Anne de Vries

INTERVIEW
with Jeppe Ugelvig

JU What are you presenting in the context of _Leaps and Bounds_?

ADV I have a few wild tryouts available. Inspired by flyers for dance events, I started to make work on paper. During my residency at ISCP, I have been experimenting with different techniques: drawing, painting, graphics, laser- and UV-printing, creating work somewhere between a flyer and a painting. I am using the structure of a flyer, which points toward the promise of an event, but without the event itself. This leaves us with this painterly visualization becoming the only experience available, but in relationship to this particular history.

What initially brought you to studying the graphic visuality surrounding early rave culture?

To me the interesting thing about early rave was that it was a new type behavior for a large crowd. Where in the '70s and '80s the pop star was still the center of attention, that was being replaced by drum machines. Suddenly it was about participation by the audience itself. You can draw an analogy with how, during the same period, the Internet opened things up to people, allowing them to take part, decentralizing information, attention economy, and power.

Tell me about your research at the nightclub archive in Berlin.

I went there because I wanted more historical references about how dance events have been part of transformation in society. Even if it is "just dancing," a crowd is always politically charged, and there are several key moments where this was clear, such as after the Wende in '1989, Berlin,' or when LGBT minorities started to organize their own events, creating communities and shaping queer culture(s), or when dancers started to use squatting laws and attract a critical mass to create a "temporary autonomous zone" in otherwise empty public or privatized spaces.

The pictorial logic of rave flyers predates but almost coincides with the emergence of the popular Internet. Do you connect the two kinds of media sites, that both serve a function of information dissemination, aesthetics, and network communication, or do you find them very different?

To me it is interesting to show how these are connected. Then within that there are several subdivisions.

As for network culture before the Internet, the flyers that came out of the squat scene come to mind. Flyers needed to be discreetly encrypted, so that there could be a phone number mixed up with a date, which was only there to provide directions to the (secret) location, functioning on the border of being illegal.

What is the status of these relics today? How have their codes aged in a time when raver culture is continually appropriated stylistically, on- and off-line, but only half-heartedly, thus further fragmenting it as a visual vocabulary?

I think there are still a lot of aesthetics and other elements that have not circulated that much, especially because flyers were an off-line network. Looking through this lens at our current situation, to me it is relevant to keep this in mind. Somehow crowds (re-)claiming space to dance did play a part in moments of social-cultural transformation.

You have been working with and through media as diverse as anthropomorphic sculpture, watercolor, and painting. Materially and formally, how has the last year been for you?

I have been collecting mostly formal elements to craft a visual vocabulary with sometimes recognizable references or historical references.

Will you be showing this body of work in the near future?

I want to present this body of work in the right context but am actually not yet sure where. Maybe I want to bring a performative aspect to this work. In the meantime, I am preparing two other projects. One is a sculptural sound installation for a solo show at the Fries Museum (in Leeuwarden, the Netherlands) in May. Then in June, I'll install a new outdoor sculpture for the Luster Warandepark in Tilburg.

A HARDER LOVING WORLD

TRANSFORMATION THROUGH DEPOLITICIZATION

When house music first emerged out of disco and soul in the 1980s, its message was remarkably different from that of the prevailing egocentric star-driven pop. With the advent of house, the black and queer community sought to empower and uplift itself, making that communal ethos a central feature of its music. When we listen to early house tracks we recognize vocals inspired by gospel, from which the themes of peace, love, unity and respect — or P.L.U.R. (a shorthand for the raver movement's ethos) — derive.

As the music culture itself evolved, some of these ideas developed and adapted to different social and political conditions around the world. Several movements to which house music was connected were ex- plicit about being more than simply dance parties: they articulated the will for social change, such as we see in early manifestos from labels and collectives like Underground Resistance (from Detroit Michi- gan, active since 1989) or Spiral Tribe (South England, active since 1990), the driving force in the Free Tekno movement. The Free Tekno movement married acid techno culture with squatter ideology, utilizing practical open spaces for the purposes of noncom- mercial parties. They created temporary autonomous zones (T.A.Z.) [Christiana Breinl, Free Tekno, Berlin: Lit Verlag, 2012] using squatters' procedures to keep law enforcement outside the spaces where the parties took place. This allowed for an "anything goes" policy inside; thus visitors could use drugs freely and noise levels were illegally high. Yet

as much as this was a politically charged development, the music itself did not call for change directly. The sound of "tekno," without vocals or melody, presented itself as a kind of anti-music, refusing to entertain and inducing a somewhat mind-numbing effect. Its main function seemed to be to restructure temporary shared space: it attracted a crowd — similar to how a wall serves to do the opposite — creating a social body that could behave outside the law.

Yet over time, the groundbreaking, ecstatic revelry of this new movement was transformed into and coopted by conformist, commercialized mass culture. One specific example is the history of the Love Parade in Berlin, which showed that partying and a few neat slogans were not enough to make substantive change. ["Party, Love and Profit: The Rhythms of the Love Parade," Wolfgang Sterneck in conversation with Graham St John, dj.dancecult.net, 2010]

In June 24, 2015, I went to the biggest HardStyle dance event in the world: Defqon.1, in Biddinghuizen, the Netherlands. This particular music scene evolved out of the harder styles of dance music at the turn of the new millennium. Although the music is too "hard" to be mainstream, it was clear that I was in the hands of the professional entertainment industry, which made use of the most advanced audio and visual effects, pulling every commercially palatable trick to entertain the huge crowds. What was once an extension of the subversive gabber subculture of the 1990s has become a safe, secure and streamlined event that plays host to eighty thousand visitors in a state of ecstasy.

