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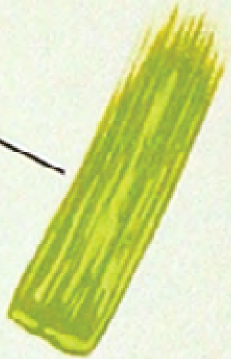
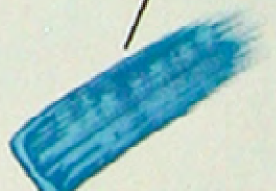
Austin Lee





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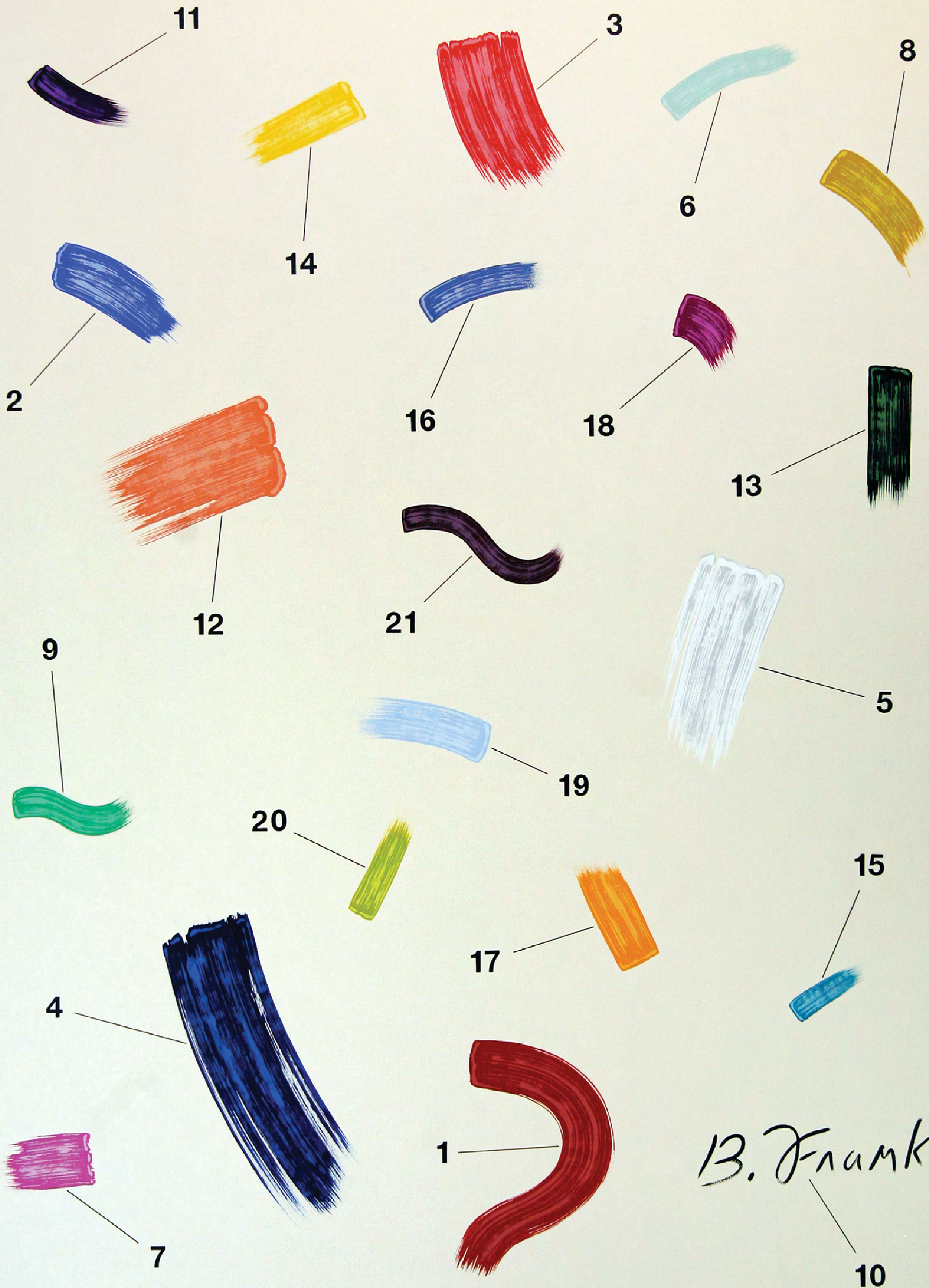

Henry Gunderson. *Lite Expresser.* Acrylic on canvas. 48 x 60 inches. 2015

Petra Cortright. *30cal M-1 Screensavers*. Giclee print. 48 x 41 inches. 2015

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Serge Attukwei Clottey, *Signed and Sealed*. Plastics, wire, and oil paint. 65 x 59 inches. 2015

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Austin Lee, *Mom.* 3D printed ABS plastic, plaster, acrylic, and paint. 9 x 10 x 9 inches. 2015

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Image credit: Gabriel L. Dunne and Vishal K. Dar, *NAAG XY*, 2015, Multi-channel projections, EPS foam, plaster, 164 x 102 x 60 in. Courtesy of the Artists.

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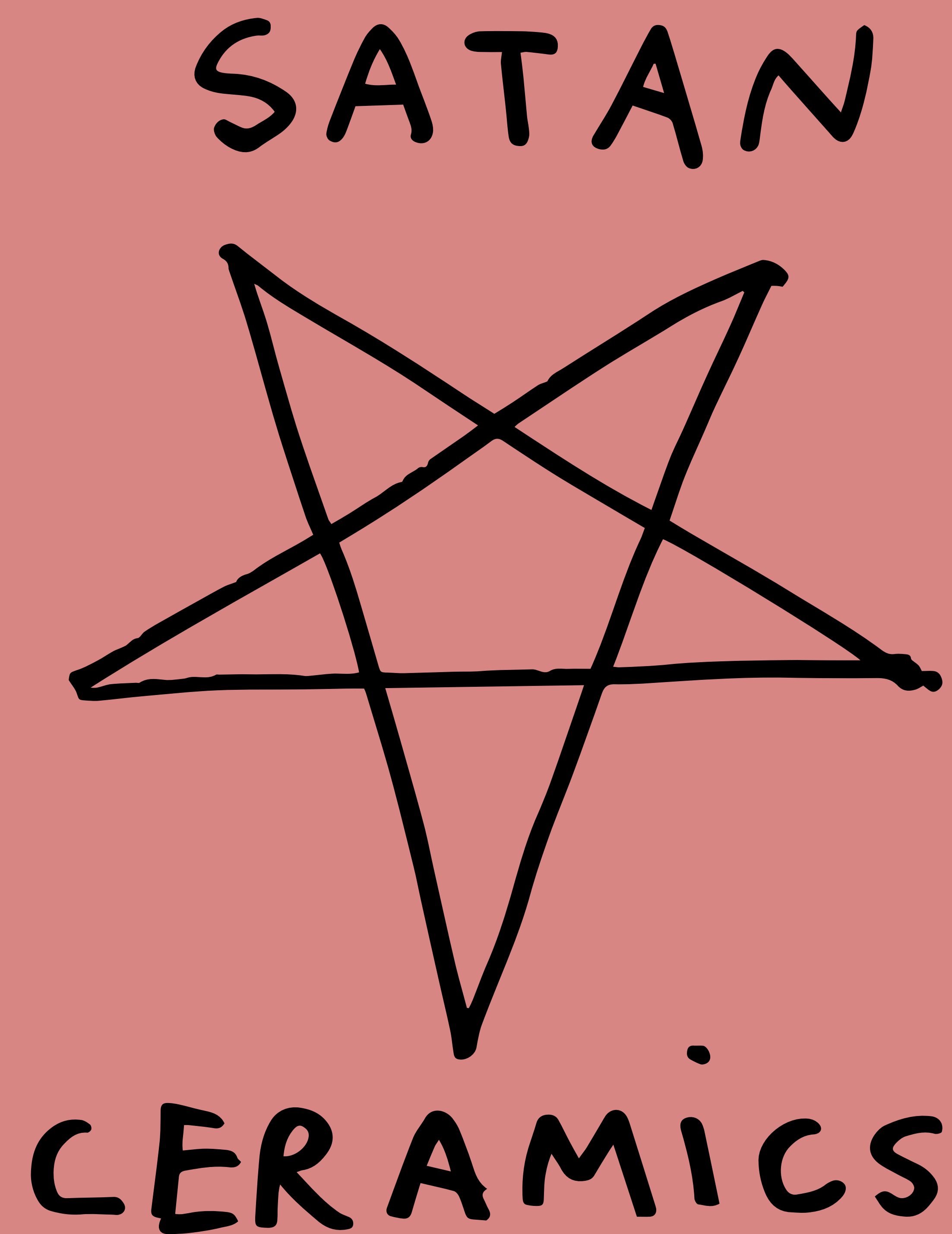

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At Five in the Afternoon, 1950. Oil on hardboard, 36 ¾ x 48 ½ in. (93.3 x 123.2 cm). Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, bequest of Josephine Morris, 2003.25.4. Art © Dedalus Foundation Inc. / Licensed by VAGA, New York, NY

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Tim Wise *Income And Wealth Inequality: Long-Term Trends And Current Realities* • **Nicole Archer** *Style Wars: Critical Reflections On The Power Of Style* • **Ben Valentine** *Data* • **John Zarobell** *The Postcolonial Contemporary* • **Alexis Anais Avedisian** *The Economy Of Nostalgia* • **Ingrid Burrington** *Literal American Gold Mine* • **Arie Amaya-Akkermans** *On The Waters Of History: The 14th Istanbul Biennial* • **Jessica Hoffmann** *Something Borrowed, Some Things About Place* • **Nicholas O'Brien** *Alternative Forms Of Media Art Distribution: Three Case Studies From Non-Art Contexts* • **Mark Van Proyen** *On Point 2.08: The Lombardi Effect*

Income And Wealth Inequality: Long-Term Trends And Current Realities

Tim Wise

Among the things most Americans have long seemed to believe about our country is the idea that in some sense, we're all part of one big team. Nods to national unity are common, and surely it isn't hard to recall how, in the days following the terrorist attacks of 9/11, millions of Americans slapped bumper stickers on their cars sporting the slogan UNITED WE STAND. One part nationalistic and militaristic hubris, one part a genuine expression of emotional empathy with the victims and their families, the slogan and the concept behind it spoke to a deep-seated component of the nation's ideology: the notion of reciprocity, or, more simply put, the idea that "we're all in this together."

Of course, in the wake of the 9/11 tragedy not all Americans shared this sentiment equally, and there was a marked gap between the willingness of white Americans to adorn their vehicles in such a manner and that of people of color. Non-whites, more viscerally aware of the ongoing inequities between their own life conditions and those of most in the white majority, were not as likely to sport such stickers or engage in the flag-waving that became so commonplace in the aftermath of the attacks. Unity, after all, is not something that can be wished into existence, or something that manifests simply because a tragedy has transpired. For many African Americans and other people of color there had been many 9/11s, so to speak, throughout their history on this continent, none of which had brought real unity or equity of experience.

That said, and with exceptions duly noted, the notion of unity, togetherness and reciprocity is something to which we have all been exposed and to varying degrees have likely internalized. While the ideology of unity and reciprocity hardly fits with the lived reality of those belonging to marginalized groups, the aspirational if not existential lure of the dominant narrative remains strong, so much so that many of our most recognizable national slogans over the years conjure this notion, from "What's good for General Motors is good for America" to "A rising tide lifts all boats."

Yet, in recent years, the idea that America is one big team has been increasingly difficult to accept, because of the rapidity with which disparities of income and wealth have been growing, opening up a vast chasm between the nation's wealthiest and everyone else. Between late 2007 and 2009, the economy imploded, doubling unemployment rates and destroying more than a third of the nation's housing value (particularly among the middle and working class), and yet *Wall Street profits rose by 720 percent.*[79] When the majority of the American population can be thrown into the worst economic situation of the past seventy-five years, even as a small economic minority can enjoy massive profits due to their deliberate and predatory actions, the idea of America being one big unified homeland becomes almost impossible to swallow.

Economic injustice, though increasingly exposed since the onset of the Great Recession, has been emerging as a serious and intractable national problem for several decades. Whereas incomes of those in all income quintiles grew together from the late 1940s until the late 1970s, after that period, incomes for all but those at the top began to stagnate.[80] By 2007, right before the collapse of the economy, the richest one percent of Americans was already receiving twenty-three percent of national income. This nearly one-quarter share of national income was the highest percentage received by the top one percent since immediately prior to the onset of the Great Depression,[81] and nearly three times the share that was being received by this wealthy group just thirty-one years earlier in 1976.[82] From 1979 to 2007, the richest one percent of Americans (2.5 to 2.8 million people during that time) nearly *quadrupled* their average incomes. Meanwhile, the middle three-fifths of Americans only saw a forty percent gain in average incomes over that time—less than 1.5 percent income growth per year.[83] From 1993 to 2012, adjusted for inflation, real incomes for the bottom ninety-nine percent of American families grew by less than seven percent while incomes for the wealthiest one percent nearly doubled.[84]

To put income inequality in graphic terms, consider that in 2013, 165,000 Wall Street bankers took home average bonuses of $162,000 each, resulting in an overall bonus bonanza of nearly $27 billion: that's nearly *double* the amount taken home annually by all 1.1 million Americans working full-time at the minimum wage *combined*.[85] Even more disturbing, the most successful hedge fund managers—a group that manages investment portfolios for the super-rich, and about whom there will be more to say later—quite typically can make in *one single hour of work* what the average American family earns in twenty-one years.[86]

Sadly, income inequality is only the tip of the iceberg when it comes to understanding the depths of disparity that plague modern America. Much more substantial is the vast inequity in tangible assets from which families derive long-term financial security. Wealth disparities, in other words, represent the much larger portion of the iceberg—the part that remains under the metaphorical water, often unseen. Even before the economy cratered, disparities in wealth—from housing value to stocks and bonds to commercial real estate—were already significant. Once the housing bubble burst, taking with it about $6 trillion in lost assets (and often the only assets held by middle-class and working-class Americans), that gulf grew even wider.[87] As of 2010, the bottom half of the American population owned only about one percent of all national wealth, while the wealthiest one percent possessed *more than a third* of all wealth in the nation.[88] As for those assets most likely to generate substantial income, meaning investment assets like stocks, financial securities, and business equity and trusts, the wealthiest one percent of Americans own just over *half* of all such assets in the nation.[89] Today, wealth inequality in America stands at a level double that of the Roman Empire, where the top one percent owned about sixteen percent of all assets.[90]

However significant this level of disparity may sound, it actually understates the problem. Within the top one percent of wealth holders there is a big difference between those who barely make it into this group, and those at the pinnacle who reside in the top one-tenth (0.1) or top one-hundredth (0.01) of one percent. As of 2012, the top one-tenth of one percent (roughly 160,000 families) owned about twenty-two percent of the nation's assets, which is equal to the share of national wealth possessed by the poorest ninety percent of Americans. Meanwhile, the richest one-hundredth of a percent (about 16,000 families) owned 11.2 percent of all national assets.[91]

To visualize what this means, we can analogize the distribution of wealth to the distribution of seats in a football stadium. Let's imagine we were going to the Super Bowl in a stadium that seats 65,000 people. If the seats in the stadium were distributed the way that wealth is in America, just sixty-five fans would get to share 14,300 of the seats in the stadium. In fact, forget sharing seats: they could knock out the seats entirely and bring in big lounge chairs, umbrellas, Jacuzzis and their own personal cabanas instead. They would have so much space they could play Frisbee during commercial breaks or time-outs if they felt like it, never worrying about bumping up against the rest of us. Six or seven of these people would actually be able to cordon off 7,280 of these seats for themselves. This would leave the other fifty-seven or fifty-eight fans within the top 0.1 percent to fight over the remaining 7,020 seats (tough, but I suppose they'd manage). Meanwhile, the poorest half of the fans, or roughly 32,500 of them, would be struggling to fit into only 650 seats, representing the one percent of the seats they own. Think of it as the absolute worst musical chairs game ever. People would have to sit on top of each other, more than fifty deep, just to make the math work. This is the extent of wealth inequality in America today; only in the real world, the disparities obviously have more consequence than the distribution of stadium seats.

