

the agency of artefacts seriously...'. This integration of anthropological perspectives in art discourse is of relevance for newer theoretical directions such as object-orientated ontology,⁶⁹ and, not least, post-artistic practices like HAiKw/.

Mutual Intentions

The encirclement of a distinct anthropological practice at the intersection of (post-) artistic research is an ongoing process. Wright's aforementioned lexicon of usership points to a concept that may prove interesting to investigate further. Wright claims that *intention* is a central (classificatory) premise for post-artistic practice: 'informed by artistic self-understanding, not framed as art'.⁷⁰ This brings to mind the 'everything is...' - wave that has washed over many of the design disciplines in recent decades (Everything is architecture!⁷¹ Everything can be graphic design!⁷² Everything can be fashion!⁷³), in the wake of the art field that has long allowed itself such a discursive slippage. Everything can now apparently be anything. It is the approach, not the practice that is important.

Wright further refers to Marcel Duchamp and the idea of a 'coefficient of art' – that is, the discrepancy in every artistic suggestion that lies between the intention and the actual realisation of the idea. Wright thus defines post-artistic practice as a kind of un-expressed potential: 'It is a radically deontological conception of art – as socialised competence, rather than performed works'.⁷⁴ The challenge then is to identify the *anthropological* aspect of such a competence in light of a collective post-artistic practice, where different actors are involved in the same practice (or *not* involved according to Wright) – a form of post-disciplinary approach with mutual intentions.

Gregory Sholette

THE COLLECTIVE BAD

1. What apparently spared the artist being charged with making criminal threats against a presidential candidate was the fact that his sculpture did not include a date of death.

2. "I Already Bought You" Abuse and Exploitation of Female Migrant Domestic Workers in the United Arab Emirates, Human Rights Watch, 2014. www.hrw.org/report/2014/10/22/i-already-bought-you/abuse-and-exploitation-female-migrant-domestic-workers-united

3. See the GLC Press Release 'Gulf Labor Responds to Guggenheim Breaking off Negotiations', online at: www.gulflabor.org/2016/gulf-labor-responds-to-guggenheim-breaking-off-negotiations/

In as much as the Vendôme Column is a monument devoid of all artistic value, tending to perpetuate by its expression the ideas of war and conquest of the past imperial dynasty, which are reproved by a republican nation's sentiment, citizen Courbet expresses the wish that the National Defense government will authorize him to disassemble this column.

– Gustave Courbet, Paris, September 4th, 1870.

A few months after Courbet wrote these words, his wish was granted when the newly instated Executive Committee of the Paris Commune "deconstructed this monument to war and patriarchy. Grainy photographs, taken in April 1871 show the toppled column in pieces with the massive statue of Napoleon, adorned in a laurel wreath and a toga, lying shattered on the ground. Unfortunately, when the Paris Commune was itself destroyed shortly afterwards, Courbet was arrested and charged with vandalising French property, though he escaped a death sentence. Executed by firing squads, other Communards fared worse. Nonetheless, such 'Bad deeds' have a long history amongst artists that continues today.

Seven months before the recent US presidential elections, a 190 KG marble tombstone appeared overnight in New York City's Central Park. Engraved directly below the marker's standard crucifix and decorative motif was written, 'TRUMP, DONALD J., 1946–', with no end date indicated. Carved into the bottom of the ersatz memorial was the ironic tribute, 'MADE AMERICA HATE AGAIN'. Removed within a day, the guerrilla headstone fabricator was soon after targeted by Secret Service agents for investigation.¹

4. Guggenheim Director Richard Armstrong cited by Hrag Vartanian, 'Guggenheim Breaks Off Negotiations with Gulf Labor Over Migrant Rights', *Hyperallergic*, April 17, 2016: hyperallergic.com/291694/guggenheim-breaks-off-negotiations-with-gulf-labor-over-migrant-rights/

5. Lovink, Garcia, *The ABC of Tactical Media*, op cite.

6. Groys made these comments 10 July 2009, at The Drawing Center, NYC, during a public lecture entitled 'Art and Power'.

7. Sholette, 'Some Call It Art: From Imaginary Autonomy to Autonomous Collectivity', originally published in the book *Duerfen Die Das?: Kunst als sozialer Raum: Art/Education/Cultural Work/Communities*, Stella Rollig and Eva Stürm eds, Verlag Turia & Kant, Wien, Austria, 2002 pp. 161–184, but available in English as a PDF at: gregorysholette.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/04/06_somewhat.pdf (cited from pp. 17–18).

