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The Leonardo Electronic Almanac is proud to announce the publication of its first LEA book, titled "Red Art: New Utopias in Data Capitalism." The publication investigates the relevance of socialist utopianism to the current dispositions of New Media Art, through the contributions of renowned and emerging academic researchers, critical theorists, curators and artists.

RED ART

New Utopias in Data Capitalism

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Red Art: New Utopias in Data Capitalism

BOOK SENIOR EDITORS
LANFRANCO ACETI, SUSANNE JASCHKO, JULIAN STALLABRASS

BOOK EDITOR
BILL BALASKAS

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Commonist Red Art: Blood, Bones, Utopia and Kittens

Does Red Art exist? And if so, who creates it and where can we find it? This special issue of the Leonardo Electronic Almanac addresses these questions and collates a series of perspectives and visual essays that analyze the role, if any, that Red Art plays in the contemporary art world.

Red Art, these are two simple words that can generate complex discussions and verbal feuds since they align the artist to a vision of the world that is 'Red' or 'Communist.'

Nevertheless, even if the two little words when placed together are controversial and filled with *animus*, they are necessary, if not indispensable, to understand contemporary aesthetic issues that are affecting art and how art operates in the context of social versus political power relations within an increasingly technological and socially-mediated world.

Red Art could be translated – within the contemporary hierarchical structures – as the art of the powerless versus the art of the powerful, as the art of the masses versus the art of the few, as the art of the young versus the old, as the art of the technological democrats versus the technological conservatives, as the art of the poor versus the art of the rich... Or it could be described as the art of the revolutionary versus the status quo. In the multitude of the various possible definitions, one appears to stand out for contemporary art and it is the definition of art as bottom-up participation versus art as top-down prepackaged aesthetic knowledge. And yet, what does Red Art stand for and can it be only restricted to Communist Art?

The contemporary meaning of Red Art is different from what it may have been for example in Italy in the 1970s, since so much has changed in terms of politics, ideology and technology. It is no longer possible to directly identify Red Art with Communist Art (as the art of the ex Union of Soviet Socialist Republics or of its satellite states and globalized Communist political parties which were and continue to be present in the West – albeit in edulcorated forms) nor as the art of the left, but there is a need to analyze the complexity of the diversification and otherization of multiple geo-political perspectives. [1]

If today's Red Art has to redefine its structures and constructs it becomes necessary to understand who is encompassed within the label of Red Artists and what their common characteristics are. Red Artists – if we wanted to use this category – and their aesthetic production cannot be reduced to the word 'Communist,' borrowing passé ideological constructs. An alternative to the impasse and the ideological collapse of communism is the redefinition of Red Art as the art of the commons: **Commonist Art**. [2] If Red Art were to be defined as the art of the commons, Commonist Art, thereby entrenching it clearly within technoutopias and neoliberalist crowd sourcing approaches for collective participation, this would provide a contradictory but functional framework for the realization of common practices, socially engaged frameworks, short terms goals and 'loose/open' commitments that could be defined in technological terms as *liquid digital utopias* or as a new form of permanent dystopia. [3]

The XXIst century appears to be presenting us, then, with the entrenched digitized construct of the common versus the idea of the Paris Commune of 1871, thereby offering a new interpretation of the social space and an alternative to traditional leftist/neoliberal constructs. The idea of the common – as an open access revolving door, is opposed to the concept of the commune – as a highly regulated and hierarchical structure.

The 'semantic' distinguo between commons and communes becomes important since both terms are reflections of constructions and terminological frameworks for an understanding of both society and art that is based on 'likes,' actions and commitments for a common or a commune. The commitment, even when disparagingly used to define some of the participants as click-activists and armchair revolutionaries, [4] is partial and leaves the subject able to express other likes often in contradiction with one another: e.g. I like the protests against Berlusconi's government and I like the programs on his private TVs.

I find the idea of the commons (knowledge, art, creativity, health and education) liberating, empowering and revolutionary, if only it was not expressed within its own economic corporative structures, creating further layers of contradiction and operational complexities.

The contradictions of contemporary Red Art and contemporary social interactions may be located in the difference between the interpretations of common and commune – the commune upon which the Italian Communist Party, for example, based its foundations in order to build a new 'church.'

The relationships in the commune of the Italian communists (oxymoronically defined Cattocomunisti or Catholic-communist) rests in faith and in compelled actions, in beliefs so rooted that are as blinding as blinding is the light of God in the painting *The Conversion of Saint Paul on the Road to Damascus* by Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio.

> *[..] and from the leadership an aggressive unwillingness to allow any dissent or deviation. 'That time produced one of the sharpest mental frosts I can remember on the Left,' the historian E. P. Thompson would recall from personal knowledge of the CP...* [5]

It is this blind faith that has generated the martyrs of communism and heretical intellectuals, accusations from which not even Antonio Gramsci was able to escape. The vertical hierarchical structure of the commune and of the Communist Party produced heretics and immolations, but also supported artists, intellectuals, academics and writers that operated consonantly with the party's ideals: people that sang from the same preapproved institutional hymn sheet.

> ***Stefania:*** *This young generation horrifies me. Having been kept for years by this state, as soon as they discover to have two neurons they pack and go to study, to work in the US and London, without giving a damn for who supported them. Oh well, they do not have any civic vocation. When I was young at the occupied faculty of literature, I oozed civic vocation. [..] I have written eleven novels on civic duty and the book on the official history of the Party.*
>
> ***Jep Gambardella:*** *How many certainties you have, Stefania. I do not know if I envy you or feel a sensation of disgust. [...] Nobody remembers your civic vocation during your University years. Many instead*

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remember, personally, another vocation of yours that was expressed at the time; but was consumed in the bathrooms of the University. You have written the official history of the Party because for years you have been the mistress of the head of the Party. Your eleven novels published by a small publishing house kept by the Party and reviewed by small newspapers close to the Party are irrelevant novels [...] the education of the children that you conduct with sacrifice every minute of your life ... Your children are always without you [...] then you have - to be precise - a butler, a waiter, a cook, a driver that accompanies the boys to school, three babysitters. In short, how and when is your sacrifice manifested? [...] These are your lies and your fragilities. [6]

To the question, then, if Red Art exists I would have to answer: YES! I have seen Red Art in Italy (as well as abroad), as the Communist Art produced in the name of the party, with party money and for party propaganda, not at all different from the same art produced in the name of right-wing parties with state or corporate money – having both adopted and co-opted the same systems and frameworks of malfeasance shared with sycophantic artists and intellectuals.