For a few more examples to illustrate the astounding depths of wealth inequality in modern America, consider:

• As of 2014, the four hundred wealthiest Americans were worth $2.3 trillion. This is more than double what the same group was worth a decade ago, $300 billion more than what they were worth just *one year earlier*,[92] and $600 billion more than in 2012.[93] The average member of the Forbes 400 now has 70,000 times the wealth of the typical American family, no doubt because they have worked *exactly* 70,000 times harder or are *exactly* 70,000 times smarter.[94]

• As of 2013, the wealthiest thirty people in the United States owned $792 billion worth of assets, which was the same amount owned by the poorest half of Americans: about 157 million people in all.[95]

• From 2011 to 2014, nine of the wealthiest people in America—Bill Gates, Warren Buffet, Mark Zuckerberg, the two Koch brothers and the four principal Walton heirs—gained an average of over $13 billion from capital gains on pre-existing assets. These gains did not flow from new work on their part, nor an increase in their personal productivity or particular genius. They weren't working more hours, and they didn't come up with some new and innovative technological breakthrough in that time. They simply owned a bunch of stuff, and over a three-year period that stuff became more valuable because of gains in the stock market. Considering that the median income for American workers was $51,000 in 2013, it would take a quarter of a million years—which is about 50,000 more years than humans have even existed—for the typical American to earn as much as the average capital gain earned by these nine people just since 2011.[96]

• For a visual understanding of what all that means, consider that if the typical American stretched his or her annual income out, in one-dollar bills, from end to end, it would stretch roughly 25,500 feet, which is about 4.8 miles. Over three years at the same income, those bills would now stretch about 14.5 miles. Meanwhile, if we took the median amount of money gained by those nine super-rich Americans mentioned above over that same three-year period, and stretched it out, in one-dollar bills, from end to end, the money chain would stretch 1.2 million miles—a money chain long enough to circle the earth forty-eight times,[97] or alternately, to stretch from the earth to the moon and back twice, and then stretch around the globe a few more times for good measure.[98]

• In all, the six heirs to the Walmart fortune are worth as much as the bottom forty percent of the American population, or roughly 120 million people.[99] In fact, the Walton heirs, who are rich simply because of the family into which they were born (or in the case of Christy Walton, the one into which she married), have so much wealth at their disposal that they could buy every house, condo and townhome in Seattle or Dallas or Miami and still have $40 billion to spare, with which they could buy all the homes in Anaheim, California (if they love Disneyland), or Napa (if they really like wine). Just to put the Walton's wealth in perspective, while the six heirs could purchase every home in these major U.S. cities, someone like Oprah Winfrey (whom most people think of as fabulously rich) could only afford to buy up all the homes in Mokena, Illinois, wherever that is.[100] In fact, the combined wealth of Oprah, Steven Spielberg, Donald Trump, Ted Turner, Howard Schultz (the founder of Starbucks), Mark Cuban (owner of the Dallas Mavericks), Jerry Jones (owner of the Dallas Cowboys), Phil Knight (founder of Nike), and Mark Zuckerberg (founder of Facebook)—a total of about $77.5 billion as of 2015—does not equal even *half* the wealth held by the Walton heirs. Even if we added the wealth of Bill Gates to the mix—the world's wealthiest individual—the combined wealth of these ten would still fall about $15 billion short of Walton money.[101] Meanwhile, most Walmart employees work for wages that leave them near the poverty line if not below it, forcing many of them to rely on food stamps to supplement their meager incomes, as we'll explore later.

Wealth disparities are especially stark when examined racially. Because of the nation's history of enslavement, lynching, segregation and overt racial discrimination, families of color did not have the same opportunity as whites to accumulate land and other tangible assets. Although civil rights laws were passed in the 1960s to prohibit formal discrimination in employment and housing, the head start afforded to whites over many generations obviously did not evaporate simply because anti-discrimination laws were passed. Due to a history of unequal opportunity to accumulate assets,[102] and the racially disproportionate impact of the recession on the real estate values of people of color,[103] the median net worth of white American households as of 2011 stood at a level *15.7 times* greater than the median for blacks and 13.3 times the median for Latinos.[104] As for financial assets such as stocks and investments other than home equity, the ratio is nearly *two hundred to one* in favor of whites, with the median financial wealth for whites standing at about $36,000 and the median for blacks a virtually non-existent $200, which in most cases represents merely the money in their bank accounts.[105] Even when black households are comparable to white households in terms of income, vast wealth discrepancies remain due to a history of unequal opportunity to accumulate and pass down assets. Comparing households that are middle class in terms of income, whites still have three times as much wealth as blacks, and among those in the top ten percent of income earners, white households

[Continued on page 5]

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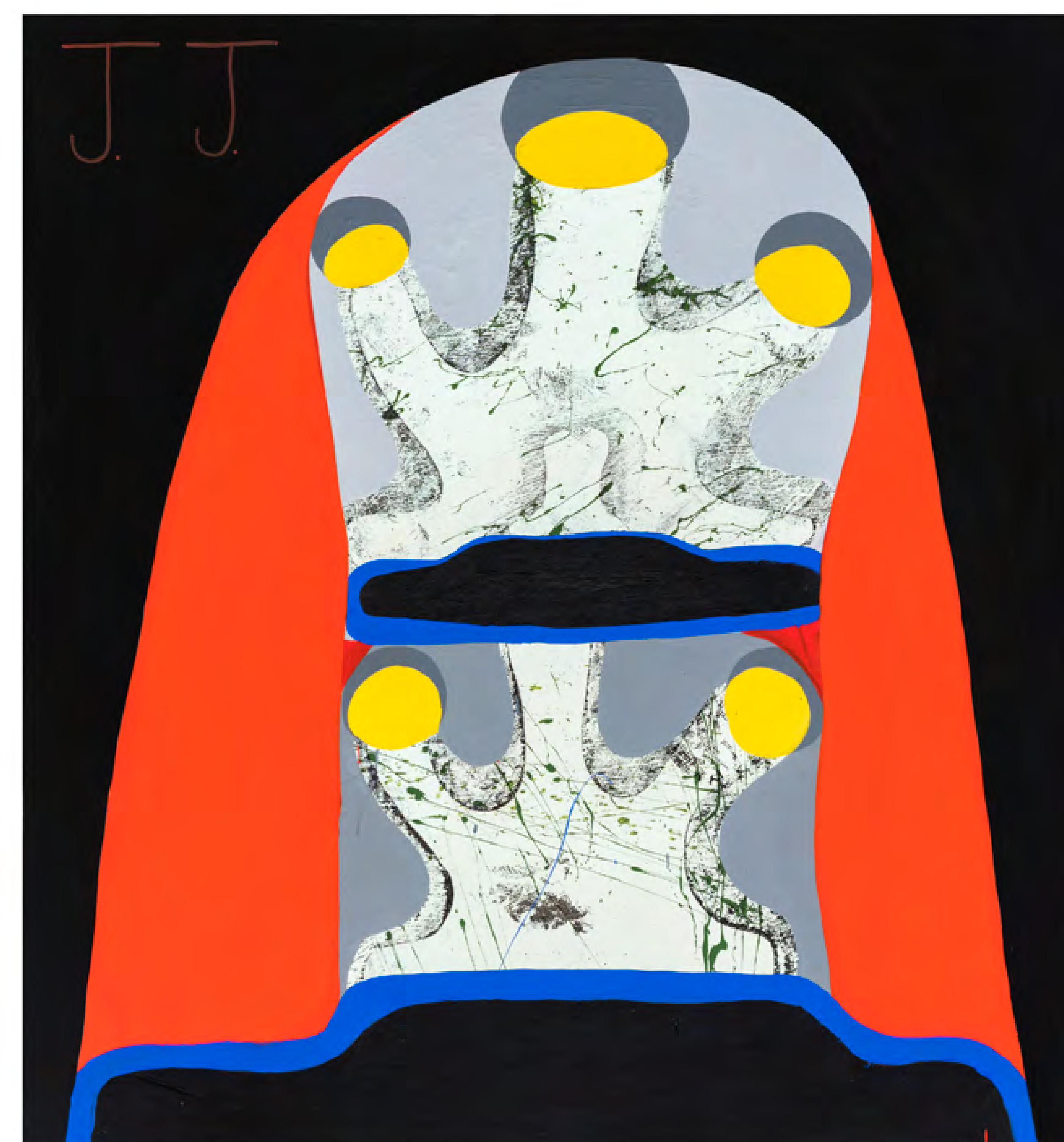

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Leslie Shows; *Slot Mount*, 2014
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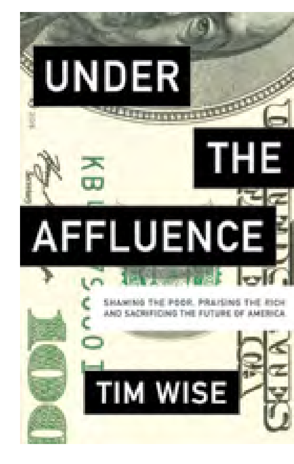

Income And Wealth Inequality: Long-Term Trends And Current Realities
By Tim Wise

Excerpt from *Under the Affluence: Shaming the Poor, Praising the Rich and Sacrificing the Future of America*, by Tim Wise (City Lights, 2015), reprinted with permission by City Lights Books

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[Continued from page one …]

have a nearly five-to-one advantage over black households.[106] Most disturbing, white families with a high school dropout as the head of household have median net worth of $51,300, while the median for black families with *college-educated* heads of household is only $25,900.[107] In other words, black households with heads who have a college degree have *half* the net worth of white households whose head finished tenth grade.

But it's not only the weight of past racism that explains current wealth gaps. In recent years, wealth disparities between whites and blacks have been intensified because of blatant discrimination in mortgage lending. During the run-up to the housing collapse, even African American borrowers with solid credit were given subprime, high-interest loans, often by lenders who were deliberately targeting them for these purposes, such as Wells Fargo. While only about six percent of white borrowers with credit scores above 660 were given subprime loans, over twenty-one percent of blacks with comparable credit received these higher-cost mortgages.[108] Most recently, discrimination testing conducted by the Fair Housing Justice Center in New York uncovered strong evidence of racial bias against potential homebuyers of color. According to a recent lawsuit against M&T Bank, prompted by the testing:

[The bank] sent out trained actors to explore whether white and non-white homebuyers would be treated differently when trying to prequalify for a mortgage. All followed a similar script, telling bank officers they were married with no children and were first-time homebuyers. The black, Latino and Asian testers presented slightly better qualifications when it came to income, credit and additional financial assets. In nine separate interactions recorded either with a camera or an audio device, employees at M&T Bank's New York City loan office can be seen or heard treating the white applicants differently than the others, according to the suit. In one instance, a black candidate was told she did not have enough savings to buy a home. A white applicant with slightly lower income and credit scores and $9,000 less in savings was pre-approved for a loan. In another case, a Latina candidate was told she would qualify for a mortgage $125,000 less than the test's white candidate with lower income, poorer credit and less cash.[109]

Although the type of disparate treatment evident in the M&T case may not be as egregious as that of Wells Fargo, which a few years ago had been deliberately steering low-income African Americans (whom they called "mud people") into so-called "ghetto loans," it nonetheless suggests ongoing obstacles to equal housing opportunity.[110] As such, a significant portion of disparities in home ownership and net worth must be laid at the feet of discrimination in the present, and not seen merely as the residue of the past. The combined effects of past and present racial bias on the financial position of persons of color should not be underestimated as we examine why so few black and brown folks sit atop the nation's economic structure. Of all persons in the top one percent of national wealth holders, ninety-six percent are white.[111] Indeed, the four hundred wealthiest white people in America were worth approximately $2 trillion as of 2014: approximately the same amount as all forty million African Americans *put together*—no doubt because those four hundred white people have worked *just as hard* as all black people combined.[112]

Despite the evidence just examined, however, many continue to insist that America is a land of opportunity, and uniquely so, compared to the rest of the world. Such persons claim that even the poorest here are better off than virtually anyone else in the world, and that inequities between the haves and have-nots are smaller than they are elsewhere. But there is growing reason to doubt this rosy image. As for poverty, among industrialized nations, the United States has the third-largest percentage of citizens living at half or less of the national median income—the international standard for determining poverty. Only Mexico and Turkey rate worse among thirty-four modern, industrial democracies in terms of poverty rates.[113] While conservatives claim that even the poor in America live better than the middle class elsewhere—a subject to which we'll return in the next chapter—this argument simply isn't true. Compared to those industrialized nations with which the United States likes to compare itself, not only are the poor here doing worse than the middle class elsewhere, they are also doing worse than the *poor* elsewhere, in large measure because of less complete safety nets in America. For instance, before the effect of taxes and various welfare benefits are considered, twenty-seven percent of Swedes are poor, which is slightly more than the twenty-six percent of Americans who are; but *after* the effects of taxes and transfers are considered, the poverty rate in Sweden plummets to only five percent, while safety nets in the United States only bring our poverty rate down to seventeen percent. Likewise, thirty-four percent of Germans are poor prior to the effects of social safety net efforts, but only eleven percent remain poor after them. In the U.K., where the poverty rate is the same as in the United States, safety nets cut poverty by more than two-thirds to only eight percent, which is twice as big a cut as that afforded by such programs in the United States.[114]

As for inequality compared to other nations, here too America's contemporary record is not enviable. Among industrialized countries, the United States ranks fourth worst in income inequality between top earners and those at the bottom, and inequality here is actually growing much faster than in those other nations.[115] At present, the poorest half of Americans own less of our nation's wealth than the poorest half on the continents of Asia and Africa, and less than the poorest half in India, the U.K. and China. In other words, inequality is actually more severe in America than elsewhere.[116] Importantly, it isn't just the gap between the rich and poor in America that signifies our nation's greater inequality relative to other countries; we also have the greatest wealth gaps between the *middle* class and the wealthy of any industrialized nation.[117] Recent evidence suggests that this gap between the wealthy and the middle class is only getting larger, in fact; since 2010, middle-class wealth has remained flat, while wealth at the top has continued to grow, producing the largest gap between the affluent and the middle class in recorded U.S. history.[118]

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Style Wars: Critical Reflections On The Power Of Style

Nicole Archer

The fashion designer Yves Saint Laurent famously quipped that "fashions fade, style is eternal." This enigmatic statement does much to elucidate the powerful place that style holds in many contemporary cultures. In particular, it alerts us to the relationship that exists between notions of style and notions of history. Or, to the idea that "to have style" is to have the means of inserting oneself into history, while "to lack style" is to risk oblivion. This column, "Style Wars," suggests that the tracing of style's fluctuating movements across varied social, political, aesthetic, and philosophical terrains is important work, and that this is particularly true within the realms of fine art, design, art history, and visual studies (as many important figures within these fields have long vied to claim and contest the ownership of this term). "Style Wars" aims to appreciate how thinking about style can offer opportunities to explore sets of subjectivities and cultural practices that are often disassociated or pitted against one another.

Life Jackets

On September 26, 2015, a photograph appeared in the online edition of *The New York Times* that lays bare the obscene circumstances that separate modern life and death. It encapsulates the complicated ways that we fashion, or style, our relative purchases on the future. Taken by Pulitzer Prize winning, senior staff photographer Tyler Hicks, the image shows a man emerging from a small, well-lit retail outlet located on Fevzi Pasa Boulevard in Izmir, Turkey. To his right, a storefront window displays men's business suits and sport shirts in limited and conventional palettes. To the man's left, a crowd of mannequins exhibit a range of bright, safety-orange colored life jackets that are visually merchandised against fully inflated inner tubes. Throughout the store's interior, deep stacks of life jackets appear to spill across the polished floor.

What is perhaps most staggering about this photograph is that the conditions of its possibility are as overwhelming as they are ordinary. It is a stark index of "the multimillion-dollar shadow economy that has developed in Turkey to profit from the massive human tide rushing toward Europe,"[1] and it documents one of the last "stopping-off" places for thousands of people seeking refuge from the violences that plague their homelands located in Iraq, Syria, Eritrea, and beyond. The absolutely radiant orange vests featured in the foreground work to signal and materialize a necessary form of hope for those who are facing turbulent seas ahead (waters that have already consumed thousands of lives just this year). This alone does not account for the image's power. The standard business apparel teases out the prospect of upward mobility and suggests a sense of security that lies just beyond the refugees' current peripheries. Juxtaposed alongside one another, these garments create a hypothetical before-and-after image, steeped in wishful thinking, hopes and dreams, and bitter necessities.

Hick's photograph serves as a perceptive, formal critique of how narrow the gulf can be between those who "have" and those who "have-not." Similar to Eugène Atget's early 20th-century images of fashionable storefronts positioned along Paris's Avenue des Gobelins, it powerfully confronts viewers with the ways in which a simple retail window can momentarily capture the complex constructions of modern life and identity, while simultaneously amplifying the spellbinding powers that starkly commodified forms of dress have, namely the power to make promises of newer and better futures.

On the eve of a new year, and in the ongoing wake of a human rights crisis of unfathomable proportions, Hicks's image commands our attention. It insists that we take seriously the material provocations that draw so many of us out into dangerous waters. And it asks: why are we so often compelled to put our trust and hopes in material objects and commercial transactions despite the sinking feeling that our chances for success are precarious at best?

There is a tendency to think that clothing is primarily meant to protect us, to defend our profoundly vulnerable and exposed bodies from the elements as much as from the penetrating gaze of one another. Clothes are deeply entangled with the belief that "our bodies" *suffer* from the peculiar capacity to be naked, and that our clothing marks our inimitable attempts at compensating for this shortcoming by extending our bodies into the future (and outside the realms of some naïve, perpetually present animality).

Clothes are wound around our bodies from the moment of our birth. Fabrics are cut, folded, and sewn into neat, clever maps, authorizing our access and granting us safe passage. Heads peep through collars, fingers and feet through varying cuffs or hems, and we are instantly *located*. Our locomotion is fixed within a variable, but limited set of parameters, plotted along a variety of political and psychological vectors: *pink is for girls, blue is for boys; no shirt, no shoes, no service; only uniformed personnel allowed beyond this point; black tie required; the concealment of one's head or face is prohibited; "but I'm just not dressed for it . . ."*

Many of the people residing in the region of the Aegean Sea have had difficulty keeping up with the new "raft economy's" demands for objects like the life jacket. Some have resorted to making the highly sought-after garments without proper materials—producing them from fabrics and foams that actually absorb water, causing wearers to sink with rapidity. Yet there is no halt to these objects' sales.[2] The hope of what they guarantee magically endures. The risk is taken; the vest is ritualistically slipped over one's head with the conviction that *this garment* will earn the right to be discarded onto the growing piles of jackets, inner tubes, and rafts dotting the beaches of Greece and Italy.

Alex Seton, *Someone died trying to have a life like mine*, 2013. Wombeyan marble, nylon webbing, dimensions variable. Courtesy of the Adelaide Biennial. © Alex Seton.

A men's shop in Izmir, Turkey, has begun selling life jackets, capitalizing on a bustling "raft economy" that caters to an influx of migrants from the Middle East. Photograph by Tyler Hicks/The New York Times.

Eugène Atget, *Avenue des Gobelins*, 1927. Albumen silver print from glass negative, 8 5/8 x 6 13/16 inches. Courtesy of the Internet.

Here, we might appreciate how our clothes organize our bodies and feelings towards the world, and towards one another. Without them we are left at a loss, disoriented, set adrift. This is particularly true in the case of the life vests pictured in Hicks's photograph. Despite the high probability of defect, *these* vests still maintain the idea that they can help usher one through drastically chaotic and dangerous times and spaces. These vests remove inhibitions. Perhaps, without them, one cannot imagine escaping the twisted circumstances of the here and now. To expand upon this point, these vests attest to the fact that much of what we buy carries defect or is dangerous (even transparently so), but that these smooth transactions and shiny, new material objects comfort us nonetheless.

