



Speculative Brutalism



speculative brutalism

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Speculative Brutalism Publication One

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Just Another Unexpected Guest

Site-specific installation

7th Liverpool Biennial, Static Gallery, Liverpool, UK.

14200x 2600 x 500 mm

Solar mirror film; concertina razor wire;

barb wire; steel

“A rather refreshing take on this year’s Liverpool Biennial’s theme – hospitality – is on show at the Static Gallery, a hub with ten studios for artists and creative professionals. The collaboration of Berlin-based artist Sascha Mikloweit and São Paulo-based Adriana Galuppo, resulting from a one month artist-in-residence programme at Static prior to the show, led to a 14 meter long and 2.60 meter high fence construction, blocking the main corridor of the place and separating the inhabitants of the Static organization for one month – half of them not even being able to use the toilet any longer without leaving the building.

The Wall, as the inhabitants of Static referred to it, reminds me of border facilities or the fringes of a particularly sealed-off areal. Just with a little difference: Instead of gazing through the typical mesh these constructions usually consist of, my gaze is facing my distorted ‘self’, reflected by a solar mirror film which replaces the usual material. All of this results in a disturbingly uncanny, ‘pop-artish’ atmosphere.

Jaques Lacan’s concept of the mirror stage, the formative constitution of ‘self’ and ‘I’ comes to mind and leaves me wondering if there’s something such as the ‘political self’ and ‘political I’, and what their status might be in a world of fair-trade label substitution and clicktivism.

Last but not least this impression is amplified by the only information given to the visitor before being entirely left to herself by the slightly cruel and monosyllabic invigilators – a blank sheet of paper with ten questions. (A.Eichhorn)

-  Roscoe Lane, L1 9JD
-  West and East entrances
-  Public social space
-  Artist studio spaces
-  WC for all facilities
-  Divided gallery space
-  JOUG Modules

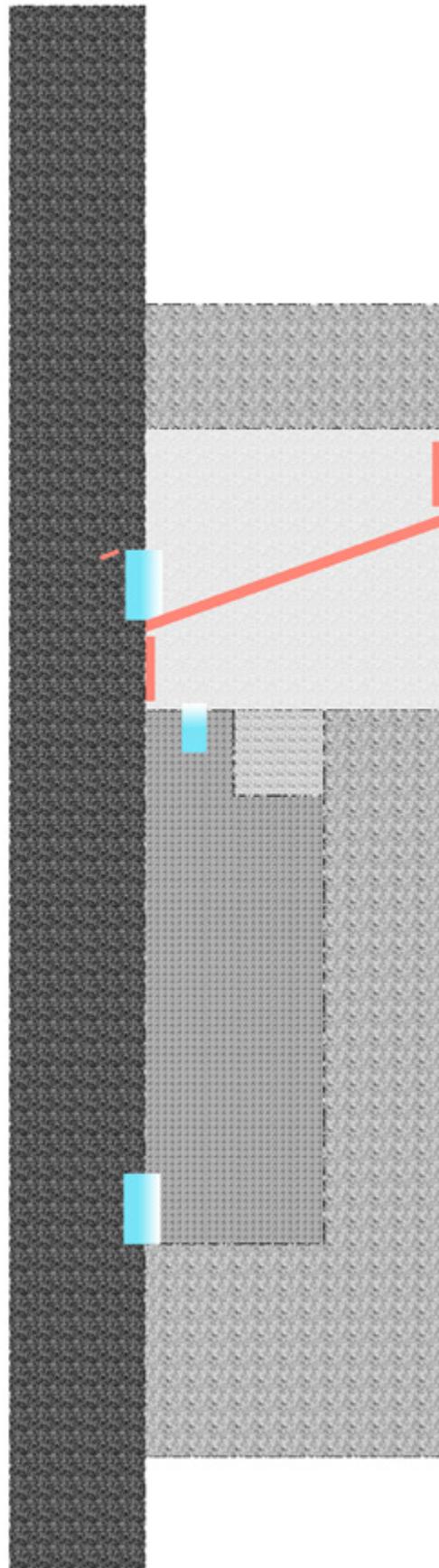


Figure 1
 Galuppo I Mikloweit,
Just Another Unexpected Guest (2012).
 exhibition layout, *7th Liverpool Biennial*,
Static Gallery.

