

THE ART OF SLOGANS (THE CONSTATIVE PART)

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PART II (CONTINUED)
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4. ART & LANGUAGE *QUA* ART & SLOGANS

Art is what we do; culture is what we do to other artists.

Art & Language, 1975

As Michael Corris, a former member of the Art & Language group, stated recently, the reasoning in the 60s was that "the pragmatic dimension of language would enable a conceptual art with socializing potential" (Corris 2004, 8) and due to this approach artists developed a wide interest in issues of language. This was related to the "linguistic turn", familiar to Conceptual Art; and it was a symptom of a general interest in the relations between language and power, as well as the role of ideology in the processes of representation. Also, due to the pragmatic effects of language, it was possible to engage those issues in political terms, such as transformation, deconstruction, and, in more optimistic cases, revolution. In this section of the essay I want to look briefly at the possibilities of problematising the philosophical issues discussed above, in the field of Art & Language's theory and practice.

One of the major activities of the Art & Language group (henceforth A&L) was the publication of *Art-Language: The Journal of Conceptual Art*, which was especially dedicated to theoretical discussions of language-related issues in art. With their participation at Documenta V in 1972, the group modified their strict theoretical and analytical programme in favour of a broader self-reflexive direction. This is not to say that with their *Indexing* project A&L retreated from their erstwhile theoretical rigour, but apart from broadening their capacity (adding new members to the group) and branching out geographically by including members living and working in New York, the group also decided to schematise and structuralise their earlier as well as current work. The *Indexing* project, which Charles Harrison describes as a "summary work of Conceptual Art", is "a model of the sorts of connectedness there might be between various texts" (Harrison 2001, 71 and 75). These various texts were produced by people affiliated with A&L: critiques, statements, declarations, analyses, etc. *Indexing* was a reflection of A&L's general interest, or, in Christopher Gilbert's words, the group's *raison d'être*, defined by "conversational activity" and its own "intra-group relations" (Gilbert 2004, 326). Apart from being a genuine solution for the problem of using paper-text as an aesthetic object, the project realised in Documenta V also raised a further philosophical problematic related to the "inadequacy of extant theory for addressing the complexities of the conversational matrix" and to the issue of the relation of pragmatics to language (Gilbert 2004, 330). Later projects, initiated after the indexes, such as *Blurting in New York* and *Dialectical Materialism*, were all dealing with issues pertaining to the group's positioning itself; more precisely, with the theoretical and philosophical problematics and conditions of

collective working. The use of language, which was crucial in these *Indexing* projects, pushed the group into a more explicitly political direction; or in Harrison's words, to "ideological self-examination", which intensified the problematic of a "language community" among the members of A&L. A&L probably took the pragmatism of language more seriously than any other conceptual artist or group did and exposed its consequences in their most extreme political manifestations.¹

Nevertheless, working on language leads one to politics, as we saw in the previous instalment of this text, but in A&L's case, working on language also led to a more solid interest in working on theory as well.² What happened after the *Indexing* project is that A&L completely dedicated themselves to the above-mentioned ideological self-examination of their own language constraints; or, to partake in their experience, we might say that A&L were now becoming interested in clarifying their own slogans and rigorously criticising the false slogans of the fashionable art discourse. For example, Ian Burn and Mel Ramsden's *Comparative Models* (1972) was based on a deconstructive reading of the *Artforum's* language. They commented on texts published in the *Artforum* by making explicit the annotations used in those texts and trying to expose their limited scope and ideological underpinning. Their critique was based on a survey that showed that the *Artforum's* critics' approach to art was "experience-laden", as opposed to the "theory-ladenness" of their own practice. This would amount to saying that while the *Artforum's* slogans were "experiential" (which now they are even

1 This concerns the rather delicate issue of the "politicisation" of A&L, which mostly happened in New York, with the group's work on the publication of *The Fox* journal and with A&L's involvement with organisations such as AWC (Art Workers Coalition), AMCC (Artists Meeting for Cultural Change), and AICU (The Anti-Imperialist Cultural Union). There is a limited body of literature on this interesting issue. For example, Zoran Popović's film *Borba u Njujorku / The Struggle in New York* was made in the heat of that transition. Of course, A&L's "political turn" was neither simple nor easy. For example, Harrison, who rightly censured *The Sunday Times* (2 July 1972) for reviewing the Documenta-Index as "a Stalinist reading-room", in the same book criticised the people involved in AICU, with whom A&L were collaborating at the time, as "Maoist-Stalinist" (Harrison 2001, 120).

