

The Artistic Device

Or the Articulation of Collective Speech

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One of the strong possibilities of art today is to combine theoretical, sociological or scientific research with a feel for the ways that aesthetic form can influence collective process, so as to de-normalize the investigation and open up both critical and constructive paths. Projects carried out in this way have complex referential content, but they also depend on a highly self-reflexive and playful exercise of the basic human capacities: perception, affect, thought, expression and relation.

Multiple examples could be given. In a very formal register there is the activity of Ricardo Basbaum, where a reflection on the operative structures of what Deleuze calls “the control society” is synthesized into installations and pictorial diagrams, which in their turn become the departure points for collective choreographies developing an expressive resistance.¹ A more hi-tech version appears in the Makrolab, where groups living under conditions of “isolation/insulation” carry out investigations into human and animal migration, climate change and the uses of electromagnetic spectrum, all within the enclosed environment of a nomadic laboratory that synthesizes a complex set of references to vanguard architectural and theatrical traditions.² Yet another case would be the e-mail forums orchestrated over the last decade by Jordan Crandall, where the unfolding of a thematic debate is used to sound out the geographically disjunctive social relations between the participants, generating a knowledge of globalizing society which in its turn contributes directly to the thematic study.³ Finally – to shorten what could be a much longer list – consider the filmic exploration of the “Corridor X” highway network on the southeastern periphery of Europe, carried out by the participants of the *Timescapes* project. After the initial filming of different geographical and cultural zones, they used a specially designed communications platform to link together editing studios scattered from Berlin to Ankara, so as to remain in constant dialogue and confrontation during the elaboration of a multitrack video installation, itself only a part of the broader program that culminated in the exhibition *B-Zone: Becoming Europe and Beyond*.⁴

In each case, the initial artistic act consists in establishing the environment and setting the parameters for a larger inquiry. And in each case, the inquiry becomes expressive, multiple,

¹See my text, “The Potential Personality,” in the archive of my work at www.u-tangente.org, in the “Meteors” section.

²See <http://makrolab.ljudmila.org> and my text “Coded Utopia,” www.u-tangente.org.

³See <http://jordancrandall.com/underfire>, and my text “Archive and Experience,” www.u-tangente.org.

⁴See the “Corridor X” project in Anselm Franke, ed., *B-Zone: Becoming Europe and Beyond* (Berlin: KW, 2006).

overflowing the initial frame and opening up unexpected possibilities. What emerges from this kind of practice is a new definition of art, as a mobile laboratory and experimental theater for the investigation and instigation of social and cultural change. Works in the traditional sense may be produced in the course of this kind of practice – indeed, excellent works may be produced, as any look into the above examples will show. However, these singular works are best understood not in isolation, but in the context of an assemblage in Deleuze and Guattari’s sense. They become elements of an *agencement*, or of what I will be calling a “device” for the articulation of collective speech.

Now, it is known that for Deleuze and Guattari, the consistency of a human assemblage results from the flow of desire, involving a multiplication of the self, indeed a kind of delirium in relation to others, to language, to images and to things. It is this drifting and at least partially delirious flow of productive energies that alone can articulate a collective statement – which is the whole interest and passion of the artistic device.⁵ But as the number of such devices multiplies, a critical question concerns the appropriation of this model of inquiry by the institutions of knowledge, and first of all, the presentation of these devices in exhibitions. The exhibition is the moment when an artistic project is valorized in our society, and therefore, when the economic conditions of its production come to bear upon its process, along with the ideologies that underly and mask those conditions. To the point where it would be naive to discuss the artistic device, without also discussing its modes of display, its interrelation with contemporary society.

A paradigmatic case involving the type of work I am interested in here would be *Laboratorium*, curated by Hans-Ulrich Obrist and Barbara Vanderlinden in the city of Antwerp in 1999. The show’s ambition was to stage the relations between a network of “scientists, artists, dancers and writers,” scattered across the urban territory.⁶ It included a series of videos by Bruno Latour, entitled “The Theater of Proof,” experimental dance projects by Meg Stuart and Xavier Leroi, demonstrations of scientific experiments by Luc Steels and Isabelle Stengers, visits to laboratories in the Antwerp area, and a wide range of installation pieces and video art in both a traditional display space and off-site locations. The artist Michel François displaced the museum offices into the display area, creating interactive possibilities, but also a classic post-Fordist spectacle of labor. The installation *Bookmachine*, by Bruce Mau design studio, offered visitors a similar look into the fabrication of the catalogue. But the central metaphor of the show, or its generative model, was a video performance filmed by Jef Cornelis for Belgian television in 1969 under the name of “The World Question Center.”

The video features the American artist James Lee Byars, dressed in white robes, officiating at a studio session where live participants and telephone correspondents from all over

⁵ Here, one of the most inspiring contemporary references are the radically original investigations of the feminist collective *Precarias a la deriva*; <http://sindominio.net/karakola/precarias.htm>.

⁶ Quote from the visitor’s brochure, reproduced in Hans-Ulrich Obrist and Barbara Vanderlinden, eds., *Laboratorium* (Cologne:Dumont, 2001).

the world were asked for their most important question. Dialing anyone with a provocative reputation, Byars would ask for “questions that are really pertinent to them in regard to their own feelings of an evolving sense of knowledge,” as he explained in conversation with a prominent sexologist of the time, Eberhard Kronhausen. Using their professional status as artists, Cornelis and Byars literally created a machinic assemblage, a technical and human device for the articulation of collective speech. Obrist and Vanderlinden clearly wanted to do something similar: to create a network of scientific and artistic inquiry, and to render it both audible and visible.

In the opening pages of the catalogue, the editors ask: “If *Laboratorium* is the answer, what is the question?” The question I will ask in these pages concerns both the creative potential and the coercive force of exhibitions like *Laboratorium*: what they allow us to say, what they make us say, what they keep us from saying. I want to ask whether the experimental articulations of collective speech take place within, at grips with, against or despite a contemporary form of social power – one which could also be described, but this time in strictly Foucaultian terms, as “the artistic device.”

In an interview carried out in 1977, Foucault offered a definition of the conceptual construct that he calls the device, or *dispositif*. The device is the “system of relations” that can be discovered between a set of apparently very different elements: “a thoroughly heterogeneous ensemble consisting of discourses, institutions, architectural forms, regulatory decisions, laws, administrative measures, scientific statements, philosophical, moral and philanthropic propositions.” Foucault goes on to say that the device is a “formation which has as its major function at a given historical moment that of responding to an *urgent need*.” And he further indicates that the device is constructed to sustain both “a process of *functional overdetermination*” and “a perpetual process of *strategic elaboration*.”⁷ In other words, the articulation of heterogeneous elements that constitutes the device is used for many purposes at once; and it’s precisely this multiplicity of purpose that is guided or managed in accordance with a strategy dictated by a need, by a structural imperative. To understand how an experimental artistic project functions today, I want to ask about our civilization’s seemingly urgent need for an articulation of aesthetics and thinking – about the need for an intellectualized art, or for what might be called “cognitive creativity,” in the particular kinds of societies that we inhabit.

