

Laecto celor festiv ir organizat
cu prile jul aeiiversohii
Zilei de 1 Mai 1988-Sala
Palatului
/958488



Ricardo Bofill.

Aa 334356 /7

Front and back of an
archive photograph of an
official celebration on the
1st of May, 1988.

on the other side of Unirii. There is a significant number of people who lost their homes, neighborhoods and social context. At the same time, when the House was opened to the public, the general feeling was one of pride. Some people took it as an acceptable revenge against Romanian history, which lacks large or prestigious buildings.

MH

You are saying that the overall feeling for this building was one of pride?

MC

Yes. History has been adverse in Romania, at the crossroads of empires, war and destruction. And finally, with local material, local designers, local craftsmen and local artists, this building was accomplished. It has a lot of ornaments and decoration, which is something many people here are keen on when it comes to architecture. Nevertheless the construction site affected some 40,000 people directly. So that's a question still to be addressed. Why people who suffered a lot, at the same time eagerly accepted the palace and took pride in it. And even among professional architects, there are big differences in perception.

MH

Can you explain these differences?

MC

At a certain moment, some 500 architects worked on the palace, not counting the engineers. There was a lot of construction on the boulevard too. Just because the dictator said that the new boulevard should look like then-contemporary architecture from Paris, for young architects, there was a feeling that somehow they could use this opportunity, and try some Ricardo Bofill-inspired postmodernism. Those who worked on the palace and the boulevards, who tried to embark on the latest trends in international architecture, have a very subtle position or perception with regard to the whole thing.

MH

The neo-classicist elements seem to be applied very roughly. It appears like an enormous Barbie house.

MC

That is true. It is rough because the scale is rough.

MH

In 2004, it was decided that MNAC, the museum of contemporary art, would become part of the House. Do you know how that came about?

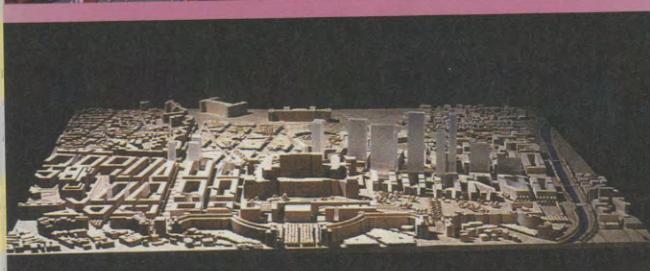
MC

There have been alternative proposals where to locate the museum. Let's say that a group of architects I



Nicolae Ceaușescu inspecting an urban model.

Nicolae and Elena Ceaușescu inspecting the crops.



Models from the 'Bucharest 2000' project, a series of commissioned urban proposals for the renewal of the zone around the House of People.

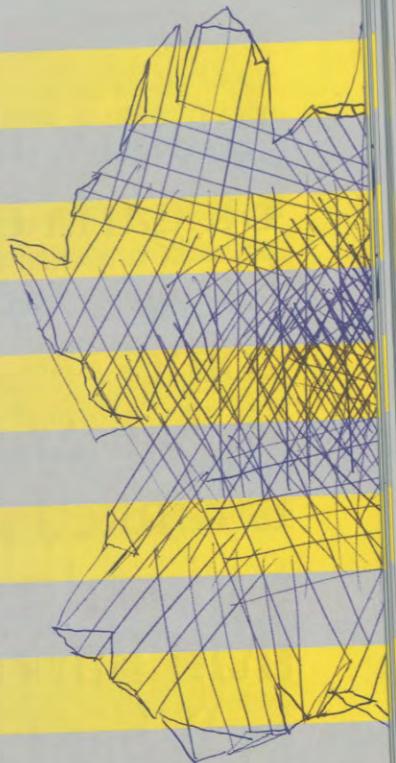


Regime change: a coin for the 2008 NATO Summit in Bucharest depicts the House of People.



belonged to at the time were very much in favor of situating the museum in a famous modernist building, which is now the location of a busy market in a modern and popular area of Bucharest. The market hall would have been a fantastic space. Something of the intensity and impact of the Tate Modern. But the government decided to locate it in the House. And I must say, I was in favor of that. I saw it as a symbolic gesture, since it interrupted this building, until then only used for the structures of power. I saw it as something 'alien,' putting one foot in the door opening. This puts the palace in a critical perspective. I understand that there is something very unfriendly about the museum with regard to its social function. It is faraway and difficult to get there. It is not easily accessible; one enters through a guarded gate. A fence around it, it is far from a pleasant excursion. For those who are managing the museum, it is a real problem: how to attract people, how to make it inhabitable. Since I don't have a car, I don't go to there that often. I think I have been there twice.

Bucharest, April 23, 2005



ADMISSION

January 1, 2007, Romania and Bulgaria entered into the European Union, receiving a lukewarm welcome.

Der Spiegel wrote that 'Romania is ranked by Transparency International as only slightly less corrupt than Burkina Faso or Syria.'

What better way to prove the critics wrong than by investing in culture? A few biennials ... maybe a monument ...

Yes or No?
 Romania's monumental structures may have different space-time 'conversations,' depending on geopolitical scale. The contemporary art museum MNAC sits very differently in its surroundings than Tate Modern or Palais de Tokyo would. These 'Scenarios for a Dialogue' were created at a time when Romania's admission to the EU was subject to debate. They examine Casa Poporului by proposing two scenarios that depend on scale, and the different relationships this scale could imply. The first scenario is that Romania joins the EU and the second is that it remains part of the former Eastern Bloc.

Scenarios for a Dialogue: No Relationship branding, 2005.

Scenarios for a Dialogue: Yes Relationship branding, 2005.



uncorporate identity—dialogues

THE MUSEUM OF CONFLICT



Matthias Pauwels
Irina Cios
Florian Waldvogel
Mihnea Mircan
Maria Hlavajova
Wouter Davidts
Calin Dan
Gideon Boie
Edi Muka
Metahaven

Dialogues

Discussion

Eleven participants try to gauge the prospects of critical relevance for a contemporary art museum wedged into a small corner of an ex-totalitarian palace.

Markedly divergent views on what constitutes critical art practice and institutions emerge in the incredibly overdetermined milieu of the MNAC/Casa Poporului.

THE MUSEUM OF CONFLICT
DISCUSSION

PARTICIPANTS

MATTHIAS PAUWELS

IRINA CIOS

FLORIAN WALDOVOGEL

MIHNEA MIRCAN

MARIA HLAVAJOVA

WOUTER DAVIDTS

CALIN DAN

GIDEON BOIE

VINCA KRUK

DANIEL VAN DER VELDEN

EDI MUKA

MATTHIAS PAUWELS (MP)

In order to start the discussion on the role of art vis-à-vis the powers that be, I would like to propose a scenario that the audience can vote on. MNAC—the National Museum of Contemporary Art—invites a curator and gives him or her *carte blanche*. A perfect labor division is proposed: the museum takes care of the infrastructural affairs and collects money through a foundation. What happens in the museum space is left to the curator to decide on. Crucial to my scenario is that the curator decides to use the museum space for three months to accommodate the victims of neo-liberal policies, just like churches in Western Europe provide illegal refugees with shelter. There are many people in the streets, and the curator invites them in. The curator departs from the idea that a museum of art is a public space. Public space belongs to the people that do not have private space of their own. It is not easy to predict the outcome of this choice. Undoubtedly, there will be political pressure. Parliament is next to the museum space and the members of Parliament are not keen on having these people so close. There will be a financial problem because no entrance fees will be paid. Also public opinion is against it since the 'common man' argues that he works and these people do not and still the latter get the benefits. Things get out of hand. The curator is dismissed. The curator digs in her/his heels and refuses to leave, stating she/he believes in the cause. Then the Romanian version of Rita Verdonk steps in and has the place evacuated. Riot police enter. The whole thing ends up being a real event on a global scale. I think it is clear where I am heading: in the scenario I depict, the museum or public

space is no longer a space where you can agree to disagree. It becomes a place where everyone will have to choose sides. So, why not choose sides today, in this conference room? Who believes this scenario goes too far? Who is pro the political dimension of art? Who thinks art should not at all involve itself at such a direct political level? Should beggars be brought in for real, or in a symbolical way as Santiago Sierra did by staging poverty and exclusion—as if beggars were actors.

IRINA CIOS (IC)

There is a question about responsibility: there is a division between being a social activist and an artistic one.

FLORIAN WALDOVOGEL (FW)

Political art does not involve beggars if you are only a painter: that's too exclusive.

MP

Then you agree to disagree.

FW

The question is not: 'Do we need political art?' The question is: 'Do we need art?'

MIHNEA MIRCAN (MM)

You remove the artist who is making the piece and give this task to the curator. The artist is no more than an accessory in your scenario, so I believe the relationship between 'art' and 'politics' is overly simplified; it is just a confrontation of institutional agendas.

FW

Does an artist ever work against art? Globalization is part of the thing, as is capitalism; that's who we are, we can't deny that. The question would be: 'Who is working against art?' I do not think there are many of these people.

MARIA HLAVAJOVA (MHL)

But Florian, can one generalize in this? We all need art, that's why we are in the business, that's why we spend hours discussing it. We all see the political potential of art, that's why we are gathered here. The questions that brought us together were defined slightly differently. Maybe we should return to those in order to proceed with the discussion instead of going into voting processes.

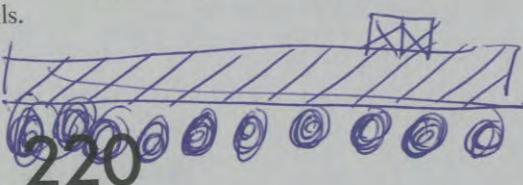
What do you think is the crucial question here?

How does the institution provide ways for contemporary art to be used as a representation of political change? Perhaps I can shortly comment on MNAC; I do believe that is a central idea for the session today. Yet, I will first comment on the terminology: we seem to use the term 'post-communist' uneasily when we refer to the situation in Romania. We struggle to find other names instead. But I would like to advocate the term 'post-communist' because then we speak about both parts of what was a bi-polar Europe: the (former) East and the (former) West. We very often fail to acknowledge that the year 1989 saw radical paradigmatic changes on a much larger scale than just Eastern Europe. I mention it because it is my opinion that the fantasies Eastern Europe had about the West to a great extent defined what MNAC has become today. There is a very strange longing for institutions in Central and Eastern Europe. That's where fantasy comes into play. What is desired most is a large, monolithic, traditional modern/contemporary art museum, like those Western contexts produced in the past. The very same museum that the West no longer knows what to do with vis-à-vis the challenges that art presents us with. This longing does not take into account the circumstances and ways in which such institutions would develop. For me, MNAC is a case of imposition. It is a monster, disproportionate to the scene of artists, galleries, collectors and all who would in normal circumstances be related to an institution. If you study MNAC's web site you notice this on a practical level: the board members, the types of programming, all seem to testify to an established curriculum defined beyond the concrete context. Most importantly, however, it does not seem to attempt to create something new. It does not try to leave the beaten track. At least not for the time being. MNAC is 'out of scale' for Romania. It does not muster energy to engage in a creative institutional thinking about its purpose. Located in the House of People, it mirrors the tragic history of the nation and of the totalitarianism of the past century, which marketing magicians play with as if it were a toy. I am afraid I am not sure how to deal with the cynicism such a construction entails.

I can only hope that younger generations can resolve this dilemma in a constructive way. They should not ignore history but rather look for ways that my generation was unable to see and find. For my generation, the building represents the things that damaged our lives. In 2004, I co-organized a number of conferences about the contemporary situation in Romania and on MNAC. It was impossible to host only one conference. The conflict concerning MNAC was so serious that some were unwilling to sit at the same table with opposing voices. How could art presented there be read beyond the tragic connotations the building exudes? And how can any art presented there suggest a new political or social imaginary? That is also the reason why I so greatly appreciate the fierce activism that artist Dan Perjovschi shows, who travels the world to make a position of resistance towards MNAC more widely known. What I find interesting is that MNAC is currently getting over its own trauma by misusing the artists: every artist has to do something with Casa Poporului. But there's a difference in resolving a trauma and restricting the artists' freedom. Why does no artist in Yugoslavia work on the theme of the Yugoslavian war? Why does no Russian artist use the war in Chechnya? The West made this demand. Ilya Kabakov is working with the theme of communal apartments. Artists could make career in the West by thematizing the House of People.

IC

Yes and no. The House of People is an image more than anything else. The war in Serbia does not have a visual representation that people relate to. But this image exists. I was in a working group that studies how Bucharest should be marketed. Everybody hated that image, but nevertheless it came up four or five times, as it immediately relates to the place. It is difficult to ignore, you can simply address it as a marketing thing; or as a political thing, since it has very diverse layers. For artists, it can also serve as a 'flat surface' that exists in Bucharest. We have lived with it for some twenty years now. It would not trigger the same emotion or have the same impact on somebody who is confronted with it for the first time or who knows about it through stories and never experienced life in Romania prior to 1989.



MM

What could be the strategies to work with the building, apart from sheer passivity, staring at it in melancholia? You may say that because I'm 30, I probably don't remember much, I won't try and persuade you that I do, but we can start from the shared premise that something should be done with the building and the social context it is part of. One possibility, as I see it, is that they undergo artistic 'accidents.'

MHL

In my writing I often posited that the drama of the pre-1989 situation in Europe could only be resolved constructively by the next generation. The burden is a real part of my existence and I cannot just say: 'ok, an art exhibition.' I do believe in the political potential of art, but I believe that if you enter the House of People, and criticize its past, you're not so extremely radical, because the current neo-liberal system has adopted culture and art as a very harmless means of venting criticism. Before you make the gesture, you have already been appropriated as part of its rhetoric.

MM

No artist is condemned to work with the House of People, it is a matter of choice. And representations of the House of People do not define or limit the program of the institution. For some artists, working with the social and political texture of the House is a welcome challenge, or at least nothing to shy away from. You say you believe in the political potential of art, yet at the same time you seem to imply that art should be kept away from the particular task of speaking with, or about the House, that this is too burdensome or too complicated. That art cannot maintain its purity or subversive potential in a place that renders it powerless or corrupted. I believe the opposite: that this a good setting for testing premises that always go unverified about the effectiveness of subversion, in East and West. What would be protected if artists decided en masse to leave the House intact, to worry about other things and operate from a 'safe distance?' What would be this distance, since the House is obviously not just a building but a conglomerate of so many things? Whose collective memory would be saved if artists stayed out of the equation?

MHL

If you want contemporary discussion in that place, you restrict it to one subject. That I find limiting for contemporary art

WOUTER DAVIDTS (WE)

It's a complete overestimation of architecture at the same time.

CALIN DAN (CE)

In 1991, nobody was concerned with the new political power that legitimized the building by the decree signed by then-Prime Minister Petre Roman. He made it into what it is now, the Palace of Parliament. If the discussion is still revolving around the building, this is because the main topic is not MNAC, but the building itself. I agree that one should not overestimate an architectural object. But if this object is the result of a complex historical process, it is not merely a building. It has to be analyzed in many ways, with different tools. Art is just one of these tools and, I am sorry to say, not the most important one.

FW

I don't have problems with MNAC being in the House of People. You could also say: 'I use the money and transform it into better things.' For me it is more problematic that the parliament is housed in the same building as Ceaușescu's regime was.

(AUDIENCE)

I think you should be careful where to draw the line between political activism and art. It was good that Santiago Sierra did not use actual beggars. People expect something if you meddle with their situation. If you are involved in politics, the people you represent depend on you. A three-month art project is not where it ends.

GIDEON BOIE (GB)

Politicians are not ready to engage in a real political discussion on the issue of beggars and illegal refugees—the art sector might as well do that, no? So, I would argue that the artist should become a politician. Today, it's only the artist who can come up with a proposal that goes beyond what is perceived as 'possible,' and thus create a political debate.

FW
It's impossible that politicians can decide on what kind of art should be realized! As if we agree on all the things that politicians do. It's about freedom of cultural production: it doesn't matter whether you call it activism or you call it painting. It makes absolutely no difference. We are all cultural producers. Which one you prefer, that's your choice.

MHL

It's remarkable to see how easily we slip from the idea of art in a building, to architecture that has a strong political profile, to using the term political art. We assume that art shown in a location of that nature is in itself political. I was using the term political art, but I was told to use 'critical artistic practice' instead.

DANIEL VAN DER VELDEN (DVDV)

The palace is a symbol. Do you think critical artistic practice can change its meaning?

MHL

I'm not sure whether it's possible.

DVDV

Calin said the symbolic power is always stronger.

CD

There is a most unfortunate relation between our moral paradigm and our visual needs. And that is the dilemma represented by this place. It's pleasurable, in a very perverse way, even through its connection to a certain image of civil war. The conditions in Romania in the 1980s very much resembled those of civil war. Apart from direct shooting, everything was there. 'The building is related to much suffering; it is huge and familiar, and it is like Disneyland.' That is, in short, the argument many put forward. On a subliminal level, the civil war paradigm is contributing to the present destiny of the building. Any effort to organize critical discourses has to be worked out 'around' the building. I think the building generates a strange feeling of pleasure that prevents people from being radically critical.

DVDV

But maybe that pleasure, that perverse side of the building, is also part of its symbolic impact.



Without that, it would not be such a powerful symbol. I'm not implying that we should give it friendly connotations. I'm just implying a change of meaning. Could the building, through an artistic or design strategy, become a symbol of resistance? This focus on sign value is maybe due to the fact that we are graphic designers, and as such, we inject 'untruth,' fictions, stories or ideas in the space between the representation and the real thing. What I sense from your question, Matthias, is that your idea of radical art is very much one of direct action. I would like to emphasize that art and design are also sites for thought, causing people to think, as critical theory does.

MM

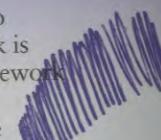
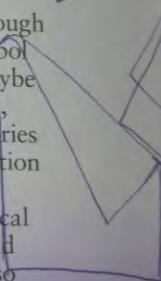
I do believe that MNAC by itself cannot solve the problem of the House of People. It's just one instrument, operating, so far, in a void, for lack of other instruments. I would like to go back to Maria's remarks about institutions. After 30 years of institutional critique, I don't think they emanate this crushing sense of authority any longer. I think they can be conceived as site-specific, provisional structures and organizations. Instead of highbrow offices that dispense truth, institutions can be experiments that exist for a few years, site-specific attempts at achieving certain goals; not temples where the same prefabricated idea reverberates emptily. Institutions can be testing grounds for themselves and ideas about art, and I think MNAC is doing a good job. It does not aspire to be there forever, nor does it say that everything is in its right place. It is a temporary solution for the Romanian scene in its relationship to the recent past.

MP

To what degree can the institution itself be experimental, not including the curators who decide on the programme? A curator still works in a framework that is set up by someone else.

MM

Without the framework there would be no exhibition programme, but the framework is just a bureaucratic empty shell. That framework is nothing in itself, it has to be filled with individual positions and priorities that are continuously renegotiated.



MP

You can never decide on the framework, only react to it.

DVDV

Mihnea, you have called MNAC a 'site-specific institution.' In site-specific art practices it is presupposed that you react to the site.

MM

I said that any other place in Bucharest would not necessarily be a better, safer place to discuss Romanian recent history or contemporary art. It's not necessarily true that the House of People can be addressed in a more radical, critical way from a five kilometer distance. Things are not that simple. MNAC's presence creates a discussion. It is a starting point from which things can progress, not a sort of closure. It advocates institutionally that the House of the People must be dealt with, but it also presents contemporary art exhibitions that do not refer to that situation.

FW

I don't believe that MNAC can ever change the meaning of this building. Not even the biggest art show can do that. Even if only one percent of the visitors has acquired a new perspective, still 99 percent of the people consider it the same.

IC

But it is changing. I don't think the younger generations connect to the place in the way that our generation did. Considering the visitors and the projects organized by the museum's curators I see that they have no sense of the history of the place, they completely enjoy it. If you ask them what they know about Ceaușescu, they reply that they heard he was a bad guy. But they don't have any idea of who the man was. So I think that very few of us here have direct contact with the lived experience of the place. How many people have visited the building? It's difficult to have a real discussion about something that you mainly know from mediated experience.

MP

Surely one could argue that it is precisely the distance, the fact that we have not directly experienced the building, that makes us perhaps more wary.

IC

I'm not saying that people cannot have a point of view, but the experience of the building is completely changing. We don't live in the past. We live now. We are mobile, get in touch with many people in many places, which adds to our experiences, and so on.

MP

So one might say that the architecture of power will survive its political experiment?

IC

Probably, I think it will remain some kind of anecdotal attachment to a possible experience of the place.

MP

That sounds like a very cynical conclusion.

IC

It is.

CD

On the one hand this might be the central truth of today's argument. This is probably why I'm so interested in collecting private memories of people who experienced the palace. I'm talking about people; ordinary people, not artists. Meanwhile, the younger generation relates completely differently to the topic. This is neither good nor bad, it is just different. It forces our generation to go back to the roots of the trauma, not in order to modify, but to make experiences more complex.

MP

It's often forgotten by the younger generation ...

CD

The new generation did not forget, the new generation simply does not know. We witnessed the construction of the building and contributed to it. We have to make sure not to forget.

(AUDIENCE)

Is that the role of the museum?

CD

I'm not here to present arguments pro or against the museum, I talk about the building, that's my topic. I'm not interested in this MNAC vs. Casa Poporului. I'm interested in something



completely different, which is the power of architecture and, in this case, Casa Poporului.

WDV

Minnea, having seen your slide show, I have the idea that during the communist era artists portrayed Ceaușescu in a variety of 'artistic styles.' At MNAC, the building is the central subject in videos, paintings; we even saw it rendered as a cake. An artistic practice without boundaries is enacted, with the building as subject. How would you react to this comparison?

MM

I would say that both cases, completely dissimilar as they are, are not based on necessity. Painters before 1989 were not forced to paint Ceaușescu. At MNAC, albeit under completely different circumstances, nobody is forced to make work about the House of People. It is telling that some artists decided to make works on the subject that were very ironic. But I do not believe the comparison holds. I would be glad to have new pieces on the subject, pieces that are not ironic and do not take the House metaphorically, but literally. I think it should be taken in its overwhelming literalness. An artist initiated—and regrettably abandoned—a project on an archive of the construction, that contained hundreds of interviews with those who had had a say in the construction, or those who were affected by it. The project was to become as big and in a sense as difficult as the House of People itself. I would strongly encourage such a project. For me, MNAC is not the problem, the House of People is. The formulation of this problem was silenced until 2004, but MNAC has at least recreated the problem and kept it alive without finding a solution, but looking for ways to deal with it. The fact that the parliament moved in troubled no one and did not lead to international conferences. The House was dormant and unproblematic. It started to cause irritation and became the subject of conferences because it accommodated a museum. The museum created this huge problem for itself, but more importantly, for contemporary Romania. Ever since the feeling of irritation has been kept alive.

FW

We refer to 4 percent of the whole building, approximately.

MP

But if we don't discuss it, nobody will. The issue is too important not to be taken up.

MM

The building can be bombarded with projects. It can be attacked creatively. Not only by MNAC, which is just one of its gateways. In 1996, when the parliament moved in, a competition was held that asked for suggestions as to the future of the building. Some suggested to blow it up or demolish it. Instead, bombarding it with projects is the best solution.

Jan van Eyck Academie, Maastricht,
September 12, 2006

FOREVERISM

Horizons

Mihnea Mircan

In a passionate quest for the ‘spastic segments’ of its national soul, the Romania of the near-future gets lost in a wilderness of monuments that grow obsolete as fast as they multiply. From the Babylonian captivity of dictatorship to the public art of Babel.

2019

Thirty years after the fall of the Iron Curtain,

Romania seems intent to verify Winston Churchill's dictum that 'the Balkans produce more history than they can consume.' The country has embarked upon an infinitely complex negotiation with its identity, a polymorphous attempt to locate, visualize and mend the agonizing fissures and spastic segments of its soul. If 1989 plunged Romania into a social whirlpool where globalization and post-communism complicated each other, 2008 marked the advent of another era, with the monuments commemorating it already in place. This could be an overcompensation for the suppression of history during communism, or linked to the dismal sense of insecurity that pervaded the new democracy after 2008. For now, a surplus of history appears to be haunting the country's psyche.

The story of this trend starts with the first—and predictably the only—revolution broadcast live on television, an extremely ambiguous event precisely because of its televisual transparency. The revolution leaves behind an immense visual data bank of making-ofs, contradictory interviews, inconclusive episodes, incongruous tracking shots still awaiting a director's cut: the sense and cohesion that would make it amount to a film. At the foundation of Romanian democracy lies the enigma of an uprising with a few thousand victims and no culprits—the fits and starts of the colossal societal transformation that followed hinge upon it. When a new political class emerged from the second rank of the Communist regime, it systematically confused administrative power and economic advantage. As everywhere else in Eastern Europe, democratic politicians proceeded to selectively eradicate the signs of Communist authority from the public domain, had their share of Freudian slips and engaged in their own acts of monumental self-congratulation. Accession to NATO and the European Union was painfully doubled by the *Sturm und Drang* of nationalism, while quasi-mystical geopolitical mandates featured prominently in all successful electoral agendas. Mapping the distance between East and West has always been a crucial matter for the East, a set of anxious political or cultural gestures whereby the East deplores its own marginality in a way that unmistakably recalls Achilles from Zeno's paradox, forever left behind by the tortoise. Following its European integration, Romania was left prey to its own 'map envy': it found itself in Europe and, in

uncorporate identity—horizons

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CORRUPTION
mph

the absence of the iconographic framework it craved, was denied inscription in the symbolic texture of the world, incapable of visualizing its belonging and allegiances.

Eastern European countries followed divergent paths after 2009, when the forces of international trade intersected disastrously with local experiments in market liberalization, generally insular and inexpert. Neo-liberal discourse lost a significant percentage of its credibility: the gap between Romania's active participation in the world market and what it had to suffer in its meltdown was too glaring. A resentful sense of irrelevance exploded throughout the East after 2009. Warding it off presupposed different national strategies—in Romania it took the form of history. Romania engaged in an unusual celebration of its past. The saga of the monuments, although some might call it a tragedy, equipped as it was with its hubris and anticlimax, has brought politics and the arts into an interplay so intricate it might remind the scholar of the Renaissance, though cynics might draw other conclusions. The frenzy of monument-building has been alternately described as 'the understandable need for collective solace in times of global anxiety,' 'reinventing the tradition of great builders of the nation,' or as a 'shallow scenography of absent solidarity.' It has been held up as an art-historical enigma and labeled 'retrofuturism in reverse.' In spite of the ideological differences that underscore these claims, almost all political forces and cultural actors in the country have had their share in the 'transformation of the cityscape into a wedding cake,' as an artist remarked to me while we took part in one of the countless, and more and more poorly choreographed, unveiling ceremonies. Untangling these misalliances will require not only the acumen of historians and sociologists, but also their painstaking work, as one critic calculated a baffling total of two hundred fifty-three monuments built in the last decade.

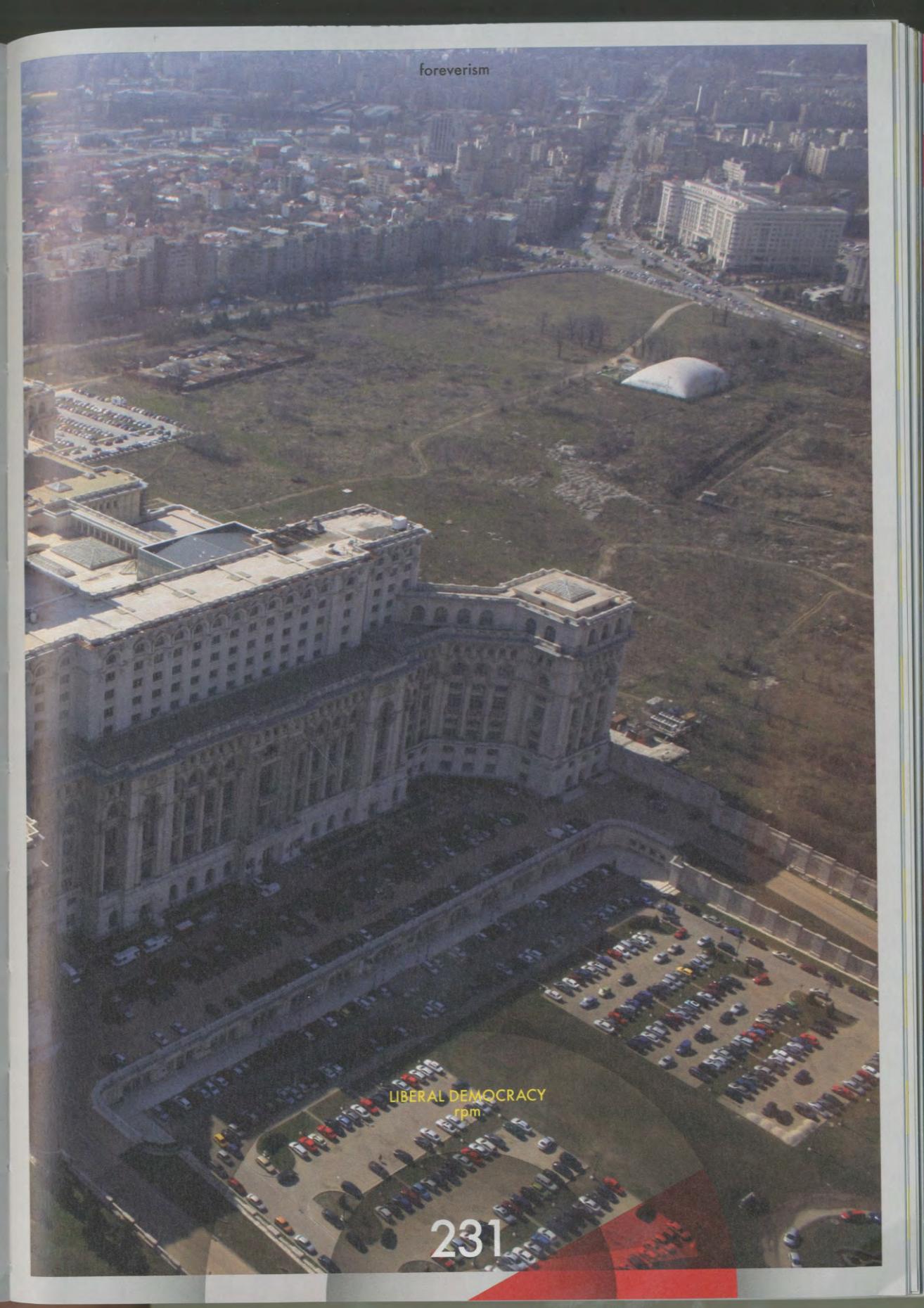
Tourists invaded Romania. Their much less numerous predecessors had been lured by another object resulting from the sublime ambition of politics, the melancholic disaster that is the House of the People in Bucharest, second only to the Pentagon in size but vastly surpassing any other recent construction in its megalomaniac disregard of scale and necessity. When this misshapen crown jewel was replaced by monuments as exotic decoys, tourists flooded cities gridlocked by networks of signs or symbols of the recent and distant past, of utopian or simply confused futures, by statues to local legends and grandiose epitaphs to Romanian patriots. So did a variety of international organizations, eager to stage their events against this very literal panorama of history made visible. Taken to the level of state policy and suggesting a Marshall Plan for the memosphere, this uninhibited excavation of history for the relics of social meaning resulted in a dense map of landmarks

and obstructions, in an often delirious enactment of past achievements and contemporary struggles. Yet the story of monuments begins in the queasy proximity of the House of the People, in its magnetic capacity to attract and constellate social symptoms.

The House, now Palace of the Parliament, mausoleum of brutality and failure as well as citadel guarding the transparent secret of that brutality, was the object of an unchallenged repossession by Romania's democratic powers, based on a rhetoric perversely continuous with what communist propaganda would have had to say to say about the edifice. If the House is the product of the constructive genius of the nation, the rarely explicit argument ran, the nation's democratic element is entitled to it, while the rest is to be locked outside its gates. Security around the edifice was maintained, its isolation from the life of the city was reinforced, and the House remained a flaccid expression of absolute power, a triumphant and empty interdiction addressed to the city. It looks and feels like an open wound pricked daily. Its resilience relies only partly on the political game of real estate that brought in the new occupants—it also stems from the preternatural capacity for ambivalence Romanians have. Not that they cannot produce sufficient quantities of dynamite, architectural expertise or revolutionary pathos; it's rather that they cannot get themselves to hate it enough, or resist the complex of superiority the House embodies.

When, in 2010, after lengthy debates and meticulously orchestrated lapses of silence,

the Romanian Orthodox Church started building a Cathedral of National Redemption on the lawn behind the House of the People, the problem reached an unexpected level of complexity. Why and how a project from the end of the 19th century was reactivated in the 21st is beyond the purpose of this text. Suffice it to say that religious populism rose to the challenge of its immediate neighbor, and matched it in ideological opacity. Apart from the protests of the elite—feeble, at least by comparison to the enormity of the initiative—the only serious impediment to the construction was that the foundation of the Cathedral would affect the underground defense tunnels spreading from the House towards other locations vital for national security. The obstacle was overcome and disparate realities were resolutely conflated.

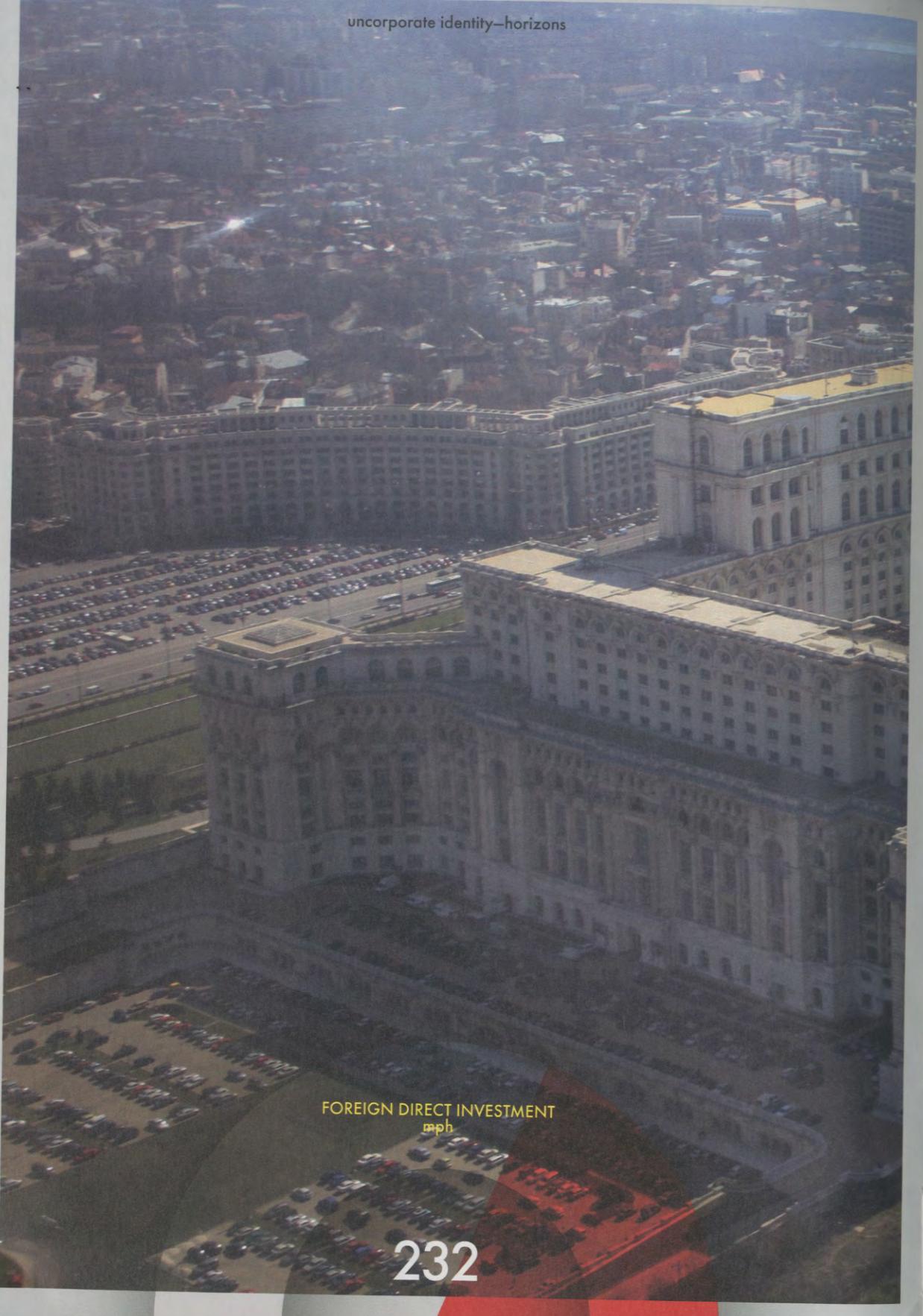


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The magnitude of the new construction is removed from the typologies of religious architecture in Orthodox faith and made to adhere to the gigantic abuses of communist urbanism, which it could only surpass in height. It rises to 114 meters and can accommodate 5500 souls in search of absolution. This synecdoche of national elevation was only achieved at the 2014 inauguration; then the Cathedral was promptly deserted, left to its own gaudy and awkward bigness, patrolled by un-uniformed, distrustful security guards and chirping with melodic sermons.

For the casual visitor to the site, the monumental stupor at work here holds the two buildings apart in spite of their similarities. A transnational precedent for this armistice between absolutisms is perhaps the 1937 Universal Exhibition in Paris, where Boris Iofan and Vera Mukhina's declaration of collectivist strength withstood Albert Speer's neoclassical onslaught. In a way equally indebted to Byzantine tradition and to Communist propaganda, Romania has fabricated both interlocutors: the House can claim democratic openness, the Church that it re-founds solidarity on the empty pedestals left behind by Communism. The interlocutors speak variations of the same idiom, and through their conversation, the future does not cease to come from the past. The Angel of History moves backwards. House, Cathedral and the ideological DMZ between them, not large enough to either qualify as historical distance or allow the city to infiltrate the site, create an image of Romania oscillating between a 'retro' side that is perfectly medieval and a 'metro' side that inexplicably fuses with the former. There is a precise and pointless dialectics between the two edifices, where the buildings enter into a relation of pure, implacable revisionism with each other. This is the puzzle that Romania assigned itself the task of solving: two life-size replicas of the same phantasmal object, a machine to stifle nuance and bury degrees of separation under slabs of concrete, an ominous silence in response to the country's fundamental question about itself—or a devastating answer.

A frenzy of construction with both public and private, clean and dirty, local and European money followed the spiritual crisis of 2014.

