

THESE BITCHES ACT LOCAL AND THINK GLOBAL

The Red and The Black already happened. In the 19th century, when it was born. In the 20th century, when it was adapted repeatedly for the screen. And in the 21st century, when it has become both Venice Biennale exhibition and chapter title — Reena Spaulings reminds us that reading is work that never ends, and that “narration is war”.

The latest iteration took place in the LES, a block from the now-canonized Dimes Square, on the eve of Fashion Week at a nascent gallery that has not yet garnered reviews in any reputable publications (though an editor of a Saudi-owned rag has swooned in Instagram comments). Only a mention in a New York Times report on a “Lower Manhattan Art Crowd Party” celebrating a new digital publication — a direct result of the impactless clout economy that governs legacy media in the age of the algorithm — whose web designer runs the space. Contemporary Hypebeast Shit.

While reduxing the aesthetics of once-trendy trend forecasts detournements of the early 2010s, the latest issue republishes a DIS press release from the Berlin Biennale in 2016, which laments the “unknowable, unpredictable, and incomprehensible” present. The echo of this sentiment can be heard in the final words of *Twin Peaks: The Return*, as Dale Cooper urgently asks, “What year is this”, only to be answered by a haunting scream. The framing of this question presents the problem — that *The Year* is no longer relevant, having been subsumed by *Machine Time* — and its solution — to read the present of the machines.

The Internet is a machinic text, churning out (re-)presentations of realities while doubling as a hyperstitional entity that can accelerate cycles of action. It’s impossible for a human to read it in its entirety — this can only be done by machines. A month ago, Philadelphia artists NR Boor and Ot7Quanny released “Press That Button”, in which the latter raps: “She said she need a couple bands, that’s gon’ be easy for me / I told her leave her AirPods at his house, then she can keep the money / Once that location lands, you know he be done”. This method to carry out a hit only became possible in the last two years — when Apple enabled GPS tracking to help users find their lost Bluetooth headphones.

Your friend hits you up, asking if you want to do a show with him. He’s able to do the show because of a series of dominoes falling that include beef, clout, and reconciliation. It’s very New York in the same way that a show can exist. When the gallery announces the show, they say it’s in collaboration with the project space that he runs. This isn’t the case. He texts them to correct it. He texts you “these bitches act global but think local”. It’s not exactly the line from *Love No Thotties*, so you wrestle with what acting/thinking local/global encompasses for a while. They also called the event happening in the middle of the exhibition an “Opening” — that’s corrected too, because nothing in that location was Opening.

You’re ambivalent about the show, no real inclination to show any of the video work you’ve “actually” made. You figure fuck it, because it’s sick to show with your bro, there’s free alcohol and an excuse to get some friends together and also friends of friends and those people’s friends in turn and then you’re at the event and there’s a lot of people you know and don’t know there it’s a nice time and the next day a different friend tweets from his burner account about how art is about getting free beer with your friends. He studied mechanical engineering and has never heard of Cyprien Galliard or Rikrit Tiravani-ja, but doesn’t care about stacking signifiers, and he 3-D printed you a pair of shutter shades that you leave at a pizza restaurant later that night. People take pictures of you in them before they’re lost.

A few months ago, after artists from the Shanghai-based *Genome 6.66* played *Oil Club* in Shenzhen, you scoured YouTube for footage of the club, discovering the account *BeckyVlogs*. Becky became Becky because she wanted to reach the West. She speaks in English to the camera. She uses a VPN to bypass the Great Firewall of China to upload her videos to the Western Internet. She shoots horizontally, instead of using the vertical framing native to Douyin videos or Shanshui paintings. You take some of her vlogs and squish them into a vertical frame. They play on loop for a week in Chinatown, while mostly white people enter the gallery space, and the occasional Chinese person lingers outside for a moment before departing, sometimes with a scowl, other times with a confused face.

