

Folding Trauma

On Alfredo Jaar's installations and interventions

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Viewing Alfredo Jaar's installation *Field, Road, Cloud* (1997) begins unassumingly as a typical museum experience. You traverse a corridor and enter a space of ascetic modernism: a large, cool, clean, empty, open room. The room is dark. Spot lit on the far wall are three large (40 in × 60 in) photographs, devastatingly colourful cibachrome prints. At left: a lush green field – some sort of crop in the foreground – fades to a landscape horizon at the very top of the frame. At centre: glowing golden hues of a dirt road, hugged tightly on both sides by a multitude of skinny trees that produce the striking stripes of sunlight to define the way (a fist of sky hovering above the path). At right: a solitary cotton ball of a cloud, against a brilliant blue sky, aloft above the tree line – it floats carefree as it gobbles the sun's attention. The spotlights on the images enhance the warm colours and reveal what appear to be unremarkable and expected information cards – the archivist's crisp list of facts: names, dates and dimensions. Upon closer inspection, however, the three placards reveal themselves as images in their own right: 6 in × 9 in sketches – white lines on black backgrounds – of the sites of the photographs. Though minimalist in form, the sketches provide information exceeding the frame of what is seen in the photographs. Including names and dates, distances and contexts, these images are simple yet intimate maps. As shadowy supplements, the maps reveal an alternate milieu of visibility to (re)orient viewers' attention.

We learn that the first image is of tea fields.

The shot was taken 29 August 1994, from the main road somewhere 40 km from the town of Kigali, near the Ntarama church. The tree-lined road is shown at the right on this first map, away from the visual trajectory the camera used to capture the tea field. The next map reveals a zoomed-in geographic scale: it explains that the second photograph is of the road to Ntarama church. The shot's direction is towards the church. If it is not yet clear, it soon will be, that we are on a journey down this road. We are on a trajectory of images and sensations, drawing a map of sensations and affects with the peregrinations of our imagination. The final map shows the shot's upward angle of the 'lonely cloud', suspended above Ntarama church. In front of the church are some squiggly lines, evoking piles. An arrow points to the piles: 'Bodies. 500?' The oblique method by which we arrive at this site of trauma – the massacre of 500 people, presumably unburied, decaying, and exposed to the elements – contrasts viscerally with the beautiful photographs. Yet the photographs contain the trauma. It is folded into them. Jaar's performative procedure is to allow the traumatic content to unfold. Rather than a mere set of three images, this is a performance of duration and revelation, mediated by a folding of six images, a folding of place and trauma.

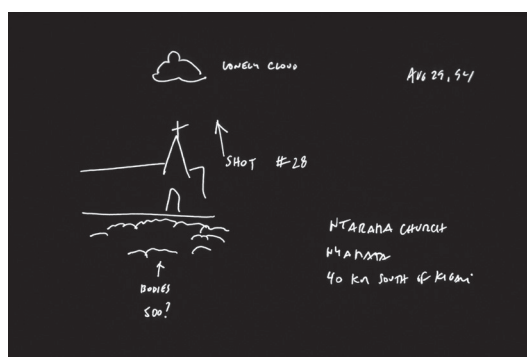
It is important that I distinguish a specific form of trauma (what can be called 'political trauma') from the wider category of trauma that includes all physical and emotional injuries (such as those sustained in accidents, natural



• *Field, Road, Cloud.*
Courtesy Alfredo Jaar

disasters and similar situations to which we refer commonly as traumas). Following Jenny Edkins, I focus on the political dimension of trauma, which depends on a thoroughly human (i.e., relational) component for its constitution. As Edkins explains, 'to be called traumatic - to produce what are seen as symptoms of trauma - an event has to be more than just a situation of utter powerlessness. ... It has to involve a betrayal of trust as well' (Edkins 2003: 4). Trust, in this sense, refers to basic protections and resides in institutions: friendship, family, community and government (in local terms), but also media institutions, economic institutions and the responsiveness of international publics (in global terms). The betrayal of these kinds of trust is an utter breach of relationships of protection. It is a saturated failure of the very conditions for the possibility of the political. It unhinges the constitutive bonds of humanity. On this account, the clearest cases of political trauma range from sexual and domestic abuse to genocide, ethnic cleansing and the Holocaust. The latter forms, of course, often include the most brutish techniques of the former.