In order to understand the misery of this kind of Red Art one would have to look at the Italian aestheticization of failure – which successfully celebrates failure in the *Great Beauty* by Paolo Sorrentino when the character of Stefania, and her 'oozing civic duty,' is ripped apart. It is a civic responsibility that is deprived and devoid of any ethics and morals. [7]

This is but one of the multiple meanings of the concept of Red Art – the definition of Red Art as Communist Art, is the one that can only lead to sterile definitions and autocelebratory constructs based on the 'aesthetic obfuscation of the lack of meaning' as a tool for the obscurity of the aesthetic to act as a producer of meaning when the artist producing it is inept at creating meaning. [8] Even more tragically, Red Art leads to the molding of the artist as spokesperson of the party and to the reduction of the artwork, whenever successful, to advertising and propaganda.

Commonist Art, founded on the whim of the 'like' and 'trend,' on the common that springs from the aggregation around an image, a phrase, a meme or a video, is able to construct something different, a convergence of opinions and actions that can be counted and weighed and that cannot be taken for granted. Could this be a Gramscian utopia of re-construction and re-fashioning of aesthetics according to 'lower commons' instead of high and rich 'exclusivity,' which as such is unattainable and can only be celebrated through diamond skulls and gold toilets?

Commonist Art – the art that emerges from a common – is a celebration of a personal judgment, partially knowledgeable and mostly instinctive, perhaps manipulated – since every 'other' opinion is either manipulated by the media or the result of international lobby's conspiracies or it can be no more than a reinforcement of the society of the simulacra. Conversely, it may also be that the image and its dissemination online is the representation of a personal diffidence towards systems of hierarchical power and endorsement that can only support 'their own images and meanings' in opposition to images that are consumed and exhausted through infinite possibilities of interpretation and re-dissemination. [9]

If Commonist Art offers the most populist minimum common denominator in an evolutionary framework determined by whims, it is not at all different from the minimum common denominator of inspirational/aspirational codified aesthetics that are defined by the higher echelons of contemporary oligarchies that have increasingly blurred the boundaries of financial and aesthetic realms.

Commonist Art – if the current trends of protest will continue to affirm themselves even more strongly – will continue to defy power and will increasingly seek within global trends and its own common base viable operational structures that hierarchies will have to recognize, at one point or the other, by subsuming Commonist Art within pre-approved structures.

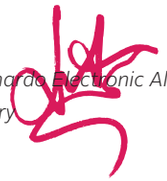
Red Art, therefore, if intended as Commonist Art becomes the sign of public revolts, in the physical squares or on the Internet. It is art that emerges without institutional 'approval' and in some cases in spite of institutional obstacles. Gramsci would perhaps say that Commonist Art is a redefinition of symbolic culture, folk art and traditional imageries that processed and blended through digital media and disseminated via the Internet enable Red Art to build up its own languages and its own aesthetics without having to be institutionally re-processed and receive hierarchical stamps of approval.

Red Art can also be the expression of people whose blood and tears – literally – mark the post-democracies of the first part of the XXIst century. Non-political, non-party, non-believers, [10] the crowds of the Internet rally around an argument, a sense of justice, a feeling of the future not dominated by carcinogenic politicians, intellectuals and curators, that present themselves every time, according to geographical and cultural spaces, as Sultans, Envoys of God, or even Gods.

Red Art, the Commonist Art that perhaps is worth considering as art, is the one that is self-elevated, built on the blood and bones of people still fighting in the XXIst century for justice, freedom and for a piece of bread. Art that rallies crowds' likes and dislikes based on the whims of a liquid Internet structure where people support within their timelines an idea, a utopia, a dream or the image of a kitten. [11]

This piece of writing and this whole volume is dedicated to the victims of the economic and political violence since the beginning of the Great Recession and to my father; and to the hope, hard to die off, that some utopia may still be possible.

Lanfranco Aceti
Editor in Chief, Leonardo Electronic Almanac
Director, Kasa Gallery



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1. Larry Ray, "At the End of the Post-Communist Transformation? Normalization or Imagining Utopia?," *European Journal of Social Theory* 12 (August 2009), 321-336.
2. Commonism was used by Andy Warhol. In this essay the word is rooted in Internet 'commons,' although similarities, comparisons and contiguities exist with the earlier usage. "Thus Warhol's initial preference for the term 'Commonism' was as ambivalent, and ambiguous, as the oscillating signs 'Factory' and 'Business.' Although it flirted with conflations of the 'common' with the 'Communist' (from cheap and low to 'dignity of the common man'), the term betrayed no hidden, left-wing agenda on Warhol's part." Caroline A. Jones, *Machine in the Studio: Constructing the Postwar American Artist* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1996), 205.
3. "For one thing, utopia has now been appropriated by the entertainment industry and popular culture – what is termed the contemporary liquid utopia – as a kind of dystopia." Anthony Elliott, *The Contemporary Bauman* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2007), 17.
4. The blurred lines between real and virtual do not exempt click-activists or armchair revolutionaries from the persecutions and abuses of the state police. The sitting room within one's home becomes the public space for conflict and revolts. One example of many around the globe: Alexander Abad-Santos, "Turkey Is Now Arresting Dozens for Using Twitter," *The Wire*, June 5, 2013, http://www.thewire.com/global/2013/06/turkey-twitter-arrests/65908/ (accessed January 10, 2014).
5. David Kynaston, *Austerity Britain, 1945-1951* (London: Bloomsbury, 2007), 342.
6. The English translation from the Italian is from the author. *La Grande Bellezza*, DVD, directed by Paolo Sorrentino (Artificial Eye, 2014).
7. "Anti-communism was never accepted as the moral equivalent of anti-fascism, not only by my parents but also by the overwhelming majority of liberal-minded people. The Left was still morally superior." Nick Cohen, *What's Left?: How the Left Lost its Way* (London: Harper Perennial, 2007), 3. La questione morale or the 'moral issue' in English is the problem indentified by Enrico Berlinguer and that questioned the role of the Communist party and the Left in general in Italy. The moral issue has not been resolved to this day and is at the core of the current impossibility to distinguish between the ideological frameworks of Left and Right – since both political areas are perceived as equally and intrinsically corrupt as well as tools for an oligarchic occupation of democracy. For the original interview in Italian of Enrico Berlinguer see: Eugenio Scalfari, "Intervista a Enrico Berlinguer," *La Repubblica*, July 28, 1981 available in "La questione morale di Enrico Berlinguer," Rifondazione Comunista's website, http://web.rifondazione.it/home/index.php/12-home-page/8766-la-questione-morale-di-enrico-berlinguer (accessed March 20, 2014).
8. "Under the surface of images, one invests bodies in depth; behind the great abstraction of exchange, there continues the meticulous, concrete training of useful forces; the circuits of communication are the supports of an accumulation and a centralization of knowledge; the play of signs defines the anchorages of power; it is not that the beautiful totality of the individual is amputated, repressed, altered by our social order, it is rather that the individual is carefully fabricated in it..." Michel Foucault, "Panopticism," in *The Nineteenth-Century Visual Culture Reader*, ed. Vanessa R. Schwartz and Jeannene M. Przyblyski (New York, NY: Routledge, 2004), 78.
9. There are those who think that the image is an extremely rudimentary system in comparison with language and those who think that signification cannot exhaust the image's ineffable richness. Roland Barthes, "Rhetoric of the Image," in *Visual Culture: The Reader*, ed. Jessica Evans and Stuart Hall (London: Sage Publications, 1999), 33.
10. Non-believers stands for skeptics and does not have a religious connotation in this context.
11. Lanfranco Aceti, *Our Little Angel*, Lanfranco Aceti Inc., personal website, January 10, 2014, http://www.lanfrancoaceti.com/portfolio-items/our-little-angel/ (accessed January 10, 2014).

