

- **Exhibition:** “Without Reality There is No Utopia”
 - **Artists:** Alfredo Jaar, Artur Zmijewski, Carlos Motta, Chto Delat?, Ciprian Muresan, Daniel García Andujar, Dora García, Ed Hall, El Roto, Federico Guzmán, Fernando Bryce, Ignasi Aballí, Jan Peter Hammer, Judi Werthein, Katya Sander, Lene Berg, Manolo Quejido, Oliver Ressler, Pello Irazu, Phil Collins, Rirkrit Tiravanija, Rogelio López Cuenca / Muntadas, Superflex, William S. Burroughs, Wolfgang Tillmans, Zeina Maasri y Zhou Xiaohu.
 - **Inauguration:** 14 April, 20:00 h.
 - **Date:** 14 April – 10 July 2011.
 - **Curators:** Alicia Murría, Mariano Navarro and Juan Antonio Álvarez Reyes
 - **Exhibition Session:** The Political Constitution of the Present
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Thinking the Present: The End of Utopia as a Problem

Alicia Murría, Mariano Navarro and Juan Antonio Álvarez Reyes

What’s behind *Without Reality There Is No Utopia*, the title of the main collective exhibition in *The Political Constitution of the Present* cycle? Behind it are two philosophers of different implications and relevance: Jean Baudrillard and Andreas Huyssen. The former, with his theory of the replacement of the real by the simulacrum, has ended up being perhaps the French philosopher of his generation with the best approach to the analysis of the present, at least for now. Baudrillard has pointed out that simulation is the generation “of something real with no origin or reality.” The dissolution of the real in the virtual is not only a good diagnostic of the present, but also a conclusion which demands to be, in turn, overcome. Thus, the interpretation and meaning of *Without Reality There Is No Utopia* follows the argument of Andreas Huyssen in “Memories of Utopia,” an article published in Spanish in his book *En busca del future perdido*. In stating that once the real has been lost and supplanted by the

simulacrum, utopia can no longer exist, since it is intricately related to the superation and improvement of reality, Huyssen premises his argument on, precisely, Baudrillard. This is the meaning implied in the title of the exhibition: *Without Reality There Is No Utopia*. That is to say, in the age of simulacra and virtuality, the disappearance of the real also drags along the utopian. This is why it is urgent and necessary to reset the real, to return to reality, or, at least, to its analysis, in order to attempt to apprehend a new utopian thought. The current situation demands it.

The project *The Political Constitution of the Present* – which takes up its title from the first chapter of Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt’s *Empire* – has, therefore, in *Without Reality There Is No Utopia* the first stop in its journey, since it is necessary to think the present on the basis of what is available, trying to find a way to set one’s feet on the ground. The second part of this project, to be produced soon, will attempt to rethink the future, and will be called *What Is To Come Has Already Arrived*, since it will consist in the research of the utopian signs that are already here, among us, within the previous analysis of the real.

Without Reality There Is No Utopia consists of two asymmetric sections. The first section is “Description of the Lie,” a kind of incredulous prologue to the systems of production of the simulacra of the real. In that section, there are two pieces, two videos, which engage human scepticism and its current drift. On the one hand, we have William S. Burroughs, reciting Bertolt Brecht. On the other, Alfredo Jaar, who recovers the analysis on Pier Paolo Pasolini.

The second, broader section, is entitled “Collapses,” although it could just as well have borrowed Baudrillard’s term “Implosions,” since contemporaneity can be described as an implosive situation. This second section is in turn divided into four collapses: the collapse of Communism, the collapse of Capitalism, that of democracy, and that of the geo-political. That is to say – according to Huyssen – “Utopia never dies alone: it drags along its counter-utopia.” Therefore, the fall of Communism drags along its counter-utopia – Capitalism – which in turn drags along democracy, since the latter linked its destiny to it. The likely collapse of the expansive system typical of Capitalism – Colonialism – would, in turn, involve a geo-political “implosion,” For these reasons, we should seriously consider the end of Utopia as “our problem,” the problem of our times, since, as Huyssen points out, its scope “is much greater than we would like to admit.”

We should, therefore, urgently rethink and recalibrate the real, since, Without Reality There Is No Utopia.

