

**Carolyn Christov Bakargiev**

**“The dance was very frenetic, lively, rattling, clanging, rolling, contorted, and lasted for a long time”**

**Originally published in C. Christov-Bakargiev, *The Book of Books*, dOCUMENTA(13), Hatje Cantz and documenta und Museum Fridericianum gGmbH, 2012, pp. 30-45**

i. to see from the point of view of the meteorite

The riddle of art is that we do not know what it is until it is no longer that which it was.

Furthermore, art is defined as much by what it is, as by what it is not; by what it does, or can do, as by what it does not, or cannot do; it is defined even by what it fails to achieve.

One of the projects that did not come to fulfillment in dOCUMENTA (13) is the proposal to bring the second-largest meteorite in the world, called El Chaco, from the north of Argentina to a spot in front of the Fridericianum in Kassel, not far from Walter De Maria’s invisible yet present 1977 *Earth Kilometer*, for 100 days. This proposal, made by the artists Guillermo Faivovich and Nicolás Goldberg, was unexpected and rubbed up against our sense of being *emplaced* in the advanced digital age. It would have been the heaviest single object to have ever in history been transported by humans, from one point in the Southern Hemisphere of our planet to a distant point in the Northern Hemisphere, where it was intended to become a temporary point of reference and meditation on objecthood, time, and place. Although—compared with its weight of thirty-seven tons—rather small in size (about 240 x 220 x 200 cm), it could have functioned as a gigantic transitional object, temporarily shared by many people for the moment of its exhibition.<sup>1</sup> This thirty-seven-ton rock, an

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<sup>1</sup> Poet, novelist and painter Etel Adnan (b. Beirut, 1925) wrote on January 26, 2012, that “the presence of the El Chaco meteorite in Kassel will be of the greatest importance. It will link us first to Argentina, which has been the site for the meteorite for four thousand years; it will also so perfectly link us to outer space in a dramatic way. It will remind the world that the landing of meteorites on Earth is in itself a spiritual-cosmic event. A visitation from the yet unknown. It will be documenta’s focal point in Kassel, the presence of an archangel incarnated in stone, and will repeat to us that the center of the universe is everywhere, and in this case, in a poetic way, is wherever El Chaco will stand. The ‘movement’ of El Chaco from its present site to another point of our planet will start, or accelerate, the movement of our thinking. The meteorite is a space vessel, and it may complete another traveling. The visual contemplation of it, a mystic experience, will take us back to Gagarin, Armstrong, the astronauts who came after them, and the human travelers who will follow. It will not take us back, not really, it will take us ahead, it will be an invitation for the human race to

object much older than Earth, a tiny fragment from a large meteor that collided with Earth's atmosphere and shattered into many fragments, or meteorites, had come from much farther away in the universe and had fallen onto our planet thousands of years ago, pulled by gravity, sinking under the surface, where it remained, creating an energy field aboveground caused by the density of pure iron core present in its materials, until it was excavated in the twentieth century and left aboveground, naked to the elements, in a park near the town of Gancedo.

This project ran up against the opposition of some anthropologists and various members of the Moqoit indigenous community, who, as traditional custodians, did not all agree to its loan. Some felt that where nature had positioned the meteorite, there it should stay forever, according to a view of natural and cultural heritage and patrimonial rights. The opponents were surely also motivated by other valid social and political struggles—the fraught and violent history of the past generalized theft of indigenous lives, lands, and cultures during the colonial period and up to today in many parts of the world. Certain very legitimate rights conflicted with the imagination of the temporary togetherness that the meteorite in Kassel intended to create, and the project was abandoned, both by the artists and by documenta, whose aspirations were not those of dividing people, but rather of bringing people together through this object.

And what if we asked ourselves, beyond this irresolvable contradiction, what was to see things from the position of the meteorite? It had traveled through vertiginous space before landing on Earth and settling. Would it have wished to go on this further journey? Does *it* have any rights, and if so, how can they be exercised? Can it ask to be buried again, as some of the Moqoit argue, or would it have enjoyed a short trip to an art exhibition, rather than a science or world's fair? What shift in its inner life would its being emplaced temporarily in Kassel have brought—being in one place, Kassel, and not in *another* place, for example Argentina? What is this *displaced* position, generated by the perception of a simultaneous being in different spaces, where the collapse of time and distance provokes a new sense of what it means to be always in one place, and not in another place? A meteorite on earth is arrested motion through space by definition, it is what remains of a collision. What kind of collision does the proposed motion to Kassel and arrest of that motion by the claims of place produce for documenta? What kind of cosmic dust links Argentina and Kassel in this

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continue our destiny, it will constitute a new point of departure toward the mystery of Being.”

collision of absence, or absent collision?

ii. to intend

documenta is a state of mind. Its history is different from other international exhibitions of contemporary art, mainly because it did not emerge from the nineteenth-century trade fairs or world's fairs of the colonial period—bringing to the old European center the marvels of the world. It emerged instead after World War II, out of trauma, and within a space where collapse and recovery are articulated. It emerged at the juncture where art is felt to be of the utmost importance as an international language and world of shared ideals and hopes, as well as the most useless of all possible activities, in a state of autonomy, as was argued during modernism.

This is a movement that is explored in the choreography of dOCUMENTA (13). Most recent usages of the term “choreography” (etymologically, the writing of a script for the sequences performed by a chorus of singers or dancers coming and going onstage) are connected with forms of harmony, found relations, participating together. Notions of self-choreography and improvisation became predominant in the choreographic imagination of the 1990s—dancing together to find new forms of agreement and democratic aesthetics. However, the notion of a harmonious syncing of people through a set of relations also repeats the false and stereotypical views of the harmonious syncing of bodies in productive economies during globalization—putting people in different places to work efficiently through the apparent improvisations achieved with smartphones and other digital technologies. The choreography of dOCUMENTA (13) is instead *un*-harmonic and frenetic, while also producing some shared understanding of this condition through alternative alliances and bonds. The appearance of movements and positions in different places does not suggest that we dance together in utopia; rather, this choreography relies on a spatial turn of *dis-placedness*, on a contorted interplay of movements in several places that cannot ever really be synced, that cannot ever be “global”; and the participants of and visitors to dOCUMENTA (13) are not encouraged to feel that they are everywhere at the same time, simultaneously experiencing life together in a synchronized manner.

The problems of today are primarily those of the acute and growing difference between the wealthy

and the poor in the world in the early twenty-first century, the subjugation of economy, society, and nature to financial systems interconnected with advances in computing power rather than with the production of material goods, and the problems and consequences of a conservative notion of “patrimony” (that cultural heritage is specifically *mine* and cannot be shared or merged in any way with that of others).<sup>2</sup> The technology that allows for this critical situation is the digital, and the time that characterizes it is speed and simultaneity and short attention spans.

