Editorial

There is a certain plasticity of meaning inherent in any use of language. If that weren't the case, poetry and literature would not exist. There would only be contracts, scientific formulas, shopping lists, and so forth. Journalism would be properly factual—there would be no fake news or disinformation. All utterances would document isolated events, never evoking larger patterns or tapping into hidden desires. But then the question arises: Even if language could be cleansed of all ambiguity and spin, what role would images play?

If language is the problem, images can only be worse. Against a backdrop where postmodern slippages in language and image have been so efficiently weaponized by right-wing populists, it would be a huge mistake to imagine a good old time when language was honest and images just showed what was there. Not only because this time never existed—and would be a lucrative right-wing fantasy to concoct on its own—but because all of the creative power of language and image lies precisely in this fold. Even by 1919, Dada was in full swing. Now, just as then, the perversion of autocratic power triggers a kind of absurdist, perverse artistic response.

In the 103rd issue of *e-flux journal*, the artist collective Metahaven excavates the power and danger, and sometimes failure, of metaphor, metonymy, and allegory, among other linguistic devices. Their essay "Sleep Walks the Street, Part I" considers Victor Klemperer's tracing of the rapid proliferation of Nazi language in everyday German life, side by side with contemporary terminology from the Dutch far right, such as the word *klimaatminaretten* ("climate minarets"), which collapses at least two layers of denial and xenophobia/Islamophobia into a few syllables. In the next installment of this essay, Metahaven will look into a certain tradition of "absurdist" Russian poetry.

One hundred years after the founding of the Communist International, facing a growing, transnational neofascist movement, Sven Lütticken calls not for absurdism but for the building of a new, anti-capitalist and anti-fascist International—or, rather, a "Terrestrial." This coalition of survivances, urges Lütticken, could eventually become a real source of political strength and action. Lütticken asks whether our current organizational structures could nurture an infant Terrestrial—very much among them the art world, where international finance capital roams free. Lütticken writes that a movement such as a Terrestrial must confront and work with the "all-too-human mutants and monsters of actually existing capitalism." This proposition of a Terrestrial is not dadaist, nor absurdist, and Lütticken positions this line of thinking directly against Situationism. It works to unravel how power is constituted and invoked.

Also in this October issue, Elvia Wilk sinks into the world of vampire "larping"—as well as other kinds of "live-action role-playing"—with consideration for the kind of detailed

discussions of consent and recognition that allow for this kind of serious play. Larping is perhaps able to suggest the possibility of some new forms of temporary autonomy, but nevertheless accountable and consensual ones that use fictions to address our world.

Meanwhile, iLiana Fokianaki delves into the increasingly alarming contemporary condition of narcissistic authoritarian statism. She begins her study with a parable from Julio Cortázar's 1951 story "Casa Tomada," in which a group of siblings inherits a mansion. Plagued by growing paranoia that "others" are inhabiting the house's many rooms, they close off and relinquish room after room to "them," finally abandoning the whole inheritance. Fokianaki relates this to the political situation of today, and examines several artists whose work offers real retorts to this statist condition.

Aaron Schuster turns his focus towards Ernst Lubitch's 1939 romantic comedy *Ninotchka*, relaying how the film had a profound effect on, for example, the 1948 Italian elections. Schuster zooms in on Greta Garbo's laugh and Lubitch's use of certain kinds of humor, showing the ideological complexities contained in its comedy and meta-comedy, its historically symbolic imagery, and its light-handed decomposition of Soviet communism. Despite the fact that the film was turned into anti-communist propaganda, Schuster writes that "many of the film's best jokes are directed against capitalists and aristocrats."

Curator Claire Tancons and artist Peter Friedl hold a conversation about theater, neutralizing curators, postcolonialism, and contemporary art as a prison in laying out a "Portrait of the Artist as a Dramatist." The two discuss Friedl's marionette works, starring, among others, Antonio Gramsci's wife, Julia Schucht. Friedl probes the concept of "resistance"—central to some currents of political discourse, and as Friedl maintains, long held as a property of contemporary art. But, he says, because of this, it's strange that contemporary art picks up the capitalist optimization of a certain kind of performance.

Jörg Heiser examines Adrian Piper's 2018 book *Escape to Berlin: A Travel Memoir*. Heiser details how, as shown in the memoir, Piper's decades-long battle with Wellesley College and self-imposed exile exemplifies the hostility of America's most "progressive" institutions to African-American artists and intellectuals. Heiser describes being drawn to Piper's work by the deadpan humor in several of her performances. This quality survives in Piper's work despite the growing difficulties she has faced, leading up to her decision to leave the US for good. Heiser points out that, at Wellesley, Piper became an American whistleblower for workplace abuses of power, and was punished for playing that role—a tradition that continues into the present.

And Cuauhtémoc Medina writes that Francisco Toledo, an artist whose work contained something of the absurd, and who died last month, fervently hated tributes. Toledo's work, spanning several decades, also spanned painting, sculpture, textile, surrealism, animism, eroticism, and so on. Medina writes that in recent years, with violent deaths rising in number across Mexico, Toledo created kites and clay funerary urns depicting the departed. In addition to his physical work, Toledo founded and maintained a series of cultural institutions—schools, libraries, museums—that transformed the city and state of Oaxaca. Medina maintains that as much as Toledo would have resisted memorialization, Mexicans have the right to mourn the late artist, who brought so much tangible good to a nation in desperate need of it.

—Editors

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