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Changing the Game: Towards an 'Internet of Praxis'

There is a new spectre haunting the art world. Not surprisingly, it has been put forward in recent articles, panel discussions and books as the 'ism' that could, possibly, best describe the current dispositions of contemporary art. The name of the spectre is "post-internet art." [1] Unlike, however, its counterpart that was released in the world by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels in 1848, [2] this contemporary spectre has not arrived in order to axiomatically change the established order of things; conceivably, it has arrived in order to support it.

Post-internet art refers to the aesthetic qualities defining today's artistic production, which is often influenced by, mimics, or fully adopts elements of the Internet. At the same time, the term incorporates the communication tools and platforms through which contemporary artworks reach their intended (or non-intended) audiences. Notably, in his book *Post Internet* (2011), art writer Gene McHugh suggests that regardless of an artist's intentions, all artworks now find a space on the World Wide Web and, as a result, "[...] contemporary art, as a category, was/is forced, against its will, to deal with this new distribution context or at least acknowledge it." [3] Quite naturally, this would seem like a strong oppositional force directed against the modus operandi of the mainstream art world. Yet, further down in the same page, McHugh characterizes this acknowledgement as a constituent part of the much larger "game" that is played by commercial galleries, biennials, museums and auction houses.

Thus, there are inevitable contradictions and challenges in the role that post-internet art is called to fulfil as a movement and/or as a status of cultural production. Firstly, there is an easily identifiable 'anxiety' to historicize a phenomenon that is very much in progress: the Internet is changing so rapidly, that if we think of the online landscape ten years ago, this would be radically different from our present experience of it. Furthermore, the post-internet theorization of contemporary art runs the danger of aestheticizing (or over-aestheticizing) a context that goes well beyond the borders of art: in the same way that we could talk about post-internet art, we could also talk about post-internet commerce, post-internet dating, post-internet travel, post-internet journalism, etc. Therefore, the role and the identity of the post-internet artist are not independent of a much wider set of conditions. This false notion of autonomy is quite easy to recognize if we think, for instance, of 'post-radio art' or 'post-television art' or, even, 'post-videogames art,' and the inherent structural and conceptual limitations of such approaches. [4]

Most importantly, however, any kind of aestheticization may readily become a very effective tool of depoliticization. The idea of distributing images, sounds and words that merely form part of a pre-existing system of power, inescapably eradicates the political significance of distribution. The subversive potentiality inherent in the characterisation of a network as 'distributed' was systematically undermined over the 1990s and the 2000s, due to the ideological perva-

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siveness of neoliberalism during the same period. Distribution – not to mention, *equal* distribution – could have enjoyed a much more prominent role as a natural fundament of the Web and, accordingly, as a contributing factor in any investigation of digital art. Last but definitely not least, one cannot ignore the crucial fact that apolitical art is much easier to enter the art market and play the 'game' of institutionalization (and vice versa).

To the question: could the Internet and new media at large become true 'game changers' in the current historical conjuncture? What does 'red art' have to propose, and how does it relate to the previously described 'post-internet condition'?

Interestingly, the term "post-internet art" was born and grew parallel to the global economic crisis and the Great Recession of 2009. One the most important objectives of the social movements that were engendered by the crisis has been the effort to "reclaim" and "re-appropriate." This aspiration referred not only to economic resources, but also to social roles, democratic functions, human rights, and – of course – urban spaces. Syntagma Square in Greece, Puerta del Sol in Madrid, Zuccotti Park in New York, as well as some of the most iconic public locations around the world saw diverse, or even 'irreconcilable' in some cases crowds demand change. Within the reality of Data Capitalism and its multiple self-generated crises, people increasingly felt that they have now been totally deprived of a place ("topos" in Greek).

It is worth remembering that the coiner of "utopia," Thomas More, chose an island as the location where he placed his ideal society. [5] Any island constitutes a geographic formation that privileges the development of individual traits through a natural process of 'appropriation.' This encompasses both the material and the immaterial environment as expressed in the landscape, the biology of the different organisms, and – most relevant to our case – culture. Notably, when it comes to connecting utopianism with the cultural paradigm of new media art, we should not focus merely on the lack of a physical space (as articulated, for instance, through cyberspace); rather, we should address the juxtaposition of "topos" with a potentially 'empty' notion of "space." The transcendence of space in a 'digital utopia' absolutely necessitates the existence of a 'topos.' In a similar way to the one that Marx sees capitalism as a stage towards a superior system of production (communism), [6] the construction of a 'topos' is a prerequisite for the flourishing of utopianism.

'Red Art' can be understood as a tool for the creation of such 'topoi.' The lesson that new media artists can learn from the political osmoses catalyzed by the economic crisis is that, in order to be effective, cyberspace should become part of a strategy that combines physical and online spaces, practically and conceptually, whilst taking into account the individual traits of both. The necessity expressed through this combination constitutes (at least partly) a departure from the developing discourses around the 'Internet of Things' or the 'Internet of Places.' [7] Alternatively, or additionally, what is proposed here is the formulation of an 'Internet of Praxis' (including, of course, artistic praxis). This approach is vividly reflected in several of the projects examined in this publication, as well as in the theoretical frameworks that are outlined.

Digital art is today in a position to capitalize on the participatory potentialities that have been revealed by the socio-political events that defined the early 2010s. The reconceptualization of cyberspace as a 'cybertopos' is a constituent part of this new ground on which people are called to stand and build. Accordingly, the emergence of a culture of 'post-net participation' in which digital media transcend physical space by consolidating it (instead of 'merely' augmenting it), may allow us to explore "concrete utopias" [8] to a greater extent than ever before in recent times. It is by actively pursuing this objective that we would expect to change the rules of the game. Artists are often the first to try.