2 In his article "Conceptual Art and/as Philosophy", Peter Osborne writes that the *Indexing* project "marks both the culmination and the demise of strong [i.e. rigorous] Conceptualism: the fantasy of the resolution of the constitutive ambiguity of philosophy's double-coding" (Osborne 1999, 64). By "philosophy's double-coding", Osborne is referring here to its twofold role in Conceptual Art: first, that of eliminating the aesthetic or artistic element in the work of art and second, that of introducing a new artfulness to it, which was in this case theory. The inescapability of Modernist aesthetic elements forms the tension of the philosophy of Conceptual Art. According to Osborne, A&L, who problematised this tendency to the most, broke with conceptualising "art as philosophy" in favour of "philosophy as art". Discussing the philosophy of A&L, Osborne refers to the first six issues of the *Art-Language* journal, in other words, the *Indexing* project, which introduced the schematisation of these issues and brought the tension of philosophy's double-coding to a breaking point. My opinion is that Osborne's article, notwithstanding its great importance regarding this issue, overlooked the important twin notions of politics and ideology, both of which play a significant role in the constitution of philosophy. In other words, Osborne's interpretation appears to suggest that once A&L began focusing on slogans, they lost the "radical openness of purely logical possibility" that used to mesmerise their philosophy (Osborne 1999, 63).

more), A&L's slogans were "theoretical". In the following year, A&L initiated their project *Blurting in New York*, which was completely based on the group's theoretical and ideological self-examination. The project's participants, including Ian Burn, Michael Corris, Preston Heller, Joseph Kosuth, Andrew Menard, Mel Ramsden, and Terry Smith, contributed by intervening in and commenting on (based on their readings of philosophical literature or earlier writings) a set of annotations that the group had chosen. The end-result, which was a book, included a schema of these "theory-laden" annotations based on their "narrow" and "wider" conjunctions. It was an attempt to demystify the concepts of collaboration, relation, work, and interest (i.e. ideology), by means of a rigorous re-examination of the patterns involved in these formations. From today's perspective, the work that A&L performed in *Blurting in New York* could clearly be described as an attempt to assemble their own "theoretical laddenes/practice", basing their references exclusively on their own annotations/slogans. To put it in Althusserian terms, they were working in the field of the "object of knowledge" and not on the "real-object"; and A&L took great care not to conflate those two. As they wrote in their "Introduction to *Blurting in New York*": "the 400-odd blurts have been approached textually, as a self-defining/containing 'imploded' 'world'. The only relations suggested are internal, i.e., between blurts, not from the blurts to anything else" (Art & Language 1975). A&L rather schematically describe the structure of the conjunctions between individual blurts; however, there are different possibilities of using those conjunctions. As they note in the "Introduction", the meanings embedded in the various connections between individual blurts are "not meanings in the normal sense of reference but in the sense of pragmatic function". This means that reassembling them is always possible and that this possibility results from the pragmatic nature of language; but at the same time, any realisation of it must be internal and needs no extrapolation from outer "reality" (or "noise", as A&L sometimes called it, which could also be productive, though its inclusion would entail stricter and harder intellectual work). As we can surely tell, this is a completely un-Makavejevic world of words, which in some way may remind one of some of Deleuze and Guattari's conceptions (e.g. immanence, pragmatism, assemblage, etc). But I think that in their theory and practice A&L took these conceptions even further; first, they did not reduce the importance of working with language (blurts, annotations, slogans) to its capacity of being ultimately performative and second, they consequently underscored the necessarily constative character of utterances. A&L thereby drew a clear demarcation line from all tendencies that might be called "experiential". In practical terms, that means that artists who wish to work on the practical issues of the "world" (such as politics and language) must be vigilant and rigorous about their own theoretical positions, or to put it differently, they must be aware of the conjunction schema of their own theoretical references. To make it even more explicit, artists, same as communists, must know their own slogans. In this respect, no critical position could base its

