

Monika Szewczyk

Art of Conversation, Part I

Much has been said of late about “the conversational” or “the discursive” in and around the field of contemporary art.¹ And yet we seem reluctant to talk about an *art of conversation* in the same breath. Maybe it is the all-too-powdery whiff of seventeenth-century aristocratic ladies and gentlemen, fanning themselves amidst idle chatter, whose connections to our own aspirations we would rather sweep under the shaggy carpet?² Or perhaps it is because we are desperately hoping to talk ourselves out of stale notions of art as a cultural practice that to suggest an *art of conversation* might at first seem utterly oxymoronic?

Binaries

My attempt to resuscitate this term in all its discomforts stems from its potential to unhinge a particular binary concept, which might be summarized in the title of a recent exhibition curated by Nicolaus Schafhausen and Florian Waldvogel as part of the Brussels Biennial – *Show me, don't tell me*.³ Why not show *and* tell? The same question might be posed to the proponents of the discursive as a way out of a *mere* looking at art. Why do we so rarely hear of doing or thinking two things at once? A dialectical intertwining of positions might demand that we ask of art (as makers, viewers, critics, students, teachers) to suspend, boggle, or otherwise challenge available discourses *and* that we in turn develop a discourse to elaborate evasions, deferrals, or misunderstandings of its available notions. Or, we could remain actively neutral with respect to this binary – however dialectically complex it may be, something seems to be missing from the equation.



Still from *Jesus Christ Erlöser* (2008) 84 min. Directed by Peter Geyer

With this in mind, I have been thinking about certain staged or filmed conversations,

with an eye to how conversation is forged and what it forges. At stake are productive notions of how thought can move through conversation and how conversation can move thought that probably have very little to do with clichés of conversation operating in the art world. This may be understood as an aesthetic point of view insofar as aesthetics is the attention to ways of appearing, perceiving, sensing. Conversation is often understood as an equal, rational, democratic exchange that builds bridges, communities, understandings, and is thus a way for people to recognize each other. The thorny issue of whether or not one should talk to dictators (with or without pre-conditions) that continually flared up in the run-up to the recent American presidential elections points to a particular concern in the political culture with regard to how, when, and with whom one should engage in dialogue. To converse with dictators is to forestall their annihilation, to see – in the sense of acknowledging – them somehow.

Yet this *a priori* recognition confuses the matter. What if conversation is understood not as the space of seeing, but of coming to terms with certain forms of blindness? In other words, what I think is not being articulated, but what drives the reticence for conversation, is the

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acknowledgement of non-knowledge rather than recognition. To have a conversation with Chavez or Ahmadinejad is to recognize that one does not know them and wants to. In this way, conversation is always political and aesthetic because it shows who we want to see, who or what we admit into a world order. To put it somewhat differently: if, as an art, conversation is the creation of worlds, we could say that to choose to have a conversation with someone is to admit them into the field where worlds are constructed. And this ultimately runs the risk of redefining not only the “other,” but us as well. Art and conversation share this space of invention, yet only conversation comes with the precondition of plurality that might totally undo the notion of the creative agent.

Plurals

One can develop a discourse about the conversation, but at least two must have a conversation about discourse (which in turn might become plural). In *The Infinite Conversation*, Maurice Blanchot creates a plural discourse on conversation as plurality, attempting to disrupt his own writing, often making it sound like a conversation (with an unnamed interlocutor who may be Georges



Still from *Hunger* (2008), 96 min. Directed by Steve McQueen

Bataille) – all this to extend thought infinitely. Common sense and manuals on the art of conversation may tell us that it is rude to interrupt; Blanchot thinks differently:

The definition of conversation (that is, the most simple description of the most simple conversation) might be the following: when two people speak together, they speak not together, but each in turn: one says something, then stops, the other something else (or the same thing), then stops. The coherent discourse they carry on is composed of sequences that are interrupted when the conversation moves from partner to partner, even if adjustments are made so that they correspond to one another. The fact that speech needs to pass from one interlocutor to another in order to be confirmed, contradicted, or developed shows the necessity of interval. The power of speaking interrupts itself, and this interruption plays a role that appears to be minor – precisely the role of a subordinated alteration. This role, nonetheless, is so enigmatic that it can be interpreted as bearing the very enigma of language: pause between sentences, pause from one interlocutor to another, and pause of attention, the hearing that doubles the force of locution.⁴

I'd almost like to stop here – to pause indefinitely and allow myself and everyone reading this to think about Blanchot's sense of the conversation, especially the force it accords to hearing.

To resume, with this in mind, is to attempt a conversation with Blanchot (or more specifically, with this particular text). So then, how can we consider a conversation through its interruptions?

A recent film that resonates with these questions is Steve McQueen's first feature film, *Hunger* (2008), which concerns the 1981 hunger strike led by Bobby Sands inside Belfast's Maze Prison. The film is virtually without speech. It proceeds through a war of gestures: the coldly administered abuse of prisoners (in scenes that evoke the inhuman conditions of Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo Bay) and the prisoners' retaliation with acts that perversely aestheticize their abject conditions, under which they are refused political status, and people are reduced to bodies for silent administration. The sublime swirl of shit painted on the walls of one grimy cell in all the deliberate blankness of a Jasper Johns (shown half-washed-off in the poster for the film) is one emblem of the prisoners' mute tactics. The other, of course, is the hunger strike

itself, wherein Bobby Sands' emaciated body slowly approximates the figure of Christ on the cross.

Roughly in the middle of the film, between the two moving images, speechlessness is interrupted with a conversation between Sands and a priest. Their exchange is captured (almost) entirely in one long take, shot from the side so that the two men face each other (and not the camera, as is customary in the shot-reverse-shot style of filming conversations). The effect is all too real: priest and prisoner banter, becoming regular guys that joke, smoke, show their affinities and their humanity, then fall into an intense debate on the merits of the hunger strike. The priest implores Sands not to mistake selfish delusions of martyrdom for political efficacy and Sands rejects the priest's suggestion that talking to the Protestants is possible or could solve the political impasse. The conversation stops and, soon thereafter, so does Sands' life. He refuses the infinity of conversation.

For all the naturalism of this scene, it is a strange thing to see a priest smoking: God's worker on earth speeding his way to the grave even as he defends the sanctity of life. Yet in mingling, the exhalations of Sands and those of the priest materialize and form something third, which lets their moral and ethical confusions hover.⁵ After Sands dies, and just before the film ends, we hear the contemptuous monologue of Margaret Thatcher on BBC Radio – another killer of conversation.

Conversation, the converse of monologue. When Blanchot wrote his polyphonous book in 1969, with the memory of the Second World War still vivid, he juxtaposed conversation to the dictatorial monologue of Hitler, most exemplarily, but added that "every head of state participates in the same violence of this *dictare*, the repetition of an imperious monologue, when he enjoys the power of being the only one to speak and, rejoicing in possession of his high solitary word, imposes it without restraint as a superior and supreme speech upon others." Conversation, Blanchot continues, even in its most coherent form must "always fragment itself by changing protagonists" with an "interruption for the sake of understanding, understanding in order to speak." What is beautiful about Blanchot's notion of interruption is that he considers silence to be one of its strongest forms. He cites Kafka, who wondered, "at what moment and how many times, when eight people are seated within the horizon of a conversation, it is appropriate to speak if one does not wish to be considered silent."