Bill Balaskas

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1. The term 'post-internet art' is attributed to artist Marisa Olson. See Gene McHugh, *Post Internet* (Brescia: LINK Editions), 5.
2. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels published *The Manifesto of the Communist Party* in London, on February 21, 1848.
3. Gene McHugh, *Post Internet*, 6.
4. The etymological comparison between the terms 'post-internet art' and 'postmodern art' could also highlight this context. Notably, in the case of this juxtaposition, 'post-internet art' puts a tool (the Internet) in the position of a movement (Modernism). If we were to consider the Internet as a movement, then, the natural historical link that would be established through the term 'post-internet art' would be with net art. Nevertheless, such a decision would assign net art to a status of 'legitimization,' towards which major museums, curators and art fairs have shown a rather consistent hostility. In this instance, historicization becomes a foe, since it would refute a 'neutral' relationship of the Web with art. This perspective is closely connected with the formation of an abstract notion of universalism, to which I refer further down (see endnote 8).
5. Thomas More's *Utopia* was first published in 1516, in Belgium. There are several translations of the book.
6. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, with an introduction by David Harvey (London: Pluto Press, 2008), 51: "What the bourgeoisie therefore produces, above all, are its own grave-diggers. Its fall and the victory of the proletariat are equally inevitable."
7. The Internet of Things represents a vision in which physical items become 'smart' objects by being equipped with sensors that can be remotely controlled and connected through the Internet. The Internet of Places focuses on the spatial dimension of the capacities that Web 2.0 offers. For an account of the Internet of Things, see Mattern, Friedemann and Christian Floerkemeier, "From the Internet of Computers to the Internet of Things," in *Informatik-Spektrum*, 33 (2010): 107–121, http://www.vs.inf.ethz.ch/publ/papers/Internet-of-things.pdf (accessed February 20, 2014). For an account of the Internet of Places, see Giuseppe Conti, Paul Watson, Nic Shape, Raffaele de Amicis and Federico Prandi, "Enabling the 'Internet of Places': a virtual structure of space-time-tasks to find and use Internet resources," in *Proceedings of the 2nd International Conference on Computing for Geospatial Research & Applications* (New York: ACM, 2011), 9.
8. For more on the concept of 'concrete utopias' see Ernst Bloch, *The Principle of Hope*, tr. Neville Plaice, Stephen Plaice, and Paul Knight, 3 vols (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986). Bloch differentiates between 'abstract utopias' and 'concrete utopias,' associating the latter with the possibility of producing real change in the present. 'Concrete utopias' should not be confused with seemingly similar theorizations such as Nicolas Bourriaud's 'microtopias,' which structurally aim at preserving the existing status quo. Bourriaud asserts in *Relational Aesthetics* (2002) that "it seems more pressing to invent possible relations with our neighbours in the present than to bet on happier tomorrows." Quite evidently, this approach stands far from the universalism that he advocates in his *Altermodern Manifesto* (2009) as a direct result of new technologies and globalization. At a time when neoliberal capitalism was entering its worst ever crisis, Bourriaud chose to largely ignore this context and build on a concept that – in the end – is apolitical and counter-utopian. 'Post-internet art' appears to follow a comparably dangerous trajectory.

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Suggestions for Art That Could Be Called Red

What is Red Art? Or rather: what could Red Art be in today's post-communist, post-utopian world, a world shaken by conflicts engendered by contrary beliefs and ideologies which have little to do with communism? A world in which countries and societies are disrupted by territorial disputes, and by bloody fights about questions of religious identity, national identity, and ideology? Where communism has been overrun by capitalism with rare exception; where the European left movement is weak. Where the post-industrial era has produced an economic reality that is orders of magnitude more complex, transnational and therefore more difficult to control or change, than history has ever seen. In this situation, can there (still) be art that deals with ideas of communism constructively, or does contemporary art look at communist ideals only with nostalgia?

And let's be clear: is art that simply speaks out against capitalism, globalisation and neo-liberalism from a leftist position – is this kind of art 'red' per se? Do we expect Red Art to be 'red' in content, for instance, in directly addressing topics such as class struggle, the negatives of capitalism and a new neo-liberal world order? And if it does, is it enough to be descriptive or do we want art to be more than that, i.e., provoking, forward-thinking or even militant? In 1970, Jean-Luc Godard drafted a 39-point manifesto *Que faire? What is to be done?* that contrasted the antagonistic practices of making political films and making films 'politically.' It called unequivocally for art that actively takes up the position of the proletarian class and that aims for nothing less than the transformation of the world. With his legacy, what kind of objectives do we request from Red Art? Do we really still think that art can change the world or is that another idea from the past that has been overwritten by something that we like to call reality? Can art that is for the most part commercialised and produced in a capitalist art market be 'red' at all, or does it have to reject the system established by galleries, fairs and museums in order to be truly 'red'?

Decades ago, when artists started to use new media such as video and the computer, their works were 'new' in the way they were produced and distributed, and changed the relationship between artists and their collaborators as well as between the artworks and their audiences and 'users' respectively. Most of this new-media-based art circulated outside the ordinary market and found other distribution channels. The majority of works were inspired by a quest for the 'new' and consistently broke with old aesthetic principles and functions. Much of it was also driven by a search for the 'better,' by overthrowing old hierarchies and introducing a more liberal and inclusive concept of the world, based on self-determination and active participation. Last but not least the emergence of the Internet brought us a fertile time for new and revisited utopias and artistic experiments dealing with collaboration, distribution of knowledge, shared authorship, and appropriation of technologies. Today we know that neither the Internet nor any other new technology has saved us, but that the hopes for a more democratic world and alternative economies sparked by it have come true, if only to a minor degree.

So how do artists respond to this post-communist, post-utopian condition? What can be discussed as Red Art in the recent past and present? In this issue of Leonardo we have gathered some answers to these questions in the form of papers, essays and artworks, the latter produced especially for this purpose. Bringing together and editing this issue was challenging because we decided from the start to keep the call for contributions as open as possible and to not predefine too much. We were interested in what kind of responses our call would produce at a moment when the world is occupied with other, seemingly hotter topics, and it is fascinating to note that the resulting edition quite naturally spans decades of art production and the respective 'new' technologies as they related to ideas of social equality and empowerment – from video art to net art to bio art. This issue shows that the search for alternative ideas and perspectives, and an adherence to leftist ideals is neither futile nor simply nostalgic. But that this search is ever more relevant, particularly at a time when European politics is seemingly consolidating and wars around the world are establishing new regimes of social and economic inequality.

Susanne Jaschko

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Why Digital Art is Red

The divide between the art shown in major museums and art fairs and that associated with the new media scene has been deep and durable. Many critics have puzzled over it, particularly because there is much that the two realms share, including the desire to put people into unusual social situations. [1] Yet some of the reasons for the divide are plain enough, and they are about money, power and social distinction. The economic divide is across competing models of capitalist activity: the exclusive ownership of objects set against the release of reproducible symbols into networks with the ambition that they achieve maximum speed and ubiquity of circulation. The social divide is between a conservative club of super-rich collectors and patrons, and their attendant advisors, who buy their way into what they like to think of as a sophisticated cultural scene (Duchamp Land), against a realm which is closer to the mundane and more evidently compromised world of technological tools (Turing Land). [2] Power relations are where the divide appears starkest: in one world, special individuals known as artists make exceptional objects or events with clear boundaries that distinguish them from run-of-the-mill life; and through elite ownership and expert curation, these works are presented for the enlightenment of the rest of us. In the new media world, some 'artists' but also collectives and other shifting and anonymous producers offer up temporary creations onto a scene in which their works are open to copying, alteration and comment, and in which there is little possible control of context, frame or conversation.

