Counter-Actualization: The Art of Wafaa Bilal
jan jagodinski

In this essay I attempt to explicate the Deleuzian concept of counter-actualization as developed in his *The Logic of Sense* through the performative art of Wafaa Bilal, an Iraqi born artist who now teaches at the Tisch School of the Arts at New York University. I try to articulate what Deleuze means by an *event*, and how we might come to understand counter-actualization that draws on the event as an ethical gesture that overcomes forms of *ressentiment*. I do this by carefully examining two performance pieces by Wafaa Bilal: *Domestic Tension* (aka, *To Shoot an Iraqi*) as well as … *and Counting*, which are intimately related to each other. As a preliminary introduction to this problematic, I try to locate Wafaa's Bilal's performances within the broader discussion of 'participatory art.'

Framing the Picture: A Prelude

The performative art of Wafaa Bilal belongs to what some observers of the contemporary *global* art scene have called 'participatory art'; variously contested by scholars, art critics and gallery curators such as Claire Bishop (2012), Grant Kester (2011) and Nato Thompson (2012). I shall follow suit, although the specificity of the term is heterogeneous and complex. [1]. The term refers to an expanded field of post-studio and post-media practices where the question of audience participation goes beyond a one-to-one relationship. By utilizing forms of online social media (video, radio, YouTube, Internet, Twitter, podcasts and so on) artists are able to reach and interact with an audience that is not bound by a geographical location of just the studio, galley or museum. Rather than just producing 'objects,' the artist or artistic cell is engaged in producing situations (installations and performances), which are generally collaborative projects that are not *necessarily* predetermined in the length of duration and space taken. While some are 'short,' making a short-term investment in the gallery, others are 'long' (chronologically speaking), making a long-term investment of space usually at the local and community level. Managing their duration is certainly part of the process. Beth Hinderliter et al. (2009) have proposed the concept of 'communities of sense' to identify this *Kunstwollen* [artistic will], which is postcritical and postideological in the sense that the relationship between aesthetics and politics has been rethought, for example by Jacques Rancière (2010), whose theory of *dissensus* has had a wide appeal. A politics of collectivity that reaches beyond collectivism (communitarian politics) and identity politics is one major goal of such participatory art. The broader claim is that 'participatory art' is capable of worrying the conventional modes of artistic production and consumption under global capitalism, a *Kunstwollen* that first began to emerge after the fall of communism in 1989 and the toppling of the Berlin Wall in 1990, when social media were then in their nascent forms (e.g., VHS).

'Participatory art' struggles with the paradox that avant-garde movements (the historic avant-garde at the turn of the 20th century and the avant-garde of the '68 student revolutions) have bequeathed it, which is to say the paradox of art *as* life and life *as* art, initiated by Marcel Duchamp's readymades. [2] Modernist art, as an exclusive practice, was to provide a self-reflexive critique of the social order via the sanctity of the gallery or museum, which became instituted during the Enlightenment of laissez-faire capitalism, especially within the context of German Idealism (Kant, Hegel, Schiller) where the bourgeoisie had failed in their revolutionary bid (*Märzrevolution* of 1848) to establish a democratic state against the monarchist constitution of Otto von Bismarck. Artistic autonomy, antagonism and the aesthetic were intimately bound with one another in this development. The border between 'art' and its disappearance into 'life' as just another object of utility was maintained by state museums and private galleries, which continue to legitimate what is and isn't considered 'art,' going so far as mediating the *non-site* that belongs to the Outside as 'life' (as for example, in the paradigmatic case of Robert Smithson's *Spiral Jetty*) and bringing it into the *site* of the gallery space (via various form of its documentation). If there is no link or connection maintained between the inside|outside space of the gallery|museum system, then there is no special category called art. Participatory art then simply becomes 'life,' perhaps as paradigmatically illustrated by the Havana based artist Tania Bruguera's development of 'useful art' (*arte útil),* which she says affects

social reality by raising questions about civil liberties and cultural politics without making moral or legal claims. Yet, her reputation as an 'artist' (she teaches at the University of Chicago) still legitimates her and her students' performances or 'behavior art' (*arte de conducta*) as she prefers to call it. If Bruguera is merely a *facilitator* when running her art school (*Cátedra Arte de Conducta*), like any museum or gallery curator, and as is the case for many community-based projects, should this 'still' considered art or simply social activity to further and sustain social relationships? If so, we should call such activities something else like community aid or help, charity if need be. When the border breaks down or is weakened between the special category called artist/art and life, the question always becomes 'is this art?' When the *Yes Men* get away by intervening and exposing corporate rot through clever mimicry and impersonation, is this then 'art'? This after-all, in one sense, is a fulfillment of the historical avant-garde's aim: art would no longer exist as a separate reality. The autonomy of the *Yes Men* remains, at the same time the realities of corporate oppression are exposed and taken to task.

