

Sous les Pavés, la Plage On Assumption and Authority

David Birkin

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'An Elephant Cannot Swallow a Hedgehog'
– Prague Spring slogan, 1968



David Birkin, *Severe Clear: Existence or Nonexistence*, 2014. Performance documentation.
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The invitation to contribute to Platform 010 came about as a result of an exhibition I staged at The Mosaic Rooms,^[1] a public gallery in London presenting contemporary art from and about the 'Arab world'. The show comprised a series of performances and photographic works centred around the so-called War on Terror, including the deployment of unmanned aerial vehicles (or 'drones') in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Yemen, Libya, and

Somalia by the United States military, as well as the counting of civilian casualties of the 2003 Iraq War, and the use of torture and indefinite detention at Guantánamo.[2] In addition to the exhibition, I invited a number of journalists, filmmakers, lawyers, and civil liberties advocates to expand the conversation through an ancillary programme of talks and screenings. At its core was a concern for how the western world fights its wars: the language that sustains them, the legal and ethical frameworks that underpin them, and the scopic regimes that govern their representation and consumption.

I'm not about to opine on the future of visual culture in a region that is actively engaged in defining its own discourse, distinct from a culturally hegemonic Eurocentric narrative. Nor will I presume to speak for anyone. What I would like to do, however, is to use this oddly mismatched assignment to think through some of the ways in which assumptions about expertise and professionalism impinge on ideas of legitimacy and authority – who is qualified to speak on a given subject, or in a given way – and try to envision how a freer and more fluid (one might even say ambitious) conception of what it means to be an artist could help strengthen alliances between cultural producers, by engendering a deeper awareness of political responsibility to one another in this globalized stage of late capitalism.

Arguing against the type of geographical coding that leads to generic curatorial groupings of 'Chinese art' and 'Arab art' (or worse, 'African art'), the sociologist and art critic Timo Kaabi-Linke observes how recent 'planetary civil movements outline a political consciousness that has been a prior ideal for a great many artists – the feeling of being part of one world,' adding that, while this may have begun as an Enlightenment paradigm (which was later developed into a powerful tool for criticism by writers like Frantz Fanon and Homi K. Bhabha), 'now for the 99 per cent – the majority of people on this planet – the pressure of existence has pushed it into being.'^[3]

To state my case from the outset: forms of categorization that essentialize a person's viewpoint are precisely the kinds of false distinctions which disempower their political voice. Put another way, when you question someone's legitimacy you undermine their responsibility, because if a person feels unqualified to advocate for a cause then they feel disqualified from the conversation, lending credence to the idea that it is somebody else's problem. For this reason, I think it's important to reject a myopia that reduces people to the circumstances of their own biography – with fixed categories of culture, class, profession, gender, or ethnicity becoming requisites for validating their voice – and instead work towards a greater sense of collectivity at this pivotal moment, when technological mediation has made peoples' atomised lives more proximate and yet, simultaneously, more remote.

This of course requires thinking constellationally (to borrow the writer and critic Teju Cole's phrase), by connecting the dots in a society that 'supports brutal policies in the morning, founds charities in the afternoon, and receives awards in the evening'.^[4] Otherwise, cultural production becomes readily recuperated by mainstream neoliberal ideology and ends up simply functioning as a release valve for 'the unbearable pressures that build in a system built on pillage' – so that famine is viewed as an immutable law of nature, war as an inescapable fact of life, and so forth – without ever addressing the systemic injustices and structural forms of exploitation that lie at the root of the most pressing problems. As Cole puts it, 'If we are going to interfere in the lives of others, a little due diligence is a minimum requirement.'^[5]

But interference is vital – though it need not, and must not, be one-directional. Noting the speed with which the so-called 'Arab Spring' gave birth to social justice protests across continents, culminating in the global Occupy

movement in 2011, Kaabi-Linke observes that people in the western world were 'following the civil uprisings that began in the Arab World to promote and protect democracy'.^[6] For all its utopian ambition and missed opportunities, this remarkable movement spoke to a sense of shared purpose in response to ruthless economic and military policies, and to the potential to transcend (using historian and activist Howard Zinn's favourite word) socio-economic, cultural, geographical – and professional – lines.

