of
"Democracy" and
Postsocialist Art from
Europe

Anthony Gardner

M.A., LLB (Hons) (Melb)

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Fig.6.37:   Aby Warburg, *Mnemosyne Atlas* (Plate 46; c.1927-1929).
              Image reproductions pinned to board. Image reproduced from Martin Warnke (ed.), *Aby Warburg: Der Bilderatlas Mnemosyne* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2003), p.85.

Fig.i.1: Gu Wenda, *United Nations: Sweden and Russia Monument* (1996).

Fig.i.2:   Oleg Kulik arrested, *Interpol* exhibition, Stockholm, 1996.

Fig.i.3:   Gu Wenda, *United Nations: Sweden and Russia Monument* (1996), after its destruction by Alexander Brener.

Fig.1.1:   Front cover of *Time* magazine after the opening of the Berlin Wall on 9
             November 1989: 'Freedom!'
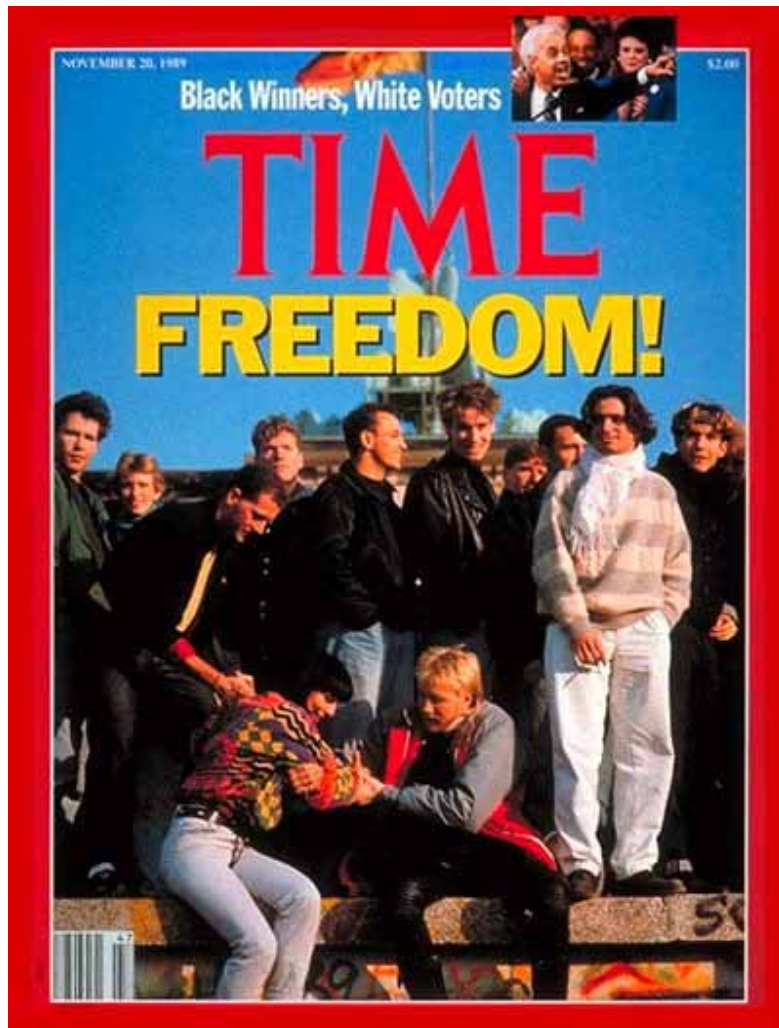
Fig.1.2: Gillian Wearing, *Signs that Say What You Want Them to Say and Not Signs that Say What Someone Else Wants You to Say* (Detail; 1992-1993).

Fig.1.3: Felix Gonzalez-Torres, *Untitled (Lover Boys)* (Foreground; 1991).

Fig.1.4: Daniel Buren, *Affichage Sauvage (Wild Poster)* (1969).

Fig.1.5: Carsten Höller, *Booster* (1995).

Fig.1.6:   Santiago Sierra, *Wall Enclosing a Space* (2003).
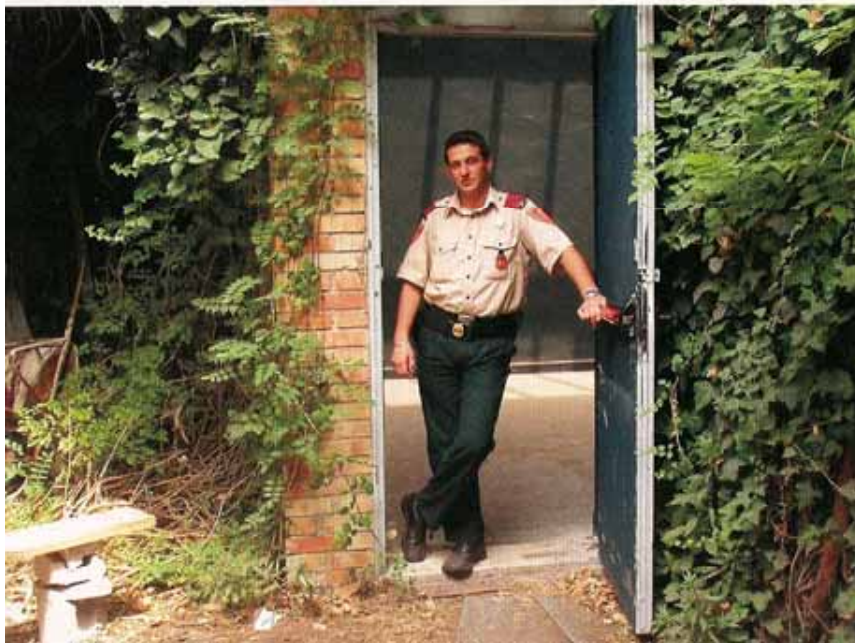
Fig.2.1:   Ilya Kabakov, *The Collector* (1988)

Fig.2.2:   Ilya Kabakov, *The Man who Collected the Opinions of Others* (1988).
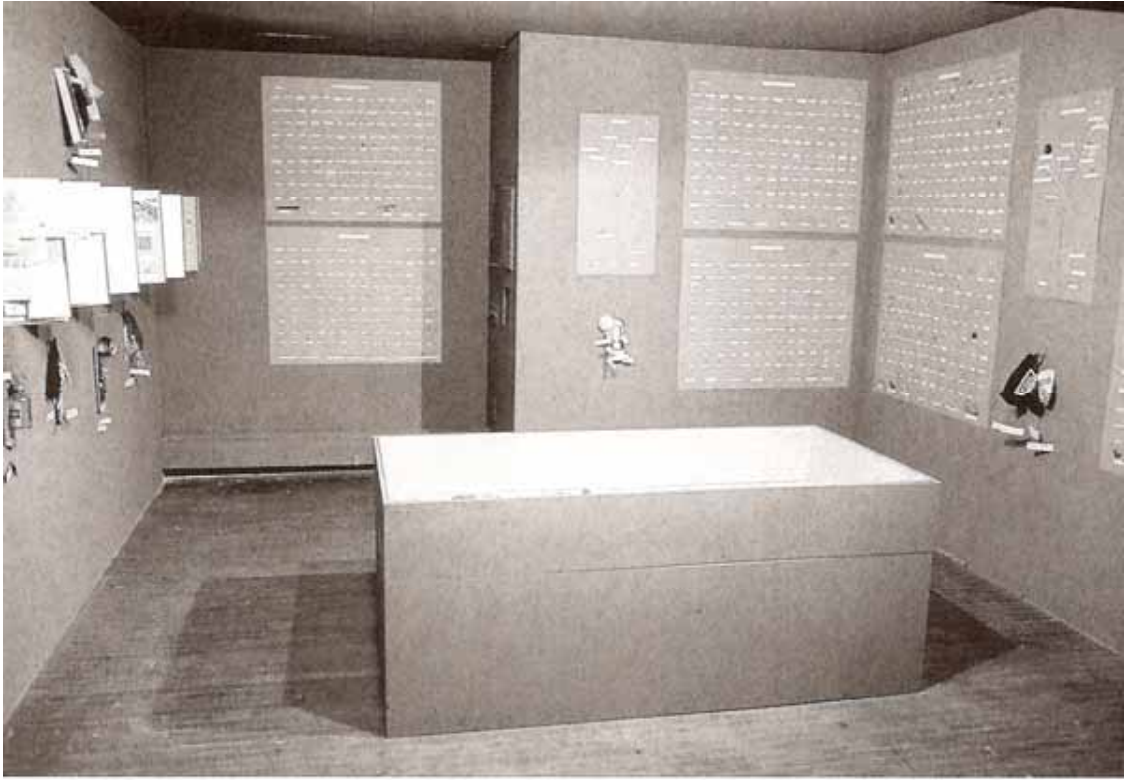
Fig.2.4:   Ilya Kabakov, *Sixteen Ropes* (1984-1988).

Fig.2.5:   Ilya Kabakov, *The Untalented Artist* (1988).