In a political economy that trades in futures and gambles on state and market instability, the relative levels of comfort that we experience are measures of our privilege. The degree to which we are in peril marks the limits of our privilege. Real, sustainable comforts mark our degrees of privilege, as do the disposable illusions of comfort that we find in shop windows. But it behooves us to remember that we are all vulnerable to exposure, and how we style our senses of comfort in the face of uncertainty matters gravely. We have grown too comfortable with the discomfort of others. We have abdicated our long-term responsibilities to one another (and to ourselves) in return for disposable, material consolations.

If this new year is to bring something other than an increased number of bodies literally sinking to the bottom, we must resolve to find new ways of fashioning more sustainable means of keeping ourselves afloat. In the face of uncertainty, we must understand that comfort always comes at a cost, and that some of us will need to feel more exposed, so that others may be covered; some of us will sacrifice coverage, so that others may find shelter. Eventually, we must challenge ourselves to develop a material logic, and a sense of comfort, that isn't founded on nakedness—or the fear of not being (human).

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2) As *The New York Times* reports, "An employee [at the store depicted in Hicks's photograph] who would not give his name said he sold 80 vests a day, for $13 each" (ibid). Maven Rana, the author of another, related report published with the BBC shortly before the *NYTimes* article (on August 28, 2015) and entitled "Europe migrants' life-jacket capital," states that other retailers report selling between 100-150 life jackets a day (http://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-34073196). Please note that I do not mean to suggest that the life vests depicted in Hicks's photograph are necessarily made from inappropriate or defective materials; this isn't something I can corroborate. Rather, what I am suggesting is that these (and other) vests are being purchased at unfaltering rates despite increasingly volatile market and cultural conditions, which unequivocally indicate a high likelihood that any such vest could be faulty.

Data

Ben Valentine

Living in Cambodia, I am sometimes offered brides. I go to eat dinner at a food stand and the owner suggests I meet her daughter, a thinly masked invitation to marry. My white skin is evidence enough for me to be seen as a promise to bring their family out of poverty. The idea of it is appallingly sad, but as people living in one of the poorest and most corrupt countries in Southeast Asia, they aren't *necessarily* wrong.

Our lives are surrounded by data and data gathering that, when discussed at all, is marketed as being in service to us, but isn't. The data we constantly produce is mostly hidden from us, and we don't think about the consequences until it's pulled out of the sea of big data and suddenly leveraged against us. Aside from marketing, which affects us all to varying degrees, data use is always political.

The terrifying power of data emerges when it is leveraged and made actionable. This is only possible for those transnational corporations and governments that collect it en masse and have the legal or monetary power behind that collection. The act of leveraging personal data defines us in a mechanistic and dehumanizing manner. Even if accurate, it is never the whole story. The potential for that data to be actionable—to rule over us—is growing, as there is ever more collected and a continued increase of more systems built on that collection. What is being collected and who can see this data is important, but understanding who can use that data is the real question of power in a networked world. These are questions of how power is spread and solidified.

The NSA surveils up to three degrees of separation from a terrorist *suspect*, meaning anyone who interacted on a phone or online with anyone who interacted with anyone who interacted with a terrorist *suspect*. If you've called them, emailed them, or visited their website, you can be on the list. This of course puts a lot of journalists and researchers one or two hops from terrorists. Acxiom, the largest data mining company in the world, touts that it has "information about 500 million active consumers worldwide, with about 1,500 data points per person."[1] They don't even have to give a reason.

There are 680,000 people on the FBI Terrorist Watchlist; according to declassified reports, 40% of this population has no recognized terrorist affiliation. *The Intercept* reports, "That category—280,000 people—dwarfs the number of watchlisted people suspected of ties to Al-Qaeda, Hamas, and Hezbollah combined."[2] Kyle Chayka reports in *Newsweek* that there are over 46 million faces compiled in FBI databases.[3] These people are not necessarily terrorists. The US kills based solely on metadata.[4]

This network of extraction is by no means new. Colonial powers invaded lands to build roads to establish trade routes to extract natural resources or slaves in service to their kings. This physical imposition of state power was meant to improve the invader's country, and to build up military might in order to continue expanding, or to aid in protecting their nation. As these networks of extraction were reconstituted into ever more granular iterations, especially now in digital networks, a new type of extraction became possible: that of raw data. This was market power, and it only needed you to be connected to impose itself. As the world became increasingly connected, physical barriers grew less relevant to the marketplace, and borders opened to greater cash and data flows. Meanwhile those very borders have become more militarized to refugees and immigrants.

This gave birth to what I'll call the "neoliberal gaze." This is a similar imposition of power to the colonial powers before it—a transnational means of looking that is invasive, self-serving, reductive, and restructures that which it sees to be more inline with the looker's own understanding of the world—but only a few superpowers, together with many transnational corporations, were big enough to benefit from the neoliberal model. As security expert Bruce Schneier points out, despite the power the network brought to amplify citizen voices, governments and corporations had a lot more power to amplify.[5]

The neoliberal gaze possesses all the qualities of the mechanic gaze, but at the behest of transnational power. The mechanic gaze is a reductive programmed logic that cannot help but impose. It is a binary gaze in a complex world. The neoliberal gaze attaches that viewing to power, and acts on what is found in the pursuit of capital, or the preservation of power, which is increasingly synonymous.

Just as the French built roads in Southeast Asia to extract rubber and marketed this conquest to the locals as job creation and better interior transit, the neoliberal gaze fundamentally favors the wealthy who own the networks. That residents of then French Indochina got roads was an accidental side effect in the process of wealth extraction to the much larger benefit of France's economy and international power. Now, too, we welcome the opportunity to be surveilled through our phones and computers—our instruments of connection—at the benefit of transnational corporations. The blood is less, but the power dynamic remains.

Hannes Grassegger, author of *I am Capital*, calls us digital serfs, writing, "We are about to enter a world that is half digital and half physical, and without properly noticing, we've become half bits and half atoms. These bits are now an integral part of our identity, and we don't own them." We don't own that data, and those who do (and those who have unfettered access to that data) have their own goals.

The threat that constant and mass surveillance holds against journalism and activism—any forms of dissent—is an existential threat to our freedom. It is proposed that through enough surveillance those in political power can prevent anything. This is the expressed goal of the NSA in a post 9/11 world. Whether they stop events for the greater good or for the preservation of their own power is the question: a question we will be left guessing about over the rise and fall of many political parties all over the world. As dictatorships around the world have been found to be employing these tools, the idea that these tools are only used by advertisers wanting our money is outdated and violently ignorant.

The realities—both physical and intangible—of the neoliberal gaze reflect its desire to be ubiquitous, hidden, and unaccountable. Nielsen ratings, the measurements for radio and television audience habits, were achieved through a physical box on top of a pre-digital television where the viewers were expected to record who

Facebook Internet drone. Courtesy of the Internet.

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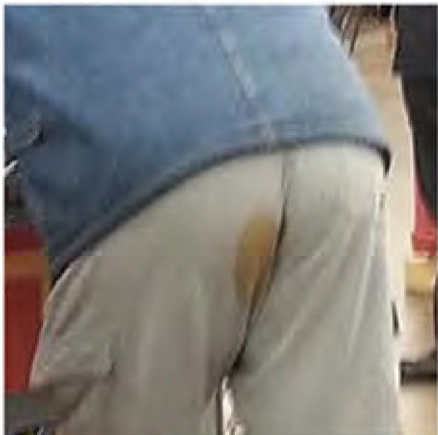

The Most Distinguished Walmart Shoppers

Hypster Guru

Click bait. Courtesy of the Internet.

was watching the TV while it automatically recorded what was being watched. The famous system also included long interviews with the family and TV diaries. Though the box has become invisible to the average viewer, data collection capabilities have become exponentially more precise while moving into our phones, computers, thermostats, cars, and more.

The problem with the Nielsen meters was that they weren't granular enough and were too reliant on the viewer's active and accurate participation. US media and entertainment was a $479.23 billion industry in 2012,[6] and nobody could really tell if you were watching their shows, what you did during commercials, who else was in the room, and so on. Now, online advertisers know where on the page you stop reading, when you change tabs, if you shared, what link brought you to their site, and so on.

The neoliberal gaze quickly moved from a desktop family computer to a personal cellphone with a password (even biometric passwords) making this data more specific to each user. Whether they know or desire this or not, this process is now seeking to connect the over six-billion people on the planet with cellphones to just a few companies and governments.[7] Facebook—with more active users than any other country has citizens—is collecting real-name data, images, relationship information, private messages, our faces, and more. While this is an advertiser's dream, it's also the NSA's. But what did we get in the exchange? More accurately targeted ads and compelling clickbait headlines?

Perhaps the most alarming aspect of this obfuscation of surveillance is not the use of surveillance as information gathering for physical force, but surveillance as a process that fundamentally corrupts that which it surveils. The neoliberal gaze is an invasive scouring of the world for capital while recreating the world in line with the politics of its maker—transnational businesses and political superpowers. The process of looking, gathering, and interpreting data holds as much agency in the shaping of meaning as the data itself. Data does not have objective meaning. Scientists understand this, but when data is collected and leveraged for companies, the goal is not to be accurate—it is to make money.

The monocrop is a perfect metaphor for the neoliberal gaze as a means of understanding a complex ecosystem purely in service to profit. The hopelessly reductive nature of this gaze—its shortsightedness—is baffling until you consider the market value that gaze creates for a few. This is a kind of viewing that, by being myopic and self-serving, extracts and destroys at the benefit of its maker. This is why Naomi Klein identifies neoliberal capitalism as the fundamental barrier to stopping climate change in her new book *This Changes Everything*.

Now, consider the metaphor of the monocrop in a digital space like Tumblr. By distancing itself from Facebook's goal of legal-name identities, or "accurate" data, Tumblr has become known as an online refuge where radical or alternative communities can find shelter and be nourished. However, the space remains subject to the realities of the marketplace; it is not outside of the neoliberal gaze. When Tumblr announced the implementation of advanced image-recognition software to identify brand loyalties in user posts, perhaps this information wasn't as marketable as Facebook's, yet the effects remain similar. "Are you a radical, queer woman of color? You need to buy _____!" The implementation of this image-recognition software could be construed as a corrosive co-optation of a safe space if it hadn't always been a privatized space, and a system to produce capital.

The next step of the neoliberal gaze is to take the surveillance capabilities of the online world into offline space. We have long seen this at borders and in militarized spaces, but we are now seeing the beginnings of this in the home with Samsung's SmartTV,[8] Google's Chrome,[9] Amazon's Echo,[10] and Google's Project Tango.[11] These either seek to bring the surveillance and data gathering we've grown accustomed to with casual browsing online into the physical world, or at least make them visible. As we've seen in recent outcries against Samsung and Google for constant recording of audio, the privacy implications are astounding; the financial potential is bigger still.

This is the future of the Internet of the Things (IoT), or maybe the Neoliberal Net, where every *thing* remains in service to its seller or maker, even after purchase. The IoT already exists in small instances and is very revealing in its application. A chaotically stored Amazon warehouse is an IoT, and it orchestrates objects, robots, and employees in a highly productive dance, literally illegible to humans in its complexity. The employees are tracked through space just as your browsing habits are online, and then hired, promoted, or fired accordingly. There are already construction companies using drones to monitor large construction projects and automatically identify areas of delay.[12]

As the neoliberal gaze gets increasingly more accurate, the intentions behind it must dramatically change for it to ever benefit the majority. As Naomi Klein expounds, the current logic spells ecological doom for our planet, and therefore society. The more accurate the gaze, the more invasive it must be. The mass surveillance of this gaze is incompatible with the freedoms we hold dear. The question the neoliberal gaze now presents us with is: if we continue this way, how much of the world can we recreate in its image before it collapses? Singularity believers are taking a risky gamble as they proselytize fit-bits and brain freezing at the benefit of a wealthy few.

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1)http://www.nytimes.com/2012/06/17/technology/acxiom-the-quiet-giant-of-consumer-database-marketing.html?_r=0
2) https://theintercept.com/2014/08/05/watch-commander/
3) http://www.newsweek.com/2014/04/25/biometric-surveillance-means-someone-always-watching-248161.html
4) https://theintercept.com/2014/02/10/the-nsas-secret-role/
5)https://www.schneier.com/news/archives/2014/04/surveillance_is_the.html
6)http://www.nycmedialab.org/10-key-takeaways-global-entertainment-and-media-outlook/
7)http://qz.com/179897/more-people-around-the-world-have-cell-phones-than-ever-had-land-lines/
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11) http://www.wired.com/2014/06/google-tango/
12)http://www.technologyreview.com/news/540836/new-boss-on-construction-sites-is-a-drone/

Scott Howe, CEO and President of Acxiom. Courtesy of the Internet.

The Postcolonial Contemporary

John Zarobell

I assure you, my cemetery has no recollection
Of unmarked mass graves, scattered bone fragments;
That skull and cross-bones over the gate? Added by Disney—
Leftover prop from Zorro. Adds a little romance.
—Deborah Miranda, from "Interviews with California Missions"

Today Junípero Serra is being canonized by Pope Francis in Washington DC. Fr. Serra is the Franciscan friar who started the missions in present-day California and was thus responsible for the resettlement and Christianization of the Native populations here, including countless deaths, beatings, rapes, imprisonment, and the repression of cultural practices, languages, and traditions. For most descendants of these California natives, it is clear this man was no saint. The pope has his reasons of course, and for the first new-world pope, honoring the Spanish settlers of California is a way of honoring all of the Spanish-speaking Catholics of the United States, many of whom followed in Fr. Serra's footsteps by walking north into California from Mexico. Yet the sanctification of colonial domination underlines many unanswered questions in the history of the lands we occupy and other territories around the world. In some sense these issues have been buried, particularly in the United States, by the marginalization of the native population and alienation of these people from their traditional lands. Colonial displacement has often been made invisible by countless historical changes that have occurred, but artists continue to disinter meaning from the colonial encounter and the long shadow it casts across the landscape.

Lewis DeSoto, *Conquest* (detail), 2004. Mixed media sculpture. Courtesy of the artist.

The advent of postcolonial studies has flooded the intellectual market with excavations of so many dimensions of the colonial past and its present ramifications in our ways of thinking and coming to terms with the world. For others, the term "postcolonial" itself is a misnomer because colonization continues unabated, sometimes in new forms such as social and economic marginalization, and sometimes as a persistent trend of outright domination exercised by the powerful on those whose resistance is at best ineffectual (think of the Occupied Palestinian Territories).

Lewis DeSoto, *Conquest*, 2004. Mixed media sculpture. Courtesy of the artist.

But I want to look at the postcolonial in a broader context, as a manifestation of our subjectivity today whether conscious or otherwise. We are all implicated in the postcolonial dynamic because most places on Earth have been colonized at least once and therefore our subjectivities have been formulated though a postcolonial lens, whether we realize it or not. The very ground we stand upon is the result of contestation, both of meaning and the will-to-power. To colonize a space is to take it away from those who previously occupied it, but it also includes changing the meaning of that space—into one of property—so that there can be no going back, no way to even imagine that which was lost because those ways of thinking about place and the alternative languages to describe it have been eradicated. Notwithstanding Ward Churchill's proposal for the US to cede about a third of its territory to Native Americans in order to live up to the various treaties promising land to tribes, the habitus where the indigenous inhabitants of the Americas once lived is gone in a way that can never be retrieved.

So we are all postcolonial now. The only question is whether we are willing to see, and to acknowledge it. Native American artists are responding to Serra's canonization, and a recent issue of *News from Native California* (winter 2014), with James Luna acting as the arts editor, explores a variety of responses by Indian artists to the missions and their legacy. Many more events have been planned, including a Day of the Dead exhibition this year at the Mission Cultural Center for Latino Arts, entitled *The Bones of Our Ancestors: Endurance and Survival Beyond Serra's Mission(s)*. The image the curators have chosen to advertise the call for artists is by L. Frank—a painting that was also featured in the *News from Native California* issue mentioned above—titled *no, really, please take my wife* (2012). It depicts a modern day Coyote, a mythical and literary figure in multiple Native American cultures and stories, dressed in sandals, shorts, and a jean jacket, holding a microphone in a barren, red landscape. Behind him on the horizon stands a comic-book mission. Looking at the clouds he says to no one in particular, "No Really Please Take My Wife." These words are inscribed in reverse across the canvas underneath him. Since Coyote is known for his sense of humor, it is no surprise that he emerges into the present as a comic, making fun of the awful history behind the missions. The humor transforms this bitter and violent past into something we can laugh about because, in the end, what else is there? The artist is a descendant of the missionized Tongva people whose culture was so thoroughly shattered by the missions that the tribe cannot even achieve the foundations for federal recognition. To paraphrase the implications of the message here: "no please take my wife (and everything else besides)." What was the homeland of the Tongva is now known as Los Angeles. From such a tragedy is born dark humor.

Andrew Gilbert, *Africa Destroys Europa*, 2013. Mixed media on paper. Courtesy of the artist.

But it is not only Native American artists who have explored the postcolonial contemporary. The Scottish artist Andrew Gilbert examines, in visceral terms, the glory days of the British Empire under the reign of Queen Victoria and Prince Edward. His pictorial antics owe much to German Expressionism, but also to military illustration and romanticized depictions of colonial conquest from films and television. Yet the images are the result of fantastic projection, a kind of re-imagining of the violence of colonial conquest as if it were played out in an entirely different way. Viewers are lured into considering their own relationship to the colonial past. In Gilbert's *Africa Destroys Europa* (2013), an enormous monster—part zebra, part leopard, part dragon, with a skull for a head in the shape of the African continent—attacks, devours, and mutilates a legion of British soldiers who attempt to defend Buckingham Palace. The image is replete with signs of violence, such as the floating hand spurting blood that references a dark episode of colonial history: the practice of cutting off the hands of workers who were not productive enough in the Belgian Congo. Other sexualized imagery, such as the exposed black breast of the beast and the black penis emerging from the skull's eye spurting semen, tease out the sexualized nature of Africans as attributed by European settler populations. Gilbert extrudes volatile imagery in vivid color here, but in a small inset—perhaps from the belly of the beast—he provides a parlor scene of two British officers smoking and examining a primitivist, expressionist painting while a severed black penis sits on the table in front of them. In this highly sophisticated faux-naive style, Gilbert self-consciously disinters the violence of European colonialism in Africa while imagining an orgy of destruction if Africa were to reciprocate.

