

In Conversation: Burak Delier and Joseph Redwood-Martinez

(“One Day Everything Will Be Free...” reader, March 2012. <http://saltonline.org/img/857.pdf>)



We Will Win Intervention, Burak Delier, Taipei/Shijhou Tribe, Taipei Biennial 2008

Joseph Redwood-Martinez: Thank you for sending me your book, *WE WILL WIN*. I’ve just finished reading through it and a few things came to mind. I find the whole project to be characterized by a certain delirious awareness of the systemic violence within which the work is situated, as an actor of sorts.

There is a simple line in the early part of your essay at the end of the book that stays with me: “If the apparatus of capture is exploiting even the cognitive fields, then the struggle must also be carried there.” You conclude this section by stating, “semiautonomous zones like Biennales are fields of knowledge where we can carry out the experimental discussions and inquiries that we need.” And at the moment, I’m trying to stay with this. I’ve recently started rereading the work of the American anarchist Hakim Bey (Peter Lamborn Wilson), specifically his writing about Temporary

Autonomous Zones. Are you familiar with this work? I think it may be of some interest to you in relation to what you've laid out in this book. But this is all somewhat complicated by the simultaneous a-legal implications of the offshore, or hidden space of global finance... In some respect, it reminds me of the way in which Jean-Joseph Goux writes in *Symbolic Economies* that money would have to be decapitated in order for an emancipatory secret society like George Bataille's *Acephale* to emerge. And of course, money is decapitated, and an emancipatory, secret society does emerge, but on an entirely other order than the once Goux was trying to anticipate. That secret, hidden, emancipatory organization - a dispersed, concealed, non-essentialist political organization - comes to us in the form of Global Finance. But the crucial difference is that the temporary autonomous zones were (are) in fact occupied, whereas the xenospatial sovereign praxis of global finance is merely a taking leave of regulatory measures in order to operate beyond the principal of centralization. No movement occurs, in fact. Movement, it would seem, is a crucial aspect of the *WE WILL WIN* project. Several times already, I've read over the section where you organize the responses to the question "if you had the opportunity of placing the 'WE WILL WIN' banner somewhere, where would you put it?" It has a poetic dimension to it. Audible almost. It too, reads as an acephalous multi text. But the body is implicated, and seems crucial to your work.

Burak Delier: As you put it, the *WE WILL WIN* Project is perhaps the anti-thesis of what can be called "Acephale," headlessness. Because it has a specific place and specific address. At that time, I was imagining local specificity against the volatile hype of global economy. In my mind, I had this topology where money can move freely and without constraint yet people, for example in this specific neighborhood in Taipei, are stuck within their environment/physicality. I was trying to put the concreteness of locality against the abstractness of money/global economy.

When you showed me the "Here and Elsewhere" headings the same image come to my mind. I believe that we have to work on demonstrating that "here is elsewhere" and "elsewhere is here."

The tomato here in front of our eyes is also an abstract entity and the abstract entity on the screen of a broker is the tomato. There is not only a connection, there is a strong dependence. And maybe we have to work on defining this relationship: Is it exploitation? Is it a mutuality? Also, in French, "et" and "est" are pronounced the same. When you say "ici et ailleurs" you are saying both "here and elsewhere" and "here is elsewhere." I would imagine Godard was playing with this phonetic... But I never imagined money or Global Finance as an example of headlessness. Because offshore banking has a specific purpose, it is not a body without organ—a term that Deleuze and Guattari use. I think the terms "headlessness" and "body without organ" are close to each other. In my thinking, offshore banking is a big head instead of being headless. It reminds me of the blackout tactic, which is the most primitive tool of power. Agamben put it as "state of exception." But state of exception is not a "free"

zone; on the contrary, it is where the power appears in its most abject image. We don't see what is happening there, we don't know but that doesn't mean it is a zone of freedom. Besides, we saw pictures from the Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq, actually I think that is exactly what is going on in the case offshore banking. Offshore banking, finance, and stock markets are places where some capital—with the help of legislations and complex algorithms—exploits other capital. But we may confuse it with headlessness because it is happening in abstraction. Maybe we have to show the violence, the physicality of this abstraction... Hakim Bey's TAZ is a concretization of headlessness, it is a body without organ. That means people who engage in this zones don't have a program, they don't have a revolutionary purpose but they have only the means. The means that the zones are the goal of the whole thing. They run away to prevent becoming established movements. They don't face the power with an "alternative" power structure, as a Party or any other institution. This is exactly what acephale means. But I am not sure if Bataille's secret societies can be a model for today's struggles. For example, when you look at what happened in Tahrir or what is happening now in Wall Street they are completely transparent and physical. They are in the square, they don't hide anything, they don't plan to bomb Wall Street in a secret room, they expose themselves as they are. I think their legitimacy stems from this "nakedness."