Who doesn't have the urge to remain silent in a conversation – to let it unfold without being

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implicated and without taking sides, remaining blissfully neutral and knowing? But this omniscience or even omnipotence is not quite what is at stake in this notion of conversation. For Blanchot, both speaking (in turn) and silence – as the two means of interrupting – can either serve understanding (via a dialectic) or they can produce something altogether more enigmatic. It all depends on how we conceive of the interlocutors of a conversation: if I address someone as my opposite, either as object of my subjective discourse or as a subject who is infinitely different but equal to me, I enter into a dialectic which seeks synthesis and unity (understanding). Yet Blanchot also explores conversation with, and interruption by, something other – one that cannot complete or understand its interlocutor, but interrupts in another way. Following Lévinas, Blanchot designates this someone as *autrui*, understood, not as the opposite, but as the neutral – “an alterity that holds in the name of the neutral.”⁶ Blanchot’s notion of the neutral is close to Barthes’ in that it is not a nothing, but something beyond the binaries that structure dialectics – a way to move in thought and sensation differently. Conceiving of dialogue beyond dialectics (which holds out unity and synthesis as an end), we can

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approach the infinity that proliferates via its deployment of the neutral. This is to say that a kind of geometry of thought is at stake that might allow for thought itself to move differently altogether.

God, avatar of *autrui*

Of all the avatars of *autrui* as the infinite and the neutral that appear in Blanchot’s text, I am perhaps most uncomfortable with God. Yet perhaps it is God as interlocutor that best boggles thinking on the conversation – it is the stuff of revolution if you think of the Protestant Reformation and the aspirations to talk more directly with God. Blanchot considers Levinas’ notion that “All true discourse . . . is discourse with God, not a conversation held between equals.” A sphinx-of-a-scribe, Blanchot understands Levinas “in the strongest sense, as one always must. And in remembering, perhaps, what is said in Exodus of God speaking: as one man to another” (maybe that is why the sight of Bobby Sands and a priest – God’s ambassador – talking as equals comes with a little extra strangeness). This god/man duplicity comes back later, when Blanchot speaks of Apollo, himself speaking through the poet Bacchylides to Admetus, the founder of dialogue (a plural



Still from *Jesus Christus Erlöser* (2008) 84 min. Directed by Peter Geyer



Joseph Beuys, *How to Explain Pictures to a Dead Hare* (26 November 1965), performance documentation at Galerie Alfred Schmela, Düsseldorf.

speech indeed): “*You are a mere mortal; therefore your mind must harbor two thoughts at once.*” (Tell me about it...) And how difficult it is to speak such a mind, especially if the dialectic is not its figure. To be of two positions at once – this is what is afforded to the viewer of McQueen’s particular angle (in profile) on the conversation of Bobby Sands and the priest. There is something to be said for film as a particularly complex medium that lets us observe the polyphony (which includes glances and silences) that makes up the plural speech of conversation.

Rather than taking this plurality of thought as something to be reproached while unity is elevated to divine heights, Blanchot concludes something that one might take to heart when confronted with all unitary voices:

What, fundamentally, is the god asking of Admetus? Perhaps nothing less than that he shake off the yoke of the god and finally leave the circle in which he remains enclosed by a fascination with unity. And this is no small thing, certainly, for it means ceasing to think only with a view to unity. And this means therefore: not fearing to affirm interruption and rupture in order to come to the point of proposing and expressing – an infinite task – a truly plural speech.

Another moving image to consider: Peter Geyer’s documentary film *Jesus Christus Erlöser* (2008), where the kranky Klaus Kinski incants a monologue of/as Jesus. In our schizophrenically Godless and post-secular world, this conversation with God might be a place to linger. Kinsky plays the savior to a disaffected bohemian proletariat assembled at the Deutschlandhalle in Berlin on November 20, 1971. His message of radical equality, social redemption, and brotherly love competes with his superstar persona (swathed in a vintage Technicolor flower chemise) and, in light of this glaring contradiction, Kinski is repeatedly interrupted by members of the audience who want to turn his monologue into a conversation. Each time someone takes up the mic, Kinsky fights back or storms off the stage, only to return and begin again. By the end of the film, even after the credits have rolled (which extends the ordeal into infinity in filmic terms) Kinski is shown down in the stands, amongst the two dozen or so remaining devotees, trying to remember his lines so that he can finally deliver his gospel in full. Here, then, is the failure of conversation as the failure of interruption – the audience is hushed; Kinsky continues.

