

“UPSTREAM”: WHAT IS “IN” FORMAL AGENCY?



“It is the virtue of the notion of the image that it combines the aesthetic, spatiotemporal concretion of an object of sight with the element of abstraction inherent in ideas.”¹ – Peter Osborne

“So all originals exist in faith, faith in God and in the Future as artistic, scientific and religious beginnings which will come to their own beginning as to a second end or a second coming of the future.”² – Kasimir Malevich

The irreality of “drawing” takes the additional step “upstream” (away from the nominal real), toward the ideational and speculative realm of thought itself, accessing – arguably – that which is more real than real. We see this most especially in the recent works of Vija Celmins where “drawing” is actually “constructive” – whether delicate mezzotint, hand-constructed photo-

gravure object, or exacting (small) painting of the night sky or surface of a shell. But “drawing” nonetheless carries the double (historical) nature of the image with it, not negating this associative logic but amplifying it. Drawings draw drawings, except when they do not. It is this “when they do not” that is the secret locus of representational agency in drawing (architectural and otherwise). In the exact manner of Theo Angelopoulos’ film *The Weeping Meadow* (2004), “upstream” connotes a “real” more real than the nominal real of mere worlds. The representational agency of drawing “from upstream” both overcomes the dualism of spatiotemporal concretion and abstraction (held in tension in the modern artwork) and suggests what quite literally resides in representational, formal agency – the repressed pure aesthetic moment given to all worlds, real and imagined.

GK (2010)

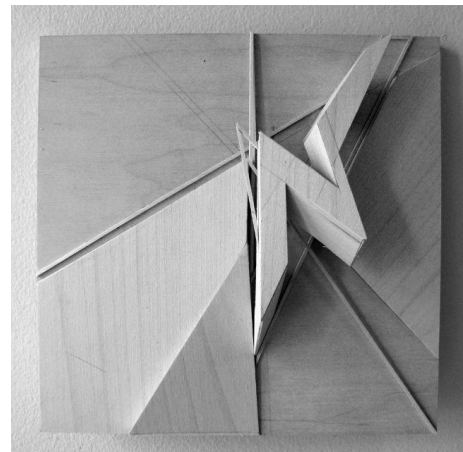
Image (above) – Vija Celmins, *Comet*, linocut, 1992

Image (right) – Parsa Khalili, *SCARcity*, model, n.d.

ARTIST’S STATEMENT

“If nature opposes us, we will struggle against her and make her obey us.” – Simon Bolivar

The most violent act of man. The work incorporated here is not a means to an end; it (re)presents fragments of the immaterial – a prelude to the offering. Operating under the auspice of “Theory” – here referring to the Greek root of the word *Theoria* (θεωρία), meaning contemplation, vision, spectator – the edge of the page is the only constraint delimiting the abstract and textual interpretations of the built world *within*.



Parsa Khalili (2010)

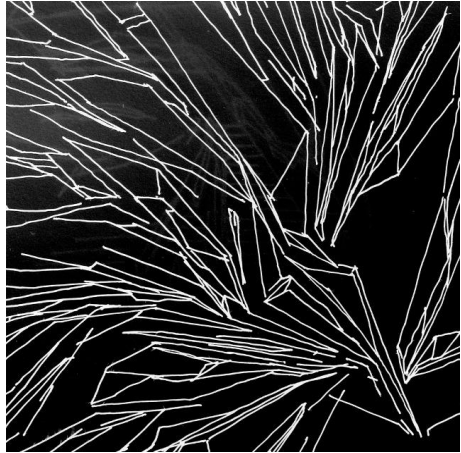
¹ Peter Osborne, “Abstract Images: Sign, Image, and Aesthetic in Gerhard Richter’s Painting”, in Benjamin H.D. Buchloh, ed., *Gerhard Richter*, October Files 8 (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2009), p. 99.

² Kasimir Malevich, “The Philosophy of the Kaleidoscope”, pp. 11-33, in *The World as Non-Objective: Unpublished Writings 1922-25*, ed. Troels Andersen, trans. Xenia Glowacki-Prus, Edmund T. Little (Copenhagen: Borgen, 1976), p. 13.

EDIT 6/2/2011

FORMS OF NOTHINGNESS: AN ELECTIVE “COMMUNISM” (2006)

“God preserve it [communism], so that this rabble who are beside themselves with brazenness do not grow more brazen still, and so that the society of those exclusively entitled to enjoyment, who believe they are loving subordinate humanity enough if they give it syphilis, may at least go to bed with a nightmare! So that at least they may lose their appetite for preaching morality to their victims, take less delight in ridiculing them.”¹ – Karl Kraus



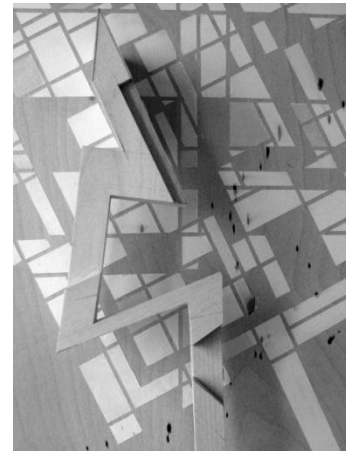
“Philosophy exists solely insofar as it extracts concepts from a historical pressure which would grant them nothing other than a relative sense. What does ‘communist’ signify in an absolute sense? What is it that philosophy is able to think under this name (philosophy under the condition of a politics)? Egalitarian passion, the Idea of justice, the will to break with the compromises of the service of goods, the deposing of egotism, the intolerance of oppression, the vow of an end to the State; the absolute pre-eminence of multiple-presentation over representation; the tenacious militant determination, set in motion by some incalculable event, to maintain, come what may, the proposition of a singularity without predicate, an infinity without determination or immanent

hierarchy; what I term the generic, which – when its procedure is political – provides the ontological concept of democracy, or of communism, it’s the same thing.”² – Alain Badiou

