

Semantic reflections on imprecise politics.

Ἐρμῆνο, ἑρμῆνο, ἑρμῆνο.

Semantic reflections on imprecise politics.

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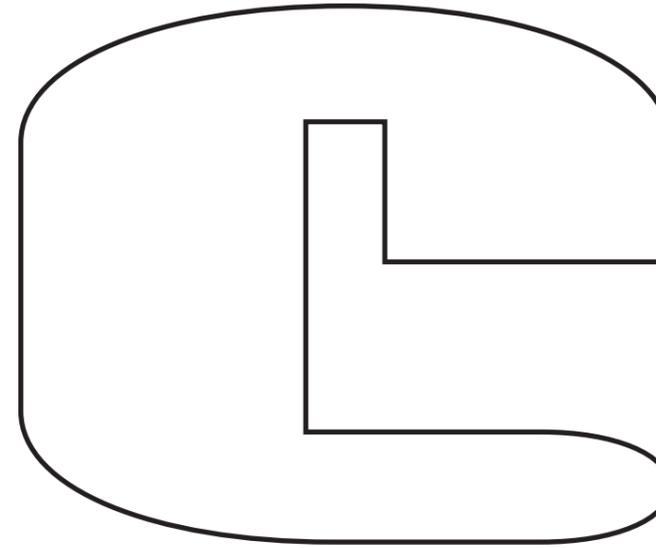
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1. A shop full of antiques and curios.
2. A small article valued as a collector's item, especially something fascinating or unusual.

Political centre, geographical centre, historical centre, cultural centre... The controversy which arises when trying to define these terms is the starting point for the project The New Dictionary of Old Ideas. What can be deemed a political centre? Can it really be associated with any specific place? Is Europe the centre of anything by chance? And if it is, from whose perspective exactly? At the same time, does the museum lie at the centre of something, thereby making it a cultural authority? And what about the culture that sits outside of this framework? From all these questions that arise when thinking about the meaning of the word "centre," we deduce that it is a deceptive term normally used to legitimize positions of superiority and miscellaneous political aberrations, from the closure of borders to the plunder of other territories and forced displacement. Perhaps the opportunity that is provided herein is thus to deal with the problems which arise with regard to the definition of these terms, problems of which Europe is the main cause or contributor and which are being manifested today through the uprise of nationalism, racist attitudes and exclusion.

hablarenarte is teaming up with three other European cultural organisations, Meeffactory in the Czech Republic, TRAF0 in Poland and Silkmuseum in Georgia, to deal with this task, which was first envisaged in 2017 in the project The New Dictionary of Old Ideas. The first time around, debate was undertaken to assess the historical and political legacy upon which countries such as the Czech Republic or Poland-

both tied together under the "Eastern countries" bias-operate, which in some way has an impact on the current way they function and their cultural production. In fact, one of the most commonplace debates has revolved around the role of art after the fall of the totalitarian regimes that governed these regions and whether, despite the fact that art is now produced in the once sought after capitalist democracies, it connects with power in a servile way or, on the contrary, it is approached in a free and critical manner. This, coupled with the burden of labels long associated with these countries such as "Eastern Europe" or "Central Europe," having determined their position within a hierarchy dominated by the West, is one of the issues constantly explored within the project. Despite we are occupying a distant position (like the Georgia partners), there are many attitudes and behaviours which we can recognise perfectly well. The contradictions of nationalism and the rise of hatred towards minorities and vulnerable groups are also a problem found here: one need only examine the recent attacks on young migrants denigratingly referred to as "menas¹" (an acronym used in Spain to refer to unaccompanied foreign minors) or the criminalisation of squatters, and therefore of people who cannot afford access to decent housing. For this reason, and with the hope of gaining the proper perspective to understand the complexities of these places, a series of artist-in-residency programs were initiated in 2019, having taken place in Prague, Szczecin, Tbi-

lisi and Madrid. Artists residing in these four countries participated in the residencies, and their research led to the production of new artworks then displayed in a travelling exhibition.

Prague and Szczecin's residencies gave artists Elena Lavellés, Erick Beltrán, Katharina Stadler, Nino Zirkashvili, Sandro Sulaberidze y Verónica Lahitte the chance of connecting with these problems from their own perspective. Three artists attended the residence at Planta Alta, which was organised by hablarenarte: Jiří Žák and Adéla Součková from the Czech Republic and Irmina Rusicka from Poland. It is interesting to note that, as occurred in the other countries during the residency, the artists found many symbols and anchors to the past in Madrid which are still conditioning current social policies and behaviours. During this time, events ensued such as the exhumation of dictator Franco's corpse, originally buried with honours at the monument known as the Valley of the Fallen. When analysing the architectures of the former dictatorship and other buildings such as the monument in memory of the 11th March terrorist attacks, we are once again forced to deal with questions about the legitimising power of art and the social responsibility that this work entails, questions later reflected in some of the works developed for the exhibition. Of course, during this time

in Madrid, issues such as Spanish colonialism and the ongoing exploitation of land and bodies were not left out either, today under the guise of a false sort of progress and the need for constant digital connection.

You might say that exploring the common elements and differences between places through these artist residencies and the exhibition held thereafter—which opened in Prague in February 2020 and travelled to Poland in June of the same year—led us to take a hard look at processes such as the obsolete, perverse border demarcations and the nationalist struggles that began in the past, and continue in the present through new trade agreements, wars for the domination of resources and the establishment of new borders. Even the restrictive situation experienced during the pandemic and resulting lockdown (at least in Spain) has highlighted accusatory and poli-

C ce-oriented attitudes amongst citizens, along with class hatred.

The exhibition that we here at hablarenarte developed with the collaboration of Alba Folgado and Centro Centro was cancelled. However, due to our desire to continue delving into these problems from an art perspective, the heterogeneous publication *Término*, *termino*, *terminó* was created. In this publication we dared to shatter the vocabulary that binds us to biased definitions and hackneyed concepts. We also ruled out the possibility of one unifying viewpoint in order to produce a body of texts and images which show the perspectives of various contributors during the different stages of the project.

The dictionary presented here defies categorization and definition logics while organizing each entry in response to a word, providing new reading possibilities. With this objective in mind we gather texts commissioned to Adrián Almazán, Marta Sanz and Mauro Gilfournier; interventions resulting from the residencies' work by Erick Beltrán and Jiří Žák; and visual contributions of Diego del Pozo, Marco Godoy and Verónica Lahitte, who among other artists participated in the public programme connected to this publication. By revealing the true faces behind the masks, the bias that lives within our eyes, or even by exposing what lies behind our communicative abuse, the contributions connect with everyday realities in which our behaviours are questionable, though they also leave the door open to potential change. Hopefully, reading this will act as a catalyst for imagining new ways to challenge this dystopian reality.

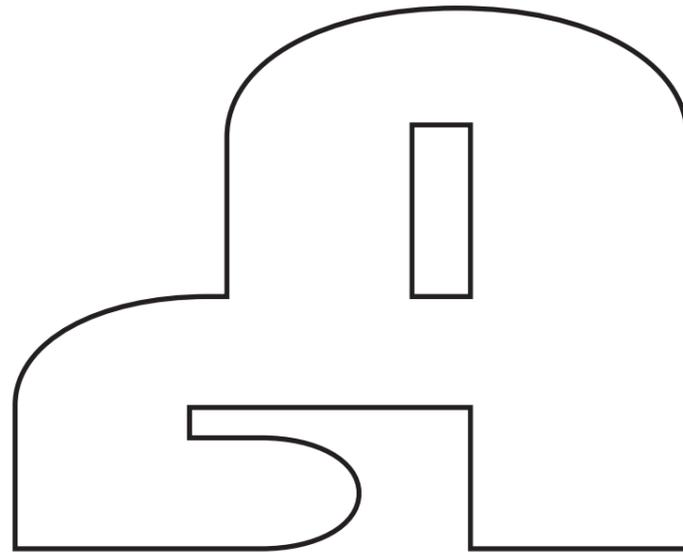
Alba Folgado
hablarenarte
María Alejandra Gatti

C

¹ The acronym "menas" has been used in a derogatory and racist way to refer to "unaccompanied foreign minors" who are tutelaged by public authorities. During the years 2019 and 2020 they have suffered numerous racist attacks, such as the throwing of explosive devices at a shelter center in a neighborhood of Madrid.

Verónica Lahitte

Verónica Lahitte: Close-up of Florian Paucke's Codex "Hin und Her. Hin süsse und vergnügt, Her bitter und betrübt." (1748-1769). Kept at the Stift Zwettl Archives in Austria.

