To be or not to be international?

The structure is simple. There are three diminutive bronze sculptures and a short animated video, with an eerie piano and a ghastly conversation as the soundtrack. The video is made of photographic stills, and occasionally an unnatural animated truck rolls through the forest. That is all.

The concept is not so simple. The sculptures are a truck, Friedrich Hayek and George R. Brown. The conversation touches on economy, abstraction, business and government, the field of sensation and cartography. The stills show the red clay slime of Mont Pelerin, shipping channel outside of Houston, a dam on the Texas Colorado River. That is not all.

The words and images have been carefully chosen by Joshua Mosley for his video International, currently on display in the ‘Live Cinema/ Histories in Motion’ rotating exhibit at the Philadelphia Museum of Art. Hayek, the Austrian-born economist, was one of Chief architects of neoliberal economic theory. Brown, the American-born businessman, played a central role in forming the military-industrial complex and in crafting the relation of business to politics in the United States, especially through his patronage of Lyndon Johnson. The dam on the river started Brown’s involvement with LIB. The Hotel was the original meeting place of the Mont Pelerin society (of which Hayek was the principle member), which, as David Harvey has recently argued, was the founding site of neoliberalism.

The ‘conversation’ never took place. Hayek and Brown never met, and Mosley has composed their interaction solely through recorded archives. The conversation perhaps appears stilted but this is as much because of the fact that it did not take place as because, had it taken place, it would have done so between the smooth accented English in which Hayek pronounces on ecology and economy and the guttural, occasionally stuttered statements of the Texas businessman.

Indeed, the metaphor concept (Hayek) and reality (Brown) is never so smooth. This is a clear point of Mosley’s work, and it is there even within the men’s own words. Hayek discusses the principles of abstraction and the autonomy of the economic and political, though he himself was deeply involved in policy matters. Brown, similarly, praises the free market at the political, though he himself was deeply involved in policy matters. He had it taken place, it would have done so between the smooth accented English in which Hayek pronounces on ecology and economy and the guttural, occasionally stuttered statements of the Texas businessman.

But that there is a difference between thoughts and actions is a rather banal point. There seems to be more happening both formally and thematically in the video. When the animated truck (modeled on the 1937 International D-50 flatbed truck) first begins to roll through the Oregon forest, it is Hayek’s voice we hear in the background: “When you pass from this concrete society, where we are guided by what we see, to the abstract society, which far transcends our range of vision it becomes necessary that we are guided not by the knowledge of the effect of what we do but by some abstract symbol. Now this only symbol which tells where we can make the best contribution is profit and in fact by pursuing profit, we are as altruistic as we possibly can be, because we extend our concern to people who are beyond our range of personal concern.”

It is a rather remarkable quote. Relations, real and immediate, are denied. Losing the immediate, we are said to pass into the abstract, and not just any abstract, but profit as the abstract. In abstraction we go beyond our immediate interest into the altruism beyond. It is baffling, perhaps, but one can understand structurally Hayek’s point. It is no different from some contemporary visions of cosmopolitanism. Although the end is different (justice and not profit), these forms of cosmopolitanism would make a similar move: denying the immediate in order to see a broader set of concerns and guided by abstractions such as “human rights,” “individual freedoms,” or “international law.”

Mosley does not seem to be taking a position here (indeed, the video is not demanding an answer for the viewer), but the title International invokes at once cosmopolitan internationalism and the world market. It has, since at least the Communist Manifesto, been the gamble of certain sectors of the left that the internationalism of the world market could be transformed into the internationalism of global justice. If new voices — and Harvey is perhaps foremost among these — are challenging such a conception, it is because of a move from time (conversion) to space (realization). In other words, it is not a matter of converting the world market into perpetual peace, but rather developing a set of practices which keep their real and immediate relations to both space and time while simultaneously attempting to build broader connections.

