PERFORMANCE
DRAWING

How Do You Translate a Text That is Not a Text? How Do You Perform a Score That is Not a Score?

Warren Neidich

PHASE 1

From the mausoleum of lost apparatuses I revivified the graphic score, first initiated by Morton Feldman, John Cage, and Karlheinz Stockhausen. During my residency at the Townhouse Gallery in Cairo, in April 2013, I collected and sampled daily newspaper images and texts that concerned the becoming situation of the Egyptian Spring. The Egyptian Spring was not a being event that crystalized after the overthrow of President Hosni Mubarak on February 11, 2011, but rather a becoming cultural condition, in transition, in which culture, politics, and theory of mind continually reconstituted themselves as "other." The question became: How could an artwork concretize these relations? Could a graphic score both embody and be metonymic for the idea of political and neurobiological transformation? What would it look like and how could it be expressed? As such, could an artwork inform beyond what we already know through language? Could the deep structure of political and social objects and things be released?

The graphic scores shown in this portfolio were made of images and texts collected from printed materials produced during and right after the Egyptian Spring. These scores were then presented at the Townhouse Gallery during a nine-hour performance in which twenty-seven Egyptian musicians used improvisational techniques to play historical instruments, like the oud and the ney, alongside contemporary ones like electric guitars and keyboards. These performers were freed from the regimented, tutored, and academic playing techniques they so often use, replaced instead by an ensemble of striking, plucking, and blowing techniques invented on the spot or rehearsed. However, these are not new techniques: they were created in another time, when the culture of the 1960s and 1970s embraced innovation, change, and difference. Importantly, most of the musicians had taken part in the uprisings, and these new forms of playing reconstituted the contemporary performances in which new technologies, like smart phones and social media, had played a part. The performances in the gallery were a form of political re-enactment.

PHASE 2

In my studio in Berlin, international dancers and performers were asked to create improvisational somatic vocabularies in response to one of the recitals that had been documented in Cairo and that were now projected upon the studio wall. First, each performer listened to the complete archive of documentation before choosing one of the twenty-seven recitals to perform to. Upon the second viewing/listening, each performer constructed a somatotope, a series of learned moves enacted simultaneously with the projection. Each performer created a vocabulary of moves that together proved to be a bodily interpretation and translation of the sounds and noise of the original performance into a set of bodily and epistemological assemblages. Think here of the movement vocabulary that ballet dancers use—such as the plié, tendu, and frappe—to construct a dance performance. In this case, the improvised movements mirrored the acoustic assemblages played out in the original performance and as such represented an individualized vocabulary of movements and bodily gestures in transition. But the emancipatory recital and bodily movement it incited were also inscribed in the neurobiological architecture of the brain.

This is key to our understanding of the nature of performance and cultural labor in our moment of cognitive capitalism, in profit or surplus value is not simply extracted from surplus labor time, but also from unwaged cognitive and communicative processes. As Paolo Virno suggests in *A Grammar of the Multitude*, performance and labor are inextricably entangled:

> First of all, theirs is an activity which finds its own fulfillment . . . in itself, without objectifying itself into an end product, without settling into a "finished product," or into an object which would survive the performance. Secondly, it is an activity which requires the presence of others, which exists only in the presence of an audience.[1]

As we can see from the above quote, labor and performance in the information economy have dissolved into each other because nothing objective has been produced or leaves a trace. I have argued previously through my artwork *In the Mind's I* that performance does in fact leave a trace, and what has been interpreted as a lack in post-Fordist production is now in cognitive capitalism quite the opposite. Immaterial labor does leave a trace in the neurobiologic architecture of the brain. In fact, one of the defining conditions of cognitive capitalism is its effect on the brain's malleability or neuroplasticity.