practice in the improvisational nature of the use of language, or in the extreme conditions of language-suspensions-in-the-field-of-language, which were crucial in Deleuze and Guattari's world, as we saw in the first chapter of this essay. This does not mean that A&L were after some pure, natural language (notwithstanding some rather curious references they made to Noam Chomsky at one point), or some totalising language. To the contrary, A&L's practice of knowing their slogans leads to a very serious, heuristic practice of theoretical pedagogy, which consequently produces a state of pandemonium with the possible result of "unsorting" or "re-assembling" language (Art & Language 1975).³ But such an adventure, the production of new slogans, is possible only in theoretical work or theoretical practice.

This theoretical practice also produces some nasty consequences in art, which calls for further discussion. As Thomas Dreher notes, writing on the *Blurting* project, mutual relations between annotations constitute a kind of "language environment" where "possibilities of self-imbedding in the art-world are presented as conditions of the latter's transformation from the inside through 'theoretical practice'". This is the difficulty. The really nasty situation is exactly this: if by means of this "theoretical practice" working on oneself produces a certain assemblage that relates to that closed system, then how does this system connect to the outer world and what is this "theoretical practice" if not a simple construction of an (artistic) identity? How may one avoid the issue of fixation (as it relates to all constructed identities) and is it possible to communicate with identities other than those of a similar nature? As Charles Harrison notes, between 1972 and 1976, on both sides of the Atlantic, the main question for A&L was this: "how was a domain of Art & Language discourse to be distinguished from the world of all other utterances?" (Harrison 2001, 104). This problematic was directly related to the issue of ideology, or more precisely to the issue of ideological interpellation. If "theoretical practice" achieves some kind of social integration by means of synthetic subjectification (i.e. by means of schematised conjunctions), then there arises the question of the relation of this distinct ideological tendency (i.e. A&L's group ideology) to the general disposition of ideology (or more precisely to the Ideological State Apparatuses). In *Blurting in New York* one can trace some hints of this "problematization": the annotation related to *problematic* (No. 282) directly refers to Althusser's conception of "theoretical practice", understood as the proposition that "concepts cannot be considered in isolation". This blurring could be familiarised (or conjoined) with another two annotations on *theory*, No. 346, which states that theory must be used in its own domain and with No. 347, which defends theory as a disavowal of experience and personality-laden orientations. No. 195 (*Language*) tells us that working on language is in some respects similar to working in theory and No. 201 (the *language environment* annotation) tells us that language is connected to ideology. The

3 In their "Draft for an Anti-Textbook" A&L also wrote that "most of our shows [...] deal with possible cultural/social transformation in language" (quoted from Gilbert 2004, 339).

annotations on *ideology* can be perplexing, but two of them, Nos. 172 and 173, suggest how difficult it is to relate to ideologies other than your own; which consequently causes concern about the possibility of participating in the real world (i.e. politics), communicating with other artistic ideologies, and agreeing on a single ideological discourse within a group of various and heterogeneous individuals working together. Generally speaking, this is about the difficulty of working on one's own slogans, translating them to the outer world, and trying not to be normative with the statements that they propose. It is a difficult task, but A&L, I believe, took up this endeavour in the most effective way. For that reason A&L's modification of Carl Andre's slogan "Art is what we do, culture is what is done to us" to "Art is what we do, culture is what we do to other artists" should be understood from this perspective, the perspective of political participation. But unlike Andre's slogan, A&L's notion of political participation does not equate ideology to normative culture, nor does it posit (autonomous) art as a shelter, a political decision still within ideology *qua* normative culture, or a detachment from it. But A&L's politics is only halfway politics. Apart from attaining an alternative organisational practice,⁴ art is also the practice of building new formulations, new cultures, and new ideologies. This "what we do to other[s]", which is related to impact and effect as the moment of transformation in art is related to a "culture", is what A&L strove to realise in their own theoretical (art) practice. They understood perfectly that such a practice could not be realised with a retreat to "autonomy",⁵ but with participation, with this "what we do to other[s]" attitude, which sees art also as a practice of issuing declarations, statements, and slogans. A task for the future might probably be to intensify these discussions by transferring the Art and Language discourse into a less euphemistically Art and Slogans practice.

