The Fine Art of Bureaucracy: Interfaces with Bureaucracy in Contemporary Art

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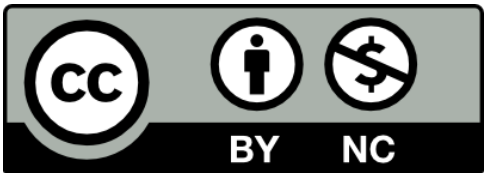

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Abstract

Despite that the histories of modern and contemporary art have in many spaces and moments coincided with bureaucracy in numerous ways and from different angles, with the exception of the flourish of scholarship on the "archival impulse", bureaucracy—literally the dominion of that most functional piece of office furniture—has been excluded from the analysis of modern and contemporary art. This project engages those practices that investigate, thematize or interface in some way with existent bureaucracies and their logics, with an interest to not take those artists who engage with bureaucracy (nor bureaucrats themselves) at their word, but rather to investigate how their works exist in practice, and within social space. By developing what I am here calling a *bureaucratic aesthetics*, this project, through three in-depth case analyses, seeks to investigate whether works of art that address bureaucracy have the potential to disrupt the institutions they critique, or whether they instead reproduce and reinforce bureaucratic logics—and bureaucratic claims to legitimacy—within their creative and artistic fields.

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Introduction to *Bureau*-cracy

Bureau

The word "bureau" comes from the French. Originally referring to the piece of fabric that laid across each and every French parliamentary official's desk, its first recorded use was in 1764 when, in his newspaper *Correspondence Littéraire,* Melchoir von Grimm recounted how the late Vincent Gournay had added to the three classic French regimes of democracy, aristocracy and monarchy a "[new] form of government, by the name of bureaucracy." As Ben Kafka reflects, to the rule by the many, the rule by the few and rule by one, "Gournay had now added rule by a piece of office furniture," a rule apparently by—and with—no body. [1]

That the desk takes center stage at this point is curious. Kings certainly had desks prior, for instance Louis XV's *Bureau de Roi* [fig 1], and besides such sovereign surfaces, monarchical states employed small armies of notaries, ministers and other functionaries before the bureaucratic turn. A 1749 illustration by Gabriel de Saint-Aubin for example [fig 2], taken from a manuscript on police reform, demonstrates in an imaginative way the kind of problems monarchical France dealt with— problems we would now consider to be bureaucratic, in this case having to do with increasingly large quantities of paperwork. While the structure was never built, it demonstrates the way that around this time, states were increasingly considering how to

[1] Gournay notably referred to this fourth form of government as on based on an illness, "bureaumania," which had taken hold of France. Ben Kafka, *The Demon of Writing* (New York: Zone Books, 2012), 77.

bring their function to order, an order that would manifest in part in the actual and metonymical structure of the bureau.

We pretty well know what a bureau, or a desk, does. It organizes things, especially documents, and it provides a surface on which to work. Yet since a dining table, a spot on the couch or a park bench are all also potentially decent workplaces, we might rephrase instead that a desk or a bureau provides an *official* place to work. This will correspond with Max Weber's statement that a significant aspect of modern bureaucracies, one that sets them apart from those prior, is indeed the official status of those employed. In a section of his essay "Bureaucracy" in *Economy and Society*, titled The Position of the Bureaucrat, Weber describes the qualifications and characteristics of this official character, which include: that remuneration is based not de facto on holding office but on performing regular, official duties; that a specific loyalty is accepted towards an objective and impersonal purpose; and that examinations are required, or some other proof of professional, not personal, merit is necessary.[2]

However, no longer provided with their positions because they are somebody's cousin, or a member of the aristocratic elite, bureaucrats are employed in full-time positions related to the work itself—positions that will increasingly require, and are increasingly legitimated by, especially desks in offices (other associated bureaucratic paraphernalia will follow: letterhead, for example). While bureaucracy is often described by its effects, or affects, and in very abstract

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2 Max Weber, "Bureaucracy," in *Weber's Rationalism and Modern Society: New Translations on Politics, Bureaucracy, and Social Stratification*, trans. Tony Waters and Dagmar Waters (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 79-85. Separately, we can look to even how the etymology changed as state practices did too; as *opus* (latin, both noun and verb) meaning simply work, transformed into *officium* (also latin) meaning the performance of a task, usually of a sacred or moral duty, to *office* (french) the word changed from a process, to an ethic, to simply a place. Even for something to be "official" today is less a quality of the thing, than a conventional status, or a marker of legitimacy, robbed of the duty it previously was laden with.

terms, the partial origin story hidden in its nomenclature can help us apprehend its practical and material dimensions, dimensions that will be critical to parse in the task of describing a bureaucratic aesthetic.

A comparison of two bureau models from an 1887 commercial catalogue demonstrate the significant the material configurations of these objects [fig 3]. The Office King Combination Desk, pictured on the left, has a design that is strikingly more commercially suitable and practically multifunctional than the somewhat more austere Desk for the State Department of Education, pictured right. The smallish drawers of the former object, better suited for small objects like keys or rolled sheets, are given the same amount of space as the document-shaped drawers and files in the sections adjacent. In its multi-functionality, and practical designation, the Office King is thus somewhat more working class in its design. In contrast, the austere Desk for the State Department of Education privileges wide, flat drawers which can comfortably facilitate tall stacks of paper, proliferating memos and thick manila files. It is, in other words, developed primarily for documents, documents presumably far more standardized in size then the ramshackle collection of objects and sheets which the Office King is primed for.

This comparison highlights two things that will be critical for what I will be defining in this text as a bureaucratic aesthetics. Firstly, it reveals that the material reality of the bureau as a sorting, organizing, professional and official mechanism has distinct, felt and material consequences, dimension and forms. Secondly, the comparison highlights the primary function bureaucracy serves—one that the aesthetic is particularly primed to question, reflect on, and also to pull apart, namely, the organization and management of documents.

Before moving forward, I would note that desks, like documents, seem to have a kind of value-neutrality built into them. We probably do not think too often about the ways in which

desks shape the world—they are just sort of there, doing the job—much in the same way as we might think about bureaucrats, too. However, just as the word bureau, in an act of metonymical cannibalism, went from referring to a piece of fabric to the man behind it, to the office itself, to the system of officialdom and desk-hood writ large—so such value-neutral assumptions become more dangerous as they, too, balloon.

Neutrality is as Camilla Stivers writes, "less a technical need than an ideological requirement in the bureaucratic search for legitimacy."[3] Yet neutral claims still reside in bureaucracy's *techne.* While it might be irritating to fill out five (or fifteen) different forms before figuring out how to renew a driver's license, or how to graduate, the assumption is that these forms *themselves* are not really doing that much to change the world besides providing one with a license, or allowing one to graduate. They are a simple means to an end, perhaps even a necessary one. Indeed neutrality as one of bureaucracy's primary justifications is typified not least of all by the infamous statement that bureaucracy is a "necessary evil," a necessity that resides especially, it would seem, in the indispensability of its technical *means*, means that nonetheless are looked through not at.[4]

I will be seeking look not *through* but *at* bureaucracy's material, formal and technical means. An art historical eye, one turned towards bureaucracy, can register its material realities in order to assess its qualitative, material, value-rich and indeed aesthetic effects. If we compare the two late nineteenth-century desk models to the Bureau de Roi, we can see what a tidal change

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[3] Camilla Stivers, Rule by Nobody: Bureaucratic Neutrality As Secular Theodicy, Administrative Theory & Praxis 37, no. 4, 2015. 242.

[4] Now widely used, the turn of phrase which describes bureaucracy as a "necessary evil" seems to have been first used by Thomas Paine, who in his 1776 pamphlet *Common Sense* wrote, "Society in every state is a blessing, but government even in its best state is but a necessary evil." In the context in which it appears in the text, Paine is here counter-posing the (un-natural yet apparently) necessary evil of government to the natural evil of man. *Common Sense* was an impassioned treatise favoring American Independence.

has taken place; if the Bureau de Roi served as a site where the occasional letter was written and not much else, perhaps it can become clear why Gournay was so keen to criticize the furniture itself in the first place (and indeed to insult the state through it: the state logic was a *mania* for the bureau). In the bureaucratic age, the desk *itself* moved out from the shadows, even as at the same time those who ruled shifted anonymously behind it.

Bureaucratic Representations

In China, where the history of governmental bureaucracy runs deep, the 'literati painters' essentially were formed in revolt against the expected trajectory of bureaucrat scholar-artists, who had to pass official examinations to fulfill their roles as equally artists and state administrators. The literati chose to elide these examinations, moving to the country to paint like "amateurs," producing some of the most wonderful examples of Chinese landscape painting that we have to date.

In the mid-twentieth century, the Surrealist artists René Magritte and Salvador Dali each in their own way painted surreal pictures of modern bureaucrats. The bowler-hat-clad and faceless figures that populate Magritte's paintings are not just bureaucrats. Indeed, they might be doctors, factory owners or any other member of the comfortably upper middle class. Yet it is, as Eve Chiapello and Luc Boltanski explore in *The New Spirit of Capitalism,* at just the time that *Golconda,* for example, was painted, that the corporation and most professional spaces were becoming increasingly bureaucratized.[5] Magritte's images suggest both bureaucratic indeterminacy, and increasing influence, by presenting us with a barrage of anonymous and

[5] *Golconda* was painted in 1953—a time when, Boltanski and Chiapello write, the corporate firm was too becoming ever more bureaucratized as the manager as top corporate bureaucrat was heroicized. Eve Chiapello and Luc Boltanski, *The New Spirit of Capitalism* (London: Verso, 2005), 17-18.

similar corporate-bureaucratic types, often in lack of or with very similar faces. This sense of bureaucratic anonymity and indeterminacy was already developed pictorially in Salvador Dali's *Average Bureaucrat,* despite the fact that Dali's was a personal haunting; his father was a local bureaucrat, and so the figure pictured may be in part his own father, the pair in the background perhaps them together, if at an earlier age.

Towards the end of the 1980s, bureaucracy appears again in the form of mail art, with early pioneers like Guy Bleus employing canceling stamps that look just like their bureaucratic doubles [fig 4]. While these emblems clearly mimic bureaucracy's own aesthetic, they are also at the same time embedded within it—both within post office bureaucracies, and within the hostile bureaucracies that confiscated, and thus collected them.[6] Around the same time bureaucrats begin to populate the popular film of the century, where the tropes of the obstructionist bureaucrat, the beleaguered bureaucrat and the *apparatchik* spy-bureaucrat appear in such films as: *Death of a Bureaucrat, Ikiru* (To Live) and *Dr. Strangelove.*

There are hundreds more examples of moments in the history of art and visual culture which beg investigation into their specifically bureaucratic components, exchanges and effects. Yet despite so much bureaucratic imagery, bureaucracy has not received sustained aesthetic or intellectual assessment in the history of art or visual culture. When bureaucracy does appear in the literature, it appears as an explanation—at best, as a window of assessment opening up onto a single artist's oeuvre—and more often onto only a single work. While it quickly became clear that there is no explicitly bureaucracy-focused art history, there is certainly no lack of moments when two overlap.

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[6] Craig Saper, *Intimate Bureaucracies* (New York: Punctum Books, 2012), 13.

In light of this for my purposes I have found it necessary, rather than discussing the historically contingent and specific modifications of bureaucracy through time, and in varying states, to develop an approach towards what I am calling a *bureaucratic logic*. This logic, stemming from the origins of the *bureau*, is one that has its genesis in the state and yet has now spread to every corporation, hospital, university and every other large-scale institution. While this thesis is less keen to address this bureaucratic spread—and will take state bureaucracy in each of the three case studies as its jumping off point—future research must investigate the how and why of this bureaucratic reproduction, as it intensifies its social hold.

A bureaucratic logic can be thought of in both abstract and aesthetic terms, since it will require assessing bureaucratic means that are shared across a certain range of applications, however. To try to define a bureaucratic logic is also another way of asking: on what particular grounds bureaucracy's choices are justified—through what language does its logic function—and on what grounds can its effects be assessed? Particularly for this project, asking this question will be critical in order to define a bureaucratic aesthetic. A bureaucratic aesthetic will pick up from where these effects leave off, particularly as they are entwined in and through the bureaucratically-facing subject.[7]

A bureaucratic aesthetic sets the parameters of engagement, or interface, between art and bureaucracy. A bureaucratic aesthetic is not just descriptive of the aesthetic *within* bureaucratic spaces (offices, desks, briefcases, melancholy, humdrum[8]). Nor does it only apply to art that simply makes a theme of bureaucracy, or takes it on in content. Rather, it sits somewhere

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[7] All subjects face bureaucracy in some way: whether oppositionally, or more frequently begrudgingly conciliatorily through the millions of regular interfaces with its processes and logics: from every form filled, to every office sat in.

[8] The short film *Gustavus and Alienation* by Hungarian artist Marcell Jankovics however is a fantastic place to look for a descriptive aesthetic of bureaucracy.

between content, space, form and effect, dealing with art that flows logically towards and away from a bureaucratic logic. It describes those practices that borrow from bureaucratic administrative means, and that from their own spatial positions develop a view towards what bureaucracy's organizational insides feel like when they are released from their particular professional frame. A bureaucratic aesthetics releases bureaucracy proper from its end application, in short, so that it might be more readily experienced as—become an experience of—pure, bureaucratic *means*.

Since bureaucracy is the kind of thing that affects different social classes differently in spite of its presumptions to neutrality, the social and spacial positioning of each practice that develops a bureaucratic aesthetic will thus inform it.[9] This is not least of all because bureaucracy too works mainly on the individual—its registrations, and accounting take place at a mainly individual level. A bureaucratic aesthetic does not just pick up on bureaucracy's individuating effect, but instead place it near the centre of its critical concerns. Before exploring this in a more concrete way it will be necessary to lay out the parameters for how I am understanding a bureaucratic logic, through three theorists who have been instrumental in the process of my own discerning how to not look through but at bureaucratic means, processes and techniques.

A Bureaucratic Logic: Weber, Arendt, Bourdieu

Max Weber provides six characteristics of modern bureaucracies: (1) the division of labor or tasks by office, (2) the strict hierarchy of offices and chains of command, (3) the enforcement of definitive rules and regulations, (4) the rigid separation between private life and public office,

[9] Bureaucracy may in fact be mainly organized to facilitate the middle classes: since for upper classes is it primarily something whose tricks should be learnt in order to evade, and for the lower classes it is experienced as structural and symbolic violence.

(5) selection based on expertise and (6) the assignment of regular tasks via official capacities.[10] Weber also writes how bureaucracies are, from the outset, justified on the basis of their rational, impersonal and functionally-divided structuring. In this context he is often cited stating that bureaucracy is "technically the most advanced" system that the modern nation state has for administering its newly defined scope, especially because of its supposed rational structuring.

While bureaucracy is often justified by its supposed rational structure, in a description of what a bureaucracy does invoking rationality is in fact incredibly vague, since it can be both a synonym for "technical efficiency" as well as a value in and of itself. Indeed, rationality in Weber's "Bureaucracy" has far more to do with the official (literally, between offices) separation of tasks, duties and expertise, than with any substantive end. Rationality for Weber is based far more on the formal and formalized nature of bureaucracy than any one value—it defines the structure, rather than representing an ideal. Interestingly, one effect of the rationalization of bureaucratic structures that Weber mentions is "the advancement of rationalized lifestyles," one he says can be seen especially in the development of professionals and specialists, with "widespread effects." David Graeber writes that bureaucracy, "using rationality as a synonym for 'technical efficiency,'" focuses on the "how" and not the "what".[11] Rationality is described by Weber as formally defined law, as an "applied science", as "procedure" and as the effort to codify. He thus describes bureaucratic expertise in the context of the law as developing not from a capitalist division of labor initially, but from the rational *form* of law—in other words its means and perhaps, even, its aesthetic—which requires training to master.[12]

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[10] Max Weber, "Bureaucracy," in *Weber's Rationalism and Modern Society*, 98.

[11] David Graeber, *The Utopia of Rules: on Technology, Stupidity, and the Secret Joys of Bureaucracy* (London: Melville House, 2016), 38.

[12] Weber, "Bureaucracy," in *Weber's Rationalism and Modern Society*, 118-126.

While investigating the specific role of rationality in state administration is beyond the scope of this thesis, it is important to remember that rationality is for bureaucracy a key justificatory claim. Many people have assessed rationality in the context of state administration; besides, it will be my claim that bureaucracy does not necessarily—or even usually—function on rational bases, despite that this is how it is justified. More interesting I believe in this context will be to pull from Weber another less cited phrase to describe bureaucratic processes: that of the *intensity of administration*. He writes: "intensity of administration means that as many tasks as possible were absorbed by the state and the processing and completion of tasks was handled by the state's own bureaucratic apparatus." This intensity he states is part of the quantitative *and* qualitative changes that bureaucracy engenders. It is denoted by an "inner unfolding of the scope of administrative functions," and it is an unfolding that engulfs social structures increasingly. [13]

Bureaucratic intensities are omnipresent in our age. Bureaucracy increases the rigor, magnitude and expanse of the political institution of the nation state occurs in part when an increasing number of claims and concerns are brought into and formalized within the bureaucratic fold. The intensity of administration manifests in the multiplication of documents and forms to fill, in procedures to follow checks and balances to take into account, in protocols to take note of, and the like. Intensity is a component of the *state* of the bureaucratic state—and it need not be rational. In fact, it is exactly the intensity of administration that results in the kind of *irrational* duplication, confusion and obfuscation that we have come to expect from bureaucracy. I would posit that we could call this *bureaucratic reproduction*, a part and product of the irrational intensities of the bureaucratic state. Such bureaucratic reproduction will be one more facet of a bureaucratic logic than an aesthetics of bureaucracy will take up.

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[13] Weber, "Bureaucracy," in *Weber's Rationalism and Modern Society*, 91, 94.

Hannah Arendt, as the second major grounding point for the theoretical framework of this project, will take bureaucracy's expanding intensity seriously. In *The Origins of Totalitarianism,* she traces bureaucracy back to its British Imperial ambitions, writing how the nascent administrative rule of colonial bureaucracies governed by reports, certificates and decrees. These colonial bureaucracies, while a purer form of "government by bureaucracy" (since they had no definable leaders, and governed by decree), laid the groundwork for present bureaucracy's anonymous quality. Colonial bureaucracies, she writes, much like those today, seemed to "flow from some over-all ruling power that needs no justification"[14]—producing what she will later poignantly call the "rule by nobody" (recall here Gournay).[15]

Arendt writes that this rule by nobody is a critical component of the present's modern bureaucratic systems, especially because it demonstrates how bureaucrats have always been fundamentally un-accountable. They "are not supposed to have general ideas about political matters," and since the constitutional government retains its place as the moral and authoritative heart of jurisprudence and legislation, the bureaucrat is absolved of all responsibility and freed from public scrutiny.[16] Arendt exposes bureaucracy therefore as the structural mechanism of responsibility deferred; displacing responsibility outwards and elsewhere to great success, it avoids prosecution by seeking protection behind its own sufficient processes. Such a self-protective and sufficient guise manifests in part as a particular kind of inter-departmental accountability-shuffling, a process which the insider literature calls "blame avoidance."[17] Yet blame avoidance is also a sensible lack—not just a lack of responsibility, but also a lack or

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[14] Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Schocken Books, 1951), 318.
[15] Hannah Arendt, *On Violence* (New York: Harcourt Books, 1970), 38.
[16] Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 214; 243.
[17] See Christopher Hood, *Blame Game: Spin, Bureaucracy, and Self-Preservation in Government* (Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, 2014).

absence of response. This is of course in the etymology of the word itself: *respondere* meaning to respond, *spondeo* meaning to promise, swear or pledge.

The idea of a rule by nobody as the rule of a government without response is particularly interesting since it reveals how bureaucracy as a phenomenon opens up onto strikingly aesthetic language. This plays out in a remarkable sets of words that borrow in sensorial language such as: silence and response, secrecy and transparency, opacity and openness, anonymity or facelessness and publicness, and the like. These words have remained evocative for me as I work through the bureaucratic literature, since they appear so regularly and always call for an affectual response. The aesthetic of course need not only be visual—on the other hand, that which is present in a work of art is only intensified by that which is *not* present, especially when the not present is intentionally, or noticeably sequestered (as is often the bureaucratic case). While state secrets may not be exclusively bureaucratic, the anonymity of bureaucracy, with its opaque and sequestered moments, will be central component to the analysis a bureaucratic aesthetics that launches towards the *state* of the bureaucratic state.