But dOCUMENTA (13) is nonetheless not organized around any attempt to read historical conditions through art, or the ways in which art’s languages and materials might represent these historical conditions. Rather, it looks at moments of trauma, at turning points, accidents, catastrophes, crises—events that mark moments when the world changes. And it looks at them insofar as they are moments when relations intersect with things, moments when matter comes to *matter*,<sup>3</sup> as in the story of the Chaco meteorite.

Therefore, participants of dOCUMENTA (13) come from a range of fields of activity. They come mostly from art but also science, including physics and biology, eco-architecture and organic agriculture, renewable-energy research, philosophy, anthropology, economic and political theory, language and literature studies, including fiction and poetry. They contribute to the space of dOCUMENTA (13) that aims to explore how different forms of knowledge lie at the heart of the active exercise of re-imagining the world. What these participants do, and what they “exhibit” in dOCUMENTA (13), may or may not be art. However, their acts, gestures, thoughts, and knowledges produce and are produced by circumstances that are readable by art, aspects that art can cope with and absorb. The boundary between what is art and what is not becomes less important.

dOCUMENTA (13) is indeed dedicated to artistic research and forms of imagination that explore commitment, matter, things, embodiment, and active life in connection with, yet not subordinated to, theory and epistemological enclosures.

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2 Susan Buck-Morss, author of an essay, “The Gift of the Past,” in dOCUMENTA (13) notebook no. 004, in conversation with author in January 2012, and lecture “The History of Humanity Demands a Communist Mode of Reception,” New School for Social Research, New York, February 8, 2012.

3 See Karen Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning* (Durham, N. C.: Duke University Press, 2007).

These are terrains where politics is inseparable from a sensual, energetic, and worldly alliance between current undertakings in various scientific and artistic fields and other knowledges, both ancient and contemporary.

As mentioned in the introduction to this volume, dOCUMENTA (13) is driven by a holistic and non-logocentric vision that is shared with, and that recognizes, the knowledges of animate and inanimate makers of the world.

The attempt is to not to put human thought hierarchically above the ability of other species and things to think or produce knowledge. This does not mean that we are always able to access these other knowledges, although scientists, and in particular quantum physicists, do attempt to learn them—how, for example, photons dance and think together—but it gives a special perspective onto our own thinking. It makes us more humble, able to see the partiality of human agency, encouraging a point of view that is less anthropocentric. It is important that today an alliance is forged between, on the one hand, progressive social thought, traditionally anthropocentric due to its engagement with social and economic injustice in human communities and, on the other, the current legacy of ecological perspectives.<sup>4</sup> This is important so that current ecological thinking around autonomy and sustainability is not misunderstood, or at risk of being trapped within nationalistic and traditionalist localisms.

Feminism in the 1970s articulated the notion that the private sphere was not separate from the public sphere and that, in that private world, lay a fault line of politics. It worked through questions of “othering,” at times in antagonism with leftist intellectual groups that preferred to discuss politics only in terms of class struggle and the sphere of production. Time proved that the bio-political fault line was indeed an essential terrain of contestation, and that our innermost subjectivity, both physical and mental, had become the space of colonization, down to the smallest gene. Today, following Donna Haraway and other thinkers, that fault line seems to have shifted once again. The emancipatory potential for thinking in new ways without producing constituted knowledge that is instrumental and easily transformed into negotiable investments could lie in an accord between human and the many non-human intelligences, affects and beliefs, emotions and forms of trust, that

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4 Michael Hardt, “Two Faces of the Apocalypse: A Letter from Copenhagen,” *Polygraph*, no. 22 (2010), 265–74.

can be established among all the life-forms on the planet. This does not indicate less interest in humanity and people, their lives and cultures, their art and imaginations. It is based instead on the principle that more potential lies in “becoming with” than in mistrust, fear, and competition over resources and possibilities.

Philosopher and scientist Vinciane Despret argues,

The rat proposes to the student, as well as the student proposes to the rat, a new manner of becoming together, which provides new identities: rats giving to students the chance of “being a good experimenter,” students giving to their rats a chance to add new meanings to “being-with-a-human,” a chance to disclose new forms of “being together.”

She adds that trust is another form of love, and that the sense of trust enables the potential to become real. One puts oneself in the position of openness, of belief, of passion:

To “depassionate” knowledge does not give us a more objective world, it just gives us a world “without us”; and therefore, without “them”—lines are traced so fast. And as long as this world appears as a world “we don’t care for,” it also becomes an impoverished world, a world of minds without bodies, of bodies without minds, bodies without hearts, expectations, interests, a world of enthusiastic automata observing strange and mute creatures; in other words, a poorly articulated (and poorly articulating) world.<sup>5</sup>

A worldly intra-action with materials, objects, other animals and their perceptions, suggests forms of de-symbolization and disowning knowledge and notions of property, as well as providing the possibilities of a slower form of time—the time of materials. This involves reconnecting people with their ancient knowledge of directly caring for their own sustenance and food (and severing that from the corporate production of food, which can dramatically disempower humans in ways not seen in the past ten thousand years), as well as forms of de-growth, alternatives to financial exchange, as in time banks or barter economies, establishing possibilities for relations and intra-actions with all

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<sup>5</sup> Vinciane Despret, “The Body We Care For: Figures of Anthro-zoo-genesis,” in “Bodies on Trial,” ed. Madeleine Akrich and Marc Berg, *Body and Society* 10, nos. 2–3 (June 2004), pp. 111–34.  
<http://vincianedespret.blogspot.com/2010/04/body-we-care-for-figures-of-anthro.html>.

things that are not digital, sharing artworks and objects from different places and times, objects that are not always filmic.

iii. to be committed

This vision of commitment is intended to shift attention away from the anthropocentric toward a more balanced relationship with all the non-human makers with whom we share the planet and our bodies.<sup>6</sup> It found a common ground with the intentions of an artists' initiative called AND AND AND, a group formed in 2009 that organized, as part of dOCUMENTA (13), a series of events, interventions, situations, and occurrences in various parts of the world prior to the opening of the exhibition in Kassel. It began with a meeting at the U.S. Social Forum in Detroit, Michigan, on June 24, 2010 (Event 1), and continued with events and meetings across the world, including a discussion considering art and culture in post-revolutionary Tunisia on May 24, 2011 (Event 8), a letter in solidarity with the Occupy Wall Street movement (Event 10) in favor of the "aestheticians of an emergent politics," and a "trial" against Monsanto Corporation, the largest company producing GMO seeds in the world today on January 28, 2012 (Event 13). This artistic and political trial poetically and literally suggested that current judiciary frameworks are inadequate to deal with the scale and nature of the damages perpetrated. "Monsanto, under current law, is granted the rights of a legitimate 'person,' while human non-citizens and non-human agents in our biosphere are not recognized," wrote the Compass of the Midwest Radical Culture Corridor, a group invited to participate by AND AND AND. "Existing law produces exclusive notions of legitimacy and harm that ignore and damage entities that do not favor a reductive calculus of profit. Our proposition is to consider all living things as potential plaintiffs in an accounting of Monsanto's crimes."

