

In the
Mind
but Not
from
There

Real Abstraction and
Contemporary Art

Edited by
Gean Moreno

In the Mind
but Not from There

*Real Abstraction
and Contemporary Art*

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Introduction

Gean Moreno

In the last decade or so, the lockstep incursion of flat ontologies, notions of quasi-sentient matter, slime-lined and mushroom-sprouting vitalisms, and network-everything into contemporary art discourse and exhibitions has been hard to miss. Embraced with steady fanfare, a slushy and exhilaratingly immoderate carnival of chemistry and composting across our discursive landscape has us querying the unfathomable inexhaustibility of objects, their capacity to pipeline unwieldy forces and transgress the tiny territory of the *real* available to human access. But as excitement for this vivacious and mud-splattered thinking spikes, ostensibly terraforming a new plateau from which to assess our cultural artifacts, skepticism tactfully summons sharpened attention. Slight misgivings we felt all along for the conceptual pirouettes encouraged by this complicity with the powers of the object or the Earth or the cosmos find some oxygen and molt their modesty. As they are elaborated, it is evident that these suspicions can't be hastily explained by charging intellectual miserliness before new proposals or blindness to the ways in which nonhuman forces are implicated in the structuring of things. It is, rather, that the scales and temporalities, the profound entanglements of apparatus and knowledge production, on which these discourses often rely and reflect in their native conceptual neighborhoods and disciplinary enclosures become, in transit and translation, something quite minor: the supposedly intractable potency

and bottomless ineffability of art objects. Weird forms are taken for inscrutable structures that harbor alien things and purposes; sculptures are confused for the mysterious artifacts that fall to earth in cheap sci-fi movies and unravel everything. The agential capacity of the inanimate, and the supra- and subhuman organic, becomes, by sheer force of spectatorial desire and zany writing, the disproportionate and timeless power of the nonstandard little thing, perched on its pedestal or gawking back from the wall, to purportedly vectorialize forces and tap dimensions that we can only know vicariously and imperfectly. The dilution of complexity and swap of scale feels rotten enough to put the stench of swindle in all this. As these objects begin to feel like sham prisms to the Vastness, we draw from the ecstatic rhetoric that conveys their supposed radical dynamics the contours of a hidden transaction, a suppressed need, which faintly registers in an eagerness to adapt and graduate discourses that subjectivize everything into dominant cultural interpretative machinery in a world increasingly structured by algorithmic governmentality, financialization and global logistics. It's a world in which abstraction seems less a thing without reference—as modernists used to boast about certain paintings and morphologies—than the ultimate reference of everything.

It's not that our diagnostic powers are exhausted by pointing out, once again, that the old pot mystifies a fragmented process of production, along with the ruination of subjectivity that this fragmentation entails. The world is of another order, every inch of it quantifiable, and we cannot but slip into weirder knots of thinking as we try to apprehend it. But it's also not that, in fear of falling out of step with the ostensible leading edge of cultural discourse, of missing the leap over the last barricade that keeps us from some exo-human plenitude and dispersion, we need to discard the critical ways in which we once approached the pot. Whatever the pitfalls and paradoxical uses of art production and interpretation

that retains critique as its dominant mode—something that even those best known for this must have begun to lament, shipwrecked as they surely feel in the toss between their stringent persistence and the unending ineffectiveness of the results—these types of exercises at least seek to understand the art object within a material matrix of institutions, economic pressures, historical determinations and concrete modes of distribution. Champions of the supercharged object are realists about everything—except, of course, the material conditions in which art objects are currently embedded—a transnational socio-institutional ecology that is structured, on the one hand, by a logic of artificial asset valorization, of foreshortened incubation periods through the manipulation of price and information; and, on the other, by “freedom” from any need to line up with larger historical projects (aside from the neoliberal one). It is a world in which art objects, beyond their social actualization as extraordinary commodities, are subsumed into a financialization process whereby the pictures on the wall, or the .mov files on the portable drive or the unwieldy installations in freeport storage, neatly tucked in their crates, can be collateralized, leveraged and turned into currency without the actual artifacts having to return to the market and have their biographies affected—and, by extension, potentially cripple the credibility of their owners and erode some of their social prestige by being taken for investors or flippers. Through procedures such as art-backed lending, the art object ceases to merely be a safe bet against the volatility of other markets or a daring gamble, afforded by a well-guarded and opaque art market, in which merchants can pry money from the clutches of stock traders and other analogous types. The art object sets frozen capital in motion; it puts it to work. This enhanced function points to the way in which capital’s most recent restructuring has found a route to reach into the very structural core of the art object and repurpose it to serve new ends, disregarding the object’s self-definition