8. Tronti's concept (op cite) is discussed in Section One: Chapter Three.

9. See Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, 1987.

10. Issie Lapowsky, 'How Trump Hacked This Election in 4 (Far Too Easy) Steps', *WIRED*, February 29, 2016: wired.com/2016/02/trump-hacked-election-4-far-too-easy-steps/

11. From an interview with

990 km due West, a pair of graffiti writers known as the Raiz Up Collective were charged with Felony, Malicious Destruction of Property and Trespassing for climbing a water storage tower in Detroit and painting the words 'Free The Water', followed by a graphic clenched-fist black-power salute. The graffiti message was intended as a protest against widespread lead contamination of Flint Michigan's drinking water after its bankrupt city government drew supplies from nearby Lake Huron through corroded pipes in an economising measure.

In fact, so far, the 21st century is rich with bad deeds. From 2004, Critical Art Ensemble member Steve Kurtz spent almost two decades in a federal prison after the US Justice Department sought charges of bioterrorism against him for purchasing harmless bacteria that the artist planned to use to illuminate the hidden history of American biological weapons research. Following the 2008 financial collapse artist Dread Scott received a summons for 'disturbing the peace' after burning US dollars on Wall Street to protest capitalist economic policy. In February of 2012 the anarcho-feminist group Pussy Riot entered Moscow's Cathedral of Chris the Savior where they performed a 'Punk Prayer' calling for the elimination of Russian president Vladimir Putin. The group's 'bad deed' led to the arrest, trial, and incarceration of two band members who spent time in a Siberian prison on charges of hooliganism and undermining the 'moral foundations of the nation'. A year or so earlier, another Russian-based artists' collective known as Voina (War) fled underground when authorities issued arrest warrants for them after members flipped a patrol car over because "a child's ball had rolled underneath it". Previously they spray painted a monumental graffiti-style phallus in front of the FSB (former KGB) head-quarters in St. Petersburg. In another action, Voina's female members went about Moscow spontaneously kissing police officers (mostly females) on the lips. Back in New York in 2013, the performance artist Reverend Billy faced a potential year in prison for staging an environmental consciousness-raising art intervention inside the lobby of a JP Morgan Chase Bank. The performance involved several choral singers denouncing the bank's financial links to the petrochemical industry. They also happened to be dressed-up as giant 'Golden Toads', a species of amphibian recently made extinct by climate change. Allegedly, frightened employees called police, believing they were undergoing a bizarrely staged bank heist.

All of these bad artistic deeds – and certainly many others come to mind, including the infamous release of cockroaches at a MoMA trustee dinner to protest the US war in Viet Nam by activists associated with Guerrilla Art Action Group (GAAG), or the same group's unfulfilled (and doubtless sardonic) proposal to kidnap curators in another anti-war protest action– suggest an *e(s)thetic of defiance* in which lawbreaking become an ethical response to the normalisation of *unfreedom*. For, while it is not uncommon to learn that, in Russia, China, Turkey, Egypt, Iran, India, the Philippines or the United Arab

Professor Cramer by Jeff Guo, 'A new theory for why Trump voters are so angry – that actually makes sense' *The Washington Post*, 8 November 2016: www.washingtonpost.com/news/work/wp/2016/11/08/a-new-theory-for-why-trump-voters-are-so-angry-that-actually-makes-sense/?utm_term=.a316f84db393

12. See Gulf Labor statement on the Boycott and UAE Travel Restrictions, 9 March 2017: www.gulflabor.org/2017/gulf-labor-statement-on-boycott-and-uae-travel-restrictions/

13. Estimates provide in 'Building Trump's border wall', *Aljazeera*: www.aljazeera.com/indepth/interactive/2017/01/building-trump-border-wall-170126112204274.html

