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# Editorial – “Quasi-Events”

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e-flux journal #58 — october 2014 Elizabeth A. Povinelli, Julieta Aranda, Brian Kuan Wood, Anton Vidokle  
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How do we invent bad criteria for rotten infrastructure, the sliding of norms to the always incomplete and the already broken? The hack, the stupid fix, the patch – these are songs sung out of holes and faults and leaks. We are only now discovering that the limits to our endurance are actually far more constitutive than our daydream fantasies of a wholeness based in currency that already functions perfectly well as toilet paper. This is past the Romantic tradition of inspired cataclysmic becoming and inside of its ruin only because it’s just not how things work out for most people who can’t afford to imagine themselves into concrete circumstances that will ever align with basic needs.

This very special issue of *e-flux journal* features a series of essays in conversation with Elizabeth Povinelli’s essay “Time/Bank, Effort/Embankments,” the last in a three part exploration on time, effort, and endurance in late liberalism (see also “Routes/Worlds” and “After the Last Man”). At the core of the issue are a series of questions on how to fully inhabit the time that never arrives and the half project that never resolves, never completes, that changes into a frozen breakdown, yet secretes crime and half-solutions in the meantime. How do we situate a field of half solutions crucially allowing for a virtuosity in conception in spite of severe limits to their pragmatic application?

Neither in shambles nor in glory, the liberal project limps on, but to what end? Where Fukuyama once heralded the fall of the Berlin Wall as the augur of the universal triumph of liberalism, by 2008 this event looks increasingly less like the end of history than the mute herald of an impending implosion. But the spectacular collapse of financial markets never quite succeeded in bringing anything down decisively. Indeed, if these buckles in the liberal social order suggest anything it’s that the idea and affect of “the end” (terminal futures, finitude) is merely another way in which liberal forms of governance secure their ongoing ethical claims and rectitude. The Big Disaster, the Decisive Event, the Last Wave: these forms of being and finitude wash away what is actually more decisive – the tsunami of quasi-events, where potentiality dwells, where normative identities collapse into crime, where crime ascends into statehood, where statehood slumps into museological conservation, but also, and perhaps most crucially, where forms of symbolic abstraction collapse to the point where objects and events crawl back into their referent, where forms of value detach from money and creep back into people. It is where potentiality is the refuge not of the hopeful but of the concretely ordinary and pragmatically banal.

We believe that to fail in this way is not to

accept misery as a permanent condition. On the contrary it may be to supersede the function and wealth of the state materially and conceptually. And yet it may be a matter of accepting a certain discursive misery of a severe poverty of terms for situating activities taking place so far beyond the stabilizing borders of the liberal project, and the richness of terms available for certain bounded expressions of polite freedom. To look beyond this is to restore historical pain and disenfranchisement back into expressions of freedom that could very well be as consumptive and corrosive, but also the very backdrop against which those expressions can only emerge. Uprisings that aren't? Welcome. We may not be idealistic, but we will always be subsidized by ourselves. We may never finish anything we start, but we deserve the richness of knowing why we shouldn't have to. And couldn't even if we tried. You are already one of us anyhow.

How does a life world already constitute a concrete money form? How do we understand and expand permanent incommensurability as the primary non-value of any form of social exchange? What figures does this produce as factors and variables in those exchanges, what does it draw into its vortex? Concentration, distraction, exhaustion, daydreaming, race, suffering, severe pain?

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