as an enclosed signifying unit, embedded in historical and conventional webs. This repurposing is voracious and subsumes art objects that come from various historical periods; however, while it touches the Fragonard and the Watteau, the Picasso and the Florine Stettheimer, contemporary art bares an irrevocable tethering to this process as birthmark, as teratological blemish.

By becoming a collateralizable entity that frees itself from its conventional illiquid status, the art object swells to be more than itself. It grows an entrapping appendage, a kind of snare embedded in the prey, that captures it for a process it can neither critique nor curtail if such things are measured by effectiveness and not intention. The art object is, in a sense, self-differentiated. It is “internally” cleaved so that it is itself and yet, rendered available to an autonomous and adjacent (to its institutional habitat) field of financial operations, something that is not quite itself. It appears boundary-bent beyond what we always thought was its elastic limit. It is irrelevant if the art object (or its producer) develops any sort of reflexive stance, or even basic awareness, of this ontological enlargement of its social being as a financial instrument. Its capacity to intervene in this new reality is, in the end, nonexistent. The critical unveiling of the artwork’s inherent antinomy between autonomy and commodity; the disposition to establish alternatives to capitalist culture through unprecedented forms and novel modes of distribution; the dream to be part of the constituent power of the multitude; the desire to retain a twisted—and therefore denuding—relationship with ideology; the drive to turn the artwork into a kind of void point that short-circuits easy absorption into spectacle economies; the aim to pry local truth, discrepant temporalities and repressed histories from a homogenizing globalization—all these laudable exercises and impulses, these promises of rupture and renewal, can continue to find articulation. They just live, from the perspective of the object’s new ontological appendage and the actions of those

who benefit from it, relegated to a fantasy island of dreams playing on repeat. Abstraction, instantiated in actual practice, supersedes the claims of the sensible thing, determining not its form but its behavior in the world—often against its very commitments.

Some of this may explain why certain discourses have flooded, as compensatory mechanisms, contemporary art production and its interpretative exercises with such ease. In light of the financial abstracting of the artwork—one of numerous abstractive processes it faces before algorithmic governmentality, the proliferation of instruments engineered to capture future value, and the emergence of new policy and legal frameworks—what could be more enticing than the object that overruns mere semantic mysteriousness to become an autonomous agent, a thing-in-itself of sorts that has crashed into phenomenal reality, heavy with qualities that manifest beyond what we can grasp, with dimensions that exceed the limited things we can comprehend? We just have to plug in, vibe on the affective resonances. These mysterious objects maintain relations, we are reminded, with other objects, while excluding us from the exchange. They possess an inner richness that can never be exhausted by either our conceptual capture mechanisms or any structural determination.

The enthusiasm for the inexhaustible object, however, even with the perfect alibi that a justified spread of concern over anthropogenic climate disturbance extends to it, as it peaks, also sputters, and it can't help but give up the "hidden transaction" that is at stake in all of this: the eagerness to re-mystify the object registers as the *displacement* of what is surely the trauma of having artworks assume a new dimension, pressured into existence by a process of accumulation that generates profit through financial instruments, through the proliferation of capital as commodity, rather than through production and sales, and over which the art object has no say and possibly finds no footing for resistance, aside from

its own kamikaze-like destruction. The new uses that can be extracted from the art object are positively recoded as its secret power to extend beyond human cognitive reach and other horizons. In the end, however, it turns out that the object's supposed unfathomable "inexhaustibility," beyond its self-understanding and controlled operations, is financial, before it is inward or relational or cosmic or whatever. The unwieldy flows of energy and matter turn out to be stand-ins for the flows of capital in moist and mushy garb, enveloped in deep earth smell.