It is here that Mosley’s animated truck moving through the Oregon forest is so interesting. What, after all, is the relationship between space, time, and the virtual? How do basic cognitive frames such as space and time translate to a media world whose coordinates seem different from everyday life (albeit not necessarily in a way all that different from how the painting, as a frozen moment, ever was)?

Two interpretive options present themselves. First, that the truck represents a form of abstraction which leads not to profit but to destruction. The pristine forests through which the truck rolls are perhaps condemned to the same fate as the Colorado River or the Swiss mountains when they will be destroyed, hijacked, privatized and converted from real entity to abstract-profit relation. The truck would then represent the ghostly presence of early international exploitation of resources, replicated and enhanced by the power of modern technologies.

The second is a more sanguine reading. Network theorist Alist Galloway has suggested that the terrain of activism is changing its dimensions. The historical-temporal Marxist model (capitalist alienation linked to the 3D spatial model (situationism, radical cartography, etc.) which in turn is leading us to a two-dimensional space of appearance/non-appearance, as signaled, for example, by the rise of anonymous communities on the web and growing political demands for things like opacity, invisibility, and so on. The model is not perfect, but it is still suggestive for considering Mosley’s animated truck.

Under this reading, then, the animation would not signal the continuation of domination and abstract profit, but rather the invention of a new practice which allows for the erasure of such pernicious histories.

This is utopian and utopia is, perhaps, but the close of the video. We return to a wooded path similar to the one in which the animated truck first appeared. There the woods were dark and the sky overcast. In the final segment, some light is showing through the trees. The animated truck which the viewer expects never appears. We are left only with the image of the woods, standing free of the truck and its connotations of logging. The damage cannot be erased, but the continuation can be. Similarly, the truck appears with Hayek’s thoughts on abstraction. The truck does not appear when Brown discusses his first forays into military contracting (his company would for a time be a subdivision of Halliburton). And the video closes on his words, “until the war was over,” followed by an animation of a building, representing destruction to the concrete end of the war: A false promise? An empty utopian gesture? Perhaps. On the other hand, a critique of such beliefs? A mocking of the idea that the war ended, that the abstract profit was not finally halted, that the destruction to the concrete end of the war: A false promise? An empty utopian gesture? Perhaps. On the other hand, a critique of such beliefs? A mocking of the idea that the war ended, that the abstract profit was not finally halted, that the war was finally over. From the abstract profit to the concrete end of the war: A false promise? An empty utopian gesture? Perhaps. On the other hand, a critique of such beliefs? A mocking of the idea that the war ended, that the abstract profit was not finally halted, that the war was finally over.

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Hans Hörbiger’s Weltentwurf (World Ice Theory), known previously as Glacial-Kosmogonie (Glacial Cosmogony) before he felt the need to further Germanize it, is an extravagant, crystal bleak, obstinately unfounded, and gorgeous theory. In short, the basic substance of the solar system is ice: ice moons and ice plants move through global ether made of... Ice. The frosty, scraping motion of winter rendered infinite. No big bang, just the wet thwp of a sodden dead star smacking into an immense burning sun, sized vapor spray, splatterting out into empty space. Radially drifting slow, freezing into elementary matter.

It’s, of course, a theory with no ground, a thought cut loose and resurfaced to the apparatus of looking-like-science, even as it purports to be a kosmotechnische Weltanschauung (a cosmo-technical worldview).

(And then there’s its nasty introduction to the ranks of melancholic Nazi pseudo-science. It was employed both as a counter to the “factual” science of things such as experimental verifiability and observable phenomena and as a cosmically grounded racial climatology. Hörbiger followers heckled other astronomers (“Our astronomical orthodoxy! Give us Hörbiger!”) and made the racial associations of the theory unmistakable: “Our Nordic ancestors grew strong in ice and snow: belief in the Cosmic Ice is consequently the natural heritage of Nordic man.”