AND AND AND events were subtle; they were spared attention by the media, they were remote from Kassel, so they could slowly build up a series of experiences into a density of memory toward their activities in Kassel during summer 2012, dedicated to emboldening cultures of the commons, non-capitalist life, practices of "revocation" of inherited values and norms, practices of artistic life.

The time span of several years, bit by bit, made up the meaning and validity of the AND AND AND

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<sup>6</sup> See Donna J. Haraway, *When Species Meet* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007).

projects, because it indicated their commitment.

Due to the fact that documenta occurs every five years, such a slow process was possible. Characterized particularly in terms of duration, which contrasts with the speed and short attention span of today, documenta-time does not go in the direction of efficiency and of the “pseudo-activities” of productive society. documenta may locate itself where the gaps in speech, the silences, and the words not even said under hypnosis find meaning. In that silence, emotions emerge that are able to break through the clutter of our times. It contrasts an element of *timeliness* to the constructed structures of *topicality*. It leaves space for the inoperative and the imperceptible, for the not-quite-appearing.

#### iv. to be placed and emplaced

dOCUMENTA (13) is located in an apparent simultaneity of places and times and against the backdrop of the impact of the Internet on how knowledge is produced and circulated in our world, on how subjectivity is constituted in an endless construction and reconstruction of the self, on how economy, politics, and society generally have been, and continue to be, affected and transformed by the digital. Over the past ten to fifteen years, a number of devices (desktop computers, laptops, iPads, cell phones, BlackBerries and iPhones) have indeed linked people in ways that were previously impossible, building “molecular” networks and archives where people are both more and more connected and more and more separated. Revolutions take place and governments topple as a consequence of the possibilities of smartphone technologies, but experience is increasingly indirect. Access to information is quicker and quicker, so more and more information needs to become available—hence the obsession with scanning and archiving as much as possible of our past and present lives. In the digital age, the past haunts us as never before, a potentially inexhaustible repository of traces of history. To build these archives of everything, more and more people have been put to work, and more and more collaboratively, in a knowledge-driven economy that increasingly functions on the basis of the products of this immaterial labor.<sup>7</sup> Cognitive labor

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<sup>7</sup> Cognitive capitalism has been widely studied over the past decade. See, for example, Franco Berardi Bifo, *Contro Il lavoro* (1970); Maurizio Lazzarato, *Lavoro Immateriale. Forme di vita e produzione di soggettività* (1997); Enzo Rullani and Luca Romano, *Il postfordismo. Idee per il capitalismo prossimo venturo* (1998); Enzo Rullani, “La conoscenza come forza produttiva: autonomia del post-fordismo,” in *Capitalismo e conoscenza*, ed. Lorenzo Cillario and Riccardo



produces goods of the intellect, and the control over and ability to use these flows of information determines forms of power, suggesting that the artist is caught between the emancipatory potential of artistic practice—the potential of the imagination—and the fact of being a prototype of the alienated, precarious creative laborer of the twenty-first century. At the same time, an infinitely close gaze onto the smallest subatomic particles reveals today in quantum physics a place and moment where reality coincides with information, where the mental and the physical, the subject of observation and the observation itself, are mutually engendering themselves, where people, their thoughts, and the things of the world are all interrelated and create one another in a world that is terrestrial and hardly immaterial.

Against this backdrop, dOCUMENTA (13) is articulated through four main positions corresponding to four possible conditions in which people, in particular artists and thinkers, find themselves acting in the present. The position of the artist in the world becomes a mode of the exhibition, a mode of apparition. Far from being exhaustive of all the positions that a subject can take, these positions or points of view acquire their significance in the mutual interrelation in which they resonate with one another. The four conditions that are put into play within the mental space and the real spaces of the project are the following:

- Under siege. I am encircled by the other, besieged by others.
- On retreat. I am withdrawn, I choose to leave the others, I sleep.
- In a state of hope, or optimism. I dream, I am the dreaming subject of anticipation.
- Onstage. I am playing a role, I am a subject in the act of re-performing.

The condition of being onstage, of *re-performativity* and virtuosity, concerns the question of the

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Finelli (1998); Nick Dyer-Witheford, *Cyber-Marx: Cycles and Circuits of Struggle in High Technology Capitalism* (1999); Enzo Rullani, “Le capitalisme cognitif: du déjà vu?” (2000); Bernard Paulré, “De la ‘New economy’ au capitalisme cognitif” (2000); Richard Sennett, *The Corrosion of Character: The Personal Consequences of Work in the New Capitalism* (2000); Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (2000); Franco Berardi Bifo, *La fabbrica dell’infelicità. New economy e movimento del cognitariato* (Rome: Derive Approdi, 2001); Paolo Virno, “General Intellect,” in *Lessico Postfordista. Dizionario di idee della mutazione*, ed. Adelino Zanini and Ubaldo Fadini (2001); Paolo Virno, *Grammatica della Moltitudine* (A Grammar of the Multitude, 2001); Jeremy Rifkin, *The Age of Access: The New Culture of Hypercapitalism, Where All of Life Is a Paid-For Experience* (2001); Y. Moulier Boutang, ed., *L’età del capitalismo cognitivo* (2002); Yann Moulier Boutang, *Le capitalisme cognitif: la nouvelle grande transformation* (2007); Andrew Ross interviewed by Geert Lovink, “Organic Intellectual Work” (2007); Antonio Negri and Judith Revel, “Inventer le commun des homes” (2008), Franco Berardi Bifo, *The Soul at Work: From Alienation to Autonomy* (2009); Andrew Ross, *Nice Work if You Can Get It: Life and Labor in Precarious Times* (2009).

display of art, the relations with an audience, and therefore the status of dOCUMENTA (13) as an exhibition but also the modalities and apparatuses, whether digital or not, through which people stage themselves, continuously re-performing subjectivity in inter-subjectivity. Kassel, which in the field of contemporary art is traditionally a key stage, acts as a metaphor for the last condition of the subject, but nonetheless contains aspects of the other three mentioned.