Arendt writes midway through *The Origins of Totalitarianism* that "the nation-state, with its claim to popular representation and national sovereignty […] was a result of a combination of two factors […] nationality and state." I was struck by not just the simplicity but usefulness of this distinction. As she writes, "nations entered the scene of history and were emancipated when peoples had acquired a consciousness of themselves as cultural and historically entities." States were on the one hand much older, "derived from centuries of monarchy and enlightened despotism," while on the other hand they had nothing to do with history at all—history is handled by the politicians, while bureaucrats plug away with administrative, functional, practical

concerns.[18] States are the administrative and functional middle-ground; a state is a structure, one that like the bureau itself it is an organizational entity of certain instrumental parameters. Throughout this project when I speak about the state and of the *state* of the state, therefore, I do so interchangeably with a bureaucratic logic—a logic that unlike that of the nation is not in the same way engaged in the scene of history, and that may in fact may be *anti-historical* in much of how it functions.

As this project progressed, the question emerged: how would I assess a series of different artists in relationship to the kind of bureaucratic states that they inhabit, without framing them in relationship to their particular state per se, while at the same time remaining sensitive to the kind of controls working on the artist themselves and the works they produce? This question had a certain congruency with my interest in exploring how bureaucracies function in practice. As a theorist of practice, Pierre Bourdieu was keen to chart actors according to not just their stated but also their actual tendencies within social space. His conceptual-practical field maps allowed him to chart human actor's positions in relationship to shared factors or tendencies that underlay the social spaces they moved through [fig 5]. These field maps have been incredibly influential to this project, as have Bourdieu's well-known sociological tools, those of field and habitus, which populate art historical and theoretical discourse. While Bourdieu did write in some quantity about bureaucracy, it is his general theory, or "logic of practice," that has especially informed my reading here.

For Bourdieu the field, as a social space and a place of human action, can be approached appropriately through the three visual/material metaphors that it engenders—those of the game field, the force field, and the field of physics. Like a sports game field a Bourdieusian field is

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[18] Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 299-301.

definable by rules, has different areas, employs players and referees, is subject to the weather (outside forces) and has definable boundaries (not to mention a distinct and agreed upon "outside"). Bourdieusian fields are also like force fields—a cosmos or "a separate universe governed by its own laws."[19] Finally, like in the field of physics, Bourdieusian fields have standard theories, truths, and beliefs; demonstrate regular patterning, as well as statistical anomalies; disclose observable qualities; express normative behavior; and are subject to certain interdependencies (the field of gravitational pull on the field of partial, or even quantum physics, for example). Fields are, simply put, social space. A field is a space that while manipulated and *ruled* yet provides a place for agency within its particular bounds.[20]

Positioned within the field is one's *disposition,* or habitus. Habitus is a sort of regulating characteristic of the individual, one which nonetheless is not agentially closed, nor explicable as obedience per se. Habitus is a cognitive construction, one that produces meaning and that comes from a person's history, and upbringing, and the relationship of these to the social space one finds oneself in (i.e. the field). Habitus exists between the social and the individual, between structure and agency. It is both "habits", socially constituted, and the tendencies by which we organize action and structure our ways of being. Hence, Bourdieu's definition of habitus numerous sources as the "structured and structuring structure"[21]; it is both of the past, projects

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19 Patricia Thompson usefully develops this three-part exposition in her chapter on Bourdieu's Fields. In Michael Grenfell, *Pierre Bourdieu: Key Concepts* (Abington: Routledge, 2014), 67-78. We can think here either of multi dimensions, separate planets in the cosmosphere, or even a force field around an intergalactic space ship in the sci-fi sense.

20 Bourdieu will describe agents within fields in terms of play, and games, in keeping with the jovial combativeness of the field as metaphor. For example, in *Logic of Practice,* ""in a game, the field (the pitch or board on which it is played, the rules, the outcome at stake, etc.) is clearly seen for what it is, an arbitrary social construct […] underlined by everything that defines its autonomy — explicit and specific rules, strictly delimited in time and space." Pierre Bourdieu *Logic of Practice* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992), 67.

21 For example, in *Logic of Practice,* 53.

into the future, and is definably "objective" in so far as it exists—practically (i.e. in practice)—in the present-ness of social space.

Defining a bureaucratic logic in this thesis has been a process of defining bureaucracy as a field. My methodology is quasi-Bourdieusian, with two critical differences. First, I am not engaging in statistical analysis as he did. Second, my fields are not organized as his in relationship to their underlying accruals, and differential expressions of, capital. Rather, I have been conceptualizing the bureaucratic field—and a bureaucratic aesthetics—in relationship to the underlying base unit of evaluation that I believe makes up the structuring structure of bureaucracy: that of *legitimacy*.

Legitimacy finds its most lucid explication in the model of "the test" set out by Boltanski and Chiapello in *The New Spirit of Capitalism.* While a full discussion of this is beyond the scope of this thesis, it is significant to note Boltanski and Chiapello's study is clearly a follow-up to Weber's *The Spirit of Capitalism*—as such their notion of the test is certainly influenced by a Weberian model. Weber had a good deal to say about legitimacy, some of which will be discussed in the chapters to come.

According to the authors, there are two types of tests: those of strength, and those of legitimacy. Tests of strength convey of a relative degree of power, manifest as physical force, while tests of legitimacy are a judgement of the respective status of the agents involved. Tests of legitimacy both cover and excuse the need for tests of strength—not least of all because it would be an immense social energy to mount physical confrontation each time a new struggle arose. Tests of legitimacy, therefore, claim to set up a just order, through which future tests can be

measured, and laid out. And, as the authors state, "the transition from tests of strength to tests o legitimate status presupposes a social labor"—a labor that bureaucracy exists largely to fulfill.[22]

The model of the test implies a few things, the first which Alexis De Tocqueville already said, in 1835, when he wrote that that the best dictator will always be a combination of a soldier and a book-keeper—namely that legitimate tests are always underpinned by violence, and force. Bureaucratic legitimacy is not just a way for social actors settle their dues. Further, it will be a way to develop a governmental structure that *conceals* the violence and force that exists both at, and as its base, via facilitative processes deemed to be legitimate. Ass-covering is here elevated to a serious science. This fits nicely with Bourdieu's own writing about legitimacy, which sees it as underpinned by a kind of structural (what he will call symbolic) violence, one manifest especially in the arbitrary.

Bourdieu tells us that the opposite of the legitimate is not the illegitimate, but the arbitrary. He writes that the moment of a person's recognition of legitimacy is exactly the same moment as the misrecognition of arbitrariness: "the adherence expressed in […] relation to the social word is the absolute form of recognition of legitimacy through misrecognition of arbitrariness, *since it is unaware of the very question of legitimacy*, which arises from competition for legitimacy, and hence from conflict between groups claiming to possess it."[23] To speak of legitimacy in a state context, therefore, is to speak in part of the management of the arbitrary (or more properly it's mis-management, since it must be managed away), and also the manufacture of illegitimacy, so that legitimate bases need never be troubled.

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[22] Luc Boltanski and Ève Chiapello, *The New Spirit of Capitalism* (London; New York: Verso), 30-31.

[23] Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 168. Emphasis mine.

On Motivation

In *The Utopia of Rules: On Technology, Stupidity and the Secret Joys of Bureaucracy*, David Graeber writes that the Left needs a critique of bureaucracy, with which I agree. While many people, even many leftists, would not dispute the social or even ethical necessity of redistribution, social welfare or the occasionally important role of experts in society, that these automatically equal the need for bureaucracy as is typically assumed is not in itself a necessary step.

At the very beginning of my research I set out with a basic question: why, in the past two decades, has there been such an outpouring of works of art interested in, thematizing, or interfacing in some way with bureaucratic structures and their logics? Are our lives simply becoming more bureaucratized, and bureaucracy is therefore part of the daily source material upon which the artistic consciousness increasingly draws?

While the increasing bureaucratization of the world is certainly a partial answer, David Graeber gives us a more succinct one: the global justice movement at the turn of the twenty-first century—coinciding with this outpouring of work—equalled the first modern truly anti-bureaucratic revolt.[24] Against the newly intensifying supra-national bureaucracies like the World Bank, the World Trade Organization and the International Monetary Fund, the anti-bureaucratic form and intent of *true* globalization, as it is sometimes called, developed. Organized horizontally, and based on empathetic, true solidarity and not on a formally registered and administrative scope, as Graeber writes the complicated direct democratic processes used were developed especially to demonstrate that important decisions and complex projects could be

[24] Graeber, *The Utopia of Rules*, 31.

carried out "without anyone ever having to fill out a form."[25]

It is my interest in the text that follows, by analyzing and identifying the constitutive features of a bureaucratic aesthetic, to begin preparing the grounds for a leftist critique of bureaucracy. This critique will require looking not through, but rather *at* bureaucracy. It will necessitate not using bureaucracy as an unexamined explanatory device for other phenomena—reducing it to an eye roll, and an aside—but rather will require addressing its characteristics and qualities in and of itself.

[25] Graeber, *The Utopia of Rules*, 31.

1. A fish out of water

> *"Social reality exists, so to speak, twice in things and in minds, in fields and in habitus, outside and inside of agents. And when habitus encounters a social world of which it is the product, it is like a 'fish in water': it does not feel the weight of the water, and it takes the world about itself for granted."*
>
> ——*An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology*, Pierre Bourdieu.

Musée d'Art Moderne, Department Des Aigles

The image most typically reproduced of Marcel Broodthaers' *Musée D'art Modern, Département Des Aigles* is probably that from the *Section des Figures: The Eagle from the Oligocene to the Present* [fig 6]. In the four years following the *Musée*'s first iteration in 1968, it was only by 1972 that Broodthaers actualized the mythical subject of his "museum fiction"—the eagle—within its very walls. Notably, the *Section of Figures* was just one section among twelve others that took place between those four years, including the: 19th Century Section; Print Section; Literature Section; Documentary Section; 17th Century Section; Encore to the 19th Century Section; Folkloric Section; Cinema Section; The Section of Figures; Publicity Section; Financial Section; and Modern and Ancient Sections that marked its close [fig 7]. As such, there is likely not one single institutional explanation that can fit the whole project.

The *Musée D'art Modern, Département Des Aigles, Section des Figures: The Eagle from the Oligocene to the Present* took place in Düsseldorf, in 1972. It featured over three hundred objects representing eagles: on beer glasses, vehicle grills, pieces of jewelry, a railroad wheel,

furniture, patches, tourist souvenirs, vases and other vessels; on a typewriter, a temple fragment, on North American Indigenous vestments; on a suit of armor, a parade banner, a military trumpet; in naturalist drawings, sculptures, photographs, books and periodicals, on a comic strip, in the form of a plastic kite in the shape of an eagles; by the inclusion of more than one stuffed eagle, and with three preserved eggs.[26] This was in addition to a profusion of eagles in naturalist drawings, pieces of print propaganda; photographs of text, signposts, and flags; on crests, watermarks, stamps and letterheads; on the covers and spines of books and periodicals; and on at least one comic strip.

This aquiline proliferation was not organized according to date, type, material, style or movement (all typical organizational strategies of modern art museums). Neither were the eagles arranged morphologically, as one would expect in a natural history museum, nor propagandistically in some way as a national history museum might entail (usually this looks like a rough chronology underpinned by a militaristic processing of time and accompanied by the occasional historical oddity to cheer things up). There was no immediately recognizable system of differentiation or ordering, and yet there was a sense of *formal* order: the eagles were regularly spaced, appearing in glass cases or on the wall in a systematic and physical organization, making a *visually* ordered form that nonetheless belied no hidden logic behind it.

There were no didactic descriptions, but each object was adjoined with a somewhat cumbersome panel, 5 x 5 inches and made of plastic, that read "This is not a work of art" in English, French and German [fig 8]. These panels, near overwhelming in sheer quantity, produced an amusing effect in combination with the exhibition catalogue that accompanied the

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[26] Rainer Borgemeister and Dick Snauwaert helped me build this list. Rainer Borgemeister, and Chris Cullens, "Section Des Figures:" The Eagle from the Oligocene to the Present" *October* 42 (1987): 135-54. Dick Snauwaert, "Marcel Broodthaers" in Elena Filipovic, *The Artist as Curator: An Anthology* (Koenig: Mousse Publishing, 2018), 123-136.

show, in which the eagles were listed alphabetically by provenance/place of origin. Since in actual display they were not dispersed in this way, a total effect was created where the numbers became scrambled, and strangely mixed.

Despite these Magritte-ian statements (Broodthaers described the panels as his "Magritte-Duchamp method") the exhibition housed a number of "real" works of art—both contemporary, such as Gerhard Richter's *Alder* of 1972 which Broodthaers commissioned for Düsseldorf—as well as slightly older works, including two paintings by his idol René Magritte. There was also present a "certified" painted reproduction of Peter Paul Ruben's *The Rape of Ganymede,* as well as a postcard reproduction of Max Klinger's *Statue of Beethoven* in gestures reminiscent of the first 19th Century Section of the *Musée*, which Broodthaers held in his home.[27] While this first, more personal iteration of the Musée indeed used "many bureaucratic tools" to "legitimate the counterfeit institution," it is in the *Section des Figures* that Broodthaers' bureaucratic aesthetic will come into full swing.[28]

The reproductions in in the *Section des Figures* were just a few objects among hundreds, and while the "charged-ness" of the eagle in a post-war European context has driven a lot of the thinking around Broodthaers since his moment, it should be noted that the artist explicitly excluded objects deemed to be too charged, or "too political", from the collection.[29] This included several German flags, a Nazi helmet and a few works from Pablo Picasso. While he never fully described the logic behind why he did not select certain objects, it seems that the

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[27] Here, in the first section of the museum, the only representations of art per se were postcard reproductions of Ingres, David and others taped onto the wall.

[28] Julian Jason Haladyn, "Exhibiting the Museum-Function: Marcel Broodthaers and the *Musée d'Art Moderne, Département des Aigles,"* in *Exhibiting Outside the Academy, Salon and Biennial, 1775-1999: Alternative Venues for Display* (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing, 2015), 224.

[29] Rachel Haidu, *The Absence of Work: Marcel Broodthaers, 1964-1976* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2010), 169.

artist may have wanted to develop a sense of the taken-for-granted-ness alluded to in the quote from Bourdieu with which I opened this chapter.

It may seem strange to begin a discussion about a bureaucratic aesthetics with a work of art that has been discussed primarily through not the bureau, but via the museum, history and the status of art within these. While it is indeed a *museum* that Broodthaers produced, it is my contention that by considering the *Department of Eagles* portion of the work's title—the portion that I believe has gotten short shrift in the work's total assessment—that an adjacent conversation might be developed to the (just) museological.

That the bureaucratic and the museological overlapped for Broodthaers personally is significant to the story. In the year 1968, the artist squatted the Palais de Beaux-Arts in Brussels as the "unofficial" artistic representative of a group of agitators. This was not just a moment as Rachel Haidu has suggested where Belgium itself was becoming intensely bureaucratized; it is further also one that clarifies the terms of Broodthaers' own institutional critique.[30] While 1968 will not play a major role in my assessment of the bureaucratic, it must be noted here that "68" as a cypher for the events of May in France, and Brussels, and for the global youth and worker unrest that took place in this year was, among other things, a revolt against bureaucracy. This moment is useful to keep in the back of the mind as we consider the bureaucratic aesthetic of Marcel Broodthaers; as potentially the most powerful initial interface with bureaucracy that the artist had, it is a source from which at least some of the inspiration for the project indelibly sprung.

A bureaucratic aesthetics will, among other things, expose the often concealed structure of a bureaucratic logic. Although Haidu is one of the only scholars to assess the bureaucracy in

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[30] Haidu, *The Absence of Work*, 143.

the proximity of Broodthaers' *Musée,* Haidu will expand on how a model of language with an absent core informs Broodthaers' work, by reading his oeuvre through his history as a poet, a history she will claim is "absent."[31] As I tried to develop in the introduction, the partial invisibility of bureaucracy in the literature has especially to do with the fact that its material parameters are not brought into the conversation. Positing bureaucracy as an absence only increases this lacuna; bureaucracy, like language, certainly has an *arbitrary* dimension, but one that is far more substantial, even material, than is usually posited when we talk about language. Like the desk-form itself, bureaucracy's organizational parameters, even when arbitrary, are not absent. They have functional, felt consequences. As the "weight of the water" in which we are submerged, a bureaucratic logic turns out to be something far subtler to notice and slipperier to grasp than the flash and noise of politics, in large part because we are daily swimming through it.

As was stated in the introduction, each actor's social-spacial position lends them certain proclivities, presents certain vectors, along which actors can apprehend, and launch, their particular critique. Benjamin Buchloh describes the way in which conceptual artists working in the 1960s had, as a group, developed the proclivity towards the administrative capacity of the work of art. As art through modernism**,** Buchloh writes**,** moved from representing the external world to representing itself, to referring only to its own formal qualities at the peak of high

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[31] Her title *The Absence of Work* borrows from Michel Foucault's lecture turned text *Madness: The Absence of Work,* where he describes madness as a "linguistic code that does not say anything […] a fold of the spoken that is *the absence of work*."[31] Haidu will expand on how a non-instrumentalized model of language informs Broodthaers' work, reading his oeuvre especially through a matrix of linguistic theory and through equally his history as a poet—a history she will claim is recently "absent." Part of the problem is that the moment where he moved from being primarily a poet to an artist, when he cast his last work of poetry, *Pense-Bête,* in plaster has been over-mythologized. Broodthaers poetic career was always very material—his artistic career with many poetic imbrications. Haidu's explication, in describing bureaucracy through language with an absent core, disregards the practical and material dimensions of a bureaucratic aesthetic that Broodthaers work will address.

modernism (sculptural minimalism), art began as it passed over this precipice to catalogue itself like as a "clerk" of its own definition. Conceptual art at this time took a new approach to an old dilemma of art, "a dilemma that could be described as the conflict between structural specificity and random organization"[32]—and that could be equally described as a dilemma of bureaucracy. That the solution to this dilemma for art took an administrative form, one that it will be important to explore here just in brief since it speaks to the conceptual field at that moment, a field which Buchloh writes Broodthaers into.

Buchloh writes how Conceptual art was driven by a "vanishing basis for the legitimate definition of the work of art," a basis that continued to wane as art's representational and formal explorations seemed exhausted. Conceptual art, turning inwards to itself as art, sought institutional validation through a tautological, or strictly self-referential model.[33] This was led by Joseph Kosuth, who developed a literal, linguistic model of art referring to its own definition as art. The tautological model (of art referring to itself as itself, for Conceptualists through the concept) vastly reconfigured the aesthetic field of that time, so much that it amounted to a "new aesthetic identity" for those working in a Conceptual model. Buchloh describes the effect of this tidal shift that became the "central aesthetic project" of the era, one where "the last residues of artistic aspiration toward transcendence [were subjected] to the rigorous and relentless order of the vernacular of administration."[34] Robert Morris' *Card File* (1962) is just one example of this, each card describing the process of the object's own making in a very bureaucratic form, if in one that to to us now will seems out of date.

It was in the late 1960s that the violent quality of these tautological works, inscribing

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[32] Benjamin Buchloh, "Conceptual Art 1962-1969: From the Aesthetic of Administration to the Critique of Institutions," *October* 55 (1990): 111.

[33] Buchloh, "Conceptual Art 1962-1969," 119.

[34] Buchloh, "Conceptual Art 1962-1969," 142.

themselves back onto themselves, were turned against "the apparatus itself" from which the "logic of administration emanates in the first place". This took the form of what we now know as early institutional critique, and leads Buchloh ultimately to Broodthaers, whose own form of institutional critique, Buchloh writes, was located at the end of this administrative trajectory, a point of "absolute farce." [35]

Institutional Critiques

The typical placement of Broodthaers' project within the canon of art history is within the nascent period of institutional critique. As a 'movement, institutional critique is usually pinned to a finite moment in the late 1960s and early 1970s, which has a familiar cast of characters: Michael Asher, Daniel Buren, Hans Haacke, Mierle Ukeles, Fred Wilson and Andrea Fraser, and Broodthaers. The mid 2000s saw a revival of interest in this trajectory; the web journal *transversal* published "Do you remember institutional critique?" in 2006; that same year, the Los Angeles County Museum of Art held a symposium titled *Institutional Critique and After* from which a text of the same name was published; and 2009 saw the publication of *Institutional Critique: An Anthology*, as well as *Reinventing Institutional Critique,* by Gene Ray and Gerald Rauning. In her influential 2002 book *One Place After Another,* Miwon Kwon posits that Asher, Buren, Ukeles, Haacke and Broodthaers serve as the "genealogy" of site-specificity, yet that the two (institutional critique and site-specificity) are not co-continuous. Since site-specific work and the socially engaged practice that grows out of it have quickly become the most consuming genres of our present time, that the first wave of institutional critique remains in Kwon's text an important yet somewhat naive forbearer—one with the right intentions, but directed far too much

[35] Buchloh, "Conceptual Art 1962-1969," 143.

towards the institutional "inside"—is telling.[36]

Thus begins the series of binaries that the location of Broodthaers within this first wave inevitably prescribes: the first wave investigates "the conditions of the museum and art field" but does not possess the same awareness of subjectivity as do, for example, Fred Wilson and Andrea Fraser. It "questioned the authoritarian role of the cultural institution, and its basis on a nationally construed idea of the public sphere" and the museum's "role in founding a national past", but did not question representation beyond the museum's walls. It "narrowly defined" took the art institution "as the institution in question" but did not yet question the role of the artist within it—and the list goes on.[37] Yet, as Claire Bishop states in *Installation Art: A Critical History,* the *Musée d'Art Moderne Département des Aigles* cannot be read as simple museological deconstruction without subject-hood. Broodthaers too, she writes, harnesses the viewer and their unspoken presuppositions—presuppositions that may be tied not just to the museum as an institution, but call on other institutions in their apprehension, as well.[38]

While the *Musée d'Art Moderne, Département des Aigles* typical, canonical location has been within the "first wave" of institutional critique, this position has left it shortchanged. To prematurely foreclose the possibility of the *Musée d'Art Modern* to even *address* terms that are not its own disallows, among other things, an analysis of the bureaucratic aesthetic within the work, an aesthetic that can be missed by looking only to the museological "within." This is a "within," that of course, Broodthaers himself not just satirized by the institution's very fictitiousness, but mocked and further made deceptive within the *Section of Figures* since, after

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[36] Miwon Kwon, *One Place After Another: Site-Specific Art and Locational Identity* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2004), 24.