One of the defining features of traumatic experience is its persistence. It exhibits stickiness in space and time, lingering unexorcizably in the places of its perpetration, in the bodies of those affected, in the eyes of witnesses and in the politics of memory. Traumas are experienced not only in lived time



(once) but also in the terrifying duration of memory's persistence (always). The massacre at Ntarama church is but a small part of a larger genocide - a million deaths in a hundred days. Yet the viscosity of trauma at such a large scale gets lost in statistical anonymity - a kind of aesthetic cleansing. By contrast, and as seen above in *Field, Road, Cloud*, Jaar draws attention to the local scale of trauma, to its lingering in singular individuals and to the way such lingering hails us to account for it. He rejects the regularity of our mediated encounter with trauma - e.g., the presentation of statistics and shocking documentary images of carnage that create distance - in favour of the singular. The singular collapses the experience to a haptic level and creates a milieu of contact. This place - Ntarama church, after the massacre, on 29 August 1994 - is a singular event containing a full history and geography of trauma. It is a continuation of the massacre. It is a place where

people like Gutete Emerita and Benjamin Musisi have lived through the trauma and bear witness to it. Jaar makes it a place of contact, a place of implication: viewers are folded into the event, becoming part of its continuation. In *Field, Road, Cloud*, the place, the images and acts of seeing are folded together in the event – folding in to the memories of survivors, folding out to the global economy of tea crops and folding both together in a performance of a singular mode of visibility for viewers/audiences.

The boundaries of traumatic experience envelop both internal and external limits – folding in, folding out, folding together. Trauma's limits can be understood as approaches to infinity (one infinitely large, expressing an endless abundance; the other infinitely small, expressing a disappearance or withdrawal). These dual limits coexist in traumatic experience as dual problems of phenomenological excess and access. At the external limit is excess: trauma always makes and takes too much (e.g., too much death, too much pain, too much betrayal, too many images, too many victims, too many meanings). Yet at the same time, the overabundance of traumatic experience folds in on itself, obscuring and blocking access to meaning, to understanding, to healing and to political imagination. The internal limit of trauma is one of access: it is always incomplete, displaced and delayed. The excess of the traumatic event itself combines with this perpetual poverty of access to constitute the experiential and performative terrain of trauma. The persistence of trauma is complicated in its very givenness, as it folds together the limit conditions of excess and access.

The double constraint of excess and access repeats itself with representational practices that attempt to address trauma. Whether it is a question of documenting, witnessing, memorializing or narrating traumas, the interplay of excess and access seems to doom these practices to defeat. Common charges include aestheticizing suffering, appropriating trauma for political gain or

reproducing ideologies of power. The ethical, political, aesthetic and epistemic questions of representing trauma reside in a terrain of limits: the unsayable, the unrepresentable, the intolerable and the unimaginable. What these limits hold in common is an assumption that expression takes the form of a point – that it is a place of arrival in a passive terrain of information. The performative puzzle for addressing trauma thus becomes a creative search for techniques of displacement. How can we displace points of expression in favour of curvilinear trajectories? How can we displace habituated modes of visibility? How can we displace passivity?

Alfredo Jaar has been performing such displacements for the past three decades. His installations and interventions fold together complex questions of political trauma, habits of representation and practices of visibility. In terms of performance, the experience for viewers is staged to unfold between elemental forms of expression: between light and darkness, word and image, memory and matter, politics and aesthetics, spectatorship and participation. In the examples of Jaar's work that I discuss, displacement is mobilized through these practices of folding and unfolding. Yet there are two other aspects of displacement that are important to consider from a performance perspective. Contrary to most typical performance contexts, installations (and some types of interventions) displace the centrality of the artist's body in the event. In its place (and in a place), the viewer or audience is cast in an active role. Installations can be understood as performances when they hail viewers to participation. Similarly, performance perspectives are appropriate lenses to bring to installations when the content of the experience bears upon performative practices and questions of performativity. In the analyses to follow, for example, viewer-participants have their mundane practices of spectatorship and political being displaced and called into question. My overarching claim is that Jaar

develops techniques of folding and unfolding to stage performative experiences for viewers. His installations are unsettling and reflexive in a way that transforms viewers into performers. More precisely, Jaar crafts experiences for viewers that implicate them as mundane performers of (and for) political and aesthetic regimes.