Placing Wafaa Bilal within this above problematic and exploring Deleuze's concept of counter-actualization enables a way to further come to terms with this *Kunstwollen* of participatory art by recognizing its double impact in the domain of art (the Deleuzian 'diagram' or platform as Bilal refers to it as will be explained below) and in the domain of social reality: what pressing socio-political questions are being raised and questioned. This paradox is addressed by the ethico-political implications of participatory (performative) art as enabled by the concept of counter-actualization. The ethical counter-actualizations of Wafaa Bilal, as will be shown, do not fall into a neoliberal World Order ethics of Human Rights and identity politics, but neither do they rest with the ethics of a grandiose Badiousian Truth Event in its stead (although singularity and accountability remain 'on the table,' as it were). Further, Bilal's performances answer to and confront the 'ethical turn' that displeases Rancière (2009) so much, where political *dissensus* is skirted via two participatory art processes: the first attends 'to the social bond and [the second is] another of art as that which interminably bears witness to catastrophe (120).' These two artistic processes 'form,' as it were, an 'ethical couple,' like the two sides of a coin, each counteracting and supporting the other. The first art process, *relational aesthetics* (more below), calls for a consensus to 'restore lost meaning to a common world' (122), while the second 'bear[s] witness to the irremediable catastrophe lying at the very origin of that bond' (130). Through the unrepresentability of the sublime, the latter art process is a work of perpetual mourning, which either avoids the horror or terror of the catastrophe because it is not possible to represent, or the catastrophe itself becomes an ethical cause by dwelling on the horror through the impossibility of its representation. [3] Hence humanism and the social justice agenda that pervades so much of participatory art adds another layer of complication to the contemporary *Kunstwollen*.

The inherited problematic of the avant-garde as outlined above is important for two further reasons when it comes to Bilal's body art. The first concerns the way, under capitalism, art's force to query and disrupt societal norms or 'common sense' is commodified and turned into profit via the global markets of art. The artistic critique of post-1968, when Deleuze became politicized via Guattari, has now been completely co-opted around the time of the fall of communism (1989-1990): the creativity of artists (their flexibility and individuality) has lent itself to a model for management and work now known as the 'creative industries' that characterize the 'society of control' through various forms of 'soft' fascism. This is basically Rancière's (2004) complaint regarding the 'aesthetic regime of art' in its present state: 'the aesthetic regime asserts the absolute singularity of art and, at the same time, destroys any pragmatic criterion for isolating this singularity' (23). On the one hand it constitutes the autonomy of art 'objects' by establishing their absolute singularity, their ability to be quasi-political in their promise for social change, and on the other hand there is perpetual critique, criticism and appropriation that ushers in the 'new' wave that becomes fetishized via market forces. Most recently this has been extended globally by a host of entrepreneurial curators—i.e., Hans-Ulbrich Obrist, Okwui Enwezor, Nicholas Bourriaud, who promote particular claims as to art's ability to capture global concerns and make a difference within the confines of museums and galleries and major 'shows' like Dokumenta and the Biennales. Such an understanding applies to the schizophrenia of capitalism in its perpetual territorialization, deterritorialization and reterritiorialization as developed by Deleuze and Guattari.