Fig.2.6:   Ilya Kabakov, *The Man who Flew into Space from His Apartment* (1985-1988).
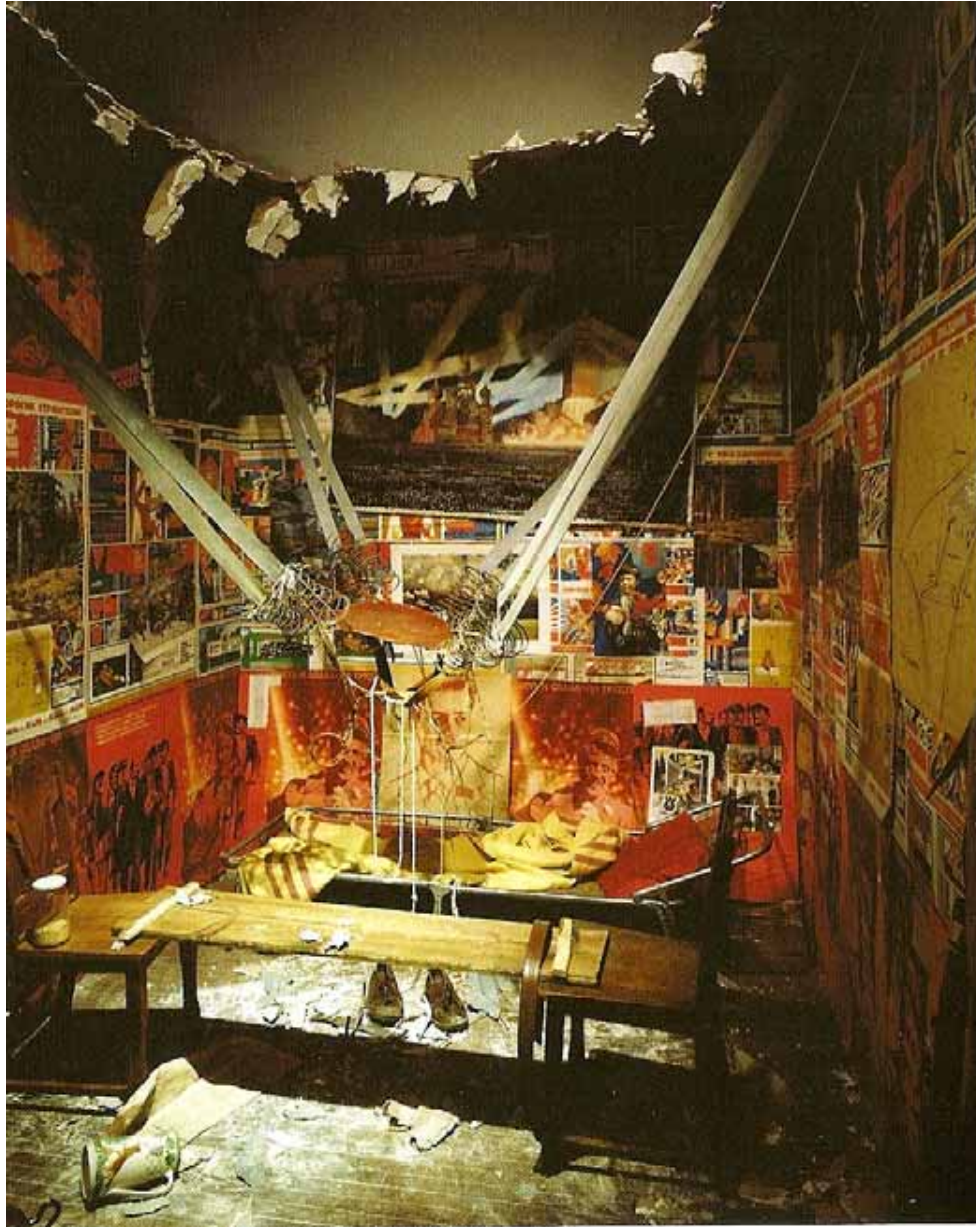
Fig.2.7   Ilya Kabakov, *The Man who Flew into His Picture* (1981-1988).
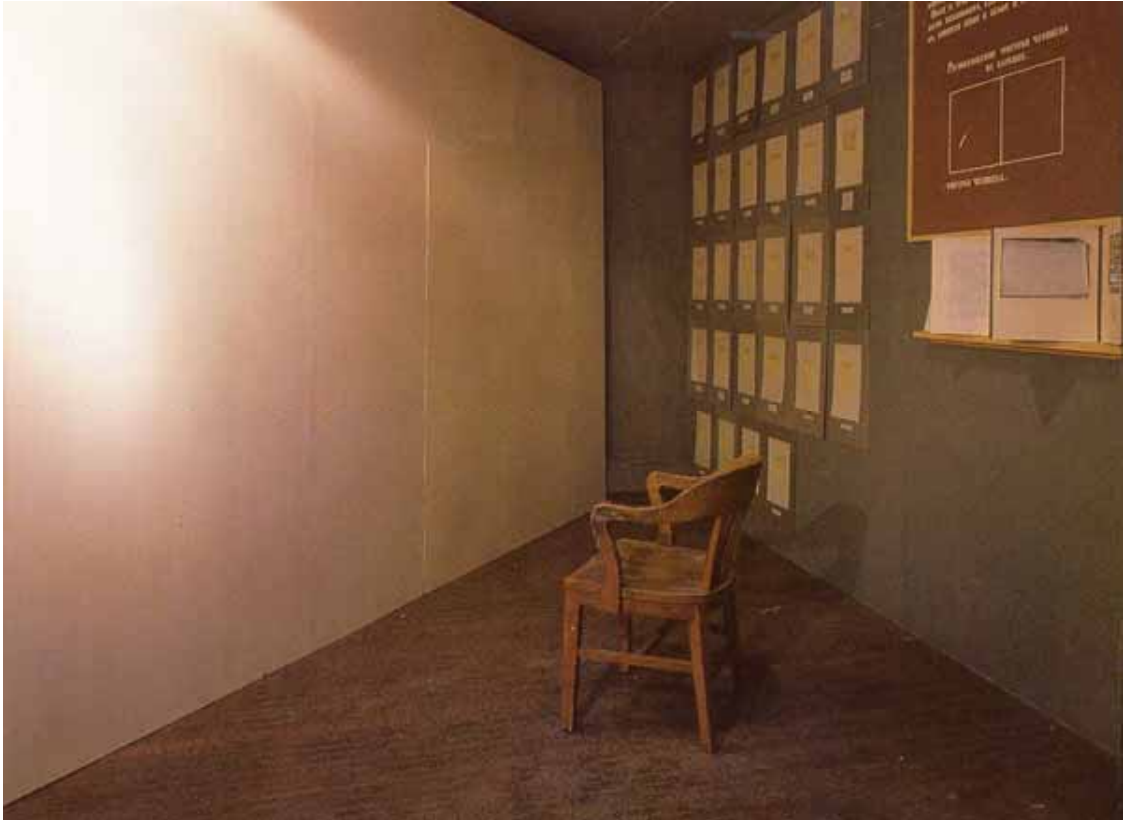
Fig.2.8   Ilya Kabakov, *Sitting-in-the-Closet Primakov* from *Ten Albums* (Detail; 1972-1975).
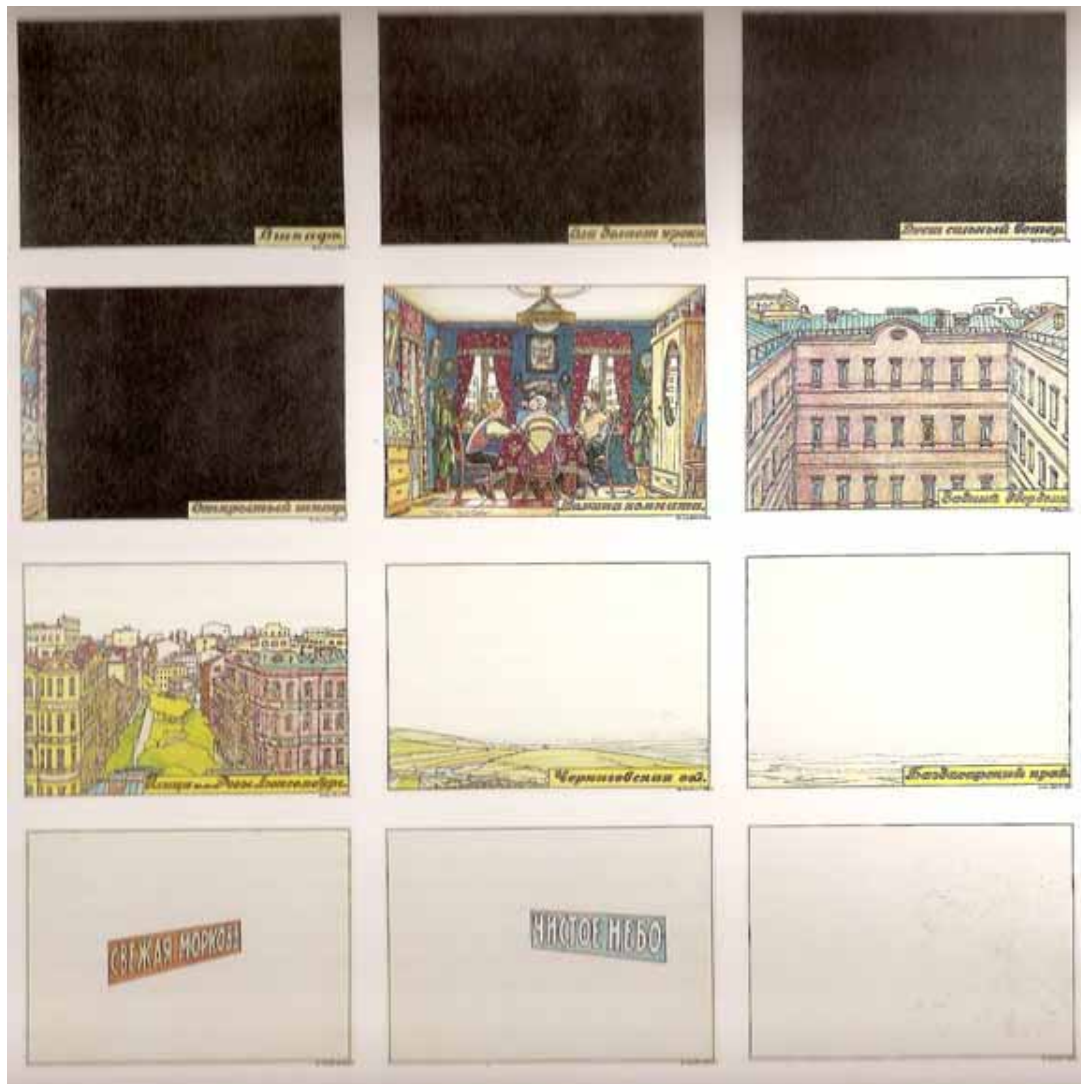
Fig.2.9   Ilya and Emilia Kabakov, *The Empty Museum* (1993).

Fig.2.10:   Ilya Kabakov, *Before Supper* (1988).

Fig.2.11:   Group Material, *Cultural Participation* (1988).

Fig.2.12:   Group Material, *Education and Democracy* (1988).

Fig.2.13: Ilya Kabakov, *The Man who Flew into Space from His Apartment* (1985-1988).