I saw *Jesus Christus Erlöser* (again), shortly after visiting the Joseph Beuys retrospective *Die*

Revolution sind wir (We are the Revolution) at the Hamburger Bahnhof in Berlin – a burgeoning show staged under the broader city-wide theme of “Kult des Künstlers” adopted by the Staatliche Museen in Berlin. Posters in the U-bahn stations include Dürer’s famous *Self-portrait at 28 of 1500*, which makes the artist look like a princely Christ; and I was expecting that Beuys would fit neatly into this long history of the Jesus complex in art.⁷ My eyes and ears were strained for signs of a Messiah, and these signs proliferated – only in the guise of a divine conversationalist.

With his gaunt face and intense jaw, Beuys bears a striking physical resemblance to Kinsky. His sense of himself as a shaman and the gravitas he projects could lead to further comparison. Yet Beuys embraced the conversational mode in his public persona as well as his artistic practice in a way that Kinsky failed to do. The exhibition features ample footage of the artist involved in public discussions on German and American television or on taped videos, also within the student milieu of the Düsseldorf Kunstakademie. And to be sure, he is often seen as the typical maestro of the German art academy – sole authority and source of mystical wisdom, at times mocking or condescending to his interlocutors. But, he retains a sense of humor – I especially think that *How to Explain Pictures to a Dead Hare* (1965) needs to be considered as much for its arch comedy as for its mysticism and priestly ritual. Not one or the other, but both – Beuys’ mentality clearly harbors at least two thoughts at once. Here I might note that, all in all, I do not take Beuys’ particular mystique as completely repulsive. A messiah needs disciples in order for the mysticism of the work to be as much a product of its reading as the character of its intent. If one option for breaking the circumscribed view wherein figures such as Beuys embody (near) divinity is simply not to congregate around them (and after their death to skip the show), another might be to bring the work of the neutral into play in confronting them.

Another Neutral

The film footage of the 1965 performance of *How to explain* shows the artist inside the Galerie Alfred Schmela, Düsseldorf, wherein he cradles said dead animal while pointing out and discussing his drawings. The entire exercise stages a kind of impossible or aborted conversation that could almost be understood as a negative manifesto. In other words, it proceeds through a series of refusals: the first to be rejected is the (human/animal) binary. The artist doubles up as a god – his head covered in honey and gold leaf for maximum Apollonian oomph. Then, the human is virtually removed from the

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Joseph Beuys, *Das Schweigen von Marcel Duchamp wird Überbewertet* (The Silence Of Marcel Duchamp Is Overrated), 1964. Oil, paper, ink, felt, chocolate, photographs.

equation, if we consider that the camera has captured the performance from the street (through the window), stressing that the audience was emphatically excluded from the gallery space as the space for communion between the man (playing a god) and the dead or sacrificed animal. Finally – and this refusal is particularly ambiguous – in obscuring the audience’s ability to hear any lesson imparted to the hare, does the mystical teacher curb his authority or does he silence the authority of discourse? The work of silence, a key cipher of the neutral, is to perpetually put signification and representation into question. The lesson of Beuys’ pictures is withheld. Announced as explanation, the performance is in fact a question engine. It echoes Blanchot’s notion of the neutral within the space of conversation as “initiating significance, but signifying nothing, or nothing determined.”

This “nothing determined” makes way for conversation. And it is not to determine, but to extend indeterminacy (infinitely) that conversations occur. What emerges here is a notion of the neutral stripped of its beige, eventless character. *How to Explain Pictures to a Dead Hare* involves both show-and-tell. It is plural and extravagantly symbolic. As such, it opens up to a sense of the neutral as excess and remainder alongside the identification of the neutral with the void. Voids – especially the avoidance of judgment – have an important part to play in neutrality. The neutral is a radical other in that it is neither opposite nor like anything because it cannot be judged.⁸ Only when there is a tendency to kneel before a void (veneration is a form of judgment) does it break with the sense of the neutral.