With their incompatible aesthetic and political criteria, Romania's legions of monuments could also be seen as scores of paradoxes. There were numerous instances of misused monuments, their intentions inadvertently or purposefully misread, or whose stories became illegible as expeditiously as they were manufactured. A monument to Communist dissidence, a six-hundred-square-meter, minimally inflected container that would have felt like a refuge were it not imbued with such a cavernous sense of nothingness, went through so many episodes of misuse (in majority squalid) that it was de-commissioned after a short-lived scandal. Heroes were commemorated and their memory was desecrated at phenomenal speed. Hazy abstractions and musical instruments, a boxer and a taxi driver, dubious politicians and football players, history itself, friendship, Romanian hospitality or international concord, saints and Roman generals, all these and more could be glimpsed in the city's swollen fabric. The War of Independence ranked highest, yet even the most optimistic supporters of national self-expression, sharing their version of 'Jung for Dummies' on prime-time television, could not persuade themselves that these exultant tombstones had anything to do with a re-articulated sense of collective identity.

In 2017, a jollier picture was painted

in the survey organized at Guggenheim Bucharest, where Romania's new monumentality was hailed as a singular art-historical incident, while its tentative typology was obfuscated by the sheer diversity of the visual material. The selection pushed traditional monuments to the background and gave prominence to the oblique, the urban and the 'cutting-edge,' to projects that doubted the pretensions and legitimacy of the monumental while vigorously pursuing its benefits. There was a profusion of plans, photographs, models, and statements for monuments, built or not, that were supposed to revolve, be dismantled or disappear, that emitted sounds at certain hours, that registered and archived feelings and memories of more and more vaguely configured communities; there were dots to be rearranged in collective games, monuments constructed through subjective response, spheres and heaps, monuments mobile, underground or hovering above the floor in electromagnetic equilibrium. The 'world's smallest monument' was exhibited in the garden of the museum. Manifestos commemorated their own radicality, other works



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documented conscientiously their own impermanence. ‘Communism never happened,’ read a gigantic text installed on the wall facing the entrance to the museum.

The Guggenheim exhibit forced artistic credibility—and continuity with a wider market for memory engaged artistically—upon objects that, essentially, originated elsewhere than in the artist’s studio. They were the provisos, hesitations, warnings, stutters, vertiginous dashes, micro-thoughts, hyperactive flickers, metaphors and meta-thoughts in a complex process of collective recalibration whose actual vectors and effects are not yet in sight. To us, working on the present issue of the journal and thinking about the chronic atomization of our post-crisis world, the images that follow indicate that a large—and, possibly, sociologically representative—number of people are swimming in a sea of oblivion, grasping for shared values to keep them afloat. How they would define the commonality of those values, or the shore and its comforts, in whose company they prefer to swim and whom they would rather see drown, were questions less relevant for our current purposes. Neither have we tried to articulate an iconography of Romania’s struggles with itself, nor do we believe the following pages frame their objects ironically, with the distance of our self-assuredness. The selection pits Romania’s monumental surge against the metonyms and metaphors we would use to account for our position at this historical juncture, to the same extent that photographs of the revolution answered our desires and anxieties in 1989. Romanian philosophers have always suspected the East might be something of a history simulator, a laboratory for European future to the same extent that it is a museum for its political history. If there is any truth to such claims, the feverish production of monuments in Romania prepares the ground for reflection.

This is a revised and expanded version of ‘Monumental Backlash. Report from Bucharest,’ published in the catalog of the exhibition ‘Brave New Worlds,’ Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, 2007.

retroactive announcement

JANUARY 11, 2007

REGIMES OF

ORGANIZED BY METAHAVEN WITH
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REPRESENTATION

ART AND POLITICS BEYOND
THE HOUSE OF PEOPLE

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MNAC,
BUCHAREST

JANUARY 11,
2007

REGIMES OF REPRESENTATION

NICOLAS BOUARD
ART AND POLITICS BEYOND
THE HOUSE OF PEOPLE

AUDIENCE

CHANTAL MOUFFE

AUDIENCE

AUDIENCE

CHANTAL MOUFFE

LECTURE IN BUCHAREST
11 JANUARY 2007

AGONISM and PUBLIC SPACE

In a talk during 'Regimes of Representation,' Chantal Mouffe rehearses some of her primary concepts, such as the distinction between politics and the political, agonistic democracy, and the contingency of the 'we/them' relation that enables both politics and the public to come into being.

As this is my first visit to Bucharest and I have never seen this building before, I won't be able to address directly the question of the House of People, but what I want to do is present some reflections on the idea of the public, which hopefully will be useful to the discussion that we are going to have during this symposium.

There are in fact two different meanings of 'public' that one can roughly distinguish: public in the sense of what is in German referred to as *Öffentlichkeit*—German can help us much better than English to understand the different meanings of the public, because then there is also the meaning of public as audience, what in German is public as *Publikum*. In fact, both meanings are of interest for the kind of reflection which I present this morning. As we will see later, they should in fact be envisaged as two sides in the process of discursive construction. It's clear, for instance, that through the establishment of a certain type of public space—*Öffentlichkeit*—artistic practices contribute to the creation of a determined public, a specific audience. Public art is not, according to my approach, art in the public space, but art that constitutes a space of common action among people. One of the questions that I want to address is for instance what kind of public in the sense of *Publikum* should progressive art institutions try to constitute and what kind of public spaces are needed to that effect.

ÖFFENTLICHKEIT

Let's begin by scrutinizing the public as *Öffentlichkeit*. Since I am a political philosopher, this is of course the theme on which I have more to contribute, but at the end I will also present some reflections about the public as audience.

As *Öffentlichkeit*, the term public is usually opposed to private. But of course its meaning differs according to the different contexts in which this opposition public/private is inscribed. I think we can, broadly speaking, distinguish the public by three main contexts which can be specified on the basis of this one opposition: for instance, there is the public as what is *common*, what is *general* as opposed to private as *particular* and *individual*; then there is public in the sense of publicity as what is *visible* and *manifest*, as opposed to private as what is *secret*. And then we've got public as *accessible*, *open* and in this case it is opposed to private as *closed*. Those different meanings are of course related, but I think they do not overlap—one thing for instance can be public in one of the senses while not in the others: the contexts are specific and that is why they should be distinguished. Moreover, the form of articulation between the three senses have varied

historically from the time of the Greek polis where the common, the visible and the open were united in constituting the meaning of public, until a new type of separation between the public and the private came about through the establishment of the state. A separation which is later increasingly undermined by the encroachment of the market in the realm of the public.

What interests me in those different uses of the concept is, of course, the reference to democratic politics in the sense of the common, publicity or openness and it is the aspect that I want to emphasize in the reflection that I am going to develop focusing on the idea of the public space. As far as I'm concerned, what is at stake in this debate is the kind of public space that those who want to foster a radical democratic project should try to establish. And the alternatives are: should it be a space of deliberation and consensus or should it be a space of agonistic confrontation?

To begin with, I need to delineate the theoretical framework which will inform my approach. Its main tenets have been developed in my previous works and here I will limit myself to those that are relevant for my argument about the public. Let's start with the distinction I once proposed to make between politics and the political. In ordinary language it's not

very common to speak of the political, but I think that such a distinction opens important avenues for reflection and in fact a variety of political theorists are making it. The difficulty, though, is that no agreement exists among those who are making the distinction and that creates a certain confusion. Commonalities exist however, which can provide some point of orientation. For instance, those who make the distinction between *the politics* and *the political*—or in French *le politique* and *la politique*—in fact accept that there is a difference between political signs which deal with the empirical field of politics and political theory, which is the domain of the philosopher who inquires not about the facts of politics, but about the specificity, the nature of the political. Well, if we wanted to express such a distinction in a philosophical way, we could for instance, borrowing the vocabulary of Heidegger, say that politics refer to the ontic level, while the political has to do with the ontological one. This means that the ontic has to do with the manifold practices of conventional politics, while the ontological concerns the very way in which society is symbolically instituted.

POLITICS AND THE POLITICAL

But of course this still leaves the possibility of a lot of disagreement about what constitutes the political and this has very important

consequences for the way the public is envisioned. Some theorists like Hannah Arendt envisioned the political as a space of freedom and public deliberation, while others see it as a space of power conflict and antagonism. I must make clear at the outset that my understanding of the political clearly belongs to the second perspective: as conflict, antagonism.

More precisely, this is how I distinguish between the political and politics. By the political I refer to the dimension of antagonism, which I take to be constitutive of human societies, while by politics I refer to the set of practices and institutions through which an order that organizes human coexistence is created, but always in the context of conflict, which is provided by the political.

ANTAGONISM

I now want to take a point of departure for my reflection about the public space. This point of departure I take to be our current incapacity to envision the problem facing our societies in a truly political way. Political questions are not mere technical issues to be solved by experts: properly political questions always involve decisions which require us to make a choice. This incapacity to think politically is, I think, to a great extent due to the uncontested hegemony of liberalism. Here of course I also need to clarify that in the way I use the term in the present context, I don't refer to economic liberalism, but to a philosophical discourse with many variants, united not by a common essence, but by a multiplicity of what Wittgenstein called 'family resemblances.'

There are, to be sure, many liberalisms, some more progressive than others, but save a few exceptions the dominant tendency in liberal thought is characterized by a rationalist and individualized approach, which is unable to adequately grasp the pluralism of the social world with all the conflict that this pluralism entails—conflicts for which no rational solution could ever exist—and the dimension of antagonism that characterizes human society.

The typical liberal understanding of pluralism is that we live in a world where there are indeed many perspectives and values and that, due to empirical limitations, we will never be able to adopt

all those perspectives and values, but when put together, those perspectives and values constitute a harmonious and non-conflictual ensemble. And this is why this type of liberalism must negate the political in its antagonistic dimension; indeed, one of the main tenets of this liberalism is the rationalist belief in the availability of an universal consensus that would be based on reason. No wonder that the political constitutes its blind spot. Liberalism tries to negate antagonism, since by bringing to the fore the

inescapable moment of decision—and here I use the term decision in the way Derrida refers to decision: the fact that we have to decide in an 'undecidable' terrain (that is what a real decision is and this is what antagonism brings to the fore)—it reveals the very limit of any rational consensus.

When we examine the different perspectives existing within contemporary liberal thought, we can distinguish two main paradigms: the first one which is sometimes called 'aggregative' democracy, envisions politics as the establishment of a compromise between competing forces in society: individuals are portrayed as rational beings driven by the maximization of their own interests and thus acting in the political world in a basically instrumental way. It is in fact the idea of the market applied to the domain of politics, which is apprehended with concepts borrowed from economics. The other paradigm, which is called the deliberative paradigm, was developed in reaction against this instrumentalist model and aims at a link between morality and politics. Its advocates want to replace instrumentalist rationality by communicative rationality. Two of these advocates are John Rawls and Jürgen Habermas. They present political debate as a specific field of application of morality and believe that it is possible to create in the realm of politics a rational moral consensus by means of free discussion. In this case politics is not conflated with economics, but with ethics or morality. But in both cases what is ignored by these rationalist approaches—one instrumental, the other communicative—what is the crucial role played in the field of politics by what I propose to call *passion*. By that I do not refer to emotion, but to the affective dimension which is central in the constitution of collective forms of identification.

Without this identification, it is impossible to grasp the construction of political identities. Political identities are always collective identities and this is another reason why liberalism is not able to grasp the specificity of the political, because of its methodological individualism. In politics we are always dealing with collective identities and we are always dealing with a *we* as opposed to a *them*—and this is why, as I will show in a moment, antagonism cannot be eliminated. I contend that it is only when we acknowledge the political in its antagonistic dimension that we can pose the central question for democratic politics and this question is neither how to negotiate a compromise among competing interests, nor is it how to reach a rational or a fully inclusive consensus, a consensus that would be without any exclusion, as liberal theorists would have it. Despite what many liberals want us to believe, the specificity of democratic politics is not the overcoming of the '*we/them*' opposition, but the different way in which this opposition is established. What democracy requires is drawing the '*we/them*' distinction in a way which is compatible with the recognition of pluralism, which is constitutive of modern democracy.

In developing this point—because I know people normally react very negatively when I say politics is necessarily about the '*we/them*' opposition—I think what can really justify that is, for instance, the notion of the *constitutive outside*. This notion is particularly useful because it unveils what is really at stake in the constitution of identity—of any identity, but of course also collective identities. This term '*constitutive outside*' has been proposed by the American philosopher Henry Staten, in a book called *Wittgenstein and Derrida*.

He proposed this term to refer to a number of themes that have been developed by Jacques Derrida around notions like *supplément*, *trace*, *differance*, and the aim of Staten is to highlight the fact that all those notions refer to one idea: to bring to the fore the fact that the creation of an identity always implies the establishment of a difference: difference that is often constructed, as Derrida shows, on the basis of hierarchy, for instance between form and matter, black and white, man and woman.

Every identity is relational, and the affirmation of difference is a precondition for the existence of any identity, at the most abstract level. This is not necessarily in terms of personal or collective identity; any form of objectivity only exists by the affirmation of a difference. Basically what is at stake is the perception of something other that constitutes the exterior, and this is what is called the constitutive outside. Once we have understood that, then I think we can understand why in the field of politics where we are concerned always with the constitution of a *we*, a collective identity, this can only exist by the determination of a *them*. This does not mean of course that such a 'we/ them' relation is necessarily one of friend and enemy, a kind of antagonistic relation, but we should realize that in certain conditions there is always the possibility that this 'we/ them' relation, which can simply be a relation of difference, can become antagonistic. This happens for instance when the *them* is perceived—and this can be real or just 'phantasmatic'—as putting into question the identity of the *we*; is threatening its existence. From that moment on—I think a very good example of that is the disintegration of

Yugoslavia—we can see that any form of 'we/ them' relation, be it religious, ethnic, economic or another, becomes the locus of an antagonism. It seems to go from a question of pure difference to become an antagonistic relation.

Let's draw a first theoretical conclusion from the previous reflection. What can be asserted at this stage is that the 'we/ them' distinction, which is the condition of possibility for the formation of political identities, can always become the locus of an antagonism. Since all forms of political identities entail 'we/ them' distinctions, this means that the possibility of antagonism emerging can never be eliminated. It is therefore an illusion to believe in the advent of a society from which antagonism would have been eradicated. Antagonism is an ever-present possibility. Another way to put it: the political belongs to our ontological condition. And as we are going in a moment to envision public space, this is of course something that must be taken into account.

HEGEMONY

Next to antagonism, the concept of *hegemony* is, in my approach, the other key notion to address the question of the political. To acknowledge the dimension of the political as the ever-present possibility of antagonism requires coming to terms with the lack of a final ground and the 'undecidability'

which pervades every order. It requires, in other words, recognizing the hegemonic nature of every kind of social order; that is, the fact that every society is the product of a series of practices attempting to establish an order in a context of contingency. The political is linked to those acts of hegemonic institutionalization. Society is not to be seen as the unfolding of a logic exterior to itself, whatever the source of this logic could be: forces of production, development of the spirit, law of history, etc. Every order is in fact a temporary and precarious articulation of contingent practices. Things could always be otherwise and therefore every order is predicated on the exclusion of other possibilities. It is in that sense that it can be called political, since it is the expression of a particular structure of power relations. Power is constitutive of the social, because the social could not exist without the power relations which gives a specific shape to the social. What is considered at a given moment as the natural order, along with the common sense which accompanies this order, is in fact always the result of what we can call 'sedimented' hegemonic practices. It is never the manifestation of a deeper objectivity that would be exterior to the practices that brings it into being.

Let's resume this point: every order is political and is based on some form of exclusion. There are always other possibilities that have been repressed and that can be reactivated. The 'articulatory' practices through which a certain order is established and the meaning of social institutions is fixed is what I call hegemonic practices.

Every hegemonic order is susceptible to being challenged by counter-hegemonic practices. Practices that will attempt to disarticulate the existing order, so as to install another form of hegemony. As far as collective identities are concerned, we find ourselves in a similar situation. Identities are always the results of processes of identification and they can never be completely fixed. We are never confronted with a 'we/them' opposition expressing an essentialist identity that would pre-exist the process of identification. Moreover, since I have stressed that the them represent the condition of the possibility of the we, what we have called 'the constitutive outside,' this means that the constitution of a specific 'we' always depends on the type of 'them' from which it is differentiated. And this is a crucial point because it allows us to envisage the possibility of a different type of 'we/them' relation according to the different ways in which the 'them' is constructed.

What are the consequences of this for democratic politics? Once the ever-present possibility of antagonism is acknowledged, one can understand, I think, why one of the main tasks for democratic politics consists in defusing the potential antagonism that exists in social relations. If we accept that this cannot be done by transcending the 'we/them' relation, but only by constructing it in a different way, then the following question arises. What could constitute a, so to speak, sublimated relation of antagonism? What sort of 'we/them' would it imply? How could conflict be accepted as legitimate and at the same time take a form that will not destroy the political association, I mean, a form that will not be an antagonistic one?

AGONISM: COMMON BONDS

This requires that some kind of common bond exist between the parties in conflict, so that they will not treat their opponents as enemies to be eradicated, seeing their demands as illegitimate—precisely what happens when we have an antagonistic friend and enemy relation. However, the opponents cannot simply be seen as competitors whose interest can be dealt with through mere negotiation or reconciled through deliberation, because in that case the antagonistic element would simply have been eliminated. If we want to acknowledge on the one side the permanence of the antagonistic element of conflict, and on the other side allow for the possibility of its taming, we need to envisage a third type of relation and this is the type of relation which I have proposed to call agonism.

While antagonism is a 'we/them' relation in which the two sides are enemies who do not share any common ground, agonism is a 'we/ them' relation where the conflicting parties, although acknowledging that there is no rational solution to their conflict, nevertheless recognize the legitimacy of their opponents: they are adversaries, not enemies. It means that, while in conflict, they nevertheless see themselves as belonging to the same political association, sharing a common symbolic space within which the conflict takes place. What is at stake in this agonistic struggle is the very configuration of power relations around which a given society is structured. It is in fact a struggle between opposing hegemonic projects, which can never be reconciled rationally. So this is why the antagonistic dimension is always present;

it is a real confrontation but one which is played out under conditions regulated by a set of democratic procedures which are accepted by the adversaries.

An agonistic conception of democracy acknowledges the contingent character of the hegemonic political-economic articulations which determine the specific configuration of a society at a given moment. They are precarious and pragmatic constructions which can be disarticulated and transformed as the result of the agonistic struggle among adversaries. Contrary to the values of liberal models, the agonistic approach that I am advocating recognizes that society is always politically instituted and never forgets that the terrain in which hegemonic intervention takes place is always the outcome of previous hegemonic practices. It's never a neutral terrain, which is why it denies the possibility of a non-adversarial democratic politics and criticizes those who, by ignoring this dimension of the political, reduce politics to a set of supposedly technical moves and neutral procedure. That's for the basic theoretical framework.

But it's time now to examine what are the consequences of the agonistic model of democratic politics for envisaging the public space.

Well, the most important consequence is that it challenges the widespread conception that—albeit in different ways—informs most visions of the public space, which conceive it as the terrain where consensus can emerge. For the agonistic model, on the contrary, the public space is the battle ground where different hegemonic projects are confronted without any possibility of reconciliation.

I have spoken so far of the public space, but I need to specify straightaway that we are not dealing here with one single space. According to the agonistic approach, public spaces are always plural and the agonistic confrontation takes place on a multiplicity of discursive surfaces. I also want to insist on a second important point: while there is no underlying principle of unity, not one predetermined center to this diversity of spaces, there always exist diverse forms of articulation among them, and we are never faced with the kind of dispersion envisaged by some postmodernist thinkers, nor are we dealing with the kind of smooth space found in Deleuze and his followers. Public spaces are always created and hegemonically structured. The given hegemony results from a specific articulation of a diversity of spaces and this means that the hegemonic struggle also consists in the attempt to create a different form of articulation among public spaces, so it's not only within the spaces, but also in the relation among the different public spaces.

My approach is therefore very different from the one defended by Jürgen Habermas who, when he envisages the political public space, which of course he called the public sphere, presents it as a space where deliberation aiming at a rational consensus takes place. To be sure, Habermas knows that it is very improbable, given the limitations of social life, that such a consensus can effectively be reached and he sees his ideal situation of communication as a regulative idea. However, according to the perspective that I am advocating, the impediments to the Habermasian ideal-speech-situation are not empirical but ontological and the rational consensus that he presents as a regulative idea is in fact a conceptual impossibility. Indeed it would require the availability of a consensus without exclusion, of a *we* without a *them*, which is precisely what I have assessed as impossible.

I also want to indicate that despite our similar terminology—which has led to some confusion as well—my conception of the agonistic public space differs from the one of Hannah Arendt which has become so popular recently. In my view, the main problem with the Arendtian understanding of agonism, is, to put it in a nutshell, that it is an *agonism without antagonism*. What I mean is that while Arendt puts great emphasis on human plurality and insists that politics deal with the community and reciprocity of human beings who are different, she never acknowledges that this plurality is the origin of antagonistic conflicts. According to her, to think politically, is to develop the ability to see things from a multiplicity of perspectives. As the reference to Kant and

his idea of 'enlarged thought', testifies, Arendt's pluralism is not fundamentally different from the liberal one, because it is also inscribed in the horizon of an 'intersubjective agreement.' Indeed what she looks for in Kant's doctrine of aesthetic judgment is a procedure for ascertaining intersubjective agreement in the public space.

'CRITICAL ART'

Despite significant differences, which of course I don't want to deny, between the respective approaches, Arendt ends up, like Habermas, envisaging the public space in a consensual way. To be sure, in her case the consensus results from the exchange of voices and opinions (the Greek sense of *doxa*), not from rational discourse like in Habermas. While for Habermas consensus emerges through what Kant called *disputieren*, an exchange of logical arguments, for Arendt it is a question of *streiten*, where agreement is produced through persuasion, not through irrefutable proof. However, neither of them is able to acknowledge the hegemonic nature of every form of consensus and the irreducibility of antagonism, the moment of what Lyotard refers to as *le différend*. It is symptomatic that despite finding their inspiration in different aspects of Kant's philosophy, what both Arendt and Habermas have in common is the privileging in Kant's Aesthetic of the aspect of the Beautiful and to ignore his reflection on the Sublime,

and I think that this is clearly related to their avoidance of *le différend*.

Now I would like to share with you some thoughts concerning the relation between the public space and the other meaning of public as audience. It is clear that we are not dealing with two pre-constituted entities facing each other, but that there exists a relation of mutual implication. The very identity of a given public space is a function of its public and, reciprocally, the identity of the public is at stake in the way the public space is constructed. Since I am focusing here on the political aspect of this relation, the question that I would like to address concerns the implications of this discursive construction for the political role that progressive critical art practices could play.

I want to stress at the outset that when I think of the relation between art and politics, I do not see it in terms of two separately constituted fields: art on one side and politics on the other, with no relation among them—and between which a relation would need to be established. I think that there is an aesthetic dimension in the political and that there is a political dimension in art and this is why I never like to speak of 'political art' as if there was art that is not political at all, because I consider that in fact we cannot make a distinction between political and non-political art.

From the point of view of the theory of hegemony, artistic practices always play a role, in the constitution and maintenance of a given symbolic order or through challenging it. And this is why they necessarily have a political dimension. The political, for its part, concerns the symbolic ordering of social relations, what Claude Lefort called *la mise en scène*, *la mise en forme* of human coexistence, and this is where its aesthetic dimension lies.

So the real issue concerns, I think, the possible form of what I call 'critical art,' the different ways artistic practices can contribute to the questioning of a dominant hegemony. Once we accept that identities are never pre-given, but that they are always the result of processes of identification, that they are always discursively constructed, the question that arises is the type of identity that critical artistic practices should aim at 'fostering.' Clearly, those who advocate the creation of an agonistic public space where the objective is to unveil all that is repressed by the dominant consensus, those people are going to envisage the relation between artistic practices and their public in a very different way than those whose objective is the creation of consensus, even if this consensus is seen as a critical one, and this is why I really am very suspicious of the current tendency to promote

what is called 'commemorative art,' even when it is a very progressive and critical kind of commemoration. Because precisely even when the intention is a critical one, this type of art tends to impose one accepted way of seeing things, instead of opening up the debate and facilitating an agonistic confrontation.

According to the agonistic approach, critical art is art that forms dissent, that makes visible what the dominant consensus tends to obscure or tries to obliterate. I do not think however that critical art only consists in a manifestation of refusal, that it should be the expression of an absolute negation, testimony of the intractable, or of the 'unrepresentable,' as some would have it. I think that there is in fact some infatuation with the idea of the Sublime which leads some to dismiss the importance of proposing new modes of coexistence, of contributing to the construction of new forms of collective identity. To put it another way, we could say that there is sometimes too much emphasis on the process of 'disidentification,' at the expense of re-identification. This perspective of disidentification, of destruction, of absolute negation, while claiming to be very radical, in my view remains trapped within a very deterministic framework,

according to which the negative gesture in itself is enough to bring about the emergence of a new form of subjectivity, as if this subjectivity was already latent, ready to emerge as soon as the weight of the dominant ideology is lifted. I think that such a conception is really completely anti-political: it fails to come to terms with the nature of the hegemonic struggle and the manifold of practices, discourses and language games through which identities are constituted.

And this is why I am really convinced that only by recognizing the need for a plural form of intervention, taking place in a variety of public spaces, can artistic critical practices contribute to a variety of agonistic public space where a radical and plural conception of democracy could be fostered.

FORM

Strategic Studies

Pier Vittorio Aureli
Boris Groys
Marina Vishmidt
Metahaven

Conversation

What is the status of form in the topography of power relations in built spaces, from boom cities to art installations? How does form both conceal and reveal, and how can an object like the iPhone come to represent the political predicament of our day?

Boris Groys and Pier Vittorio Aureli enter into discussion with Metahaven and Marina Vishmidt.

MARINA VISHMIDT

In your recent text 'The Politics of Installation,' Boris, you address the art installation as a kind of space of sublimation, where the viewer enters into a strict rule-bound space demarcated by the sovereign subjectivity of the artist and the institution. Here, there seems to be an immanent relation between form and freedom, inasmuch as there has to be a rigorous concept of space and form in order for experimentation with aesthetics, politics or ethics to take place—as opposed to the democratic-capitalist pluralism of the exhibition where objects are simply united by the institutional context of being art objects, and the freedom of the viewer is simply to navigate the display.

This dialectic between power and freedom is something that is also integral to your thinking of architecture and the political, Pier Vittorio. And Metahaven's approach to design and geopolitics is concerned to break open the ossified relations between the 'soft power' of flexibility and regimes of control, pursued through highly formal, iconographic strategies. The design of space carries a very specific ideological weight. As an initial and general question, how would you reflect on the production of space as a regime of power, both in the contemporary political-economic conjuncture of 'crisis,' and in your own work?

BORIS GROYS

It seems to me that installation art and participatory practices in art ultimately refer to the 20th century's experience of a totalitarian space in which there is no outside, no external position any more. This all-inclusive space makes impossible a contemplative position, a position that would be reserved for a non-engaged spectator. Such a space of total participation is fascinating, even ecstatic and dangerous at the same time. A democratic state of the Western type also has this participatory dimension; here also an individual tends to be completely dissolved in the networks of social communication. But at the same time the Western model presupposes a certain trans-democratic dimension of privacy that is experienced by an individual time and again as source of isolation, alienation and deprivation. That is why many authors—such as, for example, Nietzsche or Bataille—were ready to accept a radical violence to overcome the plight of privacy. Communism tried to realize this desire of total space—and failed. But this failure offered a possibility to realize this desire by the means of art. In this sense any of today's participatory art is post-Communist by nature.

Now it is true: by dissolving one's own form in the totalitarian space a spectator begins to contribute to the formation of this space. Everything that an individual is and

does is symbolically confiscated by a power that has sovereignty over the territory on which this individual lives: whatever this individual produces is interpreted as a contribution to French, American or Russian culture if this individual happens to live on the French, American or Russian territory. Installation art functions in the same way. The behavior of a spectator is automatically interpreted as a contribution to the installation's form. Every building is, of course, also a kind of exhibition object. And urban space is also an exhibition space. Architecture is made not only for the people who are living in it but—maybe even primarily—for an international tourist who visits a city as he would visit a museum. Now one can ask to what extent a certain city functions as a regular exhibition in which a visitor is supposed to move from one object to another, or from one building to another—and to what extent a city functions as an installation that should be perceived in its totality, in which the whole space is more important than individual details. In this respect, Stalinist architecture was especially interesting because of the way in which Stalinist buildings were conceived and placed so as to completely dominate the urban space of Moscow. Also the Ceaușescu palace is interesting because of a certain gap that isolated it from the 'profane' urban space. It is

precisely this gap that organized the urban space as a total space. The totalitarian dream was always to build a city according to a unifying aesthetic plan (see Le Corbusier's project for Paris, or Speer's for Berlin). But the creation of a totalitarian urban space can be achieved also by more subtle means, namely by a reorganization which produces an impression of its aesthetic, 'installational' unity.

PIER VITTORIO AURELI

My reflection on the production of space as a regime of power departs from my interest in the formal in architecture. That is not an easy point of entry, because, as we know, the regime of production of space is irreducible to something like the form of a city or the form of a building. And yet we know that any spatial power that does not incarnate (or sublimate) itself in particular forms would not be effective since everything we know is known by 'examples' and examples are very often objects, forms; in other words, singular elements. By form I mean the possibility of distinction between an 'inside' and an 'outside' (just as the political is the distinction between friend and enemy according to the famous definition by Carl Schmitt). A form always implies a boundary and that boundary is the constitution of this inside-outside condition. Thus the topicality of form in the current regime of space

production—a regime in which, I suggest, any boundary tends to be absorbed and everything is melted in the totalitarian space of the *oikonomia* ('management')—lies in the possibility of provoking 'margins' of political difference. What I am looking for are artistic and architectural forms that push and provoke these margins of political difference. These margins do not have to be imagined as anti-institutional spaces of resistance. On the contrary, the most effective margins of political difference are often generated precisely by forms that do not conceal at all their constitutive violence, the sovereign power that is necessary to establish them. This is the reason why I'm skeptical towards both installation art, and the trend of interactivity in architecture and design. Behind their friendly rhetoric of participation, as the core of their creation and experience lies the managerial paradigm of space production disguised as the opportunity to idyllically democratize art and architecture.

METAHAVEN

Totalitarian architecture means sovereignty embodied in buildings of absurd scale, permanence and immovability, testifying to absolute power, and making that power seem eternal. Pay the price: if you really want to become history, you will do so *instantly*. Totalitarian architecture

reminds us of temples and palaces, while containing a repetitive program of government and bureaucracy—neverending corridors, meeting rooms and auditoriums, prematurely postmodern—a *Wolfenstein*¹ state, a labyrinth without a Minotaur. The formerly 'totalitarian' built world has partially survived, and is given the role of the 'stark reminder'—at best, a negative *Bilbao Effect*²—representing forces and ideologies which, in the official democratic discourse, should have been overcome.

Today sovereign power has a much harder time being pinned down to, or even being represented by, iconic buildings. It is increasingly difficult to situate power in a particular site, in a fixed location. Walls are becoming transparent, even invisible or virtual. Does architecture's capacity to constitute divisions still provide the indispensable condition to demarcate power and therefore to envision the resistance to that power? If so, can the division between friend and enemy be played out in ever more varying registers, or is there, in fact, a shortage of meaningful oppositions nowadays?

We were also intrigued by how, under Modernism, the division between inside and outside, between content and form, was recently described by Boris.³ The eradication of one would give full space to the other, Modernist design being a kind

of revolution against the façade. In today's electronics and computers, this is different. A computer interface cannot be transparent about the process that goes on in a machine.

PVA

I agree that in the way art and architecture are practiced today there is a shortage of meaningful oppositions. This has to do, I believe, with the managerial-curatorial apparatuses through which these and other spheres of cultural and social action are administered. In such a context potential oppositions are disarmed and rendered futile, naïve, or rendered in terms such as 'progressive vs. reactionary.' In politics, the same happens when the media renders enmity in terms of scenarios such as 'the clash of civilizations,' etc. Yet, in spite of all that, and in spite of the ubiquity of (economic) power and its elusiveness in assuming 'fixed' positions, I think that the possibility of enmity remains. We should of course not instigate enmity, but try to define what could be the possibilities of enmity. Potential conditions of enmity may be redefined within the relationships that articulate the complex organization of the labor force, for example. Today, in many places, many corporate and state institutions feel the urgent need to tame the pressure that comes from workers, a pressure that has increased after the recent crisis.

Though in many cases this pressure is 'passive' and not yet politically organized, it nevertheless exists and is going to increase in the years to come. Facing this situation now, many public and private institutions are busy promoting sustainable communities, and embracing the activist rhetoric of affordable housing and the like in order to absorb this pressure. Another interesting trend is the proliferation of new forms of habitat that are trying to shorten the gap between living, working, leisure, culture, and education, mixing everything in the same place, and often in the same space. These issues are going to be the very 'form' through which (economic) power will renew its domination over the city. Perhaps it would be interesting to define how within these very concrete urban formations, it is possible to define the 'cracks' that can be made in their ideological (and also aesthetic) 'smoothness.' It would be a matter of again making possible, but in new terms, the potential of enmity as a positive confrontation. It may be true that many things are becoming transparent, virtual, immaterial, and so on, but I don't believe that power—no matter how sophisticated it is—is going to be forever elusive to our critical understanding, or to our means of primary perception. I think that it will always leave traces behind, and often these traces are the very form of objects, and the very form of the city, or the very form of artworks.

that one can decipher as Boris did with his critique of the totalitarian space evoked by installations. In the ixth book of his treatise, *De Natura Rerum*, Paracelsus wrote that every physical thing in this world signals its invisible and hidden mechanisms through its form (explicitly or implicitly). Paracelsus called the science of understanding these hidden mechanisms through the visible form 'signatura, without which nothing deep can be discovered.'

MV

To return to this vexing question of 'totalitarian architecture,' there is a dimension of time also to be considered. Metahaven referred to these buildings as becoming history instantly. Instant monuments could also describe a lot of the new architecture going up in China, the Emirates, the Central Asian Republics, Moscow, and even in Western Europe, but their relation to history is different—whereas Communist giganticism strove to impose itself on the future and evoke a global, if not interplanetary, socialist future for mankind, the contemporary instant monuments pay tribute only to the ephemeral, the symbolic, the power of money—they have no pretensions to eternity, even if they exploit as much labor power in their construction as the Egyptian pyramids did. If we think about 'totalitarian' as designating a space of power without an outside

or meaningful contradiction, then we can also discuss the building boom in pre-financial crisis Beijing, Dubai, or even the cultural centers 'regenerating' de-industrialized parts of Western Europe as themselves expressions of totalitarian power, if we consider capitalism without meaningful internal or external challenges or alternatives as a species of totalitarian space. As a 'negative Bilbao effect' the edifices of Pyongyang, for instance, no longer seem so alone on a world stage where Dubai, the emblem of limitless service sector growth, is suddenly a shameful ghost-town of foreclosures and sewage washing up on the tourist beaches, the return of the repressed in the 'dreamwork' of fictitious capital. Another point of commonality is ideological interpellation—the idea of 'total mobilization' (with all its contradictions, evasions and cynicism) spans the great socialist initiatives and the agendas of sustainability and eco-consumption in present-day Western capitalism. And of course, another link could be the pre-emptive and palliative nature of both these visions of popular participation which ultimately turn out to be—paradoxically—purely formalistic (by 'formalistic' I am gesturing more towards 'fetishistic' than 'formal' in the way we've been using the term).

Now that the variety of totalitarianism described above

seems to be seriously fractured, I was wondering whether Pier Vittorio could say something further about 'cracks' and positive confrontations and what 'forms' these may take; whether Boris could elaborate some of the parallels I've drawn above in the sense of 'total mobilization' and Metahaven, about whether contemporary consumer fetish objects do not conceal their content so much as displace the form/content distinction in an age where data and context, networks, etc. are precisely the evaporation of the form/content divide insofar as they replace the notion of an authentic individual who can be connected or dispersed by the dissolution of the subject into the sum of her networks? As you argue elsewhere, this simply radicalizes the friend-enemy polarity to those within the network and those outside it—yet, by thinking of social relations and political ontologies in terms of networks and protocols, can we still really speak of form and content?

BG

Speaking about Soviet architecture—but also about Soviet culture in general—Stalin said that it had to include the best of what any culture ever produced. The architectural orthodoxy of Stalin's time condemned any building if it had a certain recognizable style, be it modern, historicist, academicist, national, international

or even eclectic. A true totalitarian architectural project should be stylistically unrecognizable, unidentifiable. It should escape any categorization. It is characteristic that Hitler also insisted on the architecture for the Third Reich being neither modern, nor traditionalist, nor eclectic. It seems that a true totalitarian architecture has to be built in the middle of nowhere—beyond any possibility of comparison. In this sense I agree that Dubai or Abu Dhabi architecture has a certain totalitarian touch—also like the architecture of Las Vegas. This architecture is built in a desert, beyond any comparison with an architectural context that is inescapable to reflect on and react to if a building has to become a part of a dense urban space. Also the Ceaușescu palace is built as in the middle of nowhere. Both Stalin and Hitler planned, as we know, to erase Moscow and Berlin before giving these cities a completely new form. A building has a certain recognizable style if it supposed to be seen from the outside, to be compared with other architectural monuments. But the totalitarian architecture is built to be seen from within—like the Moscow underground.

It seems to me that there is an important factor that makes us experience an inner space of a building as a totalitarian space—namely the air conditioning. Air conditioning means a total closure

of the architectural space. Again one has to remember Dubai, Abu Dhabi, Las Vegas but also Tokyo or Hong Kong. One can wander for a long time through these spaces and they contain everything that one needs for life—from food and all kinds of services to art exhibitions and libraries. One has an impression that one is already on Mars—and cannot leave the closed, built space containing all possibilities and conditions of human life. One could say the same about the interior space of a plane. And one could say the same about today's fashionable museum architecture that includes not only art galleries but also one or two theater stages, a cinema, a restaurant, a dance room—and maybe soon also a gym.

MH

The House of People in Bucharest combined different governmental functions of the Romanian state into one building. In order to do that, one-fifth of the old city center of Bucharest had to be razed. But after Ceaușescu, the process of 'de-politicization' of this building, which was imperative in order to gain credibility for its post-totalitarian usage, is well-illustrated by a citation from Jean-Paul Carteron, chairman of the Crans Montana Forum (a Swiss NGO): 'Let us forget today the one who ordered it and let us praise the one who created it.' He refers to the massive numbers of workers

who constructed the House of People over more than a decade. Even though the palace is monstrous, the labor devoted to its construction has made it legitimate. It is now multi-purpose, combining the house of representatives with a contemporary art museum, a conference center, storage spaces and a trade fair venue. There seems to be no end to the amount of functions this palace can accommodate.

The European Union seems to also have adopted the ghost of an 'architecture without qualities.' In the fictitious buildings depicted on the Euro bank notes, there is a vein of totalitarianism—an eclectic sculpture of sublime achievement in the middle of nowhere. Ironically, here these fictitious timeless architectures were produced by consensus.

The consumer 'fetish' products to which Marina referred have a more complex relationship between their inside and outside—'content' and 'form'—than that of earlier machines. You would be able to see and understand what the machine was doing by carefully looking at it. But calculus is beyond the visible—so what we see happening on the screens of gizmos are 'special effects,' suggestions of objects, produced by complex calculus.