Every once in a while the heavy beat would break- down and an extremely vocoderized voice would make pronouncements in totalitarian fashion to the mass au- dience, often demanding that they instantly open their minds to reach their full potential, to transcend, or to enter altered states of consciousness. These lyrics functioned as
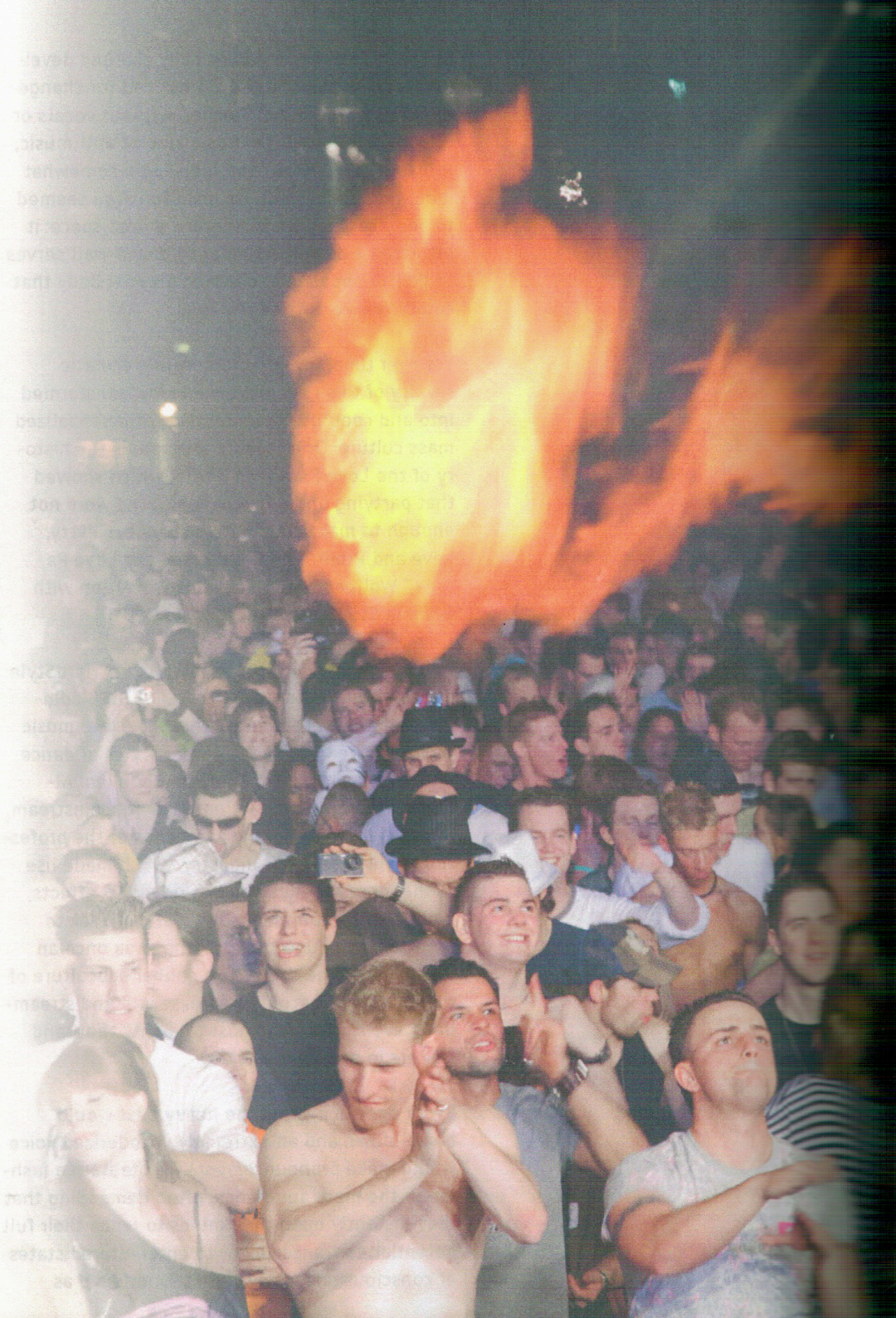
intermezzos fueling the build up to musical ecstasy. During these moments the whole event could be understood as an attempt to lead the audience into another state of mind — into a state of transformation that is as opposed to the regular "outside world" as possible.

Being in this enormous mass, one sensed how it had the potentiality to change our future — if it wanted to, and if it were focused on a common goal. But the narrative elements imposed by the disembodied voice mostly stayed away from real-world problems; what "real-world" issues it touched on were about (personal or individual) empowerment rather than entertainment, always aimed toward the same dramatic musical climax. Given Adorno's warnings about this dangerous combination of popular music and mass culture, I was curious to see how writing that wants to shift our perception, — to transform the current world, can play out within this kind of spectacle — to see if it was possible to mobilize written thought within this emotionally charged music format.

As soon as the bass line and the beat drops, it is hard to keep a critical distance from the lyrics; the music produces an artificial sentiment of consensus, what to me celebrates a sense of freedom that Adorno called "pseudo-individuation." [Theodor Adorno, Studies in Philosophy and Social Science, New York: Institute of Social Research, 1941, IX, p. 25] "By pseudo-individuation we mean endowing cultural mass production with the halo of free choice or open market [sic] on the basis of standardization itself. Standardization of song hits keeps the customers in line, doing their thinking for them, as it were. Pseudo-individuation, for its part, keeps them in line by making them forget that what they listen to is wholly intended for them or predigested."

After we first made the video Critical Mass: Pure Immanence (2015) with the help of Q-Dance, which deals with similar subject matter.