This description of the divide has been put in extreme terms for the sake of clarity, and there are a few instances of the split appearing to erode. [3] Yet its persistence remains one of the most striking features of the general fragmentation of the fast-growing and globalising art world. That persistence rests on solid material grounds, laid out by Marx: the clash of economic models is a clear case of the mode and relations of production coming into conflict, and is part of a much wider conflict over the legal, political and social aspects of digital culture, and its synthesis of production and reproduction. [4] Copyright is one arena where the clash is very clear. Think of the efforts of museums to control the circulation of images and to levy copyright charges, while at the same time surrendering to the camera-phone as they abandon the attempt to forbid photography in their galleries.

So where is Red Art and the left in this scenario? Amidst the general gloom and lassitude that has beset much of the Left in Europe and the US, the development of the digital realm stands out as an extraordinary gain. It allows for the direct communication, without the intermediary of newspapers and TV, of masses of people globally – who turn out to be more egalitarian, more environmentally concerned and more seditious than the elite had bargained for. Alexander Cockburn, with his long career in activism and journalism, remarks:

> *Thirty years ago, to find out what was happening in Gaza, you would have to have had a decent short-wave radio, a fax machine, or access to those great newsstands in Times Square and North Hollywood that carried the world's press. Not anymore. We can get a news story from [..] Gaza or Ramallah or Oaxaca or Vidarbha and have it out to a world audience in a matter of hours.* [5]

It is hard to ban social media, it has been claimed, because it entwines video fads, kittens and politics (and banning kittens looks bad). So the insight attributed by some to Lenin – that capitalists will sell us the rope with which to hang them – is still relevant. [6]

In an era in which the political and artistic avant-gardes have faded, the affiliation of the art world that is founded upon the sale and display of rare and unique objects made by a few exceptional individuals – in which high prices are driven by monopoly rent effects – tends to be with the conspicuous consumption of the state and the super-rich. [7] Here, the slightest taint of the common desktop environment is enough to kill aesthetic feeling. The affiliation of at least some of new media art is rather to the kitsch, the populist, and to the egalitarian circulation of images and words, along with discourse and interaction. New media artists who push those attachments work against some of the deepest seated elements of the art world ethos: individualism, distinction, discreteness and preservation for posterity (and long-term investment value). It should be no surprise that they are frequently and without qualification denied the status of 'artist.'

It is also clear why the death of leftist ideas in elite discourse does not hold in new media circles, where the revival of thinking about the Left, Marxism and Communism is very evident. [8] The borders of art are blurred by putting works to explicit political use (in violation of the Kantian imperative still policed in the mainstream art world). [9] Very large numbers of people are continually making cultural interventions online, and value lies not in any particular exceptional work but in the massive flow of interaction and exchange. In that world, as it never could in a gallery, the thought may creep in that there is nothing special about any one of us. And this may lead to the greatest scandal of all: think of the statements that artists who deal with politics in the mainstream art world are obliged to make as their ticket of admission – 'my art has no political effect.' They have to say it, even when it is patently absurd; and they have to say it, even as the art world itself becomes more exposed to social media, and is ever less able to protect its exclusive domain and regulate the effects of its displays. So at base, the divide is economic, but at the level of what causes the repulsion from digital art – that puts collectors and critics to flight – it is deeply and incontrovertibly political. [10] They run headlong from the red.

Julian Stallabrass

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INVISIBLE HISTORIES, THE GRIEVING WORK OF COMMUNISM, AND THE BODY AS DISRUPTION

A Talk about Art and Politics

by

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ABSTRACT

This text is based on a conversation between myself and Åsa Sonjasdotter, visual artist and professor at Tromsø Academy of Fine Arts. In this text we will discuss my artistic research into the history of the revolutions of 1989 and of state-socialism in general – which is driven by my biographical investment in these histories – in relation to broader questions regarding the relationship between art and politics, and will consider what the notion of political struggle might mean in a post-communist world. Finally, we will analyze the role of the body, of physical experience, in remembering past political events and in opening them to the present day – through different artistic strategies.

INTRODUCTION

E: My art making and research follows on from a need to revisit my own history. Living through and partaking in the period of revolutionary openness between October 1989 and March 1990 in East Germany, at the age of 15, was the politically formative experience of my life. I experienced the subsequent accession of East Germany to the Federal Republic of Germany as the end of a unique collective experience lasting only a few months. It is in relation to the utopian horizon of this experience that my work has unfolded over the past years.

Initially, my research was driven by the sheer invisibility of these utopian aspects of 1989 in historiography. Neither the happy story of national re-unification, nor that of the vindication of true freedom in the form of West German representative democracy ring true with how I perceived this period. I knew that I was not alone in feeling this way; when talking to others who lived through these events, I saw their faces light up and their bodies tingle with excitement at the memory. But this excitement almost always came with an immediate apology, a disclaimer, saying that 'we' were naïve and that 'it' could have never worked out. This 'it' only ever got expressed as what it was not and how it could not have become, because of 'reality' or political circumstances. So, I became very interested in what this shared 'it' is, that people refer to, but can never quite put into words. There was this parallel motion of trying to find something, and almost prove something that is not present in official history – in a sense, to create a counter-history – and at the same time realizing, in talking to people, but also in looking at different types of documentation, that this 'it' is never quite there, cannot be communicated and may, in fact, not be communicable within the languages available to us.

A: To revisit this 'it' is to revisit a moment where things were open and possible, and I wonder if this is a strategy, to revisit this moment and to insist on it, to open up these questions again, to not accept that they are now closed forever? This is how I understand what you have said.

E: For sure, this was my intention with this work from the start, to re-open an experience and go against the claims that this revolution is closed, that its demands were redeemed. To insist instead, that there were a lot of things that happened at this moment and that were foreclosed by history, but that are, at the same time, not fully contained in historiography, but persists as a hope or desire or potentiality. And you get a sense of these things, when you look at how people respond to certain materials that I have shown from this period.

The first work I did on this theme was based on archival footage from the Robert-Havemann-Archiv in Berlin, where they have full documentation of the meetings of the so-called Central Round Table of the GDR. The Round Tables were an institution that sprung up everywhere, not only in Berlin, after the government lost its legitimacy in the autumn of 1989. They decided in November to start using this format, which came from Poland initially, as a mediation platform, where oppositional forces and members of the government could meet. Round Tables were set up in schools, universities, town halls and regional governments. The Central Round Table in Berlin, which was on the level of the national government, started on the 7th of December 1989. It essentially had a quasi-government function at the time, but was not based on representation. It is extremely fascinating, as it brings up all

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Figure 1. *May I Interrupt*, Elske Rosenfeld, 2009. Video Installation. Original footage courtesy of Robert-Havemann-Archiv, Berlin. © Elske Rosenfeld, 2009. Used with permission.

sorts of interesting issues to do with what happens when revolution starts to self-institutionalize. And this was the moment that I was interested in, to see what happens when revolution tries to install itself as permanent change, as institution.