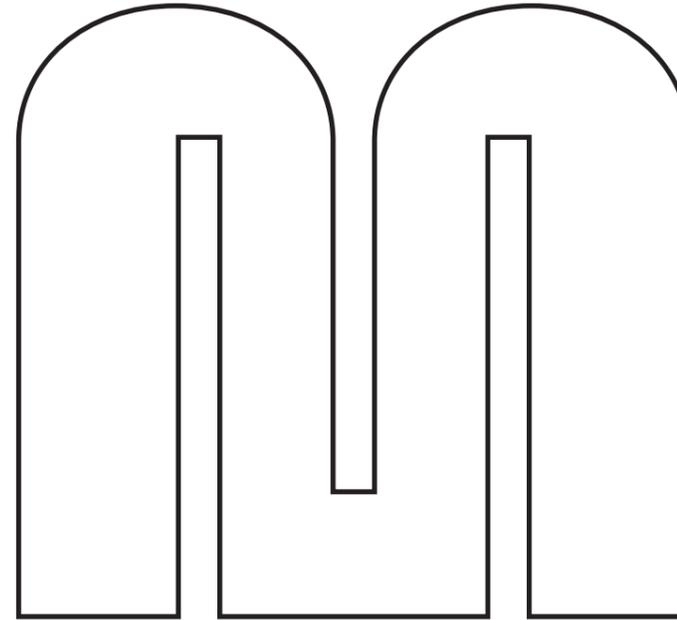


ATLAS

1. Collection of maps, mainly geographical, presented in book or notebook form.
2. In anatomy: The first bone in the spine, a cervical vertebra supporting the weight of the skull.

AN ATLAS FROM THE DESERT explores, analyses and sows an archive of plants drawn during the European trips to the former colonies in the XVII and XVIII centuries. The Atlas departs from these materials to set a route through the logic defining the current world's configuration, acknowledging its permanence, but also its capacity for change, mutation and regeneration. The first chapter of the Atlas investigates and cultivates the drawings and texts that Florian Paucke (Silesia, 1719) produced from 1749 to 1767 during his stay in what is now considered Argentinian territory. In dialogue with the people who now inhabit the territory and, by taking a leap in time, the Atlas reminds us that capitalism was colonial and Eurocentric since its beginnings.





MASK

1. Object used to cover the face, which is commonly used during festivities rituals or performances and which represents the face of a human, an animal or an imaginary being.
2. Object or piece of cloth or paper that is placed in front of the nose and mouth and attached to the head with an elastic band. It avoids or facilitates the inhalation of certain gases and substances.
3. Complete protective coverage of the entire face used in certain activities and professions.
4. Means used by a person to hide something generally negative, especially his feelings, intentions or character.

In this age of the pandemic, the centre/periphery dialectic is seeing a halt in the blurring of its dividing line, in its status of flux or oily water that seeks a diverse yet egalitarian synthesis, thus radicalising its contradictions and bearing witness to its violent bias. The masses at borders are hardening into place because the disease, instead of instilling us with an awareness about shared vulnerabilities and a mood of non-pitying solidarity in which the focus of political discourses homes in on the idea of taking care of others, leads to reactions crying out for a spurious concept of freedom. This warped concept of liberty is expressed in our masks, elevated to the category of symbols for a simplified, often reactionary ideology. Flag-masks: masks which demonstrate belonging to a group and aggressiveness towards others. Masks which sort out who is best and worst through symbols of a nationalistic ethics and aesthetics that reduce the concept of the homeland to a gold medal in an athletic competition, to mottoes like "We're number one," to "Spain is different" and other slogans and fantasy-based stereotypes, like the one that says we really know how to live life here, or that you will kill the coronavirus with your Spanish Legion-strength immune system and your El Cid legs, while complaining that

outsiders are stealing our jobs, that "Spain is for the Spanish." Retro-active masks that strip the masked individual. This new meaning of masking concerns me, scares me, robs me of my happiness. However, sadly and paradoxically, it allows me to see more clearly than I could if the masks did not exist.

The mask, far from hiding, is revealing. Each of the veils which Salome strips off to remain in the living flesh is a declaration of intent, leading us to discover displaced meanings in our culture's imaginary: the nude is not always a generous act of devotion, but rather an unnatural pose; the mask is not always concealment. Sometimes a glimpse of truth congeals through the mask; the contemplation of a nude is not always a privilege, and truths do not invariably inhabit nudity, but instead the desire to seduce the viewer peeping through a tiny hole. Sometimes the one who feels observed is the one giving the orders. Sometimes the men and women who declare they do not use masks, displaying objectivity and honesty by serving up their heart on a serving dish, wear their masks, affiliations, stickers and badges emblazoned on the back of their skin. Sometimes these men and women who claim to be no more than Juan, Pedro or Enriqueta, to be nothing more than simple, good people, are actually the-cloaked-beholders of words. Sometimes those who look without being seen and who feel powerful are poor, naïve beings who are unaware that to hide behind the curtains-the furniture-mask-is not a privilege, but rather a contraction, a shrinking, an abomination.



M From this relationship of power in which the mask interjects, we can infer a few aesthetic theories about the bonds that give meaning to the actions of issuing and receiving art, literature, cinema...

The mask is a fabric sometimes placed over the eyes in order to look at the world. To stylize it, to deform it. The fabric-mask, the filter, the stocking over the camera lens, is often used to observe the past more tenderly. The fabric-mask is what we call nostalgia, and it closes the door to utopian projection into the future. This mask resembles the poisoned books in Jorge of Burgos' library in *The Name of the Rose*. And this post-modern reference for public consumption is meant to draw attention to the experience of a new cultural sensitivity—an academic mask that is helpful to us in trying to understand the world we live in—which I have already referred to as “camp futurism” in other spaces: we men and women believe that we live well-settled in the future, with our virtual existence, our liquid screens and our pandemics, but that future is packed with the marks of a murky, tacky, greasy past, a past of Franco era news bulletins, cock-fights, exploitation, sexual violence and best-sellers that make the lower passions and an idyllic-commercial-view of our lost youth more profitable. The flag-masks, or banderillas, those rear-view masks which simplify the complex, are a fetish of camp futurism. Paddle-ball racquets, too, to play on the beach, showing the silhouette of the Osborne bull over a red and yellow Spanish flag background. ¡Olé!

You have to be very careful about appearances, because you may end up becoming what you appear to be. Kurt Vonnegut snidely writes something like this when paraphrasing Oscar Wilde's elegant bitterness, which, in *Lady Windermere's Fan*, he puts in an utterance by one of his characters similar to the following (I do not intend for my memory or the quote to be fully reliable): “Whoever believes that appearances are deceiving is completely wrong.” This axiom contradicts popular wisdom. It is imperative for literature and art to contradict the popular wisdom often based on the cliché, on hegemonic ideology made natural, made invisible, transformed into normality. As in *The Stolen Letter* by Edgar Allan Poe: confidence in the power of masks to enhance visibility is an act

of optimism which, in this case, fills my heart with joy. We can interpret the armour and the veils which cover the body. We can learn from everything that language lets us see and hides from us and, at the same time, we can use the fabrics, the weaves and the rhetoric to find out who we are, where we are, the way we want to converse with others. Sometimes fictions, which are true because we assimilate them without feeling anything, like the magnesium or vitamin A in food, like iron or fat, with the same two-fold potential for being either nutritious or deadly, helping us notice and understand things, whether deep or superficial, which we would not perceive without them. Let me give you one example: the ectoplasms that form the chorus of dead women and lost children in *Little Red Women*, the mask of those characters so different from myself, helped me practice the dual action of both self-absorption and alienation, and in that alienation, in the effort to place myself under a skin that is part of me but not exactly my own—a donkey skin, the *Venus of Furs*, the naked emperor...—I felt and comprehended a helplessness, a fear, a need to clamour for ethics and politics, the urgency of questioning the silliest ambivalences. I opened my eyes up to a world which, had I not used those voices, those masks, I would never even have glimpsed. *Little Red Women* (2020) is the novel with which I ended the Detective Arturo Zarco trilogy. It was published right when the lockdown began, and the warmth of reading kept the poppies on its cover from wilting away. I recovered nearly all my confidence in the human race, because

the book discusses the forms in which violence against women and the losing side in the Civil War were represented: horrific images and fragments of a non-nostalgic memory that some people find awkward and do not want to hear.

Literature and art, in their guise of the mask—the language-mask—allow us to create a reflection of reality and construct it. The mask allows us to take part in the transformation of reality. Thus we turn clichés on their head, as we do the joy of winning a flat in a TV game show, or our uncritical acceptance that “the early bird catches the worm,” or the kindness of silent majorities and the impudent foolishness of singing “Long live people, you will find them wherever

you go.” And we emphasise the positive meanings of the mask in aesthetic discourses, because without languages and filters, without representations that allow us to cast light on the nerve system of the hand that presses the key or holds the chisel (just two examples), art would not exist, because the mask is the face, the person, truth. The autobiography is just one form of the mask, and the mask a form of the autobiography. In this case, I was assisted by the mathematical lessons to be found in Euler Venn diagrams, and I corroborate the truth in their symmetrical nature. We must reflect upon the naked truth about masks. We must clamour for the absolute concept of love and the revenge of a masked man as famous as *The Phantom of the Opera*, to act as a counterbalance in this age filled with euphemisms, which conceal the secret, authoritarian life of those who brandish soft, white concepts—concepts of iron—about relativity, plausibility or the authenticity of artistic communication and knowledge processes. We are empowered by the mask, which has always formed part of the semantic field of concealment and shrewdness, to shout out that the metaphor-mask, the representation-mask, the staging-mask, the veiling-mask, the semi-trill mask, are all the face, the person, the body and the truth. And I know that this statement sacralises art, but at the same time it makes art down-to-earth, closer to the tangible things that matter to us most so that we can live. A perfect synthesis. A beautiful synthesis of body, food, bread... Side-note recommendation: read Ingmar Bergman's *Persona*. See the film, as well. Think, because it tells the story of an actress who has lost her voice.