A broken Mercedes Benz car can no longer be repaired at the garage because of its on-board computer—it needs to be returned to the supplier who will reset the

software rather than repair the car. This creates an analogy between, for example, a Mercedes Benz and an iPhone, as objects whose distinguishing mode of functionality is how they are being managed. Management, we argue, is not an obfuscation of more real or honest forms of power; it is a genuine manifestation of it.

Networks initially seem to hold mainly mutual benefits, even to parties who disagree. But networks also suppress alternatives by their degree of usage and popularity—and this is the way in which they may present a kind of structural coercion. If the assemblage of a political collective today depends to a large extent on the successful wielding of network power, the kind of network standard that is adopted already is a potential factor for in- or exclusion. At the same time the 'strangers' are those who do not submit to common networking protocols or who are simply not in the network at all. Amsterdam city hall talks about a 10% portion of the non-western migrant population which are 'beyond its reach.'

It would be interesting to investigate the architectural manifestations of managerial power, and the architectural forms which express decisions made on the stranger's status. Like Pier Vittorio suggests, power can be traced by the forms it leaves, so classical sovereign power and networked or managerial

power may produce different kinds of forms. Maybe the 'tensa barriers,' used for crowd control at airports, present a new, featherweight brand of totalitarian architecture ...

PVA

There is no doubt that today the network is the fundamental form of totalitarian power, since it is made of the social, cultural, and even linguistic binds that are immediately absorbed within the apparatus which allows us to work and communicate—an apparatus that is administered as the ultimate form of surplus value. This is what you rightly called 'structural coercion,' and I would even go further and say that this is the ultimate 'transcendental' coercion.

I agree that such a form of power escapes the old and abused dichotomies such as form vs. content, or even the naïve illusions of instrumentalizing the network such as 'creative commons,' 'open source' and the like. To put it simply: today the ultimate barriers are precisely the flows that grant us accessibility.

I would even say that today the very concept of accessibility, in general, must be thought as the ultimate form of closure. This is why I tend to resist the urgency felt by many theorists of urban space about focusing on 'emerging' spaces such as gated communities, borders, and so on. These are the most obvious manifestations of closure, while

closure can happen at any level of social space in our minds, that is, in our cognitive capabilities which are now immanent to capitalism. My own position is that in order to approach this situation critically—that is, to approach it without despair and naïve optimism—means precisely to change our state of mind about the city, and to rethink the very purpose of the city as a form that has *never* been unconditionally open. Only if you accept this ontological ground of the very notion of 'city-ness' then one is not constantly surprised or disappointed that to exist in urban space means to be intrinsically subjected to the condition of closure.

To talk about an open city is an oxymoron because the two words contradict each other. City is *civitas* which can only exist if there is a *lex*, a law, the foundation of any right which is precisely the violent act—the state of exception, or the supreme form of closure—necessary for the establishment of any form of social organization. The question is the meaning of and the reason for closure.

In the past, closure took the form of city walls, while today it takes the form of the multitude of social, cultural, linguistic and artistic facts that construct the space in which we live that go from art installations in the gallery, to Tensa Barriers in the airport, to the forms of language that one is 'forced' to assume in order to interact

within the social sphere. Then, yes, of course, it is very relevant (and urgent) to study visible and invisible walls and how these walls are embodied in the physical space of architecture. But we have to think these embodiments as coherent with the fate of the city, which basically remains an institution of closure. The issue, then, is not to get rid of closure but to strategically re-direct the idea and effects of closure so that this unavoidable factor can 'exceed' its present usage in the hands of capitalist power. A good example, very close to the place where I live, is the building of mosques in Rotterdam. Because immigrants inhabit the two peripheral extremes of Rotterdam (South and West), two major mosques were built at the very fringe of the city: close to the highway and railway line that connects Amsterdam with Brussels and Paris. Once marginal, and leftover, these sites have become very controversial. When coming from Amsterdam or Paris, these two 'monuments' are the very first thing that you see when you enter the city. Moreover, the extreme monumentality of these buildings, which is fashioned so as not to conform to the secular space and values that surround them. This makes these two examples of architecture capable of constituting a real possibility of outside that no avant-garde architecture with any sort of bizarre shape or program

could project. For example, the mosque in Rotterdam South is one of the most crucial obstacles to the process of gentrification in that part of the city. It is interesting to note that 'enlightened' architectural critics complain that these mosques represent a return to medieval times, that an open society cannot allow such radical manifestations of (religious) beliefs in the form of architecture, and these buildings must be built in a modernist fashion, as they have to become more integrated in the fabric of the city. Of course, this mosque may be built with the financial aid of some transnational supporters, yet what they produce in the local space is quite amazing. They re-introduce a vital 'outside' space that, by being so monumentally 'there' in such a confrontational way towards 'our' space, challenges the perception of the city, its values and its ideologies—in this case the ideology of secularization. As much as secularization can be seen as positive, it remains an ideology. So here a mechanism of closure and marginalization is turned into something that exceeds the forces that administrate closure and marginalization. I also find the type of monumentality of these mosques to be very different from both the monumentality of past totalitarian architecture that avoided the partiality of a particular style, and the pseudo-monumentality of

iconic buildings which is predicated upon the idea that everything is transparent, futuristic, and cool. So, to answer to Marina, this is surely a condition that can offer the possibility—the crack—that can be levered in order, if not to change, at least to expose the mechanisms of certain consensus effects and make the balance of power more explicit. And, again, any power, no matter how supreme, totalitarian, ubiquitous, high-tech, democratic, and evasive, at the end has to land on the actual ground of the city and leave traces that are difficult to efface. This is why, unlike the web, the city as the actual space of our primary perception remains a very strategic site of action and counteraction. For any power the city is the most vital place to conquer and, at the same time, it is power's most vulnerable form. But in order to critically frame the network, we would need to propose a radical reification of it. This would mean its transformation into a finite 'thing' among other finite things and not always see the network and its derivatives like something immaterial and invisible, without a form we can trace and change.

BG

I totally agree that networks are now a space of totality—even a totalitarian space. Of course, digital networks were especially celebrated some time ago as openings that

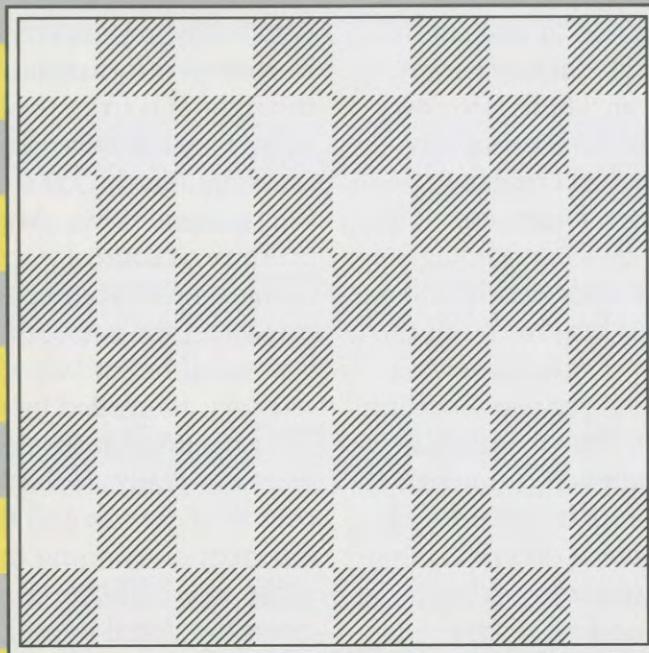
break up one's closed 'home' and connect it to the global free flows of communication. These free flows were described as 'immaterial,' as purely virtual, and as liberating. People were using a Deleuzian language of free-flowing infinite desire to describe their nature and social impact. But the illusion of the immaterial flows of information and desire could emerge only in the solitary consciousness of a user sitting in front of his computer, immersed in the contemplation of its screen. This kind of concentrated contemplation allows the user to overlook the hardware that delivers the free-floating signifiers to his home.

And a particular hardware can function only because it is built into the global hardware architecture. This network architecture is mostly hidden, invisible to the customer's view. But it is this global hardware architecture that allows for the information to flow. This hardware architecture is totalizing—it is, in fact, one global building that all of us inhabit. And this architecture is anything but immaterial. The information hardware and the architecture of the networks are material. And that means that this architecture is finite—because everything material is finite. Thus, this global network architecture is a closed one. Today it is a main site of political struggle for control. It is obvious that one has to control hardware to control the software.

And today almost everybody wants to control information flows—from the right and from the left. The right wants to control political information; the left wants to control the financial flows. And both of them promise to control pornography and crime. These types of control are only possible if the network architecture is situated on (or below) a defined territory controlled by the military. That means that the goal of future wars is already established: control over the network and the flows of information running through its architecture. It seems to me that the quest for global totalitarian power is not behind us but is a true promise of the future. If the network architecture culminates in one global building then there must be one power that controls it. The central political question of our time is the nature of this future power.

NOTES

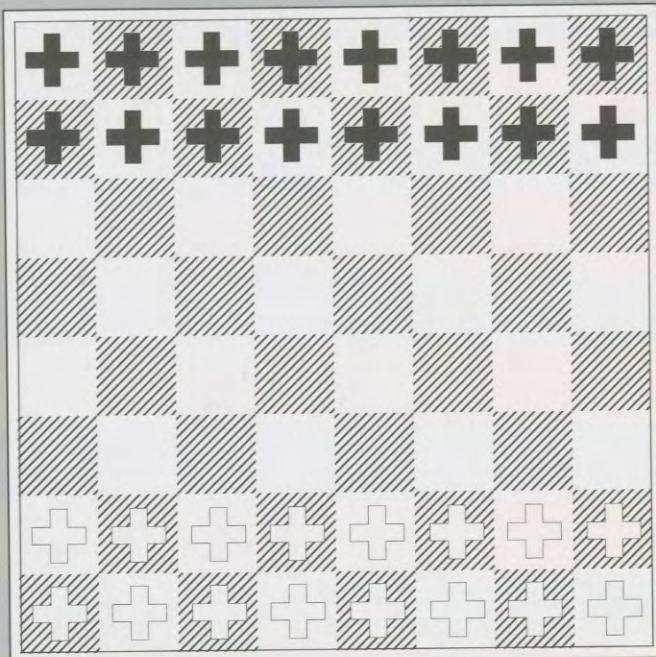
- 1 *Wolfenstein 3D* was a 1990s computer game, where the player, with first-person point of view, wanders through a maze of repetitive corridors and rooms in the fictitious Nazi castle of 'Wolfenstein.'
- 2 'The Bilbao Effect' is a term referring to the Guggenheim Bilbao Museum in Spain, designed by architect Frank Gehry, and more generally to the implications of landmark architecture for the cultural, social and political dimension of cities.
- 3 'According to Loos, the function of design is not to pack, decorate, and ornament things differently each time, that is, to constantly design a supplementary outside so that an inside, the true nature of things, remains hidden.' Boris Groys, 'The Obligation to Self-Design,' *e-flux journal* #0, November 2008, at www.e-flux.com/journal/view/6. Accessed 20 April 2009.



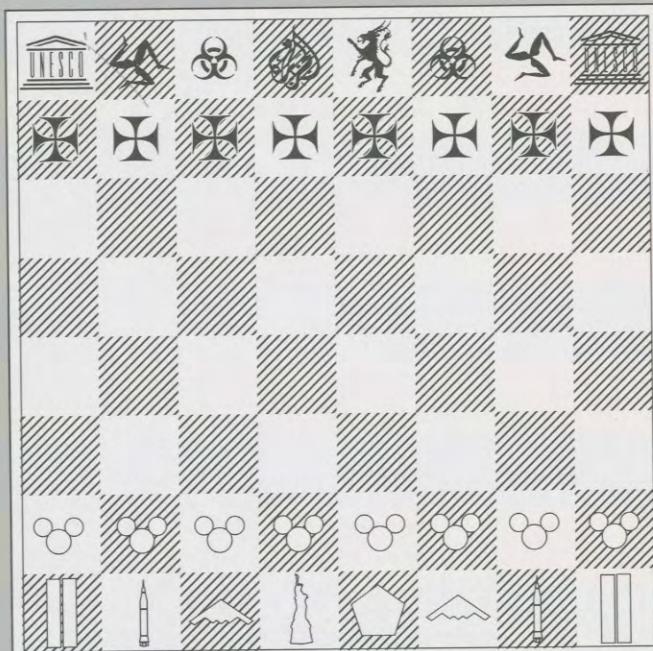
Empty Chessboard (Chess City)
2009.



Monuments vs. Politics
Chessboard
2007.



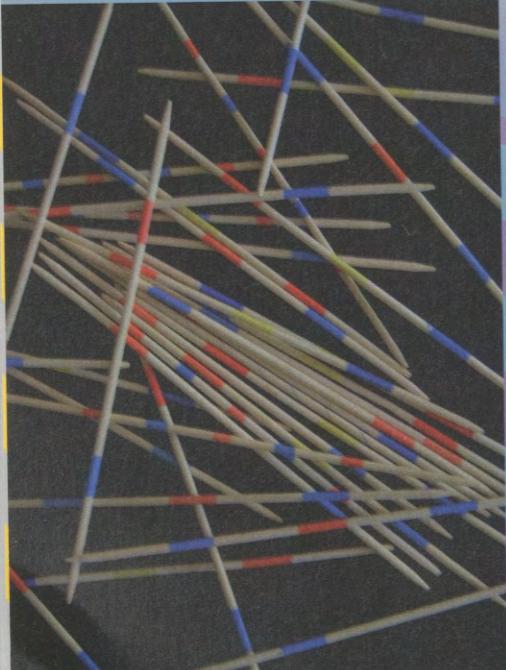
Neutrality Chess
2007.



Clash of Civilizations
Chessboard
2007.

uncorporate identity—horizons

LOOKING FOR JAKE



REPORTS OF CERTAIN EVENTS IN LONDON

Horizons

China Miéville

A mis-addressed envelope inadvertently opened by the protagonist reveals the remains of the archive of a scholarly society devoted to the little-noted propensity of streets to travel between cities: Via Fera, or 'VF.' Both a tale of the bureaucratic uncanny and a mordant *esprit* on a London of feral streets and their human fugitives.

On the 27th of November 2000, a package was delivered to my house. This happens all the time—since becoming a professional writer the amount of mail I get has increased enormously. The flap of the envelope had been torn open a strip, allowing someone to look inside. This also isn't unusual: because, I think, of my political life (I am a varyingly active member of a left-wing group, and once stood in an election for the Socialist Alliance), I regularly find, to my continuing outrage, that my mail has been peered into.

I mention this to explain why it was that I opened something not addressed to me. I, China Miéville, live on —ley Road. This package was addressed to a Charles Melville, of the same house number —ford Road. No postcode was given, and it had found its way, slowly, to me. Seeing a large packet torn half-open by some cavalier spy, I simply assumed it was mine and opened it.

It took me a good few minutes to realise my mistake: the covering note contained no greeting by name to alert me. I read it along with the first few of the enclosed papers with growing bewilderment, convinced (absurd as this must sound) that this was to do with some project or other I had got involved with and then forgotten. When finally I looked again at the name on the envelope, I was wholly surprised.

That was the point at which I was morally culpable, rather than simply foolish. By then I was too fascinated by what I had read to stop.

I've reproduced the content of the papers below, with explanatory notes. Unless otherwise stated they're photocopies, some stapled together, some attached with paper clips, many with pages missing. I've tried to keep them in the order they came in; they are not always chronological. Before I had a sense of what was in front of me, I was casual about how I put the papers down. I can't vouch that this was how they were originally organised.

[Cover note. This is written on a postcard, in a dark blue ink, a cursive hand. The photograph is of a wet kitten emerging from a sink full of water and suds. The kitten wears a comedic expression of anxiety.]

Where are you? Here as requested. What do you want this for any way? I scribbled thoughts on some. Can't find half the stuff. I don't think anyone's noticed me rummaging through the archives, and I managed to get into your old place for the rest (thank god you file) but come to next meeting. You can get people on your side but box clever. In haste. Are you taking sides? Talk soon. Will you get this? Come to next meeting. More as I find it.

[This page was originally produced on an old manual typewriter.]

BWVF Meeting, 6 September 1976

Agenda.

1. Minutes of the last meeting.
2. Nomenclature.
3. Funds.
4. Research notes.
5. Field reports.
6. AOB.

1. Last minutes:

Motion to approve JH, Second FR. Vote: unanimous.

2. Nomenclature:

FR proposes name change. 'BWVF' dated. CT reminds FR of tradition. FR insists 'BWVF' exclusive, proposes 'S (Society) WVF' or 'G (Gathering) WVF.' CT remonstrates. EN suggests 'C (Coven) WVF,' to laughter. Meeting growing impatient. FR moves to vote on change, DY seconds. Vote: 4 for, 13 against. Motion denied.

[Someone has added by hand: 'Again! Silly Cow.']}

3. Funds/Treasury report. EN reports this quarter several payments made, totalling £—. [The sum is effaced with black ink.] Agreed to keep this up-to-date to avoid repeat of Gouldy-Statten debacle. Subscriptions are mostly current and with

[This is the end of a page and the last I have of these minutes.]

[The next piece is a single sheet that looks word-processed.]

1 September 1992

Memo

Members are kindly asked to show more care when handling items in the collection. Standards have become unacceptably lax. Despite their vigilant presence, curators have reported various soilings, including: fingerprints on recovered wood and glass; ink spots on

cornices; caliper marks on guttering and ironwork; waxy residue on keys.

Of course research necessitates handling but if members cannot respect these unique items conditions of access may have to become even more stringent.

Before entering, remember:

- Be careful with your instruments.
- Always wash your hands.

[The next page is numbered '2' and begins halfway through a paragraph. Luckily it contains a header.]

BWVF Papers, NO. 223. July 1981.

uncertain, but there is little reason to doubt his veracity. Both specimens tested exactly as one would expect for VD, suggesting no difference between VD and VF at even a molecular level. Any distinction must presumably be at the level of gross morphology, which defies our attempts at comparison, or of a noncorporeal essence thus-far beyond our capacity to measure.

Whatever the reality, the fact that the two specimens of VF mortar can be added to the BWVF collection is cause for celebration. This research should be ready to present by the end of this year.

REPORT ON WORK IN PROGRESS

VF and Hermeneutics

by B. Bath.

Problems of knowledge and the problematic of Knowing. Considerations of VF as urban scripture. Kabbala considered as interpretive model. Investigation of VF as patterns of interference. Research currently ongoing, ETA of finished article uncertain.

REPORT ON WORK IN PROGRESS

Recent changes in VF Behaviour

by E. Nugen.

Tracking the movements of VF is notoriously difficult. [Inserted here is a scrawl—'No bloody kidding. What do you think we're all bloody doing here?'] Reconstructing these patterns over the longue durée [the accent is

added by hand] is to force a matter of plumbing a historical record that is, by its nature and definitionally, partial, anecdotal and uncertain. As most of my readers know it has long been my aim to extract from the annals of our society evidence for long-term cycles (See Working Paper 19, Once More on the Statten Curve), an aim on which I have not been entirely unsuccessful.

I have collated the evidence from the major verified London sightings of the last three decades (two of those sightings my own) and can conclusively state that the time between VF arrival at and departure from a locus has decreased by a factor of 0.7. VF are moving more quickly.

In addition, tracking their movements after each appearance has become more complicated and (even) less certain. In 1940, application of the Deschaine Matrix with regard to a given VF's arrival time and duration on-site would result in a 23% chance of predicting reappearance parameters (within two months and two miles): today that same process nets only a 16% chance. VF are less predictable than they have ever been (barring, perhaps, the Lost Decade of 1876-86).

The shift in this behaviour is not linear but punctuated, sudden bursts of change over the years: once between 1952 and '53, again in late 1961, again in '72 and '76. The causes and consequences are not yet known. Each of these pivotal moments has resulted in an increased pace of change. The anecdotal evidence we have all heard, that VF have recently become more skittish and agitated, appears to be correct.

I intend to present this work in full within 18 months. I wish to thank CM for help with the research. [This CM is presumably Charles Melville, to whom the package was addressed. Clipped to the BWVF papers is this handwritten note:

Yes, Edgar is a pompous arse but he is on to something big.

[What is it Edgar N. is on to? Of course I wondered, and still wonder, though now I think perhaps I know.]

[Then there is a document unlike the others so far. It is a booklet, a few pages long. It was when I started to read this that I stopped, frowned, looked again at the envelope, realised my inadvertent intrusion, and decided almost instantly that I would not stop reading. 'Decided' doesn't really get the sense of the urgency with which I continued, as if I had no choice. But then if I say that, I absolve myself of wrongdoing which I won't do, so let's say I 'decided,' though I'm unsure that I did. In any case, I continued reading. This document is printed on

both sides like a flyer. The first sentence below is in large red font, and constitutes the booklet's front cover.]

URGENT Report of a Sighting.

Principal witness: FR.

Secondary: EN.

On Thursday 11th February 1988, so far as it is possible to tell between 3:00 A.M. and 5:17 A.M., a little way south of Plumstead High Street SE18, Varmin Way occurred.

Even somewhat foreshortened from its last known appearance (Battersea 1983—see the VF Concordance), Varmin Way is in a buckled configuration due to the constraints of space. One end adjoins Purrett Road between numbers 44 and 46, approximately forty feet north of Saunders Road: Varmin Way then appears to describe a tight S-curve, emerging halfway up Rippolson Road between numbers 30 and 32 (see attached map). [*There is no map.*]

Two previously terraced dwellings on each of the intersected streets have now been separated by Varmin Way. One on Rippolson is deserted: surreptitious enquiries have been made of inhabitants of each of the others, but none have remarked with anything other than indifference to the newcomer. Eg: in response to FR's query of one man if he knew the name of 'that alley,' he glanced at the street now abutting his house, shrugged and told her he was 'buggered if he knew.' This response is of course typical of VF occurrence environs (See B. Harman, 'On the Non-Noticing,' BWVF Working Papers NO. 5).

A partial exception is one thirty-five-year-old Purrett Road man, resident in the brick dwelling newly on Varmin Way's north bank. Observed on his way toward Saunders Road, crossing Varmin Way, he tripped on the new kerb. He looked down at the asphalt and up at brick corners of the junction, paced back and forward five times with a quizzical expression, peering down the street's length, without entering it, before continuing on his journey, looking back twice.

[This is the end of the middle page of the leaflet. Folded and inserted inside is a handwritten letter. I have therefore decided to reproduce it

here in the middle of the leaflet text. It reads:

Charles,

In haste. So sorry I could not reach you sooner—obviously phone not an option. I told you I could work this out: Fiona was only on-site because of me, but I modestly listed her as principal for politics' sake. Charles, we're about to go in and I'm telling you even from where I'm standing I can see the evidence, this is the real thing. Next time, next time. Or get down here! I'm sending this first class (of course!) so when you get it rush down here. But you know Varmin Way's reputation—it's restless, will probably be gone. But come find me! I'll be here at least.

Edgar

At the end of this note is appended, in the same handwriting as that of the package's introductory note:

What a bastard! I take it this was when you and he stopped seeing eye to eye? Why did he cut you out like that, and why so coyly?

The leaflet then continues:]

Initial investigation shows that the new Varmin Way—overlooking walls of the houses now separated on Purrett Road are flat concrete. Those of Rippolson Road, though, are of similar brick to their fronts, bearing the usual sigil of the VF's identity, and are broken by small windows at the very top, through the net curtains of which nothing can be seen. (See 'On Neo-mural Variety,' by H. Burke, *WBVF Working Papers* NO. 8)

Those innards of Varmin Way which can be seen from its adjoining streets bear all the usual signs of VF morphology (are, in other words, apparently unremarkable), and are in accordance with earlier documented descriptions of the subject. In this occurrence, it being short, FR and EN were able to conduct the Bowery Resonance Experiment, stationing themselves at either end of the VF and shouting to each other down its lengths (until forced to stop by externalities). [Here in Edgar's hand has been inserted 'Some local thuggee threatening to do me in if I didn't shut up!'] Each could clearly hear the other, past the kinks in this configuration of Varmin Way.

More experiments are to follow.

[When I reached this point I was trembling. I had to stop, leave the-

room, drink some water, force myself to breathe slowly. I'm tempted to add more about this, about the sudden and threatened speculations these documents raised in me, but I think I should stay out of it. Immediately after the report of the sighting was another, similarly produced pamphlet.]

URGENT *Report of an Aborted Investigation.*

Present: FR, EN, BH.

[Added here is another new comment in Charles's nameless contact's hand. It reads: 'Dread to think how gutted you were to be replaced by Bryn as new favourite. What exactly did you do to get Edgar so pissed off?']

At 11:20 P.M. on Saturday 13 February 1988, from its end on Rippolson Road, an initial examination was made of Varmin Way. Photographs were taken establishing the VF's identity (figure 1).

[Figure 1 is a surprisingly good-quality reproduction of a shot, showing a street sign by a wall, standing at leg-height on two little metal or wooden posts. The image is at a peculiar angle, which I think is the result of the photograph not being taken straight on, but from Rippolson Road, beyond. In an unusual old serif font, the sign reads Varmin Way.]

As the party prepared for the expedition, certain events took place or were insinuated which led to a postponement and quick regrouping at a late-night café on Plumstead High Street. [What were those 'certain events'? The pointed imprecision suggested to me something deliberately not committed to paper, something that the readers of this report, or perhaps a subgroup of them, would understand. These writings are a strange mix of the scientifically exact and the imprecise—even the failure to specify the café is surprising. But it is the baleful vagueness of the certain events that will not stop worrying at me.] When the group returned to Rippolson Road at 11:53 P.M., to their great frustration, Varmin Way had unoccurred.

[Two monochrome pictures end the piece. They have no explanatory

notes or legend. They are both taken in daylight. On the left is a photograph of two houses, on either side of a small street of low century-old houses which curves sharply to the right, it looks like, quickly unclear with distance. The right-hand picture is the two facades again, but this time the houses—recognisably the same from a window's crack, from a smear of paint below a sash, from the scrawny front gardens and the distinct unkempt *buddleia* bush—are closed up together. They are no longer semi-detached. There is no street between them.]

[So.

I stopped for a bit. I had to stop. And then I had to read on again.

A single sheet of paper. Typewritten again apart from the name, now on an electronic machine.]

Could you see it, Charles? The damage, halfway down Varmin Way? It's there, it's visible in the picture in that report.

[This must mean the picture on the left. I stared at it hard, with the naked eye and through a magnifying glass. I couldn't make out anything.]

It's like the slates from Scry Pass, the ones I showed you in the collection. You could see it in the striae and the marks, even if none of the bloody curators did. Varmin Way wasn't just passing through, it was resting, it was recovering, it had been attacked. I am right.

Edgar

[I kept reading.

Though it's not signed, judging by the font, what follows are a couple of pages of another typed letter from Edgar.]

earliest occurrence I can find of it is in the early 1700s (you'll hear 1790 or '91 or something—nonsense, that's just the official position based on the archives—this one isn't verified but believe me it's correct). Only a handful of years after the Glorious Revolution we find Antonia Chesterfield referring in her diaries to 'a right rat of a street,

ascamper betwixt Waterloo and the Mall, a veritable Vermin, in name as well as kind. Beware—Touch a rat and he will bite, as others have found, of our own and of the Vermin's vagrant tribe.' That's a reference to Varmin Way—Mrs Chesterfield was in the Brotherhood's precursor (and you'd not have heard her complaining about that name either—Fiona take note!).

You see what she's getting at, and I think she was the first. I don't know, Charles, correlation is so terribly hard, but look at some of the other candidates. Shuck Road; Caul Street; Stang Street; Teratologue Avenue (this last I think is fairly voracious); et al. So far as I can work it out, Varmin Way and Stang Street were highly antagonistic at that stage, but now they're almost certainly noncombative. No surprise: Sole Den Road is the big enemy these days—remember 1987?

(Incidentally, talking of that first Varmin occurrence, did you ever read all the early cryptolit I sent you?

The Clerk entered into a Snickelway
That then was gone again by close of day

Fourteenth century, imagine. I'll bet you a pound there are letters from disgruntled Britannic procurators complaining about errant alley-ways around the Temple of Mithras. But there's not much discussion of the hostilities until Mrs Chesterfield.)

Anyway, you see my point. It's the only way one can make sense of it all, of all this that I've been going on about for so long. The Viae are fighting, and I think they always have.

And there's no idiot nationalism here either, as

[And here is the end of the page. And there is another message added, clearly referring to this letter, from CM's nameless interlocutor. 'I believe it,' he says, or she says, but I think of it as a man's handwriting though that's a problematic assumption. 'It took me a while, but I believe Edgar's bellum theory. But I know you, Charles, "pure research" be buggered as far as you're concerned. I know what Edgar's doing, but I cannot see where you are going with this.']}

URGENT

Report of a Traveller.

Wednesday June 17th 1992.

We are receiving repeated reports, which we are attempting to verify, of an international visit. Somewhere between Willesden Green and Dollis Hill (details are unclear), Ulica Nerwowosc has arrived. This visitor from Krakow has been characterised by our comrades in the Kolektyw as a mercurial mediaeval alleyway, very difficult to predict. Though it has proved impossible to photograph, initial reports correlate with the Kolektyw's description of the Via. Efforts are ongoing to capture an image of this elusive newcomer, and even to plan a Walk, if the risks are not too great.

No London street has sojourned elsewhere for some time (perhaps not unfortunate—a visit from Bunker Crescent was, notoriously, responsible for the schism in the BWVF Chicago Chapter in 1956), but the last ten years have seen six other documented visitations to London from foreign Viae Ferae. See table.

DATES	VISITOR	USUAL RESIDENCE	NOTES
6/9/82– 8/9/82	Rue de la Fascination	Paris	Spent three days in Neasden, motionless from arrival to departure, jutting south of Prout Grove NW10.
3/1/84– 4/1/84	West Fifth Street	New York	Appeared restless, settling for only up to two hours at a time, moving among various locations in Camberwell and Highgate.
11/2/84	Heulstrasse	Berlin	A relatively wide thoroughfare, the empty shopfronts of Heulstrasse cut north of the East London Crematorium in Bow for half a day, relocating late that night to Sydenham, and moving for three hours in backstreets, always just evading investigators.
22/10/87, 24/10/87	Unthinker Road	Glasgow	This tiny cobbled lane, seemingly only a chance gap between the backs of houses, occurred on the Thursday morning jutting off Old Compton Street W1, spent a day occurring with stealthy movements further and further into Soho, unoccurred on the Friday, recurring on Saturday only to cut sharply south toward Piccadilly Circus and disappear.

15/4/90?

Boulevard
de la Gare
Intrinsèque

Paris

Uniquely, this Via Fera was not witnessed by an investigator, but by a rare noticing civilian whose enquiries about a French-named street of impressive dimensions and architecture in the heart of Catford came to the Brotherhood's attention.

29/11/91-
1/12/91

Chup
Shawpno
Lane

Calcutta

The pale clay of C.S. Lane, its hard earth road cut by tram tracks, were exhaustively documented by TY and FD during its meanderings through Camden and Kentish Town.

[There is a thick card receipt, stamped with some obscure sign, its lefthand columns rendered in crude typeface, those on the right filled out in black ink.]

BWVF collection.

Date: 7/8/1992

Name: C. Melville

Curator present: G. Benedict

Requested: Item 117: a half-slate recovered
from Scry Pass, 7/11/1958.

Item 34: a splinter of glass recovered
from Caul Street, 8/ 2/1986.

Item 67: an iron ring and key recovered
from Stang Street, 6/5/1936.

[This next letter is on headed paper, beautifully printed.]

SOCIÉTÉ POUR L'ÉTUDE DES RUES SAUVAGES

20 June 1992

Dear Mr Melville,

Thank you for your message and congratulations for have this visitor. We in Paris were fortunate to have this pretty Polish street rest with us in 1988 but I did not see it.

I confirm that you are correct. Boulevard de la Gare Intrinsèque and the Rue de la Fascination have both stories about them. We call him le jockey, a man who is supposed to live on streets like these and to make them move for him, but these are only stories for the children. There are no people on these *rues sauvages*, in Paris, and I think there are none in London too. No one knows why the streets have gone to London that time, like no one

knows why your Importune Avenue moved around the area where is now the Arc de la Défence twelve years ago.

Yours truly,
Claudette Santier

[There is a handwritten letter.]

My Dear Charles,

I'm quite aware that you feel ill-used. I apologise for that. There is no point, I think, rehearsing our disagreements, let alone the unpleasant contretemps they have led to. I cannot see that you are going anywhere with these investigations, though, and I simply do not have enough years left to indulge your ideas, nor enough courage (were I younger ... Ah but were I younger what would I not do?).

I have performed three Walks in my time, and have seen the evidence of the wounds the Viae leave on each other. I have tracked the combatants and shifting loyalties. Where, in contrast, is the evidence behind your claims? Why, on the basis of your intuition, should anyone discard the cautions that may have kept us alive? It is not as if what we do is safe, Charles. There are reasons for the strictures you are so keen to overturn.

Of course yes I have heard all the stories that you have: of the streets that occur with lights ashine and men at home! of the antique costermongers' cries still heard over the walls of Dandle Way! of the street-riders! I do not say I don't believe them, any more than I don't—or do—believe the stories that Potash Street and Luckless Road courted and mated and that that's how Varmin Way was born, or the stories of where the Viae Ferae go when they unoccur. I have no way of judging. This mythic company of inhabitants and street-tamers may be true, but so long as it is also a myth, you have nothing. I am content to observe, Charles, not to become involved.

Good God, who knows what the agenda of the streets might be? Would you really, would you really, Charles, risk attempting ingress? Even if you could? After everything you've read and heard? Would you risk taking sides?

Regretfully and fondly,
Edgar

[This is another handwritten note. I think it is in Edgar's hand, but it is hard to be sure.]

Saturday 27th November 1999.

Varmin Way's back.

[We are near the end of the papers now. What came out of the package next looks like one of the pamphlet-style reports of sightings. It is marked with a black band in one corner of the front cover.]

URGENT *Report of a Walk.*

Walkers: FR, EN, BH (author).

At 11:20 P.M. on Sunday 28th November 1999, a Walk was made the length of Varmin Way. As well as its tragic conclusion, most members will be aware of the extraordinary circumstances surrounding this investigation—since records began, there is no evidence in the archives of a Via Fera returning to the site of an earlier occurrence. Varmin Way's reappearance, then, at precisely the same location in Plumstead, between Purrett and Rippolson Road, as that it inhabited in February 1988, was profoundly shocking, and necessitated this perhaps too-quickly-planned Walk.

FR operated as base, remaining stationed on Rippolson Road (the front yard of the still-deserted number 32 acting as camp). Carrying toolbags and wearing Council overalls over their harnesses and belay kits, BH and EN set out. Their safety rope was attached to a fencepost close to FR. The Walkers remained in contact with FR throughout their three-hour journey, by radio.

In this occurrence of Varmin Way, the street is a little more than 100 metres long. [An amendment here: 'Can you imagine Edgar going metric? What kind of a homage is this?'] We proceeded slowly. [Here another insertion: 'Ugh. Change of person.' By now I was increasingly irritated with these interruptions. I never felt I could ignore them, but they broke the flow of my reading. There was something vaguely

passive-aggressive in their cheer, and I felt as if Charles Melville would have been similarly angered by them. In an effort to retain the flow I'll start this sentence again.]

We proceeded slowly. We walked along the unpainted tar in the middle of Varmin Way, equidistant from the rows of streetlamps. These lamps are indistinguishable from those in the neighbouring streets. There are houses to either side, all of them with all their windows unlit, looking like low workers' cottages of Victorian vintage (though the earliest documented reports of Varmin Way date from 1792—this apparent aging of form gives credence

[To my intense frustration, several pages are missing, and this is where the report therefore ends. There are, however, several photographs in an envelope, stuffed in among the pages. There are four. They are dreadful shots, taken with a flash too close or too far, so that their subject is either effaced by light or peering out from a cowl of dark. Nonetheless they can just be made out.

The first is a wall of crumbling brick, the mortar fallen away in scabs. Askew across the print, taken from above, is a street sign. Varmin Way, it says, in an antiquated iron font. Written in biro on the photograph's back is: The Sigil.

The second is a shot along the length of the street. Almost nothing is visible in this, except perspective lines sketched in dark on dark. None of the houses has a front garden: their doors open directly onto the pavement. They are implacably closed, whether for centuries or only moments it is of course impossible to tell. The lack of a no-man's-land between house and Walker makes the doors loom. Written on the back of this image is: The Way.

The third is of the front of one of the houses. It is damaged. Its dark windows are broken, its brick stained, crumbling where the roof is fallen in. On the back is written: The Wound.

The last picture is of an end of rope and a climbing buckle, held in a young man's hands. The rope is frayed and splayed: the metal clip bent in a strange corkscrew. On the back of the photograph is nothing.]

[And then comes the last piece in the envelope. It is undated. It is in a

different hand to the others.]

What did you do? How did you do it? What did you do, you bastard?

I saw what happened. Edgar was right, I saw where Varmin Way had been hurt. But you know that, don't you? What did you do to Varmin Way to make it do that? What did you do to Edgar?

Do you think you'll get away with it?

That was everything. When I'd finished, I was frantic to find Charles Melville.

I think the ban on telephone conversations must extend to email and web pages. I searched online, of course, for BWVF, 'wild streets,' 'feral streets,' 'Viae Ferae,' and so on. I got nothing. BWVF got references to cars or technical parts. I tried 'Brotherhood of Witnesses to/Watchers of the Viae Ferae' without any luck. 'Wild streets' of course got thousands: articles about New Orleans Mardi Gras, hard-boiled ramblings, references to an old computer game, and an article about the Cold War. Nothing relevant.

I visited each of the sites described in the scraps of literature, the places where all the occurrences occurred. For several weekends I wandered in scraggy arse-end streets in north or south London, or sometimes in sedate avenues, even once (following Unthinker Road) walking through the centre of Soho. Inevitably, I suppose, I kept returning to Plumstead.

I would hold the before-and-after pictures up and look at the same houses of Rippolson Road, all closed up, an unbroken terrace. Why did I not repackage all this stuff and send it on to Charles Melville, or take it to his house in person? The envelope wrongly sent to —ley Road was addressed to —ford Road. But there is no —ford Road in London. I have no idea how to find Charles.

The other reason I hesitated was that Charles had begun to frighten me.

The first few times I went walking, took photos secretly, I still thought as if I was witnessing some Oedipal drama. Reading and rereading the material, though, I realised that what Charles had done to Edgar was not the most important thing here. What was important was how he had done it.

I have eaten and drunk at all the cafés on Plumstead High Street. Most are unremarkable, one or two are extremely bad, one or two very good. In each establishment I asked, after finishing my tea, whether the owner knew anyone called Charles Melville. I asked if they'd mind me putting up a little notice I'd written.

'Looking for CM', it read. 'I've some documents you mislaid—maps of the area etc. Complicated streets! Please contact:' and then an anonymous email address I'd set up. I heard nothing.

I'm finding it hard to work. These days I am very conscious of corners. I fix my eyes on an edge of brick (or concrete or stone), where another road meets the one I'm walking, and I try to remember if I've ever noticed it before. I look up suddenly as I pass, to catch out anything hurriedly occurring. I keep seeing furtive motions and snapping up my head at only a tree in wind or an opened window. My anxiety—perhaps I should honestly call it foreboding—remains.

