

Gean Moreno - Ernesto Oroza

# generic objects

1. By generic objects we don't mean objects that affect a kind of generic quality--objects that are brilliantly commonsensical and ordinary but still come from the rarefied space of the designer's studio, and draw value from this fact. We mean generic generic--milk crates, plastic buckets, shipping containers, wooden pallets, traffic barricades, decorative concrete blocks, urban rubbish bins and dumpsters, rubber tires, scaffolding, Scotch tape. It's not that any of these aren't designed; they are and very well so, to the point of functioning with amazing efficiency within the systems of circulation for which they are intended. It's, rather, that they have slipped beneath a threshold where their identity as designed artifacts is their most telling quality.

Functioning within the large fields of conventions that global markets and transnational productive systems inevitably establish, generic objects are designed with such programmatic exactitude that spaces that can accommodate authorial expression are reduced to make room for qualities that foster efficient and competitive performance in commercial processes. The more extensive and decentralized the circuits of production and distribution in which they participate, the more numerous the universal norms that are injected into generic objects. Any space for authorial display or geographically local markers is compressed to a minimum, when not eradicated altogether.

2. Generic objects are synthetic genetic objects: a genome or a strict chain of codes, a tight script of metric chromosomes, cuts across them and the systems to which they are attached. Like the bucket and the milk crate, the shipping container is marked by multiple conventions, by a global agreement--a genome--established between all the parts of the system in which it functions. This guarantees compatibility at every interface. The weight and structural resistance of metal used for the container, the dimensions of the cranes and storage facilities in ships, the width of the trucks, the width of the interstate highway lanes used by the trucks, the walkways in the storage areas of ports, the width and reach of forklifts--they all form a coalition. It's an alliance that generates, in proportion to the efficiency of the system, an internal violence--a force, like that of genetic coding, which imposes morphologies from the minutest detail of the object to the very edges of the system. Everything is determined by everything else.

In the generic universe every artifact plays a double role: it's a torrent of exigencies, putting its demands to the rest of the system, while at the same time it is irrevocably shaped by the enormous pressure that the remaining elements of the system exercise over it. Object and system are co-extensive. The illusion of the individual artifact and the crystallized complete system dissolves into an active and shape-producing field of exchanges and relations, internally held by the tension of provisionally optimal or near-optimal solutions but intermittently bombarded by demands that come from the outside and which it must address: new codes or laws, increased volumes of traffic, technological advances in other fields, administrative and marketing decisions, climatological events, regional conflicts, etc.

What we have, then, is a group of objects determined by a metric regime that they themselves empower, a genetic pool and the shapes it produces in a relationship of mutual reinforcement, affected occasionally by exterior demands. (These perturbations from the outside translate into alterations in the system, into new information.) In this sense, every aspect of the generic object has its own dimension of necessity. And every object is an elastic surface: If it receives a blow, it channels it to the entire system. If the resistance of the container's metal changes, then the gripping power of the crane has to be altered. And it is also so, the other way: Every blow delivered to the system finds manifestation in the individual objects that make it up. The shape or the necessary weight of these objects, for instance, produces invisible expansive waves that mark the global landscape of trade. Their trajectory is a process that extrudes compatible features from all the elements with which the object engages. And, in the opposite direction, a massive change at the global scale of trade sweeps down as a series of catastrophic waves that alters the shape of the individual elements.

3. By being one of their visual "frequencies," generic objects signal metonymically the massive and elastic systems to which they belong. These are systems to which we often remain physically, if not cognitively, blind. A run-of-the-mill shipping container, really considered, in the company of all the other containers it keeps once it is excised

from the idealized space of the sales catalogue page and the corporate website, is inseparable from the systems of distribution, transportation and storage that it was undoubtedly designed and manufactured for (even if other uses for it are possible). One conceives the container, within the stacks in ports and storage yards and on ships, as a small but essential and interconnected part in an intricate web of lines bustling with activity--lines that mark not only the routes of global/national/urban transportation of which it is an obvious part, but also the exchanges of capital that keep these routes active and that benefit from them. These lines also link back to the factories where the goods the container stores and transports are produced and the offices where marketing plans for these goods are drafted and the retail stores where they are sold. These lines to the factory, the ad agency and the points of retail are, in turn, plugged to lines that lead back to the farms, forests, mines and rigs that generate or collect the raw materials necessary for the production of goods. And these lines, if we are imaginative enough, can be linked to lines that sketch out the natural systems that allow the raw material to emerge in the first place. Every container plots a massive arabesque of relations, as it dissolves into it and relinquishes the illusion of its singularity.

And this complicated weave of interpenetrating lines is crossed by other patterns, such as the one that tracks the fuel production that is necessary for the factories to be fired up and to keep the transportation vehicles moving. And, woven into it are the patterns of war that keep oil economies in place and the patterns of intricate investment and political maneuvering that keep wars going. Even where murky zones appear in this complicated tapestry, they too are abuzz with obscure and connected activity. Discreet realms--the military site, the factory, the boardroom, the advertising firm, the port, the shopping mall--collapse into one another. Or more accurately: the idea of a world of discreet realms collapses altogether. Adjacencies become interpenetrations. The container languishing on a port can beam us, if we zone in just right, to a woven substrate of invisible materialities, to an intricate matrix of flows and forces that spreads out like a chemical LSD sky before us. It's not there *but it's there alright*.

4. Generic objects encourage us to consider the field over its individual elements. The singular seems superfluous in defining generic objects. Surely, a bucket is a bucket--irreducibly particular. But a bucket is a generic object only in the presence of another bucket (or, at the very least, in its implied presence). Generic objects draw on the dense fields of repeating specimens for definition. In its in the presence of other objects of their kind that they actualize their individual capabilities. Coupling and stacking and nesting, after all, are relations between multiples; instant replaceability implies equivalency and sameness among a large quantity of identical artifacts. Generic objects are defined by and live through a *monstrous contiguity* that mocks atomized conceptions of the world. Fields mean and function in ways that their individual components may not.

5. Inside a flow (a system of circulation), generic objects are alien to the city's production of meaning. Plastic crates used to distribute milk are abstract and autistic objects, blind and militantly inelastic artifacts, responding unwaveringly to a set of very specific demands. They are collections of data, programmed to function with the utmost efficiency, and nothing else. Surely, these crates come inscribed with the potential for a social function but they have been optimized to such a degree that the relation to the human is only one value, one dimensional datum. No different in kind from its inscribed relationship with the weight of a gallon of milk or the storage capacity of a delivery truck. Milk crates in this environment are surfaces radically devoid of meanings, figures of such alarming blankness on a symbolic plane that their emptiness overwhelms.

Milk crates invariably go out filled and return empty. They are part of a loop that, as a continuum of contiguous (melded) informational units, can remain active forever. If the world stood still, the loop that milk crates sketch out in the city would continue to flow, defying entropy and apocalypse. If one crate exits the loop, due to loss or damage, another would simply take its place. The loop is like a tide cycle or a whirlpool. Its indifference, its inwardness, the silence generated by the centripetal movements of its flows, should terrify us. It is monstrous in the way its energy absorbs all forms and meanings. As objects move within the frame of this flow, their contours, weight, surfaces, articulations, and inscribed data (date of production, type of plastic, recycled per-

centages, ownership markings) dissolve. It's as if they are moving under such pressure that they're rendered liquid-like and incorporated into a seamless helix of constant activity.

6. Two modes of time are at play here: our segmented, finite and familiar one and that of the flow. (Generic objects accommodate to the temporal modes in the situations in which they find themselves.) These two modes of time, in turn, make visible two scales of perception. Generic objects integrated into the cycles of the flow move toward invisibility; the articulation of their qualities remains hostage to and stalled by a movement that exceeds that of everyday life in scale, duration, and inflexibility. All the elements caught in this flow dissolve into a confluence of smudged characteristics. Typological markers melt into pure metrics. The possibility for us to hold on to a familiar trait is rendered impossible by the abstracting impulse within the flow.

As soon this object exits the flow, however, it is transformed. If a truck takes too long to recover emptied milk crates, these are exposed to forces external to the cycle. Someone steals one to carry the mangoes he will sell on the side of the road to complete the rent money. Once outside its "natural" flow the object becomes visible, familiar, autonomous, gains an identity, reveals potentials that hadn't coagulated until then. Its time and ours synchronize. In such a situation, we can finally think of what to do with the generic object, how to manipulate it, make it serve new functions. But these statements need to be qualified. They tie things up too neatly. The responses to the generic object extracted from its system are varied. They are contingent on particular geographies and behaviors. The very nature of the extractions and the places where the loop registers loss are not insignificant to the way generic objects will be "re-drawn" away from their startling blankness.

7. A palpitating belt of activity grafted over the city's orthogonal spread, the flow moves with the ineluctability of a stampede. And as it happens to the stampede, individual elements are picked off. The back of a supermarket, for instance, is a site where the herd suffers losses. But it's not the back of every supermarket. It depends on the neighborhood. Geography and economics, specific demands and patterns of behavior, matter. Where privation is greater, the voracity swells, the losses multiply. In affluent areas, the response is usually that of satisfied predator. (The flow itself with its endless replaceable parts is coldly indifferent to and unaffected by all this. It is indifferent, also, because it reserves the right of reclamation, always threatening to scoop up strayed elements and place them back in its currents.)

Diagrammed, the collection of points where individual specimens are extracted or expelled from the flow produces a littoral--pockets of activity closely bound to the systems of circulation both in physical proximity and in the understanding of the object that is generated. When there, generic objects are suspended in a middle ground in which they are treated a little less abstractly than they are in the flow but not as elements inserted into rhetorical relationships as they are in the broader culture and within the disciplines of design. The object's alarming blankness is dissipated somewhat by the introduction of a calculus that links real needs to functional potentials.

8. In the littoral, which usually materializes in economically depressed neighborhoods, the individual's engagement with the generic object is modulated by need. A pressing hardship demands appeasement. A contextual strain takes on a constitutive role; it exerts enough pressure to distribute importance to the potentials in objects that ought to be favored. If rolls of toilet paper need to be transported, then surely the nesting potential of the buckets being used will remain invisible.