[37] Gerald Raunig, Hito Steyerl, Simon Sheikh, respectively. All in *Reinventing Institutional Critique,* ed. Gerald Rauning and Gene Rey (London: Mayfly, 2009).

[38] Claire Bishop, *Installation Art* (London: Tate Publishing, 2005), 15-16.

its manifestation in Düsseldorf, it no longer existed in any material way, its objects re-dispersed to the over 50 museums and private collections from which they came. This is among other things, an interesting commentary on institutional co-option, and of bureaucratic labor that after so much effort washes away.

There seems to have been a suspicion embedded within the discursive categorization of institutional critique that an institutional outside is even discernable, thus localizing and reducing the possibility of critique. Institutional critique as it has been written has not allowed Broodthaers a referentiality to the constitutive outside: as such, the way we understand what the *Musée* did in the world has been foreshortened. With twelve museum sections produced, including in his own home, on the sand of the beach, and in a "fictive" museum set up inside a real Kunsthalle, Broodthaers incessantly mocks these divisions. It is notable that while Broodthaers had likely been to a modern art museum or a few, Brussels did not yet have its own. With the *Section of Figures,* by questioning the institution from "within", the critical position Broodthaers takes up is not an antiquated or weak critical position—is not a naïve but a complex one, and one which the artist was clearly (300+ times over) eager to ask. By bringing in referents to not just museological, otherwise institutional into a "fictive museum" that looks not like a museum at all, Broodthaers questions not just inter-institutional developments, or even origins. He also paves the way to expose other institutional forms, in this case the form of the bureau, to conceptual consideration—freeing them of their ends to subject them to the interrogation of their conceptual means.

Into the Bureaucratic Field

Hannah Arendt has discussed the difference between the way former oligarchic and

monarchical states, versus increasingly bureaucratic ones, conquered small villages and dissonant territories. When victorious powers past wanted to express themselves and extend their rule they would plunder dissenting villages, raze them, and then either symbolically castrate their leaders or physically wipe (at least some of) them out. Sometimes new ministers would be implanted, sometimes whole political systems would be absorbed, and sometimes organizations would be expunged. This is how power was be maintained, and competition foreclosed upon. The same model functioned within a local context; dissidents within one's own territory would be generally either be tortured, killed, or at the very least banished for some time.

In a modern, bureaucratic context, this all will change. Now no longer were the leaders or officials of small towns or principalities *de facto* knocked out. Rather, they would be simply provided with notaries, functionaries and other state representatives. Later still, existing leaders would not even be swapped out, but would simply be co-opted into the new bureaucratic edifice: they would simply be given new tasks, asked to fill out new forms, required to keep new sets of records, and provided with new hierarchies of office to answer up to.[39] This shift, one which meant that people could be let more or less alone, so long as they became properly administered, is a profoundly bureaucratic one, and will have vast consequences.

We can imagine this would change the way political symbolism functioned. Not least of all, by becoming incredibly inter-exchangeable. I imagine that if a flag that flew for the knight-king who ruled my town continues to fly as my town becomes administered by bureaucratic functionaries from some far-away state I have never heard of, that I would probably not attribute

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[39] Thank you to Keith Bresnahan, for pointing out to me that in the détourned kung-fu movie turned Situationist film *La dialectique peut-elle casser des briques* (1973) this literally happens, "when the emissaries of the evil feudal lord are sent to the village he is trying to bring under crush, and when they threaten to bring their bureaucrats and functionaries, and the villagers recoil in horror."

the same kind, or amount, of value to that flag anymore, since either the particularity of the connection to a person, or to an ideology, or simply to a functional way of being had changed. Each flag as a symbol, and each symbol upon it, would be to some degree evaluatively diminished for a time, or at the very least changed. The value political symbolism holds in a bureaucratic context becomes far more level—far less evaluatively differentiated—than it was in the past. Put another way, the eagles of my ancestors will become significantly, metaphysically diminished when they are no longer just mine, but are very few in a swarm of many.[40]

In his 1921 essay "Bureaucracy," Max Weber describes how, although democracy and bureaucracy seem to be in direct contravention, both progress by the same mechanism, that of "*leveling the governed people*."[41] He is here talking both about the levelling of power, the sort aristocrats hold, as more people desire to exercise their own direct rule, as well as the levelling of people non-official citizens themselves. Further, in the move to put a party of *professional* elites (i.e. bureaucrats) in place, the relationship between the governed and the governors is supposedly, at least in appearance, to become more level.

Critical to Weber's argument is what this *leveling* means for the newly developing bureaucracies, especially in light of the knowledge that it is not just democracies that are bureaucratized, but socialist and fascist states, too; indeed, socialist and fascists states both require the governed people to be *level* in a certain way, if these are framed by different sets of rhetoric, and apparently different ends. While a sort of mental image appears quite quickly when

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[40] This is not of course to say that national symbolism won't gain traction and explode in energy on new national and evaluative terrain. Nonetheless this still requires a levelling first off; potentially the greater the scope any national symbol covers, the more fervour (and probably violence, force) it requires in order to hold that terrain, standing on top of so many once heterogeneous but levelled symbolic histories of all sorts.

[41] Weber, "Bureaucracy," in *Weber's Rationalism and Modern Society*, 109. Emphasis mine.

the word levelling—which can mean alike "making equal" and "razing"—is invoked, the question remains: what does this levelling mean to Weber in the *bureaucratic* case?

While the above quotation from Weber about leveling appears in a section of the essay titled "The Leveling of Social and Economic Difference", Weber *first* mentions the phenomenon in an earlier section on bureaucracy's "technical" superiority. There he states: "bureaucratic domination [*Herrschaft*] means the leveling of *Stände-based* 'honor'."[42] While this statement will require a certain amount of unpacking, it will be critical to the discussion here of a bureaucratic aesthetics that is attuned to the primary effect of levelling engendered by the bureaucratic state.

We might start by taking note of exactly the kind of language Weber is using. Weber's most recent translators note that he is at this time developing a theory of class that is self-consciously not Marxist. He wanted to produce a sociological structure that was not based primarily on the economy and capital and where social classes were not based primarily on their relationship to these, either. The language he employs in this section thus is developed to set itself apart. His conception of the *Stände* is part of this process; a *Stände* is a class that is not based on the oppressor/oppressed dialectic of those subject to the market under capitalism, nor on labor nor capital per se—rather it is rather based on status and honor, cast in a particular kind of way.[43] The translators note that for example that a *Stände* can be seen outwardly, as well as experienced. In this sense, the *Stände* is a precursor to the habitus.

What is critical for the developing *bürokratie Stände* is that it exercises a form of control over the *Stände* of the levelled people, a form of control Weber describes not by using his (and

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[42] Weber, "Bureaucracy," in *Weber's Rationalism and Modern Society*,108.

[43] Weber would not deny how the economic links into the honorable, but it is only part of the equation. The economy will become just one part of his three-part theory of power/legitimacy.

the commonly-used German) word for power, *Gewalt,* but rather *Herrschaft. Herrschaft* as opposed to *Gewalt,* is something both "external to" and "separate from" the individual. While it is translated usually as "dominion" or "domination," *Herrschaft* "is rooted in the capacity to be seen as legitimate by those over whom power is wielded."[44] *Herrschaft* as the capacity to be seen as legitimate is the capacity that bureaucracy as a social class wields. If we return to the previously-mentioned village, the razing of a town, and the castration of its leaders, is an exercise in *Gewalt* (to recall Boltanski and Chiapello, it is a test of strength). *Herrschaft,* on the other hand, as a test of legitimacy, leads to a leveling of honor in the governed and governing classes, and it will have a series of critical effects.

The first is that it will enforce a logic of similitude. As eagle symbols and honor associations are diminished, everything becomes closer to the median, with less constitutive difference. I should be clear here that the honor which Weber writes about is less knightly honor, or that of kings, than a *Stände*'s basis in history; the *Stände* is rooted first and foremost in the social recognition of identity—of us versus them—made visible by identifiable markers of shared history including language, food, dress, skills, uniforms, badges. There is an assumption of a past, present and future relationship, one seen and experienced and share among others. This leads to the second effect of bureaucratic levelling as Weber frames it—that the effect of the levelling of bureaucracy will be an elision, or even *razing,* of history.

Towards a Bureaucratic Aesthetics

Bureaucracy depends on sameness. As opposed to the formal, conceptual, and organizational logics of art history, natural history, or museology, where difference is developed and displayed

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[44] Tony and Dagmar Waters, Translators Introduction, *Weber's Rationalism and Modern Society*, 11.

to prop up the ongoing successes of the logics of each, a bureaucratic logic is not interested in difference. That is to say, while bureaucratic form may seem on the surface to sort according to difference (age, gender, income, geography etc.), it sorts accordingly only after these differences have been rendered absolutely in kind—which is to say only after they have been levelled—and have been as well diluted through repetition over an incredible scope. If a bureaucratic aesthetics exposes the structure of bureaucracy, the *Section des Figures* with its 300 plus eagles puts the principle of levelling on display. The huge number of eagles appear in very different forms. They present an extremely heterogeneous scope. They come from fundamentally different places, holding within themselves fundamentally different histories that are not similar in kind, despite how they may be rendered.

There doesn't seem to be any ideology, nor method to the selection, or organization, besides that they are all eagles—and this despite that the objects on display do not share in any fundamentally similar idea of eagle. The beer mug that happens to have an eagle emblazoned on it and an ancient stone eagle head from the top of a temple hold almost nothing in common. However, if we return to the principle of levelling necessary to expand bureaucratic scope, it becomes clear that the greater the critical mass of eagles, as persons in a bureaucratic state, the more each eagle seems to be similarly, *in kind,* an eagle. The heterogeneity of their symbolic origin no longer disclosed, they are now each just one more example of an eagle among others, levelled, made similar and drained of their individual, historical honor.

A critical mass of constitutive difference made level—or different in kind—is an ongoing part of bureaucracy's functional means. The logical means of forced similitude is however not just functionally useful for the day-to-day nature of ongoing bureaucratic tasks, and was not just

necessary in bureaucracy's early days of expanding intensities, and scope.[45] Further, a logic of similitude is also the best means for dispelling the arbitrariness that always threatens bureaucracy from it from its dark and suppressed hidden throws. Returning to Bourdieu, this arbitrariness hidden in the misrecognition of declaring things to be more or less the same is the process of declaring or recognizing a thing to be legitimate—as with all legitimate citizens, or with all legitimate eagles.

Rosalind Krauss, in her text about Broodthaers' *Musée d'Art Moderne*, invokes also the "principle of levelling" but to a somewhat different effect. In her text *A Voyage on Art in the Age of the North Sea: Art in the Age of the Post-Medium Condition,* Rosalind Krauss writes, "In the *Section des Figures* mounted by his fictional museum, Broodthaers famously submitted more than three hundred different eagles to this *principle of leveling*." Krauss goes on to develop this principle—which she will call the *eagle principle*—to demonstrate how Broodthaers "implodes the idea of an aesthetic medium," razing the differential status of each object within the installation.[46] For Krauss this is a cause for concern, as it leads her to conclude that the eagle in Broodthaers' installation is a "symbol of pure exchange," thus designating the complicity of Conceptual installation-based art with market principles. Installation, for Krauss, overpowers object; the objects lose all medium-based presence, and are levelled by the installation, the institution, the market.

Krauss' levelling is one that take place in a different register than Weber's. Where the principle of leveling that she develops is essentially a sly fusion of semiotic content and market

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[45] Here I reference not just the increasing "intensities" mentioned in the introduction, as more and more functions, claims, etc. are engulfed into the bureaucratic fold, but mean to reference also the expanding scope of colonial states, which as Arendt writes were laboratories of nascent bureaucratic logic, tactics and means.

[46] Rosalind Krauss, *A Voyage on the North Sea: Art in the Age of the Post-Medium Condition* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2000*),* 10.

context—the elision between which allows the fast and free functioning and profitability of capital—the principle of levelling as Weber develops it works on the structuring structure of organizational form in order to slow down the actionability of difference, not speed it up. Difference is for bureaucracy not in this sense "profitable": indeed, it is the opposite. Where the market subsumes difference in order to profit off it, in a bureaucracy difference is either ordered and thus made similar in kind, or excluded from its organizationally logical form precisely because it fundamentally can't be registered.

This is not to say that Conceptual art does not become eaten up by the market, of course it in many ways does. Much advertising still today looks like a 1960s conceptual joke, and museums too are increasingly space of commodity consumption, speculation and spectacle. Nonetheless, by not investigating the organizational logic of Broodthaers' work *as such*—by not looking at it, but rather by looking through it—Krauss does in part what a bureaucracy does too: she fits it into her neatly organized paradigm, without the contemplation of its fundamental difference. It is in this context that Mel Ramsden of the Art & Language Group wrote in 1975, "It seems to me that art criticism provides us with a paradigm case of what the art-world bureaucracy really is […] a celebration of the world as diverse but neutral spectacle […] Contrary to seeking some sort of uncovering of ideology the critic veils it."[47]

Under Krauss' market-based "eagle principle" paradigm, the eagles are emptied out entirely. Under a Weberian bureaucratic principle of levelling, Broodthaers' exhibition reduces the status-based honor of the objects just enough that they can be registered together, and be seen as similar in kind. The relationship to the arbitrary here returns: bureaucracy's levelling is interested in dispelling arbitrariness through formal registration that expresses a legitimate

[47] Mel Ramsden, "On practice," *The Fox,* 1, 70. Alexander Alberro has suggested that the first use of the term "institutional critique" was indeed in *The Fox*.

structure, where the uncovering of arbitrariness in the emptied-out eagle object, for Krauss, is necessary to argue how the market will swoop in, and subsume their eagle forms.

But part of a bureaucratic aesthetics will be the way it develops a relationship to the arbitrary that is different from the emptiness Krauss describes. The arbitrary quality of bureaucracy, rather than being synonymous with a semiotic emptiness, is in fact incredibly substantive, material, formed and felt. If we return to the arbitrary bureaucrats interwoven into local principalities, with little to no difference from the functionaries of rule instated before, we might note that the position that they occupy is incredibly arbitrary—but they still occupy it. They are there, physically, doing arbitrary things. Thus too for the eagles. Their arbitrariness constitutes a very real reality, despite the museum's apparent fictiveness.

The substantive arbitrariness Broodthaers develops within the Musée's bureaucratic aesthetic leads me to a final point. Krauss writes that the eagle principle (which she has also called the equivalency principle) "levels objects to the measure of their exchange value."[48] While there is no justification that the levelling of their value needs to be connected to the market (as Krauss does), it is undeniable that there is a sense of exchangeability within the installation's levelled quality.

Bureaucracy itself, it turns out, is incredibly exchangeable. Bureaucracies regularly stay identical through party and even regime change, and serve governments of every ideological stripe. The malleable and arbitrary characteristic of 300+ eagles not just develops a view towards a principle of levelling that is is substantially arbitrary. Further, the eagles and their transferability across bureaucratic states are a marker of the malleability of legitimacy under bureaucracy. This takes us squarely back to Weber, and his statement that bureaucratic

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[48] Krauss, *A Voyage on Art in the Age of the North Sea*, 41.

domination means the leveling of *Stände-based* 'honor', in place of an equalized legitimacy, discussed above.

The arbitrary eagle with its exchangeable, durable and levelled form, is both a marker of the transformation of political power into bureaucratic legitimacy, at the same time that it serves as a repeated cover for this movement: a movement of legitimacy that is misrecognized as power, and strength. Broodthaers himself will mock this misrecognition in the catalogue written for the Kunsthalle show. It reads, "If we did not attribute to the eagle in the way we imagine it magic power, strong enough to propel a god or a spaceship, nobody would take any interest in it. The image we have of the bird itself is erroneous. Most naturalists describe it in words of pathos. Konrad Lorenz [a naturalist] is the exception. The eagle is stupid, he says basically, even a bicycle would frighten it."[49] We could imagine that in this one moment Broodthaers' hints at the move of not just of political symbols, but of persons too, who too move from just persons into state-administered and bureaucratically interfacing citizens, marking a fundamental, legitimate, bureaucratized shift.

The Banality of the Eagle

When in *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, Hannah Arendt writes "when I speak of the banality of evil, I do so at a strictly factual level,"[50] she refers to the bureaucratic. Bureaucracy sits at this factual level, especially that of documentary fact. While I take this up more fully in the next chapter, here I invoke Arendt's infamous statement to highlight just one more dimension of a bureaucratic aesthetics that Broodthaers develops, having to do primarily with judgement.

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[49] Marcel Broodthaers, *Collected Writings* (Barcelona: Poligrafa, 2012), 345.

[50] Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (New York: Viking Press, 2003), 278.

That each eagle-object is paired with the statement reading "This is not a work of art," has to be taken into account in any assessment of this work. As I hinted in the introduction, what these panels do is suspend judgement. "This is not a work of art" 300 times over becomes hard to parse anew each time—it is a labor to argue disagree with, even contemplate; it is exhausting. This will be a central characteristic of a bureaucratic logic, not just that it suspends judgement (even is anti-judgement, and is something meeker like a taking of account), but that any pseudo-judgement takes place in an utterly overwhelmed and exhausted—or at least quantifiably enormous—context. This exhaustion in relationship to judgement increases all the more as bureaucracy reproduces. It is hard, even impossible to care about person 351, 273, 975. It is easier to sign their death warrant.

It is critical that Broodthaers attempts to performatively suspend, even if just for a moment, and *even if it is doomed to fail*, our judgement of the objects gathered. In *Eichmann in Jerusalem,* Arendt states that, "when Hitler said that a day would come in Germany when it would be considered a 'disgrace' to be a jurist, he was speaking with utter consistency of his dream of a perfect bureaucracy."[51] To be without jurists, and without judgement, is a tyrannical, bureaucratic dream. This is part of the ultimate paradox of Broodthaers' work. On the one hand, if it were not a fiction, the drudgery of judgement 300 times over would become exhausting, impossible. On the other hand, because it *is,* we are asked to constantly parse each eagle form anew, even if it requires tremendous effort, and leaves the mind confused. As we become exhausted, we may develop bureaucratic sympathies. On the other hand, caught between the

[51] Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, 290. As well, Berlin-based journalist Charlotte Beradt's noted in her secret documentation of other citizen's dream lives during Hitler's rise to power that in half a dozen instances individuals dreamed that it was forbidden to dream. She would publish *The Third Reich of Dreams,* after the encouragement of Hannah Arendt, in 1968. For more, see museumofdreams.org, a project of Sharon Sliwinski.

expose of bureaucratic legitimacy and our position as bureaucratically-interfaced subjects, Broodthaers' exhibition allows us to experiment with placing our sympathies on both sides.

As a partial aside, I would like to suggest that it is by engaging a "principle of levelling" that bureaucracy, by expanding its scope, comes to conquer and convert the incomprehensible into a form that is absolutely in kind. As a scientific term used for topography and surveying, the *principle of levelling* means to gain a horizontal sight line, by designation of each farthest points away from the measuring device's view point. This allows the terrain to be mapped [fig 9]. As a technique by which one can *survey* as far as can be levelled (as far as can be *surveyed*), it is a technique of no small significance metaphorically. Bureaucratic states *survey* ("*fill out this form please"*) and survey (look far, map) and *surveil* (keep watch), allowing the state to see—or at least as far as they can level. The eagle is perhaps in this sense the perfect image: it can see far. Yet when the powerful eagle is transmutated into the legitimate one, its sightlines become increasingly arbitrary—even redundant. When a state has mapped its scope, what form does this surveying take? As we will see in the following chapter, the form the bureaucratic principle of levelling takes as the state senses, and *surveys*, and surveys is that of the bureaucratic document.