CAPITALISM TRIUMPHANT

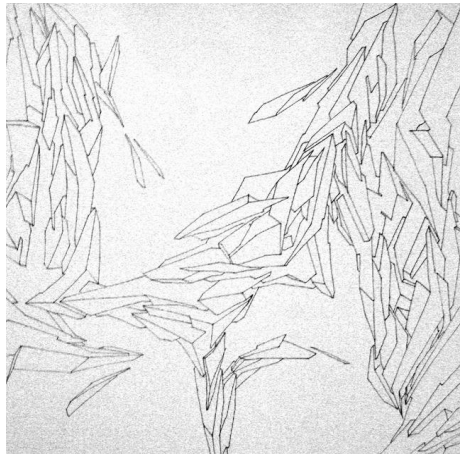
It is more than evident, today, that totalitarianism knows no bounds – whether of the rancorous, old-communist type or the neo-liberal, so-called democratic type. The current political-economic regime in the US is as totalizing (and as totalitarian) a system as any of its putative “others”; that is to say, these others as “its enemies”, enemies made all the more baleful when painted with the broad brush of hypocritical, self-serving triumphalism – or, after the fact and after the flood (after 1989).

The long march through institutions has morphed into the long march through markets. Witness books of the order of Thomas Friedman’s *The World is Flat* or Mark C. Taylor’s *Confidence Games*.³ Both serve up similar excuses for the globalization of capital and its spectral de-materialization(s). In the case of Taylor’s book, we have passed through two former worldviews (which he reduces to monism and dualism, the latter co-equivalent with high modernism). In both highly suspect scenarios (in both of these books), present-day, de-territorialized markets represent the liberation (liberalization and transvaluation) of the apparent natural abundance quite literally everywhere, up for grabs, and – as both are reluctant to quite point out – stolen every day and sold back to the otherwise enslaved populace no longer as goods but as virtual services (most especially financial services). The recent news (2005) that the New York Stock Exchange (NYSE) would go “public” is, in itself, an extraordinary thing, insofar as the NYSE produces *exactly nothing*, not unlike Enron produced exactly nothing, and the IPO represents a doubling of doing nothing for a great deal of money.



That said, one has to wonder what possibly could displace such a widening net, or what might offer respite from the creeping economic determinism that is (hopefully) the end game for capitalism itself. If there is any justice, such alternatives would be elective alternatives. Such alternatives might also include an *elective “communism”* – as people finally sicken of the revolving wheel that further rarifies the same broken premises ruling the abstract exigencies (the voided particulars) of neo-liberal economics.

An elective “communism” is nothing new. It was, after all, the game par excellence within the earliest human settlements (a game reconstituted in the first Christian and Buddhist monastic orders), and a game that survives in an altered manner in collectives here and there, including purely intellectual-speculative communities (such as literature or art), forms of community that concretize the belief that everything belongs to everyone. It was, curiously, the eccentric figure of Thomas Merton, a Trappist monk (at first literary savant-modernist, in New York, and then author of *The Seven-Storey Mountain*), who most clearly discerned in pure “communism” the ethical spirit re-naturalized. It was, then, a strange turn of events that led to Merton’s death in Thailand, in 1968 no less, at a Christian-Buddhist conference, where he more or less equated “communism” with the spiritual life (religion without religion). For this, some say, an electric fan was tossed into his shower and he was, of course, electrocuted on the spot.

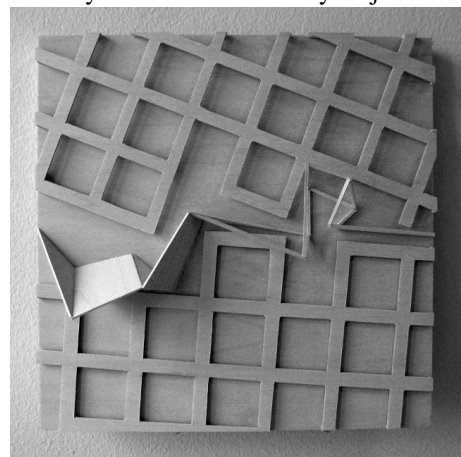


This is the same Thomas Merton who circulated *samizdat*-style writings during the Civil Rights wars of the 1960s, against the Church’s dictates, and the same Merton who toyed with the idea of quitting the Trappist monastery in Kentucky, where he was holed up, and decamping for a new, Catholic utopian order in Central America (founded by Ernesto Cardenal), a precursor to the slightly later, radicalized Catholic movements associated with liberation theology in the 1980s. Sic transit denatured onto-*theological* ideology and its representational hubris *for and against* any politics whatsoever.

If there are echoes here of what lies ahead with the recent election of a right-wing pope (described by the media as an “intellectual”, which means dogmatist), it seems possible that we are about to re-live many of the same dramas we have passed through before, in preparation perhaps for finally resolving the circular stalemates that litter the poisoned terrain of late-capitalism.⁴

Thus, it is quite likely that people will have to make serious choices (individually and collectively) as the long-anticipated end of nihilism arrives, even as the purveyors of nihilism fear nihilism as much as its demise.

Nietzsche’s greatest gift was his majestic acts of demolition, which still reverberate to this day and – arguably – acts that may be discerned in every major work of significance in literature and art in the 20th century.



As the harvest of the catastrophic 20th century proceeds into the first quarter of the 21st, Nietzsche’s limitations are also strenuously on display in the stalled post-modern transition to a new monism. What Friedman, Taylor, and others of a post-modern or neo-liberal persuasion best illustrate is the intentional perpetuation of a fractured world, out of fear of the reconstitution of a principled monism. Thus neo-liberalism privileges hot-house flowers (for example, gated, edenic corporate campuses just outside Bangalore, in Friedman’s case) – flowers of a very different “evil” than Baudelaire’s.

Whatever the outcome of the next half decade, we owe it to ourselves to miraculously, somehow, transcend our own petty, warring and whoring selves and arrive at a collective state best characterized as elective “communism”. This has rightly been termed, by Giorgio Agamben and others, as the “Coming Community”, even as neo-

Marxism denies access to the Real within its scintillating (primarily syntactical) rhetorical games and privileges, instead, its very own version of the Master Signifier (Ideology). All other alternatives are equally pathetic.