Since the subordination of the concrete to an abstract asset functions in absolute disregard of the artwork's content and self-definition, unencumbered by critical resistance and sophisticated diagnostics, how, then, does it manifest itself in the actual production or circulation of contemporary art? The essays collected *In the Mind but Not from There* wrestle with this sort of question, alongside related ones that probe capitalist temporalities, value production, mediation, visualization, risk and—struggling against a general dour mood—new possibilities of resistance. They propose, representing a burgeoning tendency, that a potential first and fruitful step in addressing the problems that cultural production currently faces may lie in an engagement with the problem of abstraction and of "real abstraction," more specifically, as elaborated by Marx and Alfred Sohn-Rethel, and revisited in our times by the likes of Paolo Virno and Slavoj Žižek. Real abstraction involves an understanding of abstraction not as a process of thinking that distills complex empirical reality, but, on the contrary, as that which emerges from material practice itself, in the world, before thought—behind thought's back, as they say. In turn, it determines epistemic limits and orients conceptualizations. If we move away from strictly epistemological concerns, we can hazard that it also impinges on the process that determines the morphologies of social and cultural institutions and conventions.

In the Mind but Not from There begins with a pair of framing essays by Alberto Toscano and Leigh Claire La Berge. Toscano traces the history of the concept of real abstraction and La Berge turns more directly to the concept's usefulness in times of financialization. Against the conceptual backdrop and historical genealogies that these texts establish, Marina Vishmidt delves into how the alignment of financial speculation, as “a self-expanding, or self-valorizing, dynamic of capital...with the ‘open-ended speculation’ of thinking and art,” sheds light on “the characteristic valorization processes of art and financialized capital as two social forms that show their internal logical relations in how they pattern our time.” Leaning away from tacky dispositions that an ersatz hope often affords us, Vishmidt probes the harmonization of financialization and art, alongside their mediation through cybernetic modes of governmentality and spreading automation, in order to ask the essential question of whether, in our conjuncture, art can “do anything more than perform a mimesis of this speculative voracity [of finance capital], or can it respond with a politics of alterity capable of putting itself into question as one...of its own future orientations?”

Vishmidt's answer, in its negative slant, aligns with our dire times, their extreme and relentless pull doing its work, and also with the paradox that, according to Benjamin Noys, contemporary artists can't escape: simply put, the artist “is the most capitalistic subject,” knowing precarity, flexibility and mobility quite intimately, and, for this very reason, is also the subject “most resistant to capitalist value extraction.” There is some critical maneuvering that can be elaborated out of the very knot of this paradox, but the places we go looking for it these days—namely, the positions in regard to art developed by Jacques Rancière, Antonio Negri and Alain Badiou, the troika of post-poststructuralists that the art world loves to love—offer very little. What we need, instead, Noys contends, is to elaborate a “punk realism”—the term, left unelaborated,

is Negri's. And Noys, like the rest of us, cringes a little upon hearing it, fearing that the gunk of commercialized nostalgia weighs down and stiffens any fugitive and liberatory potential that may have once inhabited the terms. But in urgent times, we well know, one has to make do with salvageable scraps and off-the-cuff détournements. Even if we end up having to save it from its name, what is important is punk realism's program to reach for the concrete "through a process of mediation and engagement with abstraction."

A critical take on Rancière also structures the core of Nathan Brown's contribution. Brown's critique pivots on the fact that Rancière's now-famous notion of "the distribution of the sensible" is inseparable from an underestimation of capitalism's process of valorization—that is, from the system's insensible procedures. Using the work of Canadian artist Nicolas Baier as a case study, Brown proposes that in thinking through the "distribution of the insensible"—the abstracting procedures that find articulation in the actual material interactions between many actors and apparatuses—we may find the proper relationship between political economy and artistic production. This relationship can only be understood properly when the history of technology—a history that is itself determined by the mutations and demands of capitalism—serves as the mediating element. The task of the art object is to mimetically display, while assuming the self-critical tendencies of representation itself, these abstracting conditions and to shed light on the distribution of the insensible mechanisms that organize the social totality, including the very conditions that determine the spaces and modes of labor available for cultural production.