The four conditions (“onstage”/“under siege”/“in a state of hope”/“on retreat”) relate to the four locations in which dOCUMENTA (13) is physically and conceptually sited—Kassel, Kabul, Alexandria/Cairo, and Banff—while at the same time aiming at “unfreezing” the associations that are typically made with those places and conditions, which are constantly shifting. Each position is a condition, a state of mind, and relates to time in a specific way: while the retreat suspends time, being onstage produces a vivid and lively time of the here and now, the continuous present; while hope releases time through the sense of a promise, of time opening up and being unending, the sense of being under siege compresses time, to the degree that there is no space beyond the elements of life that are tightly bound around us.

dOCUMENTA (13) thus takes a spatial or, rather, “locational” turn, highlighting the significance of a physical place, but at the same time aiming for dislocation and for the creation of different and partial perspectives, a bit like that absent present meteorite—an exploration of micro-histories on varying scales that link the local history and reality of a place with the world. Like a *matryoshka* doll, it cracks open to reveal hidden spaces and narrations behind, inside, and underneath its surface. It speaks from the inside out in an act of ventriloquism—a second voice that comes from the belly, from inside the body.

In Kassel, the Fridericianum, the documenta-Halle, and the Neue Galerie are museum spaces that are in counterpoint with a variety of other spaces representing different—physical, psychological, historical, cultural—realms and realities. There are spaces devoted to natural and technological science, such as the Ottoneum and the Orangerie, and little houses throughout the magnificent wide green of the Baroque Auepark that recall the Monte Verità retreat/commune of the early 1900s near Ascona. There are “bourgeois” spaces of a different nature, used in the past and today forgotten—often spaces of leisure and social interaction during the postwar period of reconstruction—such as old ballrooms, cinemas, and hotels. Opposite the park are the industrial spaces in the area of the

former Hauptbahnhof, once Kassel's main station but now only used for local transport—a dystopian space connected to the factory world that produced the military tanks for the regime and bears witness to both the collapse and the prolongation of disastrous twentieth-century ideas.

On the ground floor in the Fridericianum, beyond a breeze created by artist Ryan Gander and the strains of Ceal Floyer's voice, the Rotunda is sealed off by glass. It contains a number of artworks, objects, photographs, and documents, brought together as a programmatic and oneiric space, in lieu of a concept. They are held provisionally together in this "Brain" of dOCUMENTA (13) to indicate not a history, not an archive, but a set of elements that mark contradictory conditions and committed positions of being in and with the world—pitting ethics, desire, fear, love, hope, anger, outrage, and sadness against the conditions of hope, retreat, siege, and stage. Among the most ancient objects in this space are a series of "Bactrian Princesses" (2500–1500 BC) from western Central Asia. These composite stone figures are made of dark green or grey chlorite or steatite, with heads of white limestone, at times with lapis lazuli elements as well. The heads, the bodies, or the arms and feet of these tiny figurines are slotted together loosely, without glue or any other means to attach the parts more permanently. Only thanks to the commitment and care over thousands of years devoted to "holding" the parts in precarious togetherness do they exist today. They are the size of our smartphones and other technological devices, although they define for us not the digital but the grounded nature of embodied life, as well as the precariousness of all bodies, including bodies of culture.

dOCUMENTA (13) in Kassel is intentionally uncomfortable, incomplete, nervously lacking—at every step, one needs to know that there is something fundamental that is not known, that is invisible and missing—a memory, an unresolved question, a doubt. What is visible and can be experienced in the neutrality of the exhibition spaces is set in counterpoint with a ghostly *other*, a location that functions as the setting of an experiment, and where visitors might rarely choose to go, since it is located twenty minutes from the city center.

The twelfth-century Benedictine cloister of Breitenau in Guxhagen was transformed into a prison in the mid-nineteenth century; in continuity with that, it later functioned as a work re-education camp and then a concentration camp during the Nazi regime; shortly after the end of the war, in the early

1950s (when documenta, too, was developing its first steps), it became a girls' reformatory called Fuldataal, and it is now divided between being a World War II memorial site and a psychiatric clinic. It is not exactly a "venue" for the exhibition, but it is an important reference point: all the artists and participants in dOCUMENTA (13) visited it for their basic research when first coming to Kassel. It is a ghost space that has been crucial to the exhibition's overall narration, to the thinking process from the very beginning.

Breitenau is the other Kassel, the subconscious of dOCUMENTA (13), where repression and correction—physical, psychological, sexual, and even creative—has repeatedly been performed over generations in the horrid underbelly of society. It represents a parallel world or another layer—the layer of institutional repression, with its somber history of imprisonment and correction.

v. to doubt

The German sociologist, philosopher, and musicologist Theodor W. Adorno (1903–1969) has been known since the 1930s for his praise of the autonomous artistic avant-garde based on "critical theory" and the critique of modern consumerism and its "culture industry."<sup>8</sup> In 1968, he wrote:

It is self-evident that nothing concerning art is self-evident anymore, not its inner life, not its relation to the world, not even its right to exist. . . . Art must turn against itself, in opposition to its own concept, and thus become uncertain of itself right into its innermost fiber. . . . Because art is what it has become, its concept refers to what it does not contain. The tension between what motivates art and art's past circumscribes the so-called questions of aesthetic constitution.<sup>9</sup>

Adorno's position was politically radical, yet fundamentally skeptical about any direct political engagement for art.

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<sup>8</sup> See his essay "On the Fetish-Character in Music and the Regression of Listening," originally published in *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung* 7 (1938), in *The Culture Industry: Selected Essays on Mass Culture*, ed. J. M. Bernstein (London: Routledge, 1991), pp. 29–60.

<sup>9</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997 [orig. 1970]), pp. 1–3.

