

Television (an address) - Draft of an Interview by Mariángela Méndez with François Bucher

Tags

[Media and Ethics](#)

Regarding the upcoming exhibition at The Center for Curatorial Studies at Bard College

MM: I know you come from a Borges lineage, but what do you mean by a transmission of a transmission?

FB: Nice to relate that notion to “a Borges lineage,” as you call it, I definitely wouldn’t have because I don’t think of him that often these days - I have other authors in my field of thought that would immediately come to mind when speaking about this project, but not him. Five years ago or so the love affair with his work was so intense that at some point I stopped reading him altogether, as one does with things that are just too present in your life at a certain point. It’s also true that his thought became so important to me precisely because the “Borgesian” was already there *avant la lettre* (to put it in a paradoxical way). As a little boy I fantasized with a mirror that would be able to reflect the image of my aunt’s television all the way to my own house (where thanks to my parents’ progressive pedagogical efforts we didn’t have a TV). I really thought it could be done in some way, or at least the idea of it made me daydream for hours, as if the mind could invent the device by just thinking of it. One day I remembered this fact in relation to the television project and had one of those satisfactory moments where you understand how coherent some ideas are in you, without actually ever having to try. It tames an anxiety that I once heard Hal Foster express in a succinct way as “the anxiety of the arbitrary”.

Television didn’t assume its esthetical dimension, its dimension as a producer, it created instead a seamless fallacy of *transmitting* information, only distribution, broadcast, *tele*-vision; the presentation of what is elsewhere, as if everything about it was neutral. It understood itself as a social function and cut the lineage of cinema that had led to it, an adventure of perception that had been initiated in the 19th Century. In this fact (which is always so difficult to keep in focus, because every time the moment to think has already been missed, in its constant stream of *information*) is hidden its power as a social controller. Television places the image on a platform where it doesn’t assume its responsibility as a representation. Why did the camera travel? Why did it zoom? Why from this angle? These things are all crucial, and most definitely ideological. But there is no one taking true ethical responsibility, there is a vacuum behind the image: “the world making its images” as Serge Daney said. What we name “The Media” is the disappearing act of all aspects of production, of creative intention. There is an image that cannot be brought to light as an image because it claims to be something else, information.

Coming back to Borges, I just thought that it is true that he is related to the quite discreet notion that I am trying to bring forward with this project. Borges was interested, at the same moment as Walter Benjamin, in a *messianic* moment where all the letters of the Rabbinic law are reorganized

and a meaning, that is in excess of all meanings, is revealed. This is really a dimension where language itself is brought to language (and this language is evidently not made of words, but of something else). This is quite a kabalistic metaphor, but at a certain level that is the driving idea. A transmission of a transmission, in two words is an attempt to foreground language, the language of television as it hides itself.

MM: *Television (an Address)* is an ongoing project that began in 2002, but with Samper you started somehow a new line of work. How is this one different from the other transmissions?

FB: What I really like about this project is that its thought has advanced on its own. Its different when you draft something over and over and then finally come to an artwork and make it public. In this project the *thought* has happened in public.

The project itself entails an unscripted reflection on the image, of the kind you do in private, but made public. The guests face the image of TV in a non-scripted scenario and have to invent the tool of their attack to that image, *live*. After September 2001, I remember I got very frustrated at some point in New York with the repetition of one symposium after another; they all had to do mainly with the question of what to do about the situation, or about why nothing was being done. At some point it seemed like positions were merely being reshuffled, as if it were a jazz improvisation where nothing is really improvised and everyone finds the comfortable tune of a position that has long solidified in them (I think this is an idea of Adorno). I remember looking for a device that would find a way out of this endless reformulation. I thought that there should be a kind of a shock moment, an image that is brought in, something to really produce another kind of delivery, a different kind of address to the present situation, which seemed so urgent. At the time I had been offered the use of a powerful streaming server and couldn't figure anything interesting to do with the possibility of *liveness*. What to do about *live*?

