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PERSONAFICATION

Performing the Persona in Art and Activism

IN THE MODERN aesthetic regime, the artwork usually comes with an identifiable author in the form of a single person—a supercharged subject who has created an exceptional object, which in turn can overwhelm and rework the viewer's (or reader's, or listener's) own subjectivity.¹ Clearly, artistic volition is not that of some pure philosophical *cogito* or self-constituting idealist subject, which becomes self-identical by positing external objects. Artistic subjects self-objectify through the construction of social and/or artistic masks. Yet as Deleuze has argued, the same in fact goes for philosophers: Plato used Socrates as a *conceptual persona*, Nietzsche used Zarathustra and Dionysus, while the Cartesian system depends on the persona of 'the Idiot who says "I" and sets up the *cogito*'.²

The etymological root of 'person' is the Latin *persona*, denoting a theatrical mask, or character—the character being visually articulated by the mask worn by the actor. In Rome the term also underwent a legal turn, referring to persons in law—either 'natural' or juridical persons, corporate bodies. In modern philosophy, as Charles Taylor has noted, insofar as it is 'a being with consciousness, where consciousness is seen as a power to frame representations of things', the concept of the person is closely connected to 'the seventeenth-century, epistemologically grounded notion of the subject'.³ But in contrast to the philosophical subject from Descartes to the German idealists (the subject as *cogito* or self-consciousness and as the negation of objecthood), the notion of the person has always been more entangled in legal theory. The 'person' thus appears more socially grounded and constructed than the 'subject':

Where it is more than simply a synonym for 'human being', 'person' features primarily in moral and legal discourse. A person is a being with a certain status, or a bearer of rights. But underlying the moral status, as its condition, are certain capacities. A person is a being who has a sense of self, has a notion of the future and past, can hold values, make choices . . . ⁴

Personhood therefore seems to be relatively factual and down-to-earth, compared to philosophical subjecthood. This is where Deleuze intervenes, reintroducing the person(a) into the realm of philosophical cognition; arguing that the philosophical subject is in fact dependent on conceptual masks, such as the 'idiot I' of Descartes; or, one might add, Hegel's Spirit itself, as well as its dialectical manifestations, such as Master and Slave:

The conceptual persona is not the philosopher's representative, but rather the reverse: the philosopher is only the envelope of his principal persona and all the other personae who are the intercessors [*intercesseurs*], the real subjects of his philosophy. Conceptual personae are the philosopher's 'heteronyms', and the philosopher's name is the simple pseudonym of his persona.⁵

One could name artistic heteronyms such as the Machine (Warhol) or the Shaman (Beuys), yet genealogies of such conceptual personae of artists—which can be traced back at least to the Renaissance—should steer clear of oversimplifying typological excess.

Foucault proposed to historicize and denaturalize the author by thinking in terms of specific author functions: an abstract painting has a different author function to a scientific article, and a painter talking or writing about his work again differs from the painting, just as a

¹ This text is deeply indebted to my stimulating exchange with Jesse van Winden as supervisor of his MPhil thesis, *Destabilizing Critique: Personae in between Self and Enactment*. The full thesis can be downloaded from jessevanwinden.wordpress.com.

² Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *What Is Philosophy?*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Graham Burchell, New York 1994, pp. 61–2. *What Is Philosophy?* was effectively written by Deleuze alone, using the Deleuze/Guattari conceptual persona.

³ Charles Taylor, 'The Concept of a Person', in *Human Agency and Language: Philosophical Papers*, Cambridge 1985, p. 98.

⁴ Taylor, 'The Concept of a Person', p. 97.

⁵ Deleuze and Guattari, *What Is Philosophy?*, p. 64. In fact, for Hegel the subject is not necessarily or ultimately a person: *absolute spirit* is the ultimate subject, irreducible to individuals, though unfolding through their (relative) agency.

personal introduction to a scientific article has a different author function than the main text.⁶ What interests us here is a historical shift in the author function which involved a *personafication* of art. If the artist's persona was once an intercession between author and work, a public projection of artistic subjectivity that was used to frame and interpret the work while remaining external to it, this distinction between *ergon* and *parergon* broke down as the persona became the primary artistic material and focus of the artistic practice. The result is a set of performative strategies at the fraying outer edge of contemporary subjecthood and subjectivity.

Acting beyond the role

In modern theatre, the persona as physical mask was no longer a central concept, being replaced by the actors' projection of their role through an individuated performance. However, the theatre also saw the elaboration of a star system that would be transformed, industrialized and perfected in Hollywood—and in this star system, the actor's persona would be the mediating trait between performer and role. A character played by Cary Grant or Greta Garbo had to fit the star's public persona, their image; or it could be used to mould and develop, transform, challenge or even radically overhaul their persona ('Garbo laughs!'). At the same time, as Philip Auslander has argued, Brechtian epic theatre turned the actor/role dyad into a triad of actor/role/persona, as the Brechtian actor maintains a distance from the role.⁷ In the process, the persona becomes key: a mode of self-presentation that joins, interrogates or displaces the representational role, the fictional character.⁸

After World War II, the immaterial 'character mask' that is the performer's persona would become a focal point of neo-avant-garde practice. When Harold Rosenberg claimed that painting à la Pollock and de

⁶ Michel Foucault, 'What Is an Author?', lecture to the Société Française de philosophie, 22 February 1969.

⁷ Philip Auslander, 'On the Concept of Persona in Performance', *Kunstlicht*, vol. 36, no. 3, pp. 63–4.

⁸ My phrasing here is a variation on Auslander, 'On the Concept of Persona in Performance', p. 76. Auslander has tracked persona-based strategies both in avant-garde theatre (Wooster Group) and with regard to musical performers, many of whom plunder the archives of Hollywood and of the avant-garde (Madonna, Lady Gaga).

Kooning transformed the artist into one who *acts* rather than depicts, he remained strategically ambiguous about the kind of acting that was involved.⁹ The action painter was an actor in the sense of an *actant* or agent, but he was perhaps also an actor in a more theatrical sense. In both art and politics, no act is ever what it seems: 'Action and acting are semi-illusory phenomena; they include not only the actors' hallucinations and mistaken identity but the inherent misapprehension of their audiences. Every act involves a seepage of poetry into practical life.'¹⁰ In the late 1950s, Allan Kaprow stressed that Rosenbergian-Pollockian action painting needed to jump from the canvas into three dimensions and happenings or events.¹¹ In the wake of Pollock and Cage, art thus underwent a performative turn, and the new performance largely dispensed with the *role*, as it dispensed with the script in favour of a post-Cagean *score*. If, in the Cold War context, Rosenberg was by and large content to let his pseudo-existentialist dramas be played out in the context of art, the artist now appeared to be poised to become a 'man [*sic*] of the world'.¹²

At the same time, subjectivity was being renegotiated in philosophy and politics. Around 1960, Jean-Paul Sartre was embroiled in a vituperative exchange with Georg Lukács over questions of subjectivity and agency, in which Sartre—somewhat muffled echoes of whom can be found in Rosenberg—attacked Lukács's *History and Class Consciousness*, with its notion of the proletariat as the revolutionary subject-object of history (this was Lukács's conceptual persona). Lecturing in Rome in 1961, Sartre rejected his opponent's 'idealist dialectics' and proceeded to articulate an intricate dialectic not of subject and object, but of subjectivation and objectivation, in which people are never purely subject, or part of a fully self-conscious collective subject. There is always a play of interiority and exteriority, of invention and habit or repetition, and of knowledge and non-knowledge. 'Subjectivity appears as both repetitive being and inventive being'—'We will never recognize and understand what human inventiveness is if we assume it to be pure praxis, grounded in clear

⁹ Harold Rosenberg, 'The American Action Painters' (1952), in *The Tradition of the New*, London 1970.

