William Kaizen

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Aux ye ux du peuple

In the eyes of the people

Vulgar Politics

WILLIAM KAIZEN

> *I tell you – we have to start all over again from the beginning and assume that language is first and foremost a system of gestures. Animals after all have only gestures and tones of voice – and words were invented later. Much later. And after that they invented schoolmasters.*
>
> – Gregory Bateson[1]

Vulgar People

Two phrases caption a photograph by Rainer Ganahl: in the upper right corner, "Aux yeux du people"; in the lower right corner, "In the eyes of the people." The image is part of Ganahl's Basic Languages series, exploring the connections between places and the local vernaculars spoken there. The series features snapshots taken as he studied the local language, layered with texts taken from the books that he used to study them. These particular phrases come from a textbook designed for French-speaking Quebec students to learn English, but given that he is Austrian and a native German speaker, which text translates the other is unclear. The two texts reinforce this ambiguity, both speaking languages of colonization, speaking for two countries in which democracy, as the politics of a sovereign people, emerged almost simultaneously at the end of the eighteenth century. The image to which they are attached is a makeshift signboard like those used since antiquity to post messages in the commons. It is the modern equivalent of the site where the social intersects with the linguistic, where law, news, and other forms of community interest are fixed and held in common. Here this site is decrepit and forlorn. The foundation of democracy in the public square as a place for contract and disagreement has been displaced. As the automobiles at the left suggest, democracy has been driven elsewhere by new forms of mobility and connected to new types of public and private space. The image is of a place in Canada, a country whose very existence is based on the legacy of colonization and the logic of capitalist competition, expansion, and mobility. With the return to democracy in Europe, "the people" were constituted as sovereign only by holding a fundamental contradiction in suspension: that these people were sanctioned by universal human rights on the one hand and rivalrous national identities on the other. Attached to the post are two identical flyers, reading, "La répres-

1. Gregory Bateson, *Steps to an Ecology of Mind* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1972), 13.

sion est un cauchemar. Il faut se réveiller!" (Repression is a nightmare. Wake up!). Signed by the COBP, or the Collective Opposed to Police Brutality, this is a message against state power, as it both allows a people to cohere and keeps them in check. Just visible in the photograph, scrawled between the two flyers, is another, wilder text. Written in marker, directly on the post, are the words "Les Italiens contrôlent le Québec," "Italiens" constituting a further threat to the already riven French-English community of Quebec. Here is yet another reversal of the consolidation of the people: racism as something that all communities seem to hold in common as part of the "basic" local language, where the vulgar ties that bind people together come undone through xenophobia and paranoia.

Contained within this image, in the connections that it puts on display among community, language, and the common, is a kind of vulgar politics that informs all of Ganahl's work. Vulgar politics works on the level of the sociolinguistic. It is a politics where disagreement takes place between what is given in common in the constitution of a people, from what can be said to the spaces where saying takes place, and so where selves and communities cohere. Given the vulgar as the sociolinguistic common that binds selves into communities, then vulgarity is the means by which doxa is both reproduced and opens onto new possibilities. I take the vulgar as the vulgate in general, not just as the common tongue shared by a people but the vernacular in the broadest possible sense: as the partitioning of sense in general (both sensation and meaning) that shapes the sensual, sayable, and knowable for a given, local community. There is vulgarity-as-usual, the kind that reproduces the clichés and racisms of pregiven identities of all kinds, and there is vulgar politics, which is political in the sense that Jacques Rancière describes when he writes:

> Politics. . .is that activity which turns on equality as its principle. And the principle of equality is transformed by the distribution of community shares as defined by a quandary: when is there and when is there not equality in things between who and who else? What are these "things" and who are these whos? How does equality come to consist of equality and inequality?[2]

Vulgar politics is a politics that raises these questions of equality, not from the position of a pregiven assumption of universal human rights but from a position that questions the meaning of a given discourse and the limits of the community where it takes place. It is an attempt to forge a new vernacular from the words given to the old, to shift the very foundations of what constitutes a people and in whose eyes these

2. Jacques Rancière, *Disagreement: Politics and Philosophy,* trans. Julie Rose (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), ix.

people are constituted by transforming the means of knowledge and what and how things are knowable.

Rancière takes the claim of modern democracy for the inclusion of all as based largely in a "regime of opinion."[3] Consensus democracy, he says, purports to eliminate any remainder in a given community by impossibly reducing it to the sum of its parts with nothing left over. Against this, he suggests that politics is what wells up when the part that has not been given a part demands its share of the common, and so a place in the community. It is the production of counter-community, a demand for the recognition of the reality of a given group in contradistinction to the reality of the regime of opinion. Politics is what splits reality and demands that the master reality be reallocated to accommodate an other reality. Most importantly, this other reality is not political unless it is based on a call for radical equality. For Rancière, an act is political only when it makes a demand for radical equality via the redistribution of the sensible against the existing system of masters and nonmasters. He recognizes that this radical equality is utopian and unrealizable but says that politics is located in the endless striving for equality and that how and where this will take place can never be anticipated. As he says, "For a thing to be political, it must give rise to a meeting of police logic and egalitarian logic that is never setup in advance."[4] Against the politics-as-usual of the police, and so against the kind of everyday vulgarity the COBP flyers on the post decry, politics emerges only with the endless pursuit of a share for all the people. Each resistance and redistribution will necessarily beget new inequalities, but the process of demand and repartitioning is the only grounds of the truly political, as opposed to the realpolitik of politics-as-usual. Vulgar politics, then, is politics that calls for equality by working at the level of the sociolinguistic, by calling for a repartitioning of our institutions of language, education, and knowledge. It locates the sites where doxa is fixed to the post of the commons and so can be upset. Whether this has taken place is always open for debate, evaluation, and future revaluation, but politics is never a finished process. It is an endless practice with no perfect.

Ganahl's exploration of the vulgar undertakes this political doubling of reality. It both stages the given institutions that constitute possibilities for knowledge in all their given vulgarity and suggests new possibilities for knowledge by building alternative means for teaching, learning, and dialogue both inside and outside the given systems. His work reflects what lies in the eyes of the people today and tries to devise ways to move beyond the current state of affairs where the people

3. Ibid., 102.

4. Ibid., 32.

Fig. 3 *A Portable (Not so Ideal) Imported Library or How to Reinvent the Coffee Table, 25 Books for Instant Use (Japanese Version)*, 1993 (see p. 126)

are now constituted. The question posed by his work is the status of the common: Given the economic (capitalist) drive toward globalization, how is vulgarity framed and what possibilities exist for producing new forms of sociolinguistic being in common? Despite the drive to recognize universal human rights, in the face of the wave of nationalisms that flared in the many regional ("ethnic") conflicts of the 1990s, and in the current state of unilateral exceptionalism promoted by the United States, it seems that the only connection between people across regional borders is the universal advertising of international corporate goods. Ganahl's work operates on another level, neither of universal rights nor universal consumption but one more vulgar. He works on the possibilities of vernacular being in common and even of having a self that can be in common with another. *In the eyes of the people* puts on display the plight of the people and their communities today. Throughout his work, Ganahl uses vulgar politics against vulgarity-as-usual by acknowledging the need for new stagings of democracy where equality means more than the freedom to go shopping.

Learning Communities

In 1993, while attending his own exhibition at the Person's Weekend Museum in Tokyo, Ganahl had held what became the first of his Readings series. It was an impromptu event that would change the direction of his work. He had been in Japan for several months, studying Japanese as he prepared for the show. Travel was not unusual for Ganahl, who had moved from Vorarlberg in the westernmost Austrian Alps, where he was born and grew up, to Paris and then to New York, with various stops along the way. The Tokyo exhibition consisted largely of work from the past several years that explored the emergence of teletechnologies and the kinds of virtual spaces created as they pass over national borders, turning the local into the global.[5] He also produced his first Library for this exhibition, and it was this that began to point him in new directions. Entitled *A Portable (Not so Ideal) Imported Library or How to Reinvent the Coffee Table, 25 Books for Instant Use (Japanese version)*, it consisted of a selection of books sitting on a shelf. Available for the perusal of visitors to the gallery were books such as Henry Lewis Gates Jr.'s *Signifying Monkey*, Dan Graham's *Rock My Religion*, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's *Outside in the Teaching Machine*, Antonio Gramsci's *Prison Notebooks,* and Edward W. Said's *The World, the Text, and the Critic*. Ganahl had swapped the coffee-table art book, sold at exhibitions as a souvenir, for critical theory.