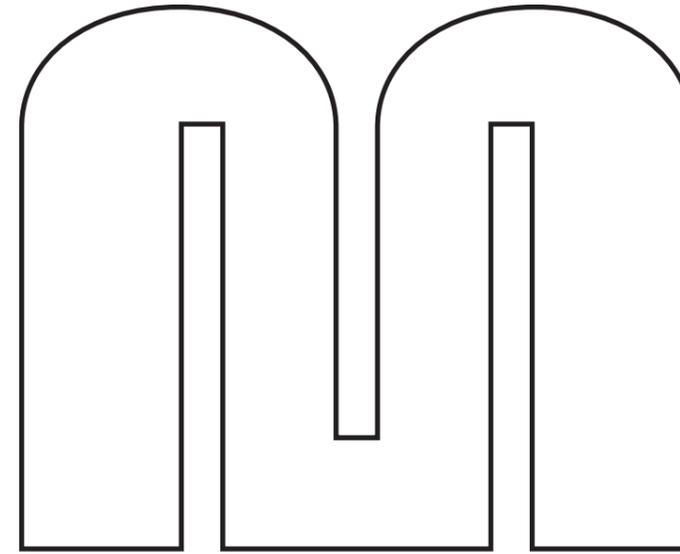
We should reflect upon the everyday nature of the sinister to come to the realisation that the face we see reflected in the mirror is the mask we have come to deserve with the passage of time. There are worthy but haggard masks, and there are other masks which, though exquisite and smooth, do not understand the meaning of any terms comprising the family of words expressing kindness.

Examples of everyday masks that reveal more than they hide: every brand of sportswear we wear is a declaration of intent. Every attempt to pass forged handbags off as genuine is a declaration of intent. Every procedure in the operating room to straighten a nose or plump up a lip, to raise sculpted cheekbones to an im-

M plausible height under which we can hardly recognize the valley in which the eye is embedded: all are a declaration of intent. Every time you use threading for hair removal. Every time you visit the Cinematèque or Fashion Museum. Every photo you post on Instagram. Every gourmet restaurant you frequent, if you can afford it with your cash, your flow, your cash flow: people's purchasing power is absolutely fundamental to the fabric of our masks and, because I have not yet forgotten we are living in this age of the pandemic, I recall an image from the era of surrealism and fur-covered ashtrays: the obscene production of a mask with precious stones whose anti-viral properties have not been proven, but whose heavy, ostentatious weight will strip flesh from the human face that actually intends to hide—and to show itself off—behind the mask. Every burger joint and gluten-free product consumed is a declaration of intent by our food-mask. Each of the friendships with which we surround ourselves. The masks you can buy, within the logic of this simplistic, commercial concept of freedom, are a declaration of intentions that fits in with our daily lives and our coveted inner lives, revealed to be the tip of the iceberg of our masks and sometimes honoured, magnified and staged on the divans of the most exclusive psychoanalysis professionals. In the era of advanced retro-capitalism, Woody Allen is an example of self-parody in this type of masking, which transforms the meek loser into a lovable hero, placing the mask of the short little wimp onto the undeniably successful man. An indelible note that confirms the link between the grammatical and the political: I don't know why, but the plural “freedoms” feels somewhat suspicious to me; I sense in this morphological trait an advertising-based diversification of the trite product-concept which once took form in a dizzying canvas by Delacroix.



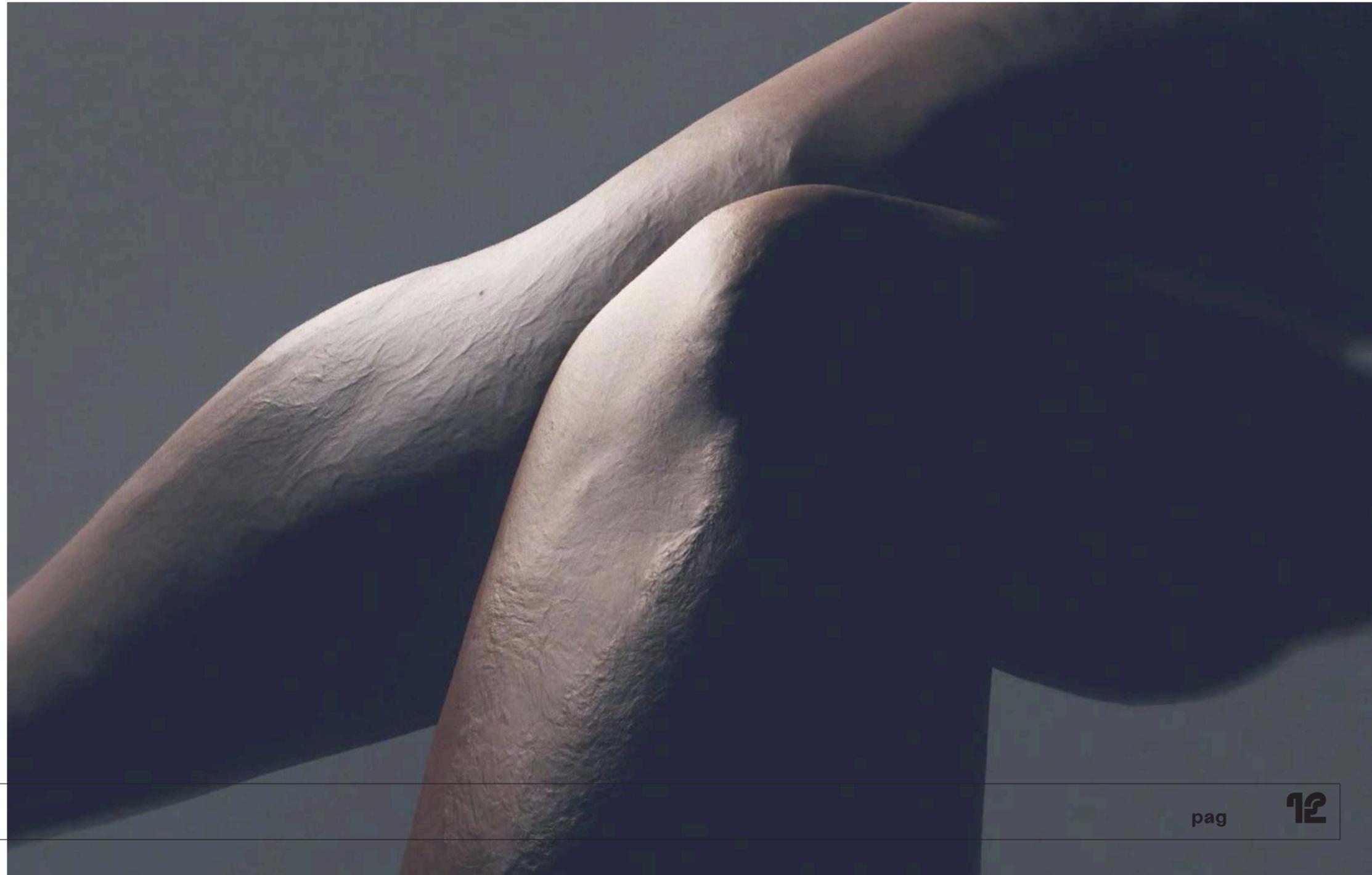
MONSTER



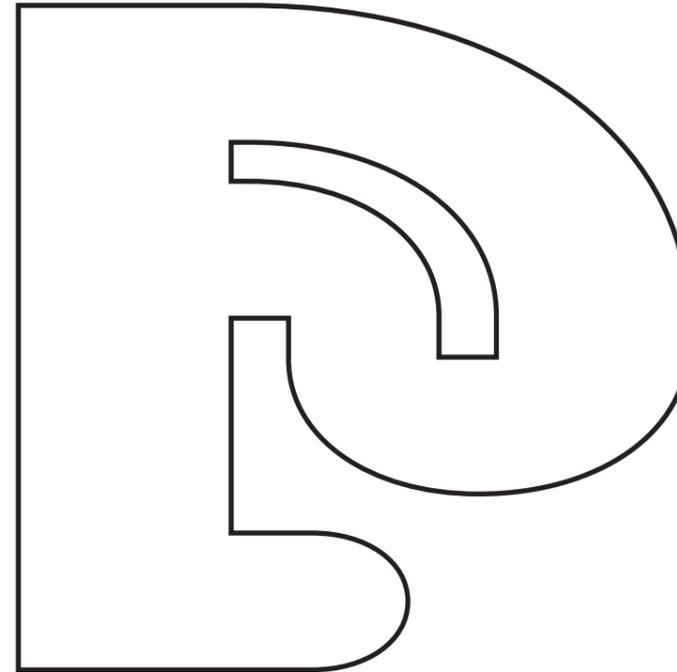
1. A being that has some abnormality not typical of the natural order and of frightening appearance.
2. A very ugly person or thing.
3. A very cruel and perverse person who causes great physical or moral pain.
4. A person or thing which has become extraordinarily successful.
5. Very large or impressive in size, extent or number.