So to get back to your question, there was a first moment when the issue was really about imagining the new possibility of a reflection of/on the image. That was it; so an email would go out and a virtual community in the internet could sign-in and watch a television transmitting its images in another part of the world, those images being simultaneously retransmitted live with the comment of a guest. Then a second stage came where I "localized" the audience. At the time of the Prague Biennial in 2003 I set things up so that Yvonne Rainer was watching TV on the 4th of July in my apartment in Brooklyn and a concrete audience in Prague was watching live. This created a diagram, a direction of the image, and it is here that I think it became really interesting - I mean the thought on it kind of bloomed. Yvonne was in NY speaking to the image of the 4th of July on TV and with a Czech audience in her mind (billiard is really beautiful when the ball bounces from three bands). From there on I always made sure that there was a concrete space where a reception was taking place: an audience in front of a projection. This last word also became quite important - projection. When the "hopeless little screen," as Leonard Cohen called it, is "projected", it has to assume a different dimension, it has to relate to the memory of the relative it killed, cooked and ate as a TV dinner: Cinema.

Lets continue with the path that leads to Samper. Once this idea of a direction of the image was in place, then I started to think of an aspect of the project that had been an aside until that moment. It is a mixture of a very real direction and a metaphorical one as well. I had been invited by Fusebox Gallery in Washington to present a project. Then I woke up one day with the idea of a transmission from Colombia to Washington. Since Washington is precisely the main interlocutor of Colombia, the platform was obvious. Well, one has to say that Washington is really a deaf interlocutor of Bogotá, more like a "locutor" without the "inter". And this is precisely the crux of the operation. It is about a politics, a non-partisan politics that is precisely set forth in the act of reversing the roles. It is not about presenting Samper in front of Bush as a "hollier than thou" figure. No. Samper is questionable as a public figure at all levels, so when he speaks back it is not as simple as a symbolic redemption of Colombia *vis-à-vis* a the corrupt leader of the Free World. The transmission was set on the day of Bush's inauguration day and in my mind I saw a mirror: an image that flies from the North and is deflected (hijacked if one wants to sound dangerous), and sent back to Washington. Samper doesn't have a visa to the US, he was judged and condemned by Washington for allegedly receiving money from the Cali mafia in his campaign, judged by the same Washington that refuses to be judged by the International Tribunal, the same Washington that holds prisoners without trail or trial in Guantánamo, the same Washington that launches a war, on more than questionable evidence, to free Iraqis from their torturers at Abu Ghraib (and I don't have to explain how paradoxical this second degree reasoning for the war sounds today). The question is Who speaks? Who judges? Who asks the questions? And speaking with the language of television "Who "anchors" the image?" He who "anchors" the conversation is the winner of the power game, no matter how much his/her policy has failed in every possible dimension.

MM: What do you mean by he who "anchors" the conversation, do you mean like a narrator? Like a translator that moves between liberty and fidelity? An artist perhaps?

FB: Well I wonder if anyone has written on this word extensively in media theory, I suspect they have, probably a million times. I focused on it in this quasi-autistic way in which we (the artists) come to focus on these things. "Anchorman" is the traditional American media word for people like Dan Rather and Walter Cronkite, it is the word that describes in an almost literal fashion what the man sitting in front of the camera during the Evening News would do: he had to produce a thesis, he had to tame the chaos of information into a narrative tied with good old sense and coherence. He was the man in charge of anchoring the image-vessel, to not let it drift. The image, the raw data had to be produced, fashioned as the truth of the News, as the objective fact that had taken place during the day, as something which could be uncovered. "Anchoring" still implies a belief in the point of gravity of the image (one unitary subject, one un-fragmented principle of reality). That fishing line can be traced all the way to the enlightenment (it is the fugue point if we speak graphically). An image means something concrete and definite in the dimension of that word, there is a meta-narrative that comprehends it all (one point of observation, one deep voiced white man sitting on it), there is a deep underwater meaning, a tangible signified body swimming close behind the signifier, it all makes sense. In a way this word, "anchorman" is totally archaic in our 24 hour media world where the news became a constant flow without definite punctuations. And let me tell you which word I

think replaced that word: the word is “spin”, to spin. A good title for a book would be “From Anchor to Spin, a History of American Media.”

