

Giving shape to painful things

Andrew Culp and Ricky Crano At the heart of Claire Fontaine's critique of contemporary art is a critical appraisal of the role played by relational aesthetics in relaying the social conditions and objects of capital into the space of art. Readymades like Duchamp's *Fountain*, on the one hand, saturate the art world with familiar objects from the 'mall-like universalism' of the social world, while, on the other hand, further lionizing the singular artist as originator of creativity and aesthetic value. CF inverts this formulation, looking to transform artist subjectivities through a becoming-stranger. Can you pinpoint what exactly it is that a readymade *artist* can do that a readymade *object* cannot? Is there a historical impetus for this shift from object to subject? To what extent does CF subscribe to a programme of relational aesthetics?

Claire Fontaine The question of relational aesthetics is crucial because it takes place at the threshold between subject and object. At this specific point, several problems arise, which cannot any longer be classified along the lines of commodity fetishism or reification. Other more complex confusions and contaminations take place between objectivity and subjectivity. For instance, when a person comes towards you in a museum and tells you 'I am an artwork by Tino Sehgal', and then requires an interaction with you, this is no longer the dynamics of the happening or the participatory theatre. It is a step forward and backwards at the same time.

It is crucial to stress that people are not artworks, that the encounter with an artwork is regulated by circumstances that are incomparable to the ones that take place when someone meets another person. The 'humanized object' – that is, the artwork – cannot be compared to a living being, ethically speaking, or in terms of the creation of intensity. It is a philosophical mistake – as Winnicott explains – to conceive a newborn baby in itself, because this newborn baby, without an adult in immediate and continuous proximity, would die. The artwork is also a purely artificially maintained artefact that entirely depends on human presence and only exists as such because the spectator is there – as a reality or as a potentiality.

Parisian artist Claire Fontaine is a fraud, a forgery, her name casually lifted from a generic brand of school notebooks, her existence only present in the art that bears her signature. She was first brought to life in 2004 by Fulvia Carnevale and James Thornhill. She resides now in the neon gas, the video pixels, the found objects, the paper, the ink and the many languages that constitute her work. Where an ordinary object, say a urinal or a bottle rack, can become a readymade piece of art simply on account of the artist saying it's so, Claire functions as a 'readymade artist' to render this very form of artistic subjectivity in a more critical light. She has a long list of influences. Most directly, her inspiration springs from the radical feminization of the Italian Autonomist movement in the late 1970s. Her philosophical roots are planted firmly in the revolutionary political theories of Jacques Rancière, Giorgio Agamben, Walter Benjamin and Michel Foucault. Her artistic allies include the ironically subversive Bernadette Corporation and the anti-political writing collective Tiqqun.

This interview was initiated during Claire Fontaine's visit to Columbus, Ohio, in autumn 2009 for the group exhibition *Descent to Revolution*, curated by James Voorhies for the Bureau for Open Culture, to which Claire made two contributions: a solar-powered neon sign installed in downtown Columbus that cycled between the words WARM and WAR; and a multimedia lecture-performance on libidinal economy and human strike that focused on the bodies of women as site of political, social and aesthetic contestation in Berlusconi's Italy.

Processes of subjectivation are influenced by encounters with objects. I would say that this is what artists are interested in and that it cannot be described in terms of the impact of an artwork on a public. The influence of the subject on the object is what capitalism in general – and collectors in particular – are obsessed with: the hand of the artist, the product which is the result of the worker's labour. Extracting oneself from the relationships created by advanced capitalism is technically and practically difficult but emotionally very easy. The devices made for alienating oneself – from the iPod to the Playstation, from gym machines to automobiles, not to mention legal and illegal drugs – are the main products that feed our economy; above all, the 'work' itself is an escapist strategy to avoid life. Becoming a stranger from the actual state of things is a generalized necessity, and this very fact should be turned against our failing system.