Here, Beuys’ *Das Schweigen von Marcel Duchamp wird überbewertet* (The Silence of Marcel Duchamp is Overrated), painted in the year before *How to explain*, refuses an overly respectful interpretation of Duchamp’s inscrutable seclusion. And although the attempt to undervalue his silence, or at least question its overvaluation, plays into the game of judgment (and thereby ruins its neutrality), the painting highlights another powerful engine of conversation: listening. By troubling Duchamp’s silence, Beuys’ shows how loudly he heard it. For all the criticism leveled at Beuys regarding his inability to absorb the lessons of Marcel Duchamp, one artist’s refusal to take the other at his silence may be read as a conversational gesture. Indeed, we could say that the registering, even the amplification, of a silence is a fine beginning for a conversation. For all their differences, I do wonder if both artists were not exploring registers of “the neutral,” albeit in very different ways.

Bestiary

How then to proliferate the neutral? This is the question at the heart of the art of conversation. This is at once very close and very far from the common sense of conversation. There is: “let’s not fight; we’ll meet on neutral ground and talk it over.” But there is also: “how can we listen to the inaudible, the unheard of, that which does not so much transcend as suspends not only the binaries but also the equivalences which constitute subjectivity?” A radical misalignment of interlocutors is needed for the work of neutrality to occur. This is how Beuys’ *How to explain* may prove most interesting. In introducing this strange sense of conversation, my aim is to apply pressure on the givens of conversation as a harmonious unifying operation. BBC Radio tells me every twenty minutes to “join the global conversation” as if something of the sort were naturally taking place. A lot of things are called conversation; and to work in the name of this model of exchange is to mark one’s tolerance for diversity, but often only as a mask for unifying operations.

A few last words from Blanchot, for whom the idea of conversation resides in a downright weird conception of the interlocutor as possessing a speech “beyond hearing and to which I must nonetheless respond.” This notion is conjured in a fictive dialogue, which includes the following retort: “Such then, would be my task: to respond to this speech that surpasses my hearing, to respond to it without having really understood it, and to respond to it in repeating it, in making it speak.” How to exercise such a hearing? Here is the other great question of conversation – not one of articulating (which is more proper to discourse), but one of hearing (which is proper to a notion of conversation as that which interrupts discourse as we know it). I cannot think through this proposition except maybe by considering certain exchanges between a woman and a stone, between a man and an animal. For the former, Wislawa Szymborska’s 1962 poem, “Conversation with a Stone,” conjures up the geological specimen’s stone-cold voice of reproach to the human poet: “You lack the sense of taking part / No other sense can make up for your missing sense of taking part. / Even sight heightened to become all-seeing / will do you no good without a sense of taking part.” For the latter, consider Marcel Broodthaers’ *Interview with a Cat*, a rather “bad example” perhaps, in that Broodthaers also has no “sense of taking part” beyond a well-rehearsed “sense of the absurd.” But it is a somewhat fitting example nonetheless, as Broodthaers’ gesture was recorded (in 1972) at the *Musée d’art Moderne, Département des*

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Aigles in Düsseldorf, and thus in Beuys' backyard.