2. State Census/senses

> "The compulsion for transparency flattens out the human being itself, making it a functional element within a system."
>
> ——*The Transparency Society,* Byung-Chal Han.

Documentary Practice

The practice of bureaucracy is especially documentary. The pop-culture trope of the beleaguered bureaucrat, usually pictured at a desk behind stacks of papers piled askance and a mile high, tells us two things about documents and bureaucracy: that documents are important to bureaucrats, and that they deal with a lot of them. This popular image probably derives, in large part, from the fact that most citizens will encounter bureaucrats in precisely the acts of filling, submitting, and renewing just such documents.

The proliferation of documents is one of the hallmarks of the post-sovereign state. In his 1615 book *Leviathan,* Thomas Hobbes writes that the "power of the Representative has there no other bounds, but such as are set out by the unwritten law of Nature"; yet at the same time, "in subordinate bodies" their businesses can "neither be remembered without letters, nor taken notice of unless Letters be Patent."[52] Of course such "letters" as regards bureaucratically logical means do more than just jog the mind. They increase officialdom, denote legitimacy and are held

[52] Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* [1615], trans. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010).

not by the power of kings (as in times past) but by the letter of the modern law, and in particular its material forms. In the move from a "letter of safe passage" to a passport, the legitimacy of the document is no longer underpinned by some official who by his signature sits behind it—it is underpinned rather by an anonymous sense of legitimacy, one that seems to resides in the very document itself.

An official letterhead or crest at the top of an envelope or page can inspire trepidation in a way that mere lines of text do not. This was quickly discovered in the American colonies in 1765, when specially stamped paper, to be used for everything from liquor licenses to newspapers, arrived at a price overseas from the crown. This costly tax was deemed too great for the new colonies and, in February of 1766, the offending parchments were paraded through the streets of Boston, declared guilty at a mock trial, and burned to death.[53]

This moment of jovial insubordination has as much to do with unwanted representativeness as with the material offence of the pages themselves. That these two are practically indistinguishable only highlights further an ambiguous relationship in bureaucratic documentation between representativeness expressed symbolically, and documents' actual relationship to power. In the case of the stamp trial, the Bostonians' response was taken to a very literal end through the formal and performative severing from the crown. In cases where documentation is not challenged, however, this ambiguous relationship to power is part of its particular power, not least of all because it remains anonymously concealed.

Documents are not just the dominant emblem of imperial bureaucracies past. Despite the digitization of file storage, paper documentary production in government bureaucracies is

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[53] This event played a major role in defining the 27 colonial grievances leading up to the American Revolution. See Lisa Gitelman, *Paper Knowledge: Toward a Media History of Documents* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014), 33.

steadily on the rise.[54] If, as Bruno Latour writes, "documents have received little attention because they are the main mechanism and dominant emblem of the formal dimension of bureaucracy," as a vanishing mediator and as the "most despised of ethnographic objects."[55] Yet, according to anthropologist and legal scholar Annelise Riles they remain "in large part because of their very ordinariness analytically invisible."[56] This invisibility is not just a quality of bureaucratic documents, but of mediators more generally: be it a book which we read, a page on which we write, or a photograph that we presume to look "through" and not at.

The aesthetic *form* of the bureaucratic form is discussed wonderfully in the work of Riles, who has done much research on bureaucratic documents. In her study of the United Nations, to take one example, she states how this supra-national bureaucracy measures success not by any conveyance of "transparent meaning," but rather by "the aesthetics of logic and language" within its documents themselves.[57] This suggests that bureaucratic documents, despite their practical intentions, harbor something impractical, even irrational, in their midst, designated not in terms of just practical ends but tied up too in the play of their own particular formal means as well.

Despite the fact that Riles concludes that bureaucratic documents are not especially transparent—that do not look just through, towards or at, but engage in their own interpretive game—they are still justified on transparent bases. Underwriting such claims of transparency is,

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[54] Matthew S. Hull, "Documents and Bureaucracy," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 41 (2012), 251-267.

[55] Bruno Latour, "Drawing Things Together," in *Representation in Scientific Practice.* Ed. M Lynch, S Woolgar, 19-68 (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press), 26. He writes, "the 'rationalization' granted to bureaucracy […] has been attributed by mistake to the 'mind' of (Prussian) bureaucrats. It is all in the files themselves."

[56] Annelise Riles, *Documents: Artifacts of Modern Knowledge* (Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 2006), 42.

[57] Annelise Riles, *Infinity Within the Brackets: The Aesthetics of Negotiation and Drafting of U.N. Intergovernmental Agreements* (Chicago, Ill.: American Bar Foundation, 1996), 386.

again, the vanishing quality mediators, but also the way this vanishing quality strategically functions; claiming that a process or form is transparent will, among other effects, entice viewers to ignore the structuring frame. This is a significant part of bureaucracy's logic—which would present neutrally its norms and forms—and one that conceals a set of documentary interests at the same time that it prevents us from engaging with the materiality of the forms themselves, as they shift in and out of view.

This practice of bureaucracy as one whose documentary means (as part of its material practice) are intertwined with transparent pretenses, runs partially adjacent to another practice whose material, substantial, mediating form is also typically usurped in a similar way—that of the photo-documentary. The convergence and constitutive difference between these two documentary practices is one a bureaucratic aesthetic will be particularly poised to exploit.

Documentary Conventions

In the opening pages to *On Photography*, Susan Sontag writes: "while a painting or a prose description can never be other than a narrowly selective *interpretation*, a photograph can be treated as a narrowly selective *transparency*." Lucky photographs, specially imbued for their part with a "presumption of veracity," Sontag warns, are "no generic exception to the usually shady commerce between art and truth." All photographers are haunted by "taste and conscience", a haunting that manifests in authorial selection, in staging, and in the "passivity and ubiquity of the photographic record".[58] Sontag develops the double meaning of what it means for a photographer to "capture" a view, or a subject—a double meaning that becomes all the less noticeable, and all the more violent, in the context of a genre like documentary where the photographer is more

[58]Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (New York: New York Review of Books, 1977), 4. Emphasis mine.

likely to claim their neutrality, and thus, their innocence.

John Tagg argues in *The Disciplinary Frame: Photographic Truth and the Capture of Meaning* that photography is a "local outcome" to the apparatuses, discursive fields and concomitant "regimes of sense" that the photographer and viewers are inscribed within. Yet despite this, documentary photography is somehow still often presumed to be a closed loop between the knowable, the pictured and the real. The well-known modernist photographer Edward Steichen in 1938 already critiqued photo-documentary's apparently definable self-containedness in the very decade of the genre's increasing self-consciousness, when he wrote that "the category marked 'documentary' usually contains the conclusion that the beginning of photography and the end of photography is documentation, and that's that."[59] The 'that's that' of documentary photography is one of its defining characteristics. It represents its status as fact. This factuality of documentary photography, further, is a characteristic shared by bureaucratic documents. Both presume neutrality and self-evidence, which in photographic language can be summarized as documentary photography's assumed transparency.

Transparency is a significant dimension of the "regime of sense" in which documentary photographs partake. Transparency has its own rhetoric and its own politics. It is a vehicle of a realist strategy that, "like all realist strategies,[…] seek[s] to construct an imaginary continuity and coherence between a subject of address and a signified read."[60] And while Tagg will claim this coherence to be primarily discursive and *not* phenomenological, many viewers of photo-documentary work, situated outside the auspices of photographic history and theory, still do apprehend these images as phenomenologically, physically, affectively transparent. This is

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[59] Edward Steichen, "The F.S.A. Photographers," U.S. Camera Annual 43 (1938).

[60] John Tagg, *The Disciplinary Frame: Photography and the Capture of Meaning (*Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010*),* 55.

proven to be true each time a photograph makes us feel for a moment like we are there in the frame.

We can approach this phenomenon through the metaphor of the window. Unless you are an architectural historian, a particular kind of aesthete, a professional glazier or a manufacturer of panes (or frames), windows are the kind of thing that are usually looked *through*, not at. This vanishing quality or characteristic that the window holds lends itself not just with metaphorical ease to the photographic document, but to bureaucratic documents too. Both have a "that's that" quality: they do not seem to state any more than there is to see.

In the case of the photographic document, the scene or subject pictured is taken to be self-evident: it is there and so in a sense are we. In the case of the bureaucratic document, the subject "captured" tends to be oneself—since we usually encounter bureaucracy as a personal interpellation (forms we ourselves are filling out)—unless of course we occupy a bureaucratized position ourselves yet a similar self-evident quality is still persistent here too. I may have a sense that I am 'more than' my information as I complete my passport application form, just as we intuit that photographic subjects pictured in documentary context have an existence beyond their photograph too. And yet, there is a certain value-neutrality to both processes, where nothing is framed out at least choice, it seems (and by extension, nothing framed in, either). The frame is in this sense a coincidence—the content is already squarely within it.

The use of photographs as transparent documents underpinned by the metaphor of the window as a non-coercive opening onto the world was not always the case. The Civil War-era photographer Alexander Gardner's *Home of a Rebel Sharpshooter* (1863) [fig 10], for example, was known at the time to be narratively manufactured (i.e. staged), and yet this was not at the time necessarily equated with falsification per se. The image was widely taken to be a true

representation of the American Civil War, despite the fact that Gardner moved and re-positioned the dead body and the rifle within the photographic frame.

Photography nonetheless became over time equated with objective documentation. This is in part because of the kind of technical mastery required with its early apparatuses, where it required both expertise, and offered itself up to a range of scientific applications, becoming privy to a developing "documentary authority." This authority, which lent a greater "epistemic weight" to its pictures than was apparently present with paintings or drawings, supplied, Tagg writes, "ready instrumentation to a number of reformed or emerging medical, legal and municipal apparatuses in which photographs function as a means of record and a source of evidence."[61] In this developing context, the photograph took on new state roles: as evidence in trials, for the collection of criminal, and mentally ill suspects and in the burgeoning field of racial science to take just a few examples.

Paradoxically, the apparent evidentiary application of photography supplied ready use to a variety of state interests, while at the same time being readily ideologically and practically available photographers no matter their political positioning—August Sander's use of photography to develop German "typographies" visible in comportment, appearance and dress, for example—since the transparent assumptions underlying the medium put an end to both "disputability" and "partisan *sense.*" [62] Thus, while a photographer may have political interests at stake, the photograph itself, understood through the metaphor of transparency, cannot. Tagg again writes that "the transparency of the photograph is its strongest rhetorical device."[63] A documentary photographer might understand their work as being driven by a need to make the

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[61] John Tagg, *The Burden of Representation* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2007), 60.
[62] Tagg, *The Disciplinary Frame,* 56.
[63] Tagg, *The Burden of Representation,* 35.

world visible, but rarely does a photo-documentary work make explicit the photographer's role in selectively organizing images. Hence transparency itself paradoxically becomes concealed, becomes an end and not a means, a special marker of truth in a process of technological and photographic progress.

Photographs do not transparently record the truth, nor are they true windows on the world. We could choose any one of a thousand arguments to dispute the "transparency thesis", as it has sometimes been called, where the photographic frame dissolves and in its place stands the viewer with a clear and open window onto the world. Despite what a photography student or a historian might tell us about photographs and their deceitful, sensual appeal, documentary photographs continue to circulate based on largely transparent assumptions of what Pierre Bourdieu terms "naïve realism." This is, in many ways, a cover for convention; photography is a *conventional system*, which is another way of saying a system of norms.[64] It also makes sense that photography is now deeply embedded in so many normative spheres, not least of all the spheres of new media, mass-culture's orgiastic and obsessive source of "factual", transparent truth.

Transparency is thus a productive place to begin to unpack the practical dimension of a bureaucratic logic that invests in the documentary. Bureaucracies rely on documents, and photography does too, yet both elide the material and substantive role of their respective forms while utilizing the window as transparent metaphor. In this chapter, I will explore the overlapping yet critical differences between the fields of bureaucratic and photographic documentary use through Jan Banning's photo-documentary project *Bureaucratics*. Bureaucracy, while it will desire to steal the rhetorically useful metaphor of the window from other forms of

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[64] Pierre Bourdieu, *Photography: A Middle-Brow Art* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), 73.

representation, will in fact open the shutters onto something far more opaque. It will be acutely necessary to parse the difference between transparency's appeal to the senses and the way the state senses, in order to develop this dimension of a bureaucratic aesthetics.

Bureaucratics

Jan Banning's photo-documentary project *Bureaucratics* (2008-2016) pictures more than fifty bureaucrats, all displayed pictorially in the same way: stone-faced and behind their *bureau* at, or near, the center of the (perfectly square) frame. In the official version of the project, the bureaucrats come from eight countries: India, Bolivia, China, France, Liberia, Siberia, the USA (Texas) and Yemen.[65] Despite these divergent geographies, the offices represented display remarkably similar contents: filing cabinets and shelves, desk phones, framed pictures, a photograph of the respective president or leader, calendars, waste baskets, calculators, water bottles or coolers, sometimes computers, sometimes flags, maps, a surprising array of indoor plants, one or a set of chairs waiting to be filled, and of course many, many piles of documents.

Looking specifically at [fig 11], we see a selection of bureaucrats from the project, in their place of work. Looking at the image in the bottom row, second from the right, we see a bureaucrat from the Siberian province of Tomsk. He stares out at the viewer—a trait held in common by all bureaucrats across the project—seated at a chair facing awkwardly towards a wall, more in the style of a home desk than an official place of state business. Some kind of a storage locker sits behind him, with keys in the two door's locks, one of which is slightly ajar. He is part of the police bureaucracy, the caption tells us, and is the lone officer for some 21,000

[65] From publications other than the definitive we see Banning excluded bureaucrats from Mozambique in the final book and in the prints acquired by the Rijksmuseum. My feeling is that this is perhaps because they do not look bureaucratic enough. These bureaucrats can't be exactly numbered, since a different number appear in different contexts.

inhabitants. This might explain the unlatched door: there may not be enough people around for security to be a pressing need. Two chairs sit in the foreground, close to the part of the frame the viewer occupies. They sit at unimportant angles, and feel ad hoc, like they are seldom sat in if they have ever been at all. The bureaucrat wears a uniform, and has clean, black, unworn looking leather boots.

The caption tells us this bureaucrat has no phone, and moves around on foot. It is interesting that these last two points are included, since they are not technically related to bureaucracy (here I mean the word in both senses: they are not related both officially/strictly; and not in *techne* or technique). Yet their inclusion tells us something that we already know, namely, he is a deviant from the bureaucratic norm, since Weber did write after all that one of a modern bureaucracy's most critical components is the separation of private, from public life.[66] This is not to say this Siberian bureaucrat is necessarily doing anything wrong, nor corrupt per se. Yet Banning's notation of the large territory he occupies, paired these somewhat typically unprofessional idiosyncrasies harbors a sense of suspicion, even cynicism, of the photographer towards his subject.

The project seems to present itself transparently. Banning pictures for the viewer a window into office spaces of bureaucrats around the world. Almost all of these bureaucrats are pictured inside their offices, just one hold "office" outside. The bureaucrats seem for the most part self-assured and comfortable. They are in different and various states of dress, some with head coverings, some very casual. Some are women, but most are men. Most of them are stoic. However, none of the images are substantially different from each other. They all present the same categorical form—office—with the same standardized accoutrements—bureau, bureaucrat,

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[66] Weber, "Bureaucracy," in *Weber's Rationalism and Modern Society*, 77-78.

documents.

This window metaphor which provides the metaphor a transparent regularity is partially symbolized the photographic frame across the project. Each frame is perfectly square, with the bureaucrat at or very near center, usually face-on and occasionally form the side. The compositions in fact are filled with squares; on this point Banning has said in an interview both that he wanted to use the square as, "the least dynamic composition format you can use" and also, "I wanted to get as many squares and rectangles in the picture, and in the middle of the straight lines is an individual who has to interpret the regulations."[67] While on the one hand the presence of squares ensure that both the bureaucrats themselves, and our view of them, is entirely regularized, Banning is clearly also trying to align metaphorically the practicality of the composition with bureaucracy's on inhibitive logic itself.

This logic of transparency in the photographic sense is further emphasized by the un-staged quality of the offices, where it seems that we are getting a glimpse into something as it usually stands, an un-staged snapshot of a moment in time. Banning and his co-collaborator in the project, Will Tinnemans, admit they designed this element of surprise into the project, arriving to the offices unannounced, as far as was possible. In the introduction to the published version of the project Tinnemans write how they caught each bureaucrat off guard by "ambushing the person in question to the point of paralysis—well before the official had an opportunity to put his perforator and ruler in a drawer, organize of move piles of paper and produce portraits of his child and dogs."[68]

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[67] Rosenberg, David. "Behold the Coolest-Looking Bureaucratic You'll Ever See," *Slate Magazine.* April 16, 2013. https://slate.com/culture/2013/04/jan-banning-bureaucratics-looks-at-international-civil-servants-at-their-desks-photos.html.

[68] Jan Banning and Will Tinnemans. *Bureaucratics* (Paso Robles: Nazraeli Press, 2008), 4.

The Gandhi photograph belonging to one Indian bureaucrat, for example, sits askance on the walls, which are crumbling. His glasses sit casually on the table, as hands are busy engaged with his work. He seems to be mid-page. Aged documents hang off a bureau to the corner of the frame, top left. The room seems unventilated, which the sight of the somewhat rusted fan at the back of the room even serves to enhance. Another male bureaucrat, this time from Bolivia, sits surrounded by pornographic calendars. He might have taken these down, had the photographer been announced—or alternatively, if a head supervisor was coming in to call. [fig 12, fig 13].

This seeming transparency of these photographs is enhanced by the relatively closed nature of *bureaus* generally. The spaces pictured are not the public-facing kind that citizens generally have to at some point transverse. Rather, they are places that very few non-bureaucratic eyes get to see. In this sense, then, Banning literally provides a window into a space not usually entered: a seemingly clear look into the unknown but imagined space of the bureaucrat tucked behind the public-facing facade. This sense of concealment made visible intensifies in a bureaucratic context, since bureaucracies are not only often closed, but also harbor an extra sense of secrecy due especially with their anonymity. Thus, while all photojournalism, and documentary photography generally, does away with this sense of secrecy to some degree, in Banning's case this is only heightened. This transparent erasure of secrecy is further quickly naturalized; in each shot there is a sense that each image seems "obvious" once seen. This is a quality not just of documentary photography as a genre, put of the photographic as document, too, how the document-object as an end in itself is only looked through as the invisible, supportive means.

Banning has said that he sought to center the bureaucrats in the frame from the

perspective of the door or entry into the space.[69] This introduced one more frame into the mix—the door frame—as the normative spatial organizer for the photographer (or the citizen who visits) as they enter the picture as they walk into each bureaucratic space. By positioning the frames in this way, Banning likens his position to the position of the viewer/citizen who would presumably enter the frame. In a clever pictorial slide, we the viewer are subjected to *that* bureau's particular sway, and while these might not be spaces we normally transverse, the implication is that we could—even, for a moment we do, in the spectatorial imagination, through the photographic frame.

In these ways Banning embeds himself in the conventional system of photographic transparency's "naïve realism", most notably by picturing each bureaucrat as they would appear any day, un-staged, with the standard accoutrements and from a position of assumed neutrality through the regularization of the photographic frame. This dissolution of the frame relies on both regularization and a believable subject-position, where the viewer occupies the position that the photographer takes up. Yet that the viewer takes up this position may remain unbeknownst to them. Banning's position as a documentarian photographer is one that Abigail Solomon-Godeau has called of "scopic command", where the central perspectival point in the field is one of "pictorial mastery." As such, Banning partakes in a world no longer of an "open and unbounded horizon," but rather one that is quite literally "captured."[70] This is part of documentary

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[69] "From the height of the client", as phrases it. Jan Banning "Bureaucratics" *Jan Banning* October 17, 2019, https://www.janbanning.com/gallery/bureaucratics/.

[70] Abigail Solomon-Godeau, *Photography at the dock: essays on photographic history, institutions, and practices* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), 180-181. She writes, "limited by the framing, lined up, put at a proper distance, the world offers itself as an object endowed with meaning, an intentional object, implied by and implying the action of the 'subject' who sights it. Such analyses of the apparatus bring us a good deal closer to understanding why the use of the camera has historically engendered a vocabulary of mastery,

photography's hidden sympathetic power: how the subject is led to believe, by the force of being aligned with the photographer's own scopic gaze, with a logic of capture.