5. Ganahl showed his earlier computer-based works, the "citY lisTs" and the Windows series.

With both the production of this Library and his personal difficulties in learning the Japanese language, Ganahl realized that his role as traveling artist had begun to "parody the cultural arrogance of the missionary."[6] The Library was meant to be a small offering as a possible point of cultural exchange, meant for the kind of "instant use" he had had in his own study of Japanese using various textbooks to absorb the local culture. He decided to go to the gallery on Saturdays and read some of his Library books, word by word, line by line, with whoever chose to join him. He and his readers would each bring to bear whatever knowledge they had in order to interpret and translate the texts. With this gesture toward active exchange, Ganahl's work switched from presenting globalization as a finished event whose consequences could be archaeologically explored to a more subtle examination of what knowledge means in process as it takes place in the midst of global travel and cultural exchange.

After this first Library, a major part of his artistic practice would focus on the politics of learning. He moved from his early concern with the spaces being opened up by teletechnologies and globalizing media to a more developed focus on how these spaces are constrained by local and regional limit conditions. He came to assume that, despite so-called globalization, people still necessarily occupy particular places through culture, especially through language and education, and that even major languages constitute a kind of vernacular. He turned toward an exploration of the ways in which specific communities arise at the intersection of the global and local, in what he decided to call, in a slightly redolent neologism, the "glocal."[7]

One of the texts from the Library that Ganahl and his visitors read together, a text that would shape his following work, was a chapter entitled "Traveling Theory" from Said's book *The World, the Text, and the Critic*. In it Said discusses two problems: (1) the reception and re-reception of ideas over time and place, and (2) the function of the particular ideas grouped under the rubric of "critique."[8] Said brings these problems together by tracing the reception of critical theory as put forth by Georg Lukács, and as then taken up by Lucien Goldmann and Raymond Williams. He suggests that in each instance social circumstance, rather than misreadings and misrecognitions, allowed Lukács to be reread through the necessities of each moment in which his critical theory was once again resumed. Said describes how Goldmann turned critical theory to scholarly use in the context of post–World War II Paris and how Williams radicalized it once again in the context of the U.K. in the 1970s. These vagaries of critical theory are, in Said's

6. Rainer Ganahl, "Nihongo Ou Japanese for Everybody: A Functional Approach to Daily Communication," 1992 (unpublished).

7. He coined the term in a wall painting titled *Glocal Language – A Portable Library,* 1999, which he designed for the Austrian Pavilion at the Venice Biennale.

8. Edward W. Said, "Traveling Theory," *The World, the Text and the Critic* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983); repr. in *Imported: A Reading Seminar,* ed. Rainer Ganahl (New York: Semiotext(e), 1998).

view, a realization of theory in general, which is inherently incomplete. For Said, in each instance, as it is resumed, the project of critical theory is not misprised or misunderstood but reborn; he presents his own resumption of critical theory as yet the next turn of the reception screw. For Ganahl, this text was also an opportunity to take up critical theory in his own way, asking himself and his co-readers how it might be possible to produce critical artwork against the reification of the global at a moment in the 1990s when the art world had begun to turn away from political issues and back toward an all-too-familiar dialectics of beauty versus the grotesque.[9] Ganahl answered through the various forms his work would go on to take as it presented studying, learning, and teaching as artworks.

Upon returning to the United States from Tokyo, Ganahl attended a seminar taught by Said at Columbia University on representations of intellectuals. Said was concerned with the fate of the public intellectual and whether, through the uptake of critical theory, it was possible to "speak truth to power" as a radical academic.[10] For Said, the intellectual could still work against prevailing norms despite the pressures to become an organ of majoritarian authority, corporate influence, or academic trends. In the series of published lectures upon which the seminar was based, Said raised the questions: "How does one speak the truth? What truth? For whom and where?"[11] In "Traveling Theory," he dismisses Michel Foucault, yet Foucault's work helps to problematize the notion of individuality and education. For Foucault, as is well known, the intellectual and the self in general become individuals only after they are produced through power relationships. Both intellects and intellectuals are made possible only through particular institutional formations of knowledge and truth.[12] Foucault does not reduce power to a unidirectional, univocal flow, but works to disclose the mechanisms by which it produces particular possibilities for knowledge and so for the self. Power is relational. Institutions fix relations of power, however contingently or long term.

In *Discipline and Punish,* Foucault locates the institutionalization of knowledge in the formation of state-sponsored education that took place during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Education became a nationalized form of disciplinary space that helped to produce the individual intellectual that Said describes.[13] Foucault does not simply foreclose this self (intellectual or otherwise) in unbreachable walls of power. He recognizes that power is multiple and heterogeneous and that selves produce resistances, even within themselves, that are also a kind of power. He called these resistances "counter-discourse,"

9. The highly politicized 1993 Whitney Biennale marked this moment of transition, just before the return to beauty and its discourses widely took hold.

10. See Edward W. Said, *Representations of the Intellectual,* chap. 5 (New York: Random House, 1994).

11. Ibid., 88.

12. For example, on the relation between institutions, selves, and power, Foucault says (*Power/Knowledge: Selected Writings and Interviews, 1972–1977,* ed. Colin Gordon [New York: Pantheon, 1980], 141–42): "It seems to me that power is 'always already there,' that one is never 'outside' it, that there are no 'margins' for those who break with the system to gambol in. But this does not entail the necessity of accepting an inescapable form of domination or an absolute privilege on the side of the law. To say that one can never be 'outside' power does not mean that one is trapped or condemned to defeat no matter what."

13. Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison,* trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage, 1977); see esp. part 3, chap. 1 on "docile bodies."

and this counter-discourse, as with all power relations, is always immanent to the system it speaks against. He describes this as the difference between a theory about imprisonment made from the outside, by prison reformers, and the critique of prisons made by prisoners themselves. [14] Against the likes of Jean-Paul Sartre, he proposes the "specific intellectual" who produces a local counter-discourse, always from the inside, always with others, and always working against the power relations in which they are directly implicated. [15] To produce counter-discourse, it is necessary (tacitly or not) to acknowledge that one's own specific, local, vernacular community is the basis of communication, that there is no outside to discourse, and that all things given to knowledge are the product of specific power flowing through a particular social body. It is this self that "compears" – to use a term coined by Jean-Luc Nancy – with local community and communication and makes existence possible. Nancy uses the term "compearance" to describe the way in which selves and communities do not precede one another but are coproduced, appearing together through communication. He defines communication as the ways in which these selves come together in communities.[16] While these selves may be filled with the vulgarity of pregiven common sense, they can also – through an examination of their own implication in the mechanisms of domination and through resistance – open onto counter-discourse and new forms of knowledge, and so point the way toward new types of community. It is in this spirit, more of Foucault and Nancy than Said, that Ganahl takes up critical theory. He understands learning as a process where selves (including himself) are always already implicated in various interplays of power that both limit the real and open onto new realities, wherever, whenever, and however they take place. He turns to education, critiquing his own position inside particular vernaculars and institutions of learning in order to build new stages for temporary learning communities that both reproduce the existing mechanisms of domination and suggest new possibilities for connecting selves to a world.

In his first Readings, Ganahl discovered this circulation of power as it moved through a contingent, local, learning community. There were several problems involved with the Readings: the text as one prohibitive authority and Ganahl as another; the interpretation of the meaning of the text as well as the interpretation of the language of the text; a text that had perhaps already been translated from a mother tongue into English; and readers moving between English and Japanese in their discussion. As Ganahl and his readers discovered (and I have

14. Michel Foucault, *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews,* ed. and trans. Donald F. Bouchard (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977), 209. Foucault's entire project was a form of counter-discourse. He makes his comments about prisons in relation to his work with the Groupe d'information sur les prisons, which allowed prisoners to speak about their own incarceration.

15. Foucault, *Power/Knowledge,* 126–28.

16. This is an ontological rather than an anthropological reading of community. Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Inoperative Community,* trans. Peter Connor et al. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), 28–29.

Fig. 4 *Imported . . . A Reading Seminar (U.S. Version),* 1995 (see p. 127)

been one of these readers on several occasions), discourse is constantly being rebuilt from the ground up, from every word chosen and each act of communication; mastery is never finished but continually produced against a background of pregiven expectations of how one reads, understands, and interprets a text; resistances are everywhere and inherent in any community. Rather than act as an individual intellectual or reproduce the divide between schoolmaster and student, Ganahl does intellectual work together with his co-readers, the text acting as a catalyst for group inquiry. It is an object to be worked on, for mutual reflection, a point of reference, exactly the kind of "fact" that Said appeals to as truth but taken as a discursive act and a point of further discussion, not stable but a sort of strange attractor. As the different vernaculars of the participants circle through and around the text, a new community is built from this interaction, however temporary. The Readings are a way of learning outside a given system of education. They stage an alternative space for group knowledge production.