If generic objects are patterned information, then in this situation it is information that is processed with the direct satisfaction of a particular goal at play. The processing is endowed with a discriminating filter that need provides. Objects are treated as pure resource. They retain an abject rawness. This inhibits deployment of the artifact in rhetorical terms. What the object or usage of the object may mean, what values it may embody, what criteria it may be judged by--these are matters sacrificed to the necessary resolution of a pressing predicament. It's almost as if the prerogatives are no longer those of the individual: the situation determines the sorts of engagement possible. If there is something like a liberated sweep of potentials in the generic object in the littoral, it is rendered available and substantial only in relation to the range of hardships that it meets there. The object's set of freed potentials is an inverted diagram of the needs that structure such a context.

In these circumstances, objects are still not integrated in some fundamental sense. They

(continued on page 7)

SUPPLEMENT: Interview, Program, Humor, Cultural Calendar, Participation, Questionnaire

# INTELLIGENT ARCHITECTURE

INTERVIEW WITH ARCHITECT CHRISTINE BINSWANGER, PARTNER, HERZOG & DE MEURON

**Now that you have worked over a period of time in Miami, acquiring a double perspective (working on site, viewing from afar), what determinant urban factors, perhaps not obvious from the outside, play an important role in the city? And, along the same lines, what are important urban qualities or potentials that are perhaps not exploited or understood well enough by Miamians?**

The great thing about Miami is that people love to go out, they are very social, and the climate allows for such public life. Strangely, there is a lack of public space that addresses this desire of being outside and the hot climate at the same time. In other words – there are only commercial spaces like the hotels on the beach or the restaurants on Lincoln Road that offer such outdoor “leisure” places. We saw the idea of offering public space that is free of charge to be part of our mission with MAM, hence the shaded and planted “porch” that is an extension to the park and that offers magnificent views over the bay. We had the same ambition with our project on 1111 Lincoln Road, and it shows that the need for public space is there and the offer hugely welcomed - people use the garage and the new part of the mall for all kinds of activities. Like yesterday, they were coming up to watch the 4th of July fireworks from there.

The city is still too dependent on private transportation. An efficient system to link Miami with Miami Beach would be such an important improvement. The Beach could be for Miami what Central Park is for New York.



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**To what extent would you consider your Miami projects to be “iconic” or “non-iconic”?**

To be “iconic” is not what we aim for. We want to make intelligent architecture that relates to its place and its program, the formal and material language that results varies in every case.

**To what extent does Herzog & de Meuron determine aspects of a building’s morphology (e.g., the canopy of the new Miami Art Museum building) based on non-cultural forces such as physics or weather patterns, versus references to local cultural iconographies (e.g., Art Deco)?**

Climate plays as much a role as the cultural context (“place”) when we develop a project. Successful projects are those that ultimately are welcomed by the locals, that become theirs - and to do so, they somewhat have to integrate into the local cultural patterns. The two cases where we probably managed best were Tate Modern with the Turbine Hall, and the Stadium in Beijing. We are confident that MAM has that potential, too.

**How do your positions on this topic relate to a place where the most common architectural forms (particularly vernacular ones) are themselves primarily derived from everyday, pragmatic considerations - parameters of weather, available economic and infrastructural resources, communal behavioral patterns, etc.?**

Every project has its economic frame, it is one of the essential design guidelines. We are not sure that what you call “everyday pragmatic patterns” is not sometimes rather laziness in thought. It is not necessarily more expensive to do something more intelligent, and it is clear that we have to address the CO<sub>2</sub> issue immediately - which we also do with the

MAM project. Like most places in the US Miami has ignored aspects of sustainability drastically in the past - in the way buildings were built as much as in the behaviour and expectations of the people towards them. The specific climate was addressed with air conditioning, to a degree that is as ridiculous as that we have to always carry a pullover with us if we plan to go inside.



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**How does 1111 Lincoln Rd relate to Herzog & de Meuron’s ideas regarding urbanism, conventional typologies (such as parking garages), and the programmatic flexibility of generic structures? How does it relate to Herzog & de Meuron’s ideas on these topics vis-à-vis Miami specifically?**

By adding a bit of depth to the floor plates the cars can be parked slightly recessed and the structure can remain unclad without being “offensive” to the public eye. The normal request for garages is that they have to have a “façade” which is a waste of material and often leads to ghost-like buildings. (There are exceptions obviously like the one by Arquitectonica, which is clad in plants).

By adding floor height to some of the levels the garage can house other temporary functions, such as parties, markets, film-shooting, performances, concerts, whatever, apart from giving a nice feel, i.e., views and air while parking your car.

By connecting the new structure to the existing building we could use those stairs for escape - and have only one open, almost ceremonial stair that again works against the stereotype of the parking garage experience.

Because the structure itself and not a cladding material is the architecture, the details of the structure had to be very strictly controlled - concrete quality, slab edges, sprinklers, lighting etc. That was the effort on this project.



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# Tabloid No. 10 Miami Art Museum

First printing August 2010

This issue was published in conjunction with the exhibition *New Work Miami 2010*, Miami Art Museum.

July 18-October 17, 2010

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Disclaimer: The views expressed in this collaborative publication do not necessarily reflect the views of Miami Art Museum.

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2121 Park Ave. (in Collins Park)  
Miami Beach, FL  
305-673-7530 or www.bassmuseum.org

**Human Rites**  
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César Trasobares, Ai Wei Wei and others  
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Gean Moreno and Ernesto Oroza  
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Derek Buckner  
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**Paul Strand in Mexico**  
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Materazzi and more  
JULY 2010

## THIS IS ART. What is art to you?



Take a photograph of anything around Miami that you consider art, and bring it to MAM's Front Desk. You'll receive free museum admission and your photograph could become part of a compilation in *New Work Miami 2010*.

## Have a say



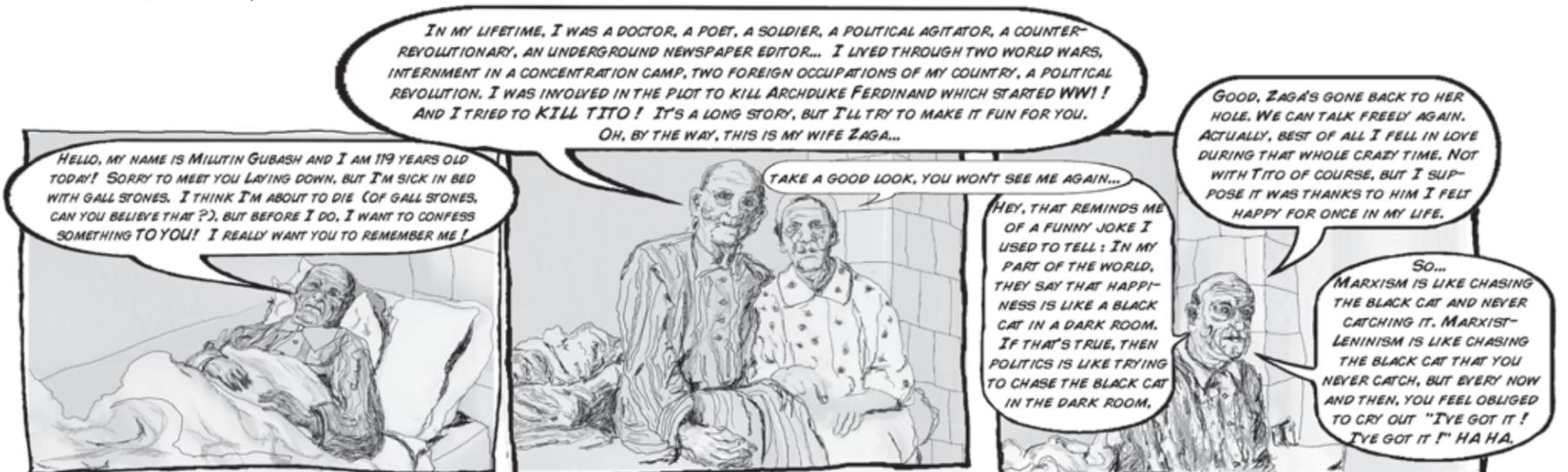
Visit [miamiartmuseum.org/MyMAM.asp](http://miamiartmuseum.org/MyMAM.asp) to provide feedback and to comment on art in Miami.



Tonel, 1982 (2010). Courtesy of the artist.

Milutin Gubash, 2010. Courtesy of the artist.

CULTURAL CALENDAR



**TITO MY FRIEND** BY MILUTIN GUBASH (GRANDSON OF MILUTIN GUBASH)

PT. 1 OF 3

PARTICIPATION

QUESTIONNAIRE

milutin gubash, 2010; tonel, 1982 (2010).

HUMOR

**Travel:** Pronunciation: \tra-uh-l; Function: verb, adjective, noun. To go from one place to another, as by auto, train, plane, or ship. Voyage, tour, junket, globe trot. To take a trip or proceed or advance in any way. Wander, peregrinate, gadabout, wend. To associate or consort. To pass or transmit as with light (speed of, diffused, fiber optic, black, and candle) or sound (acoustic, electric, intolerable, high decibel, pitched dribble, and noise). To move fixedly, as with a mechanism, such as the unseen innards of a clock or the finite combustion of the heart. Used or designed for use while traveling, such as travel shampoo or travel flask or even travel music, as grouped, for example, by its relation to the word "New," such as the New Pornographers in New Delhi or New Order in New York. To move in a direction or path through a given distance, such as a groove, a mile, a breath, a leap. **Origin:** 1325-75; ME(north and Scots) originally the same word as travail (by shift to toil or labor or to make a *laborious journey*).