The last question implies, as a methodology, that specific artistic experiments be situated within an overarching analysis of contemporary social relations, which in turn would be able to help us comprehend the recent changes in the institutions that frame art practice and lend it both meaning and value: museums, of course, but also universities. This broader analysis could

⁷Alain Grosrichard et. al., interview, “Le jeu de Michel Foucault,” in *Ornicar?* #10, July 1977, reprinted in M. Foucault, *Dits et écrits* vol. II (Paris: Gallimard, 2001). English translation under the title “The Confession of the Flesh,” in *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972-77* (New York: Random House, 1980). I have modified the English text, notably by using the word “device,” rather than the Althusserian-sounding “apparatus,” to render Foucault’s concept of the *dispositif*.

be sought in the concept of the cultural and informational economy, or of what a group of researchers in France has termed *cognitive capitalism*, characterized by the rise of intellectual or “immaterial” labor based on cooperation and open resource-sharing, but also by its contrary: the commodification or “enclosure” of knowledge in the form of intellectual property, which is then deployed as a source of rent.⁸ Such an approach has the advantage of focusing on invention power and on the ownership of its products, including artworks; therefore I will refer to it periodically as the discussion unfolds. However, the notion of the device demands greater emphasis on the material instances of power, and on the subjective conditions under which power is embodied, relayed or refracted into difference; and thus it comes closer to the kinds of specific situations that artists like to restage or transform. As Foucault explains in the interview quoted above: “In trying to identify a device, I look for the elements which participate in a rationality, a given form of co-ordination [*une concertation donnée*].” The idea is that particular social situations, with their own toolkits, logics and behavioral norms, can be observed fitting into larger scientific rationalities and governmental systems, and thereby helping to consolidate them, or even to structure them. The device, as Foucault says, *is* the system of relations between all its heterogeneous elements. But it is also the singular instance where those relations break down, reorganize themselves, turn to other purposes.

In what follows, I will set up a relation of tension between the description of specific experimental devices, like the ones listed at the outset of this section, and the analysis of more general devices of power, like the ones identified by Foucault.⁹ The effects of this kind of tension appear most clearly in performances, where individual or group behavior is put to the test of experience within a carefully structured frame (a staged environment), itself conceived either as a reflection of social constraints, or as a response to them. To approach this tension, I will first discuss an artistic performance that analyzes what is clearly one of the key devices of social power in the contemporary period: the computerized financial markets. Here we will see, not just the abstract laws of the global economy, but the highly individualized operations of a coercive structure (indeed, a “microstructure”) that acts to channel the basic human capacities: perception, affect, thought, action and relation. A consideration of this analytical performance in its public status *as art* will then serve as a bridge to the discussion of a collective performance with a self-organizing and autopoietic dimension, which explicitly seeks to break away from the kind of political rationality that is made effective by the device of the financial markets.

The second performance – which is really a kind of social experiment in motion – will offer a chance to theorize a counter-device, or self-overcoming system, even as it is placed to the test of a real situation where the conditions of life, labor and creation are all in play. At stake here are

⁸The literature on cognitive capitalism, developed primarily within the orbit of the journal *Multitudes*, has not been extensively translated. In French see Christian Azais, Antonella Corsani, Patrick Dieuaide, eds. *Vers un capitalisme cognitif* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 2001), and Carlo Vercellone, ed., *Sommes-nous sortis du capitalisme industriel?* (Paris: La Dispute, 2003).

⁹At this point it should be clear that the concept of the “artistic device” presented here has nothing whatever to do with the “device art” promoted by Machiko Kusahara – which is a banal, yet unobjectionable bid to have pieces of new-media hardware treated as art. See: www.intelligentagent.com/archive/Vol6_No2_pacific_rim_kusahara.htm.

the possibilities, but also the difficulties, of realizing the promise that contemporary art has so often formulated: the promise of transforming our relations to each other, not on an ideal plane, but within the open and problematic field of social interaction in the world. Finally, the problem of publicly *representing* the operations of such a breakaway system – and therefore, of trying to generalize it as a model of dissent and contestation – will lead us back to the exhibition context, and to a direct consideration of the ways that museums and universities function as normalizing devices within the rule-sets of a financialized economy.

Trading on the Double Edge

One of the weaknesses of the Left is an inability or an unwillingness to come to grips with capitalist culture in its most sophisticated forms. The place to look for the mainsprings of behavior in this society is at the heart of the production process. But the leading edge of contemporary production is the lightning-fast circulation of mathematical figures in the financial sphere. And who actually knows what stock, bond and currency traders really do? The simplest answer would be this: the millions of people who have been enticed into online trading, and especially, the hundreds of thousands who use the Internet to plug into the world financial exchanges every day. So-called “popular capitalism” is directly modeled on the whirlwind trades of institutional speculators – with indirect effects on culture that go further and deeper than most of us would care to admit.

The anthropologist Victor Turner gives an insight into what a performance can reveal: “Performative reflexivity is a condition in which a sociocultural group, or its most perceptive members acting representatively, turn, bend or reflect back upon themselves, upon the relations, actions, symbols, meanings, codes, roles, statuses, social structures, ethical and legal roles, and other sociocultural components which make up their public ‘selves.’”¹⁰ Michael Goldberg, an Australian artist of South African origin, has carried out exactly such a reflexive performance. In October of 2002 he made a series of decisions that would allow him to “behave as a day trader” while simultaneously analyzing the underlying *dispositif* of the computerized financial markets. With an initial capital of AUD \$50,000, lent by a so-called “Consortium” of three veteran day-traders whom he won over to his project through conversations in a specialized chat room, Goldberg set out to deal artistically in derivatives of a single stock: News Corp., the global media empire of the right-wing billionaire Rupert Murdoch.

The performance took place over a period of three weeks at the Artspace Gallery in the city of Sydney in Fall 2002.¹¹ It extended onto the Internet via a website featuring art and market information, daily balance sheets and an IRC channel for conversation; there was also a dedicated call-in line to the artist in the gallery. The title was “Catching a Falling Knife” – financial jargon

¹⁰Victor Turner, *The Anthropology of Performance* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1987), p. 24.

¹¹The original website, www.catchingafallingknife.com, has been taken down; but various documents are available at the artist’s site, www.michael-goldberg.com.

for a risky deal. In effect, the context of the piece was a market still battered by the failure of the new economy and the collapse of giants such as Enron, WorldCom and Vivendi-Universal. The use of derivatives, rather than actual News Corp. shares, allowed Goldberg to play on either a rising or a falling value, with the latter appearing much more likely in the bear market of 2002. Here is how he describes the set-up in the gallery:

“The viewer enters a space devoid of natural light. Three walls reflect the glow of floor to ceiling digital projections – real-time stock prices, moving average charts and financial news. The values change and the graphs move, unfolding minute-by-minute, second by second in a sequence of arabesques and set moves. They respond instantly to constantly shifting algorithms pumping in through live feeds from the global bourses. A desk light and standing lamp in the viewers’ lounge reveal a desk and computer, armchairs, and a coffee table with a selection of daily newspapers and financial magazines. Opposite, high on a scaffold platform another desk lamp plays on the face of the artist as he stares at his computer screens. He’s talking into a phone, placing or closing a trade. Below him there’s the continual sweep of the LED ticker declaring current profit and loss. In the background the audio tape drones. The voice of the motivational speaker, urges you ‘to create a clear mental picture of just how much money you want to make – and to decide just how you will earn this money until you are as rich as you want to be.’”¹²

By projecting software readouts and Bloomberg news flashes on the walls, Goldberg sought to immerse the visitor in the pulsating world of information that constantly confronts the trader on his screens. The decision to use a phone-in brokerage service rather than online orders allowed for vocal expression of the fear and greed that animate the markets. Daily reports to the consortium of lenders – who had contractually agreed to take all the risk, but also the potential profit – added the pressure of personalized surveillance and obligation, analogous to what a professional trader confronts in a major financial institution. The real-time charts served to graphically translate the market volatility that is technically known as “emotion.” In an earlier performance, Goldberg even undertook to paint such graphically rendered emotion on the gallery wall, thus underscoring the link between individual expression and market movements.¹³ This aspect of price-fluctuation has nothing to do with the fundamentals of brick-and-mortar industry, but results instead from the shifting positions taken by untold thousands of short-term speculators, all of them seeking to embrace the mainstream movement of the crowd when a share price swings up or down – and then to define that movement’s leading edge, by pulling out just before it reverses direction. By reflexively performing his real role as a day trader within this

¹²Michael Goldberg, “Catching a Falling Knife: a Study in Greed, Fear and Irrational Exuberance,” lecture at the Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney, Sept. 20, 2003; available at www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au/aaanz03/_data/page/2974/Michael_Goldberg.doc.

