

DIALOGUE

The Then and There

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Markus Miessen: Flaka, you do not seem to be interested in the political per se. Less political to be more political?

Flaka Haliti: Yes.

MM: Over the past years, we have discussed your work a lot and I have to say that I find it increasingly and charmingly un-ironic. In your work one easily understands that the personal itself becomes the subject of the political. You do not provoke, but rather respond to provocation. Could you please elaborate on this?

FH: My approach is not based on a priori intentions to produce a political work. I also do not by default work on modes of provocation. I indeed prefer reacting towards provocations, which I think are plentiful in the world out there. Thus, my reaction to provocations I experience is supposed to be seen as a direct intervention in the historical conditions that have shaped and continue to effect and affect my own life – with an ability to influence it and possibly change it.

MM: Who dominates Kosovo art history? Who dominates the market?

FH: If I think about the basic art history book from my high school, or the collection of the National Gallery of Kosovo, those are exclusively male-only. Nevertheless, I find it complicated to refer to art history there, since we do not really have art historians and for sure we do not have an art market. All in all, I would say we don't have an art system but we do have an art scene, and yes it was and still is mostly man dominated – but that is changing slightly.

MM: What is your take on a seemingly default of longing for the West in Kosovar culture?

FH: I try to be less busy with that.

MM: It feels to me that, especially in the context of the Kosovo Pavilion in Venice, recognition being granted to a woman is an interesting move. How do you feel about this?

FH: Good, very “proud” of my country (laugh). I feel like the work *My Balls* (2007–2008) is hunting me less and less.

MM: Your work seems to struggle with a thin threshold that describes a problematic: whether or not it is possible to approach one's practice without constantly considering one's personal background? Unlike a rubber band, where the velocity of snap back becomes stronger the further away you pull, you have described your relationship with Kosovo as a form of magnetic movement, an invisible but forceful energy – an energy that connects without touching.

FH: Remembering the work of many Eastern European artists, it feels like their practice always has a very strong relationship to their personal identity and the background from which they originated. Very often this is manifested in certain kind of aesthetics, which becomes somewhat placative. Contributing a new