TRAVEL  
Emma Trelles

## CROWN David Svenson

As the dentist prepares the molar for the crown, he notes my ground-down incisors and canines. He runs his latex finger over their plateau. He pushes down on each like planting a seed. He asks how long it has been. When I answer, mouth agape, lips dragged by the dry edges of his gloves, he stops casting my molar, puts his hands on his thighs. Sitting above the exam light, he looks like an effigy of darkness. *You're awfully young to lose your parents.*

In school, the crown draws attention. People like to remark on its sparkle. People like to see me smile. Everyone thinks I'm a hidden jewel among the spit and breath, but it hurts to drink. It cuts my tongue. It bleeds over floss. It clinks in my sleep.

Do you remember the winged  
black notes winnowed  
from the oak  
and the autumnal breeze  
that unhinged them  
in noon's jaundiced light?  
Do you remember the moon,  
egret-eyed albino  
tracing invisible edges,  
while we quietly practiced  
the art of diminution—  
the shape of us grainning out  
into the wide open yawn  
of our days?  
Do you remember how forgetfulness  
fed directly from our throats—  
the taste, colorless as grappa,  
on our tongues?  
Perhaps someone will remember  
in another time,  
and we'll reappear,  
in a less shadowing light,  
as a pentimento—  
blue, unsmiling lovers  
embracing behind a rose bush—  
painted over with braver strokes.

CHAGALLIAN SONG  
Jennifer Hearn

## M-THEORY Neil de la Flor

She wore sandstone for a woman  
whose breasts sung whispers.

She had not grown for years.  
Unable to fetch Frisbees in winter

cast upon a cloud, she got fed up  
with seahorses. Her manuscript

uttered not a word about white  
busses with red crosses. She found

miracles in minor miracles, acted  
like a magician without a hat.

*If my head had been cut off, she said,  
I would've been dead.*

There is only one brown horse in the river of white of the Carousel. Its location is also very diluted for it stands majestically as can be between the pompous purple-necklaced horse and the picturesque carriage, whose buttons are falling off one looks closely. That morning was another spent looking at all the people that walked past the Oakley Ad at the jewelry store across the fervent sea of the mall. A mother purchased a ticket as I heard her daughter whisper "the brown one the brown one!" She handed me her pink ticket, the same color of my already too-frayed polo shirt. I followed her to the brown horse as her mother watched us from the periphery. I tied her safely onto the horse and she said to me faintly as if almost to the air "I like this horse" and I ask her why. We were wordlessly still for what seemed minutes. "Because it loves me."

BECAUSE IT LOVES ME  
Ximena Izquierdo

from POEM SCORES  
Yaddyra Peralta

#### Revelation Score 1 (for 1983)

Don't play the record on your record player. Don't finger the record unless it is new. And if it is new, hold the record cover before your face, with eyes closed. With eyes closed let the light come in.

#### Revelation Score 2 (for 1980)

When your boyfriend loses his job, disconnect the black DVR from its dusty wires. Think of its heft, the redundancy of 400 channels. Remember the black ON-TV box in your babysitter's unlit rec room. Remember the on-and-off switch, the scrambled TV picture of the movie Grease. Remember Olivia Newton-John and John Travolta singing like hurt dogs. Think of the way memory stretches her body like an endless rubber band, casting their jubilant reunion song as sad, playing it backwards so that Olivia and John disappear into the funhouse and its dumb revolving barrel. And Stockard Channing's fetus shrinks and shrivels, rises up into her body, back into the cave of her gum-chewing mouth.

Part Four begins here.  
I'd like to take a moment here  
for comments  
questions?  
I believe that it is the right  
Decision for our national security  
ity ity ity

We need to back away from this  
Starts Part Three.  
"Trust and Confidence"  
Every prerogative  
Toledo, Ohio  
Fidence  
Dence

Part Two starts here.  
The General has pulled out  
We are flinging the word  
War zone around  
It is a crisis  
Tensions  
Huge security detachments

All right bullet points  
Part One.  
"Betrayal and Intimidation"  
(SPELL CHECK)  
Dayton, Ohio  
Midation  
Shun

THE RIGHT DECISION  
Jim Drain

## ESSAY

An unfortunate repercussion of the anthologizing of the Confessional poets (Plath, Lowell, Sexton, et. al.) has been the association of American poetry with honesty. Or, to be more exact, with "spilling one's guts;" with being "uncensored;" with "telling it like it is." Type "slam poetry" into YouTube's search function if you don't know what I'm talking about, and you'll get poem after poem that says, loud and clear, *I am feeling something very overwhelming!*

This genre of "honesty" is of course as much a posture as any other formal conceit, complete with its own vernacular and expected maneuvers, and 99 times of 100, the poem is still lying to you. Worse yet, since the form and message are both received whole cloth by the poet, there's not even any real emotional risk involved.

One thing I've always liked about contemporary artists is that they've trained us well to assume some form of authorial distance. Whatever the substance, we know the artist has an opinion, slant, or angle. In Paul Pfeiffer's *Fragment of a Crucifixion (After Francis Bacon)* for instance, we know that the artist is not simply a fan of Larry Johnson or the Charlotte Hornets. He's using the substance of the video footage to make a meaningful leap. He might very well have deep, personal feelings for Larry Johnson—who knows?—but if so, that's only where the work begins.

Honest poetry on the other hand (and honest art, too—let's be fair) reduces the world to the whims of the self. You'll find a tremendous amount of varied and seemingly weighty subject matter in bad poetry (Iraq War, September 11th, Racism, Poverty, etc.), but all of it is covered without any corresponding shift in formal approach. *I'm saying it, therefore it's interesting*, these poems suggest. Well, uh, no.

You won't find those kinds of lies in *Lies and Poems*. The poetry in here, like, thank goodness, the vast majority of contemporary American poetry, takes a critical distance on its subject matter. It makes thoughtful choices in its forms, choices that I would argue are much more emotionally risky than emerging naked in the poem with both hands raised. Are these poems truthful? Untruthful? These are not the droids you're looking for.

One note: I've elided biographical information on the poets due to space, but please visit [universityofwynwood.org](http://universityofwynwood.org) where I'll post brief notes and links. Please also sign up for Lady Python Nation—the University of Wynwood newsletter. We bring emerging and established poets to Miami on a regular basis for workshops and readings, and we'd love to see you at one of our events.

Finally, I'm extremely grateful to MAM for making this anthology a reality; to Gean Moreno and Ernesto Oroza for producing it; and to the poets themselves for contributing their work.

P. Scott Cunningham, Editor  
*University of Wynwood*

# NEW WORK MIAMI 2010

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Maria José Arjona  
Kevin Arrow  
Beings  
Jenny Brillhart  
Felecia Chizuko Carlisle  
Jim Drain  
Flash Orchestra  
Frozen Music

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Oscar Fuentes & the Gipsy Catz  
Lynne Golob Gelfman  
Michael Genovese  
Jacin Giordano  
Guerra de la Paz  
Adler Guerrier  
Jacuzzi Boys  
Don Lambert

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Gustavo Matamoros  
Ana Mendez (with Aja Albertson  
& Richard Vergez)  
Beatriz Monteavaro  
Gean Moreno/Ernesto Oroza  
Peggy Nolan  
Fabian Peña  
Christina Pettersson

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Poem Depot  
Vickie Pierre  
Manny Prieres  
Bert Rodriguez  
Christopher Stetser  
Talking Head Transmitters  
Robert Thiele  
TM Sisters

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Mette Tommerup  
Humberto Torres  
Frances Trombly  
Tatiana Vahan  
Marcos Valella  
Michael Vasquez  
Viking Funeral  
Michelle Weinberg

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## NEW WORK MIAMI 2010: EVENTS SCHEDULE

### **Saturday / July 17 / OPENING NIGHT**

6-9pm

MAM members free, non-members \$20

New performance by **TM Sisters**, "With Out You, Babe." Also featuring spoken word poetry & music by **Oscar Fuentes and the Gipsy Catz**, plus a live AM radio broadcast in the gallery by **Talking Head Transmitters** (segment on curatorial practices).

 **AVELEDA**  
THE MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY ART

 **CREATIVE PULSE MIAMI AFTERHOURS**

**NWMM2010 AFTERHOURS** / In conjunction with the exhibition

*New Work Miami 2010*, Miami Art Museum presents a summer's worth

of high-energy performances, artist talks and special presentations.

All Afterhours programs:



Michelle Weinberg, "New Work Miami 2010" title wall sketch for MAM Lobby. Courtesy of the artist.

# NWM2010

July 18 - October 17, 2010  
Miami Art Museum

*New Work Miami 2010* is conceived as an exuberant salute to Miami's dynamic art scene. It is not a survey exhibition but a snapshot, a passing glance at advanced local art production at this precise moment, based on a sampling of what the organizers encountered in process in the studios or freshly concocted in the minds of Miami-based artists, over the course of the past six months or so. Like any snapshot this one is limited in scope, though it is enough, we hope, to serve as a marker for the robust wave of creative activity that is being generated right now by a vibrant and *growing* community of dedicated artists.

While the works in this exhibition do not share an overriding theme or display a single style, it would be wrong to assume they have nothing in common. The network of artists here is cohesive, and many of its most active members know each other well, or they at least know each other's work. They live all over, but many of them work amid the same part-industrial, part-blighted, part-residential areas that pocket the amorphous neighborhoods along Miami's easternmost north-south axis, from downtown and the Miami River through Overtown, Wynwood, Edgewater, Little Haiti, and further north.<sup>1</sup> Many of these artists frequent and occasionally exhibit in the progressive art venues that have arisen incongruously along this same trajectory. Further, Miami offers a limited number of art supply stores, darkrooms, and fabricators willing to create strange, non-utilitarian objects at deep discounts. In other words, these works were all created by individuals who work in the same city, and whose perspectives are each affected by some combination of the same conditions that artists experience as they go about doing what they do in Miami.

And yet, the complexity of this setting at this moment is hard to overstate. It leads to a wild variety of conditions that affect how each artist lives and works very differently. Add to that a second, important variable: the wide diversity of art forms and working methods from which artists everywhere can choose to dedicate themselves to today; and we are left with a situation in which any non-thematic grouping will inevitably be both interlinked and disparate.

