

A Temporal Order of Things: The world as a list

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While writing this text, I came across the news article that the EU had decided to build refugee camps to restrict the “free movement of people”.¹

From 1999 to the present day, with the construction of camp Sangatte in France, wall-building appears to have become a routine political activity. Only a few understand the severity of the current situation, the majority remains indifferent - after all, even before the creation of control points, the authorities controlled “people’s knowledge about each other.” I call this “internalization of control.” This makes people inseparable from power², and, therefore, allows them to exercise power, since power is a manifestation of the will.

According to Schopenhauer, the whole world is Will, and the product of this will is meaningless, since the powerless objects it reproduces aimlessly create even more objects. This is the same thing that Agamben calls “means without an end”.³ Without rejecting rational pessimism, I would like to point out that as individuals, we all have our worldview and the ability to act independently.⁴ This optimism is based on the fact that our concepts, values and ideals have no basis in the world and are determined by the degree of individual understanding. The question of understanding is a matter of individual politics, as well as the aesthetic ideas of each person. Individual politics contains a certain degree of

resistance to the “big politics” that dominates the coordination of understanding of the world.

To understand means to resist, taking your position. Any creative attitude towards the world is an individual policy of understanding. A liberal policy that puts “understanding before judgment” gives a person a reason to think about freedom in a creative way. “Individual politics” manifests itself in a free attitude towards big politics, which, in turn, tries to prevent this, since it wants complete control over people. Creativity is perhaps the only way to express freedom, but any creativity, be it art or philosophy, is linked to big politics. In this contamination lies the choice for articulating the possibility of the impossible.⁵

Politicians build borders/walls, camps/prisons without considering the fact of creativity. Along with borders and camps, there is a third element - carefully encoded knowledge. These codes stimulate internalized control. The foundations of control are not laid in camps or boundaries, but in the relationships that arise from controlled, coded knowledge. Borders and camps are nothing more than places, and without internalized control of knowledge, it would be impossible to control them. Like any aspect of human existence, knowledge is far from imperfect and has its limits. To a large extent, these restrictions are used in education to control the popular mind by classifying subjects into “us” and “them.” Institutional art is an integral part of this system, which is also found in the space of art museums. Given the above, it is important to remember that this is not the only role of knowledge, and I am far from seeing it as only this function. On the contrary, I believe in another side of

knowledge that can use these codes to correct the shortcomings and imperfections that arise in the process of trans-individuation. Like Plato's "pharmakon", it has a two-sided effect: on the one hand, it is poison, on the other it is medicine. To find the positive aspect, my work focuses on understanding the issues surrounding globalization and its various impacts on the body of knowledge about the world. In this text, I would like to describe my own experience as an artist in an attempt to find an answer to such a complex question.

I have been involved in migration issues since I arrived in London in 1989. I was interested to see this paradigm in the context of globalization. I was surprised when I saw how many well-mannered and educated people behave towards non-Europeans, to put it mildly, very strangely. I think that in most cases people are not racist, but a certain mechanism used by politics forces them to behave that way. The first thing to be mentioned in this series is the classification and division of people into categories, which is called the "order of things." The irony is that ordering in this way—privileging some while marginalizing others—always leads to chaos.

I understood how things worked and realized the ability of things to move from one context to another. And this became the theme of my artwork. Although I have education and experience in both art and philosophy, I want to emphasize that my work in both fields is not some kind of legitimation of the position of "artist-philosopher", but my sometimes-morbid interest in understanding the

existing division of people into different classes and categories according to "order" as a legal basis.

At first, I continued to work on projects of “corrections” and “errors”, which I intuitively began to do back in the late 1980s in Leningrad (now St. Petersburg). I collected a section of “mistakes” from art books and installed them on paper or textiles, but soon I gave up using textiles. Later, in London in 1992, I realized that I was more interested in understanding the underlying mechanism, which allows for errors and corrections. Studies of structuralism, especially the work of Derrida, as well as a passion for the work of the great philosopher Edmund Husserl, which continues today, and the study of the question of the “temporal order of things”, have greatly helped me in trying to understand this mechanism.