And if I ever did see anything more, what could I do? Probably we're irrelevant to them. Most of us. Their motivations are unimaginable, as opaque as brickwork sphinxes. If they consider us at all, I doubt they care what's in our interests: I think it's that indifference that breeds these fears I cannot calm, and makes me wonder what Charles has done.

I say I heard nothing, after I put up my posters. That's not quite accurate. In fact, on the 4th of April 2001, five months after that first package, a letter arrived for Charles Melville. Of course I opened it immediately.

It was one page, handwritten, undated. I am looking at it now. It reads:

Dear Charles,

Where are you Charles?

I don't know if you know by now—I suspect you do—that you've been excommunicated. No one's saying that you're responsible for what happened to Edgar—no one can say that, it would be to admit far too much about what you've been doing—so they've got you on non-payment of subscriptions. Ridiculous, I know.

I believe you've done it. I never thought you could—I never thought anyone could. Are there others there? Are you alone?

Please, if ever you can, tell me. I want to know.

Your friend.

It was not the content of this letter but the envelope that so upset me. The letter, stamped and postmarked and delivered to my house, was addressed to 'Charles Melville, Varmin Way.'

This time, it's hard to pretend the delivery is coincidence. Either the Royal Mail is showing unprecedented consistency in misdirection, or I am being targeted. And if the latter, I do not know by whom or what: by pranksters, the witnesses, their renegade, or their subjects. I am at the mercy of the senders, whether the letter came to me hand-delivered or by stranger ways.

That is why I have published this material. I have no idea what my correspondents want from me. Maybe this is a test, and I've failed: maybe I was about to get a tap on the shoulder and a whispered invitation to join, maybe all this is the newcomer's manual, but I don't think so. I don't know why I've been shown these things, what part I am of another's plan, and that makes me afraid. So as an unwilling party to secrets, I want to disseminate them as widely as I can. I want to protect myself, and this is the only way I can think to do so. (The other possibility, that this was what I was required to do, hasn't passed me by.)

I can't say he owes me an explanation for all this, but I'd like a chance to persuade Charles Melville that I deserve one. I have his documents—if there is anyone reading this who knows how I can reach him, to return them, please let me know. You can contact me through the publisher of this book.

As I say, there is no —ford Road in London. I have visited all the other alternatives. I have knocked at the relevant number in —fast and —land and —nail Streets, and —ner and —hold Roads, and —den Close, and a few even less likely. No one has heard of Charles Melville. In fact, number such-and-such —fast Street isn't there anymore: it's been demolished; the street is being reshaped. That got me thinking. You can believe that got me thinking.

'What's happening to —fast Street?' I wondered. 'Where's it going?'

I can't know whether Charles Melville has broken Varmin Way, has tamed it, is riding it like a bronco through the city and beyond. I can't know if he's taken sides, is intervening in the unending savage war among the wild streets of London. Perhaps he and Edgar were wrong, perhaps there's no such fight, and the Viae Ferae are peaceful nomads, and Charles has just got tired and gone away. Perhaps there are no such untamed roads.

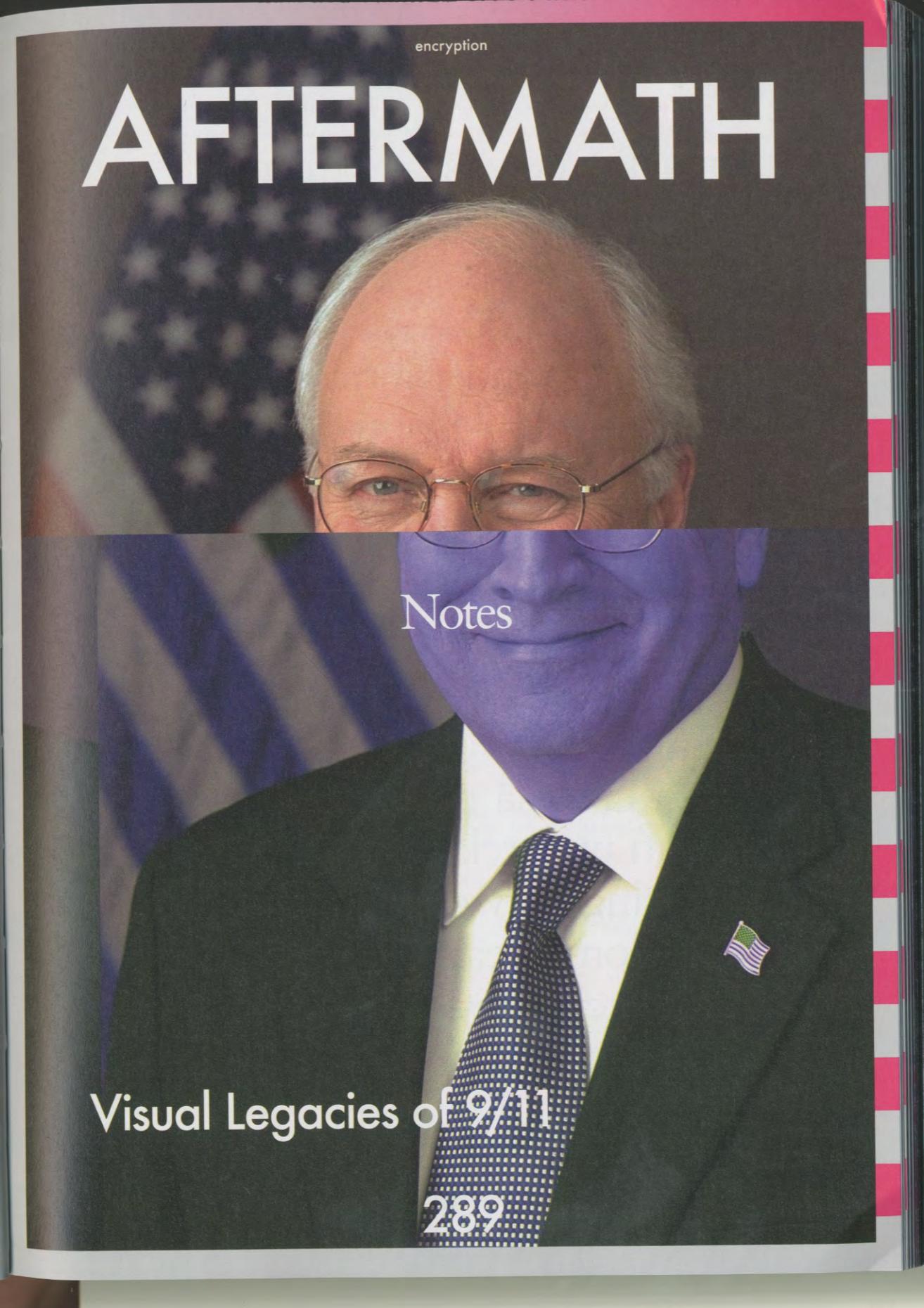
There's no way of knowing. Nonetheless I find myself thinking, wondering what's happening round that corner, and that one. At the bottom of my street, of —ley Road, there are some works going on. Men in hard hats and scaffolding are finishing the job time started of removing tumbledown walls, of sprucing up some little lane so small as to be nameless, nothing but a cat's-run full of rubbish and the smell of piss. They're reshaping it, is what it looks like. I think they're going to demolish an abandoned house and widen the alleyway.

We are in new times. Perhaps the Viae Ferae have grown clever, and stealthy. Maybe this is how they will occur now, sneaking in plain sight, arriving not suddenly but so slowly, ushered in by us, armoured in girders, pelted in new cement and paving. I think on the idea that Charles Melville is sending Varmin Way to come for me, and that it will creep up on me with a growl of mixers and drills. I think on another idea that this is not an oc-

currence but an unoccurrence, that Charles has woken —ley Road my home out of its domesticity, and that it is yawning, and that soon it will shake itself off like a fox and sniff the air and go wherever the feral streets go when they are not resting, I and my neighbours tossed on its back like fleas, and that in some months' time the main street it abuts will suddenly be seamless between the Irish bookie and the funeral parlour, and that —ley Road will be savaged by and savaging Sole Den Road, breaking its windows and walls and being broken in turn and coming back sometimes to rest.

‘Certain Events in London’ was originally published as part of China Miéville’s novel *Looking for Jake*.

AFTERMATH



Notes

Visual Legacies of 9/11

HIGH-SPEED INTERNET

9/11 marks the passage from television to the internet as the world's premier mass medium. Its aftermath encompasses much of the internet's vendetta over TV: the betrayed people—formerly 'the consumers'—can now talk back. At their pleasure, rumors and allegations may become globally narrowcasted myths. Join the battle of symbols.

LOW-RES OPINION

The social media revolution inspires a glitterati upperclass of good-doers, tree-hugging networked deliberative participation. Meanwhile, the have-nots, untouched by the charity of social design, still have internet. Truth-seeking and conspiracy



Some Gentlemen (Coded Portraits)
Giorgio Agamben vs. Donald Rumsfeld
2007.

'That the sovereign is a living law can only mean that he is not bound by it, that in him the life of the law coincides with a total anomie. Diogenes explains this a little later with unequivocal clarity: "Because the king has an irresponsible power and is himself a living law, he is like a god among men." And yet, precisely because he is identified with the law, he is held in relation to it and is indeed posited as the anomie foundation of the juridical order. The identification between sovereign and law represents, that is, the first attempt to assert the anomie of the sovereign and, at the same time, his essential link to the juridical order. The *nomos empsukhos* is the original form of the nexus that the state of exception established between an outside and an inside of the law, and in this sense it constitutes the archetype of the modern theory of sovereignty.

The correspondence between *iustitium* and mourning shows its true meaning here. If the sovereign is a living *nomos*, and if, for this reason, anomie and *nomos* perfectly coincide in his person, then anarchy (which threatens to loose itself in the city upon the sovereign's death, that is to say, when the nexus that joins it to the law is severed) must be ritualized and controlled, transforming the state of exception into public mourning and mourning into *iustitium*.

Giorgio Agamben, *State of Exception*, Chicago/
London: University of Chicago Press, 2005.



Some Gentlemen (Coded Portraits)
Carl Schmitt vs. Tony Blair
2007.

(289)
Some Gentlemen (Coded Portraits)
Alain Badiou vs. Dick Cheney
2007.

'Paranoid-style' visual culture
In the wake of the September 11, 2001 attacks, al-Qaeda operatives would allegedly have hidden crucial information—in text form—inside the source code of images which were posted on the internet. Rumor or fact? We will never know.

In a series of tests around the idea of encryption, this method has been tried on the official portraits of some of the 21st century's foremost architects of 'negative branding.'

Texts by noted theorists have been inserted into the image source code. A change in appearance from 'natural' to 'purple' is the result of this manipulation.

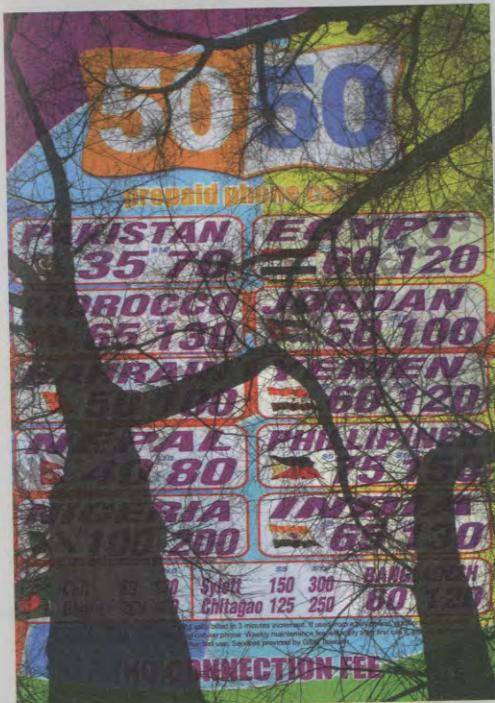
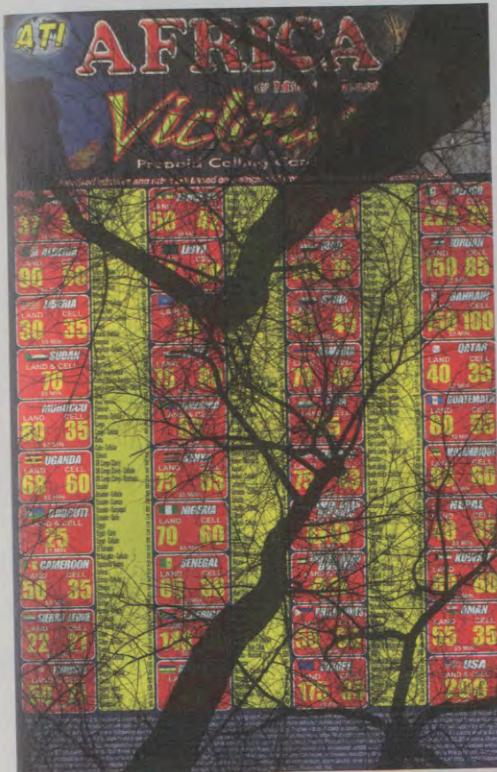
reverberate with *low-res opinion*. There are short-term benefits to be gained from the hyperbolic imagination of conspiracy theories—one is the conviction that our complex world will return to simplicity once its contradictions have been debunked.

Internet-native documentaries of the post-9/11 era—for example, Dylan Avery's *Loose Change*,¹ or Geert Wilders' *Fitna*²—present fail-safe moral narratives of pure 'good'—we—versus absolute 'evil'—they. Main message: nothing is what it seems. The 'battle of symbols' is (ironically) permeated with marginalia. The most innocent images may carry the most effective deceptions. A picture of a furry cat, posted on an internet forum, may

conceal a coded terrorist message. In '72 dpi politics,' wild allegations are the new objectivity. Novel dynamics appear between foreground and background, surface and value, form and content.³ Paranoid-style visual culture assumes deep, hidden levels of design behind commonplace appearance. We have been tricked into games of packaging and encryption—noble lies, Trojan Horses, and Trojan Doves.

ELUSION

'Personal branding' has reached its murky zenith with the untraceable leader-as-myth—a leader whose precise absence becomes presence. Osama bin Laden's undated audio tapes are usually televised with an



Phones—Trees—Networks
(No Connection Fee)
Advertisements
2007.

(293)
Phones—Trees—Networks
(No Connection Fee)
Advertisement
2007.

Tree Tops

In these models, trees are plotted over pre-paid phone card advertisements for Africa and the Middle East. The ads promote cheap calling rates to destinations in the global East and South. They show not just a global marketplace for connectivity, but also the diversity, and geographical distribution of global networks of people—an emerging symbol of what a respondent on a web forum intriguingly called 'global consumerism and liquid modernity without commitment to brands.'

undated photo of the plot leader, triggering avalanches of ‘below the fold’ news which—unwittingly—help keep the brand alive, at minimal costs for its imagineers.

Finally, ‘evil’ is a major Scandinavian export product. Especially in Norway, the styles of black metal music, and its logos, reach deep into a modern audience’s expectations of what pre-modernity should look like. Sometimes, with unpleasant consequences.

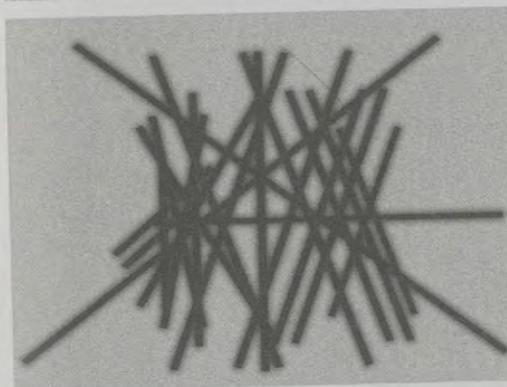
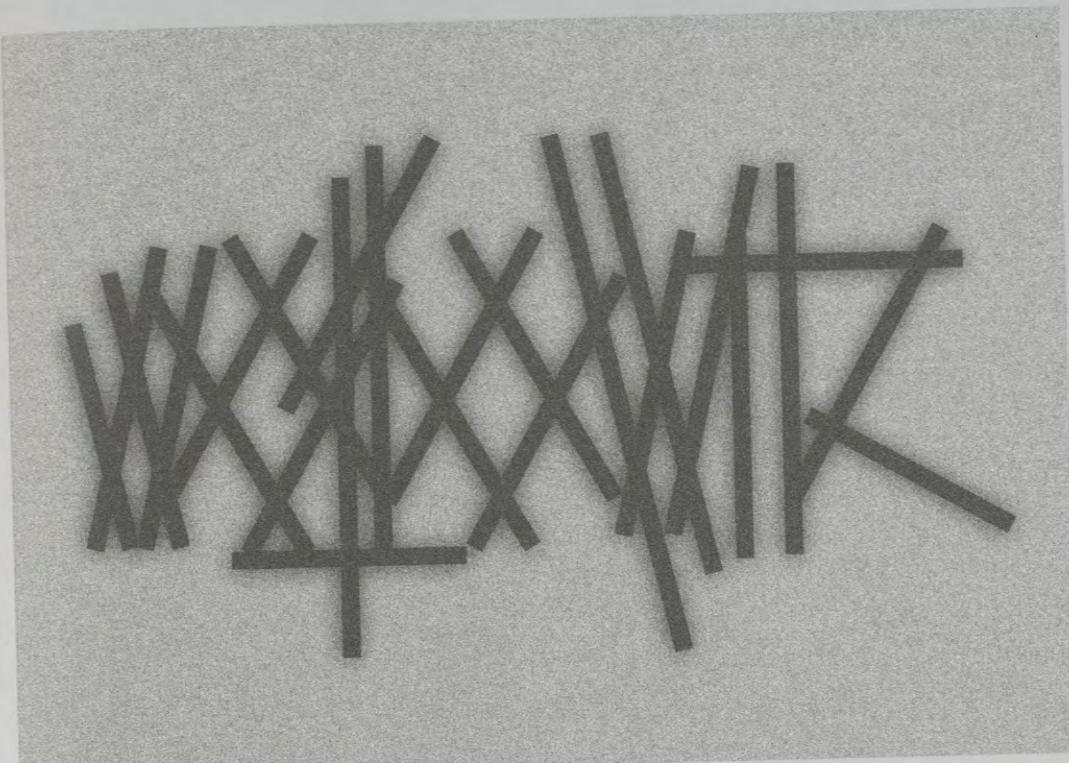
NOTES

- 1 *Loose Change* is an internet-native documentary film that presents the theory that the 9/11 attacks were organized by, or with prior knowledge of the US government.
- 2 *Fitna* is a short amateur film by the Dutch politician Geert Wilders, promoting the ‘thesis’ that Islam would be a fascist ideology. Produced from found (internet) footage, at minimal costs, *Fitna* caused an international political stir.

3

Glenn Beck, a Fox News commentator, has for example attempted to ‘expose’ the alleged promotion of Communism and Fascism through murals, friezings and engravings at the Rockefeller Center. See Steven Heller, ‘Glenn Beck, Art Hysterian,’ at www.printmag.com/Article/Glenn-Beck-Art-Hysterian. Accessed December 1, 2009.





Neocon Black Metal:
(Paul) Wolfowitz
Logo
2007.

Neocon Black Metal:
(Francis) Fukuyama
Logo
2007.

Gothic Bar Codes

Black metal music creates the most elementary kind of friend-enemy distinction by declaring itself the absolute enemy. By its passage toward illegibility, the black metal logo becomes a model for visual data encryption—a gothic bar code.

This study seeks to survey some of the possibilities for the encryption of words into visual constellations, similar to black metal logos, and into spatial configurations derived from these.

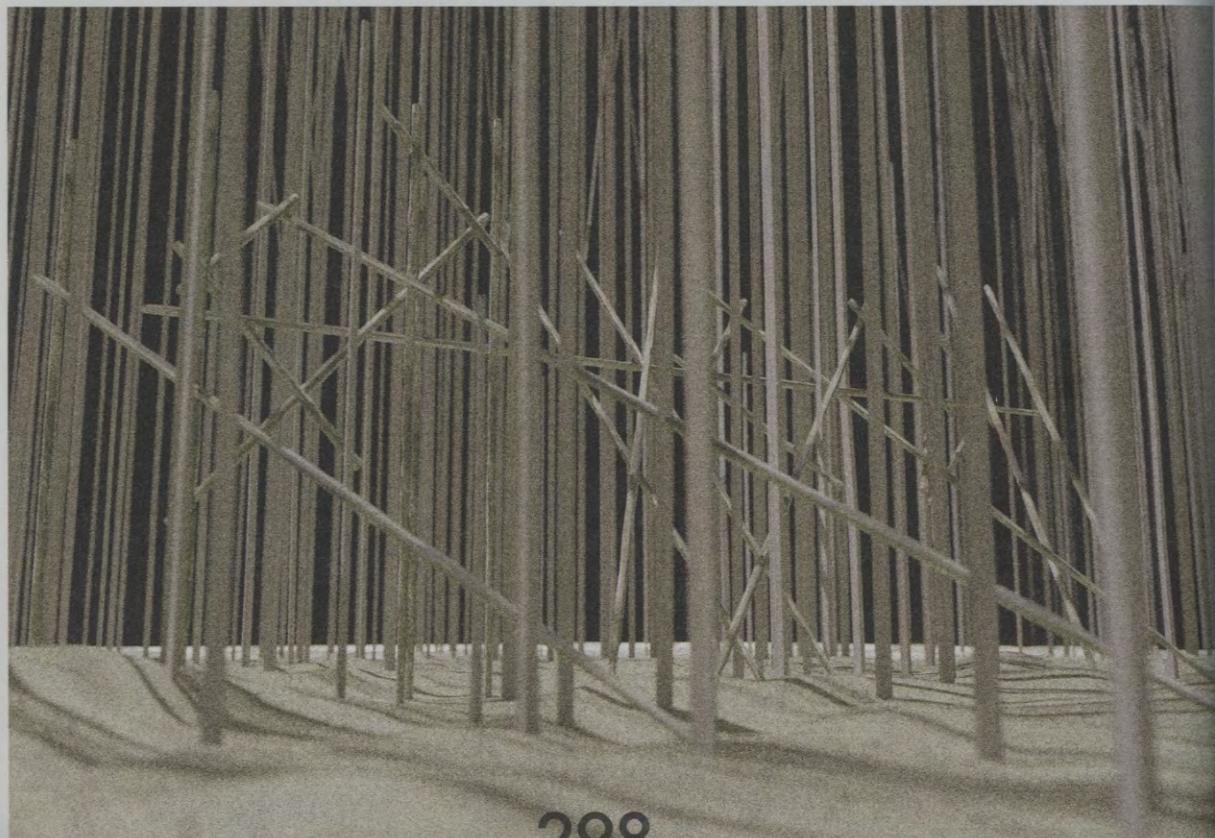
The logos play a game of hide and seek with their spectators.

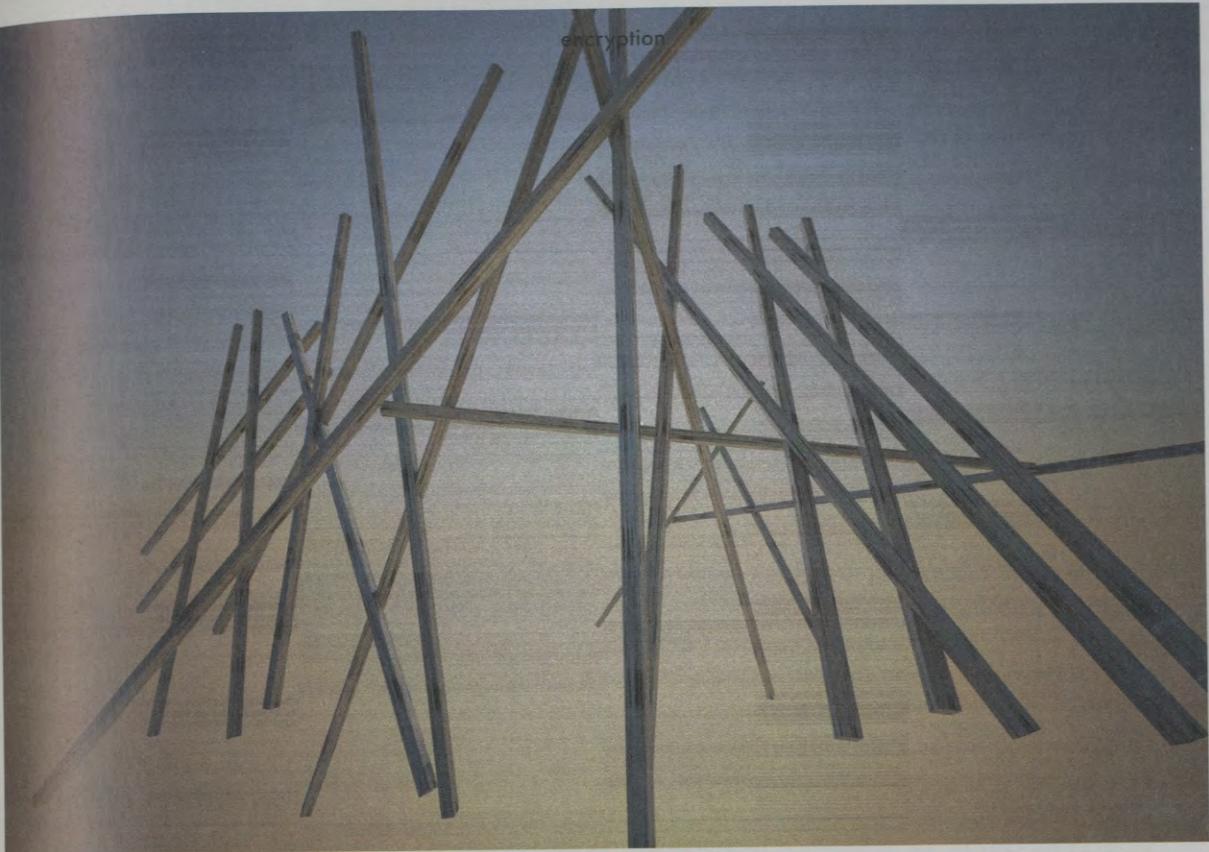
PNAC As A Black Metal Band

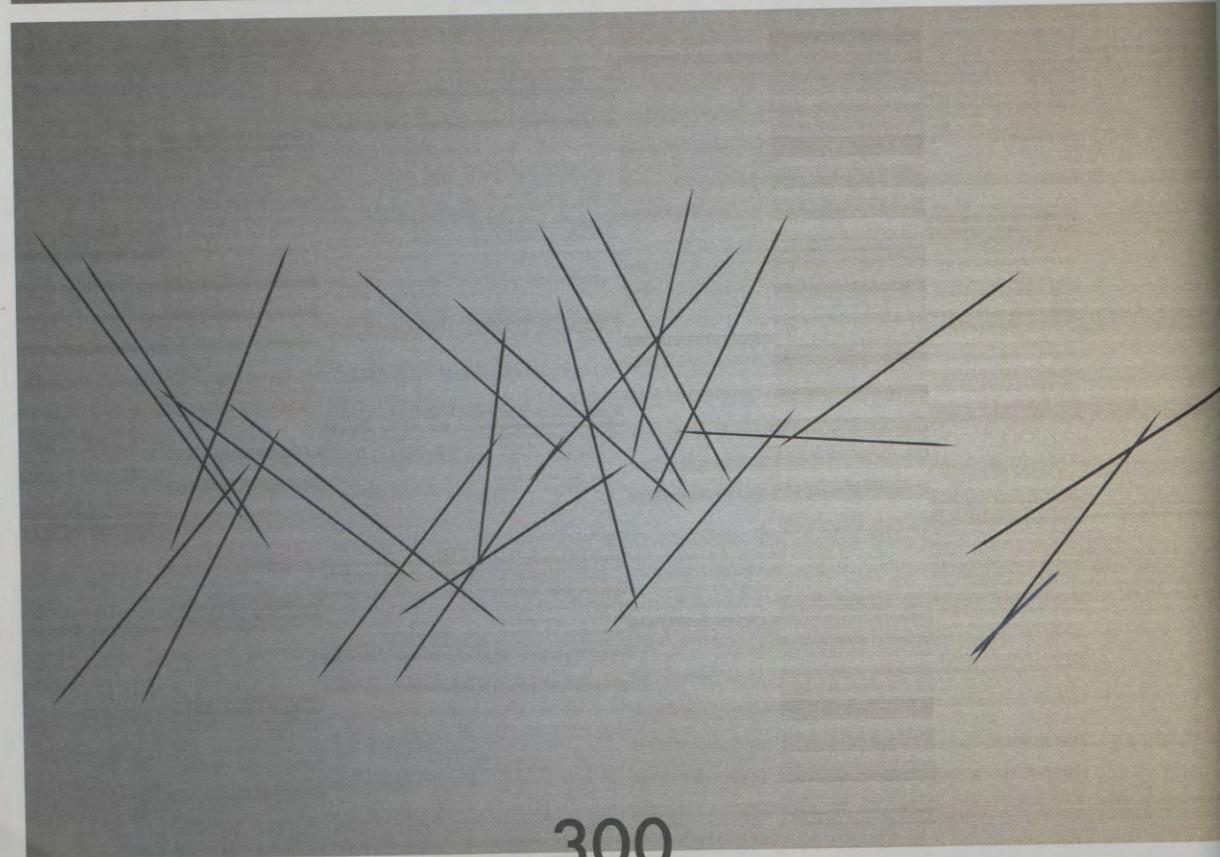
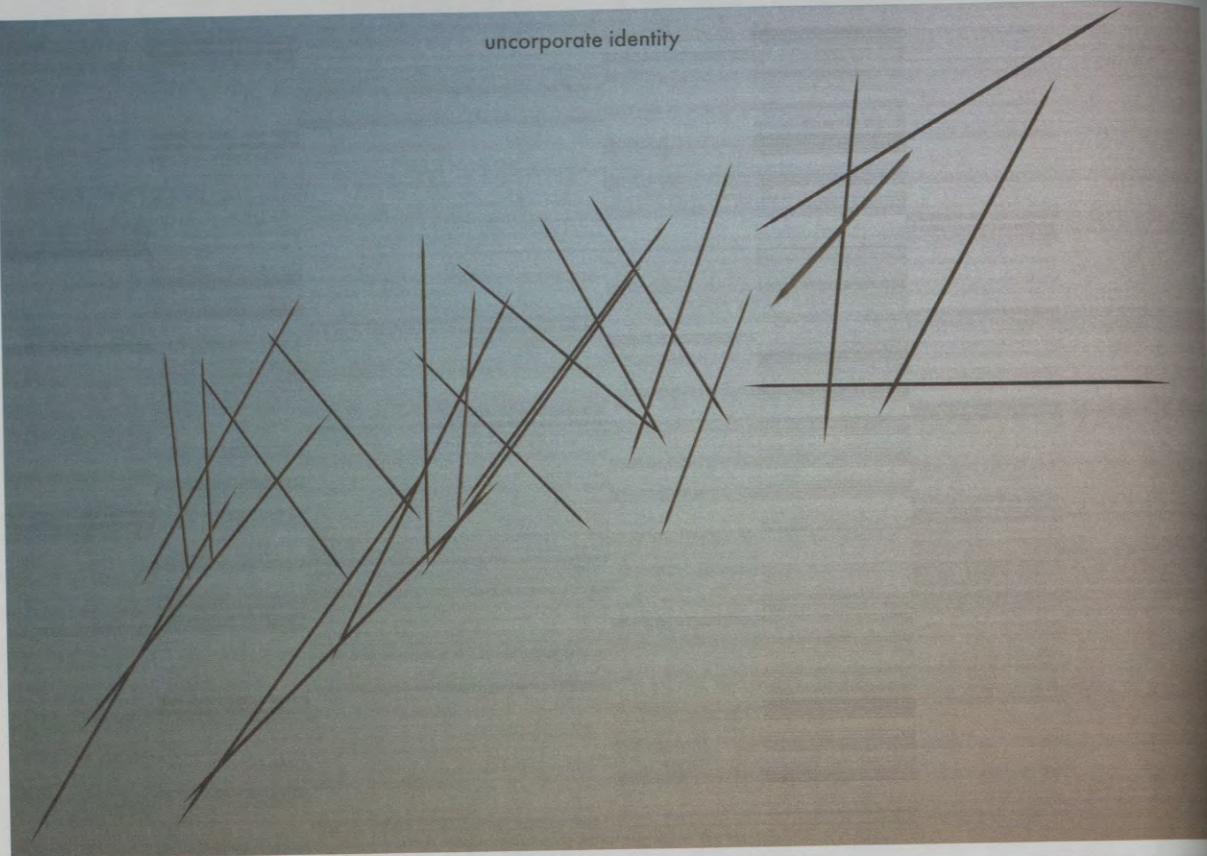
When George W. Bush referred to the perpetrators of the September 11 attacks, al Qaeda, the Taliban and Saddam Hussein as 'those evil-doers,' he was backed up theoretically by the Project for the New American Century (PNAC)—an association of academics, lobbyists and policymakers featuring among others Paul Wolfowitz, Francis Fukuyama and Richard Perle. A black metal think tank?

Neocon Black Metal Logos and Architecture	(299) (Leo) Strauss 2007.
(298) (Leo) Strauss 2007.	(300) (Paul) Wolfowitz 2007.
(Operation) Northwoods 2007.	(300) Plato 2007.
(299) (Francis) Fukuyama 2007.	(300 & 301) (Francis) Fukuyama Pavilion 2007.

uncorporate identity

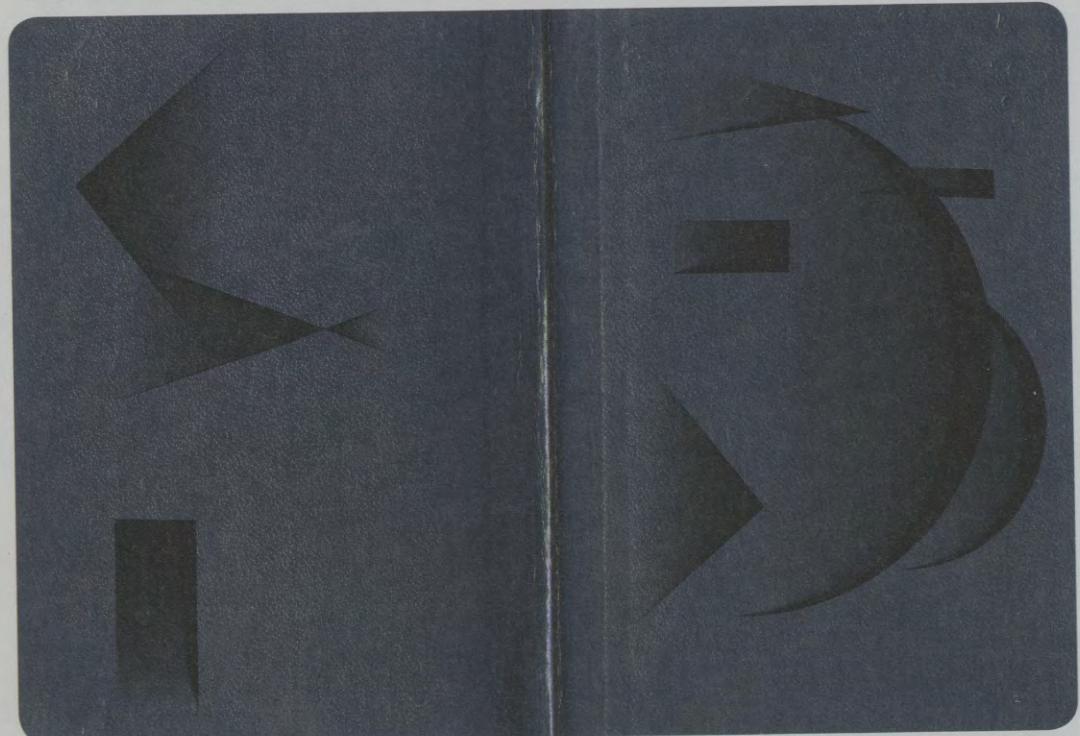


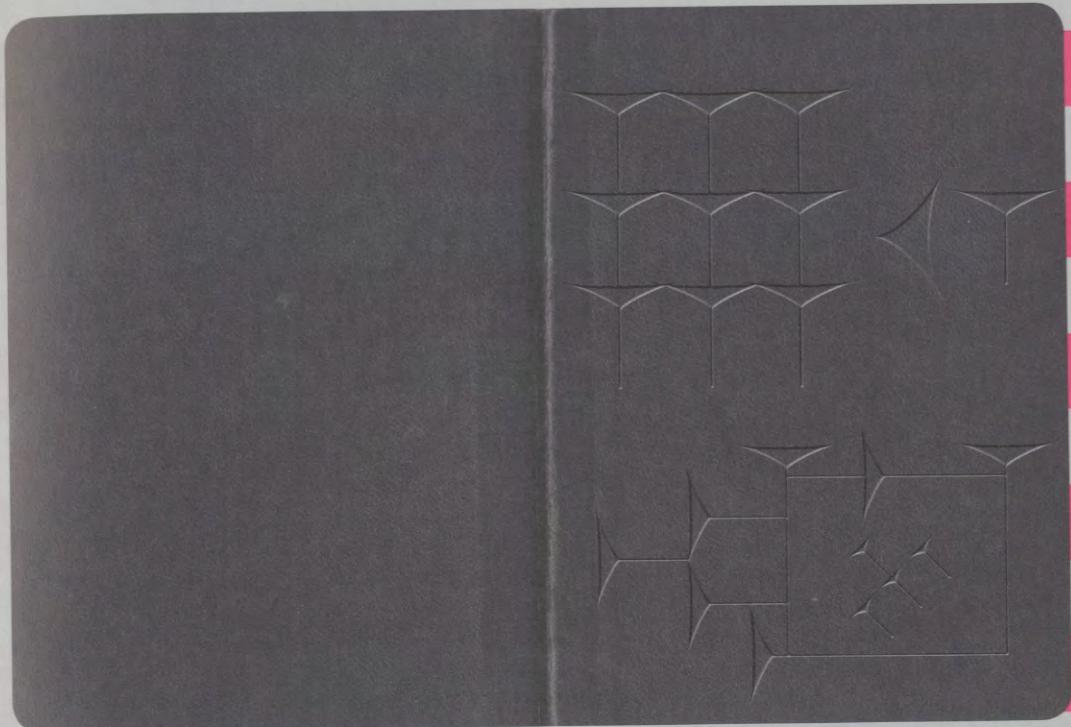










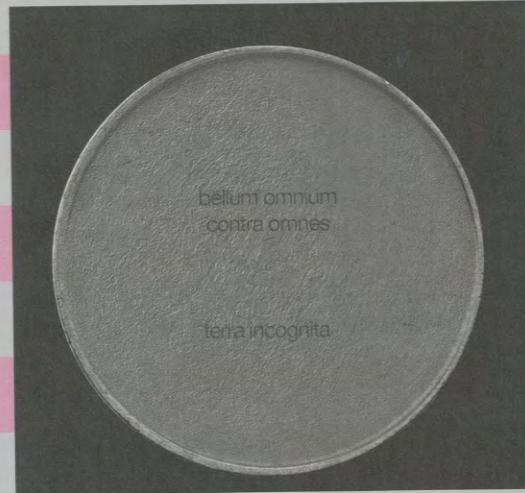
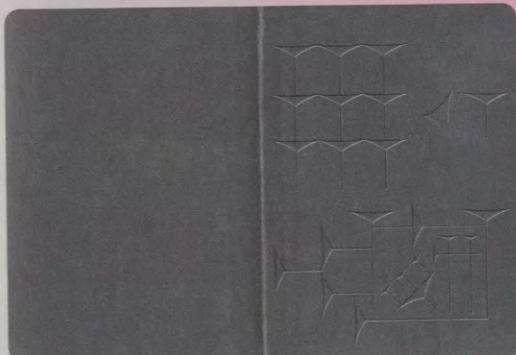


Travel Documents (Cryptography)

9/11—Calm
9/11—Thunder
2007.