The second concern under capitalist appropriation is that the artist is continually invited, marketed, promoted, supported and spectacularized again and again within the art market networks, thus again mitigating the impact or force of what the participatory (performative) work is attempting to transformatively *do.* Or, rather this 'pact with the devil' is the only way to reach and affect a participatory audience, but at the risk of 'selling out' (both figuratively and literally). The alternative is to become nomadic, itinerant, selling one's wares (or 'body') to the gallery who will take them, still a form of labor enslavement. Wafaa Bilal's performances, as we shall see, are a form of body art. It is the artist's body whose live presence and immediacy offers a visceral affect. A line should not be drawn between participatory and performative acts, since in Bilal's case at least, following Boris Groys (2009) clever phrase —'the spectacle [is] without spectators', an art without an audience in the classical sense; as everyone involved potentially becomes a producer of Bilal's performances through some form of involvement. Unfortunately, the marketing forces of designer capitalism use the same model: the customer has become a 'producer' through interactive marketing techniques, which encourage customer inputs resulting in the oxymoron of 'mass customization.' This aspect of neoliberal capitalism raises concerns for all performance artists in one very important way. In the Deleuze-Guattarian sense, all processes of becoming aim at becoming-imperceptible, which is quite a transformation when it comes to what is called a self or ego. Becoming-imperceptible is not an erasure of the ego, but it does mark a point of evanescence of the self, a fusion between the self and habitat, the cosmos as a w(hole), which results in multiple affirmative inter-connections that empower the collective, and not simply aggrandize identity. New potentials are released and realized by this 'death of the ego' that usually marks identity politics as to who one 'is' according to gender, sex, race, color, disability and so on. In his last book, Félix Guattari (1995) called this imperceptible becoming 'chaosmosis.' It is an eruption, or 'event' (as will be explicated later) for a 'future' that reshapes the present through deterritorialization. Becoming-imperceptible is the very opposite of how the artist 'functions' in the gallery system where ego is often aggrandized. Does Bilal escape this dilemma through his counter-actualizations? My answer will be yes, despite the institutionalized space of the gallery situation.

Wafaa Bilal's performative work has much to offer in relation to the above deliberations. His performances began in relation to the 'event' of the Iraq war (2003-2011), which continually haunted him. In Deleuzian terms, the Iraq war was the 'quasi-cause' (or *objet petit á* in Lacan's terms) of his desire. His artistic performances enabled him to experiment with and address the psychic damage that had impacted on him. Such a psychic wound, as an expressive event, became the source of his artistic counter-actualizations. The affective diagram of his art changed as it moved up in bodily intensity. The event hovers in the virtual realm of creativity, productivity and transformativity. Its effects in their multiplicity are constantly nourishing Bilal. Such an event is both temporal and transcendental rather than empirical; not a corporeal event, which seemingly is at odds with body art, yet intimately related with it when it comes to its counter-actualizations, for the event is a double structure, as I hope to develop.

To Shoot an Iraqi

I shall concentrate on two performances Bilal did, which compliment one another: The first, *To Shoot an Iraqi* and the second, *… and Counting*. I take these two body performances to be exemplary cases of ethical and political practice based on a Deleuzian approach to the counter-actualization of an event, where the ethics eschews transcendental judgment and rule-based law: in Lacanian (1992) terms this is 'an ethics of the Real,' saying 'the only thing one can be guilty of is of having given ground relative to one's desire' (311). In another form, the question is, 'have you acted in conformity with your desire?' (ibid.). This does not refer to some sort of hedonism, nor Sadean libertarianism, rather it is the encounter with the 'event,' (the virtual Real one could say) with the truth of one's own being.

Born in Iraq, it is precisely his iconic identity in a time of perpetual terrorism that is at issue, a symbolic identity that presses on him within a country, the U.S., that he has a love/hate relationship towards. A former professor at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago (and now assistant professor at the Tisch

School of Arts, New York), he placed this symbolic 'identity' literally under the fire of a paint gun. The performance ran for 31 days, beginning on May 15, 2007 and ended on June 16, of that year. Performed in FlatFile Gallery in Chicago, it was euphemistically called *Domestic Tension*. For Wafaa Bilal, the project had another name: *Shoot an Iraqi*, which was felt to be too controversial to stand as the title of the performance.

I will first describe the problematic that shaped his response to his wound as Event, the *amori fati* that shaped the singularity of his life and then describe the performance. Bilal's performance is very much situated in his own trauma, the deaths of his brother Haji and father in his hometown of Kufa (near the holy city of Najaf) in 2004. It was his way to bridge the gap between his own comfortable life in the U.S. a direct result of his artistic abilities, and the pain and suffering of his family and friends in his homeland—out of guilt and out of his own trauma. What angered Bilal was the disconnect U.S. citizens had concerning the Iraq war and the nature of modern warfare where the same disconnect repeats itself when innocent civilians (like his brother) are bombed and killed by missiles launched by remote control by soldiers sitting at console desks. Hence, his problematic concerned the mediation of suffering, pain and death via the screen technologies that aestheticize and spectacularize such violence.