We then approached several writers and music producers to collaborate on a project to bring writing that calls for philosophical transformation into the format of these events. After attempting different things, we decided to rework existing essays into the lyrical manner of Hard-Style vocals to be inter- spersed with the music. To present these rewritten texts, I staged a miniature, open-air HardStyle event titled Obliv-ion (2016) in a diorama with a fully functional miniature stage with a sound system and light show, which included an advertising campaign on billboards and an infrastructure built around it. One text drew from the XenoFeminism manifesto by Laboria Cuboniks (laboriacuboniks.net), which counters essentialist naturalism and an idealized understanding of the natural, and rejects pre-fixed roles or meaning. It is a call to action to adjust nature where it is unjust.

XENOFEMIN

Re-Written
Xeno Feminism manifesto by Laboria Cubo...

Another text rewrites the lecture "Human Thought at Earth Magnitude" by Timothy Morton (held at "Dark Ecology 2014," Sonic Acts, Amsterdam). Here we are taken to "earth magnitude" where human thought is as expansive as the celestial aurora. When we scale up to earth magnitude, we enter a realm of thought where all binary distinctions collapse: conscious and unconscious, living and nonliving, individual and group — all these differences dissolve. This text, which deals with distance and scale, was in the back of my head while working on the diorama, which obviously also offers an overview while flying "high" over an intense and immersive event.

We also composed lyrics based on the Boris Groys book In the Flow [London: Verso Books, 2016]. It is a free interpretation that, when put in relation to this kind of electronic dance music event, emphasizes the idea of a total temporality in the lyrical mode of HardStyle:

The texts I chose to work with share a tone of urgency, which is also characteristic of the Hard-Style format. While staying within the tradition to open minds, it was crucial to stay within the world we are facing today, and to convey that even the most metaphysical philosophical messages are still circumscribed by a realist and materialist ontology. In this way, the works thematize (and undermine) escape into transcendence or the esoteric even as they adapt to the dramatic "style" of this genre.

Besides creating presentations with this material in the form of exhibitions and events, I also made some of the recorded vocals available to HardStyle producers, and I am curious to hear if some of this will appear within the HardStyle scene. If it does, it will most likely be used in a more simplified version, but will hopefully still be relatable.

... EH, HHM

If mass culture is to prevail, we might imagine a future in which its sound track takes on a different, critical form, at peace with, and in the form of, a turbulent totality. The sounds might not be as groundbreaking and futuristic anymore, but they may manage to cultivate a platform outside of "normal" sociopolitical reality, and they could potentially offer a space in which one could experience different views and ideas. Why should this space be limited to pseudo-spirituality and science fiction? It might be able to benefit from the ongoing quests within contemporary art and philosophy, and at the same time also allow an idea to transgress the boundaries of different media formats and cultural contexts.

TECHNOCRACY
Campaign 2020

acrylic paint, uv-print, vinyl,
aluminum trusst system

MAONTAOL
FLASH FORWARD!

2012

Polymorphous

let one sketch a
picture of essential
unity hen kai pan -
one and all[I]

UNTIL LATE
NO COVER

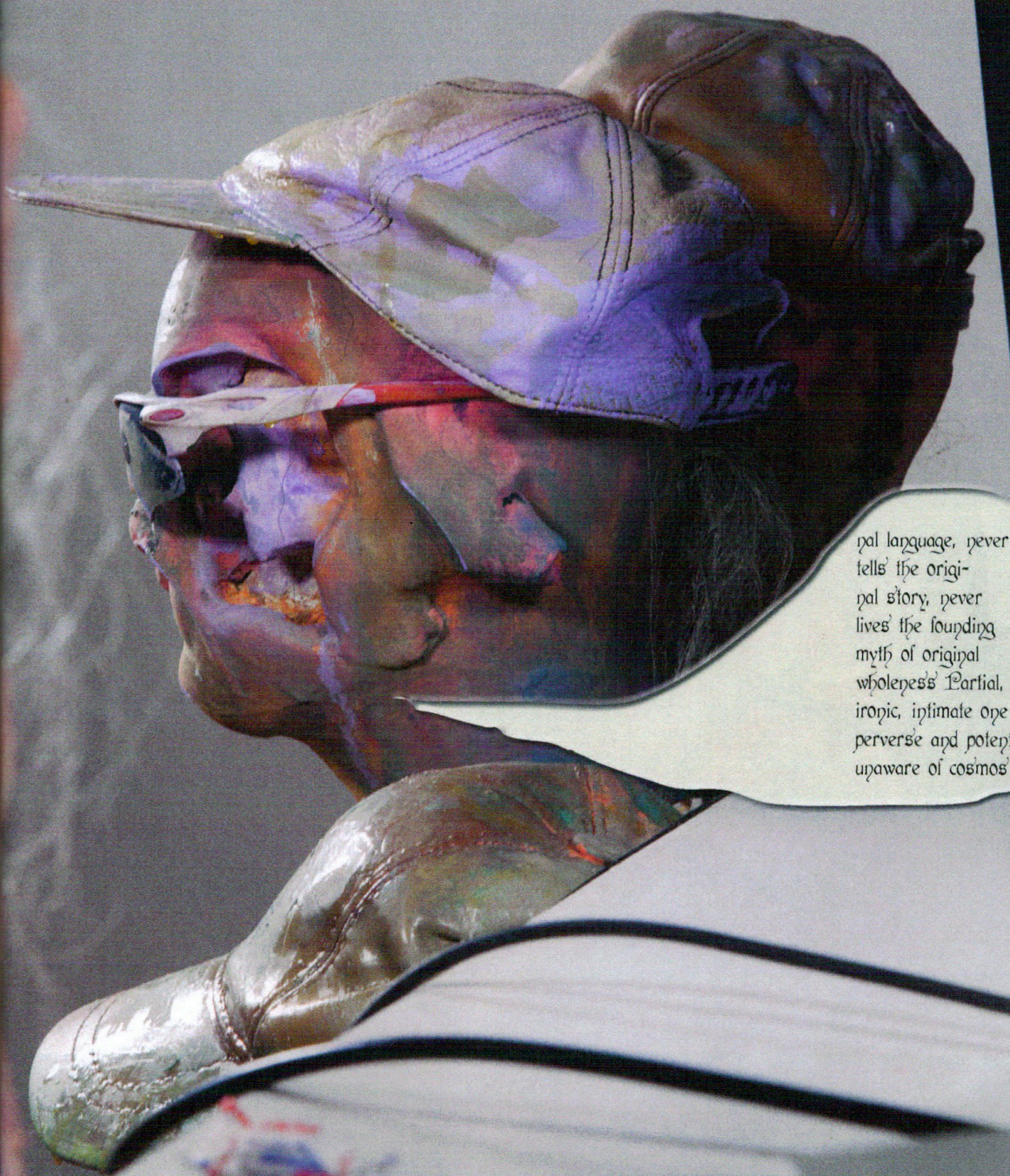When one
is a cyborg
a chimera
polymorphous
malinche
a hybrid being
to the same
race in the
world

