



* This is terrible. We're online. I thought we were supposed to be offline. We were supposed to be off the grid!

/ Off the grid, not the web, just the grid.

* Just the grid. Let me just provide a bit of introduction here, seeing as I was the one asked to convene this group of people. A couple of months ago, Lara Favaretto asked me to participate in this event and I was given a choice of words to pick from and organise a chat around. (There was a whole bunch of words, and I'm forgetting them now.) But I was predictably attracted to one of them in particular, which was "off-the-grid." And by way of introduction, I'll just talk a little bit about the reasons why I was interested in this particular subject. It has to do with an event that already involved one of us here, namely Thomas Wallgren.

Almost exactly a year ago I organised an exhibition here in Venice in conjunction with the architecture biennale at Fondazione Prada called *Machines à Penser*. This was an exhibition that was devoted to the phenomenon of the philosopher's hut. The exhibition was built centrally around two historical huts or cabins: that of Ludwig Wittgenstein in Norway, and that of Martin Heidegger in the Black Forest in Germany. There was also a third structure that was part of the equation, which was actually an artwork by Ian Hamilton Finlay called *Adorno's Hut*. So the exhibition was in a way organised around this holy trinity of 20th-century German-language philosophy: Theodor Adorno, Ludwig Wittgenstein, Martin Heidegger. Two of whom, Heidegger and Wittgenstein, had actual huts built for themselves to escape to; hermitages, places of seclusion, refuge. Then thirdly, there was a sculpture called *Adorno's Hut*, which was made by Ian Hamilton Finlay – an allusion, I think, to the centrality of the experience of exile to the philosophy of Theodor Adorno.

When I was first asked by the Fondazione Prada to propose an exhibition sometime in 2017 for the architecture biennale, I basically suggested we collaborate on notion of the philosopher's hut, which had been with me for a long time; it was something that I had long been interested in. There's another anecdote that kind of folds into this – something that I think all of you will be able to relate to. In 2015, I went on a family holiday to Jamaica, which is when my wife and I got married. Anyone here ever been to Jamaica?

□ / * ○ No.

* Well, it's beautiful. I'd like to go back. Anyway – I was predictably excited about this trip, because I never get to go on holiday. Do you guys ever go on holiday?

○ Well, in Finland and in Nordic countries we go on holiday, in the summer we go to the cottages, to the huts. Very important part of the cycle of life in Nordic countries still.

* How long?

Olaf Holzapfel □

Dan Richards /

Dieter Roelstraete *

Thomas Wallgren ○

- Long holidays.
- * How long?
- Ten weeks? No. It used to be... but we still... many of us do four weeks.
- * Yeah.
- Four weeks.
- * You know how many people in the culture industry, people like you and me, we don't really get to go on holiday, right? We travel all the time; we go all kinds of places all the time – but we never, or very rarely, go anywhere to unwind or relax.
- No, I go, I go hiking with my little kids. I didn't do it for years, but I realised the need of interruption. Otherwise we have no chance to find any distance to ourselves and to the things. The cultural world is only one idea of the matrix. Hiking is a different one.
- * Yeah.
- This year, we were hiking from Grenoble to Turin, last year we went from Bologna to Florence. Over the glaciers, more than 10 days.
- * Yeah.
- Every day 15 kilometres. This time window is led more by topography. Less grid.
- * Yeah.
- A bit off the grid.
- * You go off the grid... Anyway, when in the course of 2015 plans were being made for this trip to Jamaica, I got all excited because I hadn't been on a trip like that for 10 years or something, to somewhere where there's no art, no professional reason for me to go. Because I only ever travel to do things like this right? So we fly to Jamaica from Chicago, we arrive, there's a minivan waiting outside to pick us up. We get driven to this villa on the seashore, we're all very keen and full of anticipation... And then, inevitably perhaps, a deep sense of disappointment – though not for the reasons we might have expected.

So we get to this place: really beautiful, incredibly beautifully located, fully staffed and all that. And one of the first things that the staff shared with us was *the Wi-Fi code*. Right there, in paradise – the network. This truly was one of the first times that I came to realise how utterly inescapable the grid had become. Here we were, in full holiday mode – and the first thing everyone did was to check in: to check their phones, check their email, google this, google that...

That was back in the fall of 2015 and became an important source for the conceptualisation of what two years later became this exhibition devoted to this perennial fantasy of escape, which in a way is what *Machines à Penser* was about. So that's one part of the background of my interest in thinking about this "off-the-grid" business. On that note: I vividly remember seeing the cover of *Bookforum* a couple of years ago when they put out a special issue titled "Off the grid" – one of the first times I consciously took in the phrase – but of course the cover image had to be of one of those crusty traveler types, long dreadlocks blowing in the wind and all that...

/ With a dog on a rope... sort of thing...

* And a little Volkswagen bus in the background. Dan – speaking of covers – that of your book here seems to prove that you've done it. You've gone there – "off the grid." Where is this shot exactly?

/ This is up in Scotland.

○ This is Scotland?

/ Yes. So that's quite near Fort William.

○ The hut could never be in the Nordics. So I was wondering why then the mountains seemed too high for me for Scotland.

/ No. Well, this is just a strange picture because you have the snow and ice on the mountains in the background there but none in the foreground – although it's doubtless very cold. The peaks pictured are fairly big but they're not as high as the Cairngorm mountains ... you know, they're no the Swiss Alps.

○ You must explain then, what we're seeing.

/ Okay. So let me describe the cover of the book. There is a small bothy. A bothy is a Scottish hut, which allows walkers and hikers and mountaineers to overnight in wilderness. They're quite generous structures cause they allow further travel into wilderness and the word bothy comes from I think bothan, which is a Scottish word. Essentially it means cell or single room and often these buildings were for gamekeepers and crofters in times past and they have fallen into disuse and then been renovated by either the bothy association, they are custodians of these buildings and rebuild them in such a way that they perhaps you're able to join the dots as a walker and continue exploration.

They're very, very simple buildings. And this particular bothy is up towards Fort William, so in the North West of Scotland, the inner Hebrides I suppose, and it sits on a very dark brown, green hillside... you can imagine the tromping to get here. You can imagine your boots filled with water and you feel strangely warm, but you realise it's just your own body trying to sort of let you know that you're having a wonderful and terrible time at the same moment.

It's on the cover of this book that I wrote about outposts and the idea of where the human world ceases to hold sway, where we can walk and then the warm places takeover. So that's what the book's about. It's very much a book about going off grid and whether, the impossibility in a way that's going off grid, of going into a world that is not touched by the Anthropocene, this age that we all live in now.

* Is not touched by what?

□ The Anthropocene.

/ I never say it correctly.

□ I did some projects in Patagonia, the place with the latest human settlement of the world. I was on the move for several years. In the first year in Patagonia, I think it was 2012, there was almost no Internet. Four years later all the farmers rent their houses on booking.com.

/ Oh, really?

□ Yeah, suddenly there was no place without Internet-access anymore. You have to imagine, there is one person per square kilometre in a perfect landscape with shepherds and lamas, – really, like an ideal landscape from the Renaissance. A landscape without pressure. Structured by sundown and sunset. I could realise that the onset of the Internet changed the targets, the values and the behaviour of the farmers. It's not only about where we go, it's also about how we think, you know, how we react on this.

○ Did you live there four years or you went back and forth?

□ No, I was there several times. In my projects and my practices, I mostly do something in the physical space with someone from the area. I have one project in the North of Argentina with an indigenous community, the Wichi, living in a cactus forest. I have one of their woven textile pieces here with me. It is also a kind of a grid, you know?

○ It's a cloth. It's a small bag.

□ They've made these kind of patterns for hundreds of years. The interesting thing for me is that they weave abstract patterns about a virtually wild nature. The order of the patterns and the wilderness of nature don't mean any contradiction to them. They don't try to equalise the patterns and the nature. They can jump. A geometrical pattern can describe a concrete subject of their life and surroundings.

○ It's a very dramatical design with very few colours. So how is this nature?

□ All the colours are from plants. And all the elements of the picture reflect something from the environment of the Wichi-community.

* Of course.

/ It looks very, sort of old and kind of Incan, in that way. Really quite geometric and very beautiful.

* So this is a Wichi?

○ It's Wichi art.

* Do you know this culture?

○ No, not well, but I've heard of Wichi.

* I haven't, actually.

○ It's Andean, it seems.

* Huh?

○ Andean culture, it seems. Northwest Argentina.

* Have you been?

○ No, no. But I have some exposure to people who work on the Andean civilisations. That's part of, yeah, I want to talk about that more if I can. It's very interesting. The interest we have today in the Andean civilisation is very interesting for me so I want to share this with you.

* Yeah. Well, yeah...

○ Well I mean...

* We have a lot of time.

○ Yeah, so then I, one thing I want to react to is what they say about the net – as sort of the defining grid of our times, now it's expanding. I think of electricity as the sort of redefining grid of modernity. And when it came, it was full of hope, like Lenin is known to have said socialism is electrification.

* Plus Soviets.

○ The Soviets, yeah the Soviets. So give me the correct quote, something like that. A hundred, maybe a hundred years ago, roughly. And then that hope lasted for quite some time I think.

□ But, I think, he said electrification of the whole land.