A notion of deconstructing meta-narratives coming directly out of the 1968 paradigm shift and finding its snug stereotype in the Anglo Saxon media (which has a mastery like no other in coining terms like that, which can freeze, gel, trivialize and, in the end render obsolete a whole philosophical conversation of three decades). It was really nice to see Jon Stewart point this out to the Carlson Tucker and Paul Begala in their “Crossfire” show that was subsequently cancelled by CNN (thanks to the beating they got that day by the masterful comedian). It was a paradigmatic moment at many levels: it was, for example the first time a TV show was seen more times as a download or as a stream than on primetime TV, but that is slightly beyond the point here. Stewart knocked out those two men single handedly live on TV, bowtie and all; one of his punch-lines, which they didn’t even follow too well, dizzy as they were, was about this new word “spinning”. He pointed out to them that the place where their kind would go to after the presidential debates was called “spin-alley” and asked them what message they thought the public was getting when being told that all politicians and journalists would gather after the debates in a place called “deception lane.” It took a century for the popular culture to really come to terms with Nietzsche’s phrase “there are no facts only interpretations” (although the Third Reich machine was fully into this principle of creating a reality in the masses through propaganda, which is why propaganda was not an aside but the absolute center of the project, as Nancy and Lacou-Labarthe argue in “The Nazi Myth”). One thing is certain now, Karl Rove understands it better than anyone: reality is there to be spinned in the alley, not anchored in the Evening News. What the “left” can do in that scenario is a puzzle, being nostalgic about the defunct modern man and his sure-shot teleologies is clearly not an answer. To finish this thought forcefully let me quote a New York Times Magazine article by Ron Suskind from October 17, 2004, just before the election:

“The (Bush administration) aide said that guys like me were “in what we call the reality-based community,” which he defined as people who “believe that solutions emerge from your judicious study of discernible reality.” I nodded and murmured something about enlightenment principles and empiricism. He cut me off. “That’s not the way the world really works anymore,” he continued. “We’re an empire now, and when we act, we create our own reality. And while you’re studying that reality - - judiciously, as you will -- we’ll act again, creating other new realities, which you can study too, and that’s how things will sort out. We’re history’s actors . . . and you, all of you, will be left to just study what we do.”

MM: You have mentioned that ‘television is like the glomar response: nothing is affirmed or denied, but that *Television (an Address)* seeks to interrupt this void.’ How do you see it happening in this project (Samper)?

FB: The other day I came up with a new title for the project, “I am the Media.” It is something that again has come up as the project has developed. Media, mediator... since the media is a

disappearing act then why not take on the function of the media, as an artist, as an artistic project, and dressing up with the media's own clothes, reveal everything that the media always disguises, or tries to make us see as neutral. With Samper, this is the exact emphasis. I want to say that there is a charged, politically-pregnant dimension in every part of the process: in the fact of choosing Bogotá to speak to Washington, in the fact of choosing a man condemned by Washington, in the fact of choosing an icon that the media circulated ceaselessly and who now is a kind of broken toy in the fringes, after being "dealt with" by the media.

There is another aspect that cannot be overlooked. As François Bucher from Colombia with a "God Save the Queen" education and Heidegger and Proust for breakfast at home, I am biographically driven to be a mediator between different codes. I am not so comfortable as the Paisa1 Juanes who came up with this great crusade "se habla español" which works perfectly for him in his condition as a pop star in the International Market resisting and critiquing the Americanization of his colleagues. I have a different position, I am, like many many others, the riddle of the 20th Century (the riddle of the sphinx, a composed animal with a paradoxical identity, and I speak to that riddle. My father's movements were directly determined by Hitler for example). So I speak back and from (to) the so-called Western world naturally and logically, and I seek a language, an alphabet if you will, that will allow me to do so.