14. Gaach wrote down as much as he could recall about the experience, because no recording equipment was permitted during the examination, and shared his notes with the author via a google.doc. More about the event include Benjamin Sutton, 'Trump's Travel Ban Ensnarers Artists and Authors', *Hyperallergic*, 12 March 2017: www.hyperallergic.com/363553/trumps-travel-ban-ensnarers-artists-and-authors/

15. Cornel West, 'Goodbye, American neoliberalism. A new era is here', *The Guardian*, 17 November 2016: www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2016/nov/17/american-neoliberalism-cornel-west-2016-election

Emirates (UAE) amongst other nations, artistic dissidents have run afoul of the law, following recent events in the UK and US, we are witnessing a combination of economic, civil and sometimes national security restraints transforming acts of protest into quasi-illegal, or even criminal behavior. The question I wish to raise with this essay is this: do such acts of protest and societal destruction not also serve the collective good? If so, do they then also qualify as an aesthetic practice, perhaps even a form of art?

Artist as Anti-Citizen

To call oneself an artist is to stake a particular claim to the word freedom. A claim equated, above all, with taking risks of a personal, social, economic and/or political nature. Artist's annoy, indulge, shock and invent. Sometimes their activities display an outright disregard for broader social consequences, thus compromising, or even subverting, the collective good. What does the public receive in exchange? Art is typically considered one of the most autonomous, unencumbered types of labour humans can engage, while nonetheless still remaining part of a given society, even if sometimes only marginally so. This is the role dissent ideally plays within the frame work of collective good, as an internal check on the danger of institutionalised *unfreedom*. If, however, under certain conditions the truest artistic acts amount to anti-social actions and lawbreaking, then in an unjust society we must conclude that aesthetics is likewise criminalised.

This is not a novel hypotheses. It has been a central theme within much anarchist theory, as well as artistic practice, from Mikhail Bakunin, who described destruction as a form of creative passion, to Hakim Bey's 'Temporary Autonomous Zones' where artistic sabotage serves neither state nor party but only: 'consciousness, attentiveness, awakesness'. Today, the premise is taking on a new urgency, first as a result of the politicisation that followed widespread unemployment and austerity measures in the aftermath of the 2008 financial collapse. The so-called Arab Spring, Movement of Squares and Occupy Wall Street are amongst the most visible aspects of this popular response. And second, even more acutely, thanks to the rise of Right-wing popular nationalism sweeping across the globe, but especially visible following the Brexit referendum and US presidential elections of November, 2016.

And then, there is the contemporary art world itself.

No longer a place of innocence – if ever it was – what once consisted of a smattering of wealthy collectors who nurtured an avant-garde community, and often possessed strongly liberal or sometimes even left-progressive political outlooks, is today a market surpassing 66 billion dollars in sales with ever-deeper ties to repressive state regimes, financial black markets, and nefarious corporate interests that run opposite the sentiments of most artists, as well as the collective good. At the same time,

the art world manages to remain a cultural apparatus that celebrates and rewards certain acts of protest, even as it also distances itself from others. Case in point. A few years ago, in 2011 the well-known Chinese artist Ai Weiwei was detained and then imprisoned by government authorities in Beijing airport. Acting with a surprisingly robust moral authority, the Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation, working with the International Council of Museums, swiftly established an online petition to protest Ai's arrest. At the top of the list of signatories was the Guggenheim museum director, Richard Armstrong, followed by many, equally prestigious and powerful art world celebrities.

Perhaps due in part to this public shaming, Chinese authorities released Ai from detention only three months later. However, Armstrong and other Guggenheim museum administrators were simultaneously invested in developing a major new museum facility in Abu Dhabi, (UAE), one of several nations that operate under the Kafala system that deprives thousands of migrant workers basic human rights. According to Human Rights Watch (HRW), the UAE has 'a long record of violating the rights of domestic workers under international human rights and labour law by failing to adequately protect them against exploitation and abuse'.² Nonetheless, the Guggenheim Museum, including Armstrong, publicly rejected working with HRW and other human rights groups in order to guarantee their project meets the labor standards championed by Western nations.