Fig.2.14:   Ilya Kabakov, *The Man who Saved Nikolai Victorovich* (1988).
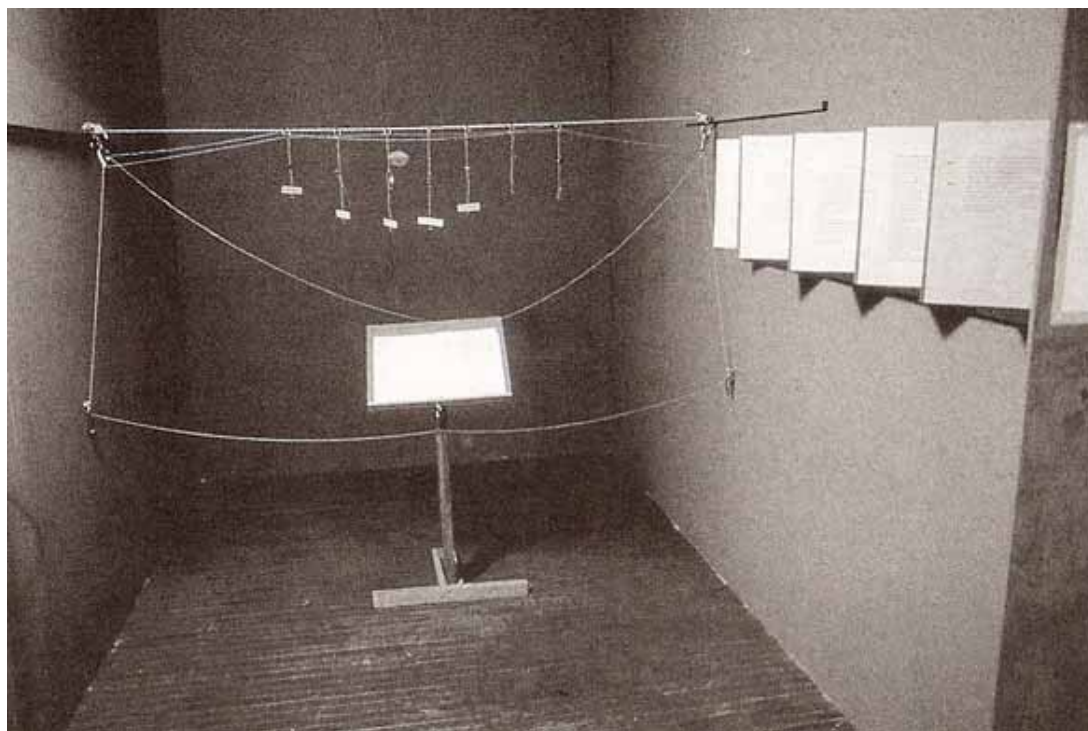
Fig.2.15:   Ilya Kabakov, *Ten Characters* (1988). Note the difference between the Cyrillic texts (such as those on the ledge within the room in the foreground) and the English language translations stuck to the walls dividing each room.

Fig.2.16:   Ilya Kabakov, *NOMA or the Moscow Conceptual Circle* (1993)

Fig.3.1:   Alexander Brener, Intervention at *Manifesta 3* (2000)
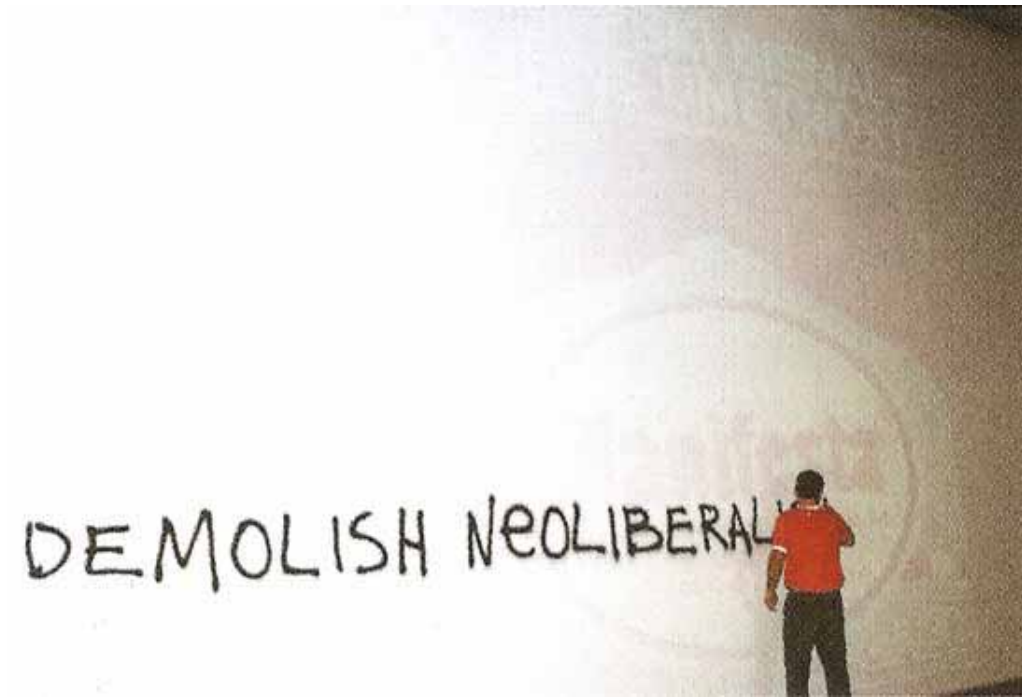
Fig.3.2:   Barbara Schurz, Intervention at *Manifesta 3* (2000)

Fig.3.3:   Stalker, *Transborderline* (2000).
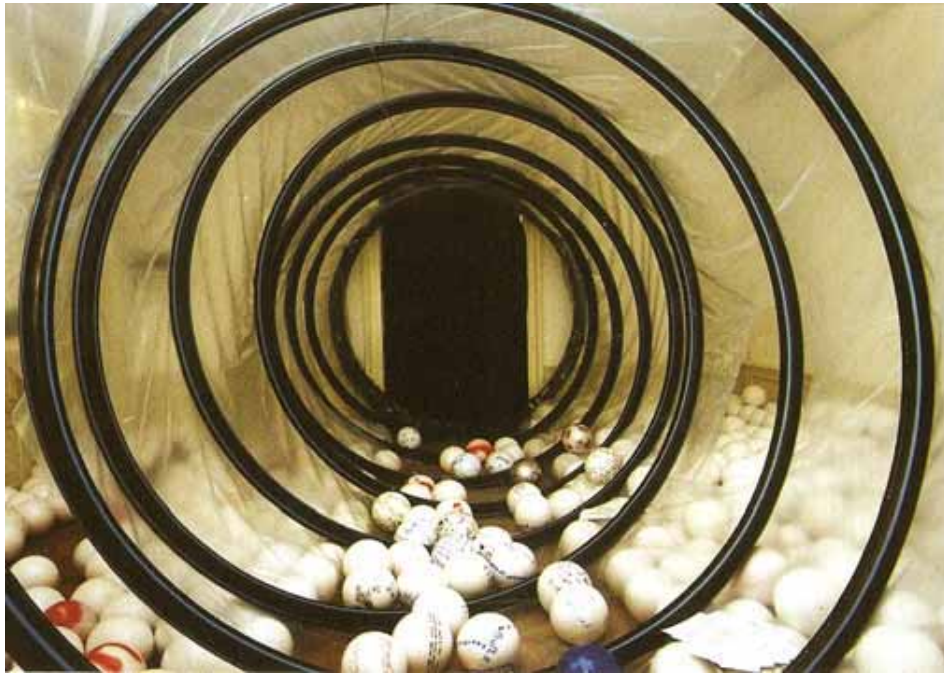
Fig.3.4:   Šejla Kamerić, *EU/Others* (2000).

Fig.3.5:   Kathrin Rhomberg's Name Plaque from the *Manifesta 3* Press Conference,
              archived in the International Foundation Manifesta headquarters, Amsterdam.

Fig.3.6:   NSK, Organigram Flow Chart (1984).
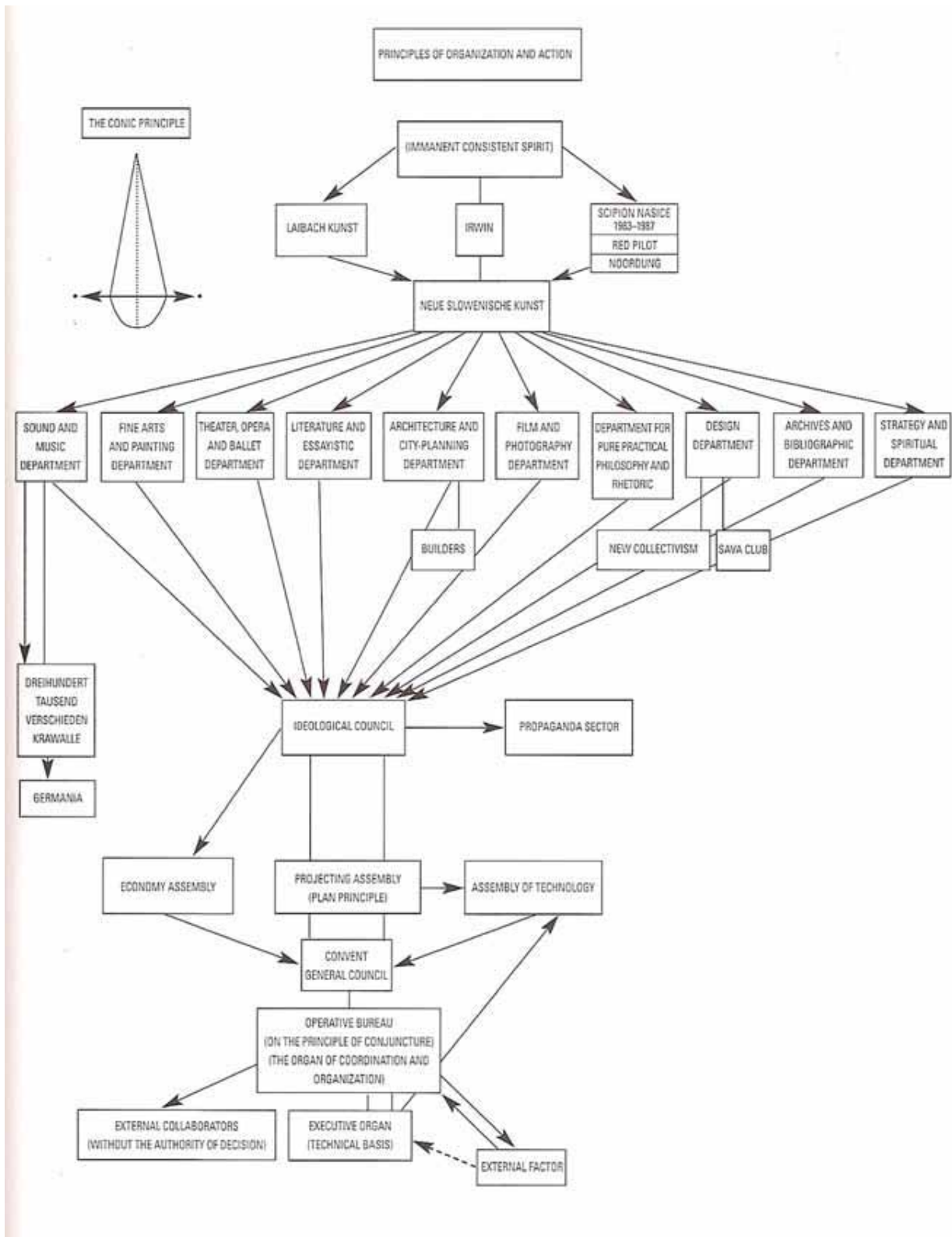
Fig.3.7:   LAIBACH, Still from *XY-Unsolved* (1983).