¹³Entitled *NCM open/high/low/close*, the performance staged the fluctuating values of Newcrest Mining corporation stocks, but without any real-time trading. It was part of the show *Auriferous: the Gold Project* at the Bathurst Regional Art Gallery, New South Wales, April 22 - June 10, 2001; documentation in the “Projects” section at www.michael-goldberg.com.

exaggerated gallery environment, Goldberg made a public event out of the intimate interaction between the speculative self and the market as it coalesces into presence on personal computer screens.

What's at stake in such an interaction? The Swiss sociologists Urs Bruegger and Karin Knorr Cetina define the global financial markets as "knowledge constructs" which arise by means of individual interactions within carefully structured technological and institutional frames, and which always remain in process – forever incomplete, forever changing.¹⁴ The constant variability of these "epistemic objects" makes them resemble a "life form," one that only appears on the trader's screens, or more precisely, via his full equipment set which, for the professional currency traders that they study, includes a telephone, a "voice broker" intercom, two proprietary dealing networks (known as the Reuters conversational dealing system and the EBS Electronic Broker), and various other news sources and internal corporate databases, including time-charts displaying the evolution of each individual's recent positions. These are the material elements of the device through which currency traders interact with their peers. Interestingly, the first networked price-display screen, the Reuters Monitor, was introduced in 1973 – exactly when the Bretton-Woods fixed-rate currency system was scrapped and floating exchange rates were introduced, leading to the tremendous volumes of trading that now prevail (on the order of \$1.5 trillion *per day*). Today "the Reuters dealing community consists of some 19,000 users located in more than 6,000 organizations in 110 countries worldwide having over one million conversations a week."¹⁵ As the sociologists stress, "*the screen is a building site on which a whole economic and epistemological world is erected.*"¹⁶ And it's a world which you can plunge into, which you can manipulate, from which you can emerge "victorious." The responsive flux that appears on the screens makes possible what the two researchers call "postsocial relationships."

The term "postsocial" is obviously a provocation – one with huge implications, given the continuing multiplication of screens in both domestic and public space.¹⁷ However, Bruegger and Knorr Cetina do not consider the postsocial relationship as humanity's total alienation to an electronic fetish. They demonstrate how the flux of the currency-exchange market is constructed, at least in part, by relations of reciprocity between traders, notably via email conversations over the Reuters dealing system. They also observe how individuals working at great spatial distances come to feel each other's copresence through temporal coordination, since everyone is simultaneously watching the evolution of the same indicators. And at the same time as they illustrate the relative autonomy that traders enjoy within their field of activity, they show how the chief trader controls and carefully manipulates the parameters, both financial and psychological, within which each individual on the floor makes his deals. In these ways, the

¹⁴Karin Knorr Cetina and Urs Bruegger, "Traders' Engagement with Markets: A Postsocial Relationship," in *Theory, Culture & Society*, vol. 19, #5-6 (2002).

¹⁵See <http://about.reuters.com/productinfo/dealing3000/description.aspx?user=1&>.

¹⁶Knorr Cetina and Bruegger, "Traders' Engagement with Markets," op. cit.

¹⁷Cf. "Urban Screens: Discovering the potential of outdoor screens for urban society," special report in the online journal *First Monday* (February 2006); http://firstmonday.org/issues/special11_2.

interaction that animates the global market is “embedded” in an expansive tissue of social relations, composing a “global microstructure.”¹⁸ All of these nuances underscore the complex and yet still fundamentally social relation that is at work. Nonetheless, what the researchers claim is that the paramount relationship of the trader is with the flux itself, that is, with the informational construct, or what early cyberpunk theory called the “consensual hallucination.” This is what they call the postsocial relationship: “engagements with non-human others.” The key existential fact in this engagement is that of “taking a position,” i.e. placing money in an asset whose value changes with the market flux. Once you have done this, you are *in* – and then it is the movements of the market that matter most of all.

Goldberg’s performance displays exactly this anxious relation to an ungraspable object, something like a jostling crowd of fragmentary information, its movements resolving at times into patterns of opportunity, then dissolving again into panic dispersal. In an interview, he explains that real day traders have little concern for so-called fundamentals, but constantly seek instead to evaluate each other’s movements: “They’d rather be looking at what the charts are telling them about how punters are behaving on the market each day, each minute, each second. Get an accurate picture of where the crowd is moving and you jump on for the ride – uphill or downhill – it doesn’t matter.”¹⁹ He uses an image from a popular film to evoke the plunge of taking a position, then closing it out for a profit or a loss, with all the attendant emotions of fear, greed, and panic desire: “I’m reminded of a scene in Antonioni’s *Blow Up* where the character played by David Hemmings mixes in with rock fans as they fight over the remains of a guitar, trashed on stage at the end of a concert and flung into the waiting crowd. He emerges the victor, only to discard the prized relic moments later as so much trash – the adrenalin rush of the pursuit having been the only real satisfaction to be gained.”

Similarly, the two sociologists reflect on the intensities of an ultimately void desire, claiming that “what traders encounter on screens are stand-ins for a more basic lack of object.” To characterize the postsocial relation, Knorr Cetina and Bruegger recall Jaques Lacan’s concept of the mirror stage, where the speechless infant is fascinated by the sight of its own body as a whole entity, and at the same time disoriented by the inward perception of a morcellated, untotalizable body-in-pieces. They stress that “*binding (being-in-relation, mutuality) results from a match between a subject that manifests a sequence of wantings and an unfolding object that provides for these wants through the lacks it displays.*”²⁰ The rhythm of the market on the screens is a way of capturing and modulating the subject’s desire. Yet once again, this postsocial tie is not portrayed as total alienation, but as a reflexive culture of coping and dynamic interchange, extending beyond the simple goal of money-making toward what the anthropologist Clifford Geertz, in a

¹⁸For the concept of “embeddedness,” see Knorr Cetina and Bruegger, “Global Microstructures: The Virtual Societies of the Financial Markets,” in *American Journal of Sociology*, vol. 7, #4 (2002).

¹⁹Geert Lovink, interview with Michael Goldberg, “Catching a Falling Knife: The Art of Day Trading,” posted on the text-filtering list Nettime on Oct. 16, 2002; <http://amsterdam.nettime.org/Lists-Archives/nettime-l-0210/msg00080.html>.