Documentary photography's logic of transparency, entombing qualities of regularity, un-mediation and capture, is of merit to investigate in and of itself further here. However, it should be noted that in a bureaucratic context, transparency will mean something somewhat different that it does in a strictly documentary-photographic one. Transparency it turns out has a long history in the rhetorical and justificatory history of bureaucracy, one that can be especially explained through bureaucracy's own desire to take account.

Transparent Bureaucrats

When a state claims to be transparent, it is really saying is that it will provide a certain degree of formal openness as regards its inner workings. It is saying it will produce documentation as regards its inner workings—it will open the books; both can happen at the same time—indeed, that the line between them may be fuzzy is part of the obfuscating power of bureaucratic reproduction. Ben Kafka in *The Demon of Writing: The Powers and Failures of Paperwork,* records how a "new ethos of paperwork," separate from state sovereignty yet protected by it, is embodied in Article 15 of the French Revolutionary Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen, which states: "Society has the right to ask all public agents to give an accounting of their administration." The language here is telling. Accountability from this point is an inalienable and individual right, one that became (in Kafka's view) "the foundation of representative government" which would henceforth be required to open the books, and keep them open.[71]

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possession, appropriation and aggression; to shoot a picture, to take a picture, to aim the camera, and so forth."

[71] Kafka, *Demon of Writing*, 38.

Kafka exhaustively recounts the debate that took place surrounding this article. The versions presented to the constitutional committee included, “All agents [sic] are responsible for their administration, and the nation has the right to require an accounting.” But the rhetorical choice to supplant accountability and responsibility was made, and with major ramifications—it was a choice, says Kafka, “for paper work, since the former term unlike the latter carried with it the connotation of records, accounts, registers and receipts.”[72]

On the imperialist character Arendt writes, “bureaucracy was the result of a responsibility that no man can bear for his fellow-man and no people for another people.”[73] The ethical dimensions entombed in the etymology are here are telling, where to account means simply to calculate or count up, a paltry substitution for the inter-connection of responsibility, which is rooted in the interest or ability of parties to respond. States are not responsible—they are accountable—or at least they trying to abide by the appearance of being accountable.

This aim to appear accountably frequently manifests in the claim that government are seeking to be transparent. This works vice versa, too: when states claim they are interested in being transparent, what they are in fact really saying is that they will be accountable which, again, means only either producing or providing documentation. This relationship is evident in the way the language is collapsed by governmental officials, and there are many examples to support this. Author Marilyn Strathern, in *The Tyranny of Transparency*, describes her text as a “short excursus into the social world of accountability.”[74] The Government of Canada website, in a section titled *Transparency*, includes a commitment to “hold Parliament, the government and public sector officials accountable”, and the whole section essentially deals with how to make

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[72] Kafka, *Demon of Writing*, 44.

[73] Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 271.

[74] Marilyn Strathern. "The Tyranny of Transparency". *British Educational Research Journal.* 2000, 26: 3 309-321.

documents more available.[75] The American Legislative Exchange Council has a *Transparency and Government Accountability Act,* and the Statistics Canada and the U.S. Census Bureau websites have pages similarly stating their dedication to accountability and transparency.

That these words appear together on these two (and probably many other) census websites is telling, since the census is the perfect meeting place of these claims. The census was notably used at first in Imperial colonies like India and Canada, until slowly European states began to realize the importance of the census as a tool (the modern form was in fact invented in Canada, by Jean Talon).[76] Underpinned by its Latin root *censere*, or to assess—and haunted by its spectral counter-part in the *sensus*—the modern Census stands as a model for the way the state *senses*, through a certain set of accountable (and countable) means.

If bureaucratic transparency basically means providing an accounting of documents, it should be noted that such documents are frequently confusing, long, of a vast quantity of very limited information, and incredibly opaque to the outside (and often to the bureaucrats, too). In this sense, at least, to speak of transparency is an oxymoron—yet these same documents present one of the largest and most important means by which the state senses. As I suggested in the previous chapter, as regards legitimate reproductions and the banality of the eagle, the oxymoronic quality of bureaucratic transparency suggests something irrational at work in the supposedly rational mix.

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[75] The Canadian Government uses these two together with special frequency. As A. A. Bronson write in "The Humiliation of the Bureaucrat," bureaucratic tendencies are a "national attribute" of Canadians. This has especially to do with the colonial roots of modern bureaucracies, and especially those proffered by the English. Incidentally, the basic census model that is now used worldwide was also developed in Canada in order to assure good accounting for her majesty oversees. A. A. Bronson, "The Humiliation of the Bureaucrat," in *Museums by Artists* (Toronto: Art Metropole, 1983), 29-37.

[76] For a history, see Thomas Chapais, *The Great Intendant: A Chronicle of Jean Talon in Canada, 1665-1672* (Toronto: Glasgow, Brook & Co., 2018).

Transparency is not solely a justificatory claim invoked by the bureaucratic state, however, but is a significant interest for society at large. It is this argument that Byung-Chul Han makes in *The Transparency Society,* when he states that, "no buzzword dominates contemporary public discourse so much as transparency."[77] Han is talking about transparency more broadly than I am using it here. He frames it as a total effect of information, tied into the freedom of knowledge with which popular discourse is orgiastically privy. Nonetheless, many of Han's conclusions are still relevant to my discussion here.

Transparency, Han states, "eliminates Otherness."[78] This is true both with documentary photography and bureaucratic documentation, if by somewhat different means. Photography literally pictures the Other, "capturing" the previously unseen and thus rendering them similar in kind (not unlike Broodthaers' eagles). Bureaucracy, on the other hand, in its own formal aspect, eradicates Otherness by simply not registering its categorically different dimensions since there is no room for difference in its radical economy of means. Bureaucratic form reduces every object of its registration to its most categorical, arbitrary dimensions, onto small spaces marked by dotted lines. This leaves room for only what Han will call an "inferno of the same."[79]

Han also writes that transparent language is a "language that harbors no ambivalence," a description that might equally apply to the observations already made about bureaucratic documents and the photographic documentary, both haunted by the naïve realism of the medium's transparency claims.[80] Transparent language, according to Han, is both devoid of event and is emptied of desire. To this I would add, transparent language is a language does not

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[77] Byung-Chul Han, *The Transparency Society* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2015), 1.

[78] Han, *The Transparency Society,* viii.

[79] Han, *The Transparency Society,* 2.

[80] Han, *The Transparency Society,* 2.

permit responsibility, since who needs responsibility when you have a perfectly clear account? Jan Banning's project functions through the logic of taking account, in a way that is conciliatory with bureaucracy's own sensual frame. If bureaucratic transparency is based primarily on the process of taking account—where photographic transparency is based primarily on the frame as window—it will serve us now to consider just how, what, Banning's project is accounting for.

Bureau-*cratics*

Let us look at the captions accompanying each bureaucrat in Banning's project. In each caption there is a name, a geographical location, a position within the given bureaucracy, a relative rank in the bureaucratic hierarchy, and sometimes a note on the number of people whom the pictured bureaucrat oversees. The image-caption for one bureaucrat from India [fig 14], for example, reads,

> Susha Prasad (b. 1962) is an assistant clerk at the Cabinet Secretary of the State of Bihar (population 83 million) in The Old Secretariat in the state capital, Patna. She was hired on compassionate grounds because of the death of her husband, who until 1997 worked in the same department. Monthly salary: 5,000 rupees ($ 110, euro 100).

These captions are in the first place formulaic. They are almost identical in the kind of information that they present across the project. They deal especially with numbers, quantities, and things positively verifiable. They read much like the filling-in of a bureaucratic form.

Lisa Gitelman writes in *Paper Knowledge* that, much like the widely-despised Terms and Conditions which prod us with a similar sense of anathema, bureaucratic documents are made up

primarily of blank spaces. With firm denotations of the kind of information to be recorded within them, they are meant to be "printed and used", and not authored or read. Such user-ship suggests an evaluative economy that among other things radically foreshortens subject-hood, while it also robs us of the imagination that readership entails. Blanks don't just "make bureaucracy," therefore, they also, in "incremental expressions […] [make] the modern, bureaucratic self."[81]

Fittingly, then, Banning represents his bureaucrats *bureaucratically,* as bureaucratic selves. Presenting them in a radically simplified economy of formal means (again, square frame, near centre, enclosed by boxes and lines), and with a series of captions that don't reveal much besides the most basic facts, Banning accounts not unlike a census does for each bureaucrats presence. Further, Banning accounts for each bureaucrats presence (documents them, period), at the same time that he accounts *them* themselves (documents their pay, tenure, etc.).[82]

A census was intended to track productivity and resources, in a way Banning's project does too. Any irregularity of the offices, any askance portrait, nudie calendar or rotting pile of documents are pictured as reflections onto the subjects as types themselves, and as, further, a cipher for their country. Just like in a census, each bureaucrat is not a self but an evaluative and evaluated unit, one whose productivity and level of corruption (political, as well as social, racial, etc.) mush be charted, noted, tabulated and tracked. This is another way Banning duplicates a bureaucratic logic of accounting, tied to a particular bureaucratic census/sensus.

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[81] Gitelman, *Paper Knowledge*, 33.

[82] Notably, bureaucrats can both be themselves (presumably) held accountable (by means of their apparent, inherent contract with the public), at the same time that their own tasks involve accounting, and counting. Tallying persons, numbering files and counting cases are all major parts of the bureaucrat's everyday, and tasks are also part of the *bureaucratic* everyday, or the everyday of the average person who finds their lives more and more consumed by bureaucratic tasks. Not all counting is bureaucratic: keeping a budget or encouraging roommates to wash dishes, for example, do not necessarily express bureaucratic interests—but producing an Excel sheet, or a fridge chart, might.

As a tool of accountability, the census in addition to being a "choice for paper work," is based in fact that bureaucracy conceived itself as a science of what Max Weber called the "applied" type. This applied science, based on the burgeoning fields of probability and statistics, is described by Ian Hacking when he writes with the increasing epistemic power of statistics and probability in the development of public policy, a history tied very closely with (often, it is the same) that of bureaucracy, how people became regarded as not "vital organic unities" but "social atoms subject to social laws."[83] As statistics became one the primary charges of bureaucratic governments, the discipline of statistics moved from being what Goethe called in 1786 a "species of political inquiry" or what the English called "political arithmetic," to, sure enough, a "pure science" of the citizen that it is conceived as today.[84]

Banning's *Bureaucratics* tries to position itself as a science of the applied type while it reads its sitters as social atoms. This is signified in the title: -*'atics* from the Greek meaning "the science of" is a suffix most frequently seen appended to words like math (mathematics), information (informatics) and the like. Operating as scientist as *censor* (a person who conducts a census), conducting political arithmetic, Banning himself fills a bureaucratic position: he becomes a bureaucrat conducting a census of all other bureaucrats, and he seeks out degrees of adherence to and deviance from the bureaucratic norm.

In this process the photographs, despite all of their idiosyncrasies, function much more like early criminology photographs or the typological *Face of Our Time* project of August Sander. Like Sander, the idiosyncrasy of the sitter is not a mark of a unique individual but rather a cipher for type. Like Sander, the setting and comportment both play a part in this. This mode of keeping track like that of a bureaucrat in a mode of photographic *sensus* reproduces state

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[83] Ian Hacking, *The Taming of Chance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 15.
[84] Ian Hacking, *The Taming of Chance*, 31.

census—excepting that Banning's scope is not national, but supra-national.

It is in this process that a contradiction is exposed. The formal ordering and regularity of the frame, paired with the persistence of the attributes of desk and documents, signify each sitters role as bureaucrat. The frame closes in like a bureaucratic document on a single person. Like a bureaucratic form, only a radically reduced number of boxes need to be "checked" in order for the bureaucrat to be proved as such. Yet despite all this the idiosyncrasies of the sitters, the architectural spaces, and to some degree the attributes within resist the order of bureaucratic accountability. They provide to us far more information than is needed in and by the bureaucratic frame.

The presence of kitsch, the presence of eyeglasses or flowers on a table, or a pile of potatoes left in the corner as a thank you all seem to belie the humanness of a world that cannot be bureaucratically registered. By producing a series of bureaucrats, again, represented as similar *in kind,* Banning develops their personages through the logic of bureaucratic transparency, or accountability, in the mode of a state census. Yet at the same time the seemingly transparent photograph does reveal partial and obscure clues about the sitter's actually existing world. In the play between the categorical, arbitrary dimensions of forced bureaucratic form—and the resistant strands of the un-bureaucratized everyday—each new image sets up a formal paradox that pushes back at the photographers bureaucratic sensus/census.

Han writes that autonomy, "presumes one person's freedom not to understand another," and cites Richard Sennett who writes that, "rather than an equality of understanding, a transparent equality, *autonomy means accepting in the other what you do not understand*, an opaque equality."[85] Banning's photographs do not presume autonomy for his subjects, despite

[85] Han, *The Transparency Society*, 4.

that he is a self-stated autonomist photographer. Not only does he describe his own project as a typological approach he further attempts to display his subjects in a mode of bureaucratic transparency—that is to say, with transparent equality—by pairing them with captions that are meant to render the images *even more transparent*. To Banning they are all transparently, equally, bureaucrats. They are "types" of one bureaucratic norm, without the norm ever being up for question, and with everything else as accidental anecdote (we see this in his presence during his artist talks, where talks about the corrupt Chinese bureaucrats and the backwards Liberian bureaucrats, etc.). By refusing the opaque, Banning refuses the autonomous as he slides into the bureaucratic.

But he does not foreclose on it. Despite all his planning, the real world of each "bureaucrat" resists, even if at an askance angle, and in an opaque way. It was only in a happy moment recently where, looking more closely at this project and particularly the bureaucrats from Bolivia, I noticed that while Figure 12 has porn calendars openly displayed all around him another bureaucrat constable *Josué Galarza Mendez,* has exactly the same poster on the wall adjacent to him, with the slight difference that he had just enough time to cover it up with an anatomical poster before Banning shot [fig 16]. While I would not call this bureaucratic resistance, it is certainly a moment of the real encroaching on and pushing back at bureaucratic sensus/census, something that bureaucratic documentary form, as much as it may try, can never entirely squash out.

State Census/Sensus

In 2004, Jan Banning's photo series *Bureaucratics* won the first prize award in the World Press Photo Foundation "photo stories" category. The World Press Photo Foundation began as a

national prize competition of the Dutch photojournalists' union, the Nederlandse Vereniging van Fotojournalisten or NVF; in 1955 it declared itself international, in order for its photographers to expose their work to an international audience. It is now best known for its annual contest that presents a number of awards in different categories to do with world politics and photojournalism.

The phrasing of the NVF's original mandate is telling. The aim of the newly international phase was to incorporate an international audience for national-promotional means. This is not just a move of selfishness but rather an intensely bureaucratic one, setting up a hierarchically organized system of experts, as is the bureaucratic way. Earlier imperial bureaucracies such as the Dutch Empire had a very manipulative functional bureaucratic layer that worked through the giving out of awards, certificates and prizes. It is interesting that the World Press Photo, as a Dutch institution set up like a microcosm of this bureaucratic world, interestingly became "international" at the moment its colonial bureaucracy failed. Banning's success in this officially sanctioned category might then be marked as particularly—even too—comfortable, given his self-identification as Dutch in this context the child as he states of parents from the "Dutch East Indies."[86] Yet it more importantly proves just one more way Banning mimics bureaucracy itself; just as the NVF adjudication bureaucracy selects a series of winning photographers from among countless entries, so the photographer himself selected only a fraction of frames and only a fraction of bureaucrats from the global milieu. Banning's as bureaucracy's global documentation machine pretends neutrality—but very few are buying it. There is also here the suggestion that the next stage for bureaucracy is a global one, a move of course we know the institutional form to already be making.

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[86] In the documentary about his work, "A Touch of Cruelty," 2015. He might have said Indonesia, instead.

To sense through bureaucracy is to participate in bureaucracy's violent means. *Bureaucratics* is a project where the viewer becomes violently forced into a bureaucratized mode of sensus/census as they apprehend bureaucratic form through accountable documentary means. As our sensual apprehension is molded through works of art that uncritically re-present a model of state sensus—making us see like bureaucrats—the toll on the psyche is felt.

Pierre Bourdieu notes how there is always a violence embedded in apprehension, entombed in the terms of consent since subjects "can only use instruments […] that they have in common with the dominator"—instruments which, "incorporated into the form of the structure…make this relation appear as natural."[87] *Bureaucratics*, in presenting global bureaucrats in terms that appear natural, is productive of a violence that directs viewers to see more like bureaucrats. *Bureaucratics* has been notably widely reported as an "empathetic" project, which only further demonstrates how much the bureaucratic sensus/census is already detrimentally subjectively entombed—to view this project as empathetic is to be already empathic to a bureaucratic logic and its senses.

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[87] Pierre Bourdieu, *Pascalian Meditations* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000), 170. He follows this with language that is strikingly bureaucratic, "incorporated into the form of the structure…make this relation appear as natural; or, in other words, when the schemes they implement in order to perceive and evaluate themselves or to perceive and evaluated the dominators are the product of the incorporation of the (thus neutralized) classification of which their social being is product."

3. Only direct action can do

> "Direct communication with the authorities was not too difficult, for well-organized as they might be, those authorities had only to defend something remote, in the name of remote and indeed invisible gentlemen, whereas K. was fighting for something very close to him, for himself, and doing so, at least at first, of his own free will, for he was the one on the attack."
>
> -Franz Kafka, *The Castle*

> "Thus, there is no specific form of Direct Action. Some people, with a very superficial grasp of things, explain it away in terms of an orgy of window breaking. Making do with such a definition—which brings joy to the hearts of the glaziers—would be to take a really narrow view of this exercise… it would be to reduce Direct Action to a more or less impulsive act, and that would be to ignore what it is in it that constitutes its greatest value and to forget that it is the symbolic enactment of workers' revolt. Direct Action, is workers' might applied to creative purposes: it is the force that acts as midwife to a new law—enshrining social entitlement!"
>
> -Emile Pouget, *Direct Action*

Av. Madero

Francheska Alcantara stands in the center of Av. Madero while pedestrians flood by. She stands on two bare feet, on pavement that heats as the day reaches over 30 degrees. She has one arm out-stretched. She is holding a cone of ice cream. In a place that is bursting with bodies, she is entirely immobile, static and transfixed. Some pedestrians stop, and a few engage.

Alcantara has an assistant who summons passers-by and asks them to fill out small squat forms that she holds in her hand. *Comprobante de Gastos* they are called—receipt forms or

vouchers of expense [fig 17]. *What debt does your government owe to you*, she asks, *and to what dollar amount*? She passes out the *comprobantes,* forms most commonly used among merchants and by vendors or others who are not quite friends, and who might otherwise forge their contracts in words. People write "*Land Claims, South Africa, 80 billion plus"* [fig 18]. They write "*donde estan los desaparecidos"* (*where are the disappeared*)—write about the missing women and *femicidios*. They write about education. They write out numbers so giant that they do not mean anything, yet mean everything.[88] These are vouchers of expense, in short, and they are recording governmental debts.[89]

Once the vouchers are filled, the assistant asks the participants to roll them neatly into small paper tubes and to submit them, not to the local claims office, but onto the body of the performer herself. Anyone who would like to can do this, and as the performance continues over several hours the small paper tubes fill the artist's shirt sleeves, are tucked behind her ears, are forced into her mouth and even into her clothing bands. It feels violent—it is an experience of violence—and as the day carries on the sense of violence increases as more forms are added, and the ice cream melts in long sticky passages while the pavement cooks [fig 19].

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[88] In *The Uprising, On Poetry and Finance,* Franco Bifo Berardi states, "money and language have something in common: they are nothing and they move everything." 134.

[89] Alcantara is one of an increasing number of artists to understand the deep connection between bureaucracy, debt, violence and the symbolic. The Chilean artist Papas Fritas to take one example mounted a bureaucratic counter-attack in 2014 when over the course of 10 months Chilean artist activist Francisco Papas Fritas[89] snuck into the administrative vaults of the notorious, private for-profit Universidad del Mar to secretly remove tuition contracts. The contracts recorded the debt owed by students to the University, and added up to a grand total of $500 million dollars. After amassing this quantity under the pretense of doing research for an artist installation (which is arguably not untrue)—the artist released a video to the former students, stating, "It's over. You are all free of debt." He had burned the documents, which apparently did not have a record anywhere ese. The artist escaped to an un-named embassy un-apprehended, while the documents for their part, reduced to ash, toured the streets of Santiago in a van labelled *Universidad del Mar* in large plastic document folders—a mockery of their former state.