PHASE 3

It is this concern and critique that led me to create the third and perhaps most important component of the performance. In the final gesture of the work, the dancers and performers were asked to assemble in a demarcated space marked out in my studio. Together, with no instruction other then where they would perform, they created a collective rendition from memory. Eight dancers re-enacted what they had previously rehearsed. No longer aided by the simultaneously projected video,

This page and next page: Graphic scores. 11.8" x 16.5".
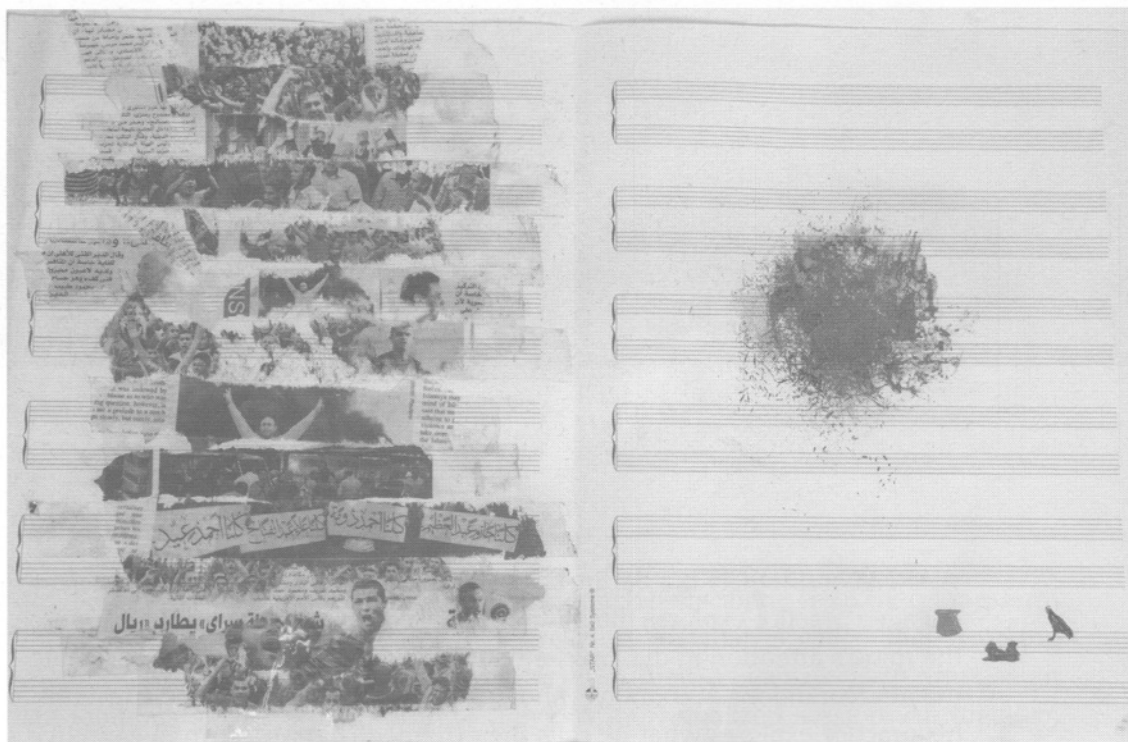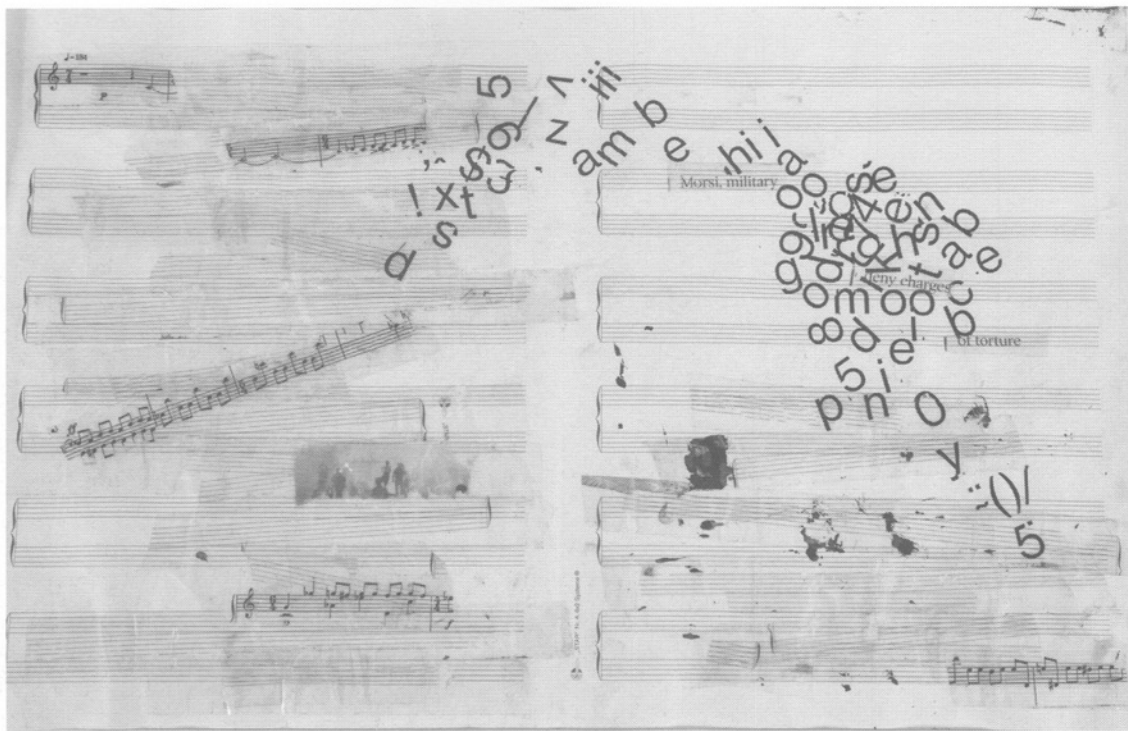© Warren Neidich 2011–2012.