According to the ancient philosopher and physician Sextus Empiricus (160–210 AD), there are three kinds of philosophers: those who declare that they have found the truth, the dogmatics; those who declare that it is impossible to find the truth, the academics; and those who continue to seek it, the skeptics (“skepsis,” σκέψις, means “search”). “Skepticism is an ability, or mental attitude, which opposes appearances to judgments in any way whatsoever, with the result that, owing to the equipollence of the objects and reasons thus opposed, we are brought firstly to a state of mental suspension [ἐποχή / ‘epoké’] and next to a state of ‘unperturbedness’ or quietude [ἀταραξία/‘ataraxia’],” Sextus wrote at the start of his *Pyrrhoneioi hypotyposesis* (Outlines of Pyrrhonism), where he described the ideas of one of the ancient Greek post-Socratic founders of skepticism, Pyrrho (360–270 BC).<sup>10</sup> He added:

the originating cause of skepticism is, we say, the hope of attaining quietude [ἀταραξία]. Men of talent, who were perturbed by the contradictions in things, and in doubt as to which of the alternatives they ought to accept, were led to inquire what is true in things, and what false, hoping by the settlement of this question to attain quietude [ἀταραξία]. The main basic principle of the skeptic system is that of opposing to every proposition an equal proposition; for we believe that as a consequence of this we end by ceasing to dogmatize.<sup>11</sup>

This is not a simple form of relativism, and neither is it cynicism—it is a form of openness to the space of the propositional, of the possible *worlding* together. Skepticism is an optimistic position that doubts the validity of induction as a means to arrive at knowledge.<sup>12</sup> The paradox lies in the fact that to be a true skeptic, one must believe it is possible to reach knowledge—the goal of a skeptic is thus to stop being a skeptic.

Pyrrho lived through the rise and fall of Alexander the Great; he traveled to Central Asia and to India with him and came back with many different knowledges and points of view. He later also saw the civil wars of the empire, a traumatic world of disillusionment in the period after Alexander.

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10 Sextus Empiricus, *Outlines of Pyrrhonism*, trans. R. G. Bury (Amherst, N.Y.: Prometheus Books, 1990), p. 17.

11 *Ibid.*, pp. 18–19.

12 One of the avenues of skepticism is to be found in the potential that lies in an active use of stupidity, “the essential dulling or weakening that forms the precondition of utterance” (*ibid.*, p. 5), in the revocation of normalized intelligence, in the refusal to produce constituted knowledge, in forms of self-emptying timidity, in acts of *bêtise*. See Avital Ronell, *Stupidity* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2000), and Avital Ronell and Anne Dufourmantelle, *Fighting Theory* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2010).

Although it is impossible to link periods literally, it is useful to take a leap of the imagination and see how we are currently facing a period of instability that makes connections, disconnections, and relations between distant places. And in our turbulent times, skepticism again provides an opportunity.

It is now thirty years since the first experimental verification of quantum entanglement; thirty years since the first genetically modified plant cell, and twenty years since the first GMO (genetically modified crop); twenty-five years since the PCR machine allowed for the reproduction of chains of DNA necessary for any genetic research; twenty-five years since the collapse of the East/West divide in Europe; twenty years into the daily use of the Internet by broad sectors of society, which began with emails in the mid-1990s and continued with the World Wide Web, initially for sourcing information and then for the intense uploading of information with web.2.0 practices; less than five years since the financial crisis that marked the precariousness of the financial systems of our times, more a contemporary religion than a science; and in the middle of political uprisings all over the world such as the Arab Spring.

We are told that we live in a state of permanent crisis, emergency, and exception.<sup>13</sup> Collapse and recovery no longer seem two subsequent moments in time, but often appear simultaneously, and the precariousness of lives all over the world has become the norm. Artworks and art objects, just like genetic biodiversity in food crops, are being created and destroyed by accident or by intention in ways not seen since the period when art had a cultic or ideological function, prior to the rise of the bourgeoisie in the late 1700s. In the age of the Internet, an age in which numbers, at the basis of all computing, have become more and more “real,” the destruction of the symbolic, of which art is a prime example, at times assumes greater significance to people than the destruction of physical bodies and lives.<sup>14</sup>

Due to the fact that there are many truths that are valid, one is constantly confronted with unsolvable questions: thus it has become a choice between *not* making a choice, on the one hand, not producing

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13 For Giorgio Agamben, a state of exception is a state of suspension of democratic rights during exceptional times. Agamben, *State of Exception* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).

14 We easily remember images of destruction of monuments in Eastern Europe after 1989, the looting of the Iraq museum in Baghdad after the U.S. invasion of 2003, and the destruction of the Bamiyan Buddhas in 2001 by the Taliban.

a concept, acting from a position of withdrawal; or, on the other hand, making a choice that one knows will also be partially and inevitably “wrong.”

The suspension of judgment is not a closure—it opens the space of the propositional.

vi. to engage and to witness

War creates facts. But art, too, can create facts of a highly different order. Arte Povera artist Alighiero Boetti from Turin, Italy, visited Kabul in early 1971, and decided to open a hotel called One Hotel on Shar-e-Naw near Chicken Street, together with an Afghan called Gholam Dastaghir. He spent half the year there, both as a hotel manager and as an artist, commissioning his embroidered *Mappe* from 1971 to 1977.

The question of whether or not to engage in projects in Afghanistan—in a location clearly under siege yet also in a state of hope, retreating, and more than almost anywhere in the world, onstage in the media worldwide—was discussed at length. Even today, after months of seminars and art-making there, the question remains open. In a slippage and comparative study of different historical periods and places, some questions came to the forefront immediately: is the fact of organizing artistic projects in war zones or occupied territories (in Afghanistan’s case, after the Soviet occupation and then twenty years of civil war from 1978, after the totalitarian Taliban regime from 1996 to 2001, and during the present occupation by foreign, European and U.S. forces) a form of “normalization” of outrageous events? Or is such engagement a form of alternative action keyed toward enacting and testing the potential of art to intervene effectively and decrease violence, injustice, and conflict in those places? Furthermore, what costs do such an activity and such engagement have in terms of the risks of being instrumentalized by the forces that wish to normalize such a condition? To answer that, one could ask whether art and its display system through exhibitions is not always somehow “instrumentalized,” even in Kassel, and if so, why one would question such an instrumentalization only in non-European or non-Western contexts, ignoring those same agendas in the West? Or rather, how can one act in a condition of propositional and skeptical ambivalence despite the fact that one’s actions, aesthetics, practices, and thoughts are partially and potentially problematic? I made the decision to act in ways that do not isolate people even further,

but provide opportunities for the opposite.

The initial impulse came from imagining not the scenario of war, but rather a form of continuity between the vibrant and international life of the 1970s in Kabul, during the time Boetti spent there, and our own times, rejecting the state of exception that is determined by the war, and choosing to act *hōs mē*<sup>15</sup>—that is, *as if* the situation were not what it is, as if the checkpoints, cement walls, and barriers, the conflict, occupation, and militarization in Kabul, did not exist—through acts of radical imagination, all the while continuing the daily life required by and inevitable while living in a militarized zone.