○ Yeah, exactly. This is, everybody has to be very important.

□ It has this territorial aspect, you know, it has to be everywhere.

○ Yeah. So everybody has to be included. That was the dream. Yes. And then something happened. I come from Finland. In Finland, we had this episode from 1990 to 2005 roughly that one company, Nokia, grew quite big and the slogan was “connecting people” and that was socialism for the 21st century. The Finnish contribution to the evolution of mankind. That way we do connect everyone and not only through, not only physically you know, the land, but also mentally... people would be more connected. So connection would be deeper and modernity will be more perfect and more splendid.

And I think so that’s one thing and it, it happened very fast and I want... I’ve been thinking of the speed of change of culture. I mean one thing is that the ways of life change more quickly, but I think also the shift from early optimism to disappointment was quicker. That in 1990 it was a good selling point, “connecting people.” Now everybody is shit scared. You come with your net to Patagonia and we are scared of what’s going to happen with these people or what can happen with us when all are connected. So there has been an acceleration of the speed with which modernity gets disappointed with itself. I mean, Trump is there.

* Yeah.

○ Then we have the books. I don’t know if you know this important book by Sherry Turkle, *Alone Together*?

* Yeah.

○ How we’re all on the web and we’re all there and alone together, so that’s one. And then the empirical findings that we’ll get depressed. The more we are on social media, the more depressed we are. So the shift to disappointment is very quick.

/ Yes. And the mind is actually, you know, people are becoming not rewired, they’re becoming hardwired to desire and become, well addicted to dopamine hits. These hits of approval from strangers, you know the likes and the need to check your phone. You know, they did experiments with people and my phone is there and I do that... How often do I do that? I don’t do that at the moment, but in daily life, how often do I do that? I do that apparently if I am a normal person with a mobile phone every two minutes to some degree, if it’s next to me, if it’s in my pocket, I do it every 10 minutes.

I sleep with it next to my head perhaps as cause maybe I use it as an alarm and it’s there the whole time. And where does this, is it a need for real connection or is it a need for reassurance or is it an actual addiction where you just want this meaningless connection? I have put a picture online, somebody likes it. Oh, half a second maybe. I feel good. Yeah, I clear that. I put my phone down again. This is a problem.

○ I wanted to emphasise... this is the thing, and how quickly it comes. 20 years ago, I think it was kind of a little bit elitist, artistic, philosophical thing to be, have this worry and now everybody is worried. And I think that's a very quick learning process. But at the same time it's getting very totalitarian.

It's very difficult to do without, this week we had Greta Thunberg and the climate justice movement in New York. Climate justice tells us we have to leave it in the ground. We really have to leave it in the ground, it's very obvious. But everybody who mobilises for leaving it in the ground, mobilises with these machines. Links up even more with those who are destroying... who are this great... this monster. So the ones who are fighting the monster, we know more than before, what it does, how dangerous it is, and we're more completely dependent. It's more totalitarian in a sense. More Greek tragic than it was.

★ Yeah. This reminds me a little bit of this quip ascribed to Fredric Jameson who famously said that "it's easier to imagine the end of the world than it is to imagine the end of capitalism."

○ And now the end of Google is difficult to imagine.

★ The end of Google... Right. You know, it's 2019 and I find myself living in Chicago. The only way that I am able to reconcile myself with the prospect of staying in America is the guarantee that Trump could be defeated in 2020. If he is reelected then I'm going to have to leave the country and move back to Europe. Anyway, right now it looks like his most formidable challenger might be Elizabeth Warren – who has made the very expensive political promise that once in power she wants to break up Big Tech. She wants to break up the biggest companies on earth. And they of course are not going to let that happen. She might actually jeopardise our chances of defeating Trump by this very promise – her allying herself with the forces rallying against big technology. Something to keep in mind... Are you off the grid now?

□ No, I tried to find this philosopher from Berkeley, who wrote that through the media we are going to compare each other more and more. And this makes us hysterical.

★ René Girard? No...

□ Yeah.

★ Mimetic desire.

□ Yes, I think this is what happened when I was in Patagonia. The people compare each other more. In a landscape, you cannot lose your privacy. There was a woman I knew who had a lake, a beautiful house, and everything, an own weaving mill, a very simple and continuous life. She went out every day, had these animals, Guanacos. I came with my cameraman, who filmed some trees in the landscape.

Then she came and said “Shame on you! You work for this European man and you don’t give me money for this.” You could see she was completely into the new media. The camera and our work had nothing to do with her. I felt that she was devaluing and downgrading her own life. Later, I understood. She had a lot of time during her daily routines. After she has had a smartphone, these intermediate times were filled completely different. The smartphone brought a comparison with pictures, which are not from her reality. I tell this story because it is an example for me to see how we lose what our own life is about. I think, when you say, it is about learning, this is what we have to learn. But I’m quite optimistic, you know... In summertime we were hiking. I was walking with my daughter, asking her: “What are you doing there?” She took all the photos from her friends, everything they had sent her from their holidays in the trash. Immediately.

○ Oh, trashing them.

□ Yeah. All of them. She said: “One hundred from New York.” Very odd, because it were hundreds of photos, in a class of 12 year old children, you know? You’re not there. You know, you’re not, you are in your own body. I think she understood it, you know?

/ Right. Where there’s a generation that have grown up with nothing but the Internet, you know, it’s strange for all of us because I remember when I was at school and pagers, very briefly, pagers came in before mobile phones and it was often the children who had doctors for parents would turn up with a pager. We’d be like, what are you doing? What’s this? And there was a system to where you had to phone up somebody and tell them your message and they would write it down and it would appear on someone else’s pager in the school. And I remember very clearly there were boyfriends and girlfriends who would phone in these embarrassingly sort of like lovey dovey messages to each other.

There was a sense of pride that this page has suddenly said, you know, I love you. Halfway through a science class, but even then I thought this is just odd. Then you had the Nokia handsets, you know the bricks came in and children, some richer children had that and now we all have it. But there is a generation that has grown up only knowing smartphones. Really. Only knowing-

* Connectivity.

/ Connectivity.

* Born into connectivity.

/ Born into connectivity, absolutely. Whereas, I think, people of our age – people born in the 70s and 80s – are better able to pick and choose how we deal with and connect with the internet because we’ve grown up and lived through decades where it didn’t exist. Whereas I think, for people who’ve known nothing else during their lifetime, they’re more likely to feel inundated – although I might be wrong... but choice can be problematic, you know?

I can completely understand how younger people could feel paralysed because there are so many choices, how do you choose what to engage with when it's all coming at you so much? Does that make sense?

No, not much.

/ No?

No. I don't think that's the case. I mean it's true that of people have a different relation to the gadgets, but just the fact that you grew up with something doesn't mean that you are more competent to deal with it, in terms of freedom, in terms of what to do with it. Expressing yourself, making, shaping a life with it. I'm not convinced, I mean I hear this all the time and I think that's exactly the thing. I think maybe we're waking up to that. I think kids are more often what your daughter did and we just drop the thing instead of using it more and more. So I think it's kind of myth of the grownups that these things have to be used and will be used more and more. So I think, when you speak about learning, I'm also, I want to be optimistic.

/ I think, I think choosing not to use it as part of, I mean-

What do you mean?

/ What I mean as the choice to engage? I mean with the whole platform.

Right, right. Okay. Okay. Sorry, I didn't get it right.

/ Oh, no, no, no. I mean, I think Facebook, I was told recently by someone younger than me that Facebook is for their parents.

Yeah, absolutely.

* For sure.

Grandparents.

/ And grandparents. Twitter, they're not engaging with it really either. It's things like Snapchat, it's things like the, it's things I've never heard of. I mean, I'm 36 but I'm a very old man in the world of the Internet and it's a strange thing for me. I don't know if that makes sense, but I'm quite optimistic when people say "Oh, I don't do that."

* You see, I grew up with this.

It maybe a little bit difficult on this, how we talk. Is it this kind of generalisation? We – the people – Okay. You have to do it, but we cannot speak for them. I try to train my kids to... for example, they have to Unkraut jäten. What's it in English? You know, if you take out the weeds.

* You mean in the garden?

□ In the garden, yes. We are gardening together. I realised over time, because I did not share longer periods of something with them for years. This has to do with space-time-continuum. And for this you have to make a decision. You have to decide to stay in a situation for a longer time. Then you talk less. This grid is all about text. The new media... it's a programme, a written programme. But we are here, this is a good example. We are physically here in this bunker. If you would start to describe this space here – you could sit here for years and never end, because this physical reality is so endless and diverse, that's the point. But if you... if you are trapped into this Internet... hierarchy. It's so limited. So it's a very short line, because it's very hierarchical... now! It wasn't in the beginning, but now it's completely hierarchical. And in the end, you have to follow some people all the time and you're losing your personality or your body in a way.

/ That sort of hierarchy of, there are different, in my experience, different sorts of expectation as well. The hierarchy of response, the time, you need to respond quickly if otherwise people, even on the text messages and things like this, people suddenly have a need that you respond to them. There seems to be a pressure.

* You know who's the worst with that though, right? Mothers.

/ Yes I would.

* They are.

/ Some, some.