To understand this potential in relation to the authority and role of artists in wartime, I think there is value in looking at the subtle attempts people sometimes make to either depoliticize or delegitimize their work by imposing rigid categorizations, and in questioning the origins of those impulses, which are often tied to more insidious modes of soft censorship and control. To that end, I'd like to recount a personal experience which got me thinking about the distinctions people often choose to draw between politically-engaged art practices and what might be loosely termed creative protest, and the wider implications of these otherwise annoying labels.



ACLU, tweet with image of *Severe Clear: Existence or Nonexistence*, 2014.
Courtesy David Birkin.

In 2014, I staged a pair of public performances relating to the American government's use of drones for the purposes of targeted assassination.^[7] The first entailed skywriting the words 'EXISTENCE OR NONEXISTENCE' above New York City on Memorial Day weekend.^[8] The second, on Veterans Day, involved a plane circling the Statue of Liberty's torch towing a banner that read 'THE SHADOW OF A DOUBT'.^[9] These interventions were prompted by a letter that the CIA sent the American Civil Liberties Union rejecting their Freedom of Information Act request for documents pertaining to its classified, yet widely-reported, programme. The letter states that the agency can 'neither confirm nor deny the existence or nonexistence' of any records pursuant to the request.^[10] Online, the response was rapid, with people from across the city posting images to social media, including tweets from the ACLU and the actor and political activist Stephen Fry to his 12 million followers.^[11] Then, about a week later, in what seemed an unlikely coincidence, the CIA officially joined Twitter with its maiden message: 'We can neither confirm nor deny that this is our first tweet'.^[12]

Dispiriting as it was to witness the slick ease with which a government spy agency could spin their assassination programme into a joke, equally glib was the response from the mainstream media, who reacted with ebullient mirth at the idea that the CIA might actually have a sense of humour. Aside from *The Guardian* and *The New York Review of Books*, who tweeted the entire contents page of the Red Cross torture report, no mention was made in the press of the battles being fought by civil liberties organizations seeking some measure of accountability for a policy that has killed thousands, many of whom have been civilians and children, yet which remains unconstrained by judicial or congressional oversight. In short, it was as if they'd published the CIA's own press release. Following a talk I gave in New York with the ACLU's director Anthony Romero,^[13] in which we discussed the problem of self-censorship in the media, a number of people including friends in the commercial art world began asking me variations of the same question: namely, whether I now

considered myself an artist or an activist.[14]

Despite identifying as the former (with a reflexive conviction that has since given me pause), my enduring feeling is that the distinction is neither an incisive nor a constructive one. On the contrary, it is a loaded question since it presupposes mutual exclusivity. Definitions in general, and of art in particular, are rarely neutral. More often, they stem from a desire to validate, regulate, or constrain a person's voice, and have the effect of flattening out the slippages and contradictions where meaning is generated. What's more, this kind of pigeonholing ultimately serves to reinforce elitist and class-rooted conceptions of what qualifies as high culture, bolstering a commercially and ideologically driven desire to determine what art should or shouldn't be, or who can or cannot speak as an artist, while at the same time devaluing many artists' attempts to contribute to a broader political dialogue. Nevertheless, it can be instructive to question why such tired distinctions persist and the motivating forces behind them.