Wafaa set up a space in the FlatFile gallery (a room 32 X 15 feet), which housed a bed, his computer, a lamp, a coffee table and an exercise bike (that he never used). A number of Plexiglas screens mounted on racks, as well as a mock doorframe were the partitioning divide between his space and the rest of the gallery. A paintball gun attached to a custom-designed robotic mechanism was positioned two-thirds of the way between the back wall of his room and the doorway into the gallery. The technology that enabled the gun to be controlled via the Internet was the same EZIO circuit board that allows cubicle warriors to launch and operate Predator drones. The paintball gun's shooting range was about 20 feet. The gun fired yellow paintballs in response to commands of online viewers. Gallery visitors could fire as well from a small area that was not in the line of fire. The gun could be fired at shoulder level; it could rotate 180 degrees left to right. Gallery exhibits ran on as planned — as did gallery weddings (which have become the chic thing to do).

His performance was based on the model of a videogame to upstage its codified conditions. The 'screen reality' now becomes actualized with Wafaa Bilal becoming a 'living target,' shot at by gamers (his interactive audience) with a paintball gun that had been hooked up to the Internet so that gamers around the world could shoot at him. The videogame, which is the apotheosis of designer capitalism in terms of the complex *possibilities* that it holds for gamers, is deconstructed as a machinic assemblage of potentiality. Potentiality replaces possibility, opening up a future to 'experifigure' [4] his identity as an Iraqi.

Wafaa Bilal was to spend a month being shot at—as a moving avatar that controlled his own movements. Publicity for the event was word-of-mouth and viral. The entire month was streamed live on the Internet via a webcam mounted on the gun that beamed the gaze of his audience. A website chat room was set-up behind a Plexiglas shield. He could tell from where the shots were being fired from by the shooters' IP addresses. The website interface had been intentionally set up grainy and without sound to heighten the sense of loneliness and isolation.

Each day Bilal would record the events with his own video camera and post some edited footage, usually from two to ten minutes worth, as a video diary on *YouTube*. He was interviewed by visitors who came into the gallery, recording their thoughts as well as his own reflective monologues. The *YouTube* archival record shows that about day 15 Wafaa was on the edge of madness in his desperation to escape the noise of the whirling gun and the pellets that never stopped. Hackers had managed to turn the single-shot paintball gun into an automatic firing machine gun. The chat room comments also began coming at blistering speed. Shots were fired for over four hours straight by someone in Columbus, Ohio. Day 15 marks the place of the tension between *breakdown and breakthrough* within the catastrophe that has been set into play. Bilal's would-be breakout from the haunt of the war, the loss of his brother and father,

would be energizing and life affirming; but at the same time he is now placed in the greatest danger of complete breakdown and failure. To look at his face on the *YouTube* post on Day 16 he has become a 'probe head' who no longer is the figure of Bilal but has become abstracted into something else.

Wafaa Bilal, The Paintball Project, Day 16 [still], 2007.

Bilal always wore a paintball vest and goggles along with his trademark keffiyeh. At the end, more that 65,000 shots had been fired at him from people in 136 countries, many of them spending hours in the website's chat room. As Wafaa notes, being hit by a paintball at close range was often a debilitating experience. Although, the room becomes covered in yellow, the symbolic colour of cowardice, Wafaa remained defiant and victorious. For Bilal, performance offers a counter-actualization to the painful actualizations of the event as it has been inscribed in his flesh— and here I mean skin, the surface, that mediates the implicit and explicit body recorded as the haunting memories of his past.

The counter-actualization is the releasing of a potentiality that brings with it a repetition with a difference. So while Bilal's E\event is brought about by the empirical conditions of his existence, the result of his actions and his passions, the eternal authenticity of this event is irreducible to these said conditions. The counter-actualization of his performance opens up an ethico-political stance that affirms the irreducibility to such origins. It points to the transcendental quasi- cause of the wound, of time as *Aion*, of virtual multiplicities, rather than to any empirical cause. This performance as counter-actualization limits, moves, transfigures and mimes the affect of the event.