○ No, no, no. They're the ones who are the first to get all anxious about not receiving responses. My mother's like this – and my mother-in-law is even worse, texting my wife *all the time*. It's like they live in a text bubble together: if my wife does not answer a text within an hour or so, total and utter panic breaks loose.

* And this of course leads me to wonder, how did we actually manage it back in the day? I was born in 1972. Moving to Ghent when I was 18 to study at the university... I've actually kind of forgotten how we stayed in touch with the home front? Did we call once a week or so at a prearranged hour using a pay phone? I guess that's what we did, right? There were no computers yet, so there wasn't any emailing or anything like that. This is the moment when "connecting people" became a thing. And to Thomas' point about Nokia: I've actually written an essay once titled "Disconnecting People." This was probably 10 years or longer ago, right around the time when the art world had become inundated with the fantasy of relational aesthetics and the paradigm of immersion. Immersion in particular, at the time, I felt to have become a singularly powerful aesthetic injunction... But maybe you just want to get out, right? Away from it all. Maybe you don't care for this being immersed and connected. This is a bit what we're talking about here – the point that Dan is making about the temporal economy of these technologies, where it's not just that you check in every two minutes, but also that you get checked all the time in turn.

/ Yeah.

* And then there's the proliferation of all this communicating platforms... WhatsApp, texts, Facebook messages, email... In fact, I sometimes get the feeling that emailing has become a little bit of the Facebook of the intelligentsia. I feel like younger people don't really use email anymore.

/ Well there's this.

□ I use WhatsApp because when I was in Chile we were in a huge farm. 150,000 hectares, like a huge city. It was the only way in Patagonia to get in contact. I realised also later that with WhatsApp you can send small data pockets. SMS, I think, always have bigger data pockets, phone calls are too unstable. I think that's the point. Now, I am planning a show in Buenos Aires, I am in contact with two museum directors and they never answer emails. Never. They are also 40-something, established women and they only use WhatsApp. And you could see them mostly in the social networks... They also send photos from their parties and all these things. I'm a stupid old European man and I want to have something like a little contract, the one email, like: "Okay, Olaf we make the show and you get this and this and we open on this day" and I can trust that and this would be okay. I should have had opening this summer in the north of Argentina this show, which I'm doing now in Buenos Aires. It did not happen, because I didn't send any social things all the time, you know? I wrote one email in the beginning of the year. "We do the show in summer?", I received a letter, I asked again in June and heard: "Oh no, it has changed now." Because I wasn't always in the...

* Because you're not in that bubble.

□ I'm not a person, I'm too abstract.

* Yeah, sure.

□ Not always present.

* This is exactly what I'm talking about – the issue of constant presence. What I think is especially malicious about WhatsApp is that you can see whether someone has read...

/ Ticks.

* Yes, has received your message or not. And sometimes you send someone something and you go like, "Come on. It's been a week. Can you bloody well read what I sent you?"

/ But you know you can turn the ticks off.

* You can?

/ You can turn the ticks off. So there are levels of passive aggression. The passive aggression with social media is amazing. And also you were saying about the panic that you haven't responded and people react viscerally to that. I occasionally have turned my ticks off just because I think, "I don't want that." And then you get messages about how your ticks haven't come up either and is everything all right? And there's also the tyranny of the long message and the engagement. Do you know TLDR or TLDNR? Which you will send an email and you will get TLDNR: Too Long, Did Not Read. That is the response sometimes. So you are emailing someone who's very busy and you get TLDNR. So they must be sending these out all the time.

* I did not know that.

/ That does not give me any confidence they will ever read it. That's not a message that says, "When I have more time, I will read this."

* Sure, you can't.

/ So I have a friend who wrote a book about the Wu-Tang Clan's first album and they are very difficult people to get hold of.

* The Wu-Tang?

/ Yeah. So he ended up emailing out to people who he knew knew members of them, not because he wanted to meet them. Quite difficult to get a hold of.

○ But who are they?

* You don't know the Wu-Tang Clan? Thomas! Completely iconic mid-nineties New York hip hop consortium. They are, or used to be, a very powerful underground hip hop force.

○ Okay. Very underground.

/ That's a very good-

* But they're very popular. But they embodied the spirit of underground rap when they emerged.

/ Yeah. So he wrote-

* But they're also a cultural force, which is why someone would write a book about them.

/ Yes. And their first album, 36-

* *Enter the 36 Chambers.*

/ 36 *Chambers*. So he wrote a book of 36 chapters each, which dealt not with a particular song but with the cultural background and then the music and then the individuals involved. And when the book was published, he tried... He wanted to send a copy to them and he began getting in touch or trying to get in touch with their associates. Because in the world of hip hop as I believe it they don't have a direct line of communication. They have associates and you go through these gatekeepers and time and again he would get... He would write a long email to just introduce himself, talk about the book, talk about the fact he liked the album, he had done this work, and he would get versions of, "This sounds great, but your email is too long and I did not read it. Good luck."

○ I will share with you a terrible story about the aggression that's connected. But I interrupted your story. You wanted to-

/ No, not really.

○ Tell us what happened.

/ No, this is new aged-

* They didn't read it.

/ They didn't read it.

○ It was too long.

/ It was too long. But then, just to go back to the idea of connectivity, I was once on a mountain with my father. We climbed the Dent Blanche mountain in Switzerland, the Pennine Alps, and I was going after the story of my great, great aunt and uncle who climbed this mountain in 1928. I went up with my father five years ago. We got benighted, so we had to stop on the mountain. We stopped, we sat down, we roped ourselves on. I had been living in the 1920s and 30s whilst writing the book in my mind, because that was when the people I was writing about were alive. Well, you're climbing this mountain. And suddenly in that moment I realised that I was not living in the 1920s and 30s I was living in 2015 and I did not have a working mobile phone and I suddenly realised that no one knew where I was.

My father was fine with this because whenever he'd been climbing, that was never a possibility. But we suddenly realised two things. One was people would be worried because we did not have a mobile phone. First and foremost they couldn't get hold of us. The second one is they might try and rescue us. At which point we did not have the right insurance for a helicopter.

This became paramount because if you do not have the right insurance for a helicopter in Switzerland, where a cup of tea is 10 pounds, a helicopter would be about 50,000 pounds and I was sitting with my father and we realised we did not have the correct insurance for a helicopter.

We did not have a mobile phone to say, "Please do not rescue us." And he began thinking about whether he would have to remortgage his house back in Bath to pay for a helicopter we did not want and so rather than a vehicle to let people know we were okay, the phone became a vehicle of letting people know that we had done the maths and our lives were not worth saving by Swiss standards of currency and helicopters. We were like, "Leave us alone." We needed a mobile phone to say, "Leave us alone on the mountain. We are stuck but we are fine and we will walk down tomorrow."

And I thought that was incredible that even if you don't want to contact people, you still need to let people know to leave you alone. Because the given is no longer the starting point that you wish to be left alone. No, you always wished to be rescued. You always need to be in touch, otherwise there is something wrong.

* Well, yeah. This is why getting rid of your smartphone and going back to a flip phone is a bit of an aristocratic gesture, right? It's a move that you have to be able to *afford*, professionally speaking. One reason why you might want to get rid of your smartphone has to do with tracking of course. This thing that we carry around with us is also a machine that always knows where you are.

/ It's a location tracker.

* Yeah. Surveillance technology. But I'm interested in your story about aggression.

/ Yeah, yeah. I think it's-

* Social aggression?

O I think it's true that there's this elite phenomenon among youth and among philosophers and artists that we think we dropped the phone and we go away and we're not part of it. So that happens. And I think that's a real movement. I mean cutting your links. But the story I wanted to report comes from those who had never been included and who still fight for survival outside the grid. Those who don't have access because they don't have the means and some people who also fight to have the right to remain off the grid. I was on an expedition, on a solidarity mission to Honduras in 2009. There was a coup there against... This was very normal Latin American politics. There's a democratic change of government. Then the new government is more left or slightly left, not very radical. And then there's a military coup and the people were thrown out and I was there on a mission just to monitor the resistance against the military coup.

So I got to know people in Honduras in 2009 very nice. Some of the people I got to know were from the Lenca indigenous community. And they had interesting connections to Finland because... Or that happened a few years after. The Lenca people have a sacred river and then people come and want to build a dam on the river for it to produce electricity.

So then the local community protests the dam to protect the river. And one of the leaders of that protest movement was a woman called Berta Cáceres, whom I happened to see quite a lot in that lovely solidarity mission to Honduras in 2009.

So three or four years later she was desperate to reach people in Finland because Finnish development money was funding the building of that dam together with Chinese and World Bank and Netherlands money. Finnish development bank money was involved in funding the building of the dam, that is destroying the river and destroying the cultural survival of the Lenca people. So Berta was there protesting it and then protesting in those countries is not very safe. So 2nd March, 2016, she was murdered.

And then we wondered, “Do we have blood on our hands?” Finnish taxpayers are very much part of solidarity movement. The development money, which there is, is a product of solidarity Mobilisation. We wanted to give money, we wanted to share with the Lenca people. And then our money comes in. We have Cáceres, and our solidarity comes in and they kill our friends. So what is this? She did not want to be part of the grid. She wanted off the grid. She didn’t want to be part of the electricity-producing worldwide community. So she was murdered. So we had public dialogues and things. And I come to my point very soon: People from the development bank in Finland joined the dialogues and we said that we should express our regrets, our apologies.

