

On the *Extra-Institutional*

—Genevieve Lipinsky de Orlov

The *extra-institutional* is undisclosed, incognito, inconspicuous, covert, quotidian, surreptitious. It is also often insurgent, ungovernable, recalcitrant. Above all it is public.

The *extra-institutional* artwork or text typically operates clandestinely, at least at initial encounter. It’s not typically immediately recognizable as an artwork or text, in part because it’s not in a space we’ve been conditioned to expect artworks or texts. It evades conventional modes of authorship or identifiability, circulation and distribution.

The *extra-institutional* is not object- or product-oriented, but tends to be ephemeral and fleeting, evading capture and the possibility for ownership. It is a reorientation for moving through and engaging with the world, its objects, one’s environment.

The *extra-institutional* is a response to “institutional fatigue.” It’s a strategy for navigating and refusing to cooperate with institutions whose structures, conditions, and politics conflict with, neutralize, negate, or repress the intentions or claims of one’s work.

The *extra-institutional* is distinct from the “para-institution”: the prefix “extra-” indicates outside or beyond while “para-” refers more immediately to beside, alongside of, or closely related to. The para-institution desires and performs institutionality that is parallel to if distinct from its dominant manifestations.

The *extra-institutional* eschews the institution entirely.¹ It turns to public space: the street, the park, the subway; the open-access journal, the mutual-aid-funded project, the neighborhood bar. At the same time, it maintains a relationship to the institution in that its *extra-institutionality* is a response to the conditions of the institution—indeed a refusal to submit to those conditions—and is structured in opposition to those conditions. The *extra-institutional* is defined in opposition to the institution as it exists right now.

The most immediate manifestations of the *extra-institutional* are intimate, subjective, personal encounters that depend on and emerge from one’s own communities. It’s Hannah and I sending each other pictures of compositions we see on the street. It’s Pedro’s tear basin. It’s Sahar’s newsletter. It’s the Bed-Stuy aquarium. It’s David Hammons’s *Four Beats to the Bar* (1990). Less abstractly and admittedly more institutional, it’s also visiting Gordon Matta-Clark’s rosebush; it’s encountering Kameelah Janan Rasheed’s text taped to a lamppost; it’s sitting with the never-before-publicly-shown Mapplethorpe portfolio. It’s artworks and texts that ask and propose, What would it mean for the primary criterion for art, its discourse, and their circulation to be publicness—instead of and against institutional accreditation and its attendant investments in individual celebrity, market value, capital accumulation?

The *extra-institutional*:

- against the historical and dominant logic of Institutional Critique that there is no outside the institution;
- against art’s supposed autonomy;
- against the recuperation of the institution;

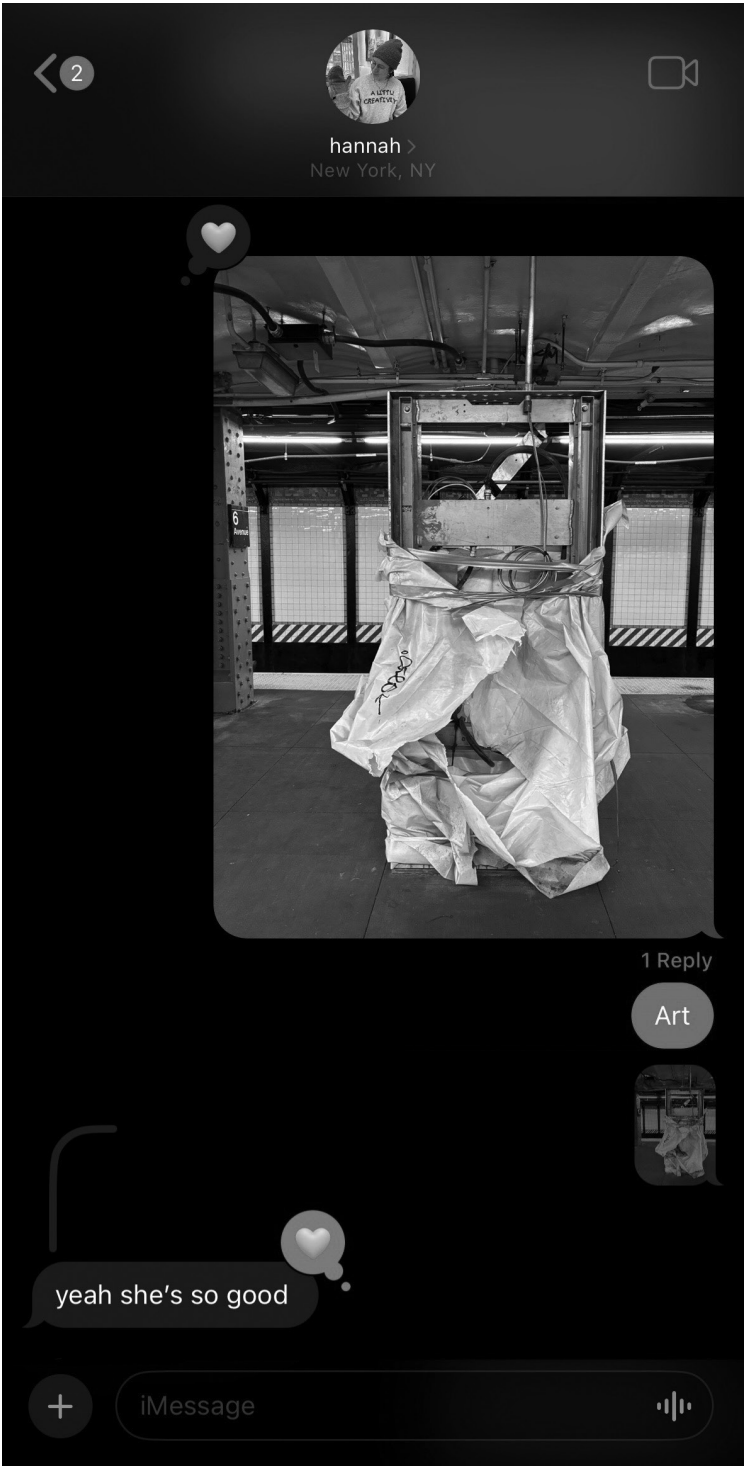
what would it look like to be (make, write) outside of the institution, to be independent?