The Av. Madero is a pedestrian walkway that leads off the Plaza de la Consitution in Mexico City. Millions of people throng down the street regularly doing a combination of eating, spectating, gazing at colonial buildings, shopping at the *historic Librería Murduía* or one of the other many "historic" stores that dot the walkway, and move on to Old Navy or Zara when they're bored. If they are civil authorities, they may walk by in suits. If they are police, they patrol in dark uniform, often on motorcycles, with huge weapons as part of their daily work.[90] If they are locals they might work the food stalls, if they are less poor in the cafes, and if they are poorer yet they might be seated on the Av. Madero itself, selling their wares from the baking hot ground.

The Plaza de la Consitution from which the Av. leads off, and to which this performance is adjacent, sits like a gaping hole in the center of Mexico City. The Plaza that has been the center of Aztec, Spanish, and now Mexican state power. It is as many city centers a place of the performance of power: of presidential speeches and militant marches; of ancient culture neutralized, perverted and on display; of towering edifices casting long shadows across immense paved stretches, never quite to touch. Flanked by the Metropolitan Cathedral on one axis and the Presidential Palace, historic City Hall and bureaucratic buildings on the other, this Plaza that can hold more than 100,000 people is a cavern. It is a cavern that centers on 500 pounds of Mexican flag as large as an Olympic pool which is carried out of the National Palace each morning, and is in a performance of national sovereignty spectacularly raised, where it hangs for the duration of the day, and then is lowered and refolded each night.

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[90] In all of Mexico City it is shocking for me to witness the sheer number of police: that travel in bands and on motorbikes, or drive in packs on open jeeps loaded down with rifles, that direct museum lines, that crowd all tourist destinations and that throng through public squares with beady eyes.

Alcantara has stated that the performance she produced on the Av Madero in 2019 came to her in a dream. In this dream, she requested ice cream from a vendor, but was given only small tasting spoons instead. After insisting she get what she ordered, Alcantara was served ice cream on papers that she recognized as loose sheets from a receipt book—from a *comprobante de Gastos*—in a somewhat mixed metaphor sitting between state handouts, and receipts with debts still owed. About her work, Alcantara writes, "What are the *cuentas abiertas*/open accounts that those in power have with their people?"[91] The apparent metaphor, of so many utensils without nourishment, served as formally designated portions and held within a checkbook of receipts, is hard not to read as a bureaucratic one.

As Alcantara stands there, taking the *Comprobante de Gastos* onto her body like so much existential debt, she in some ways acts the body of the bureaucrat. Like a bureaucrat, she is a primary vehicle accepting claims and for recording form, placing her own body in the place of the body of the state. Like a bureaucrat also, she does not take notice of the notices; she actually never reads them, as they are submitted to her immobile flesh. Like the bureaucrat she is in a sense faceless with a face—apprehensible, sure, we can literally see her, and she is technically public-facing— and yet her body is just one more amongst the (anonymous, disinterested) crowd. For the duration of the performance she does not meet one person's gaze. She is distant. She does not seem to care. These are descriptions that can stand for the bureaucrat too: a distant, disinterested (ruler by and/of) nobody, restricted and foreshortened by the bureaucratic form.

Despite this resemblance, Alcantara's registrations of the participant's claims is very unlike that of a bureaucrat, since for her the registration is embodied and felt. Alcantara is not of nobody; literally she instantiates her living feeling body in the place of the no-body of the

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[91] Francheska Alcantara Studio. *"*Performance at El Zócalo." *Instagram,* June 17, 2019.

bureaucrat. She literally feels each form submitted onto her flesh. As each new claim bears upon her body, the sweat increases from the sun. As small rolled up forms are tucked by the participants behind her ears, slotted into her shirt sleeves, fill the waistband of her pants and are shoved into her unspeaking mouth, the invasive quality of bureaucracy as it encroaches onto the human body is exposed. As her body becomes overburdened with more and more forms, she remains not just unflinching, but entirely unresponsive. Again like a bureaucrat, she either does not care or chooses not to show it.

But Alcantara is not just here playing the part of bureaucratic proxy with a feeling body; she also holds the space of those who seeks its interface. Hers is a triple position: held between herself as proxy for the bureaucrat-as-nobody, her own body as an artist, and the bureaucratically-interfaced-bodies of the claimants. In a way hers is the paradox of the bureaucratic everyday, how we are all held between and asked to fill the rolls of bureaucrat, and bureaucratic subject, at the same time that we are also ourselves as well. This is a paradox that manifests first through the experience of violence, and secondly through wasted time, or the constant experience of having to wait.

A bureaucratic logic is enveloped in slow, bureaucratic, wasted time. As the brutal duration of her body in performance mirrors the duration of the subject who interfaces with bureaucracy's arduous logic, and waits, Alcantara sympathetically holds the space of the body at the bureaucratic threshold, literally weighed down by obtuse and cumbersome bureaucratic forms the claimants filled. As the time of Alcantara's performance increases, so to the violence of the *form* of the form (it's levelling, it's assumptions to transparency, it's simplicity to the point of idiocy and the fact that its ignored) increases too. As the forms both literally multiply, and become more substantially felt on the artist's body, the violence of the performance increases.

This too is the experience of one who seeks out bureaucracy—the experience of violence that multiplies as one continues to wait.

Land Claims, South Africa, 80 billion plus. In a way, this petition has everything and nothing to do with bureaucracy. And yet, it is *to* bureaucracy that such claims must submitted and processed, *through* bureaucracy that they are registered and filed away, and *by* bureaucracy that they are so often unanswered, and left to suffer, squander and flail. Where else would they go? Politicians may answer—but who will do the work? Written in earnest, and with weight, while a keen smiling assistant solicits participation, these forms remain for all their pain, and all their history, unregistered except in the bluntest of forms. They are one form among many other made-similar forms. For all their original affective density, the forced similitude of foreshortened bureaucratic form only represents in the crudest of ways. Since Alcantara does not read them anyways, the forms are two times over untranslated—the first because they come in many languages, the second because they remain unread.

This performance goes on until the ice cream entirely melts, at which time the artist turns, eyes still forward, and walks towards the center of the Plaza de la Consitution, up to the Mexican flag and stares at it. Her body burdened with other people's receipts, claims, pleas and debts owed, Alcantara stares at the flag. She is not quite calling anyone to task—she both says and in her face reveals nothing. Yet the opaqueness of the documents, not rendered transparent but rolled up, made secret bear upon her a silent question. They hold a silent presence. All the while she simply stands, borne down with the weight of the violence of the form of the form, unregistered and unaddressed but nonetheless directly felt.

In this performance, Alcantara is literally breaking the law; it is illegal for a foreign national to criticize the Mexican state on their soil. And yet the power of her performance that I

will be exploring here is not just held in this *literal* extra-legal position that she occupies, a position it should be noted that is itself so opaque to the authorities that they would likely never register it.[92] Further, and despite the triple role she holds between (the seemingly official) bureaucrat-claimant-(artist)self, it is my interest to pursue how the *way* she launches her critique—particularly its indeterminacy with respect to the law—is one that in its own aesthetic means functions extra-legally, too. In what follows I will look to pursue how a critical bureaucratic aesthetics must be one that functions in an aesthetically, as well as symbolically extra-legal way, since bureaucracy itself also works so heavily through and in the symbolic. Alcantara's performance will counter the symbolic violence of bureaucracy by taking up a mode of performance that borrows from the history of direct action, a history which has itself always been symbolically attuned. It is this which I will now explore.

Direct Action Against Bureaucracy

Direct action has always been against bureaucracy. The term, coined in 1897 by French anarcho-syndicalist Fernand Pelloutier, was used to describe an emergent practice that was conceived of politically but was differentiated itself from politics as usual—namely, from the kind of politics that took place in the parliament and in the bureaucracy.[93] While it was applied to wildcat strikes, general strikes and acts of sabotage especially, the fundamental defining

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92 And here literally didn't: no one stopped the performance despite the police presence in the area.

93 This first mention appears in Pelloutier's own journal, "Bulletin" *L'Ouvrier des deus mondes* (Paris, Feb 1, 1897), 14. Pelloutier as a trade unionist and anarcho-syndicalist belongs very much to a European working class history. It could be argued (and has) that direct action tactics extend back across time, and through a global context. I however moving forward be using the term in relationship to its explicit self-consciousness coming-into being through naming, where to be "direct" means to be against bureaucracy, and corresponds with the coming-into being of the history of modern bureaucracy.

characteristic of direct action was its contrast to what IWW organizer William Trautmann would call the "indirect action" of those institutions acting within the spheres of conventional politics. Direct action, in this early moment, also distinguished itself from vigilante violence—what Trautmann interestingly called "anti-social direct action"— despite recognizing that such *orgies of window breaking*, as per Emile Pouget's words above, are its basic associations to the public mind (and still are today).[94]

Unlike the simple wage strike with specific and satisfiable demands, however, direct action has been historically *un*specific as regards the status quo, making demands that are not immediately satisfiable. Historian Michelle Perrot, writing about what she called the "emotional strikes" of 1890s, describes strikers, led largely by women and children, who "didn't give any reason for their interruption of the work."[95] Claire Fontaine expands on this notion in their text *The Human Strike,* stating that for Perrot, "what is at stake is a transformation of subjectivity"; in their concept of the *human* strike what needs to be transformed they write is the "neither merely political nor social"; rather, it is that which is "inseparable from the lives of people" and which, "cannot be measured in terms of numbers… but only in different ways of living and thinking."[96]

Ambiguity in relationship to power in the form of un-satisfiability thus exists at the heart of direct action. If in its most literal context to be direct means to simply go directly around (in this case, bureaucracy), it also means looking directly at one's own needs as regards one's own *direct* and circumstantial experience. And if bureaucracy is, as David Graeber contends basically

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[94] William Trautmann, Direct Action and Sabotage, 1912. In *Direct Action and Sabotage: Three Classic IWW Pamphlets from the 1910s* (Oakland: PM Press 2014) 34-38.

[95] Michelle Perrot, *Les ouvriers engreve*, France 1871-1890 (Paris, La Haye: Mouton, 1974), 99.

[96] Clair Fontaine, The Human Strike (Berlin: PML Books, 2013), 55-56.

"a form of anti-action"[97]—both because of its slow speed and because physically its organization exists in closed and hidden spaces—to take action means not just to be more direct in organizational strategy, but also to be more direct in space *as well as in time*. It is to be directly opposed to bureaucratic forms and means.[98]

This is a critical point about direct action; it is the experience of the action that becomes more direct, since it directly calls upon ones (uncodifiable, unsatisfiable by the state) needs while leading to forms of confrontation that are also direct. Trautmann notes that direct action developed in part by "observing the actual conditions and occurrences" of worker's experience where the experience of oppression itself was direct.[99] When bosses would shut down plants, forced factory lockouts, forced suspensions and fired workers without notice, this taught workers that they could directly shut down the same spaces too—symbolically and physically appropriating, directly, the prerogative of those in power. In this sense, it was a direct experience of oppression, frequently of violence, that revealed to workers a consciousness of through what *means* direct action could mount its practical rebuke.

How we understand direct action has been partially re-cast by and through the especially creative approaches that have been blossoming in our present time. Julia Ramirez Blanco, for example, has traced the aesthetic turn in extra-parliamentary social movements that have become increasingly evidently creative when she wrote that since the 1960s creativity has developed around the symbolic and visual character *of the actions themselves*, providing new ways to protest and to propose. She writes, "In a broad sense, we could speak of a certain 'aesthetic turn'

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97 Graeber, *Utopia of Rules*, 110.

98 This is of course a (possibly the) fundament of anarchist politics: to eschew teleology in favor of an paramount presentism: to always *prefigure* the desired future in the here and now. Bureaucracy and direct action are opposed through their opposite relations to time.

99 Trautmann, *Direct Action and Sabotage*, 33.

in the extra parliamentary politics of social movements after the 1960s, as a result of the huge explicit importance acquired by the creation of symbolism."[100] Blanco further develops what has been described from a nebulous array of sources coming out of the globalization protests of the 2000s as "creative direct action", as a positive frame for an extra-institutional praxis where taking to the streets and circumventing bureaucracy has amounted to a reinvention of direct action's internal processes.[101]

If direct action was initially developed on an anti-bureaucratic basis, how, if at all, does its newly visual and symbolic forms attenuate its inherent bureaucratic critique? It is strange and interesting in this context to note how Pouget infers direct action is productive of law (in a very bodily and reproductive manner), a seeming paradox in the extra-institutional mix. When Pouget does state however that the greatest value of direct action is it's "symbolic enactment", we might be tempted (wrongly) to perceive this as a paradox, since the symbolic realm does not immediately square with our common notion of what is "direct." While it seems there is a fundamental paradox here, it may be that direct action has not used the symbolic as a primary tactic before, but is now increasingly gaining a conscious of how to do so. Further, I believe the symbolic can also be direct. It is my interest here to prove how this is the case.

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[100] Julia Ramirez Blanco, *Artistic Utopias of Revolt* (UK: Palgrave MacMillan, 2019), 87.

[101] Yates McKee in his influential text *Strike Art* will claim that David Graeber came up with the concept in *The New Anarchists* article written for the New Left Review, yet he doesn't use the phrase as such in the text, despite describing creative approaches to the traditional tact. The phrase in fact may have been first used in relationship to the San Francisco Art and Revolution group, specifically the giant puppets they developed for the protests, which Graber wrote about in *On the Phenomenology of Giant Puppets*, while, again, not explicitly phrasing as such. The term enters radical and scholarly discourse from a variety of places around 2002, however, and so we can safely assume it was developed in the militant investigations of those on the streets, and brought into the literature after. Yates Mckee, *Strike Art: Contemporary Art and the Post-Occupy Condition* (New York, London; Verso, 2017), 16.

Francheska Alcantara's performance thus in engaging a critical bureaucratic aesthetics does not just engage in the anti-bureaucratic strategy of direct action, it also takes bureaucracy *in content* as it primary critical focus. As noted above, if it may be that direct action came into consciousness in part as a reciprocal context to the surrounding oppressive terrain, what is the implication of the performance's extra symbolic twist? Rather than posit that Alcantara's performance is more distant from bureaucracy because of its inherent symbolism, it is my interest to claim that *symbolic direct action,* as a form of a critical bureaucratic aesthetics is strategically positioned reciprocally to bureaucracy's similarly symbolic form of violence, a violence which in itself is felt as, perversely, direct.

Social Space and Symbolic Violence

Across his oeuvre Pierre Bourdieu develops an approach to what he calls *symbolic violence*. Indeed, symbolic violence is at the center of his sociology, despite that in popular use it may receive short shrift compared with concepts such as field and habitus, which nonetheless serve as major grounding points for symbolic violence's functioning. In *Social Space and Symbolic Power* he states that social space, "tends to function as symbolic space."[102] Yet for the sociologist the symbolic is a particular kind of space, one that is different—he states explicitly—from the symbolic spaces of semiotic traditions such as with Saussure where, "he [Saussure] separates the 'external' elements of linguistics from the 'internal' elements, and, by reserving the titles of linguistic for the latter, excludes from it all the investigations which establish a relationship between language and […] the political history of those who speak it." Language is rather, Bourdieu instructs, an "instrument of action and power", embedded in and run through

[102] Pierre Bourdieu, "Social Space and Symbolic Power," *Sociological Theory* 7, no. 1 (1989), 20.

with a "silent violence," despite language's apparently auditory measure. He concludes this section with characteristic brutality,

> "In any case, bracketing out the social, which allows language or another symbolic object to be treated like an end in itself, contributed considerably to the success of structuralist linguistics, for it endowed the 'pure' exercises that characterize a purely internal and formal analysis with the charm of a game devoid of consequences." [103]

Here Bourdieu points to language's violence, as well as its status as a means which are not pure, simple nor inconsequential, but are themselves tied to messiness of social practice.

It is in his book *Reproduction in Education, Society, Culture* where Bourdieu first lays out his theory of symbolic violence cohesively, here in relation to pedagogy. Symbolic violence is first and foremost the imposition of the arbitrary: it is, "to impose meanings and to *impose them as legitimate* by concealing the power relations which are the basis of its force."[104] This violence is existent, however, not just in the meaning. It is also there in the force of the imposing, a force itself that is arbitrary. Critically, the social relationships that underpin and enforce the imposition that are arbitrary as well. Drawing these together he writes, "the objective degree of arbitrariness… rises with the degree of arbitrariness […] of the culture imposed."[105] It should be

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[103] Pierre Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power*, ed. John B. Thompson (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2018), 34.

[104] Pierre Bourdieu, *Reproduction in Education, Society, Culture* (London: Sage Publications, 1990), 4.

[105] Bourdieu, *Reproduction in Education, Society, Culture*, 9.

noted that Bourdieu does not think everything is arbitrary. Rather, the arbitrary is based on misrecognition that takes place in "practical practice."[106]

This misrecognition leads to a final point to be made: that symbolic violence is redoubled once more in the concealment (again, a legitimation) of violence.[107] To return to the former chapter, a paradox of bureaucratic legitimation is that its violence is hid behind a false sense of transparency, or a sense that "it is what it is", a process that makes its legitimation processes even more complicated, and even harder to catch.

That symbolic violence exists on the basis of arbitrary misrecognitions—misrecognitions that are, further, concealed—is pertinent to a bureaucratic context, since arbitrariness is one of its defining characteristics in the critique launched against it. Part of my larger argument has been that it is the persistence of the invisibility of a bureaucratic logic is one of its most prevalent characteristics. That the concealment of legitimacy is the final gloss on bureaucracy's symbolic violence is in this sense critical. The concealment of violent force is an immense definition of what bureaucracies do *in practice*.

Bourdieu notes how concealment disguised as legitimacy regarding the state becomes all the more trenchant when "legitimation circuits becoming increasingly long and complex, [and so] the symbolic efficacy of the prevailing mode of domination tends to increase, and physical coercion and repression tend to give way to the milder dissimulated constraints of symbolic

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106 Kyle Maton invokes Bourdieu's *Pascalian Meditations* to demonstrate a case where Bourdieu supports the given structure itself—in this case the structure of logical reason—which is not in itself arbitrary in fact he says far from it, but is arbitrary in its relation to the scholastic field, i.e. in practice. Kyle Maton, "The sacred and the profane: The arbitrary legacy of Pierre Bourdieu," *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, 8, vol. 1, (2007).

107 Bourdieu, *Reproduction in Education, Society, Culture*, 15.

violence."[108] This is a fantastic definition of how a bureaucratic logic functions, in long legitimation circuits stretching out for miles, wrapped up their own arbitrary and violent conceits.

That legitimacy is central to the symbolic violence of the state is developed by Bourdieu when he responds directly to Max Weber, something he does with frequency. In *Practical Reason,* to take one example, he states, "it is in the realm of symbolic production that the grip of the state is felt most powerfully," and also that it is the state, "which successfully claims the monopoly over the legitimate use of physical *and symbolic violence* over a definite territory and over the totality of the corresponding population."[109] This is of course an attenuation of Weber's famous thesis that the state is the only kind of human social organization that lays claim to the monopoly of the legitimated use of physical force, with a new symbolic twist.[110]

Bourdieu provides us with a kernel of resistance. He notes how as "the cost of the social energy expended for legitimation increases," so does too "the threats of crisis."[111] This *legitimation antimony,* as he calls it, undermines the state's institutional and arbitrary means. That the production of legitimation is undermined as the social energy required to produce it, in practice, increases is a fascinating point. It contains within it the possibility that the larger the bureaucratic edifice grows, the easier it is to see the cracks, something symbolic direct action is poised to exploit.

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[108] Pierre Bourdieu, *The State Nobility: Elite Schools in the Field of Power* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), 386.

[109] Bourdieu, *Practical Reason* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), 38, 40.

[110] Weber says this in a few different ways across different texts. In "Politics and Vocation", at the beginning of a section titled Definition of the State he writes, "Today, contrary to the past, we are compelled to say that the state is the only human *Gemeinschaft* [roughly: society, based on history, association and honor] which lays claim to the monopoly on the legitimate use of physical force." "Politics as Vocation" in *Weber's Rationalism and Modern Society*, 126. Emphasis mine.

[111] Bourdieu, *The State Nobility*, 387.