While their broader implications may not be obvious from day to day, this complexity of setting and diversity of art forms both have much to do with Miami's paradigmatic status with respect to globalization, the issue that defines our time. The highly contested term "globalization" encompasses a panorama of competing definitions and issues. Its most quantifiable dimension involves a world that is becoming increasingly integrated by virtue of the relatively free flow of capital and the tapping of cheaper labor markets across national and regional boundaries. This economic process has been inseparable from an equally accelerated trend toward cultural globalization, which has been greatly augmented by expanded travel and especially new forms of instant digital communication.

The cultural side of the debate has generally revolved around what some believe to be the inevitable prospect of global domination by Western popular culture, at the expense of local traditions and

diversity – the supposed "Disneyfication" of the world. In recent years, however, a more complicated view on the power dynamics at play in this operation has emerged, in light of the unambiguous rise of China, India, Brazil, and other countries as major economic powers; the murkiness of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan; and various backlashes from groups around the world that seek to assert and retain their independent cultural identities. The sharp economic downturn that the US and the EU have been slogging through since 2008 has made the situation even hazier.

Moreover, while fears of homogenization are not moot by any means, today it is becoming increasingly clear that local cultures are simply too strong a force to yield in any uncomplicated way. As Erla Zwingle has pointed out (along with numerous commentators, in different words): "When cultures receive outside influences, they ignore some and adopt others, and then almost immediately transform them."<sup>1</sup> Saskia Sassen writes that "a good part of globalization consists of an enormous variety of micro-processes that begin to denationalize what had been constructed as national."<sup>2</sup> The seemingly uniform molecule of world culture that appears to be developing is an unstable one; it atomizes and regroups into different types of hybrid matter as it forms. It is a bone that is continuously fracturing into a million pieces, simultaneously as it is resetting.

A related facet of globalization involves the way in which it has changed the experience and physical character of the 21<sup>st</sup>-century city. This topic is hotly debated in architectural circles, and new perspectives continue to arise. The architect Rem Koolhaas, for example, sees homogenization as an indication of once "peripheral" sites (e.g., Mumbai or Miami) actually tearing themselves away from the "center": In the process of capitalizing on the recent outflows of money from traditional financial hubs (e.g., New York, London, Zurich), they are liberating themselves "from the straightjacket of identity" while breaking "the destructive cycle of dependency."<sup>3</sup> This account of globalization describes a process that is nowhere near as directed and conspiratorial as economic or cultural neo-imperialism. Per Koolhaas, the explosions of uniform building activity that we have seen in recent decades are purely the consequence of sudden accumulations of treasure combining with the 21<sup>st</sup>-century needs of high-density, high-energy populations, which if anything are more independent than ever; the "generic city" is almost entirely pragmatic, "nothing but a reflection of present need and present ability."<sup>4</sup>

The stakes of these intertwined aspects of globalization – economic integration, cultural heterogeneity, and urban development – are as high in Miami as they are anywhere in the US. The so-called Crossroads of the Americas is of course geographically positioned to serve as a major trade center, port, and travel hub between the US, Latin America, and Europe. It is also of course a key center for mass immigration, which has resulted in a wide diversity of residents and a constant degree of cross-cultural interaction among them. Miami is a sprawling city with no discernible edges and no real center.<sup>5</sup> In this sense as well it parallels the unbounded, de-centralized character that may turn out to be the ultimate condition of a truly globalized world.

These predispositions to the effects of globalization are certainly amplified by Miami's relative newness. Precisely mirroring both the overheated growth and the chronic disarray that characterize the age of globalization, Miami is a city whose youth makes it seem for the moment to be locked in perpetual transition, perpetual potential. At

(NWM2010/ rené morales)

present it is notable for bearing a kind of dynamic malleability, which makes it more receptive and more subject to powerful new forces of change like globalization. This in turn may make the everyday, lived experience of these forces seem more attenuated here than in older, more developed cities. In combination with its economic permeability, cultural flux, and “generic” urbanism, Miami thus serves as a telling case study in globalization, one that is only more revealing because it is located not in Asia or Latin America or Africa or the Indian subcontinent, but in the United States.

The field of art bears a special place within these debates, for many reasons. Globalization (and the separate but related issue of cultural identity) has been a major topic of conversation within art circles for years. The various terminologies and concepts that have been developed to describe the current age (“hybridity,” “neoliberalization,” “transculturation,” etc.) have deeply infiltrated contemporary art theory and jargon. The art world has emblemized globalization – both its positive aspects and its myriad problematic ones – through the rise of numerous international biennials and trade fairs, which today create busy travel schedules for collectors and curators who hop from Gwangju (South Korea) to Istanbul to Johannesburg to Sydney in the struggle to keep up with the insights that these venues are generating in real time.

Leaving aside the question of travel budgets, the act of person-to-person communication that comprises a fundamental (if not necessarily *the* fundamental) *raison d'être* for art-making has been naturally facilitated by the amazing expansion of humanity's ability to converse with itself across borders and great distances through both images and text, thanks to the invention of JPEG, TIFF, DOC, PDF, HTML – the acronyms that enable the second lives we lead on the internet. Most essentially, there is the basic fact that a given artwork is, at heart, a vessel for ideas, and that of all the commodities that are currently in frenzied circulation transnationally, it is ideas that are being most contagiously transmitted and most vigorously transformed.

This brings us back, then, to the issue of art in Miami at this moment. The ideal that art can serve to embody the transnational transmission of thought and experience constitutes one of the primary organizing principles of MAM's exhibition program and permanent collection. It comprises the overall theme of *Between Here and There* – the first long-term installation of the museum's holdings – which is on view concurrently with *New Work Miami 2010*. While the relationships between the two presentations may not be immediately apparent, they are threaded together by an interpretation of this city that factors in its special position vis-à-vis globalization, and by a belief that this position can be clarified through art.

If there is anything that unifies the diverse production of the artists included in *NWM2010*, it is that they indicate a community that has clearly embraced the range of artistic approaches that are currently in development across the world: from research-based strategies that cross over into disciplines beyond the field of art (commerce, science, urban studies, archival history, etc.); to methods that tap into the energies of non-art subcultures, from the improvisatory dynamics of economic survival in Little Haiti to the anarchic spirit of punk rock. The participation of Miami-based artists in internationally relevant art conversations is equally evident in selected works that are fully relational (participatory) and ultimately ephemeral. It can be seen just as well in the new ways they have developed to tackle the old challenge of image-making, involving new media as well as new, critical takes on ones as familiar as paint on canvas. In so doing, these individuals and the broader population of artists they represent are encapsulating the most recent chapter in the ongoing cultural history of Miami's progress out from its swampy, provincial origins and into a new world marked by patterns that are playing out globally – from Shanghai to Berlin, Dubai to Bogotá.

This paradoxically global local outlook has been nurtured in part by the significant degree of support and exposure to international art production that this community has received through local private collectors (who travel widely) as well as from Miami's public institutions. The institutions in question include not just the non-profit collecting museums and *kunsthalle*s (non-collecting institutions), and not just the for-profit galleries (which play a crucial role), but also a phenomenon exemplary enough of this city that it bears the term “The Miami Model” – whereby local collectors open buildings for the public display of their possessions.<sup>6</sup> The community has been nourished as well on a steady diet of overwhelming numbers of high-quality artworks that are shipped to Miami from all over the world for the annual Art Basel Miami Beach trade fair, which simultaneously provides an audience of thousands of members of the global art crowd, who descend upon the city en masse for a few short days every December, like clockwork.

At a farther remove along this chain of support, but unequivocally the most important, is the general audience for art in Miami. With

respect to art in this city, the question of the general population sometimes feels like an elephant in the room. From the beginning Miami audiences have sent mixed messages on the subject: On one hand, there has always been a nebulous but deep hunger for art and culture. On the other, this potential audience is so fragmented as to make it challenging to serve. But while it has tended in the past to float above and outside the local “art world,” today it is more steadily flowing through it. So much is evident in the growing number and diversity of visitors to the “Second Saturday” gallery walks in Wynwood, which include swelling numbers of new collectors and others clearly interested in engaging actively with Miami's art scene. This increasingly cosmopolitan audience is on track to build into the critical mass that will in turn empower the degree of participation in global cultural currents that this city seems to yearn for.

As important as it is, this network of support (taken as a whole) can be inconsistent, in part because it is highly sensitive to the state of the overall economy. In Miami it remains critically fragile, and it has undoubtedly been bruised by this recession.<sup>7</sup> But while it has seen painful losses, overall it is clearly pulling through. Indeed, there are signals that it is poised to become more than it was as the economy recovers. Regardless, the last two sobering years have forcefully presented this support structure with an opportunity to pause and reconsider its perspectives. Above all, they have clarified the importance of its mandate.

For while recessions are difficult times for everyone, they can be downright awful for artists. At the same time, historically they have been, if not bright, then at least special times for art. For one thing, they have a way of opening up subject matter, especially for artists whose interests coincide with social issues and issues of urbanism. Artistic approaches with a political bent take on greater sharpness, if not greater effectiveness. And of course, there is the issue of art's basic function as a collective escape valve, and as a way to not just divert ourselves from but to better understand and cope with our daily problems.

To suggest that these supportive factors should have a motivating effect on artists working amid a recession, even a positive effect on their morale, is to risk speculation. It is never wise, in any case, to overstate their relevance to the everyday realities of art-making. To do so is to underestimate the depths of self-sufficient research and concentration into which artists typically immerse themselves in the process of carrying out their projects. Many artists will hold up the gratification that occasionally results from this kind of focus (and even its occasional agonies) as their primary motivation; it is an important support mechanism in its own right – if not *the* most important, for some. It suffices to note in passing that as a group, artists have proven time and again to be impressively resilient. To quote the playwright Arthur Miller: “The artist is a weed that can survive in the cracks of a pavement.”<sup>8</sup> Given the clouds of economic uncertainty that are still hanging over us, this observation may well be the most pertinent way of describing the state of art in Miami in 2010.