5. LENIN ON SLOGANS

[I]n "Anarchy in the U.K." they had damned the present, and in "God Save the Queen" they had damned the past with a curse so hard that it took the future with it. [...] "No Future in England's dah-rrreemling!": England's dream of its glorious past, as represented by the Queen, the "moron", the nation's basic tourist attraction, linchpin of an economy based on nothing, salve on England's collective amputee's

4 Some critics tend to dismiss A&L's problematic of working together as some kind of escapist and introverted socialising. For example, Gilbert sees it as having "a political significance which they obtained by opening a space of learning, or a sheltered conversational community, within the highly administrated culture of advanced capitalism" (Gilbert 2004, 331).

5 Here are two blurts on the annotation about *autonomy* that are linked to each other: "The scientist does not ask himself about the historical presuppositions of his work while working. He takes the trivialities which he lives and works with (his Lebenswelt) for granted. Husserl has said that you can't ignore these trivialities if you want to understand the meaning of science" (No. 60) and "Autonomy has been a condition of art's ideology. An art without autonomy would be an ideologically different art" (No. 62) (Art & Language, 1975).

itch for Empire... So one heard, when Johnny Rotten rolled his r's; [... Richard Huelsenbeck's Dadaism from 1918, Ranter Abiezer Coppe's cruelty from 1649, and the Situationist International's prophecy from 1961] (Marcus 1989, 11, 27)

I would call this system Lloyd-Georgism, after the English Minister Lloyd George, one of the foremost and most dexterous representatives of this system in the classic land of the "bourgeois labour party". A first-class bourgeois manipulator, an astute politician, a popular orator who will deliver any speeches you like, even r-r-revolutionary ones, to a labour audience, and a man who is capable of obtaining sizeable sops for docile workers in the shape of social reforms (insurance, etc.), Lloyd George serves the bourgeoisie splendidly, and serves it precisely among the workers, brings its influence precisely to the proletariat, to where the bourgeoisie needs it most and where it finds it most difficult to subject the masses morally. (Lenin 1964, 117–118)

Lenin's short text *On Slogans* faces us with a strange situation: even though he criticises unjust and false slogans, Lenin does not propose a correct slogan to replace the old ones. Most of Lenin's text is a critique of "slogans which lost all meaning – lost it as 'sudden' as the sharp turn in history was 'sudden'" (Lenin 1964, 183). Lenin is alluding to the slogan "All Power Must Be Transferred to the Soviets!", which was valid from 27 February to 4 July 1917, while a peaceful transfer of power to the Soviets was still possible. But the course of history changed and after July the peaceful option was no longer there, so the only possibility for revolution was a violent takeover of power. But nowhere in his text does Lenin propose this "new slogan" to replace the old ones. Here we see that slogans are collective enunciations (i.e. a slogan cannot be written by an isolated individual), that they keep evolving all the time, and that they are elements of language related to power (Lenin is interested in slogans primarily due to their performative character, which will be realised when the revolution comes: "the fundamental issue of revolution is the issue of power" (Lenin 1964, 183). All of these characteristics and elements of slogans were also used and theorised by Deleuze and Guattari in interesting and exciting ways. But there is one characteristic of slogans according to Lenin that Deleuze and Guattari overlooked or, perhaps, chose to ignore: slogans must tell the "truth". This obligation, which is tightly related to the "thought" content of slogans, is at the same time also strongly connected to force and power; or in Lenin's own words: "primarily, and above all, the people must know the truth – they must know who actually wields state power" (Lenin 1964, 185). The intellectual or, as we dubbed it above, constative aspect of slogans Lenin defines thus: "every particular slogan must be deduced from the totality of specific features of a definite political situation" (Lenin 1964, 183). This is a purely theoretical axiom of slogan politics, at loggerheads with Deleuze and Guattari's politics and its opposition to any legislation by constants or stable contours. Given that the