The method will become virus and replicate — YouTube’s analytics show that this is the most popular part of the song. The song only officially exists as a music video. The artists don’t bother uploading to any streaming services that could serve to monetize the digital file, though fans bootleg uploads onto them anyway. The video transmits images of a pile of money in a hall lit by chandeliers, designer clothing, expensive jewelry, and pharmaceutical drugs — images of an Art World, in a sense much truer than that of any white cube striving for editorial recognition. “Press That Button” is an Opening, a change-over point in reality that stands in stark contrast to the uniformed conferences that sporadically manifest hallucinations of Worlds, with complimentary drinks and subsidized drugs cut from white cubes. There’s a reason Bernadette Corporation just started making Earthworks with coins when rappers have been drawing with money for years (see 50 Cent, Soulja Boy, Lil Durk, Verde Babii, Hotboii). There is an Event, which is made Image, and the image circulates.



In the 1960s, Dan Graham brought attention to art operating like a science, relying on being written about and having images reproduced in magazines for work to be recognized, which was reintroduced to our contemporary corpus via Seth Price’s Dispersion. Time changes, and with it, memory changes. We need reminders to stop us from forgetting forgetting. The time before our algorithmic time gets reduced to a fading memory (see French Montana’s “They Got Amnesia”), and today we witness an inversion, that of science becoming art, as the “art” of decades past remains shackled to insolvent publications, vanity projects, and affiliate marketing schemes. This inversion takes place everywhere, yet we can locate its genesis as the San Francisco Bay Area, where technological innovation in the name of progress shapes the machinic text that governs the daily lives of virtually every individual in the world. This is a region built by the military and inherited by venture capitalists.

The white guy who runs the space tells you how much he loves sitting with the piece throughout the day. Becky soundtracked most of the vlogs with Crystal Castles. They probably never got cancelled in China. You wonder how big their page is on Weibo, drift to thinking about Jack Ma, and then the impending war over computation. Oh My God What Happened To Jack Ma. Oh My God What Happened To Taiwan.



Last year you took the train to Harlem to see Jafa’s The White Album at a temporary auxiliary location of Gladstone Gallery. Outside, there was an old black man yelling at another person on the street about how even when things are free there’s a cost. He wasn’t happy about the exhibition and clearly felt no desire to go inside. But you brought him in with you and after you sat with the piece, you and your homie went around the corner to Sylvia’s for some soul food, then took the train back to Bushwick. Jafa also took clips from the internet but it’s different because even if the Chinese in Chinatown were about upset the piece, who would hear or understand them? When your friend sent the piece to the people running the gallery they were concerned — neither of them spoke Chinese and were new to the neighborhood. The night of the event you notice that the awning above the entrance still has a Chinese business on it. The gallerists’ worries about the piece are quickly assuaged when they found out you weren’t white. You figure that’s what they’re teaching at CCS Bard these days.

After the event, a clothing pop-up moves into the gallery along with your work. It’s there for the last two days of the show, for fashion week. You aren’t happy about it but again it’s like fuck it. The bullshit is the point. Maybe the fashion week shoppers of emphatically “Made In America” goods can appreciate distorted Chinese vlogs. But you’re not at the show at this point, you’re visiting the galleries of the Upper East Side — proper businesses moving wealth, not passion-subsidized fronts — and walk into Gagosian to see a Cy Twombly show.

Knowledge of Lacan, Adorno, and Deleuze carries little weight; instead, value lies in Girard (via Thiel), NRx (Land and Moldbug), the AGI thinkers (Less Wrong blog posts, EA, Longtermism), Balaji and The Network State — just like the New York of Reena Spaulings, reading, here, is work of the utmost importance. The ideas of these thinkers govern the engineers who create the algorithms that feed the world its daily doses of data, shaping our aesthetic experiences in such a way that we don't even realize them as such.