There is nothing mutually exclusive about art and activism, except insofar as this dialectic plays into some pretty well-worn tropes stemming from a nineteenth century notion of *l'art pour l'art*. Walter Benjamin observed how art, which began to lose its ritual function during the Renaissance as it developed into a 'secular cult of beauty', reacted to both the advent of photography and the rise of socialism with this doctrine of art for art's sake – a 'theology of art', as he described it – that in turn brought about a 'negative theology in the form of the idea of "pure" art' that was denied any social function.[15] George Orwell echoed this view in his essay, *Why I Write*, when he stated: 'The opinion that art should have nothing to do with politics is itself a political attitude'.[16] Looking beyond these European perspectives, the poet, cultural theorist, and former Senegalese president, Leopold Senghor, emphasized art's functional, collective, and committed nature, pointing out the fact that, 'in black Africa, "art for art's sake" does not exist',[17] while the playwright, poet, and critic Amiri Baraka made the point that, despite its functionality, 'Black African art and literature are not merely utilitarian,' but instead are understood by an audience that 'assimilates beauty with goodness and especially with efficacy'.[18] Such assessments remind us of the relatively recent and limited conception of art which prevails in our contemporary market-driven discourse.

In their most reductive form, debates around art and activism speak to a prevailing art world snobbery that deems 'didactic' a dirty word, and polemics as tantamount to agitprop. Despite the success of socially and politically engaged public art organizations, like Creative Time in the USA and Artangel in the UK, and the institutional recognition of artists such as Tania Bruguera and Ai Weiwei, many art consumers have internalized a set of biases which privilege oblique strategies in place of more explicit critique, retaining a veneer of neutrality and Postmodern ironic distance while dealing with even the most urgent and emotive political issues. This of course wasn't always the case. A quick survey of the mainstream western canon (not to mention the many marginalized art histories) attests to the fact that restraint and equivocation were hardly the hallmarks of sophistication and taste. From Grünewald[19] and Gentileschi[20] to Goya[21] and Manet,[22] there is a long history of artists embracing often violently polemical styles, expressing their compassion with unabated force and indignation.[23] Often, the political reverberations of such artworks have been felt for years to come, as was the case when the tapestry version of Picasso's 1937 painting, *Guernica*, which flanked the entrance to the United Nations Security Council, found itself so conspicuously concealed in advance of then-Secretary of State Colin Powell's 2003 speech on the eve of the invasion of Iraq.[24]

Part of this stems from a market logic which rewards ambiguity over criticality, and consistency over content,



David Birkin, *Severe Clear: The Shadow of a Doubt*, 2014. Performance documentation.
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perpetuating a set of abstract and anodyne notions of taste. Pierre Bourdieu describes a variant of this theme in his 1979 treatise, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*, citing 'the relationship between "intellectual" theatre, which is condemned for its "laborious" pretensions and "oppressive" didacticism, and "bourgeois" theatre, which is praised for its tact and its art of skimming over surfaces.'^[25] In the visual arts, collaborative projects between artists and activists have confronted these categories head-on, while highlighting the potential for more collective forms of creative response. For example, *If You Lived Here...*, Martha Rosler's 1989 exhibition on housing and homelessness in America at the Dia Art Foundation in New York, engaged with activists and advocacy collectives, as well as elected representatives, academics, journalists, writers, film- and video-makers, architects, urbanists, community members, and a self-organizing group of homeless people, to stage a radically different kind of exhibition. It was described by the dancer, choreographer, and filmmaker, Yvonne Rainer, as an exhibition that could offer not only a diversity of objects, but which could also 'contextualize a social field in and from which the objects are produced and derive their meaning.'^[26] Indeed, the resistance to this innovative methodology towards artistic plurality was evident in the show's initial reception, which revealed a reticence to regard the project as an art exhibition at all compared to, say, social activism, despite presaging the later shift towards more discursive modes of production, including the participatory practices and 'relational' art of the subsequent two decades. A more recent example would be *State Britain*, Mark Wallinger's reconstruction of Brian Haw's Parliament Square protest against the Iraq War, which was dismantled by the Blair government before being installed in the neoclassical galleries of Tate Britain as part of Wallinger's 2007 Turner Prize-winning exhibition.^[27] Such projects have expanded the scope of what museums will countenance as art, while at the same time underscoring the extent to which context determines the reception of a political project.