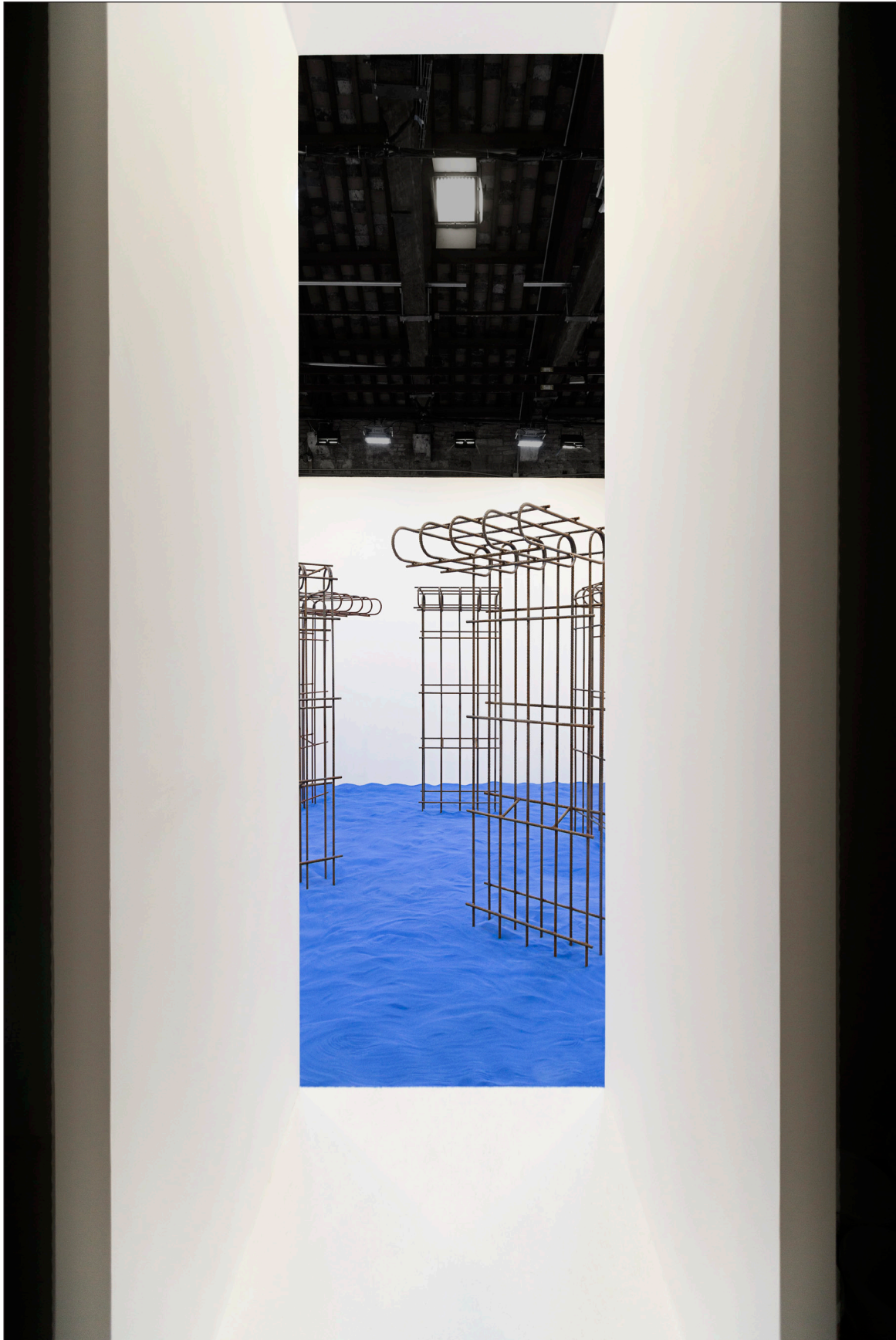


Figure 1: Installation Views, Pavilion of The Republic of Kosovo, 56th La Biennale di Venezia, Speculating on the Blue – Flaka Haliti, 2015, Sand, Metal, Light, Courtesy of the Artist and LambdaLambdaLambda. Credits: Marc Krause.



Figure 2: Installation Views, Pavilion of The Republic of Kosovo, 56th La Biennale di Venezia, Speculating on the Blue – Flaka Haliti, 2015, Sand, Metal, Light, Courtesy of the Artist and LambdaLambdaLambda. Credits: Marc Krause.

position as a representative of the younger generation of artists, I think it is important to challenge this tendency and – to a certain extent – deadlock. In my latest works, I attempt to emphasize that kind of invisible touch of the story that content-wise could depart from a local discourse, but that later on – during the time of developing and displaying or displacing it in the representation of a global context – is able to open up further a comprehensive reading of the narrative in order to loosen control. It could be understood as a link from its own departure, or even better: to narrate the same story backwards.

MM: In Kosovo after the war there is certain distrust of international representatives. It started with too much trust, celebrating the Americans as the ultimate savior who would quickly establish a national democratic framework leading to independence. You are currently living in Munich. We know each other from the Staedelschule in Frankfurt, where you studied. Would you consider your home country as a kind of feedback loop in regard to your practice and modes of production? What has been your relationship with your home country since you have lived abroad?

FH: A number of critics nationally and at the regional level have questioned the role of the international factor in Kosovo, analyzing the nature of post-independence under the internationally monitored restriction and looking at the relationship between the two parts. Yet, this was not enough to affect the course of events and the policies followed in the processes of nation state formation by the country. However, in this case the topic of my PhD in Practice is very much related to critical questions about the transnational versus national politics of representation in Kosovo. Here, I attempt to produce a body of work that tends to open up an aesthetical and political space of reading the visual. In particular, I am paying attention to the role the image plays in the body, culture, and politics. That is “image” in the sense Rancière refers to, as an object of a twofold dilemma: the question of their origin (and consequently their truth content) and the question of their end or purpose, the uses they are put to and the effect they result in.

MM: Your work often talks about what it feels like to be a guest in the world, the impossibility to be “international”. Could you please elaborate on this?

FH: I think it is very hard to be international or an expat in the West as someone, who comes from a non-Western country; in this case, one is immediately perceived as an immigrant. I find it fascinating to try and understand that, or even questions like how long one can live in the foreign country as an international? How far one can be integrated in another society culture without learning the language? Where does integration start and does it ever end? What is the difference in the treatment of a foreigner ordering his/her coffee in English and another foreigner who is making an order with a very poor local accent? These are the kind of thoughts I tried to elaborate, also through the work *Ex-Spatium* (2013), a sound installation shown at Weltkulturen Museum in Frankfurt during the exhibition “Stealth Architecture” in 2013.

MM: In an age of precarious work coupled with the assumption of perpetual mobility, you are questioning a new era of relationships. In this context, Post-Internet art has emerged as a tool that has become the binding force of many contemporary relationships, somewhat materializing the immaterial. What is your take on this?