DESCRIPTION OF THE LIE

Philosophers such as Christian Salmon – member of the Centre for Research in the Arts and Language – have described and analysed a contemporary phenomenon which goes beyond, and is different from media manipulation and censorship as defined since the first decades of the twentieth century: *storytelling*, or the machine to fabricate stories. A system to impose ideas, generate sense and control the behaviour born in the U.S.

Art hasn't been, and isn't unrelated to the narrative operations of *storytelling*. In a deliberate ambiguity, it both denounces the excess of publicity or propaganda marketing, and deploys similar formulae in its production of meaning. "We all need our own story. This is the vulnerability that *storytelling* bases its strategy on." And, by force of its strength, it also builds itself an imaginary.

The section borrows its title from the sixth poetry book by Antonio Gamoneda, dated between 1975 and 1976, *Descripción de la mentira*. A decrying, and a warning, of the deceit and fraud through which representation (or its more common formulation, the word) weaves the real of the reality it covers up. The lie as will and as a tool for the representation of the world, extended like oil and multiplied by the media of reality constitution of the truth of all there is.

A reality that has become more and more evident, both in the resources used in Communist political systems, which have almost vanished in Europe with the turn of the century, and in the multiplicity of false narratives constructed in order to endorse the Iraq War, or, more recently, in the inflation of economic stories which take over the informational horizon and, and the same time, dilute realities and responsibilities.

The irruption of pieces of information provided by Wikileaks has not only made evident the known facts of double standards, covert operations, protection of certain crimes, and other similar miseries of the relationship between the powerful and their more or less legitimate representatives. It has also established, more or less clearly, the nature of the rules of conspiracy for the elaboration of the deceitful stories spread through

public opinion, and, also although collaterally, how communication media are, really, filtering systems for the information to be disseminated, hidden, and, above all, the information that certain interests want to skew.

German artist Wolfgang Tillmans simulates contemporary encyclopaedic knowledge in a series of works that reproduce the information reproduced in print media on diverse issues under the common umbrella of “the truth.” The works of Spanish artist Pello Irazu and Argentinian-Thai artist Rirkrit Tiravanija allude to the capacity of modification and propaganda content of the news published in print media, however different the topics covered, be it the War in Lebanon or the bankruptcy of Lehman Brothers.

Spanish artist Dora García penetrates the offices of the sinister Stasi, the ideological police of the German Democratic Republic, which had become a society within society, with its own internal rules. Danish artist Lene Berg, in turn, deconstructs the happy image of a free and educated society, revealing how many of the actions we consider intellectually nevertheless respond to plans laid out by the powers that be in order to ensure their supremacy. Finally, Argentinian artist Judi Werthein explores the anomalous construction of identities in the Renacer Colony, founded in Chile’s Araucana by Germans connected to National Socialism, who fled the German war defeat.

COLLAPSES

1. Communism

The final leg of the decade of the 1980s was an involved witness of how the spectre that had haunted it since 1848, with the publication of the *Communist Manifesto* by Marx and Engels, and had been a solid and dominant figure in the Soviet Union, in Eastern Europe and part of Asia after the end of World War II and the Korean War, would vanish from the Russian and Western horizons – except for the shadow of some lonely spectre – and would only continue to howl in some parts of the Far East, where it has either entrenched in famine and horror, or where, on extraordinary and contradictory transformations: that mix of political Communism and economic Capitalism that characterizes China.

The fall of the Berlin Wall, the end of the Soviet Union, the Reunification of Germany, and the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact, with the subsequent progressive inclusion of

some of its countries to the European Union, not only accounted for first-class geostrategic and economic changes, whose consequences are still being paid by the citizens of these countries, and those of Western countries in general, but which also involved, ideological and programmatic changes of extraordinary depth, the final structure of which has been definitely consolidated, while simultaneously positioned in its appropriate perverse and damaging perspective by the ferocious crisis triggered, only two decades later, in the very sustainability of the Capitalist system and its single thought discourse.

The political situation derived from these events has experienced different narratives, according to circumstances, vantage points and distance from the extinct USSR. Currently, some democracies, almost comparable to the de facto pre-existing ones, combine this with authentic autocracies, countries submerged in criminal structures, and other that could hardly be considered autonomous entities. But both remain equally silent in terms of autonomous political thought.