I'm interested in turning the question around though, so that instead of focusing on the work of artists engaged in overtly activist gestures, we instead ask why the work of activists is rarely recognized for the artistic merit it often embodies. Having photographed soldiers and civilians in Afghanistan during the country's 2004

presidential election, and conscientious objectors in Israel during its 2006 war with Lebanon, I'd encountered the perennially dull debate over whether someone considered themselves a photographer or an 'artist working with photography', only to now face the equally antithetical and facile question of whether to class something as art or activism. (Class, I suspect, being the operative word.) Rather than play into this polarized vision of the world by trying to define my own work, I began focusing instead on those forms of creative protest that embody the elements I admire most in a socially conscientious art practice. My thoughts turned to individuals engaged in acts of extraordinary courage that neither sought nor received the dubious accolade of 'art'.



Francis Alys, *The Green Line*, 2004. Performance documentation.
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In December 2011, at the height of the Arab uprisings and before Syria was plunged into a proxy war, *Al Jazeera* reported that a group of activists had placed red dye in the water of the seven major fountains in Damascus, on one occasion directly in front of the headquarters of the government's main intelligence agency.^[28] This show of defiance was intended to give voice and visibility to residents living in a state of virtual lock-down by the security services and shabiha militia, and contrasted sharply with the open marches seen in other less tightly controlled cities across the country. Inspired by the writings of Gene Sharp,^[29] these iconoclastic acts were a creative response to restrictions on conventional means of protest and formed part of a wider campaign of civil resistance – employing flyers, balloons, graffiti, hidden tape recorders, and laser

pointers – all of which was designed to be deeply subversive while avoiding more direct and dangerous confrontations with the state's power. Other collective actions included mass blackouts or large numbers of students wearing black on a specific day, invoking a kind of plausible deniability that made distinguishing protesters virtually impossible. Such acts call to mind the civil disobedience which met Soviet troops when they invaded Czechoslovakia in 1968 following the Prague Spring: the ringing of church bells and honking of horns; the removal of street signs and renaming of villages; the shutting down of water supplies; the diverting of trains; the papering over of tank periscopes; even the handing out of pornography to Russian troops to land them in trouble with their commanding officers.[30] Few would describe these actions as 'art', and yet they remind us that the creative process is a dynamic and shifting force which adapts to constraint – not some rarefied gift, or the preserve of an artistic elite – and which frequently arises in response to the most formidable of obstacles.

The author and educator, Ken Robinson, describes how creativity abounds in children, but is for the most part stifled in schools by nineteenth century pedagogic models designed to supply a uniform and compliant industrial workforce. Paraphrasing Picasso, he argues that all children are born artists – the problem is remaining one as you grow up.[31] Similarly, the Marxist art critic, Ben Davis, addressing the issue of alienated labour, argues that, 'creativity is not a monopoly of a particular set of professionals; it passes through the entire social world. And when you start there, you can also see how 'art' in this very general sense relates to the image of what a more equal society might look like'.[32]

To be clear, I'm not advocating for the amateurization of art (although recent trends in its professionalization do raise questions vis-à-vis the sway of institutional power, particularly insofar as an increased demand for academic qualifications and the proliferation of practice-led PhDs coincides with the demise of free higher education in Britain and mounting student debt), but I am suggesting that, in addition to thinking about what it means to be an artist, it is also important to consider what it means to engage in an artistic act within a context born out of political urgency. As the artist Francis Alys proposes in the subtitle of his 2004 performance, *The Green Line*, which entailed walking the length of Israel's pre-1967 border while dripping green paint from a punctured pot: *Sometimes doing something poetic can become political and sometimes doing something political can become poetic*. [33] This creative crux is discernible throughout the history of 'nonviolent resistance' – a precept rooted in the imaginative and visionary. Martin Luther King Jr. acknowledged this elevated symbolic dimension when he declared that 'We must not allow our creative protest to degenerate into physical violence', instead 'meeting physical force with soul force'. [34] The soul force of which Dr. King spoke has its origins in Gandhi's doctrine of Satyagraha, or truth force, which in turn drew on Thoreau's transcendentalist-inspired *Civil Disobedience*. [35] as well as Shelley's earlier writings, such as *The Masque of Anarchy*. [36]

