



Fig. 1—Lee Krasner, *Combat*, 1965. 179 x 410.4 cm. National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, Felton Bequest, 1992 (IC1-1992). © Pollock-Krasner Foundation. With its references to André Masson's *Massacres* this work is double faced: on the one hand pathfinding including random, on the other hand goalseeking including empty spaces. A painting w/"design"

'Private' is something *set apart* from something else. A misconception derives from the *received* notion that language is initially private—as though private reflects the natural state—and then becomes public through socialisation. The argument that will be explored here is that both categories (the private and the public) need to be arrived at: the position taken is that they are they are both the children of political history, taking place on the backdrop of cultural history. The corollary is that we also need to determine routes that are available out of the private *versus* public divide.

If we start up with two less oppositional—and more neighbouring—categories as the *quotidian* (everyday situations) and *mundane* (occasional arenas) our task is then to determine whether there is an architecture affording *entrance* and *exit* into/from the private and public. We go about our daily business (the quotidian). A different alert throw us into collective arenas (the mundane). They are each in themselves *neither* private *nor* public. They are likely closer to the natural state: as hunter-gatherers, foragers and nomads. Private comes with fences. Public when ruling them.

Claiming that "this is mine, and not yours!"—or, more broadly, appropriation—is by no means a trivium linked to the natural order. Which means that it is *either* violent, *or* somehow justified. If justified the privacy is hatched as a legitimate form of appropriation. It hatches alongside with the category appropriating the right of permitting it and ruling over it. Before we get there, however,

the forms of creative and managed appropriation in art and design, allows us to consider how the alternating, opposite, yet mutually dependent categories of *private* and *public* are likely to hatch in the first place.



Fig. 2—The branding of private language in public appears to have become a lingo in our time. It is not any lingo, since it has to do with privacy in a politically aggressive phase, where options of attacking public institutions is a political option. And it also is an option for politicians to support the attack privately, while remaining a candidate for presidency over the institutions that are under attack. This has of course been the alt right strategy for the entire duration of Hodbawm's "short" 20th century.

If we assume that assimilation comes *before* appropriation, then our task is to inquire into how assimilation becomes *assigned* (rather than simply assumed): how do we take knowledge of the quotidian, and how is an understanding acquired of the mundane. How are *tasks* and *occasions* linked up with the cultural organisation of *encounters* (Barth, 1972). Are the *common* methods for this (common in the sense of being *at once* conceived and embodied)? There at least applicable ones: *chance methods* are applicable to the quotidian, and *symbolism* to the mundane. In art these apply to *painting* and *print*.

If painting is open to chance methods, print is constitutively symbolic (because it based on transfer and fit). While they are both linked to the possibility of numeric ubiquity (random), print is different in that it is constitutively brought about by transference through joinery (the

matrix and the edition): it is symbolic in the sense that the Greek *symbolon* was an artefact that allowed recognition through joinery. Print-making is—in this sense symbolic—while painting is not. We are talking about material techniques here, only, and not about “symbolic motifs”. Painting is numeric in the sense of chance-ridden.

Jackson Pollock’s [Blue poles](#)—once more—raise the question of what might result from combining painting and print. In his practice, another common point is revealed: since neither are determined by accuracy, and accordingly define precision at a [different level](#). This is why the movement from the icon to the index (which is Julia Robinson’s chief errand) is common, but according to two different models of assimilation. Both are models in the sense of serial without repetition. But while the time of painting is situational, the time printing is occasional.

What is meant by situational is that accident can and will be incorporated: painting is daily practice. What is meant by occasional is that printing is not everyday. The technical apparatus required for printing yields a specific operational context—with machines and personnel—which painting does not require. Painting and printing are direct instances of what *holds* and what is *held*, and accordingly candidates, as good as any, to speculate on the origin of language. With this approach, the language is neither private nor public. But comes of making and sharing.

Here, painting and printing are considered as special/semiotic cases of *making* and *sharing*. Making is situational—it makes the best of accident—sharing is occasional; it proceeds by the convertibility of negative spaces (that hold). The constitutive relation between holding and what is held is exemplified in the following passage (F. Barth 1966:15): «Human behaviour is 'explained' if we show (a) the utility of its consequences in terms of values held by the actor, and (b) the awareness on the part of the actor of the connection between an act and its specific results».

In the first case, the above passage is concerned with how the *explanation* is made (a). While in the second case the explanation is shared (b). The compound is a ‘common notion’, in Spinoza’s sense, because it conjointly conceived *and* embodied. The relation between the private and public is similar: private is what holds, public is what is being held. Private is made. Public is shared. We already know this. However, private and public is regularly conceived in oppositional terms. From this emerges the notion that private can win over public, or the public can win over the private.

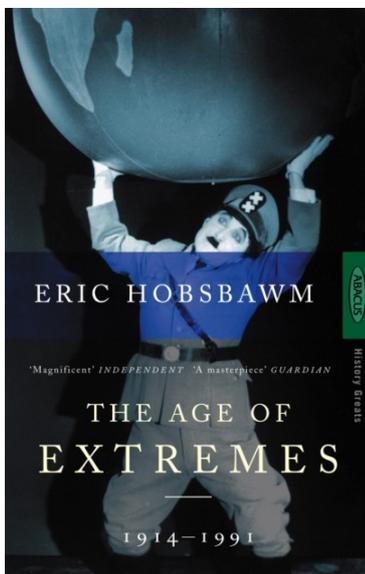


Fig. 3—Eric Hobsbawm’s volume from 1994 (above) features a joint critique of state socialism, capitalism and nationalism. He writes: “The world of the third millennium will therefore almost certainly continue to be one of violent politics and violent political changes. The only thing uncertain about them is where they will lead.”

What we may miss from this political economic narrative is an account of the art-field in the perspective of *cultural history*. That is, art beyond what might be called the prison of aesthetics, and part of the field of pathfinding and goalseeking of our time: that is, what one—in an extended sense—might call *design*.

The absence/dismembering of design in society (and political history), and inscription of artistic choices as aesthetics correspond exactly.

Modernism has brought us down that road. But what means has it managed to make it credible? Like the abuse either comes from the private or the public (abusing of their powers). Have they engaged in a mock-fight while in reality feeding the same interest? Is this the explanation for colonialism, slavery and exploitation of sorts? Where are we now in regard of this bill? If this is true, it is likely a dangerous game: both to engage in and to accuse. But it might well be the summary of Eric Hobsbawm’s [Age of extremes: the history of the world 1914-1991](#). The “short twentieth century.”

But what shall we call the era where the private and public are verging to collapse? When private language is boasted in public. When the congress is attacked by wo/men in ideological “hoodies”. Where public language is upheld in public in blatant private interest. The powerlessness before the fact can only be explained if matters, such as they have been laid out here, *either* has been ignored *or* actively kept from people (art ownership). Whichever it might be, we have not been cultivating the basic understandings laid out here: neither in the current art education, nor in scientific research.

What we are witnessing, in the place of this, is the transformation of artists and scientific researchers into bureaucrats (rather than into argonauts that they should be): based on the basic premise that if anything valuable is found, it should benefit the powers that be. From this vantage point it does not matter whether they are private or public. If a third element is lacking—between the quotidian and the mundane, the situational and the occasional, the made and the shared—what might that be? Design? For the time being, let us call it the X-factor. That is, a matter of urgent inquiry in the time to come.