The tangle of Broodthaers and Beuys, whose own conversations with animals did not stop at the hare, are most often read through Broodthaers' open letter dated September 25, 1972, published in the *Rheinische Post* on October 3 of that year, where he effectively accuses Beuys of being too Wagnerian.⁹ Yet, in sharp contrast to his interview with the cat, Broodthaers' *Department of Eagles* encroaches on the sinister uses of the bird by administrative and totalitarian forces. His interview is thus imbedded within an extensive project of extravagant animal symbolism. Like Beuys with the hare, Broodthaers chooses to talk pictures with the cat. In a stroke of arch-irony, we hear the comparison of conceptual art with an unseen canvas – constituted as pure concept. A climax of sorts comes as Broodthaers, ventriloquizing Magritte, alternately repeats "*C'est une pipe*" and "*Ceci n'est pas une pipe*" as the feline chimes in with its loud inarticulate noises. The recording feels manipulated, in that the cat's timing, his absolutely polite waiting for its turn, turns the disruptive element of the animal's voice into the mechanical certainty of a laugh-track. In the end, Broodthaers poses many questions, but does not articulate any questions that he hears of himself so that he might invent "a response without understanding."

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Now dear, patient reader, you might ask:

"Where does this leave us? What have we learned about the art of conversation, which is already dead, or is by most accounts dying? Are we meant to put ourselves in the shoes of Beuys' hare? Is this some elaborate funeral?"

I might respond, provisionally, or as a preface to the next chapter, that:

"The thought of conversation needs to become stranger still if we want conversation to forge something altogether new. In de-naturalizing it – and veering towards the neutral – we might get out of the circle we're in, take God and animal, and forge some kind of Sphinx to listen to, posing questions that interrupt what we have thus far called conversation."

x

Monika Szewczyk is a writer and editor based in Berlin and in Rotterdam, where she is the head of publications at Witte de With, Center for Contemporary Art, and a tutor at the Piet Zwart Institute. She also acts as contributing editor of *A Prior* magazine in Ghent.

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1
The interest of this very journal and its organizers at e-flux in these notions is well evidenced by two texts on the subject: one in Issue #0 by Irit Rogoff (whose Curatorial/Knowledge Seminar at Goldsmiths University, co-organized with Jean Paul Martinon, which I have participated in, often questions notions of conversation and how conversational modes play a compensatory role in the art world); and one by Liam Gillick in Issue #2, which was first formulated for the Hermes Lecture he delivered in Den Bosch on November 9, 2008. But the investment in conversational and discursive practice is also evidenced by e-flux projects such as unitednationsplaza in Berlin and Night School at New York's New Museum, which consist predominantly of activities such as talks, panel discussions, and similar arenas of knowledge production and exchange. Here, I should mention that one of my closest encounters with e-flux was *The New York Conversations*, a three-day event co-organized in the summer of 2008 with *A Prior* journal (of which I am a contributing editor), which included Anton Vidokle as one of the featured artists alongside Rirkrit Tiravanija and Nico Dockx. While the list could go on indefinitely, I'll mention just one more text, Emily Pethick's "Resisting Institutionalisation," found at <http://www.ica.org.uk/Resisting%20Institutionalisation,%20by%20Emily%20Pethick%20+17441.twl>, because her understanding of conversation as above all "a way of preventing a fixed representation" is important for my own understanding, and perhaps also connected to Gillick's sense of conversation as a place to "hide within a collective" and thus become difficult to recognize or represent in a Deleuzian sense.

2
For an elaboration on the elevated status of conversation as an art in the period, and the attendant attempts by French aristocrats to distinguish themselves from a rising bourgeoisie, see Mary Vidal, *Watteau's Painted Conversations: Art, Literature, and Talk in Seventeenth- and Eighteenth-Century France* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1992), 75-98. One of Vidal's most prescient themes is that of conversation as a form of creating and disseminating knowledge and information in a manner other than the conventional and fundamentally hierarchical school model where those who learn are pupils and those who teach masters. To uphold a veneer of perfection from birth, nobles could not be taught and therefore rejected formal notions of learning. Vidal notes that, "A conversation with one's equals was one of the few acceptable ways for the

aristocrat to increase knowledge and to perfect (not acquire) superiority. . . . The salons had initiated a distinctly noble learning process based on the exchange of agreeable and relevant bits of information among equals, in contrast to the authoritarian, pedantic, master-student relationship of the bourgeois academic system" (95). This scenario presents an interesting foil to current experiments in education and exhibition-making which privilege the conversational mode – I am not concerned about this as a snobbish pursuit. Rather, I see the nobility described by Vidal as under duress, and conversation as a means of self-constitution and self-preservation, which had to remain clandestine. Her main point about Watteau's paintings is not that they show conversations but that they cannot represent what is said.