The language and imagery that a movement adopts often reflects the resources available to it, with demands being articulated in increasingly symbolic terms as people's freedom of expression is curtailed – and this visual vocabulary often looks a lot like what we might think of performance art. For instance, when the African-American athletes, Tommie Smith and John Carlos, raised their black-gloved fists at the 1968 Olympics, heads bowed and barefoot as the Star-Spangled Banner played, [37] they occupied the only platform White America would afford them – a (literal) stage at an awards ceremony for the men's 200 metre race – and used it to signal solidarity with Black communities being brutally subjugated back home. Or the previous year outside the Pentagon, when an anti-Vietnam protestor pushed carnations into the barrels of a National Guardsman's gun, [38] their simple gesture met the military might of empire with an iconic force that resonated across mainstream media, earning photographer Bernie Boston a nomination for the Pulitzer Prize. More recent



Winners' podium for the 200m race at the 1968 Olympics. Tommie Smith and John Carlos give the Black Power salute.

examples include the Chilean 'passion protests',^[39] when students flooded the streets of Santiago kissing for educational reform, and the flamenco flashmobs,^[40] which saw dancers protesting the financial crisis in the lobbies of Spain's banks.

Poetry, lyricism, aesthetics, and humour all occupy vital roles. Echoing Baraka's point about the assimilation of beauty, goodness, and efficacy, the philosopher Slavoj Žižek speaks of 'those magic, violently poetic moments of political subjectivization in which the excluded [...] effectuate a change in the global perception of social space',^[41] while the feminist author and activist bell hooks contends that, 'We cannot have a meaningful revolution without humor. Every time we see the left or any group trying to move forward politically in a radical way, when they're humourless, they fail.'^[42] Friction and confrontation play their part too. Art historian Claire Bishop (a contentious voice for many within activist communities) recalls how Dada and Surrealism sought to 'shock' viewers into being more sensitive and receptive to the world, arguing that 'such discomfort and frustration – along with absurdity, eccentricity, doubt, or sheer pleasure' can be crucial elements of a work's aesthetic impact, and 'are

essential to gaining new perspectives on our condition',^[43] while Rosler emphasizes those two movements' intent to destroy art as an institution by merging it with everyday life, 'transforming it and rupturing the now well-established technological rationalism of mass society and its capacity for manufacturing consent to wage enslavement and rationalized mass killing.'^[44]

So why distinguish at all between the work of artists engaged in political acts and the profoundly creative work of activists operating without any pretension to art? Not that many would necessarily want their work to be thought of as art – but then is that because the art world represents something that an activist wouldn't aspire to be a part of? For a lot of people there remains a sense in which contemporary art is perceived as luxuriant and whimsical, with 'political art' epitomizing that most insipid brand of ineffectual bourgeois spectatorship. In this context, it's not hard to see why describing the visual components of a political struggle in aesthetic terms, or the iconic gesture of a person risking their life as poetic, could appear demeaning and tone deaf. The history of western image-making, from Renaissance painting to twentieth century photojournalism, is replete with aestheticized spectacle and Christian overtones of sublime suffering, so there's a real danger in foregrounding formalist concerns which can evacuate struggles of their political content.