In my work, I always face the question: how to create an artistic object in a situation of an uncontrolled increase in the number of images, which leads to an imbalance between images and the ideas accompanying them? I was inspired by the question of conceptual artist Douglas Huebler: “The world is full of objects, more or less interesting; I don’t want to add new ones.”⁶ My answer: if the world is full of objects, then instead of adding new ones, I create a list of objects. Taking lists as fuzzy objects, I create movies (which are often edited from still images with reference to different locations, with audio tracks and sometimes moving images also moving from one location to another to create a stream of images that works like a list) and paintings consisting from lists, which are often made in alphabetical order, referring to people's actions. The world is like a list of objects transcribed as the subject comes into contact with

objects, where the object of art is more of a transcription than an image or description.

I was also inspired by Hollis Frampton's film *Zorn's Lemma*, one of the most interesting examples of how one can deal with the partial order of a world emerging from chaos, so to speak, by visualizing philosophical theories. Based on set theory, and in particular the work of Max Zorn, who created many partial objects, Frampton's film describes how the partially ordered letters of the alphabet approach, but do not reach, the maximum level of reference to things, where each fully ordered object has an upper and lower limit.

Such objects are not maximally or minimally ordered, but their existence depends on alphabetical order, which is determined by the graphical representation of the voice. Also, starting in the early 1990s, I was interested in Robert Smithson's work on the use of the concept of entropy, and I was also very interested in chaos theory and fractal theory, but my work took a completely different direction after I met the great cultural theorist Stuart Hall, who became my close friend. Conversations with him about the secondary role of culture and the discovery of the “encoding-decoding” model changed my attitude towards my own activities.

As a result, to accurately define my interest, I came up with a new term: *migrasophia* (migration + philosophy). I have tried to show migration not from an economic point of view but as knowledge of a world that is essentially open to influence despite strict controls. Order and disorder, non-essentialism and non-fascistic ways of being have become themes in my work since then.

My work is an attempt to understand the current order of things. There are two ways to think about the situation. At the philosophical level, it is about the dissemination of ideas, both subjectively and objectively. I believe that objective, as well as subjective views, have lost their foundation, and all that is provided by the experience of knowledge is a long list of objects and their endless distribution, often without any understanding, as if these lists speak for themselves. In an attempt to challenge this paradox, I direct my work towards finding ways to understand this endless proliferation. Lists are good alternatives to artefacts in trying to consider our relationship to space and time. As the number of artefacts increases, this relationship is lost. Making lists expresses this loss by recording the memory of things. There is no such identity in the lists, even though they are constantly used in commerce and industry. They have no internal order, although they may be arranged alphabetically to give the impression of a logical sequence. Analyzing Plato's *khora*, Derrida observed that logos is the "wild animal" before it becomes an ordered cosmos. Everything depends on the organization or even reorganization of the text that expresses this logic. It is also true that this "wild animal" is still present (as absent) in the ordered Universe.⁷ The example of compiling lists in alphabetical order is similar. They often complement books and other written materials and are now also widely used in electronic writing as the basis for search engines, electronic dictionaries and encyclopedias. In the perspective created by lists as a space for the coexistence of chaos and order, the path to freedom must be found. But this freedom is only the freedom of rediscovery and the freedom of "something."

The concept of “something” is something special, a special thing, a residual element of the Universe.

This something multiplies and multiplies, endlessly turning into lists, sometimes in alphabetical order, and sometimes randomly. This disrupts and dissipates the thinking of the whole. The world no longer exists as the end point of an unattainable infinity, as it is described in books and other sources. The world turns into a list of objects, ideas and people. Infinity and any form of its comprehension are replaced by endless lists. If you want to learn about the world, make a list! There is no need to take pictures or narrate events; instead, make indexes of symbols and ideas. The understanding of infinity originates from lists, which are the remnants of the phenomena of the world. The list represents a schematic trajectory of the remains of knowledge.