AC&RC Jim Voorhies's curatorial practice at the Bureau for Open Culture in Columbus, especially with the *Descent to Revolution* show, seems to operate on a like-minded principle of alienation, in the Brechtian sense. Expectations of the gallery itself – its territoriality, its rules of propriety – are immediately challenged when we open the door, only to find an empty space in which we are invited to do anything we like, while the art we seek lives elsewhere. One might suggest that *Descent to Revolution* puts the 'ex-' in 'exhibit', in the sense of the outward distribution of art, on one hand, but also in the sense that those who occupy the gallery space are no longer *in*-hibited by artworld protocol. Despite the apparent correspondence between CF's insurrectionist art and Jim's subversive curatorial work, the two are also strikingly at odds, in that much of CF's work depends on being situated and received in more traditional spaces of art. What is CF's relationship with curatorial practice and curators in general? How does *WARM/WAR*, for example, or a lecture on 1970s' Italian feminism and 'human strike' respond to the complexities specific to a galleryless exhibit?

CF Within Jim Voorhies's *Descent to Revolution* project, we committed to invest the public space of a city (Columbus) that we didn't know beforehand. *WARM/WAR* is a neon sign run by a solar panel, functioning only at night, and evoking the climate of disaster, but also the political weather in which we must live and which resembles in many ways wartime. It is and it is not a site-specific work, because all we knew about Ohio came from research and a few descriptions that Jim provided. We have previously worked in the public sphere, often with neon interventions that melt easily into the urban landscape and 'advertise' themselves. Claire Fontaine is not an artist who merely works inside the white cube, and this has been true since her very beginning. We consider the exhibition space as a context, and we challenge its pretended neutrality. The talk on human strike was the result of the difficulty that we encounter in performing a presentation of our work with slides and explanations. We do it all the time; it is useful for viewers but sterile for us (it is almost inevitably pedagogical or self-promotional).

Concerning curators, we cannot say that we have worked hand in hand with any curator up until now; we have met some of them that we like to work with, and we always hope it is going to be a satisfactory cooperation, but we have not been 'championed' by anyone.

AC&RC By displacing the focus paid to artistic production onto the *artist-function*, there seems to be a tension between the role of Claire Fontaine as artist and her artistic practice. We are wondering why CF produces objects for galleries rather than doing something more performative, gestural, temporally inclined, or, historically speaking, less prone to commodification. Is there something crucial about defamiliarizing banal objects that are tied to a single purpose – like coins and neon advertising signs that are tied to exchange – even though they still retain their commodity form?

CF It's an absurd cliché that Claire shows mostly in galleries; we wonder where it comes from! We have shown in many independent and squatted spaces, but obviously these occasions are less advertised and do not seem to mark institutional memory. We have an

object-based practice (but we also work a lot with writing) because we are interested in the aesthetic status of the object in the age of the commodification of subjects. The commodity form is the one that we inhabit and the one that we have to fight from within; even our body is washed, fed and dressed with industrial products that all have a price. Why should we create a pretend 'outside' just for a recreation? We are not providing a social service with our art, but giving shape to disturbing and painful things, and it is even better if people agree to exhibit them and eventually to live with them. We are not there to be an ephemeral and pleasant parenthesis between one activity and another in the schedule of the viewer; we don't intend to provide any entertainment, nor do we intend to draw attention to the beauty or the poetry of the human body. We are suffocated by the horror of a fabricated world where everything costs money, and we express this in our work – that's all we can do.

AC&RC In *What Is Philosophy?* Deleuze and Guattari argue that art, like philosophy, can 'summon' a people-to-come but cannot 'create' this people. Such creation, they hold, must occur through struggle. A people must create itself. Art and philosophy, for their part, can only make perceptible a people by illuminating those conditions that must be resisted. Is this more or less what CF means by 'giving shape to disturbing and painful things'? Does CF locate her position vis-à-vis 'a people to come' in any sort of vanguardist sense? And what exactly is the significance of 'marking the memory', especially if we understand the summoning of a people to struggle to involve some sort of storytelling or 'fabulation', as Deleuze and Guattari have it?

