

## Plan for an Activity in Mind

So, to start with, I haven't prepared anything. I haven't had time, that is, time has been allocated elsewhere, turned into a finite and meagre resource through events, circumstances, and primordially through the language of allocation and its grandfather clause – resource management – through the inveterate flitting about of a human resource that hasn't been allocated. Like Negri's free bird of labour power in the forest of life.

So if we imagine that free bird continuously flying at full speed into the concrete walls around us, its wispy wings splintering and splaying in astonishment every time (if only we'd put bird stickers on the walls to warn it away, like they do on expanses of glass to signal to the birds of the air that they have left the forest of life and must exercise more caution).

**But they are justified in their brutality because the 'riff-raff' of the whole world ends up passing through Berlin.**

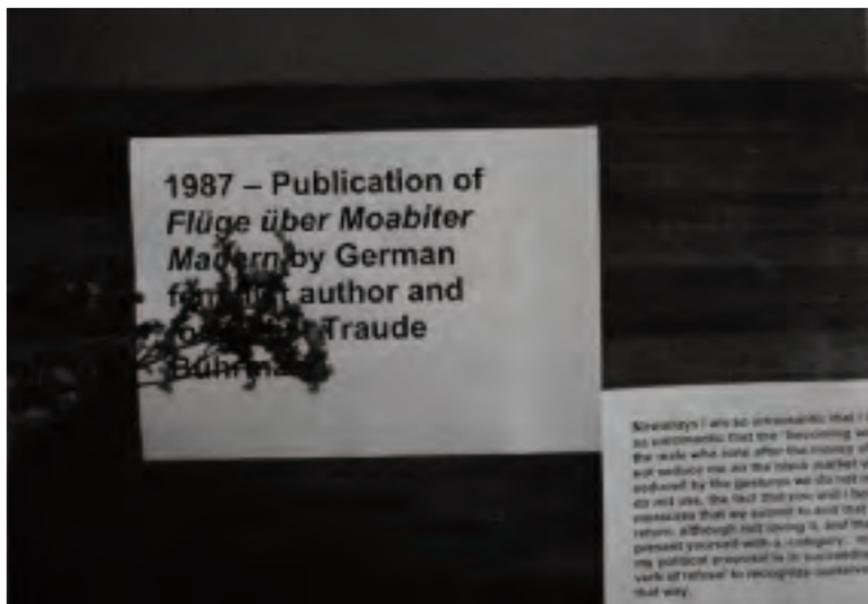
Alongside this, I want to think of the expanse of poverty and desolation that language as a prosthesis is able to reveal to us, like the bird-shaped stickers, disclosing a world around us to which we have no access. A negativity performed and pushed through but a negativity which is the mechanism of production, producing a relation which is the awareness of the conditions for that which exists, in all its positivity, to be able to continue doing so.

**The police  
are. The police, are. The police**

It is mainly in that sense that we can discuss negativity in terms of antagonism in any formation. It is both the condition of existence – that which is abjected, cast aside, denegated – and the inverted positivity of opposition and resistance that could propose, gnostically (the fallen world) or politically (a project) a scheme of existence that presupposes the passing into non-existence of the current moment. The labour of the negative can truly never be completed. This is to think negativity historically, but it can also be thought via and as ‘abstraction’, the dissolution of simple fact and self-evidence, the endless looping inconsistency within the existent

***Flüge über Moabiter Mauern***

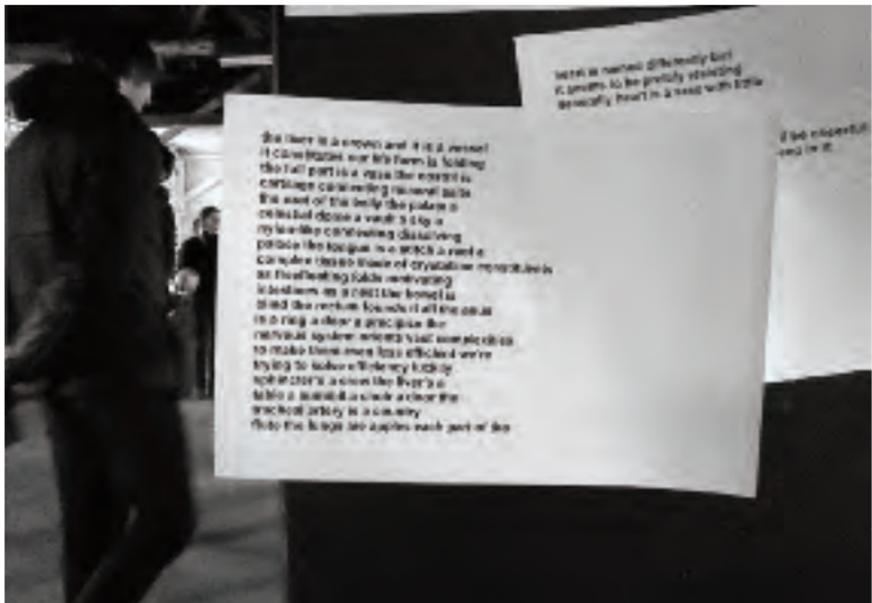
if the way of transcendence is eliminated.