It should be noted that symbolic violence for Bourdieu has very much to do with the body. Returning to *Language and Symbolic Power,* Bourdieu states that it is how the internal and external components of the social world are not autonomous from but *united* in and through language, and at the same time in and through the body, that defines language's symbolic power; "language" he states, "is a body technique."[112] Rather than, however, essentializing the body as a site of physical articulation, it is the body as a socially constituted habitat, one that exists in objective social space and is inflected by and discovered in and through the habitus that is his concern:

> This is precisely the notion of the function of habitus, which restores to the agent a generating, unifying, constructing, classifying power, while recalling that this capacity to construct social reality itself socially constructed, is not that of a transcendental subject but of a socialized body, inventing in its practice socially constructed organizing principles that are acquired in the course of a situated and dated social experience.[113]

These Bourdiesian meanderings are critical to how I would like to draw together direct action. Direct action against bureaucracy, as it was set up near the outset of this chapter as both direct in space and direct and time, can be articulated via Bourdieu through the *situated and dated* socially organized body. Performance, as a site of *corporeal* history, is too situated and dated. On the terrain of a bureaucratic aesthetic, Alcantara's performance will instate symbolic violence back into a realm of visibility via the use of language as a bodily technique, all while holding some

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[112] Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power*, 86.
[113] Bourdieu, *Pascalian Meditations*, 136-137.

things, namely the written language of the claimants, to be inoperable in their bureaucratic context—to be opaque.

How to do things with and without words

Through the execution of what J. L. Austin calls *performatives*, the body that speaks brings the world into action. The classic example is the preacher's declaration *I now pronounce you man and wife,* which has the force of law, or the biblical announcement *let there be light*.[114] In each case notably the speaker holds some position of authority. While the power of performance is in both examples world-making, it is so only in a very conventional sense. Austin only allows the performative power within the bounds of the law, through the body that is codified within the space of the state. Performance theorist Diana Taylor extends Austin's analysis by de-conventionalizing it, through the description of a series of events that took place, significantly, in the very Plaza where Alcantara's own performance occurred.

The colloquial name of the Plaza de la Consitution is El Zócalo, Zócalo coming from the Spanish *zócalo* meaning plinth or platform, coming from the Italian *zoccolo* meaning pedestal of an unfinished monument and the French *socle* meaning sculptural base. El Zócalo as city center is certainly a platform of many things, but El Zócalo as base in the sculptural sense admits a certain emptiness: it holds an un-certain center. A monumental pedestal waiting for its sculptural marker, "a marker at a particular place for a specific meaning/event" as Rosalind Krauss writes, remains an empty threshold. It is a threshold of its own negative condition, a threshold of "sitelessness, or homelessness, and absolute loss of place."[115]

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[114] J. L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words: Lectures Delivered at Harvard Univ. in 1955* (Massachusetts: Harvard Press, 1962), 68.

[115]Rosalind Krauss, "Sculpture in the Expanded Field," *October* 8 (1979), 35.

In 2006 Mexico exploded in popular *insurrección* in contestation of the disputed election of far Right leader Felipe Calderón. Diana Taylor explains this contestation event in all its fervor— where two million protestors flooded the Zócalo alone—as one that was electrified with the potential of performance. The protestors were indeed organized into a fifty-day sit-in by the performance artist Jesusa Rodríguez, during a time where they engaged in, among other activities, a fake inauguration of the favored to win in lieu of electoral fraud Andrés Manuel López Obrador (popularly called AMLO). And while Calderón stayed in the presidential seat for the next 6 years, it should be noted AMLO would be elected as the actual president in 2018 in exactly the same place as his fake inauguration, turning the place of *un*-official contestation into one of official performative consecration.

In *The Politics of Passion,* Taylor engages with J. L. Austin's performatives to describe this moment, where speech acts can performatively bring about the reality they announce. Such performatives belong, Taylor contends, to a cohesive reality necessarily defined by authority, who efficacy relies on conventional structures. While Austin's performative may thus "index the Electoral Commission's declaration of the [false] winner," it may index too the daily re-hanging of the flag that haunts the Zocalo centre, it does not apply to the dissenting power of those gathered in contestation during the sit-in. She proposes a model to counter, the *Animative*:

> Animatives are part movement as in animation, part identity, being, or soul as in *anima* or life. The term captures the fundamental movement that is life (breathe life into) or that animates embodied practice. Its affective dimensions include being lively, engaged, and

> ‘moved.’ "Animo" in Spanish, emphasizes another dimension of the Latin 'animatus': courage, resolve, and perseverance. Animatives, thus, are key to political life.”[116]

If performatives are grounded in the conventional power of law, animatives are grounded in the human animal; they lie in the capacity *to be animated*. Unlike performatives where the agreed-upon real is concretized by an agreeable audience and backed by the state, Animatives do not just exceed state formation but are messy, unsanctioned and are based on states of dissonance founded physical—not officious—conspiring. They hang between language and the social. And while the body is not frequently mentioned in text, it is present in the experience of the pre-performative political as in experience of being animated, an experience that takes “complex” “embodied” forms.

Direct action exists in this logic of the Animative. Positioned outside the conventional authorial structures that make up state bureaucratic logic, direct action draws on the energy of the extra-bureaucratic as a site of the body being and becoming animated—of moving and being moved. Alcantara, in the very space that inspired Taylor’s text, engages the logic of direct action through the animative. Hers is a law-breaking performance, not just since it is literally illegal in Mexico for a foreign national to critique the government on their soil. Further, and in the spirit of direct action proper, the artist in her animated state questions the legitimacy of conventional law via a logic that is neither merely political nor social via a life that is outside the law if for just one moment—a life in an extra-bureaucratic state.

It should be noted that bureaucracy, while related to and dependant on what Weber called a “legal-rational context,” is not entirely co-extensive with it—is in letter subject to the law and

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[116] Diana Taylor, “The Politics of Passion.” Keynote Address, Cities Bodies Action Encuentro Conference, Hemispheric Institute. (São Paolo, January 13, 2013).

law-abiding, but is not the law as such. Alcantara's performance, in soliciting vouchers that infer, or ask for, bureaucratic responsibility, highlight bureaucracy's inability to respond. This begins to get us towards the paradoxical space the Alcantara holds, as one who sits between direct action's animated quality, and one who waits for the bureaucratic state. Yet her paradox is not a new, or particularly unique one. Rather, it is the space that every citizen under bureaucratic state purview holds.

Bureaucracy before the law, or life at the foot of the castle

In *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life,* the philosopher Giorgio Agamben takes up the indeterminacy that surrounds the law in a way that is strikingly bureaucratic. He considers how power above the law, and subjugation beneath it (both on its "outside") are two kinds of exception to the laws rule. Setting these positions that he will go on to define as sovereign power and bare life into distinction while establishing how they are intertwined in in different bodies and to varying capacity, Agamben develops a view towards how in the contemporary world these states of exception must exist for the rule of law to hold. In Agamben, like in Austin, it is the language of the law that especially qualifies. Yet the critical difference for Agamben is how it is the *un*conventionality of the law that defines its structure, a structure visible especially in the unconventional position of sovereign power itself (the power to make the law, and to hold in exception).

Sovereignty is not defined as the select purview of kings, but rather is defined in a way that is much more akin to language. Both language and sovereignty invoke and involve exceptions, and both further come together in the letter of the law—the meeting point of

exception and exclusion held in place by their limit figures, or the figures of sovereign power and language themselves. He writes "'the rule lives off the exception alone' must therefore be taken to the letter. Law is made of nothing but what it manages to capture inside itself through the inclusive exclusion of the *exception:* it nourishes itself on this and is a dead letter without it."[117]

This Agamben writes perpetuates a crisis of distinguishability, where "what emerges in this limit figure is the radical crisis *of every possibility of clearly distinguishing between membership and inclusion*, between what is outside and what is inside, between exception and rule."[118] It is exactly this impossible paradox that Alcantara brutally expresses, held between the bureaucrat-as-nobody, her own body as an artist, and the bureaucratically-interfaced-bodies of the claimants themselves.

While Agamben does not discuss bureaucracy explicitly, he defines sovereign power through Franz Kafka, the great bureaucratic novelist, using *The Trial* and *The Castle* to define sovereign power. By so doing, he sets up the apprehension of sovereign power on a bureaucratically logical threshold, describing the law as a force that does not signify, a law "all the more pervasive for its total lack of content," through *The Castle's* protagonist K.[119]

K. is a land surveyor. In *The Castle,* K. for the entire expanse of the novel spends his time trying to gain entry to the castle or the heart of power proper, where the Count for whom he is supposed to surveying apparently dwells. K. never hears back from the count. Instead, for a duration of four hundred pages, K. is given the worst kind of bureaucratic runaround. Agamben

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117 Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), 27.

118 Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 25.

119 The full quote reads, "For life under a law that is in force without signifying resembles life in the state of exception in which the most innocent gesture or the smallest forgetfulness can have most extreme consequences And it is exactly this kind of life that Kafka describes, in which law is all the more pervasive for its total lack of content." Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 52.

writes, "in Kafka's village the empty potentiality of law is so much in force as to become indistinguishable from life." [120] K. slowly concedes to living life in the village at the foot of the castle, while he waits to hear back.

That total collapse of life and law as consequence of its indistinguishability, in the experience of waiting, is brought to a high tenor in the performance of Alcantara. Not only is her performance durational in a way that is only exacerbated and made more brutal by the elements, and thrown into relief by the millions of passers-by who curiously apprehending her stillness (like all of the village idiots who work to bar K. from the Castle, whilst promising his imminent entry, through the novel). Further, the forms she registers on form of her body express debts, complains and supplications that are *too* in a state of waiting. We cannot here speak of suspended animation; the human *anima*, until death, never truly stops. However, the forms do enclose a durational violence that wears away at the *anima*, the animated spirit, and at the capacity to be animated. This is part of the paradox that the content of Alcantara's performance engenders; by bringing the animated nature of direct action to a head with the unendurable duration of bureaucratic form, she performs the violence that Kafka wrote about via K.'s life at the foot of the castle, a life where one dies after an insufferable and unending wait.

Agamben will describe the condition of indistinguishability between life and the law with no content that intermingle in the experience of waiting as *being in force without significance*. Rather than read this state of the law of being in force without significance, where we are abandoned "to and by a law that prescribes nothing" nihilistically, Agamben instead reads it as an opportunity. This opportunity, he states, is one to "*push the experience of abandonment to the*

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[120] Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 53.

extreme," where "only where the experience of abandonment is freed from every idea of law and destiny is abandonment truly experienced *as such*."[121]

Abandonment as such, as the antidote—the *direct* inverse—to bureaucracy's being in force without significance, is the aspiration of every critical, symbolic act of direct action. Not to be abandoned, but to *live in* a state of abandon, is the only answer to bureaucracy's indeterminate and arbitrary means. The substantial yet arbitrary quality of bureaucracy that I have been trying to parse throughout this thesis can here be brought to a head: abandonment as such is the practical retooling of bureaucracy's substantive arbitrariness, no as a conceptual trinket, or a mode of sensual apprehension, but as a radical and resistant technique. Abandoning the law in letter is what direct action does; the extra-legal aesthetic context is abandonment willfully, creatively, animatedly as such.[122]

K., for his part, living his life out as a school janitor in the village while he waits to hear from the castle, but alas never does, actually dies from the duration of a life spent waiting: from a life of insignificance and duration spent indeterminately on the bureaucratic threshold.[123] Alcantara through an animated form of symbolic direct action, takes the duration that K. lived—one in force without significance—and spins it to be experienced *as such*.

If we return to the point that direct action on its most sophisticated terrain is based not on a satisfiable claim—but on claims incommensurable with the parliamentarian, bureaucratic status

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[121] Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 60. Emphasis mine.

[122] Agamben writes, "Only if it is possible to think the Being of abandonment beyond every idea of the law will we have moved out of the paradox of sovereignty towards a politics freed from every ban." Agamben, Homo Sacer, 51.

[123] It is only at his funeral that word ever comes for K. from the castle. comes from the Castle. It reads K.'s "legal claim to live in the village was not valid, yet taking certain auxiliary circumstances into account he was permitted to live and work there." Here, when the bureaucratic machine does answer it is woefully behind, substantiating only the permission for K. to be in the village but never with an answer from the count.

quo—we can see now in the light of bureaucratic indistinguishability just how Alcantara continues this tradition. And while there is no clear road between her holding space for so many cheques left unbalanced, she yet continues to hold it, holding bureaucracy itself responsible—notably, in public—while asking nothing in particular in return.

Symbolic Direct Action and Abandonment as Such

When Alcantara ends her performance staring up at flag [fig 20] she exposes the brutal duration of a life lived under bureaucracy for those who wait. She asks what it means to live bureaucratic time, and precisely answers: the felt body living in bureaucratic time is one immersed in a duration of violence. Against and in inverse to bureaucracy's insignificant force, direct action as it manifest on the Av. Madero is a strategy, one heavy with violence and duration, that is transformed through the substantial and material reality of abandonment as such.

The move of direct action into even-more symbolic is a move from the tactical to the strategic. Symbolic direct action as a medium, a strategy, a style and an approach is able to meet symbolic violence's demands at its own level, and to speak to it on its own terms. Sometimes community organizers distinguish between tactical and strategic power, where tactical power is a useful but incomplete measure in addressing an issue, and strategic power holds the capacity to stand on its own. While direct action can float between the level of the tactic and the strategy, symbolic direct action proposes a more total strategy which takes up the terrain of social space as it stands: as both spacial and symbolic. Symbolic direct action, which has always been against bureaucracy, redoubles its bureaucratic critique in the performance of Alcantara which is already in content, in form—in its sense of space and time—attuned to bureaucracy's violent formal means. Strategically positioned to consider the symbolic violence of the bureaucratic terrain,

symbolic direct action—abandonment as such—rips bureaucracy away from its justification towards state *ends.*

The symbolic realm is a collective one. Yet this is something that a bureaucratic logic will deny by attempting to foreclose on all non-literal and symbolic form while at the same time shuttering all attempts to exercise and organize collectivity. Bureaucracy is anti-community in the mode of its formal organization, means and techniques. Yet unwittingly as the bureaucratic case the collective symbolic creeps in the form of symbolic violence through the bureaucratic backdoor—in Alcantara's case a new form of anti-bureaucratic community is prefigured in an extra-bureaucratic, extra-legal state. Alcantara brings a bureaucratic logic—as a site of collective, symbolic violence—into public space and visibility at the threshold of her own body, countering with bodily presence the violence of concealment at part of state *means*.

At the point of Alcantara's body bureaucratic indolence, inertia and indifference collide with the lived experience and material reality of those who wait. Between the bureaucrat-as-nobody, Alcantara's own body as an artist, and the bureaucratically-interfaced-yet-disembodied remnants of the claimants themselves, Alcantara exposes the paradox of what bureaucracy does to a body torn between bureaucratic and non-bureaucratic selves that must wait and wait and wait and wait in violence.

Symbolic direct action allows the body as language to hold bureaucratically inconceivable paradoxes within it. Bourdieu writes that an, "extraordinary inertia" results "from the inscription of social structures in bodies."[124] Alcantara uses symbolic direct action to display this extraordinary inertia at very same time that she denies it, as the form of the bureaucratic

[124] Bourdieu, *Pascalian Meditations*, 172.

form pushes against the subject who exceeds it. She is direct in her waiting: as bureaucratic time faces the direct in space and time, of the body situated and dated.

At the bureaucratic threshold, Alcantara stands immersed in a crisis of distinguishability. On the Zocalo as an empty base, she marks a commitment to making bureaucracy's violence publicly visible. Bureaucracy's symbolic violence, as a direct experience of violence expressed in and through an indeterminate structure, is answered by symbolic direct action as an indeterminate experience expressed in a direct structure. They are reciprocal, in short—a call and response both in and out of language—both social and anti-social—mediated through while surging around state forms and means.

Conclusion

> *"The reality of the public realm relies on the simultaneous presence of innumerable perspectives and aspects in which the common world presents itself and for which no common measurement of denominator can ever be devised. For though the common world is the common meeting ground of all, those who are present have different locations in it, and the location of one can more coincide with the location of another than the location of two objects"*
>
> -Hannah Arendt, The Human Condition

Public service does not equal the public realm for Hannah Arendt. In fact, if Arendt's framing of bureaucracy as the "rule by nobody" was indeed based on her "commitment to the public realm as a space of appearance,"[125] bureaucracy does not just erase the possibility of a public realm. Further, without making visible different and individual political actors who speak—without bringing constitutive difference into a shared realm—bureaucracy is *anti*-political, since it is impossible when there is no body available to offer speech or to give a response. Arendt's politics of appearance can also tell us that it is the partial obfuscation built into the "rule by nobody" that renders it as invisible in the art historical literature, as well as in the social world—although it is not invisible for artists in practice.

In light of the fact that bureaucracy has always meant the rule of a desk and those who sit behind it, bureaucracy's invisibility from public, popular apprehension makes a lot of sense. A

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[125] Camilla Stivers, Rule By Nobody: Bureaucratic Neutrality As Secular Theodicy, Administrative Theory & Praxis 37, no. 4 (2015) 242-251.

desk was always intended for a closed official space. A desk can't respond, but can only "do." Yet as it has been demonstrated if the preceding chapters, bureaucracy is not invisible to the practice of the artists who seeks its interface. Giorgio Agamben develops a view towards a politics of pure means in *A Means Without End.* "Politics is the exhibition of a mediality," he writes. "It is the act of making a means visible as such."[126] A bureaucratic aesthetic makes bureaucracy visible by exhibiting its mediality, while also functioning medially, as art does, through aesthetic means. Experience, and aesthetics, as both spaces of pure means, engender a bureaucratic aesthetics that better than any other strategy looks not through bureaucracy but at. As I tried to suggest in the final chapter, symbolic direct action is best poised to critique bureaucracy because of its relationship to space, time and inevitably the body.

A bureaucratic aesthetics is particularly concerned with exposing the structuring structure of a bureaucratic logic, one that is usually justified in terms the *ends* it desires (rationality as such, expanding civil liberties, social support, the state's expanded scope), and the ends it evades (corruption, patrimonialism). Yet this only serves to purposely evade and obfuscate the true nature of bureaucracy, which is to say its own practically logical, which are also material, means. As such a bureaucratic aesthetic exposes many the fissure point of bureaucracy. In these chapters those fissure pints have been found: between legitimacy and social levelling; between transparent claims and documentary forms; and between bureaucratic linguistic form, and the form of symbolic direct action.

Bourdieu's rejection of Marxism was largely because of his distrust of the revolutionary's teleology, or his direction towards ends.[127] I myself share in this suspicion. Attention towards

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126 Giorgio Agamben, *Means Without End: Notes on Politics* (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 2008), 116-117.

127 Buroway, Symbolic Violence: *Conversations with Bourdieu,* 41.

revolutionary ends can distracts from the necessity of a politics of means. Ends make it harder additionally to locate the site of social and political responsibility in a similar way that bureaucracy evades responsibility itself, since there is not anyone in the present who can speak, precisely, to what is in the present being done.[128] The model of tests of legitimacy and legitimacy in general has been therefore purposefully used throughout this thesis in the hope of staying committed to a non-teleological politics.

Legitimacy is on the one hand very stagnant, and on the other needs to be re-articulated—through the process of arbitrary misrecognitions—ongoing, presently and every day. There are many ways in which a bureaucratic logic encourages us to misrecognize its arbitrariness as legitimate in the everyday. I have suggested here three: it encourages us to see each other as formally level, and similar in kind; it suggests to us that we picture the world through not just formally regularized, but transparent and accountable means; and it commits us to an experience of waiting, underwritten with the indeterminate violence of the form of the bureaucratic form and the indistinguishability of state membership. In future writing, I hope to continue in its own right to develop how legitimacy is a social building block that is not entirely co-extensive with nor explicable through capital, but has its own particular obduracy (as does bureaucracy) that requires recognition.

It is my hope that future research will continue to look not through but at the space of bureaucracy in order to critique its symbolically violent, its documentary, its levelling techniques and the material consequences of these. By ending this thesis with an artist working in a symbolically manifest form of direct action, I have tried to point towards the way in which a

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[128] "Bureaucracy", she writes, has the effect of "making it impossible to localize responsibility," since "there is no one left who could even be asked to answer for what is being done." Hannah Arendt, *On Violence* (New York: Harcourt Books, 1970), 38-39.

critical aesthetics of bureaucracy might be launched. Alcantara, and the many other artists who are re-tooling bureaucracy through direct action's radically indeterminate means, take a bureaucratic logic and turn it on its head. In one of the widest-spread and most promising moves of creative or symbolic direct action and other blossoming "a"narchist techniques[129], official anonymity is being increasingly swapped for an incognito and extra-statist guise: with one critical difference. Artists are now holding bureaucracy responsible—they are subjecting it to public judgement—and in so doing they are presenting an alternative to the most dangerous dimension of bureaucracy's logical means.

At the end of the first chapter, I suggested that to live a life without jurists is to live a bureaucratic dream. This claim can also be re-stated: that to live without judgement is to live in a state (of) bureaucratic nightmare. I would like to suggest that we must return bureaucracy to a place of judgement in our criticism in the same way that artists have been all along. In this, we must stay driven to work through a politics of pure means so we too can be committed to the thriving, animated, material present, and to necessity of response, as we seek collective reverie in our own alternative to the bureaucratic dream.