ENTR’ACTE - A DAY IN THE HELLISH CITY

I took the M3 bus south from Central Park East (Fifth Avenue) to the the New York Public Library (NYPL) at Fifth and 41st to read Schopenhauer’s *World as Will and Representation*, looking especially for the justly famous passages on music, expecting dark draughts of so-called pessimism against the anterior sky of some-thing else. The call slip came back marked “Not on shelf” and I was relieved of the responsibility. I ambled over to the Internet stations below the plum-red skies of the palatial Rose Reading Room now rationalized to keep tourists and ne’er-dowells at bay (now requiring a library card and log-in) and spent some time wasting time.

I left walking east toward Tudor City and First Avenue dodging triple-wide strollers, tourists walking three or four abreast, past Grand Central, past rolling luggage, past workmen arc-welding air conditioners on the sidewalk, deliverymen wheeling carts of shrink-wrapped bottled water, mounds of decomposing garbage in superheated, super-sized black plastic bags, past ranges of newsstands, trashcans and bystanders, crossing the taxi- and car-jammed intersections with and against the light, one eye open for delivery “artists” on bicycles riding against traffic. In time, I descended, eventually, a set of stairs to the chronically disabled and permanently under-construction UN enclave (sovereign outpost) at Turtle Bay, waiting then to board the M5 bus on First, all the while ignoring a man exposing himself to no one in particular from a window in an apartment high above the urban carnage. When the bus finally arrived, I found that I had \$0.00 on my MetroCard.



Stepping off the bus, instead I walked through the destruction zones of the First Avenue traffic corridor, through over-, under-, and through-passages, eventually connecting up with the East River Park just north of the iconographically grotesque One Sutton Place South and the high-flying Roosevelt Island Tram. Walking along the esplanade (which follows the dull, flat roar of the FDR), I observed relatively “ancient”, brownstone ashlar walls holding up the eastern-most portion of the

Upper East Side against the cut of the expressway wondering what if anything at all was buried behind the ivy-clad, east-facing precipice punctuated by soot-glazed windows and rusted, sealed iron doors and grills. Shiny black limousines and town cars flew north, from Wall Street, toward Connecticut where there’s no income tax to speak of

...

Approaching 78th Street and the chlorinated John Jay Park, and gazing toward the brick colossi of Roosevelt Island (the towering apartment blocks), I noticed the waves of the East River rolling softly off the embankment, the inky brown-green waters stirred by a passing sailboat (motoring northwards) and a cruiser of the Circle Line plying southward. The barely audible surge of the river tugged and nodded in the 95-degree heat, a just-perceptible lullaby in late-afternoon, and I thought of Rabindranath Tagore staring into the waters of the Ganges, “adrift” in thought, as it flowed through Benares; the poet transfixed by light-on-water, signal event of the Real (which is always already “present”).



NOTHING MUCH / MERE FORM

It is strange that architectures that do mostly nothing (nothing much) are also architectures that sing/singe (in the sense that Massimo Cacciari meant in “Eupalinos or Architecture?”), though this strangeness is also an obvious signal that the ontological fact of architecture is both vital and violent. (For this reason alone, 1970s neo-rationalist architectures – Peter Eisenman, Aldo Rossi, Raimund Abraham, and John Hejduk – come to mind.)

The implicit violence is the theft of time-space for other ends, not all noteworthy, nor all innocent (if innocence merely indicates Colin Rowe’s “good intentions”). It is perhaps bizarre (a compounded estrangement), then, that it is commercial architecture that is matter-of-factly pervaded by criminal intentions – that is, the theft and re-direction of architectural time-space toward the market, an evisceration of the architectonic of speculative thought as mere speculation. (Witness, thus, the wide and tall array of *de luxe* condominiums going up in New York City of late designed by signature star-architects.)

If “public” and “private” bracket “commercial”, it is this middle terrain that discloses the reduction of architecture not to generative experience (time-space), and not to “ground” (necessity), but to anti-experience (slavery) and “air” (artifice as de-materialized capital). This air (also the spectre of *surplus capital*, the form of capital always expropriated) was denoted by Louis Althusser as ‘()’, a bracketed nothing preceding the word *labor* in the

somewhat famous pseudo-empirical sentence from *Reading "Capital"*: "The value of () labor is equal to the value of subsistence goods necessary for the maintenance and reproduction of () labor."⁵

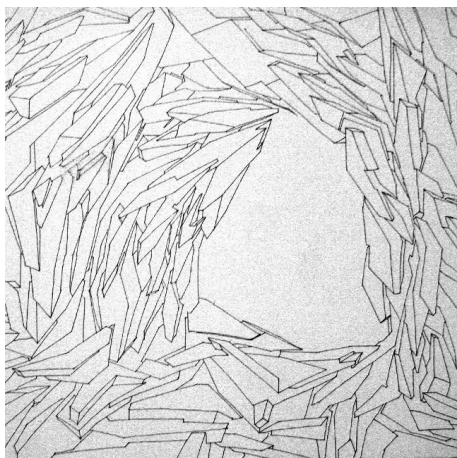
The struggle for depth (presence) is always effaced (blocked and/or hijacked) by surface-as-information (mediation), or that information flowing through mediatic (mediatized) capital and across the face of commercial architectures as both style and apparent "surplus" value. The long history of subterfuges regarding modern architecture's capitalization to the same runs through 20th-century critiques of what happened to the ostensibly utopian impulse en route to the prison-house of contemporary urbanism and the invasion of public and private time-space by the yet-parasitical, infinitely clever de-materializations of ideology that came with late-modernism and the IT revolution.