For several years Ganahl recreated his *A Portable (Not so Ideal) Imported Library* . . . and the Readings associated with it at various exhibitions, in various languages, changing the texts at each venue.[17] In Readings that followed, he focused on a few authors – Antonio Gramsci, Karl Marx, and Franz Fanon – using their texts repeatedly. Rather than try to match the Readings site-specifically to the place of reading, Ganahl traveled the same authors to see how their work was produced differently in each place they were read and what resistances occurred. In this circulation of reading, Ganahl makes critical theory travel, each text finding new life in each rereading, each rereading producing a new stage for a new learning community.

Ganahl recently held a Reading as part of the first Summit of Interventionist Art (SoIA), staged in opposition to the G8 Summit at Lake Geneva, Evian, France (2–3 June 2003). The SoIA took place on the other side of the lake, in Switzerland, at an art space called the Usine. As its name indicates, the Usine is a converted factory, located in a relatively marginal area just outside downtown Geneva. During the Summit, the Usine was a hub for anti-G8 activism. The international, alternative-media group Indymedia used it as a base of operations, and the police had conducted a raid on it the night before Ganahl's arrival, making arrests and causing general chaos in an attempt to disrupt the protestors. Nevertheless, the SoIA went on as planned, with a series of lectures, workshops, and art events held as part of the general protest.

Ganahl contributed a Reading to the SoIA, of Frantz Fanon's "Concerning Violence," from *The Wretched of the Earth*, which took place

17. These Readings were held in Hiroshima, Nice, Moscow, Stuttgart, Los Angeles, and Lakeland, Florida.

outside on the street in front of the Usine.[18] This Reading crystallized the potential of these works to act as counter-discourse. Text and site were brought together so that traveling theory found a home in the midst of ongoing political struggles. In taking Fanon's "Concerning Violence" to the streets, he was able to turn the Reading into an even more active form of counter-discourse, producing a learning community whose location was a direct reflection and application of the theory being read. While this is true of earlier Readings, here the threat of actual violence raised the stakes of this Reading on nonviolence.

Fig. 5 *Reading Frantz Fanon, Geneva (during the anti–G8 Evian protest),* 2003, photograph, 20 x 24 in. (see also p. 139)

The Reading was held for two days, on the street outside the Usine, with a core of several readers and various passersby who joined and left, depending upon their interest. Anyone could choose to participate, to watch, or to walk past. Fanon's text describes the struggle for freedom undertaken by the Algerians as they fought against French-colonial oppression. He recounts the dehumanization of the colonized Algerians, and how the French saw them as animals and exploited them through a Manichean policy of radical otherness. He also recounts the response of the Algerians, who internalized the violence of their oppression and could only return violence with violence in an unending "circle of hate," in acts of "counter-violence" that simply reproduced the violence of their oppressors.[19] The street where Ganahl held the Reading is known as a place to buy drugs from North African immigrants. Although not far from downtown, the area around the Usine is industrial and at a remove from most tourism and commerce. The dealers are all black, in accordance with an unofficial police decree that prohibits whites in the (visible, public) drug trade. Both little and much had changed from the days in the 1960s that Fanon describes. The formerly colonized people are still marginalized and other, but they have moved to the land of the colonizers, have fully internalized the will to capital rather than the will to violence, and are making more money than (and so are more "successful" than) many of the excolonists who had oppressed their people a generation earlier. One circle of hate has been broken, but otherness has continued in a marginal although lucrative corner of capitalist production. While the drug dealers did not participate in the Reading, their presence lent an extra dimension to the community of readers, as a reminder of how Fanon's text must be read and received in light of glocal politics.

The anti–G8 protest lent a further point of reflection as to how the text was read. All around during the Reading, protests and police responses were taking place. Thousands of activists had descended upon Geneva and all sorts of demonstrations were happening, some

18. Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth,* trans. Constance Farrington (New York: Grove, 1963).

19. Ibid., 89.

Fig. 6 *S/L, Edward Said, Last Works / Late Style, 12/15/1995* (detail), 2 photographs, each 20 x 24 in., edition 4, AP 2

spilling over into riots. The Reading became another form of street demonstration. Sit-downs as political protest have a long history, notably during the U.S. civil rights movement when they were a nonviolent means of resisting arrest. Reading Fanon during the G8 protests allowed for the reconsideration of a previous moment of struggle and of the use of violence and the trap that it laid for those who turned to it as a solution to colonial, and especially economic, struggle. The persistent appeal of violence was very much still alive in Geneva where a neoanarchist "Black Bloc" gathered to smash storefronts and automobiles as a means of protesting international capitalism.[20] To read Fanon's analyses of colonial and postcolonial violence, in a nonviolent way, in the midst of an event where violent protests against capitalism were all around (including the kind of violence and capital involved in drug dealing and its marginalization) was to take a discourse originally produced as a counter-discourse against violence and to receive it once again as a new form of counter-discourse. It was to work against the police to produce Fanon anew, in the midst of current, glocal politics as they were erupting. In turning away from counter-violence and toward counter-discourse, "Concerning Violence" was received as a counter-discourse reborn in an act of learning as resistance. The G8 Reading enacted vulgar politics by constructing a people, no matter how small, who staged counter-discourse in action. Even more explicitly than in earlier Readings, what was being read and the way it was being read came together: the form of reflection and the reflection were one. A learning community was produced in the midst of ongoing politics and various mechanisms of domination that the Reading both reflected and staged anew.

Rhetorical Photography

While attending Said's seminar on representations of the intellectual, Ganahl got the idea of making his own representations of Said as an intellectual at work. As he sat at the table, reading along with the other students, he realized that photographs of this event would be a document of academia and of the production of knowledge from the inside. He could produce his own version of the very types of representation that Said was addressing. Returning to Said's next seminar, Last Works/Late Style, Ganahl began photographing images that he would call his S/L (Seminar/Lecture) series.[21] S/L borrows its name not from Said but from the slash in the title of Roland Barthes's book *S/Z*.[22] As in *S/Z*, it indicates a gap in signification, but while *S/Z* symmetrically inverts the terms on either side of this divide, the balance of power in

20. Black Blocs are affinity groups from various left and ultra left organizations, as well as independent people, who join together for violent protests, usually directed at corporations with multinational reach.

21. There is an added poignancy to these images of Said, because it was one of the last seminars he would teach at Columbia after being diagnosed with leukemia. It was Said's own "last work/late style." Said was the first of Ganahl's subjects to die, the images becoming as much memorial as mementos with the passage of time.

22. Roland Barthes, *S/Z: An Essay,* trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1974).

Ganahl's images is lopsided. Rather than seminar/lecture, S/L would perhaps be better put as "S/T" for student/teacher, or "S/A" for speaker/audience, or better still left as S/L but with the references changed to "speaker/listener." But leaving S/L as "seminar/lecture" emphasizes the way in which these photographs bring together the event of learning as a whole, including teacher-speaker, student-audience, and their institutional relationship. These groups are an archive of learning and of the places where critical theory is endlessly rereceived in university classrooms, museums, and public halls. S/L shows frozen moments of people caught in the midst of thought, posed like Rodinesque Thinkers, not lost in their own Romantic worlds but rather seen in the middle of temporary learning communities composed of those who listen and those who speak. Bodies are caught in midgesture, in the midst of learning transmission, as they swing from attention to boredom, from focused listening and speaking to daydreaming and distraction.

In the first S/L photograph of Said, he is seen sitting at the seminar table together with his students, but as the series develops this would become the exception rather than the rule. Through the rest of S/L, the speaker (or speakers) and the listeners are generally shown in separate images. If audience members appear with the speaker in later images, they are usually seen from behind, only partially visible. Each side of the knowledge exchange is represented, but separated into individual frames, hung side by side but at a slight remove and so mirroring the original educational context that keeps teachers and students at arm's length, even when bringing them together at a seminar table.