when one forms a
whole, morphs into
other, becomes an
image of the two
when this one never
possesses the origi

SURRENDER
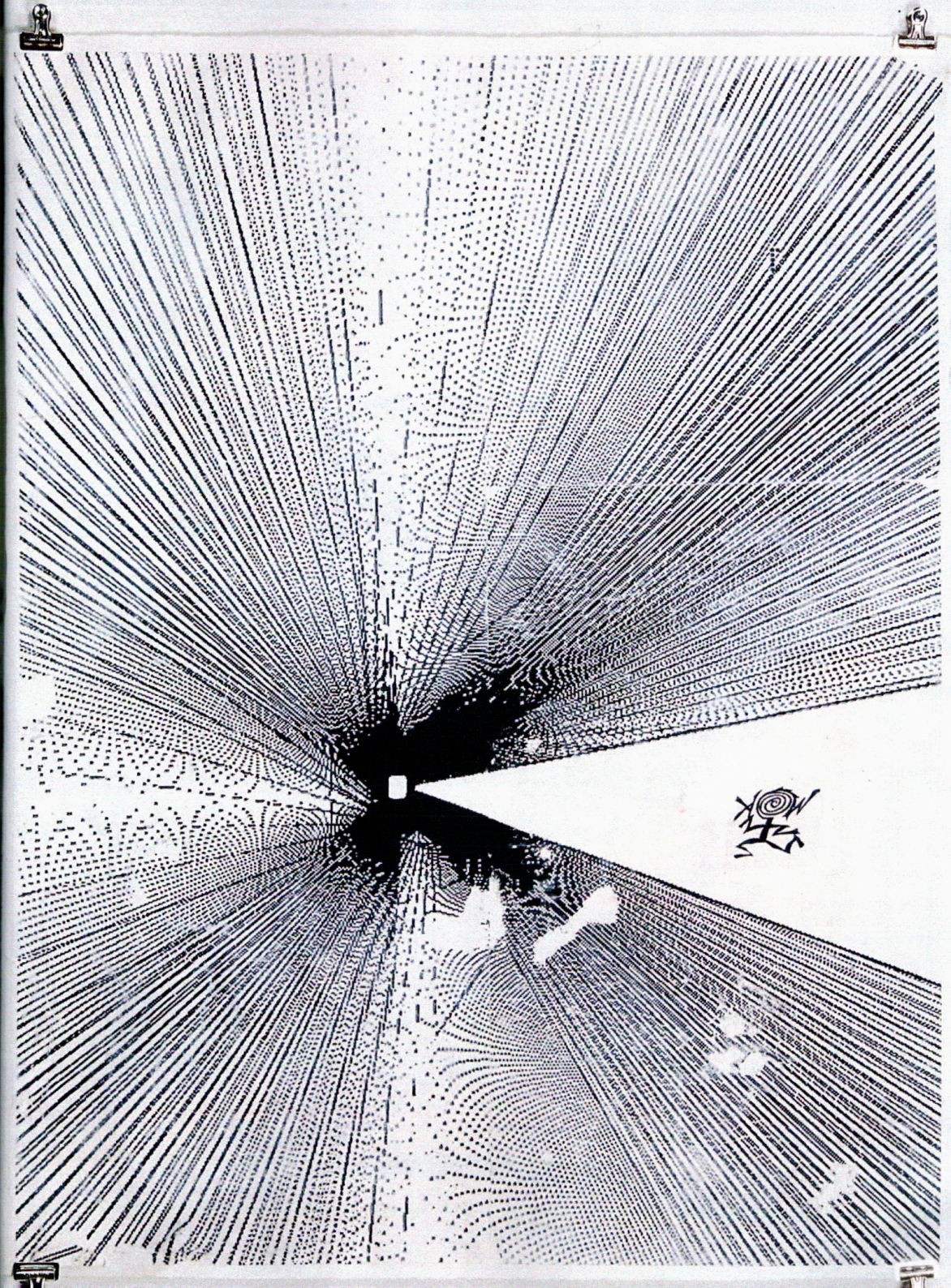
nal language, never tells the origi- nal story, never lives the founding myth of original wholeness. Partial, ironic, intimate one perverse and potent unaware of cosmos