Fig.3.8:   Novi Kolektivizem, *Dan Mladosti* (1987).

Fig.3.9: IRWIN (Dušan Mandić), *Malevich between Two Wars* (1984-1986).

Fig.3.10:   Neue Slowenische Kunst, *NSK Embassy Moscow* (1992).

Fig.3.11:   Neue Slowenische Kunst, *NSK Consulate Umag* (1994).

Fig.3.12:   Neue Slowenische Kunst, *NSK Garda Priština* (2002).

Fig.3.13: Novi Kolektivizem, *Poster for NSK Staat Berlin* (1993).

Fig.3.14:   IRWIN and Marina Abramović, *Namepickers* (1998).

Fig.3.15: LAIBACH, *NATO* – Compact Disc Liner Notes (1994).

NATO IS THE FRAMEWORK FOR AN ALLIANCE DESIGNED TO PREVENT AGGRESSION OR TO REPEL IT, SHOULD IT OCCUR. IT IS DETERMINED TO SAFEGUARD FREEDOM, COMMON HERITAGE AND CIVILIZATION. FOUNDED ON THE PRINCIPLES OF DEMOCRACY LIBERTY AND THE RULE OF LAW. IT PROVIDES FOR CONTINUOUS COOPERATION AND CONSULTATION IN POLITICAL, ECONOMIC AND OTHER MILITARY FIELDS. IT IS RESOLVED TO UNITE ITS EFFORTS FOR COLLECTIVE DEFENCE AND SEEK TO PROMOTE STABILITY, SECURITY AND WELL-BEING IN THE NORTH ATLANTIC AREA. IT IS OF INDEFINITE DURATION.

WASHINGTON DC 1949–1994

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Fig.3.16:   IRWIN, *Transnacionala* (1996).

Fig.3.17:   IRWIN, *Transnacionala* (1996).

Figs.3.18-3.19: IRWIN, *IRWIN Live* (1996): Top/right, as installed in Warsaw in 1998; Bottom/left as installed in Atlanta in 1996.

Fig.3.20:   IRWIN, *East Art Map* (1999–).
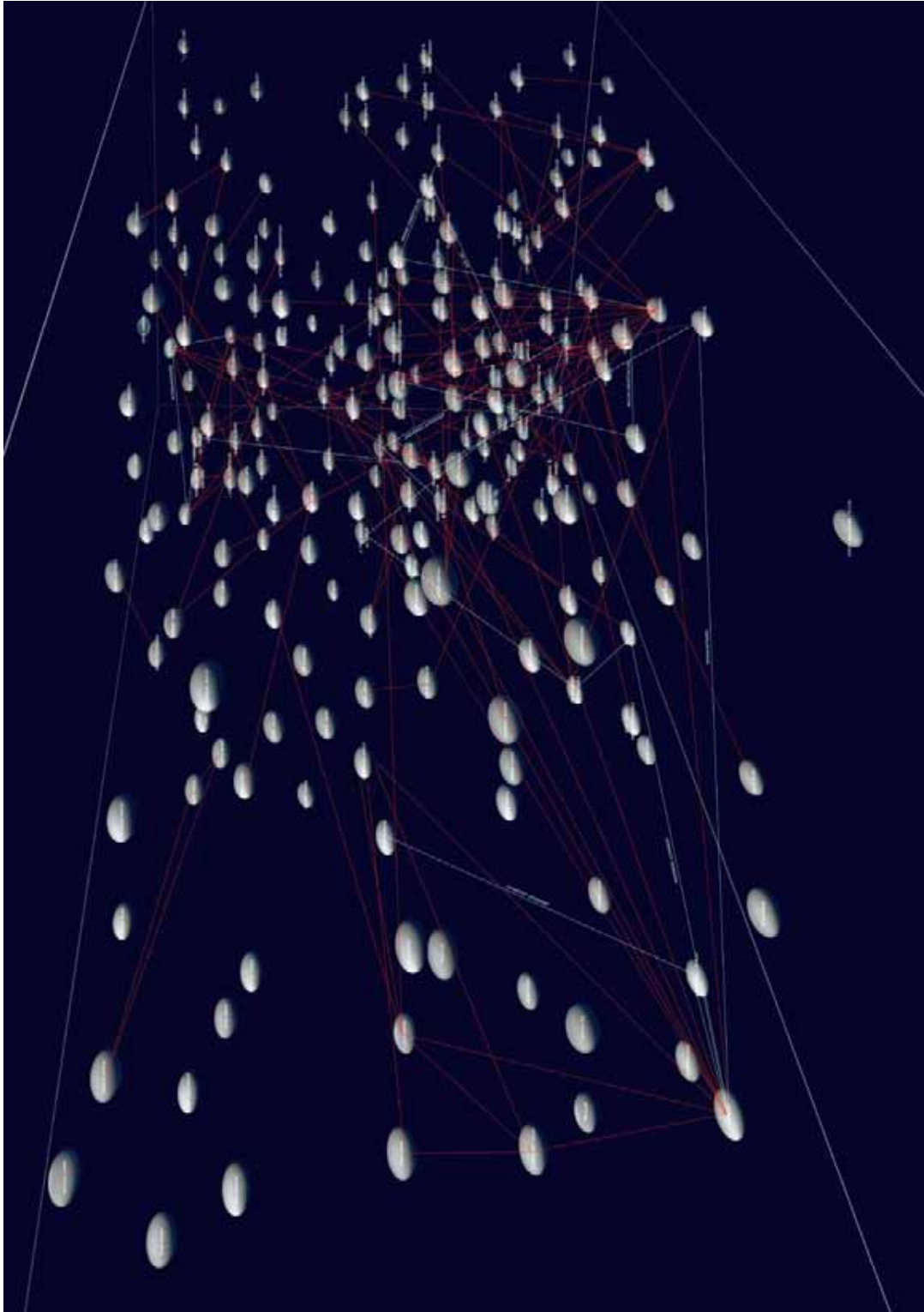
Fig.3.21: *Museum of Contemporary Art Sarajevo 2000* Exhibition, Installation view, Moderna Galerija Ljubljana (1996).

Fig.3.22:   Atelier van Lieshout, *AVL-Ville* (2001).

Fig.3.23:   Marina Abramović, *Lips of Thomas* from *Seven Easy Pieces* (2005).

Fig.4.1: Thomas Hirschhorn, *Jumbo Spoons and Big Cake* (2000).

Fig.4.2: Thomas Hirschhorn, *Very Derivated Products* (1998).

Fig.4.3:   Thomas Hirschhorn, *Ein Kunstwerk, Ein Problem* (1998).

Fig.4.4:   Thomas Hirschhorn, *Utopia-Utopia = One World, One War, One Army, One Dress* (2005).

Fig.4.5:   Thomas Hirschhorn, *World Airport* (1999).

Fig.4.6:   Thomas Hirschhorn, *Swiss Swiss Democracy* (Exterior; 2004).

Fig.4.7:   Caricature of the Swiss Parliament Urinating on Thomas Hirschhorn, from *Berner Zeitung* (December 2004).
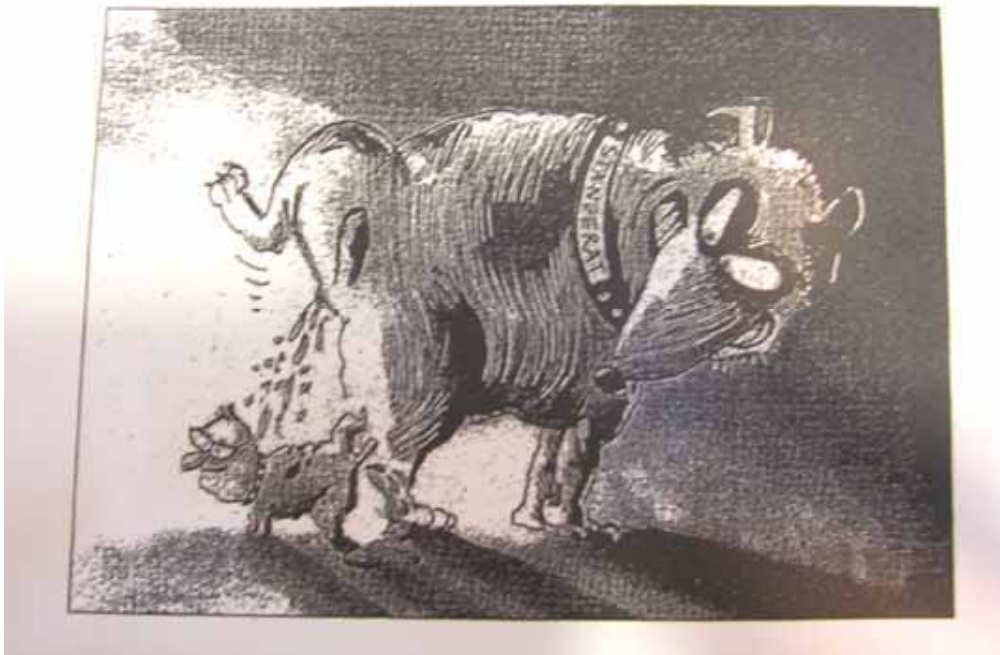
Fig.4.8:   Thomas Hirschhorn, *Swiss Swiss Democracy* (Interior; 2004).