For reasons very specific to his quest for radical architecture that *does what it says it does* (says what it means), Manfredo Tafuri abandoned modern architecture and his critique of the same for the salacious world of Giulio Romano and late-Renaissance Mannerism. This evacuation (out of weariness with waiting for a way out of the labyrinth) perhaps also proves the point that the primal-scene of architecture is an eroticized landscape of portents, as Karel Teige also re-discovered after the twin avant-garde insurrections of Russian Constructivism and early Functionalism (roughly the period from 1920-1932) fell to pieces (were eaten alive by so-called "aesthetic modernism"). Thus Georges Bataille and Maurice Blanchot (and Pierre Klossowski) err toward that self-same libidinal excess in literature, always claiming "the outside" (and, therefore, always secretly moving further *inside* of the speculative agencies of *literary* time-space toward a newly de-limited version of the architectonic). Thus, for the very same reasons (affects as affectations toward this "other" zone), architects and architectural critics often bail out of the sinking ship of so-called avant-gardism for anterior regions within representation (new agitations and/or heresies), insofar as the embrace and misappropriation of parallel disciplines require the same plunge to spectral presence. The eroticized wonders disclosed (an exquisite example of Franco Moretti's "signs taken for wonders") are also always already the existential-metaphysical nexus within the semi-divine imaginary of mimesis – the so-called/putative "exit" at the center of all labyrinths of thought.⁶

This assault by capital on architecture itself leaves no site unmarked; and if sites are abandoned along the way, as they always are, it is usually because they have failed and capital flees. These sites (post-industrial and post-modern *at once*) are left to the public as legacies, to re-capitalize with public capital for the eventual re-colonization by parasitical private capital. Thus the wheel rolls over everything in its path.

Erasing this middle ground (parasitical expropriation of both metaphysical and very real abundance), while virtually impossible (utopian), remains the elective, possible-impossible purpose of architectures that do nothing much *intentionally*.

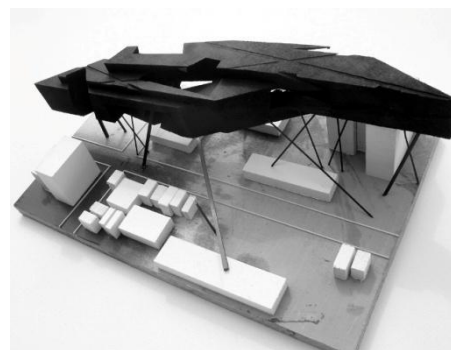
THE ABJECT SUBJECT



Tucked into the mostly circular and often hermetic essays of *Who Comes After the Subject?* (1991) is a somewhat devastating critique of the state of the subject at the end of the 20th century by Étienne Balibar entitled "Citizen Subject". Unlike the majority of essays in this seminal volume re-working the late post-structuralist question par excellence (essays that trace the "strange shadows of the inner world", as Gordon Marino characterized the spirit of Søren Kierkegaard's writing), Balibar goes straight to the dark heart of the political matter of what constitutes a subject and *what or who* might follow such an epochal event (an event he traces back to the Middle Ages, clearing Descartes of the onus of having perpetrated, *avant la lettre*, or in the name of then-nascent modernity, the thinking subject as locus of modern, abject subjectivity).⁷

In clearing Descartes, Balibar merely shows that the concept of autonomous thinking subject never quite appears (is named) in Descartes' writings (the *Meditations* in particular) *as subject*, and that the abject nothingness of the *cogito* is a performative interpretation of Cartesian thought after the fact (by idealist philosophers generally objecting to the metaphysical ghost-in-the-machine, by *partition*, that the *cogito* seemed to represent).

By naturalizing the rights of the citizen, quite naturally citing the French Revolution, Balibar unearths the social aspects of the so-called *subjectum* within a Hegelian trajectory toward freedom, passing through the debris field of the justifications and theological hairsplitting associated with Baroque absolutism. The subject-as-citizen appears, after the revolution, as revolutionary citizen only to disappear again in the Napoleonic Code as bourgeois subject (perhaps recalling Levinas' wonderful term for acquiescence, "to inbourgeois" oneself or allow oneself to be "inbourgeoised"), a loss of the fundamental status of free subject within the socialized order of the State (incipient or otherwise). In this manner, the question "Who comes after the subject?" devolves to "Who co-opts the subject?" (or, "Who hunts/stalks the subject?") and the apparent harvest of Rousseau's seminal work on the social contract seems to invoke endless capitulation, to be taken up, later, by Karl Marx as the teleological (upside-down Hegelian dialectical) abuse and re-subjectivization of subject-as-victim (self-avowed perhaps, yet always prepared, in advance, to revolt – that is, to opt out of the social contract individually and/or collectively), Badiou's point (exactly) regarding "multiple-presentation".



Similarly, the essay in the same volume by Gérard Granel entitled appropriately "Who Comes After the Subject?" further tracks the travails of the bourgeois subject (the proverbial "They") referring to Descartes cogito as an "ontological puppet" (never a subject, then), drenched in an evanescent, onto-theological self-disclosed aura provided through the passage of time and history by the disembodied (ghostly) machinations of an instrumentalized metaphysics. Appropriately, Badiou warns against "instrumentalizations of instrumentalizations", which always conceal incipient and/or rampant forms of ideology – in a word, endless (cyclical) reifications. For Granel, this spectral subject (as puppet) merely responds and/or dances within the space (time-space *as distance*) provided by the theater of permissible subjectivity. Granel's thoroughly toxic reading of this theater devolves in its own right to the political economy of present times toward the disposable unit of contemporary subjectivity hopelessly mired in the abstract "juridical" interventions of the monstrous "Firm" (a figure denoting the corporatist assumption of individual rights over and above the rights of citizens). "In an amazing dialectical sublation centered on the Firm, a finite world is thus perpetuated. *There is the true actual subject: in this 'form' under which Capital has managed to hire mankind.*"⁸



Granel's darkening vision of subject as "trained servant" augurs horizons of (in)finite tinkering with subjectivity in service to Capital, versus its outright "death", and presents no respite other than the historical (horizontal) exit always deferred in dialectical materialism. If Granel and Balibar resurrect the hope for a transcendent revolutionary exit from the unholy embrace of endlessly reified Capital, it is not clear that "Citizen" or "Worker" mean anything more today than they did in the days of radical intervention (the age of revolutions). Thus, the empty universals return (mankind, freedom, human rights) as a flimsy scaffolding on which to perform non-Nietzschean dances and pageants

invoking the spent Real; the usurpation of everything for nothing, and the World Soul Fire-Sale always already underway.⁹