A few dozen designers shaping how we interact with reality-altering technologies. There is no easily delineated point of start or stop to the work, nor a geography of where it operates — we struggle with how when works when our culture's prior concept of Time diminishes with every passing moment. The present moment plunges us into Bing, ChatGPT, and other LLM-based interfaces (Courtesy of OpenAI and the flows of Effective Altruist money) showing us the beginning of non-human alien intelligences. Yet, rewind the clock slightly and treat the arrival of rideshares like WWI and MadeInTYO's "Uber Everywhere" like a Marinetti poem. The work is not done by publishing journal studies, but by making available to the public technologies that warp the way of living into possibilities unimaginable only a few years prior. Perhaps an analog exists in examining entropy as it functioned in the works of Robert Smithson. Just as documentation of Glue Pour fails to exactly capture the aesthetic experience of watching Glue Pour, and the essay and film titled Spiral Jetty fail to capture the earthwork Spiral Jetty, so does any document that is a relic of spiraljetta fails to fully encompass what spiraljetta has meant in 2022 and in 2023. "You had to be there" — it's like Yung Bans in 2018, or how listening to ppgcscr's "Pretty Face" and "Paris Hilton" feels so different in 2023 vs. 2019, or how AyooLii, Maz G, Renzo, Samson2Slapped, Judah, Ad Huncho, and Fear-dorian's "Skatepark" has already become a classic after being out for 3 weeks. Land Art, or Landscape Art, lost its land, becoming (e)-scape Art.

The Internet serves as an exit hatch, just as the now art-colonized Marfa did for Judd, formalizing a flow that can be seen today. Now Hans Ulrich Obrist says that video games are revolutionizing "the art world" — what does this mean for the games of eons past: the Farmvilles of Zynga and Facebook, the Adobe Flash games left to decompose in digital rot, the Flappy Birds removed from the app store because of their addictive quality? There was a moment when Paper Toss was a digital experience par excellence,

Every gallery assistant is Black and dripped out in tailored designer suits because Antwaun Sargent is the director. You call it "Black Gagosian" later, confusing a friend who at first thinks you're talking about 52 Walker. It was a disorienting experience, maybe that's the point. Days later you get an email and see that Sargent has a collaboration with Helmut Lang that exhibits at Hannah Traore Gallery, "a space which committed to advocating for and celebrating artists who have been historically marginalized from the mainstream narrative". It's a group show, you recognize American Artist, and scroll thru the merch for sale. Art is commerce is Art; you wonder if anything from this show will fetch prices even comparable to the Sargent-directed "Figures of Speech" Virgil Abloh show at the Brooklyn Museum.



You think about how art, in this context, is a historically Western concept, how Diderot brought forth art criticism in France, how Ruskin brought it forth in England, how Virgil wanted to frame streetwear as an art movement and create work for both "the purist" and "the tourist". There are artists imagining decolonized art worlds, artists recolonizing art worlds, artists envisioning alternative histories, alternative futures, post-futures, colonies, post-colonies, imaginations, post-imaginings, post-paginations, your mind drifts to an upcoming Urbanomic publication — an English translation of Hiroki Azuma's Philosophy of the Tourist. Last summer you were in Shravanabelagola, a small village in Karnataka, where on top of a hill is a temple, and within that temple complex the Gom-mateshwara Statue, a monolith carved out of granite that if made today would be "site-specific installation", but because it's from over a millennium ago it just is, and because they could never figure out how to remove it and bring it to a museum like the coffins you saw in the Louvre Abu Dhabi, it never became Art.

when simple apps meant to simulate Zippo lighters and drinking beer were revelatory experiences brought constantly into daily life. In the 1950s, Barthes wrote about how The New Citroen was the new Gothic cathedral; today we live amongst digital churches with hidden entrances, though if one enters into them, they can get lost forever. But the Notre Dame burned into a bastard state, the Citroens rusted away into parts, and there's an infinite number of 0's and 1's that don't mean anything anymore. There will only be more loss.

So where does Art occur today? "Swag Like Ohio", a deep cut Lil B track from 2010, resurfaced on TikTok towards the end of 2022, becoming a viral track that dominated the feeds of users. Let's situate in the Midwest and go back before the White Noise of East Palestine in recent weeks, only just a little further to the Front Triennial during the summer of 2022. Where nothing happened— just Pace Gallery loaning out a few Yoshitomo Nara's, a Tony Cokes video courtesy of a slew of institutions, a commissioned Cory Arcangel piece that ends up online in the form of an automated Twitter bot posting generative music scores — all of this, just as the Kia Boyz rose to prominence in Milwaukee, which has bubbled into Rolling Stone through the music of Certified Trapper and AyooLii. Of course, a Rolling Stone article means little in 2023 besides a screenshot to share in preexisting networks. The piece reports on Milwaukee music taking over TikTok, but what really took over TikTok was methods how to steal cars and the audiovisual documents that then followed this cultural movement. YouTube channels and TikTok accounts of youths swerving Kia Souls and Fortes to the Four-on-the-floor clap of Milwaukee music. Music made for bodies to twerk to, turned to music to swerve cars to; or Real Dangerous Art, for those demanding such a fetishized concept.