Craig Owens interviewed by Lyn Blumenthal in 1984:

“As much as I wish this were not the case, it’s probably necessary to have a certain kind of recognition in order then to be able to do your work, even though it involves all kinds of compromises and can make you crazy at times. But one cannot stop there. / Another way to think about success would be to be able to move to a position. I would probably feel successful if I could get myself to **a position where I could determine the terms of my own work, rather than having them dictated to me.** Now, that may be somewhat foolish, to think that that could ever happen, but one does not feel particularly successful when one is always responding. I think **being able to set the agenda, and to set it responsibly,** would be a form of success that I would want. But that sounds too much like power.”²

there is power and possibility in obscurity. Flying under the radar, against hypervisibility and attention, as strategy. What’s attractive about public attention and institutional recognition other than the possibilities it creates for doing what one actually wants to be doing? What does it generate other than celebrity and capital? What doors does it open, and what other ones does it shut? what does it mean to be independent? What does it mean to be a critic?

As long as my peers and I have been professionals in the “art world,” we’ve watched the museum operate in very explicit and active ways in opposition to the aspirations and politics and safety of the artists who exhibit in them, the constituencies they claim to serve, and many of the workers who make them run—ourselves included. We are, and have been, experiencing the institutional conditions for making art, for writing about it and curating it, as increasingly untenable and hostile. For many of us, the political compromises have begun to feel too great to dismiss or overcome,



too great to continue to work in and with the institution. The institution—its financial, political, ideological investments; its values, priorities, and practices—is so at odds with what we want from art and the world. How can we make it otherwise?

If the conventional institutions for art and its criticism are intolerably or irredeemably compromised, where can art and its criticism appear publicly and circulate? If critical artistic practices and art criticism are precisely the modes of engagement one deploys to probe and confront art’s institutions and the systems they’re part of, but those institutions implicitly or functionally disallow that work, where can it be made, written; exhibited, published; viewed, read; discussed and debated?

This is an appeal for working and engaging otherwise. For the potential and possibilities of practices that articulate and exercise their critiques outside of the institution—the corporate nonprofit museum, the legacy magazine, the neoliberal university, the commercial gallery—outside of the world mediated by capital, by private corporations, the individuals who profit off them and us and their philanthropic, tax-deductible investments. For making what we want to have, on our terms.

1. The institution includes: the corporate nonprofit museum, the legacy magazine, the neoliberal university (both private and public), the commercial gallery, the art fair, the auction house. It is defined by a structure in which financial stakeholders—private individuals and foundations, corporations, advertisers—exercise outsize influence on the types of speech the institution and its administrators will allow, typically in the interests of the stakeholders’ own financial and political investments.

2. Lyn Blumenthal and Kate Horsfield, *Craig Owens: Portrait of a Young Critic* (Badlands Unlimited, 2018), 28–30. Emphasis my own.

I would like to thank my ISP cohort, as well as Anna Cahn, Carlos Kong, Henning Lahmann, Blake Oetting, and Hannah Westerman.

given/made

—Iulia Nistor



Pedro Lopez, tear basin ii, Italian alabaster, Vale of Cashmere, Prospect Park, Brooklyn, 2022-.

When Lygia Clark visited Jean Arp, she found him in his garden sculpting a small, white stone, no bigger than could fit in a palm. Once it had the perfect shape, he threw the small sculpture onto a pile of pebbles, which all looked exactly the same.

I would like to consider the distinction given/made as a pair of terms useful for the description of artworks and other phenomena. It can be compared to the relationship between figure and ground or that between form and content; however, I would like to suggest that it is more adept at describing the process-related aspects of works. While the figure/ground relationship describes an axis of value, and the form/content distinction emulates the body/mind dualism, the made/given pair pertains to process; to the process of making as well as that of perception and reasoning. In the former two, a finished product is assessed, while the latter allows one to address aspects of becoming and undoing. Furthermore, it can also be applied to objects and states of affairs that are not artifacts.

What do we mean by the term ‘given?’ A given can be something that is the case, that is, something that indicates reality, a fact, something quantifiable as opposed to something made, or fictional. It can serve as evidence in case of doubt or dispute. The given is often associated with sense-data (which literally means ‘that which is given to the senses’), but it is not exclusively related to facts. It is also used as in ‘given xy, it follows z.’ In this case, it indicates a premise that may be factual, but can also be abstract or speculative. It means that a conclusion has been reached on such and such grounds. It can therefore also include counter-factual scenarios. Moreover, the given can be understood as a gift. The term ‘made’ is no less complex, since it relates to questions of representation on the one hand, and agency and intention on the other. In a broad sense, the made can be understood as something that is not ‘naturally’ present but occurs as a result of a preparative or investigative procedure, as something that is not given but the result of a process of making. This includes certain physical and abstract objects, but also actions, speech acts, and mental states. Given and made seem to form a dichotomy, the made being something that is not given, the given something that is not made.