They were very lukewarm, very slow. But we did have this public dialogue. There was some regret that we have been funding this project... And that it was obviously a political murder. The people building the dam wanted to get rid of Berta Cáceres because she was a leader who was in their way.

Now coming out one of those meetings, an old friend from Finland in the development business, idealist, green solidarity, idealist of the old times, now director of the bank. So we’re waiting, the two of us, for a lift to go down from the meeting. And then he told me, confiding between old friends, speaking in a soft voice that, “You know, Berta was against development. So she really had to go. It’s sad, but that’s how it is.” So the amount of violence and aggression that we commit in order to do what we then say is inevitable. So this is the terrible story I want to report. There are the people who are not part of it. And my prediction is that they stand for the future. That all this thing with rare earth metals and building dams in all the rivers of the planet, all this thing is going to go, it’s a short-lived civilisation I think. Maybe it’s going to be there a hundred years still, maybe less than a hundred years. It’s collapsing.

★ Ours is a short glimpse of life.

○ Yeah. So off the grid is the future. So when she was murdered, she was against development.

□ With humans or without humans?

○ Well I think with, but you know. I have very disparate predictions. I just want to say that I think the battle field... There's something very real happening, which is not included yet in that phenomenally effective and rapid expanding grid that we call the net. And in this context, the shed, I mean we could go back to the shed. There are people that live in sheds. The shed on your... You call it a boat?

* Bothy.

○ The bothy. The people who... and your Patagonia. They are connected but not that much. I mean they want to be now under WhatsApp but not that much.

□ I think in the past we did make more decisions. We sent someone a letter: "I will come in a week." You made a decision and you were just not able to correct it all the time. It means, okay, you make a decision and you are taking care of it. You plant a tree. Today we make thousands of micro-decisions.

/ While I am here in Venice, I have written three letters and people think I'm mad.

* Postcards.

/ I'm someone who still sends postcards. I write letters to people and I never get responses. I get responses to my letters 20% of the time. People don't know what to do. People don't know where their post office is. People get my letters. Also, my handwriting is difficult to read, so-

* You think it is?

/ I don't think so.

* Can I see?

/ It's not so bad.

○ Superb.

/ But there is that thing where you can... I remember talking to a photographer for a book I wrote about creative process and he said, overnight when digital technology came in, overnight magazines, newspapers, they didn't know how to use negatives. They got rid of their dark rooms. They got rid of the people who knew about chemicals and film.

And so his job suddenly became enforced. He had to be digital to be a photographer, you had to know how to use Photoshop. You had to know how to make your pictures perfect. He had to do all this to maintain his position as a photographer because the technology changed and his chemicals were taken away from him. They stopped making... Until it's recently come back. But they stopped making Polaroid film. People used that. Unless you're Anton Corbijn, you did not have access to things.

So there's also a tyranny of change, which is what you were talking about where it is not a soft, lovely, hipster, arty decision. You have these big global companies like Kodak, like Apple. We take these decisions that fundamentally changed the way people do their jobs and they change the media. Because when I last bought a laptop, they had taken away the USB things. They had given me little USBs, which nothing fitted because that was the future.

- That's capitalism.
- * More stuff, more stuff.
- More stuff, more stuff.
- * Which you lose very easily. I mean it's the same with this, no?
- But the aggression-
- * This is the thing that drives me most crazy. But yes.
- Well I'm interested in the tyranny part and the violence part, also what you tell us, Olaf, about Patagonia. There is of course a pool effect. People do want, even though you're there in Patagonia of the beautiful landscape, but still you want to be on the WhatsApp. So I don't deny that this phenomenon, that interest, the curiosity, the voluntary aspect is there. But there's lots of pressure, there's lots of violence, lots of aggressive push. They are making life difficult for us unless we buy the stuff without the USB thing, we're going to be out. So there's lots of that dependence and I'm interested in the model and the emotional economy of that. How aggressive people are... When I meet people who are not dependent on the money it brings.

My university has reformed the premises, my university in Helsinki. There's a very sudden reform... We have to cut office space, they say. But that's not the heart of it. They say we should cut office space. We should move people from their small offices to these huge open landscapes where people sit in big halls, a hundred people together, and somehow the administration thinks that when people are in these big halls, they're going to be creative and new things will happen and only old-fashioned people will be in these small rooms. And they're very aggressive and say this is not good. They become very, very-

- / This is the future.
- And that tyranny comes very quickly, shows its ugly face. So we're going to forcibly remove you.
- I think that's not right. I think there is a mistake. Sorry. Sorry.
- I want to hear your idea.

□ I think you follow this European idea of development, of all this... capitalism, feudalism... all those terms. This kind of language, the thinking of dialectic language and progress. And then there's something like bad capitalism and good... but I have the feeling, we follow the same path, being for or against something. We try to find a way out, but I think that there is no way out of this. There is something parallel. It's the grid. A grid has different and reversible directions. You can change the directions. You don't have to destroy your phone. Create a difference. This is hard because these medias are so attractive and being against them is attractive too. You can make a career out of being against something, especially in the arts. There have been generations of left wing artists since let's say 1870 or so. Since 150 years people are making careers this way. You are inside of the hierarchical patterns, which you criticise. Now we are in a postindustrial time and we have millions of people, who basically have nothing to do. No physical work. We are creating part of the matrix now just to plug them in. It's about decisions. For example, I make this work with the Wichi, with this indigenous community. I was invited, someone organised it for me. I was not so much involved in the planning when I decided to make it, but I had some helpers. When I met them the first time and I thought: "Should I continue here? I'm coming from an urban European metropolis, why should I continue with this community in the jungle. Is it balanced?" For the Wichi-weavers, the decision was very clear: it was good business. They get 10 times more income when they work with me. One of the weavers, an 80 year old woman said to me: "You know, Olaf, we don't want to say, this is art. We played this naive game because we want to be outside." They wanted to be outside of the grid...

★ It's a losing conversation.

□ The future, this capitalistic reality, is going to be a text cloud, involving more and more human identities. Negotiating and fighting. For example the Germans, the Berliners, the Eastern Germans where I come from, this postindustrial society. They are all groups and all part of the Internet. You have more and more of these groups, but the question is, if you find another way to act parallel. I tried to make physical things, to give more attention in the exchange with the physical world...

○ I met with Berta Cáceres in Honduras and I went to see a friend in South Mexico and Oaxaca; a friend I met 30 years ago in Finland and now for the first time after that. He lives and works with the indigenous communities in South Mexico. Oaxaca is the only state in Mexico which has majority of indigenous. And they share difficulties, and this is what they experience, that the thing you suggest, which I think is beautiful, that we have this parallel, the world with many worlds. That's what the Zapatistas say, we want to create a world where many worlds can live in parallel.

But that's why the experience is becoming difficult. Berta Cáceres wanted not to be left or right wing or modernity. She wanted to have a life of her own for her community and then she was destroyed. And now this new Mexican president is in... And now the Zapatistas are in more danger than before because he won elections in a big way, the Mexican president, Social Democrat or whatever he is.

And he is more dangerous because he has got a bigger legitimacy. So that means he can move in. Not because he wants to, I mean officially, not because they want to destroy people, but they want to destroy those who are not part of the one way of life.

So I think Olaf, yes, it's beautiful, but we have one... I have this problem with modernity. I think much of it has been very aggressive and we don't want people to have access to certain places where they can think and places where they can be off the grid. Not only that we can't exploit people there, but that we can't... Some way it is disturbing this kind of freedom, the things we don't understand that may be happening in that shed or in that village or in that... That's somehow terrifying.

/ It's the Tom Waits song. Do you know the Tom Waits song, *What's He Building In There?*

○ Yeah, exactly. Exactly. That's it, that's what I mean.

* The essence of the shed, when you speak about it that way, is that it's opaque. So in a way these giant common workspaces are obviously also completely folded into this culture of surveillance, right? Obviously, the rhetoric of business is that communication flows more freely and teamwork will come about more organically, but it's also a very simple measure of control, right? You can see how much time your colleague is spending on Facebook and all that.

/ But none of this is new. I mean, in the 1930s they had a new director at the British Broadcasting Company and they took away all of people's Anglepoise lamps because they said the BBC was too full of men at desks with Anglepoise lamp, low light thinking. And it was meant to be a broadcasting company. And this was in some ways a new director worrying that you had all of these individuals with their low lights plotting things, thinking too much. So the same thing, you have these bigger rooms, you have the sunlight coming in, you don't want people working after dark, you don't want this sedition. The idea that it is in some way worrying to the powers that be that people can spend time on their money in their own head.

* And there's actually a nice parallel here with the process of modernisation that you talked about earlier and its convergence with electrification. There's this really great book that Wolfgang Schivelbusch wrote, do you know who he is?

/ No.

* He's a German cultural historian. He wrote this book titled *Disenchanted Night* about the rise of electrical lighting in European cities in the 19th century, and how electricity was promoted on the back of this idea of the enlightenment as a mental or spiritual fact as much as a physical one. Yet it obviously also brought about the destruction of many illicit cultures and illicit economies that aren't necessarily perverse but thrive in intimacy and in seclusion and privacy.