Is that there, this here?
What side is this – the inside or the outside?
Are we them, or is it they who are us?
Are you here, or is that you over there?
'Thou art that'?
Are you where you ought to be?
Do you decide what you ought to be?
How do you know what you ought to be?
Are you what you ought to be?
What is this?
Is this it?

Figure 2

Text handed to the visitors of
Just Another Unexpected Guest
at *Static Gallery* during
Liverpool Biennial 2012.

Text by Sascha Mikloweit and Mia Tagg.

Adriana Galuppo, Sascha Mikloweit

Just Another Unexpected Guest

Samo Tomšič

Subject, Alienation, Border

A text by Samo Tomšič in response to the 7th Liverpool Biennial installation *Just Another Unexpected Guest* by Adriana Galuppo and Sascha Mikloweit at *Static Gallery*, Liverpool, UK, in October 2012.

In his writing on the uncanny (1919), undoubtedly one of his most fascinating accounts of anxiety and its mechanisms, Freud reports the following personal experience:

I was sitting alone in my wagon-lit compartment when a more than usually violent jolt of the train swung back the door of the adjoining washing-cabinet, and an elderly gentleman in a dressing-gown and a travelling cap came in. I assumed that in leaving the washing-cabinet, which lay between the two compartments, he had taken the wrong direction and come into my compartment by mistake. Jumping up with the intention of putting him right, I at once realized to my dismay that the intruder was nothing but my own reflection in the looking glass on the open door. I can still recollect that I thoroughly disliked his appearance. Instead, therefore, of being frightened by our 'doubles', (...) I simply failed to recognize [it] as such. Is it not possible, though, that our dislike of them was a vestigial trace of the archaic reaction, which feels the 'double' to be something uncanny?¹

The intruder, an unexpected fellow traveler, who quickly turns out to be merely Freud's own reflection in the mirror, troubles Freud. A specific encounter takes place, in which the subject encounters itself as fantomic entity. The encounter is marked by mis-recognition, *une-bévue*, an overlooking. For a moment Freud's image

1 Freud, S., 1955. *Gesammelte Werke*, Vol. XII. London: Imago Publishing. p. 262-263, note.



Figure 3
Galuppo | Mikloweit,
Just Another Unexpected Guest (2012).
Installation view, West side,
7th Liverpool Biennial, Static Gallery.

got a life of its own and was detached from its habitual function. Or better, the identification, supported by the distinction between the interior and the exterior was for a moment put under question. The border was not simply abolished. It was projected outwards, thereby undermining and disrupting the univocal passage from interiority to exteriority. The interiority became an outside, the exteriority invaded the inside, and Freud became his own foreigner.

The image of the “I” turns out to be nothing other than the border of the inner world. Freud famously identified the “I” with an image of the body, or better, he defined it as the spatial projection of the bodily surface, hence as projection of its border. This definition also answers the question: what is a border? A spatial projection of the surface that seems to constitute a totality, thereby not only delimiting my inner world from the outer world, but more importantly uncovering the mechanism that determines the subjective relation to reality more broadly. The worldview logic, ideology, the mechanisms of which were criticized by both Freud and Marx, follows the same procedure. By totalizing reality it delimits itself from the disruptions and contingencies that traverse it, thereby constituting itself as unalterable and consistent.

Behind Freud’s encounter of himself, his image, or his double, as he claims, there is yet another and more important lesson, which addresses the flipside of the border, the “surplus” that is produced through the constitution of the border, in the process of projection, a drama of subjectivation



Figure 4
Galuppo | Mikloweit,
Just Another Unexpected Guest (2012).
Installation view, East side,
7th Liverpool Biennial, Static Gallery.

that Lacan conceptualized under the notion of the “mirror stage”.² The concept is known for being introduced in order to explain the famous *Aha-Erlebnis*, the moment of the child’s self-recognition in the mirror, the zero level of identification. The mirror stage describes the emergence of the subject, the transformation of what appears to be merely the living being into the subject. To become a subject means to assume an image, but also to become constituted through a projection, which inserts alienation in the very core of subjectivity.