²⁰Knorr Cetina and Bruegger, “Traders Engagements with Markets,” op. cit.

discussion of Balinese cock-fighters and their high-stakes gambling, called “deep play.”²¹

Could Goldberg’s piece be taken as a celebration of this “deep play” in the finance economy – a fascinated exploration of the actions and gestures unfolding within a global microstructure, without any regard for the macrostructures on which it depends? The baleful presence of a wall-sized portrait of Rupert Murdoch at the entryway to the performance space argues against that reading. The artist’s earlier work had been primarily about the institutions of the British empire in Australia. Here, by speculating exclusively on the value of News Corp. stock, he situates the interactions of a small-time day-trader within an arc of power that extends from Australia to the United States, via Murdoch’s extensive holdings in Italy and England. In America, Murdoch is the owner of the bellicose Fox News channel, but also of the *Weekly Standard*, the insider publication of the neoconservatives in Washington. He is a direct supporter of the Anglo-American war coalition, and a transnational entrepreneur who stands only to gain from further extensions of US-style capitalism. As a key player in the construction of satellite TV systems with global reach, he has helped build the infrastructure of a new imperial politics. The billionaire mogul is the master of a postsocial relationship writ large: the relationship of entire populations with the proliferating media screens that structure public affect, through a rhythmic modulation of attention that is orchestrated on a global scale.²² The reference to Murdoch therefore situates the gallery device within an overall imperial power structure, adding implicit meaning to the military vocabulary that the artist affects when speaking of the day-traders (he calls them “battle-hardened veterans of the tech-wreck,” and notes that he prefers this kind of expression). The critique here is tacit, deliberately understated; but it is clear nonetheless. The strength of this carefully conceived gallery performance is to convey a precise analysis of the ways that the microsocial structure of the financial markets is shaped and determined by the overarching constraints of the imperial macrostructure, even as it opens up new spaces for the manifold games of everyday life, exemplified here by the experience of a single individual. In this way, the performance reveals the electronic market, with its relation between face and screen, between desiring mind and fluctuating information, as the fundamental device of power in the economy of cognitive capitalism.

The work, then, is no mere illustration or celebration of “deep play” in the financial markets. Rather it is an ambiguously critical analysis of the markets in their formal, operational, affective and symbolic dimensions – comparable in this respect to other contemporary art productions on the same theme.²³ However, there is a more telling question to ask about the work and its performative intentions. Was Goldberg just hedging his bets with his tacit critique, which

²¹“Traders not only confront lacks, they turn ‘lacking’ into a sophisticated game or practice, a domain of shifting, increasing, decreasing, predicting, hiding, delaying, and trying to live with lack.” Op. cit. For Geertz and the concept of “deep play,” see note 44 below.

²²For the modulation of affect through the use of screen technologies, see Nigel Thrift, “Intensities of Feeling: Towards a spatial politics of affect,” *Geografiska Annaler*, vol. 86 (B), #1 (2004).

²³Indeed, it would have fit perfectly into the catch-all range of attitudes gathered in the exhibition *Derivart*, held at the Casa Encendida in Madrid, 27/6/06-3/9/06; www.derivart.info. However, the information-based, computer-driven works of *Derivart* tend to fall short of the affective and symbolic dimensions explored in *Catching a Falling Knife*.

in the worst of cases could always serve as a kind of blue-chip value on the intellectualized end of the art world? Because it was clear that in the best of cases, a dazzling string of profitable trades would generate media attention, draw crowds of visitors and create a *succès de scandale*, allowing the artist to win on both the intellectual and commercial levels. And Goldberg was definitely not in it to lose (even though, as mentioned, any monetary profit would go to his backers). An Australian critic described *Catching A Falling Knife* as a “two-edged” proposal, because of the ethical contradiction it staged between the worlds of finance and art.²⁴ Yet it could also have marked a bid to take two strong positions, to occupy the leading edges of both worlds. What arises here is the question of the artist’s political role, of the way his or her own production orients collective desire. How to confront the link between art and finance, without succumbing to the latter’s attraction? How to engage a relation of rivalry or artistic antagonism within the most fascinating capture-devices of contemporary capitalism?

At this point – precisely when we could begin to speak about the operations and limits of the artistic device – the performance seems to fall silent and to withdraw into its analytic dimension. Goldberg may have wanted to answer exactly the questions I have asked, seeing them as the highest challenge. Or he may not have seriously considered them. We can’t be sure, because reality offered no opportunity to put the matter to the test. He lost money on the sequence of trades – due quite ironically to the fact that instead of falling, the News Corp. stock tended to rise. And so we can only judge his intentions from his final word, which to his credit he issued *before* the outset of the performance itself: “I believe that the real value of the project will emerge in the form of interrogations from the dark recesses of its implausibilities and not from the spectacle of successfully meeting its expectations.”²⁵

Cartography off the Rails

By retracing the links between everyday life and the complex operations of the financial markets, Goldberg’s performance exposes the basic device of power in cognitive capitalism. But as we have just seen, it almost literally begs the most important questions where artistic practice itself is concerned. First, how are the microstructures of art affected by the “urgent need” of power in our time – namely, the need to integrate productive populations to the globalizing economy? And second, how to articulate an *implausible event* within, against or despite the operations of the artistic device?

These questions become far more important when you consider the degree to which aesthetic environments can now be manipulated, for reasons of behavioral control. To get an idea of the techniques in use, just open a manual like *Experiential Marketing*, by Bernd Schmitt.²⁶ It

²⁴See David McNeill, “Trading Down: Michael Goldberg and the Art of Speculation,” in *Broadsheet*, vol. 32, #1 (2003); available at www.cacsa.org.au/publish/broadsheet/BS_v32no1/32_1.html.

²⁵Lovink, interview with Goldberg, “Catching a Falling Knife: The Art of Day Trading,” op. cit.

²⁶Bernd Schmitt, *Experiential Marketing: How to Get Customers to SENSE, FEEL, THINK, ACT and RELATE to Your Company and Brands* (New York: The Free Press, 1999); for the following quotes see pp. xiii, 60 and 234.

compares traditional advertising based on product features and benefits to what the author calls a “framework for managing customer experiences.” This holistic framework requires the skillful targeting of “sensory experiences, affective experiences, creative cognitive experiences, physical experiences and entire lifestyles, and social-identity experiences that result from relating to a reference group or culture.” Schmitt quotes management guru Peter Drucker: “There is only one valid definition of business purpose: to create a customer.” With this phrase, the rather abstract notion of biopower becomes concrete. Biopower is achieved by establishing the psychological, sensory and communicational horizons of the customer’s experience: by producing the customer. But even more remarkable is Schmitt’s suggestion for building a corporate culture able to carry out such biopolitical advertising. He calls for an “experience-oriented organization,” based on “Dionysian culture, creativity and innovation, taking the helicopter view, attractive physical environment, experiential growth for employees, and integration in working with agencies.” Biopower at this level is the attempt to orchestrate the vital creative energy, or invention power, of the managerial labor force. At stake in this creation of the manipulatory agency, and of its products, are the basic human capacities, which figure in the subtitle of Schmitt’s book: “SENSE, FEEL, THINK, ACT and RELATE.”