We all stand to benefit from this resilience, because it is the artists – the producers – who are on the frontlines of the charge to build a more humanistic culture for this city. They do so from the ground up, in parallel to the more spectacular macroeconomic forces that are hard at work building it from the top down. This microeconomic level comprises the true undertow of a city's creative activity, and provides the most reliable way of gauging the solidity of the ground upon which more official institutional endeavors are to take root. It is for the artists that the issues and stakes involved in establishing a balanced relationship between the local and the global, as well as the inestimable importance of making and exhibiting good art in hard times, are so deeply internalized as to be instinctive. It is this artists' instinct that has best equipped us as a city to participate in the global arena of art-making, at last.

--René Morales, Associate Curator

<sup>1</sup> Erla Zwingle, “Globalisation,” *National Geographic* (August, 1999).

<sup>2</sup> Saskia Sassen, *Territory, Authority, Rights: From Medieval to Global Assemblages* (Princeton, NJ: 2006).

<sup>3</sup> See Rem Koolhaas, “The Generic City,” in Koolhaas, Bruce Mau, and Hans Werlemann, *S, M, X, XL* (Monacelli Press, New York: 1997). The reference to Koolhaas is indebted to Gean Moreno and Ernesto Oroza's forthcoming essay “Notes on Miami as Generic City” (working title).

<sup>4</sup> Koolhaas' ideas are particularly germane to cities that are new and/or poised to grow. In an evocative passage Koolhaas actually makes subtle reference to Miami, citing “the collision or confluence of two migrations – Cuban émigrés going north and Jewish retirees going south...” Elsewhere he states that urban homogeneity “tends toward the tropical – converging around the equator...”

<sup>5</sup> When one speaks of “Miami” what one generally means is a contiguous urban area that stretches far beyond the City of Miami's technical boundaries, from lower Broward to Kendall and points south, and from Miami Beach to Doral, Westchester, and points west.

<sup>6</sup> Particularly relevant to the present conversation is the recently opened de la Cruz Collection, which is already notable for its frequent programming – lectures and so forth – as well as the way in which it has been presenting local artists' work in a space in the back that could have been devoted to storage. Notable also is the Rubell Family Collection, which has had a demonstrable impact on the work of several Miami-based artists through its forward-looking installations.

<sup>7</sup> While the same could be said about cultural support networks throughout the world, it is worth noting that Miami has been one of the worst victims/perpetrators of the same national housing crisis that helped trigger the much larger ruptures in the global financial industry. Consequently, the first waves of the recession were felt earlier and more severely here than in much of the country.

<sup>8</sup> Arthur Miller, “Letter to Mr. Gingrich,” *The Nation* (July 31/August 7, 1995).

6-9pm  
MAM members \$5, non-members \$15

**Thursday / August 5**  
Performance artist **María José Arjona** challenges visitors to find a way to take a diamond from her mouth; the victor of this power struggle becomes the stone's owner.

In the gallery, meet artists **Michael Genovese** and **Gean Moreno/Ernesto Oroza**, plus **Talking Head Transmitters\*** (segment on the environment: "The Big Spill").

**Thursday / August 19**  
Experience an experimental performance choreographed and performed by **Ana Mendez**, in collaboration with **Aja Albertson** and **Richard Vergez**.

In the gallery, meet artists **Kevin Arrow** and **Manny Prieres**, plus **Talking Head Transmitters\*** (segment on contemporary dance). Additionally, **Mapping Miami** and LegalArt will be on hand with information about their organizations.

**Thursday / September 2**  
Bring on the bands! Celebrate Miami's rich crossover of art and music, as local bands **Beings** and **Jacuzzi Boys** headline a night of rock at the museum.

Special interactive performance by **Bert Rodriguez**, plus **Talking Head Transmitters\*** (segment on 80's rock).

**Thursday / September 16**  
Explore auditory sensations with sound art collectives **Frozen Music** and **Flash Orchestra**.

In the gallery, meet artists **Adler Guerrier** and **Mette Tommerup**, plus **Talking Head Transmitters\*** with **PDM Music Ensemble**. **Poem Depot** will also be on hand to create personalized poems on demand. *This evening of sound is generously supported by Lin Loughheed.*

**Thursday / October 7**  
Video art screening (location to be announced)

*\*This schedule is subject to change. To receive event updates, invitations and reminders, please visit [miamiartmuseum.org](http://miamiartmuseum.org) and sign up for MAM e-news; or find Miami Art Museum on Facebook.com. MAM yearly memberships: Individual \$45, Dual \$60, Artist \$35*

**Saturday / August 14 / SECOND SATURDAYS ARE FREE FOR FAMILIES**  
"We're in Stitches"  
1-4pm

Free of charge  
Weave the day away and take home a colorful yarn creation. Do you knit, crochet or embroider? Bring in your own stitchery to show off! Special guest artist: **Frances Trombly**.

\*To be interviewed on live AM radio by **Talking Head Transmitters**, please go to [www.talkingheadtransmitters.com](http://www.talkingheadtransmitters.com) and sign up in advance.

**MAM'S ANNUAL EXHIBITION FUND**  
May 1, 2009 – June 15, 2010

100,000 and up  
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Zubizarreta Group

# MAM 2010

## July 18 – October 17, 2010

New Work Miami 2010 is organized by Miami Art Museum and supported by MAM's Annual Exhibition Fund, with additional support provided by Lin Loughheed. It is curated by Peter Boswell, assistant director for special programs/senior curator and René Morales, associate curator.



**Miami Art Museum**

101 West Flagler Street, Miami, FL. • (305) 375-3000 • [miamiartmuseum.org](http://miamiartmuseum.org)

# MEMBERSHIP/

Take advantage of everything that comes with being a museum member. Free invitations to exhibition previews, 10% off all purchases at the MAM store and free admission to the museum all year long. For membership information, please call 305.375.1709 or email [membership@miamiartmuseum.org](mailto:membership@miamiartmuseum.org).

Accredited by the American Association of Museums, Miami Art Museum is sponsored in part by the State of Florida, Department of State, Division of Cultural Affairs and the Florida Arts Council, and the National Endowment for the Arts; with the support of the Miami-Dade County Department of Cultural Affairs, the Cultural Affairs Council, the Mayor and the Miami-Dade County Board of County Commissioners.

Attached directly  
to the base without a stalk  
(a leaf, a flower);  
immobile ( a coral reef).  
Walled garden, Judith at rest:  
Graves' White Goddess,  
she's now her own muse, loyal  
to her cat, the mice,  
the ficus strangling her house,  
Auden read at lunch. The source:  
sed-, (to sit, saddle):  
Indo-European root  
of chair, cathedral,  
tetrahedron. The sculptor  
Ossip Zadkine, a Russian  
by birth—bundled off  
to England by his mother,  
sent to the French front  
(World War I), bore a stretcher  
(at Epernay), escaped World  
War II in New York—  
ended up in Paris, where  
he wrote to a friend,  
...come see my pleasure house and  
you will understand how much  
a man's life is changed  
by a dove-cote, by a tree.  
Trillium, oak: sessile.

PARIS RENG  
Carol Todaro

## LIES AND POEMS

- 3 **Essay**  
P. Scott Cunningham, Editor
- 4 **Crown**  
David Svenson
- 5 **Travel**  
Emma Trelles
- 6 **The Right Decisions**  
Jim Drain
- 7 **Paris Renga**  
Carol Todaro
- 8 **More Uses for Honey**  
Nick Vagnoni
- 9 **L'Abeille Noiseuse**  
Jessica Machado
- 10 **Downpour at the Last Gas Petting Zoo**  
Peter Borrebach
- 11 **Because It Loves Me**  
Ximena Izquierdo
- 12 **Chagallian Song**  
Jennifer Hearn
- 13 **M-Theory**  
Neil de la Flor
- 14 **from Poem Scores**  
Yaddyra Peralta
- 15 **Window Poem #4**  
Christopher Louvet

DOWNPOUR AT THE LAST GAS PETTING ZOO  
Peter Borrebach

A final bison before the desert.  
That had never rolled on the prairie floor.  
Never woven itself a star-  
white cloak of sun bleached corn-silk.  
That knew nothing of dress-feathers.  
Had forgotten the lore.  
A strangeness stumbling athwart  
our path, half-lidded, tilted  
toward its world's sudden puddles.  
Pockmarked boulders bargained  
freshly minted coins. Water  
dribbled from its bristles  
like notes bubbling from a carousel organ  
in a drowned amusement park.

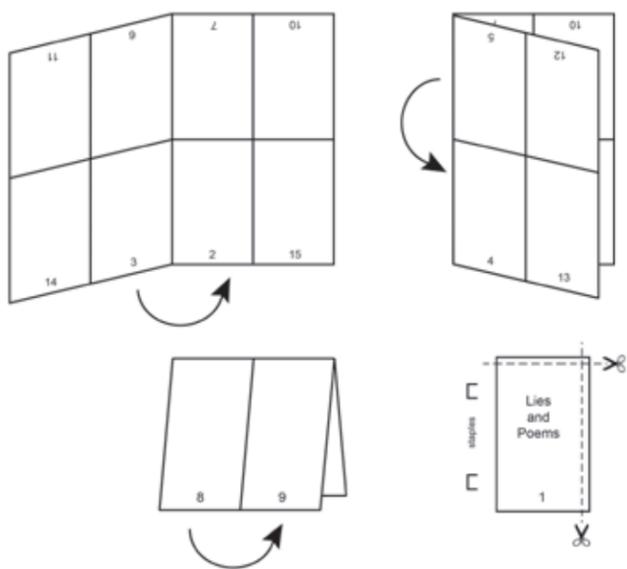
WINDOW POEM #4  
*on Jennifer's birthday*  
Christopher Louvet

After a year, the orchid has finally blossomed.  
Each flower's open mouth bellows daringly,  
and together they master a superb performance  
with no mind of the street lacking patience  
for the gradual opera unfolding on the balcony.  
Parked cars with tickets, delinquent students,  
deliberately don't applaud. Passing cars thump  
stereophonic thunks like crazed pelicans diving  
bill-first and hungry against the house's walls  
in search of some legendary, delectable fish,  
and they depart like animals, entirely nonplussed.  
The sound of the ocean is there, barely, behind  
them, one careful cascade after another singeing  
to sleep the wounds sunk before it, as a surgeon  
cuts anesthetized flesh and backs out with stitches  
designed to dissolve without a noticeable scar.  
But it's soft, likely low tide, and hard to splice  
from the traffic's Doppler-slap songs. Baudelaire  
might have much to say about that bland music  
pummeling the orchid; he might say it pines like  
*une ville qui a peur d'être une ville*, it seems to me,  
and he might call it *la rhapsodie soûl de la rue*,  
as if traffic's auditory ebullience made this world,  
*la même femme* Baudelaire would've trembled at  
if he ever finally met her, but I've seen his grave,  
his pensive monument, rich with the dead's anxiety,  
and like a gargoyle this window abuses its charity  
because it knows precisely words it will fashion  
as mines know the fires that will implode them,  
as oil wells know their eventual, spectacular spills,  
much better than you or I could even think to say.  
Replete with correspondences, storms will arrive,  
inevitably as the moment one greets the mirror,  
and this window waits for them as if for memories  
it will later fashion into proper ideas of the past.  
The ocean will still be there, behind the scenes,  
uncredited, while life lashes into the time it let  
slip by. What of it? Life never pretended to be easy.  
Things were different?—the orchid would be bare.  
Beauty has always digested time without difficulty.