The notion of the mirror stage describes more than a mere historic event in the child’s development. It also has its structural value, so that it already addresses two issues, the imaginary constitution of the Ego as projection or reflection of the bodily surface, on the one hand, and the symbolic constitution of the subject in its *Spaltung*, its splitting, on the other. Freud’s last writings addressed precisely this issue, the splitting of the Ego in defense mechanisms. The mirror stage, and also Freud’s own account of the encounter on the train, is therefore a specific theory of subjective alienation. When the subject is produced, it emerges as thrown out of joint, delimited and differentiated from its “self”. The encounter of the double, the image in the mirror, is therefore expressing, exemplifying the drama that accompanies the subject throughout its history, the drama of decentralization and subjective destitution, rather than constitution.

2 Lacan, J., 1966. *Écrits*. Paris: Éditions du Seuil.

The double is not really something that would be capable of producing fear, as the passage in Freud seems to suggest. It stands opposite to the subject as the embodiment of its own lack. This lack should again not be understood as ‘substantive’ lack, i.e. lack of something. Unlike what is usually thought, the psychoanalytic notion of the lack does not concern some lost object that is henceforth impossible to recompense. Instead it stands for the constitutive impossibility to enclose the field of subjectivity, or put differently, the incompleteness, openness of the processes of subjectivation. Taken in its radical consequences, the idea of the mirror stage means that the subject can only emerge under the condition that there is a minimal distance, a minimal gap, an empty space that traverses the subject, thereby separating it from itself, like in the case of Freud and his image, which appears to have obtained a life of its own, standing opposite to him as his uncanny other. The image was detached from the “I”, and Freud literally says that he perceived the intruder, the unannounced guest as someone who wandered off in the wrong direction and mistakenly entered his compartment. It was not only Freud who has mistaken his reflection for a foreigner. The image, too, has mistaken Freud for its match. We could say that every identification, every recognition contains an encounter of two mis-recognitions, two subjective errors.

It is the empty space, the minimal difference between the “I” and the projected image that supports the identification with my double. This minimal difference that Freud so exemplarily points out in his personal account can be called the ‘imaginary alienation’, the alienation that manifests itself on the level of my relation to the body. The fundamental inscription of this alienation into language consists therein that my relation to the body is not that of being but rather that of having. The question of Being meets its limits in the encounter with the body as something that one is not but something that one has: the body as the ground level of property, the body as universal commodity.³ The very expression “having a body” points out that the body implies detachment and alienation. I am never, or never entirely identical with my own body. The subject and the body never overlap. My own body stands in the center of alienation, and inversely, every alienation departs from the subjective relation to the body. As Marx showed, under all different strata of alienation we encounter the labour power – which, being not only a commodity among others but the commodity that supports the capitalist mode of production, stands precisely for the alienation of the subject in relation to the body. Only as far one has a body, it makes sense to speak of labour power as commodity.

3 Lacan, J., 2005. *Le Séminaire, livre XXIII, Le sinthome*. Paris: Éditions du Seuil.



Figure 5
Galuppo I Mikloweit,
Just Another Unexpected Guest (2012).
Installation view, East side,
7th Liverpool Biennial, Static Gallery.



Figure 6
Galuppo I Mikloweit,
Just Another Unexpected Guest (2012).
Installation detail view: Razor barbed wire
and barbed wire construction.
7th Liverpool Biennial, Static Gallery.

A further level of alienation can be called the 'symbolic alienation', the alienation that marks the subject's relation to language and traverses every speech act. For psychoanalysis the dimension of the foreign body persists also on this level, only that this time the *Fremdkörper* that embodies the alienation coincides with the linguistic structure as such. The foreign body, the body within my body, is nothing other than language. Retrospectively the constitution of the subject turns out never to be purely imaginary or purely symbolic, but always-already in the coinciding of the imaginary and the symbolic axis. The foreigner that I encounter in the mirror is also the linguistic Other, and inversely, the language that represents, and thereby also splits, alienates me as the subject and retroactively determines my relation to the bodily image as the other.

Freud's encounter with himself as his own double contains more than the "mirror stage" theory seems to imply. For the mirror stage the question first and foremost consists in the passage from the ambiguous relation to one's own image, a relation that encloses both curiosity and aggression, to recognition. Freud's account, on the other hand, pinpoints the missing element that introduces the structural and topological dimension. The dimension of uncanny raises the question of the border. The German expressions *heimlich* and *unheimlich*, on which Freud excises an entire linguistic meditation, constantly evolves around the impossibility to delimit the inside from the outside, the hidden from the unveiled, the homely and common from the foreign and uncommon. The concept of alienation, of course, brings together all meanings, and in addition introduces the topic of segregation, which departs from the point of the impossibility to delimit the self from the other. The function of the mirror stage is to establish a relation between the interiority and exteriority, not only between the self and the other, but also between the subjective and the social reality. What is also already at stake in the subject's relation to his own image is the social bond. Together with the subject the Other is constituted.