in this new world
without innocence
when one is a mo[r]
phing salamander

SYSTEM ASSAULT SQUAD
TEKNO - TERRA + ATTACK
FREE + NONSTOP

in a continuous
spiral of regener-
ation, resistant of
the drama of life
as individuation
and the birth of
the self
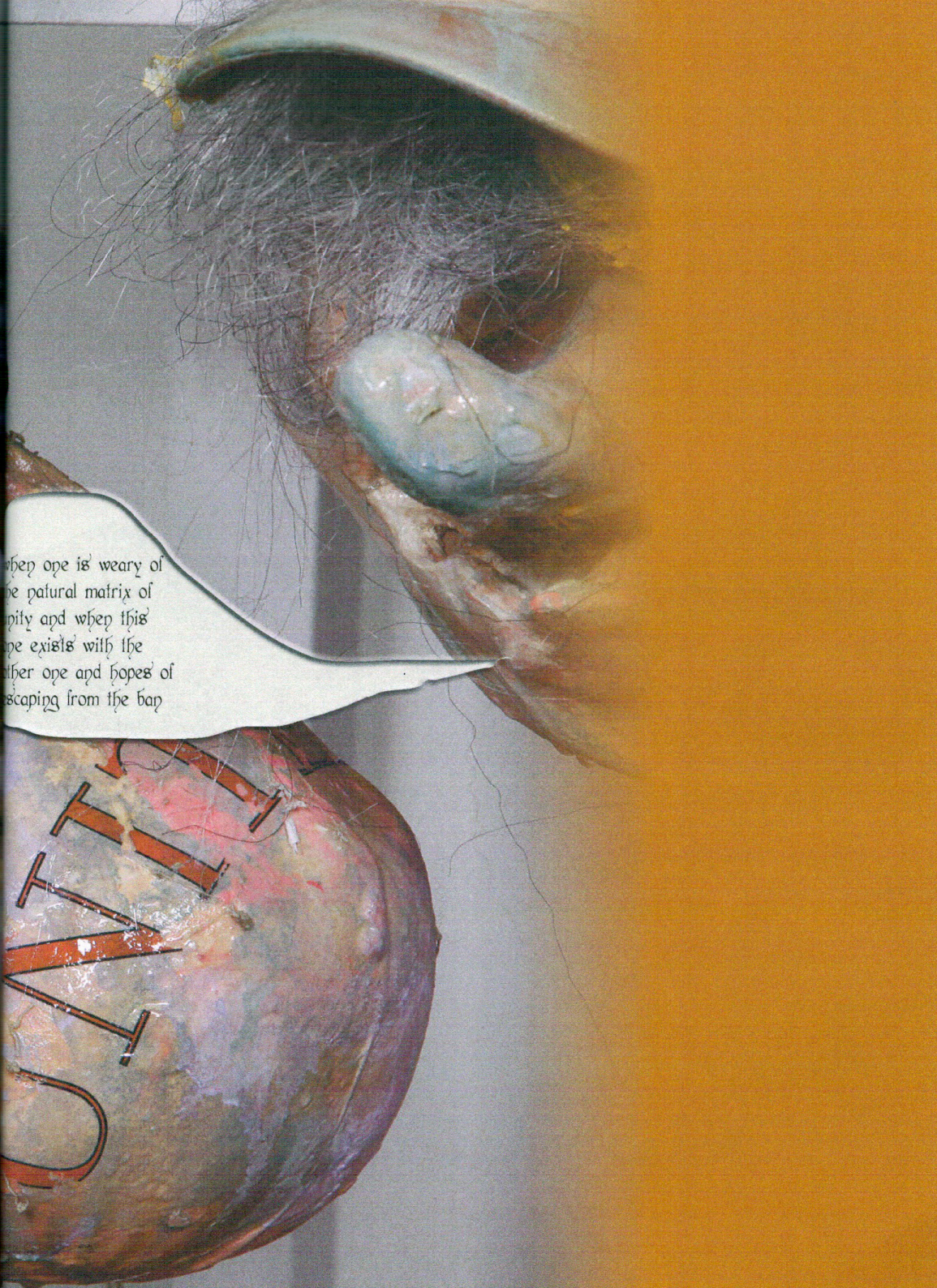