I adopt the concept of the fold from Gilles Deleuze. The fold is a wide-reaching and malleable concept, appearing in Deleuze's work in contexts as varied as subjectivity, perception, politics, ecology, music and mathematics. The fold is also one of Deleuze's least defined concepts. In many ways, this is because the concept itself performs variation and fluidity, receding from the limits of its own givenness. Appearing throughout Deleuze's works, the fold is a concept crafted both in excess – it is potentially everywhere and obvious – and in limited access – it is used to describe phenomena of infinite approach without definite arrival. It is this interplay of phenomena both obvious and ineffable that resonates with (1) the nature of traumatic experience and (2) the performative challenges of addressing trauma aesthetically. As this essay itself unfolds, I describe how these resonances play out in terms of phenomena that fold and unfold. As a philosophical concept for Deleuze, the fold figures most prominently in a book on Foucault and in another on Leibniz. In the latter book, Deleuze describes Baroque forms (e.g., of architecture, arts, mathematics, biology and politics) in terms that might best be understood as a 'machinic' phenomenology of the transcendental aesthetic. Through this text, Deleuze provides an animated and productive view of space, time, movement, memory and distribution. 'Straight lines are all alike, but folds vary, and all folding proceeds by differentiation', writes Deleuze. 'There are two kinds of concepts, universals and singularities. The concept of fold is always something singular, and you can only get anywhere by varying, branching out, taking new forms' (Deleuze 1995: 156–7). The fold envelops sensation and sense in a kind of perpetual motion that remains resolutely

singular. It is in this sense that I find the fold to be a particularly fitting concept for describing performative phenomena.

The fold expresses processes of connection and compression. According to Deleuze, 'the Baroque' should be understood primarily as a function producing folds: pleats, curves, contours, textures, approaches to infinity, and perpetual displacements. For Deleuze the fold has a constitutive excess that is both 'a power of thinking and political force' (Deleuze 1993: 38). In this phenomenological sense, traumatic experience shares its form with the Baroque, i.e., it produces and is produced in folds. 'A fold is always folded within a fold, like a cavern in a cavern' (Deleuze 1993: 6). The excessive nature of political trauma is experienced and disseminated as a folding – a *plication* – of images, memories, violence and politics. Thus, *implication*, *explication*, *complication* and *replication* of traumatic experience are mingled together in an interplay of excess and access. It is perhaps this folded nature of political trauma that leads such experience to be described often as being beyond representation and imagination. Nevertheless, by staging the folded nature of trauma's constitutive excess and limited access, an effective strategy of address may be found. As I attempt to show in my discussions of some of Jaar's works that address political trauma, his performative procedure is a mobilization of folds. He addresses folded phenomena by creating performative experiences that operate via folding, unfolding and refolding.

Jaar's most discussed work has explicitly addressed cases of political trauma, especially his series of works about the 1994 genocide in Rwanda. Yet from works about his native Chile – e.g., his early *Studies on Happiness* (1979–81) and the recent *The Geography of Conscience* (2010) – to his scores of projects about Africa, to his trilogy of works about Antonio Gramsci, he has produced bold installations and public interventions that explore the relations between politics, images and the vagaries of globalization. His projects usually combine

philosophical interrogation with rhetorical exigency. As performances, these works are encounters with habits of thought, systems of information and politics of visibility. By way of what we might call 'performative folding', Jaar stages jarring displacements of traumatic events - showing how aesthetic regimes are often folded together with political ones, exploring the nature of traumatic events in dramatic interplays of presence and absence. In his installations, he often folds together speed and slowness, speech and image, visibility and violence, matter and memory, singularity and multitude. In what follows I unfold and refold several of Jaar's performative themes across analyses of his most trauma-specific works.