CF Discursive strategies within the political field did not do well during the second half of the twentieth century. The causes of this state of things are numerous, and I will make a long story short by saying that representative democracy has discredited the political world by entirely cutting the link between speech and the ethics of the speaker. This is a deep symbolic damage, if we believe that the speaker should represent the people. Now this wound is still fresh; intellectuals have had to suffer its consequences and tried to craft their mourning in



different ways, mostly by justifying their shameful impotency and the inefficiency of their activity. For example, Adorno and Günther Anders evoke the moral catastrophes of Auschwitz and Hiroshima as the main factors that broke the link between thinking and acting, essentially through a technology of destruction that cannot be stopped by acting on people's consciousness. Arendt describes this mechanism well in the case of Eichmann, who was nothing but a part of an enormous machine he did not even completely know and understand. Faced with his responsibilities, Eichmann was inadequate and pathetic, 'a clown'.

So storytelling and fabulation have also lost their function, or I would say that this function has been modified – Benjamin describes this process beautifully in his text on Nicolai Leskov, 'The Storyteller'. There is not much to add through words. Consciously choosing the visual field and preferring it to the textual space, as Broodthaers for example did, is a political gesture, but I don't think it can be defined as a vanguardist one. Maybe helping the 'missing people' to become real is an action that can be achieved through specific skills, medical or technological ones, such as getting in touch with defenceless, sick bodies or the relaxed minds of television spectators and videogame players. What is reassuring is that people will arise from where we don't expect them to, and there is no way to control this process anymore, we just have to recognize it in time and accompany it if we can.

Subjectivation

AC&RC A quick question regarding method: why talk about ‘subjectivation’ and not, for example, ‘individuation’?

CF Individuation, as Simondon describes it, is a singularization, a movement that goes from the pre-individual to the individual, a process of distinction. Later on, Foucault will explain that this process of separation – which is necessary and important for each being – has been turned into a strategy for better governing and subjugating people. We are anonymous numbers for school, health insurance, customer services, but we become ‘suspect individuals’ to be extracted from the crowd by the police at any time if we exhibit behaviour that appears irregular. Subjectivation is a reaction against these devices that can be as much an individual process as a collective one. So it opposes both faces of governmentality – the massifying one and the individualizing one.

AC&RC Initially, it seems that much of your art can be taken on two levels: first, as commodities in an artworld ruled by collectors and dealers, and second, as familiar objects turned into tools for sabotage – keys to empty out galleries that have shown your work, pieces hung in a way that are just asking to be stolen, bricks cloaked in dust jackets that read like a who’s who of postwar radical thought, coins modified with blade attachments, and so on. Yet neither



of these readings quite captures what the work actually does, which is to play interminably between these two levels, ultimately having less to do with direct action than getting us to understand our own desires. Take the *brickbat* series, for example. We expect a book but must settle for a brick. Books and bricks alike can be tools for building or tools for smashing, but a brick on the floor of Reena Spaulings Fine Art is neither. The question thus posed, by the brickbats and by much of CF’s art, is not ‘What does it mean?’ nor ‘What can we *do* with it?’ but ‘What do we *want* to do?’ and, even more important, ‘How is it that we, good consumers of capitalist art that we are, come to repress those desires?’ The brick, the coins, the keys, and so on, all express, on the one hand, pure exchange value, but, on the other, also pure potentiality. How does CF understand the relation between exchange and potential? Does she see her objects as a challenge to the artworld to step out of its repressed desire? Is it not precisely the sustained repression of revolutionary desires within capitalist art spaces that allows CF to continue being called an artist rather than an abettor of criminal activity?

CF I would say with Foucault that power *produces* desires always more than it represses them. Maybe we intervene within the grey zone between repressed and encouraged desires in order to short-circuit them. Potentiality has to do with communication and with sharing things, more than with exchange. The market talks all the time about the potentiality (of a house, of a student, of an investment) but, in the end, the smaller the margin of chance, the better it is for speculation. Flows need to be channelled; they can’t be left leaking around. When it comes to contemporary art, it is all more confused. There are not real experts out there that can say what is good and what is not – or there are, but they are more influenced by the market than they are able to influence it. The reason for operating in the space of contemporary art is not only to be found in its shield of impunity, but in its freedom. Our work is a discourse where sculptures, projections, texts function *as sentences*. Some things cannot be said with words; they need to be expressed with an object, a colour, a form. Not

everything is translatable, and contemporary art allows people to use all possible media to very precisely express affects, percepts and concepts.