when one is weary of
the natural matrix of
family and when this
one exists with the
other one and hopes of
escaping from the ban
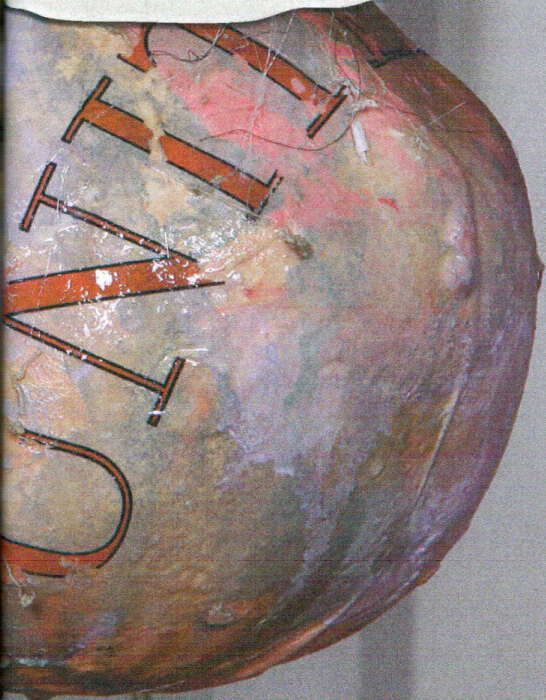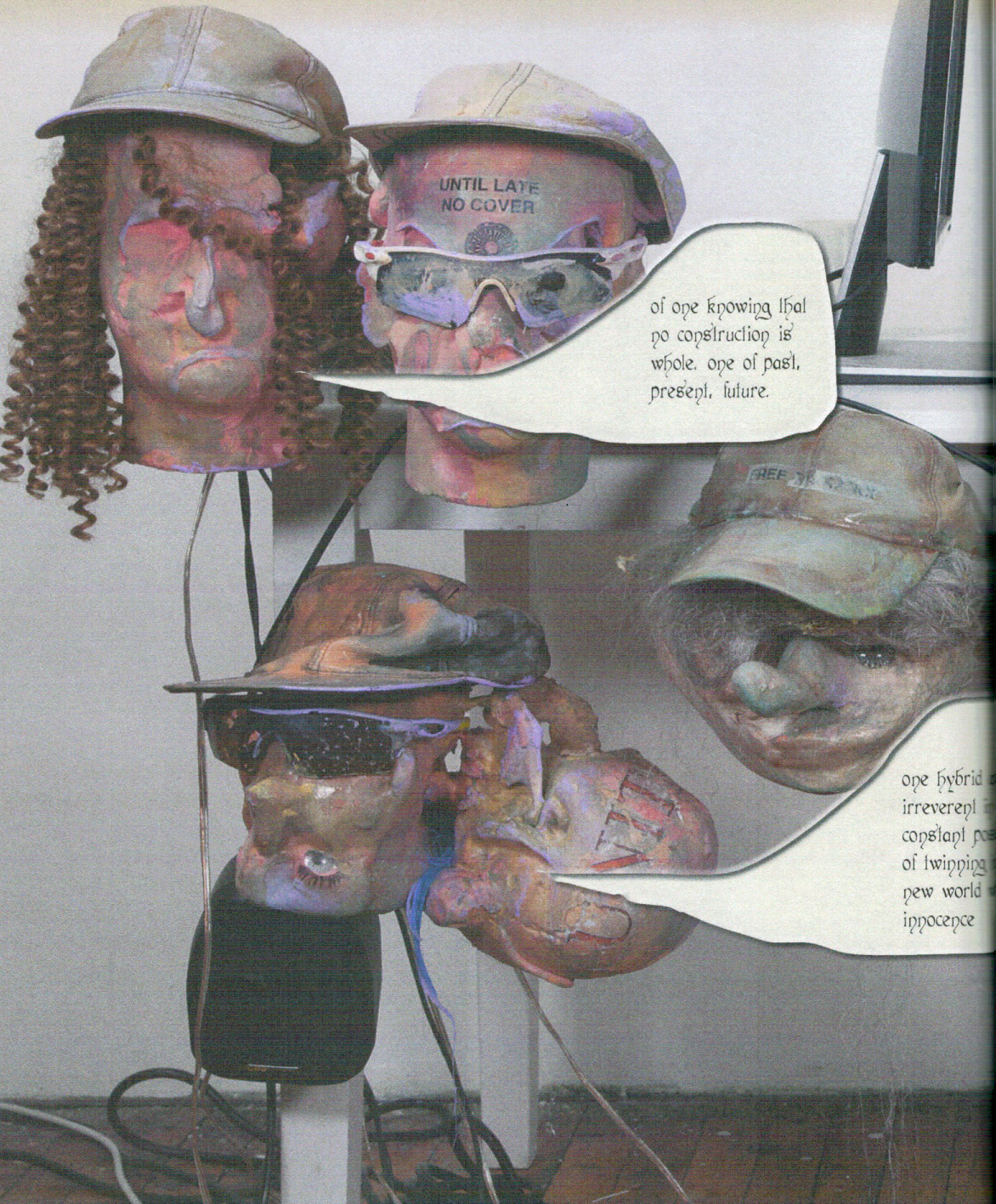
One is too few but two
are too many den kai pan
U.N.I.T.Y.