Diego del Pozo

Video still from "A 200 metros de distancia" [200 Meters Away] by Diego del Pozo (2020).



"El Parlamento del Odio" [The Parliament of Hate] is a work by Diego del Pozo that attempts to reveal the hidden mechanisms driving policies of hatred against migrants, people of colour and LGTBIQ+ communities. Several decades of neoliberalism have enshrined a system of control allowing for an economy of affects in which hatred and fear are internalised by the population. Along with other phenomena, this economy makes clear the systemic social crisis in which we are deeply enmeshed. How can we imagine other times and spaces that will turn the clock back on the violence of hate?



PAIDEIA?

1. In the culture of ancient Greece, the term paideia referred to the rearing and education of the ideal member of the polis. It incorporated both practical, subject-based schooling and a focus upon the socialization of individuals within the aristocratic order of the polis. The practical aspects of this education included subjects subsumed under the modern designation of the liberal arts, as well as scientific disciplines like arithmetic and medicine. An ideal and successful member of the polis would possess intellectual, moral and physical refinement, so training in gymnastics and wrestling was valued for its effect on the body alongside the moral education which the Greeks believed was imparted by the study of music, poetry and philosophy.

A society, and therefore a culture, cannot be understood without comprehending its materiality. The life of human groups amounts to so much more than just their languages and institutions, or the biographies of their great figures. It is also made up of the ways in which they cook, the way they build their homes, the way they farm, forage or hunt for food... In fact, some like Pounds have referred to this as their "material culture," a history that stains their hands with dirt, grease and wood shavings. A history of everyday life amongst different generations of human beings who live their fragile, finite lives on this planet.

And just as there is no culture without materiality, nor is there culture without all the other lives lived on Earth. We form part of a biotic community, a system of systems that science already knows as Gaia, without which we could not exist. Distant from the ideal of the almighty Western man who dominates all other lives (including those of women), placed under their servitude by some sort of

God, our reality is that of an animal in need of care, who is confused, in search of meaning, and eco-dependent upon all the other animals and plants with which it shares its path through life.

It is therefore paradoxical that, by thinking of itself through culture, society attempts to set itself away from this materiality surrounding it. Our way of relating to the rest of the planet, which some call our social metabolism, is one of the major little-considered facets of

Western culture. Culture has historically been regarded as something different and superior to sheer brutal, repetitive manual labour. In the face of animalism and nature, culture has presented itself as a symbol of refinement, humanity and transcendence. And whenever nature has furtively slipped into culture, as it did in romantic creations, for instance, it did so as an "other" that was used to criticise culture's faults and inadequacies, but not as an integral facet of it.

This neglect is of special severity, because the deification of Western culture, parallel to the formation of a notion of genocidal and imperialist civilisation, was based on a colonial, unequal, destructive material reality. Modernity and capitalism, inseparably bound to the new machinery that ran on coal, embarked on the cannibalisation of a world reduced to the abstract logic of production for profit and extraction. This new mega-machine could only be sustained by the accelerated digestion of all kinds of resources: human lives, personal priorities, sensitivity, fossil fuels, forest matter, fertile land, communality, etc. The World was vanishing into thin air at a breakneck pace; human relations were increasingly viewed within the abstract framework of State and market bureaucracies, but this was all deemed to be Progress. This progress lay at the centre of Europe, and, in the hands of philosophers like Hegel, had the privilege of comprising the synthesis and motor for all world history, with the remaining

territories acting as slow train cars following behind the great locomotive of European ingenuity. It was a progress whose price was genocide, the destruction of ancient ways of relating to the land inside and outside of Europe, the integrity of ecosystems, atmospheric balance, community relations... It was a form of progress which, despite Rousseau's complaints in his "discourses³", conveyed an enlightened culture that turned its back on materiality and, at the same time, became obsessed with it. The consolidation of capitalist modernity, and above all the advent of the industrial era, ushered in the godlike worship of technology, which was presented as a spearhead of progress. The ongoing advancement of industry and human inventiveness would be responsible for building a paradise of abundance and freedom that would automatically resolve all conflicts. Furthermore, progress very soon became the matrix of a Faustian culture in which the human condition itself promised to open up to the possibility of abolishing labour and even politics itself, as abundance was to turn conflict into an outdated reality. However, this obsession with eminently material technology concealed the creation of a metaphysics that turns its back on life's true nature. Technology thus becomes a reductive fetish for human progress, and mechanism becomes an epistemological paradigm. As a result, everything living is once again hidden, because it gets reduced to an endless, mechanical stockpile of resources used to grease the gears of industry's glorious machinery. A mere sum of mechanical relations, the Universe is transformed into a boundless, infinite whole destined to submit to our control and feed our teeming desires. In other words, once again we find an "other" that exists only to sate our hungers.

The Western culture of the last three centuries has appropriated this tale of civilization and progress, with some resistance and exceptions, and above all it has almost unanimously agreed to keep our metabolism, our concrete relationship with resources, in the shadows. This exercise in concealment has reached paroxysm with the implementation of digitisation and computerisation processes. Computer technology, the latest stronghold in the moribund ideology of progress, is re-

configuring the tangible ways in which culture is made, its lexical framework and the extent of its meaning. Ours is now a fluid, immaterial, cloud-based culture globally interconnected by virtual networks, giving shape to a new digital cosmopolitanism.

The computer, a new fetish in the progressive creed, is presented as a response to the promises that outdated technologies such as the steam engine, car or television were unable to fulfil. We will now be able to create fair, inclusive societies, automate the decision-making process and the administration of justice, and build a transparent world in which we can all participate to the same degree. We will now also be able to continue down the path of perpetual growth, of progress, since it has been divested of its material nature. After the late acknowledgement of an inalienable destructive dimension to our highly praised economic growth, which environmentalism made unavoidable, information technology and its uses are once again locking materialism back up into the backwater

of irrelevance. There is nothing to worry about anymore, because digital life has worked the ultimate alchemy: the destruction-free production of immaterial progress in the kingdom of the clouds...

All of the above is obviously false. Our societies, now globalized, have not taken a single step backward on the path of industrialisation. There have never been more workers on the planet than there are today. Never has so much coal been burned as today. Never has as much oil been consumed as today. Never have there been as many cars as today. Never have so many mines been operated as today. Never have so many species of animals and plants been put to death as today... Digitisation is, more than all else, a catalyst and a facilitator of the enormous destructive processes which capitalist modernity has been rolling out for at least three centuries. There is no hiatus, but only a grim continuity in the consumption of resources and the reconfiguration of human life⁴.

In this continuum, computer devices themselves (computers, cell phones, tablets, etc.) are the main role-players. On a social level, this redefines human relations in almost every arena. It now seems impos-

sible to do hardly a thing without first paying the toll charged by our little screens: from love to bureaucracy, nearly every single act has been reduced to a mechanical series of clicks. And this has also occurred on a metabolic level. It is estimated that the emissions associated with energy use by Information and Communication Technologies could reach 14% of the total amount before 2040⁵, a figure equivalent to more than half of the transportation industry's current contribution worldwide. ICTs are also extremely dependent upon very scarce materials in the Earth's crust, such as rare-earth elements. Mining currently accounts for 8-10% of primary energy consumption around the world, but as the trend aims towards a dependence upon an increasing amount of minerals, this percentage is likely to increase.

Without the vast majority of the culture seeming to perceive it, the requirements of the enormous metabolic transformation now under way, or in other words our access to resources, are reconfiguring and reinforcing our system based on materialism and global geopolitics. North-South relations historically based on the exploitation of human resources (migration and slavery) and industrial resources (sugar cane, cotton, iron, etc.) already endured a crucial transformation as a result of the entry of coal and oil into industry's metabolisms⁶. However, the global eco-social crisis which we have been experiencing for over a half a century is already a true geopolitical wake-up call, and will be even more so in the future.

The sway held by age-old oil powers is being weakened as fossil fuels grow increasingly scarce. The processes of productive relocation that digitisation has made possible concentrate enormous power in China, the main producer of many of the products necessary to reproduce our daily lives. Globalized, petroleum-dependent food production and distribution networks devastate fertile soil and put the bulk of the population at risk of food shortages. Climate change destroys biodiversity. Access to fresh water is threatened and already triggering large population movements which are expected to continue increasing in the future...

In the face of all this, the only solution that governments and market are offering us is to build new non-renewable devices to

¹ Norma G. J. Pounds, *La vida cotidiana: historia de la cultura material*, [Hearth and Home: A History of Material Culture], Spanish translation by Jordi Ainaud (Barcelona: Crítica, 1999).