performative (or *force*-related) character of slogans is obvious in their appearance, I believe that insisting on their intellectual (or, better, theoretical) aspect is very important, not only for any "theoretical practice", but also for any evaluation of the programme of art (primarily Conceptual Art) as a heuristic practice.

Louis Althusser even wrote in slogans (earlier on, I called this theoretical manifestation of slogans *Althusserian slogans*): *Reading Capital, For Marx, Lenin and Philosophy*, considering just the titles of his books. Describing Althusser's philosophy in Leninist terms, as "the ability to draw lines of demarcation within the theoretical", Alain Badiou reminds us that those lines are drawn with theses (Badiou 2009, 63). This is, as Badiou writes, a philosophy conceived as a *declaration*, which is, or must be, a political word (Badiou 2009, 66–67). What makes Althusser's philosophical theses so close to slogans is not only his insistence on demarcating his materialist philosophy off from the idealist ideology, but also his conception of philosophy not as isolated cognitive appropriation but as a forceful declaration and statement.

In his article "Lenin the Just, or Marxism Unrecycled" and book *A Marxist Philosophy of Language*, Jean-Jacques Lecercle discusses Lenin's pamphlet on slogans as crucial in Marxist linguistics. In Lecercle's view, not only Deleuze and Guattari but also Althusser and his followers gathered around *Les Cahiers marxistes-léninistes* were influenced by Lenin's pamphlet. Lecercle analysed the "Vive le léninisme" issue of *Les Cahiers marxistes-léninistes*, where a considerable number of discussions concerned slogans. According to Lecercle, what was most important for Althusser in his reading of "On Slogans" was his understanding that, apart from being concrete analyses of concrete situations, slogans also command great strategic importance. In this reading, slogans constitute a conjunctural analysis that is strongly related to the struggle, or to "the power relationship that it establishes", as well as a "concept *linguistic conjuncture* which combines the state of the encyclopaedia (the compendium of knowledge and beliefs of the community of speakers); the state of the language (sedimentation of the history of the community of speakers: taken together, the language and the encyclopaedia from what Gramsci calls a 'conception of the world'); and the potentialities of interpellation and counter-interpellation that exist in the situation" (Lecercle 2006, 100–104).

In order to assess the use of Leninist slogans and slogans as a theoretical practice in the arts, in the concluding part of this essay I will address the use of "Lenin" by Art & Language and Dušan Makavejev, representing two antagonistic artistic directions.

After the *Blurring project*, A&L continued working on issues in the philosophy of language, with special emphasis on the conversational matrix inside their collective. Their discussions concerning this