In April 2016, Armstrong along with the Guggenheim trustees, walked away from six years of negotiation and public pressure aimed at making their proposed museum in Abu Dhabi a regional model of fair labour practices. A couple of months earlier, Gulf Labor Coalition (GLC) arranged to have members of the Building and Woodworkers' International, Human Rights Watch, International Trade Union Confederation, and Society for Labor and Development to meet with the museum's management and trustees in order to work together to create just working conditions to guide the construction of the UAE's new cultural facility.³ GLC is an international group of artists seeking to ensure that migrant workers' rights are protected during the construction of museums on Saadiyat Island in Abu Dhabi (and, in full disclosure, I am a core member of GLC).⁴ One of the reasons cited by Armstrong and the museum for discontinuing these deliberations GLC's alleged shift of demands over time, and the group's purported publicising of 'deliberate falsehoods' about the Guggenheim Abu Dhabi. And yet substantial evidence exists underscoring GLC's claims that are underscored by the group's NGO partners. Therefore, a more likely source of Armstrong's chagrin is GLC's ability to humiliate the museum, thanks to the group's seven-year campaign combining a public boycott, a series of art projects focusing attention on unjust labour practices in the UAE, and a series of direct actions staged by the coalition's offshoot organisation Global Ultra Luxury Faction (GULF).

On numerous occasions throughout 2015, GULF staged a series of

interventions targeting the Guggenheim's flagship Frank Lloyd Wright building on Manhattan's Fifth Avenue. These actions received mainstream media and art press coverage, stimulating several closed-door negotiating meetings between GLC members and the museum's administration. And yet, progress addressing human rights abuse in the Gulf continued to get bogged down. On 1 May 2015, GULF decided to occupy the museum for several hours. Still, the administration did not budge. But, one week later, during the opening of the Venice Biennale GULF, together with SaLE Docs cultural space, orchestrated a marine landing onto the loading dock of the Peggy Guggenheim Collection. Before the end of the day, GLC was promised high-level discussions with the museum's trustees. Despite several hours of talks involving not only the artists' group, but members of several prominent NGOs with expertise in drafting workable labour contracts that met proper human rights standards, Armstrong and the trustees of the Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation, abruptly withdrew from further participation. More than a year later, the situation remains unresolved.

Tactical Media and Artistic Dark Matter

The alt-globalisation or counter-globalisation movement of 1990s was, prior to Occupy Wall Street, the last significant moment when urban activism tightly meshed with creative, cultural dissent, in this case inspired by the Situationist *Détournement* and taking the form of Tactical Media (TM). As Geert Lovink and David Garcia elaborated, Tactical Media are what happens when:

The cheap 'do it yourself' media, made possible by the revolution in consumer electronics and expanded forms of distribution (from public access cable to the internet) are exploited by groups and individuals who feel aggrieved by or excluded from the wider culture. Tactical media do not just report events, as they are never impartial they always participate and it is this that more than anything separates them from mainstream media.⁵

TM was born out of the theories and practices developed decades earlier by Walter Benjamin, John Heartfield, Bertolt Brecht, Guy Debord and in the 1980s by Michel De Certeau's breakthrough 1980 thesis, *The Practice of Everyday Life*. But it was also made possible thanks to the onward pace of capitalism's endless search for new ways to save time and labour costs. The internet is one example of this process. Not only did the internet allow tactical media practitioners to engage in new types of activist, or, better yet, hacktivist activity, these same networked infrastructures have also made all sorts of previously hidden, isolated, fantastical and suppressed imaginative labour gain visibility, both to themselves and to others. Although, as recent political events indicate, that

outcome has not always been progressive, which is a point I will return to below.

It is accurate to observe that today there exists an ever-more accessible and sophisticated technology for manufacturing, copying, documenting and distributing 'home-made' or informal art. This reality has dramatically ended the isolation of creative labour previously quarantined from high culture as naïve, romantic or amateur. It is now impossible to escape the spread of this informal, heterogeneous, art-like activity as it radiates from homes and offices, schools and streets, community centers and in cyberspace. As Boris Groys comments 'everyone is now on stage'.⁶ This bottom-up artistic groundswell is typically made up of fantasies drawn from popular entertainment and comic books as well as personal trivia and sentimental nostalgia. Its form may range from the whimsical to the banal, from the absurd to the obscene. It represents a qualitative shift that is unique to the last ten years. It is certainly and decisively post-Greenbergian and anti-formalist.⁷