¹⁰ Harold Rosenberg, *Act and the Actor: Making the Self*, Chicago 1970, pp. vii–viii.

¹¹ Allan Kaprow, 'The Legacy of Jackson Pollock' (1958), in *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life*, Jeff Kelley, ed., Berkeley and Los Angeles 1993, pp. 1–9.

¹² In his 1964 essay 'The Artist as a Man of the World', Kaprow reflected on contemporary art's newfound commercial and social success: see *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life*, pp. 46–58.

consciousness. Elements of ignorance are necessary to permit inventiveness.¹³ Foregrounding the role of non-knowledge, Sartre asserts that ‘once consciousness is involved, subjectivity becomes objectivity’ through processes of projection. Arguing that ‘subjectivity must be understood as perpetual projection, and to the extent that it is a mediation it can only be the projection of being within—*en deçà*—onto being beyond’, he effectively analyses subjectivity in terms of a dialectic of self and projected persona.

Activist aesthetics

Persona politics became a key factor in post-Cagean 1960s art. George Maciunas and others within Fluxus were highly sceptical of the sham-shaman persona that their German ally Joseph Beuys developed in his *Aktionen* from 1962 onwards; Maciunas of course preferred art to be understated and to have ‘impersonal qualities’.¹⁴ Jonas Mekas’s insistence that Maciunas and Warhol were ‘the same’, as both dealt essentially with ‘nothingness’, can be extended to their performance persona, and their persona performance.¹⁵ Maciunas’s bureaucratic identity as Fluxus ‘chairman’, as well as his later forays into drag, provide many parallels to Warhol’s explorations of machinic, empty celebrity. Mekas’s remarks accompany a double film portrait containing footage of a ‘dumpling party’ organized by Maciunas in 1971, whose attendees included Warhol as well as Yoko Ono and John Lennon. In the later 1960s, through her liaison with Lennon, Ono had become exposed to celebrity on a scale beyond Warhol’s notoriety, and the couple decided to explore their celebrity and their public persona(e) as material.

Their *Bed-In* performance (1969) is a key moment in that it represents the convergence of artistic and pop-cultural performative strategies. The *Bed-In*, the first instalment of which took place in Amsterdam’s Hilton Hotel, was a Fluxus event reconfigured as a celebrity media event.¹⁶ As in some of the most understated Zen-like Fluxus concerts, this was an event

¹³ Jean-Paul Sartre, ‘Marxism and Subjectivity: The Rome Lecture, 1961’, with editorial introduction and an accompanying essay by Fredric Jameson, ‘Sartre’s Actuality’, in NLR 88, Jul–Aug 2014.

¹⁴ From George Maciunas’s 1963 definition of Fluxus: Craig Saper, ‘Fluxus as a Laboratory’, in Ken Friedman, ed., *The Fluxus Reader*, London 1998, p. 139.

¹⁵ Jonas Mekas, voice-over in his short film *Andy Warhol & George Maciunas*, 2006.

¹⁶ The Amsterdam *Bed-In* was from 25 to 31 March 1969; the event was later repeated in Montreal.

in which nothing really happened—apart from an endless defile of well-wishers and co-performers. These included the *fine fleur* of Amsterdam's counter-culture scene, which was marked by the confluence of several strands of radical activity, including those of Ono's Dutch ex-Fluxus peers and the offshoots of the 1964–67 Provo movement. Among the latter was Robert Jasper Grootveld, who from 1962 onwards had used his knowledge of American happenings and Fluxus events as the basis for a provocative public performance that regularly attracted police intervention and helped to make Amsterdam an international 'Magic Centre', as he put it.¹⁷

By 1969 Grootveld was a member of several overlapping groups involving Max Reneman and Theo Kley, including the so-called Insektensekte (Insect Sect), which protested against pollution with imaginative costumes and events; its members showed up in full regalia to present Ono and Lennon with butterfly insignia.¹⁸ Dressed in fantastic costumes that sometimes suggested insect/human hybrids and other forms of mutation, the Insect Sect staged striking tableaux that look like a hippie version of the *Mad Max* universe. Just like Lennon and Ono, they tried to effect change through images and personae—in their case, rather more blatantly artificial than those of Lennon and Ono, who 'played themselves'. Somehow, in circuitous ways, such persona-performances would supposedly affect people and effect change. It is easy, and to some extent justified, to brush aside such hopes as naive. However, to deny such actions and practices any and all agency because they did not instantly revolutionize the world would be reductivist. The activist aesthetics of personafication could indeed have social effects, but as one might expect, these tended to be partial or temporary, at times long-lasting but unintended, and sometimes contradictory.

Having been given the persona of Magic Centre, the city of Amsterdam had become a key node in the global counter-culture. On 5 February,

¹⁷ See Harry Ruhé, 'Acties en performances in Amsterdam: Een overzicht van 20 jaar branche-vervaging', in *Amsterdam 60/80: Twintig jaar beeldende kunst/Twenty Years of Fine Art*, Amsterdam 1982.

¹⁸ This was documented by photographer Cor Jaring, who was close to the circle around Grootveld, Theo Kley and Max Reneman; his photos were published in the weekly *Televisier* on 3 May 1969 ('Vlinders in het Hilton', pp. 26–7). On the Insektensekte see also Marjolein van Riemsdijk, *De bestorming van het onmogelijke: Max Reneman, De Keerkring & de collectieve verbeelding*, Amsterdam 2001, pp. 47–55.

the Kabouter movement—another Provo successor—proclaimed the ‘Orange Free State’ (as in: free from the House of Orange), creating a fictional or hypothetical state as a conceptual persona.¹⁹ The counter-cultural magazine *Aloha* styled itself as the official press organ of Orange Free State; its editor Willem de Ridder was a former Fluxus artist and proprietor of the Amsterdam Fluxshop. In the early 1960s, De Ridder had still presented his projects to the media dressed in a suit and wearing horn-rimmed glasses, in a mimesis of respectability, but by the end of the decade he was founding pop/counter-cultural clubs such as Paradiso and Fantasio and publishing the avant-garde sex mag *SUCK* (*The First European Sex Paper*).²⁰ The latter was the initiative of a London-based group of Germaine Greer, Jim Haynes, William Levy and Heathcote Williams. Some of the group’s members had been involved with the *International Times*, a partial model for *Aloha*. To avoid prosecution, *SUCK* was published in Amsterdam, where a transplanted Levy and De Ridder took on editorial and design duties.²¹ Priding themselves on practicing the sexual liberation and promiscuity that they preached, the *SUCK* editors posed naked (alone and together) on its pages, while De Ridder also appeared in drag.²² Though the activities of the *SUCK* group were often marked by a form of sexual productivism—who has the greatest libidinal stamina?—De Ridder’s play with roles and personae introduced a different dimension.

Self-objectification?

Surveying this continuum of late-1960s practices between neo-avant-garde performance, counter-cultural self-organization and political contestation, there is a pronounced tension between, on the one hand, the prevalent rhetoric of liberation from oppressive roles or character masks, in favour of an untrammelled expression of natural desires, and on the other, a focus not just on drag but on role-play in general.