I worked with a ten minute clip from the very first session of the Round Table that I had found looking through the transcripts, or rather the index/content pages of the transcripts for that day, where it said: "Demonstration passes the building." I immediately became interested in that, because in this instance you have the 'street,' the liminal space of revolution, clashing with this formal institution that is coming together for the first time. And this confrontation of the two is what makes the clip extremely interesting. You see people sitting in this space, which was a church assembly hall, and they have only been there for an hour or so, for the first time. Then you hear these sounds of whistling and shouting from the outside, and you have this sudden intensity and drama, because people do not know how to relate to this. Some people think the demonstration is there to support the Round Table, some perceive it as a threat, and everybody thinks they have to legitimize themselves in the face of this demand from the street. Because, in fact, the 'street' was the sovereign at that time. So you have this brief moment, where the question of legitimacy is called up, and the question of action, because they are supposed to respond, but they do not manage. For ten minutes they talk about what can we do, who can we send out there, how can we represent the table out there, who will the people going out there represent, etc. – essentially going through the very basic vocabulary of politics.

This was the first piece of footage that I began working with and that I actually continue working with today.

In the first installation piece I made based on this, I had the video clip playing on a screen set into the surface of a table I built, next to a small frame with what was essentially the outcome of the Round Table meetings, namely a draft for a new East German constitution. To write this draft was one of the main tasks of the Round Table during its three months of existence. But in the course of these three months, the political situation had changed so dramatically, that by the time the draft was completed, it was already obsolete. The draft was produced by all political forces across society, the former socialist party, reform socialists, greens, citizens-rights people, social democrats, anarchists, women's groups etc., i.e. including people that you would not normally get in a 'government.' And together, in an extremely speeded-up process, they wrote a document that responded very concretely to how the project of state-socialism failed in East Germany. You could say that it amounted to a kind of implicit history of state-socialism, in the sense that it included very precise regulations regarding those points where this project was felt to have failed most specifically. But it is interesting also for its limitations; it is not a revolutionary manifesto or utopian document by any means, because of the unusual and wide-ranging group of people that worked on it not by majority vote, but solely on a consensus principle. This document was commissioned in December 1989, because the assumption was, that East Germany would continue to exist as a separate democratic, but not necessarily capitalist state. The revolutionaries at the Round Table were not in favor of reunification at that time, in fact, by and large it was not an issue in those early months. When the revolution started, it was about reforming socialism. But when the document was completed by March, it was already clear that things would no longer go that way. The use of the document in parliament was then openly sabotaged; it immediately became a subversive document. It also immediately became, and still is, extremely obscure.

In my installation, I was interested in the communication between the video clip and the constitution document. I showed this work at the Geschichtsforum in May 2009 in Berlin, which was the biggest cultural event in the context of the 20-year anniversary of the revolution, initiated by the German Cultural Foundation. And then I showed it again, in a different context, in Halle, my home town, in the actual building where the local Round Table took place and which is now owned by an art association, who put on a show there in October 2009 together with institutions that are invested in memory politics in Halle, but from a very official point of view.

I later expanded this work for an exhibition in the context of the Former West project at BAK in Utrecht in 2010. Here, I condensed the table into a smaller installation, with the video on a screen by the entrance of the room with my work. The original sound was on headphones, but the sound you heard when you approached the room, was the sound of the demonstration, the outside sound, the iconic sound of protest/revolution. So the inside/outside idea was there, but it was very condensed and that was the intro to the whole room. The room itself contained three parts: first, there was a table with a projection of me reading the Constitution booklet silently, but in real time from front to back. Effectively, visitors could read it along with me watching the video, although it still remained a solitary act of me reading this document. The other part was an interview I did with a guy who was at the Round Table, involved in the writing of the draft, but also in its printing, which was done by a very small oppositional publishing house in collaboration with the East German official state press. And next to the

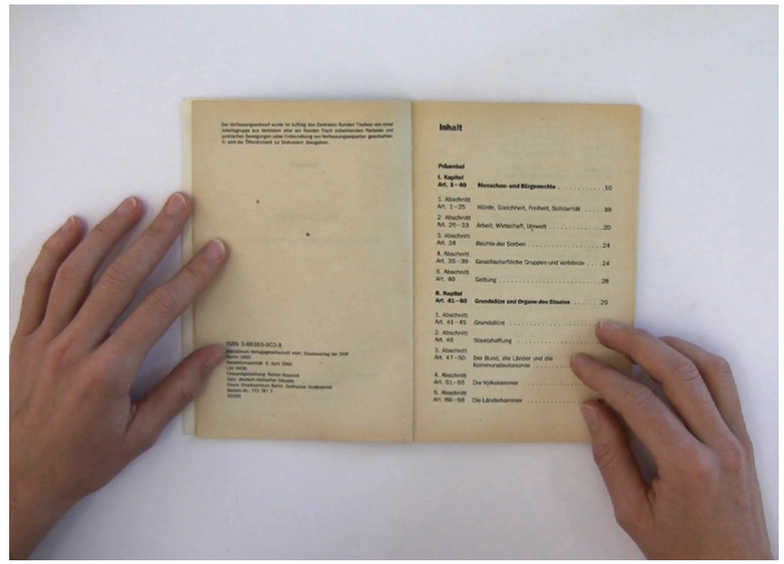

Figure 2. *Reading the Constitution*, Elske Rosenfeld, 2010. Video /Installation, HDV, color, 43 minutes. © Elske Rosenfeld, 2010. Used with permission.

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interview with the story of how it was published and distributed, I showed an image of the box in the storeroom of the publishing house today, that contains the last remaining 20 copies of the document. On the third wall was a video of the very last session of the Round Table, where representatives of the main political groupings take turns reading the constitution draft, already knowing that it will not be used.

A: I think this series of work relates to something I am very interested in, namely what art is, and can do, in relation to politics. In the first works you re-actualize the 'it' situation anew by directly presenting the constitution in the places where it was at stake, which are not art-contexts, whereas in the last installation, which is presented in an art-context, you develop a more complex reading of the situation. It seems to me as if these different kinds of locations, representing politics versus art, carry different possibilities for reworking the 'it' moment.

E: Initially, I placed this material in an art context in order to see how it could be read outside of the narratives in which it has been encapsulated over the last 20 years. But I think, what I am moving towards in my work now is not to rely entirely on this kind of transfer from the space of historiography or document to the space of art, but to see how and by what other means such a transfer can be achieved, in order to bring this material closer to the 'it' that I am searching for. And I am finding that this 'it' is less accessible in purely documentary material, but begins to come into view, if you introduce different forms of, let us call it, artistic authorship – if that is the right word.

