FROM THE EDITORS

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The texts and artist project in the present issue reflect on the relationship between aesthetics and social constructivism, or the appearance and elaboration of new forms of social and political organization. Taken together, they represent something of a departure from the kinds of historical—often institutional and archival—reconstructions that we often publish, by considering the names and visual forms of still inexistent modes of political subjectivity. At the risk of making an overly broad generalization, we might say that rather than interrogating the relationship between formal conventions and institutional norms within the context of really existing socialism or third-world internationalism, the present issue of the journal looks, in Fredric Jameson's words, for "a yet undreamed of global communism" in the discursive and visual semblance of the present.[1]

The two texts that comprise the Document section, both titled "What Is *Hamasteghtsakan* Art," by Armenian artist Arman Grigoryan and art critic Nazareth Karoyan, consider the consequences of artistic experimentalism in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Equally as significantly, they reflect on their own gestures of naming and historicization in the context of Armenia's transition from a Soviet state-planned economy to a free-market economy. As Angela Harutyunyan explains in her

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[1] Fredric Jameson, *Allegory and Ideology* (London: Verso, 2019), 37.

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critical introduction, both texts concern the 3rd Floor art movement, which, "coming together in 1987 in the context of Mikhail Gorbachev's programs of liberalization and reform, *glasnost* and *perestroika*," included a wide variety of artistic styles, media, and genres. If, as Harutyunyan suggests, the word *hamasteghtsakan* can be translated as "collectively created," in her words, "the use of *hamasteghtsakan* as a concept to delineate a set of artistic practices was never straightforward—at times, it was used as synonymous with Conceptual art, while at other times it was used to refer to 'postconceptual' or even 'postmodern' art." As Harutyunyan notes, if Grigoryan emphasizes the creative or interventionist aspect of *hamasteghtsakan* art, Karoyan questions the subject implied, at once, by the obsolescence of modernism and the sudden effects of globalization.

Emily Apter's essay, "Regioning Difference: Translation and Critical Cartography," proposes "a model of *regioning differences* that focuses on the politics of 'area-ization,' with special emphasis on denominations of continental relation, orientation, and entanglement that defy the monothetic rubrics that order planetary maps and secure sovereign borders." Apter signals the extent to which "geotopic regionalisms" such as "global/local, Europe/non-Europe, North/South, South-South, intra-Asian, tricontinental, zones of settlement and unsettlement" that, in recent decades, have often presented non-European or North American art through the lens of geopolitical determinism, "are themselves constantly in translation, which is to say, subject to revision and renaming." In Apter's essay, translation as a way of categorizing this process of revision and renaming, then, is limited neither to the seemingly autonomous movement of signifiers nor to the movement and reorganization of imperial power, but instead describes moments when what she terms the "regional unconscious" causes a disturbance in the order of names and places, allowing us to "suddenly perceive how knowledge and cultural legacies are politically parsed at specific temporal and historical conjunctures."

In "Contingency Plans: Art Collectives, Shared Pseudonyms, and Theories of Collectivity," Lindsay Caplan discusses two recent books, Jacopo Galimberti's *Individuals against Individualism: Art Collectives in Western Europe (1956–1969)* and Marco Deseriis's *Improper Names: Collective Pseudonyms from the Luddites to Anonymous*. Caplan asks us to consider these works in relation to a broader set of contemporary assumptions about political commitment or "engagement" in art, in which artists' emphasis on process over representation pretends alternately to effect and prefigure new forms of political organization and collectivism more broadly. Positioned against the backdrop of de-Stalinization and the Soviet repression of the Hungarian Revolution of 1956, Galimberti's book surveys the work of artists' collectives such as the Spur group in the Federal Republic of Germany, GRAV in France, Gruppo N in Italy, and Equipo 57 in Spain, parsing "the granular differences between notions of collective subjectivity and the specific tactics deployed to realize them." However, where Galimberti observes the dwarfing of these groups' projects before the background of the overall politicization of society, Caplan in turn questions Galimberti's fondness for artistic process and collectivism as models for leftist politics. By contrast, Deseriis's study of artistic and political collectivism illuminates how collectives, historically, have alternately used pseudonyms and anonymity as a way of questioning individual authorship in art, but also, more significantly, of constituting de-centered social and political movements. In Caplan's assessment, the "improper name" represents a way of conceiving the socially constructive potential of collectivism in symbolic terms.

Freya Schiwy's "Thresholds of the Visible: Activist Video, Militancy, and Prefigurative Politics" attends to the formal conventions of activist video in the context of the 2006 Oaxaca Commune. Schiwy considers how these videos, much like the artists' collectives in Galimberti's study, seek to effect a prefigurative politics. Asking "how can activist video, a genre committed to reflecting what occurs before the lens, make visible what has not yet arrived?," Schiwy's article challenges the truth claims of many activist videographers by underscoring their stylistic choices. More specifically, Schiwy examines contrasting examples of indexicality in digital video and film. She argues that their representations of the Oaxaca Commune also simultaneously reveal forms of self-government to come. Against the truth claims of their authors, Schiwy asks us to consider the veracity of such images, based not only on the adequacy of the phenomena that they document, but on the retroactive truth that they effect through the relationship forged with the spectator.

Katarzyna Pieprzak's "Whitewash as Affective Platform: Art and the Politics of Surface in the Work of Yto Barrada and Hassan Darsi" examines two contemporary artists whose works involving "photography, film, and architectural models . . . engage and produce whitewash surfaces that insist on being looked at, slowly and at length." Both artists address the phenomenology of postcolonial Morocco, in which the whitewash of shanty neighborhoods, like that of modernist architecture, dissimulates the historical contingency and social heterogeneity that lies beneath. Rather than reveal the material histories and ontological multiplicity that whitewash conceals, Pieprzak instead invites us to "dwell on the surface, on whitewash itself." Moreover, Pieprzak argues that insofar as Barrada and Darsi ask us to consider the surface as an affective site, their works also register "moment[s] of possibility" for radical subjective transformation.

Hiba Kalache's artist project, titled "Encounters—Ongoing," records the artist's chance encounters with "people who have a vested interest in Lebanese land." As Kalache writes in her preface, the inkwash of the drawings attempts to capture the fleeting and casual nature of her conversations with farmers met, in the artist's words, "on leisurely road trips around the mountains of Lebanon." Text and image both signal and blur "the sectarian divisions upon which the ownership of land is based." However, far from providing a reprieve or decorative escapism from the sectarian divisions of the region, the fragments of conversation juxtaposed with and transposed onto the artist's watercolors of native flowers and plants testify to the images' violence. As if they were inviting us to reflect on the interpretive claims of Schiwy and Pieprzak, Kalache's elegant illustrations attempt at once to "index encounters" with the farmer and the land, and to do so by transcribing the speech of the artist's interlocutors in handwritten Arabic script on the picture plane. (The titles or captions of each painting include fragments of this text.) Perhaps counterintuitively, Kalache's diaphanous plants and fragmented, coded transcriptions (for those who do not read Arabic) test the limits of aestheticized sociality and surface reading by simultaneously presenting and dissimulating, registering and abstracting, the passing encounters of a determinate time and place.