¹⁹ Coen Tasman, *Louter Kabouter: Kroniek van een beweging*, Amsterdam 1996, pp. 66–7, 80. The name is an ironic *détournement* of that of the South African Boer state.

²⁰ The major publication on De Ridder is still the catalogue of his 1983 retrospective at the Groninger Museum (*De Ridder Retrospective*, Groningen 1983), conceived with William Levy in an informal-autobiographical mode.

²¹ William Levy, ‘De recreatie van De Ridder’, in *De Ridder Retrospective*, p. 18.

²² See for instance a photo (by Anna Beeke) in William Levy, ed., *Wet Dreams: Films and Adventures*, Amsterdam 1973, p. 34; as well as *De Ridder Retrospective*, p. 46.

If the latter could be seen as part of a broadly Reichian dialectics of liberation, the play with identities and personae might also be seen as the inscription of 'liberated' selves into a new regime of productivity.²³ The constant auto-production of subjectivities proceeds through constant self-objectification.

The practices under discussion here are actualizations of Sartre's insight that 'what is essential in subjectivity is knowing oneself only outside, in one's own inventiveness, and never inside. If subjectivity knows itself inside, it is dead; knowing itself outside it does indeed become an object, but an object in its results, and this leads us back to a subjectivity that is not really objectifiable.'²⁴ However, for Sartre the micropolitical formations of much counter-cultural/avant-garde activity would of course in themselves have been insufficient. The problem that preoccupied him in this late work was that of the relation between individual act or practice and the collective/revolutionary event: 'Sartre's tormented awareness of the logic and empirical difficulties of constructing an ordered set of social structures from a multiplicity of antagonistic unit-acts', as Perry Anderson has put it.²⁵ Sartre's unpublished second volume of his *Critique of Dialectical Reason* grappled with the question 'how can "a plurality of epicentres of action have a single intelligibility", such that class struggles can be described as contradictions—in other words "particularizations of a unitary totalization beyond them"?'²⁶ If these formulations were still marked by a traditional belief in the proletariat as revolutionary agent (and by its use as conceptual persona), the plurality of epicentres would prove to be too centrifugal to allow for any totalization in terms of a single revolutionary struggle. Yet the questions about individual and collective agency remain, and here again strategies of personafication come into play.

The year of the first official Fluxus concerts, 1962, saw the posthumous publication of J. L. Austin's *How to Do Things with Words*, which expounded his theory of speech acts. In Austin's terms, Fluxus event scores can be seen as—can be read as—*perlocutionary* speech acts which,

²³ Paul Preciado has termed this the 'pharmacopornographic regime': *Testo Junkie: Sex, Drugs, and Biopolitics in the Pharmacopornographic Regime*, New York 2013.

²⁴ Sartre, 'Marxism and Subjectivity', p. 107.

²⁵ Perry Anderson, *Arguments within English Marxism*, London 1980, p. 52.

²⁶ Anderson, *Arguments within English Marxism*, p. 52.

when they succeed, bring about a new state of affairs.²⁷ However, many event scores by George Brecht and others are deliberately minimal and open to interpretation—even sowing doubt as to whether they are meant to be performed at all. At least in its Fluxus incarnation, then, the generalized art of action that emerged around 1960 is not so much a voluntarist cult of the act as an examination of the preconditions and parameters of agency. Among other things, perlocutionary language is the language of history-making; Marxian parties think they have the conceptual levers to help bring about or hasten the end of capitalism, and their texts are supposed to have agency: from interpreting to changing the world. Intriguingly, while a group such as the Situationist International tried to play the role of a Marxist vanguard party, George Maciunas conceived of Fluxus as a productivist, neo-Soviet group—to the bemusement and irritation of his peers.²⁸ As if taking aim at the discrepancy between the Fluxus score as ‘open work of art’ on the one hand, and Maciunas’s teleological view of history on the other, Jackson Mac Low’s short 1963 pieces titled *Social Project* suggest a social agency that is both grand and unspecified. In the manner of Fluxus event scores, they purport to be condensed instructions for a performance or act of some sort. *Social Project 2* (29 April 1963) reads:

FIND A WAY TO END WAR
MAKE IT WORK²⁹

The rub, of course, lies in the hyper-condensed ‘make it work’. While Mac Low was not among those 1960s artists who crafted a visible public persona, there is an intriguing link with a later intervention by that most visible of couples, Lennon and Ono. Their 1969 Christmas poster and billboard campaign *War Is Over (If You Want It)* is in many ways a remake of Mac Low’s piece, replacing a vague but pragmatic-sounding ‘make it work’ with the voluntarist ‘if you want it’.³⁰ The message was

²⁷ J. L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, Oxford 1962.

²⁸ See the selection of letters in Emmett Williams and Ann Noël, eds, *Mr Fluxus: A Collective Portrait of George Maciunas, 1931–1978*, London 1997, pp. 91–115.

²⁹ The piece is in the collection of the Museum of Modern Art. The museum’s entry on the piece notes that the *Social Project* pieces were ‘written in response to what he felt were negative approaches to social concerns by other Fluxus members’.

³⁰ The *War Is Over* poster campaign took place in several cities across the world, including Amsterdam; a photo by the Dutch ANP press agency shows that the posters were up by 15 December 1969.

driven home courtesy of Ono and Lennon's celebrity, and their financial means. The piece may not have helped to bring about world peace any more than Mac Low's, being just as abstract and as far removed from any actual political process—but it was certainly more publicized, and Ono and Lennon appear to have speculated on the performative agency of celebrity if used 'for the good'.

Such media- and celebrity-based voluntarism was of course anathema to leftist avant-garde movements such as the Situationist International. Ensnared in a fancy hotel, it was clear that Lennon and Ono were far removed from anything the Situationists would recognize as a genuine class basis—though one of *Provo's* points had been precisely that class formation was no longer what it used to be, with the industrial proletariat in the West having lost its place to a multitudinous *provotariat* of the unemployed, bohemian artists and students—'in solidarity with the Proletariat in the Third World.'³¹ Without a clear class identity or class persona, however, postindustrial multitudes were difficult to whip into action. And what if bourgeois and capitalist institutions and structures—their theoretically proven obsolescence notwithstanding—refuse to crumble or wither away?

Becoming a persona ficta

Legal personhood can be divided into the *natural person* on the one hand, and the *juridical person* on the other—the latter being corporations, registered nonprofit organizations, cities or states. Starting in the 1960s and early 1970s, artists began either to simulate or actually create foundations, corporations and other legal structures. Examples range from wonderfully named (and usually not legally deposited) organizations and companies in the context of Willem de Ridder and Wim T. Schippers's Dutch (proto) Fluxus, such as AFSRINMOR International, the Mood Engineering Society or the Dodgers Syndicate, to Joseph Beuys's Deutsche Studentenpartei and Marcel Broodthaers's Musée d'Art Moderne, Département des Aigles.³²

Such (pseudo-)organizations and their successors are often discussed either in the context of collectivity in art or of institutional critique—

³¹ Roel van Duyn, 'Aan de linkse beweging', *Provo* 7, February 1966, p. 26.