I determine that Samper is enough of an icon in the American imagination that he will be recognized, and therefore I can use him to write the subtle plot which is not exactly what he will say *about* the image but the very fact of his address to Washington. This is what I *can* do as an actor in the field of representation. I have some understanding, sometimes quite intimate, of radically different cultural codes. In any case, coming back to your question, the effort is to do something real, in the real place where the images quarrel, in a more crucial, more dangerous place than the space that was given to me as an artist at Art School. When the gallery hosting the project mysteriously lost its connection to the Internet on the very day the transmission was scheduled, (after the news of my project were all over the Washington Post) we all suspected someone was paying attention; So I suppose it was a compliment. I have to say that Pierre Huyghe's buying of Ann Lee was an inspiration to me in this sense, to allow even the monetary transaction of a copyrighted image to enter the conversation, so that the global socio-economic questions of the circulation of images in the market is fore grounded and not left aside.

MM: An act of translation can be seen as an act of interpretation, and implies recognizing the transformations that the image suffers when it is seen from specific socio-cultural contexts that constitute the viewer. What happens when the works of art subvert the traditional flow from north to south? When you give Samper the power to narrate after being narrated by Washington?

FB: What happens is a gesture, a political act. I like Giorgio Agamben's quasi-poetic argument in "Notes on Gesture", by which he finds a difference between the image (in its etymological implication as death mask, *imago*), and the gesture as a site where politics take place. Gesture as a place where we can't dwell, which is precisely why it is political. The image, in the sense that this

argument is laid out, is precisely a reminder of a dynamic force that is precisely not there anymore when the image has halted it. Only because it isn't fixed is the gesture a politics, and that is for me the important part of it here. A "gag," Agamben writes at some point, in the sense of something that doesn't allow us to speak and also in the sense of the prefabricated line that actors use when they have forgotten their lines. Gesture is the end of action in the strong and definite sense of the word, It is another kind of action. It is not about saying "here comes the South with its magnificent Che Guevara revolution that will make you tremble and see your imperialistic manipulation". We can't say that, it makes no sense to regurgitate these *fixed* confrontations. A translation is in itself gesture, its an in-between, a translation is necessarily cinematic, it doesn't land anywhere, its the middle, the unfixed mediation, the "means without ends" (to quote the title of Agamben's collection of essays). In the end the question is to avoid a new presupposition, to be able to exist in an *incompleteness*; or rather inside of a movement of thought that only finds a temporary completeness in the mind of the reader, in the dangerous moment of *reading*. To return to your question, what can be done is to remobilize meaning by playing in the field of debris that all this History of North and South has left us. The other day I thought that a good definition for a politics could be formulated like this: "a politics is a non-essential position".

MM: So, would you say that the gesture of giving a voice to Samper, or, as you say, "giving Samper the power to narrate after having been narrated" is to take a nonessential position? Would you say that this gesture is a politics?

FB: Yes, I think it creates an in-between: in between his image and him, in between *Latin America* and the US; it foregrounds the threshold and the terms in which that threshold is constructed ideologically. In between the uncolored America (no adjective) and its Other, the colored Latin America; in between the images of each nation, as they are spinned on TV and that unnamable something else that remains. In between the genres of truth and fiction. It also foregrounds the passage, the mediation, it refuses a prescription, a presupposition but it is still a political action (with no fist up in the air). This is, again, what I am looking for, the specificity of LIVE. To remain there, to stay in the site of the passage.

MM: You have said in 'Journal of Visual Culture' that to "observe reality morally- is to include oneself in the problem rather than ignore the ground where one stands." Does this have something to do with the fact that you are born Colombian living abroad? That you come from an area of conflict? As you just said about translation: an in-between that doesn't land anywhere?