I would like to suggest seeing the given/made distinction not as an opposition, but rather as a pair that mutually constitutes one another. What is given and what is made are not fixed attributions that pertain to things. The same thing, depending on the context, can be called a given or a made. Rather, the given is that on which we base our beliefs and claims, or that from which we draw our conclusions, wherever we choose to locate it (sense-data, reliable information, thought experiments, etc). Thus, a given is constituted by the made: in believing or claiming x, we take xy as a given. Accordingly, a made is determined by what it is made of. This could be the actual material, but also the circumstances and concepts involved in the making. When we are reading the news, we assume that it is based on factual events. And whether a certain gesture means something depends on the given circumstances, linguistic agreements, and social practices among which it appears. In this sense, we can understand the notions ‘given’ and ‘made’ as a pair of terms that mutually constitute one another.

Some artworks confuse, invert, or otherwise violate apparent dichotomies. These are particularly interesting examples because they make implicit biases visible, and thus enable us to question them. Using the figure/ground or the given/made distinction in the formal analysis of works can help to describe how these works operate. While the figure/ground relationship is based on a principle of perception, my hypothesis is that the given/made distinction is determined by the inferential structure of our reasoning. Given that x and y, it follows z. Or z, because x and y. It is important for us to justify our beliefs, and to give reasons for our actions.

In order to make an inference, we have to take something as a given.¹ That is, for the moment, the mind takes a premise as evidence for another claim, and does not question it further. By taking something as a premise, it is made a given. The given/made distinction is not exclusive to artworks, but it also applies to social, political, and environmental phenomena. When we become aware that what we take as given (institutions, nature, the past, etc.) is actually made, these categories and narratives become less fixed. Sellars claims that the ‘given’ is a myth, that each given is actually made, and suggests that knowledge is a “self-correcting enterprise”,² or, one might add, a power struggle. Evidence is crucial for our reasoning, but inherited justifications and ready-made descriptions have to be questioned. Moreover, this distinction is itself manufactured. It is a dichotomy that our mind creates out of the necessity of taking something as a reason for its claims and actions, or as a justification and ground for its beliefs: the given/made pair itself is not given, but made. This distinction is not absolute, but relational, changeable, and transitory; it is not a universal, but a tool.

The anecdote I began with was related to me by a friend when I mentioned the given/made pair. Wishing to use it in a project description, I attempted to locate the source. I looked through the correspondence between Lygia Clark and Hélio Oiticica and other texts of hers, but had no luck. The closest I could come was a description of Arp’s studio by Mario Pedrosa, but this was different. The scene in which the artist carefully sculpts a white pebble, only to throw it onto a pile of similar looking stones, does not appear. Pedrosa described how sculptures in different stages of work were stored in Arp’s garden, and how they blended in with nature.³ Perhaps it was nothing that Arp actually did, but something that occurred in the eye of the beholder: Clark might have recognized an example for her own theory in this instance. Or perhaps it was my friend who recalled the account in a somewhat metaphorical way when I explained the distinction I was working on. Is evidence necessary in this case, or is the function the anecdote performs sufficient? This is partly what is up for debate.

1. Boghossian, Paul. “What is inference?” Philosophical Studies 169, no. 1 (2014):1-18.

2. Sellars, Wilfrid. Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind. Harvard University Press, 1997, p79.

3. Pedrosa, Mário. “As pedras de Arp.” Jornal do Brasil (17 May 1958), Rio de Janeiro.

Burning down the house

Ecological Prisons and Abolitionist Architecture

An Excerpt

— Jo Evans



Mural of Herman Wallace at “Solitary Gardens,” the abolitionist gardening project Jackie Sumell started after Wallace’s death in 2013. Photo credit: Jo Evans

In 2002, 30 years into their life sentences at Louisiana State Penitentiary (more commonly known as Angola Prison), Albert Woodfox and Herman Wallace received two identical letters from Jackie Sumell, an artist in a MFA program at Stanford University. Each letter included 24 photos: hourly snapshots Sumell had taken over the course of a day to offer them a glimpse of her life. A lively correspondence began between Sumell and Wallace. In 1971, Wallace and Woodfox had formed the first chapter of the Black Panther Party to be established within a prison. The following year, in retaliation for their activism, they were framed for the murder of prison guard Brent Miller and wrongly convicted. Wallace and Woodfox became the longest-held prisoners in Closed Cell Restriction (solitary confinement) in the US: 41 and 43 years respectively. Together with Robert King, another wrongfully-convicted Black Panther, they were known as the “Angola Three.”

Shortly after Sumell began writing to him, Wallace was transferred to the notoriously brutal Camp J, known as “the dungeon.” As Sumell witnessed his mental and emotional condition rapidly deteriorating, she happened to be given a “particularly indulgent assignment”¹ in her MFA: to interview a professor about “dream homes.” The assignment’s idealization of wealth was irreconcilable with Wallace’s reality. Rather than suppressing her unease, Sumell engaged it as a generative limit. She did not interview a professor, but she did pose the following question to Wallace: “what sort of house does a man who has lived in a 6-foot-by-nine-foot cell for over 30 years dream of?”² Wallace was at first fearful about entering into an imaginative exercise, but by the end of his reply to Jackie he wrote: “P.P.S. Let’s do the project, baby – you done gone way out there in that water and let’s see how we do together. If there’s a breakdown it’s your fault!”³ In his next letter, he described a house in astoundingly concrete detail:

First I would like for you to build me: 1> a swimming pool with a light green bottom and a large Panther in the center. 2> I want flower gardens surrounding the house enclosed. 3> A garage for two cars. 4> A large tree in the backyard under which will be my patio. The patio made of marble brick. 5> My kitchen with wall and base cabinets. Racks for pots, pans and utensils – the floor made of tile and several microwaves. 6a> 3 bedrooms all with thick carpet – king size beds – one of the rooms with lots of large mirrors – mirror ceiling, crystal furniture; African art mahogany furniture and soft blue light; and in the third room I prefer a room consisting of various different cultures with furniture made of white birch, white carpet. 6b> A very large conference room with portraits of all political prisoners and prisoners of war displayed on the wall around the conference room. Beside the conference room will be 7> my library. 8> My office – computer, files and a large picture of my Hero. 9> There are two bathrooms. One with counter and mirror and a large bathtub. The other equipped with a shower and thick glass casing. 10> A large dining room equipped with video wall screen for whatever the occasion. 11a> A guest house with 4 rooms to accommodate out-of-state activists. The rooms must be open with sliding glass doors to accommodate people who may suffer claustrophobia. 11b> I want an underground bunker leading from my bedroom and a tunnel leading out to an artificial drainage. The bunker is made of strong cement and equipped with all military essentials – that reminds me the house is to be made of wood. 12> I would like a workshop as I enjoy tampering with electrical appliances. 13> I want a large fireplace.⁴

Sumell’s initiative in asking Wallace this question, and his generosity in answering it, sparked a lifelong architectural collaboration in the planning of “Herman’s House.” What began as an epistolary exercise in imaginative description grew into drawings, followed by the development of architectural plans, models, digital constructions, and a touring exhibition.

In the 2013 documentary *Herman’s House*, a number of architects who specialize in designing prisons responded to Sumell and Wallace’s architectural plans. The architects were struck by the confined structure of the house, a spatial logic that reminded them of a prison: “[In solitary confinement] you’re in a very tight little area all the time. And his house reflects that, too...there’s no free-flowing space here at all,” and “From this house, you cannot see the rising sun, you cannot see the setting sun. It would actually be quite oppressive to live in this house.”⁵ Aside from the irony of prison architects musing on spatial freedom, what their reflections surface is less, as they suppose, the psychological hold of carceral spatiality on Wallace’s imagination, and more the degree to which *all* houses are already on a continuum with prisons. In fact, the features that the architects suggest Wallace might incorporate to make the house *more* dream-worthy – a “bowling alley,” a “media room”⁶ – would increase its prison-like qualities by expanding its function as a zone of removal and confinement via privatization. The architects’ idea of a “dream house” would not only provide social isolation, but also would – were we all to have one – require multiple planet Earths to sustain. The “dream” evoked by their “dream house” is of enclosure within perfect detachment, both from others (the public, the social) and from the material reality of ecological effect. In stark contrast, some of the features of Herman’s house that are seemingly *most* prison-like are also *least* carceral: six microwaves for prolific catering, a central conference room (which one architect compared to a prison “day room,” and which Herman had assigned for revolutionary organizing). Herman’s unusual house shows how, in the necessity of accommodating a large and fluctuating population, the prison, in its imposition of communal life, is in some ways *less* carceral than the nuclear family’s private home, in its imposition of autonomy.

Wallace’s divergent plans and the prison architects’ responses to them expose the continuum between the prison and the private house, between the *oikos* of slave-tended agricultural-carceral lands (like Angola prison) and the *oikos* of the family home. They urge us to observe the strategies of withdrawal, containment, and management that resonate between the prison and the house, and to consider the risks that Wallace mitigated with his unusual design. This continuum can then be further extended to consider the great house of postindustrial life: *economics*, and its simultaneous subsidiary, condition of possibility, and tugging antithesis, *ecology*...

Works cited:
Jackie Sumell and Herman Wallace, *The House That Herman Built* (Edition Solitude, 2015)
Herman’s house, directed by Angad Singh Bhalla (First Run Features, 2013).

1 Check for citation
2 Sumell and Wallace, *The House that Herman Built*, PAGE
3 Sumell and Wallace, *The House that Herman Built*, PAGE
4 Sumell and Wallace, *The House that Herman Built*, PAGE
5 *Herman’s house*, directed by Angad Singh Bhalla (First Run Features, 2013).
6 *Ibid*.

The Gaze of Cinema in the Space of Film Installation,

— Stephen Woo

In her book *Exhibiting Cinema in Contemporary Art*, Erika Balsom helpfully outlines the arguments of thinkers who debate whether and how the concept and experience of spectatorship in relation to ideology changes as film leaves the movie theater and enters the museum.¹ For theorists of film in the 1970s, such as Jean-Louis Baudry, Christian Metz, or Laura Mulvey, the cinematic apparatus interpellates a passive spectator who easily identifies with the popular fantasies of Hollywood fare, such as ones that prop up heterosexual difference through narratives of romantic coupling, during which a “male gaze”² formalizes and fetishizes the woman as object. Ensconced in the darkness of the movie theater, the viewer in these accounts becomes susceptible to ideological manipulation.