Artist Mark Curran and artists João Enxuto and Erica Love, in their respective projects, engage in a kind of artistic fieldwork in the spheres of financialization and datafication. Curran travels to and photographs the actual sites and people through which disembodied financial activity takes place. He

combines these images with quotes pulled from long interviews conducted with traders. The result is a collage of strangely desolate spaces, cold as the marble that seems an obligatory part of the décor; people that, despite their nice suits, seem as lost as those who are on the receiving end of their botched operations; and a language on the verge of being rent asunder by the pressure a massive underlying fear, the bubbling up of a substrate of swirling disorientation. The nebulosity of financial processes not only envelopes dolts like us, who end up with outrageous debt, repossessed homes and whittled pensions; its haziness may be there from the very genesis of these processes, first channeled by those who, keeping an eye on the bonus, “blindly” execute them on the ground.

In order to “test the potential of algorithms for delivering predictive art market advantages,” artists João Enxuto and Erica Love sought out one of the producers of such an algorithm, Hugo Liu, co-founder of the art-ranking site ArtAdvisor. In the adventure that ensued, Liu first worked enthusiastically with the artists, but eventually stopped communicating with them as he went off to become some kind of illuminated techno-shaman and Chief Data Scientist for Artsy, a platform which had in the meantime acquired ArtAdvisor (Enxuto and Love did some prior critical work on Artsy, so the abrupt end of the exchange is not all that surprising). The conclusion that the artists reach is that exercises in data aggregation only serve as instruments that reinforce tendencies already latent in the art system. They are something like self-fulfilling prophecies and not tools to predict emerging, heterogeneous patterns or provide any advantage beyond tracking what is already foreseeable.

Responding to a historicist demand, Sven Lütticken proposes that we are in need of an updated understanding of real abstraction. We need a “vectorial” version of it that can help us conceptualize the convergence of juridical, technoscientific and monetary spheres. Beyond abstract labor and exchange,

there are other abstractions which assume the form of legal, technoscientific, and data-based instruments and protocols as they aid in establishing, in Sohn-Rethel's words but extending his scope, an "identity between the formal elements of the social synthesis and the formal components of cognition." What this "vectorial" field of interrelated abstractions, insofar as it has stretched production itself into cognitive and affective dimensions, demands is a constant upgrade and "optimization of one's performance." Design, in these conditions, ceases to be a discrete field and becomes a totalizing structure through which we incessantly calibrate ourselves and our worlds. Once we grasp this, the following question gains purchase: "What, if any, contributions can artistic or aesthetic practice make to a *praxis* directed against our current regime of accumulation and abstraction? The aim, of course," Lütticken suggests, "would not be to instrumentalize art in the name of a political project, but to sound out possibilities for an aesthetic contestation in conjunction with a political one." He sounds out some possibilities himself around alternative currencies, e-publishing, and time banks.

Jaleh Mansoor, also attending to a historicist demand, tracks the recent ontological reconfiguration of the line—that "basic tool of representation"—in artistic practice from a strictly formal element to an indexical one. In her account, this change, as the symptom of a mutation at the register of the real, anticipates the possibility of properly representing the seismic shifts that capitalism itself has undergone in the last half century and the reconfiguration of the entire planet that these have led to, making the displacement of people at unprecedented scale one of its dominant features. Mansoor reminds us that art's real critical potential may reside less in its interventionist forays than its capacity to obliquely index real abstractions through symptomatic mutations to its structural conditions. And if this is the case, then in our conjuncture, there is perhaps no question as pressing for art history and

criticism (and possibly for artists, too) than that of context, in so far that the qualities we usually associate with the term—concrete location and historical period—and the work that the term does in our thinking cannot help but be severely taxed in a world of supply chains and capital flows, populations displaced by aggressive extractivist practices, capital’s peripatetic restlessness in its search for ever cheaper and unprotected labor markets to exploit, and the capacity of The Bank—as in the IMF, The World Bank, and the WTO—above that of nation states and other governmental forms to determine the very conditions of life for such a large swath of the species. If this is indexed in contemporary art, if the disintegration and recomposition of the category of context registers symptomatically in cultural production, our potential blindness to this demands a restructuring of our critical methods.