Artist Mario Garcia Torres, who had created an artwork referencing Boetti's One Hotel prior to dOCUMENTA (13), was therefore invited to Kabul for a research trip; he proposed as his artwork for dOCUMENTA (13) to find the old hotel and reactivate it. It turned out that the building, currently used occasionally as an office space, had not been destroyed during the civil war as Boetti had claimed.<sup>16</sup> So it was rented for Garcia Torres in 2011 as an artwork of dOCUMENTA (13), a place where things could occur. Garcia Torres proceeded to reactivate the abandoned and forgotten premises, restoring it to how it had been when Boetti had lived there, planting roses in the garden and offering tea to his guests over the year 2012. In a departure from what we would normally conceive of as an artwork, this new version of the One Hotel became a partly real, partly fictional space-time of the imagination for dOCUMENTA (13). This artwork, in the shape of an act of restoration of contemporary cultural heritage, formed the initial basis of dOCUMENTA (13)'s presence in Kabul, a city under siege, whose inhabitants are constantly scrutinized by the media as actors on a permanent stage. A story connected with contemporary art intersected with a story connected with current events and produced a place where, all of a sudden, the compression of siege opened up onto a garden filled with discussions about tomorrow.

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15 In his Epistle to the Romans, Paul speaks of the vocation of those who are called into the messianic community as a condition where first of all their differences are nullified, such as the difference between a slave and a free man, a circumcised and a non-circumcised man. Then, those who are "called" are asked to continue with their lives as normal, but with a form of vocation that is at the same time also a revocation of their normal daily lives ("... time contracted itself, the rest is, that even those having wives may be as not [*hōs mē*] having, and those weeping as not weeping, and those rejoicing as not rejoicing, and those buying as not possessing, and those using the world as not using it up. For passing away is the figure of this world. But I wish you to be without care."). This messianic time, a revoked time, is a time after time, a time that remains, according to Giorgio Agamben in *The Time That Remains: A Commentary on the Letter to the Romans* (Palo Alto, Cal.: Stanford University Press, 2005 [orig. 2000]), pp. 23–26.

16 Tom Francis had actually located the building during a trip the year before, and came with us to Kabul.



Projects were also initiated with artists who came in 2010, such as Francis Alÿs and Lara Favaretto, and others who engaged from a distance, including Tacita Dean; diaspora Afghan artists such as Mariam Ghani, Khadim Ali, and Masood Kamandy engaged with others already in Kabul like Rahrawh Omarzad and young Kabul students of art and theory in the dOCUMENTA (13) seminars including Zaneb Haidary, Abul Qasem Foushanji, and Mohsen Taasha. Throughout early 2012, the layering of the early 1970s life of Boetti over the experience of today provided the frame for initiating a series of seminars with students from Kabul and artists both Afghan and international, as well as philosophers and friends. Through these contradictions, the role of imagination as a political tool was discussed, and the possibility of defining artistic practice was debated in both theoretical meetings at the University of Fine Arts, the Queens Palace, and the CCAA Kabul (with Goshka Macuga and Christoph Menke) and practical seminars such as “seeing studies” with Natascha Sadr Haghghian and Ashkan Sephavand, or “Archive Practicum” at Afghan Film, dealing with the potential of past Afghan documentary footage from the 1950s to the 1980s, archived and commented on as a repository of the contemporary by Mariam Ghani and Pad.ma. Materials and their embodied transformations shaped several seminars, including Michael Rakowitz’s workshop on stone carving, held in a cave in Bamiyan not far from the holes where the giant Buddha statues had stood prior to their destruction during the war in 2001.

War creates facts. Art also creates facts, of a different order. The question of oblique speech is related to this. How do you affirm art in places and in conditions where it is impossible to take an open position—for example, because that would mean that the entire project would collapse? When can a secret be not an act of withdrawal but an act of bold engagement?

The body, repositioned and emplaced as a witness, shoots a photograph and sometimes dies. This is at the core of Rabih Mroué’s work for dOCUMENTA (13)—a non-academic lecture-performance and an installation exploring the use of mobile phones during the Syrian revolution in 2011–12. Mroué’s work includes short, fragmentary, and jumpy videos made by protestors or witnesses on their cell phones and uploaded to the Internet, some of them recorded (“shot”) by people who died while paradoxically recording their own assassinations. The camera is now a prosthesis of the body, and just as the body of the image-maker becomes precarious, so does the life of images, which are

often used to decrease thinking rather than to think with and through them.

In 1973, Susan Sontag argued that the act of photographing a scene was an act of power, a “shooting” of the world.<sup>17</sup> Today, the situation seems to be reversed. The violent, aggressive gaze seems ever more that of the person looking at a photograph *at a later* moment, the moment of its upload onto the Internet, and in *another place*, in front of their laptop far away. Power is the power to browse YouTube on the Web and to “google” images from the detached and safe vantage point of one’s laptop. The *witness*, the maker of the photograph, is instead a subject who puts his or her body on the line and is personally engaged in the lives of those pictured.<sup>18</sup> The witness is not at a distance from things, people, and events. War increases when forms of distance are created from those people against whom war is waged. “I want to argue that if we are to make broader social and political claims about rights of protection and entitlements to persistence and flourishing,” Judith Butler has written, “we will first have to be supported by a new bodily ontology, one that implies the rethinking of precariousness, vulnerability, injurability, interdependency, exposure, bodily persistence, desire, work and the claims of language and social belonging.”<sup>19</sup>

#### vii. to focus

Recent writings about art are often of two orders. The first reports on the intention of the artists and the effects their artworks have on viewers, as well as on the social consequences of these effects, and this register is often descriptive and illustrative. The second order occurs in writings that speak about curatorial positions in art today, constituting a meta-artistic discourse. This second mode of speech began during the period of self-awareness of curatorial practice and the professionalization of the field of exhibition-making that coincided with the emergence of what were called postmodernist discourses in the 1980s, later applied to the understanding and circulation of art as discourse in the 1990s and 2000s. An exercise in embodiment might be experimenting with how to reconnect with visual, structural, and phenomenological analyses of the twentieth century without giving up the

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17 “There is an aggression implicit in every use of the camera. . . . Just as the camera is the sublimation of the gun, to photograph someone is a sublimated murder.” Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (New York: Picador, 1973), pp. 7–15.

18 Giorgio Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz: The Witness and the Archive; Homo Sacer 3* (New York: Zone Books, 1998).

19 Judith Butler, *Frames of War* (London: Verso, 2009), p. 2.

political and social dimensions of recent art discussions.