³² AFSRINMOR: Association for Scientific Research in New Methods of Recreation.

or both. While these are valid and relevant perspectives, what has been under-analysed is the fact that for the first time in the context of visual art, the artistic subject is no longer identified with a single natural person, nor even with a collective or collaborative endeavour, but with one that has been formalized in the guise of a juridical person. While the difference between an actual juridical person (say, the Raindance Corporation, which was officially registered in Delaware in 1969) and a fictitious one (such as Broodthaers's Musée d'Art Moderne) is certainly far from negligible, neither is it insignificant that it can be difficult to determine whether one is dealing with one or the other.

In his monumental 1957 tome *The King's Two Bodies*, Ernst Kantorowicz studied 'the curious fiction of the "twin-born majesty"', that is to say: the doctrine that the king has both a 'body natural' and a 'body politic'. Whereas the former is mortal, the latter is not.³³ The king is dead, long live the king. Kantorowicz had been a member of a right-wing militia after WWI and an acolyte of the charismatic symbolist poet and quasi-cult leader, Stefan George. His well-researched but heroicizing 1927 biography of the medieval emperor Friedrich II was a product of the George circle. Stylizing Friedrich II as a prototypical Germanic hero and ruler, Kantorowicz's biography was intended as a performative intervention in the *nachkaiserlicher Zeit* of Weimar.³⁴ The rise of a violently anti-Semitic Führer forced Kantorowicz to relocate to Princeton, and necessitated the adoption of a more conventional scholarly stance. Even so, Friedrich II features prominently in *The King's Two Bodies*, and the Georgean sacralization of the poetic and/or regal leader-figure clearly informs his analysis of medieval divine kingship, its transformations and eventual secularization. Asking how the institution of the throne came to be regarded as having an existence independently of the life and whims of this or that particular monarch, Kantorowicz traces the emergence of a royal *persona ficta*—the king as 'body politic'—through many antecedents and iterations in late-medieval legal theory, with its relation to scholastic

³³ For a use of Kantorowicz's archaeology of the 'two bodies' doctrine in the context of contemporary art, see Boris Groys, 'Marx after Duchamp, or The Artist's Two Bodies', *e-flux journal* 19, October 2010.

³⁴ Ernst Kantorowicz, *Kaiser Friedrich der Zweite*, Berlin 1927, p. 7. In this 'Vorbemerkung', Kantorowicz uses an action by the George circle—putting a wreath on Friedrich's grave in Palermo with the inscription 'SEINEN KAISERN UND HELDEN/DAS GEHEIME DEUTSCHLAND' as proof that interest in Germany's great historical heroes was no longer limited to scholarly circles.

philosophy, which includes the notion of the king as a *gemina persona* that is time-bound in some respects and above time in others.³⁵ With iconological assistance from Erwin Panofsky, Kantorowicz shows that this could be represented in funerary monuments by having the king (as well as other worldly and religious dignitaries) appear twice: once as a miserable human corpse, and once *in dignitas* with all the trappings of an office that will continue to exist.³⁶

Such an office—‘the Crown’—will remain intact even when its occupant dies. Since Kantorowicz relates this to the emergence of the concept of corporate persons, the scope of his study is greater than the apparent subject suggests. It concerns the emergence of the *persona ficta*, or juridical person, as applied to all kinds of collective bodies; not just to kingship but to *kingdoms*, with the notion of the separate legal status of the state only gaining ground gradually. And there were of course many other, smaller *personae fictae*, such as cities or universities. Kantorowicz notes that the ‘personifications of communities, cities, and kingdoms created by juristic speculation’ should not be taken for ‘a revival of those toponymic personifications of classical Antiquity which had lingered on in the miniatures of Carolingian, Ottonian, and even later manuscripts’. Medieval *personae fictae* were not ‘classical city goddesses’, embodied genies of a place, but ‘philosophical fictions belonging to the realm of speculation’. They were not anthropomorphic but ‘angelomorphic’: ‘legal corporations compared structurally with Christian angels rather than with pagan goddesses’. Thus medieval theology, while taking cues from Roman law, created the corporation by allowing for ‘the possibility of treating every *universitas* (that is, every plurality of men collected in one body) as a juristic person’.³⁷ Mysticism laid the groundwork not just for the modern nation-state, but also for Monsanto, Apple, Goldman Sachs and Disney.

Party-goers

Contemporary aesthetic and activist practices are marked by a proliferation of doubly fictitious *personae fictae*. Here the persona becomes pure

³⁵ On Georgan motifs in Kantorowicz’s later work see also Ulrich Raulff, *Kreis ohne Meister: Stefan Georges Nachleben*, Munich 2009, pp. 313–46.

³⁶ Ernst Kantorowicz, *The King’s Two Bodies: A Study in Medieval Political Theology*, Princeton 1957, pp. 419–36.

³⁷ Kantorowicz, *The King’s Two Bodies*, pp. 303–6.

performativity. Many ‘real’ juridical persons can be seen as pragmatic attempts to provide a legal framework and financial basis for collective undertakings; given their legal status, such organizations can perform certain transactions. But they also have performative effects on another level, which has to do with the efficacy of a brand. Founding a fake political party or a fake company may be an act that has no legal significance, yet such ‘organizations’ can have real effects, with the mere announcement of a new political movement, prior to any legal registration, rocking the political landscape and transforming the discourse.

Joseph Beuys’s Deutsche Studentenpartei was registered as an organization with legal subjecthood in 1967, but it never operated as a *bona fide* political party. It was a real juridical person that might as well have been fake, since it functioned mostly as a brand for Beuys and a few associates, who produced anthroposophically inspired discourse about the need to reform society and education. Tellingly, it was launched publicly (i.e., for the press) in the Düsseldorf Art Academy on 22 June, three months before it was legally deposited by a notary—with the latter event, on 17 November, commemorated by Beuys and his allies posing in the centre of Düsseldorf as though they were some kind of rock band. Beuys’s later attempts to craft organizations also remained largely symbolic, especially the Organisation für Direkte Demokratie für Volksabstimmung. After his forced departure from the Düsseldorf Academy, the Free International University was supposed to become a substantial institution; it survived as a brand, represented in various countries by small groups or individual true believers. The key difference with his engagement with the fledgling Green Party, from 1980 onwards, was that this was an actual political movement, albeit an internally quite heterogeneous one; while Beuys was trying to get the Greens to accept his anthroposophic notion of *Dreigliederung* as a basis for policy, the Greens strategically used Beuys’s persona and visibility for PR purposes.³⁸ If Beuys had used his ‘student party’ and the direct-democracy organization to help build his own persona as a social visionary, this persona was now in turn exploited by the Greens.