A: Yes, the second presentation of your work has more layers of complexity, also because you include yourself in it. It is about you reading the material, and you add that to the other perspectives of the film clip, the inside and outside, and the perspective of the person who was involved in the printing and writing of the constitution. You introduce the layer of the *now* and what it means for you to read this text now. The complexity of the relations contains so much, that the place where it is shown is less important than your 'authorship.'

E: Yes, although the installations in Berlin and Halle also importantly functioned as interventions in specific constellations of memory politics, which by and large followed the established narratives of this history.

A: And then to place it in these situations as an intervention can be very powerful.

E: Yes, the placing was important. And I think the question is also what your main impulse in doing this is. This is something I am still working out, but back then I wanted it to be very immediate, a very direct intervention in the commemorative events that were going on in 2009, an almost activist, direct idea of what art can do, of how it can take effect. I came from this very literal concept of political or documentary art – the idea of showing something that is not otherwise visible and achieving something just by doing that. But I think art can also function in a different way, as you mentioned, in creating an openness that is somehow closely related to the openness of the revolutionary moment itself. And this openness can in some ways be an almost anti-activist space, because activism suggests a clear instruction or message coming with the work, and my earlier works had an element of this immediacy. Now, I am increasingly also interested in how art creates a sense of openness or disruption in the ways of speaking about politics or about history, in a way that does not follow a counter-documentary impulse of saying 'this is how it was.' How art can open an experience up again, without necessarily immediately putting a label on it. I guess, this will be easier to explain when we talk about my more recent works. But it is great that we already have this framework for talking about my work, the different ways art can be political, or interact with an audience, or have an impact.

My next larger project was *Watchtower/Ghosts*, which I conducted over four months in the summer of 2010 in a former East German border watchtower in Berlin. I used the tower as a kind of open studio, making my research available there, but also inviting different protagonists from 1989 for a series of talks that touched on different aspects of this history. In terms of our discussion of how art can be political, I guess, this was partly research for me and for my own purposes, but it was also very much about creating a sense that there is an experience that is shared, rather than individual, and to see what happens, if you bring together people whose past experience has been muted and individualized to such a shocking degree.

A: This somehow also makes me think of Adorno and Horkheimer, and what they wrote about how to recover Marxism, which they found had either been hijacked by the Stalinists or domesticated within Social Democracy. So, I am thinking of the work they did in using cultural criticism as a way to reflect on their own failures. This might be an interesting parallel.

E: Yes, and in my work this kind of critical reflection is, in fact, addressed to two different audiences or groups: Firstly, there is an ephemeral or, if you will, non-community that I attempt to create around my work by calling on those who shared this experience, and the experience of its invisibility. In this sense, my interventions in Halle and Berlin were also always investigations of how this experience can call upon such an audience and address it specifically as a 'community' vis à vis a particular experience, rather than as isolated individuals. The same goes even for a more recent work which I did in public space, in the streets of a Leipzig neighborhood, in 2012, where I worked with magazine covers and texts from the period, and which, again, communicates a political excitement and a horizon that differs widely and goes far beyond what the revolution is held to have 'achieved' officially.

Secondly, also to move on to a different strand of my research, my work is addressed to the Western dominated present-day leftwing, of which I am also very much a part. I feel that I can bring a different kind of critical perspective to this project – that of the experience of real existing socialism. To remind us, that this idea of communism, which has such currency again today, was actually supposedly implemented, or at least in the process of being implemented, in this whole part of the word. To look at the particularities of how this project failed concretely, without cynicism, but also without self-censorship, and to follow the need for some kind of grieving work about this. To look at all that could have been, and how it was thwarted again and again by concrete acts. So, a starting point was to look at communist iconographies and the different desires they evoke in people from the Western and, on the other hand, the Eastern European left. A first project, which I started at a residency in Canada, came out of a conversation I had there with a very well-known American Marxist philosopher, who was there as a tutor. When I told him about my work, he said, this is all very interesting, but to me as a Marxist, the history of state-socialism is not relevant. And this was not the first time that I have heard that from high-profile leftwing Western academics.

A: That seems like an extremely lazy position. If you want to talk about Marxism you have to think about what happened in state-socialism. This is again why I think Adorno and Horkheimer are so relevant in how they consider theirs as well as other's failures.

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Figure 3. *Red Flag, Original, GDR*, Elske Rosenfeld, 2011. Photo Series. © Elske Rosenfeld, 2011. Used with permission.

E: Yes, and this is, once again, a very clear and immediate political impulse to doing what I do. In response to this conversation in Canada, I started looking on eBay and researching for East German produced red flags and made a series of prints of those images, exactly as they were posted on eBay, with a small text plate next to them that states where and when they were purchased, alongside the name of the East German factory where they were produced.

I continued with this theme at a residency in Berlin Pankow, in a building that used to be a home of the FDJ, the communist youth organization of East Germany. In fact, the whole surrounding area is interesting – it was known as the home of the party and cultural elites in the early days after the founding of the state. Many politicians had their homes there, the embassies were there, there was a street where all the writers and artists returning from exile after the war were housed, Eisler, Becher, etc. And a former Prussian palace there became the seat of the first prime minister and later the official guesthouse of the East German government.

The project I did here was a bit of a follow-on from the Red Flag project, because I had bought this red flag fabric and was thinking about working with this material. I had come across a piece by the artist Felix Gmelin, where he re-enacts a film by Gerd Conrad from 1968. Conrad had some students relay-run through West-Berlin with a red flag, and Gmelin re-staged this in Stockholm in 2002. I decided not to restage it for the third time, but to use the same camera perspective going through some streets of Pankow, with basically an empty space in the middle, where the relay runners are in the original video. The voice-over is going through what these places were and what their role in the architecture of the East German state was, to give an idea of an actual state apparatus, a power apparatus, being in place, that is supposed to be the implementation of the communist project. On the other monitor you see me stitching up one of the pieces of red fabric to make it into a flag and put it on a handle. The third component I included was a Mayakovsky poem – for the simple reason that the main street that people associate with this area is Mayakovsky Street. And, of course, Mayakovsky was the most prominent poet of the early Soviet Union until he committed suicide in 1930, which was very much hushed up. There is this one poem from 1929 where you can get this implicit, but still very present sense of his disillusionment with the project of the revolution. This is another entry point into the tragedy of the failure of this great project, through one of its early protagonists, who sees his life-project fail and kills himself.

So essentially, the second strand of my work deals with this, a kind of grief work around the project of state-socialism, but a form of grieving and dissecting that nonetheless insists on the validity of a political project that aims beyond the status quo.