Ganahl is frequently drawn to art-related topics. S/L speakers are often represented in front of either works of art or projected images of works of art.[23] One S/L set shows Martha Rosler, an artist whose work has particular resonance with Ganahl's own. This set points to the historical connections between S/L and conceptual photographic practices. During the 1960s, these practices emerged in opposition to traditional documentary photographs that assumed a position of either journalistic neutrality or sympathy, but always at a distance from the anonymous images that appear in the news as photojournalistic records of daily events, or images that had a social agenda, such as those shot by Lewis Hine in order to reveal the plight of child labor. After nearly ten years of documents of the civil rights movement, Vietnam, and Watergate, by 1975 it was no longer possible for these artists to think that through photography they could record an event (any event) at a distance. Rosler recognized that even the most liberal-

Fig. 7 *S/L, Etienne Balibar, Possessive Individualism Revisited: Displacements and Reversals, Columbia University, New York, 3/13/2002,* 2 photographs, each 20 x 24 in., edition 4, AP 2

Fig. 8 S/L, *Jan Philipp Reemtsma, Aryeh Neier, Robert Rindler, Gilles Peress, Judith Friedlander, Documenting Genocide: Defining War Crimes, International Symposium on Military War Crimes: History and Memory, New School University, New York, 12/3/1999,* 2 photographs, each 20 x 24 in., edition 4, AP 2

23. If not these, then blackboards. Often the works of art were not the topic of the S/L lecture, but incidental to the spaces where the seminar or lecture took place.

minded documentary photojournalists reinforced their own position as intrepid adventurer-artists who captured scenes of dismay and decay for the edification of the elite.[24] To acknowledge her place in her images, she turned to what she calls photography as "radical metonymy."[25] In her project *The Bowery in Two Inadequate Descriptive Systems*, the direct image of her subject matter – the "Bowery bum" – is absent. Her subject is presented through photographs of empty streets paired with words unkindly used to describe those who sleep on these streets and their existence in general: "lush, wino, alcoholic," "muddled, fuddled," "knocked out, laid out, out of the picture." There are no images of people in any of the photographs, and so emotive empathy with the face of the other is denied.

Barthes had previously invoked the relation between photography and metonymy in his essay "The Rhetoric of the Image."[26] He adopts Roman Jakobson's use of the term, whereby the substitution of the contiguity of one symbol for another acts as the means for shaping connotive meaning. As Barthes recounts, metonymy normally functions in photography to secure meaning by linking the image to rhetorical ideologies embedded in the community where it is received. In an analysis of a French advertisement for Italian tomato sauce, Barthes describes how the metonymic substitution of pasta, cans, onion, peppers, et cetera, emerging from a string bag, keyed to the colors red, yellow, and green and tied to the name Panzini, all secure the connotive meaning of "Italianicity" for a French viewer. (One can also think of Ganahl's *In the eyes of the people*, where "Italianicity" has an entirely different connotation.) Rosler's radical metonymy is meant to undo these ties, to release the various components of photographic meaning from their given rhetorical message. She separates image from caption and eliminates the face of her subject in order to undermine the ability of the various parts of her photographic message to reproduce given documentary ideologies. Rather than give the viewer an image of a "Bowery bum," to which given cultural associations could be securely affixed, she puts these associations on display as the subject of representation, disrupting the normal flow of photographic connotation. By literally placing her "subject" out of the picture, her use of metonymy is radicalized because these images do not seem to re-present directly the subject they circle around. Standing in for the absent subject are images and words that consist only of a material place and set of materialized signifiers linking that self to a place – in this instance, "Bowery," plus, "lush, wino, alcoholic." The collision of image and caption troubles the means of photographic and linguis-

24. I have paraphrased the term "adventurer-artist" from Rosler (*Decoys and Disruptions* [Cambridge: MIT Press, 2004], 180). She writes, "Documentary testifies, finally, to the bravery or (dare we name it?) the manipulativeness and savvy of the photographer, who entered a situation of physical danger, social restrictedness, human decay or combinations of these and saved us the trouble. Or who, like the astronauts, entertained us by showing us the places we never hope to go. War photography, slum photography, 'subculture' or cult photography, photography of the foreign poor, photography of 'deviance'. . ."

25. Ibid., 195. For more on the aesthetics of conceptual photography, see Benjamin H. D Buchloh, "Conceptual Art 1962–1969: From the Aesthetics of Administration to the Critique of Institutions," *October* 55 (1990), 10–43; Jeff Wall, "Marks of Indifference: Aspects of Photography in, or as, Conceptual Art," in *Reconsidering the Object of Art: 1965–1975* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1995), 246–67.

26. Roland Barthes, *The Responsibility of Forms: Critical Essays on Music, Art, and Representation,* trans. Richard Howard (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 21–40. For an earlier take by Barthes on metonymy, see his *Elements of Semiology,* trans. Annette Lavers and Colin Smith (New York: Hill and Wang, 1967), 60–61.

tic representation and undoes their connection. Despite the title, it is not the Bowery that is inadequately presented here but the absent subject, whose construction only takes place metonymically. What this suggests is that photography, like all means of reproduction (including language), is metonymic in that it produces meaning through articulated substitution, endlessly deferring the "real" for the active production of reality based on a system of absence. The Bowery further suggests that this condition is hidden in the normal reception of photography, where connotive meaning is taken at face value and the image seems copiously, even corpulently, full.

Rosler's project calls into question the vulgarity-as-usual that underlay previous notions of documentary photojournalism, especially when it worked to evoke sympathy and change through the portrayal of the misery of others. Yet her position in relation to the descriptive systems she calls into question remains uncertain. In troping the "Bowery bum" as a means to comment on documentary photography as a whole, she nevertheless reproduces the kind of othering at a distance she works to critique. Despite the denial of literal figuration, the "Bowery bum" is still present and her connection to the "Bowery bum" still, however marginally and aporetically, comes from the outside. While she may be immanent to metonymy in general, she maintains her specific connection to her subject matter only by continuing to hold it at a distance. To be fair, Rosler assumes a less neutral stance in much of her other work, and the power of *The Bowery. . .* comes precisely from the ways in which it raises the stakes of neutrality and sympathy in documentary photography.[27]

S/L more closely follows a project like Allan Sekula's *School Is a Factory*, which is especially sensitive to the problem of the immanence of the photographer to that which is photographed.[28] Like S/L, this work engages with school and learning as an institution in the context of postconceptual art. It consists of an essay with captioned photographs and graphics that Sekula uses to analyze the economics fueling the junior college where he taught in Southern California in the late 1970s and early 1980s. No vulgar Marxist, Sekula locates the vulgar capital at work at the heart of his own institutionalization. Through text and image, he describes the ways in which college departments in general, and his school in particular, are funded so as to filter students into careers based on the demands of employers, even when there is little need for their labor. He was teaching photography to students who, if they were lucky enough to get work, would likely find it as commercial photographers. Nevertheless, it was his job to expose them to "certain

Fig. 9a-b *S/L, Martha Rosler, Martha Rosler talks with curators Dan Cameron and Brian Wallis, New York University, New York, 8/8/2000* (detail) (see p. 52)

Fig. 10 Martha Rosler, *The Bowery in Two Inadequate Descriptive Systems* (detail), 1974–75, courtesy the artist

27. Other projects by Rosler in which she is apparently more immanent to her subject matter include *Vital Statistics of a Citizen, Simply Obtained* and *In the Place of the Public: Airport Series.* See *Martha Rosler, Positions in the Life World,* ed. Catherine de Zegher (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1999).

28. Allan Sekula, "School Is a Factory," in *Photography against the Grain: Essays and Photo Works, 1973–1983* (Halifax: Press of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, 1984), 198–234.

Fig. 11 Alan Sekula, *School Is a Factory* (detail), 1982, mixed media
"Four male commercial photography students inspect a camera in front of an exhibit of a well-known woman art photographer's work, prints with certain vegetable-erotic overtones. Most commercial photography students learn to concentrate on technical matters. Nevertheless, their inspectors [sic] periodically expose them to certain privileged examples of the beautiful."

privileged examples of the beautiful" through fine-art photography.[29] His students worked during the day at laborious jobs and went to school at night to further their education, in the hope of finding more fulfilling employment.

Sekula developed this project as a way of presenting the limits he felt were imposed on both himself and his students in the setting where they came together several nights a week. It was first shown in a student-run gallery on campus next to the photo studios. In its original presentation in the middle of the institutional space it addressed, this work functioned as an intervention in as much as it became a talking point for the further analysis of Sekula's role and that of his students in their own learning environment. It went on to be shown at other junior colleges and to be reproduced in educational journals. As such, it is a model for critically engaged photographic practice based in the acknowledgment of the author's position in relation to the production of the image, with one major caveat: in his use of the caption, Sekula resumes the kind of reductive metonymy that Rosler's radical metonymy pried open. The images and captions foreclose each other, as if they could arbitrate and thus guarantee each other's meaning.[30] This meaning is underwritten by Sekula's position of mastery as artist. Even when deflating his position by recounting in the text how his students jokingly compared his lectures to whatever they were missing on television that night, he still speaks from the position of the one who knows, on behalf of his students and in their place. He does not question his role as the master who speaks for his students and allows them to speak only after the fact.