TRUST A STRANGER

1989

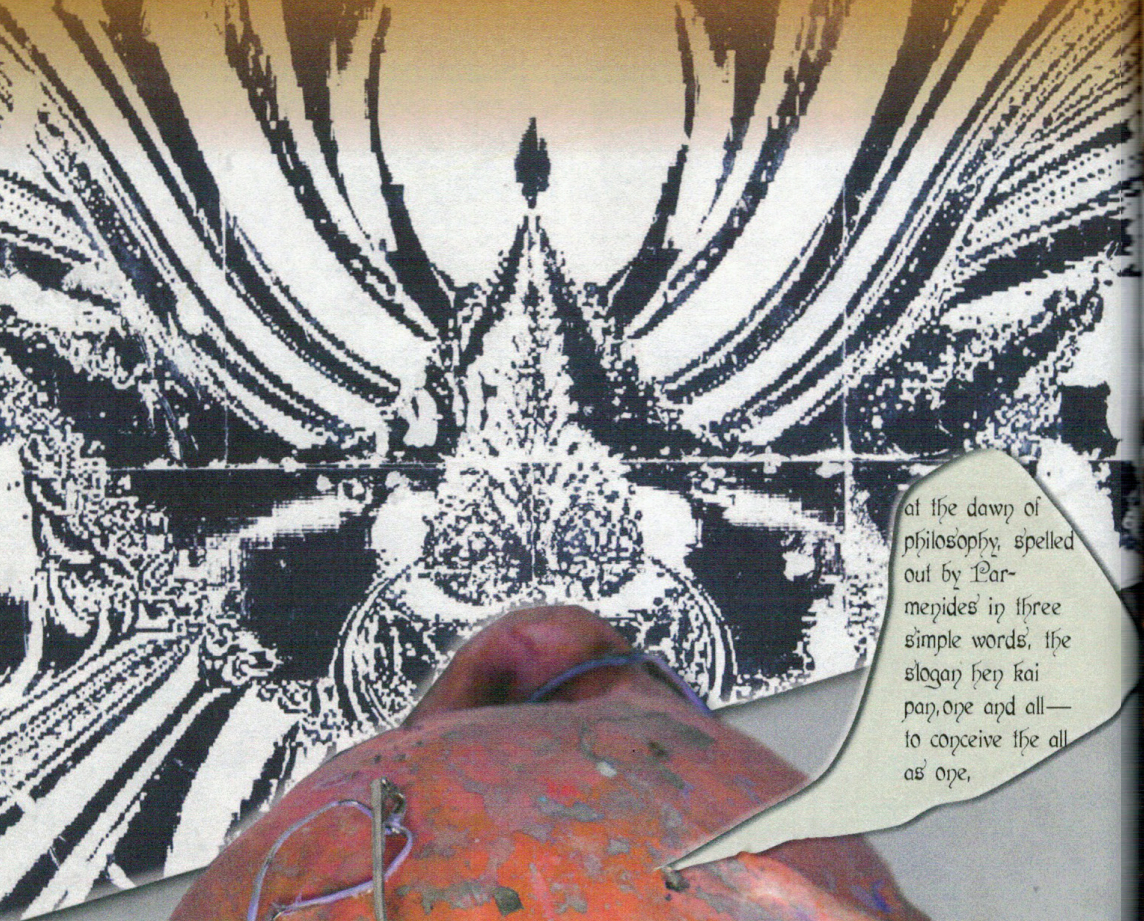U.N.I.T.Y.
one's a unity one
and all from infinity
to infinity

THE FREE FORCE
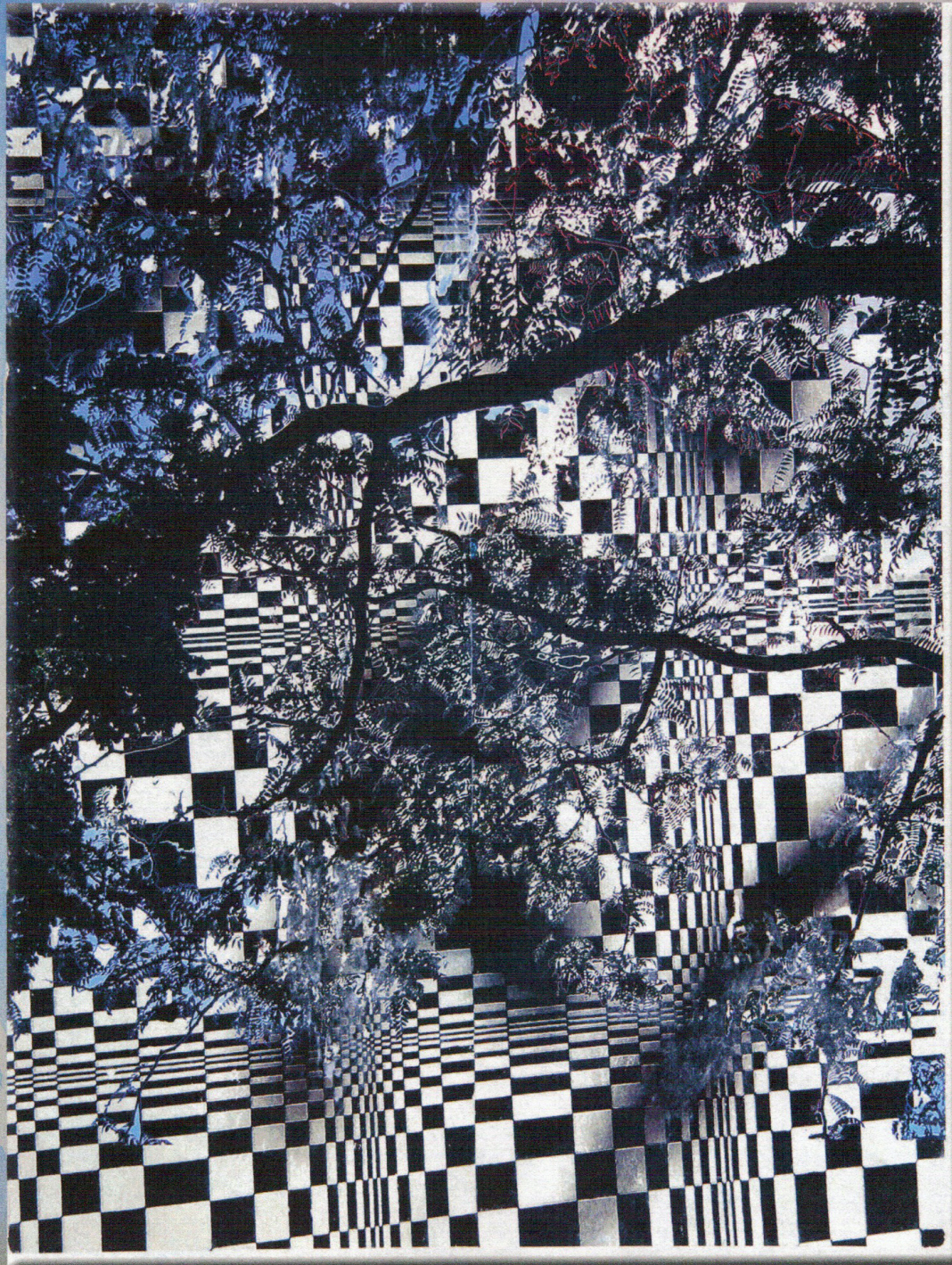
[I] '
That program was' pronounced