Cuneiform and Cryptography

This project explores the cuneiform script, a writing system which was developed by the Sumerians and later adopted by various peoples of the Ancient Near East. Cuneiform writing started out as a way to record economic transactions. Initially, the cuneiform script was purely ideographic (or logographic)—its characters originate from pictures of objects. As cuneiform had to accommodate different languages over time, the original ideograms were re-used and adapted to represent the syllables that make up words.



Terra Inc. Discs

Bellum Omnium Contra
Omnes
Radix Omnium Malorum
Est Cupiditas

2006.



Can the friend-enemy distinction be considered in architectural metaphors? If yes, the friend-enemy building may be *Wall*.

But be cautious. *Wall* may be a screen, or a mirror. This comic links the rise of the post-9/11 neocon security state to the paranoid atria and perfect reflective surfaces of everyday life in the frictionless friendspaces, airports and transit hubs of the global West.

Have a safe trip.

Wall
2008.

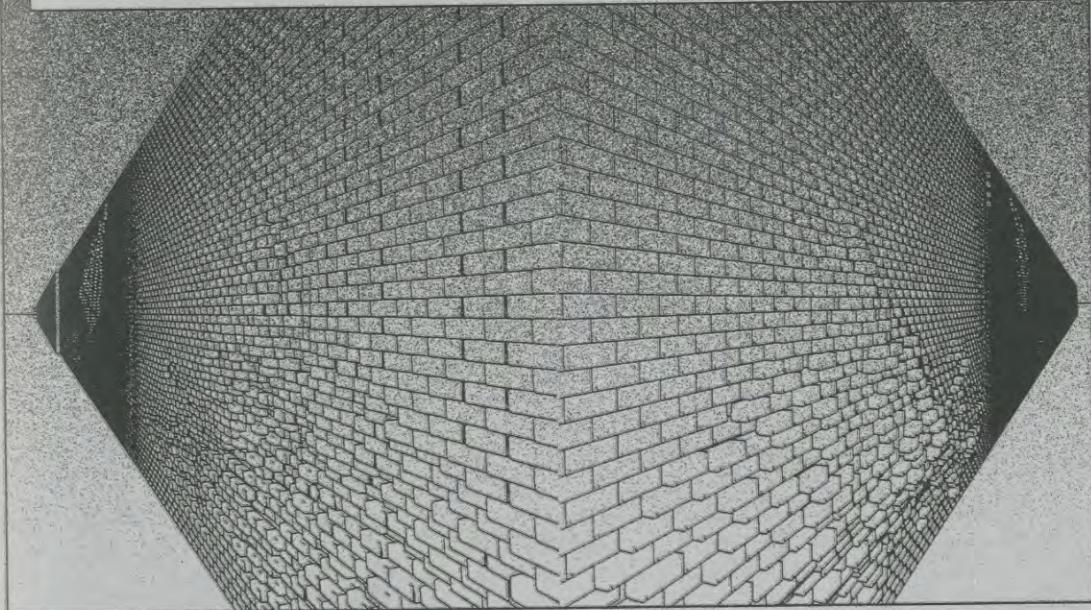
Originally presented at
Dictionary of War, Novi
Sad, Serbia, January 25,
2008.

WALL

MANAGING MULTIPOLAR IMAGE WARS

THE WALL THAT SEPARATES 'US' FROM 'THEM' IS A VIRTUAL PIECE OF ARCHITECTURE, A BUILDING OF SORTS, TO ORGANIZE THE OPPPOSITION OF IMAGINATIONS. IT CERTAINLY HELPS TO UNDERSTAND THE WALL AS THE DIVISION BETWEEN PARTIES IN A CONFLICT. BUT IT IS A CONFLICT OF A NEW KIND. IT IS A CONFLICT OR WAR PERFORMED BY AND AGAINST IMAGES AND SYMBOLS.

THESE IMAGES OVERCOMPENSATE FOR THE PHYSICAL ABSENCE OF THE ENEMY WHO IS IMAGINED AT THE OTHER SIDE OF THE WALL. THE WALL ENSURES WE CANNOT SEE HIM FOR REAL AND DO NOT PHYSICALLY MEET OR EXCHANGE WITH HIM; WE DON'T KNOW WHETHER HE EVEN IS AN OPPONENT.



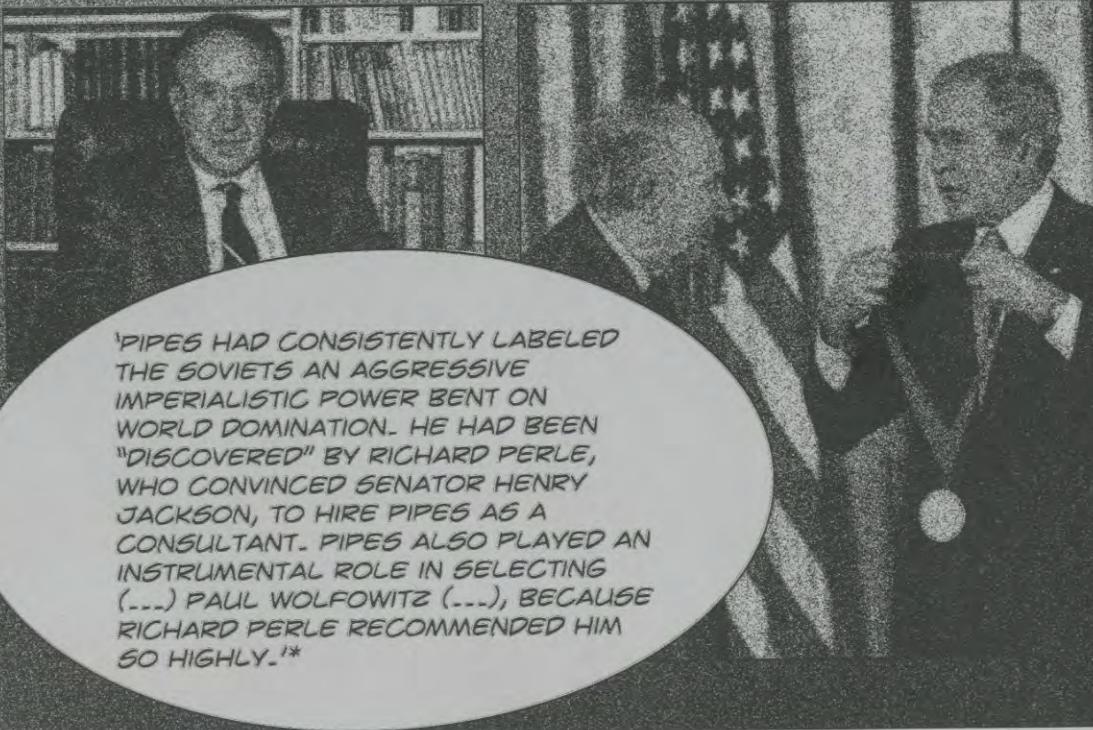
THE 'FRIEND-ENEMY' DISTINCTION, THE CONFLICTUAL RELATION BETWEEN 'US' AND 'THEM', IS MANAGED BY THE WALL. THAT RELATION IS ONE OF THE IMAGINING VERSUS THE IMAGINED. TEAM B DURING THE COLD WAR, AND THE NEOCONS DURING THE WAR ON TERROR, KNEW HOW TO IMAGINE AND REDESIGN THEIR OPPONENTS AS DANGEROUS TYRANTS IN ORDER TO WIN SUPPORT FOR THE BATTLES WHICH BEST SERVED THEIR INTERESTS. THE DESIGN OF ENEMY. AN IMAGE FILLED WITH THE MONSTROUS COLORS OF 'PURE EVIL' (WHICHEVER FLAGS)...



A SUBSTANTIAL PART OF CONFLICT NOW CONSISTS OF ORGANIZING AND APPLYING THE IMAGE OF 'ENEMY' TO OPPONENTS WHO ARE SHAPELESS, INVISIBLE, VIRTUAL OR EVEN NONEXISTENT!

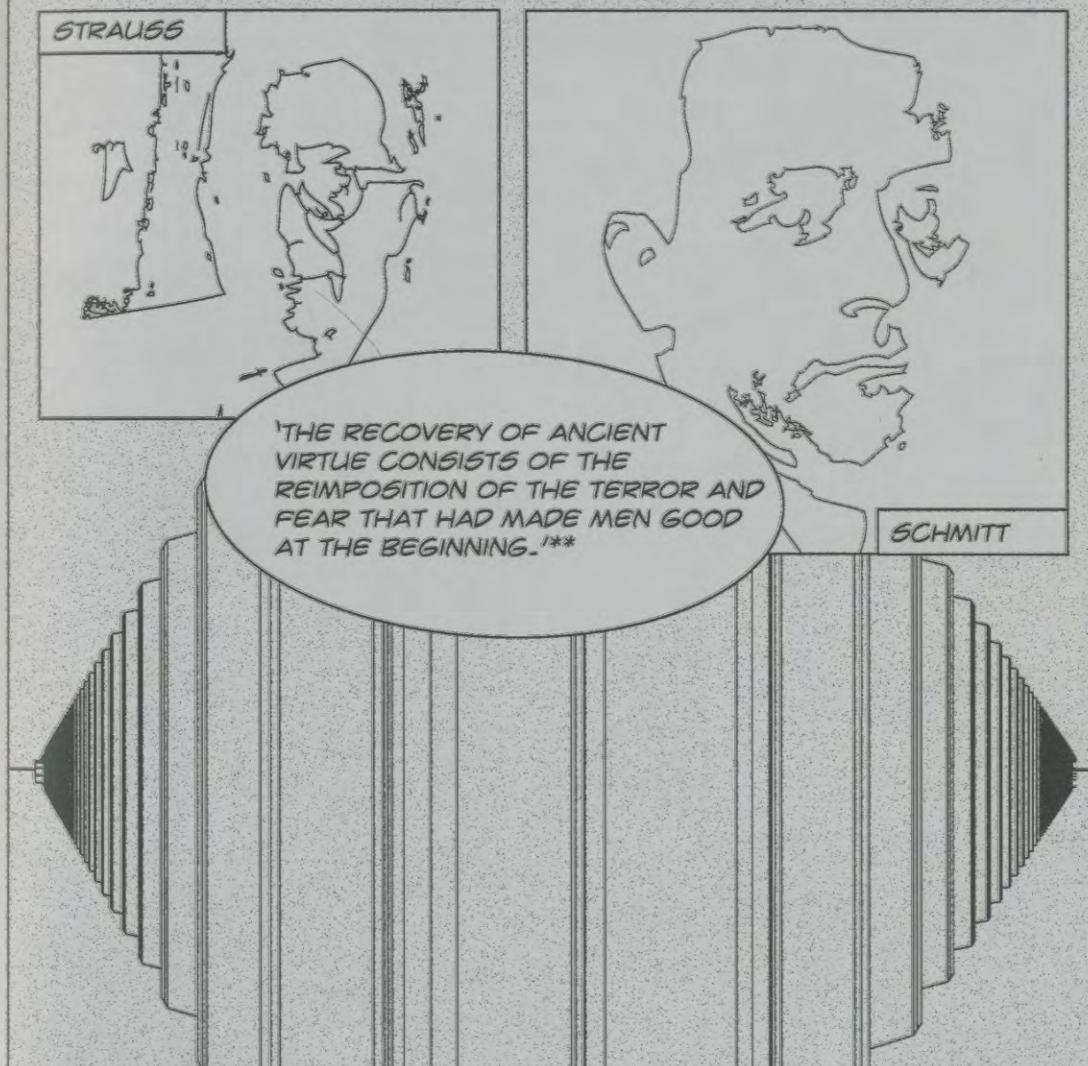
COLD WAR.

IN THE 1980S 'TEAM B', THE AMERICAN TASK FORCE LED BY PROF. RICHARD PIPES, WAS IN CHARGE OF THE ASSESSMENT OF WHAT WAS CALLED THE 'NATIONAL INTELLIGENCE ESTIMATE' ON THE SOVIET UNION. TEAM B DELIBERATELY OVERESTIMATED SOVIET MILITARY POWER AND DELIBERATELY MISINTERPRETED THE SOVIETS' STRATEGIC INTENTIONS!



'PIPES HAD CONSISTENTLY LABELED THE SOVIETS AN AGGRESSIVE IMPERIALISTIC POWER BENT ON WORLD DOMINATION. HE HAD BEEN "DISCOVERED" BY RICHARD PERLE, WHO CONVINCED SENATOR HENRY JACKSON, TO HIRE PIPES AS A CONSULTANT. PIPES ALSO PLAYED AN INSTRUMENTAL ROLE IN SELECTING (...) PAUL WOLFOWITZ (...), BECAUSE RICHARD PERLE RECOMMENDED HIM SO HIGHLY.'*

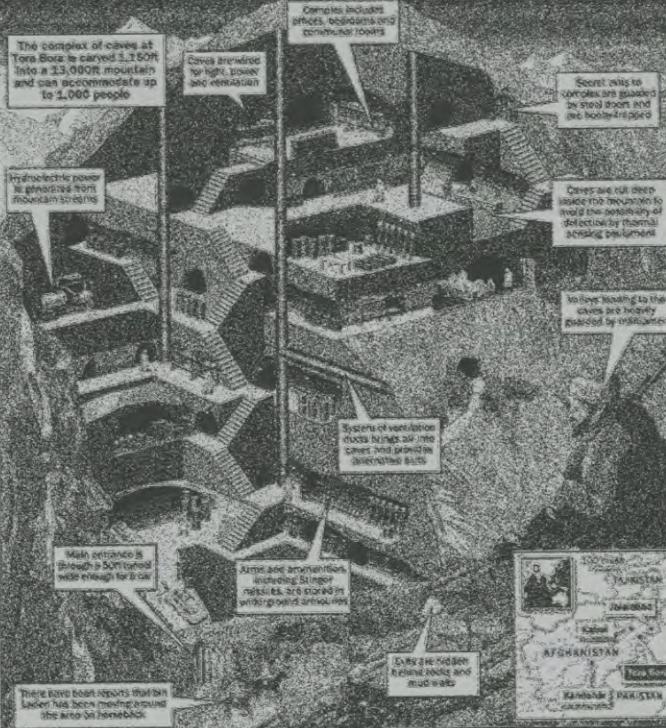
SUCH POLICIES WERE IDEOLOGICALLY BACKED UP BY CONSERVATIVE ACADEMICS WHO NEGATED LIBERALISM. ONE OF THOSE THEORISTS WAS PROF. LEO STRAUSS. STRAUSS LECTURED AT CHICAGO. HE NEVER APPEARED IN PUBLIC, EXERTING INFLUENCE FROM BEHIND THE WALL! A DARK AND MYSTERIOUS FIGURE, STRAUSS MAY NOT HAVE BEEN CONSCIOUSLY SHAPING U.S. POLICY, BUT THEN THERE WERE THE 'STRAUSSIANS': FOLLOWERS IN POSITIONS OF INFLUENCE, FORMER STUDENTS OF STRAUSS IN THINK TANKS WITH DIRECT ACCESS TO POWER... STRAUSS WAS INFLUENCED BY AND INITIALLY ACQUAINTED WITH THE GERMAN POLITICAL THEORIST CARL SCHMITT, WHO RE-INVENTED THE FRIEND-ENEMY CONTRADISTINCTION FOR MODERN POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY. LATER, ABOUT THE TIME WHEN STRAUSS HAD ESCAPED HIS NATIVE GERMANY TO THE U.S. THANKS TO A SCHOLARSHIP RECOMMENDED BY SCHMITT, THE LATTER BECAME A PROMINENT NAZI...



YEARS LATER...

ONE OF THE FICTIONS USED IN THE WAR ON TERROR IS THE IMAGE OF THE COMMAND CENTER OSAMA BIN LADEN ALLEGEDLY OCCUPIES IN A CAVE IN THE MOUNTAINS OF TORA BORA, AFGHANISTAN...

BIN LADEN'S MOUNTAIN FORTRESS



EVEN THOUGH THIS COMMAND CENTER DID NOT EXIST, IT WAS IMAGINED, DESIGNED AND PUBLISHED AS A FULLY CREDIBLE DOCUMENTARY IMAGE FROM BEHIND THE WALL. PROVING THAT THE ENEMY HAS 'GRAND SCHEMES' BY DESIGNING THEM FOR HIM COMES DOWN TO THE SELF-AFFIRMING MODEL OF THE CONSPIRACY THEORY!

Bin Laden may be in city, not cave - ex-spy chief

The Christian Science Monitor
By Mark T. Tackett, Special Correspondent

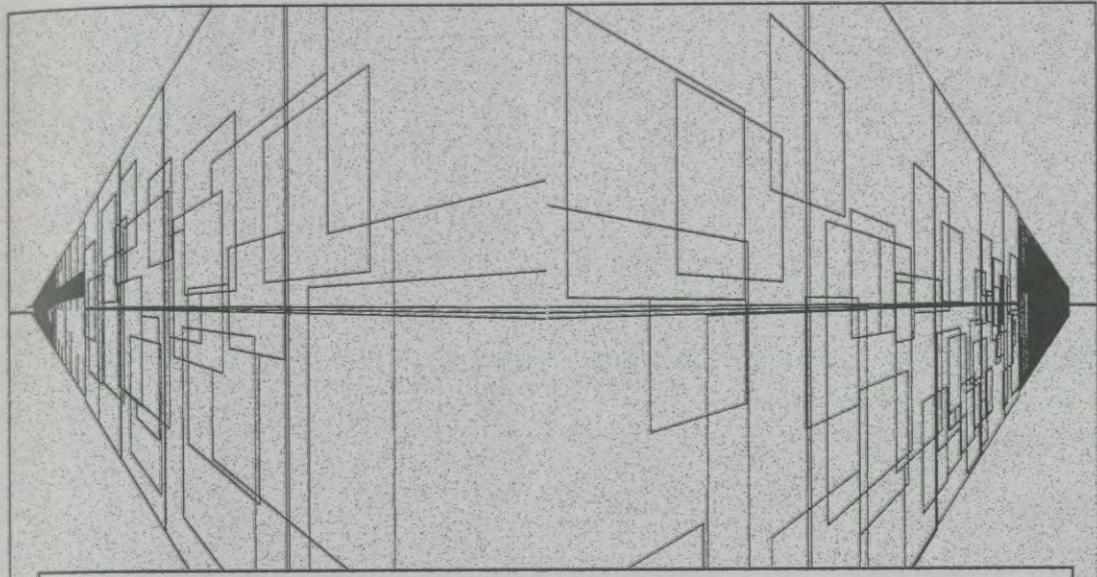
By Mark T. Tackett, Special Correspondent
LONDON (UPI) -- Osama bin Laden would find more safety in a city than a remote desert region, a former Pakistani intelligence chief said on Tuesday, challenging the notion that the Al Qaeda leader is usually hidden up in the mountains.
Lieutenant-General Asad Durrani, former head of the powerful military intelligence agency (ISI), said the terrorist leader probably resides back in the tribal areas west of Kabul, in Afghanistan, he told a London-based news agency.

Lieutenant-General Asad Durrani, former head of the powerful military intelligence agency (ISI), said the terrorist leader probably resides back in the tribal areas west of Kabul, in Afghanistan, he told a London-based news agency.



NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLER
SEAN HANNITY





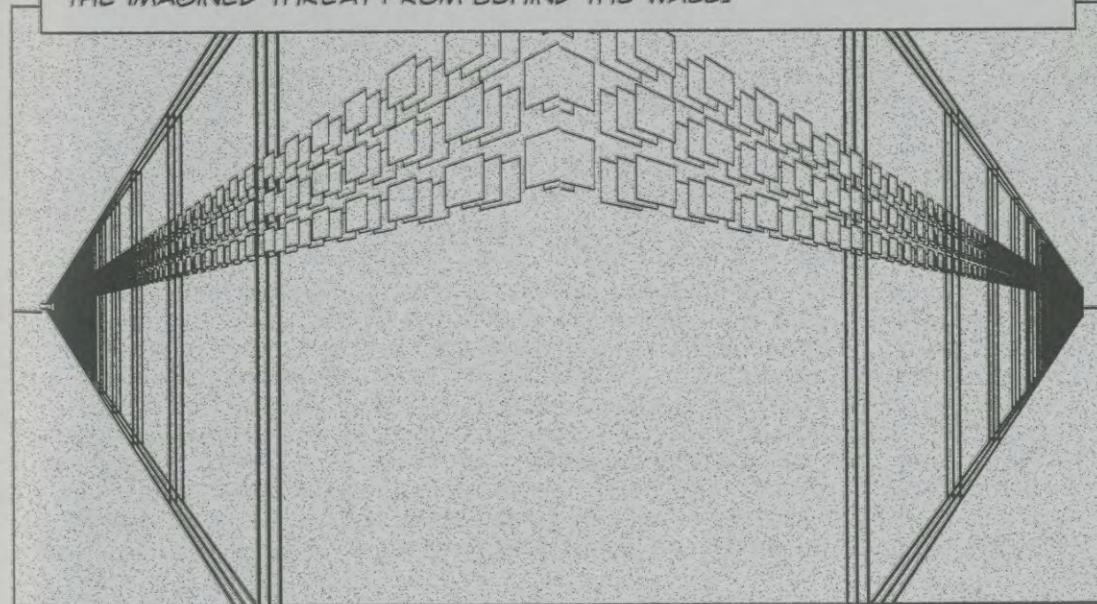
MEANWHILE...

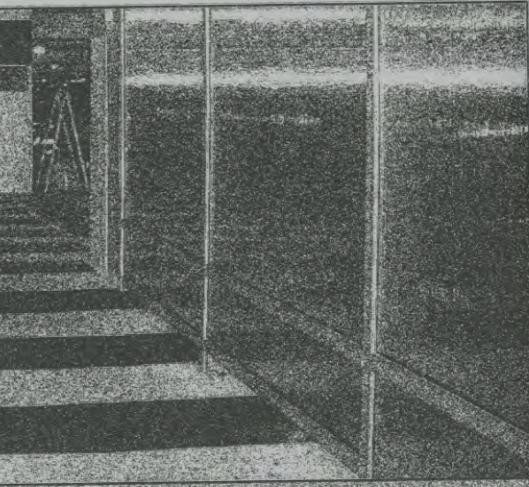
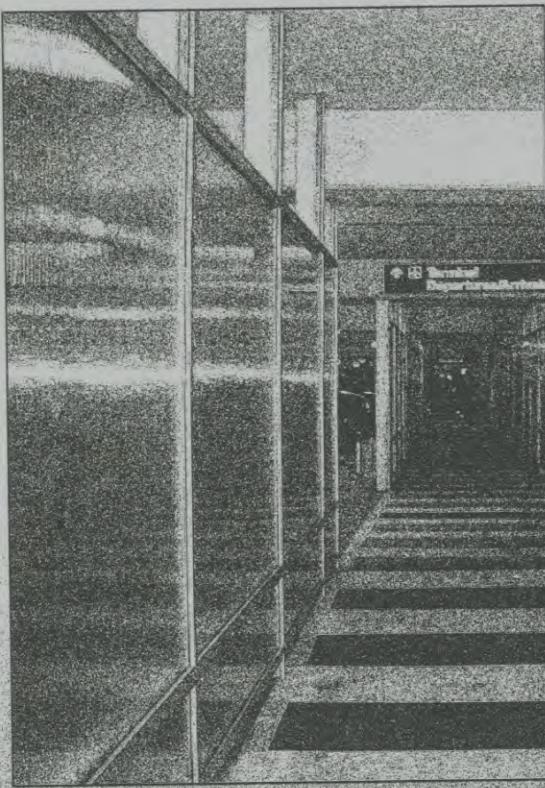
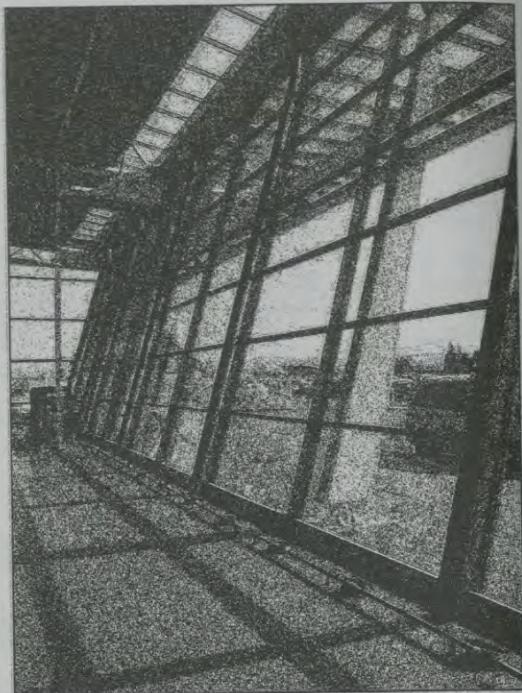
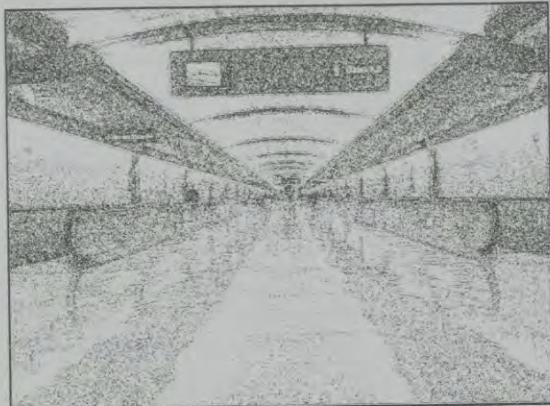
THE WALL DOES NOT ONLY SEPARATE 'US' FROM 'THEM'. IT ALSO SEPARATES 'US' FROM 'US'.

IT ORGANIZES MANAGERIAL AND LOGISTIC RELATIONS.

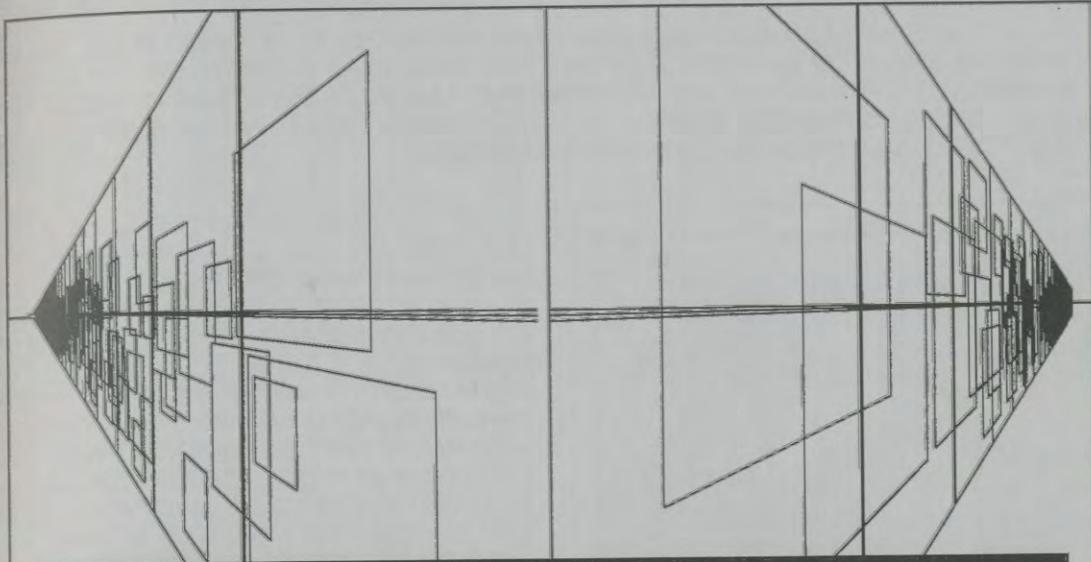
IT IS MADE OF GLASS. NEITHER OF THE PARTIES SEPARATED BY THE GLASS WALL REALLY KNOWS WHETHER THEY ARE IN FRONT, OR BEHIND THE WALL, WHETHER THEY ARE IMAGINING, OR BEING IMAGINED.

THE CONSEQUENCES OF THE SEPARATION ARE REAL EVERYWHERE; INFORMATION ALLOWING US TO VERIFY WHETHER OUR OUTRAGEOUS IMAGININGS ABOUT OTHERS HOLD ANY TRUTH IS EVENTUALLY BEING MANAGED AWAY AND REDUCED TO THE LEVEL OF IMAGES IN THE 'ZERO FRICTION ZONES'. PUBLIC SPACE IS BEING RESHAPED UNDER THE IMAGINED THREAT FROM BEHIND THE WALL.





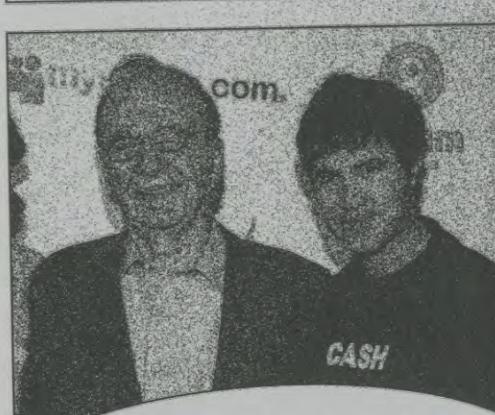
THE GLASS WALL AT THE AIRPORT MANAGES THE FLOWS OF INCOMING AND OUTGOING TRAVELERS SO THAT EVERYONE IS AN IMAGE, A SILENT FIGURE BEHIND THE GLASS HASTILY MOVING TOWARDS THE OBJECTIVE: THE GATE. ENCOUNTERS ARE REDUCED TO THE PASSING OF CHECKPOINTS. AT THE CHECKPOINTS, OUR STUFF IS BEING BROUGHT OUT IN THE OPEN TO BE SUBJECTED TO SCANNING. ONCE WE'VE SETTLED OURSELVES IN THE LUSH COMFORT OF LOUNGE AND RELAX ZONES WE OPEN OUR LAPTOPS, ENTER A FEW CHARACTERS TO PASS THE FIREWALL, AND BEGIN CHECKING OUR AIRMAIL. THE INCOMING MESSAGES AFFIRM THAT WE, ALTHOUGH HAVING PASSED THE CHECKPOINT, ARE STILL ON OUR SIDE OF THE WALL---



MANAGING MULTIPOLAR IMAGE WARS. THAT IS THE BUSINESS OF THE WALL. ESPECIALLY WHEN THE INTERNET COMES IN AS THE NETWORK FOR DISTRIBUTING THEM. NETWORKED IMAGINATION MULTIPLIES EVER-NEW FEARS AND CONFLICTS, AS THE ADVERSARIES AVOID POLITICAL CONFRONTATION. THE WALL BECOMES THE PRODUCTIVE BASIS OF IMAGINATION. THE INTERNET AND NETWORKING INFRASTRUCTURE SURPASS THEIR OWN CONDITION OF NON-TERRITORIALITY. BY ENABLING FRICTIONLESS EXPANSION, NETWORKS BECOME IMMATERIAL TERRITORIES WHICH DEVELOP PURELY ON THE BASIS OF THEIR OWN KNOWLEDGE, THEIR OWN SIDE OF THE WALL. ONE SIDE OF THE WALL PROVIDES SPACE FOR FRIENDS, WHILE THE WALL ITSELF CAN EXIST ONLY THROUGH THE IDEA OF ENEMY. THE MORE A POSSIBLE ENEMY APPEARS VEILED AND BLURRED, THE MORE USEFUL IT IS IN ITS IMAGINARY EFFECTS AND IMMATERIAL ECHOES... 'WE', ON OUR SIDE OF THE WALL, CAN ENDLESSLY RE-AFFIRM AND MAINTAIN OUR IMAGE OF 'THEM', OUR MORAL RIGHT, OUR OPINIONS, AND OUR VALUES. 'THEY', ON THE OTHER SIDE, WILL DO THE SAME THING...



ALONG WITH INDIVIDUALIZATION AND TERRITORIAL DISLOCATION, THE PARTIES ENGAGED IN IMAGE WAR ARE NO LONGER FIXED TO THEIR PHYSICAL DOMAINS. THE WALL'S EMBEDDED REALITY IS VIRTUAL REALITY, IDEOLOGICAL SPHERES, MORAL VALUES, NAMES, SOCIAL NETWORKS, ATTITUDES AND TAGS, IMAGES AND MARKETS---



RUPERT MURDOCH (NEWSCORP)
AND TOM ANDERSON (MYSPACE)
ON THE DAY MURDOCH BOUGHT
MYSPACE.

WHAT YOU FIND ON THE NET---
USER GENERATED CONTENT IS THE
NOISE THAT SHAPES THE OUTER
SURFACE OF IDEOLOGICAL WORLDS.
IT MULTIPLIES AND FEEDS BACK ON
ITSELF!

EVERY IDENTITY AND IDEOLOGY
CAN BE PLACED ALONG THE WALL
AND MULTIPLIES BEFORE IT. THE
ENTITY ON OUR SIDE OF THE WALL
IS ALWAYS A 'FRIEND'. MYSPACE,
THE 'SPACE FOR FRIENDS', IS THE
INFINITELY STRETCHED, VAST SOCIAL
NETWORK WHICH ALLOWS SIGNALS
ON ITS SIDE OF THE WALL TO ECHO
ENDLESSLY. AS WE SPEAK, TOM,
THE FOUNDER AND PRESIDENT
OF MYSPACE, HAS 234,841,641
FRIENDS---

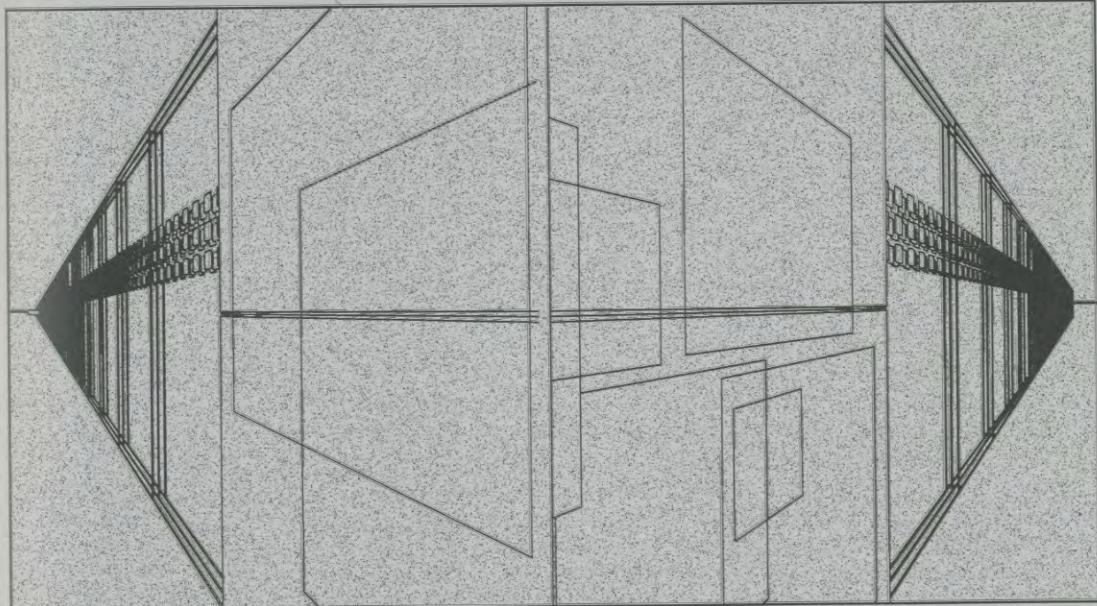
'YOUSSEF & KAMAL',
HOME MADE RAP MUSIC
FROM THE CITY OF
EINDHOVEN---



IMAGINE THAT THE ACTORS WHO APPEAR CLOSEST TO THE WALL ARE
AT THE OUTER LIMITS OF THEIR NETWORKS, NOT AT THE CENTERS. THEY
ARE EXTREMES. AS NODES IN A NETWORK THEY ARE SITUATED AT EITHER
A DIRECT LINK, OR AT THE WALL. THOSE END-NODES ARE THE LEAST
CONNECTED TO CENTRALIZED POWER, BUT IN PRACTICE THEY ARE THE
PRODUCERS OF MAXIMUM FRICTION!



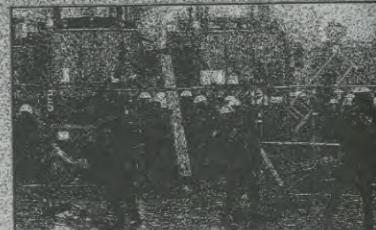
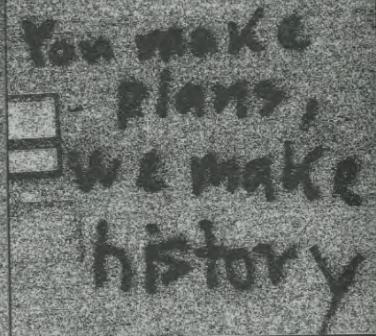
FRIENDS MAKE ENEMIES. THE CLOTH OF SURVEILLANCE CURRENTLY LAID OUT OVER OUR SOCIETIES IN THE NAME OF RISK CONTROL AND PREVENTION TAKES THE VERY APPEARANCE OR POTENTIAL PRESENCE OF ENEMY AS IMAGE AS THE THREAT THAT MUST BE CONTAINED.



THIS GLOBAL MEASURE SUPPRESSES NOT MERELY REAL TERRORISTS BUT ALL OPPOSITION AND NEGATION...