AC&RC It's interesting that you bring up media here. Digitization literally converts 'all possible media' into the general equivalent of numerical information. Is CF particularly interested in 'new media art'? Would she care to comment on the political potential – or perhaps danger – of the 'informatization' of art?

CF Claire Fontaine was born in a fully computerized world; she is certainly a child of her time and cannot imagine nor regret a different world. If we have to name a real metamorphosis that has recently taken place, it is the one of the domination of the moving image. It is incredible how much the simple act of walking through an exhibition has changed on this count. The 'making of' videos found online converts the slow experience of encountering artworks into a compressed movie where space and time are regulated by the needs of editing. More generally, all forms of expression can now be absorbed by the moving image, but this is politically promising, not something to be feared.

AC&RC In her essay 'Footnotes on the State of Exception', CF does something very curious to the received sense of 'state of exception': rather than the space of the camp, in opposition to the safe space of civil and juridical rights, you take 'exception' in a totally different yet complementary direction. The 'exception' here is what neoliberalism makes of each of us – that is, unique, monadic, self-enterprising, *exceptional* individuals. Coupled with the Agambenian sense of 'exception' as camp, your formulation illustrates well the distinct movements of exclusive inclusion (the exceptional individual) and inclusive exclusion (the refugee, the detainee) conjoined by the politico-military-economic apparatus. Within this doubly potent analytic of exception, what value does CF ascribe to the refugee as a figure of revolutionary potential alongside other paradigms of 'whatever singularity'?

CF We usually say that we are political refugees in the art field; there are a few of us actually. The refugee is an interesting but a tragic figure: there is something desperate about saving your life or exporting your freedom into a country or in a space where this life and this freedom lose the meaning they used to have. The refugee is always a survivor too, and a paradoxical witness of the pain he escaped, but he is also inevitably a foreigner, in many ways. What we try to articulate around the different implications of being a foreigner has to do with the fact that not only are foreigners more and more numerous, but also that we *all* feel like strangers in an entirely fabricated world that we cannot modify. That is what makes this figure of the foreigner and/or of the refugee potentially revolutionary, because in the world we live in everybody is a foreigner – everybody is easily deprived of her rights – no one truly has the freedom of speech that comes from perfectly knowing a territory, a group of people, a situation. Things keep changing, people are constantly being moved or locked into their houses, so the *whatever singularity*, contrary to what one would think, might be a foreigner today.

AC&RC In trying to grasp our own contemporary alienation in this way, do we not run the risk of romanticizing the tragic fate of the refugee? If we are all foreigners in fact (and not by analogy), does it follow that this foreignness must also be a source of commonality or that we hold this foreignness in common? How would we distinguish this from current modes of belonging and inclusion?

CF As a matter of fact, the imaginary of the struggles of the 1960s and the 1970s is extremely 'white' – especially in Europe. The iconic images of May '68 in Paris, for example, or of the feminist demonstrations in Italy that have shaped the fantasies of insurrectionist youth up to the present, are simply obsolete. The same is true for the life-form of The Worker, the good proletarian. The term, the idea, doesn't match at all the faces and stories of today's precarious people, whether working class and steadily employed or

unemployed. There is a puzzling variety in today's complex world of work, and unions flounder among all these fragmentations.

Foreigners have been used to break strikes, to stop the transmission of struggles, because they were very easy to racket, desperately poor and lost. Our individual situations today more resemble those of immigrants in an unknown country than the subjectivities that rose up in '68 and '77. Classes have multiplied, but there are different and more numerous possibilities for disobedience, flight, communication and the reappropriation of things. But it is definitely much more difficult to get organized. Foreignness is our commonality, and we need to find the language and the gestures to inhabit it all together; there is nothing romantic in this urge.