To steal a particularly potent line of thought from Balibar/Granel/Marx, what "bites" Capitalism is the Real (the "Given"). This Real lies buried in subjectivity itself as force field, a spectralized nature (Rousseau's "voice of the conscience", theosophy's and Helena Petrovna Blavatsky's "voice of silence", and/or Levinas' "voice of the Other"). Its antecedents are to be found in the Greek concept of words as things. The Real is that thing that cannot be appropriated (because it is speculative though itself). It is, as such, the "Thing" that remains unanswerable (unassimilable). It "exists" as exit before the echo (before "The Fall"). If John Ruskin sort of caught its breath in his writings regarding the fall of Venice (the fall of the Republic, after the plague of the early 1500s) by circling the notion of the grotesque (even given his now-obvious, eminently Victorian sublimations and repressions), he also caught sight of it *as site* in the stones of Venice in the form of the merely ghastly apparitional "nature" bestowed by the corpse of the Republic.¹⁰ To this end (which is also a beginning of an answer, yet always an incomplete answer)

the Real returns as “Exit” from sublimations, repressions, and capitalist instrumentalizations (also forms of sublimation and repression). The slightest margin of error re-creates the machinery of the world. This small margin (an *elastic* margin) is also the line between “Self” and “World” (the Real).



THE REAL

“To deduce moral thunder in buttercups ...” ... The Real, always already buried in things, is the signature of the turning point (the present-present). To demolish bankrupt forms of mediation is the proverbial way out, while avoiding re-loading the same – which is the problem every day in the sense that the machinic nature of advanced capitalism is constantly in the process of re-constituting its own idols.

Nietzsche’s philosophy of the Superman, or an “aristocracy of spirit”, has absolutely nothing to do with being über-rich (or with reified Calvinism). As always, with inverted states (lopsided, upside-down worlds), it is precisely the opposite – that is to say, the concept of aristocracy (a *coming-aristocracy*). Thus, to move “upstream” connotes re-tracing “ground” lost long ago, and a ground not given to

territoriality in any geographical or physical sense. As with Theo Angelopoulos’ figure of the “Weeping Meadow”, which is at the headwaters of all “rivers”, a place is located “outside” of time where single drops of water run down single blades of grass, producing the torrent of “Life”.¹¹

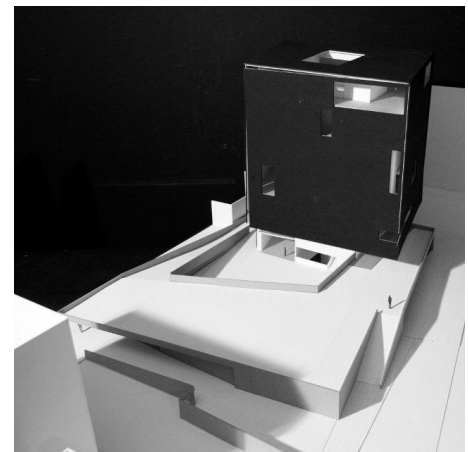
GK (August 2005/June 2006)

All images (drawings, models, photomontage) – Parsa Khalili
Soundtrack – Eleni Karaindrou, “The Weeping Meadow”, 2003

POSTSCRIPT (2009)

We were on Metro-North returning to New York City from New Haven recently when we stopped at Stamford, Connecticut, and Those-Who-Trade-in-Human-Hides boarded. They have sawn-off office towers in Stamford for the likes of UBS, Royal Bank of Scotland, and Citibank. The commuter train resembled the New York City subway from Stamford to Grand Central with standing room only. The financial services wizards played with their BlackBerrys and cell phones the entire trip (much like the hoi polloi on the subway in New York, though as of yet there is no cellular signal available on lines that pass underground, which is the vast majority of the system). At least Amtrak has so-called quiet cars.

I was in New Haven to see two exhibitions (one by plan and one by accident). The first was the Venturi and Scott Brown exhibition at the Yale School of Architecture, in the recently restored and expanded Paul Rudolph building, a work of exquisite Brutalist sensibilities. The second (by accident) was “The Postwar Avant-Garde and the Culture of Protest, 1945 to 1968 and Beyond,” an exhibition of avant-garde books and posters stretching back from the proverbial present to around 1914 (and the Russian Futurists).¹² Along the way one could follow the Surrealists, the Lettrists, and the Situationists all vying for the right to critique the ethical vacuum of advanced capitalist society. It was odd to find this agit-prop work in the Beinecke, an extraordinarily beautiful building by Gordon Bunshaft (of SOM no less), a building reputedly inspired by a harem in Istanbul, though much more a mausoleum for rare books than either “gallery” or “harem”. The Venturi and Scott Brown exhibition seemed mostly annoying in comparison, a recycled mishmash of an outmoded architectural aesthetic from the late 1960s and early 1970s that was, in fact, a mishmash of effects derived from Pop art and the then-radical embrace of American kitsch and vernacular (strip) development.



The latter was based on the famous studio Learning from Las Vegas conducted by Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown at Yale in 1968. Called “What We Learned”, the exhibition might have been called “What We Might Unlearn”.¹³ For example, “trees block signage” (meant as a negative attribute of city planning apropos of Las Vegas).

While walking back to “downtown” New Haven (its very own commercial strip) from the architecture school we got disoriented and ended up in a residential ghetto, New Haven’s great shame. The campus is notoriously surrounded by urban blight that stretches on and on without relief not unlike Washington, DC. Perhaps a studio at Yale could be inaugurated called “Learning from New Haven” and we could just get on with it (instead of constantly revisiting and reinventing the past). Yet nostalgia is contagious insofar as it allows us to avoid the present. Most of recent development in New Haven has been concentrated in the downtown, with shops, restaurants, and condos aimed at the New Haven elite – much of the “upgrade” sponsored in part by Yale University.