² Manuel González de Molina y Víctor Manuel Toledo, *Metabolismos, naturaleza e historia: hacia una teoría de las transformaciones socioecológicas*, 1. ed, *Perspectivas agroecológicas* 7 (Barcelona: Icaria Editorial, 2011).

³ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, "Discurso sobre las ciencias y las

artes" ("Discourse on the Arts and Sciences"), in *Discurso sobre las ciencias y las artes ; Discurso sobre el origen y los fundamentos de la desigualdad entre los hombres ; Emilio o la educación ; El contrato social*, ed. by Sergio Sevilla Segura, translation by Salustiano Masó, Francesc Ll Cardona and Consuelo Berges (Madrid: Gredos, 2011), 1-111.

⁴ Grupo Marcuse, *La libertad en coma: contra la informatización del mundo* [Comatose Freedom: Against the world's computerisation], translation by Adrián Almazán Gómez and

Salvador Cobo Marcos, *Segunda* (Madrid: Ediciones El Salomón, 2019).

⁵ <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jclepro.2017.12.239>

⁶ Fernando Prats, Yayo Herrero, y Alicia Torrego, *La gran encrucijada: sobre la crisis ecosocial y el cambio de ciclo histórico* (Madrid: Libros en Acción, 2016).

⁷ <https://antonioaretxabala.blogspot.com/2020/07/una-reflexion-mas-en-torno-al-5g-y-los.html?m=1>

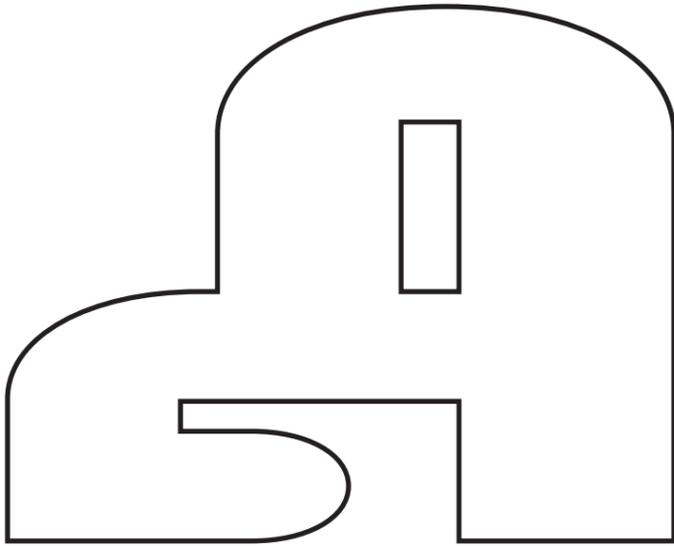


capture renewable energy—also dependent upon scarce, rare materials—and the total digitisation of societies within the framework of what is referred to as the Fourth Industrial Revolution, encompassing the Internet of Things, automated mobility, robotization, artificial intelligence, total connectivity through 5G, and so forth. As well as being clearly insufficient to deal with the current crisis⁷, this strategic choice will only cause further strain on an already highly polarised geopolitical order. China currently controls approximately 90% of the Rare-earth Materials on the entire planet. Moreover, it produces and refines them using the minerals which it extracts and then sells all over the world. Thus, the fact that the entire planet is betting on the Fourth Industrial Revolution instead of a fair, free, egalitarian eco-social revolution based on a decrease in energy and resource consumption promises to further broaden the dependence of all of the Planet's territories on the Asian superpower.

It seems obvious that culture, as it is beginning to do in certain cases, should accept its responsibility for making all of this visible and analysing it critically. Putting life at the centre of its creations while overcoming its historical oblivion, demonstrating the senselessness of a suicidal, Euro-centric project for civilisation that is currently destroying the land, devastating non-industrial forms of life and jeopardising the potential for other lives. However, in its spectacular, commercial form, culture evidently finds great difficulty in shifting from the role of critic (in the best of cases) to the role of a relevant social actor when critiques of its own materialise. Perhaps in order for something like this to happen we would need to make culture less of a realm of experts, content for museums and elevated reflection, conferring it a much greater role based in mainstream life, democratic paideia and, in conclusion, a critical dimension in true politics: the kind in which we all reach shared decisions about the way we want to live.

Adrian Almazán





ANAPHORA

- 1. *In grammar*
Reference to a term or preceding group of words within the same utterance.
- 2. *In literature*
A rhetorical figure or construct consisting of the repetition of one or more words at the beginning of a series of phrases or sentences.
- 3. *In religion*
Part of the mass in the Eastern Liturgy that corresponds to the preface and canon in Roman Liturgy.

Special Material. In the classified documents under the former Czechoslovakia, these two somewhat euphemistic words were used to refer to weapons and military technology. During the twentieth century such Czechoslovakian products were exported to various parts of the world. A turning point came in this arena in 1948, with the rise of the Communist Party government in Czechoslovakia, which decided to cooperate with like-minded socialist regimes. The Syrian Arab Republic stood out on a long list of "friend countries" in these trade agreements. Syria signed its first contract with Czechoslovakia during the second half of the 1940s, and their trade and cultural exchanges lasted until 1991.

The following story takes place in the early 1990s, depicting the negotiations between governmental representatives from both of these countries. Jiří Žák presents a fictional dialogue that reveals the reality of Czechoslovakia's weapon industry and the end of a long friendship. The subject of discussion is Syria's debt, which has gradually risen throughout the years. To what extent can a historical memory that has been denied and concealed determine our current experience? Is it possible for us to notice the cracks in the peaceful image projected through the Czech national identity?



01 THE DEBT: Epilogue of a Long Friendship



02 PRAGUE, 25th February 1994



03 HUSAM: Have you ever seen your products in action? For instance, a Czechoslovak RM-51 rocket launcher?



04 JAN: No. My job is just to deal with business matters



05 HUSAM: Actually, all of these weapons have stories behind them, but they are stories which have never been told. Would you like me to tell any of them to you?



06 JAN: I don't care about your stories... It's been ten years since Hafez al-Assad came to Prague asking for an extension on the payment of Syria's debt.



07 HUSAM: Syria was the first Arab country to buy arms from Czechoslovakia. And now you want to stop exporting them?



08 JAN: That chapter is closed. From now on everything will be regulated by the free market.



09 HUSAM: Do you know that dream in which you can't move?



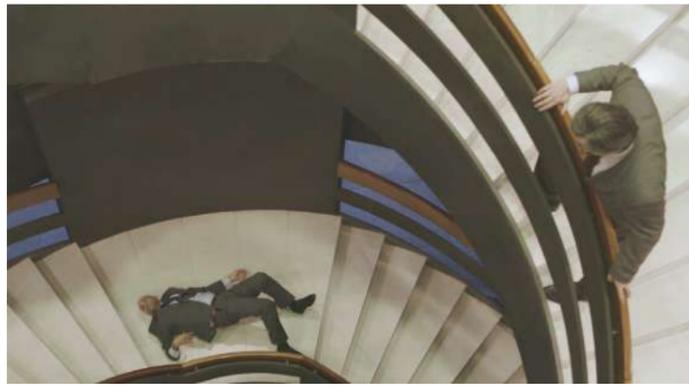
10



11



12 JAN: Some dreams float around freely, with no one to dream them.



13



14



15 JAN: The government I represented in the past, and the one I represent now, make rational decisions based on actual reports. We do not act at random.



16 JAN: Our weapon industry is based on a concrete fact: if you cannot see death from the inside, it is sheer fiction. The hypothesis of death must therefore be rejected, because it is baseless.

A



17 HUSAM: Are you serious?



18

Jiří Žák

A



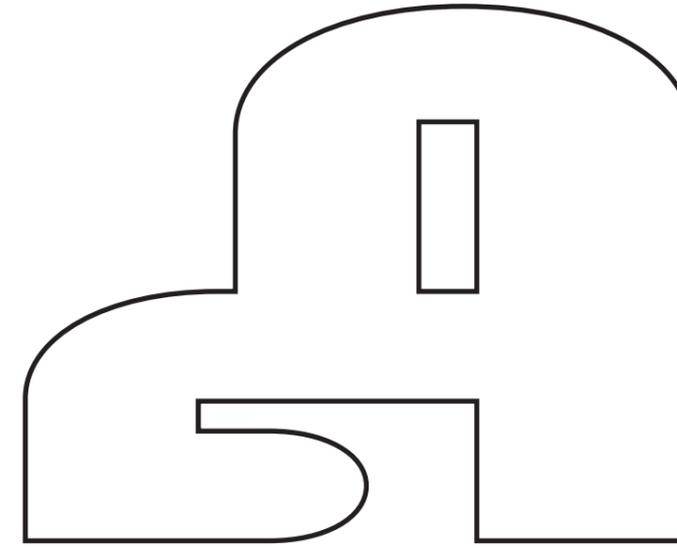
19 JAN: The world needs its small suppliers. It needs small industries. That is what we do. After all, there are small wars, too.



20 HUSAM: I can only hope that death will become a fact for me as well as for you.

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22



- 1.A ghost or ghostlike image of a person.
- 2.A remarkable or unexpected appearance of someone or something.
- 3.Something you believe, imagine, or dream you see.