L. Frank, *no, really, please take my wife*, 2012. Acrylic on board. Courtesy of the Internet.

A very different kind of postcolonial contemporary is visible in the work of Lewis deSoto, a Napa-based artist of Cahuilla ancestry. DeSoto's name has a dual reference, which he teases out in the sculpture *Conquest* (2004). On one hand, there is the American mid-century car company and, on the other hand, Hernando de Soto was one of the first conquistadors, whose trail of murder, rape, and destruction winds through both South and North America. The fact that a car company would be named after such a dubious historical figure is not exceptional. Cadillac is named after the French explorer (Antoine de la Mothe Cadillac) who built the first European fort in what is now Detroit, while Pontiac is named after an Ottawa chief who laid siege to the fort in 1763. Many American car models were named after Native tribes (Jeep Cherokee and Comanche, for example), to say nothing of state and city names throughout the United States that reflect traces of the loss of Native sovereignty and territory across the country.

For the artist, being an Indian named after de Soto is not a source of pride, but he turns this infamy on its head by creating an artificial DeSoto from a 1965 Chrysler New Yorker. (Chrysler headed the company from 1928 to 1961, when it perished from lack of sales.) The artist has lovingly hand crafted a variety of details that make this car unique. First of all, the vehicle shares characteristics with the Spanish conqueror's legendary horse—the car is white with a black textured vinyl top, like a white horse with a black-haired man atop. Further, the interior is filigreed with touches of gold that reference the conquistador's quest for El Dorado that led him to extinguish so many lives. A relief portrait of the Spaniard is inset into the steering wheel. Other details on the exterior reference colonial conquest, such as a small inlaid marquis (Conquest) with a sword and an image of the smallpox virus that decorate the rear fenders. Finally, the artist has reprinted the Spanish *Requerimento* of 1513, which established the laws for indigenous inhabitants of the Americas in relation to the Church and the Crown of Spain. The gist is: submit or die/be enslaved, and if you resist it will be your own fault. This is listed in the fine print on the price sheet that is attached to the window.

DeSoto's tongue-in-cheek homage to colonial decimation in the Americas once again turns tragedy into humor. More importantly, it transforms recognition of the colonial past into the essential condition for the appreciation of his work of art. Consciousness of our postcolonial position becomes the aesthetic of this work, and in the classic sense of the term, the sculpture reveals for viewers the truth behind such an object of beauty. To confront the truth of our postcolonial present does not entail the same stakes for everyone. If your ancestors were nearly wiped out in the process of colonialism, such a truth is a burden to bear, but none of us can claim to be innocent because our city, our homes, and our countries once belonged to others. All artists who encourage us to confront this destructive and painful history allow us to come to terms with *this* reality: our present. The artists and other residents of San Francisco who are being displaced now are but the latest manifestation of an age-old trend for the powerful to seize what they want, no matter the cost for those who have no say. One response that I see regularly is a piece of graffiti on a freeway underpass in Oakland: "Occupy to De-Colonize." As I drive along that postcolonial freeway I wonder if it's possible, if we can actually de-colonize our present. At least that writer has seen the limits of our condition and has imagined an alternative. As artists take up this challenge of illuminating the postcolonial, they imagine and project the alternatives.

The Economy Of Nostalgia

Alexis Anais Avedisian

Last year during the holiday season I sat in my family's living room browsing Facebook on my iPhone while passively experiencing my brother's *Call of Duty* marathon. If you were also using Facebook around this time, you likely remember the platform encouraging you to watch a "Year in Review" video that had been tailored to your specific account. The video compiled all of my most favored status updates and photographs of 2014 to obnoxiously upbeat music. I laughed at how cliché it was to consider the past year of my existence in such dramatized terms, negating a large part of my identity which is difficult to be condensed into social media appropriate content. As the avatar in my brother's game was murdered by a spray of enemy bullets, I remember thinking: If we see a flashback of our lives when we die, would our re-play be sponsored by Facebook? Do we appreciate memories more when Big Data ideology, obtrusive and unavoidable, affirms they were also appreciated by everyone else?

Year in Review was a preview for a more complex service Facebook made public in March. Titled "On this Day," every user can follow an internal link to access content they had posted on that same day every prior year. Succeeding the competing independent application Timehop—which compiles a user's dated Facebook content in addition to Twitter and Instagram—On this Day encourages nostalgia through personalized rediscovery. To major companies like Facebook, nostalgia is no longer a pained feeling of moments lost, as romanticized by the likes of Proust, but an economized emotion embedded into an algorithmic infrastructure of surveillance and corporate dominance. As many of us hold profiles approaching a decade old, Facebook wants us to recognize its homogeny through reinforcing its popularity. In doing so, we begin to see Facebook as a platform for social affluence, mirroring capitalist ethics ever tied to a continual quest for profit.

Using On this Day exemplified monotony. I found that most of what Facebook considers to be my memories were actually highly performative or otherwise explicitly tailored sentiments aimed at specific audiences. I began recognizing patterns, not only in the types of content I was producing at specific times, but also in my ability to solicit the attention of the people my content was targeted to. Attention in this context is a "like" or a comment—a fleeting, impartial imprint of commonality that another user had gifted to me, likely prompting momentary euphoria if a greater connection to that person was so desired. We know this feeling all too well: when our crush acknowledges a selfie, when a distant colleague congratulates us on a career update, or that one time every year when practically everyone we have ever interacted with wishes us a happy birthday. Browsing the content itself is boring, repetitive, and largely unstimulating to revisit, but the communities we created and the scalability of our social media personalities distinguishes our day-to-day updating from that which merits tempestuous memorialization.

In a 2012 article for *The Atlantic*, media sociologist Nathan Jurgenson theorized that, much like a photographer who inherently sees the world as a potential photograph, a "Facebook Eye" enables users to assess specific moments of their lives as potential public updates. Jurgenson's research rejects the sharp binaries of online and offline. There is only one reality, and the tools that guide our perception are often digital. Understanding that frequent usage of social media creates little distinction between the "physical" and the "virtual" becomes more important to the uprooting of nostalgia as a definitive concept: we do not live a "real" life to then filter our memories for public consumption—the action of filtering for public consumption is an extension of living, a memory within itself.

This isn't a Millennial-specific ideology, even if the term "born digital," used for the generation growing up alongside the rise of digital technologies, is becoming synonymous with networked connectivity. With Facebook surpassing one billion active users across all continents, from a governance perspective it would be impossible for the company to view every user as unique. Services like On this Day are efficient in the sense that they rely on the user to construct their individuality among a standardization of the masses.

Nostalgia is evolving. We remember a status update we posted that received dozens of likes, and we remember its context collapse—the precarious feeling that arises when people from various cliques group together for the sole purpose of recognizing us. Their profile pictures are compiled into a neat, calculated list, evincing a life lived socially and fully—a life not only of friendships, but of the emotional assurance afforded by this very archived data. Nostalgia is an amalgamation of human sentience becoming present from the past, automated in a value system designed specifically for the ephemeral. The delete button then acts as an antithesis of memory, alleviating the pain of public social rejection in a system designed only for a commemoration of prosperity.

I sometimes struggle with this, and not because I am fetishizing what it was like to live before Facebook, but mostly because there is seemingly no end to this Orwellian hellscape. "Logging off" isn't an option when our livelihoods are based on the merits of our connections. When this livelihood is also entangled with relationships, a dependency originates through its colloquialism. What is less frequently talked about is competition, not only with other peers in our networks—which can be challenging and fun—but the competition we create against ourselves. The quantification of our content becomes a number we've associated with our presence: an achieved goal, a transparent worth. An inability to accrue this worth again can indicate an ineptitude, an anxiousness, a yearning to reflect back. Yet Facebook's predictive algorithm promises us minimal anxieties—we're always being recommended new friends—and if one can manipulate the system to entice and appease to all of them, one is more likely to accept Facebook as a vernacular platform purely for its seduction of success.

Chelsea Manning, a discharged US Army soldier and privacy activist currently serving a 35-year jail sentence for disclosing military documents, recently spoke with *Paper Magazine* about maintaining a sense of self under consistent corporate and government surveillance. She analyzed a friction between the natural inkling to maintain a genuine identity and the institutions of power that seek to usurp it from us, citing targeted advertising models on social media platforms as one way media corporations turn our data into capital. It's apparent that when we post to Facebook the language we use is being tracked to better suggest products to us, restricting any semblance of authenticity in favor of placing us into buyer demographics. In light of this power play, being true to yourself is subversive and radical.

Is it possible to find consolation on social media and still maintain this inner truce? Nostalgia is sought by corporations as it allows consumers to feel a connection to larger cultural frameworks. As more people adopt self-branding practices, latching onto shared memories feels habitual. "I remember when" quickly transitions to "I remember feeling communion as this event was unfolding"—a by-product of absorbing information publicly. There is a long history of nostalgia being used as an advertising tactic, which is consistently refreshed for whichever generation has the most spending power: the youth maturing into the financially promiscuous.

I didn't watch the last Super Bowl, but I witnessed Missy Elliot's triumphant comeback over a series of Tweets. And a few months ago, Kanye West waxed on the proliferation of capitalism in his MTV Video Music Awards speech, where the artist accepted the Michael Jackson Video Vanguard Award for his prolific career. Referring to his 2009 on-screen dispute with Taylor Swift, he stated: "You know how many times they announced Taylor was going to give me the award, 'cause it got them more ratings?" The controversy in question initially spurred when Swift received "Best Video" over Beyoncé and West hopped on stage to express his disapproval, which has long been debated as a protest against systematic racism in pop culture. Yet MTV saw the altercation as a ratings ploy, summoning the viewer's nostalgia for a past cultural event away from the important criticality it represented in a clear effort to pique viewer curiosity. West was subtly forced to celebrate unfounded happiness upon reconciliation, as nothing is more marketable than rage repackaged as bliss.

It seems nostalgia is associated with happiness (not loneliness or aging) *because* it is a marketing tool, and we're conditioned to feel happy when we consume products. Nostalgia is a preference of taste, signifying that we are part of a larger cultural collective. Only now, social media's surveillance grants us instant access to the products we want, creating more potential happiness. Advertisers do not sell us nostalgia—they sell us our own tracked desires masquerading as pleasure, like a hybrid form of romanticism.

"I am not a born digital," UK-based visual artist Penny Goring assures me in a conversation over e-mail, "I did not want my youth lost in the 20th century." Goring's visual anthology *DELETIA* that launched as part of the New Museum and Rhizome's *Poetry as Practice* is a haunting tribute to the artist's life. Images of her former self are cut and rearranged upon images of nude models, inverted flowers, and rag dolls. Set to Irish funeral music, she includes looping .gifs of an industrial factory—a machine making donuts, a machine spurting liquid to create something unknown—and her subtle references to the hidden mechanics of consumerism become an analogy not only for the death of youth but for the impossibility of personal growth in an era that esteems cyclical replenishment. Less about digital market disruption and more about synchronicity, the self is rendered a prism that wards off the ghostly promises of data immortality as much as it fragments the lived experiences that make up the whole of a person. We are taught that we will age out of passion and sexuality; we are taught to fear this day as much as we fear the youth that emblazon so well the lives we may have already lived. Using her age as a platform for empowerment, Goring teaches us that it does not matter when an image of ourselves is published, but that it has been disclosed fearlessly from the economy of nostalgia. The body holds inherent obsolescence, like an iPhone or a Facebook service, but selfhood cannot be scheduled for depletion. The self is not a product to be upgraded, but an archive to be cherished, with or without reminders from Facebook. "*DELETIA* is a way of protecting myself, forgiving myself, making peace, and coming to terms. I am the sum of everything I was, am, and will be; it's all of me existing at once."

Heather Dewey-Hagborg's forensic DNA phenotype of Chelsea Manning. Courtesy of the Internet.

Penny Goring, *marvelous precious hole*, 2015. Interactive work on NewHive. Courtesy of the artist.

Penny Goring, *broom*. Interactive work on NewHive. Courtesy of the artist.

Penny Goring, *sign of the eagle*, 2015. Interactive work on NewHive (a multimedia publishing platform; the works by Penny Goring mentioned here can be found at newhive.com/penny/profile). Courtesy of the artist.

Literal American Gold Mine

Ingrid Burrington

Newmont gold mine outside of Elko, NV. Courtesy of Mapbox and Digital Globe.

Newmont gold mine outside of Elko, NV. Courtesy of Mapbox and Digital Globe.

"Everything here is built to scale," I'm told, standing before a haul truck approximately the size of a two-story house. The person telling me this drives one of these haul trucks at a Newmont gold mine outside of Elko, NV. He is telling me why driving the Caterpillar 793D is not unlike driving a Toyota Corolla. The 100-foot wide roads, the berms, the equipment and operations of the mine are built around these massive trucks, which means it's not actually that scary to drive one.

At this mine, which sits on a geological site called the Carlin Trend, there's on average four–five ounces of actual gold within a single haul truck's 250 tons of earth. In current prices, that means there's about $5,275 to be made from a haul, which is about 0.17% of the sticker price of the haul truck itself, or about 11% of just one of the truck's 12-foot tall, $45,000 tires. In making these calculations, I am not sure what scale the haul truck driver meant when he described mining operations as "built to scale."

As far as commodities go, gold seems like one that is pretty far removed from my day-to-day life, encountered only in trace amounts—the roughly 0.034 ounces of it in my phone, maybe a 90-second segment on public radio about gold's fluctuating price and "what that means for the economy." Gold mining, I had incorrectly assumed, now only happened "somewhere else," in places where "mineral" was always accompanied with "conflict"—certainly not in the United States, where economic value is presumed to be more abstraction than anything else.

But, as noted in a 2015 United States Geological Survey report,[1] the United States was the fourth largest gold producer in the world last year. Newmont Mining is one of the largest gold producing companies in the world, and the majority of their North American operations are in Nevada, which is where over 75% of the United States's gold production happens. Newmont offers tours at three of its open-pit mine sites, and the idea of touring an actual, operational gold mine was too novel to pass up. Growing up in California, gold mining field trips for me generally meant men in old-timey outfits and tin pans, not haul trucks the size of houses or 2000-foot deep pits created to extract microscopic amounts of ore.

The tour of the Carlin mine is scheduled on the same day I have to drive from Wendover, UT to San Francisco, CA, so after I finish packing up for the day I drive the two hours to Elko to meet the tour group at the parking lot of the Northeastern Nevada Museum. It's the last tour of the season, which means the tour group consists of a retired man from Reno on vacation in the area and myself. Typically they have enough attendees to justify a charter bus, but today we ride to the mine site in a company SUV. Corporate tours generally exist for corporations, not tourists, so I'm not that surprised when our tour guide cheerfully reminds us that, per the waiver signed earlier, our photos are for "personal use only." It looks like an inverted Aztec pyramid boring into the Earth, or maybe the ruins of a lost civilization recently unearthed by intrepid archaeologists. It looks like a setting of a Brian Aldiss novel. It looks like a dreaded future, spectacular and terrifying.

Instead of my photos from the mine, I can offer satellite images and aerial photos from the USGS. From that distance, the pit is still impressive, but it's also in the Nevada desert, a place which tends to daunt and swallow up even the most massive of human endeavors. In the desert everything is built to scale, though not necessarily to last—at least not through geologic time.

Newmont began operations at the Carlin Trend in 1965, and since then the site has been one of the most productive US gold mines and a pioneer in open-pit mining and cyanide heap leaching, a now-common and relatively cheap method of extracting gold. In this process, a pile of rocks extracted from the ground are laid out on an open-air heap and sprayed with a diluted cyanide solution, which leaches gold ore out of the rocks. At Carlin, the gold is then refined out of that cyanide solution into 93% pure gold bars, which are sold to Brinks and sent to a company in Switzerland for further refinement into 99.9% pure gold bars. Those 99.9% pure gold bars then enter the wholesale market for gold, at which point they enter into entirely separate supply chains for things like jewelry and electronics. The open pit in Nevada that I can't publish photos of is just one of many ground zeros for a much longer, much more byzantine supply chain, which is why I don't and probably can't really know precisely what conflict-ridden country the 0.034 ounces of gold in my phone comes from, and why it's such a difficult industry and supply chain to regulate.

Despite being part of an opaque supply chain network, open-pit mines are heavily regulated and surveilled. As we look out onto the future ancient ruined city of the open pit, our tour guide explains that a network of prisms and sensors monitor the pit at all times, helping the company predict and prevent landslides. The entire mining operation is as delicately monitored as the earth they mine. The haul trucks are tracked by management and directed to different extraction sites via software. The refinery site where gold bars are actually poured stands behind a maze of barbed wire, key cards, and surveillance cameras (the inside of the refinery is not on the tour). Employees can't take anything offsite, including "waste rock" materials that would be used for building berms (technically, this just means anything from the earth that isn't gold, so other minerals like silver and copper are forms of waste rock). Refinery workers have to shower before and after their workday, though this is more likely due to chemical exposure risks than fear of theft.

Geologists sampling extractions from the mine compile data to calculate something called "life of mine," which is roughly how much longer the mine is expected to be productive. At Chukar, another of Newmont's mines also located in Carlin, the termination date is estimated to be around 2032, although advances in mining technology and extraction methods keep extending that date. In the 1960s, many assumed the Carlin site as a whole would be active for maybe a decade, tops—a comment frequently noted in a 50-year anniversary publication created by Newmont and the Elko Daily Free Press.