Fig.4.9:   Thomas Hirschhorn, *Swiss Swiss Democracy* (Interior; 2004).

Fig.4.10:   Thomas Hirschhorn, Invitation to the Opening of *Swiss Swiss Democracy* (2004).

Fig.4.11:   Thomas Hirschhorn, *Swiss Swiss Democracy Journal* (Detail; 2004-2005).

Fig.4.12:   Thomas Hirschhorn, Detail from *Les plaintiffs, les bêtes, les politiques* (1995–).

Fig.4.13 :   Thomas Hirschhorn, Detail from *Les plaintiffs, les bêtes, les politiques* (1995–).
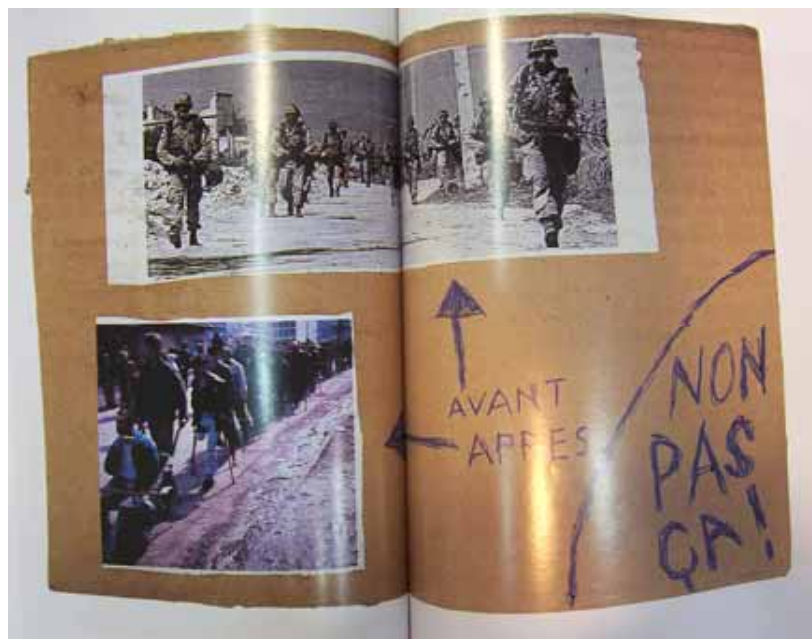
Fig.4.14:   Thomas Hirschhorn, *United Nations Miniature* (2000).

Fig.4.15:   Thomas Hirschhorn, *Chalet Lost History* (2003).

Fig.4.16:   Thomas Hirschhorn, *Chalet Lost History* (2003).

Fig.4.17:   Thomas Hirschhorn, *U-Lounge* (2004).

Fig.4.18:   Thomas Hirschhorn, *Hotel Democracy* (2004).

Fig.4.19:   Joseph Beuys, *Office for Direct Democracy by Referendum* (1972).
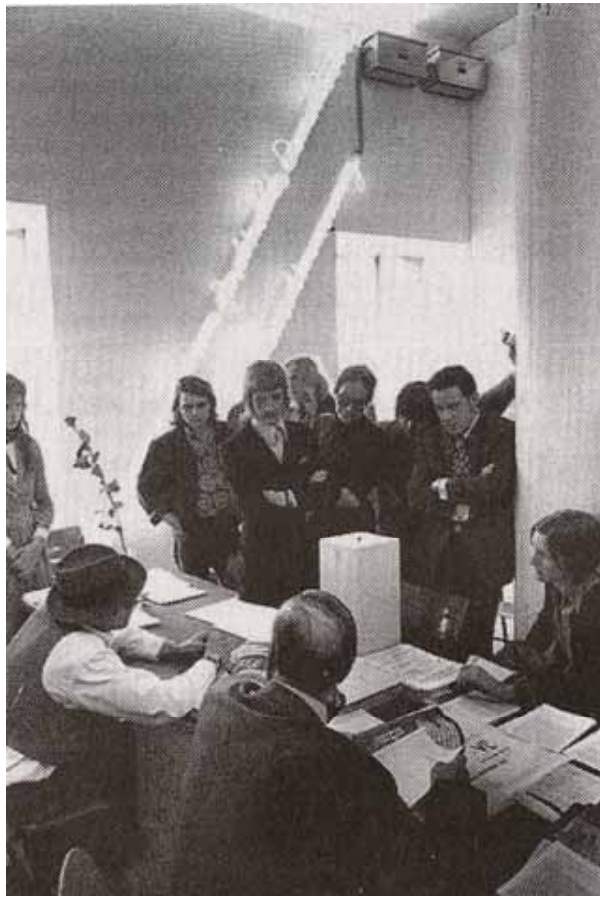
Fig.4.20:   Thomas Hirschhorn, *Artists' Scarves* (1996).

Fig.4.21:   Thomas Hirschhorn, *Maison Commune* (2001).

Fig.4.22:   Thomas Hirschhorn, *Bataille Monument* (2002).

Fig.4.23:   Thomas Hirschhorn, *Musée Précaire Albinet* (2004).

Fig.4.24:   Thomas Hirschhorn, *Skulptur Sortier Station* (1997).

Fig.4.25:   Thomas Hirschhorn, *Bataille Monument* (2002).

Fig.4.26:   Thomas Hirschhorn, *Bataille Monument* (2002).

Fig.4.27:   Thomas Hirschhorn, *Musée Précaire Albinet* (2004).

Fig.4.28:   Thomas Hirschhorn, *Musée Précaire Albinet* (2004).

Fig.5.1:   Muzeul Național de Artă Contemporană, Bucharest, Romania.

Fig.5.2:   Palatul Parlamentului, Bucharest, Romania.

Fig.5.3:   Muzeul Național de Artă Contemporană, Bucharest, Romania (interior).

Fig.5.4:   Christoph Büchel and Gianni Motti, *Guantanamo Initiative* (2004).

Fig.5.5:   Christoph Büchel and Gianni Motti, *Guantanamo Initiative* (2004).

Fig.5.6:   Gianni Motti, *Review* (2000–).

Fig.5.7:   Gianni Motti, *HIGGS (À la recherche de l'anti-Motti)* (2005).

Fig.5.8:   Gianni Motti, *ONU* (1997).

Fig.5.9:   Gianni Motti, *Nada por la Fuerza, Todo con la Mente* (1997).

Fig.5.10:   Gianni Motti, *Gianni Motti Assistant* (1997–).

Fig.5.11: Gianni Motti, *Revendications* (1986-1996).

Fig.5.12: Gianni Motti, *Plausible Deniability* (2004).

Fig.5.13:   Christoph Büchel, *Home Affairs* (1998).

Fig.5.14:   Christoph Büchel, Untitled Installation Project, Swiss Institute, New York City (2004).

Fig.5.15:   Christoph Büchel, *Hole* (2005).

Fig.5.16:   Christoph Büchel and Gianni Motti, *Cadeaux Diplomatiques* (2002).
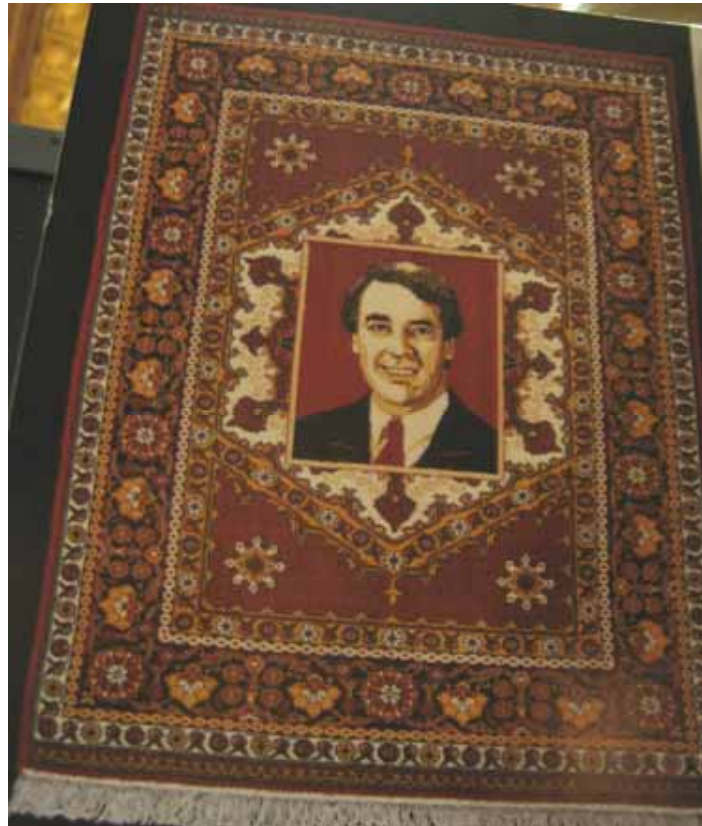
Fig.5.17:   Christoph Büchel and Gianni Motti, *Capital Affair* (2002).

Fig.5.18:   Christoph Büchel and Gianni Motti, Installation Project for *Under Destruction #1*, (2004).

Fig.5.19:   Christoph Büchel and Gianni Motti, Installation Project for *Under Destruction #1*,
               (2004).

Fig.5.20:   Oliver Ressler, *Alternative Economics, Alternative Societies* (2003).