celestial dome a vault a sky a  
 nylon-like connecting dissolving  
 palace the tongue is a stitch a root a  
 complex tissue made of crystalline constituents  
 as freefloating folds motivating  
 intestines as a nest

To refer to an earlier actualisation of reflection around the self, production, negation and language, I would like to draw our attention to this passage in Jean-Luc Nancy's *The Restlessness of the Negative*, his weird short book 'on Hegel'. He writes there:

'Self' cannot precede itself, because 'self' is precisely the form and the movement of a relation to self, of a going into self and a coming out of self [...]. [I]t is because the world undergoes itself as a world of separation that its experience takes the form of the 'self.' This form is that of a relation and a movement. 'Self' means 'relating itself to itself': it is a relation whose terms are not given.



For Nancy, the major lesson of Hegel is the subject as a dissolving, corrosive agent, the experience of separation as the emblem of modernity and the condition for thought.

### **Her uncleanness is in her skirts**

In Kant earlier, of course, the self was split by its condition of experience, never present because split by time – the self is a product of the cutting operation of active temporality – past, present, future. I would like to conclude now by riffing on a few more instances of the philosophical and political intimacy between thought and negativity, with language as one of its operations (other forms of articulation of this negativity have to be considered always, if we don't want to be academic). This will involve travelling between citations of this argument, since, as I said, I didn't have time to prepare.

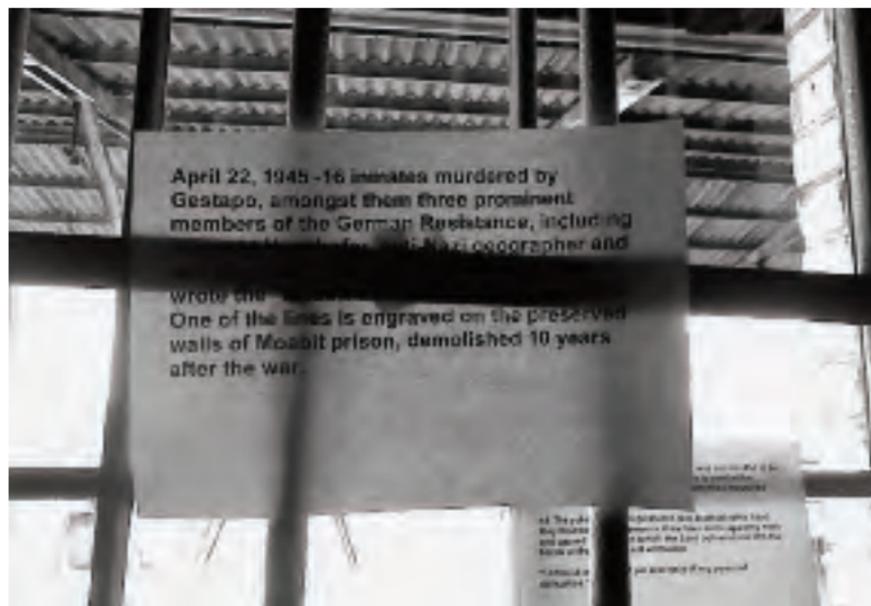
In a book of short essays and interviews published in 1984 in the US called *Driftworks*, Jean-Francois Lyotard replies to a question on the meaning of theoretical research to him today:



the function of theory is not only to understand, but also to criticize, i.e. to call in question and overturn a reality, social relationships, the relationships of men with things and other men, which are clearly intolerable. And as far as I am concerned, that is the dimension of politics. It isn't only the assumption of power, it must consist in the overturning of a mystified or alienated reality.