All this brings us to the present moment and the endless recycling of excuses for not getting things right (mostly from the right, but increasingly from the left and the middle, which means the entire political spectrum). In New York City it is easy to find signs of vested interests most everywhere, waiting and waiting, doing next to nothing, waiting for the game to start again (the speculative game of hyper-capitalism and its pendant, philanthropy). One such venue to watch is news of the nexus between the so-called artworld and the NGOs (non-profits), as its privileged set scurries for cover and/or bails out of prestigious addresses and downsizes to save their own hides (the upper echelons, at least, or those who spend half the year fundraising their own jobs and the rest sitting on their hands, or wringing their hands in anticipation of a new cycle of the same, or laying off workers and slashing budgets). Museums may be done with their grotesque fundraising and capital campaigns (at least for now), while those late to the game are just finishing up their “re-design” (rebranding, expansion, and kowtowing to the circular model already passing into history – art as spectacle, capital as art, capital as spectacle).

Thus, it is perhaps appropriate to cite Guy Debord’s *Rapport* (1957), the document that led to the merger of various avant-garde protest movements and the foundation of the Situationist International:

“We must advance the keywords of unitary urbanism, of experimental behavior, of hyper political propaganda, and of the construction of environments. The passions have been interpreted enough [Surrealism]: the point now is to discover others.”¹⁴

And this (these words now to be found) amidst the splendor of Yale and the squalor of New Haven, in an alabaster mausoleum for books, in a glass vitrine, preserved for posterity.

The forces of entropy are arrayed again against all forms of progressivity. Capital may appropriate and assimilate almost everything (the lament of the melancholy left), but were it to appropriate true progressivity itself (social justice), we might have something to celebrate.



First signs are not promising, as the *New York Times* reports on November 22 (“Wall St. Finds Profits Again, Now By Reducing Mortgages”) that hedge and private-equity funds are buying up “lots” of distressed mortgages at 60-percent discounts, lowering the principal (at a notable savings to distressed borrowers), and dumping the product on the government (the FHA writing the new mortgages and Ginnie Mae re-securitizing them). What banks would not do, private capital (investment funds) have seized as the new new frontier (banking the difference in purchase and re-sale price, plus fees), offloading the paper on the government and conceivably buying it back for the long haul, that is, further profits. Many of the same players in the subprime disaster are involved. Ironically, without the federal government as intermediary, the funds might have had to actually hold on to the actual loans. By rolling them over,

their “philanthropy” is short-lived: about the time it takes to exit the transaction (or “the time of the transaction”). Again, Wall Street gets all of the “upside” (profit) and “the people” get the downside (the risk).

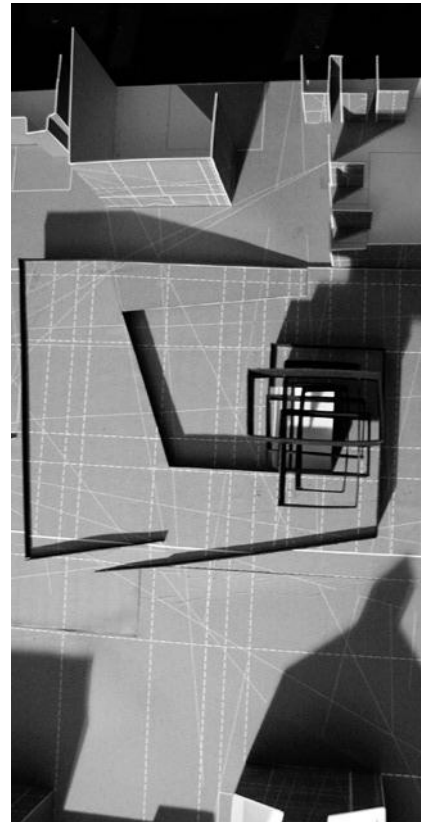
Here, the art of capital is the re-securitization of “equity” and risk. What is obvious is that “the game” is starting once again (and the spectral commodity of “justice” has been re-mortgaged, or pushed further down the road.)

The great, unanswered question is: “What’s different?” When the Obama administration suggested the same (forcing banks to sell distressed assets to hedge and equity funds by way of the Treasury) the banks balked. How is it that without the government’s purchase and resale of these assets, profiting in turn by acting as broker, private equity can nonetheless pry free the very exact assets the banks refused to sell six months ago? Can it have anything to do with the fact that it is the same traders-in-human-hides that are involved; the banks, the investors, and the brokers who – as elite club – can always find a way to finesse the system?

What’s different is that the government (the taxpayer) is at the end of the equation (or the middle end), and, as such, left holding the re-packaged loans, able to sell them off to the same investors as long-term securities by re-insuring them (assuming the risk). And so forth ...

What is becoming obvious is that “we” should have nationalized the insolvent banks when we had a chance, and that we should have kept long-term warrants in those that received bailout funds. They clearly have no interest in changing the game. It is the public, therefore, that must look out for the public good. They (Who Trade in Human Hides) have long since exited anything resembling anything public or good. As H.L. Mencken once wrote: Imagine the very worst and you have a fair approximation of the truth.

GK (November 2009)



¹ Karl Kraus, cited in Walter Benjamin, “Karl Kraus”, trans. Edmund Jephcott, *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings, Vol 2, 1927-1934*, ed. Michael W. Jennings, Howard Eiland, and Gary Smith (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1999), p. 456. “Nothing is understood about this man [Kraus] until it has been perceived that, of necessity and without exception, everything – language and fact – falls, for him, within the sphere of justice.” *Ibid.*, p. 443. “His charge: high treason of the law against justice. More exactly, betrayal of the word by the concept, which derives its existence from the word: the premeditated murder of imagination, which dies of the absence of a single letter and for which, in his ‘Elegy on the Death of a Sound’, he has sung the most moving lament.” *Ibid.*, p. 444.

² Alain Badiou, “Philosophy and ‘The Death of Communism’”, pp. 126-40, *Infinite Thought: Truth and the Return of Philosophy*, ed. and trans. Oliver Feltham, Justin Clemens (London: Continuum, 2004), p. 130.