Ganahl does not speak from the position of schoolmaster. He is in the places he depicts as a member of the audience, not as one who knows but as one who listens. The S/L images, as with his work in general, may seem superficially touristic in as much as they are mementos in what he calls his "personal historiography,"[31] but they are not biography per se. Rather, they recognize that any politics of representation begins at home, with one's own vernacular and one's local vulgarity. Like Rosler and Sekula, Ganahl acknowledges that the self is not given but produced through the vulgarity of the various institutions that shape what can be said, where to look, and what is knowable. In S/L, as in his other work, Ganahl represents this institutionalization as the compearance of self and social structure, turning what would otherwise be only a series of portraits of intellectuals into an examination of the intellectual habitus based on his own position inside it. He captures the support system that surrounds intellectual work. In S/L,

29. Ibid., 216.

30. Barthes (*Image/Music/Text,* 39) describes this as the "anchorage" performed by the use of caption and photography in the usual function of connotive metonymy.

31. George Baker (untitled review of Rainer Ganahl exhibition, Max Protech Gallery, New York, *Artforum* [April 1999], 124–25) has accused Ganahl, not unjustly, of "theory tourism" and "intellectual flaneurie," but this overlooks Ganahl's own acknowledged immanence in these images. "Personal historiography" is my paraphrase of Ganahl's conception. See Rainer Ganahl, "Refined Information and Petrified Politics," in *Next Target? Versteinerte Politik/Petrifed Politics* (Bremen: GAK; Frankfurt: Revolver, 2004).

learning is not something that is simply transmitted in an instrumental way. The students, the audience (their ages as well as their racial diversity, or lack thereof), the podium, the seminar table, the slide show, and the microphone all show knowledge as something that takes place in the midst of a specific, local community in which Ganahl's own self, as with all the selves present, are complicit. Although these are personal images, he follows the most rigorous, formal framing conditions: to catalogue a series of views of the educational divide between speakers and listeners, taken from the standpoint of the listener, in order to suggest the need for a repartitioning of this system.

Fig. 12 *S/L, Fredric Jameson, Modernity, Modernism and Late Modernism, UCLA, Los Angeles, 4/26/2001,* 2 photographs, each 20 x 24 in., edition 4, AP 2

Viewers can see the communicants in S/L sitting, heads cocked, legs crossed, mouths open in speech or lips pursed in concentrated listening. What is missing is the speech, the sound of the information transmitted. Ganahl has silenced the voice of the master. What cannot be seen is the very reason why these people are gathered where they are, as they are, in the temporary learning communities that bring them together. In dividing his pictures between speaker and audience, Ganahl splits this community down the middle, making the gap between speaker and listener seem unbridgeable. The sound that had connected speaker and listeners in the actual event falls into the space between the frames of the pictures separating them. These photographs show learning taking place, but the viewer cannot take in whatever was transmitted at the original event. Instead, connotation has been shifted only to the register of the photographic.[32] In one S/L set, the word "ideology" floats like a speech balloon beside Frederic Jameson's head, but viewers cannot hear what he had to say about it. While Jameson may look bored, head in hand, giving another lecture on a topic he has addressed many times before, viewers will never know for sure. They are presented with the silence of this learning scene, in the face (and faces) of pedagogy in process. Mastery, or better "schoolmastery," is acknowledged not by recounting what is being said but by putting this act of educational speaking on display through photography's silence. Ganahl has doubly split reality, using the split between sound and vision in the two photographs to reinforce the divide between student and lecturer. He uses photography against the institutionalization of knowledge in order to make the viewer aware of how frames are placed around the social production of knowledge, around who speaks and knows and who listens and learns. He frames the institutional vulgarity of university-level education and how it takes place. In the S/L images titled *Zeinab Eyega, Female Circumcision, Female Genital Mutilation, A Health and Human Rights Issue for Girls and*

32. This is not quite true, as the titles offer important clues as to what shaped the event depicted. These are not captions imposed by Ganahl but are taken from the name given to the events by those who originally produced them.

Women, Columbia University, New York, 2/25/1997 (p. 00), there are three shots of the speaker where only the slides can be seen well. In one of these, Eyega's shadowy outline can be seen standing beside pictures including a close-up illustration of sutured-shut labia. In the shot of the audience, the lights have been turned up, and several of the women are smiling as if in relief, or at least in the recognition, of their distance from the types of violence Eyega addresses as she presents this issue at a tertiary remove, via slides of illustrations. Here Ganahl recognizes the kind of distances imposed in the preexisting institutions of higher education, even for the best-intentioned speakers and most attentive audiences.

In his documentary strategies, Ganahl is not distant from those he represents. Rather, he puts distance on display immanently. In calling attention to the slash between speaker and listener while sitting in the audience as listener, he has made S/L both radically and immanently metonymic. These images are radically metonymic in that they use the absence of their apparent, connotive subject (the content of education) to evoke another reality that further splits the real. In their silence, they reveal an existing mechanism of domination. In their form, transposing sight onto sound, they produce a new means of learning about the institutionalization of knowledge. They are immanently metonymic in as much as Ganahl no longer works as the adventurer-artist but always accounts for his own position in the system he presents. For Ganahl, there can never be any neutral distance in his photographic practice. He always explicitly acknowledges his own position in the mechanisms of domination that he represents by recuperating the strategy from the documentation of early performance art where the artist is included in the event reproduced. In all of his work, Ganahl is always directly implicated in the situations he documents. He does not enter the educational complex as an outsider or as a neutral observer. He is inside the event, documenting an institution while also a part of it. Whereas Rosler is generally part of the metonymic system she presents, Ganahl is specifically a part of S/L, attending these events as a student, aligned with the audience even when shooting the audience from one side or head on, and even when critical of the audience as much as of the schoolmaster. He shoots as a student, from a place in the audience, imposing what mastery he can from the side rather than from above.

In S/L, Ganahl does not deny that there is pleasure (and often humor) to be found in listening to those who know, in hearing what they have to say, or even in their presentation via "beautiful photographs,"

but he does not approach his subject from the outside.[33] He has spent his professional life working with and against the limits of various education institutions.[34] Overall, his work is a kind of self-portrait of the processes of education, both those that are given, as in S/L, and those that he has built himself, as in the Readings. S/L is the exception to the rule in his work, the standard of what is educationally "always-already" against which the rest of his practice is built. While these images may seem to reproduce the power relations predetermined in the distribution of those who know and those who are ignorant, when taken in the larger context of his practice they must be seen as a means of resistance that can potentially destabilize this relation. He undermines the power of the schoolmaster's voice, leaving only posture and habitus for the viewer to see. There is something both horribly funny and also just plain horrible about S/L. In both the symbolic slash between student and lecturer and the physical separation between the frames of the images, S/L points toward the vulgarity-as-usual of the given systems of education: that there are schoolmasters who know and students who are ignorant and that there are various pregiven distances between them.

Ignorant Mastery

The vulgar, as vernacular, is the basis of Ganahl's notion of community and power: that we are born into a mother tongue and that it speaks for us as we speak through it.[35] This sensitivity to language – to how it acts to frame possibilities not only for the self but also for knowledge and power – was born from Ganahl's own experience when he emigrated from Vorarlberg. Since then his motto has been "keep moving away from your mother tongue." But even this movement away from the homely was complicated by the exigencies of the glocal.[36] Ganahl tells an anecdote that summarizes his life's work as a process of finding new vernaculars both purposely and also inevitably. Upon returning to Vorarlberg after sometime away, he found that the dialect he had spoken growing up was changing among the "ethnically" Austrian people in the area. Beside himself, only the second- and third-generation Gästarbeiter still spoke with the old, local accent. He had not, it seemed, moved as far away from his mother tongue as the citizens with whom he had been raised. The only other people speaking what had been his mother tongue were those who would have been radically other when he was growing up. For Ganahl, as for me, the moral of this story is that the very weave of the linguistic fabric is embedded in mobile power relations, which contain both the homely and the uncanny. It

33. Part of the pleasure of these works is their humor, especially for those who know, if only by reputation, the speakers shown. That they are often also the kind of beautiful photographs mentioned by Sekula comes from a recognition on Ganahl's part (and on the part of other members of his generation, such as Gabriel Orozco) that the gallery and museum always beautify any object they frame, even photographs, no matter how unskilled.

34. Ganahl has also acted as a schoolmaster. In his *Book by Book* project, he brought his Readings into a university setting, doing regular group Readings as an associate professor at the Art Academy in Geneva from 1996 to 1998. See p. 130.

35. The problem of language and the common is prelinguistic as well, based on emotional connection and nonverbal communication as much as linguistic communication.