But there also exists enormous potential for people working across cultural and professional lines to build on the collective spirit that has characterized so many truly radical movements in art history, rather than maintaining a binary that segregates speech and obstructs dialogue and collaboration. Such divisive tactics not only limit peoples' sense of shared responsibility – instrumentalizing their work by imposing set criteria against which to judge its relative 'success' or 'failure' – they also reinforce regional groupings, ring-fencing populations

who are otherwise inescapably bound to one another through geopolitical circumstances.



Mark Wallinger, *State Britain*, 2007. Site specific installation, Tate Britain, London.
Copyright the artist.

Like a lot of ordinary British and American citizens of my generation, I grew up feeling a deep sense of accountability to the people living at the sharp end of my governments' military adventures. While my parents' generation were politicized by colonial and neocolonial interventions in Algeria, Iran, and Vietnam, my own political awakening was refracted through the lens of Iraq. I remember, aged 12, being glued to a pocket radio as George H.W. Bush announced the deployment of forces to Kuwait on humanitarian grounds, only to later read about the columns of Iraqi conscripts incinerated by American jets as they retreated along the infamous Highways of Death.[45] I recall the political rhetoric that attended that invasion, buoyed by an overwhelmingly subservient and obsequious press, and the hero's welcome which greeted American troops returning in 1991: the triumphalism and moral certitude, the conceit of language, the sea of flags and the clouds of ticker-tape billowing above the streets of downtown Manhattan – streets that a decade later would be consumed by an altogether different kind of paper pall, foreshadowing yet another war of 'liberation'. I still wince at the hubris and audacity in the phrase Shock and Awe – that spectacle of fireworks crackling over the Baghdad skies, each thunderous reverberation signalling another undocumented death – and the sense of disbelief with which two million protestors on the streets of London beheld the ineffectuality of their voices before their own elected government.[46]

Thinking back, it's easy to absolve oneself of guilt on the grounds that you didn't vote for a particular party or condone a particular policy. It's harder to acknowledge your complicity in a system of political and economic policies, and to accept the responsibility that entails. Thoreau, who was briefly imprisoned for withholding taxes in protest at slavery and the Mexican-American War, embraced a rare moral clarity in this respect, when he asked, 'Must the citizen ever for a moment, or in the least degree, resign his conscience to the legislator? [...] I cannot for an instant recognize that political organization as my government which is the slave's government

also.[47] One theorist who has helped shape my thoughts around these questions is Judith Butler, whose writings on precarity and grievability rework Emmanuel Levinas' ideas about the responsibility people have to those whose faces are obscured. She explains that, for Levinas, 'the meaning of responsibility is bound up with an anxiety that remains open, that does not settle an ambivalence through disavowal, but rather gives rise to a certain ethical practice' – one that is both experimental and fully fallible, but which tries to attend to 'the precariousness of life'.[48]

And so, to the question... 'Where to now?' One of the lessons of Vietnam was that the war of images is as critical as any bombing campaign. That legacy lives on in the tight controls imposed by the military on photojournalists operating today, and through less overt mechanisms such as self-censorship in the mainstream media, which have, in turn, helped galvanize the citizen journalism movement – another example of people bypassing the dominant model of a professional class. The visual arts are uniquely positioned in this respect, and should constitute the vanguard in any image war, while activists engaged in creative strategies of resistance possess the soul force needed to challenge 'our' governments and demand accountability for policies being pursued in our name. Kaabi-Linke notes that the protestors in 2011 did not represent a single sector of society, 'but people of many colours, genders and political persuasions' who had no one agenda or manifesto except 'a common conviction that they are "the 99 per cent that will no longer tolerate the greed and corruption of the one per cent".' If political vision is to continue evolving in the public consciousness, a complacent and often complicit media can't be its only refuge.

Butler proposes that if there is a critical role for visual culture during times of war, 'it is precisely to thematize the forcible frame, the one that conducts the dehumanizing norm, that restricts what is perceivable and, indeed, what can be'.[49] At this seismic geopolitical juncture, after continuous conflict in the Middle East, it is surely time to set aside the old rhetoric around art and activism, and upend the tyranny of experts. For it is only when we look beneath these shallow constructs, and stop asking what art is, that we may truly appreciate what it can be.