Bilal shows us a away out of the identity politics of representation and further shows us what I would take to be his *problematic:* for as Deleuze warned us, fabricated concepts address problems so that they do not become empty and blind. Art processes and forms that are based on problematics recognize the 'event' itself as being problematic, without any final closure—only exhaustion. Deleuze maintains, following Nietzsche, that such art politicizes and raises ethical concerns as *amor fati* (the love of one's fate)—to become offspring of the events of our singularity; that is to Xpress [see note 5] the wound and make it the quasi-cause of one's life—via counter-actualizations of 'art,' an art which has no categorical definition per se apart from its affects and percepts as 'blocs of sensation.' Art is that multiplicity that

continually plunges us into *catastrophe*. Emotions and passions are bound to the subject and are the order of *Chronos* as the state of affairs rather than the order of the event, which is bound to the order of affects and the intrinsic body of energetic flows —that is *zoë.* Bilal demonstrates through his work what it means to become paradoxically imperceptible, to drain the ego from its usual narcissism that pervades the art, to face the fault-line that traverses his existence that *is* the transcendental wound, the inhuman felt within him, to which he tries to give body to the incorporeal event-effect.

Neither Bilal nor the Internet gamer-audience could remotely predict the results. Rather the game unfolded through the *durée* of time, ending only by an arbitrarily chosen pre-specified time limit—30 days, the time of Chronos. It lasted, however, an extra day, which has its own significance in terms of time as Aion—the event had not been exhausted. Bilal extended the time to 31 days. On that day he pulled the plug and declared: 'the gun is silent'! Posting his last video he says, 'Please keep the conversation going,' marking an open narrative.

The distinction between time as Chronos and time as Aion is an important one. Aion is the paradoxical time of never passing and never arriving, subdividing endlessly into the past and future in the becoming present. It is composed of a simultaneous movement in two directions, opening upon both the future and the past at once— a time which is not. It belongs to the incorporeal surface, to the virtual, to non-being, to the transcendental (not transcendent) as a wound that always already testifies to the fragility of life—that death can appear at any instant.

What the performance did, and what Bilal desired was to raise ethical and political questions concerning video violence, to dialogue on the terror of war, the choice to shoot or not to shoot, the loss of family, and so on. Such an assemblage of questions remain unavailable and 'outside' a videogame world where designer capitalism seems to be at its alluringly best. This was his problematic uniquely explored and risked by his performance. There were moments of sheer terror and days of outright depression. Bilal's performance piece used the same technology that 'enables someone sitting in front of a computer to drop a bomb from thousands of miles away' (Bilal and Lydersen, 2008:10). His interactive art project eventually became a cybercultural event. Wafaa was interviewed by a number of major networks: NPR, BBC, CNN, MSNBC and the History Channel, helping to disseminate the event to a global audience. This kept him sane.

Event

To explore the notion of event, via Bilal's performative art, shifts the ground from the usual understanding of aesthetics, theorized from a phenomenological level of form and emotion, and repositions it to the intrinsic body of affect and sensation as an asemiotic unconscious experience at the level of the nervous system. As Deleuze reminds us, 'the event is not [to be] confused with its spatio-temporal realization in a state of affairs' (1990:22). This realm of sense, 'above' the level of representation, presents the unthought, a realm where 'authentic' creativity is released potentially for psychic health. I use the term 'authentic' very gingerly here since it has nothing to do with true or false but with a state of having little egoic control, yet coming to terms with accident, difference, and repetition that are 'outside' and irrational when it comes to meaning making that (re)assures the frames of perception. As has been shown, this aspect points to art as *catastrophe* in its positive affirmative sense. It is the counter-actualizations as the practice of Xpressing catastrophic changes that constitute and destroy any actuality. The virtual event is always produced Outside as an emerging potential immanent to a particular confluence of forces that take places during the processes of arting.

The counter-actualization of an event is a difficult concept to grasp, especially as applied to artistic performances. For Deleuze the event is an event of the senses, and sense is located between subject and object. It resists origins and particularity. The sense of an event breaks apart on the surface of the split between subjects and objects. As Deleuze says, sense is located between words and objects: 'the event is sense itself' (Deleuze, 1990: 22). The event is indeterminate making it resistant to structure, analysis and

meaning. The event's temporality also resists any forms of teleology in terms of past-present-future. Paradoxically, the event exists in a time which is always just past and is always just about to come. Events are always expressed in the infinitive—such as to die, to be ill. Without movement or becoming, the event is inconceivable. It resists temporal specificity, the time of Chronos, as it also resists spatial location. It is, on every account a difficult concept, yet it is precisely the event that is the singular life of artistic practice that holds at bay *ressentiment* and forwards an affirmative ethics: 'either ethics makes no sense at all, or this is what it means and has nothing else to say: not to be unworthy of what happens to us' (Deleuze, 1990:149).