The question of privacy is tantamount here. One of the things that I think is very important to understand about these machines is... Okay, so I have a two-year old son. Your children are older. Thomas, you have a daughter, no?

○ 15.

* 15.

○ And you know, mine-

* What's that?

○ Fake expats, please go on.

* So Isidore's two. And all I can think about, really, is what are we going to do with all this tech stuff? By the time he's 10 maybe it'll just be a chip planted into the palm of his hand and he'll talk into it and some kind of airborne entity is going to answer his question. I don't know.

/ Drones.

* Drones.

/ Drones!

* Drones.

□ But Thomas says... It is this net, this grid. I would say it's the new bourgeoisie. You feel secure, because you are part of the grid. It's not bourgeoisie, but in the end, it is.

* What I wanted to say is the following: many of the fears that haunt our generation in particular are strongly bound up with the idea of privacy. In a way we don't want to be spied on, right? We distrust our phones because *we know* that they've been shaped in large parts by technologies that are essentially military in character. I sometimes worry that for a younger generation, privacy is in fact the least of their concerns: that they actually don't care. The issue of privacy for someone like Elizabeth Warren is Big Tech's make-or-break point. She wants to break up Facebook because Facebook is essentially a giant machine for destroying the private lives of citizens. But the problem is that half of the electorate are young people who may not care all that much about the fact that they have willingly surrendered any right to privacy. They don't seem to care so much about it. Those of you who have older children may have different perspectives, but I think that all this is part of the generational discord in how we approach these technologies. *Do we care?* Are those of us who were born in the 60s, 70s and 80s too hung up on an idea of privacy that is perhaps already completely historical and bourgeois? Is privacy *overrated*?

□ It is bourgeois to be in the grid.

* Yeah, it's the new bourgeoisie.

□ Because you said it's about being involved in a group. You have a job because you are part of the grid.

* That's not bourgeois. I feel like that's more capitalist.

□ I know, but I make a translation from what Thomas said before, that you are inside, you're part of this.

* Monster.

□ If you put yourself outside of the matrix, what Dan said about the mountain, when you feel you are outsider now.

/ People try and rescue you for your own good and bring you back.

□ This is what I mean: you have to make decisions. We don't know what our children will do. Look in Berlin, also in Japan, when I was there, 15 years ago, you could see all these hipsters, you know the techs, fashion, lifestyle, food, other things. People realise, that they have to do something for their body. They're always in the matrix, like having no clear personality, so they try to find something. They manipulate their bodies and appearances to be someone. They try to be someone, because they see that they are nobodies. It's interesting... These are small steps, but I could also see, for example, when I was in Chile, that, okay, on one hand, you can see there's this equality. All the farmers also, everyone in Patagonia is now part of the Internet, but in the same time, you can see people creating their own spaces. They build their own houses without architects. They are thinking much more about food, so this is also a movement, because it's also about physical space, the body...

* Yes – craft brewing and all that. Sure. The fact that we're so completely ensnared in this culture of connectivity makes us long for the physical world all the more strongly.

□ In Israel there were a lot of avant-garde movements. I was there once, visiting a kibbutz. The people there looked very hipster and very conservative at the same time. The man wasn't doing anything. All the jobs were made by his wife. Someone brought me to them, because they had some special old handcrafted furnitures, I wanted to see. Later the man showed me what he's doing. He opened his laptop and I could see, that he was creating an immense network of craftsman in the whole Middle East with whom he was building very contemporary houses for special clients. It was absolutely up to date. The community was old and new at the same time.

/ But this keys into, I think everything we've been talking about is that word, special people. This sort of keys into what we're talking about, because the outside and the inside, it depends where you're standing, all of this. Who are the special people? Are the special people the ones who can choose to be outside, or don't choose to be outside, or choose to be inside, or don't choose to be inside. The fact that we're having this conversation. The fact that we have to some degree in a bunker in the Venice Biennale. The fact we have this distance to talk about the fact that social media, meanwhile the world is on fire. There are different problems. When I am here, I've obviously ... This is a very privileged thing, we've all been flown or got the train or whatever to be here to talk about this stuff, so it's always, as you were saying, and actually all of us were saying, who is the we? Who is the you? Who is the generalisation? When you talk about mothers, whose mothers? In that way. We are so far removed perhaps from even under a hundred years ago. The fact that it was quite... When people were setting up the networks of the electricity it was... I've got a bit here about it, the idea that it was quite socialist, even FDR setting up these big dam projects, there was a kind of hope and socialism about the connectivity, it was always described. Can I read this very small bit?

□ Yes, sure. Of course.

/ It's from Richard Brautigan. There's a short story that I love by Richard Brautigan called *I was Trying to Describe You to Someone*, in which having tried and failed to describe his beloved in terms of other people.

Sorry. I'll start. "There's a short story that I love by Richard Brautigan called 'I was Trying to Describe You to Someone', in which having tried and failed to describe his beloved in terms of other people – I couldn't just say 'Well she looks like Jane Fonda'. I couldn't say that, because you don't look like Jane Fonda at all." The narrator instead likens her to "a movie about rural electrification, a perfect 1930s New Deal morality kind of movie, which he saw as a kid in Tacoma, Washington" making it quite possible that it's a film about these very Saget dams, because I went and visited some dams near Seattle. "A movie about farmers living and working without electricity, until a new dam is built and electricity flows, appearing to the farmer like a young Greek god to take away forever the dark days of his life. Suddenly, religiously, with the throwing of a switch, the farmer had electric lights to see by when he milked the cows in the early black winter mornings. The farmer's family got to listen to the radio and have a toaster. 'That's how you look to me,' he ends."

○ So that's terrible, ha?

/ Yes, or it's wonderful depending on who you are.

○ Exactly, that's my point, but literally I want to connect this thing Dan is talking about to your [Dieter's] book about the shed. You have worked so much on the shed. This thing about electricity coming and what then happens and all of you mentioned electricity and enlightenment and what is the connection there.

I think it is interesting, Dieter, you made an exhibition about three philosophers who defined philosophy in 20th century: Wittgenstein, Adorno and Heidegger. For those who are not philosophers, let me just say that these are sort of very big names in philosophy, – very big names in the history of enlightenment – that’s what we think as philosophers. Then Dieter puts up a show, he says “Much of the best work of these people happened in these sheds, which are kind of off the grid. Heidegger’s hut in Todtnauberg, Wittgenstein’s in Norway, Adorno in exile in California. That’s where the masterworks were written.” Now one thing, I’ve been discussing this thing with colleagues twice, last year here in Venice, and this year with Dieter, and in another place. Spending days with philosophers and artists talking about the huts... One thing which occurred to me preparing for this occasion was that I think we never mentioned whether they had electricity in the shed or not. Then I checked your exhibit catalog because I thought that neither of them, neither Heidegger, whose hut was built in 1920s nor Wittgenstein, his house was built in Norway in 1910s, but he lived there in 1930s mainly. So I thought neither would have had electricity, but then it appears, at least from the exhibit pictures, that Heidegger did have.

* You can tell.

○ There was a lamp, an electric lamp, but I would bet that Wittgenstein did not have electricity in Skjolden.

* No.

○ So that means that the greatest breakthroughs in enlightenment in bringing light to reason happen in this...

/ In the dark.

○ In the winter ‘36, ‘37 in Skjolden.

In these caves. So the claim is that, you know when actually the light goes out, so I object to your...

/ Of course. Well I was just reading it, I was not reading it with good or bad.

○ Of course.

/ But it’s moved away from the kind of, you know, the god coming and yet with enlightenment, the god of the mind was...

○ The god is important. Yes.

* But I want to make this... I want to say something about...

○ Olaf wants to protest.

* Well, I'd like to make a somewhat categorical point that has to do with the notion that we can look at technology as a mere tool, which is something that I'm utterly fed up with. You know, the comparison of a particular technology to a knife, say – a knife that can be used to cut meat to feed yourself, or that can be used to kill someone.

○ The neutrality idea.

* Yes, I don't like that. I don't want to buy into that. If a knife is a tool you can kill someone with, if the possibility of killing someone is folded into the knife's very being, you can't possibly call it "neutral." I have the same problem with the Internet, which I think – and I'm going to say something somewhat silly-sounding now – is just *objectively bad*. There was of course an utopian moment that accompanied it back in the day, with lots of utopian expectations swirling around these technologies. But I think the rise of social media was soon dramatically misread, especially in the period 2011-2012, when it was said to have spawned the Arab spring and all that.

○ The Arab Spring.

* You know, so those are typically... Those are the instances where sometimes technology is served to us as like, here's just a neutral, valueless tool that can be used for good or for bad. I actually no longer believe that. I think that actually this tool was developed for nothing other than the purposes of control and subjugation. In fact, I also think, and I've written about this in another catalogue essay just recently, I also think that there's some kind of law of exclusion between the idea of connectivity and the idea of art. Surely there's a lot of great art to be produced using those technologies and addressing these technologies, but I think that they actually inhabit philosophically exclusive realms where new media are inimical in a way to the spirit of art.

□ But what would you do with all these humans who are out of work now? I mean, I can see in the art world...