What Jon MacKenzie calls “performance management,” or what Maurizio Lazzarato describes as “creating worlds” for corporate employees and consumers, is in fact a highly codified set of aesthetic practices for the management of our minds, of our collective sensorium – practices that are in operation today throughout the middle and upper socioeconomic strata of the Western societies, the strata where such experience management can be profitable.²⁷ In the language of Felix Guattari, we could speak of an “overcoding” of experience. What Guattari designates with this word is the establishment of abstract models of collective behavior, and the use of these models as guidelines for the creation – or if you prefer, the “coding” – of real environments, which are expressly made to condition our thinking, our affects, our interactions. The encoding of such environments draws on the basic insights of cybernetics, which always conceives of human actors as they are inserted into matrices of equipment and information, offering possible choices whose nature, range and feedback effects themselves exert a decisive influence on what can be perceived, felt, said and done.²⁸ In response to such environmental and informational manipulations, Guattari continuously tried to engage in collective experiments, where groups consciously structure the contents of their own sensorium, creating interactive, confrontational milieus whose parameters can be transformed as the process of experimentation unfolds. Part of the game was to let codified knowledge encounter its own limits, as in the paradoxical case, first outlined by Gregory Bateson, of a cybernetic system that goes beyond simple feedback to change its own functional rules. The practice of institutional analysis sought to throw a calculated but irreducible grain of madness into the cybernetic rationality of contemporary societies, in order to

²⁷See Jon MacKenzie, *Perform or Else: From Discipline to Performance* (London: Routledge, 2001); Maurizio Lazzarato, *Les révolutions du capitalisme* (Paris:Les empêcheurs de penser en rond, 2004).

²⁸On cybernetics as a general theory for the social sciences, cf. Steve Joshua Heims, *The Macy Group, 1956-1953: Constructing a Social Science for Postwar America* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1991); for ideas about the contemporary applications of this social science, see esp. the last chapter, “Then and Now,” pp. 273-94.

help people abandon formalized constraints – including those of the analytic process itself, when they no longer serve any purpose.

In his late work, and particularly in the books *Chaosmosis* and *Cartographies schizoanalytiques*, Guattari sought to build up “meta-models” of the self-overcoming process that had been tried out in the experiments with institutional analysis. He sketched diagrams showing how people on a given existential territory come to mobilize the rhythmic consciousness of poetic, artistic, visual or affective fragments – the refrains of what he called “universes of reference (or of value)” – in order to deterritorialize themselves, so as to leave the familiar territory behind and engage themselves in new articulations. These would take the form of energetic flows, involving economic, libidinal, and technological components (flows of money, signifiers, sexual desires, machines, architectures, etc.). He explained how these machinic flows are continually transformed by contact with the abstract phyla of various symbolic codes, including formalized juridical, scientific, philosophical and artistic knowledge.²⁹ The point was to suggest how a group can act to *metamorph itself*, to escape from the overcoding that tries to fix it in one position, and to produce new figures, forms, constellations – in short, original material and cultural configurations that are inseparable from collective statements. This is what Guattari calls an *agencement collectif d'énonciation* – the phrase which I have translated as “an articulation of collective speech.”

Now I want to examine an ambitious attempt to carry out this kind of experiment with the edges of knowledge, organized by a medium sized group in September 2005: a conference and art-event on the rails between Moscow and Beijing, in the corridors, berths and dining cars of the Trans-Siberian train. Some forty individuals – philosophers, artists, technologists and social theorists – came together to put their discourses and practices to the test of a movement beyond familiar borders. The journey was framed by an analysis of the system of constraints that weigh on human collaboration at the biopolitical level, i.e., the level where the elaborate processes of cognition, imagination, speech and affect all come to mesh with the sensory-motor capacities of the living body. Traversing the Eurasian continent – one of the great theaters of contemporary geopolitical struggle – in a small, intensively communicating group would be a way to explore the nature and the limits of those constraints. In such a framework, the faculty of *poiesis*, that is, of making, doing, form-giving, creating, applies not only to materials and to speech, but above all to the energetic and relational potentials of life itself.

The project, whose partners included university departments and an art museum, was made public through the web-journal of the *ephemera* group, devoted to “theory & politics in organization.” One of the ways to understand the experiment is as an attempt to theoretically model and artistically replay the self-organization processes at the origin of the great counter-summits and social forums which have marked the horizons of contemporary leftist politics (and

²⁹Cf. in particular the diagram entitled “Discursivité et déterritorialization,” in *Cartographies schizoanalytiques* (Paris: Galilée, 1989), p. 40. The term “universes of reference (or of value)” is from a similar discussion in *Chaosmosis: An ethico-aesthetic paradigm* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995).

to which *ephemera* itself has devoted a very interesting issue). But the project could also be understood as a very deliberate subversion of the way the university produces knowledge – a paradoxical *dérive* along the fixed curves of the railway line, a kind of "continental drift" toward unexplored possibilities. The title of the event was *Capturing the Moving Mind: Management and Movement in the Age of Permanently Temporary War*. I quote from the initial call to participation:

"In September 2005 a meeting will take place on the Trans-Siberian train from Moscow via Novosibirsk to Beijing. The purpose of this meeting is a 'cosmological' one. We would like to gather a group of people, researchers, philosophers, artists and others interested in the changes going on in society and engaged in changing society as their own moving image, an image of time."³⁰

This "organizational experiment" begins from the state of existential anxiety and ontological restlessness that inevitably ensues with any suspension of the control structures and production imperatives that normally act to channel the hypermobility of flexibilized individuals. What would happen to the mobility of a multiple mind inside the long, thin, compartmentalized space of a train snaking across the Siberian wasteland? What forms of intellectual discourse and artistic practice might arise between the members of a linked and disjointed group? And what would occur at the stoppages, in Moscow, Novosibirsk and Beijing, where conferences were organized with stable university colleagues? By trying to embody the contemporary sense of life's precariousness, while infusing it with a poetics of mobility and flight, the project sought to generate an imaginary of the encounter. Two participants, reflecting on the "explicit and hidden hierarchies" of the different forms of precarious labor, expressed this imaginary in directly political terms: "One of the most urgent tasks is for these different types of precariat... to come together in a real meeting. What is needed is a class consciousness among all precarious labor that lets all the precariat see their mutuality and inter-dependence."³¹

The question is, how to begin moving toward such a goal? How to launch a *movement of the mind*, within the multiple constraints of cognitive capitalism? The framing of the project – the way it is announced, the way its problematics are formulated – is one of the keys to the entire endeavor. It seeks to establish the horizons that an improvisational practice will explore and ultimately deconstruct, in the course of a transformational experience. At the center of this effort is a "position paper," which reinterprets the major ideas of the last fifteen years concerning the flexible, mobile, non-hierarchical character of post-Fordist labor. The paper focuses on the ways the collaborative process is guided, channeled and instrumentalized through the control strategies of media modulation. This "capture of the moving mind" is situated within the context of endlessly temporary warfare: a conflict characterized by the Bush doctrine of the pre-emptive strike, seen here as the maximum expression of an attempt to control the wellsprings of human possibility.

³⁰Call for abstracts and proposals," available at www.ephemeraweb.org/conference/call.htm.

³¹*Ephemera: theory & politics in organisation*, vol. 5, #X, special issue, "Web of Capturing the Moving Mind," available at www.ephemeraweb.org/journal/5-X/5-Xindex.htm.

The analysis culminates in the definition of a “new form of control and organization” which is fundamentally *arbitrary*: “It operates without institutional legitimation or its logic and foundations seem to change from day to day: it is power without *logos*, that is, arbitrary power or pure power, power without any permanent relation to law, to norm, or to some particular task.”³² And this contemporary form of power is linked to currency fluctuation: “Whereas discipline was always related to molded currencies having gold as a numerical standard, control is based on floating exchange rates, modulations, organizations of the movement of currencies. In short, it tries to follow or imitate movements and exchanges as such, paying no attention to their specific contents. The knowledge economy is the continuance of capitalism without a foundation, and arbitrary power is its logical form of organization.”