problematic were published in their collectively signed *Draft for an Anti-Textbook* in 1974. A similar text was published the following year under the title of "The Lumpen-Headache", which discussed issues in the philosophy of language as well as "the [group's] relation to the name 'A&L', its commitment to socialism and its basis of unity" (Gilbert 2004, 335). This commitment to socialism introduced "external elements" into A&L's practice, elements that were foreign to their previous work undertaken in the *Indexing* project. This broadening of A&L's field of interest was seen as a schism between the group's UK and New York factions. Beginning with the *Blurting* project, a number of works that incorporated this "socialisation" effect in A&L's theory and practice (communicating with external elements and broadening the group's field of interest) were realised in New York with significant international participation. Many of the participants in these projects regarded A&L's work as not political enough to make a meaningful impact on cultural politics inside the very repressive art system of the United States. So they decided to collaborate with different, more politically engaged artistic groups, such as AWC and UICA, to expand the work methods of previous A&L projects so as to include various other communities, such as repressed sexual and ethnic groups, and to work more openly with labour movements. This was the route that Ian Burn took, among others; for some ten years following the definite schism between A&L's "artistic" and "political" factions, Burn concentrated exclusively on various organisational activities among Australia's labour movements. By 1976 *The Fox* and along with it the New York section of A&L ceased to exist. This was not simply because one section was less political than the other; the conventional wisdom has it that A&L's UK faction was more interested in the formal problematic of the pragmatics of language, as opposed to the New York faction, whose political activism was more explicitly pronounced. This is partly true, because the group's very consideration of their group problematics, including issues of theoretical practice, ideology, autonomy, etc. as constatives of the performativity of language was that which made A&L on both sides of the Atlantic into a political art theory and practice group. I believe that the inclusion of external elements in the group's theoretical practice without dealing with the issues of communication, relation, and ideology in their full complexity contributed to the dissolution of the group. Without having dealt rigorously enough with the problematic of the influence of their "culture" (i.e. "what we do to other artists"), A&L decided in favour of an unrestricted openness. This is not to suggest that the problem was caused by Amiri Baraka's "Stalinism", to which they decided to open up; rather, it was more of a technical issue, involving uncritical cooperativeness that seemed to arise from this activist practice. A&L regarded cooperation and harmony as stalemate practices that would bring not only theory to a dead-end but also any kind of heuristic activity, without which there could be no revolutionary practice. As A&L's UK faction stated in 1975, their politics was based on conflict: "It's no good just carrying-on with good intentions. The progressive intellectual's task is to generate ideological conflict" (Art & Language 1999, 352).

Before returning to "Lenin", I would like to remind us of Močnik's theory, the starting point of which was that "communication is a nuclear instance of the ideological mediation of social integration" (Močnik 1986, 176). As Močnik clearly realised, social integration was integral to the communist ideology; also, the communists used "speeches, passions and illusions" to integrate and consolidate their own ranks. It seems then that this ideological integration transcends all individual "ideologies" and constitutes itself as a general "human" condition of sorts. The ground for its self-constitution is communication that sucks everything into its force field. Then how are we to think the difference between communists and non-communists? Is it the same "speeches, passions, and illusions" but with different *constatives* and their structures of conjunction that distinguish the speeches of communists from those of non-communists? I think so. We can likewise arrive at the same problem from the point of the discussion above if we consider that communication takes place, or that language materialises in the process of ideological interpellation through the force of "constative-performatives", which we called slogans. So we might claim then that both communists and non-communists communicate through slogans, but that the constative aspects of their slogans and their intra-relations differ. Following Lenin's argument, apart from having the effects of force and power (the strategic point), communist slogans are also utterances, words that are related to truth and knowledge. That is why we may refer to those slogans as theory slogans. Therefore it is possible to say that communist slogans aim at truth-effect. That would be enough to demarcate them from advertisement.⁶

But it is common knowledge that communist slogans are indeed different from non-communist slogans. From this perspective it seems that the "problematic" is different: how is it possible for two communists to communicate? If they are to integrate socially with the communist ideology by means of communicable "performative-constatives" *qua* collective enunciations, then how may communication between the two of them amount to anything else than tautology? The question comes down to this: how is it possible to communicate differently as a communist? That is why theory slogans, with their double role of articulating the collective nature of enunciation and providing at the same time elements for non-personal communication, are crucial here.

So far, we have seen that it is possible to claim that one of A&L's primary concerns was precisely this problematic. A&L's policy was to intensify research on their theory slogans, to schematise them without succumbing to any kind of "personal is political"

⁶ Or as Lecerclé distinguishes between those two: "The insistence on the correctness of the naming of the moment of the conjuncture by the slogan is what distinguishes good old 'propaganda', in the Leninist sense of the term, from the 'political communication' that the imperialists are so fond of, which aims to sell a policy in the same way that an advertising slogan sells a product" (Lecerclé 2006, 103).

emotionalism, to place their production outside subjectification by means of abstract elements of theory, and to try to communicate with other communists along these lines (remember, A&L was a "Marxist-Leninist" group).⁷ In A&L's case, this was an immensely difficult task, because their integration was to be realised in the general field of artistic production or, more precisely, in a theory and practice of art that inclined toward the communist tradition.