However, as much as this previously hidden dark-matter creativity has emerged into visibility thanks, in part, to the very same networked communication technology required by post-Fordism and global financial markets – it is also being illuminated by the ravenous needs of capitalism itself. Confronted with falling profits from traditional manufacturing and the increasing use of automation as opposed to living labor, capital has turned to extracting every iota of potential value from what Mario Tronti once called the social factory.⁸ Even if that quarrying that region has also uncovered the most shadowed, disobedient, fantastical and resentful affects of individuals and communities (think of the US Militia Movement and Alt-Right, the Golden Dawn of Greece or the National Front in France amongst many other previously shrouded communities of Nietzschean *Ressentiment*).⁹ The potentially disruptive capacity of this new force was, for both better and for worse, emerging in the form of dark matter creativity. A networked form of resentment was, therefore, completely predictable once the visualising power of the Internet was conjoined with the monetisation of everyday life. And this dark matter force, in turn, would not only interrupt art world norms but also previously dominant models of business and politics. One outcome of this disruption is now all too conspicuous, and that is the result of the 2016 US presidential elections. However, before clarifying what by this, I must add one more link in the theoretical sequence started in 1934 by Benjamin with regards to the dangers of aestheticising politics, as opposed to politicising art.

Hacking the USA

Marx and Engels famously compared the phenomenon of ideological misrecognition with the inverted images produced by the *camera obscura*, pointing out that religion, laws, and grand philosophical ideas are not the true foundation of society or the

motivators of historical change but are instead generated by historically determined modes of material production. Today, we seem to have pushed past, or been pushed past, the threshold of such representational metaphors altogether, to arrive at a point where faith in ideas and in material production, as much as history, society, and the future, are in a state of conceptual free-fall. Art and life, as well as base and superstructure, have collided and, in the process, fulfilled a centuries-old avant-garde dream. But the dream is made flesh at a time of profound disenchantment with the world and its future advancement, exactly the opposite moment imaged by the early avant-garde in Soviet Russia. The 2016 US election results might be the strongest evidence of this undoing. What to make of a nuclear-armed nation electing (barely) a president who boasts (tweets) about his bad citizenship? The new president and his administration accomplished the most successful interventionist art project to date. Its aim was to erect greater barriers between people, further dismantle social programmes and services, and transform neoliberal global capitalism into a *démodé* form of *capitalist nationalism*. Goodbye art world, hello world.

The victorious 2016 US presidential candidate is said to have succeeded in his interventionist endeavour by hacking into mainstream news media's desire for spectacular content, thus literally tweeting his way into the White House.¹⁰ Though his news tweets were frequently suspect, or even outright false, he managed to encircle his campaign with a digital barricade of sham pronouncements and dissembling headlines that proved impossible to puncture with traditional journalistic tools of investigative fact-finding. And there is every indication that this delusive creativity will continue to be disseminated in the years ahead. But this practice of hacking prevailing norms and protocols also extended to disrupting familiar structures of democratic representational politics. After first identifying organisational weaknesses in one of the two major US political parties, the candidate infiltrated his way inside, quashing attempts by traditional party members to prevent his insurgency.

In the corporate world, this would be described as a hostile takeover in which a predatory company or investor group acquires another target company by making attractive buyout offers to the targeted company's shareholders. In the world of politics, of course, the role of shareholder is less clear-cut, though we could say metaphorically that registered party members, as well as potential voters constitute the *ideological* investment base of a given political party. However, this analogy raises an obvious problem: the shareholder selling off her business stock is making a rational transaction insofar as a specific quantity of investable capital is received in exchange for what is (presumably) an underperforming or lower-valued financial investment. In other words, the immediate benefit of the takeover to the shareholder is something tangible, as well as spendable, or bankable.