Whereas it is difficult to determine to what extent Beuys ever wanted his ‘student party’ to become an actual political force, or whether he

³⁸ My discussion of Beuys’s creation of or involvement with these organizations is based on H. P. Riegl, *Beuys: Die Biographie*, Berlin 2013, pp. 263, 396–7, 479–94.

was content to have it be his artistic project, Christoph Schlingensief's party CHANCE 2000, founded on 13 March 1998, was a much more tactical project. From the start, Schlingensief aimed to politicize the media through a party whose agency was one of 'performance for the press' more than of election results. A *Vereinssatzung* was drafted stating that any natural or juridical person can become a member of CHANCE 2000, and 'CHANCE 2000 e.V.' was deposited with the official companies' register. Schlingensief détourned the collectivism of the German reunification slogans, *Wir sind das Volk* and *Wir sind ein Volk*, by decreeing that every individual is one *Volk*. Even, and especially, the unemployed: CHANCE 2000 was to be their party, in response to the established parties' *de facto* acceptance of mass unemployment and the right-wing media's vilification of the unemployed as work-shy scroungers. With the *persona ficta* of CHANCE 2000, Schlingensief also aimed to transform this collective persona of the multitude excluded from the job market. However, not many of these individual *Völker* actually voted for CHANCE 2000. The party's participation in the national elections of 27 September was always a very long shot. Germany having a complex two-vote system that combines a constituency element (first vote) with proportional representation (second vote), CHANCE 2000 ended up with a mere 3,206 *Erststimmen* or 0 per cent of the first vote, and 28,566 *Zweitstimmen* or 0.1 per cent of the second vote.³⁹

It could be argued that the party's 'actual' existence as a juridical person (as an *eingetragener Verein*) and its participation in the elections were needed primarily to give its media actions more legitimacy; the fiction had to be made so real that nobody could claim it was 'only make-believe'. Adopting one of its slogans from Beuys ('CHANCE 2000 is ACTIVE neutrality'), the party focused on the unemployed and initiated 'activities in the media of art and theatre, film, television, internet and print'. It demanded 'an open communication society, from which nobody will drop out against their will'.⁴⁰ The party's texts make constant reference to the student movement and the extra-parliamentary

³⁹ There is evidence that the party campaigned for Schlingensief to get a *Direktmandat* in Berlin, but evidently this was also a failure—and with 'failure' being a leitmotif throughout the party's statements, this defeat could be seen as part of the project. The *Vereinssatzung* appears in Christoph Schlingensief and Carl Hegemann, *CHANCE 2000: Wähle Dich selbst*, Cologne 1998, pp. 18–26; see in particular point 4.1, p. 21. See also pp. 11–12, 125–6.

⁴⁰ 'CHANCE 2000—Vereinssatzung', in Schlingensief and Hegemann, *CHANCE 2000*, p. 21.

opposition of the late 60s and early 70s, contrasting that period of failed revolutionary endeavours and disappointed hopes with post-unification Germany, its seemingly eternal right-wing Kohl government and its mass unemployment.

The party's mission statements teem with references to television, exhorting the unemployed TV consumers to 'broadcast themselves'. With his needling of former-revolutionaries-turned-bureaucrats working for German public television, and his motto that 'everybody can be their own talk-show host', Schlingensief also clearly positioned his project in the context of the 'liberalization' of German TV, which resulted in an ad-revenue bonanza for private channels such as RTL and SAT.1 during the 1990s.⁴¹ These channels purportedly gave the people 'greater choice' while helping the conservative parties to dominate the airwaves; during 1993–94 Kohl even had his own 'simulated interview' show on his friend Leo Kirch's SAT.1 channel, *Zur Sache, Kanzler*.⁴² Schlingensief took the supposed 'democratization' of the media further by helping the 'invisible' jobless to 'broadcast back', either via alternative or new media (the theatre, the internet), or by staging media events that the German mainstream press could not help but cover. The most sensational example of the latter was his announcement that he would come with a multitude of unemployed people to swim in the Wolfgangsee and thereby raise the water level and flood Kohl's holiday home, from which the Chancellor gave TV interviews each summer. This resulted in a predictable anticlimax—the media event as non-event—though Kohl did in fact end up losing the election.⁴³

The post-party man

Juridical personhood is a highly mutable and contested category. Literalizing the concept—which always came with the proviso that the rights and duties of natural and juridical persons are not identical—the US Supreme Court has ruled that since 'corporations are people', they should be allowed to donate to political campaigns. Meanwhile, terrorist organizations such as al-Qaeda and ISIS expertly craft and maintain their

⁴¹ Christoph Schlingensief, '68–98–98', and Schlingensief and Hegemann, 'Parteiprogramm—CHANCE', in *CHANCE 2000: Wähle Dich selbst*, pp. 12, 80.

⁴² 'Im Schatten des Riesen', *Der Spiegel*, 16 August 1993.

⁴³ An 'Aktionsfoto' of the Aktion *Baden im Wolfgangsee* is available on Schlingensief's website.

public personae, to keep the recruits and funding coming, but it is the response of the state and of supranational organizations that turn them into proper *personae fictae*. These groups are given a legal status *ex negativo* by their designation as terrorist groups, subject to persecution. Even if the organization has no juridical form, ‘membership’ itself becomes a punishable offense, as is the intent to join these groups. In the process, the legal personhood of individual citizens is becoming ever shakier: for terror suspects, citizenship becomes revocable, while the remaining citizens are now subject to general suspicion and surveillance.

David Graeber has discussed some of the contradictions of incorporating an activist group or network with the example of a donated car that threw the Direct Action Network in New York into disarray: ‘We soon discovered that legally, it is impossible for a decentralized network to own a car. Cars can be owned by individuals, or they can be owned by corporations, which are fictive individuals. Governments can also own cars. But they cannot be owned by networks.’⁴⁴ Troubled by the consequences of incorporating as a non-profit organization, ‘which would have required a complete reorganization and abandoning most of our egalitarian principles’, the network got rid of the car instead. However, some go beyond mere avoidance of the fictitious person. Activist and/or artistic entities such as the Invisible Committee or Bernadette Corporation, which Pamela Lee has termed ‘pseudo-collectives’, are a paradoxical response to the crisis of collective action in the context of global neoliberal capitalism and generalized policing: they exacerbate the fiction of the fictive person by opting for opacity.⁴⁵ Here, a collective conceptual persona becomes an activist and aesthetic tool.

Opacity is a leitmotif in Bernadette Corporation’s film *Get Rid of Yourself*, whose manifest content is the Black Bloc in the autonomist/anti-globalist camp, which attracted the gaze of the media and of the surveillance apparatus by blocking it. The Tiquun group and its follow-up in the formless form of the Invisible Committee have long celebrated a veritable cult of opacity in the entrails of a society of control and surveillance.⁴⁶ The

⁴⁴ David Graeber, *Revolutions in Reverse: Essays on Politics, Violence, Art, and Imagination*, New York 2011, p. 43.

⁴⁵ Pamela Lee, *Forgetting the Art World*, Cambridge, MA and London 2012, pp. 147–84.

⁴⁶ Tiquun published two journal volumes in 1999 and 2001, before dissolving; some of its members, including Julien Coupat, supposedly went on to (co-)found the Comité Invisible. Most Tiquun texts have been reissued as books by La Fabrique in French, as well as in English by Semiotext[e].

curious result of this is that to the outside world the collective becomes a pure brand: it turns into the mocking double of the capitalist corporation, which wants to be known not so much for its concrete deeds as for its alluring image. As if they themselves were not opaque enough, Tiqqun and the Invisible Committee have launched the fiction of the Imaginary Party. Taking the established social formation of the political party and voiding it of most of its known content, this speech act amounts to the creation of a *doubly fictitious* persona. In such a move, the operative legal fiction that is the juridical person may become performative in different ways.