Refusing to give up on art’s operative capacity, Victoria Ivanova searches for conditions in which art can rearrange, at the very least, the systems in which it functions. Her essay revisits Jack Burnham’s “system aesthetic” from the late 1960s, which proposed a reconfiguration of artistic production so as to have it align with and respond to “an increasingly technologically mediated society” and the “rise of mass media and integration of computational technologies into all facets of life.” What remains unsaid in Burnham’s work is that these technological changes were complemented by a shift in economic orientation away from industrial production and toward financial investment, a mutation that has impinged on the sphere of contemporary art and turned it into a quasi-financial regime regulated by rating agencies (theorists, curators, museums, collectors). Exploiting the ambiguity between artworks that *represent* systems (“systems aesthetics”) and artworks serving as *representatives* of systems (“systems art”), Ivanova finds in the latter the possibility to intervene in fundamental ways—more than merely aesthetically or discursively—in the “infrastructural back end” of the

systems in which they function, reconfiguring things such as “market relations, institutional and legal protocols.”

Diann Bauer, Suhail Malik and Natalia Zuluaga propose that real subsumption and the proliferation of cybernetic governmentality and automation have given rise to a new kind of “representational but non-indexical” image—what they call the General Abstract Image (GAI). This is a synthetic image generated from data and produced by different apparatuses, at times but not necessarily with human input. As such, these images are inevitably “concretized...versions of otherwise abstract relations.” Employing conceptual tools provided by analytic philosopher Wilfrid Sellars, the authors draw on what Sellars calls the “scientific image”—the image science provides regardless of human self-conception and understanding—to argue for GAI as the image of the abstract relations that comprise the social totality in excess of our immediate subjective comprehension of the world. In light of the emergence of this synthetic image, the authors further propose that real abstraction may be rethought less as that which consolidates in actual activity and subsequently reconfigures thinking than as the endless loop between our ever-enlarging understanding of objective social conditions, facilitated by GAIs, and the constant intervention on the mediations through which we grasp these conditions. The task that art can assume in relation to this, after it sheds the strictures and insufficiencies that have organized the field’s self-understanding from modernism to contemporary art, is to operationalize GAI, to construct new “epistemo-informatic constructions”—that is, to not just produce new ways to see and understand the world, to cognitively map things, but to generate new features in the world that further complexify it and, presumably, tax or overhaul some of the dominant tendencies that currently organize the social into such a grotesque configuration.

Artist John Miller, putting some flesh back in things, considers the genre of the diary in relation to capital’s

mechanization of time through its forms of production, demands for consumption and impoverishment of language. This mechanization standardizes not only our lived moments but subsumes the past and the future, syncopating it all into the same monotonous rhythm. Risking triviality, making room for history's losers and for their quirky ways, reopening the gap between work and leisure while closing the one between utility and waste, the diary crystallizes the tangled condition whereby its fugitive impulses are everywhere marked with the routine of the workplace: the labor of jotting things broken down into daily "shifts," the sequentiality of the entries, the material regularity of the actual notebooks and journals. As such, however, the diary may just be a place where a certain unraveling of the regulatory and abstracting push of late capitalism may find a little breathing room. One should read this meditation on the diary while keeping in mind that Miller himself has been engaged in a multi-decade diary-like project titled "Middle of the Day," in which he takes pictures wherever he is in the world, but only between noon and two o'clock—so, lunchtime pictures. One cannot help but recall Frank O'Hara's *Lunch Poems* here, and of the impossibility of really thinking about Miller's long-term project at a distance from the fact that the images that comprise it are enveloped by a workday that they never quite depict directly. Lunch hour cuts through labor time, as Jasper Bernes, casting light on the social determinants that shaped O'Hara's poems, recently reminded us, but only to free us to enter the world of circulating commodities, of branded burgers and, lately, of a spurious hyper-connoisseurism of grass-fed beef and humanely plucked coffee beans. But where O'Hara was able to wrench meaning from this commoditized world by plunging deep into its objects, Miller seems to find nothing but staggering uniformity, an elastic and encompassing banality that is coterminous with the planet itself, and that in its unyielding repetition reveals the magnitude of its brutality.

In “Middle of the Day,” we see the abstract spreading evenly across everything as the unflinching reproduction of tepid sameness; in Miller’s resilience before it, we see the tendency to critically face it, to the last of our resources, holding the line. Recent additions to the “Middle of the Day” project accompany Miller’s text.