Hörbiger’s whole enterprise (an “astronomy of the invisible”) is speculative thinking reaching its peak, beginning from a near lyric moment of potential misprision - word, I just realized that the moon looks like a bunch of ice stacked together - that unfolds. Rather than saying yes, many things look like ice when the sunlight hits them correctly yet I knew not to be eternal, order-founding ice. The cosmos is being built, tocking out, telling science to flick off while clinging to its hems, all to bind the universe as such to a solitary judgment. Like the pendulum of which Hörbiger dreams, growing longer and longer until it broke, the world ice theory lengthens from an uttered fulcrum, an instance of total intentionality (all must be objectively as it seemed to me at that moment), produces an entire system, and consequently threatens such a first thought, such a cosmospolitik, such a nostalgia, such a fading illumination.

How does it threaten it?

Halted, gloomy, and falsely eternal as it is, the world ice system undoes its apparent stasis - Halted, gloomy, and falsely eternal as it is, the world ice system undoes its apparent stasis - Halted, gloomy, and falsely eternal as it is, the world ice system undoes its apparent stasis - Halted, gloomy, and falsely eternal as it is, the world ice system undoes its apparent stasis - Halted, gloomy, and falsely eternal as it is, the world ice system undoes its apparent stasis -

The ground of our experience is the crystallization of the invisible - that unfolds. Rather than saying yes, many things look like ice when the sunlight hits them correctly yet I knew not to be eternal, order-founding ice. The cosmos is being built, tocking out, telling science to flick off while clinging to its hems, all to bind the universe as such to a solitary judgment. Like the pendulum of which Hörbiger dreams, growing longer and longer until it broke, the world ice theory lengthens from an uttered fulcrum, an instance of total intentionality (all must be objectively as it seemed to me at that moment), produces an entire system, and consequently threatens such a first thought, such a cosmospolitik, such a nostalgia, such a fading illumination.

The Hot Wet Breath of Extinction

I don’t think they would do anything different if they returned to power. They are not statesmen [des politiques], in my opinion, but politicians [des politiciens] in the sense of micro-politicians [micropolitikern] people on the hunt for votes by any means.

D.M. Political marketing?

C.C. Yes, it’s marketing. They have no program. Their aim is to stay in power or to return to power, and for that they’re capable of anything. Clinton campaigned solely by following the polls—“If I say this, is it going to play?”, each time, as a voting option for public opinion. As they say: “I am their leader, therefore I’m led by them.” What’s fascinating in our age, as in all ages moreover, is the way things conspire. There is an intrinsic link between this type of political nulity, politics becoming worthless, and insignificance in other domains, in the arts, in philosophy or in literature. This is the spirit of the times: without any conspiracy by some power, there could deliberately, everything is conspiring in the sense of radiating in the same direction, for the same results, that is to say, insignificance.

D.M. How would politics be done?

C.C. Politics is a strange profession, even the aforementioned politics. Why? Because it presupposes two abilities that have no intrinsic relation. The first is to come to power, to do something with it, that is to say, governing. If you don’t come to power, you can have the best ideas in the world, and it’s of no use. There is thus an art of coming to power. The second ability is, once you come to power, to do something with it, that is to say, to govern. Napoleon, for example, who could see in that petty drool’s evaporation with the wet dead sponge? Does it keep burning a little by itself? You say “pseudo-democracy”… does it work?...
The Poisonous Stone Fish
Dreaded Denizen of the North

Before becoming an artist and after some intense years of study, distilling off many a volume in a fervid attempt to sniff out the more pernicious strains of the idealist legacy, the author of this article was trepang-fishing in the tropical seas of the North. After being pounded by the fists of the world and finding little solace in Fichte's elevation of the ego, Hegel's promise of spirit and healed wounds, and finding greater kinship with Schopenhauer's unremitting pessimism and Nietzsche's cold-blooded criticism, the author felt that the more challenged we are by Nothingness, the more passionate, eager and violent must our resistance become. He thus turned from the Germanic heights to the tropical shallows to steel himself for the years to come. During the many hours he spent contemplating the shallows, he saw several specimens of the deadly stone fish—a paragon of resistance. He can vanish for its lethal powers. Many a connoisseur, he says, has paid the penalty for not having discovered that what looked like a stone was this treacherous enemy of man. What follows is a brief report from these years.