Or as another 1968 slogan reminds us: *Sous les pavés, la plage*. [50]

[1] See: <http://mosaicrooms.org/event/mouths-at-the-invisible-event/>

[2] Chris Woods, *Sudden Justice: America's Secret Drone Wars* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

[3] Timo Kaabi-Linke, 'Geo-coding Contemporary Art?' in *Contemporary Practices* 9 (2012).

[4] Teju Cole, 'The White-Saviour Industrial Complex,' *The Atlantic*, 21 March 2012, <http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2012/03/the-white-savior-industrial-complex/254843/>.

[5] *Ibid.*

[6] Kaabi-Linke, *op cit.*

[7] David Burkin, 'EXISTENCE OR NONEXISTENCE: CIA's Linguistic Somersault Takes to the Sky,' *American*

Civil Liberties Union website, 20 June 2014, <https://www.aclu.org/blog/existence-or-nonexistence-cias-linguistic-somersault-takes-sky>

[8] *Ibid.*

[9] David Burkin, 'THE SHADOW OF A DOUBT Circles Liberty's Torch,' American Civil Liberties Union website, 11 November 2014, <https://www.aclu.org/blog/shadow-doubt-circles-libertys-torch>

[10] See: http://creativetimereports.org/files/2015/05/CIA-ACLU_letter.jpg

[11] Jessica Glenza, 'CIA Sends Out First Tweet and Shows it has a Sense of Humour,' *The Guardian*, 6 June 2014, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/jun/06/cia-twitter-first-tweet>

[12] *Ibid.*

[13] 'Civil Liberties in the Twenty-First Century' talk, NeueHouse, New York, 16 October 2014.

[14] After a subsequent talk at the Mosaic Rooms in London, I was asked similar questions, with one audience member enquiring as to whether I felt it was important to take a 'moral' approach when making this kind of work.

[15] Walter Benjamin, *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, ed. Hannah Arendt and trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, [1935] 1968).

[16] George Orwell, 'Why I Write' in *Gangrel* (1946).

[17] Leopold Senghor, as quoted in Craig Hansen Werner's *Playing the Changes: From Afro-Modernism to the Jazz Impulse* (Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1994).

[18] Amira Baraka (formerly Leroi Jones), "'We Want a Post-American Form": What the Arts Need Now,' in *The Negro Digest*, April 1967, p. 6.

[19] Matthias Grünewald, *Isenheim Altarpiece* (1512–1516).

[20] Artemisia Gentileschi, *Judith Slaying Holofernes* (1614–1620).

[21] Francisco Goya, *The Disasters of War* (1810–1820).

[22] Édouard Manet, *The Execution of Maximilian* (1867–1869).

[23] The contemporaneous response to works by those artists is an altogether different matter.

[24] The tapestry copy of Picasso's 1937 original was commissioned by Nelson Rockefeller in 1955, and hung at the entrance to the UN Security Council from 1985 until 2009. See: <http://www.nytimes.com/2003/02/05/opinion/powell-without-picasso.html>