Does this equation change in the museum? The white cube does not serve “as a neutral, protective container” for cinema, Balsom reminds us, but “produces a new cinematic dispositif through its particular discursive and institutional framing and the various practices associated with it,”³ including how the museumgoer, unlike the filmgoer, walks freely through gallery space. But she nevertheless problematizes a binary wherein cinema fosters a “passive” spectator, as Baudry suggests in his comparison of moviegoing to the enchainment of the Platonic cave⁴, whereas the museum empowers a purportedly “active” spectator who moves unencumbered. This binary not only presupposes that “the movie theater constitutes a space of ideological regression, whilst the gallery is a clear-sighted realm exempt from such mystification,” but also “conflate[s] physical stasis with regressive mystification and physical ambulation with criticality – a claim that holds true on neither end.”⁵

In addition, should we take for granted what Baudry, Metz, and Mulvey wrote? In her conceptualization of the “male gaze,” for instance, Mulvey relies on concepts from Jacques Lacan but ultimately conflates his ideas on the “gaze” with Michel Foucault’s notion of “panopticism,”⁶ for she relies exclusively on how the former diagnosed the mirror-stage early in his career, not the later seminars and formalist mathematics through which he theorized the gaze as *split from the human eye*.⁷ In these later ideations, “the split between the eye and the gaze” marks, as Pietro Bianchi puts it, “a separation between visual space as an *experience* and visual space as a *thought*.”⁸ Lacan thus moves beyond the vision of a particular subject—as seen with his mirror-stage essay—and ventures to “think the totality of the *space* where vision occurs.”⁹ A formalized conception of visual space departs from yet simultaneously reevaluates the human experience of vision; such abstraction does not forget the particular body who sees, but rather factors into the calculation that which necessarily escapes its vision. In this way, the gaze involves *absence*, a blind spot in the field of vision to which the viewing subject lacks access.

These understandings of the gaze that emerge in later seminars from Lacan completely negate how Mulvey, Metz, and others read the gaze operative in cinema. The gaze does not figure a transcendent look of chauvinist mastery or surveillance, as Mulvey or Foucault would have it; instead, it conceptualizes, and gives ontological weight to, the gap or blind spot in the body’s seemingly omnipotent look. The gaze marks an objective lacuna in the visual field, split from human vision, which bars the capacity of any camera, film, or viewing subject to be, as Metz said, “all-perceiving.”¹⁰ The classical cinema, as fantasy, deploys but usually strives to domesticate this gaze or blind spot of a given film and its viewer, whereby the viewer is satisfied with an imaginary enjoyment of knowing or seeing all by the end of the film. In this way, the cinema, as that which models the gaze, offers both the lure—and yet anxiety—of seeing something more than what everyday life and human vision does.

In this sense, we can agree with Mulvey that fantasy structures the (heteropatriarchal) ideologies peddled by classical cinema. But she and someone like Baudry thus conclude that spectators must aspire toward conscious reflection upon, and rejection, of these fantasies. However, as Todd McGowan reminds us, because ideology “needs fantasy to compensate for its constitutive incompleteness,” whereby “fantasy fills in the blank spaces in an ideological edifice,” the spectator paradoxically should *identify* with this fantasy.¹¹ Rather than separate from fantasy, we should “traverse” it, as Lacan urges, realizing the points at which it effaces gaps and contradictions, which in the cinema manifests through how films smooth over and make seamless their form and narrative in service of normative projects like heterosexual coupling. *Classical cinema in this sense obfuscates the gaze, or the inability to see or show everything, an impotence which the ruling ideology needs to disavow*. “Our ability to contest an ideological structure depends on our ability to recognize the real point at which it breaks down,” McGowan thus concludes, “not on our ability to distance ourselves from that structure through the process of conscious reflection.”¹² As a result, he criticizes the notion that passivity begets ideological interpellation while the act of conscious reflection seems to counteract it. Instead, he suggests how we “should pave the way to a more intense submission to” cinema,¹³ so as to encounter the gaps in ideology and the fantasies that obfuscate this gap.

Following McGowan shifts the terms of the debate that Balsom summarizes, wherein the cinematic spectator is totally passive while the museumgoer progresses freely and thinks critically. “A more intense submission” to cinema does not necessarily concern physical stasis or absorption. Rather than worry over presumed spectatorial movement, we should emphasize how the public staging and structure of fantasy remains consistent across cinema and the museum. To “exhibit cinema” means to “hold it out to view or subject it to scrutiny,”¹⁴ as Balsom suggests, and in thinking about the museum exhibition of cinema, to “hold out” its gaze means to subject its fantasies to scrutiny in a new space. Abstracting the content it visualizes from the everyday and staging itself within the extraordinary space of the museum, film installations provide the museumgoer with something they do not usually see. But even as the film installation offers us vision beyond everyday sight, it can also draw attention to the limitations of what we can see on our own: Multi-channel installations especially reinforce the Lacanian split between the eye and the gaze, wherein the museumgoer encounters the insufficiency of vision in a space of its multiplication via two or more screens displayed in varied positions.

With vision both expanded yet obstructed in a space of fantasy beyond the quotidian, the “art of truth and the anxiety of the gaze” emerges, as Bianchi says of cinema, or “the experience of seeing something we did not know could be seen.”¹⁵ This indeed exemplifies the nature of the “optical unconscious,” something Walter Benjamin first discusses in *A Short History of Photography* and then revisits in his famous essay “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Production,” whose title my own mimes.