According to the gestalt psychologists of the early to mid-twentieth century, visual perception was not just retinal, and a “visual pattern” was not the sum of retinal registrations. Furthermore, perceptual psychology was interested in the mental experience of vision: you think while seeing, you see only while thinking; thought and perception are not two distinct moments, and vision/thought is based on the apprehension of a hidden field of energy forces. In the 1950s, Rudolph Arnheim connected perceptual psychology with art, which he understood as a special kind of meta-perception. Not all of his conclusions can be shared today: he supported some conventional, essentialist perspectives espoused by the conservative circles of art in his time—that humans tend toward a sense of equilibrium, reached either by simple strategies such as symmetry or centrality or through contrapuntal balances of opposite masses and forms. (It seems obvious today that the validity of much artistic practice lies precisely in the ambiguity and non-closure of any art, in a fractured world characterized by the dominance of the media and of simple, direct communications that foreclose forms of life, forms of emancipation.)

However, other positions held by Arnheim can be extremely refreshing. For example, he went against the excess of art criticism and theory (“Art may seem to be in danger of being drowned by talk. Rarely are we presented with a new specimen of what we are willing to accept as genuine art”<sup>20</sup>), adding, “We have neglected the gift of comprehending things through our senses. Concept is divorced from percept, and thought moves among abstractions.”<sup>21</sup> These words might well be used today, in an era of excess instrumental theory, of flows of information and immateriality. Visual expressiveness resided for him in objects themselves, rather than in our projections of feelings onto the objects perceived:

If one thinks of expression as something reserved for human behavior, one can account for the expression perceived in nature only as the result of the “pathetic fallacy” . . . say, the sadness of weeping willows as a figment of empathy, anthropomorphism, primitive animism. . . . Actually it would be instructive and appropriate to do the opposite, and describe human

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20 Rudolf Arnheim, *Art and Visual Perception: A Psychology of the Creative Eye; The New Version* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974 [orig. 1954]), p. 1.

21 *Ibid.*

behavior and expression by the more general properties pertaining to nature as a whole.<sup>22</sup>

All artworks both *express* and have *expression*. Arnheim suggested that these patterns could be universal, and even if art would always change, some elements would always be the same, yet always different.

To look at what is shared or in common, rather than different, means to look at experience *phenomenologically*. For example, Maurice Merleau-Ponty emphasized the body, and not consciousness, as the source of knowledge; he saw the relation between the body-subject and an object as a form of “facticity”<sup>23</sup> and meeting, an encounter where different actors, including objects, meet. In his *Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty argues for a body that is an organism linked to the world through its perception of things, what he called a sense-experience:

I might be said to have sense-experience (*sentir*) precisely to the extent that I coincide with the sensed, that the latter ceases to have any place in the objective world. . . . It is sometimes the adherence of the perceived object to its context and, as it were, its viscosity, sometimes the presence in it of a positive indeterminate which prevents the spatial, temporal and numerical wholes from becoming articulated into manageable, distinct and identifiable terms. And it is this pre-objective realm that we have to explore in ourselves if we wish to understand sense experience.<sup>24</sup>

Prefiguring what he later (around 1960) called *la chair du monde* (the flesh of the world), one chapter of his 1945 book focuses on desire, love, and the sexual body:

“.. So long as we considered space or the things perceived, it was not easy to rediscover the relationship between the embodied subject and its world, because it is transformed by its own activity into the intercourse between the epistemological subject and the object. Indeed the natural world presents itself as existing in itself over and above its existence for me; the

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22 Ibid., p. 425.

23 Here earlier concepts of phenomenological reduction, such as Edmund Husserl's, can be useful again today.

24 Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1962 [orig. 1945]), pp. 4, 14.

act of transcendence whereby the subject is thrown open to the world runs away with itself and we find ourselves in the presence of a nature which has no need to be perceived in order to exist. If then we want to bring to light the birth of being for us, we must finally look at that area of our experience which clearly has significance and reality only for us, and that is our affective life. Let us try to see how a thing or a being begins to exist for us through desire or love and we shall come to understand better how things and beings can exist in general.<sup>25</sup>

When you have more time, you can *focus* more, and when you focus, for example, on a single artwork for a long time, you concentrate and you meditate, like a calligrapher, less dispersed in the global flow of data. And when an artwork is looked at closely, it becomes, as in meditation, an ever more abstract exercise, a thinking and imagining while thinking, until the phenomenology of that viscous experience allows the mind to merge with matter, and slowly, possibly, to see the world not from the point of view of the discerning subject, the detached subject, but from within so-called objects and outward: I am the ball, the ball is me. We are a ball. I am an artwork. How strange my makers are! In particular, those objects that we use to do things with other people constitute forms of transition that break the traditional subject/object dichotomies; they are quasi-objects, objects of passage, as Michel Serres noted thirty years ago.<sup>26</sup>

Let's look at a picture together. The image was found in the documenta archives. A woman on the left is looking at a piece of sculpture exhibited in the second edition of documenta in 1959. Another sculpture is positioned on the same metal shelf, at the center of the image. There is a man on the right, who may or may not be looking at the sculpture.

This photo was taken in the summer by an unknown photographer. We do not know who she is; we do not know who he is.

In 1959, the year in which this photograph was taken, many events occurred internationally. The French War in Vietnam was raging. Fulgencio Batista fled Havana when the forces of Fidel Castro advanced and Che Guevara and Camilo Cienfuegos entered the city. In Leopoldville, Congo, forty-

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid., p. 176.

<sup>26</sup> Michel Serres, "Theory of the Quasi-Object," in *The Parasite* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982).

two people were killed during violent riots between the police and participants in a meeting of the Abako party. Charles de Gaulle was inaugurated as the first president of the French Fifth Republic. Walt Disney released his sixteenth animated film, *Sleeping Beauty*, and the Barbie doll was launched in the U.S. A referendum in Switzerland turned down female suffrage, and at Cape Canaveral, Florida, the Titan intercontinental ballistic missile was first successfully test-fired, while NASA announced the first U.S. astronauts. This same year, the ETA Basque revolutionary group started its activities in Spain. World events and the space race intertwined in the media of 1959, which was also the year Pan Am flight pilots claimed to have sighted UFOs above the Pacific Ocean on July 11.<sup>27</sup>