Jaar travelled to Rwanda in 1994, just after the three-month period of genocide (April-July) ended, taking photographs of survivors, witnesses to the horrors, inhabitants of the aftermath. Jaar spent much of his time talking with survivors, collecting stories, images and affects. As many as one million Tutsis and peaceful Hutus perished at the hands of Hutu militias. (More perished afterward in the precarious life of refugees and the injured). Jaar was deeply troubled by the widespread violence and its thick patina of horrors; he was perhaps even more horrified by the global indifference to the events, most notably the dearth of media coverage, the sparseness of public outcries and the lack of intervention by global powers. In light of these dual traumas - local ones of material violence, and global ones of indifference - Jaar produced over twenty works between 1994 and 2000 known collectively as *The Rwanda Project*. Consisting mainly of installations and interventions (i.e., performance actions), these works share gestures of interrogation and lamentation. As much as the project works to expose horrors in the full singularity of experience as a kind of consciousness-raising performance, it also addresses the nature of photographic images, the haecceity of names and art's ability to effect political action or to capture truths of traumatic events.

For Jaar, the genocide in Rwanda involved at least two kinds of political trauma. On the one hand, and most obviously, is an internal betrayal. Millions had their lives rendered destitute and bare. They were killed, maimed, left homeless, displaced, devoured. Their own people - neighbors and countrymen - and government turned on them. On the other hand, there was an external betrayal as well. No one came to their aid. It was weeks before media coverage and images reached mainstream media. No one intervened. No one helped. No one cared. They were erased, displaced, devoid.

As mentioned above, a common perspective on trauma is that it is beyond communication and representation, that it resides beyond the limits of the speakable and imaginable. These are precisely the limit conditions of excess and access that define trauma, and they are particularly acute problems when considered in terms of an aesthetic of linearity and points (as with documentation and narration). Jaar's work, by contrast, performs in the folds of betrayal - i.e., between excess and access - to illuminate both political betrayals and aesthetic betrayals. Not only does he lament the violence of perpetrators and the indifference and inaction of various publics. He also laments the betrayal of images, sensation, subjectivity and the political as such. By folding politics and aesthetics, Jaar draws attention to the performative stakes of both.

In *Real Pictures* (1995), for example, Jaar stages a memorial for victims of the Rwandan massacre. The installation is composed of many elements common in Jaar's work - darkness, light, boxes, images and texts - as well as his trademark disruptions and displacements of viewer expectations. From the thousands of photographs Jaar took in Rwanda, he selected a set to capture various aspects of the massacre (e.g., survivors, crowds, places of destruction, humanitarian organizations etc.). The prints were made from slides using the cibachrome process of dye destruction printing - known for its colour richness, image clarity and archival longevity. Each print was then placed inside



• *Real Pictures*.
Courtesy Alfredo Jaar



a black linen archival box (folding presence and absence). The top of each box contains a description of the image inside, in white text. The clean font of the text invokes the informational regime of museum conventions, only in negative. In *Real Pictures*, Jaar stacks hundreds of these boxes - little resting places for the images - into 'monumental' forms of varying heights and dimensions. The room in which they are stacked is dark. The monuments are theatrically lit with narrowly focused light to illuminate the texts and produce a low, somber glow around each stack. The texts provide names, contexts and descriptions of the prints lying inside:

Ntarama Church, Nyamata, Rwanda
40 kilometers south of Kigali
Monday, August 29, 1994

This photograph shows Benjamin Musisi, 50, crouched low in the doorway of the church amongst scattered bodies spilling out into the daylight. Four hundred Tutsi men, women, and children who had come here seeking refuge were slaughtered during Sunday mass.

Benjamin looks directly into the camera, as if recording what the camera saw. He asked to be photographed amongst the dead. He wanted to prove to his friends in Kampala, Uganda, that the atrocities were real and that he had seen the aftermath.