'The event', Deleuze tells us, 'is always and at the same time something which has just happened and something which is about to happen; never something which is happening' (1990: 63). The event therefore never actually occurs in present time. Deleuze draws a fundamental distinction between time as Chronos and time as Aion. As we know, these are not binary oppositions. To think so falls immediately into representational thinking; they are simultaneously present as a disjunctive synthesis; time as Aion is revealed as it were, only through 'experifigural encounters' [see note 4]—these are events, or more importantly such events are only effects. Encounters with 'what' one immediately asks—encounters with worlds, with life itself, when the world of sensation penetrates through the subject object distinction. We have heard it often enough—when the world 'looks at us,' not us at it; when the centered subject of control begins to fade, when an unease seems to come over us and there is a flooding of anxiety as this object becomes too close, or perhaps we are caught by its beauty, not as a fetishistic object of desire, but of wonderment.

Deleuze repeatedly maintains that events are only effects and for me Bilal presents us with an X-pression that encounters the events of his life that touch the X-pressive aspects of the event that wounded his psyche. For Deleuze, the event is doubly coded, subject to a double causality or double structure, a co-terminus dualism of empirical cause and transcendental quasi-causes (*objet a*), which is why his ontological system is dubbed an empirical transcendentalism, a quasi-causal system since it is impossible to trace completely the emergence of the event. We can only deal with its effects ethically and politically through self-refleXion and X-pression as processes that counter-actualize, as we shall see, the virtual memories of the past and the future that is to come.

Bilal's performance is self-refleXion and Xpression at its best [see note 5], the enactment of a delicate operation since the counter-actualization of the event that embraces the wound as a virtual effect cannot fall into the role of a victim or patient, that is the risk taken. It could have ended badly in psychic breakdown. Had it, the platform as he calls it (or diagram in Deleuzian terms) would have failed him. The affirmative catastrophic side of arting, the breakdown, would have won over. As Deleuze writes of catastrophe 'something arose whose force fractured the codes, undid the signifiers, passed under the structure, set the flows in motion, and effected breaks at the limits of desire: a breakthrough …' (1994: 370).

[…and Counting]

The notion of catastrophe and failure plays a prominent role in the second, and complementary performance that I shall now discuss. *… and Counting*. This is a recent performance (March 4, 2010) where Bilal utilizes tattoo art to document the deaths of thousands of Americans and Iraqis killed since March 2003, the start of the US-led invasion. Over the period of 24 hours tattoo artists methodically rendered the names of Iraqi's major cities in Arabic script on Bilal's back producing a borderless map. It is a territory that he attempts to shoulder that can only fail. 5,000 red dots to symbolize the American death toll are then embedded. The next stage imagined 100,000 dots representing the estimated number of Iraqi deaths distributed across his back in invisible ink could be rendered visible only through ultraviolet light. When his back was lit one might think of the *multiplicity of effects* each pinprick of light gave off, creating a virtual halo of the pain and suffering of those that died, and the loved ones who mourned their death.

The relationship between the visibility and invisibility of death is made obvious.