Time and violence

AC&RC Agamben describes the contemporary in terms of a certain untimeliness, a singular relationship with one's time based on disjunction and anachronism. This formulation seems useful in thinking about the relationship between CF's interest in genealogy (e.g. in lieu of an artist talk, a lecture on the Italian women's movement *circa* 1977) and the non-style of her art proper (Bruce Nauman knockoffs, etc.), both of which are rooted in the temporality – or, better, the untimeliness – of human strike: stoppage, interruption, refusal to act. Capitalist time, to the contrary, is characterized by discretization, speed and linear development. Capitalist art history, in turn, has always been predicated on similar notions of progress. Innovations are measured according to the exceptionality of an artist or a work and the valuable addition of something new. By making works that mimic others, CF seems to valorize pure accumulation, fundamentally interrupting the historical trajectory of art, somewhat analogous to the way genealogy can breach a present power-knowledge apparatus by excavating the subjugated discourses of a collectively inherited past. Yet for all this, CF remains indebted to the art institution for the success she has achieved while she bides her time waiting for an uprising. Is her art-star status simply a residual by-product of her insurrectionary pining, or does it say something more significant about the inherent contradictions of the art institution in the era of advanced capitalism? How does CF understand this seemingly contradictory nature of her work qua 'art'? How does she measure success?

CF First, the linearity of capitalism is something that we must call into question. 'Progress' now means sustainable energy; it means devastating building sites all over European towns in order to put back tramways that were eliminated forty years ago; it means organic food, de-industrialization of some territories, de-growth, austerity, recycling and so on. Technology is there to create new products and new needs, so it needs 'progress', but art, literature, music don't really bring anything new – they aren't even supposed to. The way these things are marketed insists on the uniqueness of the products, and the limited relevance of critics makes it very difficult to trace genealogies, to track the migration of forms and sounds. Plagiarism is all over the place, often involuntary, and maybe it was good to repeat it clearly and to dissect this situation rather than just taking advantage of it in a more or less sordid way. The 'whatever singularity' that affirms herself as such is a first step towards some kind of emancipation for sure. CF does not really feel her success, we have more and more work and we travel too much, but our life has not changed substantially. It's great sometimes to see the work reproduced in fanzines and quoted in discussions that don't have anything to do with art: that is a success, the success of the work, not ours.

AC&RC Would it be fair to say that CF doesn't seek to expand the frontiers of art, but to produce unforeseen connections through a sort of contagion?

CF The frontiers of art appear uncertain: if they exist they are only there to be expanded like the frontiers of freedom in democratic countries. For CF the artworld is a space of expansion and experimentation; it is not a context to honour as such, nor something that

makes sense in and of itself. The artworld does not have any content and doesn't have a clue about what art is or should be; it has habits and prejudices but less strong ones than the rest of society. This allows an incredible amount of freedom: feelings, problems, images that don't have any right of citizenship in social life or in militant contexts can take all the space that they need and therefore can generate encounters, discussions, small transformations. *Contagion* is a funny word; if you can say that the love for a woman is contagious when a poet talks about it – as Dante used to say – then, yes, Claire aims to diffuse her desires and make them as common as possible.

AC&RC There's something unavoidably messianic about all of this talk of interruption and waiting. CF's insurrection is always an indeterminately future event, always to come. Is an actual revolution possible or must it remain a virtual idea, something to be hoped for, something that drives practices, perhaps in a more subtle way? To what extent does CF share Benjamin and Agamben's notion of a revolution in which nothing changes save a shift by a fraction of a millimetre, or in which everything stays the same but meanings change? Is this an adequate account of effective uprising or rather of what art is capable of in its pre-revolutionary phase? Does CF even recognize a qualitative difference between these two modes?

CF I don't see a substantial contradiction between keeping the horizon for insurrection constantly open (there are insurrections within insurrections) and imagining that radical transformations take place through very small changes, almost imperceptible ones. Waiting actively is what we all do when circumstances do not seem amenable to moving forward, although there is a way to wait that accelerates events; it's this specific way that we are interested in with Claire Fontaine, not in a Leninist sense but, for example, by exploring different regions of the sensible, something only accessible in times where political action is rare and dissatisfactory.