FB: A couple of friends thought it was quite problematic, within the argument of the piece that I published in JVC, to use that hard-to-swallow word - "moral" - and especially coming from Rossellini who really saw himself as a man with a very specific mission. But I really think I wanted to refer back to the difference with the idea of a social space that the camera of Neo realism *constructs* in

opposition to the *objective reality* that the camera of the Media pretends to *transmit*. I wanted to play with the words in that discussion; a bit like in the famous Godard quote of making the film *politically* rather than making a *political* film. Rossellini says "to observe reality morally" and in that sense he unfixes a morality. It is an adverb, and as an adverb it is suspended from the ground... meaning, it isn't a noun. Going back to the words of the previous answer, it is *gesture*. On the other side, on the side of the media, there is the observation of a moral reality, a fixed notion that holds some fixed values at its core, without ever confronting them in the present, as the crucial live questions that they are. What is overlooked always in the dimension of the media is that everything is a proposition. Rossellini was proposing a kind of thought on the reality of his time, the Media pretends to be giving us information about our times, information that they left unadulterated, that they only *programmed* for us, be that a re-run film or a report on the guerrilla in Colombia. Then there are commercials, and we accept the cut naturally, because we are indoctrinated to accept an image that shows 20 dead people in Iraq and then 20 lively people enjoying Budweisers next to a pool. There is a logic that we participate in, that always goes *through us*, thoroughly unquestioned. No one is thinking the matter, only the overwhelming invisible mind of the new director of the movie, the market.

When you say that one comes from a "land of conflict," I think you are right in more ways than the obvious one. I remember having a moment of recognition at the Whitney Program with other Latin Americans about the fact that we don't sit comfortably in our chairs. What I mean is that we always have in us that conflictive stance within our societies, we are the educated elite, the economic elite, the social elite and to round things up we also left our countries driven by an ambition to be visible (which no one should hold us accountable for). So we are neither subalterns nor exploiters, we are an in-between, we can't sit. I think that is a virtue in the same sense of Agamben's gag. It's difficult to speak when your center of gravity moves all the time, you can't be so sure, but this hindrance keeps you far away from the self-righteousness that others have more at hand. In the US there's always a chair, people chair things, in Latin America that chair is always flying upside down.

MM: Do you feel you have a political responsibility as an artist?

FB: Yes, the platform of images is the platform of the political, now more than ever. If you work with images you are inside of the politics of representation. I like to feel like I am in dialogue with the culture at large, even if only within my microscopic range. I guess in the end there are two choices: to engage the questions of your culture and your time with whatever tools you have, or to remain in the illusion of a "neutrality". I think one has to have an angle, which, I repeat, is not a partisanship. I liked the historical account that for the Greeks the worst crime of all in a civil war is to remain neutral, not to take a stance. There is an argument, that people like Giorgio Agamben have brought forward, that we are in a global civil war right now. But having an angle is perhaps more a question of rearticulating the dominating narrative, within a *coming* ethical framework (never already formed, always becoming). And who can do that but the people who are entering the information flux from the fringes? The people who are not completely determined by all-powerful economic gridlocks and still have some (limited) avenues to re-broadcast meaning in a different context. The

coming politics may be a politics that spells the end of action in the strong sense of the word as Agamben points out. But it is still producing meaning, it is still activating, it still has agency, albeit a different agency which doesn't offer itself to an easy paraphrase.

MM: Why are you interested in working with Jorge Eliecer Gaitan 56 years after his assassination? Is this a recognition of the ground where you stand? Does it have an end?

FB: There are many reasons, but I will be brief. There are affective reasons: because of being drawn by a personality with such a magnificent conviction (as well as doubting that conviction at the same time); because of having discovered one day all the documents of the American secret services that narrated his life, and Colombian History in the 1940s through the dark looking glass of the Cold War mentality. Because of the same reason that I gravitated to 911, because I am extremely interested in historical thresholds and moments in time that change the paradigms of a society in the most essential way. And also because of the idea that one can, as an artist, be a real actor in reactivating a present thought on history and on images of the past that have frozen and can't be easily thought of in original ways. No end, just an opening of the fan where it has been closed by a sanctioned memory of events that always get told in a certain way.

MM: What are the implications of doing a live transmission? How is it different, or more effective? Is it closer to the truth? How to recognize the presence of fiction in every truth?