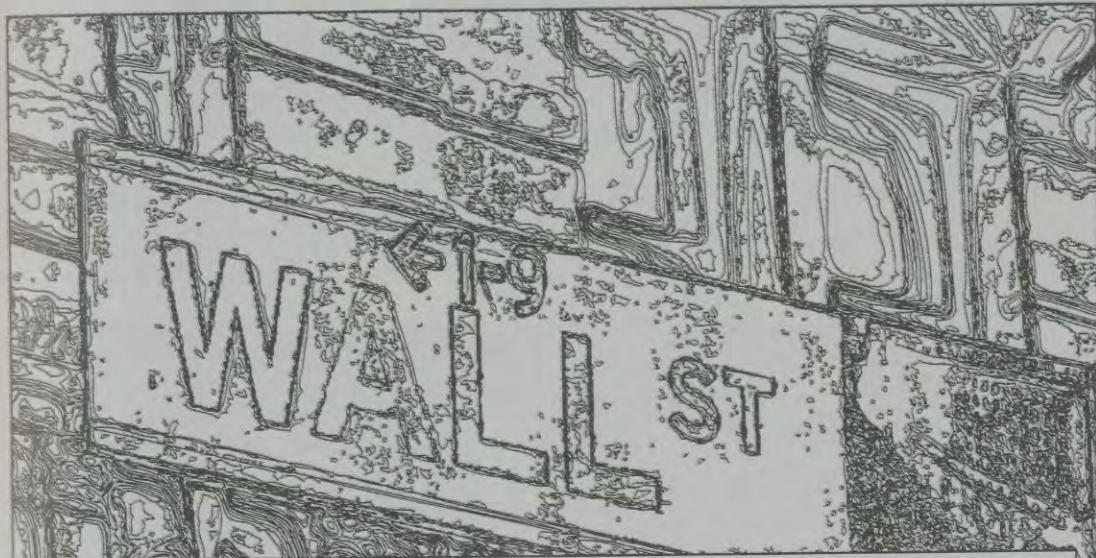
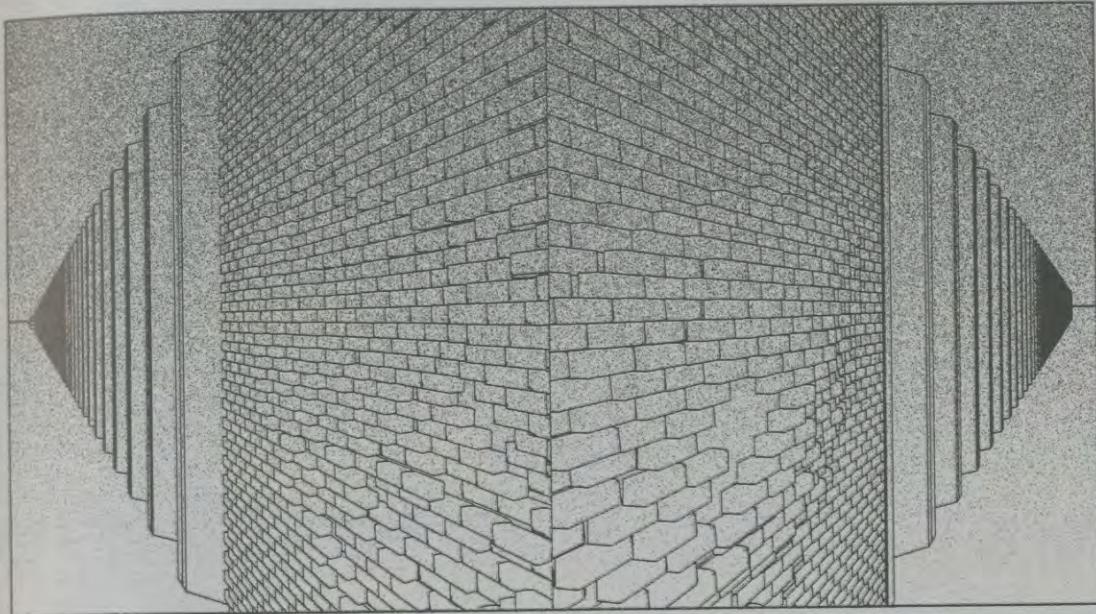
BY MEANS OF THE PAIRED REGIMES OF ZERO FRICTION AND ZERO TOLERANCE, PUBLIC SPACES ARE DESIGNED AND MAINTAINED AS THREAT-FREE ZONES. 'ZERO FRICTION' PREVENTS, 'ZERO TOLERANCE' FORBIDS. THE DESIGN OF PUBLIC INFRASTRUCTURE IS A HIGH-LEVEL SECURITY FACILITY, PREVENTING ANY UNEXPECTED PERSONAL EXCHANGES BETWEEN PEOPLE FROM HAPPENING IN PUBLIC BY MEANS OF VARIOUS SPATIAL TOOLS WHICH ALL FALL BACK ONTO A SINGLE TYPOLOGY: THE WALL!

GENOA G8, 2001...



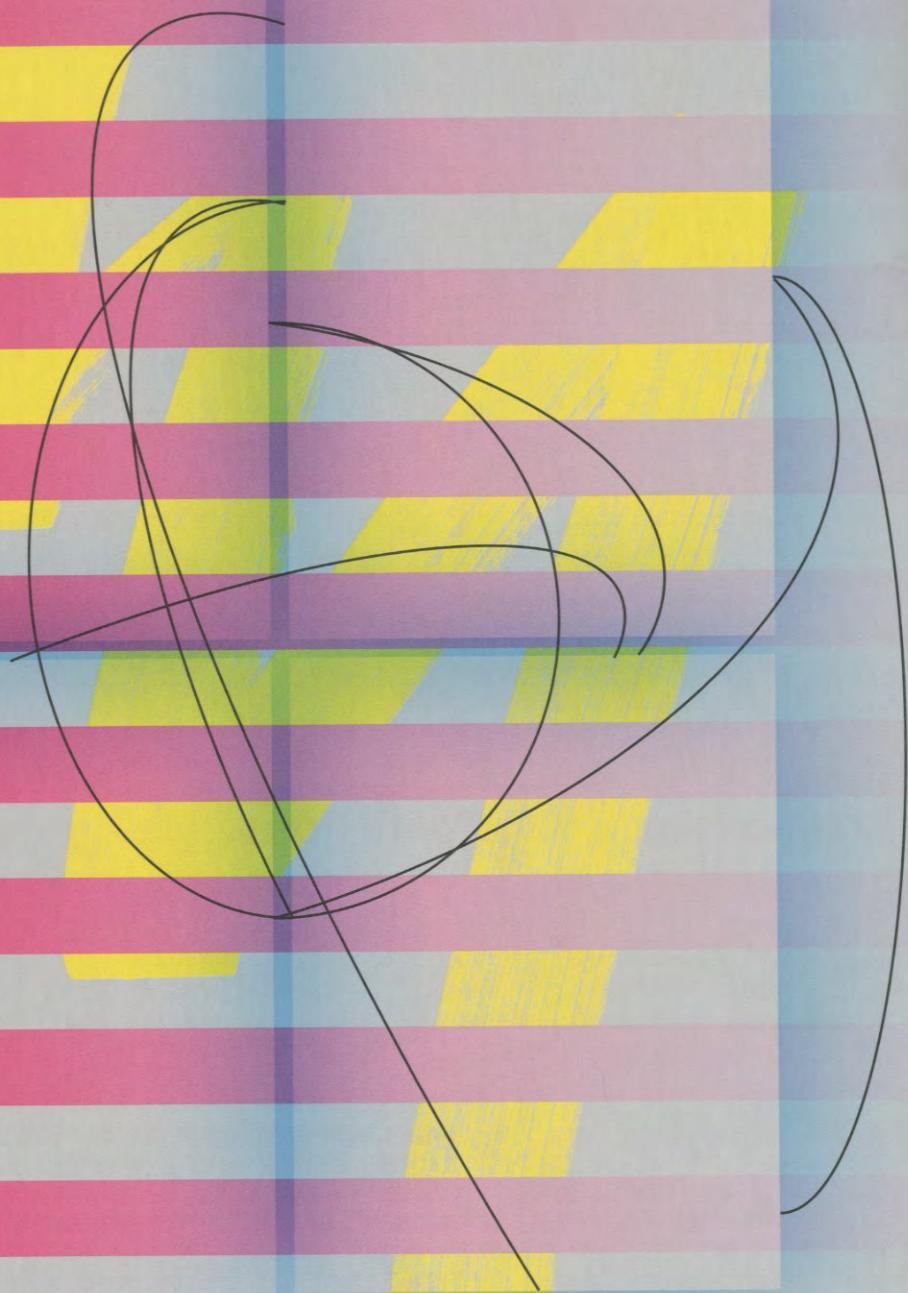
A RECENT PROJECT OF FRENCH PRESIDENT NICOLAS SARKOZY IS TO REVIVE 'CIVILIZATION' BY QUESTIONING SECULAR SOCIETY. BY LINKING CITIZENSHIP TO CHRISTIANITY HE PROVES THAT THE NECESSARY CONDITION TO ALLOW FOR THE BUILDING OF A WALL IS A VIRTUAL ONE. HIS WALL AMOUNTS TO THE CONSTRUCTION OF AN OPPONENT TO ALL OTHER IDEOLOGICAL SPHERES, TO ALL OTHER DIMENSIONS. IT COMPRESSES ITS OWN TERRITORY INTO A SINGULAR, ONE-DIMENSIONAL REGIME AGAINST TERRORIST BARBARIANS. THIS WALL FUNCTIONS INSIDE FRANCE ITSELF TO SEPARATE FRENCH FROM FOE, LIKE A VIRTUAL 'BOULEVARD PERIPHERIQUE' THAT SEPARATES PARIS FROM ITS SUBURBS...





THE WALL PRODUCES PLACEHOLDERS FOR ENEMIES. IT PRODUCES FEARS AND ALLIANCES. IT INSTITUTES CONFLICTING SIDES BUT ALSO REGULATES AND MANAGES. IT DIVIDES IN AND OUT, WEALTHY AND POOR, RIGHT AND WRONG, ACCORDING TO MULTIPLE POSITIONS ALONG A BIPOLAR AXIS. THE SELF-AFFIRMATIVE NATURE OF COMMERCIAL SOCIAL NETWORKING ON THE INTERNET, WITH ITS VISUAL REGIME OF BREAKING BOUNDARIES, ONLY AFFIRMS THE WALL AND STRENGTHENS ITS POTENTIAL FOR PROJECTION AND MIRRORING. THE WALL CAN BE USED TO DESIGN ENEMIES IF YOU DON'T HAVE THEM ALREADY, AND TO CONSTRUCT GLOBAL FINANCIAL REGIMES VIA A SINGLE WALL STREET. IT WAS THE SAME WALL THAT WE HAVE BEEN FACING ALL ALONG.

‘GAME’



UNCOVER THE CONSPIRACY BY FOLLOWING THE LINKS, FINDING
OUT ABOUT THE REAL INTENTIONS BEHIND THE GRAPHICS.

PITCH
BLACK
METAL

Logos,

Passwords,

and

Games

METAHAVEN

Certain correspondences have been detected between privacy software and subculture, as manifested in black metal and its illegible logos.

The genealogy of proto-Metal font Fraktur—from Middle Ages to Third Reich—is the gateway to the many lives (and ‘faces of death’) of black metal: as a conservative force of teenage negation, as a torture technique at Guantánamo Bay, and as a blast of ‘realness’ in art galleries.

The song is called *War*. Backed by drums, the sound of massive guitar overdrive blares from the speakers. Then, a shrieking voice joins in. Although the singer is in deadly earnest, it sounds like some kind of horror muppet is being strangled. Varg Vikernes, the lone member of the Norwegian band Burzum, sings, drums and plays the guitar. A major difference between Vikernes and 'hard rock musicians' like Black Sabbath's Ozzy Osborne, or Metallica's James Hetfield, is that Vikernes has taken the ideology of his music to heart, and declared war on the world. Vikernes is now in jail for the murder of Øystein Aarseth, the guitarist of the black metal band Mayhem. He is also serving additional prison time for setting fire to ancient wooden churches in the Norwegian countryside. In prison, Vikernes devotes himself to the future of the Aryan race, writing down his world views in *Vargsmål*¹—a book that looks somewhat like *Mein Kampf* gone Ikea. After his release from prison, Vikernes will move to a rural village in southeastern Norway.

When Mayhem issued its now legendary debut demo in 1985—called *Pure Fucking Armageddon*—it was common practice for underground metal bands to record their own tapes and distribute them through an intensely networked, but very distributed, community of fellow bands, zines and random youths aspiring to have a band of their own. In starting a band, the name would be essential, with the word 'death' often prominently featured.² Equally important were the photos of the band, cover art and, most of all, the band logo.

These symbols were to be prioritized over any sense of credible musicianship. The logo of an underground black metal band had to be illegible—a symmetrical maze of jagged forms. The brand message of the illegible logo, of which there are now many thousands, is the visual personification of an idea of 'Evil'—and with that, a carefully fabricated stance of rejection of the 'modern world.' Historically the ideas of 'Evil' in black metal logos are linked to a strain of iconography and typography used in Nazi Germany, which freely borrowed and appropriated from earlier sources. As an offspring of the more generic 'hard rock' genre and its early 1980s infusion with the D.I.Y. sound of punk rock, extreme metal bands have often referenced the typography of the Third Reich to embolden their logos. The logo of Kiss, designed in the early 1970s by band member Ace Frehley, already unmistakably resembles the SS trademark.

Though not ideologically endorsing Nazism, Kiss wanted glam and scandal, appropriating not the politics but the shock value of form—a postmodern Las Vegas rather than a return to some sort of invented 'Aryan roots.'

Deena Weinstein, author of *Heavy Metal: The Music and Its Culture*, believes that metal is apolitical, and interested in the idea of power in the most general sense. Fans and musicians behave rather naively, and Frehley and the other members of Kiss explain the two S's in their logo as lightning bolts.³ Robert Walser, professor of musicology at the University of California, qualifies that image. He writes that heavy metal musicians make use of 'images of horror and madness' in order to comprehend and critique the world:

Although they are continually stereotyped and dismissed as apathetic nihilists, metal fans and musicians build on sedimented musical forms and cultural icons to create for themselves a world with more depth and intensity. If in some ways heavy metal replicates the ruthless individualism and violence that capitalism and government policy have naturalized, it also creates communal attachments, enacts collective empowerment, and works to assuage entirely reasonable anxieties.⁴

Tom ter Bogt, professor of pop music at Utrecht University, adds: 'Metal is a form of escapism. Naturally you see this more often in youths who are up against it. A metal concert is a celebration by people with problems. I think this is less true in the Netherlands, by the way. If you are a hard-core metal fan in the United States, you are extremely marginalized socially. Dropouts from school, if they are white, are always metal fans.'⁵ U.K. Subs, a legendary 1980s punk rock band, had 'Self Destruct!' as its motto. The black metal logo seems to have taken this idea to heart. Its systematic illegibility has a self-cancelling quality to it; a message erased at the very moment it is transmitted.

As black metal threatens the world with total devastation, it issues similar threats to the logo.

Sometimes, this even happens amidst Scandinavian social-democratic well-being. According to the American designer Mark Owens, Mayhem (Norway) was among the first bands to have an illegible logo.⁶ The logos of predecessors like Venom (England) and Celtic Frost (Switzerland) were still barely legible. As Mayhem's logo took a tiny step over that line, it seems that that the illegible band logo came into being around 1985. The logo is a password-behind it, a secret world is waiting. Illegible logos and messages are an unprecedented brand of fantasy in the otherwise rationalized world of visual trademarks, especially when seen in public. Their coded, forbidding appearance negates common assumptions on how to properly visualize an organization. Graphic design has, by education and professional mandate, cared for modalities of legibility and communicability more than for oppositional or romantic notions of public recognition. Design's role and alibi as a provider of public information may have initially identified with a utopian drive towards a new and more enlightened society, but has ended up obsessed with accessibility and marketability that appeals to convention and habit. Communication strategists, behavioral scientists, copywriters, styling agents and other experts have helped create a world without secrets. Black metal logos, by contrast, are perhaps pseudo-religious or faux-ideographic forms more akin to encoding and encryption than they are to clear ('public') communication.



Mayhem, undated photo.

Francisco de Goya
(1746–1828)
The Sleep of Reason
Produces Monsters
etching, 1797–1799
The Metropolitan Museum
of Art, New York.

Kiss logo—glam rock—and
the black metal logo's
transition to illegibility:
Venom (UK), Mayhem, and
Darkthrone (both Norway).

BLACKLETTER'S MANY USES

Before the illegible logos of bands like Mayhem, metal and hard rock bands were mostly identifiable by their use of gothic Blackletter, or 'Fraktur.' While the typeface was ubiquitous in medieval Europe, it was progressively marginalized as a common form of script, especially at the advent of Renaissance, except for Germany, where it remained current. Much later, at the time of German unification in 1871, Bismarck considered Blackletter the only correct German script.

Fraktur, among many other applications, served as the logotype of the anti-Semitic magazine *Der Stürmer* published by the Nazi ideologist Julius Streicher.⁷ The German forces got rid of Fraktur as their corporate typeface in 1943, due to its lack of legibility to inhabitants of occupied territories.

Fraktur and its relatives are widespread as titling typefaces. Fraktur doesn't necessarily refer to any Nazi ideology when it adorns the front page of newspapers (like *The New York Times*, *Le Monde*, and the *Frankfurter Allgemeine*), eminent lawyers' offices, various brands of alcoholic beverages—including Warsteiner and Jägermeister—and so on. Metal and hard rock bands combine Fraktur with an umlaut (Motörhead) to strengthen references to Germany and the Third Reich. Formally, Fraktur also resembles spikes, flames, foliage, castles, scythes, church towers, and fences, and in more than one respect is related to the later generation of illegible logos.

Fraktur is still widely used, from diplomas to wedding invitations. There seems to be nothing 'evil' about that, but perhaps there is something about Fraktur which has generally come to stand for immovable loyalty, permanence, and a retroactive rooting in history—the fact that it is put to use to typographically mark *important, decisive, and binding* moments—such as graduation, or marriage—is fully compatible with its usage as a symbol of power. The brewery giants' gothic logos refer to their craftsmanship,

tradition, and origin—something only to be appreciated by connoisseurs. Fraktur's linkage to connoisseurship also strikes a note with metal fans. Roberto Martinelli, editor of the *Maelstrom* metal fanzine, writes: 'A logo plays a huge part in the image of a company or product. This is also certainly the case with bands... In black metal particularly, there is a certain revered aesthetic, like spikiness, illegibility, intricacy; to those things are added that intangible element that tells the connoisseur 'this is a cult album that is worth your time.'⁸

Extreme metal is generally considered an 'underground,' especially when Satanic or Pagan forces revolt against what is pictured as a Christian world establishment. From this perspective, metal promotes points of view which seem 'conservative.' So much in fact, that this point of view may wear a progressive mask, evoking a mythical world before any social contract, when human relations came down to the direct, unmediated confrontation between adversaries.

And yet, the negative energy prevailing in black metal is not amenable to the release of 'progressive' ideas; metal's rejection of the present order is more strongly connected with notions of power and violence, or the imagined omnipotence of totalitarian force, than with the ideas about equality and anarchy which typified punk.⁹ According to Dieter Roelstraete, a Belgian curator, philosopher (and musician in the metal-inspired grindcore genre), such a distinction is 'typical of the 80s': 'I think that punk always had more to do with the ethics of protest, and metal more with the aesthetics of protest; however, the idea that metal could be an affirmative cultural phenomenon seems to me impossible—'reactionary' does not necessarily imply identification with power.'¹⁰

BLACK METAL AT GUANTÁNAMO

At the Guantánamo Bay prison in Cuba, an American extra-legal bastion located outside of any jurisdiction, prisoners caught in the 'War on Terror' were exposed to a range of experimental punitive methods, in order to have them disclose information about their alleged membership of terrorist networks. One those advanced torture methods consisted of exposing kneeled, chained prisoners to (black) metal music played at concert volume, with the same song repeating for hours. This practice was portrayed in Michael Winterbottom's film *The Road to Guantánamo*. The film describes how Shafiq Rasul, Asif Iqbal, and Rhuhel Ahmed from Tipton, England were deemed to be terrorists by the American forces in Afghanistan and locked up in Guantánamo Bay.¹¹ In Winterbottom's version, the

featured black metal music was by Cradle of Filth from Suffolk, England.¹²

Asked about the use of metal at Guantánamo Bay,¹³ Tom ter Bogt replies: 'This type of music is very far from the musical idiom of the people who are imprisoned there. Even to Western ears, it can literally sound devilish. Most people will go crazy if you force them listen to that sort of music... Particularly the so-called 'grunting' brings out something devilish that is probably recognizable in other cultures too. I don't know for sure, of course, but I think that this way of singing cross-culturally refers to very dark things. That is why it is so effective. It could also be music that is popular amongst the prison guards there.'¹⁴ Guantánamo Bay held 'unlawful combatants' (a special juridical category invented by the George W. Bush administration) without granting them the prisoner-of-war status required by the Geneva Convention.

There is an alignment, a relation, between the usage of metal music in torture experiments at the Guantánamo prison, and the idea of power promoted by metal as a music genre in general. This alignment or relation can be conceived of purely at a conceptual level: the expression of total, unforgiving destructive power—perhaps also the power the Leviathan possesses, the sovereign beast who decides on the state of exception, revealing the base of law to be the arbitrariness of power...

Metal may not simply be 'apolitical' as Deena Weinstein claims. Paradoxically, metal as a cultural phenomenon is defended and promoted with liberal arguments by liberal American academics, while the positions of many black metal groups in continental Europe seem to be more of an ultra-conservative rightist lineage. Indeed, Varg Vikernes, black metal's most fervent ideologist, states that he is inspired by Vidkun Quisling, Norway's national-socialist leader during World War II, who authored a patchwork ideology of mystical beliefs he called 'Universism.'¹⁵ Yet, black metal and its visual culture have also provided a powerful cultural meme of resistance and negation. This meme, as we will see, serves as a stand-in for elements which are currently found to be 'missing' in the realm of 'high culture.'

BLACK METAL'S CULTURAL BRAND

Dieter Roelstraete, in an article on the artist Steven Shearer, remarked that 'the broad "cultural" attraction of grindcore is not only in the searing, destructive energy of the music (and the accompanying cathartic release) but also in the fiery passion with which this lifestyle has managed to embody a steely, evocative "NO," and to propose this "no" as a legitimate cultural position.'¹⁶

The soundtrack of Harmony Korine's feature film *Gummo*, 1998, featured Scandinavian black metal bands including Burzum and Bathory. Artists like Jonathan Meese, Mark Titchner, and indeed Steven Shearer cite freely from the black metal and grindcore mentality and aesthetic.

Artist Bjarne Melgaard collaborates with the Norwegian collective Thorns Ltd. to produce black-metal inspired experimental music, accommodating the genre in the broader artistic current of 'relational aesthetics.' Thorns Ltd. made its debut in 'Playlist' at the Palais de Tokyo in Paris. Roelstraete observes:

The art world looks with great envy and longing at the bizarre excesses of a handful of spoiled Norwegian teenagers because it thinks it recognizes a residue of 'realness' that can no longer be genuinely experienced in its own habitat, which has long been paralyzed by the cult of irony. Enter the 'Return of the Real!' The longing for negation and/or negativity which is really and truly 'bodily' experienced—that is what interests the art world in its flirtation with the metal underground.¹⁷

The 'black metal artist' becomes an exchange medium between the creative elite of viewers paralyzed by irony, and a dark subculture of abject and archaic symbols. Here, the contradistinction between 'good' and 'bad'-beautiful vs. ugly, high vs. low culture, as rehearsed by pop art-has given way to the juxtaposition of 'good' and 'evil.'¹⁸ But metal and grindcore's brutalizing energy also has more advanced usages than a mere stylistic scraping of the black metal brand for its 'evil' looks. John Zorn, a New York avant garde composer and musician, has been a pioneer of accommodating metal and grindcore influences in a more abstract method. In 1988, Zorn formed Naked City, a band merging elements from grindcore, jazz and surf. Naked City's music was used as the title soundtrack for Michael Haneke's feature film *Funny Games*.

In 1991 Zorn formed the band Painkiller, which sought (and found) a more direct appeal to extreme metal audiences. John Zorn also applied game theory-inspired methods to improvised jazz.¹⁹ The score of a 'game piece' consisted of little more than rules of engagement for improvisation between musicians, inspired by Cold War strategic models for games of coordination.

ULTIMATE D.I.Y.

With the advent of activist, or violent, black metal, the band as a group entity becomes smaller and smaller. For reasons of extreme aural distortion, the distinction between guitar and bass is no longer very meaningful. Either instrument may be jettisoned, and, when it comes to ban politics, a smaller band stands less of a chance to break up into disagreement

between members. The shrinkage of the metal band may also be traced back to punk's decisive impact. At the end of the 1970s, hard rock had degraded into a symphonic genre for middle-aged men with ponytails and overly expensive audio equipment.

Under the influence of the punk movement, metal bands became smaller, their music louder, faster and often messier. Venom, the legendary Newcastle trio who invented black metal, could hardly play. In that sense, it was more of a two-man band. With its illegible logo, Norway's Darkthrone is one of the most famous and two-man groups. The most bizarre was probably the Swedish duo Abruptum, with a dwarf named 'It' as frontman. Abruptum's vocals allegedly were produced through self-torture and automutilation.

With the advent of the one-man band, a new meaning has been given to the word 'solo career.' Music, lyrics and logo have become the vehicle for the distribution of highly personal ideas. The influential Swedish black metal group Bathory essentially was the one-man project of Ace Börje 'Quorthon' Forsberg. Poland's Graveland is the solo project of Rob Darken (born Robert Fudali), who holds extremely nationalist political views. And there is Burzum, Varg Vikernes being its only musician and the Leviathan of his personal battle against the rest of the world.

ENCRYPTION AND THE INTERNET

The visual symbols of contemporary society are increasingly based on their interaction with or existence in electronic information networks. A symbol like the bar code, which has come to stand for free market exchange and consumer society, is primarily used to compress information into a formal standard. The information 'hidden' inside the bar code can be extracted from its otherwise 'illegible' form at each occasional scan.

Adjacent to the bar code, some forms of encryption and compression were developed especially for the Internet, such as the so-called CAPTCHA - 'Completely Automated Public Turing test to tell Computers and Humans Apart.' CAPTCHA images are word pictures generated without human intervention, which must be retyped by a computer user when setting up a Hotmail, Gmail or Yahoo e-mail account, for example.

abbless ablan aceser ackeerd *affpha* *aflyeis* freff gashente gibezz glambin
 agnicate *ahlether* *ahlaus* balized *baudik* *golvhi* gootaili *gromb* *gnor* *gynessi*
 blutzn brumis busabsi *cabton* *castro* *hakice* *hangstir* *helist* *hepictis* *hishme*
 chqwoon ciprofit *cluth* *leesmo* *coparial* *hosem* *humersi* *imauat* *impentu* *inachor*
 cready dermo *dinar* *dionia* *drastor* *himm* *inoret* *intablet* *juagaree* *jushp*
 droctar dualall dumb *ehonic* *enewr* *kerme* *kistan* *knockbh* *kopphara* *laviti*
 erimi exerur *fanth* *fless* *icist* *lechedb* *licarch* *lismil* *loggessb* *malisa*
 marder matcho *melama* *mlanbw* *nulithe* *seask* *seun* *shingly* *smsho* *sheed*
 muddom *mooswia* *ovesc* *oxkilli* *paera* *shess* *shummo* *somen* *sonstra* *speev*
 picaph *pilicanni* *poodad* *pradhan* *pehome* *svaticat* *theting* *thionuh* *tasti* *ultis*
 prestiza *prophima* *prutipa* *psion* *quasaugh* *undr* *ulernne* *urnod* *ulout* *upslur*
 quenee *quillt* *quite* *quoups* *reactumb* *urbacie* *venth* *verthyo* *vitio* *vuttio*
 reatef *reisham* *rept* *regar* *rejgune* *waksac* *waxkr* *whiskey* *wishem* *xesilie*
 rerath *ressishe* *robiss* *rumbol* *sceme* *vedrobi* *yewars* *yisngi* *zupr* *znson*



The CAPTCHA has to guarantee that it is a person and not a machine setting up the account, so as to prevent abuse for spamming purposes. As such, the characters that compose the CAPTCHA have to optically diverge from standard letterforms, being practically illegible, while the words they form should be 'meaningless,' so that they cannot otherwise be automatically guessed by a computer. The Dutch graphic designer Jeremy Jansen generated thousands of

CAPTCHAS in order to study their appearance and examine their degrees of meaninglessness. He found words like 'shehell,' 'castro,' 'blutzn,' 'ourevil,' and 'askednex.' Some of these uncanny logos recall the names and symbols of black metal bands. Indeed, Arthimoth, Horna, Myrkskog, Toxocara, Tsjuder and Xasthur are all black metal bands, but they could as well be CAPTCHAS.

Black metal's illegible logos functionally correspond to the age of individualism; they are more structurally similar to the bar code and the CAPTCHA than to the swastika. Whereas the Third Reich's symbols and propaganda tools were mass communication devices meant for entire populations, black metal logos—especially when combined with extreme rightist political views—have come to symbolize the hatred of more or less specifically named others by preventing the public from reading the symbol.²⁰ From Kiss to Burzum, black metal is the privileged subcultural development of an aesthetic of 'evil.' While the political views endorsing the aesthetic may be considered regressive and backward, its sense of visual method is not. It bridges the publicly visible and widely accepted notion of the 'trademark' with the privately defined idea of the 'password.'

NOTES

1

Michael Moynihan, Didrik Søderlind, *Lords of Chaos: The Bloody Rise of the Satanic Metal Underground*, Los Angeles: Feral House, 2003. Varg Vikernes took the life of Mayhem founder and guitarist Øystein Aarseth a.k.a. Euronymous in 1993; this was after the band already had had to bid farewell in 1991 to singer Per Yngve Ohlin a.k.a. Dead, who committed suicide with a hunting gun. In addition to being the guitarist of Mayhem, Euronymous was the owner of the Helvete record store in Oslo and the record label Deathlike Silence Productions, on which he brought out his own and other people's music. A key figure in the underground black metal network, Aarseth worked on a highly personal view of world history, cultural anthropology, and religion. *Vargsmål*, the title of his book, translates as 'Vargspeak.'

2

At 'Death Metal Generator' by Jan Pieter Kunst, one can automatically generate band names and song titles. www.deathmetalgenerator.info/, accessed 30 April 2009.

3

Deena Weinstein, email to the author, July 2006.

4

Robert Walser, *Running with the Devil: Power, Gender and Madness in Heavy Metal Music*, Hannover, NH: Wesleyan/University Press of New England, 1993.

5

Tom ter Boga, all quotes from conversation with the authors, August 2006.

6

Mark Owens, email to the author, July 2006.

7

There exists a 'national-socialist' black metal band called *Der Stürmer*, which uses the original header from this Nazi journal as its logo. Based in Athens, Greece, the band promotes a curious breed of Hellenic-Aryan origins; its web site says that 'our strife as a band is IDEOLOGICAL and NOT MUSICAL.' Source: www.thepaganfront.com/dersturmer/main.html, accessed 30 April 2009.

8

See www.maelstrom.nu/ezine/interview_iss7_74.php, accessed 1 October 2007.

9

The late Mayhem guitar player had been a supporter of the Romanian dictator Ceausescu.

10

Dieter Roelstraete, email to the author, April 2007.

11

See also the website of the Center for Constitutional Rights, New York, for the statement of the 'Tipton Three': www.ccrny.org/v2/legal/september_11th/docs/Guantanamo_composite_statement_FINAL.pdf, accessed 1 October 2007.

12

See for example foia.fbi.gov/guantanamo/122106.htm: '[There were] rumors that [an] interrogator bragged about doing lap dance on defendant, another about making defendant listen to satanic black metal music for hours.' Accessed 1 October 2007.

13

Suzanne G. Cusick, 'Music as Torture, Music as Weapon,' www.cageprisoners.com/articles.php?id=19404, accessed 1 October 2007.

14

Tom ter Boga.

15

Michael Moynihan and Didrik Söderlind, *Lords of Chaos. The Bloody Rise of the Satanic Metal Underground*, Los Angeles: Feral House, 2003, p. 168

16

Dieter Roelstraete, 'Death Drives, Différence, and Nothingness,' *A Prior* 12, 2005.

17

Dieter Roelstraete, email to the author, March 2007.

18

The heavy postmodern artworks of Helmut Middendorf and Anselm Kiefer, and even the monolithic tombs of Hubert Kiecol, are distant ancestors of the Wagnerian posturing of the recent wave of artists citing black metal and Gothic references.

19

See Scott Maykrantz's biography of John Zorn at www.scottmaykrantz.com/zorn05.html, accessed 30 April 2009.

20

The French philosopher Alain Badiou calls Evil a 'simulacrum of truth': 'When a radical break in a situation, under the names borrowed from real truth processes, convokes not the void but the "full" particularity or presumed substance of that situation, we are dealing with a simulacrum of truth ... Fidelity to a simulacrum, unlike fidelity to an event, regulates its break with the situation not by the universality of the void, but by the closed particularity of an abstract set (the "Germans" or the "Aryans"). Its invariable operation is the unending construction of this set, and it has no other means of doing this than that of "voiding" what surrounds it.'

Alain Badiou, *Ethics: an Essay on the Understanding of Evil*, London: Verso, 2002.

DEFACEMENT

Dialogues

A Conversation with Michael Taussig

Anthropologist Michael Taussig discusses ideas from his essay *Defacement*. Its groundbreaking argument is that destruction may be our last remaining window to the sacred.

Influenced by Nietzsche and Bataille, Taussig enters into a dialogue with Metahaven on topics including the structure of revelation that survived the Enlightenment intact, the return of religion, and defacement as an act of exorcism releasing social energies and allowing statues to fall.

METAHAVEN

In *Defacement*, you write that desecration is the closest many of us will ever come to the sacred. You write about glimpses of what you call 'a very angry God.'

MICHAEL TAUSSIG

What some people call the sacred, in today's world is expressed in a negative form—in a kind of destructiveness. And that has come to surpass more positive notions of the sacred. In a secularized world, whatever is meant by the sacred gets smaller and smaller. Religion is now back on the table as a force to be reckoned with—especially post 9/11—but before that as well, and this owes much, I suggest, to the (negative) sacred power of defacement, or to its synonym, sacrilege. As I was struggling with defining the criteria, the thought occurred to me, in the framework of *Defacement*, that this negative sacred, this destructiveness and violence, is something which is enjoyed and exalted in—this is the new religion, if you like. The new sacred. And that is what I meant. I thought that was an interesting and provocative way of looking at it. Bataille's notion of religion is to emphasize the violence and transgressive qualities of it. We could say that the core of Christianity is the crucifixion. So, what I call this negative sacred has always been

important. I was raised in a sort of secular society—Australia in the 1950s—and 'the church' meant the Christian church, it meant order and constraint. What I want to emphasize is that if Bataille is right that all religion contains violence at its core, what we see today could be related to that notion of religion.

MH

So you do see some kind of relation between the particular kind of images that have turned up around the events of 9/11, and your concept of defacement?

MT

This is such a great connection, and I don't think I have made it myself yet. I have written something on 9/11 before—just a spontaneous piece. In the first several pages of *Defacement* I talk about this Australian case of a statue of the English king and queen being mutilated, which I follow via television and newspapers day by day. So if we substituted this statue for 9/11, you would end up with about four, five, six different kinds of avenues to think through. I was thinking of the famous statement by Robert Musil that no one ever notices statues until they are toppled.

One of the problems with 9/11 and Abu Ghraib is that intellectuals are like moths to a light bulb, or people rushing to see after an accident. They are falling all over

themselves to be clever about it. So Zizek had a Lacanian analysis, the other has a Marxist analysis and there is something vaguely stupid about this. It doesn't seem to have shaken up their confidence in their own thinking process or their own favorite paradigms. One would hope a trauma of such magnitude would be a moment when we could start on another track. What would you yourself say the implications of defacement for 9/11 were?

MH

We are interested in the interchangeability of physically existing structures, built things, with images, projections, and fantasies. We are also interested in their corporate 'message,' in what they 'officially' embody and stand for versus what they come to mean in the world through their usage and existence. As for statues: we were in Budapest last week, where there is a park of Communist statues which were removed from their original sites.

MT

It is odd that so much energy goes into these statues to build them, and very often in a democratic society there is a great deal of controversy surrounding the decision. There is nothing more controversial than public art. And I see what you are

getting at—as if there is something subliminal to the understanding or perception of the statue. Most people walk up and down the street and don't even see it. Often the destruction of statues can be very humorous; there is a wit and a humor which wants to not so much destroy—like 9/11—but take hold of something which is inherent in the statue and then move it a little bit. So it requires an irony or a mockery. There was a movement in Sydney, called Buggerup, which was very interesting. It was a student movement which came out of architecture, I think, and they would go to these billboards advertising cigarettes and beer, and they would paint and they would erase one word, or would put something in the picture that wasn't there before—it was all very minimal—changing the meaning. At the end of the year they produced a calendar with all their work in it. And the fines are massive for doing this. That is another example where you do not only physically destroy—you work internally on the thing. It is as if often the object contains within itself a hidden flaw, the seed of its own defacement. Rather than a crude imposition, defacement can be the act of eliciting this. Criticism, I believe, works in a similar way.

MH

In that statue park in Budapest they removed the pedestal from

underneath the statue, so you can be on the same plane as the statue. The Dutch politician Pim Fortuyn, who was shot in 2002, was given a statue—which was decapitated during its transportation, as the truck driver ignored a tunnel that was too low.

MT

Talking about statues was a roundabout way of talking about human-to-human violence. I felt that there is so much resistance, mental resistance, to talking about violence. *Defacement* could be read as talking about violence in the modern world—violence between humans. It seemed to me easier to speak about that than about human-to-human violence. But it is also a book about secrecy, public secrecy. I don't know if it works out. Defacement has some hidden power within, the negative sacred and so forth. My next point was, following Nietzsche, that this separation of the surface from the depth is very much a hallucination—very much the basic figure or idea present in Western philosophy from Socrates and Plato into Judaism and Christianity and then the Enlightenment, following Nietzsche's sequence in *Twilight of the Idols*.

You reminded me today of Nietzsche's famous riff on 'the death of God.' Now, there are many interpretations of this, but to me Nietzsche seems to be saying: we

have never killed God because the Enlightenment maintained the same form—that there is a hidden truth and a deceptive surface. *Defacement* is preoccupied with that. The unmasking can never stop. I became interested in public secrecy, because it seems like our culture or our intellectuals see their task as one of unmasking, finding the 'God' behind the surface appearance. Deleuze is the huge exception here, as are the plots in the novels of Chilean writer Roberto Bolaño. But rather than retain the notion of a secret beneath the surface to be unmasked, I came up with the notion of 'the public secret'; that which is 'known' but cannot be (easily) articulated. It is what we know not to know, a fantastically interesting power. This is far more than 'ideology'. And this might get close to your interests, as you seem to be looking for principles of design, principles of icons that are made more vivid, or explicit, through their defacement.

MH

In design the 'interface' has become important, as a device for showing, handling, or obscuring information.

MT

A lot of that relies on the notion that an observer could read hidden truths from the surface. This is a very deeply rooted thing. And on the other hand, the face is the window

to the soul, right? Which suggests the opposite, that we can indeed read depth from surface and and scoop out the secret. At the same time we conduct our lives with the ever-present thought that the human face can be deceptive—it is like a mask. Yet the face is both these things. Either one of them is really tricky but put the two together and you have a bewildering machine turning tricks all the time.

MH

Is defacement the event that overcomes the distinction between surface and depth?