* People losing their jobs because of automation – the rise of the robots.

□ The Internet creates new environments. I think that is one of the main reasons why it grows so fast and you can see the administrators-inviting-administrators-code. I mean, nowadays institutions are full of sub, sub, sub jobs.

* The university as well.

□ The institutions are not producing any artworks. For example, most of the German museums cannot invest in artworks. They have to invest in administration. Like making the show, infrastructures, advertising, all the money goes into infrastructure. The museums, which are houses to collect artworks and to exhibit them for the public. Also they can't really invest in, let's say, teaching people to produce artworks... It would be nice if museums could be workshops...

* Well this is a function of the new spirit of capitalism, as Luc Boltanski put it.

□ But when you say bad – okay, if you would cut off this technology, you would immediately have half a billion people without job.

* No job?

□ Yes, they would have nothing to do.

* Well, half a billion people would lose their jobs, but two billion people would be back into jobs, right?

□ No.

* I've read somewhere that in 20 or 30 years' time, 80% of all people involved in logistical work will be out of their jobs thanks to developments in the relevant technology.

/ Either that or this particular conversation that we're having today will be held up as the turning point of the 21st century which I'm quite excited about.

* September 25th, 2019.

/ Yes, they will look back at this talk and go, hang on, that was...

* The bunker...

/ The bunker talk. That was the way it all shifted. The pendulum.

* That's how I see it myself.

□ But Dieter makes this category...

* Point.

□ Point. I would make another category for Dieter. I would say, to work with a fibre and to go in the jungle...

* Optical fiber, not...

□ Working with the Wichi in the jungle, being a shepherd or working with the computer, there's no difference! It's always about material world. Pipilotti Rist spoke about that in her video once, which was really interesting for me. She was observing the screen, you know, how it looks. The screen, the projector, as a surface. Normally, we see the movement, the narratives of the film and the text, but this is very physical, you know, the space and all those things. I think it's always connected.

But what we are talking about here, is all text. Text and meaning. Then we say, okay, this and that is capitalism and all those things – totally disconnected from the material world. But there's a continuity between fibre and jungle and shepherd and light, because the people, who really produce the Internet are always thinking about... how long? How big? How can you build a chip? How big can a computer be? How does the ergonomics work, how does it feel, how big should a screen from my iPhone be, you know, so that you can carry it?

/ The hardware.

□ The hardware.

/ But the delivery method, the digital versus the analogue, I think the delivery and the actual network, if we're talking about the grid, if we talk about a physical analogue grid or we talk about an instantaneous digital grid, the means of connection changes the message.

* Yes.

/ I would suggest.

□ Yes, this text brings us together. So yes.

/ It goes through a filter.

* But it also changes togetherness.

□ Yes.

* I understand what you mean – the substrate is always the material world, but...

□ I think this is also the way out. The way to change it, you know. If you really want a change, you have to leave this hierarchical way. It's always in the same cloud. So if you want to change it, you have to change the material world.

○ I want to respond to that.

□ This is a big risk, like your friend, you know. She tried to change the physical world, it's a big risk.

○ That's really... I went to the... I bought a share in Nokia, this is my Finnish, favourite company and I bought the share in Nokia and some other friends as well. I went to the Nokia shareholder meeting and we suggested that in Nokia shareholder meetings we have a lottery every year and we put every... You know, there's 380 million shares.

* When did you buy the shares?

○ This was maybe six, seven years ago, maybe eight, nine years ago.

★ When it was already cut off.

○ It was, you know Nokia network is still big, so it was big in Finland still. So we went there and we thought we have so many... Nokia was still big at the time, before the collapse. This was before the collapse. Maybe it's 10 years. Anyway, so you buy a share and you suggest... We suggested that each share has a number, all numbers are put in a big hat. We draw one number and the winner, the owner of the share, gets a free ticket to go to the Congo to work in the mines to produce rare earth metals. The only obligation is you come back, you spend three months and you work on the local conditions. Nokia will take care if you have mortgage and have family to support. Nokia will take care of those expenses. The only obligation is you come back to the shareholder meeting next year and you give reports. We were very disappointed that only 40,000 shares voted for us and 398,170,000 voted against our proposal, but that was the material side of the...

/ What a terrible conspiracy to vote against you. I mean, who were these people?

○ You could have had your shares.

/ Yes, I would have. But you know, going back to the Trump thing. Trump has changed the law now. You know, it used to be, they didn't use to use kids so much to get the mercury and the rare earth metals. One of the first things Trump did when he came into office was change the moral rules for people like, mainly Apple. So now the things in this phone could come from anywhere. Whereas before, under the previous administration, there was a... Not just a moral, there was a legal duty to show where your supply chain went back to. That's now gone.

○ But do you see the supply chain, that never worked, 40% always come from... Or 25% always came from the Congo. So I mean the supply chain was never... That was the point that of course everybody was claiming that we don't buy from the Congo and everyone knew that 25 or 40% comes from there.

/ That's where the uranium came from, wasn't it? For the...

○ As well, but...

/ For the Manhattan project and things like that.

○ They're big producers of coltan. Tantalum I think is the mineral...

/ Which is needed.

○ Yes. So a lot of that comes from the Congo.

/ It's a superconductor, isn't it? If this is a four minute warning I'm glad we're in a bunker. Talking about nuclear end.

○ Yes, something is happening.

* You mean coltan.

□ Maybe.

* The material that's mined in the Congo to...

○ It's mined in China and Russia and US, and many places, but a lot of it is there in the Congo, unfortunately. I mean they are rich in minerals, so it's difficult. I was, you know... I knew the person who was ethical adviser to Nokia in those times. She insisted many years that we don't buy from there. The discovery was that it was impossible to implement that kind of monitoring of the supply change chain. So maybe I'm glad if that has changed and Apple can...

/ No, I think it's got worse.

* Well, now it's been changed back.

/ It's changed back. It's they can say, well, you know, it's...

* There's been a scaling back of oversight – deregulation.

/ Deregulation.

○ But even with regulation it's very difficult to monitor.

□ Of course.

○ So Trump is less hypocritical. I mean, that's a big difference.

/ Sure.

* No, of course he's not. He's not a hypocrite.

○ No, that's right.

* No, he likes to wear his evil on his sleeve.

○ Yes, and we others try to hide it.

/ I mean this is obviously the unanswered thing about Elizabeth Warren. She is mainly trying to break up big tech to get Trump off Twitter. That's, you know, this is the...

But is she against Google and Facebook and these things or against the banks?

* No, Bernie is the one who's railing against the banks. With her it's Silicon Valley, that's her focus.

Okay.

But this movement, you also had in France in the 19th century...

* Which one?

I think in Belgium were a lot of printing companies, printing books for France without paying fees to the authors.

* Outsourcing.

Baudelaire didn't get money for his books for a long time. It was out of control. The books have been printed outside of the country. So it's a bit a technological thing. The technology was faster, they had new printing machines and they could print it outside from France, because they had trains. After a while, in France, they changed the law. Baudelaire could have an income.

* There was something... Who's hungry?

No, not yet.

When I was in Tokyo in 2006, it was interesting. In this time, there were no smartphones, but in Tokyo all the people in the subway already had something like it. You could read books on it. I was wondering, because it was not really a smartphone, you could see that it was not the final developed technique. You could feel it. And no one in Europe used it, but there, everybody did. I mean, they have this 25 million people and, I think, poor capitalistic city, Tokyo, for me.

* Poor capitalists.

Pure.

* Oh, pure.

Perfect. Then I was in this Kimono-shop. The clothes. You know, those hand-woven kimonos of silk. These shops are owned by old families, I don't know, maybe the 20th generation. They produce Kimonos, which cost maybe between \$2,000 and \$10,000. But if you look at them and think about it, and I know this as a producer, 10,000 dollars is nothing to produce this kind of piece. They make maybe \$1,000 or \$500 profit. Not much. I'm sure these families, who produce these kind of kimonos, they take a decision.

They have to make profit, but then it's like: "Okay, this is our identity. We do this, it's our knowledge and we will continue." You know, it's more about if they survive. If they can survive. These are personal decisions of people who want to live a certain life. We have to think about meaning and how we make decisions, you know. Since the postmodern era, everybody's his own capitalist, trying to optimise his body and his life. Then, people stay alone. You know, they have no family or they have no relationship to other things. So they are taking less care of each other, because they are always in this competition. If we want to make a break, a change, it's not only about the big system. It's also about our own life. I want to be related to something. This is my tree, I'm taking care of it. You know, I plant this tree and I go there.

* Yes.

/ I think this goes back to the idea that the medium is the message. The fact that there is somebody there making these kimonos and they have... You know, the fact that they are doing it in a certain way, that is a message, that speaks about their values are in that way. I think the materials you use, the way you express yourself, the medium, it speaks about what your values are.

* And the value is not growth.

/ The value is not necessarily growth. It's about taking joy in process. I think process has been actually vital to everything we've spoken about today. The idea of process, the idea of media, the idea of connection because nobody is saying connection is bad. It's just the vehicle for that connection in that way. There is a very top down view that you have to express yourself through these certain channels. There is a pressure and there is a guilt, but then there's the bottom up thing, which is what you've described with the kimonos, which goes in the other way, but there's a contra flow. You know it's pushing again and that's what creates the tension.