This is an explicit critique of the very device that Goldberg analyzed in his performance. Arbitrary power exists as a coercive threat to subjective mobility: that is the “position” of the paper. But its *disposition* is performative, it seeks to produce “a performance of movement,” it is oriented to a “theater of the future.” The conclusion of the text refers to an extraordinary passage from *Difference and Repetition*, where Deleuze contrasts the philosophical mobility of Kierkegaard and Nietzsche to the “mediation” and “false movement” of representation in Hegel: “It is not enough,” Deleuze writes, “for them to propose a new representation of movement; representation is already mediation. Rather, it is a question of producing within the work a movement capable of affecting the mind outside of all representation; it is a question of making movement itself a work, without interposition; of substituting direct signs for mediate representations; of inventing vibrations, rotations, whirlings, gravitations, dances or leaps which directly touch the mind.”³³

All the elements of the framing apparatus seem to come together in this ambition to go beyond representation in order to affect the movements of the mind, to shape the unfolding of a process which will effectively be captured on the rails of the Trans-Siberian line, but will nonetheless remain uncertain in its outcome. And the same ambition, or the desire to confront the same destabilizing paradox, can be seen in the proposals for the trip itself – ranging from conceptual experiments in the social sciences to artistic projects and performance events, by way of technological inventions such as an in-the-train radio channel and a “Mobicasting” platform for the live transmission of digital images to a distant site in a Finnish museum. At stake here is an experiment in *counter-modulation*: an attempt to seize the potential that is overcoded and channeled by the monetary sign, and to release it into freely ranging movement. Yet it is precisely with respect to this ambition that the deepest anxiety arises: “But what was actually the difference between our experiment and so-called reality TV shows like *Big Brother*? Or were we just imitating the model of Post-Fordist production where mixing different roles and

³²“Capturing the Moving Mind: An Introduction,” available at www.ephemeraweb.org/conference/Intro.pdf (the text is anonymous, but largely the same as “The Structure of Change: An Introduction,” by Akseli Virtanen and Jussi Vähämäki, in *ephemera* vol. 5, #X, op. cit.).

³³G. Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition* (New York: Columbia U.P., 1995), p. 8.

competences, arts and sciences, is the basic method for putting to work not this or that particular ability, but the faculty of being human as such? Or were we engaged in a spectacle, a pseudo-event, a false event of marketing movement and crossing borders without, or separated from, a real capacity to experience and engage with it?”³⁴

In the face of this anxiety, the attempts to address the contradictions of the trip seem to gravitate toward spontaneous performance-events, recorded and interpreted by the participants. The first was a moment of spatial wandering on the railway quays at the Russian frontier-post of Naushki, in answer to the rigid discipline of the guards patrolling a sovereign borderline. While awaiting the call to go back into the train, members of the group traced abstract paths on quays in front of the customs house, as a sublimated form of resistance. “Together, they created a kind of pattern generator, fabricating curves and interruptions, relations of proximity, distance and touch, illegible to the techniques of the border but somehow enabled by its very being,” wrote two of the participants.³⁵ The theatrical ambitions of the project resurface here, along with the images of the text by Deleuze: “vibrations, rotations, whirlings, gravitations, dances or leaps which directly touch the mind.” The desire is to encounter a self-transforming experience. But the participants themselves are suspicious of this desire: “At stake was a kind of encryption. But one that begs for no decoding, as if in retrospect it could be revealed and labeled as an act of transgression.”

The location at the border, the urge to denormalize the experience of crossing it, the notion of transgression, all evoke the “liminoid” states described by the anthropologist Victor Turner. Liminoid behavior is defined by Turner as a kind of modern rite of passage, a flow unanchored from the *communitas* of traditional experience, tending instead toward invention, disruption, even revolution. This was the great dream of performance in the 1960s, epitomized by The Living Theater.³⁶ But such overt drama, of the kind that can be enacted at a political protest or counter summit, is precisely what eludes the group on the train. Instead they must turn to a typically postmodern resistance, formulated linguistically as a momentary breakdown of grammar, inseparable from an immediate restoration of the rules.³⁷ This forced restoration was underscored by the severity of the guards about half an hour further down the line: “To cross the border, as became clear in Sukhbaatar, the Mongolian border town, one must stand and say who one is. And so the group chose to rise and face itself as at once highly mobile and free to move, even as each stood before the guards as an individual and a citizen.”³⁸ The declaration marks an awareness that the mobility of the collective mind cannot erase or even overtly defy the individualizing discipline and the ritualized surveillance of the nation-state. The words “individual” and “citizen,” in this context where the would-be multitude holds out their identity papers to the gaze of the

³⁴Akseli Virtanen and Steffen Böhm, “Web of Capturing the Moving Mind: X,” in *ephemera* vol. 5, # X, op. cit.

³⁵Brett Neilson and Ned Rossiter, “Action without Reaction,” in *ephemera* vol. 5, # X, op. cit.

³⁶See Victor Turner, “Liminal to Liminoid, in Play, Flow, and Ritual,” in *From Ritual to Theatre*, op. cit.

³⁷For the notion of “postmodern” or so-called “resistant” performance see Marvin Carlson, *Performance: A Critical Introduction*, part III (London and New York: Routledge, 1996).

³⁸Brett Neilson and Ned Rossiter, “Action without Reaction,” op. cit.

border guards, is something like an admission of defeat. The question, at this point, was how to continue.

The next performance attempts to answer that question – but through an appeal to the very transgression that the first refused. The action took place in Beijing, at the Factory 798 art complex, which has acquired a certain notoriety among connoisseurs of the Chinese "creative economy.". One of the travelers, Luca Guzzetti, a sociologist at the University of Genoa, entered what normally should have been a closed studio space, featuring the exhibition *Rubbishmuseum* by the Korean artist Won Suk Han. Among the exhibits was a toxic sandbox of dead cigarette butts, piled over a foot deep. "Often when you go to a contemporary art exhibition you have the problem to find out whether the piece of art in front of you is supposed to be touched and used, or just watched," reflects Guzzetti. "It happens that being uncertain, you stand watching something with which you should bodily interact or, seldom, that you touch something which should just be looked at. In that studio in Factory 798, I was sure about the use of the cigarette pool, and I jumped into it."³⁹

Two other travelers convinced Guzzetti to redo the jump for pictures and videos, transforming a spontaneous action into a deliberate performance, and setting off a heated argument between different factions of the group as to the proper kind of behavior toward art. The controversy continued into the night and evoked what some said were repressed feelings surrounding the exclusion of a participant at the outset of the journey, due to drunken behavior and a missing passport. It's worth noting that Guzzetti himself considers the argument to have been worthless, while the author of the *Rubbishmuseum*, Won Suk Han, found Guzzetti's jump to be an excellent use of his work. He says this: "I would not have left him alone to jump in the maggots but we would have done some performances on my work together. I would have liked to talk with him more, for I think that him and I, we could become the 'best friends.'"⁴⁰

"The Jump" and the ensuing argument appear as the sought-after moment of liminality, the inevitable act of transgression which ends up furnishing the representational material for the entire experiment. The Finnish art magazine *Framework* contains three articles devoted to it, and the issue of *ephemera* contains no less than six, including a complex essay by the artist Bracha Lichtenberg-Ettinger, who sees the act as an occasion for the group to enter what she calls a "matrixial borderspace" where they can engage in "copoiesis."⁴¹ Videos of the event reveal how she provokes an embodied confrontation: as though responding to a collective desire for existential truth-production. From the outside, however, the entire sequence of events appears as a kind of psychodrama, with the intensity but also the limits that the word suggests. Indeed, one can wonder what this kind of truth produces, or how it contributes, through its public status as art, to the broader orientation of collective desire. This was Michel Foucault's question: "At what

³⁹Luca Guzzetti, "What is Art?" in *ephemera* vol. 5, # X, op. cit.