AC&RC CF draws on Rancière to argue that the current aesthetic regime matches the boring 'whatever singularities' of the social world. Representations cascade by without order or differentiation, a paratactical mass that *indifferentiates*, say, a Holocaust narrative and Flaubert. You draw a consistency between Antelme's account of the camp and Flaubert to argue that daily life in advanced capitalism shares in the pacification of the camp, the space par excellence of whatever singularity. This reminds us of Tacitus: 'They make a desert and call it peace.' This draws out interesting distinctions regarding affects and violence that are usually hard to access: for example *A fire is a fire is not a fire* (2006) or *Visions of the World* (Greece, summer 2006), videos that depict the conflict and violence of recent events. How would CF describe her thoughts on the aesthetics of violence? Is there always violence in subjectivation? And what of the violence that resists it? Where do affect and desire fit in?





CF Subjectivization can itself be a pacific process. The conflicts happen because we encounter resistance in our becoming; we are supposed to remain ‘the same’ or to change within very regulated structures, such as those of various sorts of ‘coaching’ or education, which always occur within the framework of a teacher–student or boss–employee dialectic.

Then there is another phenomenon: people are supposed to remain placeless, and this is where desubjectivation becomes a political action, on account of the necessity of breaking the correspondence between what we are told we should be and what we need to be. Affects and desires always play a big part within processes of subjectivation and desubjectivation – they are the engine and the guideline, respectively, of those procedures. The violence that resists them is called the *reaction*. It’s not very interesting in general; it works according to a counter-movement of conservation and the preservation of the status quo. We don’t know if there is one or several aesthetics of violence; the aestheticization of violence creates these abstract messages that we can see in movies, television and videogames, but this ‘violence’ has nothing to do with the real violence that we are immersed in every day. It’s this latter violence that would be interesting to show, or rather the continuity between this deaf, quotidian violence of administrated life in a country ‘protected’ from war and the massacres that take place where conflicts explode.

AC&RC By what criteria does CF look at the aesthetics of violence? Exciting, frightening, destructive, creative? What sorts of affects and desires does she hope to generate by showing these videos that capture a declaration of conflict precisely in a country that is not in a state of war?

CF What exactly do we mean by ‘aesthetics of violence’? For us some adverts, some faces, some expressions, some proximities between products and bodies are unbearably violent.

Maybe the true violence is this: the violence of photoshopped bodies, the words associated with certain gestures... These things have created a world, and this is the world we all live in. This coexists with police brutality, merciless bureaucracy, tax tyranny, continuous controls and solitude. Open conflict exists in our pacified countries, in the work place, in hospitals, in prison. In these places people who have a minor problem get sick and die all the time, because nobody looks after them until it's too late: there is no time, not enough personnel and so on. As long as there will be wars, where a nation sends soldiers to fight another nation's soldiers, all countries will be in a state of latent war, which shows itself explicitly through the monopoly of violence of the police. Maybe this is something that we all know without knowing it, and seeing it on a screen can awaken this thought.

AC&RC The trope of the readymade artist diagnoses a crisis of authenticity permeating the artworld. Yet you seem to remain optimistic about this moment. Is there a new possibility for communization, and, if so, does it emerge from the crisis of subjectivities named by the readymade artist? But why is art a crucial vehicle for diagnosing the crisis? Do you imagine the artworld as a space for transformation or is it a staging ground for escape?

CF I will begin from the end. As we said, art is a territory where people can exile themselves and enjoy a sort of freedom that is comparable to the one of the political refugee. Meanwhile, however, it is not a space that is detached from the global economy and its tragic violence, and that's why it is populated by the same 'whatever singularities' as everywhere else is. Art is indeed a crucial vehicle for diagnosing crisis – not only the economic one but all sort of crises. The very history of art and crisis are deeply related, and one could say that even the criteria to judge an artwork are in a state of crisis.

The readymade artist is obviously a positive phenomenon, a breach in the mythology of the exceptional aesthetic hero and a step towards more accessible models of behaviour and gestures, towards an appropriation of art as part of life and life as a part of art. Of course, this is happening slowly, but blurring these borders between art and life in a non-romantic way still seems very important, even if it's the non-artistic that contaminates the artistic. The artistic will arise somewhere else; it does not need to be protected, it needs to be fed by our freedom.

AC&RC This is perhaps an incredibly irritating question, but what is CF's conception of 'artistic-ness'? What separates art from non-art?