And you think about how days after your show, Bloodzboi, a Soundcloud rapper in China cut the characters 我是好人 into his forearm and posted a picture on Twitter. The characters translate to "I am good people". He's deleted the post but you have a screenshot. He also has to use a VPN to get past the Chinese firewall, same as Becky. His social media in the country has been banned, he thinks his music is going to be taken down. The blood reminds you of Farocki burning himself with a cigarette in The Inextinguishable Fire, but also of the cost of things that must be paid for. It's crazy that people fuck with Ai Weiwei like that. Do they even really though?



A week later and you're back in West Oakland. There's a store down the block from the windowless room in the warehouse you're renting that you decide you stop into — inside are white walls and not enough books or records for sale to cover their rent. It doesn't matter, they're only open on weekends. It fucks with you — white guy behind the counter who runs the place, Master P cassettes, Drexciya and Mac Dre vinyls, books about Gordon Matta Clark, David Hammons, even the screenplay to the new Martine Syms film — because you leave the white walls and walk around the corner to a lady smoking crack. Later when you're in San Francisco you see a man shitting on the sidewalk, bent over, trying to wipe his ass in a drugged-out daze. This is where it all happens — blocks away are houses exclusive to esteemed members of the AI industry. The artist residencies with the most significant barrier to entry. You feel so fucked. You message your plug on Signal, but he never responds. You look up the store and see that they follow the gallery you showed at. You wonder why they don't sell clothing too.



One of the strongest pieces is relatively authorless: the cover art to a Soundcloud reupload of RTM lilsixx's "high speed music", ripped from YouTube by Łowëñd Màri. The image has no ascribed source — it's just a screenshot of an Instagram story of someone behind the wheel of a stolen Hyundai. The futureless youths of the Midwest decided that it was their time: to steal Kias and Hyundais with nothing but screwdrivers and USB cables, to drift and crash them throughout the city, to revolt against the current state of being in a way far more powerful than any artist working within the confines of the museum or gallery. It's the antithesis of Theaster Gates, perhaps synthesized with Mwazulu Diyabanza. The detritus goes viral across the Internet — through the music, TikToks, Youtube Compilations, Police Dash Cam footage, it all recirculates and then dies. A sun is birthed, a flame engulfs a moment of Everything, and then there is Nothing. It's Everyday Bro.

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Clearly Sargent has the better idea. Honestly it's pretty based — exorbitantly raise the values of Black Artists, get Rich White People to pay for it, everyone wins. They can flip the investment for double in another decade. Maybe Sargent is the greatest artist of all. Bending the world to his will. There was a time when writing was a way to transform reality — it still is, though creating texts is far from the most efficient way to do so. Creating images is a step up, but creating systems and apparatuses — that's where the mechanism really lies, that's what Sargent has done. The pen was mightier than the sword because it could inscribe computation, both mathematically and non-mathematically. We're on the brink of a war for computation, and still you're writing words. If words cannot transform reality, there is the slight chance that they can exist as a historical record, a piece of the past for a post-future to decipher. A webpage to be printed and preserved, if deemed valuable, to be turned from zeroes and ones into ink and paper. These Bitches Think Local And Act Global. Who the fuck are you?



Additional Readings:

<https://www.artforum.com/print/reviews/201106/andrei-molodkin-39170>

<https://web.archive.org/web/20230212175428/https://tripleampersand.org/dimes-essence-gardeners-creative/>

<https://www.nytimes.com/2023/01/25/style/paradigm-trilogy-party.html>

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R36ww3q7nqE&ab_channel=dipboyuploads

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<https://www.instagram.com/p/CoWDsE8rnML/>

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<https://www.artforum.com/print/197407/contemporary-art-and-the-plight-of-the-public-a-view-from-the-new-york-hilton-37356>

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