The extension of mine life, the energy and overhead costs, and the risks that go into pulling just a little more ore out of earth is an example of how everything in mining is built to scale. At a local scale, it keeps a major employer and economic driver in operation. Newmont employs around 5,100 staff and contractors in the state of Nevada, and as of 2011 gold mining as a whole accounted for 6% of Nevada's GDP. Local impact also extends pretty far beyond the borders of Elko County—workers will commute from as far as Boise, ID, since the work schedule for many mine employees is five days on, five days off.

At the scale of a global economy, the corporate office at the Carlin mine has six clocks in the lobby displaying time in different Newmont mining regions: Nevada, Colorado, Ghana, Indonesia, Perth, and Yanacocha. The profit margins for mining are astonishingly narrow, as those four-five ounces per 250 tons might have suggested. Making holes in the Earth that are visible from space is pretty expensive, and extracting as much value from that process adds even more expense, environmental consequences, and attempts at regulation.

This is perhaps a familiar tendency of Anthropocene economics: to scorch the Earth while scavenging for scraps of value, to maintain a way of life we maybe shouldn't have ever had in the first place for just a few decades longer. Our tour guide tells us that when the Chukar Quarry stops being productive, the company will perform "land reclamation"—in this case, they will turn the pit into a reservoir over a decades-long process. It's hard to imagine the open pit filled with water, harder still to imagine a civilization that will be able to use it.

When we return to the Northeastern Nevada Museum after the tour, my phone with its 0.034 ounces of gold tells me that I have 526 miles of driving ahead of me. I'll cross through lonely northern Nevada, where all the gas stations have slot machines, into California, where the legacy of gold mining has been superseded by data mining, a commodity fiction of similarly opaque supply chains, intensive scrutiny, surveillance, and growing desperation. I drive for nine hours and I do not look back.

1) U.S. Geological Survey, Mineral Commodity Summaries, January 2015. http://minerals.usgs.gov/minerals/pubs/commodity/gold/mcs-2015-gold.pdf

On The Waters Of History: The 14th Istanbul Biennial

Arie Amaya-Akkermans

An old, white fishing boat journeys up and down the Bosphorus from the Golden Horn and is seen from various places in Istanbul throughout the day. This is not just a boat among many, but an artwork containing a sound installation by Füsun Onur, one of Turkey's most prominent early conceptual artists, who is little known outside the country. If you sit on the roof terrace of the Istanbul Modern museum for an hour or two, you might be able to see *Sea* (2015), yet most people had not seen it a month after the exhibition had opened to the public. This story encapsulates well the spirit of the 14th Istanbul Biennial, *SALTWATER: A Theory of Thought Forms*. While you might be able to see many things, you might as well not, and this depends not only on good luck but on your ability to read through a thick forest of invisible references and a highly theoretical, if not speculative, concept of art where aesthetic objects, reality, sites, and science meet rather haphazardly.

SALTWATER is rich in examples of the kind of speculative thinking that drives the ambitions of contemporary theory as a holistic apparatus of knowledge that ultimately becomes too abstract. A work by Lawrence Weiner, *On the Verge* (2015), is placed at a historical lighthouse in the coastal village of Rumeli Feneri, 25 kilometres away from metropolitan Istanbul, on the northwestern end of the Bosphorus Strait, and the work, described as "language and the materials referred to," leaves the viewer slightly dumbfounded. Fernando García-Dory's "para-institution," under the name of *INLAND Türkiye Extension Agency* (2015), is an example of art as social practice, self-styled social sculpture, and propaganda space, but delivers little and bizarrely includes a shop. Pierre Huyghe's *Abyssal Plain* (2015) is a concrete structure buried in the water on the island of Sivriada, and, again, is invisible to an audience that journeyed for two hours on a boat to an empty island in the Sea of Marmara.

Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev's exhibition concept, which she has chosen to term a "draft," revolves around saltwater, one of the most ubiquitous materials in the world and one fundamental to planetary life, looking at different types of waves and knots across seas and oceans as metaphors for movement and human agency. Saltwater is here deployed as the raw material of history in a city spread across different bodies of water. Hosted by dozens of venues in Istanbul—including traditional white cube spaces but also everything else from hotel rooms to private homes to islands to parking lots to lighthouses to the actual waters of the Bosphorus—the biennial is not one contiguous show but many solo presentations, only loosely interrelated and staged around a central exhibition (housed at the Istanbul Modern), in a complex network of relations between art and non-art, attempting to redefine a porous boundary between curatorial practices, exhibitions, archives, and theory.

Different species of movements and circulations—migrations across seas, blood flowing through our veins, movement of the stars, political transitions, revolutions—act as analytical models for knowledge types, overcoming the centrality of the aesthetic object and placing art in a larger symbolic order at the risk of fusing art with theory and losing both in an endless stream of metaphysical associations.

In a city like Istanbul, which is passing through a dangerous moment of transition and is at the heart of one of the world's most convoluted regions, it is difficult to imagine how a discredited system of thought such as theosophy can serve as the cornerstone of this ambitious biennial edition, one that is traditionally highly political and strongly influenced by the post-Soviet world. But as is always the case with biennials, individual artists are sometimes able to respond to context more effectively than the grand narratives that command them—an often arbitrary theme crafted by a "curator"—making a case for art's ability to resist its own mechanisms of authority.

Michael Rakowitz's multi-room installation, *The Flesh is Yours, The Bones are Ours* (2015), is an investigation into the material history of Armenians in Istanbul, reproducing the art nouveau forms that adorned buildings in the period after the late-19th-century fires and earthquakes, when wooden houses were replaced by still-standing

Ed Atkins, *Hisser*, 2015. Two-channel video with multiple audio channels and mixed media. Photograph by Sahir Ugur Eren. Courtesy of IKSV.

Michael Rakowitz, *The Flesh Is Yours, The Bones Are Ours*, 2015. Plaster molds, casts, dog skeletons from Sivriada, bones of livestock from dispossessed Armenian farms in Anatolia, fragments of lost Louis Sullivan building in Chicago, rubbings, photos, and letters. Photograph by Sahir Ugur Eren. Courtesy of IKSV.

modernist structures at the hand of Armenian architects. The plaster of his work is mixed with ground bones from the island of Sivriada, where many stray dogs died of hunger in the 1910s after being transferred to the island, a chilling and almost surreal story that would be replicated in the persecution and extermination of Armenians during the genocide of the same decade. Rakowitz's work is heterogeneous and compelling, but upon seeing it a couple of times it seems repetitive and a little forced. In the same building, the historical Galata Greek Primary School, a traditional biennial venue in Istanbul, with bitter references to the expulsion of minorities from the country, Haig Aivazian's moving choreographed performance *Wavy Wavy is the Sea of Bolis, O Mother* (2015) took place only a couple of times with men from the Beyoğlu Holy Trinity Armenian Church Choir, addressing the creolization of Turkish and Armenian cultures. Paradoxically enough, it is in this building where the exhibition comes together best, even if it moves only in one direction: memory.

In any discussion about this biennial it seems crucial to ask why it was so important to have a large number of works addressing the Armenian genocide, either obliquely or directly: does the participation of an artist with an Armenian background imply already a reference to the genocide events of 1915 or at least to the historical process of recognition and reconciliation? For example, the visual history of salt trade by Anna Boghiguian or the paintings of Paul Guiragossian are not easy to cross-reference, except by a correlation of identity. On the other hand, the joint project of Ayreen Anastas and Rene Gabri called *Multi-storied Houses* (2015), located in the office of the late Hrant Dink (an Armenian-Turkish intellectual assassinated in 2007), connects with Rakowitz's by dealing with the role of Armenians as photographers in the Ottoman Empire, and presents a beautiful assembly of objects and memories in the form of a puzzle waiting, almost hopelessly, to be deciphered.

Hera Büyüktaşçıyan's project *The Open School*, though it has received little attention, is perhaps one of the most effective knots in this movement of waves between histories and places. It begins as a preoccupation with the re-activation of a space, gathering an archive of books, notes, and objects from the original Greek school at the time of its functioning; the items are displayed in the reading room alongside a number of notebooks in lieu of the original number of students. *Islands Speaking* has been a cycle of weekly readings held in the room, bringing together a number of languages, speakers, and themes along the shores of islands (Büyüktaşçıyan lives on one of the Prince Islands of Istanbul). Thinking about the island as metaphor for displacement, isolation, insulation, alienation, but also the much-needed shelter of the private domain, intimacy, and inwardness, how does one speak like an island in an archipelago of temporal variations and spatial confusions?

On the second week of October, *The Open School* hosted Turkish sociologist and art historian Pelin Tan, whose work is also showing at the biennial with Anton Vidokle, and who spoke at length about different types of islands and archipelagos, the Israeli blockade on the Palestinian territories, the military rule throughout Kurdish cities east of Turkey, political and cultural movements outside their times, how to fundamentally reframe the relationship between artifacts and time, enabling the possibility of there being forms that do not belong to any specific timeframe. The action of a public reading in a space that has long been considered to have ceased to exist introduces an aural aspect of reverberation, as if the angular frequency of waves could grow exponentially over a period of time. Yet this time is not pure, abstract, or ahistorical; it belongs with familiar objects and knows the process of decay in all living matter.

The memorialization of the Armenian genocide as a whole is a very easy strategy out of the gray zones of Turkish history that the exhibition looks at touristically, almost as circumstantial events captured by the lens. The easiness is derived from the distance that exists between the genocide and our own time, so that that it becomes possible to address a history that is no longer present. But while this theme is overbearing, the crude realities of the country today, from the Kurdish problem to the Syrian war to the new fundamentalisms, remain largely absent. One should not expect differently from a biennial, for the present presses so closely that it suffocates any attempt at representation, but the narrative of movements across time seems incomplete without assimilating the whole of reality's tissue, in the same way that the exhibition wants to swallow the entire city and becomes consumed by it.

The eight sites on Büyükada and Sivriada, two of the Prince Islands, reveal the difficulties of this imperial mode of curating that assimilates not only institutions but also entire topographies and bodies of water. William Kentridge's *O Sentimental Machine* (2015) is a mesmerizing tale about Leon Trotsky's exile on the island, through the exchange of letters and a utopian program, but pales in comparison with the rest of Kentridge's oeuvre. The different black and white screens appear contrived in their setting—an entire floor of the sumptuous Splendid Palace Hotel, with its red carpet and art deco motifs that deprive the work of its cinematic qualities. One of the most highly publicized works in the show is the monumental sculptures by Adrián Villar Rojas, *The Most Beautiful of All Mothers* (2015), set right on the water, which appear majestic as you exit the garden of the dilapidated house where Trotsky lived. The work has a sense of the spectacular, but could it have succeeded in a different venue? Closing the biennial with this work seems in stark contradiction with the open-ended attitude, and sets the same monumentality it attempts to disestablish, as an event horizon that cannot be crossed.

A number of critics and journalists, often disingenuously, read Villar Rojas's sculptures against the background of the bodies of Syrian children washing ashore on the coasts of Turkey. His life-size fiberglass sculptures, combined with organic and inorganic materials atop, form a Noah's Ark going in the opposite direction, as if moving towards the dry land, or returning from mythology to the uncertainties of history. Still, one is left feeling that despite the immensity of the show in terms of both its scale and the geographical area it comprises, from the Black Sea through the Bosphorus and the Marmara, one is still hungry for more art.

Ed Atkin's digital film *Hisser* (2015), set on the ruined Rizzo Palace, delivers a powerful shock that sets it apart from all the background noise of institutional art. Based on a news story from a Florida man that fell into a sinkhole while he slept, the film recounts the last thirty minutes of his life. As the man falls into the hole after a long sequence of sobs, anxieties, and obsessive behaviors, the sound becomes louder and louder and the dilapidated palace begins to shake. For many in Istanbul, Atkins was, accidentally, the centerpiece of the biennial; the shaking house of the Turkish republic finds itself now at a turning point, in between the threat of looming war in the region, internal turmoil, decelerating economy, and, above everything, uncertainty. Back on the mainland, the central exhibition at Istanbul Modern is a serious disappointment, with an eclectic combination of artwork that does not coalesce, and that does not feel poignant. Marwan Rechmaoui's pillars are elegantly executed and remind one of the artist's earlier mapping of Beirut, leaving a striking impression, but are somewhat disjointed from the rest of the show, as are works like the paintings of Fahrelnissa Zeid or Paul Guiragossian.

The Channel, in which Christov-Bakargiev deploys the full extent of her curatorial alchemy, is a self-standing exhibition at the heart of the biennial that operates independently of the rest and is replete with obscure references to science. Being one of the finest exercises in intellectual history and curatorial power that an Istanbul Biennial has witnessed, there's very little art in it: books of Charles Darwin, pages from Lacan's drawings, the neuron drawings of Santiago Ramón y Cajal, copies of Annie Besant's sketches, the vases of the botanist Émille Gallé.

SALTWATER: A Theory of Thought Forms, takes its cue from the once-popular *Thought Forms* book by late-19th-century English theosophist Annie Besant, present in the exhibition through copies of her drawings in *The Channel* and the original book placed alongside the unremarkable artist's book of Merve Kılıçer's, whose work is said to precede European abstraction and refers to materialized thought that has taken physical form, so that the vibrations and movements of our body in the world create a variety of forms that are then materialized through movement. However interesting, the reference to Besant seems antiquated and vague in this context.

The interest in this biennial arises not necessarily from its many complications, but from certain points of contact that emerge on the margins of these complications and establish newer, increasingly dynamic relationships that do not yet form a consistent whole; they stay at the level of forms, from which one is compelled to conjure up his own magic.

This is not necessarily a weakness in the broader understanding of what art can do versus the political, but it is too fragile and superficial a survey of the possibilities afforded by Istanbul. In the 11th century, Europeans looked at Constantinople with eyes of desire—Wael Shawky's film *Cabaret Crusades, The Secrets of Karbala* (2015), screened in a historical hamam from the 15th century, tells the story of the crusades in reverse, seen through the eyes of the Arabs, Constantinople is portrayed as a wealthy city at the gates of a new world, an architectural marvel, and the seat of an empire. Underlying this image, however, the Byzantine Empire was an unstable house of intrigues, conspiracies, and political deadlocks. In that regard, Istanbul is still very Byzantine: an excessively complicated, intricate maze of failing bureaucracies and growing tensions. But the image projected on the wall of the city, facing Europe, was enough for the impoverished Europeans to sail on boats and vessels to besiege Constantinople.

Yet visitors today are still in awe at the sights of the city, as if they were still staring at an image projected on a wall, forbidden from entering this curious passage of time that connects all that glorious past with a present space. This image, which no longer existing in its original form as many sections were dismantled in the 19th century, splits into different images projected on many other interior walls. But behind this synchronized spectacle lies a seat of authoritarianism, the result of several decades of dictatorship and chaos, attempting to raise its head above water with the help of neoliberalism. The kind of soft power deployed to transform an ailing space into an image of the future is not unique to Istanbul: I am speaking here of art that exists only in a state of suspension, or as a future imperfect tense; a reference to the past that expresses an unfinished, ongoing action.

The 14th Istanbul Biennial is one great example of such soft power. While it does not attempt to cover up the glaring facts on the ground, and in fact highlights their omnipresence, the many exhibitions in the biennial create a parallel universe of loosely interconnected bodies gravitating around each other: a universe far greater than the facts themselves so that they are ultimately suffocated by the grandiose show. This species of time, an ever-expanding timeless future, is made possible only at the expense of the present and has to be safely anchored in a past that is either no longer tangible or already too solid to become streamlined with the measurements of the here and now. This is a phenomenon taking place in all major institutional shows in the art world from Venice to Sharjah to São Paulo.

As biennials are hardly able to fund themselves, they are growing far and away from academic shows, forced to compete with galleries and art fairs. Perhaps this also means that from now on there will no longer be any excellent biennials, unless they agree to operate as an extension of the marketplace. This new philosophy of abstraction and vagueness behind exhibitions, sensorial more than it is representational, is so highly politicized—rather than political—because it is essentially homogeneous and powerless, tackling otherness and conflict only from a very safe academic distance. If the purpose behind this edition of the Istanbul Biennial was to showcase our current state of confusion and shock at the new political realities of this country, through a labyrinthine maze of metaphors and events, then it is clearly very successful. Deep down, however, we do not turn to art in order to speak for the obvious, but rather in order to make sense of bigger questions about the possibilities of human agency in a convoluted world. As the Hungarian philosopher Ágnes Heller put it, "the goodness of the message of art does not always translate into goodness of art."

Endnote

On the morning of October 10, as this article was being edited, an explosion shook the Turkish capital Ankara with a blast that cut short the life of more than 100 people participating in a peace rally. The courts placed a temporary gag order on investigations into the deadliest terror attack on modern Turkey, and so far a list of suspects remains elusive; hard to believe in a state of mass surveillance. With six different tragic scenarios since 2011 that have taken a toll of nearly 600 lives, there has not been a single resignation of a government official. And this is the way we live now. On the evening of September 1, as MOMA PS1 offered a cocktail party on the roof of Soho House to honor the biennial curator, tear gas rained down on the streets after a peaceful demonstration, marring many gallery openings taking place that night. The director of an art institution in the region remarked that the government was engaged in a war against the people, not being aware that since the events of Gezi Park in 2013, such scenarios of confrontation and violence have become part of a weekly routine in Istanbul. In this state of increasing confusion, it would be difficult to tell what kind of criticality or engagement is required from art and its institutions, but a commitment to the politics of the here-and-now, with all its ugliness and disenchantments, could be the first step.

Ayreen Anastas & Rene Gabri, *Multi-Storied Houses; Stables; Folds and Barns; Farms and Summer Homes; Lands and Fields of Villages; Destroyed Vineyards, Orchards and Vegetable Gardens; Churches; Chapels and Shrines; Parish Schools; Mills; Areas of Forest, etc...*, 2015. Ink, pencil, eraser, pastel on paper, various other materials, and video. Photograph by Sahir Ugur Eren. Courtesy of IKSV.