MORE USES FOR HONEY  
 Nick Vagnoni  
 Gray roof peaks, the spiral  
 of bubbles from the coil  
 under the pot.  
 Cardamom.  
 Rain.  
 The slow gallop  
 of fan blades.  
 Dry patches  
 of asphalt surface  
 and my street  
 is a map,  
 narrow and nameless.

This beehive is filled with curators. One's put her wings on wrong. She's drunk on honey wine again. Like a mad sculptor, she pinches her charges into spider lilies, planes others into tabletops or Oscar Wilde's nose. She whittles her favorites into dragonflies. Little drunkard, when the queen sniffs you out, she's going to seal you up into your own private cask.

L'ABELLE NOISEUSE  
 Jessica Machado



Editor: P. Scott Cunningham.  
 University of Wynwood - [www.universityofwynwood.org](http://www.universityofwynwood.org)  
 Cover: Jim Drain

*Lies and Poems* was part of a tabloid (#10) that accompanied Gean Moreno and Ernesto Oroza's participation in the exhibition *New Work Miami 2010*, Miami Art Museum.  
*Lies and Poems* was published in July 2010, in a run of 5000 copies.

Hito Steyerl

# In defense of the Poor Image

The poor image is a copy in motion. Its quality is bad, its resolution substandard. As it accelerates, it deteriorates. It is a ghost of an image, a preview, a thumbnail, an errant idea, an itinerant image distributed for free, squeezed through slow digital connections, compressed, reproduced, ripped, remixed, as well as copied and pasted into other channels of distribution.

The poor image is a rag or a rip; an AVI or a JPEG, a lumpen proletarian in the class society of appearances, ranked and valued according to its resolution. The poor image has been uploaded, downloaded, shared, reformatted, and reedited. It transforms quality into accessibility, exhibition value into cult value, films into clips, contemplation into distraction. The image is liberated from the vaults of cinemas and archives and thrust into digital uncertainty, at the expense of its own substance. The poor image tends towards abstraction: it is a visual idea in its very becoming.

The poor image is an illicit fifth-generation bastard of an original image. Its genealogy is dubious. Its filenames are deliberately misspelled. It often defies patrimony, national culture, or indeed copyright. It is passed on as a lure, a decoy, an index, or as a reminder of its former visual self. It mocks the promises of digital technology. Not only is it often degraded to the point of being just a hurried blur, one even doubts whether it could be called an image at all. Only digital technology could produce such a dilapidated image in the first place.

Poor images are the contemporary Wretched of the Screen, the debris of audiovisual production, the trash that washes up on the digital economies' shores. They testify to the violent dislocation, transferrals, and displacement of images—their acceleration and circulation within the vicious cycles of audiovisual capitalism. Poor images are dragged around the globe as commodities or their effigies, as gifts or as bounty. They spread pleasure or death threats, conspiracy theories or bootlegs, resistance or stultification. Poor images show the rare, the obvious, and the unbelievable—that is, if we can still manage to decipher it.

## 1. Low Resolutions

In one of Woody Allen's films the main character is out of focus.<sup>1</sup> It's not a technical problem but some sort of disease that has befallen him: his image is consistently blurred. Since Allen's character is an actor, this becomes a major problem: he is unable to find work. His lack of definition turns into a material problem. Focus is identified as a class position, a position of ease and privilege, while being out of focus lowers one's value as an image.

The contemporary hierarchy of images, however, is not only based on sharpness, but also and primarily on resolution. Just look at any electronics store and this system, described by Harun Farocki in a notable 2007 interview, becomes immediately apparent.<sup>2</sup> In the class society of images, cinema takes on the role of a flagship store. In flagship stores high-end products are marketed in an upscale environment. More affordable derivatives of the same images circulate as DVDs, on broadcast television or online, as poor images.

Obviously, a high-resolution image looks more brilliant and impressive, more mimetic and magic, more scary and seductive than a poor one. It is more rich, so to speak. Now, even consumer formats are increasingly adapting to the tastes of cineastes and esthetes, who insisted on 35 mm film as a guarantee of pristine visuality. The insistence upon analog film as the sole medium of visual importance resounded throughout discourses on cinema, almost regardless of their ideological inflection. It never mattered

that these high-end economies of film production were (and still are) firmly anchored in systems of national culture, capitalist studio production, the cult of mostly male genius, and the original version, and thus are often conservative in their very structure. Resolution was fetishized as if its lack amounted to castration of the author. The cult of film gauge dominated even independent film production. The rich image established its own set of hierarchies, with new technologies offering more and more possibilities to creatively degrade it.

## 2. Resurrection (as Poor Images)

But insisting on rich images also had more serious consequences. A speaker at a recent conference on the film essay refused to show clips from a piece by Humphrey Jennings because no proper film projection was available. Although there was at the speaker's disposal a perfectly standard DVD player and video projector, the audience was left to imagine what those images might have looked like.

In this case the invisibility of the image was more or less voluntary and based on aesthetic premises. But it has a much more general equivalent based on the consequences of neoliberal policies. Twenty or even thirty years ago, the neoliberal restructuring of media production began slowly obscuring non-commercial imagery, to the point where experimental and essayistic cinema became almost invisible. As it became prohibitively expensive to keep these works circulating in cinemas, so were they also deemed too marginal to be broadcast on television. Thus they slowly disappeared not just from cinemas, but from the public sphere as well. Video essays and experimental films remained for the most part unseen save for some rare screenings in metropolitan film museums or film clubs, projected in their original resolution before disappearing again into the darkness of the archive.

This development was of course connected to the neoliberal radicalization of the concept of culture as commodity, to the commercialization of cinema, its dispersion into multiplexes, and the marginalization of independent filmmaking. It was also connected to the restructuring of global media industries and the establishment of monopolies over the audiovisual in certain countries or territories. In this way, resistant or non-conformist visual matter disappeared from the surface into an underground of alternative archives and collections, kept alive only by a network of committed organizations and individuals, who would circulate bootlegged VHS copies amongst themselves. Sources for these were extremely rare—tapes moved from hand to hand, depending on word of mouth, within circles of friends and colleagues. With the possibility to stream video online, this condition started to dramatically change. An increasing number of rare materials reappeared on publicly accessible platforms, some of them carefully curated (Ubuweb) and some just a pile of stuff (YouTube).

At present, there are at least twenty torrents of Chris Marker's film essays available online. If you want a retrospective, you can have it. But the economy of poor images is about more than just downloads: you can keep the files, watch them again, even reedit or improve them if you think it necessary. And the results circulate. Blurred AVI files of half-forgotten masterpieces are exchanged on semi-secret P2P platforms. Clandestine cell-phone videos smuggled out of museums are broadcast on YouTube. DVDs of artists' viewing copies are bartered.<sup>3</sup> Many works of avant-garde, essayistic, and non-commercial cinema have been resurrected as poor images. Whether they like it or not.

## 3. Privatization and Piracy

That rare prints of militant, experimental, and classical works of cinema as well as video art reappear as poor images is significant on another level. Their situation reveals much more than the content or appearance of the images themselves: it also reveals the conditions of their marginalization, the constellation of social forces leading to their online circulation as poor images.<sup>4</sup> Poor images are poor because they are not assigned any value within the class society of images—their status as illicit or degraded grants them exemption from its criteria. Their lack of resolution attests to their appropriation and displacement.<sup>5</sup>

Obviously, this condition is not only connected to the neoliberal restructuring of media production and digital technology; it also has to do with the post-socialist and postcolonial restructuring of nation states, their cultures, and their archives. While some nation states are

dismantled or fall apart, new cultures and traditions are invented and new histories created. This obviously also affects film archives—in many cases, a whole heritage of film prints is left without its supporting framework of national culture. As I once observed in the case of a film museum in Sarajevo, the national archive can find its next life in the form of a video-rental store.<sup>6</sup> Pirate copies seep out of such archives through disorganized privatization. On the other hand, even the British Library sells off its contents online at astronomical prices.

As Kodwo Eshun has noted, poor images circulate partly in the void left by state-cinema organizations who find it too difficult to operate as a 16/35-mm archive or to maintain any kind of distribution infrastructure in the contemporary era.<sup>7</sup> From this perspective, the poor image reveals the decline and degradation of the film essay, or indeed any experimental and non-commercial cinema, which in many places was made possible because the production of culture was considered a task of the state. Privatization of media production gradually grew more important than state controlled/sponsored media production. But, on the other hand, the rampant privatization of intellectual content, along with online marketing and commodification, also enable piracy and appropriation; it gives rise to the circulation of poor images.