Lists are ideal tools for maintaining connections between times. They challenge hierarchy and offer a model of possible equality, similar to Jacques Rancière's concept of “part of those who are not part”.⁸ Although there is an equality space, direct access to this space depends on the choices made by matching objects. Lists mean a new way of compiling which is not promising or possible; it is a transposition of objects "on a line" that takes lost objects into list space. The list is not linear or non-linear, it is on a line that challenges any hierarchy and provides an opportunity to find a balance so that they can function within social and cultural boundaries. In fact, with the advent of new technologies, the functioning of the social system is transformed into digital form by compiling lists consisting of keywords that define the search leading to discoveries that

constitute culture as an application to existing forms. These ideas underlie my study of equal spaces, where existence is uneven and subject to new genealogies, and lists are the main cultural devices. My goal is to create a table for these devices similar to the periodic table.

Thus, I would like to find an alternative artistic/philosophical approach to a world that has lost its objectivity and is ready to be calculated and settled. Subjectivity has also lost touch with any objective approach, since contingencies endlessly replace the order of things, and any reaction to the world is an endless mutation of genres. At the political level, under the conditions of the new totalitarianism, chaos is an element of control, whereas previously the goal of totalitarianism was order. Globalization is still an alternative if understood in the right way. However, the new totalitarians use globalization to create chaos and then control that chaos. There is an illusion that chaos can be overcome through ordering. This is impossible simply because the objects circulating in this process are temporary and full of surprises.

Lists are also interesting because they are temporary objects. My work involves questions about the textuality of objects expressed in lists and related philosophical explorations - it is mainly an exploration of the temporal object and a critique of the industrial temporalization of consciousness. From my experience, I realized that these two directions influence each other.

Migrasophia is just one example of my artistic and philosophical experience, which focuses on understanding what I call the “migration paradigm” not only

in terms of places and the movement of people but also in terms of internalized codes of knowledge.

Thus, my work, the subject of which is globalization, is developing in two directions: the first is an understanding of the paradigm of migration as the driving force of globalization, and the second is an attempt to integrate into new means without abandoning the old. Most of the work is done on audio-visual media, and what is not included in my films is developed on paper or canvas. I perceive this as a connection between the visual and alphabetical orders through their connection. As lists proliferate in the form of films and scripts, tension also increases because energy is released by items emerging from the encoded knowledge space.

For me, the question of freedom and intellectual integrity are extremely important and inseparable from each other, and I must find a path to freedom that can only be a non-fascist way of being. I believe that making art is, first of all, inventing your own way of defining problems. Therefore, I am very sceptical of artists who decide to engage with questions of time and develop a concept that is not based on the study of the issue. Before dealing with any problem, the artist must invent his language to be able to express that problem. In art, I do not separate intellect from sensitivity. And I think that contemporary art has marginalized itself as a form of knowledge due to the predominance of emotions over intellect. As a result, works of art have lost the ability to fully express their thoughts. There is a shortage of languages in the modern art world. One might be sceptical about this because the history of modernism is also the

history of languages invented by artists. I think these languages have exhausted their resources and have become empty gestures.

Because of this, I always felt the need to invent something for myself out of the existing chaos. The language I have invented for myself is conceptually impure and is a combination of different languages from different sources. Another characteristic point is that my projects are long-term, my works are traces of my thinking about objects, and my art records my thoughts. In this sense, it can be called autobiographical, although I am very sceptical about any kind of biography because I believe that people usually live the lives of others, and the “I” is a fiction of others.