Fig.6.1:   Dan Perjovschi, Untitled Poster for the 2004 Cetinje Biennale (2004).
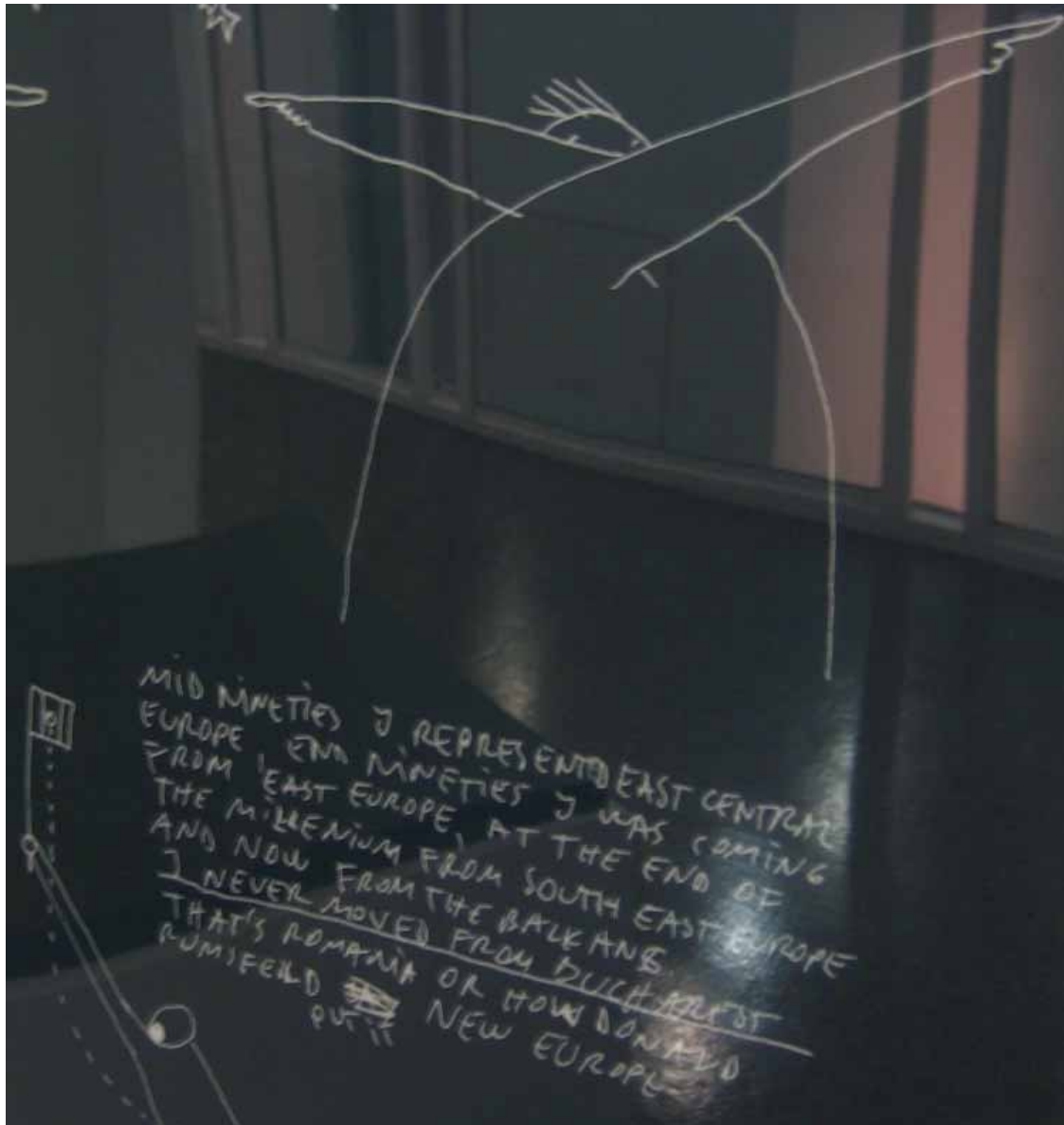
Fig.6.2: Dan Perjovschi, *rEST* (1999).

Fig.6.3: Dan Perjovschi, Untitled Drawings for *White Chalk, Dark Issues* (2003).

Fig.6.4:   Dan Perjovschi, *Group Show* (2005–).
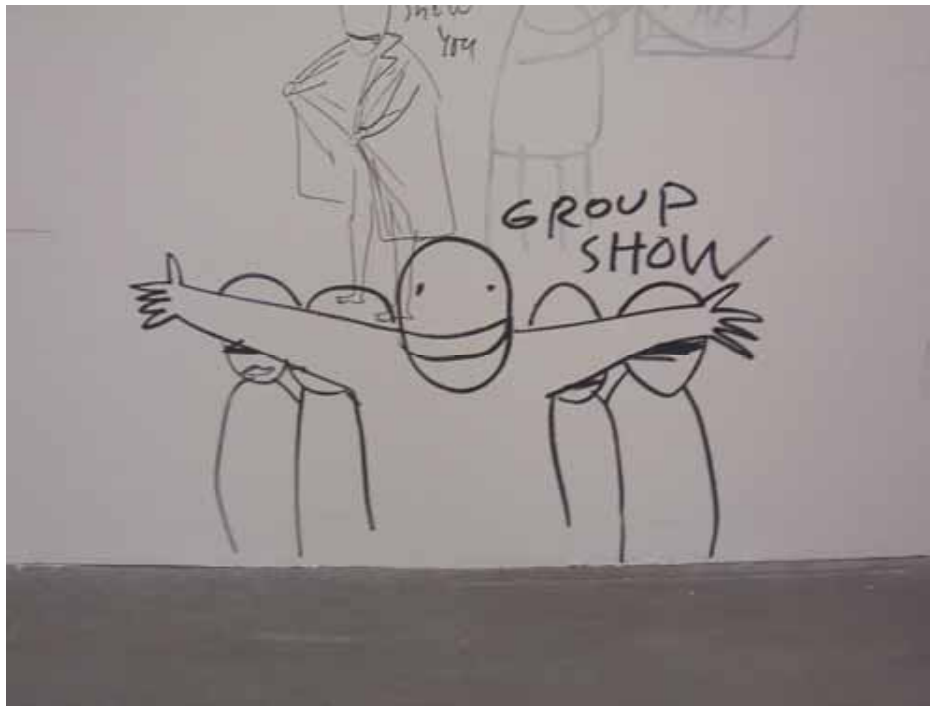
Fig.6.5:   Dan Perjovschi, *Manifesta in East* (2000).

Fig.6.6: Dan Perjovschi, Untitled Wall Drawing for *The Vincent Prize* (2006).

Fig.6.7: Dan Perjovschi, Untitled Wall Drawing for *The Vincent Prize* (2006).

Fig.6.8:   Dan Perjovschi, Untitled Drawing for *Revista 22* (2006).

Fig.6.9:   Dan Perjovschi, Untitled Wall Drawing for *The Vincent Prize* (2006).
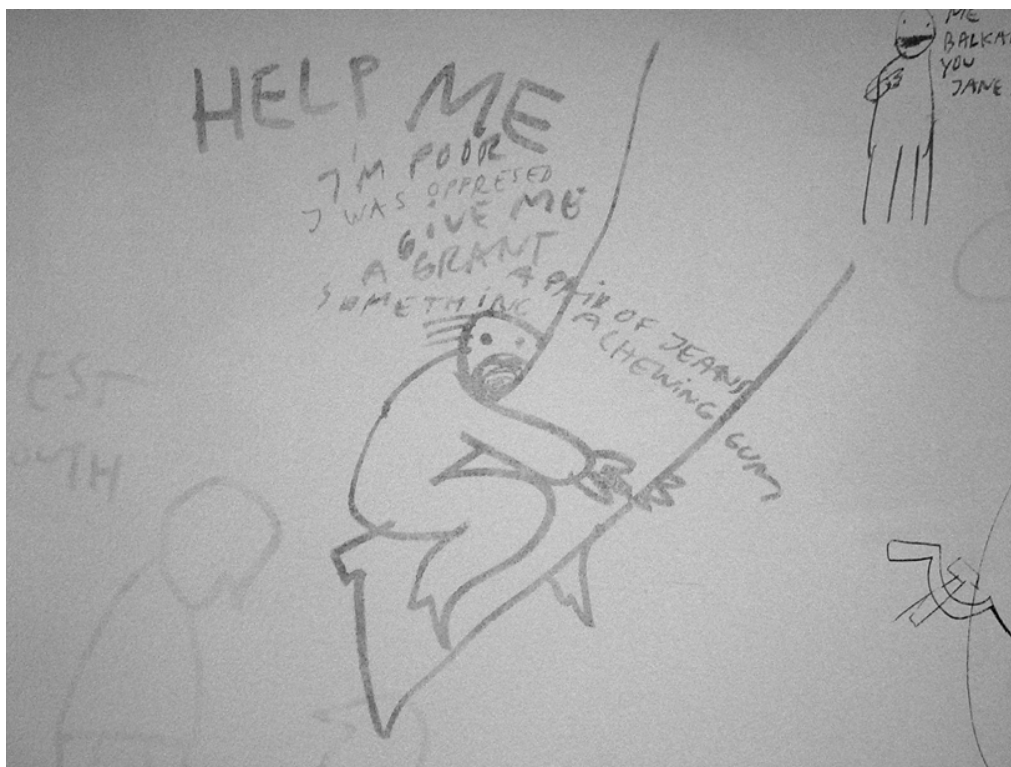
Fig.6.10:   Dan Perjovschi, *The Venice Drawing* (partially erased) (2007).
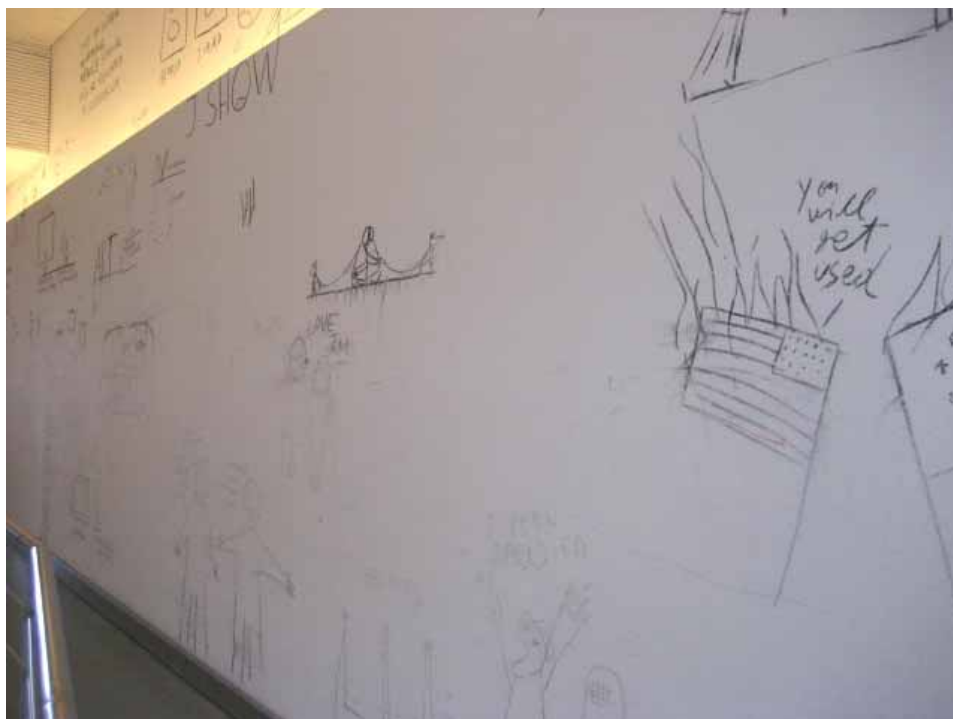
Fig.6.11:   Dan Perjovschi, Notebook Archive (c.2005).
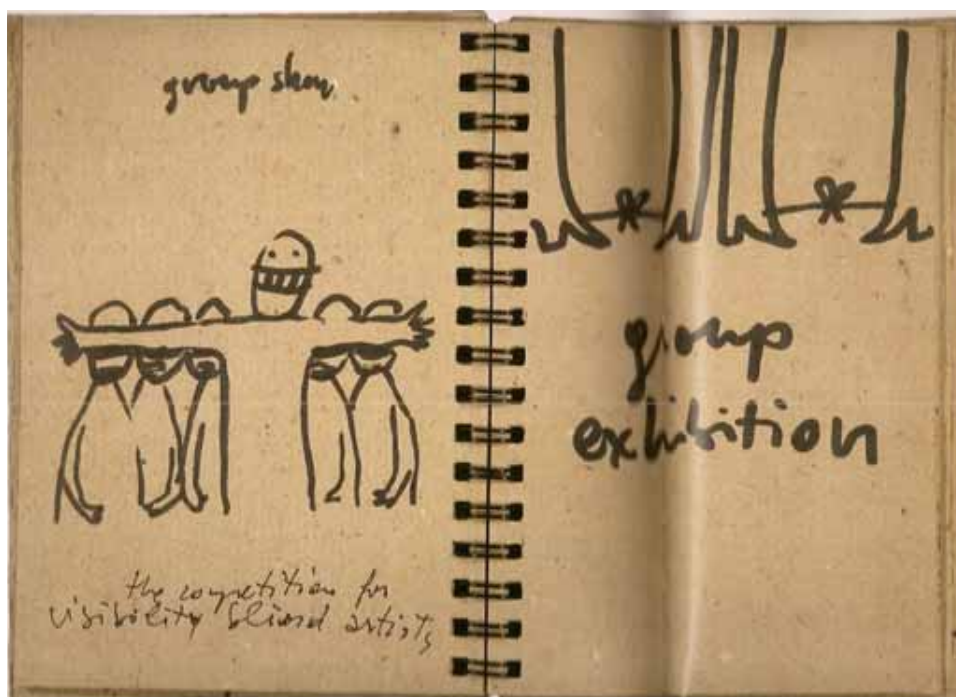
Fig.6.12:   Dan Perjovschi, Untitled Drawing for *White Chalk, Dark Issues* (2003).