³ Thomas L. Friedman, *The World is Flat: A Brief History of the Twenty-First Century* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2005); Mark C. Taylor, *Confidence Games: Money and Markets in a World without Redemption* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004). See also Tim Parks, *Medici Money: Banking, Metaphysics, and Art in Fifteenth-Century Florence* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2005). For a review of Friedman’s book, see John Gray, “The World Is Round”, *The New York Review of Books*, Vol. LII, No. 13 (August 11, 2005): pp. 13-15. Notably, this review locates all the flaws in Friedman’s Panglossian worldview by way of explaining that Marx and Engels predicted the rise of global capitalism and *welcomed it*. What Friedman cannot see (or wishes not to see), because the mechanisms are so very subtle (or because it demolishes his own desire), is the rise of terrorism as the Frankenstein monster generated by globalization. To see these linkages, one would have to invent a Dr. Frankenstein, to apostatize the disembodied forces at work worldwide within globalization (a monstrous, diabolical thing in pursuit of the subject-as-last-frontier).

⁴ “Foster” on “Foster”: “The issue is the ideological dimension of contemporary architecture.... ‘Foster’ approximates a similar feat [as the ‘white’, abstract architectures of Loos and Le Corbusier] for the look of modernity today. Perhaps more persuasively than any other office, it delivers an architectural image of a present-future that wishes to appear advanced. Of course, the very attempt is underwritten by the new-economy clients that the practice attracts – high-tech companies, mega-corporations, banks from Europe to Asia, governments of many sorts – but they are attracted for this reason too. This look of the modern is not

merely a look; it is an affirmation of an ethos: if Le Corbusier imaged modernity as clean functionality, with architecture as a 'machine for living in', 'Foster' updates this image with sophisticated materials, sustainable systems and inspired schemes." Hal Foster "here" steps straight into the neo-modernist game of smoke and mirrors (ambient environmental affects and curtain walls) insofar as he elides far too much to make his reduction – i.e., Loos and Le Corbusier are not simply progenitors of image(s) – one after another – nor is "scenography" (always derogatory in critiques of architecture) necessarily a post-modern (corrupted) thing. What passes Foster by, tackling "Foster", is that the architectural demiurge is one and the same in architectures that merely service Capital/Mammon. Loos, for one, produced an architectural image of extreme plasticity beyond the white, planar surfaces – the interiors departing altogether from rationality and the orthogonal. Hal Foster, "Go, Modernity", pp. 11-12, *London Review of Books* (June 22, 2006): p. 12. Regarding Foster's plan for re-building the World Trade Center site in Manhattan, Foster writes: "The scheme is telling. As much as any other candidate for the site, 'Foster' appeared to be in sync with the popular – the imperial – call to build the towers 'higher than before'. Such is its [the firm's] faith in modernity that perhaps 'Foster' didn't feel too knocked back by 9/11. Indeed, for all its sensitivity to ecology, it doesn't seem touched by any disaster, natural or man-made, of the postwar period; history is indeed abstracted in its work. In the post-9/11 world this unshakeable confidence is welcomed by the shaky powers that be, and, like Santiago Calatrava and a few others, 'Foster' delivers it, and more: the office offers moral uplift in beautiful forms on a grand scale." Ibid.

⁵ Louis Althusser, in Louis Althusser, Étienne Balibar, *Reading "Capital"*, first published as *Lire "le capital"*, 2 vols. (Paris: François Maspero, 1965); cited in Jacques Rancière, "Althusser, Don Quixote, and the Stage of the Text", pp. 129-45, in *The Flesh of Words*, trans. Charlotte Mandell (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2004), p. 131. Volume 1 of *Lire "le capital"*, by Louis Althusser, Jacques Rancière, and Pierre Macherey; Volume 2 by Louis Althusser, Étienne Balibar, and Roger Establet. See *Reading "Capital"*, trans. Ben Brewster (London: NLB, 1970). English editions of the book have retained only the essays by Althusser and Balibar. Already by 1970, structuralism was shading into post-structuralism and Althusser's preface attempted to bracket much of the language of the 1965 "return to Marx" that mirrored Lacan's "return to Freud". Post-structuralism, arguably, arrived with Jacques Derrida's *De la grammatologie* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1967), although it is often said that the beginning of the end for Structuralism proper was Roland Barthes's slow exit culminating with the 1967 essay "The Death of the Author". In English, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976). The bloom was already off of post-structuralism by the mid-1980s, with the arrival of George Steiner's *Real Presences* signaling its demise in 1989. See George Steiner, *Real Presences* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1989). Derrida's *Spectres de Marx: L'état de la dette, le travail du deuil et la nouvelle Internationale* (Paris: Éditions Galilée, 1993) began the process, for Derrida, that Barthes initiated for exiting one's own trap. In English, *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt: The Work of Mourning, and the New International*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (London: Routledge, 1994). See Dominique Janicaud, Jean-François Courtine, Jean-Louis Chrétien, Michel Henry, Jean-Luc Marion, *Phenomenology and the "Theological Turn": The French Debate* (New York: Fordham, 2000). In French, *Le tournant théologique de la phénoménologie française* (Combas: L'Eclat, 1991). It is Derrida, Emmanuel Levinas, and Paul Ricoeur who are generally credited with re-introducing "theological" perspectives to French deconstruction, albeit, in Derrida's case, only after the materialist (or determinist) and purely language-based agenda of deconstruction had run its course. *Specters of Marx* was, in fact, delivery on a promise Derrida had made for many years to deconstruct Marx. It is Marx's *German Ideology* that Derrida turns to, where one spectral presence is Hegel and Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*. It is the Marx of *The German Ideology* that Derrida turns to, where one spectral presence is Hegel and Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807). *Die Deutsche Ideologie* was written in 1845-1846 by Marx and Engels and not published until 1932. With *Specters of Marx*, Derrida did not so much betray deconstruction as bring it to completion. Yet in doing so he also managed to alienate both deconstructionists and Marxists, and, like Manfredo Tafuri, this *volte face* was accomplished by re-loading the spectral agency of transcendental idealism apostrophized in the very idea of a non-objective subject (the transcendental ego). With this move, the historical determinist model given to deconstructivist operations is made formal and Derrida returns to where it all began – his critique of Husserl's exit through ideality as formal, non-contingent agency. Husserl's 1929 *Formal and Transcendental Logic* is effectively the point of no return for those who wish to retain historical and materialist agency within the development of conceptual and/or speculative thought and cultural production. Edmund Husserl, *Formale und transzendente Logik: Versuch einer Kritik der logischen Vernunft* (Halle/Salle: M. Niemeyer, 1929).