While the collection opens with a couple of “framing essays,” it ends with a pair that open beyond the confines of contemporary art. Sianne Ngai plunges into the gelatinous depths of Ron Halpern’s *Music for Porn*—a book that obsesses on the body of the male soldier and, through desire’s incorrigible lens and the ambient pressure of our moment’s general fuckedupness, splits and sutures this body as besieged flesh and eroticized abstraction, as overworked allegory and unknown territory, as a site of managed withdrawal and unregulated investment. What Ngai seeks through this engagement with Halpern’s work are rhetorical figures that can usefully relate what is at stake in the process of capitalist abstraction. The problem of value as a social relation, touching on things but never quite in them, defies mechanisms of direct representation, forcing us, as she shows, to rely on catachresis to approximate proper expression. This is a problem that, as Ngai’s tour through the rhetorical heterogeneity of Marx’s writing reveals, has always been pressing and elusive of resolution. Although in her probing of the visceral as a location where bodies and abstraction congeal, Ngai doesn’t refer to any visual artworks, her overall take is a provocation to think anew the turn to the body and the abject in contemporary art practices that has coincided with the consolidation of finance economies. One may consider how her insights apply to some of the work that John Miller has produced—his brown paintings, for instance—over the last four decades, to say nothing of the fascination with the genetic and animation, with the disintegration of bodies into code, which spreads across the practices of so many younger artists.

Last, while starting with a gloss on the work of contemporary artists Goldin+Senneby, Brian Kuan Wood oversteps the confines of artistic production to propose that, beyond exchange, it is reality as gamespace that serves as the concrete abstraction that these days sets the conditions for contemporary modes of thinking and subjective production. But it is also this mutation of reality that may provide the possibility for gestures of resistance to blossom. If the logic of gamespace is determining the morphology of our epistemic terrain, this very logic leaves in play—as this is fundamental to what gamespace is—the possibility of tinkering with the social source code, with the background script, in order to alter the results. It becomes a matter of misaligning patterns, of superimposing skewed grids over the ones that we are offered; it is a matter, in the end, of finding the soft spot in the system, the slip in the numbers, where one's infringements can issue the greatest impact.

3

Artist's Project: THE MARKET (2010–)

Mark Curran

The Market Has a History, But No Memory

from a recorded conversation with a senior financial analyst (name withheld), restaurant, The City, London, England, May 2013



JP Morgan (formerly Lehman Brothers)
Canary Wharf, February 2013 London, England



Matthew, banker (negotiation, two years)
Canary Wharf, March 2013 London, England

**...fear is central to how we operate...it
pushes everyone to perform...I have to
say personally, without that insecurity, I
couldn't work, not the way I do...**

from a recorded conversation with a banker (name withheld)
Café, The City, London, England, March 2013

**...you know, just before last
Christmas (2012), 1,200 workers at
(name of bank) found out they had
lost their jobs, when they showed up
to work in the morning and
discovered their security cards
wouldn't let them in the
building...simple as that...**

from a recorded conversation with a banker (name withheld)
Café, The City, London, England, March 2013



Jennifer, Markets Marketing manager (negotiation, 1.5 years)
The city, July 2013 London, England



Credit Suisse (access denied)
Canary Wharf, March 2013 London, England

**...what people don't understand...is
that what happens in the market is
pivotal to their lives...not on the
periphery...but slap, bang, in the
middle...**

from a recorded conversation with a senior trader (name withheld)
Café, The City, London, England, March 2013

According to a report (2012) by the British Government Office for Science, *algorithmic trading will replace most human trading in the global market within a decade.*

The same report states: *algorithms will eventually be able to self-evolve through ability to experience—i.e., building upon previous market experiences and requiring no human intervention.*

However, they also warn that within such a framework exists the potential for what they describe as the *Normalization of Deviance—unexpected and risky events come to be seen as ever more normal until disaster occurs.*



Government
Office for
Science

•••• Foresight



**The Future of
Computer Trading
in Financial Markets**

An International Perspective

FINAL PROJECT REPORT

Markets are instant...maybe the biggest globalization is through markets...you know, worldwide twenty-four-hour trading...people expect responsiveness...and that extends to the market...the *now* is all important...