⁴⁰Won Suk Han, "Thank you for the Jump," in *ephemera* vol. 5, # X, op. cit.

⁴¹Bracha L. Ettinger, "Copoiesis," in *ephemera* vol. 5, # X, op. cit.

price can subjects speak the truth about themselves?”⁴²

The way that the story of “The Jump” and the representation of the entire project comes to revolve around the motif of *copoiesis* suggests the power of what Foucault, in *The History of Sexuality*, called “the will to know,” reconfigured here beneath the specific conditions of the post-Fordist era. This contemporary “will to know” takes the form of an almost obsessive preoccupation with subjective energies, focused on on the productive mysteries of cooperation and creativity. In other words, the “price of truth” – at least within the art and academic circuits – becomes a concern with evaluating the sources, expressions and uses of a group’s vital energy. But what tends to disappear, in this process of evaluation which becomes the group’s self-representation, is the vast topography of the journey itself: an entire continent, the crumbling ruins of the Soviet project, the crucial geopolitical territory of Central Asia, and the encounter with the new productive forces of China. Has all that been forgotten in the focus on group dynamics?

The representational material can give you that impression; but it also depends on who you ask, on which works you see or which texts you read. The destiny of *Capturing the Moving Mind* was to be at once collective, and irrevocably multiple. Beyond each point of concentration, the project reveals other bifurcating paths, other geographies, other possible interpretations.

Conclusions

In its most intriguing, most vital, most compelling definition, art has become a complex “device”: a mobile laboratory and experimental theater for the investigation and instigation of social and cultural change. In the same movement, what was formerly called criticism has abandoned its outmoded role of describing and evaluating singular works, and seeks instead to join with project-flows, where at best it can exert deterritorializing effects, through the evocation of elusive images and the application of sharply delineated analytic codes. At stake in the new art are framing decisions which set boundaries around productive groups (by constituting relational structures with unique parameters) and at the same time provoke displacements in those frames (by engaging processes of self-reflexion and intervention on their constitutive structures). In this way, groups respond experimentally to the forceful attempts, now so common in society, to set the psychological, sensorial and communicational horizons of life for manipulative ends.

Experimentation of this sort involves a drifting uncertainty, which is not diminished but augmented by the sophistication of the technological, discursive, artistic and scientific resources that are called on to structure the projects. It was Guattari’s contribution (or more broadly, that of institutional analysis) to reveal the multiple symbolic components at work in these complex versions of the *dérive*, freeing up the tools of an expanded cybernetics for deviant use by modern-

⁴²Michel Foucault, interview with Gérard Raulet, “Structuralism and Post-Structuralism,” in *Politics, Philosophy, Culture: Interviews and Other Writings of Michel Foucault, 1977-1984* (London: Routledge, 1988), p. 30.

day constructors of the ancient *Narrenschiff* (the allegorical "Ship of Fools," narrated by Sebastian Brant, illustrated by Dürer, painted by Bosch and filmed by Fellini at the close of the twentieth century). But at every sandbar or change of the wind, those who would cut all ties to the norms of society have to ask which larger or more agile devices may be at work, channeling the currents and guiding the flows. How can emancipatory experiments be captured in the productive nets of the contemporary economy? How should we understand the relations of tension that almost invariably arise between the catalysts of collective speech and two major institutions of cognitive capitalism, the university and the museum?

The classic figure of the Foucaultian *dispositif* is Bentham's Panopticon. Everyone will recall its elements: a ring-shaped building with a tower in the center; long, thin cells with windows at each end; prisoners revealed clearly in the light. The tower itself is fitted with venetian blinds, so the prisoner is never sure that the guardian is present; therefore he always conducts himself as though beneath the watcher's gaze. Like all social devices, the Panopticon was functionally overdetermined: it could be used as a prison, a madhouse, an army barracks, a hospital, a factory, a school. It could serve to isolate dangerous or useless persons, to banish them from society; but it could also serve to shape its disciplinary objects into a productive force, to integrate them as soldiers, workers or bureaucrats. Its function was to resolve the confused, communicative, contagious mass of the crowd into distinct, knowable, controllable individuals. Foucault underscores this point: "Each individual, in his place, is securely confined to a cell from which he is seen from the front by the supervisor; but the side walls prevent him from coming into contact with his companions. He is seen, but he does not see; he is the object of information, never a subject in communication."⁴³

The description of the Panopticon inaugurates the notion of the device, in *Discipline and Punish* (1975). The book marks the culmination of Foucault's long effort to distinguish the normalizing techniques of disciplinary power from the juridical decisions of the sovereign. Now consider the second, startlingly different use of this same notion of the device, in the first volume of *The History of Sexuality* (whose French title is *La Volonté de savoir*, "The Will to Know"), published just one year later. Here Foucault discusses the "device of sexuality": a vast set of discourses, technologies, literary figures, corporeal practices, scientific concepts and medical interventions, extending far beyond the pleasures of the body. The device of sexuality is conceived as that which makes us speak, as that which makes us subjects in communication. Or rather, it is what makes the privileged subjects of the bourgeoisie speak about the best uses of their own vital energy, whether to the Christian director of conscience in the sixteenth century, or to the eighteenth-century psychiatrist.

Foucault challenges what he calls "the repressive hypothesis." He observes that when restrictive forms of institutional control finally were imposed across the spectrum of the social classes, in the latter half of the nineteenth century, psychoanalysis almost immediately emerged

⁴³Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* (New York: Pantheon, 1978).

to offer the bourgeoisie a new tolerance for their own practices, and a fresh release of sex into language. What he analyzes in *The History of Sexuality* is less a coercive structure than a guided transformation. The figure that we glimpse no longer has the sharply delineated form of a circle with a central axis and radiant spokes, indeed it is no longer a figure at all: it appears instead as a continuously unfurling mesh of discourses, gazes and relations. Yet this relational device is still productive. It corresponds to “that epoch of *Spätkapitalismus* in which the exploitation of wage labor does not demand the same violent and physical constraints as in the nineteenth century, and where the politics of the body does not require the elision of sex or its restriction solely to the reproductive function; it relies instead on a multiple channeling into the controlled circuits of the economy – on what has been called a hyper-repressive desublimation.”⁴⁴

Obviously, I was thinking of this passage at the very beginning, when I referred to James Lee Byars’ telephone call to the sexologist Kronhausen. In the pages of the *Laboratorium* catalogue devoted to *The World Question Center*, and indeed, in the first extensive conversation that is reproduced there, Kronhausen says this: “Well, instead of offering you a question, I can tell you that you are calling us, my wife and I, on a very special day. Because today we presented for the second time our film *Freedom to Love*, which we shot in Holland last June, to the German censorship board, and they were very liberal, very generous, fair-minded, and they passed the film, which has very strong erotic content but only very minor threat.” This absence of threat from a newly unbridled sexuality is exactly what Marcuse, in *One-Dimensional Man*, had identified as the control mechanism of repressive desublimation.

Now, the idea is not to suggest that the exhibition *Laboratorium* was somehow secretly obsessed with sex, because that’s not the case. And it’s also true that Foucault never again pointed to a device of power with the architectonic precision of the Panopticon – not even Freud’s famous couch, which still seems to haunt the introductory volume of *The History of Sexuality*. Nonetheless, for an epoch genuinely obsessed with the immaterial productivity of its unbridled creative energy, I believe that the laboratory-museum could well serve as an exemplary device of power, precisely to the extent that it achieves a multiple channeling of that creative energy into the controlled circuits of the neoliberal economy.