My next project after these two was the video *Je ne rentrerai pas*, which goes back to my research on 1989 and revolution, and the question of what other

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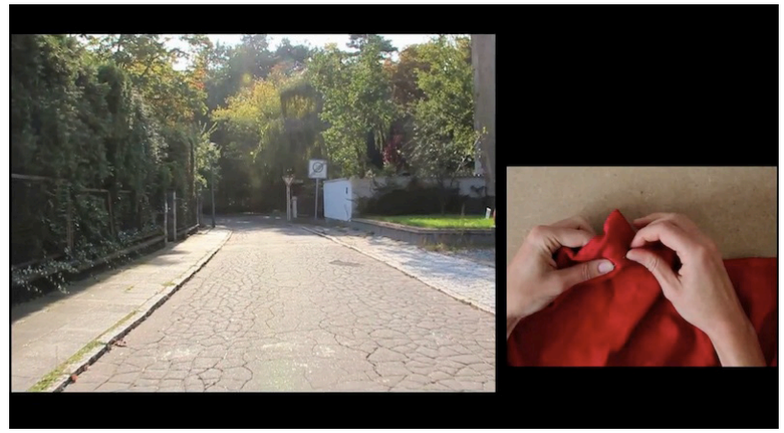

Figure 4. *Pankow Colourtest (Die Rote Fahne, III)*, Elske Rosenfeld, 2011. Video installation or 2-channel video, HDV, color, 14 minutes. © Elske Rosenfeld, 2011. Used with permission.

ways, beyond narrative or documentation, you have as an artist of engaging with such an experience. I decided to go back to a film that I saw a few years ago at a film festival in Oslo, the French militant film *La Reprise de Travaille aux Usine Wonder*, which was made by Jacques Willemont in 1968. It is a ten-minute clip of the end of a strike, where one of the striking women is standing outside the gates of a factory refusing to go back inside. When I first saw this in Oslo, it was not even subtitled, so I just knew the situation, and I saw her face and her body language, and I was completely blown away by it. It was the most powerful image for my experience of 1989 that I had ever come across – much more so than any documentary material I had seen from the period itself. So this clip had been in my head for a long time, I had written a short text about my encounter with it, and I decided to go back to it, and intervene in the footage directly, based on this earlier text. What I was interested in, was to use this to look into the non-verbal, almost gestural level of this type of experience – in this film, but also in much of my material from 1989. To work with the fact that the intensity of this kind of moment is not in the language, but in the non-verbal, the physical.

In the film, I go through different motions of engaging with the material and confronting it with my own experience of 1989. I took only three minutes from the original film and I go through it in different loops around the moment where she screams: "I am not going back inside, I am not going back into that pigsty of yours" in French. Which is the only text from the film that is translated, the rest is in French. I even worked on the sound a bit to make it harder to understand, even if you do speak French, just to recreate my experience with the film of not understanding the words. The three-minute clip is basically of her shouting, while the two union officials try to calm her down, and this clip gets repeated in different ways. First of all, there is the level of what she does and how she goes through this set of gestures, which one could maybe describe as an affective cycle from being resigned and depressed, listening to the officials and almost giving up, but still with a sense of defiance, and then erupting again with rage. In the original footage you have about five full cycles of this motion, of which I picked one. From almost giving in, listening to 'reason,' to flaring up again with rage, insisting again, that you cannot go back inside. In two of the cycles of this full set of motions I use very minimal text. One cycle shows her cut out in front of a white background, and on the second screen I show quotes from a documentary that was made by Hervé Le Roux in the 90ies, using a few statements from his interviews with her former colleagues, where they all say how much they empathized with her and felt the same way. The second cycle is of her being cut out of the image and the two men talking to her empty silhouette from both sides, where I used quotes from a translation of what they were saying, all the reasons for why she should be content with the small changes that the strike has achieved, and go back inside, and not be upset. And you have this minimal text alongside her going through this cycle of gestures, of her rearing up and calming down. From that I wanted to do something that continues this physical process as a space of

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Figure 5. *Je ne rentrerai pas*, Elske Rosenfeld, 2011. 2-channel video, HDV, b/w and color, 7 minutes. Original footage Courtesy of Jacques Willemont. © Elske Rosenfeld, 2010. Used with permission.

resistance into the present. To work on this space as anchored in the body, to enact it through my bodily recognition of her refusal and her rage. So, I experimented with a few gestures that repeat, recreate this space in the body, gesturally.

I have been reading a lot about gesture, and on performance and body art, and I am becoming extremely interested in the idea of the body as an outside to language, and therefore as a possible site of disruption. I think there is something important in this for understanding revolution, or 'the Political' in more general terms, especially if you look at how the recent uprisings in Cairo, or the Occupy movement have been so much about the physical formation and sustenance of a community of bodies in space. I think it is important to insist on this physical level of the Political, especially because the body has been neglected to such a degree by post-structuralist theory, and the suspicion this has caused, also in the field of art, towards using the body, because of the claims of authenticity and the essentialist overtones of a certain type of body art.

In order to get a better understanding of this, I have started looking at more contemporary material, from 2011, and at how these events were constituted above all by such physical acts as camping, sleeping and eating together in space. I am collecting images of those activities from different protest sites and planning to develop some performative, maybe choreographic work around those. Right now I am working on a script for a performance based on the note that was put up around Zuccotti Park on November 15th 2011 to end the protests there. This notice goes through a list of activities that are being prohibited, and it is extremely specific about which bodily position you are allowed, or not allowed to assume in the square, in terms of lying, or reclining, or sitting down. So these restrictions concern very basic physical positions, and not political actions in the classical sense of giving speeches or holding up banners.

I am also working on some material I shot in Cairo last year in February with a friend of mine from there, where we drove around Tahrir Square one night in her car in three circles, while talking about revolution. This gesture in some ways marks the endpoint of a revolution, or maybe not actual endpoint, but point of disillusionment after revolution, but at the same time it performs this moment of potential closure and disillusionment also as a physical gesture of persistence, by going round the square physically, several times.

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A: I really find it interesting that you, through this whole process, arrive at the body and the non-verbal. I share your analysis that so much of what is at stake concerns the subjugation of the physical body, and it tells something about the urgency of the situation, where much else is already lost. The name *Occupy* also shows that this is the strategy, to go out in the streets and insist with your physical body by not leaving the place.

E: Absolutely, and the next thing I want to do is bring my investigations of the physical in these more recent situations back into my work on the past, and how it relates to this deep sense, that something of my experience of 1989, and therefore of the experience of revolution in general, persists in the body as potentiality, even after revolution becomes closed down in language, re-institutionalization and historiography. I think, this work is so pressing, because within a classical concept of emancipation as linear progress, all of these revolutions, the one in 1989, the one in Cairo, even the events of 1968, must be considered as failed, at least in terms of the ambitions of their original protagonists. I am interested instead, in a notion of the Political that is not linear, that unfolds on this juncture between order and the opening/rupture of this order. And then to ask how art can contribute to creating such instances of rupture or openness, also by working directly on bodies and on embodied memory of a past political experience. To create experiences of entering such an outside, and to see if and what shifts can occur in this back and forth between outside and status quo. And this, of course, proposed a particular relationship between art and politics that I want to understand better and continue to experiment with. ■

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