CF Claire Fontaine is not a curator, nor an art historian, so she is not really competent to answer. Maybe it is a certain *frequency of intensity*, but this is subjective and historically determined. Today, the most interesting artworks are those that question their own legitimacy as artworks, those that ask these questions with different visual languages.

ACRC The thought of blurring the boundaries between art and life has long been a seductive idea. But, as Benjamin argued, along with the good ways of arriving at this indistinction, there are also some very bad ways. How do we go about it in a 'non-romantic' way without going bad? Could things like sexiness or sensuality in art serve as potential antidotes to romanticization?

CF I don't know. Romanticization of anything can only be a reactionary, nostalgic move. On the other hand, sexiness is something entirely dependent on power. If one looks at the psychosomatic transformation of men and women when they reach power, it is striking. For example, Gianfranco Fini, head of the most miserable and pathetic fascist party in the world, who always looked like a primary-school teacher from the 1950s, is now the protagonist of a revolt against Berlusconi. He has become another person, he has learned how to smile, how to seduce. Sarkozy tries hard too... These are revolting men, but they have learned how to be looked at, how to capture one's attention and benevolence through servile strategies in

order to rule. They all speak to the lowest instincts, and Berlusconi is the king of them all: a living miracle if you think that he can even convince the public that his sexual life is hot when we all know of his physiological problems and his dependency on substances in order to have sexual intercourse. Sexiness is a way of connecting gestures and power, flattery and domination. Nazism has created a paradigm of sexual politics in the dirtiest way possible by stigmatizing illicit behaviours and races. Races are created by a sexual imaginary; that's why they give rise to such aggressive affects. As long as we admire sex symbols we are all expropriated of the miraculous and surprising complexity of human sexuality.

Human strike

AC&RC The concept of *human strike* is meant to jam up the subjectivating machine of the contemporary art world. It has to do with the transformative potential of refusal. CF's piece *Human Strike* substantially overlaps with the refusal to work as expressed through Bartleby's maxim, 'I would prefer not to', demonstrated, for example, in a series of pieces that admit CF's complete alienation from the production of the object (one sign reads 'This neon sign was made by Felice Lo Conte for the remuneration of one thousand, nine hundred and fifty euros') and a refusal to articulate her subjectivity in the commodified terms given to her by the artworld. Obviously, though, it does not mean halting the production of art. Is the human strike directed exclusively at the sovereign artist – a desubjectivation of the artist that retains the artist function? What role does the human strike have in relation to the objects of art?

CF Human strike isn't meant to exist only in the art field; on the contrary, the art field is maybe the most difficult to strike against because it is the least normative and in some ways the most flexible. I don't think we ever display our alienation from our work. In *This neon sign was made by...* we wanted to make visible the submersed aspect of the production of art, its costs, its protagonists, and to criticize the pretend neutrality and tautology of conceptual art (such as in Kosuth's *Five Words in Blue Neon*). We criticize the identification between the artist and the artwork; that's what the device of Claire Fontaine achieves – it opens up a space for forms and contents to create a visual and verbal constellation that does not only belong to us.

Human strike is a concept aimed at extending the borders of what is considered and read as political, giving political dignity to actions that might seem uncanny or just violent, but are in fact the only possible way to manifest deeply unresolved problems neglected by everyone. Refusal to work is a part of human strike, but the more important aspect of the strike is the wider refusal of certain human relationships and social dynamics. Human strike is open to subjects that actually do not work, whose work is not recognized as a professional activity, who are unemployed or precarious and therefore cannot organize themselves against some specific conditions of exploitation, but instead have to endure submission to the economy and its merciless laws.

AC&RC The figures of human strike that come most quickly to mind all seem to suffer rather tragic fates – Bartleby, Gregor Samsa, Joseph K...

CF Human strike makes us think about the intervention of an anonymous woman saying in an assembly, during the 1970s somewhere in Italy, something that sounded like this: freedom is leaving home with nothing but a toothbrush; it is sleeping on friends' couches and testing their patience and tolerance; it is selling your wedding ring. Today, we are already many, entire crowds, who have deserted the prison of domestic work and imposed love. Today, we are inventing life and inventing freedom for the first time in history, and we know this will be contagious because it is the most exciting and the best thing we can do.