If this analogy has any virtue, therefore, it would seem that for the mostly white, middle-class 'shareholders' of the recently hacked American political party, the payoff would be best described as payback; that is to say, as ideological compensation for their diminishing economic mobility, collapsing social privilege and a general loss of control over their lives. According to political scientist Kathy Cramer – who has interviewed rural, white voters in the American Midwest for over a decade – a politics of resentment is the reason so many voted to elect a man with no political experience. And this resentment is, in turn grounded in the same voters imaginary a self-constructed identity based on 'the *perceptions* that people have about their reality', as opposed to facts or data, both of which belong to educated elites, the very people that the 2016 insurgent election was intended to punish.¹¹

Another way to explain the mobilisation of resentment is to view it as part of a broader aestheticisation of politics, a process made all the more compelling by the flagrant mixing of verifiable truths with speculation, outright fiction and even menacing conspiratorial fantasies, bringing us to reflect on the growing field of social practice art, which is dependent on the collapse of traditional artistic autonomy and the full-on aestheticisation of society. Social practice art might best be described as having a utilitarian ethos that spurns individual acts of expression, or avant-garde efforts at shocking its audience, while favouring instead practices that involve cooperation, group conversation and efforts to remedy social ailments. There is an implicit hope that reason and dialogue will ultimately prevail over repression and disorder, not only when the artist is engaged with other artists or friends or community members but also when a project's participants include prison guards or the police. What then becomes of the desire to disobey, to dissent, or create trouble, all well-known staples of avant-garde art? Under what circumstances is such dissonance more than mere shock, and should it factor into any discussion about the ethos of social practice art?

4. Bad Deeds

When confronted with dissent, the initial impulse is that the state seeks an immediate return to normalcy. After the Paris Commune was crushed, the French government reconstructed the Vendôme Column and even forced poor Courbet to finance the project, a task he almost carried out before dying penniless at the age of 58. More recently, five members (thus far) of Gulf Labor Coalition have been placed on travel entry bans into the UAE as retribution by princely authorities for the group's activism on behalf of migrant labourers.¹² These actions appear, in retrospect, to have anticipated things to come, as the Republican presidential candidate made good his campaign promises to greatly expand travel restrictions on people from certain nations, while building a 1,900 mile-long border wall (3,200 km) between the US and Mexico.¹³ Since the elections

Green Card holders and even some US citizens have been detained and questioned by custom agents. On Thursday, February 23, 2017 the artist Aaron Gach, (AKA 'Center for Tactical Magic'), was subjected to an hour-long interrogation upon re-entering the US in San Francisco from Belgium, where he had been invited to install an art project. The artist is an American-born citizen, who was travelling on a US passport and has no criminal convictions. Amongst the questions Gach was asked were 'How often do you travel for your art? How many times a year? Where else have you been in the last year? Also for art?' The assessor also asked why he goes by the name 'Center For Tactical Magic', instead of his own name. Ultimately, they insisted he unlock his smartphone for them to examine, which, reluctantly, Gach did, before finally being released.

Of course, many individuals have been treated just as badly, or considerably worse, by US border agents, and for many years before the new administration took office. Gach also acknowledges his privileges, writing that these kinds of interrogations place an 'unfair burden on people, especially if they are members of more vulnerable or targeted communities'. Suddenly, we have exited capitalism's thirty-seven year infatuation with globalisation and relatively open trade and travel barriers and now enter a world of reinforced frontiers and spreading borders, material as well as immaterial, the latter taking the form of omnipresent electronic surveillance. As activist and theorist Cornell West expressed immediately after the results were in, the neoliberal era in the US ended with a neofascist bang. The political triumph of Donald Trump shattered the establishments in the Democratic and Republican parties – both wedded to the rule of Big Money and to the reign of meretricious politicians.¹⁵

When unfreedom becomes law, injustice is transformed into a system of control. Still, when 'bad deeds' are carried out as in the name of art, might we describe this practice as a form of insurgent beauty that operates outside the reach of the art world's control. The desire to disobey, to dissent, to engage in social misconduct and political protest rests on the belief that when a society turns bad, acting 'badly' is a logical, even necessary response, and if law hampers freedom, then law breaking becomes freeing. Even a seriously playful act of disobedience can inspire hope, and, as we have seen, it can also stimulate state suppression. But if anarchist activist Emma Goldman once stated that, 'every society has the criminals it deserves', then perhaps it is time that we art activists and social practice artists take up the mantle of society's scoundrels, blackguards and criminals. After all, this may very well be exactly what the collective good today actually requires.