David Levi Strauss describes the experience of viewership as a folded one: 'One wanders among these dark monuments as if through a graveyard, reading epitaphs. But in this case, the inscriptions are in memory of *images*, and of the power images once had in us' (Strauss 2003: 93). It is not that the images in the boxes - their visibility folded into absence - should not be seen or remembered. It is rather that the power of images has become diminished. To have unmediated access to the images would be too

familiar, too regular, too forgettable. It would be expected.

Images themselves have been betrayed by the system of information. They've been folded into oblivion. Because information seems to envelop our lives in continuous broadcasts, we think we have (always already) seen too much. Yet in this excess we lack access: we do not see enough because we do not see in the mode of singularity. We rely on aesthetic distance and skimming. *We do not take time*. Jacques Rancière implicates the dominant news media in the evacuation of that time. Although we take for granted the idea that we live in a world of image overload, the images we see are mostly those of the newscasters and expert commentators. What is visible is mainly the system of information speaking. What Jaar does with *Real Pictures* is effect a reversal and a displacement. As Rancière puts it, *Real Pictures* 'overturn[s] the dominant logic that makes the visual the lot of multitudes and the verbal the privilege of the few. The words do not replace images. They are images - that is to say, forms of redistribution of the elements of representation' (Rancière 2009: 97). In effect, Jaar allows the singular image to speak. By folding presence with absence, he is able to unfold the power of the image to speak in the name of singularity (as opposed to speaking in the name of regularity and the regulatory function of news media). The force that the 'real pictures' have with which to speak increases as we spend time with the descriptions,

displaced from the images themselves.

Imagination speaks as a performative supplement to this displacement. The folded, monadic quality of the regular image gives way to a nomadic unfolding of the imagination.

'To unfold is to increase, to grow; whereas to fold is to diminish, to reduce, to withdraw into the recesses of the world' (Deleuze 1993: 8-9). Jaar's motivation is to draw our attention to this withdraw from the genocide in Rwanda and to show that we are implicated in (i.e., folded into) the event. It is to transform regimes of visibility. In these boxes, these enclosures, Jaar unfolds the imagination by folding visibility.

One of Jaar's aesthetic principles is to unfold intimacy to infinity while reanimating the transformative powers of imagination that have been evacuated from photographic images, especially those deployed in a documentary mode. A performance technique to accomplish this in his installations is the creation of haptic encounters, zones of contact and phatic connection. Jaar folds the distant and the near - vision and touch - to produce encounters and animate the imagination. Simultaneously, he folds durations that define the limit conditions of events. Jaar's performance technique here is to design the temporal aspects of the viewing experience between waiting and instantaneity. Two versions of an installation titled *The Eyes of Gutete Emerita* (1996) are exemplary of these techniques.

• *The Eyes of Gutete Emerita*. Courtesy Alfredo Jaar



One version of *The Eyes of Gutete Emerita* is a repeating display of four sets of two images. The images are presented in two quad vision light boxes hung side by side in an otherwise empty room. The room itself is dim, the atmosphere is cool. The images cycle through in increasingly shortened durations. The first set of images contains only gritty white text on a black background, filling each of the boxes. The content is a description of an absent photograph, as in *Real Pictures*. Yet this installation requires a different type of engagement on the part of viewers. Whereas viewers wandered among the monuments of buried (folded) images with their (unfolded) inscriptions in *Real Pictures*, this time viewers are asked to stand as monuments. The images of the inscriptions themselves move, holding viewers in place by holding duration. The first set of slides fill each frame with ten lines of text. They appear for viewers' consumption for forty-five seconds:

Gutete Emerita, 30 years old, is standing in front of a church where 400 Tutsi men, women, and children were systematically slaughtered by a Hutu death squad during Sunday mass. She was attending mass with her family when the massacre began. Killed with machetes in front of her eyes were her husband Tito Kahinamura, 40, and her two sons, Muhoza, 10, and Matirigari, 7. Somehow, Gutete managed to escape with her daughter Marie-Louise Unamamarunga, 12. They hid in a swamp for three weeks, coming out only at night for food.