36. "Keep Moving Away from Your Mother Tongue," Rainer Ganahl interviewed by Momoyo Torimitsu, in *Offene Handlungsräume, Catalog for the Austrian Pavilion of the 48th Venice Biennale,* 1999.

demonstrates how languages travel and evolve as much as the ideas they shape, and that possibilities of identification are bound up together with those of disidentification. In the age of the glocal, critical theory and the analysis of power return in the form that Ganahl calls "traveling linguistics" in recognition of how vernaculars are produced and inevitably move around.[37] Resistance is only possible in the recognition of this movement, in exploring its past and trying to influence its future while new discourses and resistances emerge.

Ganahl's Readings are one means of exploring the production of vernaculars. They destabilize the existing systems of knowledge production by holding educational events outside traditional learning institutions, staging education in a dialogical way rather than through the passage of information from one who knows to those who are the ignorant. He has found other ways of doing this as well in his other series. His Studies have various manifestations, all based on the time he spends learning different languages. Like the Libraries, Readings, and S/L, they also began in 1993 while he was in Japan for his exhibition at Person's Weekend Museum. While trying to learn Japanese, he decided to display his kanji study grids, a more personal update of the minimalist grids made by Dan Graham and Carl Andre in their early poetry works. Following this, he would display the sheets he wrote while learning Greek, Italian, Russian, Korean, Chinese, and, most recently, Arabic. Ganahl's attempt to acquire Japanese became the foundation for further Studies in other languages. As he saw it, those studies were a transformation of the paradigm of the ready-made into what he called the "trying-hard."[38] In the Studies, the private practice of learning is made public. He displays the trying-hard of autodidacticism as a self-portrait of the artist as a learning machine, repeating catchphrases from language textbooks and writing them down on paper and so in his memory. Rather than putting commodities on view in order to call attention to the institutionalization of the work of art, he exhibits the residue of his attempts to reframe his own personal vernacular. In the Studies, Ganahl presents the difficulty of the production of the self through language, demonstrating the process of decentering the self that takes place while trying to learn a foreign language. He shows himself returning to a state of linguistic inferiority where he no longer has mastery over his words and so his place in the world. The Studies also demonstrate that, while languages may be ready-made (since we are all born into a mother tongue and we all must learn at least this one language), mother tongues continue to exist only when they are used in living communities where selves compear. To paraphrase Jacques

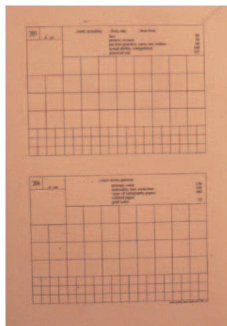

Fig. 13 *Basic Japanese (Kanji Study Grid),* 1993 (see p. 65)

Fig. 14 *Basic Korean (Study Sheet),* 8/7/1997, pencil on paper, 9 3/4 x 7 in. (see also p. 77)

Fig. 15 *Basic Arabic (Study Sheet),* 9/5/2004 (see p. 88)

37. "Traveling Linguistics" (1995) is an adaptation of Said's "traveling theory" (see n. 8).

38. Ibid.

Lacan, language is that which, in being taken up, takes up the self as a subject. It is what allows the self to produce itself by giving it access to a reality ("the real") and so to others.[39]

Fig. 16 *Basic Chinese: My First 500 Hours,* 1999 (see p. 87)

In putting this process on display, Ganahl forces viewers to consider their own place in relation to their mother tongue. His Studies have become a kind of mania as he repeatedly stages the attempt to become the linguistic other.[40] This linguistic excess is embodied in stacks of videotapes of himself studying various languages, hundreds of hours placed on top of, and next to, each other. If Warhol loved the Campbell's soup he represented, here Ganahl presents the actual boxes of tapes containing himself engaged in the Studies he loves, no matter how trying-hard they may be. He transforms the consumption implicit in Warhol's Brillo boxes from endless hours of shopping to endless hours of studying. Ganahl does not take the self shown on these tapes for granted. It is a self like that in the early video works of Vito Acconci and Joan Jonas in which they produce alter egos, a self unfolding into a new identity.[41] As in much early video art, the camera becomes an externalized superego, only transformed into a mechanized schoolmaster. Ganahl uses the camera as a means of framing the decentering effects of his language studies while he produces mental changes on his self.

The Study videotapes embody the interest Ganahl has throughout his work in Bildung. *Bildung* is the German word for education with, as he says, "a specific ideological touch."[42] It is an ideology of general education promoted in order to transcend the specialized skills of the trades combined with a national system of learning that was presumed to be universal. As such, Bildung encapsulates the ideological paradox whereby the people have both universal ideals and a national identity. It is the kind of educational thinking that leads to both global educational standards on the one hand and nationalist racism based on cultural superiority on the other. Bildung was encapsulated artistically in Bildungsroman, like Charles Dickens's *Great Expectations,* which transformed the picaresque into a morality play where a young man (and occasionally a young woman) learned his (or her) place in the world. In the subgenre known as the Kunstlerroman, the young artist learned his or her place there as well. In yet another subgenre – the Erziehungsroman – the focus was specifically on the educational processes in which this self-knowledge took place. Ganahl's work can be taken as a kind of combination of these subgenres: as an artist's-education-novel, but without end. If the supposition of the Bildungsroman is that the young hero finally reaches maturity, in Ganahl's work maturity is al-

39. Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis,* trans. Alan Sheridan, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller (New York: W. W. Norton, 1981).

40. One of his heroes is Louis Wolfson, with whom he has corresponded. For more on Wolfson, see Giles Deleuze, "Louis Wolfson; or, the Procedure," *Essays Critical and Clinical* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 7–20.

41. See, for example, Acconci's *Corrections* or *Conversions* or Jonas's *Organic Honey's Visual Telepathy* or *Organic Honey's Vertical Roll.*

42. *Educational Complex,* ed. Rainer Ganahl (Vienna: Generali Foundation, 1997), 45.

Fig. 17 *Please, teach me Japanese,* Saturday performance with Noritoshi Hirakawa, Person's Weekend Museum, Tokyo, 1993 (see p. 62)

ways to come. As a life project, his work acknowledges that learning is never finished, and that what is known, and even what is knowable, is always open. In the quantity and implied endlessness of Study tape stacks, the viewer sees this process as ongoing and unfinished. And Ganahl does not always study alone. Photographs exist of dialogical study sessions, where he works together with a native speaker in a form that parallels his Readings. As in his documents of both the Readings and S/L, he captures himself in the midst of a system of learning. Here, as in the Readings, he presents a system that he has produced himself rather than the preexisting ones in S/L. He has taken the lessons of Bildung to heart, making the production of education his life's work, but against the nationalist ideology from which Bildung was born. Throughout his work, he has produced a counter-discourse on Bildung whereby education becomes a means of vernacular learning.

In *Discipline and Punish,* Foucault addresses the question of who speaks and who does not in the halls of learning. For Foucault, this is a matter of docility, of bodies trained to obey rules of behavior that allow them to be ranked and classed and so defined for a future role in both civil and industrial society. He describes a form of pedagogical training used in Christian schools in eighteenth-century France where the schoolmaster became a kind of holy drill sergeant, using a wooden signal that would make a noise to attract the students attention. The signal, which was struck in various, simple ways, was to be obeyed immediately by the pupils. The voice of the teacher was reduced to a kind of ringing of the church bells, as if God were commanding the students to work. [43] This kind of training in the immediate internalization of the voice of the schoolmaster developed simultaneously in modernizing military forces and became the standard for early educational practice using repetition, drilling, and recitation. When fully internalized, the schoolmaster, with no need for his or her own voice, had taken complete control over the pupil's right to speak. The teacher could then quickly begin the process of instilling a given body of state-sanctioned knowledge deemed necessary for future citizenship and national obedience. From the beginning, this methodology allowed enormous control over who would have access to reading and writing and in what ways this access would be granted, determining both what counted as knowledge and who could produce new forms of knowledge.