To go back to our photograph: what you see in this picture is two people who are members of the audience of documenta passing in front of sculptures by Barcelona artist Julio González. González was one of the first artists to use the technique of welding iron in art, which was possible due to his blacksmithing skills. González went to Paris around 1900, where he met Picasso, whom he later taught how to weld. If we look at this photo, we see that the floor appears dirty, rough. The woman is barefoot. Her movements are odd. She looks as though she's moving sideways, to the left, as if about to stop and turn in front of the sculpture. Her weight has shifted onto her left foot, creating a different form of linearity. This seeming change of heart might be caused by the fact that the man has stopped looking at her, and she has shifted her attention to the work, almost as if the work could represent a magnetic force that might distance her from the man, breaking eye contact with him. The hand in front of her mouth is indicative of the increased attention she is paying to the artwork, but also of her perplexity or perhaps surprise. What might have surprised her? This photo is interesting in that there is a triangulation that leads to a possible next scene, in which the two people might talk about the artwork. González's artwork functions as a device to make this meeting and this conversation happen. The other sculpture on the plinth is a head; it is almost in the center of the photo, slightly off to the right. It seems mute, as if the use of figurative art were pointless and ineffective. No one looks at this second sculpture, and it seems almost indifferent, passive. The long table, the plinth, provides a display system. It is probably made of metal using a concept designed by Arnold Bode, the initiator of the documenta. A third piece of sculpture is hidden behind the man, although only part of it can be seen in the picture, like a tail or a hidden organic element. With his

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<sup>27</sup> <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1959>.

hands behind his back, the man walks like a *flâneur*, as if he were strolling and not really standing in front of the work. He is in transit, while the woman is stationary.

In the image, González's sculptures appear to *act*, like the "transitional object" described by Donald Winnicott that an infant invests with special attention, the first "not-me" possession.<sup>28</sup> The object marks the transition between a symbiotic identity with the mother (a period in which the child feels one with the world, able to magically control and create the world at will, in a condition where desire finds immediate satisfaction, as if the objects of desire could be created simply by evoking them), and an autonomous identity, separate from the world yet in relation with it. A doll or a stuffed animal, a thumb or a blanket, is affectionately cuddled and must never be changed, unless by the child, who uses it over a period of time as something comforting to avert anxiety. For Winnicott, this "intermediate state between a baby's inability and growing ability to recognize and accept reality" is the substance of illusion. Although hallucinogenic, the transitional object is important for its actuality, not its symbolism. It is not an "internal object," like a mental concept—it is a possession. Yet for the child, it is not an "external object" either: "It is not the object that is transitional. The object represents the infant's transition from a state of being merged with the mother to a state of being in relation to the mother as something outside and separate."<sup>29</sup> The use of the object "symbolizes the union of two now separate things, baby and mother, at the point in time and space of the initiation of their separateness." Existing in the space of play, neither inner psychic experience nor external reality, the use of the transitional object lies at the boundary of its separateness, which gives rise to a quality in our attitude when we observe such objects. While it is accepted in the infant, and accepted in adult life in art and religion, it otherwise becomes the "hallmark of madness." Winnicott describes how the infant will damage or destroy the transitional object only to verify its survival after the aggression—its continued existence; he explains how this condition of survival creates the possibility for an understanding of the object as a form of reality separate from the self:

1) Subject relates to object. 2) Object is in process of being found instead of placed by the

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28 D. W. Winnicott's first mention of this term was in his lecture given at the British Psycho-Analytical Society in CITY on May 30, 1951 (published in 1953 as "Transitional Objects and Transitional Phenomena: A Study of the First Not-Me Possession," *The International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, no. 34, pp. 89–97). He develops his ideas in *Playing and Reality* (London: Tavistock Publications, 1971).

29 *Ibid.*, p. 14.

subject in the world. 3) Subject destroys object. 4) Object survives destruction. 5) Subject can use object. The object is always being destroyed. This destruction becomes the unconscious backcloth for love of a real object; that is, an object outside the area of the subject's omnipotent control.<sup>30</sup>

There is no anger in the destruction of the object to which I am referring, though there could be said to be joy at the object's survival. From this moment, or arising out of this phase, the object is *in fantasy* always being destroyed. This quality of "always being destroyed" makes the reality of the surviving object felt as such, strengthens the feeling tone, and contributes to object-constancy. The object can now be used.<sup>31</sup>

The photograph of documenta visitors passing by González's sculptures, the barefoot woman and the unknown man, reminds me of Chris Marker's film *La Jetée* (1962), in which the protagonist uses an image to travel back in time to a period prior to World War III, in hopes of finding a way to save the survivors of the future. The image he chooses is a childhood memory of seeing a man assassinated at Orly airport, on the jetty. It is an image of himself, traveling back in time from the future. On one of his trips to the past, he meets a woman, probably his own mother, who seems to guide him on the journey. The meeting takes place in a museum. It is curious that in one of his most quoted and noted essays, of 1980, Roland Barthes wrote:

Photography began historically as an art of the person, of identity, of civil status, of what we might call in all senses of the term, the body's formality. In front of the photograph of my mother as a child, I tell myself: "She's going to die." I shatter, like Winnicott's psychotic patient over a catastrophe which has already occurred. Whether or not the subject is already dead, every photograph is this catastrophe.<sup>32</sup>

The question is related therefore to needs rather than to desires; and it is possible to argue that

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30 D. W. Winnicott, "The Use of an Object and Relating through Identifications," New York Psychoanalytic Society lecture, November 12, 1968. *Ibid.*, p. 94.

31 D. W. Winnicott, *Psycho-Analytic Explorations*, ed. C. Winnicott, R. Shepherd, and M. Davis (London: Karnac Books, 1989), p. 226 (original lecture, 1968).

32 Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981 [orig. 1980]), p. 79.



subjectivity or subject formation in the advanced digital age is often frozen in a state of “subjective omnipotence,” caused by the fact that all questions receive immediate responses, at the tips of fingers on our browsers, in a period characterized more by the simultaneity of information production, collection, and communication than by any older view of spectacle, and the megalomaniac disorders that spectacle caused in the past. In this state of “subjective omnipotence” of the advanced digital age, all information seems available and accessible at will, and yet experience is severed and interrupted. We feel we can access the satisfaction of our desires and actually create our own world at will, as the child imagines before the transitional experience begins. And so, it is not on the performative that dOCUMENTA (13) focuses, or the virtuosic “I am here” of the Facebook generation. Neither is it the inert object that dOCUMENTA (13) addresses—the conservative return to taste, to academic archiving and collecting, building alternative patrimonies of inert objects in tune with patriarchal moods. It is rather the space of relations between people and things, a place of transition and transit between places and *in* places, a political space where the *polis* is not limited by human agency only, a holding space, a committed space, a vulnerable space, a precarious yet cared-for space.

The artwork, an ambiguous entity, a quasi-object whose attributes are to provide both grounding and relation, performs the task of the transitional object, a prop for an exercise, a gymnastics of being-without, without another, but also becoming-with, unwired, in one place and not in another place, in one time and not in another time, just here, in this place, with this food, these animals, these people, poorer, and richer too.

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