According to Močnik, who separates "aesthetic interpellation" from normal interpellation, the former, apart from subjectifying illusion (which is common to all ideologies), must also meet the condition of being subversive (in order to realise itself as an artistic process) (Močnik 1986, 185). This daunting task, almost impossible, is only thinkable in the context of those artworks that have a "multi-serial" or *polyphonic* character, which always manages to thwart interpellation. In Močnik's words, the illusion never ends – but neither is it ever consummated (Močnik 1976, 187–188). This particular feature of the nature of art is why A&L insisted on working on their theory slogans from within their field. The meaning of communication between two communists may be understood as making explicit the structures involved in the constitution of their integration. This process is in itself a re-assemblage, as we saw from the "Introduction to Blurting in New York"; but it is not the same as the Deleuzian position of escaping schematisation through constant/permanent variables or through the transition of eternal pass-words. The problem might be simplified even further if we consider what is the minimum required practice that aesthetic interpellation entails: to look at art. What we want to know is whether there is any difference as to how communists look at art. After 1976 this question was probably the main source of headache for A&L.

Their provisional answer was *A Portrait of V. I. Lenin in the Style of Jackson Pollock*, which comprised a series of paintings, an essay, and a song recorded with Red Krayola, all realised in 1980. This "impossible picture" or, in Harrison's words, a "monstrous détente", was a summary of A&L's long-time "communist headache", as it were. How are we to understand a painting of Lenin rendered in a style that art criticism typically sees as quintessentially non-communist, or even anti-communist? Harrison, who took part in its production, interprets it as a "critique of fashionable artistic forms of left-wing theory" (Harrison 2001, 139). But at the same time, according to Harrison's interpretation this was a practical solution

⁷ In Charles Harrison's opinion, when A&L used slogans, for example in *Nine Gross and Conspicuous Errors*, their musical work realised in collaboration with Red Krayola in 1976, they were "self-consciously ironic to naive optimism associated with Chinese propaganda posters" (Harrison 2001, 109). Nevertheless, Harrison is indeed aware of the theoretical – even if reduced only to aesthetics – character of collective enunciations (as diverse as, for instance, Constructivist and Surrealist imagery): "both were treated simply as episodes, from which certain durable and canonically acceptable works of art might nevertheless be extruded in order to be admitted into Modernist critical and technical categories" (Harrison 2001, 110).

against the appropriation of Conceptual Art by a superficial detached semiotic aesthetic that was starting to look a lot like commercial advertisement. Accordingly, the *Lenin-Pollock* project could be seen as a possibility of bringing two completely antagonistic signs inside a single frame and of generating tension between at least two modernist collective enunciations. But if that was indeed all, then it could be seen as a step back from A&L's theory and practice, which had been so cautious not to include extrapolations in their system or limit their interest to the aesthetic problems of the Modernist canon (see Annotation No. 37). First we have to be clear that A&L were not homogenous or very consistent about their theory, which included many contradictory elements, ranging from analytical philosophy to communist theory. But we should remember that at times A&L comprised as many as ten different people. So one might claim that the idea behind *Lenin-Pollock*, in terms of bringing contradictions together, had been present in the work of A&L as far back as the early 70s. Second, at the time of *Lenin-Pollock*, politics in Europe and the United States was undergoing a swing to the right, which resulted in the oppression of all kinds of communist thought. The *Lenin-Pollock* project was also strategic inasmuch as it brought much-needed abstraction to the issue of communism, which was previously lacking, either due to fashion or reductionism. In order to avoid these constraints, which affect the way one sees a picture, A&L proposed the "reconstruction of the causal relations, rather than any iconic consideration", which meant shifting their interest from structural to generic analyses (Art & Language 1984, 154). This might also strike one as a very regressive decision, since A&L introduced the schematisation of the conditions of production in its most extreme manifestations (as indexes and annotations of the existing conjunctions) as a critical practice; a retreat to "causality" might then seem like a theoretical step back to determinism, historicism, or, worse, evolutionism. A&L's interest in the generic conditions of a picture (or, say, a slogan) did not come out of the blue: it was already present in the problematic of Conceptual Art. It is hardly surprising that Ian Burn, writing at the same time about his personal dissatisfaction with Conceptual Art, conceptualised its failure as the disappearance of history.