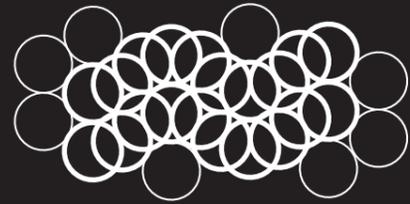
“Abrams wrote that the State is not the reality behind the mask of politics, but actually the mask that obstructs the reality of political practice. In order to create a representation of this golem, the power of fetish is required. Making this mask visible means transmuting the sacred into matter: a revelation which is given form by the social psyche.”

Erick Beltrán's research methods are halfway between the sociological and the artistic, and they reveal the relationship that the inhabitants of Prague establish with institutions and figures of power surrounding them. It is through a deep exploration of these collective imaginaries that we can understand the workings of the social subconscious and the mysticism surrounding power.

Erick Beltrán

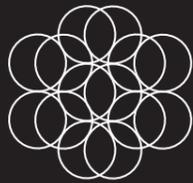
The image of power

appearance of kaleidoscopic body (mosaic law)



new entity

motion introduce an agenda



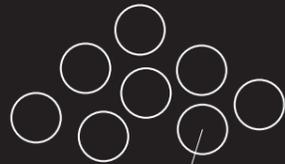
fuse

recognition of a body organization



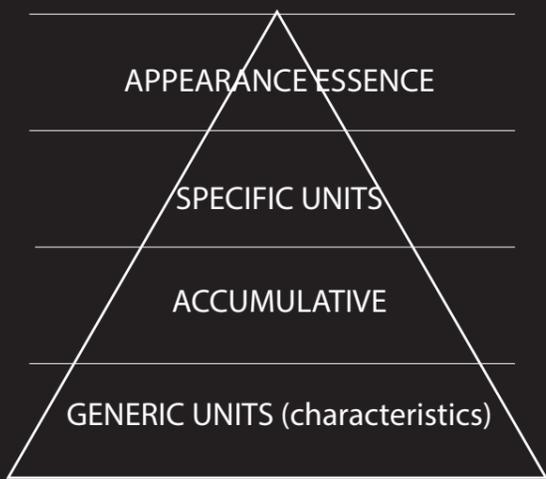
compact

random image reference or engrams



low attraction

certain immediate characteristics



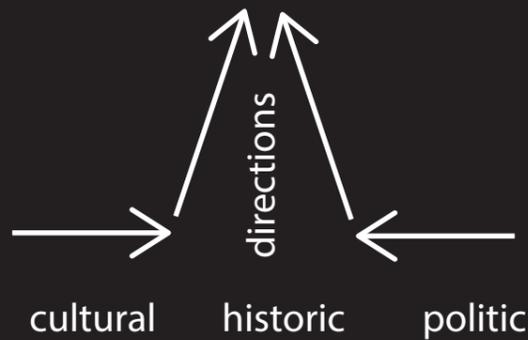
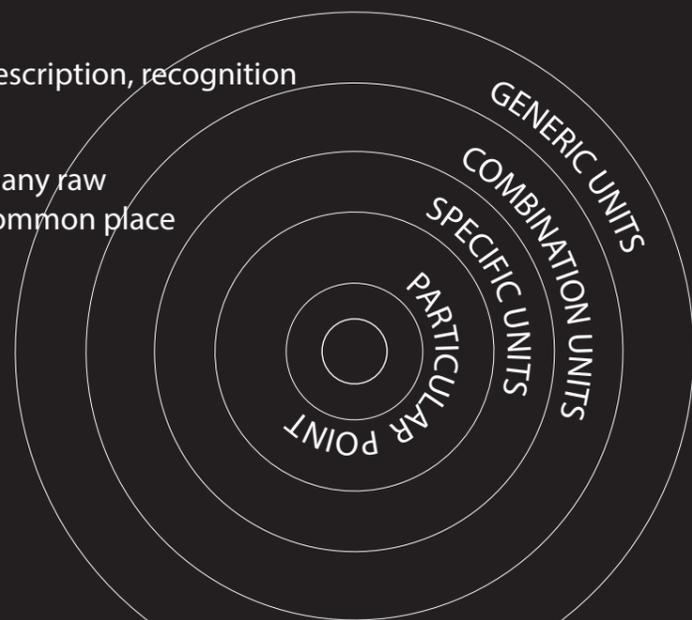
scarce idiosyncratic

images, as particles, tend to gather so to distribute energy and stabilize an entity

detail

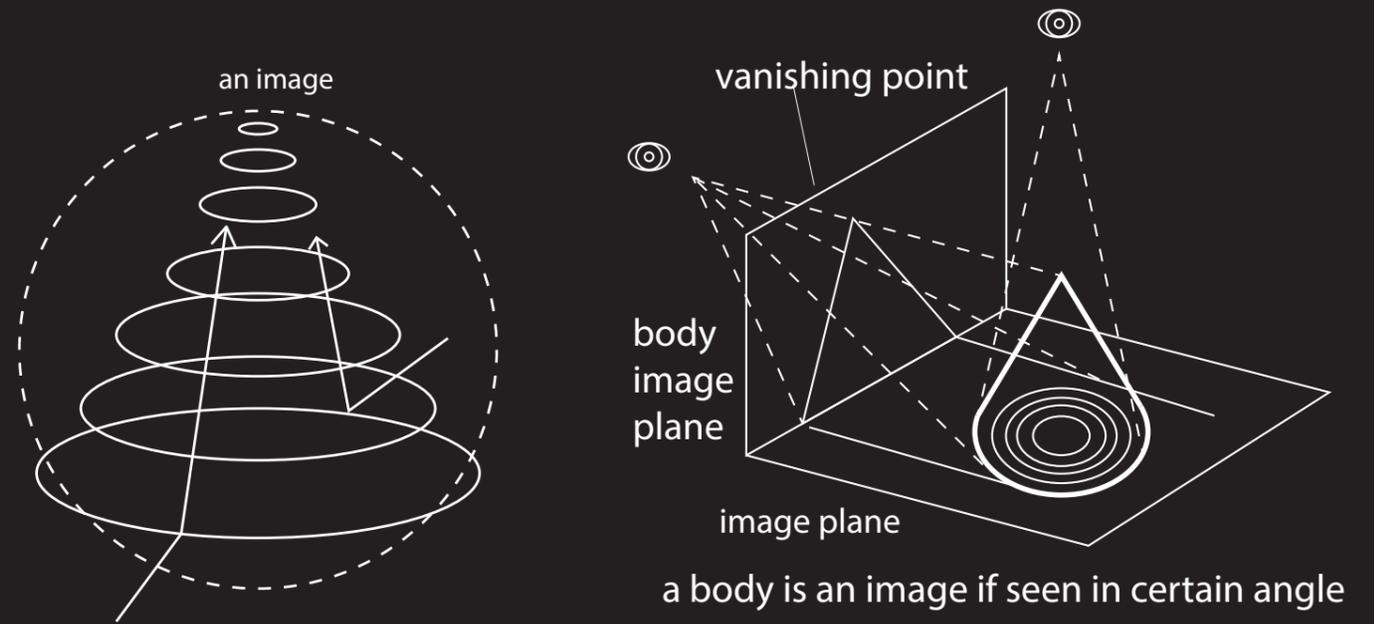
description, recognition

many raw common place

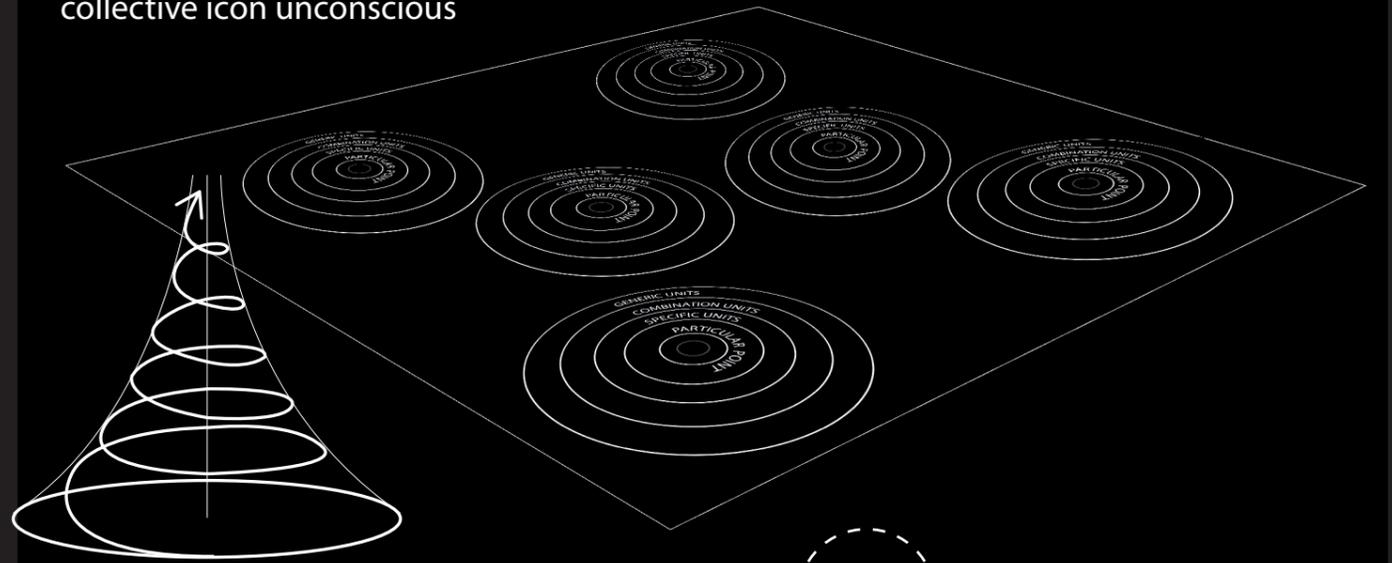


Appearance of imagery in social horizon

Construction of the image through accumulation of pathos in the collective



collective icon unconscious



"sense of individuality"