FH: It is simply an attempt to understand a new means of materiality or practicalities, which obviously influence the condition under which we are connecting with each other, working, acting or being participating observers. And the opportunities seem to be endless. The video installation *I Miss You, I Miss You, Till I Don't Miss You Anymore* (2012–2014) is one of my works dealing with the materialization of that feeling.

MM: I would claim that you are a romantic, who enjoys practicing in the margin that leaves things open to interpretation. Are you an optimist, a romantic, or a cynic?

FH: Maybe a combination of all three!

MM: In an age of all-encompassing digital existence, is there such thing as automated or outsourced emotions? What do you consider the danger innate to this increasing distance to the subject?



Figure 3: Installation Views, Pavilion of The Republic of Kosovo, 56th La Biennale di Venezia, Speculating on the Blue – Flaka Haliti, 2015, Sand, Metal, Light, Courtesy of the Artist and LambdaLambdaLambda. Credits: Marc Krause.

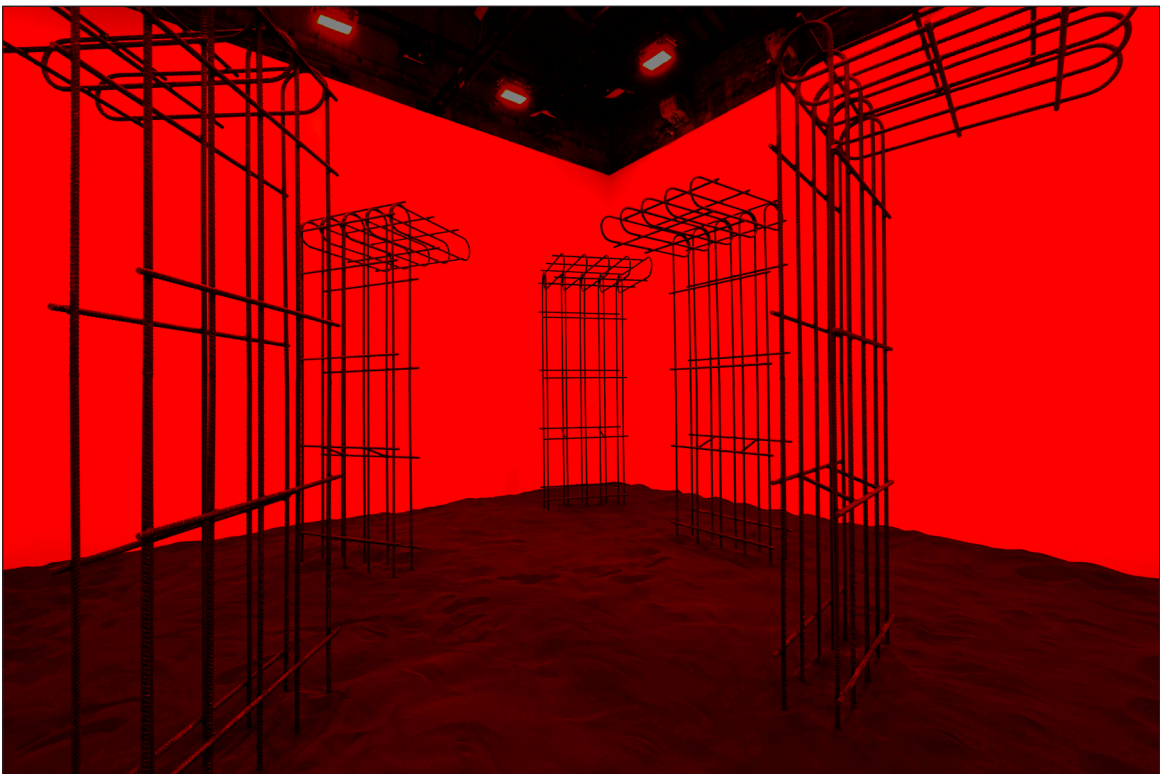


Figure 4: Installation Views, Pavilion of The Republic of Kosovo, 56th La Biennale di Venezia, Speculating on the Blue – Flaka Haliti, 2015, Sand, Metal, Light, Courtesy of the Artist and LambdaLambdaLambda. Credits: Marc Krause.

FH: This could easily be explained by the birthday alert on Facebook. Once I removed my birthday info from the profile and I only got three to four birthday wishes; the year after I re-added it to my profile I received around 500.