What is the role of psychoanalysis in this matter? The task of psychoanalysis, Lacan claimed, consists in bringing the subject to the point of a specific recognition: *tu es cela*,⁴ "Thou are that", a recognition that seems to mimic or simply repeat the recognition that apparently took place in the history inaugurated by the first, originary encounter of the subject with its own image, the constitution of identification. But this is actually not the case. The recognition in psychoanalysis consists not only in addressing the recognition that supports identification, the recognition of the other (the image) as the self (or the image of the self, the spatial projection of the bodily surface).

4 (Lacan, 1966), *loc cit.*, p. 100.

What is at stake and what needs to be recognized by the subject is rather intimately related with what Freud tried to point out with his example, the recognition of alienation, the recognition of the impossibility of reconciliation. Psychoanalysis thus confronts the subject with a specific radicalization of alienation, with the alienation that is contained in the subject's identification and uncovers its structure. It is not the relation between the self and the other as two external entities that is at stake but the relation of the self to itself as its own other. We are not dealing with two different entities but with one entity that is divided into two. In this confrontation with the self and the self as the other the subject encounters its own destitution. Lacan also claimed that the psychoanalyst could only accompany the patient to the point of this recognition. The true 'adventure', the actual subjectivation begins after this recognition, but it is the subject's task alone to embark to this "subjectivation without the subject".⁵

At this point we also encounter the political dimension of psychoanalysis. Freud offered the tools, which enabled to explain segregation and repression as response or reaction to the constitutive alienation. The spatial projection of the border produces not only the subject but also a surplus that is detached from the subject and stands opposite to it, the other. The counterpart of emancipatory politics built on the subverted identification – is precisely populism and racism. Is not the fundament of racist and populist politics in the effort to deepen the delimitation between the "I" and the other, and thereby to respond on alienation with social repression and segregation? The populist and racist politics depart from the fantasy that it is possible to heal the wound of constitutive subjective alienation, and thereby to construct a perfectly consistent national identity. As psychoanalysis has repeatedly shown, racism is always addressing the problem of the Other's jouissance. In order for the racist and populist politics to become operative it needs to identify the other as the "subject supposed to enjoy":⁶ present economic migrants as social parasites, who exploit the generous social transfers of Western democracies, or the precarious Greek workers as lazy mediterraneans, who care only for their private enjoyment, etc.

The latter point, the ideological connection between jouissance and racism, was already indicated in Marx's brilliant analysis of the function of primitive accumulation in classical political economy.

5 Lacan, J., 1998. *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*. New York: Norton, p.184. Trans. modified.

6 Dolar, M., 1998. Introduction: The Subject Supposed to Enjoy. In: A. Grosrichard, 1998. *The Sultan's Court. European Fantasies of the East*. London: Verso.



Figure 7
Galuppo I Mikloweit,
Just Another Unexpected Guest (2012).
Installation view, West side,
7th Liverpool Biennial, Static Gallery.

The founding myth of capitalism – which is actually repeated throughout Europe in today’s economic crisis – tells us that at the beginning there were two groups of people, the carrying proto-capitalists, who renounced their enjoyment, and thereby accumulated the first wealth; and on the other hand the lazy rascals, the proto-proletarians, who spent “everything and more” (ihr alles und mehr),⁷ meaning that their enjoyment progressively pushed them into debt, the negative surplus. Marx’s confrontation with the capitalist ideology of saving reveals the true kernel of capitalism in productive indebtedness (public debt, credit system, and other forms of so-called “fictitious capital”), which not only pushes entire nations into economic slavery but also introduces an entirely new historic form of social repression and segregation.

The subject of capitalism is a subject that is constitutively excluded from the egalitarian representation in political space, and speaking of the need to “include the excluded”, to “represent the unrepresented” is a rather poor response to the deadlocks of capitalism. On the other hand, by analyzing the symptomatic social position of the proletariat, Marx seemed to have formulated precisely the same lesson: the critique of political economy, too, leads its subject, the proletarian, to the radical point of his or her social alienation, to the point of *Thou are that*, or as Marx himself puts it in the Communist Manifesto, to the point where it becomes clear that the proletariat has nothing to lose than its chains. Psychoanalysis and Marxism thus seem to be engaged in a common struggle.