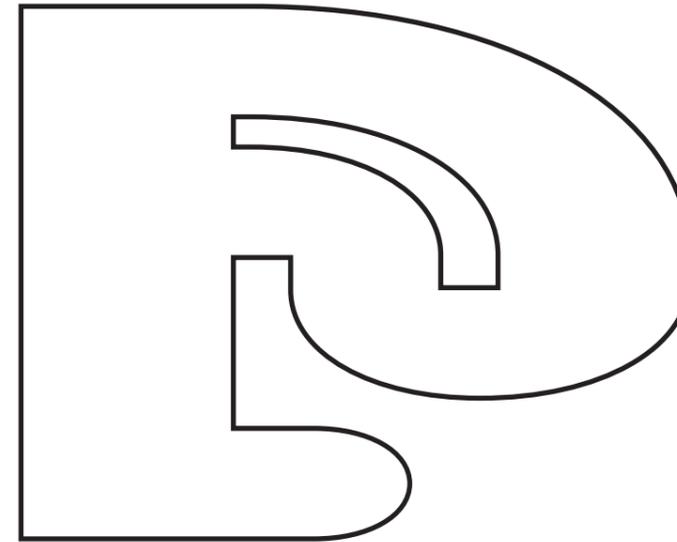
IMAGE appears

SOCIAL IMAGERY

Actions considered personal are those which define/structure of the collective.



PERSPECTIVE



1. The art of representing three-dimensional objects on a two-dimensional surface so as to give the right impression of their height, width, depth, and position in relation to each other.
2. A particular attitude towards or way of regarding something; a point of view.
3. A feeling or opinion about something or someone.

We experience a loss of perspective when our glasses fog up or when there is heavy rain. When we go into a sauna or a thickly overgrown jungle.

We have no perspective at all when we are snakes and we crawl on the ground. Or when our life lasts just a few hours, like a fly's. We lose perspective when we live with questions all around. When we feel anxious. When we do not allow enough time for things to happen. We lose perspective at many times in life.

As a society, we also lose perspective when we fail to look back at the past. When everything seems new. When we believe we are the first to do something or arrive somewhere. When the moments we experience seem to be the last within something very distant. When we think time has run out. When we are incapable of relating different phenomena with each other. When the facts cease to be important. When overcharged emotion govern our collective behaviour.

Perspective has to do with the ground upon which we stand with our own two feet. A linear, classical, renaissance perspective requires such ground, a horizon line and other lines of escape. It requires gravity and the Earth. Perspective is quite different from inside the water. It is an immersive, blurry, dynamic perspective. Floating in motion. When the level of uncertainty is as high as it is today, we are not sure what ground we stand on or what water we are floating in.

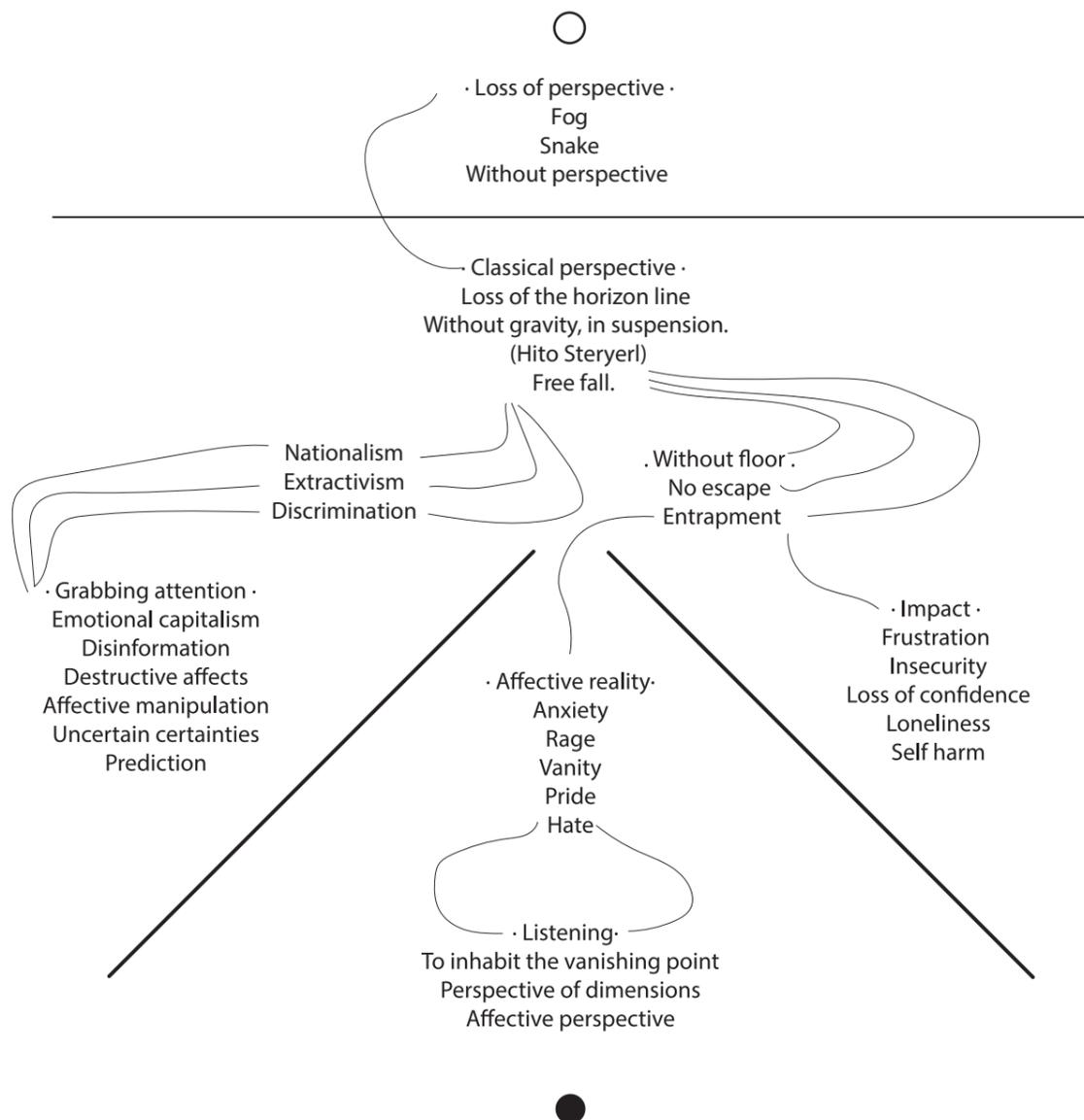
How can it be that the ground is no longer a stable place to fix our bearings? As Hito Steyerl allows us to see¹, we are falling but there is no ground beneath. We are in a free-fall, in a place where there is no perspective. "Falling is relational: if there is nothing to fall towards, we may not be aware that we are falling. If the-

re is no ground beneath us, gravity may be weak, and we do not feel our weight. Objects remain hanging in mid-air if we let go of them. Entire societies could be falling all around us, in the same way we are. This may in fact seem like the perfect stasis, as if history and time had ended, and we cannot even remember there was a past when time moved forward."

Maybe perspective has been turned upside down and now focuses on falling. When what was once up seems to be down. What was a centre has been laid out along a continuous periphery. When disorientation is so great that we fall through the fog, we not only lose perspective but also our reference points in terms of weight and gravity. According to Steyerl, the ground has now become a satellite surveillance image. Digital life is life under constant acceleration in a vacuum of bits in which anything is possible. Spaces and times change. Leisure time spent on our sofas is creating new collective realities. The pandemic has only sped up this process. All of our attention is focused on digital space. For one moment, we are left hanging in an accelerated state of suspense. Perhaps there is not even any falling

then, but we are trapped at the point of escape, like a black hole, with no surfaces, lines, streets or city squares.