A&L's insistence on the concept of genesis instead of iconic analysis should thus be understood as an attempt to re-historicise those slogans that were no longer used and, perhaps more importantly, to trace their transformations by looking at what had happened to them. That is what A&L attempted to do with their portrait of Lenin in the style of Pollock: to direct our attention to forgotten but still not thoroughly processed conjunctions in modernist cultural history, of routes of ideas from overall ambition to stupefied recuperation and more importantly to all-beautiful slogans that meant so much for the emancipation of millions. In their own words, "the notion of genesis directs our attention to the world, to the problem of material causation and not to the patrician intricacies of an idealised cultural coherence"

(Art & Language 1984, 154). Considering Lenin in conjunction with art is somehow usually a bit of a problem, which, I believe, A&L's theory and practice might help us to address. If we tried to reconstruct Lenin's relationship with art based on the recollections of Lunacharsky, Gorky, or Krupskaya, and the snippets that he wrote on the subject, we would face a man who was apparently uneasy about art. Most notably, this would include his unpredictable relationship with Mayakovsky, as well as some works of art that he admired, such as the sonatas of Beethoven. His remarks allegedly made to Gorky whilst listening to Isaiah Dobrovain's rendering of Beethoven's *Appassionata* are probably the most commonly quoted passage in all of Lenin's writings:

I don't know of anything better than the *Appassionata*, I can listen to it every day. Amazing, superhuman music! I always think with a pride that may be naïve: look what miracles people can perform! But I can't listen to music often, it affects my nerves, it makes me want to say sweet nothings and pat the heads of people who, living in a filthy hell, can create such beauty. But today we mustn't pat anyone on the head or we'll get our hand bitten off; we've got to hit them on the heads, hit them without mercy, though in the ideal we are against doing any violence to people. Hm-hm — it's a hellishly difficult task! (Gorky 1967, 247)

This passage occupies a central place in Dušan Makavejev's 1971 film *W. R. — Misterije organizma* (*WR: Mysteries of the Organism*). In this film classic, when Makavejev posits a Lenin unable to confront art, he is actually reproducing Lenin's own world, in which politics and art formed two completely separate fields of interest. As an irresolvable tension, this incompatibility is a dead-end for thinking art in terms of concepts, theoretical postulates, and declarations. As I tried to show elsewhere, to take up this position is not to disavow Lenin, but rather to include him as an external factor in an otherwise transcendental and experiential art practice. More precisely, it amounts to a cultural politics based on the following postulate: to create an "artistic politics" by means of an artistic immanency based on experience, creativity, and spontaneity. By pointing to Art & Language, I tried to show that there is another possibility, that of thinking art as a practice in itself, a "theoretical practice" that poses the question of purity not as a question of identity anymore, but as a position of demarcation.⁸

⁸ Here we must add one more recollection of Lenin's relationship with art. Among other things, Lenin made the following remarks to Clara Zetkin: "I have the courage to display myself as 'barbarian'. I cannot regard the works of Impressionism, Futurism, Cubism, and other 'isms' as the highest revelations of artistic genius. I simply don't understand them and I get no pleasure from them" (Zetkin 1967, 250). In his article "Lenin in Las Meninas", Geoffrey Waite uses this recollection to develop his thesis that demarcation is the condition and attitude necessary for a truly historical materialist description of, among other things, artworks. Waite applies his thesis, which I have also found extremely useful, to Velázquez's *Las Meninas* (Waite 1986).

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