[129] "a"narchist: work in anarchist modes, under and through anarchist principles, that do not necessarily know themselves to be or categorize themselves as such.

Appendix A: Figures

Fig 1: The *Bureau de Roi*, or what was originally King Louis XV's "Secretary" Desk, used by both King Louis XV and King Louis XVI. The bureau locked with a single key, of which only the king had a copy and would carry around at apparently all times. After spending some time in the Louvre, the bureau now resides at Versailles.

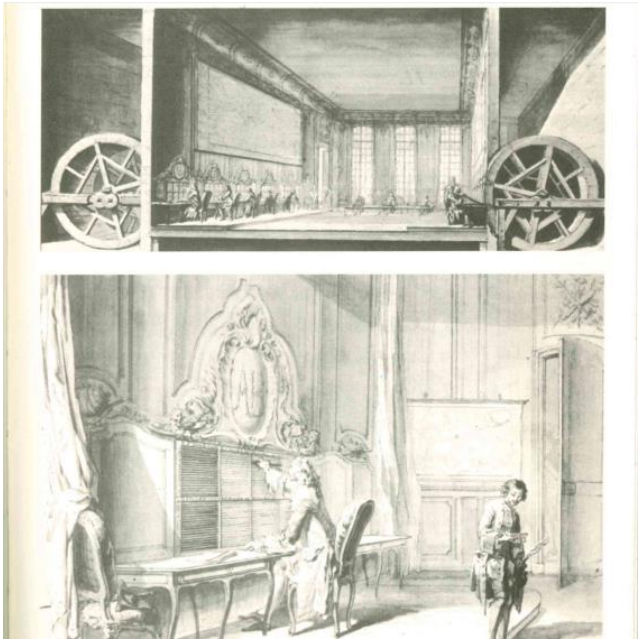

Fig 2: From the illustrator Gabriel de Saint-Aubin we have this engraving that accompanied a 1749 treatise for police reform, written by a man named Guillate, which presented a comprehensive proposal for a system of tracking, storing and retrieving information such as name, age, address, birthplace, employment history, rent due, and the like. As Ben Kafka writes, the irony of the construction, visually overpowered by the giant document wheels that look like they are about to crush the dainty, decorated Rococo space expose a visual paradox in this moment of the construction of the early French state.

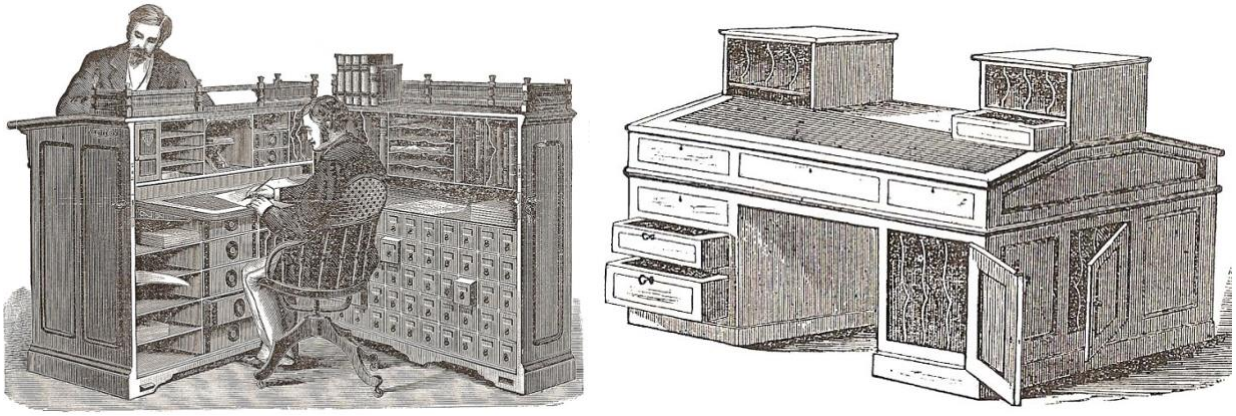

Fig 3: The Office King Combination Desk, left; Desk for the State Department of Education, right.

Fig 4: Mail art "cancelling stamps", Guy Bleus.

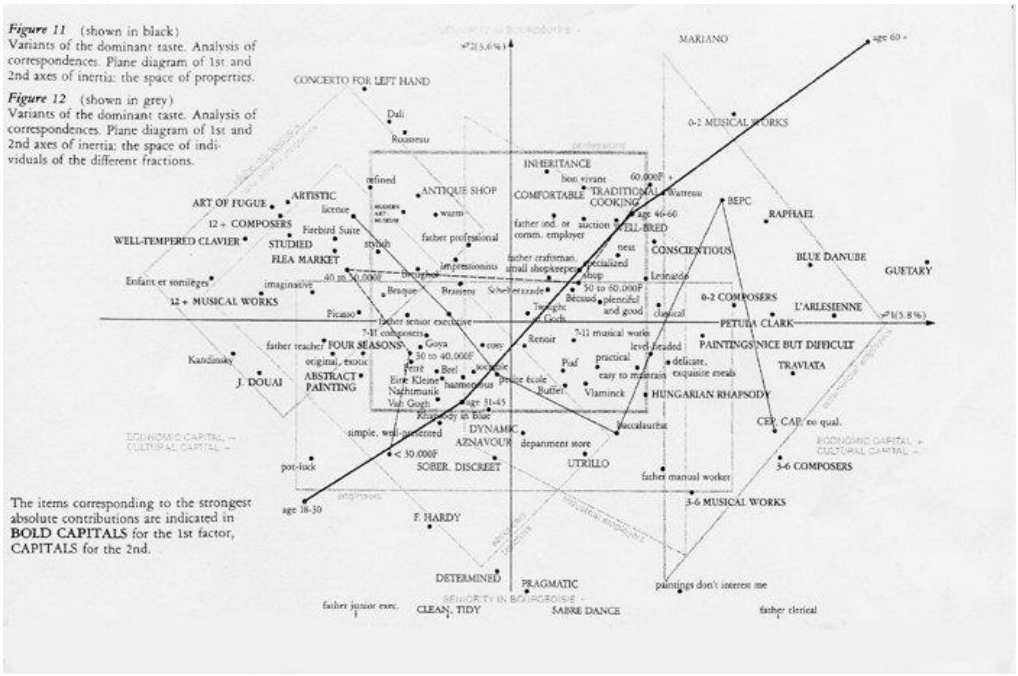

Fig 5: Above is just one example of a field map, from Bourdieu's studies on social positioning and taste. For example, here those with less economic capital but more cultural capital are more likely to enjoy Kandinsky, flea markets and pot lucks. Those with more economic capital and less cultural capital, on the other hand, are more likely to enjoy Hungarian Rhapsody and department stores.

Fig 6: Marcel Broodthaers, *Musée d'Art Moderne, Département des Aigles*, *Section des Figures: The Eagle from the Oligocene to the Present*, 1972.

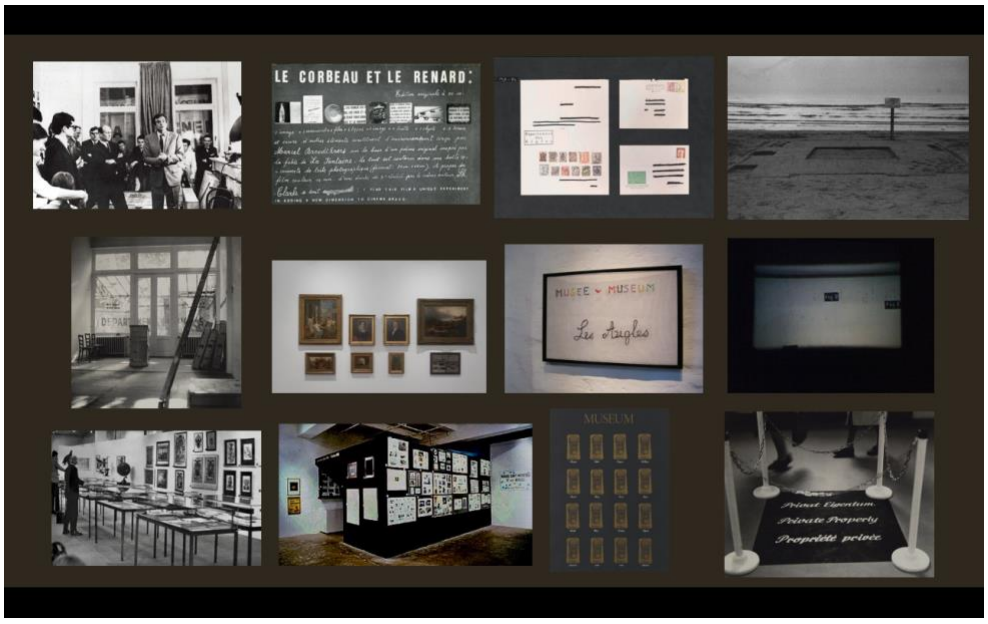

Fig 7: Marcel Broodthaers, *Musée d'Art Moderne, Département des Aigles*, Sections 1-12 (13 is not visualized, since it was painted directly over top of section 12, seen bottom Right), 1968-1972.

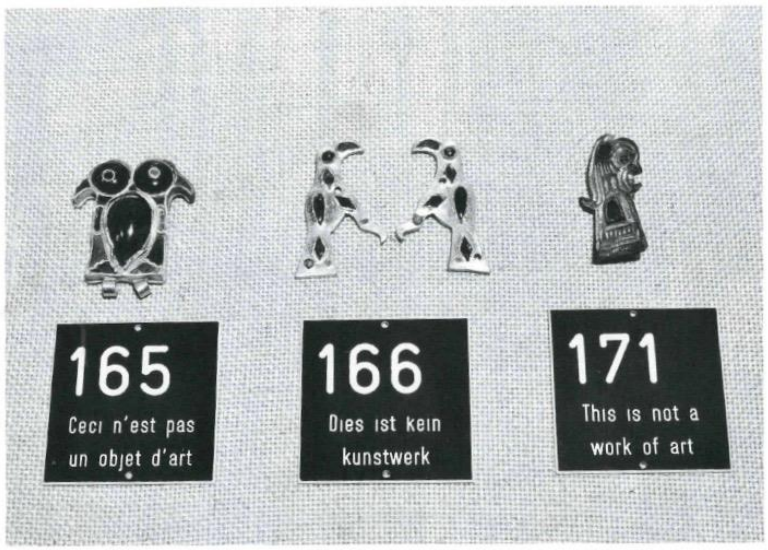

Fig 8: Broodthaers referred to these panels as executing his *Duchamp-Magritte Method.*

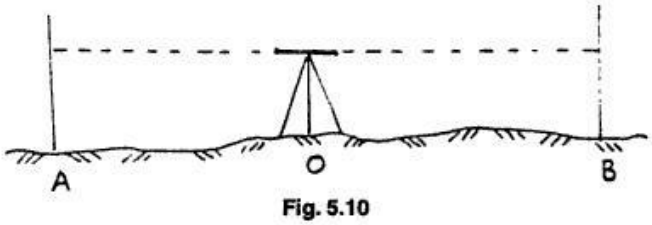

Fig 9: A diagram of the process by which sciences that engage in topographical studies and surveying call the *principle of levelling.*

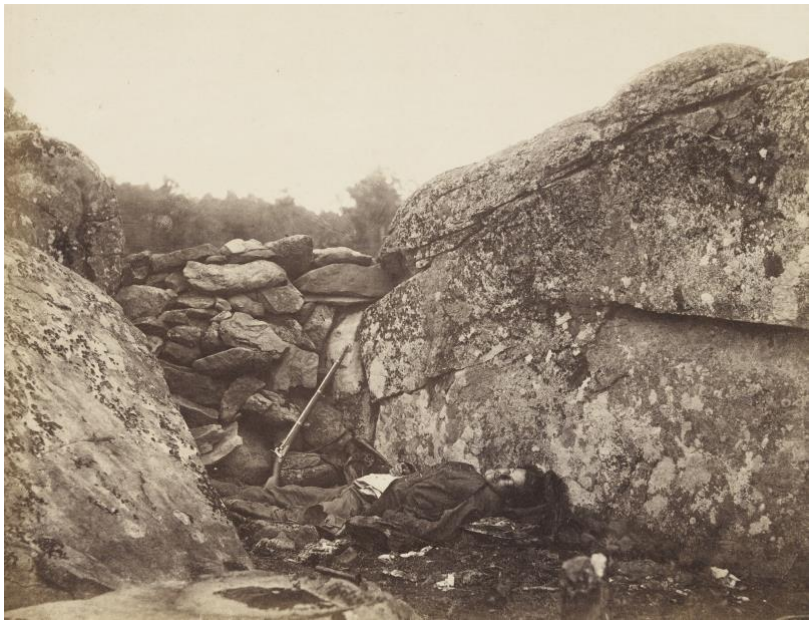

Fig 10: Alexander Gardner, *Home of a Rebel Sharpshooter,* 1863.

Fig 11: A selection of images from Jan Banning, *Bureaucratics.*

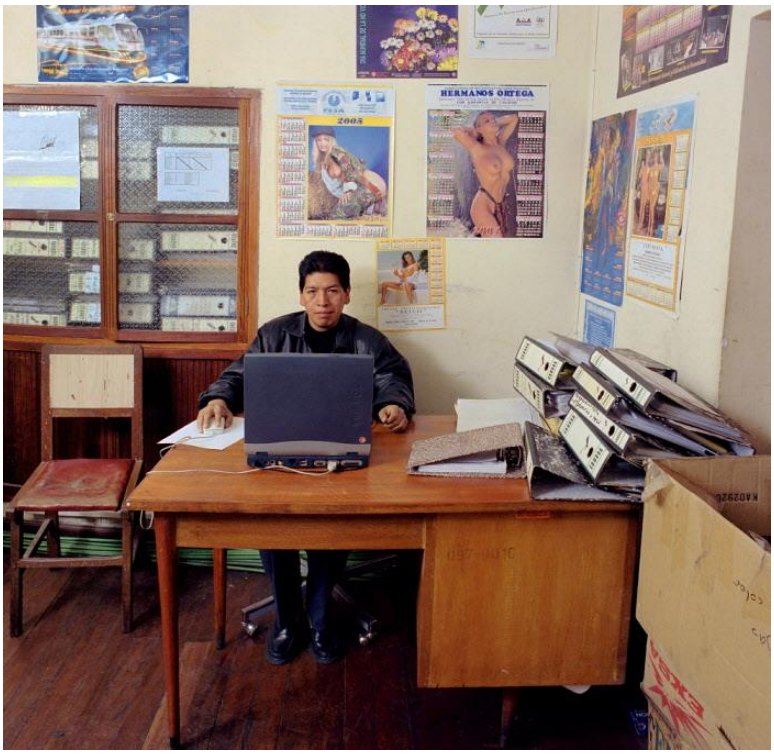

Fig 12: Jan Banning, *Bureaucratics*, 2005, Bolivia.

Fig 13: Jan Banning, *Bureaucratics*, 2003, India.

Fig 14: Jan Banning, *Bureaucratics,* 2003, India. Official caption reads: "Sushma Prasad (b. 1962) is an assistant clerk at the Cabinet Secretary of the State of Bihar (population 83 million) in The Old Secretariat in the state capital, Patna. She was hired 'on compassionate grounds' because of the death of her husband, who until 1997 worked in the same department. Monthly salary: 5,000 rupees ($ 100, euro 100)."

Fig 15: Jan Banning, *Bureaucratics*, 2006, Liberia. Official caption reads: "Major Adolph Dalaney (b. 1940) works in the Reconstruction Room of the Traffic Police at the Liberia National Police Headquarters in the capital Monrovia. Monthly salary: barely 1,000 Liberian dollars (US $ 18, euro 17). Traffic accident victims at times are willing to pay a little extra if Dalaney's department quickly draws up a favorable report to present to a judge."

Figure 16: Josué Galarza Mendez. Note skeleton poster covering an identical 2005 poster of see figure 12.

Fig 17: A standard *comprobante de gastos form*, like the one that appears below.

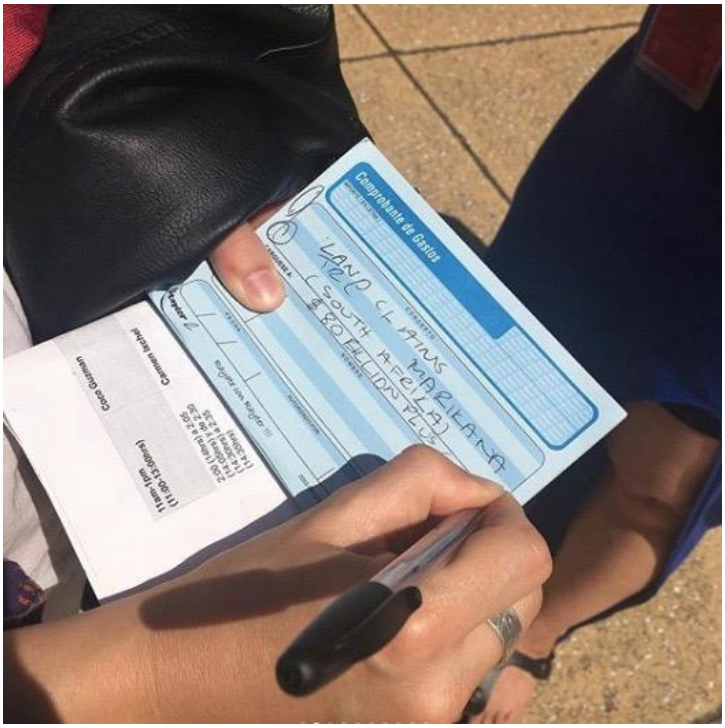

Figure 18: A participant fills out a form during the performance.

Figure 19: Alcantara on the Av. Madero during the performance, which lasted approximately two hours.

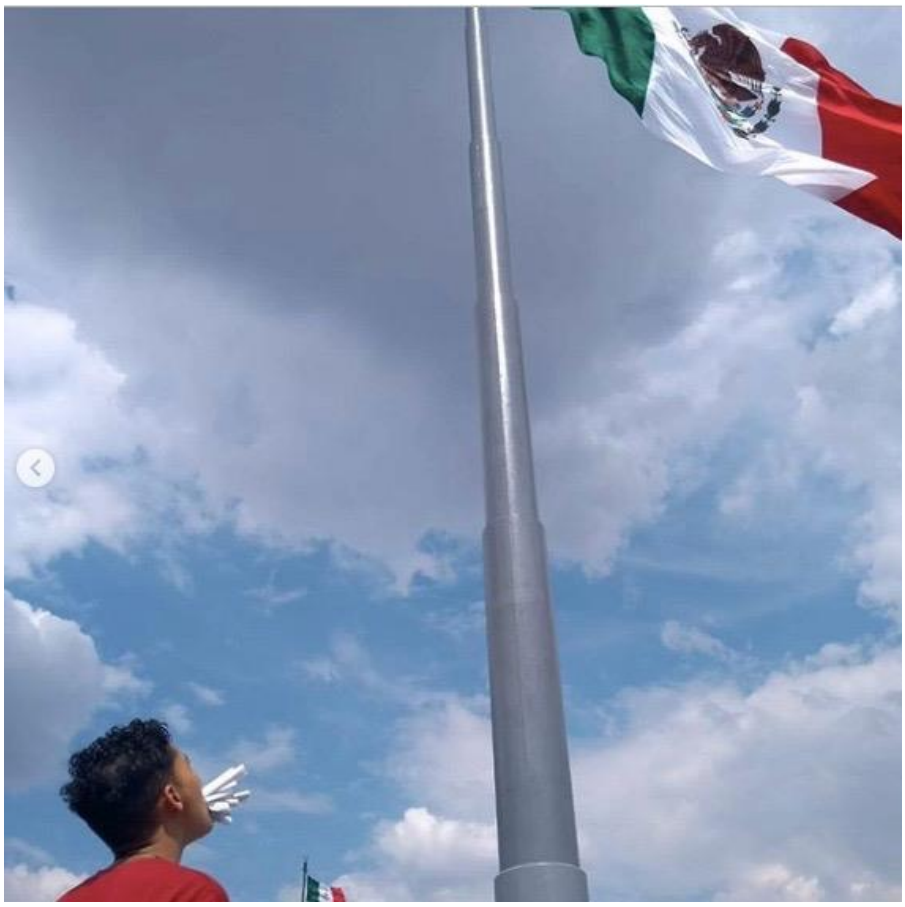

Figure 20: Alcantara in the middle of the Centre Historico, staring at the national flag. This flag—the biggest one in Mexico City, is considered one of the *banderas monumentales* or monumental flags of Mexico, a program first started in 1999 by then President Ernesto Zedillo. The decree stipulated they measure 14.3 by 25 meters, on flag poles 50 meters high, and weigh approximately 120 tons.

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