each dancer envisioned the video and soundtrack by recalling from their long-term memory the internal image and by visualizing, in what is called their working memory, what they had previously produced in their rehearsals. Each artist as an autonomous agent re-enacted their previous individualized session. All together, performing side by side in the constricted space, their movement became a collective response of the multitude.

NOTE

1. Paolo Virno, *A Grammar of the Multitude: For an Analysis of Contemporary Forms of Life* (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2004), 52.
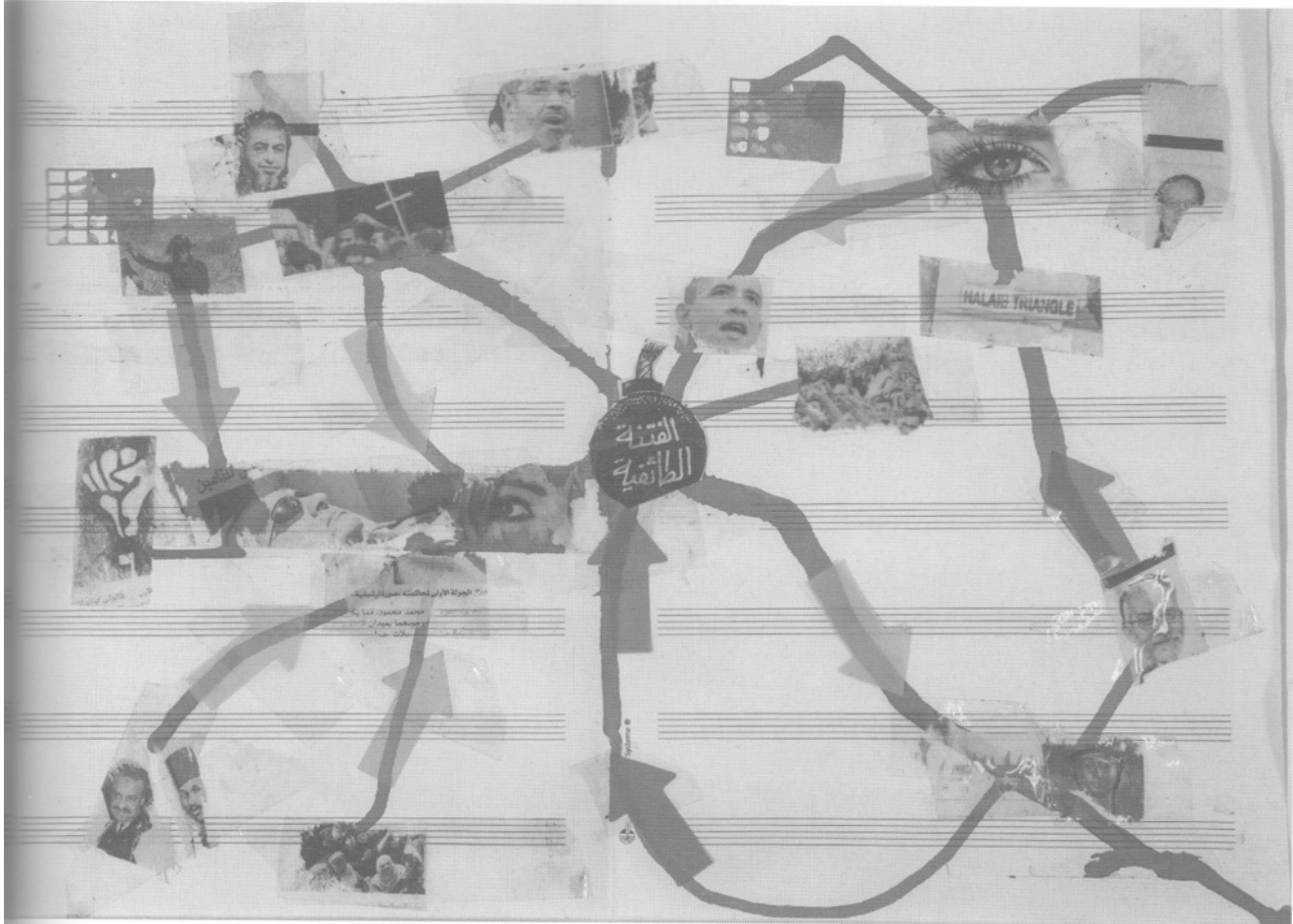
WARREN NEIDICH is a Berlin-based interdisciplinary artist whose socially engaged practice explores the interfaces between super objects that capture the mind's attention in dynamic, interactive ways as a means to investigate the new conditions of cognitive labor in the information economy. Currently, his practice explores what he calls the extended cognitive turn in cognitive capitalism. Selected exhibitions include the Whitney Museum of Art; the Museum of Modern Art's PS1, Long Island City; Palais de Tokyo, Paris; the Ludwig Museum, Koln; the Kunsthalle Charlottenborg, Copenhagen; the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles. Neidich's recent publications are *Cognitive Architecture: From Biopolitics to Noopolitics* and *The Psychopathologies of Cognitive Capitalism*.