In Ambon seas lives one of the world's most poisonous fish. Never more than 1 ft. in length when fully grown, the skunk fish is a repulsive object. The head is flat and broad, and it is adorned with a small upturned mouth, the inside of which is of a sickly, whitish-green hue. Near the base of the tail start 14 spines. They are charged with venom similar to that of the deadly Indian cobra.

As a rule the stone fish lies half-covered on the bottom of the sea in shallow water. Its habitat is generally among small stones—hence its name. At other times it is half-covered with sand or mud. So effective is its camouflage that it can hardly be seen even when it is searched for most carefully. Even the keenest and most discerning eye often fails to see it in time to prevent one from stepping on it. The deadly venom is secreted in poison sacs which are beneath the skin under the spines.

I've seen many a boot clad friend and foe step on one of these insidious creatures of the shallows. The sharp spines piercing the sole and entering the flesh, the afflicted writhe in agony as the corrosive venom quickly deadens the surrounding tissue. Without immediate attention, death invariably follows.

It is ingenious how this fish feeds. It takes advantage of its wonderful powers of camouflage. So closely does it resemble its surroundings that small fish swim close to it, and when some of them are just above the broad head the deadly creature opens its mouth and draws in water at great pressure. The current pulls the living food into the mouth waiting to receive it.

There is something perverse about Ludwig Richter's obsession with the stone fish. For those capable of reading symphonies, one could perhaps find a key to his decision to produce himself as an artist and to conceive a signature that seeks to challenge from within the sundry specters that threaten an art that remains committed to being unity. As he has often uttered, art should strive to become like the stone fish—a being that plays with its reflection, et becoming a lifeless form, so as lure its prey and repel its enemies.
The worlds of Jennifer Levonian’s new animations evoke a strange familiarity. One feels at home amid the myriad pedestrian objects so exactly and sensuously depicted while suddenly realizing that this mundane and fortifiable reality surrounding us is much more odd, much more uncanny, than what we normally see.

In three new short films, Her Slip is Showing and Buffalo Milk Yogurt, showing at the Fleisher/Ollman Gallery through June 12, and Take Your Picture with a Puma, which just completed a month-long installation at the PMA as part of Adelina Vlas’s Live Cinema: Histories in Motion exhibit, Levonian explores the subtle unhinging, forgotten hopes and unfulfilled desires of her characters amid richly wrought landscapes. The stories these films tell through collaged paper animation are often funny – during a recent public dialogue between Levonian and Vlas at the PMA the sight of a wonderfully banal animated lawn sprinkler, from Her Slip is Showing, was greeted with uproarious laughter – and the moods produced by the original musical scores are often bright. But the comedy, the brightness of tone, along with the richly variegated hues of the watercolor figures with which Levonian constructs the film, is somewhat playing into an almost mournful disquiet. When, in Her Slip is Showing, a small bird watches an ant drag a cocktail olive into and out of frame and then expands its “flight feathers” to reveal the text “Goethe’s last words: More Light!,” we might do well to remember Milan Kundera’s darkly comic quip that these words are merely one graphic mark removed from their opposite.

Perhaps whoever testified to the poet’s final articulate breath “Mehr Licht!” while Goethe actually said “Mehr Nicht.”

Perhaps we would simply rather hear “Mehr Licht,” and the immaculate attention that these films pay to the prosaic details of our everyday experience is not without concern. “Goethe’s last words: More Light!” said “Mehr Licht / Mehr Nicht.” Goethe’s last words: More Light! / More Nothing.

Having returned from his agrarian fit at the Bread and Circus Gourmet Market gives one a sense of the constrained horizon of possibility in consumer society. Upon arriving, he encounters an anthill and then expands its “flight feathers” to reveal the text “Goethe’s last words: More Light!”

Goethe’s last words: More Light! / More Nothing.