The memory of others is what enhances a work of art. Its intensity depends on how easily a person can recreate an artistic object in his memory. In this sense, any work of art is an appropriated memory of someone else. Because of this, complete order will never be possible. However, to understand the situation and create a work of art, such as a list of things, it is important to know that neither chaos nor order can bring anything interesting into our lives. The things that migrants carry in the “double-locked suitcase” move not only from one place to another, but also from one context to another, and then turn to a list of imprinted objects. What these things provide is an unrelated and irregular inventory that becomes a "vocabulary" for the invention of language and can be used to create a story or become a record of lived experience. Art, which invents languages and thereby transcends the boundaries of chaos and order, is the only way to understand the world. Art provides an opportunity to reflect on the world.

This means that juxtaposing and/or mixing endless inventories creates even more chaos. This is a situation that teaches us that a certain order is a necessary condition to find a position in the chaos of life. The meaning of art is to bring a certain order to the chaos that violates the established norm. For me, making a list of things means breaking order because there is no fundamental order, but at the same time, the list prevents complete chaos because the meaning is preserved. The search for meaning, for that matter, is “an endless process, a shuffling of signs without fear or hope of completion.”⁹ Interminable inventories, made as a reminder that functions as a delay, can be used to disrupt this order when it is harmful and recreate it again for a while when it is harmless. In this temporal order, “a person ultimately finds in things only what he has put into them”.¹⁰ Accordingly, each person is responsible to others for what he puts into things. This is an absolute necessity due to the threat of chaos today. And here I leave these chaotic elements in alphabetical order following the latest events: Biohacking, Climate Change, Impact Event, Artificial Intelligence, Lack of Food, Loss of Reality, Tyrant Ruler, Killer Robots, Particle Accelerator, and Nuclear War.¹¹

London, 2018

¹ BBC News, July 3, 2018.

² The word "individual" comes from the Latin word "individuus", which means "undivided", "indivisible".

³ Giorgio Agamben, *Means without Ends: Notes on Politics*, University of Minnesota Press, 2000

A. Schopenhauer, *The World as a Will and Representation*, Dover Publications, 2000

⁴ I would make a distinction between the individual and the subject because they are different from each other. They are also both connected because they are shaped by outside influences,

such as ideology. The difference is in the choice. Individuals may maintain an ambiguous position regarding the recognition/denial of their personality, but for the subject this is a key moment of formation. Thus, the subject is the result of conscious decision-making that shapes the individual, and the formation of the subject depends on awareness of the degree of the dual nature of the personality. Thus, the subject is the result of conscious decision-making that shapes the individual, and the formation of the subject depends on the awareness of the degree of the dual nature of the individual. On the one hand, we as people are aware of certain limits and possibilities of violations, accompanied by an understanding of these limits. Maurice Merleau-Ponty once said that if we perceived the world through the eyes of birds, we would see it differently. See Merleau-Ponty M. *Phenomenology of Perception*, Routledge, 2002. This limit is the driving force behind the formation of subjectivity.

⁵ This is different from the politics of anarchy: anarchism is only possible as a personal attitude, and it will never become a state policy. However, if this subtle attitude is the discovery of the impossible through ideas, then it can also become a creative act. Ideas are anarchic from the very beginning, their elasticity and flexibility contribute to the development of the contingent, which makes them instruments of freedom. This is what Umberto Eco meant when he said that "lists are anarchic." Beyer S., Gorris L. Interview with Umberto Eco // Spiegel, November 11, 2009, see also:

<http://www.spiegel.de/international/zeitgeist/spiegel-interview-with-umberto-eco-we-like-lists-because-we-don-t-want-to-die-a-659577.html>.

⁶ Douglas Huebler quotes in: Edward Allington. "About Time," in *Frieze*, Issue 92 June-August 2005

⁷ Jacques Derrida, *On the Name*, Stanford University Press, 1995

⁸ Jacques Ranciere, *The Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible*, Continuum, 2005

⁹ Terry Eagleton. *The Meaning of Life: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008. P. 62.

¹⁰ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, Penguin, 2017

¹¹ Collins T. How Will the World End? From Killer Robots to Biohacking, here are the 10 Biggest Threats to Humanity // The Daily Mail, February 13, 2017.