3
Show me, don't tell me was organized by Nicolaus Schafhausen and Florian Waldvogel for the inaugural Brussels Biennial, as a satellite exhibition organized by the Witte de With (where, incidentally, I work as the head of that most discursive of departments: publications). I mention the exhibition with a lot of sympathy for the curators and artists, but also a sense that the title rehearses a cocky stance and a binary that was only interesting in that it irritated and was in turn foiled by the joint contribution of Charles Esche (for the Van Abbe Museum, Eindhoven) and Maria Hlavajova (for the BAK, Utrecht) installed next to it at the former Post Sorting Center in Brussels. The project entitled *Once is Nothing* discursively restaged an earlier exhibition claiming to critique the unreflexive production of ever-new shows.

4
See Maurice Blanchot, *The Infinite Conversation*, ed. and trans. Susan Hanson (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 75. All subsequent quotations are from the section "Plural Speech: (the speech of writing)," 3-82.

5
This strange smoke is also the strangely all-but-sharp *punctum* of the image of Sands smoking, used on posters for the film, taken from the shot that breaks the long take that captures his conversation with the priest. It hovers almost like a blank speech bubble, enforcing the refusal of speech.

6
Blanchot's continued meditation on 'the neutral' occurs in dialogue with Roland Barthes, for whom this term is a continually elaborated and multiplied point of departure for developing a movement of thought that suspends binary

structures, even the most sophisticated of these – the dialectic. While Barthes thought about the neutral throughout his career, it was not until 1977-1978 that he developed it into a seminar – the second of three he gave while he held the Chair of Semiology at the Collège de France. See Roland Barthes, *The Neutral*, trans. Rosalind Krauss and Dennis Hollier (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005).

7
I must admit that, in North America, where I studied art history, the reading of Beuys has been overshadowed by Benjamin H.D. Buchloh's damning 1980 essay "Beuys: The Twilight of the Idol," *Artforum* 5, no.18, 35-43. Here, Beuys' assumption of the identity of a shaman and healer is seen as an obfuscation of German post-World War II guilt. For a complication of Beuys' complex play with totalitarian power, see Jan Verwoert's essay in Issue #1 of this journal.

8
Both Blanchot, and Gilles Deleuze (in dialogue with Claire Parnet) stress the work of conversation as the avoidance of judgment. See especially p. 81 of Blanchot's *Infinite Conversation* where he notes that "we know, first of all, that there is almost no sort of equality in our societies. (It suffices, in whatever regime, to have heard the 'dialogue' between a man presumed innocent and the magistrate who questions him to know what this equality of speech means when it is based upon an inequality of culture, condition, power, and fortune. But each of us, and at every moment, either is or finds himself in the presence of a judge. All speech is a word of command, of terror, of seduction, of resentment, flattery, or aggression; all speech is violence – and to pretend to ignore this in claiming to dialogue is to add liberal hypocrisy to the dialectical optimism according to which war is no more than another form of dialogue." Deleuze's attempt to critique the continual presence of judgment in existing conversations, is made clearest through the folksy lyrics of Bob Dylan: "And while you're busy prosecutin' / we'll be busy whistlin' / cleanin' up the courtroom / sweepin' sweepin' / listenin' listenin' . . ." – a set of attitudes that could be named neutral, especially the space of acute listening. See Gilles Deleuze and Claire Parnet, "A Conversation. What is it? What is it for?" in *Dialogues II* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 1-35.

9
The most notable addition would have to be *I Like America and America Likes Me* (1974) wherein the artist shared the space of Galerie René Block in New York with a young coyote for the duration of three days. This time,