The problematic idea was to memorialize the loss of both civilian and American lives in Iraq in such a way that the monumentalism of such loss might be felt by an American public, who are largely unaffected by the silent cry of Iraqi civilians. How might the 'substance ' of such loss, its 'hard' unrepresentable core' that has been repressed and di(*still)*ed into so many iconic forms by the media—like the distant images of the war on television—, be 'opened up' to expose the pain and suffering? Bilal's body was to become a living 'monument' where representational logic, the chronological time of memorialization via physical monuments held no ground, where forgetting usually becomes a question of the passage of time. This was a 'monumental' artwork in the sense that Deleuze and Guattari (1994) develop this concept. Monumentalism here is not a question of size or massiveness of material like marble, granite, or bronze that so many commemorative monuments are made of as a sign of permanence to mark the memory of the event. This is a question of substance or material and form. Here we are dealing with monumentalism as an 'open' deterritorializing force. Matter and function supplant substance and form. The former are process terms, the latter are representational products. An artwork that functions as a 'monument' becomes an 'abstract machine.' It attempts to undo territorialized substance, to open it up, deterritorialize it, and enable it to hyper connect with matter. A closed system becomes an open one as energy is released. The artwork does this through its *diagram,* the term Deleuze and Guattari use (1987), that illustrates or codes the forces at play so that the route or map of the deterritorialized lines of matter that begin to transverse out of the substance (materialized form) can be followed. The artist's diagram enables an encounter with the work into another plane, which may be otherwise impossible. The way the diagram is crafted and how it suggests participation with its 'outside' potentially opens up the unthought. In this case Bilal's diagram, literally the back of his body as the surface is meant to increase the active memory that a monument contains. Monuments are intended to recall or remind witnesses of an event or a life: to keep memory 'alive' as it were by recalling the past (as in a memento). In order for such a memory to be actualized, to have sense, it must participate in the *virtuality* of the commemorative life that is its condition. Once more, Bilal's performance offers another counter-actualization of that loss of life.

During the performance, witnesses were asked to read names of those who died. A dollar was asked in donation for every tattooed pinprick that would go to help children who had survived while their parents had not. The performance ended in *failure*. Only a fraction of the total deaths were marked on his skin before the pain overwhelmed him, and his back became too inflamed for the inked renderings to appear properly. His body could not codify the total number of deaths within the time frame, nor could the borderless map of his back 'contain' them. The dot, as a single reiterative sign elides and obfuscates the multiple and varied encounters of death that took place. Here, I would argue, the paradox of Bilal's breakdown itself became a breakthrough. As Deleuze and Guattari (1987) tell us, desiring machines only work when they break down. The 'abstract machine' functions when it breaks matter that is locked into substance. The diagram, as the place of catastrophe held to a point where the immensity of the task—to somehow 'represent' the monumental loss of life—was *stilled* by the pure sensual intensity of the performance itself. The moment of failure, of acute bodily fatigue and rejection, is the moment of Bilal's imperceptibility. The role of the self as a reference point for the understanding of art disappears. It is undone as 'what the body can do' reaches a place of sublime failure that it can do 'nothing' or 'no more.' The artist disappears at the point when his or her art reaches its greatest intensity. The pure intensity of the work takes effect, escaping its capture into interpretation.

Like those participants in *To Shoot an Iraqi*, those who were able to enter his diagram felt the affect of this failure. Bilal's diagram broke down; his 'platform' as he calls it never held up, the physical catastrophe that underlies his performance came to a collapse so that witnesses would 'get it.' It is within the diagram (the platform) that the artist confronts the greatest danger. Here, I think, the intensity of the catastrophe is so great that it addresses the problematic of loss of life as powerfully as his body would allow. His 'death' so to speak, as the disappearance of his figure, like that moment on the 15-16th day in *To Shoot an Iraqi*, is transferred over to the witnesses in the studio and online via streaming video, confirming that the

wound as event remains open, that the mourning goes on. …. *Still counting*.

Bilal's performance articulates and imagines that the task itself is impossible in its comprehensibility, and that any statistical numbers are there merely to satisfy pundits, and to measure a regime's success in the continuing of violence. Bilal's counter-actualization once again mitigates the *ressentiment* that is so pervasive. In its most crass rhetorical form, this statistical ruse is countered when a politician singles out some common man or woman that they have spoken to, representing him or her as an iconic exemplar of someone out of work, or striving for the American dream, or making ends meet despite the hard times. Or, worse perhaps, is the sentimentality that is continually evoked through media networks for the poor and suffering whether it is war or poverty.

Bilal shows his witnesses in the gallery and those patched in via Internet and video streaming that there is no form that stands for or signifies the multitude of lives lost. His body, at that moment of failure and exhaustion, exposes a plane of immanence that shakes the nerves. It becomes formless, imperceptible. His pain and loss is in no way analogous, metaphorical or iconic of the pain the nation endures. Metonymy fails as well. It only invites viewers to identify with the incomprehensibility of monumental loss. It is a question perhaps, whether Bilal can escape a heroic transference that some may confer on him—or even martyrdom, should something have gone tragically wrong, such as the pain leading to heart failure, or the amount of tattooing leading to an aneurysm.