## 4. Imperfect Cinema

The emergence of poor images reminds one of a classic Third Cinema manifesto, *For an Imperfect Cinema*, by Juan García Espinosa, written in Cuba in the late 1960s.<sup>8</sup> Espinosa argues for an imperfect cinema because, in his words, "perfect cinema—technically and artistically masterful—is almost always reactionary cinema." The imperfect cinema is one that strives to overcome the divisions of labor within class society. It merges art with life and science, blurring the distinction between consumer and producer, audience and author. It insists upon its own imperfection, is popular but not consumerist, committed without becoming bureaucratic.

In his manifesto, Espinosa also reflects on the promises of new media. He clearly predicts that the development of video technology will jeopardize the elitist position of traditional filmmakers and enable some sort of mass film production: an art of the people. Like the economy of poor images, imperfect cinema diminishes the distinctions between author and audience and merges life and art. Most of all, its visuality is resolutely compromised: blurred, amateurish, and full of artifacts.

In some way, the economy of poor images corresponds to the description of imperfect cinema, while the description of perfect cinema represents rather the concept of cinema as a flagship store. But the real and contemporary imperfect cinema is also much more ambivalent and affective than Espinosa had anticipated. On the one hand, the economy of poor images, with its immediate possibility of worldwide distribution and its ethics of remix and appropriation, enables the participation of a much larger group of producers than ever before. But this does not mean that these opportunities are only used for progressive ends. Hate speech, spam, and other rubbish make their way through digital connections as well. Digital communication has also become one of the most contested markets—a zone that has long been subjected to an ongoing original accumulation and to massive (and, to a certain extent, successful) attempts at privatization.

The networks in which poor images circulate thus constitute both a platform for a fragile new common interest and a battleground for commercial and national agendas. They contain experimental and artistic material, but also incredible amounts of porn and paranoia. While the territory of poor images allows access to excluded imagery, it is also permeated by the most advanced commodification techniques. While it enables the users' active participation in the creation and distribution of content, it also drafts them into production. Users become the editors, critics, translators, and (co-)authors of poor images.

Poor images are thus popular images—images that can be made and seen by the many. They express all the contradictions of the contemporary crowd: its opportunism, narcissism, desire for autonomy and creation, its inability to focus or make up its mind, its constant readiness for transgression and simultaneous submission.<sup>9</sup> Altogether, poor images present a snapshot of the affective condition of the crowd, its neurosis, paranoia, and fear, as well as its craving for intensity, fun, and distraction. The condition of the images speaks not only of countless transfers and reformattings, but also of the countless people who cared enough about them to convert them over and over again, to add subtitles, reedit, or upload them.

In this light, perhaps one has to redefine the value of the image, or, more precisely, to create a new perspective for it. Apart from resolution and exchange value, one might imagine another form of value defined by velocity, intensity, and spread. Poor images are poor because they are heavily compressed and travel quickly. They lose matter and gain speed. But they also express a condition of dematerialization, shared not only with the legacy of conceptual art but above all with contemporary modes of semiotic production.<sup>10</sup> Capital's semiotic turn, as described by Felix Guattari,<sup>11</sup> plays in favor of the creation and dissemination of compressed and flexible data packages that can be integrated into ever-newer combinations and sequences.<sup>12</sup>

This flattening-out of visual content—the concept-in-

## RE-VALUE SYSTEM

Peter Lang, 2008

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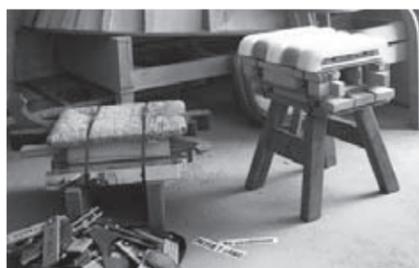
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**C.** MIS-MATCHED, RE-TOOLED PARTS AND EQUIPMENT, AS WELL AS PREVIOUSLY FETISHIZED SIGNATURE UNITS ARE PROCESSED INTO NEW RE-VALUED DESIGN UNITS.

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**E.** NEW RE-EVALUED DESIGN ELEMENT IS BRANDED WITH A SEAL OF RE-VALUE.

**F.** NEW RE-VALUED DESIGN ELEMENTS EXITS MIS-ASSEMBLY LINE AND IS INTRODUCED INTO THE NEW ECONOMY SYSTEM.



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becoming of the images—positions them within a general informational turn, within economies of knowledge that tear images and their captions out of context into the swirl of permanent capitalist deterritorialization.<sup>13</sup> The history of conceptual art describes this dematerialization of the art object first as a resistant move against the fetish value of visibility. Then, however, the dematerialized art object turns out to be perfectly adapted to the semioticization of capital, and thus to the conceptual turn of capitalism.<sup>14</sup> In a way, the poor image is subject to a similar tension. On the one hand, it operates against the fetish value of high resolution. On the other hand, this is precisely why it also ends up being perfectly integrated into an information capitalism thriving on compressed attention spans, on impression rather than immersion, on intensity rather than contemplation, on previews rather than screenings.

5. Comrade, what is your visual bond today? But, simultaneously, a paradoxical reversal happens. The circulation of poor images creates a circuit, which fulfills the original ambitions of militant and (some) essayistic and experimental cinema—to create an alternative economy of images, an imperfect cinema existing inside as well as beyond and under commercial media streams. In the age of file-sharing, even marginalized content circulates again and reconnects dispersed worldwide audiences.

The poor image thus constructs anonymous global networks just as it creates a shared history. It builds alliances as it travels, provokes translation or mistranslation, and creates new publics and debates. By losing its visual substance it recovers some of its political punch and creates a new aura around it. This aura is no longer based on the permanence of the “original,” but on the transience of the copy. It is no longer anchored within a classical public sphere mediated and supported by the frame of the nation state or corporation, but floats on the surface of temporary and dubious data pools.<sup>15</sup> By drifting away from the vaults of cinema, it is propelled onto new and ephemeral screens stitched together by the desires of dispersed spectators.

The circulation of poor images thus creates “visual bonds,” as Dziga Vertov once called them.<sup>16</sup> This “visual bond” was, according to Vertov, supposed to link the workers of the world with each other.<sup>17</sup> He imagined a sort of communist, visual, Adamic language that could not

only inform or entertain, but also organize its viewers. In a sense, his dream has come true, if mostly under the rule of a global information capitalism whose audiences are linked almost in a physical sense by mutual excitement, affective attunement, and anxiety.

But there is also the circulation and production of poor images based on cell phone cameras, home computers, and unconventional forms of distribution. Its optical connections—collective editing, file sharing, or grassroots distribution circuits—reveal erratic and coincidental links between producers everywhere, which simultaneously constitute dispersed audiences.

The circulation of poor images feeds into both capitalist media assembly lines and alternative audiovisual economies. In addition to a lot of confusion and stupefaction, it also possibly creates disruptive movements of thought and affect. The circulation of poor images thus initiates another chapter in the historical genealogy of nonconformist information circuits: Vertov’s “visual bonds,” the internationalist workers pedagogies that Peter Weiss described in *The Aesthetics of Resistance*, the circuits of Third Cinema and Tricontinentalism, of non-aligned filmmaking and thinking. The poor image—ambivalent as its status may be—thus takes its place in the genealogy of carbon-copied pamphlets, cine-train agit-prop films, underground video magazines and other nonconformist materials, which aesthetically often used poor materials. Moreover, it reactualizes many of the historical ideas associated with these circuits, among others Vertov’s idea of the visual bond.

Imagine somebody from the past with a beret asking you, “Comrade, what is your visual bond today?” You might answer: it is this link to the present.

6. Now! The poor image embodies the afterlife of many former masterpieces of cinema and video art. It has been expelled from the sheltered paradise that cinema seems to have once been.<sup>18</sup> After being kicked out of the protected and often protectionist arena of national culture, discarded from commercial circulation, these works have become travelers in a digital no-man’s land, constantly shifting their resolution and format, speed and media, sometimes even losing names and credits along the way.

Now many of these works are back—as poor images, I admit. One could of course argue that this is not the real thing, but then—please, anybody—show me this real thing.

The poor image is no longer about the real thing—the originary original. Instead, it is about its own real conditions of existence: about swarm circulation, digital dispersion, fractured and flexible temporalities. It is about defiance and appropriation just as it is about conformism and exploitation.

In short: it is about reality. ■

<sup>1</sup> Deconstructing Harry, directed by Woody Allen (1997).  
<sup>2</sup> “Wer Gemälde wirklich sehen will, geht ja schließlich auch ins Museum,” Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, June 14, 2007. Conversation between Harun Farocki and Alexander Horwath.  
<sup>3</sup> Sven Lütticken’s excellent text “Viewing Copies: On the Mobility of Moving Images,” in *e-flux journal*, no. 8 (May 2009), drew my attention to this aspect of poor images.  
<sup>4</sup> Thanks to Kodwo Eshun for pointing this out.  
<sup>5</sup> Of course in some cases images with low resolution also appear in mainstream media environments (mainly news), where they are associated with urgency, immediacy, and catastrophe—and are extremely valuable. See Hito Steyerl, “Documentary Uncertainty,” *A Prior* 15 (2007).  
<sup>6</sup> Hito Steyerl, “Politics of the Archive: Translations in Film,” *Transversal* (March 2008).  
<sup>7</sup> From correspondence with the author via e-mail.  
<sup>8</sup> Julio García Espinosa, “For an Imperfect Cinema,” trans. Julianne Burton, *Jump Cut*, no. 20 (1979): 24–26.  
<sup>9</sup> See Paolo Virno, *A Grammar of the Multitude: For an Analysis of Contemporary Forms of Life* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2004).  
<sup>10</sup> See Alex Alberro, *Conceptual Art and the Politics of Publicity* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2003).  
<sup>11</sup> See Félix Guattari, “Capital as the Integral of Power Formations,” in *Soft Subversions* (New York: Semiotext(e), 1996), 202.  
<sup>12</sup> All these developments are discussed in detail in an excellent text by Simon Sheikh, “Objects of Study or Commodification of Knowledge? Remarks on Artistic Research,” *Art & Research* 2, no. 2 (Spring 2009).  
<sup>13</sup> See also Alan Sekula, “Reading an Archive: Photography between Labour and Capital,” in *Visual Culture: The Reader*, ed. Stuart Hall and Jessica Evans (London/ New York: Routledge 1999), 181–192.  
<sup>14</sup> See Alberro, *Conceptual Art and the Politics of Publicity*.  
<sup>15</sup> The Pirate Bay even seems to have tried acquiring the extraterritorial oil platform of Sealand in order to install its servers there. See Jan Libbenga, “The Pirate Bay plans to buy Sealand,” *The Register*, January 12, 2007.  
<sup>16</sup> Dziga Vertov, “Kinopravda and Radiopravda,” in *Kino-Eye: The Writings of Dziga Vertov*, ed. Annette Michelson (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 52.  
<sup>17</sup> Vertov, “Kinopravda and Radiopravda,” 52.  
<sup>18</sup> At least from the perspective of nostalgic delusion.