1 Erika Balsom, *Exhibiting Cinema in Contemporary Art* (Amsterdam University Press, 2013).
2 Laura Mulvey, “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,” *Screen* 16:3 (1975): 6-18.
3 Balsom, *Exhibiting Cinema*, 40.
4 Jean-Louis Baudry, “Ideological Effects of the Basic Cinematographic Apparatus,” *Film Quarterly* 28:2 (1974).
5 Balsom, *Exhibiting Cinema*, 50, 51.
6 Michel Foucault, “Panopticism,” in *Discipline and Punish* (Pantheon, 1977).
7 Jacques Lacan, “The Split Between the Eye and the Gaze,” in *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis* (W.W. Norton & Company, 1973).
8 Pietro Bianchi, *Jacques Lacan and Cinema: Imaginary, Gaze, Formalisation* (Routledge, 2017), 141.
9 Bianchi, *Jacques Lacan and Cinema*, 95.
10 Christian Metz, *The Imaginary Signifier: Psychoanalysis and the Cinema* (Indiana University Press, 1977), 48.
11 Todd McGowan, *The Real Gaze: Film Theory After Lacan* (SUNY Press, 2012), 17.
12 McGowan, *The Real Gaze*, 17.
13 McGowan, *The Real Gaze*, 18.
14 Balsom, *Exhibiting Cinema*, 13.
15 Pietro Bianchi, “What is Adult About Cinema? On the Fabelmans,” 24 February, 2023, <https://www.e-flux.com/notes/521127/what-is-adult-about-cinema-on-the-fabelmans>.

Acknowledgments

—Adrienne Jacobson Oliver

on ‘*Sankofic Attunement*.’ Proposes a framework of critical listening positionalities attentive to unmarked, unvoiced, and otherwise gagged sensibilities, ~~establishing a knowing beyond knowing~~ through methodologies of imperative, critically erotic aliveness that might leverage the irreducible incalculability of recursively captive laboring under and with/in the entropic atmospheres of the afterlife of extractive reproductive enslavement in the American South, ~~itself a non-regional emplacement, and instead a resonant frequency orchestrating antiblack logic and structures.~~

“A philosophy of sound art must remain a strategy of listening rather than an instruction to hear, and thus its language itself is under scrutiny.” [Salomé Voegelin, *Listening to Noise and Silence: Towards a Philosophy of Sound Art* (Continuum, 2010), xiv.]

“[T]he black text speaks to and in a black world, subjunctive and imaginary as that is, away from the false and damaging expectations that black texts have to speak universally, which means that they speak to the larger racial project or conversation—that is, to people who are not black.” [Kevin Quashie, *Black Aliveness, or a Poetics of Being* (Duke Univeristy Press, 2021), 14.]

“The ‘feminine’ of *l’écriture féminine* is not passive. Like a volcano erupting after years of dormancy, it expels energy, explodes through language, with a force and a rigor which have traditionally been associated with the male voice. Given that the tendency of patriarchal social structures is to maintain rigidity in language, the work of the insurgent must be to oppose such tendencies by opening up further linguistic possibilities.” [Ana Aneja, “The Mystic Aspect of L’Écriture Féminine: Hélène Cixous’ Vivre l’Orange,” *Qui Parle*, Vol. 3, No. 1, Theatricality and Literature (Spring 1989): 189-201, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20685880>]

“I’m interested in the convergence of blackness and the irreducible sound of necessarily visual performance at the scene of objection. Between looking and being looked at, spectacle and spectatorship, enjoyment and being enjoyed, lies and moves the economy of...hypervisibility.” [Fred Moten, *In the Break: The Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition* (University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 1.]

“Oh, but to reach silence, what a huge effort of voice. My voice is the way I go to seek reality; reality prior to my language exists as an unthinkable thought. Reality is raw material, language the way I seek it—and how I don’t find it...I return to the unsayable.” [Clarice Lispector, *The Passion According to G.H.*, trans. Idra Novey, (New Directions, 2012), 169-70]

“What would the afterlife in Blackness look like as a total obscurity? What if it manifests itself in the most oblique, opaque, and dense ways? Would we find a space of the imagination in the sinkhole, in the break, in the hold? One of the ways such an aesthetic of withdrawal would make itself known is precisely ‘as a structural position of non-communicability,’ silences, breaks, voids, pressed and presented to you so that you never recognize their prior manipulation. Such tactics do not concern or employ negation. Rather, they are decoys, rerouting and rearranging at the level of the surface.” [Adrienne Edwards, “A Splinter to the Heart: On the Possibility of Afro-Pessimist Aesthetics,” *ASAP/Journal* 5, No. 2 (2020): 273-280, <https://doi.org/10.1353/asa.2020.0018>.]

“What do we remember and what do we forget? How do we name and categorize what we can barely observe, for what purpose, with what results? ...What do we need to remember that will push back against the forgetting encouraged by consumer culture and linear time? What can we remember that will surround us in oceans of history and potential? And how?” [Alexis Pauline Gumbs, *Undrowned: Black Feminist Lessons from Marine Mammals*, (AK Press, 2020), 19.]

“What is terrifying partakes of the abyss, three times linked to the unknown. First, the time you fell into the belly of the boat. For, in your poetic vision, a boat has no belly; a boat does not swallow up, a boat does not devour; a boat is steered by open skies. Yet, the belly of this boat dissolves you, precipitates you into a nonworld from which you cry out. This boat is a womb, a womb abyss. It generates the clamor of your protests; it also produces all coming unanimity. Although you are alone in this suffering, you share in the unknown with others whom you have yet to know. This boat is your womb, a matrix, and yet it expels you. This boat: pregnant with as many dead as living under the sentence of death.” [Édouard Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, trans. Betsy Wing, (The University of Michigan Press, 1997), 6.]