Graphic scores. 13.4" x 20.5". © Warren Neidich 2011–2012.

Other *PAJ* features in the Ongoing Performances Drawings Series—

1. "The Event of a Thread," by Ann Hamilton, *PAJ* 104 (May 2013).

2. "A Poetics of the Street," by Alain Arias-Misson, *PAJ* 103 (January 2013).

3. "Drawing as Excavating," by Hiraku Suzuki, *PAJ* 102 (September 2012).

4. Artist Portfolios by Laurie Anderson, John Kelly, Ralph Lemon, Elizabeth LeCompte, Julie Mehretu, and Brian Dewan, *PAJ* 100 (January 2012).

5. "The Line Is Fine," by Joe Diebes, *PAJ* 99 (September 2011).

6. "Visible Music," by William Hellerman, *PAJ* 97 (January 2011).

7. "Ear Bodies, Ear Lines," by Fabrizio Manco, *PAJ* 94 (January 2010).

8. "*Ryoanji: Solos for Oboe, Flute, Contrabass, Voice, Trombone with Percussion or Orchestral Obbligato*," by John Cage, *PAJ* 93 (September 2009).

9. "Fluxus Long Weekend," by Alison Knowles, *PAJ* 91 (January 2009).

10. "*Deep Trance Behavior in Potatoland and Maria Del Bosco*," by Richard Foreman, *PAJ* 90 (September 2008).

11. "*Geneva, Handfall*," by Trisha Brown, *PAJ* 89 (May 2008).

12. "*The Threepenny Opera*," by Robert Wilson, *PAJ* 88 (January 2008).

13. "Research Events," by Ralph Lemon, *PAJ* 81 (September 2005).

14. "Studio as Study," by Melinda Barlow, *PAJ* 71 (May 2002).