- [25] Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1979).
- [26] Yvonne Rainer, as quoted in Nina Möntmann, '(Under)Privileged Spaces: On Martha Rosler's "If You Lived Here...,"' in *E-Flux Journal* 9 (2009).
- [27] Mark Wallinger, *State Britain* (2007).
- [28] Basma Atassi, 'A Colourful Uprising in Damascus,' *Al Jazeera*, 13 December 2011, <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2011/12/20111211105436823841.html>.
- [29] Sheryl Gay Stolberg, 'Shy US Intellectual Created Playbook Used in a Revolution,' *The New York Times*, 16 February 2011, <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/02/17/world/middleeast/17sharp.html>.
- [30] Gene Sharp, *The Politics of Nonviolent Action* (Boston: Porter Sargent, 1973).
- [31] Ken Robinson, *Do Schools Kill Creativity?*, TED Talks, February 2006, https://www.ted.com/talks/ken_robinson_says_schools_kill_creativity?language=en.
- [32] Ben Davis, interview in *Frieze*, 19 August 2013.
- [33] Francis Alÿs, *The Green Line* (2004): 'Sometimes doing something poetic can become political, and sometimes doing something political can become poetic.' Curated by Mark Godfrey and Kerryn Greenberg, Tate Modern, London, 2010.
- [34] Dr Martin Luther King Jr., 'I Have a Dream' speech, Lincoln Memorial, Washington DC, 28 August 1963.
- [35] Henry David Thoreau, 'Civil Disobedience', 1866; originally published as *Resistance to Civil Government*, 1849.
- [36] Percy Bysshe Shelley, *The Masque of Anarchy* (1819).
- [37] Tommie Smith and John Carlos' salute at the Summer Olympics, Mexico City, 1968.
- [38] See Bernie Boston's Pulitzer Prize-winning photograph, *Flower Power* (published in the *Washington Star*), taken outside the Pentagon, Arlington, VA, 21 October 1967.
- [39] Alexei Barrionuevo, 'With Kiss-Ins and Dances, Young Chileans Push for Reform,' *The New York Times*, 4 August 2011, <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/08/05/world/americas/05chile.html>.
- [40] 'A Flamenco Flash Mob Performance in a Spanish Bank,' *BBC News*, 17 April 2013, <http://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-22174456>.
- [41] Slavoj Žižek, Afterword to Jacques Rancière's *The Politics of Aesthetics* (Paris: La Fabrique-Éditions, 2000).

[42] George Yancy, 'bell hooks, Buddhism, the Beats and Loving Blackness,' *The New York Times*, 10 December 2015, <http://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2015/12/10/bell-hooks-buddhism-the-beats-and-loving-blackness/>.

[43] Claire Bishop, 'The Social Turn: Collaboration and Its Discontents,' in *ArtForum* 44.6 (2006).

[44] Martha Rosler, *Decoys and Disruptions, Selected Writings, 1975-2001 (October Books)* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006).

[45] Torie Rose Deghett, 'The War Photo No One Would Publish,' *The Atlantic*, 8 August 2014, <http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2014/08/the-war-photo-no-one-would-publish/375762/>.

[46] Patrick Barkham, 'Iraq War 10 Years On: Mass Protest that Defined a Generation,' *The Guardian*, 15 February 2013, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/feb/15/iraq-war-mass-protest>.

[47] Thoreau, *op cit*.

[48] Judith Butler, *Frames of War: When is Life Grievable?* (London and New York: Verso, 2009).

[49] *Ibid*.

[50] 'Under the cobblestones, the beach.' Paris street slogan, 1968.

TAGS

Performance

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David Birkin

David Birkin is an artist working between New York and London. He studied anthropology at Oxford University and fine art at the Slade and was a studio fellow on the Whitney Museum's Independent Study Program.

Birkin has written for Creative Time Reports, Cabinet Magazine, the Harvard Advocate, and the American Civil Liberties Union, and was an artist-in-residence at Yaddo, The MacDowell Colony, and the Art & Law Program in New York. He has exhibited internationally at the Mosaic Rooms, Courtauld Institute, Photographers' Gallery, Saatchi Gallery, HotShoe, Cøpperfield, and Trolley Books, London; Baibakov Art Projects and the Solyanka State Gallery, Moscow; Photomonth, Krakow; the Kunstihoone, Tallinn; the Benaki Museum, Athens; Centre d'Art et Photographie, Lectoure; MUDAM Museum of Modern Art, Luxembourg; FotoFest, Houston; MoMA PS1 Rockaway Dome and the Whitney Museum ISP, New York.

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