These two performances present counter-actualizations, the doubling of the event where an artistic expression doubles the expression of differential changes in actuality. Destruction and creation are intimately tied together moving back and forth on one another. As Deleuze writes, 'The eternal truth of the event is grasped only if the event is also inscribed in the flesh. But each time we must double this painful actualization by a counter-actualization, which limits, moves and transfigures it … to be the mime of *what effectively occurs* …' (1990: 161, original italic). It requires a draining of the 'self' to face the wound of the event. In these counter-actualizations Wafaa Bilal manages to come out the other end—re-born as it were—resurrected. He is no longer the same and neither is the audience who had participated in dialogue as interactive witnesses and 'interactors,' those who had encountered the transference of Bilal's event within themselves.

[… and Questioning]

Bilal's counter-actualizations oddly are exemplary of Rancière's call for the 'heterology' of the aesthetic where 'heterology refers to the way in which the meaningful fabric of the sensible is disturbed: a spectacle does not fit within the sensible framework defined by a network of meanings, and expression does not find its place in the system of visible coordinates where it appears' (2004: 63). Sensible, in the above quote, it should be noted, refers to 'common sense.' I say 'oddly' since Rancière has misread both Deleuze and Lyotard's reworking of the Kantian sublime and boxed them in within his own Hegelian terms, misunderstanding the virtual in Deleuze's case, and the unrepresentable (*l'impensable*) in Lyotard's as something impossible to conceptualize. Further, Bilal's performances fit very well into the political work of art that disrupts 'the relationship between the visible, the sayable, and the thinkable without having to use the terms of a message as a vehicle' (Rancière, 2004: 63). Bilal presents us with an ethics that mitigates *ressentiment* and, as Rancière would want it, a political art that ensures 'at one and the same time, the production of a double effect: the readability of a political signification and a sensible or perceptual shock caused conversely, by the uncanny, by that which resists signification' (ibid.) Counter-actualization, as a Deleuzian strategy 'for a people [yet] to come' offers a challenge to the 'precarious' world that we live in. It avoids falling into so-called *postproduction* of social reality that is now forwarded by Nicolas Bourriaud (2009), which is confirmed by contemporary art in a negative form, namely the fall, oxymoronically, once more, into a permanent affirmation through the constructivist deconstruction of the transitory and 'circumstantial nature of the institutions that partition the state and of the rules that govern individual or collective behavior.' This is a form of permanent 'revolution' rather than persistent resistant 'affirmation.' Perhaps both are necessary, but I would hedge my bets on the latter rather than

the former, on the minoritarian aim where creativity is harnessed to fabulate new life rather than reaffirming its precariousness under global capitalism.

> 'This isn't a time for art,' he said. 'This is a time of war.'
> I said: 'It is never a time for war, but it is always a time for art'
>
> (Bilal, 2007, 94)

Notes

[1] Synonyms include collaborative art, contextual art, socially engage art, community-based art, interventionalist art, dialogic art, and so on.

[2] Please see my chapter, The Fundamental Antagonism of Art and Design, which develops art into life and life into art complex more fully (jagodzinski, 2010).

[3] This second artistic form is directed at François Lyotard's understanding of the sublime that has affinities with Gilles Deleuze in his re-reading of Kant. The sublime for Lyotard becomes a way of resistance and a witnessing of the forces that lie at the heart of social justice as developed in modernism—witness, that is, to the survivor ethos that the 'dialectical imagination' has wrought. For Deleuze the sublime is precisely the way a 'real experience' takes place that goes beyond its conditions of possibility, opening up the future. His transcendental empiricism discovers 'difference' as the genetic condition for change. Rancière, a Hegelian, wants to accuse both Lyotard and Deleuze of obliterating any tension between art and politics through their 'ethical turn.' Political emancipation, for Rancière, is a process of subjectification that disrupts the existing division of the sensible (the perceptual organization of a community) via decomposing and recomposing relationships between ways of doing, being and saying.

[4] This is a neologism that combines experimentation with the *figural* rather than the *figurative*. See jagodzinski, 1997.

[5] This is another neologism I use throughout my written work to distance this particular process of artistic self-refleXion from self-reflection and the poststructuralist constructivism of self-reflexion. The capital X graphically marks the virtual realm of sensation. Xpression and Xpress are also distinguished from the phenomenological use of expression in arting.

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