Wael Shawky, *Cabaret Crusades: The Secret of Karbala*, 2015. Installation with projection in HD video, liquid tar, clay, cement, wool, marble, and hand blown Murano glass marionettes. Photograph by Ilgun Erarslan Yanmaz. Courtesy of IKSV.

Something Borrowed, Some Things About Place

Jessica Hoffmann

“elevates copying to an art, but”[1]

In March, at Brown University, white conceptual poet Kenneth Goldsmith stood before an audience and read his new “poem,” which was actually Michael Brown’s autopsy report, slightly re-ordered. In October, in an article called “Something Borrowed” in *The New Yorker*, Alec Wilkinson, a white staff writer at that publication who was once a policeman, wrote about the “beleaguered” poet Kenneth Goldsmith and some of the “politically correct” and “resentful” people who are doing the beleaguering.

“Goldsmith, who is fifty-four, likes pranks and provocations and making people uncomfortable—challenging behavior, he thinks, is an artist’s prerogative,” Wilkinson writes.

Goldsmith fits a certain idea of an artist that makes very good sense to people who are living well and comfortably in a 2015 America that seems to them to be working quite nicely, that celebrates the plucky individual, that believes, say, that intricate consumer choice is freedom, or that “an artist’s right to make a mistake is much more sacred than anyone’s feelings,” as Goldsmith is quoted as saying toward the end of the piece. Much more sacred, too, they might think, than a close examination of a young man’s dead body for the purpose of determining how exactly he died.

More sacred, maybe, than the desire of people who loved that young man to have some space or some silence or some entitlement around that text.

In Goldsmith’s view, it would seem, the artist is entitled to just about anything. Which is another way of saying that Goldsmith’s idea of an artist is as colonizer, and that *The New Yorker* (et al.) might share a worldview that is colonially confused on the definition of certain key words: borrowing, stealing, freedom, progress, savagery.

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On view through November 21 at the William Grant Still Arts Center in Los Angeles is *The West Adams Collectors Club: Collecting, Archiving and Exhibiting Your Own Cultural History*. The exhibition is the result of an eight-week, intergenerational workshop on grassroots archiving and collecting.

West Adams, where the William Grant Still Arts Center is located, is a neighborhood that was once segregated via race-based land-use covenants, that lost many Japanese American residents when they were interned during World War II, and where people are now struggling to maintain their homes and communities in the face of gentrification. The collections in the exhibit are by community members, professional archivists, and local historians.

Billie Green, a longtime resident of the neighborhood, shares her collection of dolls by the Shindana Toys company, founded in LA in the wake of the 1965 Watts Rebellion, which she started after attending a party for her granddaughter’s birthday in a tea house decorated with lots and lots of dolls, all but one of them white.

In the *West Adams Collectors Club* exhibit, there is a wall devoted to ephemera of the neighborhood’s Trinity Baptist Church, and another to Alden Kimbrough’s first editions, newspaper clippings, and other materials by and about James Baldwin. Newspaper and magazine clippings are also prominent in C. Jerome Woods’s selections from his Black LGBT Project, especially featuring niche media coverage of local icons Sir Lady Java, a black trans performer who in the 1960s played a key role in bringing down LA’s law against “impersonat[ing] by means of costume or dress a person of the opposite sex,” and Jewel Thais-Williams, proprietor of Jewel’s Catch One, the local black-owned gay club that announced its closure after four decades this year. The baker Tené Harris’s collection uses recipes as an entry point into her family history and into the idea of cooking as a means of understanding legacy.

An entire room is devoted to Community Services Unlimited, Inc., which was created to serve as the nonprofit arm of the Southern California chapter of the Black Panther Party. Photographs and ephemera show the trajectory from the Panthers’ free breakfast program of the 1960s to CSU, Inc.’s current urban-gardening and food-justice programs. (There was produce for sale at the exhibition opening.) “Each item in this exhibit has a political significance in the history of the work of Community Services Unlimited, Inc. Our gaze on this history is not romantic, but it is respectfully critical and designed to hone our current trajectory,” reads the artist statement by CSU, Inc. Executive Director Neelam Sharma.

Some of these collections have been housed in shoeboxes in people’s garages. Some have been solicited for institutionalization but have declined out of concern that the collections would get buried or become inaccessible to the communities from which they came.

“This exhibit is one of our most diverse, but what connects all of the items are personal affinities in the vision of each collector’s archive, the majority of which are being presented for the first time,” it says on the wall.

(This is not to say that I don’t understand the concept or even to say *there are lines one does not cross*. Goldsmith’s “Day,” a copy of the *New York Times* of September 1, 2000, did the concept. And no one is Mao here. A critique that involves a realistic appraisal of the situation is a concept I find worth engaging. I use the term *realistic* here as opposed to colonial, which always ranges from delusional to deliberately deceptive although, through force, it often makes a terrible new real.)

News clipping detail from the Trinity Baptist Church archive. Courtesy of the William Grant Still Arts Center.

Installation view, *Activism is poetry in full swing*, Dimitris Dokatzis at Qbox Gallery, Athens, 2015. Courtesy of Qbox Gallery.

In a two-bedroom apartment in Whittier, south of LA, Enrique Serrato lives in the midst of his 6,600-object art collection—one of the largest collections of Chicano art in the world. Since he was 16, the 74-year-old has been collecting art near where he’s lived.

I know these things because Emily Rappaport, a Mexico City–based writer, profiled Serrato on artsy.net a week before Alec Wilkinson’s piece on Kenneth Goldsmith appeared in *The New Yorker*.

“three avant-garde poets . . . drinking in a basement bar in Buffalo . . . decided to start a revolutionary poetry movement”[2]

Los Angeles’s Museum of Contemporary Art is under new leadership and is embarking on two new initiatives to connect to LA community, or communities, beyond the museum’s traditional spaces downtown. One of them is a gallery called “Storefront,” where actual storefront galleries from throughout the city will be selected to set up shop at the museum on a rotating basis. The other was initiated by the late painter Noah Davis: a collaboration between MOCA and Davis’s Underground Museum that will bring museum art from MOCA’s collection to the West Adams district, also on a rotating basis.

Further south in Leimert Park, the hub of Black Art in LA, rising art star Mark Bradford has returned to the neighborhood where he grew up to co-found, with the Hammer Museum, Art + Practice, a gallery, residency space, and program of arts education for young people in the foster-care system.

With spaces like the Brockman Gallery, which showed artists like Betye Saar, David Hammons, and John Outterbridge in the early days of their careers and the heady days of the Black Arts Movement, and the jazz and poetry crucible The World Stage, Leimert Park has been at the heart of Black Arts and culture in LA since the ’70s. The neighborhood, which takes its name from white real-estate developer Walter H. Leimert, was master-planned in the 1920s as a whites-only neighborhood; as the realization of Mr. Leimert’s “perfect” suburb.

Today, Leimert Park is threatened by gentrification, with longtime arts spaces vulnerable to displacement in the face of rising property values and rents.

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I do not think “social practice” and “community-based art” are the same thing. I do not think the latter term is really what I mean. I do not think “social practice” and “community-based art” are apt or adequate terms for art that comes from somewhere and knows it, for art that is rooted, for art that understands and maybe even finds sacred its connectedness.

Muriel Rukeyser’s poem “Islands” actually has three stanzas (it turns out; I just looked it up). I think about this poem a lot, but always only the first part. It goes:

Islands
O for god’s sake
they are connected
underneath

“There needs to be activism. There also needs to be art.”[3]

The white conceptual poet Vanessa Place has this project where she has been tweeting the entire text of *Gone With the Wind*, with a profile picture of Hattie McDaniel as Mammy in the film version of that novel. It has been met with loud critique. The *LA Times* asks, politely, “artistic expression or racism?” Vanessa Place responded to the critiques with a public statement that is a lot more complicated and engaged than anything Kenneth Goldsmith has said, and it does seem to indicate that she is attempting to be critically provocative about white supremacy in a way that she thinks is important for a white person to do, and it very explicitly connects appropriation to stealing, and yet . . .

Bhanu Kapil: “Vanessa Place, in person, has always been unfailingly kind, tender, funny—and great. I loved many of her initiating projects: the brilliant little blue book on failure, co-written with Rob Fitterman. Maybe I would read it differently now, but at the time I thought it was stunning. I taught *La Medusa* in a class on the city and the novel. I taught *Dies: A Sentence*. I thought Vanessa’s work with the mirror, the confession—the strict, fierce brilliance of the performances she gave—were: striking. [. . .] I was impressed by Vanessa’s stance/mind. I thought, I understand. Her work is returning an audience’s—reaction—to itself. . . .

So why now? Why, last night, when I saw the Mammy avatar sequence on Twitter for the first time, did the Russian-Indian vibe—the NO—come over me? Because, I think: it has been such an utterly shitty spring—when it comes to black bodies—”[4]

Vanessa Place and Kenneth Goldsmith both apologize for the “hurt” they have caused, for the people who have been “hurt” by their literary projects. This strikes me both as a fascinating and unexpected concern for people’s feelings in relation to an art form, or concept, that generally has a much tougher posture than that, and as a sort of diminishment, a lack of responsibility—“I’m sorry if I hurt your *feelings* . . .” Shrug.

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I always come back to intersectional feminism (cite: Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw; roots: Combahee River Collective, Audre Lorde, Gloria Anzaldúa, Angela Davis, so many others). It is not about “including” the marginalized in an existing center that is based on concentrated power. It is about re-centering, not centering, multiple and different centers. It is not reductive or simplistic or censorious in the ways certain conceptual artists and prestigious publications would misunderstand/misrepresent any kind of challenge to their unbounded “freedom” (entitlement) as “resentful” “political correctness.” Actually it is a lot more complex and a lot more about freedom and a lot more avant-garde, even, if we can really think about “avant-garde” as the production of radical and experimental ideas and techniques beyond a very narrow legacy primarily located in the bodies of white men who perceive themselves to have no place meaning every place and (so strangely, really) defend their territory as a defense of freedom.

Copied and pasted from the Combahee River Collective Statement (1977): “If Black women were free, it would mean that everyone else would have to be free since our freedom would necessitate the destruction of all the systems of oppression.”

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It is so simple I would think it goes without saying but apparently it does not? It is white artists who feel entitled to any text, any story, any provocation, any pain. It is a very different thing, in this context that we all are living in, for a white man to read a black man’s autopsy report as his own innovative poem than it is for a black woman to collect and display black dolls because her granddaughter’s birthday party was full of white ones.

Or: white supremacy is real. Art is not located somewhere separate from it.

“How I make my way through this thicket of information—how I manage it, how I parse it, how I organize and distribute it—is what distinguishes my writing from yours.”[5]

I am thinking about what Kenneth Goldsmith is famous for and what might be interesting about that work. (Oh, I know, he doesn’t care. “He likes to say that he is ‘the most boring writer who ever lived,’” Wilkinson writes.)

There is a show I have not seen, but I keep thinking about its title, or the image of it I saw on Instagram: from May to July in Athens, Greek artist Dimitris Dokatzis showed new works in an exhibition called *Activism is Poetry in Full Swing*.

The activist/philosopher Grace Lee Boggs and the filmmaker Chantal Akerman died this week (October 5th, 2015).

Grace Lee Boggs, who made it to 100 years old and was active in the Black Power movement and a loving swell of community-based social and economic transformation in Detroit, talked about work to transform societies from hierarchy, exploitation, and violence to justice and sustainability as “people exercising their creativity in the midst of devastation.”

Chantal Akerman showed, on film, how deeply interesting and relevant it is, a woman cleaning a bathtub, a woman making coffee, a woman walking down a hall in her home—

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Kenneth Goldsmith began his career as a visual artist before sidling over to poetry. At the end of Wilkinson’s “Something Borrowed,” Goldsmith says, “Sometimes I think I might be headed back to the art world . . . They still seem to like me there.”

Some words the meaning of which it might be interesting for the art world to think more about instead of just appropriate: sacred, freedom, ownership, hurt, here and there—place.

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1) Quoted from Alec Wilkinson, “Something Borrowed,” *The New Yorker*, October 5, 2015.
2) Ibid.
3) Vanessa Place, interviewed in Rich Smith, “Vanessa Place Is in a Fight Over *Gone with the Wind*’s Racism, But It’s Not the Fight She Says She Wants,” *The Stranger*, May 21, 2015.
4) Bhanu Kapil, in a blog post from May 14, 2015: http://jackkerouacispunjabi.blogspot.com/2015/05/vanessa-place-mongrel-coalition-and.html?m=1
5) Kenneth Goldsmith, quoted in ibid.

Alternative Forms Of Media Art Distribution: Three Case Studies From Non-Art Contexts

Nicholas O’Brien

It has long been established that digital networks radicalized the ways in which contemporary moving-image and media artworks are distributed. Even before YouTube, network technology was fundamentally changing the ways that media art was being shared through IRC channels, BBSs, and listservs. But as network technology continues to develop and mature, the overall systems of distribution for time-based artists have been relatively the same since the first co-ops and rental agencies like the New York Filmmakers’ Cooperative or Canyon Cinema emerged in the early 1960s. Current institutions for media art have done little to adopt 21st-century technology in an effort to share that work.

Although some contemporary artists working online have abandoned these traditional institutions’ distribution methods, a substantial alternative financial support network for artists still remains to be seen. A large motivation for artists desiring new financial support platforms is the realization that the attention economy of YouTube or Vimeo is not enough to generate actual monetary sustainability for contemporary time-based art. Many freelance artists and media makers have started using the micro-transaction philanthropy website Patreon. Marketed as a service to “help every creator in the world achieve sustainable income,” Patreon does not necessarily provide the kind of community prestige that many contemporary media artists desire. Where artists like Ryan Trecartin and Rafaël Rozendaal have been able to capitalize on their online success by dipping into traditional markets, others are finding that their work does not fit nicely into last century’s distribution and ownership schemes.

As a result of this frustration, a handful of models have emerged to offer artists a way to generate equal amounts of financial gain and attention value. Models like Opening Times and the Film and Video Umbrella in the UK provide evocative starting points for commissioning and otherwise supporting emerging artists working with moving images. Another of these models is a project I worked on as an editor called Undervolt & Co. The idea, started by artist Yoshi Sodeoka, is to create a distribution methodology that resembles that of a small, independent record label. The label “represents” artists and projects and acts as a distribution platform for moving-image work to be sold at a reasonable cost. The trajectory of the project is to create a platform of sharing art in unlimited editions to a wide audience. Instead of making small batches of content and selling them at a high price, the model of Undervolt is instead to make an infinite batch of content that can be sold at a price that most individuals can afford (between $5 and $7). This method encourages sharing content and generating a wide audience of interested individuals while also helping to support artist financially in the production and distribution of their work. Artists and affiliates working with the label then become involved in a kind of collective and collaborative model of mutual support.

When initially launching the project with Sodeoka and co-founder Johnny Woods, I was really interested in looking at other potential examples for distribution and collective ownership. Although the independent record label was a great model to emulate for this project, I was also curious to research models in other cultures/communities and to find potential ways of applying those methodologies to the distribution of moving-image artworks. Instead of thinking about how to apply models like venture capitalism or risk management to moving-image work (since the logic and rhetoric of large corporate enterprises has quickly been adopted by arts funding organizations in the United States like Creative Capital and The Andy Warhol Foundation), I wanted to find other possible ways of creating long-term investment in my community.

Case Study One: The Green Bay Packers

It would be an understatement to say that the NFL is an incredible moneymaker. Earlier this year the commissioner of the NFL publicly stated that the organization expects to exceed $25 billion in annual revenue by 2027. Although the league itself is classified as a non-for-profit, all the teams playing in it are for-profit entities—all teams except the Green Bay Packers. In the 1920s, the NFL was struggling financially, and in order to prevent the team from falling into bankruptcy and/or moving to another city, five local businessmen decided to incorporate the Packers as a public non-for-profit with Wisconsin’s secretary of state. This group, called The Hungry Five, sold shares of the team to local fans, offering partial ownership of the team and influence in its decision-making processes by forming a board of directors for management and organization. Over the course of the team’s existence, shares have only been offered five times (the most recent offering ended in 2012). These shares contribute to offsetting the team’s finances, and most recently helped finance updating the audio and video system in their stadium, Lambeau Field. The team has over 360,000 shareholders, but the articles of incorporation prevent any single individual owning more than 200,000 of the current 5,011,557 shares, thus preventing central or individual ownership.

As a result of this investment strategy, not only have the Packers been able to stay in Green Bay—the smallest market of any national sports team in North America by far—they also thrived. A consistent threat in the NFC North division, The Packers have won more championships than any other team in the history of the NFL. Although it’s difficult to argue that their success is a direct result of their non-for-profit status, it is interesting to consider how the unique quality of the team’s ownership has fostered a competitive spirit within the franchise. This is particularly interesting considering that the ownership of the team is modeled after a non-competitive investment strategy. Shareholders in the team do not have any dividend on their investment. In other words, investing in the team does not provide any financial return. As a result, the incentive for becoming a shareholder is squarely rooted in fandom.

The distinct quality of the Packers within the NFL not only makes them an interesting case within competitive sports, but might also provide insight into a potential model for media art commissioning and distribution. How could a “franchise” that relies on community investment without the financial problems of return dividends be developed within the art world? One way could be through extending the already existing public outreach of education departments within cultural institutions. For instance, art education satellite programs run by the Guggenheim could offer opportunities for community members to invest in commissioning new works (or works exclusively made from *within* those communities).

Packers Stock (a stock certificate for shares of the Green Bay Packers). Courtesy of the Internet.

BerkShare 10 note featuring Robyn Van En, one of the first members to create a CSA in Massachusetts. Courtesy of the Internet.