“[A] Poethics of Blackness would announce a whole range of possibilities for knowing, doing, and existing. For releasing Blackness from the registers of the object, the commodity, or the other would halt...the very mode of representation, and its philosophical assumptions, that provides those meanings to Blackness—and its signifiers, ...”[Denise Ferreira da Silva, “Toward a Black Feminist Poethics: The Quest(ion) of Blackness Toward

the End of the World,” *The Black Scholar*, Vol. 44, No. 2, States of Black Studies (Summer 2014): 81-97, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5816/blackscholar.44.2.0081>]

“[P]oetry is not a luxury. It is a vital necessity of our existence. It forms the quality of the light within which we predicate our hopes and dreams toward survival and change, first made into language, then into idea, then into more tangible action....Poetry is the way we help give name to the nameless so it can be thought.” [Audre Lorde and Roxane Gay, ed., *The Selected Works of Audre Lorde*, (W.W. Norton & Company, 2020)]

“Such black and feminist posthuman acts of speculation are never simply a matter of inventing tall tales from whole cloth.” [Tavia Nyong’o, *Afro-Fabulations: The Queer Drama of Black Life* (New York University Press, 2019), 4.]

“History pledges to be faithful to the limits of fact, evidence, and archive, even as those dead certainties are produced by terror...[T]his raise[s] important questions regarding what it means to think historically about matters still contested in the present and about life eradicated by the protocol of intellectual disciplines.” [Saidiya Hartman, “Venus in Two Acts, *Small Axe* Number 26, Vol. 12, No. 2 (June 2008), p. 1-14, <https://doi.org/10.1215/-12-2-1>.]

“We see that mother doesn't mean ‘mother,’ but ‘felon’ and ‘defender’ and/or ‘birther of terror’ and not one of the principal grounds of terrors multiple and quotidian enactments. ...This is Black being in the wake. This is the anagrammatical. These are Black lives, annotated.” What kind of mother/ing is it if one must always be prepared with the knowledge of the possibility of one's dead child?” [Christina Sharpe, *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being* (Duke University Press, 2016), 77.]

Unapproved images

—Stella Liantonio

In 1970, in the midst of protests against the Vietnam War, the artist-activists group *Art Workers’ Coalition* distributed 50.000 posters for free in the streets of New York. The image featured a war photograph taken by U.S. army photographer Ron Haeberle, and portrayed the corpses of children killed by the army during the My Lay massacre. The event was one of the many mass killings perpetrated by American soldiers against the unarmed civilian population during the Vietnam War. On the top of the photo, a question figures in red letters: “And babies?”, answered by the affirmative repetition “And babies.”, at the bottom of the image. Soldier Paul Meadlo, who had participated in the killings, shared the information during a news interview. The quote was then edited on the photo by AWC activists in an effort to highlight the cruel arbitrary murders committed by the US army.

I will not include the image on this page, as I don’t believe in the necessity of seeing images of death to understand and agree on the immorality of killing. I’ve been questioning the function of images of violence in times of war, and I still struggle to reconcile the need for a public awareness of war crimes with the re-enactment of pain that image-makers use, or exploit.

If I took on the assumption that photojournalism portrays events with veracity and directedness, I would need to assume the neutrality of the photojournalist; someone whose work requires selling images extracted from suffering subjects. I would also have to assume the neutrality of the camera, a technical device whose development follows that of European colonial empires[1]. If I believed such premises, then war images would take on an unrivaled role in portraying truth. Yet, even in this context, the emotional effects of images on political choices remain vague, and seemingly unbound.

However, I’m moving from the assumption that there is no such thing as truth in a photograph. There are characters, composition, framing: all of which are elements of choice for the photographer amidst a sea of other signs, objects and people.

These considerations configure another scenario, where portrayals of dead or suffering bodies do not serve the purpose of peace or a transmission of truth, but act as power displays.

Maybe the role of the war photograph in the West is not to account for the atrocity of military actions commanded by its national governments. Maybe, instead, it is a proof of power. It is a warning, a documentation, a message that works in its repetitiveness, in its multiplicity. Photographs become tools of a visual regimen which thrives on the overproduction of images of death, and exploits them to legitimize its necessity. If the aim of a war photograph was to inspire empathy and thus tame conflict, then what do we make of the countless videos and photographs taken by the people directly impacted by the war?

What is the difference between death exhibited in a newspaper and death shared by those grieving?

Images of dying bodies are “obscene” in public reception, according to what Susan Sontag wrote in *Illness as a Metaphor*. The author specifically focused on photos of suffering and dying bodies, deeming them as more intolerable subjects for the public. Such images remind the viewer of their own mortality, evoking a feeling of repulsion. It does not take away from their visual strength and impact in public opinion. Representations of suffering will often elicit an emotional response, drawing empathy. But empathy is not enough in the face of violence[2].

Media images contribute to the emergence of a collective consciousness and a public memory. Scholar Alison Landsberg uses the notion of *prosthetic memory* to denote “a public cultural memory created in a site between personal memory and contextual historical narrative”. A prosthetic memory forms through the exposition to images that the mind appropriates in an artificial first-person account; despite the fact that the events portrayed were never directly experienced. As news agencies and photo editors select photographs every day, they reduce exposure to a wider array of contributions, crafting an intentional and coherent narrative. They choose the images that will be part of the collective prosthetic memory. In doing so, they often employ an “unequal use of images of death, where the dignity of one group, an “us”, is protected, while the publication of graphic images of the “other” is often permitted[3]”.