UNTIL LATE
NO COVER

at the dawn of philosophy, spelled out by Parmenides in three simple words, the slogan hen kai pan, one and all— to conceive the all as one,
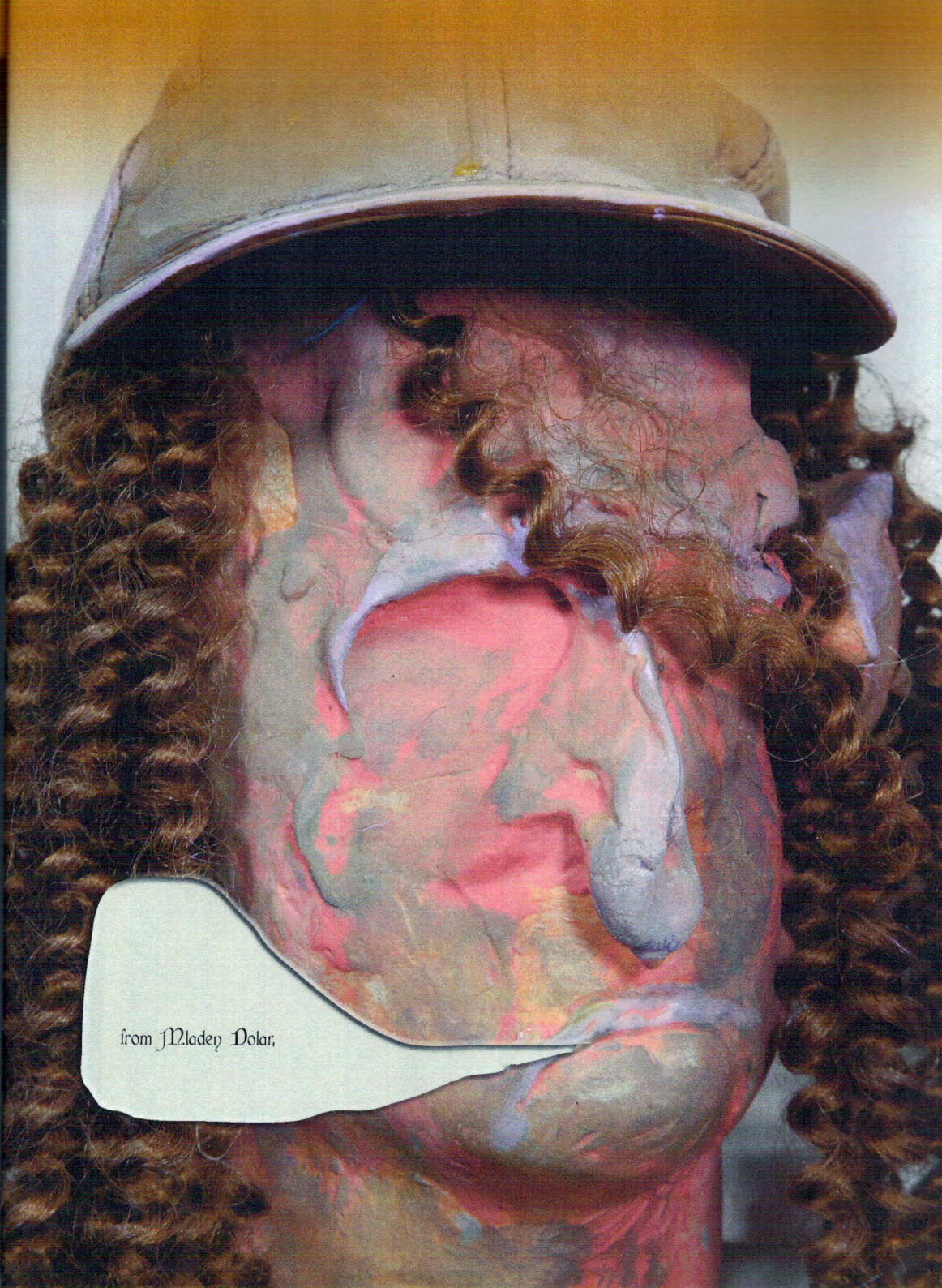
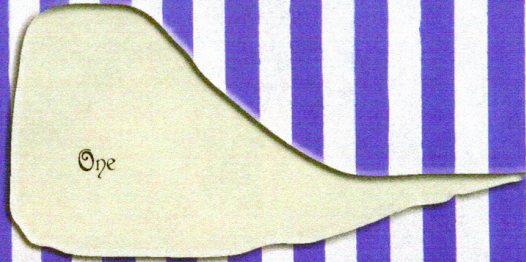to encompass the whole in its unity, and to take the one as the simple clue to the whole and whatever

multiplicity it may present: to take the whole under the auspices of One'.
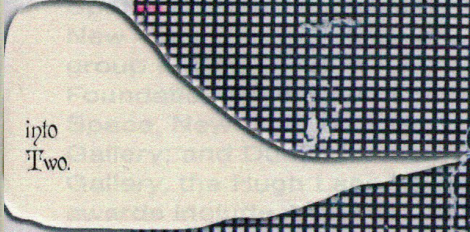
SYSTEMS UNITE

RESPECT

from Mladen Dolar,

One

Divides'

into
Two.

RESPECT