**I am seduced by the gestures we do not make, the language we do not use, the fact that you and I both know so well the measures that we submit to and that we frequently offer in return, although not loving it, and that every time you present yourself with a 'category', my declaration of love and my political proposal is in succeeding in conjugating the verb of refusal to recognize ourselves and make us alike in that way.**

Further Lyotard says,

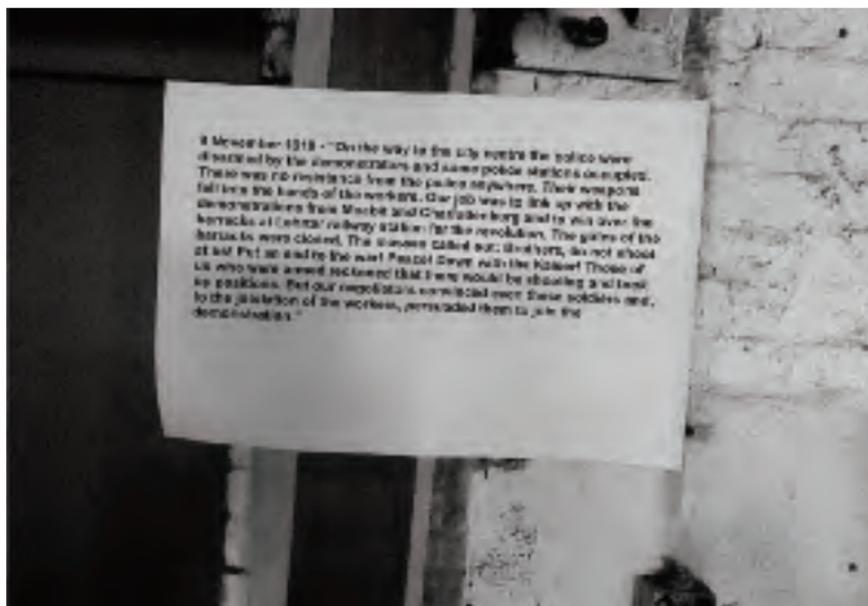




self-abolition of the proletariat, that an *ought* can be converted into an *is* and placed in an sequence of implication – this is where Lyotard claims to part way from Marx and/or, or rather from, Marxists, and we can see elements of this in radical communist theory influenced by structuralism and Hegel in varying degrees, such as communisation.

**Of their general habits little is known; occasionally they appear in the streets, and by ordinary persons would be taken for pick-pockets or private distillers.**

But there is something paradoxical about Lyotard's argument, especially considering the way Nancy tries to read Hegel above, because he claims that the relation between theory and practice – so to speak, with these reified but analytically residual categories – can only be read negatively, and not in a 'Hegelian sense'. Which we might say is the labour of negativity through and through, though perhaps not the Hegel that had been naturalised for the whole of the French philosophical and militant formation, which had thus been turning against it for a couple of decades already by the time ex-militant Lyotard made this claim.



Since we have been taking a historical excursion in the present and in an intentional space of mimesis of a relatively non-existent historical external real (the site of the old Moabit prison is too far away for us to visit for confirmation), the direction that I will finish up with, although it hasn't left me alone for many years, and I shall be going back to it more seriously in the near future, is the link between the aesthetic and negativity by means of the corrosive yet constitutive effect of time on the subject, the volatilisation of the subject by time, precipitating it into objecthood and into objectivity. While I'd be primarily working through this where I left off many years ago, via Kant and Deleuze's reading of Kant in *Difference and Repetition* on the self divided by time, here again I will resort to a Lyotardian aphorism. This was coined at a political meeting in 1970 of which notes have also been collected in the book I mentioned above: 'If desire can be fulfilled in the work of art, then the work of art gives something to hope for. I believe that what is revolutionary is precisely to hope for nothing.'

#### Note

This text was prepared as a talk for the Anguish Language seminar at Zentrum für Kunst und Urbanistik, Berlin, 1-4 October, 2013. It is a transcript of an ambulatory citation through the ZK/U in the Moabit district of Berlin, a zone historically dense with large-scale industry, rebellion, and incarceration. Accompanying images give an impression of the structure of the walk within the walls. The sources for the citations are grouped in the list that follows.

#### Sources

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