from a recorded conversation with James, operations manager, decommissioned trading floor, Irish Stock Exchange, Dublin, Ireland, April 2012



James, operations manager (negotiation, one year)
Irish Stock Exchange, April 2012 Dublin, Ireland



Bell, decommissioned trading floor
Irish Stock Exchange, July 2012 Dublin, Ireland

...they are the future...they are the reliable system...only twice has it gone down...a small exchange like Ireland... when you look at the rest of Europe, most other exchanges were electronic... for us not to do that...we were competing with the London Stock Exchange for market share...because, that was life...so not to do that would have been practical suicide for the market...

from a recorded conversation with the head of Public Affairs & Communications, decommissioned trading floor, Irish Stock Exchange, Dublin, Ireland, July 2012

```

3
4 from Tkinter import *
5 import numpy as np
6 import matplotlib.pyplot as plt
7 import matplotlib.dates as mdates
8 import csv
9 from tkFileDialog import askopenfilename
10
11
12 class TkApp():
13
14     def __init__(self, root):...
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25
26
27
28
29
30
31     def showGraph(self):
32         # open a csv.DictReader, grab the last col, read it into 'data' list and graph it
33         inpFile = "Market.csv"
34         dat, adjcl = np.loadtxt(inpFile, delimiter=',', skiprows=1, usecols=(0, 6), unpack=True,
35                               converters={0: mdates.strpdate2num('%Y-%m-%d')})
36         plt.plot_date(x=dat, y=adjcl, fmt="r-")
37         plt.title("Market Data")
38         plt.ylabel("Adj Close")
39         plt.grid(True)
40         plt.show()
41
42         x = [1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6] # x axis plot points
43         y = [1, 2, 4, 3, 6, 5, 7, 8] # y axis plot points
44         N = len(y)
45         x = range(N)
46         plt.plot(x, y, 'rs')
47         #plt.axis([0, 40, 0, 50]) # x=0-10, y=0-6
48         plt.xlabel("Dates")
49         plt.ylabel("Adj. Close")
50         plt.show()
51
52     def openFile(self):
53         self.filename = askopenfilename(filetypes=[("allfiles", "*"), ("csv Files", "*.csv")])
54         self.fil = file(self.filename) # get file handle from filename
55         self.txt = self.fil.read() # read text from file handle into var
56         self.fil.close() # kill file handle
57         self.txtBox.insert(0,0, self.txt) # insert the file text into textbox
58         self.txtBox.pack(expand=1, fill=BOTH) # show txtBox object

```

Algorithm & Sound Composition

Ken Curran

Through the application of an algorithm identifying the words *market* and/or *markets* in public speeches by relevant national ministers of finance, the date is then transformed to create an installation soundscape.

...if ECX were working for a profit, the whole situation would be different... the risk ECX take would be different... ever since I was a little girl, I wanted to be part of some revolutionary moment...so ECX has a price fixation...at the upper and lower level and this assures both the traders and the suppliers are protected...it regulates over-speculation...so protecting the exporters and the small farmers...this is revolutionary...

from a recorded conversation with Meron, clearing house officer,
Ethiopian Commodity Exchange,
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, September 2012



Bethalem, trader (negotiation, 1.5 years)
Ethiopian Commodity Exchange,
September 2012 Addis Ababa, Ethiopia



Untitled, trading pit (negotiation, 1.5 years)