At this point, I really do not know how much of it has to do with automated emotion, or if this is just another way of adapting our subjectivity by using a different means of connecting in our relationship with what we could refer to as a cybernetic future.

MM: Some of your works address distance and separation, while others express a global and international sense of reality. How do you deal with the double reality of exile: the understanding of the “world” as a whole, and the feeling of strangeness when one leaves his or her country?

FH: This is a weird one, indeed. To give an example: I arrive for the first time in a new city, get to the hotel, and I call my boyfriend and tell him: I just arrived home, and then I hear myself and immediately replace the word “home” with “hotel”. I too easily use the word “home” for almost any space these days – it is strange. I realized the word “home” has dissolved, and is more and more being replaced with the more temporal word “base”. And my base is where my studio is, where I can do most of my work and can be fully concentrated and productive – which is happening in Munich at the moment.

MM: How do you feel about representing the country you exiled?

FH: Kosovo is the newest and youngest country in Europe – as well, it is unfortunately one of the poorest at the moment. Its history is mostly connected to armed conflict, trauma and refugees.

And corruption. Every time there is a possibility in politics, sports or culture, where Kosovo can participate as a sovereign state, the moment this happens it immediately becomes emotional for everyone. Somehow in the weirdest way my responsibility to represent the country starts here. Regarding the word exile, and the way in which I understand the meaning, I am not sure it fits my position too well, since I went away for studies, and I am still studying. Who knows – I could decide to go back after my PhD studies. I like the idea of being forever international; a free floater of sorts.

MM: How do you feel about representing Kosovo after having reclaimed the place for women in the art world in this country?

FH: Fantastic! I hope it does not start and end with me as a one hit wonder story, but continues on with the next generation.

MM: Regarding the structural and conceptual model of the Venice Biennale, how do you feel about this format of national presentation?

FH: I am well aware that I am not the first to question or say something about the biennial format, but I do try to reflect on it and, through my work as statement, contribute subjectively to the matter at hand. I think the position of Kosovo in this discourse is a very sensible one. I am happy to be able to articulate further the complexity of it in regard to what it means to build a nation state today, and at the same time represent the territory of your country within the improvised concept that is the “Biennial Pavilion”.

MM: The title of an exhibition is generally part of the narrative and in dialogue with the work. In your case, titles seem like starting points. Or would you describe them as a result?

FH: It depends. I would say a bit of both. Or even sometimes it is like the chicken and egg situation.

MM: Do you consider your titles a voluntary act of relativization of the object?

FH: In some of the works, yes.

MM: The titles provoke a statement of each work clearly defined. It becomes intelligible, direct and facilitates empathy. What kind of relationship are you envisioning between your subjectivity and the subjectivity of the spectator?



Figure 5: Installation Views, Pavilion of The Republic of Kosovo, 56th La Biennale di Venezia, Speculating on the Blue – Flaka Haliti, 2015, Sand, Metal, Light, Courtesy of the Artist and LambdaLambdaLambda. Credits: Marc Krause.