7 Marx, K., 1974. *Das Kapital, Vol. 1*. Berlin: Dietz Verlag. p. 741.

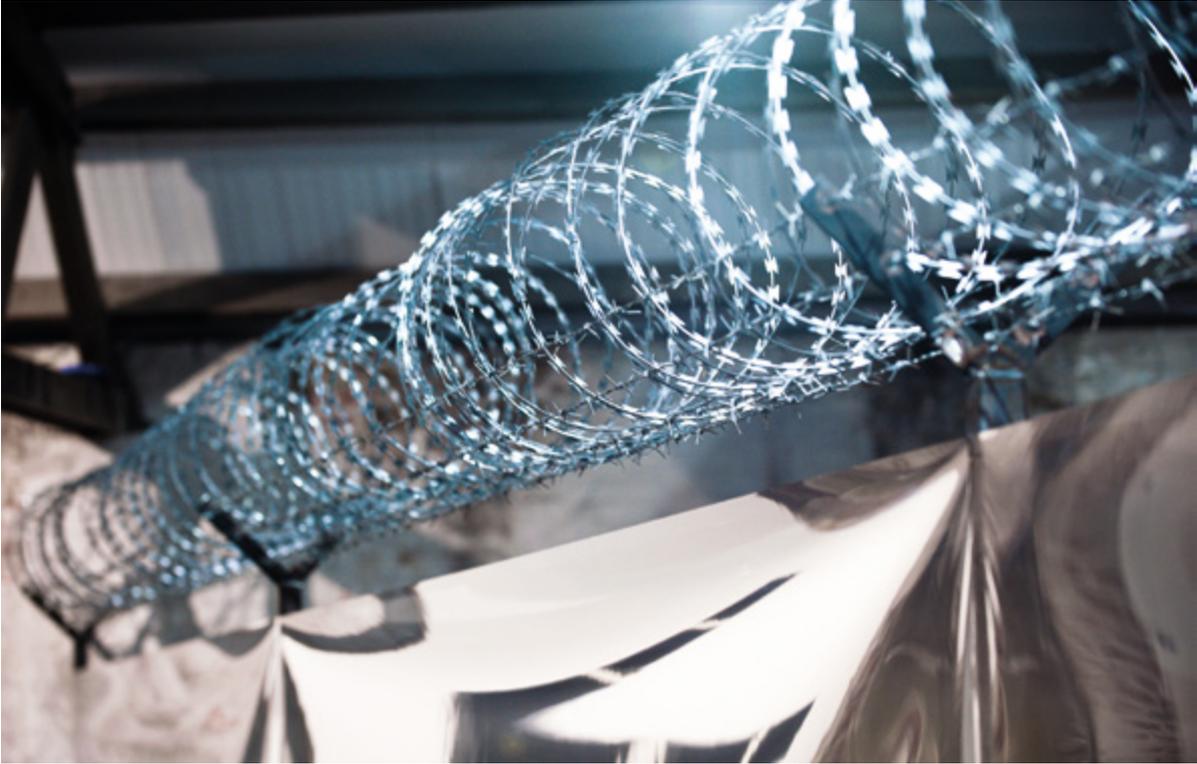


Figure 8
Galuppo I Mikloweit,
Just Another Unexpected Guest (2012).
Installation detail view, razor barbed wire
and barbed wire construction,
7th Liverpool Biennial, Static Gallery.

Samo Tomšič obtained his PhD in Philosophy at the University of Ljubljana, Slovenia. In the past he worked at the Scientific Research Centre of the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts (Ljubljana) and at Jan van Eyck Academy (Maastricht) and is currently a research fellow at Humboldt University in Berlin. He has published widely on theoretical psychoanalysis, structuralism, French philosophy and epistemology. Recent publications include *The Capitalist Unconscious* (Verso, 2015), *Jacques Lacan Between Psychoanalysis and Politics* (ed. with Andreja Zevnik; Routledge, 2016) and *Psychoanalysis: Topological Perspectives* (ed. with Michael Friedman; Transcript, 2016).

Sascha Mikloweit trained in fine art in Düsseldorf, Münster and at Central Saint Martins, London, based in Berlin, Germany.

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