□ I think there are two parallel things which need each other. The Wichi, you know, when they make these abstract patterns about the jungle and god, they bring the world to order, in doing it, they think about reality. So they need this grid for themselves, as a model, to think about the weather, the forest and all these things. So it is parallel. You could also use WhatsApp this way, you know?

○ But I mean that's my question. If we share this kind of good pluralistic dream, which I hope is not only a liberal fantasy, that it's good and that the pluriverse, the idea that we have these many worlds... is better. I think it's better to have many worlds on the planet, many civilisations.

□ You have to give them power, this is important.

○ So these parallel worlds, I agree that that's a dream and...

- Why? It's not a dream.

- No, but this is my reaction to you, see, my question is, and the biggest experiment is that we don't know whether a world in which there are computers is compatible with a world in which there are many worlds.

- * This is... I...

- We don't know. It's a big experiment.

- * No, maybe the computer was invented to *destroy* the pluriverse. This is actually a little bit my fear.

- No, I think this is a left-wing thesis.

- * Come on, the left is pro modernist.

- No, there was someone who developed this machine because he could, you know. It were mathematicians. It was not a question of left and right wing.

- * That's my point.

- But we can use it in different ways because you say about dreams, you know...

- We cannot estimate all the results of the experiments. I did a film about a kibbutz in Israel, which exists since 1949, since then, they have a basic income. For over 70 years now.

- One of the good post communist kibbutzes.

- Really interesting, the first thing they did was build a theatre. They built a museum and a hall, where they eat together. Then, later, they built the houses. And everything is still existing. I made a film about children there, which I presented in a museum, later. I think, Dieter, you have seen it.

- * Yes, I know.

- A journalist from Deutschlandfunk also came. He was really impressed by how these kids were playing and by the ideas of this kibbutz - which are still existing. They've had electric cars for 25 years. They have a basic income. They're living a rural life in the landscape and they have a museum. Everything at the same time. And then, in his text about the show, the journalist said: "Olaf, his social romantic ideas..." With these words the journalist was making a dream out of it. But it isn't romantic at all. I showed a concrete reality, existing facts. Since 70 years. But it's maybe not good for everyone.

- * You can't organise...

□ It's not really working for...

/ It's not a universal.

□ But the universality is not important, you know. It works there. 20 kibbutzes still continue this way. This is the important point, that they are existing. They did it for 70 years, maybe they will end in the future, but that's not the point. I think we should stop to make these generalisations. We don't have to say, that the whole of Israel has to live in kibbutz now.

/ But isn't the point that perhaps, and I may be completely wrong with this, that the Internet and connectivity perhaps inevitably pushes people towards homogenisation... Take early Twitter, for example, which has meant all of these utopias that are made and they have their rules and, you know, 140 characters. It pushes you towards a certain sort of message, a certain sort of connectivity and then it pushes you towards uniformity. It pushes you towards being the same. Then you do have the kibbutz situation. You do have these people who do not want to take part in that.

They do not see the positivity because it's not for them, but then when you choose to go against that, what happens to your friends?

○ That's what I'm worried about.

/ That's what happens because it's the tyranny of the media, the medium. The medium has its tyranny. To actually acknowledge that is not to say, it is bad, because it is as it stands, it is just a thing. It is just a tool, but it is made by people and people with vested interests. When we're talking about the net, you can say a net is a perfectly peaceable, lovely technology, in the same way that the people who built the first nuclear bombs, they were scientists, they were solving a problem. Then they wrote...

□ They knew they built bombs.

/ Yes, but then they wrote to the president and they said, "You must never use..." We have solved your problem...

★ You can never use the bomb we made for you.

/ You can never... Can you please... This was a big... Ęjzenštejn did not sign it. Einstein did.

★ Szilard. It was Léo Szilárd and Einstein.

/ They said, "You must explode this over the sea. You must show what you can do, but do not use it against people." In the same way you could say about the Internet and all of these things, you must...

○ But you can only use it for people.

/ We only use it for people. It must be used without people. It must exist in a museum.

□ You must use the Internet above the ocean.

/ Yes, only above the net, the cloud. The cloud must exist only off land, not on land. In that way that you could say...

○ In my museum it will be there.

/ Yes, exactly, but you could say it's a machine, but it's the people. I'm not saying the people are the problem. I'm saying it was built by people, and so it has these intrinsic problems of the fact it's...

* Well, the thing is... It's a programme, right? It's a set of rules that are actually much more determining. This vision of it being just a tool... This is my biggest qualm.

/ Well, you mentioned this earlier. I brought it back to you.

* Yeah, the medium is the message. It's more like certain things are written into the programme. The programme is written in such a way as to completely exclude certain possibilities from the world. The point that you made about being in Tokyo in 2006, which is now our reality... When you find yourself in a train station, or when you're sitting in a subway train and you look around – everyone's basically hunched over their phones, right? It is of course very easy to get depressed over this. But sometimes I imagine that everyone is actually reading the Communist Manifesto – or maybe they're all reading Greta Thunberg's speech to the UN. But of course they are not.

○ Of course, we read it. Yes.

* Yes, we did read it. So this is a bit like a fork in the road. If we're all completely consumed by our screens, and we're all reading the same liberating message... If that could be true, then why aren't we, right?

/ Why aren't we better?

□ I think it's because of the concentration of just a few big companies. In the beginning, the new technology didn't mean that there's only one language. There were a lot of different companies with a lot of different screens. Means that, today, we read the messages in the programme of two companies. Neither the Kibbutzim nor the farmers of Patagonia have their own network – they're owned by someone from the West Coast. So, I think, it's not just the technology, it's more how people own it. Because of my interest in semi-nomadic ways of living, I was interested in doing a project with nomads in Syria...

* Was the Syrian war already happening?

□ Yeah, it was shortly before. It was half a year before.

/ So, you could've been the Susan Sontag of Homs.

□ But you know, nobody speaks about these nomads. In the Syrian War, everyone was only talking about the centres... But Syria is the only country in this region, which has a really huge community of nomads, Bedouins, but in the media they do not exist. No one was speaking about this very important minority of the Bedouins. That's the point, they have no power in technology. So, I think this has to change. That's why ISIS copied Hollywood, it was the same language.

/ By the Aborigines as well. You know, they have the Songlines, they have this deep connection. They have networks. But it's not understood.

□ They could produce their own network. It would be possible. It's not so expensive, but they have no access. Apple – the big companies – they bought all the laws. They already bought Nokia and Motorola. So now, if you wanted to make your own network, you would have to pay them, this is one of the main incomes for them, the copyright.

* We live in the age of monopoly. And monopolisation is the product of this culture.

□ It's not a product of the Internet.

* The Internet was obviously not invented to *produce* this monopoly, but the monopoly was definitely enabled by the Internet. I don't know. Bit of a catch-22, no? The Internet – this network of electronic knowledge machines was developed for military purposes. We should never forget that many of the great 20th-century breakthroughs in communications technologies have military roots. They are often developed by *states*; independent businesses don't have the means of production or wherewithal to fund the kind of research required to develop these technologies.

In other words, these technologies are always kind of preconditioned to point us in some direction or other. This is what happened when the art world embraced the Internet upon its introduction to the broader population in the early '90s. The libertarian enthusiasm for its presumed emancipatory potential is what produced the euphoria that cultural moment, when it really did look like the Internet was going to deliver us from evil. But that's long gone. And I think it's over because it was always a military industry to begin with.

□ The military and the bourgeoisie are two different things. The army is building states and grids. In India, they have a 3000 year old grid. The interest of the military is not to build a new economy or monopoly – they build grids! They make an order, they don't build the economy. It's the bourgeois class which is running the monopoly. It is not the army, who is owning the Internet.

/ But the control. There is a symmetry in the control. It comes from the military, and then it goes into the world of technology. There is a definite mirror in the control. You know, when anything gets large enough, I mean, you get companies large enough to be countries... states. They have more power. They assassinate people by virtue of the fact that it would be best for the technology, for the status quo.

□ But for example, in eastern Germany, where I grew up, you know, there was this Stasi. In the beginning, in the 50s, Stasi was a small group. Later hundred thousands of people were working for them, spies. But this would only happen when the system had already collapsed, when all the little bourgeois were connected to the power of the state. The bourgeois people, not the soldiers. I have the feeling there is something similar now. For example, now, if you're part of the grid: if you are able to plug in, you plug in. In this kind of network, you are one of the administrators. You don't have to produce anything. In GDR, it was the same. You had to be in the party to exercise power. You didn't have to be an engineer, you didn't have to produce anything.

* You're totally right. The problem of global politics modelled after the American example is that you've basically got one-party states all over. That's a good point. We're all apparatchiks now.

□ Yes. I think – and not cynically – they have to be in this party, you know, because we are so many humans, you have to be all part of the party. I always say to my assistants they are not having a very good income, because it's really not easy to make money with physical work, you know? But it's a privilege, because you're connecting something. You have experiences. You feel your body. We discuss space, all the time during installing. We never know what we do. It's a real adventure and it's a privilege.