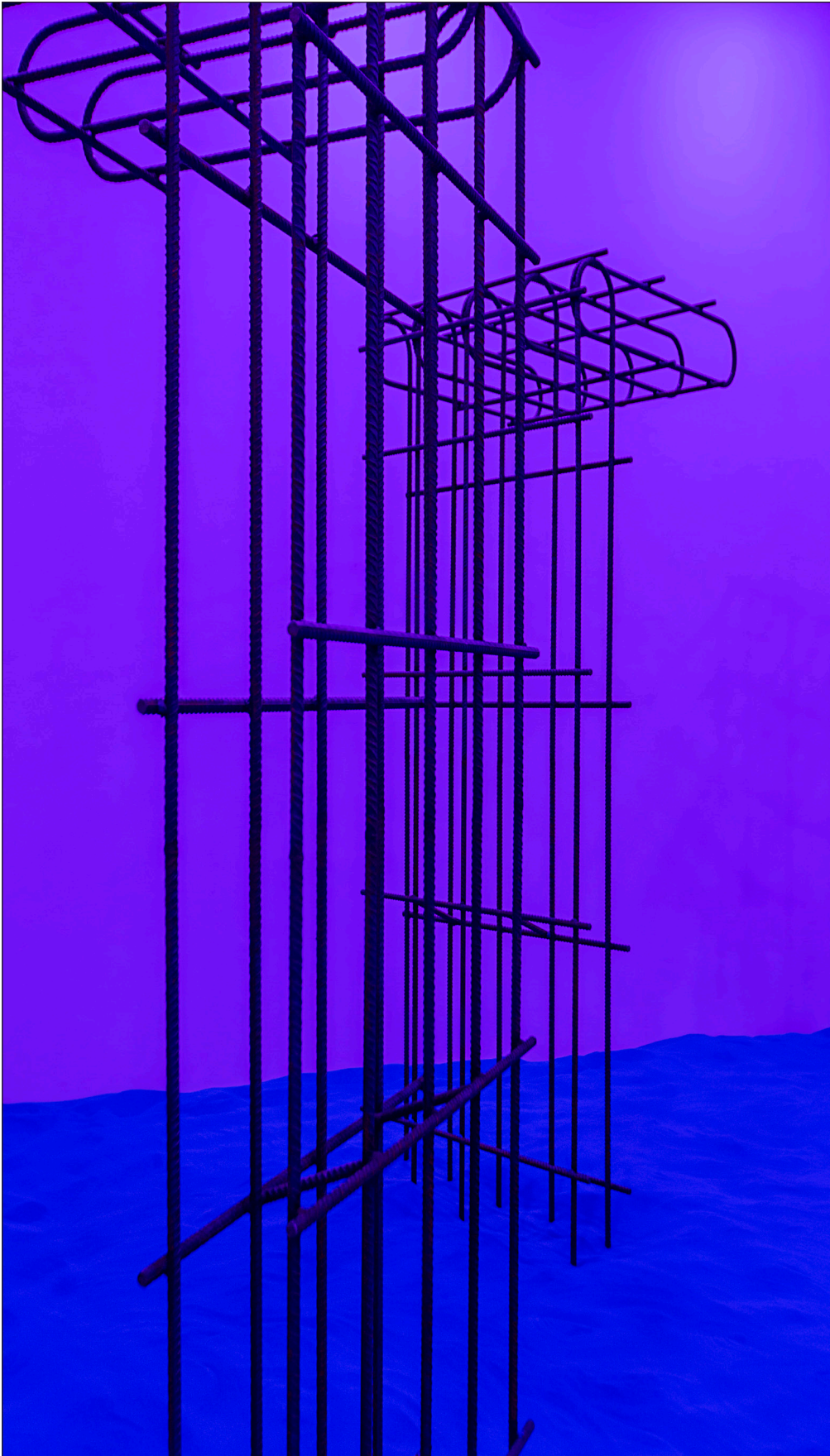


Figure 6: Installation Views, Pavilion of The Republic of Kosovo, 56th La Biennale di Venezia, Speculating on the Blue – Flaka Haliti, 2015, Sand, Metal, Light, Courtesy of the Artist and LambdaLambdaLambda. Credits: Marc Krause.

FH: I guess that I attempt to create different temporalities of reading the work, through the motion of the observer and the observed object that exists in a particular space and time, where the work is happening and is being experienced.

MM: In a previous conversation, you have argued that one should always also look backwards, work with the past or at least be conscious of the past — and not only your own — both in a political and in a personal sense.

FH: When I say backwards I mean that laterally. And I practice it in my process of working. After I am about to reach the end of narrating a complete story, I look backward and that is usually the moment when I filter the elements, which are too much on the work itself. I truly believe in the power of working backward. It can help one to more easily crystallize the essence of the work and highlight the key points even on a more abstract, political, or personal level.

MM: But what we know about the past in terms of historic fact versus personal memories is often far from reality and highly filtered. In other words: the past is always partial and in- complete. Does your work attempt to colonize the missing links?

FH: Bloch says: “Primarily, everybody lives in the future, because they strive, past things only come later, and as yet genuine present is almost never there at all.” From here I would say I try to colonize the alienated present, while creating different layers of temporalities, which potentially would create a missing link between the past and future and allows one to see different times and places at once. Sounds full of contradictions, I know.

MM: What is your personal relationship with the past: one of fighting with it or one of taking care of it? What does a horizon line entail?

FH: I only fight the past when it appears to have the threat of an ongoing nostalgia. This is what I really hate, because I think if it does so, then it must mean that your present and future is manifested as being over. When the horizon emerges in my work, it could be understood as a kind of queerness, an effort to see it as the anticipatory illumination of the utopian. When I say utopia I am referring to a concrete utopia and not an abstract one. Recent theoretical reflections describe it as relational to historically situated struggles, a collectivity that is actualized or potentially affirmative, something that is not yet but in the process of becoming. (José Muñoz, 2009)

MM: Where does reality begin, where does it end?

FH: The “then and there.” Maybe.

Competing Interests

The authors have no competing interests to declare.

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