FB: A live transmission is a metaphor for a *reading* in the present on the one hand. On the other hand a live trans - mission is also a way to point out towards a passage, as all translations do. The term "transmission" speaks about language, it is the term for a positivistic conception of language, language as a tool. The terms "transmission" and "television" already purport transparency, an objective *outside* (a meta physics) that is simply *making it* to you, (you, the television viewer), through a neutral mechanism; as if a language were something that corresponds to a thought, to a thing. A language doesn't adjust in one way or another to a thought, a language is the thought. The media creates the illusion of something outside, something it is being a mediator to, and that is where its power as a social controller lies (as we said before). I guess the use of liveness on my part is a mechanism to bring forward the always hard to grasp question of the media, mediality, mediation, translation; to be able to address that language that is always performing a disappearing act in front of our eyes. How is it different to a recorded event? I don't know, I ask myself the question. What to do about live? Speaking about translation, the focus of your show, I am in contact now with Katharine Gun, the translator that leaked the memo where the U.S. was asking Britain to bug the phones of the delegations of the members of the Security Council, in the months when key decisions were being taken regarding the legality of an Iraq Invasion. I am interested in her also as an icon, a person whose stance in the collective imagination of the world is quite precise, she is known for one significant action and only that. She is very interesting in that she foregrounds

problem of the exception: first she breaks the law in order to bring judgment to the lawlessness of the very administrators of the law: the governments of the US and Britain, acting illegally in the international arena of the UN. She reveals the unaccountability of their abuse of power: no one has power over the organisms that administer power. Who could have a supra supra national power to condemn them, considering that the supra national power is barely enforceable? "I the sovereign, who stand outside of the law say there is no outside of the law". That said on the side of sovereignty, her case goes on to reveal the other side, the *Homo Sacer* figure that Agamben rescued from Roman jurisprudence. The individual that can't be judged and is left suspended in an *outside*. Katharine might be a more intricate case than the Guantánamo detainee (and certainly not comparable in human terms) but I still think it is very interesting how she was left un-judged after committing a punishable crime, because the British government couldn't afford a trial that would bring another illegality to the forefront, that of the war on Iraq, itself. After choosing her as an interesting subject of my work I ask myself what to do with her, how to mobilize her as an icon. I hate the trivialization that words like "whistle blower" give to the matter. I know I don't want to interview her or make a video about her, I want to include her in this live question. Why? Because then I am competing with the Media in what is brought forward and what isn't at a certain moment in time, at least metaphorically. That's where I stand.

Speaking about truth and fiction, I am thinking of including archival material in the next transmission, yet have a live reading of it. The material is from a moment when Dan Rather, the anchorman of CBS news was in Cali covering a massive kidnapping by the guerilla in 1999. He narrated the recent history of Colombia with a summary of the rise of a Narco-guerrilla born as an offspring of the mafia, basically as their private army. Anyone who knows anything about Colombia would laugh at this notion. The guerrilla group he was referring to was born in 1964, and actually in the 50s there were already liberal guerrillas that led to the Maoist and Moscow-lined ones. U.S. Anchorman Dan Rather goes to Colombia in a special mission, to narrate the events, exactly as the Clinton administration wants to see them at the time; they are invested in coining the term *Narco-guerrilla* to simplify their actions, to keep the uni-dimensional focus U.S. foreign policy pragmatism operates on. At the time it was "war on drugs", now it is "war on terror". Now the guerilla is not "narcoguerrilla" but a "terrorist group of global reach". The Rather clip is gone, expendable news, but precisely because it is I would like to bring it forward, give myself the right to bring forward what is no longer news and *make* it news. I would like to have ex-Colombian anchormen and women responding to Dan Rather's assertions, and to think of the question of *anchoring* images. I don't know the details of how it will take place exactly, I like the punk slogan that says "I don't know what I want but I know how to get it."

MM: What about reality shows phenomena? Extreme Makeover, The Apprentice, American Idol, etc

FB: All are very interesting to me. I see them a bit like a social drug, I am immediately addicted as soon as I'm in front of any of those things. I'm very voyeuristic, but so are you, I mean everyone is. It is strange, these two sides of the coin: the camera that watches us as criminals in every public space where we walk, and the same camera that now watches others to fulfill our insatiable voyeuristic

desire; the internalized observer. We are now a deeply masochistic society when it comes to the image. Or is it that the more we feel powerless in front of this surveyed world the more we need a little fix of the feeling of power that those shows give us tacitly. Remember the Duke watching the central courtyard through his binoculars in the last scenes of Pasolini's Salò?

