

Editors Editorial

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A riddle: One night, an arresting officer enters a holding cell full of people. He asks the group what they were doing congregating on the public thoroughfare that morning. Why bring their bodies out from home to stand together on the sidewalk, walk together on the street? The officer seeks connection. Somewhere in the cell's radius a commercial window had been smashed. Somewhere in the cell's radius was a changing of the guards. Thinking for a moment that they can see each other, one of the arrested persons asks in return, "Well, don't you think another world is possible?" What happens when the arresting officer says yes?

The possibilities could split a body in two.

No matter the response, this body's dimensions will always exceed those of the cell.

Now and for centuries, decades, another world has been conceived of by bodies in need of place. After Sun Ra, one possibility, one necessity: space is the place. The place, among other things, for refuge – as Eva Díaz traces in "We Are All Aliens," an essay in this issue of e-flux journal charting space travel through visual art in the years since Ra touched back down (in Chicago or Birmingham) from Saturn. Among the more recent works on the contemporary art-on-space timeline, Díaz describes Halil Altındere's installation *Space Refugee* (2017), invoking Muhammed Faris's 1987 trip, as a stateless exile: the first Syrian to travel into space. The project, like others before it in the best veins of the sci-fi tradition, envisions "outer space as the ideal sanctuary for homeless and refugee populations."

Díaz elaborates on Faris: "A Russian-trained cosmonaut who traveled to the Mir space station in 1987, Faris spoke out against the Assad regime and joined the armed opposition in 2011. Eventually, he and his family fled Syria, crossing into Turkey. In the film, Faris describes the discrimination against refugees he and others experience, and reveals his hope that 'we can build cities for them there in space where there is freedom and dignity, and where there is no tyranny, no injustice.'"

"In contrast," Díaz continues, "New Spacers like Musk and Bezos treat outer space, ostensibly free of indigenous peoples, as a new frontier exempt from the exploitation that characterized earlier colonial projects. And yet ..."

In the world New Spacers seek to recreate with themselves at the controls, the SpaceX–Guggenheim Mars joint venture becomes inevitable.

To highlight the contrast between these two developing realities, of course, Díaz reminds us that "voluntary, touristic travel remains an experience of privilege; for many around the

globe, travel is undertaken in forced and dangerous circumstances.”

In space tourism we may yet see echoes or reflections, satellites of the radiation from years of Terran cultural tourism. Parasitic symbiosis occurs in the art world too. In the body or bodies of current contemporary art, we see by-products of ongoing tourism leaving its internal and external marks, nodes; forced host-guest relations between national bodies.

In a more nuanced reflection, iLiana Fokianaki traces the host-guest nation reversals in Athens last summer, identifying the tactics of “Redistribution via Appropriation” at play in the mega-exhibition and contemporary art industrial complexes. Importantly, too, Fokianaki casts eyes on institutional rhetoric that hurls (self-flagellating) daggers toward the past, but a persistent reality remains in contemporary art’s present: “Institutions, biennials, and mega-exhibitions attack colonial pasts, but not presents. They are quick to be politically correct and ‘host’ the Other – while often maintaining an all-white staff, and a clearly rigidly Western approach as to how to institute.”

Fokianaki considers conditions under which “the Western mandate for the universal – which has corroded our varied and complex cultural histories just as the chemicals corroded the surface of the Parthenon Marbles – might finally collapse.”

Another riddle, in a sense: “As the state wages its undeclared war, it faces the same question as the murderer: What to do with the body?” asks Oxana Timofeeva in “Now is Night.” Of the ongoing, undeclared war in Ukraine, she relays: “There are rumors that some of the white trucks in a Russian humanitarian aid convoy that drove into Ukraine were empty but returned full of cargo 200 (the general name given to both fallen Russian soldiers and the zinc coffins in which they come home from the war). Some bodies come home, others stay on Ukrainian soil, buried on the spot. Some say that the Russian army has bought mobile crematoria: special trucks on a Volvo frame for the quick and safe disposal of biological waste such as the corpses of homeless animals or infected cattle.”

What indeed to do with the body? And, here and elsewhere, do we consider body qua body, body in a body, or a more complex arrangement? Body first as metaphor then as metastatic ideology, a rail linked with others toward a common goal, or tied down as corpse? Body as leftover, as evidence, as person, or machine of the state. What begins to happen to constructions of corpses as seed, gross national product, necessity, possession of a larger, hungry, always threatened and proud growling

national body when a body can be – or must be – shipped out, returned in ashes by priority mail or Amazon drone? Certainly we are running out of space.

Certain forces of capital relations lead the pack in producing involuntary movement, involuntary death: war and its continued fallout. Terradeformation: scorched earth, to say the least.

Depending perhaps on location, depending on where in the end of the end-of-the-world process one’s people are or have already been, there too exist psychic preoccupations with catastrophe.

In “A First Step Towards a Regional Risk Assessment,” Michael Baers maps real climate projections considered in Stockholm atop speculative accounts from the same city in 2040. At that time, from these reports back from the future, the bodies on earth face greater external harm, yet lack internal (weather) veins – instead of censors, the weather without invades so as to become the weather within.

Sometimes, we are or have been told, a body needs to embody an idea, moving it with hands, tools, weapons, or words along with others in order to construct a reality.

Looking back into a Soviet past, Robert Bird traces in this issue an as-yet-unmapped history of three possible lived concepts of (Socialist) realism, through the work and lives of three figures in critical conversation: the Soviet writer and poet Andrei Platonov, Hungarian Marxist philosopher Georg Lukács, and Soviet literary critic Viktor Shklovsky – whose “writings can all be taken as links in a single chain of utterances about the conditions of realism under socialist construction.” Also in this issue of e-flux journal, we are delighted to hold space for a revived, multilayered historical conversation between Andrei Platonov’s short story “Immortality,” appearing in its first English translation here by Lisa Hayden and Robert Chandler, and the first English translation, by Robert Bird, of Georg Lukács’s review of “Immortality,” focused on railway protagonist Emmanuil Levin. To continue populating the reanimated community, we also include Jewish-Ukrainian Soviet poet Lev Ozerov’s written portrait of Platonov, translated by Robert Chandler.

In Bird’s “Articulations of (Socialist) Realism,” he describes Platonov’s commission to write a story for the Union of Soviet Writers and the railway newspaper Gudok (Horn). Bird shows how Platonov’s own past as a railroad laborer literally animated a key metaphor: the revolution as the locomotive of history. “A revolutionary fact gives rise to a feeling and organizes labor,” Bird explains, “but then returns to a metaphor that rapidly accelerates out of control. This

literal belief in metaphor animated socialist realism, the official aesthetic system of the Soviet Union beginning in 1932, and Stalin relied heavily upon the mobilizing power of metaphor when, in 1935, he placed the rail industry at the center of public discourse.”

Among Bird’s later conclusions on the power of the word in these authors’ work: “What is realist in the realist novel, then, is not its style or even its genre, but its operations of articulation and coupling, just like working on the railway.”

He continues: “How, Lukács asks, will the realist novel, this machine of articulation and linkage, be retooled for the aims of socialism now that history has made its ultimate turn?”

So now – at night or at war or otherwise – how to order and reorder, construct via text, assembling bodies toward building the worlds we need in order to survive each other?

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