The presence of proper names and this brief description of horror transforms the vast anonymity of global violence into a singularity and a milieu of contact.

The brevity of the description is not enough to keep images from rushing into viewers' minds. The invasion of the imagination is the special purview of both terror and trauma, and we are now exposed to it. Jaar designs duration into his installations as a way of displacing our viewing relations with images. So much spectatorship involves mindless scanning and glancing of the immediately present visual field. Being forced to wait with these words, we see them as images

themselves. As we endure the duration of these images, the imagination activates alternative visibilities. One of the things we see is Gutete seeing; we see her seeing the horror. Then we see the horror of her hiding; we see her hiding for survival.

This first set of images fades away, and another set of texts appears. Both the amount of text and the duration of its appearance are shortened. There are five lines in each box, and they remain for thirty seconds:

Her eyes look lost and incredulous. Her face is the face of someone who has witnessed an unbelievable tragedy and now wears it. She has returned to this place in the woods because she has nowhere else to go. When she speaks about her lost family, she gestures to corpses on the ground, rotting in the African sun.

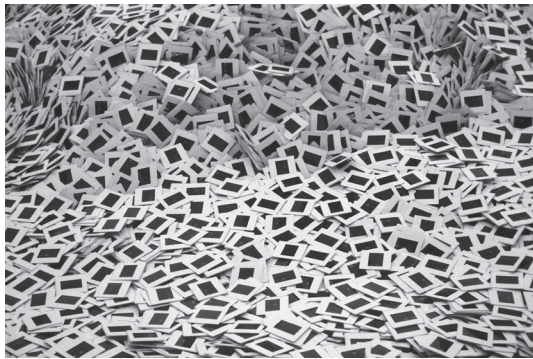
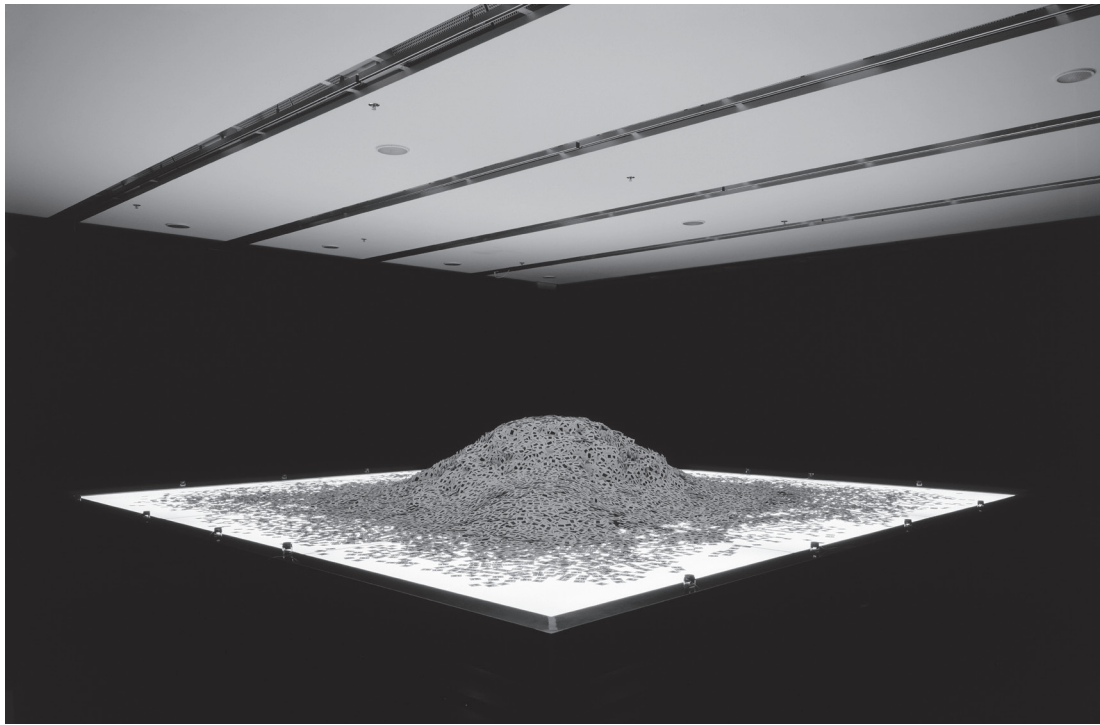
Not only do Jaar's words localize the horror and animate the imagination. They also draw attention to practices of spectatorship. Viewers do not want to bear witness to what Gutete Emerita has seen; they don't want to wear her pain. Yet our habits of looking invoke a strange summons - as captivating as the Sirens' song - to see an image, even if it is horrifying. It is as if the ability to look brings with it a kind of will to trauma. The stillness of the image heightens awareness of - while simultaneously soothing - the vertiginous movements of the imagination.