Quoting Foucault to the effect that ‘the generality of the struggle specifically derives from the system of power itself, from all the forms in which power is exercised and applied’, Tiqqun note that they ‘have called this plane of consistency the Imaginary Party, so that in its very name the artifice of its nominal and *a fortiori* political representation is clear’:

Like every plane of consistency the Imaginary Party is at once present and yet to be built. Building the Party no longer means building a total organization within which all ethical differences might be set aside for the sake of a common struggle; today, building the Party means *establishing forms-of-life in their difference, intensifying, complicating relations between them, developing as subtly as possible civil war between us*.⁴⁷

Meanwhile, the Invisible Committee was defined as ‘an *openly secret* society, a public conspiracy, an instance of anonymous subjectivation, whose name is everywhere and headquarters nowhere, the experimental-revolutionary polarity of the Imaginary Party’:

The Invisible Committee: not a revolutionary *organization*, but a higher level of reality, a metaphysical territory of secession with all the magnitude of a whole world of its own, the *playing area* where positive creation *alone* can accomplish the great emigration of the economy from the world. IT’S A FICTION THAT’S MADE ITS REALITY REAL.⁴⁸

Given that these passages manage to combine a very contemporary autonomist-immanentist stance with provocatively retro-Blanquist and conspiracist overtones, it is remarkable that the notion of a *Parti Imaginaire* was already used in Belgian Surrealist Marcel Mariën’s 1958 *Théorie de la révolution mondiale immédiate*, which amounted to a scenario

⁴⁷ Tiqqun, *This Is Not a Program*, trans. Joshua David Jordan, New York 2011, p. 13.

⁴⁸ Tiqqun, *Bloom Theory*, available from the Anarchist Library website.

for an 'effective Blanquism' on a global scale. Starting from the dismal state of revolutionary politics in the West at the height of the Cold War, Mariën proposed a rather striking scenario to bring about 'le passage d'une économie anarchique à une économie disciplinée, entièrement subordonnée à la logique du bien-être universel'. The ideal, then, is a more 'rational', planned economy. In his innovative proposal, which was partly inspired by his experiences working for an advertising agency, communism can be brought about in no more than a year through an 'immediate fiction' that results in an 'invisible revolution'.⁴⁹

Mariën starts by proposing a global organization of leisure which would be represented in each country that needs to be conquered by a Club des Loisirs. This club will start a multi-media advertising campaign. In addition to the press, media such as radio, cinema, television, skywriting and sandwichmen will not be forgotten. These ads do not aim at selling any specific products; rather, they are PR for the Club des Loisirs itself. I will leave out here all the curious details that Mariën gives as to how this propaganda campaign will foster a mindset that will make the populace ready for the next step (after three months): the transition from PR to action and the creation of a new party, which Mariën calls the *Parti Imaginaire*. Its doctrine is of no consequence. It will be opposed by a *Contre-Parti* whose programme will be its exact inverse. At the next election, helped by the publicity campaign, the two parties will together win by a landslide. Effectively, the revolution will have been victorious. After some more machinations, the hidden *Centrale* will announce the fixation of prices and the nationalization of industries. As to how this peculiarly capitalist revolution with its sky-high advertising budget would be financed in the absence of super PACS, Mariën's answer is simple: we are only talking about a short period, and since the Club des Loisirs will have the appearance of a regular commercial enterprise, the whole thing can be done *on credit*.⁵⁰

In this oneiric scenario, the hidden directors of the *Centrale* play the role of Blanquist-Leninist 'professional revolutionaries'. While his scenario in *La révolution mondiale immédiate* represents a not-so-tacit critique, or indictment of the defensive and tactical nature of Moscow-led

⁴⁹ Marcel Mariën, *Théorie de la révolution mondiale immédiate*, Brussels 1958, pp. 45, 41, 46. 'Immediate fiction' and 'invisible revolution' are the titles respectively of section 7 and of part II of the text.

⁵⁰ Mariën, *Théorie de la révolution mondiale immédiate*, pp. 53–60, 65–71, 82–3.

communist parties in the West, Mariën was nonetheless still fixated on the Soviet Union. In 1957 he had published *Quand l'acier fut rompu*, an inquiry into 'destalinization' that was at times indistinguishable from an apologia for Stalin.⁵¹ Guy Debord, who did some research on the subject for Mariën in early 1957, can hardly have been pleased by the outcome. For a number of years the young members of the Internationale Lettriste had collaborated on Mariën's journal *Les Lèvres nues*, which would also publish the *Théorie de la révolution mondiale immédiate*; the contact between Debord and Mariën broke off in July '57, just as the Situationist International was formed.⁵² Although the Situationists rejected 'actually existing socialism' in favour of council communism, it had been a question posed by Michèle Bernstein that helped trigger *La révolution mondiale immédiate*: how to imagine the proletarian revolution after all previous attempts have failed?⁵³

The 1995 reprint of *Les Lèvres nues*, containing important early texts by Debord, would have been of interest to the connoisseurs of avant-garde groupuscules and magazines who created the *Tiqqun* journal in 1999.⁵⁴ Of course, *Tiqqun*'s version of the Imaginary Party is resolutely post- and anti-Leninist, rejecting any notion of the proletariat as subject-object of history. In *Tiqqun*'s wake, the Invisible Committee likes to stress that 'there is no new revolutionary subject'—no Negrian multitude can play that role.⁵⁵ What is needed is the building of communes that displace the institutions of society; such communes are not collectives, having no inside and outside, but a dense knot of ties. This is *autonomia* as extreme desubjectivation. Is it also a 'depersonafication'? Launching the notions of Imaginary Party and Invisible Committee, *Tiqqun* and its offshoot both potentialized and voided the *persona ficta*.

In *The Coming Insurrection*, the Invisible Committee states: 'This book is signed in the name of an imaginary collective. Its editors are not its

⁵¹ Mieke Bleyen, *Minor Aesthetics: The Photographic Work of Marcel Mariën*, Leuven 2014, pp. 113–5.

⁵² Debord's side of the correspondence has been published in a complete and commented edition: François Caodou, ed., *Guy Debord, Lettres à Marcel Mariën*, Toulon 2015.

⁵³ See Mariën's epilogue to the 1998 German translation of his book: 'Der Ansturm auf den grauen Himmel (Nachwort)' [February 1989], in *Weltrevolution in 365 Tagen: Versuch über das Unmögliche*, Berlin 1989, p. 167.

⁵⁴ *Les Lèvres nues 1954–1958*, Paris 1995.

⁵⁵ Invisible Committee, *To Our Friends*, New York 2015, p. 44.

authors. They were content merely to introduce a little order into the commonplaces of our time, collecting some of the murmurings around bar-room tables and behind closed bedroom doors.’⁵⁶ By all accounts, the actual writing and editing process is distributed and networked, with many more authors than the core editorial group contributing to the texts. However, the French state and its security apparatus insisted on identifying the ‘Tarnac 10’, arrested and charged with ‘terrorist’ attacks on TGV trains, with the Invisible Committee—Julien Coupat was frequently designated as its main author. In their withering 2015 deposition *Bye-Bye Saint-Eloi*, the Tarnac 10 declare: ‘If adhesion to the writings of the Invisible Committee is constitutive of a criminal association in relation to a terrorist enterprise, we must collectively admit such guilt with a light heart.’⁵⁷ Following this, numerous intellectuals, writers and artists signed a declaration stating *Je suis l’auteur de “L’Insurrection qui vient”*. In seeking to narrow down authorship in order to produce a clear-cut ‘terrorist cell’ that could serve as exemplary enemy of the state, the French state in fact multiplied it.⁵⁸

The stateless state

Noting that many early Renaissance humanists and poets were trained in the law, Kantorowicz traced back elements of the Renaissance conception of art to late-medieval legal thought, which in turn often had antique sources. The act of legislation was frequently seen as an act of imitation, because it produced something new in accordance with the general laws of nature; popes and emperors could create true and just fictions and ‘make something out of nothing’.⁵⁹ If Kantorowicz is right in discerning continuities (via Dante and others) between late-medieval legal thought and theories of mimesis and artistic genius, we might say that today legal and aesthetic conceptions and the *persona ficta* increasingly clash.