MT

It seems to, yes, but then it probably reinstates the distinction ...

MH

Aren't the conspiracy theories as we hear them about 9/11 a kind of defacement-by-information? Conspiracy theories are always about getting behind the deceptive surface, and then there is another screen and then it turns out there is another conspiracy behind it.

MT

Absolutely. One of the things you saw with 9/11 was the phenomenon of New York taxi drivers saying that there were no Jews who went to work that day. What are the

relationships between defacement and 9/11—more and more uncanny details are revealed. And that is what conspiracy draws upon. For example I remember reading a couple of years back that the tapes of the control tower of a very large area in Manhattan were destroyed, or at least some key component of them. And there must be tons and tons of strange details like that. And this is of course something that defacement thrives upon. It is like turning on a tap. More and more stuff is going to come pouring out. A secret revelation creates further revelations—because there is more dirt to be dug.

New York, February 28, 2008

Towers & Symbols

Towers & Symbols
Red
2006.

(328)
Towers & Symbols
Green
2006.

(329)
Towers & Symbols
Yellow
2006.

(330)
Towers & Symbols
Blue
2006.

towers and symbols

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

WINTER 2008

Bruce Riedel

Containing Russia YULIYA TYMOSHENKO

Face Odyssey GILL & KLEIN

Generals

Costs

Many Memories STELLA

IRAQIS

339

SAVING
RICHARD HOLBROOK

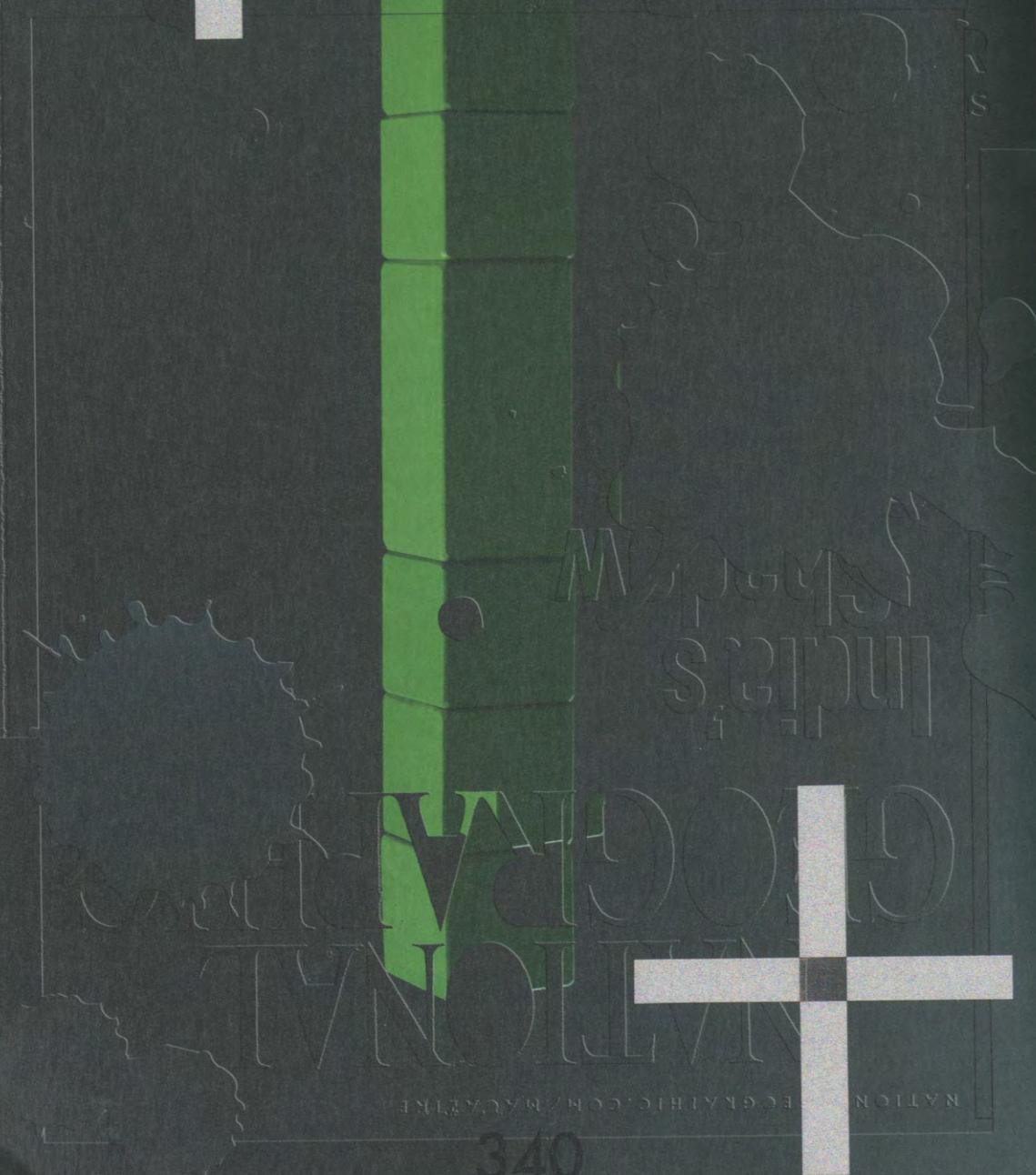
\$9.95 IN USA • \$12.95 IN CANADA

AT WWW.FOREIGNAFFAIRS.ORG

339 6479

uncorporate identity

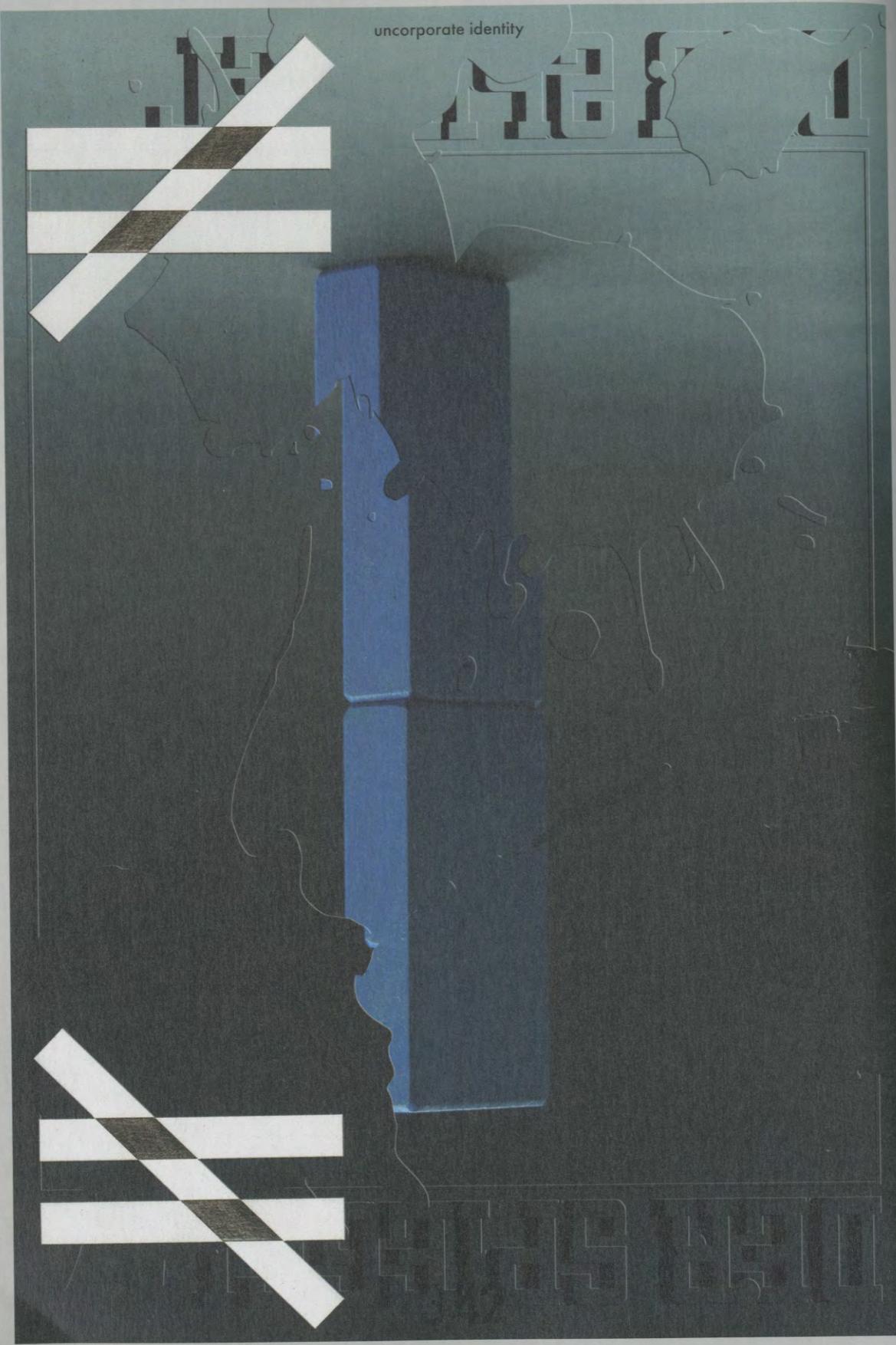
THE WORLD OF INTERNS



towers and symbols



uncorporate identity

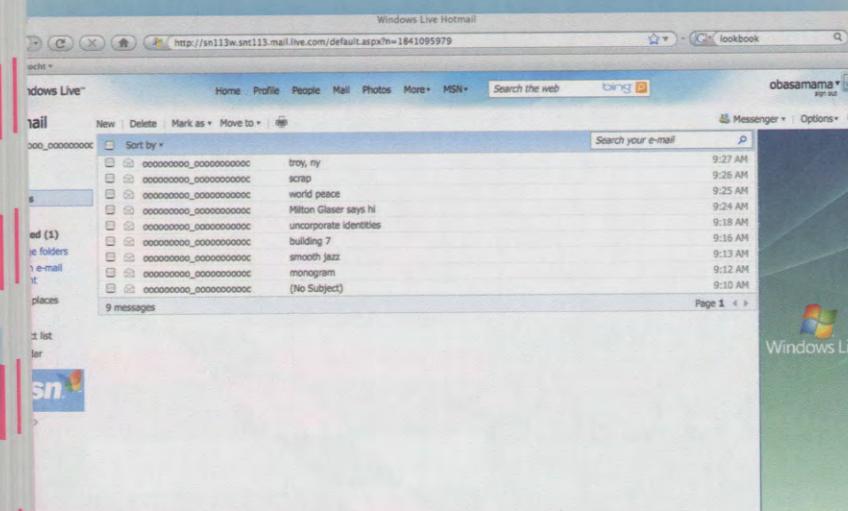


DRAFT BOX: THE STORY OF 'O'

Dialogues

Brands without a Center

An incognito pen pal is the addressee of a series of short e-mail messages that were never sent. The writings survey nothingness, disappearance, centerlessness, corporate stealth, and dingbats typefaces, while the identity of their recipient becomes more and more of a mystery.



Unsent e-mails

O,

You did not receive this e-mail, because it was never sent.

There was an article in the *Washington Post* by Steve Coll and Susan B. Glasser. It noted a recent, al-Qaeda-originated communications tactic.

Mohammed or his operatives [...] would open an account on a free, public e-mail service such as Hotmail, write a message in draft form, save it as a draft, then transmit the e-mail account name and password during chatter on a relatively secure message board. Since no e-mail message was sent, there was a reduced risk of interception, the researchers said.

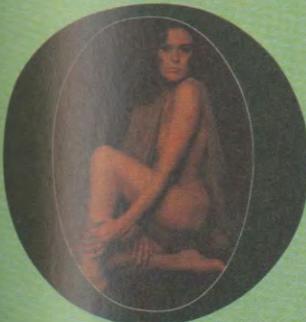
Strategists John Arquilla and David Ronfeldt claimed that 'the information revolution is altering the nature of conflict across the spectrum.' They observed how 'power is migrating to non-state actors, because they are able to organize into sprawling multi-organizational networks.' Netwar is waged by networks, more than by hierarchies, while 'the conduct and outcome of conflicts increasingly depend on information and communications.' Even the very circumstance of communication can already be considered an act of war.

And you knew this all along, O.

MH

Pauline Réage

Histoire
d'



Monogram

O,

Something about your initial.

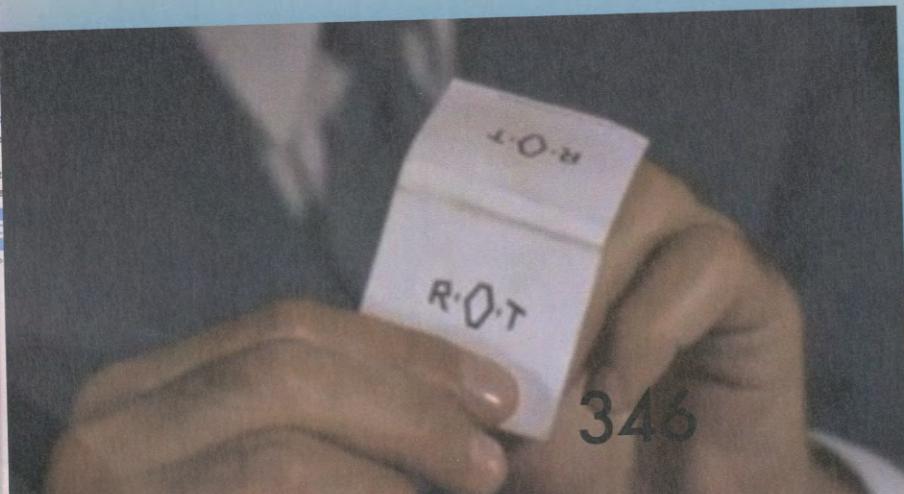
In Alfred Hitchcock's *North by Northwest*, advertising tycoon Roger Thornhill escapes by train from New York City. On board the train, an attractive, mysterious woman helps him hide from the police. Her name is Eve Kendall. And they begin to talk.

Thornhill lights Eve Kendall's cigarette using a match from his monogrammed matchbox. The monogram reads R O T.

Kendall assumes this means 'Roger O. Thornhill,' and asks what the O stands for. Thornhill answers: 'Nothing.'

Absence and emptiness are less reassuring than presence and substance.

MH



Smooth Jazz

O,

In August 2001, Mohammed Atta had a phone conversation with Ramzi Binalshibh (described as an 'al-Qaeda associate'). The two discussed the targets for the planes operation in a coded language.

They called the White House 'politics,' the Capitol 'law,' and the Pentagon 'arts.' They called the Twin Towers 'architecture.'

It was Atta who chose the date of the attack.

On the phone Atta referred to the date not by naming the month and day, but by describing them visually, as symbols. '11/9' would be two branches, a slash, and a lollipop.

When the towers fell, it was like being awakened from a dream. Had we been lulled to sleep by the smooth jazz of benign globalization? Remember the weather forecasts and the city specials, the image of the financial districts, the waving palm trees at the tropical beaches. Remember the way globalization had been a Koyaanisqatsi of investment potential and travel destinations. Remember how each disparate place on earth was supposed to retain its originary characteristic and identity, while fully embedded in the flows of finance capital, culture, tourism and information. That fairytale was interrupted by the planes operation.

After the Events, armies were unleashed, data bases consulted, books written. Policies changed. Freedom needed an enemy.

O became that enemy.

George W. Bush said that 'freedom itself was attacked this morning, by a faceless coward.'

MH



Building 7

O,

7 World Trade Center, or 'Building 7' was opened in 1987. It stood opposite the Twin Towers. It looked like you'd expect any small skyscraper to look.

Building 7's tenants were

Salomon Smith Barney (floors 28–45)
ITT Hartford Insurance Group
American Express Bank International
Standard Chartered Bank
Securities and Exchange Commission
Internal Revenue Service Regional Council
United States Secret Service
New York City Office of Emergency Management
National Association of Insurance Commissioners
Federal Home Loan Bank
First State Management Group INC.
Provident Financial Management
Immigration and Naturalization Service
Department of Defense
Central Intelligence Agency

The South Tower collapsed at 9:59 AM. The North Tower collapsed at 10:28 AM. But at 5:20 PM, Building 7 collapsed too, without being hit by a plane. No one was hurt. The reported cause of the collapse was structural damage caused by the fire started by the Twin Towers' debris.

BBC World reported the collapse of Building 7 more than 20 minutes before it actually happened. Reporter Jane Standley was filmed with the building still standing in the background, while an on-screen 'newsbar' chronicled its collapse. Afterwards, Richard Porter, head of BBC News, assured everyone that

We're not part of a conspiracy. Nobody told us what to say or do on September 11th. Contrary to what is suggested we didn't get told in advance that buildings were going to fall down. We didn't receive press releases or scripts in advance of events happening. In the chaos and confusion of the day, I'm quite sure we said things which turned out

to be untrue or inaccurate—but at the time were based on the best information we had. [...] Our reporter Jane Standley was in New York on the day of the attacks, and like everyone who was there, has the events seared on her mind. I've spoken to her today and unsurprisingly, she doesn't remember minute-by-minute what she said or did—like everybody else that day she was trying to make sense of what she was seeing; what she was being told; and what was being told to her by colleagues in London who were monitoring feeds and wires services. [...] We no longer have the original tapes of our 9/11 coverage (for reasons of cock-up, not conspiracy). So if someone has got a recording of our output, I'd love to get hold of it.

There is a movement called 9/11 Truth. Its members believe that 9/11 was a false flag operation organized by the state, in order to advance justify later acts of war and conquest and infringements of civil liberties. The 9/11 Truth Movement has its hopes set on unveiling this evil plan.

MH



Uncorporate Identities

O,

After the events, war was waged against the elusive celebrity of Osama bin Laden. The terrorist leader became a placeless avatar of Evil. Sometimes, he was filmed addressing the world from inside a cave. That primordial image has remained as the quintessential al-Qaeda posture.

‘Your security is not in the hands of Kerry or Bush or al-Qaeda; your security is in your own hands,’ Mr. bin Laden said. He added: ‘Any state that does not mess with our security, has naturally guaranteed its own security.’ Gesturing emphatically at times with his hands, the al-Qaeda leader wore a long gray beard, traditional white robes, a golden cloak and a turban. He gazed directly into the camera as he delivered the address, which he appeared to be reading from a text behind a lectern in front of a plain brown backdrop.

Terror, fear and uncertainty became marketable assets in an orgy of hypothesis. After an incessant search for the operatives of al-Qaeda, the CIA resorted to a programme of rendition flights, sending captives around the world to be detained and interrogated. The flights were carried out using private passenger jets. The stealth of these passenger jets was that there was nothing special about them.

They were white, sometimes with a single red or blue line running along the length of the body. They were run by such CIA front companies as Aviation Specialties, INC based in Washington, DC, or Premier Executive Transport Services, INC of Dedham, Massachusetts.

Phantom firms with nonexistent employees—the uncorporate face of netwar. The administrative stealth of the rendition flights presented a *mean modernism*—the compliance of the divine neutrality of the Swiss International Style with the practice of extrajudicial punishment.

MH



Milton Glaser Says Hi

O,

When entering the characters 'Q 33 NY' into a word processor, use the Wingdings symbol typeface. The outcome will be '✈NYC'! That's an airplane, two tall buildings, a skull, and a David's star. It has been claimed that this provides evidence of 9/11 conspiracy. As late as 2008, a web user named 'almond259' wrote on Yahoo Answers:

I heard the other day that if you type 9/11 on microsoft word and put it on a certain font, it comes up as two buildings and a flame. does anyone no wat font that is? ive tried all the wingdings ...

In an earlier case involving the Wingdings typeface as an alleged storage for hidden messages, people noted that setting 'NYC' in Wingdings produces '💀✡️'. In yet another symbol typeface, Webdings, the connotations are slightly more 'positive': 'NYC' = '👁️❤️NYC'

Eye heart city. Which translates as one of the world's most famous city brands: **I❤️NY**, designed by Milton Glaser in 1977.

MH

World Peace

O,

The Twin Towers, designed by Minoru Yamasaki, were believed by their architect to be an icon for world peace. But much of Yamasaki's built oeuvre has been historically identified with destruction. The architect had previously designed the Pruitt-Igoe residential complex in St. Louis, a famous yet controversial building that became emblematic of the 'failure' of the public housing system and its modernist values, and got demolished in due course. According to Charles Jencks, 'modern architecture died in St. Louis, Missouri on July 15, 1972 at 3:32 PM.'

Pruitt-Igoe became a kind of conceptual iconoclasm—destruction as the end of an architectural idea.

MH



Scrap

O,

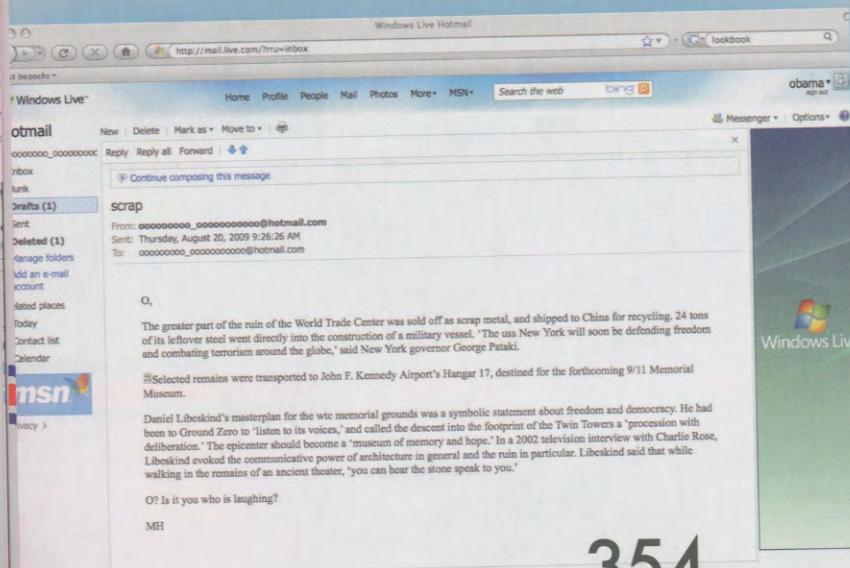
The greater part of the ruin of the World Trade Center was sold off as scrap metal, and shipped to China for recycling. 24 tons of its leftover steel went directly into the construction of a military vessel.

‘The uss New York will soon be defending freedom and combating terrorism around the globe,’ said New York governor George Pataki. Selected remains were transported to John F. Kennedy Airport’s Hangar 17, destined for the forthcoming 9/11 Memorial Museum.

Daniel Libeskind’s masterplan for the WTC memorial grounds was a symbolic statement about freedom and democracy. He had been to Ground Zero to ‘listen to its voices,’ and called the descent into the footprint of the Twin Towers a ‘procession with deliberation.’ The epicenter should become a ‘museum of memory and hope.’ In a 2002 television interview with Charlie Rose, Libeskind evoked the communicative power of architecture in general and the ruin in particular. Libeskind said that while walking in the remains of an ancient theater, ‘you can hear the stone speak to you.’

O? Is that you, laughing?

MH

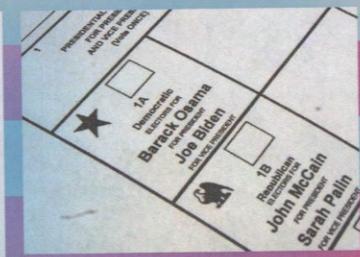


Troy, NY

O,

Barack Obama's campaign logo was an O. On an absentee ballot issued in upstate New York at the 2008 US elections, citizens could vote for a 'Barack Osama.' That was, of course, just a misspelling.

MH



WTC 7, also called 'the Third Tower,' collapsed on 9/11, without having received a direct hit from the planes.

Debunking the mysteries of the downfall sends self-styled pyrotechnicians on a journey down conspiracy lane. A '7 dollar banknote' provides the visual travel report, from a 'web wall' to a 'conspiracy cloud' to the numerological wizardry of Boeing's plane models.

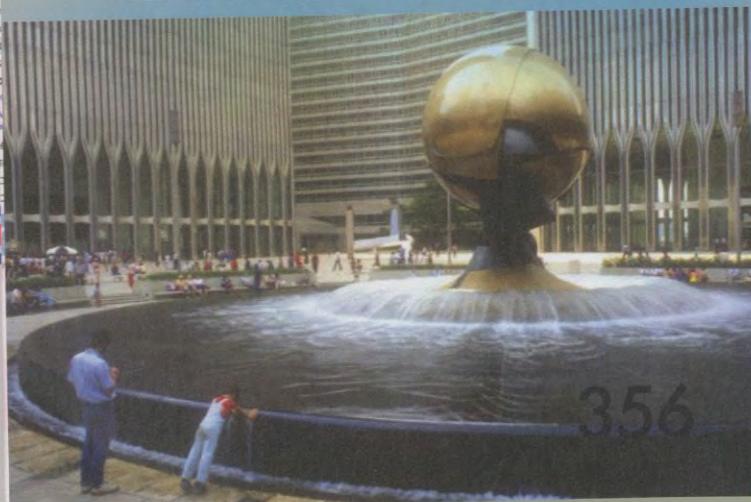
Can you spot the Pentagon?



Corporate Art
Joan Miró's World Trade Center Tapestry (1974) in the lobby of 2, World Trade Center. It was lost on 9/11.

Alexander Calder's WTC Stabile (1971) was situated in front of 7, World Trade Center, at the time of the attacks. Partially recovered.

The Sphere (1971) by Fritz Koenig, was situated at the central square between the Twin Towers. It survived 9/11 and is now in Battery Park. Koenig: 'It was a sculpture, now it's a monument.'

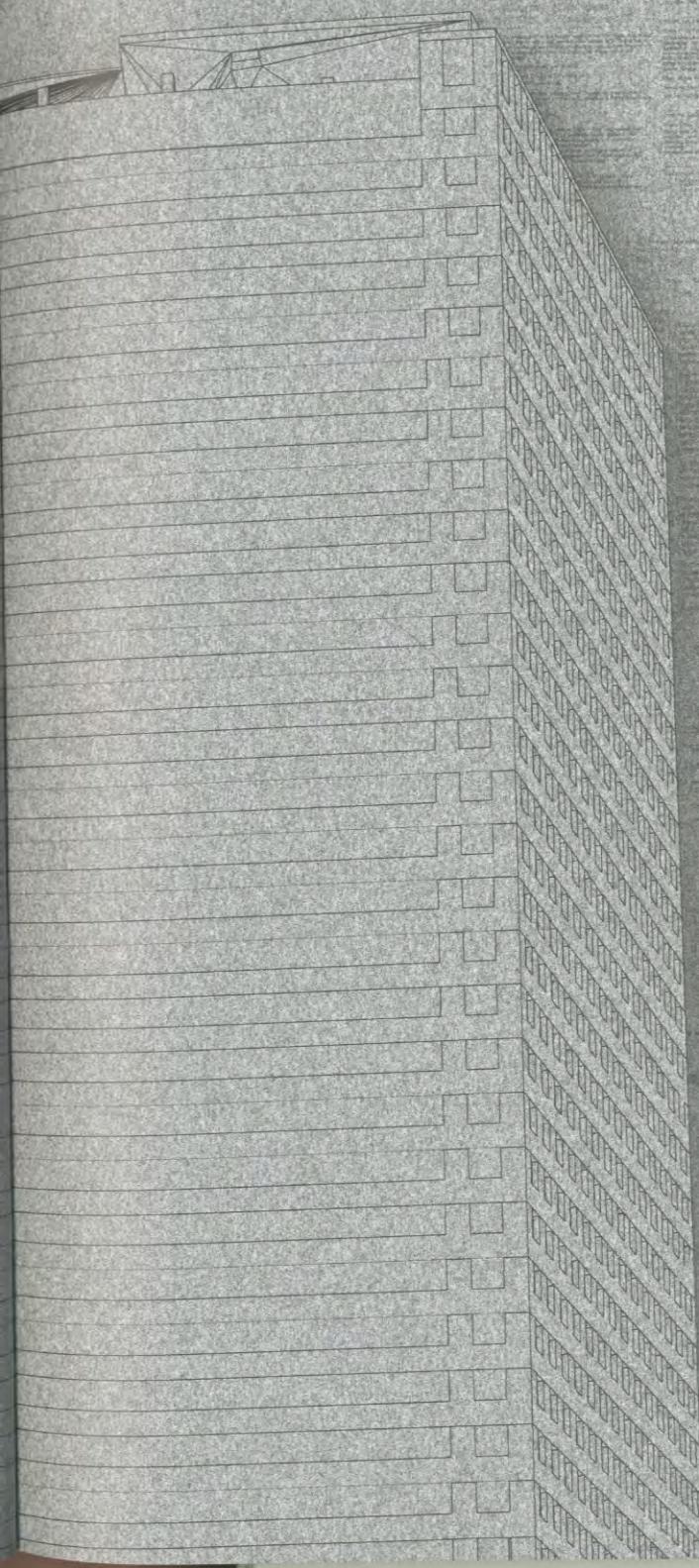


wtc 7



WEB

WALL



DEPARTMENT OF
TRANSPORTATION
WORLD TRADE CENTER
TRANSIT AUTHORITY
DRAFT EDITION

WORLD TRADE CENTER
TRANSIT AUTHORITY

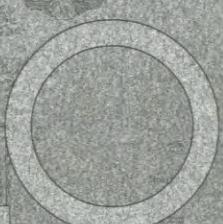
DOVER

WORLD TRADE CENTER

WORLD TRADE CENTER

WORLD TRADE CENTER
TRANSIT AUTHORITY

WORLD TRADE CENTER
TRANSIT AUTHORITY



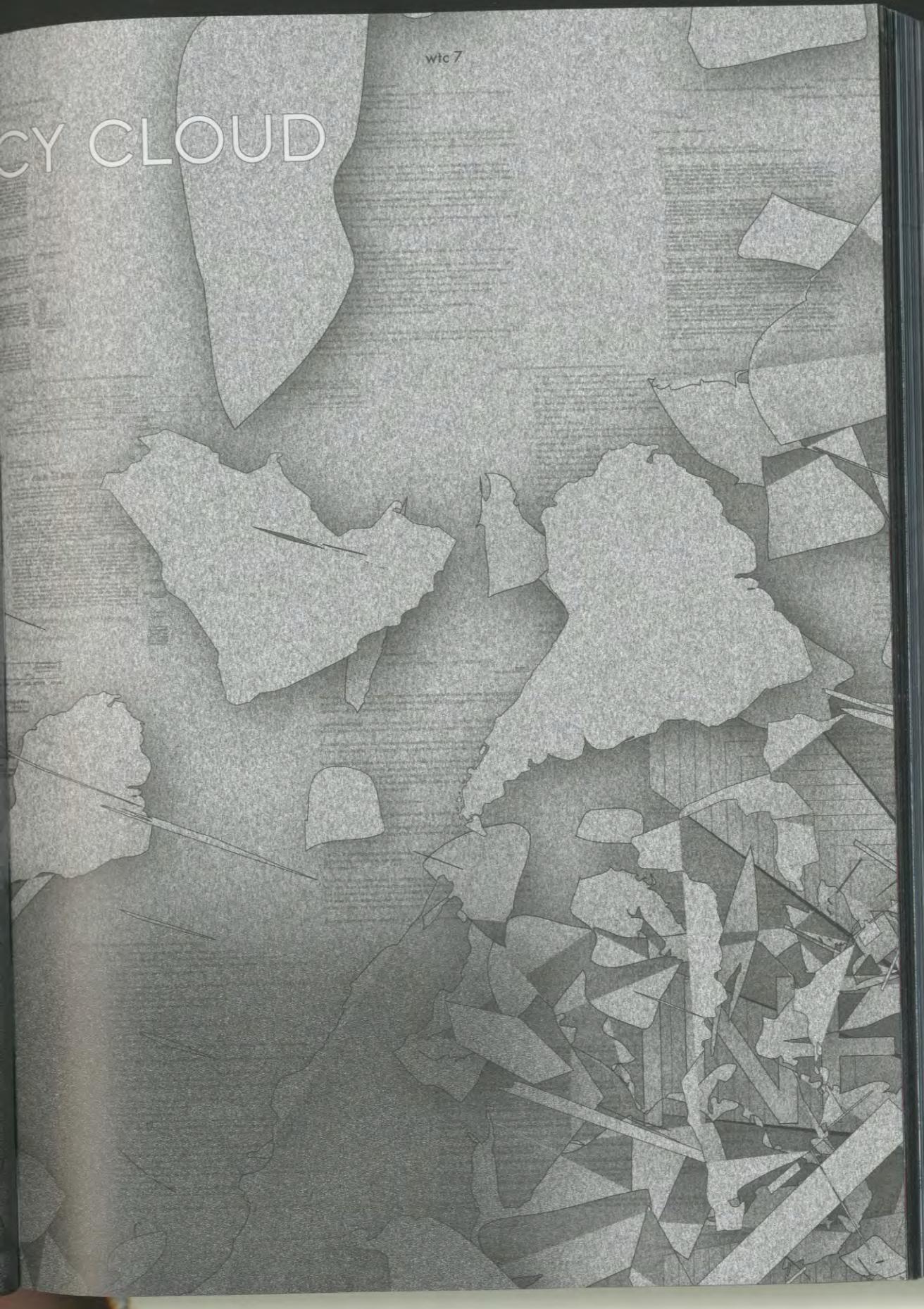
uncorporate identity

CONSPIRA



wtc 7

CY CLOUD



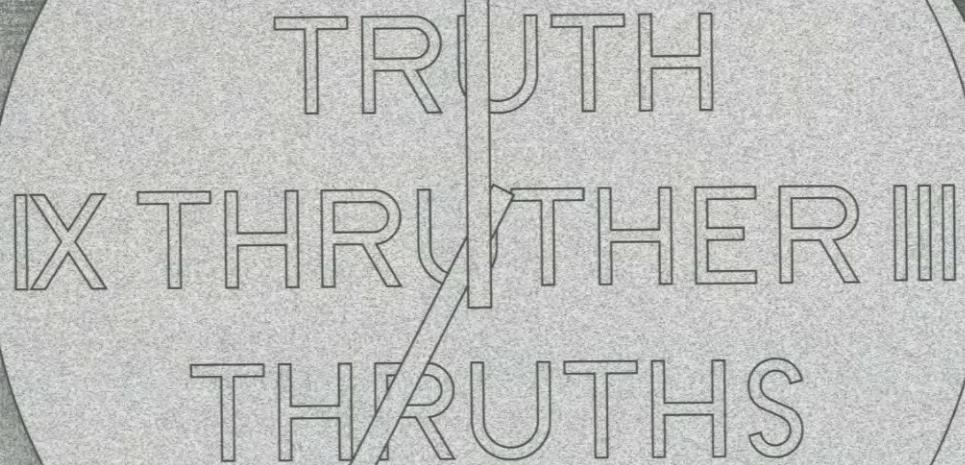
uncorporate identity

757

wtc 7

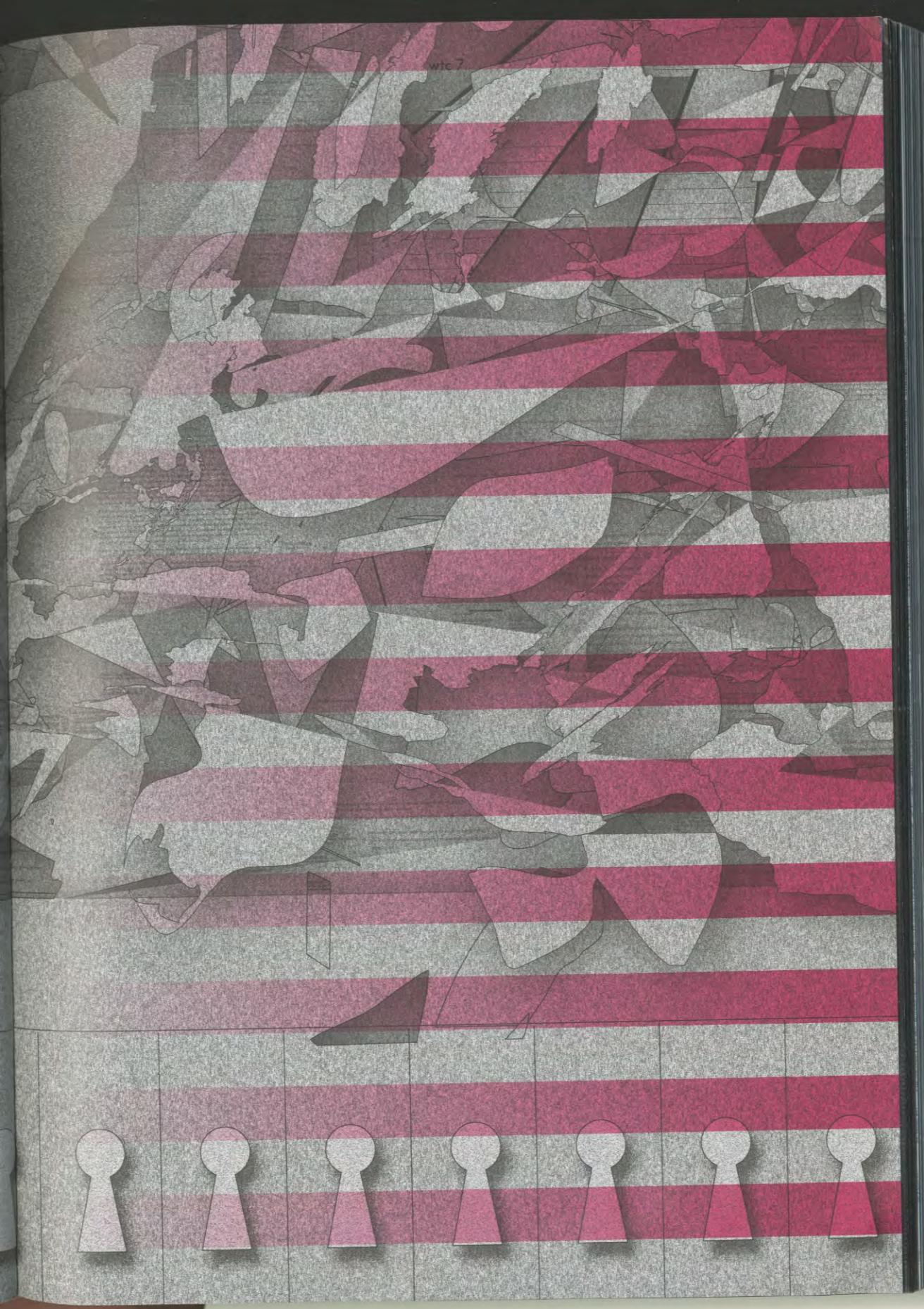
767

767



TRUTH
IX THRUTHER III
THRUTHS

VI



place brands and borders

'WELCOME' TO EUROPE

Notes

Place Brands and Borders

It all began with a painted sun.

Now, nation branding is here to stay. Whether it's enticing tourist cashflow or deterring illegal migrants, the exercise of nation branding is paramount to the fortunes of most European countries. But the conflation of brand management and foreign policy shows that a 'Europe united in diversity' reserves the right to select its customers.

Spain did it first ...