What is more, it appears that a large-scale version of this device is being constructed right now, in Great Britain, at University College London. One just might wonder how Foucault would have reacted, upon learning that this device of power for the late-capitalist or post-Fordist era has been conceived under the direct intellectual patronage of Jeremy Bentham, and that it is called The Panopticon Museum?

For the readers of *Discipline and Punish*, the reference is almost macabre – like Bentham’s skeleton dressed in casual clothes and a hat, still preserved with its wax head in the famous “Auto-Icon” on the grounds of University College London. But there is no irony in UCL’s

⁴⁴M. Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction* (New York: Random House, 1978/French ed. 1976), p. 114.

proposal. Its principle is human productivity: “The name of the building, which derives from Greek and means 'all visible', encapsulates the bold public vision that UCL has for its future and the future of its unique collections.... Visitors will be actively encouraged not only to engage with the exhibits and themes but also to engage with the scholars, researchers and conservators as they work to reveal the historical relevance of artefacts and conduct essential preservation work... Scholars, too, will greatly benefit from the modern facilities of the lecture theaters, study rooms and the conservation laboratory, enabling the detailed examination of many rare and valuable items.”⁴⁵ And the description ends on a fabulously optimistic note: “Seeing people at work is an excellent idea!”

The Panopticon Museum is exemplary of the destiny of cultural practices under the regime of cognitive capitalism. Indeed, the entire college has been turned into a value-adding machine, traversed by public-private partnerships, oriented to the production of intellectual property. Education is now a speculation on human potential, where the conduct of students and professors is scrutinized as closely as currency values on the charts and screens of the postsocial traders. Of course, the emphasis here is not on restrictive control, but on innovation and invention, developed in open networks by the exploitation of what management theorists like Ronald Burt call “structural holes.” What we are allowed to say, what we are forced to say, what we kept from saying: all that changes under these conditions.

In his course at the Sorbonne in 1978-79, Foucault shifted the focus of his inquiry from the normalizing procedures of the disciplinary regime to the characteristically liberal mode of governance, where power is exerted “not on the players, but on the rules of the game.” This led him to study the Chicago-school economist Gary Becker and his theory of human capital, which holds that individuals always calculate the potential economic value, not only of their education, but also of marriage, childrearing, crime, altruism, etc. Foucault saw this model of the economic subject as the foundation-stone of a political rationality, around which new kinds of institutions could be built. At the close of the long recession of the 1970s, and at the outset of what would come to be known as globalization, he recognized that this care for the value of the self could be instituted as a series of *markets*, replacing the traditional forms of the welfare state and forming the core of a growth policy no longer centered on investment in fixed capital and management of physical labor, but one that instead “will be precisely centered on exactly the things that the West can modify most easily... [i.e.] the level and form of the investment in human capital.”⁴⁶ A far-ranging transformation of the developed world’s institutions – a transformation generally referred to as “neoliberalism” – becomes the ultimate price of speaking one’s subjective truth in Becker’s econometric terms.

The results of this shift can be seen in the seemingly endless development of procedures to identify productive potential in the workplace, ranging from the early “quality circles” of

⁴⁵“Panopticon at UCL – Welcome,” available at www.ucl.ac.uk/panopticon.

⁴⁶Michel Foucault, *La naissance de la biopolitique: Cours au Collège de France, 1978-79* (Paris: Gallimard/Seuil, 2004).

Japanese factories in the 1980s, to the American techniques of “Total Quality Management,” or a more recent practice like the “360-degree evaluation,” or “panoramic evaluation,” where an entire organization subjects itself, via Internet, to reciprocal critique from all its collaborators. These techniques represent a deep transformation or “transvaluation” of the panoptic device, eliminating the central tower and the asymmetric power of the hidden eye, and releasing the evaluating gazes for circulation within an all-channel network. The Panopticon becomes panoramic, as discipline fades away in favor of self-motivation according to liberal principles. Indeed, the UCL Panopticon Museum is the Benthamite utopia of a perfect society, where even minor threats have been removed, where corrective discipline is no longer needed, where vital energy has become integrally productive, not just in speech, but in all the activities of intellectual creation.

How can artists and intellectuals exit from such a device, which has come into perfect synch with the operations of the computerized financial markets? What seemed most promising, in the Trans-Siberian project, was the ambition to leave the integrated circuits of the conference-exhibition-festival economy, in order to seek out sites of resistance to the three major forms of power: sovereignty, which excludes and takes the sacrifice of bare life; discipline, which normalizes docile bodies for hierarchical command; and finally the liberal mechanisms of incitement, which encourage the individual to constantly speculate on his or her own value in monetary terms. Clearly, the three forms (which correspond to the three major phases of capitalism: primitive accumulation through slavery; the exploitation of salaried labor in the factory system; the channeling of cognitive potential in the informational economy) are all at work in the contemporary world. Today, these different forms of power are simultaneously enmeshed in the operations of a financial-industrial-war economy which has become increasingly threatening, whether in the battlefields and ambushes of Iraq, in the endlessly exploitative factories of contemporary China, or within the rarefying perimeters of Western “knowledge parks,” struggling to regain their competitive advantage by grooming citizens for the invention of intellectual property. Perhaps what is most “arbitrary” about the arbitrary power that seems to guide this disjointed triple dance, is its ability to blind its subjects to the seemingly inexorable set of determinisms that make them all participate in the minutely controlled flux of a journey toward disaster.

The concept of “deep play” – or the quality of artistic excess that Bruegger and Knorr Cetina wanted to transfer from Clifford Geertz's Balinese cock-fighters to their own postsocial traders – was itself, as a kind of intellectual fate would have it, an invention of Jeremy Bentham.⁴⁷ He used it to describe the irrational activity of inveterate gamblers, whose speculative excesses could not be resolved into any calculus of individual pleasure, and should therefore be outlawed. Geertz sought to go beyond Bentham's shallow moralizing, by portraying the deep play of Balinese gamblers as an arena for the meeting of self and other, an affirmation of the social tie.

⁴⁷See Clifford Geertz, “Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cockfight,” in *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), p. 432: “Bentham's concept of ‘deep play’ is found in his *Theory of Legislation*. By it he means stakes which are so high that it is, from his utilitarian standpoint, irrational for men to engage in it at all.”

But in a further turn of the screw, it is now this speculative irrationality that lies at the heart of a self-denying and ultimately self-destructive tie, in the age of a fully realized post-social Benthamite utopia. And this kind of speculation on the value of the creative self is what we are now being taught to calculate, this is what we are being encouraged to create in the cultural field.

What has to be understood, expressed, and then dismantled and left behind in the movement of the artistic experience, are the specific modalities whereby the planetary middle-managerial classes share, through our work, our labor, in the concrete deployment of sovereign, disciplinary and liberal devices of power, and in the depths of systemic madness they together configure. I have focused on the relations between the cultural and financial spheres, as a key articulation that permits, structures and at the same time hides this deployment of power over the movements of both body and mind. It is precisely this articulation that should be challenged, questioned in its legitimacy and its very sense, so that the entire communications machine of cognitive capitalism can be used to open a debate on the crisis of the present. The systemic “device” must be confronted by deliberate and delirious processes of social experimentation, which can dismantle it, derail it, while opening other paths, other modes of production and self-production. This is the counter-urgency of our times.