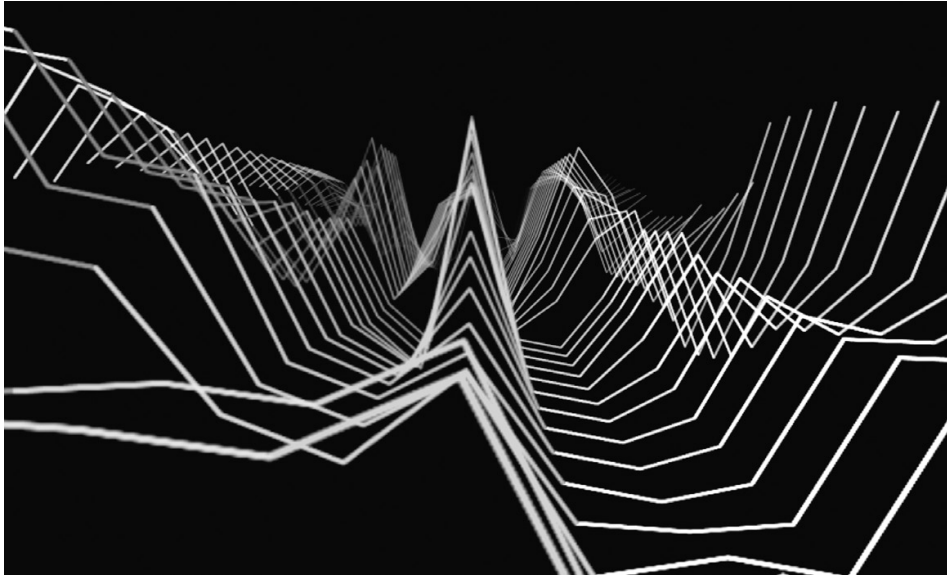
Ethiopian Commodity Exchange (ECX), September 2012 Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

**...we still need human traders here...
but this element will decrease in time...
but not eliminated...this trading floor
is still new to us...the traders still only
get used to this...but yes, in time we will
go to technology and in time we will
dismantle these trading floors...in time...**

from fieldnotes of conversation with Dawid, information officer,
Ethiopian Commodity Exchange,
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, September 2012

Algorithmic translations of Michael Noonan (Ireland), George Osborne (United Kingdom), Pierre Moscovici (France) and Jeroen Dijsselbloem (Netherlands & Eurozone Group president) have been included in exhibitions in those countries.

Disrupting the popular graphic representation of such circumstance, the visualization of the soundscape represents contemporary financial capital functioning through the conduit of the financialized nation state.



The Economy of Appearances 2015

(Jeroen Dijsselbloem, minister of finance, Netherlands and Eurozone Group president) (4:51, Single Channel Projection, 16:9, HD Digital Video Animation, Looped, Floating Screen)

Data Visualization: Damien Byrne



Financial Surrealism (World Trade Center II)

Hoarding, Zuidas Financial District, July 2015 Amsterdam, The Netherlands

Extracts from *THE MARKET* (2010–), a project by Mark Curran. In the evolutionary aftermath of the global economic collapse and absence of sustained audio-visual engagement with the central locus of this catastrophic event, the ongoing multisited project *THE MARKET* critically addresses the functioning and conditioning of global markets. It is the continuation of a cycle of long-term research projects, beginning in the late 1990s, focusing on the predatory context resulting from flows of global capital. After an extensive process of negotiation, averaging one and a half to two years, to access strategic sites and/or individuals, the author created ethnographically informed work that incorporates photography, film, soundscape, artifacts, data visualization and verbal testimony. The project takes the financial sphere out of abstraction and positions it as a pervasive force that is central to our lives; its themes include the algorithmic machinery of financial markets, central innovators of this technology, absorption of crisis as normalization of deviance, and long-range mapping and consequences of financial activity distanced from citizens and everyday life. Profiles include traders, bankers and financial analysts, and documentation from London, Dublin, Frankfurt, Amsterdam and Addis Ababa.

Art, Systems, Finance

Victoria Ivanova

Preamble

Jack Burnham's essay-manifesto "Systems Esthetics," published in the September 1968 issue of *Artforum*, was both prophetic and ambiguous. Speculating on the evolution of art in an increasingly technologically mediated society, Burnham reflected on the implications of the rise of mass media and integration of computational technologies into all facets of life. The one-time art theorist, critic, curator and sculptor asserted that what was entailed by these larger developments was a "transition from an object-oriented to a systems-oriented culture." For Burnham, the prospect of this newly crystallizing ecology highlighted the "problems of organization" that were to emerge and proliferate given the speed and scale by which circulation-based systems have the capacity to order the world, in turn fundamentally recoding the function of discrete entities and localized experiences—not least, in the sphere of art: "Progressively the need to make ultrasensitive judgments as to the uses of technology and scientific information becomes 'art' in the most literal sense." What Burnham recognized through the prism of techno-social advancement is none other than the rise of the logics of abstraction and circulation, in which management of systems that organize flows set the direction for productive processes. As I will show, the shift that Burnham described so succinctly and prophetically