Fig.6.13:   Dan Perjovschi in the process of drawing for *WHAT HAPPENED TO US?*,
               Museum of Modern Art, New York City (2007).

Fig.6.14:   Dan Perjovschi, *Bringing Western Values* (2003–).

Fig.6.15:   Dan Perjovschi, Untitled Drawing (c.2004).

Figs.6.16 and 6.17:   Dan Perjovschi, Untitled Drawings (c.2003–).
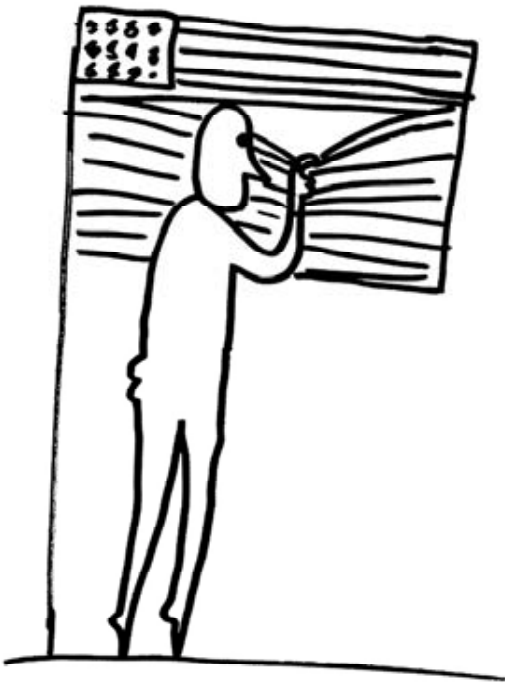
Fig.6.18:   Dan Perjovschi, *The Venice Drawing* (Detail; 2007).

Fig.6.19:   Dan Perjovschi, *The Istanbul Drawing* (Detail; 2005).
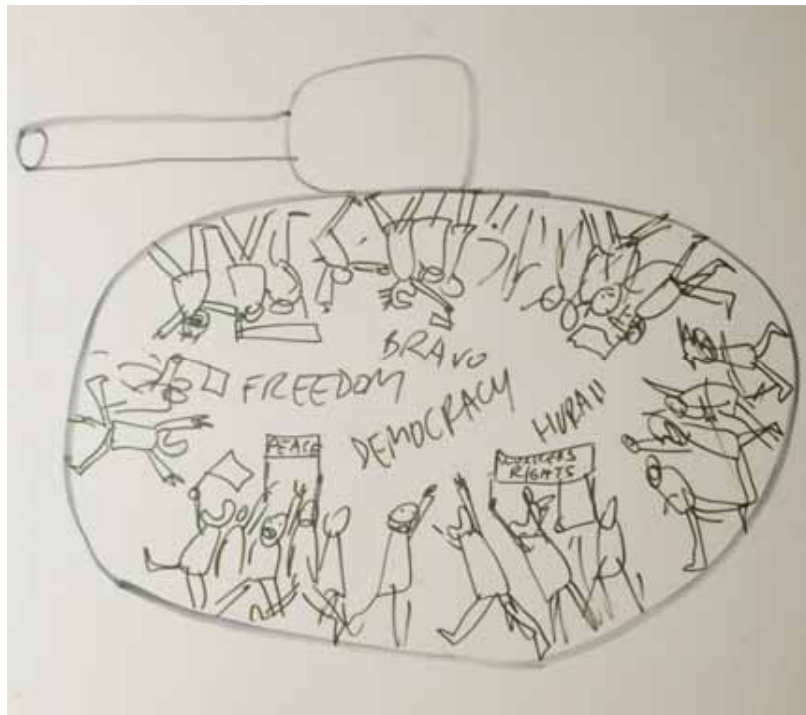
Fig.6.20:   Dan Perjovschi, Untitled Drawing for *White Chalk, Dark Issues* (2003).
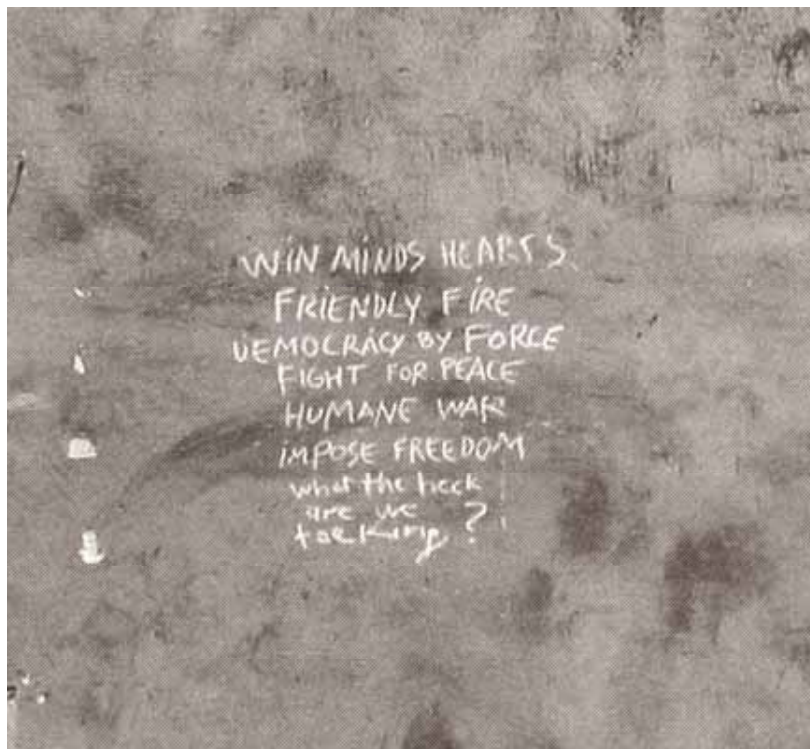
Fig.6.21:   Lia Perjovschi, *Endless Collections (The Globe Collection)* (1990–).