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Goethe’s last words: More Light! / More Nothing.
SCREENING
Screening was an alternative gallery based project that was staged in a small black box viewing room near the entrance of the Vox Populi gallery. The project was conceived and programmed by artists Nadia Hironaka and Matthew Suib. Screening broadened the scope of, and expanded access to video art in Philadelphia, in part, by providing a venue less institutional than a museum, but more formal than your living room. Screening was dedicated to the presentation of innovative, challenging and exciting moving images. Screening exhibited works that explored the ways moving image culture influences how we see ourselves, and others.

The first exhibition was held on July 6, 2007, and ran three years until it finally closed on June 27, 2010 with twenty exhibitions in total.

JOAN JONAS, Organic Honey’s Visual Telepathy: JUNE 4–JUNE 27, 2010
PAT O’NEILL: MARCH 5–MAY 30, 2010

VALÉRIE MRÉJEN: JANUARY 8–FEBRUARY 28, 2010
HIRAKI SAWA: SEPTEMBER 4–NOVEMBER 1, 2009
OODA part 1: Heather Burch – Unreleased: JULY 18–AUGUST 2, 2009
OODA part 2: Renee Petropoulos - Two or Three Things I Know About Gas Station Mini-Marts: AUGUST 7–AUGUST 30, 2009
MUNGO THOMSON: MAY 1–JUNE 28, 2009
KELLY RICHARDSON: MARCH 6–APRIL 26, 2009
KRIS LEFCOE: JANUARY 9–MARCH 1, 2009
MARK LEWIS: NOVEMBER 7–DECEMBER 28, 2008

GEORGE STADNIK: JUNE 6–JULY 27, 2008
SEMICONDUCTOR: APRIL 4–JUNE 1, 2008
DEBORAH STRATMAN: FEBRUARY 1–MARCH 30, 2008
TAKESHI MURATA: OCTOBER 5–DECEMBER 2, 2007
PASCUAL SISTO: SEPTEMBER 7–30, 2007
LARS LAUMANN: JULY 6–SEPTEMBER 2, 2007
PHILIPPE DECRUZAT: JUNE 1–JULY 1, 2007

Screening, like the former Blowhard Gallery, Kate Midget’s Project Room, the Lawrence Oliver Gallery, and the Matthews Hamilton gallery, amongst others will be sorely missed.

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more some bureaucrats, politicians, so-called people in charge, take the lead. They have a good justification: “I take the initiative because people aren’t doing anything.” And the more those people dominate, the more the others say to themselves, “it’s not worth it to get involved, there are enough of them dealing with it and, in any case, there’s nothing one can do about it.” That’s the first point of view.

The second point of view, linked to the first, is that of the dissolution of the grand political ideologies—either revolutionary or truly reformist—that really wanted to change things in society. For a thousand and one reasons, these ideologies have been discredited; they have ceased to correspond to the times, to correspond to people’s aspirations, to the situation of society, to historical experience. The collapse of the Soviet Union and of communism was an enormous event. Can you show me one single person among the politicians—not to say political schemers—on the left, who has truly reflected on what has happened, on the reasons why this has happened, and who has, as we foolishly say, learned lessons from it? An evolution of this kind, first of all in its initial phase—the rise to nonstostronomy, totalitarianism, the gulag etc.—and then in its collapse merited a very in-depth reflection and a conclusion regarding what a movement that wants to change society can do, must do, must not do, cannot do. Absolutely no reflection!

How, then, do you want what one calls the people, the masses, to arrive at their proper conclusions when they are not really enlightened?