Over the past year and a half, I’ve been exposed, like anyone who has access to media broadcasts, to an uninterrupted series of images from the ongoing genocide in Palestine. Like in the 1970 poster, many of the photographs portray the unanimated bodies of civilians, of which around 17,400 are children[4]. I do not know how to react to these images; I don’t think there is any adequate response. But I see a difference in the treatment of images created by official, approved sources of information – that is, photojournalists, and images produced by the people of Palestine. And the latter are not considered truthful. Their legitimacy is continuously questioned, contextualized, reframed or not displayed.

Unapproved images testify to the exertion of imperial military violence, but do not reaffirm its narrative of winners and victims. They bring dignity to grief, resilience to testimony. The photograph here is a counteract, a reaffirmation of presence against dispossession of the land. Yet images of dignity do not seem to concern the news; perhaps hope is not shocking enough.

[1] Ariella Aisha Azoulay, Potential history: Unlearning imperialism
[2] It is also necessary to look at whose empathy do these images try to elicit, as it is revelatory of who stands behind the shutter and what political use the image serves. See Aruna D’Souza “Imperfect solidarities”.
[3]<https://opiniojuris.org/2024/11/21/regarding-pictures-of-the-pain-of-others-photographic-images-of-conflict-related-deaths-under-international-law/#:~:text=These%20images%20convey%20a%20twofold,that%20happens%20in%20those%20places%E2%80%9D.&text=IHL%20contains%20several%20provisions%20regarding,dead%2C%20emphasizing%20dignity%20in%20death.>
[4] <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/longform/2023/10/9/israel-hamas-war-in-maps-and-charts-live-tracker>

always already in:

— sahar khraibani

specificity fugitivity¹ counter-hegemony
conjugation of language of bodies² of space suspension of chronological imperative i exist in
excess of expectation a suspension of certainty beyond myself

chyros/chaos
concurrence + constellation
+ opportunity

for a disjointed trembling³ being with
but not yet arrival it continues it persists
history spirals fear of freedom the return
discomfort as an aesthetic strategy
haunted by the notion of formalism
the question has priority over the answer
is the horizon an enclosure? the putting in
question of causality? we only see violence
in its aftereffects, what is the first impulse?

it begins again i say there was light i say she can't handle what she wants i say people can't handle what they want the most they are found sat at the
ecstatic edge of something to be known blue skies ahead the spring is tragically here we can only see violence in its aftermath it is *there: a feeling*⁴, a
feeling, we saw the sun set at the edge of the park there are these rites that bind us i cried for seven days and seven nights i walked the edge of that
feeling i sat at the sidewalk i went to the basin the absurd hero is the one who continues despite knowing the truth the neverending carousel of lust and
suffering of longing and walking away standing in the doorway, looking at you, i could've held you in my arms forever and it still would not have been
long enough

i have no one else to blame for this but myself a front row seat to this heartbreak time and time you learn the same lesson in the cherry colored
automobile i asked how did that feel you say you like a little punishment i nod noted filed in the back of the head for some other day to return
to today where i am wondering who is being punished here

BITTER KNOWLEDGE
IMPRINTS ON THE
SHUDDERING OF
THINGS THAT FLEE
INTO THAT OPENING
LEADING TO A RIVER
LEADING TO AN OPEN SEA
AN OBJECT LESSON
IN LETTING GO

but then where were you when it fell down how long did it take you to get here was it days or weeks
and when was it that you decided

FRAIL TOOTH SWIVELS
ROTATES IN THE BACK
OF MY MOUTH LOOKING
FOR ITS PLEASURE
BITTER KNOWLEDGE
IMPRINTS ON THE
SHUDDERING OF
THINGS THAT FLEE
INTO THAT OPENING
LEADING TO A RIVER
LEADING TO AN OPEN SEA

AN OBJECT LESSON
IN LETTING GO
ARMS BROKEN
OVER EMBRACING
CLOUDS THE END
OF SPACE & ITS MIDDLE
EVERYTHING EVEN
YOUR ABSENCE
SEEMED POLISHED
AND THE NIGHT
THICKENED

I GIVE YOU THIS SEA
OF EBONY GIVE ME BACK
THE BLUE THE SKY BLACK
OCEAN OUR SOUNDING
PORT PLUNGE MY HEAD
SINKS DOWN THE SMOKY
WRECKS OF POINTLESS
ORGIES

FUTILE GROPINGS RESEMBLING
OBSCURE FIELDS SWEETNESS
OF AUTHORITY OF FLESH
INACCESSIBLE BLUE
KEEPS A PLACE GAUCHE
AND WEAK BOTH GOODNESS
AND CRIME THE SUNSET AND
DAWN SHAKE IN THE AIR
WARM AS THE SUN

I CRAVE YOU IN THE MOST
INNOCENT FORM
THICKER THAN PITCH
ALL MY PLEASURES
PACKED TIGHT AND
SWARMING THE BANAL
CANVAS NOT BOLD
ENOUGH TO GUSH
FORTH AM I TO
ABANDON THIS
BOTTOM OF
DEEP SEAS

¹ Harney, Stefano. and Fred Moten. 2013. The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning and Black Study. Wivenhoe: Autonomedia, 2013.
² "5. The afterness of return. The way in which the body rejects its current circumstances: rejecting the quiet, rejecting the time zone, the light." Mina Zohal, "Mehan e ma / Macrorayan,
³ Katarzyna Marciniak and Bruce Bennett, "Aporias of foreignness: transnational encounters in cinema," Transnational Cinemas 9, no. 1 (2018): 1-12.
⁴ There: a Feeling, exhibition text by Gregg Bordowitz