⁵⁶ Invisible Committee, *The Coming Insurrection*, New York 2009.

⁵⁷ The Tarnac 10, *Bye-Bye Saint-Eloi!*, available on the Not Bored website. In this text, the Tarnac 10 display a remarkable negative fixation on the Situationists, titling a section on the French security agent Christian Bichet ‘A Situ among the Cops’; the English translator from the pro-Situ site Not Bored was clearly not amused, leading to much finger-wagging in newly appended footnotes.

⁵⁸ ‘Je suis l’auteur de “L’insurrection qui vient”’, *Libération*, 11 June 2015.

⁵⁹ Ernst Kantorowicz, ‘The Sovereignty of the Artist: A Note on Legal Maxims and Renaissance Theories of Art’, in *Selected Studies by Ernst H. Kantorowicz*, Locust Valley, NY 1965, pp. 352–69.

If Hegel considered the nation-state as an actual manifestation of Spirit in the form of a social institution, Alexandre Kojève noted that the ‘universal and homogenous state’ in its various iterations laid the groundwork for its own abolition. The Invisible Committee quotes Kojève from 1945: the nation-state is the official French ideal, but ‘in the depths of its soul, the country understands the inadequacy of this ideal, of the political anachronism of the strictly “national” idea.’⁶⁰ Thus the state as ‘eternal’ *persona ficta* is attacked as a fiction whose expiry date has been reached. In the work of artist Jonas Staal, the *persona ficta* that is the nation-state is decentred through the foregrounding and performing of various organizations that have been banned or branded terrorist. In the context of his New World Summit and New World Academy projects, Staal collaborates directly with representatives of such organizations. In the New World Summit meetings, these representatives enter into debate in a kind of international counter-parliament. In the New World Academy, in which art students work together with representatives of certain organizations, the spectrum is broader, with groups not necessarily being deemed terrorist; in addition to the Filipino Maoist party and the independence movement of Azerwad (in Mali), the German Pirate Party was also involved. Another instalment focused on the Kurdish women’s movement, which has recently contributed to such a remarkable reversal of the official image of the Kurds: from terrorists to freedom fighters against ISIS, with female combatants in the frontlines.

For Staal, what the various movements share ‘is their defence of a self-determination that, while remaining stateless, is first and foremost a militant cultural struggle. They are the representatives of stateless states—of peoples that *precede* their administrative representation in the formal, recognized entity of a state.’⁶¹ As Staal notes, the Kurdish PKK has made a rather striking about-face concerning the desirability of the state. Originally a classic vanguard party striving for a Kurdish nation-state, the PKK’s transformation is attributed in part to the imprisoned leader Abdullah Öcalan’s prison readings. After encountering the work of Murray Bookchin, Öcalan decreed that the nation-state ‘is the national governor of the worldwide capitalist system, a vassal of capitalist modernity which is more deeply entangled in the

⁶⁰ Alexandre Kojève quoted in the Invisible Committee, *The Coming Insurrection*.

⁶¹ Jonas Staal, ‘To Make a World, Part I: Ultrationalism and the Art of the Stateless State’, *e-flux journal* 57, September 2014.

dominant structures of capital than we usually tend to assume: it is a colony of capital.⁶²

Meanwhile, art—though not necessarily what is recognized as such by art historians and museums—contributes to the creation of the stateless state. According to the Filipino activist and theorist José María Sison, the cultural worker ‘uses the tools of art in order to uphold the narratives and convictions of those who are marginalized, dispossessed, and persecuted by the militarized state’:

He or she is an educator, agitator, and organizer, all in order to maintain and to enact—to perform—the symbolic universe of the unacknowledged state that is not so much an administrative entity as a collective condition. The long cultural struggle of the Filipino people has created a state in itself, a detailed network of references, histories, and symbols that define a people’s identity far beyond what a state could ever contain. We are speaking here of *art’s stateless state*.⁶³

Two types of *persona ficta* are involved in Staal’s project. On the one hand, the project deals with parties and other organizations with varying degrees of reality, ranging from registered parties to illegal groupings and revolutionary movements. On the other hand, Staal’s New World Summit is itself an organization that had a strong public profile and as such has the appearance of a *persona ficta*; of an organization that has agency as such. However, the NWS is not in fact a registered foundation or company, and is *de facto* Staal’s project—though a project with a strong collaborative aspect, involving researchers, architects and designers.

At the Artist Organizations International ‘assembly’ at Hebbel am Ufer in Berlin, which was co-organized by Staal, participants Alice Creischer and Andreas Siekmann and the group Haben und Brauchen criticized the ‘trendy’ event for effectively hijacking self-organization and turning ‘the organization’ into an artistic form, or into an artist’s project.⁶⁴ Effectively, then, artists were accused of faking it, of simulating what grassroots groups build up through hard organizational labour. There is much to be said for this criticism, but an element of fakery might prove

⁶² Abdullah Öcalan, quoted in wall text in Jonas Staal’s exhibition *New World Academy*, Centraal Museum Utrecht, 11 April–21 June 2015.

⁶³ Quoted in Staal, ‘To Make a World, Part I’.

⁶⁴ See the Artist Organizations International website.

to be productive in some situations. The production of an *Imaazje* can be an act; the construction of a doubly fictitious persona can have direct and indirect effects, distributed in unpredictable and circuitous ways. For instance, working with Amina Osse and Sheruan Hassan, the New World Summit framework has allowed Staal to design and build a parliament for Rojava, the self-governing Kurdish region in northern Syria that has been at the forefront of the fight against ISIS. A constructivist pavilion whose dome brings together the flags of different political groups active in the region, this parliament helps to craft a persona for this autonomous region, whose existence is truly a fiction by the standards of international law.

The Great Fetish

At present, the Christian Right asserts the personhood of fetuses while the animal rights movement attempts to claim personhood for primates, or for animals in general. A court case about the personal rights of two lab chimpanzees at Stony Brook University has been widely reported on.⁶⁵ It is obvious that chimpanzees do not perform and construct personae in the way that humans do, but when artist Coco Fusco performs a chimpanzee from the future, being made up (masked) as Dr Zira from *Planet of the Apes*, the animal persona re-performs her as much as she performs it.⁶⁶ In the role of a speaking chimpanzee from a sci-fi future, Fusco analyses humans as a destructive, imbalanced species. She also mentions the hatred she faced after having travelled back in time to the Earth of the early 1970s in *Escape from the Planet of the Apes* (1972); that film in fact ends with Dr Zira's death.

If citizenship seems increasingly revocable, becoming and remaining the citizen of certain states appears all the more desirable. As Oxana Timofeeva has put it: 'The rights of citizens are becoming practically equal to human rights. And there is a certain logic here. The state is a guarantor of human rights; therefore, a certain human can enjoy his human rights as a citizen of a certain state. Citizenship is becoming

⁶⁵ See for instance 'Judge Orders Stony Brook University to Defend Its Custody of 2 Chimps', *New York Times*, 21 April 2015.