As this text disappears, it is replaced with two short lines:

I remember her eyes. The eyes of Gutete Emerita.

The brevity of the text is striking. Memory and image converge: 'I remember her eyes.' The seeing and the seen become one: 'The eyes of Gutete Emerita.' Though this text remains for fifteen seconds, it is consumed in only one or two. And so the wait for what is coming takes on the slow time of terror. We are caught in both a lust for the expected visual image and revulsion at continuing to wait for it. Close-up shots of her eyes appear in a shocking instant. And after one second they are gone, before we have a chance

• *The Eyes of Gutete Emerita*. Courtesy Alfredo Jaar



to focus on anything, before we have a chance to fix our gaze upon them. In this installation, Jaar denies viewers access to the duration of the gaze desired, denies the exposure time that can provide both aesthetic and moral distance. Instead, the instant is unremittingly haptic - we are touched by her eyes. The afterimage burns. In this moment, the distances of globalization and the distances of language dissolve, revealing the singularity of her life. In this moment of brief encounter, the image makes a demand. The image demands simply that we see her. It demands recognition. It demands that she not be forgotten. It hails her to memory. In his short essay 'Judgment Day', Giorgio Agamben explains that 'the photographic exigency that interpellates us has nothing aesthetic about it. It is, rather, a demand for redemption. The photograph is always more than an image: it is the site of a gap,

a sublime breach between the sensible and the intelligible, between copy and reality, between a memory and a hope' (Agamben 2007: 26).

A second version of the installation brings to presence trauma's dual constraints of excess and access. This time, the text glows on a black wall. It runs in a single, continuous line so that viewers must walk along with the words. The trajectory ends at a room containing a large light table (16 ft x 16 ft) piled high with slides - one million of them. The one million slides, of course, symbolize the one million deaths in the genocide. This representation of statistical information produces the desired effect of being overwhelmed. But it also poses the problem Jaar is illuminating. It is the very excess of large numbers that denies access to the singular. It is lack of access to the singular stories that produces indifference. As you approach the table, you start to realize that every slide is the same. Instead of a million different images, there is one image reproduced a million times. Excess and access are collapsed. They are folded into the singular image to allow the imagination - including the political imagination - to fix upon something tangible. There are loupes on the table for examining the slides. To view the image, you must bend down, position a slide, and place your eye on the loupe. You are oriented eye-to-eye with Gutete Emerita. Your eye is filled with hers. The

distance is infinitesimally small, approaching zero in the intimacy of haptic vision. Visibility is touched. As vision and touch collapse, we see – and feel – our implication in the event.

The unfolding of both versions of *The Eyes of Gutete Emerita* is an unfolding of the singular. Deleuze offers singularity as part of an alternative conception of subjectivity concomitant with the fold:

Singularity should not be understood as something opposing the universal but any element that can be extended to the proximity of another such that it may obtain a connection ... Truth and falsehood no longer count; the singular and the regular, the remarkable and the ordinary replace them. (Deleuze 2006: 350)

Across these two versions of the installation, Jaar crafts a performance of the singular in order to produce proximity and connection. In so doing, the experience also illuminates our own everyday performances of indifference that rely on regular practices of spectatorship.