⁶ Fredric Jameson, *A Singular Modernity: Essay on the Ontology of the Present* (London: Verso, 2002). "Modernity's epitaph might well be the long goodbye to the hopes invested in that particular constellation, overwhelmed by the final triumph of the alignment of the Enlightenment project with the imperatives of a market society, the name for whose contemporary ubiquitousness is now the consumerist blankness of the postmodern. In the mouths of today's politicians, the 'modern' is but the spectral trace of the fake re-enchantment of a thoroughly disenchanting world." Christopher Prendergast, "Codeword 'Modernity'", *New Left Review* 24 (November-December 2003): pp. 95-111. It is this sense of the word that Hal Foster's "Go, Modernity", as above, tackles the work of Norman Foster. For a review of Jameson's *Archaeologies of the Future* (London: Verso, 2005), see Michael Saler, "Adorno on Mars", *Times Literary Supplement* (June 16, 2006): p. 51. Like Marx and Engels, "Jameson similarly embraces utopian texts as negative critiques of the status quo. Utopian thought is valuable for providing an imaginative space in which radical alternatives to global capitalism and postmodernism are forged." Ibid. "In a neat dialectical synthesis, Jameson concludes by arguing that it is precisely the unique form of utopian texts – which absolutely separates and distinguishes their imagined societies – that in turn becomes supervening content: the *radical disruption of actuality*." Ibid. Italics added.

⁷ Gordon Marino, “Edifying Discourse”, *Bookforum*, Vol. 12, No. 2 (Summer 2005): p. 21. See Slavoj Žižek, ed., *Lacan: The Silent Partners* (London: Verso, 2006) for the sources, some Medieval, buried/concealed in Lacanian exegesis.

⁸ Gérard Granel, “Who Comes After the Subject?”, pp. 148-56, Eduardo Cadava, Peter Connor, Jean-Luc Nancy, eds., *Who Comes After the Subject?* (London: Routledge, 1991), p. 151.

⁹ Regarding /S/ ... S (Spirit) does not = \$\$\$; \$\$\$ = (in fact) imprisoned abundance (Spirit); Mammon = anti-Spirit ... For those still in doubt, S (after Hegel) is configured immanently, not historically. This is the mark of the irruptive, eschatological moment, deified in Walter Benjamin’s *Theses on a Philosophy of History* and personified by the Angel (after Rilke, after Klee, after Kraus, and before Cacciari). This self-same thing is endlessly deferred in all post-modernist, so-called elective forms of nihilism. If the Angel also connotes ennui, it is partly because of its trajectory through imaginary time-space, as in Albrecht Dürer’s *Melencolia I* (and certainly in Günter Grass’s essay on Dürer’s *Melencolia I*), while in Ilya and Emilia Kabakov’s work the same figure appears as follows: “Man-Angel” (c. 1996): “Make two wings out of white tulle fabric ... also leather straps for attaching these wings on your back and fixing them in place. After this, having stayed alone in your room ... you should put on the wings, and sit completely without anything to do and in silence for five to ten minutes, after which you should turn to your usual endeavours without leaving the room... After two to three weeks of daily procedures, the effect of the white wings will begin to manifest itself with greater and greater force.” Ilya and Emilia Kabakov, *The Utopian City and Other Projects* (Bielefeld: Kerber Verlag, 2004), pp. 339-40. Exhibition catalogue: Kunsthalle Bielefeld, September 12-November 19, 2004; Kunsthaus Zug, February 27-June 5, 2005; and Albion Gallery, London, October 13-December 23, 2005. In a brilliant bit of literary-exegetical detective work, Giorgio Agamben finds St. Paul buried in Benjamin’s *Theses* – that is, the hunchback dwarf (theologian) “hiding beneath a chessboard”. See Giorgio Agamben, “Threshold or Tornado”, pp. 138-45, in *The Time That Remains*, trans. Patricia Dailey (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2005).

¹⁰ See Mark Dorrian, “The Breath on the Mirror: Notes on Ruskin’s Theory of the Grotesque”, in Alberto Pérez-Gómez, Stephen Parcell, eds., *Chora Four: Intervals in the Philosophy of Architecture* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2004), pp. 25-48. It would seem, according to Dorrian, that Ruskin justified his usage of the problematical word *Spirit* as an emblem of the proto-Romantic *esprit du cœur* (that is “experience”, the “inspirational” versus “transcendental” not-thing informing creativity). While this spares Ruskin the onto-theological burden, it also is entirely unnecessary, except as a lyrical, literary-rhetorical gesture (classicizing red herring). Since Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Spirit* works, as all such works work, as a literary under-taking (as Augustine’s works also work), the literary-exegetical task of Ruskin’s *Stones of Venice* remains impervious to the reduction to simple representational doublets (linguistic dust/ghost “letters”). Perhaps Debord (writing/erring drunk) is the paramount late-modern epigone in this sense, *in this scene*, though he embraces the diabolical figure of irreversible time (an empirical, infernal force) and qualifies, as a result, *détournement* (polemical appropriation and expropriation) as the privileged antidote. *The Society of the Spectacle* is, after all, an intoxicated/intoxicating affair representing, through fractured and dislocated chains of figuration, the full-blown de-flowering of experience – the Apocalyptic Imaginary as the Real.

¹¹ Theo Angelopoulos, *The Weeping Meadow (Τριλογία 1: Το Λιβάδι που δακρύζει)*, 2004.

¹² “The Postwar Avant-Garde and the Culture of Protest, 1945 to 1968 and Beyond”, October 6-December 19, 2009.

¹³ “What We Learned: The Yale Las Vegas Studio and the Work of Venturi Scott Brown & Associates”, Yale School of Architecture Gallery from October 29, 2009-February 5, 2010.

¹⁴ Guy Debord, *Report on the Construction of Situations and on the International Situationist Tendency’s Conditions of Organization and Action* (1957). A copy of the pamphlet was included in the exhibition “The Postwar Avant-Garde and the Culture of Protest, 1945 to 1968 and Beyond” at Yale, as above. This document immediately preceded the founding of the Situationist International.