The Russian collective *Chto Delat? (What Is To Be Done?)*, with its Leninist historical resonance, makes the viewer critically engage the events during the presidency of Mikhail Gorbachev and the beginning of the 1990s that lead to the demise of the Soviet system. The video of British artist Phil Collins delves into the personal experience of those who, as is the case of his three teachers from the German Democratic Republic, saw themselves obliged to replace all their social structures, historical systems, political conventions and civil assumptions with those that up until that moment had been considered the wrong enemy, and subject to bourgeois Capitalism. On the other hand, Ciprian Muresan shows a false silent story with which he convinces us of something as impossible to believe as is the statement that Communism, in fact, never existed, allowing a double reading of that very sentence. Finally, Manolo Quejido explores his personal feelings regarding Cuba, in a manner in which the clarity of thought regarding the current situation doesn't preclude his empathy with Cuban citizens, the recognition of their dignity and the Revolution they encouraged and in the circumstances of which they live.

2. Capitalism

The economic crisis triggered between 2007 and 2008 caught the governments and a good number of economic analysts unaware, as if it were a case of a strange, illogical, unforeseeable fact, independent from the economic policies adopted during the past

three decades. “The crisis is interpreted not as the inevitable result of the instability of the unregulated financial markets themselves, but as the effect of the lack of honesty and the irresponsibility of a few financial agents out of the control of public powers,” as is pointed out in the book *Manifesto of Terrified Economists*. Many voices are raised against these policies, that underscore the urgent need to reset economic thought, and powerful social movements are born that demand a kind of sustainable development, not premised on consumerism, waste and the depletion of the planet’s resources.

Nevertheless, in order to amend this crisis, those responsible for triggering it are called upon, as indicated by Michael Hardt and Toni Negri, “(...) looking for its solution in the very ideas and behaviours that fostered it.” A new terminology is being put in place, and concepts such as “to calm the markets,” the translation of which is no other but the reduction of gains for the workers, their precariousness and the general retreat in their social benefits, measures that, paradoxically, don’t seem to help in alleviating the situation. “Much as you downsize, you won’t wake up with a job,” stated a sticker worn by participants in the demonstrations that took place in Madrid in autumn 2010 against the plans for economic cuts on workers.

The project, produced jointly by Antoni Muntadas and Rogelio López Cuenca speaks of the crisis with irony, starting out with an adaptation of language and of its configurations to musical scales. On the other hand, Rirkrit Tiravanija, an artist engaged in weaving socialization connections opposed to those imposed by Capitalism, based on unbridled consumerism –what Ulrich Beck summarizes in the concept of “organized irresponsibility” – with *Fear Eats Away at the Soul*, a series of canvases where he continues with the set of ideas already postulated in *The Days of This Society Are Numbered*, uses news articles published in German newspapers between September and October 2008, that reflect on the bankruptcy of Lehman Brothers, a decisive fact in the triggering of the current economic crisis. In the meantime, Daniel García Andújar, in *Timeline*, brings together a wide range of images from media and advertising in order to configure a subjective chronology where different events from the post-Capitalist period are narrated.

From a different vantage point, in *The Financial Crisis*, the Superflex collective parodies this situation with humour. Through a fictional narrative, it describes the situation as if it were an illness that could be cured through hypnosis, a healing that, finally, will only be possible if we leave the establishment. Also through fiction, Jan

Peter Hammer, with his piece *The Anarchist Banker*, explores, in a narrative plot that follows the structure of a TV interview, the ultra-liberal positions of the financial workers that turns individualism into the foundation of human behaviour. Andrés Rábago, hidden behind his pseudonym El Roto, offers a clear answer to this question with his cartoons and his telegraph-like comments, which mix irony, dark humour and sarcasm, in order to compose a start portrait of our present. From a different point of view, Katya Sander seeks to engage the spectator, involving them along with the characters that burst onto the screen, in order to answer, over and over again, the same question: "What is Capitalism?"

3. The Geopolitical

The tide of popular rebellions that have spread throughout the Maghreb and the Middle East in the last few weeks have caught the West so off guard, that they have plunged it into the greatest confusion. First Tunisia and then Egypt saw how the peaceful popular pressure, headed by the youth, brought down the governments of Ben Ali and Hosni Mubarak. The riots in Morocco, Argelia, Bahrain, Yemen and Oman take place with different degrees of intensity, and, in all cases, are violently repressed. In these first days of March, Libya is the scenario where repression adopts its most unbridled brutality. In the meantime, the paralysis affects the democracy of the developed countries who are witnessing these projects by turning a blind eye, and appear surprised that their own good allies, suppliers of raw materials and great business, could be so tyrannical with their own people.