You were talking to me about the role of intellectuals. What are these intellectuals doing? What have they done with Reagan, Thatcher, and with French socialism? They brought back the hard-line liberalism from the beginning of the 19th century, the one that we had been fighting against for one hundred and fifty years and that would have driven society to catastrophe because, in the end, old Marx wasn’t entirely wrong. If capitalism had been left to itself, it would have collapsed a hundred times. There would have been a crisis of overproduction every year. Why hasn’t it collapsed? Because the workers struggled. They imposed wage increases, thereby creating enormous markets of internal consumption. They imposed reductions in working hours, with the advent of technological unemployment. Now we are surprised that there is unemployment. But since 1940 working hours haven’t noticeably diminished. Nowadays we quibble, thirty-nine hours, “thirty-eight and a half, thirty-seven and three quarters,” it’s grotesque... So, there was this return of liberalism, and I don’t see how Europe will be able to get out of this crisis. The liberals tell us, “it’s necessary to have confidence in the market.” But what these neo-liberals are telling us today, the academic economists themselves refruted in the thirties. They showed that there can be no equilibrium in capitalist societies. These economists were neither revolutionaries nor Marxists! They showed that everything the liberals relate concerning the virtues of the market that would guarantee the best possible allocation, that would guarantee resources, the most equitable distribution of income possible, they showed that all of this is nonsense! All of this has been demonstrated and never refuted. But there is this grand econonmico-political offensive by the dominating and ruling strata that can be symbolized by the names of Reagan and Thatcher, and even Mitterrand for that matter!

D.M. Why isn’t there opposition to this liberalism?

C.C. I don’t know: it’s extraordinary. We spoke of a sort of terrorism of conformist thought, that is to say of non-thought. It is unique in its conformity in the sense that it is the first form of thought that is complete non-thought, liberal conformist thought that no one dares to oppose. Currently, there is a sort of victorious discourse of the right that is not a discourse but affirmations, empty discourses. And behind this discourse, there is something else, which is what is most serious. What was liberal ideology in its heyday? Around 1850 it was a widespread ideology because there was a belief in progress and the liberal thought that progress would bring about an elevation of economic well-being. But even when people weren’t getting rich, in the exploited classes, there was a move toward less work, toward less arduous tasks in order to be less stultified by industry. It was the great theme of the age. Benjamin Constant says as much: “the workers cannot vote because they are stultified by industry (he says it straight out: people were honest back in the day!), thus a voting system based on the poll tax is necessary. But subsequently, working hours diminished, there was literacy, there was education, there was enlightenment, which was no longer the subversive Enlightenment of the 18th century but enlightenment all the same, which spread through society. Science develops, humanism becomes more humane, societies become more civilized and little by little, asymptotically, we will arrive at a society where there will be practically no longer any radicalism. In this situation, this representative democracy will tend to become a true democracy.

D.M. Not bad?

C.C. Not bad. Except that it didn’t work, and it doesn’t work like that. The rest happened, but men did not become more human, society did not become more civilized for all that. Capitalists did not soften up. We see that now. It’s not the fault of men, it’s the system. The result is that, from the inside, people no longer believe in this idea. The mood, the general frame of mind, is one of resignation. Today, what dominates is resignation among the representatives of liberalism. What’s the major argument at the moment? ‘Perhaps this is bad, but the alternative is worse.’ Everything boils down to this. And it’s true that this has numbed quite a lot of people. They tell themselves: ‘if we change things too much, we’re headed for a new Gulag.’ That’s what’s behind the ideological exhaustion of our age. And I think that we will only get out of this by a resurgence of a powerful critique of the system and a revival of people’s activity. of their participation in communal affairs. It is a tautology to say that, but we must wait, we must hope and we must work in this direction.

D.M. The political elite reduced to serving as lackey for the World Company, guard-dog intellectuals, the media that has betrayed its role as an oppositional force, these are some of the causes and some of the symptoms of this rise of insignificance.

C.C. But at present, we’re feeling the tremors of a revival of civic activity. Here and there, we’re nonetheless starting to understand that the “crisis” is not an inevitable outcome of modernity to which we must submit, “adapt,” for fear of arachnism. Thus the problem of the role of citizens is reemerging. The right of each person to exercise rights and democratic duties with the aim—sweet and beautiful utopia—of getting out of generalized conformism.


- Etienne Dolet