In the early 1980s the Spanish artist Joan Miró painted a vivid sign: *España*. It was the most widely distributed Miró painting of all time, itself part of a lesser-known subgenre of corporate work by the artist.

It was a new sign for the Kingdom of Spain.

But *España* was not—like a national flag—an expression of sovereignty. Neither was it—like a logo—a sign of government bureaucracy. Neither was it a piece of folk art, or an authorless artifact taken from an archaeological museum.

The sign indicated a *state of mind* about Spain.

The new brand's main purpose was to reposition the Iberian



corporate identity—notes



... then Malta, Armenia, Turkey, Poland, Bulgaria, Greece, Croatia, Maldives, Azerbaijan, and even The Netherlands (holland.com) followed, each making their own 'Mediterranean promises.'

peninsula as a welcoming and vibrant destination for tourists. It is sometimes assumed that it also told the world that Spain was beyond Franco and dictatorship.

España's hand-painted brush effect became widely copied by other nation-states, along with the motif of sun, waves, and flowers, in attempts to launch equally successful brands. Travel agencies flocked with posters, brochures and display materials promoting just about every country below the polar circle with an image vaguely reminiscent of Spain's.

But one element was consistently different from the 'original.'

The various adaptations (by Poland, Greece, Croatia, Cyprus, Malta, Armenia, Hungary, Bulgaria,



corporate identity—notes



From El Salvador, via
Windows and Google,
to Europe ... diversity
branding or 'full spectrum
dominance?'

and even The Netherlands) lacked the artistic signature that had made the original stand out. In trying to repeat and systematize the initial success, the 'spontaneous gesture' had become increasingly steered by the invisible hand of the branding industry. A managerial aesthetics of 'Mediterranean' generosity now carefully guided viewers toward the appropriate brand experience.

ALL-INCLUSIVE

The design historian Steven Heller wonders why nation branding makes 'El Salvador look like a discount subsidiary of Microsoft.' The full-color spectrum, both in the identities for IT firms and place brands, equals an all-embracing grip on human emotion.

This is not limited to the logos of El Salvador, Microsoft or Google. The European Union displays the same preference. In 2007, it organized a competition among art and design students to create a European 'birthday logo' visualizing one of its corporate values: diversity. The winning entry was a logo called *Together*, with every character set in a different typeface and color. Sex Pistols (*Never Mind the Bollocks*) meets Miró at the coffee dispenser, *Together* appeases with all the formal criteria of diversity and tolerance—family-friendly Europunk for all ages.

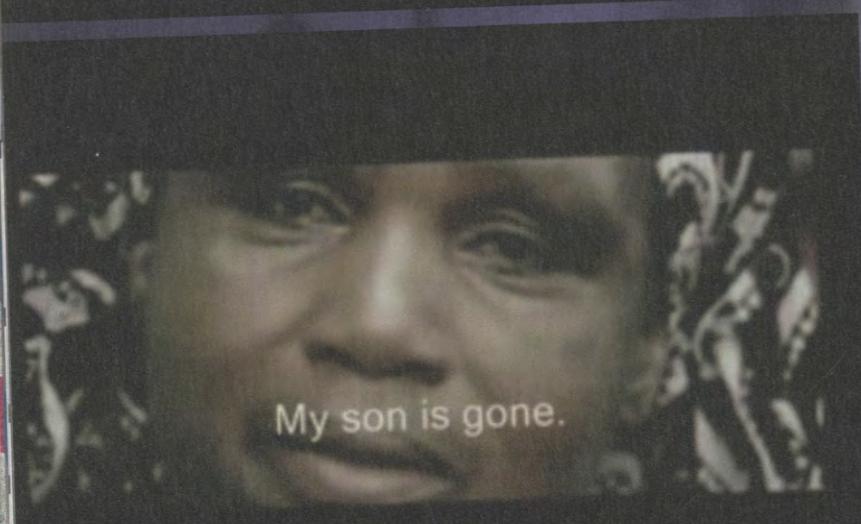
GATEWAYS TO EUROPE
Nation brands are part and parcel of the management of gateways

and borders. Territories may be branded positively, or negatively, depending on the types of flows desired, including people and finance. The notion of 'openness and diversity' is a question of target audience. Advertising campaigns, issued in an attempt at rebranding Europe as an unattractive and harsh place, illuminate this fact.

In 2007, Switzerland funded an anti-migration television commercial which illustrated the horrors of living in Europe as an undocumented migrant. Simon Bradley described how 'the advert, which has been aired on prime-time television in Cameroon and Nigeria, depicts the life of freshly arrived migrants in Europe as one fraught with problems

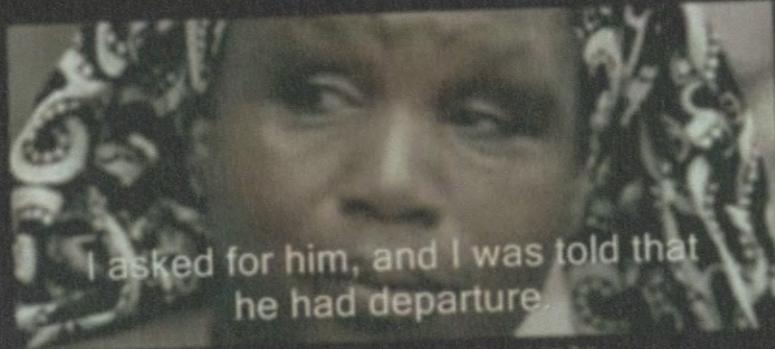


Yes dad it's Christian
Ah! Christian how are you doing



My son is gone.

Spanish and Swiss
campaigns to fend off
illegal immigration.



I asked for him, and I was told that
he had departure.

Penggunaan istilah "illegal immigration" dalam kamus

and dangers. [...] An African migrant phones his father from somewhere in Europe in the pouring rain and assures him that all is well while in reality he is living on the street, being chased by the police and having to beg for a living.¹ The advert was part of an awareness campaign by the Geneva-based IOM, and supported by Switzerland and the European Commission.

THE RAIN IN SPAIN

Since 2007 Spain also targets potential migrants on African television in an effort to discourage them from crossing the Mediterranean. The adverts show images of what appear to be drowned migrants—actors?

You already know how this story
ends, thousands of families
destroyed.

Miles de familias destruidas.

BY THE SWITZERLAND GOVERNMENT AND T



IOM • OIM
INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATION
OF MIGRATION

Spanish and Swiss
campaigns to fend off
illegal immigration.

Despairing family members give emotional accounts of their missing relatives. At the crossroads of border and brand management, these anti-migration campaigns have become the supplement to the sunlit emblems fired at tourists and investors—in a schizophrenic twinning of attraction and deterrence.

I

NOTE
Simon Bradley, *Advert aims to deter African immigrants*, November 30, 2007, at swissinfo.ch, www.swissinfo.ch/eng/Advert_aims_to_deter_African_immigrants.html?cid=6287120.

uncorporate identity



382

border crossing

21 : 46 : 52 : 00

uncorporate identity—surveys

THE SCANDAL

NOTES ON THE AUTONOMY OF THE IMAGE

Surveys

Florian Schneider

As soon as the border is passed, engineers become cleaners, academics turn into sex workers and brain surgeons become taxi drivers ready-made for overexploitation on the informal labor markets of late capitalism.

Hyper-speed footage of African migrants breaching the EU border at the Spanish enclave of Ceuta triggers reflections about mediation and autonomy that borrow freely from Deleuze's cinema studies, the stories of migrants at Ceuta, and the practices of 'Fortress Europe.'

It is the night of the 29th of September 2005.

215 men and women have made a momentous decision. Over several weeks or months they have been eking out an existence reduced to bare survival; seeking cover in low forest or shrubland, camping in flimsy tents, with no access to food or water, and without money.

Although they came so close to the final destination of a journey full of privations, what opens up now is a reverse perspective: the longer they are standing still the further they get from the finish. Europe, or at least the official territory of what is considered the 'European Union,' is only a few meters away. They have been discussing the problem in many nightly meetings. Should they take the risk and leave one night all together or wait for another opportunity? Should they continue to try to cross the border in small packs —in such low numbers that it does not cause a stir?

The people living in the forest are well-organized in groups of 15 to 20 members. Most of them gather according to their countries of origin, but there are others who join a group of a different country. A group elects a leader among its members, and the group leaders meet in a council. The decision to cross the border in the night of the 29th of September is almost unanimous, though apparently without the consent of the elder leaders who are sometimes called 'the fathers of the forest.' They must have feared the scandal such a decision would cause; they were aware, at least, that such an exodus and its aftermath would dramatically change the situation in the forest.

The images taken by the CCTV cameras of the Guardia Civil, the Spanish military police, show dozens of people using improvised ladders to climb the three-meter-high fence running along the 50 kilometer border around Ceuta, a military outpost in the north of Morocco. One can only guess how painful it must be for a human body to crawl through the barbed wire; and then one sees them jumping the three meters down onto the road that runs behind the fence. Almost everybody was hurt. Broken arms, legs and sprained ankles, injuries to the head. Seven people lost their lives. They did not survive the fall into Europe. Or they were shot by the border patrol's rubber bullets.

The footage spread by Reuters over the next few days is a parody of serious journalism. It consists of a nine-second sequence from the images of the surveillance cameras, animated in fast motion. Broadcast all around the globe, looping every hour, a voice-over gabbles about the 'storming of Fortress Europe.'

The sequence turns out to be an unintentional piece of art. In its conceptual radicalism and determination it far outstrips many ‘politically engaged’ works seen at biennials and art exhibitions which deal with the issues of borders and migration. Instead, the border appears here in its almost perfect postmodern design: performed through a scandal, in a widely publicized incident involving moral outrage, disgrace, and allegations of wrongdoing.

But what is so scandalous about these images? At first sight, the scandal relates to the collective attempt to overcome the border, the self-authorized and self-organized transgression of the fence.

It is a scandal in the truest sense of the word, which derives from the Latin ‘scandere,’ to climb. But there is yet another, no less compelling, etymological perspective: the border as ‘skandalon,’ which is the ancient Greek word for a stumbling block. In this respect, the events of the 29th of September serve as an exquisite example of what activists and theorists of the ‘noborder network’ have, since the early 1990s, called the ‘autonomy of migration.’

This expression seeks to understand migration as a much more complex process than its usual reduction to misery and calamity. The patterns of victimization are as omnipresent as the control system. Both advocates and adversaries of the contemporary border regime seem to understand migration as a logical result of the movements of capital—as its unsavory after-effect or appendix.

The ‘autonomy of migration’ claims that both research and activism should refrain from indulging in recurrent tropes of charity and compassion. Instead, it recognizes the manifold social and political processes needed to practically cross a border. These processes are, politically, constituting migrant subjectivities.

Migration is not the action of an isolated, asocial, expelled individual. Its social and subjective dimensions appear, rather, in its autonomy and independence from the political measures that try to control it. To escape one’s country of origin, to cross borders, to perhaps seek something more somewhere else, is an eminently political act.

But the night’s events had an even wider impact. They exposed the redundancy of the hi-tech gadgets central to the staging of technological supremacy around Ceuta (and in many other border sites). Every few hundred meters, there is a watchtower equipped with spotlights, sound and movement sensors, and video cameras providing CCTV footage to a central control booth via underground cables. The decision of the Guardia Civil to release the footage was deliberate. Normally it is inaccessible to the public and the press. Yet the scandal is not the release of the images; rather, it lies in fast-forwarding them. The low frame rate of the recordings of the surveillance

camera is accelerated through an additional time lapse. Normally this video effect is applied in order to highlight processes that would appear rather subtle to the human eye. The purpose is all too clear: of the 215 people who crossed the fence that night, only a few dozen were captured in the published footage. The manipulation of the images transforms the distinct number of individuals into a swarming mass. The animation effect, also known as 'undercranking,' transforms them into animals—even insects, bereft of all human agency. Their staccato, choppy movements reveal an imaginary plague beleaguering Europe, over-running its outposts and fortifications.

According to the dictionary, a scandal usually is produced by a mixture of both real and imaginary events. The scandal suppresses the distinction between the real and the imaginary. It operates through unuttered laws which regulate that which is permitted to some and not permitted to others. The real movements of the border crossers who appear in the news footage are chopped up and broken into the smallest possible pieces, into jerky, saccadic movements. In order to reconstruct an impression of coherence, they have to merge inseparably with the most banal, enduring fantasies and 'common sense' about illegal immigration. The scandal transforms the event to solicit a moral outrage, the purpose of which is nothing but the reaffirmation of the border, which would otherwise be invisible, disputed or disbelieved.

The scandal affirms that the border is still there, still true. Its conceptual homogenization of real and imaginary reassures us, permitting us to enjoy and cooperate with the regime, relying on the frail and ineffectual 'facts on the ground.' On the same basis, we can even worry about its perversions and moderately criticize its violent character.

Each of these notions of the scandal are instantiated by the frame of the image as well as within the frame. The frame is the allegedly necessary homogenization of real and imaginary elements. It is the border that limits what is and is not visible, and thereby establishes what can and cannot be said. And yet there is another, a more disturbing presence, beyond the field of the image and its homogenization of space and time—indeed, beyond the frame of the scandal and its homogenization of real and imaginary.

It takes place out-of-field, outside of the frame, and it testifies to an elsewhere; not to something literally to the left or the right of the frame, but rather to the spaces where the border crossers come from, and where they are going. Neither exists in the immediacy of the footage of the events; both must be negated, ignored, in the *mise-en-scene* of 'Fortress Europe.'

Moussa K., for example: he fled from the civil war in Sierra Leone in 2003 looking for another life in Europe. Passing through Guinea-Conakry, Mauritania, and the Western Sahara, he tried to enter Spanish territory in

Las Palmas, but was caught by Moroccan police and deported to Oujda on the Moroccan-Algerian border. With some comrades he decided to try again in Ceuta.

In June 2005,

after a month of walking across several hundred kilometers through desert and mountains, they reached Fnideq, a small town near the border at Ceuta. 'We lived like animals—it was like in a war zone,' he recalls of the three months he spent in the shrubs. On the 28th of September he decided to take part in the collective attempt to climb across the barbed wire fence and make his way into Ceuta. The slogan of the collective effort was: 'No retreat, no surrender.'

Moussa made his own ladder from small tree trunks and branches and succeeded—unlike his friend, who died from police gunfire. A few weeks later his injuries were almost healed. He now hopes to obtain a residency in Spain and to study mining somewhere in Europe. But what is really at stake is not the *relative* out-of-field, such as geographical destinations, privations and longings, motivations and identities, but the nullification of any subjectivity. The essential function of the border regime is to render innocuous *any* past experience of the border crosser, let alone future desires. As soon as the border is passed, engineers become cleaners, academics turn into sex workers and brain surgeons become taxi drivers—ready-made for overexploitation on the informal labor markets of late capitalism.

Rather than lamenting the unfairness and considering himself a victim, Moussa K. seems to understand border crossing as a process of extreme desubjectivation—in large part by living in ways that are almost unlivable. Pushed beyond the conditions and limits of what is often described as 'human,' his experiences become a sort of negative freedom. Border crossing exists neither in the images nor in the imaginaries of the border and its regime of scandalization. It rather insists or subsists somewhere else, in an absolute out-of-field or 'hors-champ.'

In his second book on cinema, *The Time-Image*, Gilles Deleuze associated an 'absolute out-of-field' with the concept of 'durée' or duration. Instead of measuring sequenced movements in homogeneous space, he suggested a heterogeneous, non-representative notion of time which is irreversible, irretrievable and indivisible.

Something quite stunning happens when the published, animated nine second sequence of border crossers at Ceuta are re-rendered back into what might have been experienced as 'real time.' The specters supposedly overrung

ning Fortress Europe seem to stand still. Every single image is stretched and prolonged to an almost unbearable extent.

Since CCTV cameras usually run with a lower frame rate, in this case compensated for by the speeding up of the video material into fast motion, any attempt to slow it down again results in what, at first sight, seems a pointless duplication of each single original frame.

With one exception: the only moving part of the image is the counter of the time code running smoothly from frame to frame, replacing one image with its double, and presenting every 25th part of a second as if it were enjoyable as pure time while all the content of the image is waiting for the next moment of release.

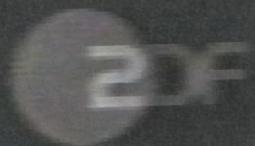
As the movement of the border crossers is halted for a moment that feels infinite, one witnesses a strange kind of apparition. The deadlock of over-mediated content causes a collapse of time. It has emerged as the result of a two-fold manipulation of the footage: first a fast-forwarding for the sake of the scandal, then its reversal through slow-motion: an ethically necessary, but apparently quite arbitrary restoration of the time in which what seemed to happen could have actually happened.

The elapsing of time produces new blocs of invisibility, potential hide-outs between the still images—uncontrolled zones between the frames.

NOTE

The full interview with Moussa K. can be found at
www.kein.org/ceuta

uncorporate identity



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A QUESTION OF SCALE

Notes

Affiche Frontière



Cities used to be encircled by fortified walls. Often, these walls are now boulevards. The beltway is a demarcation line between central and peripheral economies and identities. This is not always to the benefit of the center. Some city centers appear destined to lose their vital dynamics to the peripheries.

The center—economical magnet branded by ‘known’ assets—becomes slowly paralyzed by its ‘sense of quality.’ Unaffordable, satisfied, saturated, it no longer has to meet outside demands stimulating its renewal, renovation, or revolution.

The only outside demand a city center has to meet is to become more like itself.



unporate identity—notes

Affiche Frontière
The project consists of ten different posters shown in JCDecaux advertising furniture on the streets of Bordeaux. The 150 mupis are situated in a ring around the city following its 'inner border.'
Courtesy CAPC musée d'art contemporain de Bordeaux, 2008.

Map of Bordeaux, with spatial distribution of the *Affiche Frontière* posters.

(399)
Affiche Frontière
Brand.

(401)
Affiche Frontière
Windows.

(402)
Affiche Frontière
Périphérique.

Affiche Frontière
Les Européens sont les habitants de l'Europe.

Affiche Frontière
Inward Escape.

Affiche Frontière
Eurololly (l'Europe qui protège de quoi?).

(403)
Affiche Frontière
Rupture.

(404)
Affiche Frontière
White Hole.

(405)
Affiche Frontière
Structural Hole.

(406)
Affiche Frontière
Sphere.

One benchmark for the ‘value’ assigned to city centers versus outskirts consists of the types of brands that advertise in their streets. Moving outward from the center, the advertising’s glam factor usually falls from high fashion to discount meat.

FROM VALUE TO OPPORTUNITY

The term ‘structural hole’ refers to a social gap existing between two groups.¹ It is reminiscent of the walls that surrounded the ancient city. Every group’s relative isolation from the other presents a potential benefit.

A ‘bridge’ connects groups—thus far separated—while it offers economic opportunities. Radically diverse, but disparate networks present the best context for bridges.

Urban planning, according to architect Miguel Robles-Durà, focuses too much on dissolving the concentrated forms of urban energy existing at peripheries—even if such an energy may appear as ‘negative.’

He criticizes its stereotypical substitution by middle-class suburbia: ‘Centralities empower capital, while dissolving any common consciousness, except the necessity for commercial identification. Social inequalities blend and fade out in the consumer market. [...] Centralities absorb their physical borders. It becomes difficult to talk of them simply as marginal spaces, since they have become integrated spaces of marginalization.²

BRAND

Cancel
branding.

Fake

profiles.

This

border

is virtual.

Affiche Frontière.

CAPC

AFFICHE FRONTIÈRE

EUROPEAN IDENTITY

The story of city center and periphery may be expanded to a European scale, while the epic of European border management may be downscaled to fit the (global) city.

How does the EU—arguably the world's historical city center—confront its periphery? Today's citizenship practices are concerned with 'the production of "presence" of those without power and a politics that claims rights to the city.³

Any question of iconography and identity for the EU cannot be separated from what lies beyond the gap.

NOTES

- 1 Ronald S. Burt, *Structural Holes. The Social Structure of Competition*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995.
- 2 Miguel Robles-Durán, in 'Beyond the Periphery,' *Research Passport 6: Affiche Frontière*, Bordeaux: CAPC, 2008.
- 3 Saskia Sassen, *Territory, Authority, Rights. From Medieval to Global Assemblages*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008 (2006), p. 315.

WINDOWS

Montebello
Montebello

Les œuvres sont exposées dans une
salle de pointe. D'après une
liste de 100 œuvres à voir.

capcMusée

AFFICHE FRONTIÈRE

PÉRIPHÉRIQUE

2011

MULTIPOLAIRE

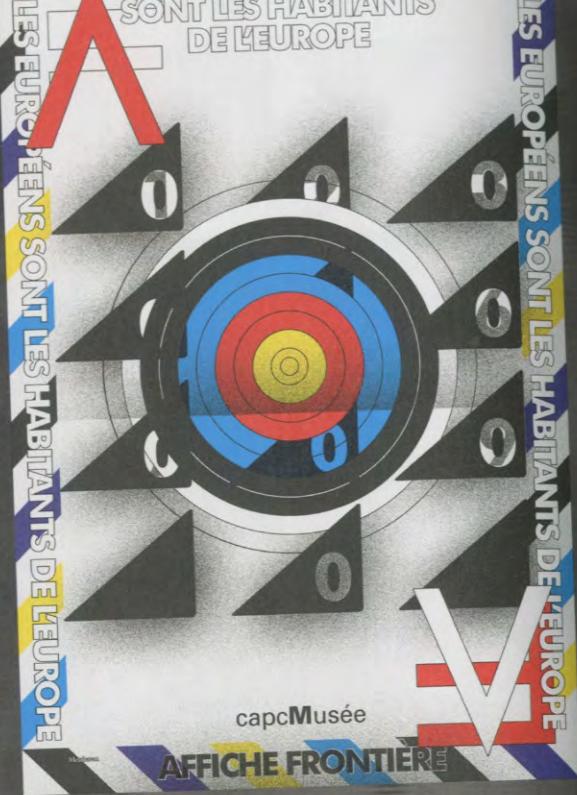
MULTITUDE

capcMusée

AFFICHE FRONTIÈRE

LES EUROPÉENS
SONT LES HABITANTS
DE L'EUROPE

LES EUROPÉENS SONT LES HABITANTS DE L'EUROPE



INWARD ESCAPE

EXIT



AFFICHE FRONTIÈRE

EUROLOLLY

L'EUROPE
QUI
PROTÈGE
DE
QUOI?

capc

AFFICHE FRONTIÈRE

RUPTURE

MUPI · MOBILIER URBAIN POUR L'INFORMATION

MUPI

capc Musée

AFFICHE FRONTIÈRE

MUPI · MOBILIER URBAIN POUR L'INFORMATION

WHITE HOLE

affiche frontière

Metahaven

apc

STRUCTURAL HOLE

CPG

AFFICHE FRONTIÈRE

Metzhaven

SPHERE

We have
occupied
the border

to ensure
consumers
always
remember.

DU VENT*

ON VIENT

Affiche Frontière.

GAPC

AFFICHE FRONTIÈRE

affiche frontière

21 46:59:10

407

Board games are also border games. Borders in games represent, but also structure, borders in the world.

A remix of the Monopoly game takes players on an endless detour around the city center of Paris, with the *banlieue* an off-world frame governed by the RER commuter railway—a prime standard in Parisian life *extra muros*.

MONOPOLIS

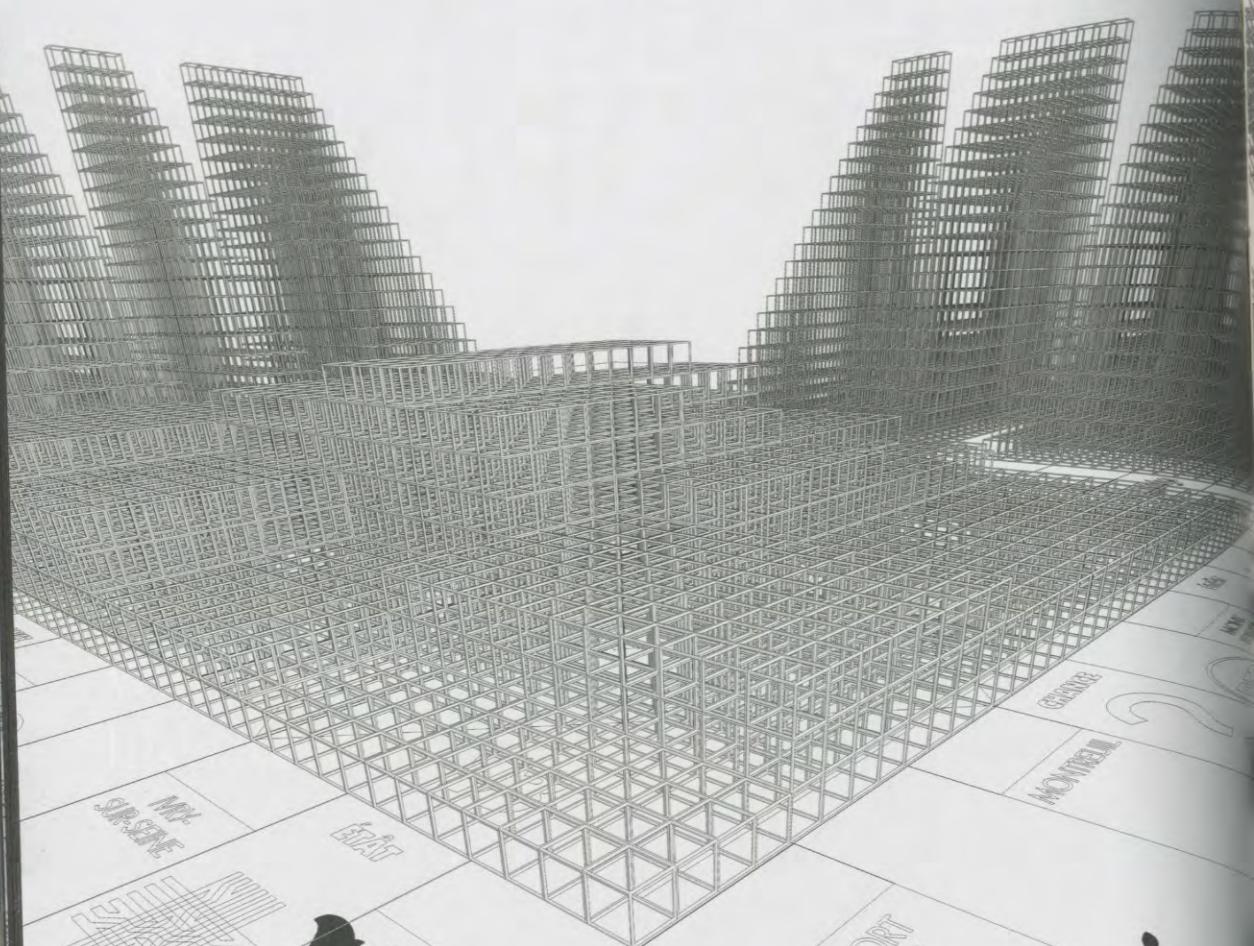
A EUROPE GAME

AT THE INNER BORDERS OF EUROPE

PARIS
INTRA
MUROS
GRANDE
BANLIEUE
409

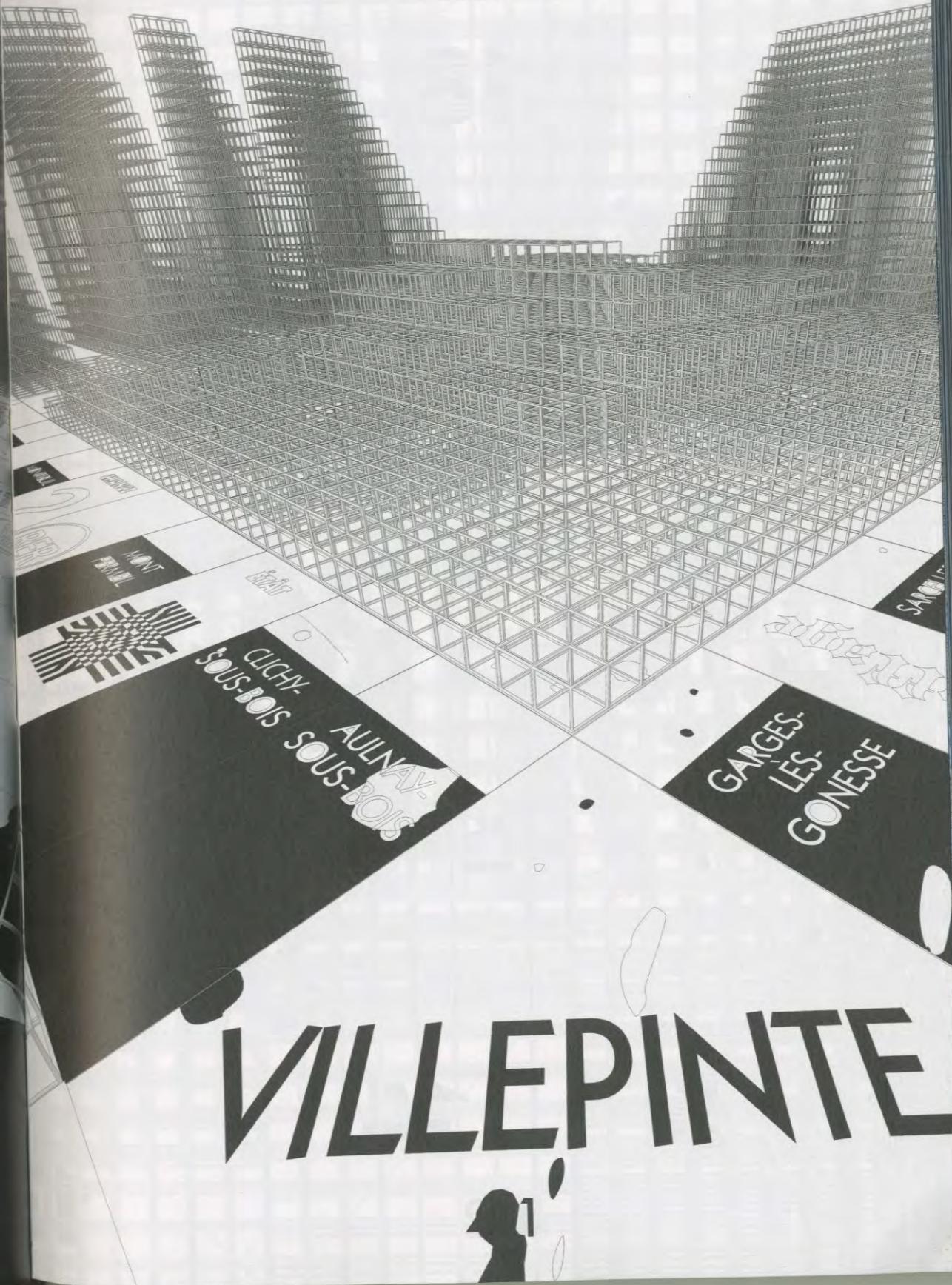
THE OTHERS STAND AT THE GATES

uncorporate identity



CRÉTEIL

410



uncorporate identity

18

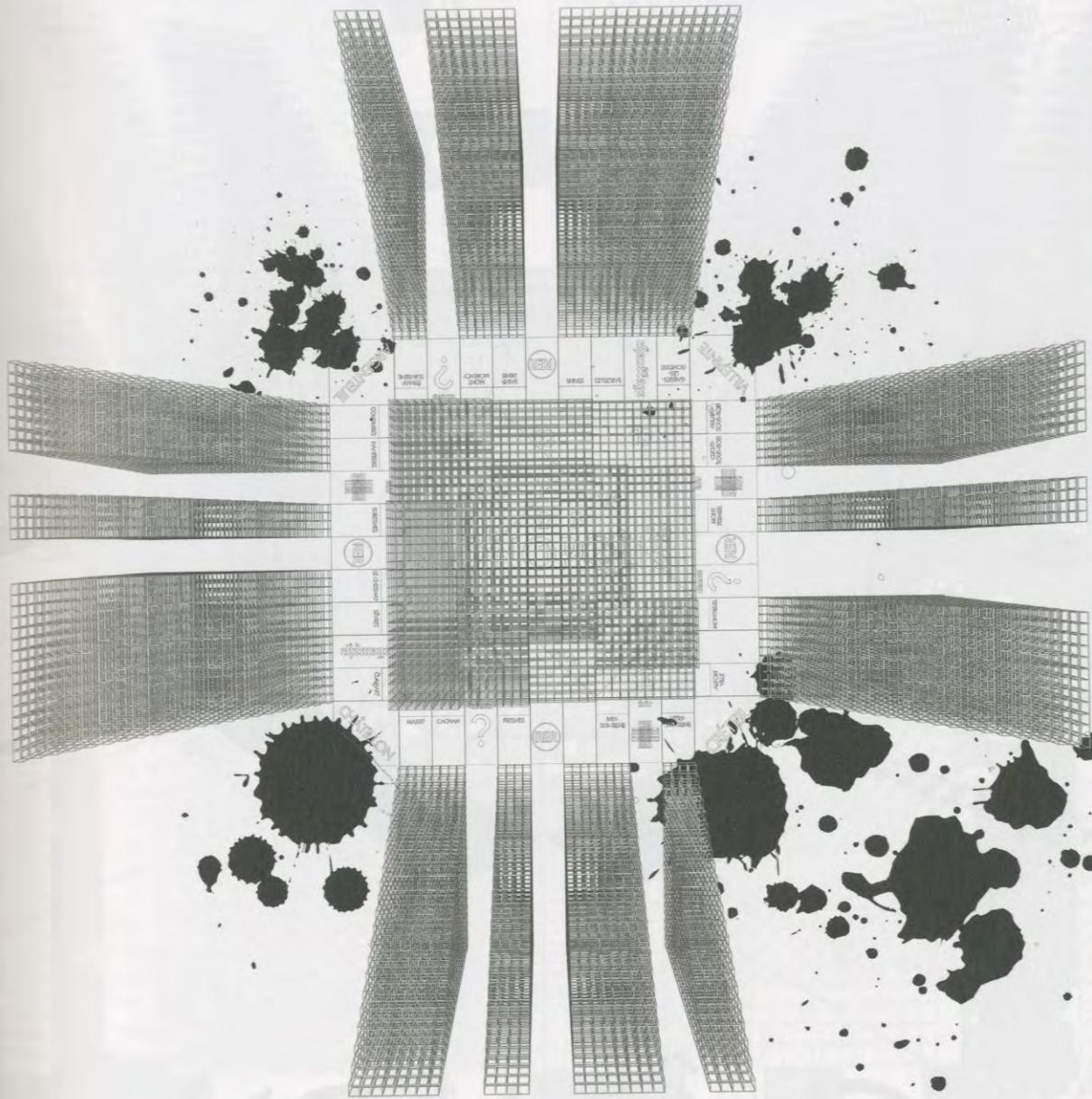
2

3

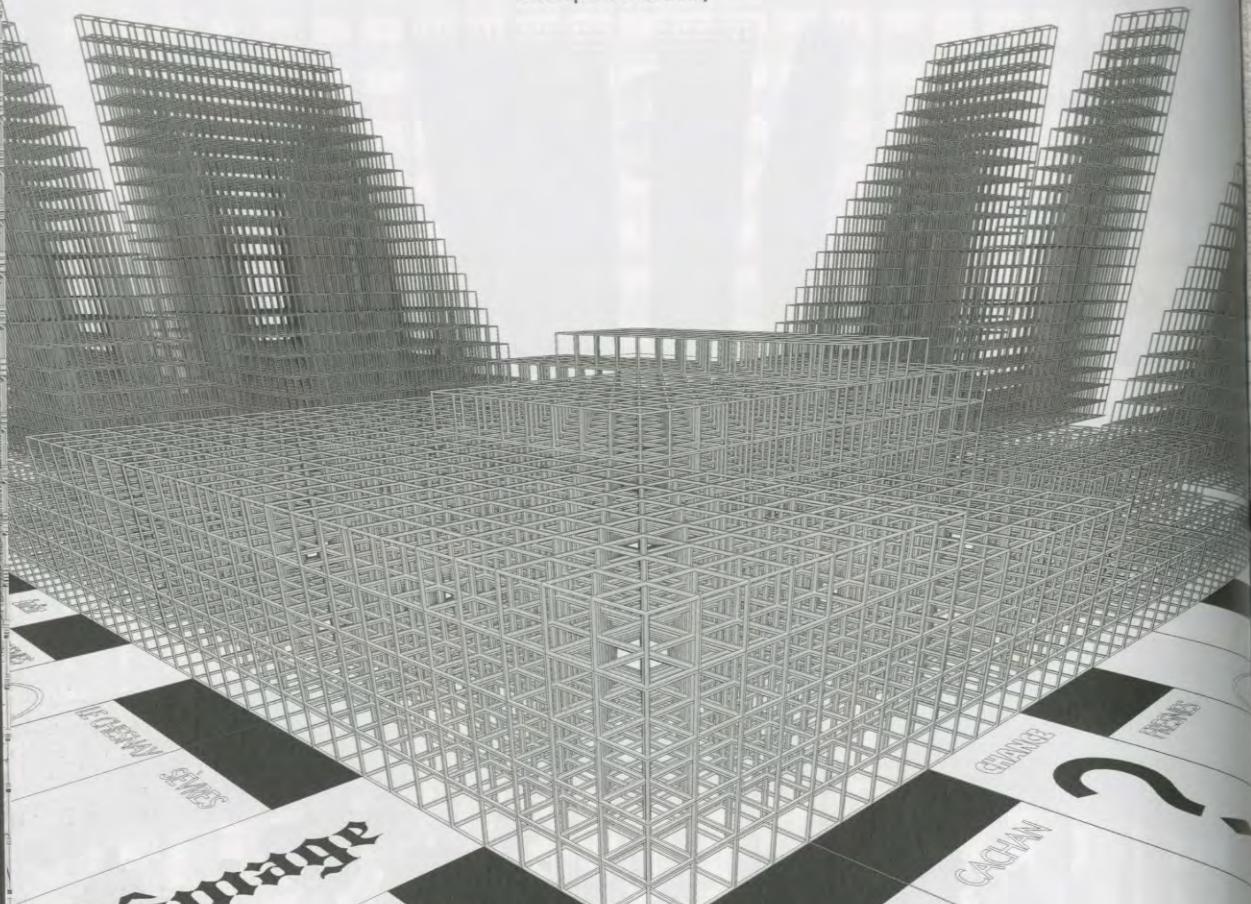
100

5

412



uncorporate identity



CHÂTILLON

MONT
FERMEIL

monopolis

RER

CHANCE

?

MONTREUIL

AÉROPORT
VILLE

ÉTAT

IVRY-
SUR-SEINE

VITRY-
SUR-SEINE

CRÉTEIL

RER

afy

CHATILLON

MASSY

CACHAN

CHANCE
?

FRESNES

RER

ÉTAT

IVRY-
SUR-SEINE

ÉTAT

VITRY-
SUR-SEINE

AÉROPORT
VILLE

CRÉTEIL

415

uncorporate identity

100%
self-tanning



1895

MON
MORENCY

CHANGE

ÉPINAY-
SUR-SEINE

ARGE