How are we to understand this confusion and this extreme slowness in reacting on behalf of Western democracies? It is obvious that the weight of economic interests is key. But, intertwined with these interests, we have the ignorance and prejudices that identify the Arabic world with radical Islam, the lines of thought according to which, in those contexts, the weight of religion makes it impossible for them to develop democratic forms of coexistence. All these attitudes are permeated by a set of prejudices that perpetuate the shadow of the colonial heritage, as well as the belief that the rights, freedoms and welfare of societies can only come from the experience of the West. In opposition to this exclusionary and totalizing nature of modern rationality, we have the statements of Walter Mignolo, when he refers to the fact that the "unfinished project of Modernity," can only be realized when the "unfinished project of decoloniality" has taken place, understanding the idea of coloniality as the "cultural logic" of

colonialism and its heritage; a heritage which survives, and multiplies, even when the domination of colonial power has disappeared.

The goal is to focus the spotlight on certain realities that shape the present; to map, describe, analyse, expose power configurations, decode, deconstruct, re-read, discover what lies behind the inherited images, behind History as it is being narrated, and to explore the geopolitical reconfigurations generated by the new relationships of global domination. It is a case, finally, of “opening up the code the visual frame, showing its reverse, exhibiting its entrails,” as pointed out by García Andújar. Some of these questions feed the work of Fernando Bryce, who engages representations of colonial practices and their “civilizing” discourses. Through a collection of posters, Lebanese artist Zeina Maastri, researches the different narratives between text, image and transmission of discourse among the groups participating in the civil war in Lebanon between 1975 and 1990. Meanwhile, Ignasi Aballí traces a cartography of international conflicts through the cold operation of accounting their media presence, and Zhou Xiaohu produces a critical discourse on media and their capacity of manipulation and concealment. On the other hand, Federico Guzmán points out how the consequences of the FTAs, a new form of global coloniality, affect the everyday practice of citizens.

4. Democracy

While broad movements arise that demand access to political systems based on rights and freedoms which they have been refused for decades, the signs of decline in these conquests are obvious. “Democracy – the formal and substantive, representative and participatory, procedural and material – is not currently going through its finest hour,” states Juan Gabriel Tokatlian, who points out how “After September the 11th 2001, there has been a shift (...) which tends to give democracies a huge discretion to downsize freedoms and apply enforcement policies.”

The excuse of terrorism is effectively exploited by the U.S. while developed Europe yields immigration in its “defensive” strategy, strengthening its frontiers and cutting minority rights within, all that with the agreement, in both cases, of large sectors of the population.

In the face of these dynamics, there are other voices, that question the democratic model premised on highly structured traditional political parties, and their alternation in government and in voting as a simple act of citizen participation. Technological

development allows a global-scale control which was unimaginable only a few decades ago, but which, once an almost absolute surveillance and control have been made possible, where the notion of privacy has been eroded, has opened up the doors to a new phase in terms of information transmission, communication and unmediated relationship among individuals, which is revealed, in an extraordinary manner, in the deployment of new forms of organization.

Ed Hall, with his banners, builds a kind of microhistory of social struggles of the recent decades in England; and Artur Zmijewski, in his work *Democracies*, shows concentrations of people in different parts of the world (Belfast, Berlin, the West Bank, Gaza, Warsaw, Strasbourg) collected both in anti-war protests or repression, as playful and celebratory events, where the human body becomes the centre of attention.

Sometimes it is simply a case of compelling and collecting the voices of citizens, as does Carlos Motta in his analysis of what is democracy and what it means today, a research project that has lasted for four years and which is titled *The Good Life*. His inquiry is not far from the one raised by Oliver Ressler, determined to note that there are other ways of understanding, of deepening, of extending what we understand as democratic systems. In *What is Democracy?* Ressler interviews philosophers, politicians, activists and concerned citizens in order to delineate other forms of economic and political intervention, of individual and collective development. In one of these interviews, German sociologist Heinz Dieterich points out that “the objective conditions are much more prone to a truly participatory democracy. I think there has never been a better chance of having a truly direct democracy than the one we have today.”