The other day a girl's perfectly round breast got punctured in some Eden-haze reality show and as the silicon and blood were still being mopped from the floor of the bathroom (a real image of the image) her enemy in the show said that she would happily puncture her other breast if she were to come back. Isn't this interesting? Isn't it speaking at some level about where our body is, our body mediated to ourselves?

MM: If you ask about the status of painting in contemporary art, some people still would say that it's dead. What would you say is the status of image in contemporary culture?

FB: Painting is not the image that the culture is in dialogue with like it used to be in other centuries. So it is clear that most artists are looking elsewhere because they want to be in dialogue with a society around them. There's also that whole question that Walter Benjamin mentioned through the reheating of the concept of the aura. The difference between a venerable contemplation and a reception in distraction, the art object as a bullet that hits us. Diluting a strong subject, diluting the author as well, so that thought that has never started can unravel. But I always find, again and again, that painting has something to say anyway, and every once in a while I find myself in front of a painting that is doing something quite remarkable that no other medium could have done, because it has a long, deep, intricate dialogue with a history of representation and particularly with the religious imagination of the world.

MM: Don't get me wrong but I have become highly suspicious of these non-essential positions that have been invoked in the figure of the refugee, the migrant, the exiled, (even the sphinx that you came up with). It seems that we are the only ones to recognize something important, some possible political model of radicality (radical passivity) in those non-essential positions. Meanwhile political and economic powers of the day do take sides in the name of nations, erasing everything else; rendering ineffective all the careful avoidance of essential positions that the intellectuals have engaged in for the sake of a subtlety that doesn't seem to have any power to mobilize anything. Don't get me wrong, I don't want to fall into nationalisms or sides but I do believe at a certain level these things are not effective practically. Would you recognize that at least the audience (viewer, public, etc) needs to take an essential position? Aren't you willing to manipulate things to have people look at them from your side? Or force them to run through the middle, if you will, since you don't take sides? Is this subversion an option?

FB: An undoing of the traditional principle of a subject and its position in the world has to take place if we are to really engage in the journey of understanding ourselves as “spoken by” language rather than “users” of language. An “essential position” entails an essential subject that faces a world outside of him with an external tool, a metaphysical (anchored) language through which he understands and uses his world. That subject is necessarily unified, which is why the so-called postcolonial historical shift is one of the factors that led to the undoing of a notion of that essential subject within an essentially accountable History. When there are many subject positions that are speaking from the place that was traditionally assigned to “the spoken of”, then that essential subject necessarily dissolves (the perspective isn’t unique anymore), and with it a firm principle of reality also dissolves. What can we do in a spinning reality? It is a mystery how a non-essential position can still have agency in a hard hat convoluted world like ours, but one has to believe that politics is coming, a politics of non essential positions. Agamben tries to find a model for these kinds of politics in the “revolution” of early Christianity. This revolution doesn’t seek a new essential presupposition, especially as viewed through Saint Paul, who rather than contest the division of the law of his time between Jews and non-Jews breaks the division in two, thereby rendering the law obsolete. He creates “non-non Jews”. He checkmates the law by dividing the division that the law was based on. This is a paradigm for a non-essential position, a resistance that doesn’t define itself essentially and yet is still *acting*, though in a different dimension of that word. Agamben points out that to *remain*, *g*, to avoid the projection that looks beyond the means, can be the place of resistance. *Reste* and *resister* (to remain and to resist) have the same root at least in French.

MM: Francois where are you living now? What will be your next transmission?

FB: Now I live in Berlin. My next transmission is two simultaneous feeds from two African ex-French colonies to the Musée des Beaux Arts in Nantes... if we get the budget together. There would be two groups of writers in two different geographical locations reacting to the image at the same moment in time. That transmission will be called, deforming a title of Pasolini’s work, “Notes for a Second Poem on the Third World.”