Though the Packers are a unique team (and community), it’s important not be too quick to praise them as some kind of paragon of cultural progressiveness. Although the shareholder model shows the potential strength and value of community-based ownership and support, the Packers are able to share in the revenue of sponsorship deals generated by the NFL, which acts as a financial safety net for player salaries and other team expenses.. Though observing the early history of the Packers’s ability to stay in Green Bay is fascinating as an investigation of community-based investment, other models in different fields have more to offer towards developing sustainable strategies for media art distribution and ownership.

Case Study Two: Community Supported Agriculture (CSA)

CSAs have gained more notoriety in recent years as a result of the rise of farm-to-table restaurants and the growing demand for local produce. However, community organizations of farmers and consumer advocates have been around for some time. Initially conceived by two European farmers in the mid 1980s, CSAs were formed in the US (and elsewhere) as a way for collectives of non-corporate farmers to reach out to local communities to support their harvest in more direct and less bureaucratic ways. CSAs operate as membership organizations where a local consumer buys small shares of investment in a farm that eventually returns in a small percentage of that farm’s harvest. Individuals participating in a CSA are grouped into what could be called a low- or shared-risk network of investors. The hope is that with enough investors a farm could sustain an entire harvest year of produce with their operation costs covered before production begins. Although shares of a CSA can differ between various farms, a primary principle for this model can be understood as more investment from the community equals higher quality product for the community.

There is more to glean from the CSA model than its investment structure alone. Looking at CSAs solely as a potential investment strategy is precisely the kind of methodology that web-based crowdfunding companies like Kickstarter and Indiegogo have done. These companies view a CSA as a way of distributing risk. But when considering it as a distribution model, other ideological principles play a large role. CSAs have been modeled in a way that allows for community feedback and farmer transparency, following some primary tenets: (1) the farmers’s understanding of their communities’ needs; (2) an established consensual agreements for product delivery between farmers and consumers; (3) community conversation between consumers and farmers with regard to financial limitations; and (4) the assertion that the needs of farmers within their community must be expressed, communicated, and understood by consumers.

These principles establish direct lines of communication between consumers and producers, and acknowledge that producers are integral members of their community. In this way, the labor of farmers within their community is understood as being of great value for creating quality products. This gesture of communicative reciprocity begins to dissolve, through transparency, the class divisions often found between laborers, consumers, business managers, and a local populace.

It is in these lines of transparency and communication where media artists and distribution networks must work the hardest. For too long artists have been divided from their immediate community by a class of consumers who are not interested in transparency. Where CSAs have prospered in providing communities with a platform that fosters positive and nurturing feedback, artists have struggled to find a foothold. The structural methodology of a subscription-based, risk-mitigated, sharing economy is one that many artists and media art ecologies have overlooked, often times instead opting for their corporate cousins: crowdsourced funding. While platforms like Kickstarter have been successful for greenlighting projects that otherwise would not find financial backing, the line of direct communication between the artist and their community is quite limited.

This is not to say that all artists, or that all art communities, have turned a blind eye to the ideological potential of CSAs. A foundational example of this is the project Community Supported Art (also CSA), established by the Chicago art nonprofit Threewalls. Very similar to a farming CSA, this project asks supporters to purchase shares of a season’s worth of artists’ editions and multiples. The shares provide funding for the production of new work and the distribution of artworks to their immediate community. These collections then become a stand-in for other methods of distributing work that would require an art market intervention. By adopting this model, Threewalls initiates a conversation with the artists they want to support *with* potential consumers. In doing so, the organization wants to encourage consumers to support the arts in a sustainable practice that is separate from the increasingly corporate and predatory art marketplace.

Although this kind of implementation of the CSA does provide a refreshing alternative to standard methods of art distribution and ownership, it does so without requesting initial feedback from its local community. The curatorial decision to select the artists prior to the offering of shares limits the potential discourse that normally occurs in standard agriculture CSAs (as suggested by the four primary tenets of these organizations). Another important difference is the way that the *ownership* of the work is not necessarily distributed, but rather the *production* of those pieces is offset by consumer investment. The property—which is primarily intellectual in this case—is not inherently distributed. In more traditional CSAs, the land itself can be owned by a community and leased to a farmer for cultivation. Community Supported Art does not have the same kind of holding, which might be for the better, but it would be worthwhile to speculate how that aspect of a traditional CSA could be applied not only to the production of an artist’s work, but also their property.

The question becomes: how can an artist be able to employ a radical approach to distributing his/her intellectual property? One way that artists have begun to initiate this kind of thinking is through the exchange of processes, materials, and goods on the Internet. Many artists working in code distribute access to their intellectual property bundled within the product they create, be it through versioning software like GitHub or through the distribution of open-source libraries and software. Some non-code-based artists working online participate in more subtle ways by releasing their work via Creative Commons, which encourages remixing, re-editing, or appropriation of an artist’s work by peers or strangers. There are regrettably few instances where the packaging of source material is present within the distribution of online works. One could point to a surf club (or group blog) like *Spirit Surfers* as an example of the way online work could include source material, but mere linking back doesn’t really fit the criteria that I have in mind.

When looking back at the initial models of co-ops and rental agencies, one thing is clear: institutions are exceedingly useful at the creation of property. Be it a rental house, an academy, or a museum, institutions have continually generated countless platforms for the preservation and distribution of intellectual and cultural goods through highly documented forms of ownership. On the flip side, however, these same institutions are not particularly good at fostering feedback from public or non-institutional communities. The CSA as a model, therefore, could be one way of simultaneously generating feedback while continuing to produce and maintain property.

Though CSAs are a powerful example for creating community-based platforms for the distribution of media, these models become a bit difficult to negotiate when the property being cultivated and produced is of an intellectual variety. Another way of looking at this problem could be to ask a series of important questions within media distribution and ownership: What parts of intellectual property should be cultivated by an organization that operates through community investment? Can a community investment model only be applied to artistic production and not to intellectual property? What good would come from consumers having access to an artist’s intellectual property? Do consumers even care about the intellectual property of an artist? What would consumers *do* with that property? Is there a way to gain partial access to an artist’s property that could support both the artist and a larger community?

Some of these questions begin to show the potential limitations of directly applying the structural and ideological methodology of a CSA to a moving-image distribution network. For instance, a critique of the CSA model is that the altruism of sharing the ownership, production, and distribution of goods within a specific community requires local physical proximity. Though the strength of these organizations is rooted in their commitment to local transparency and communication, how could a model of distributed risk and collective ownership affect larger cultural venues or use network technology to benefit society at large?

Case Study Three: The Humble Bundle

This last question points to the final case study in this analysis of alternative models of distribution and ownership: the Humble Bundle. This independent video game distribution network uses a name-your-price model to support developers, artists, authors, and charities. The success of this model is evident in that is has recently raised over $50 million for charities like the Electronic Freedom Foundation, the American Red Cross, Doctors Without Borders, and Child’s Play. Galvanizing player communities, video game enthusiasts, and independent graphic novelists through weekly and “flash-sale” bundles have also generated significant profits for a variety of creative individuals. Although the organization also partners with larger companies like Electronic Arts (or EA), the basis of its activities is to act as a charitable distribution network separate from big-name corporate publishers.

Though the organization acts as an altruistic distribution network for independent developers, Humble Bundle also supports the sharing of creative works by avoiding punitive digital rights management (DRM). As a result, when an individual purchases a game, they are able to download the title on a variety of different platforms without the fear of lockouts from publisher companies. In recent times, the problem of DRM has been felt by a wide variety of digital consumers—Apple iTunes purchases, purchasing games through Amazon direct download, or proprietary software preventing users from installing a program on more than one machine with the same license. Distributing digital media without these encumbrances creates a symbolic gesture of trust and equanimity between distributor and consumer. Due to the continued lamentation of proliferating DRM, the Humble organization listened to their community like a CSA would and decided to distribute DRM encryption–free products. This system of communicative feedback between players and developers fosters a distribution network where consumers are invested in the livelihood of the organization and are rewarded with having more control over the ownership of their purchases.

As beneficial as this platform is, the Humble Bundle rarely invites the community into a discussion about what products and what charities should be selected for upcoming bundles and campaigns. Nor does the Humble Bundle model create a system of distributed risk, since the purchases of bundles happen only after a product has been completed. In other words, there is no way to subscribe to or automatically receive bundles at a set price in an effort to sustain the cultivation of creative work for an entire “season.” (The Humble Bundle has recently decided to develop a subscription model). Though the Humble organization does a lot for independent game developers, it does not actively support the creation of new titles from the ground up. This work of financial support and community-activated fundraising within gaming communities still belongs in the hands of Kickstarter and Indiegogo. The purchasing of games and other media through the Humble Bundle does not give consumers ownership of an artist’s intellectual property (though some might argue that having DRM-free media does give users more ownership of their purchases). Though this demand might appear to infringe upon the creative energy of the artists, authors, and developers that get their work distributed through this platform, another way of

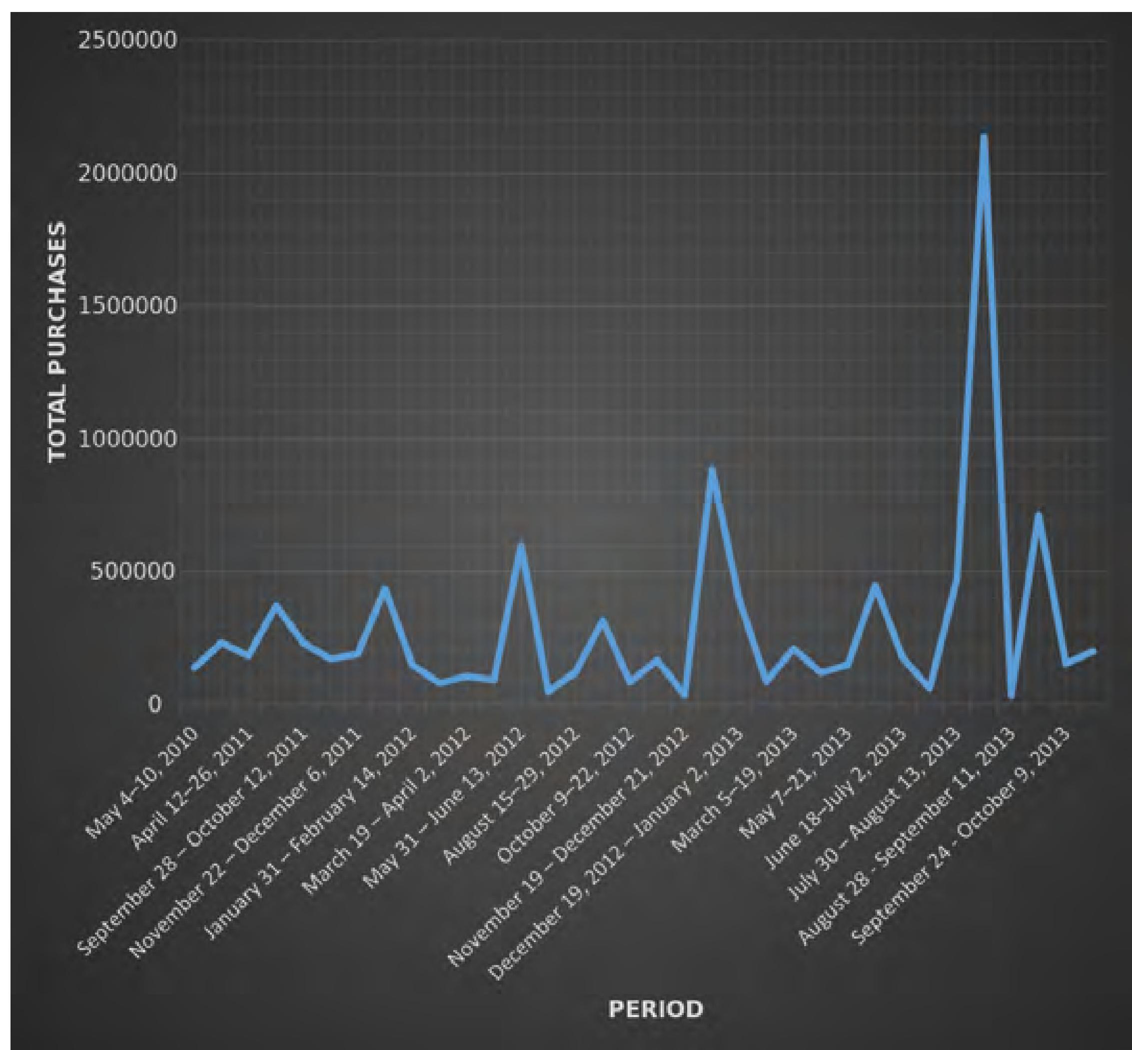
looking at this is to consider the problems of generating intellectual property at the mercy of crowd fickleness. To do so would be all too similar to the dreaded "design by committee" model. With this in mind the Humble Bundle accomplishes what the CSA cannot: it affects a community beyond the physical proximity of its product distribution network.

Lagging Behind

Looking at these three models of alternative distribution and ownership, it becomes painfully obvious that contemporary moving-image institutions and distribution networks are far behind the curve. Another way of saying this would be to ask: Who are the Hungry Five of the contemporary media art world? If the Packers incorporated their team to protect the small-market interests of their local community almost a hundred years ago, why can't we do this now? One simple answer is that the market conditions of our time prevent such simplistic reallocation of property. Another is that there is a noticeable difference between the distribution of goods and the decentralization of property. Though the goods produced by the media artists of our time have become increasingly easier to distribute, the long-term support mechanisms of leveraging the intellectual property of artists has significantly weakened. As a result, co-optation of sustainable strategies of decentralized investment in other industries must be taken into consideration for contemporary media art networks. This is particularly the case since these strategies appear to have weathered the recent global economic storm.

However, I'd be remiss to offer these alternatives without also posing a warning: a problem with discussing the "alternative" is that it situates the practice of a community or an individual as operating from a place of marginality. For some, working in such a space might be helpful, but the invocation of the alternative implicitly suggests an aligning of oneself in relation to the mainstream. In other words, it's hard to resist the urge to ask: *alternative to what?* Though I believe it is important for media art practices to maintain some sense of autonomy from the market drives of the mainstream, it's important to consider why the alternative is necessary for ownership and distribution.

It would be a mistake to assume that the alternative is important merely as a way of wedging creative content into more normative forms. Similarly, it would be a mistake to look at the platforms discussed above as a way of repackaging mainstream content into so-called alternative networks for the sake of exploiting these models for generating profits. For emerging networks of distribution and ownership to be truly alternative, the content itself needs to reflect the channels in which it travels. We need creative alternatives to the standard procedures for getting work out there and sustainable ways of supporting the practices of artists, just as we need the kind of work that subverts, pushes, undermines, and challenges the mainstream. The development of any and all new models of distribution and ownership networks should happen simultaneously and in mutual support with those who are themselves concerned with the radical advancement of the arts.



Humble Bundle total purchases (the amount of units sold by the Humble Bundle between 2010 and 2013). Courtesy of Humble Bundle.

On Point 2.08
The Lombardi Effect

Mark Van Proyen

I was late to the Mark Lombardi party. It was not until the beginning of 2004 that I had ever heard about him or his work, let alone ever having seen it. But it finally came to San Francisco in the form of a posthumous retrospective presented at Yerba Buena Center for the Arts titled *Global Networks*, curated by Robert Hobbs and originated by Independent Curators International. At that time, Lombardi had already been dead for 4 years, having taken his own life at the age of 48 in March of 2000. At the time of his passing, the 9/11 terrorist attacks were still more than a year away, and the onset of hostilities of the 2nd Iraq War would not commence for another two years. When *Global Networks* opened in San Francisco, those hostilities were well underway, as was a booming stock and real estate market that were the beneficiaries of a shop-'till-you-drop homeland defense policy that would take an additional four years to come to grief in the form of the financial crisis of 2008–2009.

It took some time to hone in on the genius of Lombardi's project. His exhibition consisted of about 15 drawings, most of which quite large and all done in crisp black ink on luxurious white or off-white paper. Their scale could be said to self-consciously reference many of the works of Jackson Pollock, but that might just be a red herring of potential interpretation that rests too comfortably on coincidence. The carefully applied ink of Lombardi's drawings showed precisely arcing lines that coalesced at and diverged from various intersections to form spiderweb-like configurations, all of which were labeled with neat lettering. This lettering indicated names of individuals, criminal organizations, law firms, and financial institutions that were very much in the news from 1995 to 2000. That was a time of financial boom-and-bust that was brought about by the bad corporate behavior of institutions like the Houston-based energy giant Enron and Charles Keating's Lincoln Savings and Loan Association, not to mention the first dot-com crash. One name that appears in several of the works is the Harken Energy Corporation (ticker symbol HKN), which at some early juncture purchased the Spectrum Energy Corp, which was owned by George W. Bush. Bush continued on as a highly compensated member of the Harken board until the point when he inaugurated his presidential campaign in late 1998. One could almost say that Harken Energy and the nefarious connections around it represented a kind of great white whale of perfidy in Lombardi's universe of omnipresent malfeasance, but that universe was a vast and sprawling one, with many players located in maddeningly complex relation to one another.

At first, I thought that Lombardi was simply doing an artsy parody of that time-honored American folk art form known as the conspiracy flow chart. The best examples of that tradition are the most far out and fanciful, showing links between such things as the Knights Templars, the Federal Reserve Bank, and the royal family of Great Britain. Frequently, the Vatican is depicted, and imaginative citations of Masonic lore and symbols are given pride of place alongside the Illuminati, the Reptilian Shapeshifters, and those happy rapscallions who cremate care every summer in the Sonoma county woods. And then there are the Kennedy assassinations, of which so much has already been said and speculated that I can only excuse myself from any further comment. The key point about the conspiracy flow chart is that it proposes some form of secret, guiding order to the apparent chaos of historical events, and therein lies the core symptomology of paranoia—that being the moment when speculation sans evidence becomes embraced as fact. The discovery and documentation of such orderings, if and when they exist, is of course something of a gold standard for any kind of historical study. This is because bringing hidden motivations to light is what historical research is supposed to do, especially now when so many people are content to recite their own press-release fabrications as holy mantra awaiting the dubious confirmations given over by the Facebook like button. Conspiracy flow charts almost always fail the historical documentation test, but they are interesting in another way that is similar to gypsy storytelling. In the Gypsy-Romani culture, storytelling is a prized activity, but the purpose of such stories is not to illustrate any great truth or heroic character—rather it is their sheer elaboration of facts, motives, and disconnected details organized in such a way as to propose stories that demonstrate that there is no real story, only a momentary convergence of random shadows that seem to sound good when they are put together. Think Lady Murasaki's 11th-century *Tale of Genji*, but without characters who are conflicted about the honorability of their actions.