It was this account of docility that led critics such as Said to accuse Foucault of having a monolithic view of power. Thinkers more sympathetic to Foucault, however, would demonstrate ways in which power was mobile, the terrain that it maps out constantly shifting with each

43. Foucault, *Discipline and Punish,* 166–67 (as in n. 14).

act of obedience and disobedience. Written in dialogue with Foucault, Rancière's book *The Ignorant Schoolmaster* recovered the story of the nineteenth-century French educational reformer Joseph Jacotot. Jacotot had developed a theory of universal teaching designed to operate against the established limits of intellectual inequality, inverting the drive toward universal education that was sweeping the postrevolutionary Western world.[44] Whereas universal education had proposed that every child should become a student and so learn the national rhetoric, universal teaching proposed that every parent, no matter how "ignorant," could become a teacher and that the student could learn whatever she or he wished. Jacotot developed a system whereby parents could teach children to read even when they themselves did not know how. His pedagogy was based on a principle of radical equality which assumed that if everyone could learn how to speak they could also learn how to read, and from this they could then go on to learn anything else. School was not necessary and neither was the schoolmaster; all that was needed was the innate ability, which every person has, to communicate with an other and the desire to learn. Jacotot's system was not opposed to the established methods of pedagogy per se: memorization and recitation played a fundamental component in universal teaching. Rather, it was opposed to the control of what was learned and where it was learned. The difference between Jacotot's method and older forms of signal-based pedagogy was not the use of repetition but instead the lack of direction or explication on the part of the teacher. What was being learned was of no importance, rather that learning was verifiably taking place was all that mattered. There was to be no sanctioned curriculum and no value or hierarchy assigned to the subjects learned. Students could follow their own interests along whatever lines they saw fit, as long as learning was taking place. Teachers would act as guides only in as much as they demanded and verified that something was being learned.

The key difference between Foucault's position on counter-discourse and how Rancière receives this hinges on the issue of mastery. Whereas Foucault says, "nothing is more foreign to me than the idea of a 'master' who imposes his own law," Rancière acknowledges that there are schoolmasters on one side of the Bildung slash (or in any institution) and those who are ignorant on the other.[45] He does not deny that these roles are systematic and institutionally based, but he accepts that they exist and, in accepting that mechanisms of power depend on masters and nonmasters, is able to locate the role of the police in maintaining politics-as-usual. Rancière is able to make Jacotot's pedagogical theory

44. Jacques Rancière, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster: Five Lessons in Intellectual Emancipation,* trans. Kristin Ross (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991).

45. Here, because of its resonance with Ganahl's work, is the whole quote by Foucault, made in response to the critiques of his account of power as monolithic. Note that, unlike Rancière, he avoids the problem of mastery. "When I study the mechanisms of power, I try to analyze their specificity: nothing is more foreign to me than the idea of a 'master' who imposes his own law. Rather than indicating the presence of a 'master,' I worry about comprehending the effective mechanisms of domination; and I do it so that those who are inserted in certain relations of power, who are implicated in them, might escape through their actions of resistance and rebellion, might transform them in order not to be subjugated any longer. And if I don't ever say what must be done, it isn't because I believe that there's nothing to be done; on the contrary, it is because I think that there are a thousand things to do, to invent, to forge, on the part of those who, recognizing the relations of power in which they're implicated, have decided to resist or escape them. From this point of view all of my investigations rest on a postulate of absolute optimism. I do not conduct my analyses in order to say: this is how things are, look how trapped you are. I say certain things only to the extent which I see them as capable of permitting the transformation of reality." Michel Foucault, *Remarks on Marx* (New York: Semiotext(e), 1991), 173–74.

travel in order to make it live again as a system for undoing the sociolinguistic politics-as-usual of education whose mechanisms of domination label some people ignorant and others intellectuals. Rancière's recovery of Jacotot's educational system is vulgar politics in as much as it makes a claim for radical equality based on the leveling of difference between teacher and student. The historical facts related to Jacotot's success and the integration of his method into current models of pedagogy (to the point where his legacy has been largely forgotten) is of little importance to Rancière. It is the re-reception of the radical origins of these thoughts as a means for repartitioning current social inequality that makes *The Ignorant Schoolmaster* immanently political.

Ganahl's work to date has remarkable resonance with Jacotot's method of producing a counter-discourse on Bildung. Without knowing *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, he had also proceeded from a similar position based on radical equality in education as a political production of the self. His overall project is the embodiment of learning as ignorant mastery. To "keep moving away from your mother tongue" is to put oneself in the position of having to constantly learn that which one is ignorant of, of challenging oneself to learn and following this learning wherever it might lead, no matter how decentering or self-destructive. It is to transform given institutions, whose slash between S and L reproduces a kind of intellectual stultification, into a lifelong attempt to learn as a political act. It enacts an equality of learning by example, and, as in the Readings, by participation. It splits reality by demanding that education be remapped onto everyday life and by recognizing that selves must actively remake themselves in their production of personal vernaculars. Ganahl takes sociolinguistics as the grounds of being-in-common and community, and so as the grounds of equality. He recognizes the internalized mastery that takes place as one learns a mother tongue, and that to move beyond one's mother tongue means to become the other, to think as they think, to speak as they speak, and so to escape the confines of the vernacular into which the self was inexplicably and randomly born. His Studies split reality by splitting the self, making the construction of the self and what the self can know into a political act calling for a repartitioning of the self by direct injection of the reality of the other into the body and brain.

Vernacular Politics

Ganahl's Dialogs series extends this logic from the self to direct social interactions with others based on language exchange. He follows Rancière in recognizing that there is always some kind of mastery in any

communicative act and in every community. The only thing one can do is constantly work for some kind of equality despite its actual impossibility, not juridically but through vernacular negotiations that bring to light what is unsayable and unthinking in a given regime of opinion. As in S/L, sometimes just exposing vulgarity can be a kind of politics. Two linked bodies of work that fall under the heading of Dialogs are Lueneberger-Heide-Sprechen and the Language of Emigration.[46]

The Lueneberger-Heide-Sprechen series includes interviews with people from Neuenkirchen, Germany, near the site of the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp.[47] This series is an extension of projects like Claude Lanzmann's film *Shoah* and Steven Spielberg's Survivors of the Shoah Visual History Foundation, but refocused on the connections between language and community in the legacy of the Holocaust.[48] A local version of German, called Plattdeutsch or Low German, had been spoken in the region before 1945. Because of the various internal migrations that marked postwar Germany, Plattdeutsch has largely disappeared. As local communities were displaced, High German became a bridge across dialects, and only those people who lived through the war generally speak Plattdeutsch today. In an interview from the series with the local ethnologist Dagmar Falazik, Ganahl discusses the relation between competing vernaculars in given societies. In social groups with multiple vernaculars, one language tends to become master, marginalizing the others. The master language acts as grounds for officialdom and history. Ganahl and Fazalik discuss Plattdeutsch and also Fazalik's fieldwork with Native American languages, which are similarly hovering on the brink of extinction. Although the preservation of minority languages in the American context seems to be of the utmost urgency for the maintenance of radical equality, this becomes less clear in the case of Plattdeutsch, as further revealed in other interviews. Most of the younger, postwar generation that Ganahl interviewed only knew Plattdeutsch in passing, but for the older generation it was still very much alive. History had always been written in High German and so it was rewritten after the war in an attempt to make the attitudes that supported the war anathema, but in the vernacular community still represented by Plattdeutsch older attitudes persist. In one interview, Friedrich Tödter, who was a German fighter pilot during the war, questions how many Jews died in the Holocaust. He claims (as do the other interviewees of his generation, even those less inclined to Holocaust denial) that no one from Neuenkirchen, where he had been mayor, knew that Bergen-Belsen was an extermination camp during the war. He defends his doubts about Jewish deaths by re-

Fig. 18 *Lueneberger-Heide-Sprechen,* 2002: Dagmar Falazik (above), Friedrich Tödter (below), 2 stills from 18 video interviews (see pp. 120–21)

46. These works are published in Rainer Ganahl, *Lueneberger-Heide-Sprechen.De* (Frankfurt: Revolver, 2002).

47. Ganahl also took photographs of the area that he layered with local, colloquial phrases. See pp. xx.

48. Unlike these other projects, Ganahl's works addressing the Holocaust are less about victimization than about how language functioned in relation to it, both before and after. For Spielberg's project, see www.vhf.org.

Fig. 19 *Afghan Dialog (with anonymous), America Strikes Back,* 2001/2 (see p. 104)

Fig. 20 *Afghan Dialog (with anonymous), Next Target?* 2001/2 (see p. 104)

course to his own, local experience, saying that he knew of only a few Jewish families living in the area, all of whom escaped or were deported and so avoided the camps. Despite returning to Neuenkirchen after the war and living there to this day, he has never traveled the forty or so miles to visit Bergen-Belsen, and he believes that the majority of Jewish deaths were caused by typhus. He therefore claims to be unable to accept the Holocaust because he had not seen it or its effects directly, having only experienced his own deprivations at the hands of the Allies when he was shot down and held captive by the French. Here a minor vernacular acts as a place for radical inequality to fester. What this demonstrates is that one cannot simply value minority, but must, as Ganahl does, explore the ways in which all vernaculars accumulate and disseminate knowledge, major or minor.