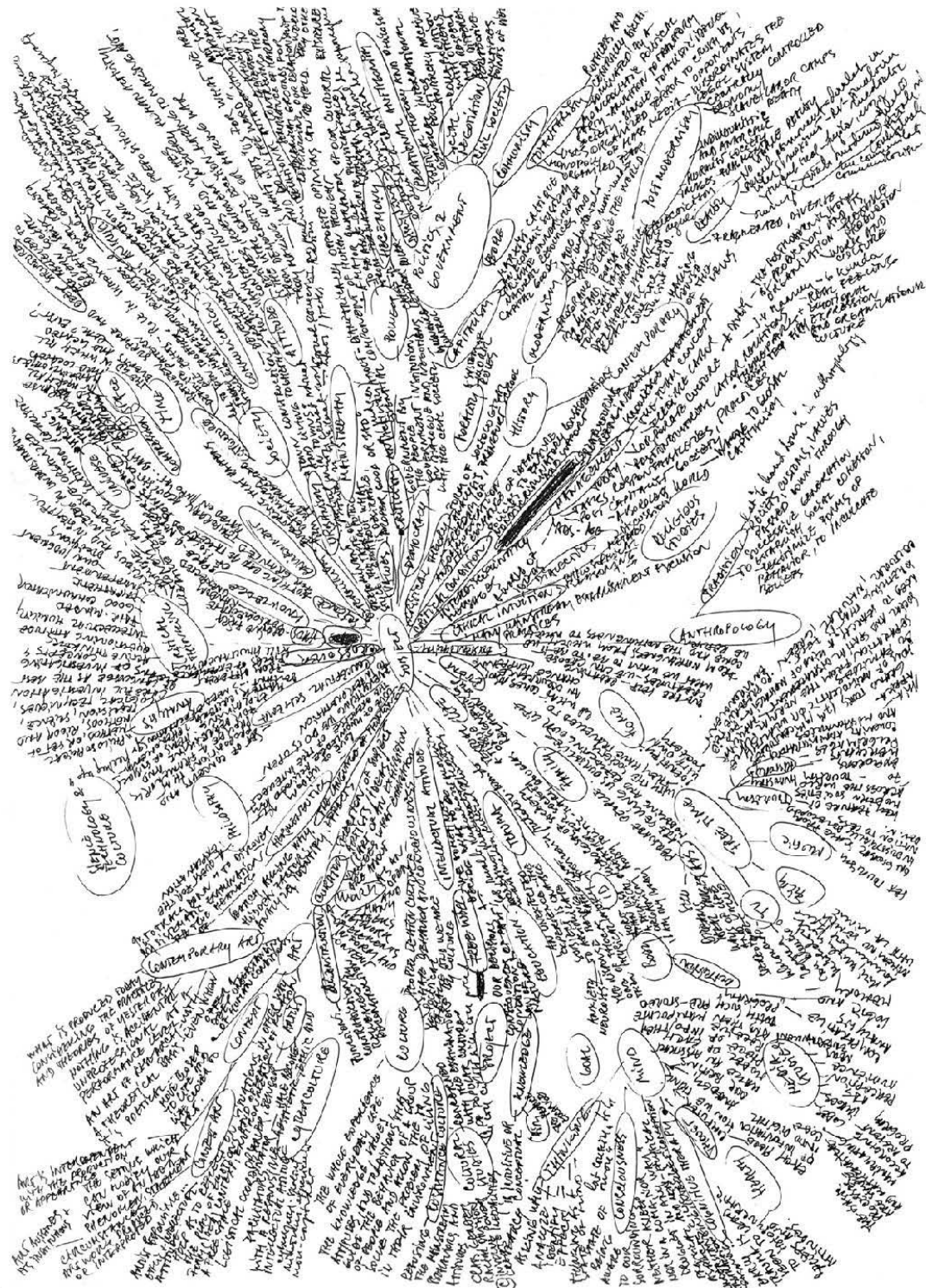Fig.6.22:   Lia Perjovschi, *Mind Maps* (Detail; 1999-2006).

Fig.6.23:   Lia Perjovschi, *Research File: Subjective History of Romanian Culture in the Frame of Eastern Europe and the Balkans, from Modernism to the European Union* (Detail; 2000–).
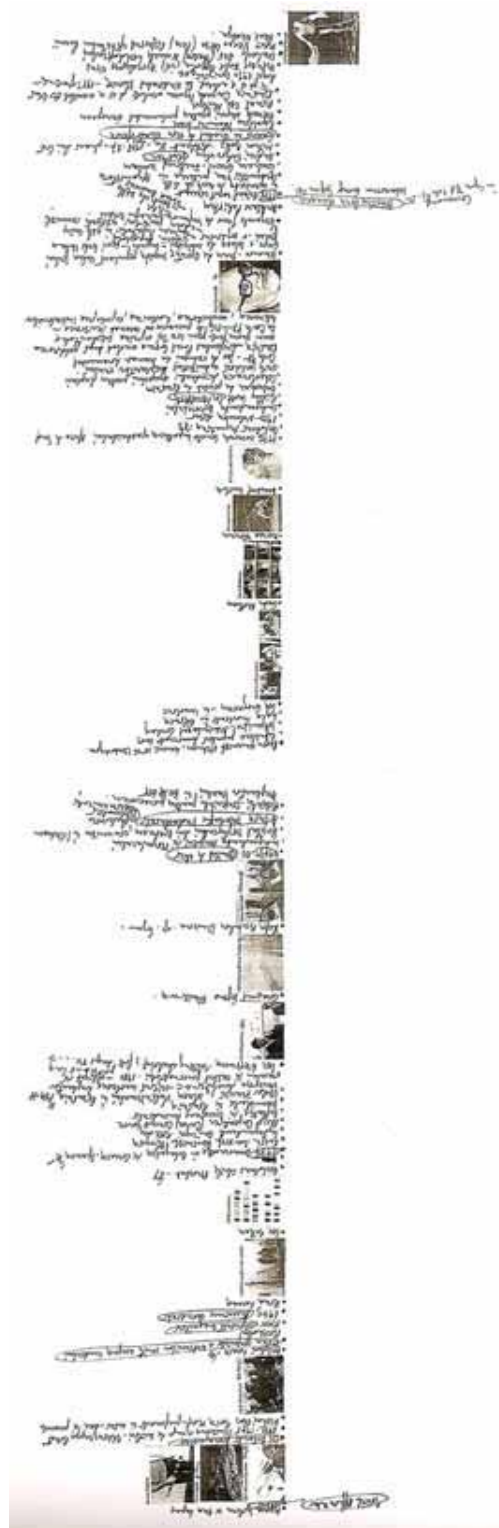
Fig.6.24:   Lia Perjovschi, *Magic of Gesture/Laces* (1989).

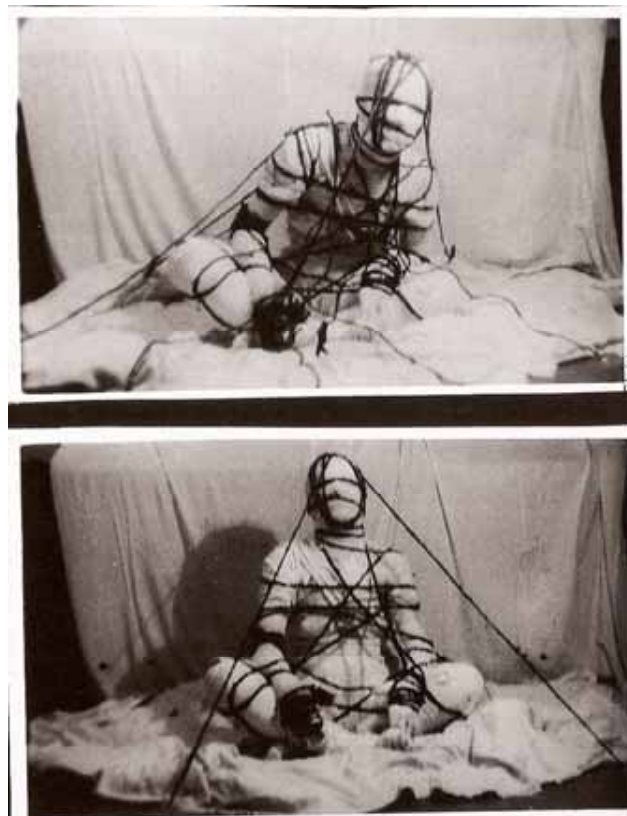Fig.6.25:   Lia Perjovschi, *Annulment* (1989).

Fig.6.26:   Lia Perjovschi (with Dan Perjovschi), *CAA (Contemporary Art Archive)* (1985–).

Fig.6.27:   subREAL, *Art History Archive: Archive Deconstruction* (1995).

Fig.6.28:   subREAL, *Datacorridor* (1996).

Fig.6.29:   Dan Perjovschi and Lia Perjovschi, *CAA Newspapers* (1998–).
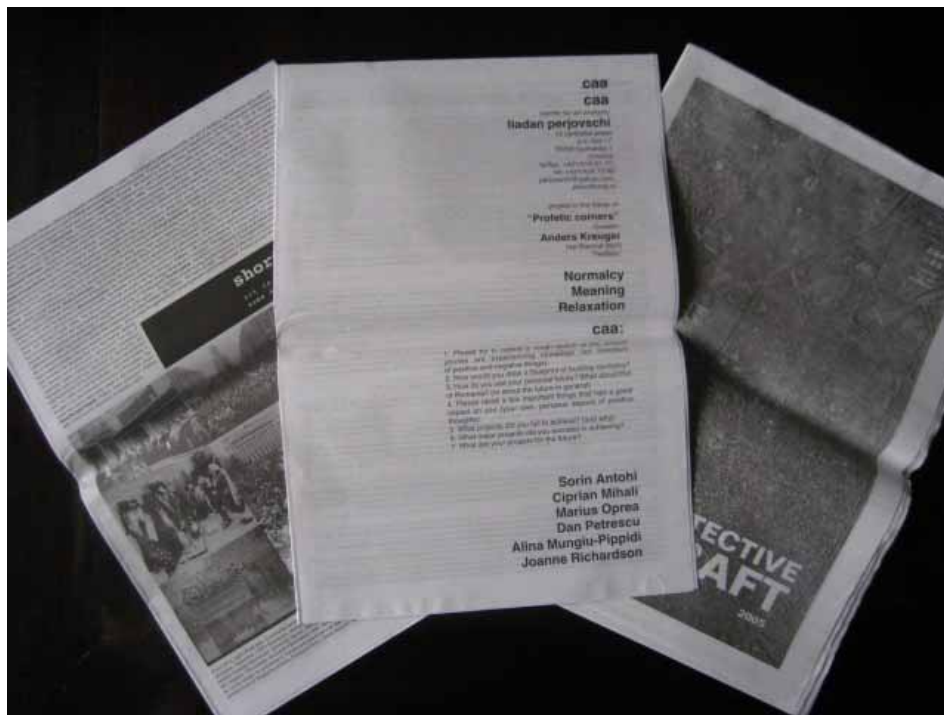

Fig.6.30:   Dan Perjovschi and Lia Perjovschi, *Everything on View* (2000).

Fig.6.31: Lia Perjovschi, *CAA Kit* (2001–).

Fig.6.32:   Lia Perjovschi (with Dan Perjovschi), *CAA (Center for Art Analysis)* (1985–).

Fig.6.33:   Lia Perjovschi (with Dan Perjovschi), *CAA (Center for Art Analysis)* (1985–).

Fig.6.34: Walid Raad/The Atlas Group, *My Neck is Thinner than a Hair: Engines* (2001).

Fig.6.35:   Gerhard Richter, *Atlas* (Plate 13; 1964-1967).

Fig.6.36:   Gerhard Richter, *Woman Descending the Staircase (Frau, die Treppe herabgehend)* (1965).

Fig.6.37: Aby Warburg, *Mnemosyne Atlas* (Plate 46; c.1927-1929).