An earlier version of this text was improvised in a response at the “Essayfilm—Ästhetik und Aktualität” conference in Lüneburg, Germany, organized by Thomas Tode and Sven Kramer in 2007. The text benefitted tremendously from the remarks and comments of Third Text guest editor Kodwo Eshun, who commissioned a longer version for an issue of Third Text on Chris Marker and Third Cinema to appear in 2010 (co-edited by Ros Grey). Another substantial inspiration for this text was the exhibition “Dispersion” at the ICA in London (curated by Polly Staple in 2008), which included a brilliant reader edited by Staple and Richard Birkett. The text also benefitted greatly from Brian Kuan Wood’s editorial work. It was published, in its current form, in *e-flux journal* no. 10, November 2009.

REPRINT in defense of the poor image / hito.steyerl



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remain in a condition of partial concealment. The individual's gaze is pressed too close to them to acquire a full picture. His field of vision is saturated by one or a limited number of the objects' qualities or potentials. Need pushes him up against the capabilities in the objects that will assuage it. If someone has to urgently figure out how to carry all his supplies from office building to office building as he washes cars now that he's been laid off from the supermarket, the milk crate's metric precision in relation to the delivery truck will be relegated to a blurred edge of his field of vision, if not simply obviated altogether. Need determines what is useful or adequate at that moment. For an individual in a condition in which survival has become a predicament, a bucket is simply a body of condensed physical qualities, a bunch of physical "morphemes," a complex library of connections, information to be applied, and always in light of a problem demanding immediate solution. Interpretation and consideration of the object as such is minimal. Hardship engenders urgent relationships of functionality and unbinds an ineluctability that, like the ineluctability that makes the crate-in-the-flow an indivisible informational assemblage, possesses the individual to drag generic objects to the ravine of survival. Impossible to plot within moral and rhetorical universes, use is justified solely by its effectiveness in alleviating the need that determined the kind of engagement with the object that was possible in the first place.

9. Imagine two adjacent spheres--one the flow of generic objects; the other the realm of human activity in the city. Occasionally, their edges make contact and the flow releases elements. This is how we come to see just outside a bodega a group of milk crates trapped tangentially by human need and intuitive ingenuity. They've become chairs in a domino game, a display structure for a handful of sugarcans, the base of the water vendor's cooler at the stop light, the "mobile unit" of a car washer working in the empty lot next door. The transient nature of these activities always threatens to return the object to its urban drifting along with the leaves blowing on the sidewalks. The abbreviation of the object in the littoral finds a counterpart in the provisional quality it takes on as solution or appeasement. If an object that can provide a better solution appears, the original one will surely be discarded. The object is recognized as always a temporary substitute. A rock that serves as a doorstop finds a homologue in a bucket full of water. A kind of non-rhetorical analogy happens. Oxymoronic as the term sounds, it is intended to designate the results of a comparative gesture that pivots on the *performance and potential of objects* and not on their physical or conceptual similarities; that is, on typologies of use and not of objects. In fact, since both rock and bucket are structured by abstract forces--natural processes in one case and super optimized industry on the other--they find themselves in this context without any affective mnemonic dimension or symbolic baggage. It is their mobilization as pure information that allows them to be interchangeable.

10. All this is not to say that solutions aren't repeated, that a bank of local knowledge doesn't accumulate and grow in the littoral. It is to say, rather, that the transfer of solutions out of their immediate moment of linking need to potential is incidental, even if highly significant. Contingent relationships are stabilized as recurring solutions, folded into a common and shareable repertoire. Future users can draw on it. This is where experience, repetition, and habit enter the frame and fortify the temporary repertoires of new activities in which generic objects engage.

11. So, to recap, at least three situations in which the generic object finds itself: 1) in the flow it is manufactured for; 2) in the littoral where need determines use and the generic object, due to the very conditions in which it functions, recoils from rhetorical manipulation; 3) in a space of symbolic production (culture, design disciplines). Different standards of values and criteria of competence are prominent in each situation. The first and second situations, flow and littoral, seem determined by a certain ineluctability--the flow by the autism that propels the avalanche of optimal production; the littoral by the forces that cut through the individual in precarious situations. In both situations the milk crate is treated less as an object per se than as information. In a cultural environment the milk crate is understood as a sublimated representation of the other two situations.

A relation to the object seems, then, to be determined by the situation in which it is encountered: a prohibitive and prohibited one in the flow; a performative one, guided by need and survival, in the littoral; and a rhetorical one in cultural spaces.

12. In the last of these situations, in cultural spaces and within design disciplines, when the question arises of what to do with generic objects, analogy (in a rhetorical sense) has proven the easiest answer. Turn the bucket over and it becomes the lampshade it always looked like. Cut out holes in the shipping container and it becomes the shed it always suggested. But these easy analogies (*easy* because they lack that *leap across deep divides and the magic of conjoining seeming incommensurables* that rich analogies thrive on) always seem like efforts to retract the generic artifact from its condition as nondescript and anonymous. It's a way to lay a designer's branding on a thing that was circulating in the world fine without it. The appeal to the obvious, to what the object was already suggesting, is a thinly veiled pretense to rescue the generic from its dreadfully flat world of sameness by pulling it onto the lifeboat of differentiated artifacts.

13. Easy analogies treat the generic less as a resource than as a topic. The mundane artifact is infused with (saved by?) the designer's "intelligence." And the designer is celebrated for his or her resourcefulness, DIY politics, poetics of the quotidian, critiques of the commodity system, imperative to recycle and understanding of the demands of sustainability. The rapport established narrows and hinders, though, while supposedly doing the very opposite. It's too quick to subsume the object's productive potential into a set of familiar typologies. It treats the object as *only* its meanings and manifested physical traits. What is most interesting about the generic quality is that it clarifies objects as compressed and manipulable energy and information, free of that magical cloak of meaning and added value in which the fairy dust of sanctioned creativity can wrap them.

14. More interesting may be to place these generic objects in scenarios in which they are confronted with "deformative" forces--forces that will "torque" them. These twisting forces can be ushered in by applying unexpected protocols to a situation, plugging a vector that is usually absent from the contexts in which generic objects function, or plotting generic objects within the coordinates of a program that is alien to them. It's not, then, a matter of working against the traits inherent to generic objects, of making a bucket or a milk crate do the work of established furniture and architectural typologies as an ultimate productive horizon. On the contrary, it's about the inherent capacities of the objects. These give discipline to the experiment. If the bucket or the container is stackable, what possibilities does this stackability open up when an unexpected demand is put to it, when a tiny catastrophe (in Thom's sense) makes it swerve off course? What does its modularity permit beyond the functions and contexts it was designed for? What can be done with the object's portability, with the fact that it's structured to couple with a large array of other artifacts (say, in the case of the container, the cranes that can be found in ports across the planet)?

Or else: What are the unintended consequences of the artifact's design and how does one smoke them out and have them reveal their potential? How can new options be inserted in the seemingly closed systems in which these objects function? How are these systems rendered sites of potential and unexpected plasticity? How is topographical instability introduced into a flattened pattern of uses? What can be done about the unexpected uses that these objects are already being put to but can't perform in the same optimal way that they perform the functions they were designed for? Can additions, joints, inserts, or deformed clones be produced which enlarge the range of their functions and generate new systems that they can become basic building blocks for? One starts to look for ways to tap into these objects' pregnant infrazones, seeking latent potentialities. One attempts to tease aberrant forms from the object's "natural" tendencies through uncommon modulations and feels for points of malleability or "holes" in the pattern that was consolidated during the original processes of design and applies pressure there.

15. It may take temporarily padlocking the studio to think the generic in this way. To turn a bucket over or bore a few windows on the walls of a container is a *perfectly reasonable solution to a problem* in the end. It is the work one is supposed to be doing. But it comes at the cost of ignoring what is truly amazing about the generic: that it functions in relation to a series of forces; that it is always part of a field of interconnecting vectors; that to think it, to really think it, is to think in terms of large, nearly unfathomable landscapes. The generic is globalization's inevitable "aesthetic"--the quality that is dominant in the objects that seem most at home in it, most comfortably bound to

massive and invisible materialities and networks.

The scuffed bucket in which we keep our clay-stained baseballs is like Calvino's suburban trashcan: the mirage that it is a self-contained artifact, dumbly sitting there, an entity independent from the world swirling around it, quickly evaporates. The object begins to unfold as a pattern compressed out of a series of relationships that bind it, irrevocably, to infrastructural circuits, economic pressures and social contracts. In Calvino's trashcan the city's entire infrastructure of garbage collection and management--not to mention the amounts of energy, accumulated knowledge, and economic demands that lead to its particular morphology--is inscribed. It was inscribed even when the object was still a shiny new wastebasket on the vendor's shelf. Bound up in it, like virtual ribbons of data, have always been all the networks and all the vectors that it will course through--all the systems of design and production it is the result of as well as all the systems of distribution and storage it is made to be a part of. Understanding how this is already so fantastically complex, so much better than producing a new lamp or a new shed, than turning out a new variant on a typology in the same way that these have been turned out so many times, one looks to apply new pressures and invent unexpected scenarios until "aberrant" and novel functions in generic objects are set free. ■

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