In Language of Emigration, Ganahl interviews Holocaust survivors and forced emigrants living in the United States. One of the interviews, with the forced emigrant Ralph Freedman, begins in German but switches to English as a buffer between the present and memories that, even sixty years later, are still painful to recall. Freedman says that speaking about the war in German "puts me into it, rather than let[ting] me stand aside and reflect back. [I feel like I'm] back in there when I try to explain in German."[49] For Freedman, the move from one vernacular to another is a means for coping, for redistributing his own internal sense of what happened and how it continues to affect his life. Another interviewee, Clara Ringel, asks to speak in English because, while she still speaks German, she has almost entirely left its use behind. Ringel had been deported from Germany to the Lodz ghetto, then briefly was in Auschwitz before being sent to Bergen-Belsen. After her original relocation, she quickly learned Polish in order to survive. Her language studies, from German to Polish to English, were imposed upon her by necessity. Her acts of linguistic mastery were made under the duress of forced migration and the horrors of the ghettos and camps. For Ringel, language mastery was a supplement to war.

In his most recent Dialog work, Ganahl has begun to produce collaborative objects with people from Afghanistan and Iraq, engaging vernacular conflict in the midst of the current "war on terrorism." For the Afghan Dialogs, Ganahl makes printouts of logos he has photographed from television news programs, which he sends to Afghanistan to be embroidered. He instructs the embroiderers to add whatever commentary they wish to texts such as "Latest Developments," "Most Wanted Terrorist," and "America Strikes Back." In response to "America Strikes Back," an anonymous embroiderer wrote

49. Ganahl, *Lueneberger-Heide-Sprechen.De,* 189. See pp. 122–25.

(according to Ganahl's translation), "If America is hurting others, it should first find out how much of this pain it can take herself." The response in another Afghan Dialog is more sanguine. Given the question "Next Target?" the embroiderer responded, "G8 members should make their decisions wisely." Here the G8 appears not in the context of a revivified Reading, but in the voice of the subaltern speaking anonymously but in dialogical relation to the West through a medium and language coded by the West as Eastern. Two vernaculars rub shoulders and the other returns in an act of counter-discourse as translation.

A similar process has taken place in Ganahl's Iraq Dialogs, made together with Iraqi exiles living in Europe and done with collaborative texts on tiles instead of cloth. In *Iraq Dialog: Showdown Iraq, Live Coverage, Would U.S. Use Nukes?* Ganahl worked with an Iraqi-born physics professor named Hikmat, who lives in Holland, and whose brother Saddam Hussein had killed.[50] To go with the American news slogans, Hikmat drew a mountain-shaped chart, whose base is the fall of the Hussein regime. Rising up from this is a call for democracy and human rights, culminating in a pinnacle of freedom. Despite his personal tragedy, Hikmat hoped regime change would take place via greater international pressure enacted through a continuation of weapons inspection and increased isolation of the Hussein regime rather than through war. In an attempt to counter the "Countdown to Iraq" announced boldly in the American slogans, Hikmat has written his own: "Irak [sic] Peaceful Liberation from Saddam's Dictatorial Regime," "No War on Iraq," and "No Invasion of Iraq."

The Afghan and Iraq Dialogs are a welling up of vernacular clash from below. They invert the claims of global culture clash made by Samuel Huntington, stacking the deck in favor of people who are assigned the role of Islamic other by current U.S. foreign policy.[51] In doing so, these dialogs are perhaps overly optimistic. Nevertheless, a stage is produced for the meeting of Western and Eastern vernaculars, from their form, at the level of medium and image, to the content of the messages. They are a place for both the continuation and contestation of Orientalism, in all of its contemporary political consequence. Whereas Ganahl's Studies attempt to internalize the other by incorporating it into the self, the Afghan and Iraq Dialogs allow the other to speak across the slash of the kind of logo-centric corporate logic favored in American public life today. Ganahl's collaborators can present their own act of mastery, however small. Reality has been split so that American and Arabic vulgarity bump up against each other. In putting this vulgarity on display, the dialogs are a direct call for the further, more thoughtful production

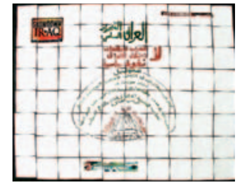

Fig. 21 *Iraq Dialog (with Hikmat), Showdown Iraq, Live Coverage, Would U.S. Use Nukes?* 2003, painted and glazed ceramic tile, 31 1/2 x 39 3/8 in.; preparatory drawing (see also p. 147)

50. He preferred to not use his last name for fear of reprisals.

51. Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of the World Order* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1998).

Fig. 22 *Basic Canadian, Yours to discover*, 2000 (see p. 114)

of a community of equals based on other forms of vernacular exchange. As in *In the eyes of the people*, where the comment "the Italians control Quebec" is recognized as a form of "basic Canadian," in putting this enmity on display Ganahl begins the process of public airing out, using the gallery as a commons for the posting of vernacular grievance.

This is also true of *Basic Canadian: Je me souviens/Yours to discover*. Here Ganahl deviates from his text sources in the rest of the Basic Languages series. Instead of language book catchphrases, he uses the different provincial mottos of Quebec and Ontario as his captions. These are official, government slogans, commonly seen on license plates and other government documents. Not only do they differ linguistically, but they also offer two diverse, seemingly opposed, notions of national identity and tourism: on the one hand the appeal to memory and memorial, on the other empire and conquest. Ganahl brings them together by recognizing how, in each case, whether looking back or looking ahead, a locality is fixed through the language of historical inequality papered over by the promises of capitalist equality. As in Rosler's use of radical metonymy, he attaches these slogans to an image that ties together and undermines both. What he has discovered in this image is a view from a park in Montreal, looking out across a street where a billboard, featuring an Apple iMac, abuts a typically Quebec storefront. An iron fence blocks access between the park and the street. Sleeping bags, which belong to Native Canadians who spend their nights in the park, hang on the fence, but these other Americans are absent from the image. They are as left out as the subjects of Rosler's *The Bowery*. . . , but here the text that captions the image is not solely about them. It is partly about these people, who are mostly Cree, and their colonial fate, which has been "redressed" through the turn to capitalism embodied in the scores of Native-American owned casinos that have proliferated around Canada and the United States. Otherwise, these people have largely been expunged from official memory and from the life of passersby like those who make their way down the street at the left in the image. Money replaces memory. As such, this image is also about rediscovering memory in the face of both the global promise of branded virtual media and the construction of local, French-Canadian identity. What Ganahl has really discovered, and what he is giving to memory, is an image of glocal vulgarity as it begets politics-as-usual.

The question I have been chasing by the tail throughout this essay is, Whither critical theory, in art as well as politics?[52] Has it stopped traveling? One answer is given by Said's call for the necessity to re-receive critique in the midst of one's own personal time and place and in the

52. Here I echo Etienne Balibar's question "Whither Marxism?" Étienne Balibar and Immanuel Wallerstein, "From Class Struggle to Classless Struggle?" in *Race, Nation, Class: Ambiguous Identities* (New York: Verso, 1991).

means by which Ganahl does so. This is precisely in opposition to claims made today that we are living in an age of the obsolescence of theory.[53] While models of negation may rightly be seen as impoverished (whether cribbed from Hegel, Marx, or Adorno), Ganahl's work demonstrates a positive-constructive strategy whereby critique also opens onto new modes of being together. Along with putting vulgarity-as-usual on display, he proposes new stagings of the sociolinguistic in his vulgar politics, performing a repartitioning of common sense that opens onto new possibilities of equality. Ganahl's work acknowledges the inevitability of power, that resistances are everywhere, all the time, moving in many directions both open and closed, and that there is always, as Foucault said, "a thousand things to do, to invent, to forge."[54]

Fig. 23 *Please, teach me Cree*, 2004 (see p. 104)

In another piece related to *Je me souviens . . .* Ganahl works to undo vulgarity-as-usual. Against French, English, and iMac, he asks from the back of a postcard, "Please, teach me Cree." Whether or not this is the next language he takes up, it is a gesture toward becoming other that the request to "Please, teach me . . ." represents. It recognizes the immanence of selves to both their own vernaculars and the need to work against them and so against the regimes of opinion founding glocal discourse today. It holds out the promise of mastery by choice and not duress, calling for communities based on more radical notions of sociolinguistics predicated on vernacular equality. The request to "Please, teach me . . ." offers the hope of a society to come where "we, the people," as any group of people, can keep moving away from our mother tongues and toward a community of equals.

53. For debates on the end of critical theory and its continued relevance, see "The Future of Criticism: A Critical Inquiry Symposium," special issue, *Critical Inquiry* 30, no. 2 (2003).

54. Foucault, *Remarks on Marx,* 174 (as in n. 45).