JRM: Can you tell me more about what it might mean to work on demonstrating that here is elsewhere and elsewhere is here? Perhaps this has something to do with the violence, or at least physicality of abstraction, as you've already mentioned. Maria Lind curated an exhibition "Abstract Possible" where she looked abstraction in terms of its relationship to withdrawal; *abstrahere* meaning, literally, to draw away, detach, or divert. Broadly speaking, in one of the three components of the program she was interested in tactics and strategies of self-organization used by artists and cultural producers in order to allow for greater freedom of action—tactics that both mimicked and questioned contemporary practices of, for example, contemporary finance. But it seems you are not interested in withdrawal so much as you are in reconsidering strategies of embeddedness. Maybe this is asking the question too bluntly, but do you think artists working within bank-supported cultural initiatives can still operate in such a way that this line of inquiry remains legible as such? Or does it lend itself more toward being read as an impotent display of oppositionality, or, perhaps even worse, a proclamation of complacency? Maybe this goes back to the exhibition title, "I slowly come to discover that it is more meaningful and subversive to engage in experimental investigations on art than carrying out some selfcontent, easily commoditized anarchist gesture." I'd like to know what you think about those investigations possibly taking place within a bank-supported cultural initiative like SALT, which is technically an extension of Garanti Bank's Social Responsibility program.

BD: Firstly, I think that while the probably inevitable global warming catastrophe is coming, now it is much more necessary to grab the relation between here and elsewhere. This has two dimensions: First, we should understand it “horizontally”—that the economic, social, and political life in New York is strongly depending on the life in Sao Paulo, Cairo, or Niger. Secondly, we should understand it “vertically”—the economic calculations about the future of capitalism are depending on physical and biological life. When I used the term “physicality of abstraction,” I was trying to emphasize that the lights flashing on the broker’s screen in a financial institution are depending on concrete things, like forests, oil, water, tomatoes, and so on. Further, as the crisis of 2008 showed us, at the end someone will pay. And now it seems that the younger generation and their future children will pay for capitalism to regenerate itself...

I think your second question is about the working conditions within the art world. Especially in Turkey, almost every art institution is depending on banks. What I understand from withdrawal is that it is aimed at finding new types of relationships between artists, audiences, critics, curators. At present, all our relations are mediated through banks and established art market principals. I see myself as surrounded by these relations, and that is why I don’t think that an art project realized in an art institution could be an example of the withdrawal strategy. To put it within a wider framework, I think you can take into account to name your actions as withdrawal when you don’t use currency in order to exchange goods, when you don’t use Google to discuss theoretical issues, or when you don’t pay taxes.

All of these strategies will push you to find alternative ways of communicating, exchanging ideas, and forming solidarity. An art project is not an alternative entity; it is over coded by the art system. I think we can discuss what is alternative, we can produce knowledge, but I am not sure if we can claim that exhibitions and artworks are examples of withdrawal. But that doesn’t mean we have to shut up and embrace these conditions and the framework of institutions within which our activities are over-coded.

On the contrary, I think we should use—or better, we should “misuse”—these institutions to show how hypocritical their policies are. We have to produce more knowledge and more discourse about the current incapability of these institutions facing the weakness of capitalism. We also need to address their poor policies of “Public Responsibility.” Besides, no art institution is managed from a strict ideological worldview. There are always negotiations. When there is no negotiation, we can name this system/institution as fascism/fascist. For example, SALT wouldn’t be an interesting art institution if it were solely managed through Garanti’s public relations agency. Garanti as a bank—as a chain of capitalist relations and mechanisms constructed in order to get more profit and to obtain increased ratings of growth—needs to get from us some sense of legitimacy.

I think we can use this interval to think about what we will do when the last economic crisis will happen. Still, that doesn't mean these institutions are the only place to be. With their cultural policies and inconsistencies, they are possibly the worst place to be. I don't think working with a bank-supported cultural institution is a "proclamation of complacency" or "an impotent display of oppositionality." We don't need to tame our aspirations, intentions, and thoughts regarding our mis-place. Our aspirations, intentions, and thoughts should be their problem not ours. When I said that we need much more than "self-content, anarchist gestures," I was trying to emphasize slower, more resistant, discursive, and settled ways of working. While they believe they can trick the world, we should work on the possible coming society.