The last piece I will discuss from the Rwanda project is the most literal appearance of the fold in Jaar's work. *The Gift* (1998) was a performance intervention in Stockholm. In it, 15,000 red cardboard boxes were produced and then given to passersby at various places throughout the city by volunteers from Doctors without Borders. Text on the outside of the handheld box instructs recipients of this gift to unfold and refold it, to

turn it inside-out. Four sides of the refolded box reproduce four images from an earlier Rwanda installation, *Let There Be Light* (1995). These four photographs are of two boys, part of a crowd, who are witnessing something outside the frame. The shots are taken from behind them. We see them holding each other, the folding movements of mutual embrace suggested across the sequence of shots. The gesture of simple embrace suggests a human solidarity that should know no borders. The top and bottom of the refolded box contains text in Swedish. The bottom panel reads, 'What did you expect? We can only offer you the possibility of getting outside yourself. Please help someone else. Please help Doctors without Borders' (Princenthal 2005: 19). The top panel of the box contains a removable card inscribed with the direct-deposit bank account number for Doctors without Borders. Removing the card transforms the gift into a donation box.

On a surface level, *The Gift* seems simple and straightforward. You are given something in the hope that you will reciprocate by making a donation. It is clever and therefore memorable, of course, to build a slot into the top panel. Not only is the gift a box; the gift itself is a gift box – a box of giving. *The Gift* displaces consumption by calling on funds for Doctors without Borders (even while it becomes a cherished collectible item from the artworld). But it is in the folding, unfolding and refolding of the gift that trauma is revealed in its persistence and duration. When



• *The Gift*.
Courtesy Alfredo Jaar

• *The Gift*.
Courtesy Alfredo Jaar



the gift is given, it is just a red box. Folded inside the box, however, is a whole world of trauma. Silenced in the dark recesses of the world, it is brought to light by refolding the box. Turning the refolded box animates the embrace of the boys and suspends it in perpetuity. Yet it allows trauma to hover with hope. The co-presence of an international non-government organization on the box, combined with its distribution in a European country, folds together tangled webs of violence, globalization, money and the possibility of transformation. It is significant that *The Gift* appears in the shape of a simple box-style camera, which multiplies a metaphor of exposure. Refolding exposes the images inside the box and also the genocide in Rwanda. Exposure, furthermore, is created for the aid organization. In addition, the long exposure of colonialism and globalization is also implied, folding out the traumatic durations of global poverty, institutionalized violence and political disenfranchisement. Still, a hope hovers with the gift: the recognition that singular exposures can effect transformations. Unfolded here is a stance on the political: multitude within each singularity.

'Folds are always full,' writes Deleuze (1993: 36). This seems no clearer than in Alfredo Jaar's works of political art. At once oblique and direct, Jaar negotiates the limits of excess and access: of light and dark, of imagination and image, of visibility and representation, of outside and inside. He works in the folds of trauma, within its swarming fullness. In a recent installation called *The Geometry of Conscience* (2010), built for the Museum of Human Rights in Santiago, Chile, Jaar has created a three-minute installation of folds. In this work, viewers enter the box itself (a 5-metre cube of a room), becoming enfolded in the performance. The performance begins by plunging the room into total darkness for 60 seconds. Over the next 90 seconds, one of the 5 m x 5 m walls begins to glow, increasing in intensity from 10 per cent to a blinding brilliance of 100 per cent fullness. Revealed from the darkness are hundreds of silhouettes of faces –

victims and witnesses of the political violence perpetrated during the dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet. The adjacent walls are mirrored, creating an infinity effect: infinite faces, infinite viewers, infinite light. The whole world is folded into the room, a multitude of singularities. After the light reaches full intensity – enveloping the space, the viewers and the images – the room is plunged again into darkness for 30 seconds, leaving only afterimages and the imagination. The door then opens automatically. The installation repeats as a slow, steady breathing of light and image, visibility and memory – performing the persistence of trauma and activating the political imagination. In addressing trauma and tyranny, Alfredo Jaar's works demand redemption.

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