And that is why Lombardi's work is so brilliant. By locating his narrative constructs in the art world he was hiding them in plain sight, because he was guaranteed that they would have been assumed to be instances of gypsy storytelling simply because almost everything else in that world is exactly that. Also, in that world, no one pays any attention to any news that is not about themselves, making the purposes behind Lombardi's work invisible to the immediate social environment surrounding it. But for those who may have paid close attention to the news of that day, the likely reaction would have been akin to Ira Levin's Rosemary realizing that her congress with Satan was not merely a frightening dream ("This is really happening!"). In other words, the work points to documentable relationships between political and financial entities to illustrate the vast phenomena of interlocking directorates defined by John Scott in his 1990 trio of books *The Sociology of Elites*. These directorates have been slowly proliferating since the onset of the Bretton Woods Conference that inaugurated economic globalism in the summer of 1944. Once you understand how they work, there is no need to pursue any more speculative version of the conspiracy flow chart as anything other than fanciful graphic design.

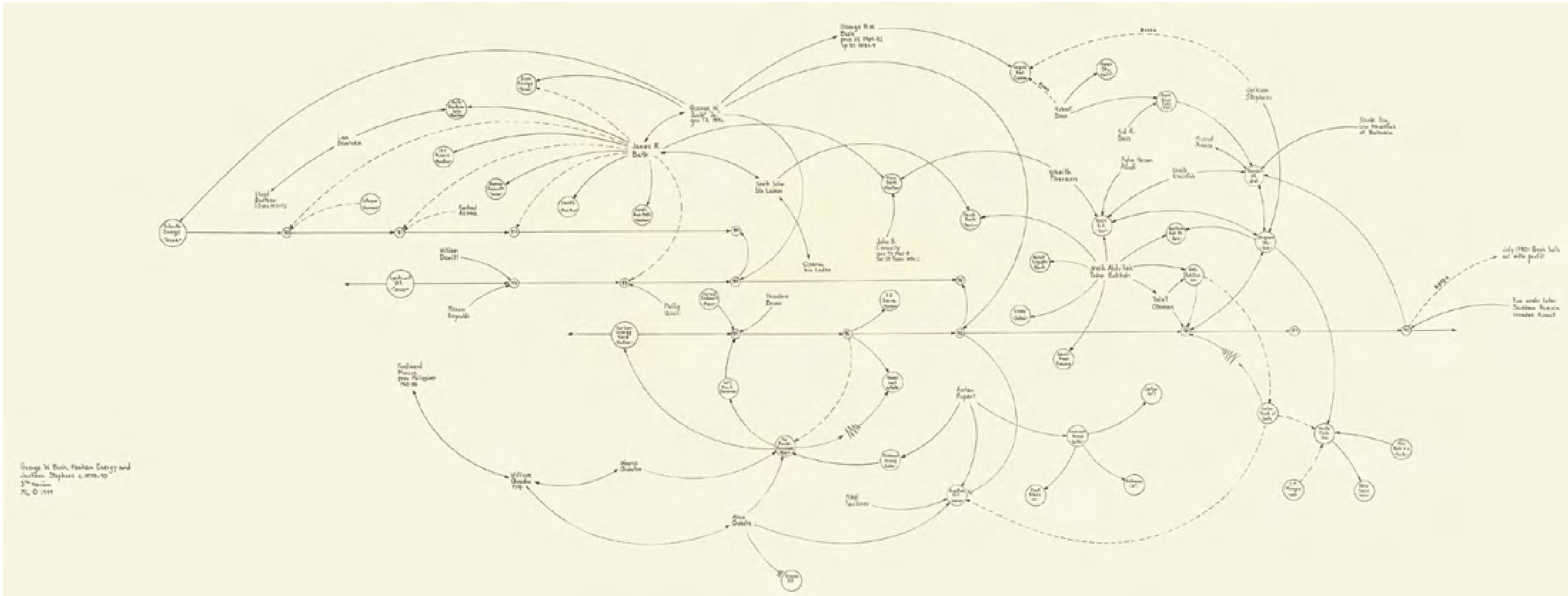
Patricia Goldstone has just published an excellent biography of Mark Lombardi titled *Interlock: Art, Conspiracy and the Shadow World of Mark Lombardi*. According to the book, Lombardi's business card indicated himself to be a practitioner of "death defying acts of art and conspiracy." The fact that he hung himself in is own studio in March of 2000 paid to the card's motto, and Goldstone's book takes a measured view of the claims made by some that Lombardi may have been the victim of government-sanctioned foul play. It certainly makes some disturbing facts clear: that agents of both the FBI and the CIA had taken a very special interest in Lombardi's work during the months prior to his demise.

Goldstone's book takes its title from the name of a standard forensic technique for making infographics that accounts for the convolutions and pathways of "hot" laundered money. It is interesting to note that when Lombardi was asked to describe his works, he called them "interlocks" rather than drawings or works on paper. His practice was driven by a passion for meticulous research, which sometimes went so far as to have Lombardi posing as a journalist to interview key players in some of the episodes referenced in his work. There is much consideration given to documents found in Lombardi's "personal papers," and his famously extensive card file of research topics is accorded some very special attention.

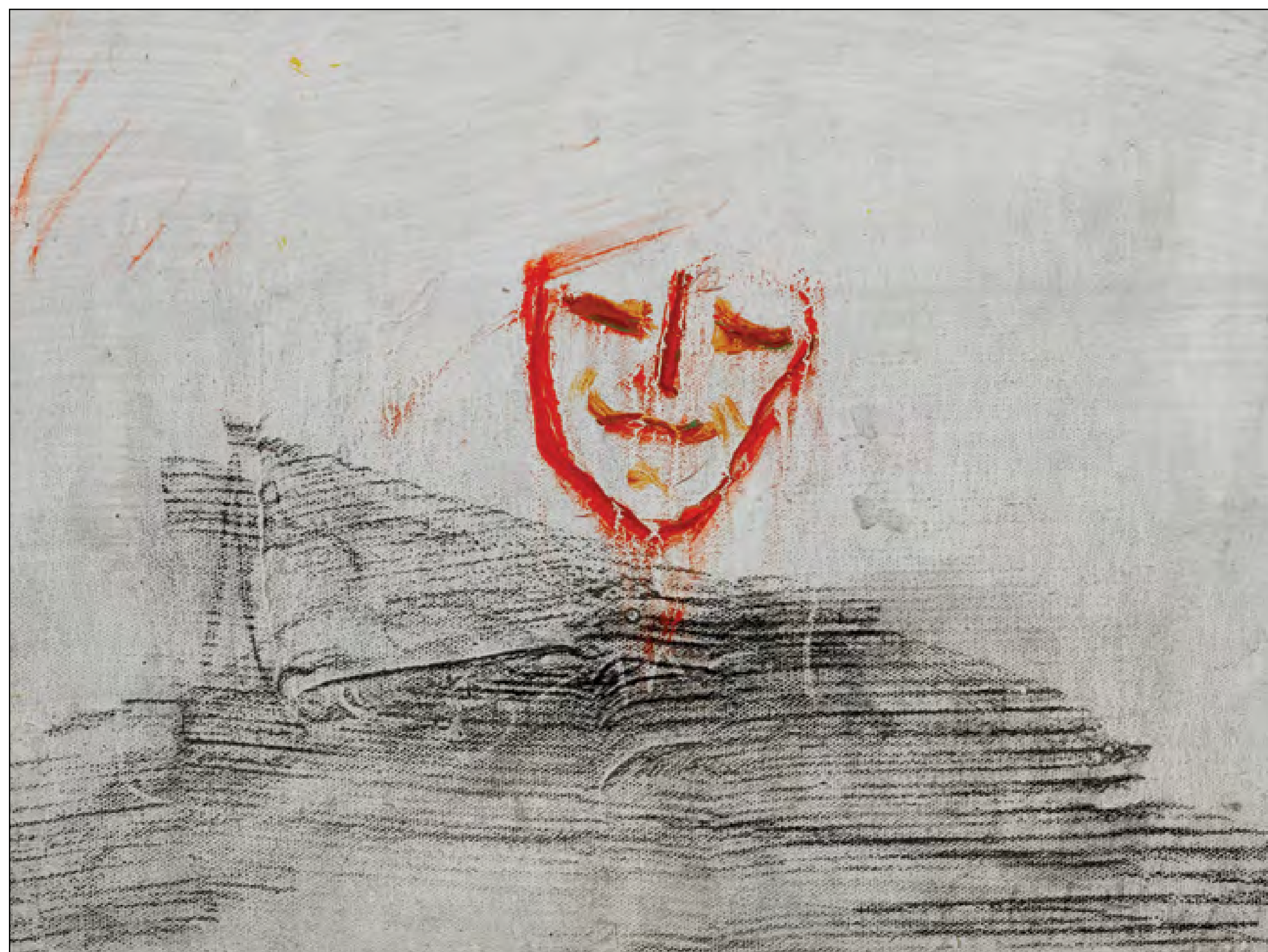
The book is divided into two parts, the first being an account of Lombardi's life running from his early Kennedy-era childhood in a suburb of Syracuse, New York to the time of his suicide in his Williamsburg studio. It includes a variety of interesting narrative tidbits, including the fact that Lombardi's father was an avid reader of John le Carré's espionage fiction. We also learn of Lombardi's early art historical research on 19th-century panorama painting as well as his role as an assistant curator in the staging of a Watergate-era exhibition titled *Teapot Dome to Watergate,* which was a visual history of American political corruption. During his student years at Syracuse University he worked with James Harithas, who was the director of the Everson Museum—a shadowy, myth-laden figure who later married into big-time money and much earlier was (in the early 1950s) stationed as a drafted soldier in Algeria. When Harithas left the Everson to work at the Houston Museum of Contemporary Art in 1974, Lombardi followed him southward and became a part of the burgeoning east Texas art scene that had grown up around the inflated oil revenues that were made possible by the OPEC oil embargo.

It was there that Lombardi made the acquaintance of Sissy Farenthold, who was a mover and shaker in the Texas Democratic party (back when Texas still had democrats), and at one point was the only female member of the Texas State Legislature. Farenthold ushered the young Lombardi into the social world of oil, money, and politics, placing him close enough so that he could see the players and understand something about the duplicitous games that they were playing—she herself having committed a kind of "political suicide" by seeking to pass anti-corruption legislation. No doubt this explains why the operations of the Bush family are such a recurring topic in Lombardi's work. He had a ringside seat.

The second part of Goldstone's book steps away from Lombardi's life story in favor of exploring some of the organizational players that are referenced in the artist's elaborated taxonomy of shell-game operators. If anything, this shows that Goldstone shares Lombardi's passion for research, and in some cases she has completed parts of it that were left unfinished at the time of the artist's death. One can only wonder what Lombardi's work would have become had he lived through the 2nd Iraq War, the financial crisis of 2008, and the many other shady political controversies that are now a part of our everyday life. One also wonders why we see so few artists who are willing to take up the mantle of doing political art with the same level of subtlety and sophistication that Lombardi brought to his project.



Mark Lombardi, *George W. Bush, Harken Energy, and Jackson Stephens, c. 1979–90 (5th Version*, 1999. Graphite on paper, 20 x 44 inches. Private collection. Photograph by John Berens. Courtesy of Donald Lombardi and Pierogi Gallery.



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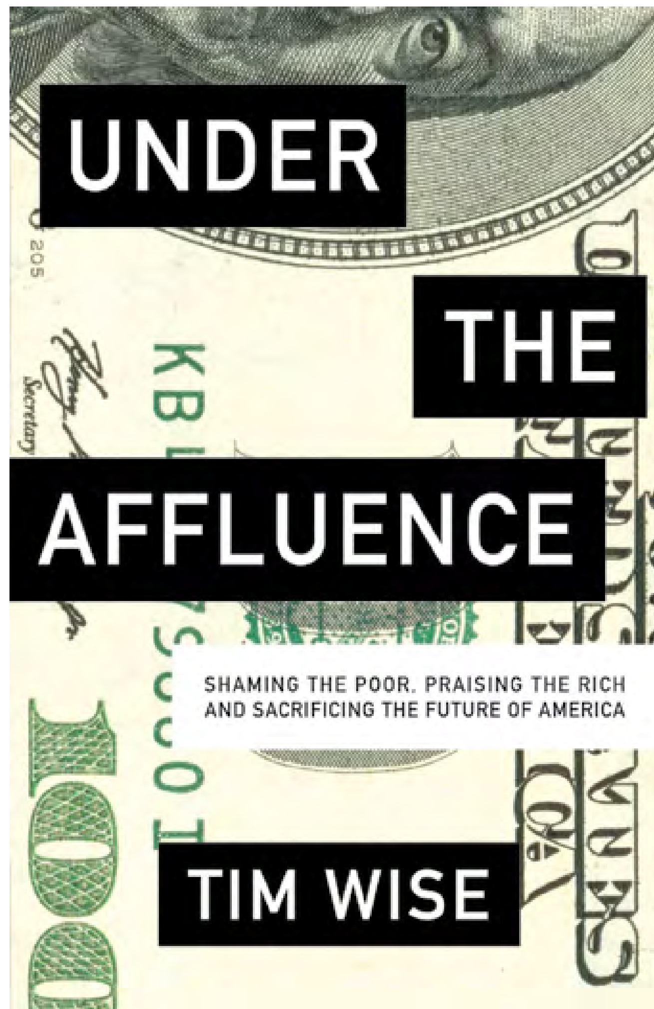

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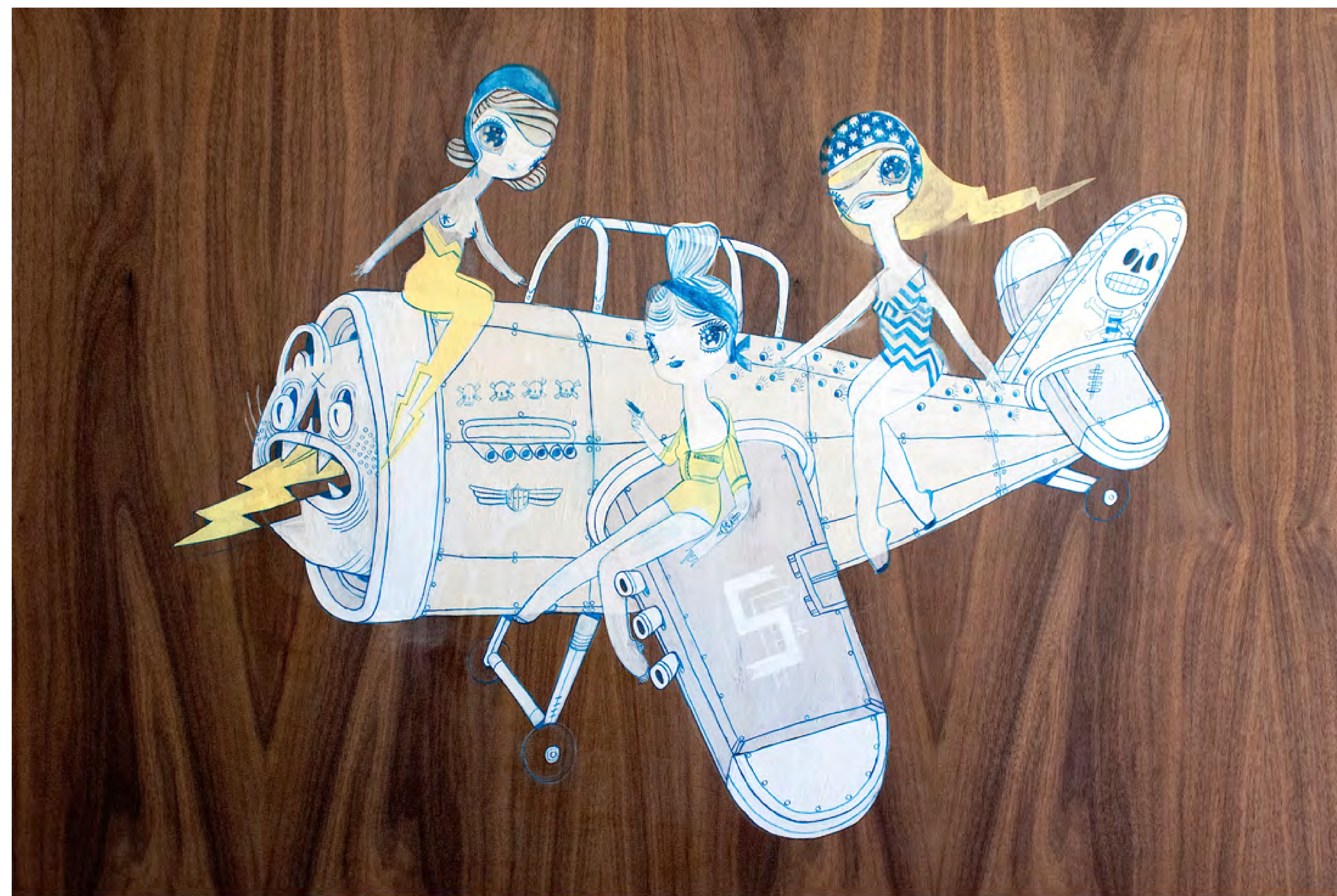

Holding Pattern

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Vik Muniz, 'Album: Ferris Wheel,' 2014, Digital C-print

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