⁶⁶ Following a 2013 live performance titled *Observations of Predations in Humans: A Lecture by Dr Zira, Animal Psychologist*, Fusco produced the video *TED Ethology: Primate Visions of the Human Mind* (2015).

a legal condition for someone's *humanship*, so to speak.⁶⁷ But if this makes 'illegal aliens' potentially nonhuman or subhuman, indeed animalistic, Timofeeva rightly argues that it is problematic to claim that we need to 'extend the realm of human rights to include animals, to bring them into the human universe', for 'if these changes were implemented within the existing capitalist regime, we would end up with something like animal citizenship, with related attributes like border control, dealing with illegal animals trying to reach happy European fields from forests on the global periphery, and so on.'⁶⁸

However, the 'nonhuman rights' movement can reach a tipping point where personhood is clearly redefined beyond and against the prevailing paradigm. In Ecuador, indigenous advocates and lawyers have successfully argued that 'ecosystems—the living forests, mountains, rivers, and seas—are legal subjects', gaining a degree of constitutional protection against oil companies—those violently extractivist *personae fictae*.⁶⁹ With a focus on the Sarayaku region in the Ecuadorian Amazon province of Pastaza, this is the subject of Ursula Biemann and Paulo Tavares's 2014 video installation *Forest Law*. In addition to presenting protagonists of this struggle standing in the jungle and holding forth on the subject, the video installation contains nocturnal images of the jungle accompanied by written titles that appear to come from a future perspective, stating that 'these were the early years of a system of earth jurisprudence' and looking back on 'a legal battle over the fundamental question whether the planet was a corporate estate or a sentient living organism'.⁷⁰ If modern law has an 'animist' component anyway, according personhood to fictions, then why not claim protection for entities that animist communities have always considered to be living beings endowed with a volition of their own?⁷¹ As limited as the bureaucratic-documentarian approach of Biemann's video pieces is, *Forest Law* is highly apposite as a presentation of activist research into persona politics on a grand scale.

⁶⁷ Oxana Timofeeva, 'Communism with a Nonhuman Face', *e-flux journal* 48, October 2013.

⁶⁸ Timofeeva, 'Communism with a Nonhuman Face'.

⁶⁹ Ursula Biemann and Paulo Tavares, *Forest Law—Selva Jurídica*, East Lansing, MI 2014, p. 79.

⁷⁰ Quoted from Ursula Biemann and Paulo Tavares's installation *Forest Law*, BAK Utrecht, 4 September–29 November 2015; see also Ursula Biemann, 'The Cosmopolitical Forest: A Theoretical and Aesthetic Discussion of the Video *Forest Law*', *GeoHumanities* 1, no. 1, pp. 157–70.

⁷¹ Biemann and Tavares, *Forest Law*, p. 19.

A small projection next to the main two-channel video installation contains an interview with Michel Serres on his 1990 book *The Natural Contract*, which was a key reference for *Forest Law*.⁷² In recent years, both Serres and Bruno Latour have attempted to construct an artificial persona for Earth, using readymade elements from history. Serres has revived Auguste Comte's term for Earth, 'the Great Fetish', which was one of the three elements in the Holy Trinity of his positivist religion. Serres notes that, given the etymology of fetish (*feitiço*), the concept acknowledges that the Earth had been 'made', which is more relevant than ever in the fully-fledged anthropocene; on the other hand, a fetish is only a fetish when it appears to be autonomous from its maker.⁷³ As in the case of Marx's commodity, a fetish appears alive. Thus the Great Fetish is also brimming with theological whims. Stressing the point that we need to come to terms with this planetary subjectivity, whose objects we humans are, Serres has given it a new name: Biogea.⁷⁴

Thinking along similar lines, Latour has appropriated the name Gaia, which James Lovelock had taken from Greek mythology and given a New Age spin. Latour opposes his version of Gaia to Nature: whereas nature is often romantically essentialized and seen as timeless, Gaia is the Earth as historical being. She is an assemblage of nonhuman and human agency, but the effects of these interlocking agents are unpredictable. There is human influence, but not control; again we encounter something resembling a persona that asserts itself.⁷⁵ Latour has spent much time demolishing the modern subject-object dialectic, criticizing a constant vacillation between treating the fetish as an impoverished and pitiful object that is the product of human labour, and attacking it as having a dangerously autonomous life and force of its own; however, it is telling that Serres presents precisely this instability as key in thinking of the Earth as the Great Fetish.⁷⁶ And is the Latourian Gaia that different?

⁷² Michel Serres, *The Natural Contract*, trans. Elizabeth MacArthur and William Paulson, Ann Arbor 1995.

⁷³ Michel Serres, *Times of Crisis: What the Financial Crisis Revealed and How to Reinvent Our Lives and the Future*, trans. Abbe-Marie Feenberg-Dibon, New York 2014, pp. 46–7; Serres (with Martin Legros and Sven Ortoli), *Pantopie: de Hermès à Petite Poucette*, Paris 2014, pp. 263–95.

⁷⁴ Serres, *Times of Crisis*, p. 47; see also his *Biogea*, trans. Randolph Burks, Minneapolis 2012.

⁷⁵ Bruno Latour, *Facing Gaia: Six lectures in the political theology of nature* (Gifford Lectures, Edinburgh, 18–28 February 2013).

⁷⁶ Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, Cambridge, MA 1993, pp. 49–55.

Both proposals not so much negate as explode the subject–object dialectic by positing the Earth as a hyper-object whose persona is the result of human and nonhuman interaction. The predictable unpredictability of the results of this (the Earth’s ‘behaviour’) should inspire great caution, but mostly triggers hand-wringing appeals to the conceptual personae of ‘the global community’ or ‘humankind’. Serres’s call for a ‘global institution where Biogea will finally be represented and have the right to speak’ goes one step further; but, more than on the level of Ecuador, the question of who will do the representing and speaking becomes all the more pressing.⁷⁷ This would clearly have to be a fundamentally different form of globalization than that of current supranational bodies and their exercises in Empire-perpetuation.

The Otolith Group’s *Who Does the Earth Think It Is* (2014), an installation connected to their film *Medium Earth* (2013), consists of blow-ups of letters that were sent to the US Geological Survey Pasadena Field Office.⁷⁸ In these unsolicited letters, members of the public predict earthquakes using the most eccentric methodologies. Fault-lines and seismic tremors become actors in the writers’ *psychomachia*. Some even claim they can cause earthquakes, rather than just predict them, making the short-circuiting of the geological and the psychological even more explicit. A correspondent who has ‘had it with all these Mexicans & Niggers, & all the gang & drug bullshit’, announces that he has installed ‘an earthquake maker’ that will sink the LA basin into the ocean. Here, the living Earth has become a paranoid Gaia, a proto-fascist fetish. As refugees from civil war enter the EU on an unprecedented scale, similar personifications of ‘Christian Europe’, of a splendidly isolated Albion or a purely German Germany return to the surface. Developing counter-personae and second-degree fictions is perhaps as urgent now as it was in the early 1930s—and the success of the operation is as doubtful.

⁷⁷ Serres, *Times of Crisis*, p. 32.

⁷⁸ The Otolith Group is itself an interesting case of a pseudo-collective, consisting as it does of Anjalika Sagar and Kodwo Eshun while being supplemented by The Otolith Collective, a curatorial platform directed by Sagar and Eshun which (in contrast to the Otolith Group) functions as an institution that is eligible for public funding.