○ We have this sort of empirical fact that so many people are connected to electricity, and to the Internet, and this stuff. And then we have the movements which are shut off. It's quite explicit. It is marginal, but it's vocal. All the people who are disconnected, the nomads in Syria, they are not so much connected into the Internet, perhaps and maybe some of the nomads somewhere else. And then all the new expressions, people who move out from cities, like the self sustainers, the Swaraj and the independence movement, like the gardeners. You have your garden, you're not dependent on the global chain of production. You pick your mushrooms, you have your eco-villages. We have a forest Institute in Finland where, you know, people live without money for decades, and through physical labor, and produce.

These are small expressions, but they are becoming important, for some people in the physical reality, for many people in their minds. So, I think it's important because I think the grid, with all its success, is so incredibly vulnerable. Like we saw with your experience of GDR, that the thing that was supposed to be there forever collapsed overnight.

□ Everybody knows, that it is interesting...

○ You've seen maybe. I don't know, but people have lived through collapse. I met recently a woman from Romania who was, I think, 15 or 16, when Nicolae Ceausescu and his wife were murdered in the palace. This was Christmas day, 1989, I think. Christmas Day '89, so Ceausescu was murdered, and she's 15 or 16, and she lives several days in this state of complete bewilderedness that the impossible has happened. It's a real miracle. The scarf and the pictures, and everything she grew up with is gone. And it was just the thing you could not even dream of. How important is it that so many people now think that Google is there forever, and a chip is there forever, and when it collapses, maybe two years from now, or maybe 22 years, or maybe 200 years from now, how are we equipped for addressing that shift?

★ I don't have an answer obviously.

○ I'm not saying it's going to collapse, but it might.

□ It will be transformed. It's too big.

○ But I mean, Stasi was transformed.

□ No, I'm not sure, if these Google people... its not like Stasi. I think it's much more direct. It's not like Stasi. *We give* them the power, you know. In GDR, they built these satellite cities, huge houses out of concrete. At the centre of the cities, like the middle of Berlin, there were these beautiful houses from the 19th century, in a very bad condition. As a child, I thought if people would not go to these new houses, if they would say that they want to live in these old houses, the houses would have been repaired. Later, in the 80s, the political movements started in these rotten quarters. People have to change their...

★ Desires.

□ Yes. If people change their direction, the companies will follow.

○ But Stasi didn't follow, it collapsed.

□ Yeah. But Stasi was from the state. I mean, if Trump and Google would merge into one company, then we would really have a big problem.

★ I read an interesting story recently about the mental health crisis among Facebook workers. Around the world tens of thousands of Facebook employees do nothing all day except moderate content. Which means: watch the most repellent videos and read the most repulsive stuff. They watch rapes, suicides, bombings, human sacrifices... And read all this junk... The mental health crisis in these institutions, in these business empires, has to do with these people's exposure to all this vile viral material, which is just a function of how the machine works. It is written into the very machine. But the bigger issue is that many of these moderators are increasingly lured to more and more fringe views.

Facebook, at this point in time, is the single most powerful tool for the dissemination of extreme-right views. The return of very explicit racisms has been made possible by these conglomerates. And it's telling how you never read about how social media moderators are lured to fringe views on the left...

□ Facebook said from the beginning that they would have no standards...

* Because they're just a tool. Of course. They don't moderate. This is what they said: We don't moderate. Freedom of speech, right? This is really one of the most dangerous delusions known to man: freedom of speech.

/ Yeah, if we'd ended at that point would've been...

* Grim.

/ So, we're all going to log off the Internet immediately and that's the end of that.

* I will write you a letter.

/ Thank you. That'll be nice. I will wait one week.

○ Yeah, we love, we've seen your phone. It's very promising. Much better than mine. Yeah, you can compare. You see this?

/ Oh, I like your handwriting.

○ Okay. So you at least it's on the grid. You see how it's on the grid paper with lines that go? Yeah.

* I love how everyone took notes the analogue way here. Ok. Is there anything left to say in conclusion?

/ I like how we've got a lot of analogue notes. I quite like that.

□ The grid is a model. It's not positive, negative. It's kind of an order.

* Yeah, sure. One thing that I actually didn't get a chance to tell anyone here is that already way back in 2009 you commissioned me to write an essay about your work, Olaf, and I ended up writing something about the grid. Of course, this did not involve a value judgment about the good or bad of the grid... Not at the time.

□ It was in Haus Lange. Right now, I am building an installation out of reed, a house in a house. I wanted to create a very quiet space. The reed, you know. It's like a fibre. It swallows the sounds.

○ A long house. Is that what you have? You say longhouse.

* No Haus Lange is a Museum in Krefeld.

○ Okay.

□ I imagine when Mies van der Rohe built this house, saying okay, I try to be true as an architect, you know, I try to see where I am... there were these new technologies, the industrial time... so he built a house, which was organised horizontally, like a factory. At the same time, he remodelled the landscape around the house. He was also concerned with the relationship between being inside or being outside. I thought that his manipulation of the grid in Krefeld was the outside. He brought 700 truckloads of soil there, creating a counterpart to “the factory.” I was asking myself: “What would Mies do today?”, and thought that he would create some space of intimacy, because these former categories of inside/outside wouldn’t function anymore today. That’s why I arranged the material of the landscape inside the house.

* There’s one more thing that I forgot to mention. You live in Berlin, you live in Bristol, and you live in Helsinki – all European cities that grew somewhat organically, right? I don’t know how old they are exactly, but I know what they look like and feel like. Now, as a European, I live in a city that is shaped like a chess board, in which the streets only ever meet in straight angles, and this produces a completely different social experience of space. It’s hard to actually imagine the depth of the impact of this spatial organisation. But you know, there are no squares in American cities.

/ Here we are in Venice, which is a maze. It makes no sense.

□ But the oldest cities in the world, 3000 years before Christ, in the Ganges Valley... they were built the same way like these American cities.

* Of course, I know the grid is old in that way. Older than the organic growth of European cities.

○ I thought that in the Ganges plains, 3000 years back, cities would have been labyrinthic.

□ No, they are grids.

○ Okay. I didn’t know. Okay.

□ They had both. It’s only a system. In Patagonia, the new cities were also made like a grid. It’s a system and I think it can be also very organic. I mean, there are beautiful works from Sol Lewitt which are organic.

* Sure. But I just wanted to make an observation about the grid as an organisational principle that is imposed on living space, and how this produces completely different social outcomes. And yes, I prefer the maze.

/ Maybe I can tie this together a little because, you know, I just said Venice, it makes no sense. But of course it makes sense from the water. It makes sense depending on where you stand, on land or in the water. I think everything that we've spoken about, it depends on your point of view, and it depends on how you are approaching. Are you approaching something with a particular mindset which is perhaps land-based, when actually the medium needs to be water, or vice versa. So, there is a sense to be made in all of this. It just depends what your original standing point and your, what's the Greek word, your epistemology. It depends on your epistemology as to and your starting point as to the sense of the thing that you are engaged with. Does that make sense?

○ Yeah. I think what you say about water makes lots of sense. I think that one aspect of modernity is it to do to water what it does to people. I mean, you want to have it, you don't want the water to flow like it meandering like it does in Venice. You want it to be back in a pipe and deliver electricity for the people in the grid. So, water has to be in the grid, and people have to be in the grid, and the world has to be in the grid, and then it's perfect. I mean it's a dream. It was a dream, and I suppose it still is a dream. So, Venice is very bad.

/ Someone should straighten Venice out.

○ Also old fashioned water, you know, running wild, you know, floating this way or that way. Eccentric.

/ It's eccentric. That's not what we want.

○ We could cut it up in straight lines.

□ Dieter was first focusing on the Internet as a grid. There is another grid. Our smartphone is a pocket calculator. We are calculating and programming our time. That's the point. We try to optimise and it's all about growth and profit. But it's not because of the existing grid, it's more our thinking, you know, this bourgeois... We try to be a bit faster and better organised than our competitor.

○ Use your time well.

□ I think this is all hysterical. Everybody is connected with this time frame of the phones. You always know what other people do, you don't have your own time.

/ Yet I think of the Pirahã, indigenous people of the Amazon rainforest, who live in the present with no capacity for abstract thought. Their concept of time is so completely different to ours... yet they exist, they function – why don't we really get into it now and discuss what time is – what it is and whether 'it' exists. I think everyone here accepts that 'history' exists – history, time, all of that stuff, all those fundamental concepts because we grew up in the western tradition of science and philosophy.

And actually, fundamentally, these are systems and concepts that we may not even recognise or comprehend anymore because of the way and the places we grew up – they are to us like water is to fish. The philosophy of the, you know, the country, the philosophy of the hemisphere, the philosophy of the planet, all of its things.

○ Isn't it wonderful? We are in this bunker, and in this bunker we're off the grid, and we don't have a time limit. And the time horizon here is, I feel it's very liberating too, in this bunker. I must say. Yeah, yeah, yeah. I feel it's easier if we don't, you know.

/ I've gone back to lunchtime.

○ Lunchtime.

/ You know, the time is physical.

○ Yeah.

/ It's kind of like I am hungry. We've gone back to the first principles of timekeeping, biological time.

* Hunger, hunger. It's eat o'clock.

○ Hunger is not. Greed is there.

* Greed, desire, desire.