Where can we now find the city we used to represent our societies? Where are our inner spaces? What sort of urban planning is created by such a free-fall? This perspective-free urbanism is no longer represented by lines and layout maps alone, or by divisions between public and private. Or with any specific scale. Urbanism today is found in the places



Pto which our attention is drawn. Urban studies, being a critical and relational tool, must make sense of the complex digital network that carries out this constant task of calling our attention. Today, not paying attention is a matter of perspective. And this “attention grabbing” by digital platforms that work by manipulating emotions with unbridled artificial intelligence is what now governs our collective life. In this human vulnerability they have found the most powerful tool. They have turned humans into beings which behave by seeking immediate and accelerated positive rewards. “We confuse the rewards of technological addiction with values and truth” according to the Center for Human Technology. Emotional capitalism is based on the gradual, progressive modification of our behaviour and our perception of things. This can be considered manipulation, because the only goal is to increase the economic capital held by digital platforms and companies, and other forms of capital sought by governments.

This is the great modern addiction², with which millions of people are living to a greater or lesser degree, whether we wish to acknowledge it or not. What kind of world can we hope to build through addiction? Herein lies the greatest question of our time, in which neither we nor machines are capable of distinguishing what is true from what is not. It is a dark era of disinformation. Fake news are an entity within today’s perspective. And it is perhaps the most remarkable feature in societies with a flat perspective.

In this era of uncertainty and destabilisation, digital platforms sell certainties. Algorithms possess the coveted ability to predict the behaviour of individuals. Predicting perspective thus becomes a vital matter: certainty about the perspective an individual will adopt. But what ensues uncontrollably are the collective consequences which are produced. Algorithms are already out of control, and we have no perspective on the matter. We can find this in commonplace behaviours we see today. People are unable to overcome their frustrations and insecurities, solitude shared with the algorithm, loss of self-esteem, self-harm among teenagers, and so on. At a collective level, we are forming increasingly polarised societies in which the filter bubbles concealing dissent are growing smaller and smaller, almost minuscule. The most destructive emotional realities are rearing

their head through radicalism: rage, vanity, arrogance and hatred. And these have destructive consequences that we see in our everyday lives. Interference in elections, manipulated voting, states that control their people through online platforms, massive changes of opinion... We see it, too, in the rise of nationalism, extractivism and discrimination. All these actions have real-life consequences in societies and cities. It is a form of urbanism in which digital and earthly environments are at stake. A complex sort of urbanism which we must begin to investigate. A networked, distributed urbanism with many centres that are de-localised but at the same time hierarchical and powerful. A type of urbanism that goes far beyond geography and technology, it is an emotional urbanism. And in this environment in which perspective is manipulated, emotions are destructive.

I would like to describe an image which illustrates the beginning of the free-fall which Hito Steyerl tells us about. It doesn’t matter when it begins, but rather how it begins that gives us an idea about its trajectory, with a prediction of the force we need to create a reconstruction of it. At the beginning of this new era, with a generation already born holding digital platforms in their hand, the ground began to tilt, causing us to start sliding downward and get trapped in this free-fall. Once there, who is able to make a great enough effort to climb back up the slippery slope? It is an insurmountable effort. My question is, do we want to keep building societies out of anxiety? Out of addictions? Can we place boundaries on something that was designed not

to have any? Can we get perspective when we are in a free-fall, with our glasses fogged up as we receive likes on our mobiles?

We can gain perspective on things, but what sort of perspective? If, according to Brunelleschi’s classical scientific order, perspective is a tool that allows us to create one-dimensional representations of a reality with three dimensions while maintaining the illusion of such a spatiality... If perspective is also a political matter in accordance with Hito Steyerl... then how many dimensions can one perspective be made up of at present? Of course, it could be said that, when taking on a perspective, there is a personal and subjec-

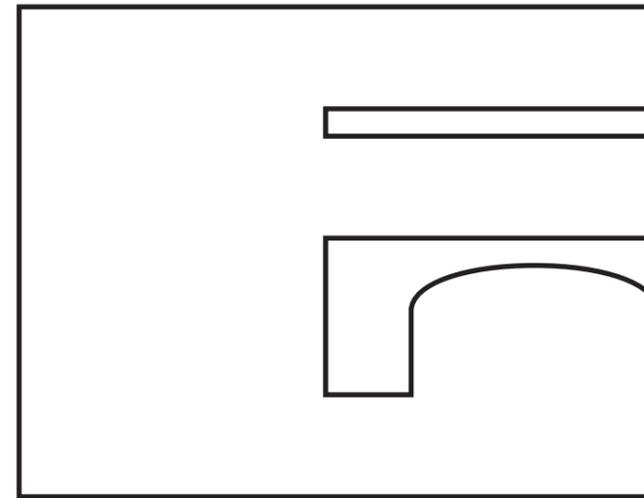
tive factor, which is simultaneously linked to the collective and to the post-truth nature of facts, and such a perspective is co-produced in the polarisation of contemporary societies. Perhaps these are the forces in tension: escaping through perspective, not the way lines escape, but rather like stains, like blurry lines that enter our realm of decision-making and cloud our impressions. It is a matter of who imposes perspective upon whom, or to put it in clearer terms, who blurs the perspective of whom.

Thus, we can get perspective if we are eagles, when we fly high, remain calm and set ourselves free from uninterrupted connection. When we live hanging in mid-air, in a free-fall. It is in those moments that weakness becomes strength, and it becomes possible to take action and explore criticism. On the one hand, we can strengthen our ability to investigate and observe. Listening is one of the most powerful tools of observation: listening as a tool and an attitude for gaining perspective. However, this is a complex task, because we must first calm down for some time and yield to others, assuage our anxiety, take some time off and avoid permanent connection, and so forth. In today’s environment, time for listening tends to be scarce, so listening has become an act of resistance. Listening is vanishing in business meetings, at restaurant with friends, during family breakfasts and even in bed, because we do not sleep well. Listening is also disappearing in much research, which is highly focused and not very cross-cutting. Listening can be a prelude to action, as well as the key to changing the way we do things. Creating new imaginaries means experiencing them; each one through your own body. Modified imaginaries can only be defined as such when we have made them apparent through our practices. The new is the new that we pass on, which will eventually become the old for others. New protocols for connection, different laws, urban spaces where we can disconnect, group therapies that allow us to re-imagine new customs. Today, in an era when Tesla would like to place a chip inside humans, we need the most diverse forms of intelligence to halt a gradual process in which we are losing our perspective, a process now accelerating alongside constant environmental crises now coupled with health and economic problems, with more troubles soon to come in other arenas. They are all directly

Paffecting our already precarious lives. If we want more equitable, less extractive and more caring and aware societies, we need to describe the realities that we are living, in a way that is appropriate to the complexity we inhabit. We need to rewrite basic notions to prevent getting lost, to take a step back as part of the construction of a perspective which is more affective with ourselves, and with the planetary society as a whole. Right now, the ground is tilting down, but not in our favour.

Mauro Gilfournier

¹ A complete version of this text with all its annotations can be found in English in the e-flux journal of April 20
² See Marta Peirano’s studies in Spanish, from the Center for Human Technology.



ESCAPE

1. Action of fleeing or running away; to release oneself from confinement.
2. When a substance leaks through an opening accidentally produced in a container that holds it or the conduit through which it is flowing.
3. To fail to be noticed or recalled by someone

Marco Godoy

Marco Godoy, Alchemy and Protocol, 2020.



Marco Godoy's work examines the relationships between power, alchemy, art and protocol. Using examples such as the Spanish Royal Palace and its architecture, Godoy examines the way in which the bodies that inhabit these spaces are legitimated. He also analyses how institutional protocol preserves authority through the use of coding in image and relationships that remain hidden. Alchemy and Protocol seeks to make visible and understandable the ways in which these strategies continue to exist in current political life, in an alchemical interplay containing spaces capable of changing the status of their inhabitants.



Término, termino, terminó.
Semantic reflections on imprecise politics.

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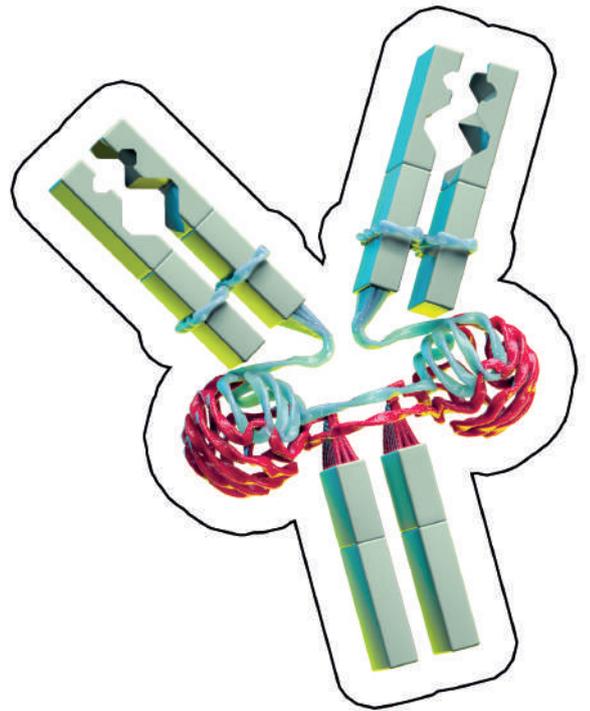
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