



/ Good day. My name is Krzysztof Kościuczuk. I have the utmost pleasure of joining you today, and I thank you for your time and for being here. We are recording this conversation on the occasion of the exhibition at Kunstverein Hannover curated by Jeremy Deller, who was invited by Christoph Platz, and one of the artists in the exhibition is Lara Favaretto. Lara Favaretto has an ongoing project titled *Thinking Head*, through which she invites different individuals to reflect on, to discuss, and to look at, from different perspectives, a set of notions that she has identified as important for the understanding of what a human being is and how we function, as I understand it.

In the end, I think the most interesting and, at the same time, challenging aspect of this is that, aside from the one notion we are invited to reflect on, or discuss, or travel through, if you wish, there is no script for this meeting. So I would kindly ask you to introduce yourselves.

Today we have, alphabetically, Raven Chacon, David Riff, and Jasmin Trächtler, and I would like you to say hello and perhaps introduce yourselves using a few words, in the sense of what you think is crucial in your practice for this conversation.

As for myself, I am an art historian by education, and I work with exhibitions. I have the pleasure of working with artists, including Raven. We are also very honoured because you currently have a solo exhibition at the Kunstverein, so I would like to start with you and ask you to introduce yourself.

□ I'm Raven Chacon, and I'm really happy to be here. I've been here all week, for the opening of the exhibition, which I also worked on with Krzysztof and Christoph Platz. The exhibition is very short; it's only up for two weeks, and it brings together some sound works from the earliest part of my career up to more recent works, and it also incorporates performance. So composing music is a big part of my work, and the reason I'm here for another week is to do some performances and also to take part in this talk.

* I'm David Riff. I'm a curator, artist, sometimes writer. At the moment, I'm working at the Steirischer Herbst festival in Graz, which happens every year, and I'm in the midst of preparing that.

What my practice really centers around, though, are two things. Both as a curator and as an artist, I'm very interested in narrativity—so, fiction and storytelling—and how those things work in an art context. That's one thing I've been working on for years.

Another area I'm heavily interested in is Soviet Marxism and Marxist aesthetics of the Soviet period, which, if we're talking about naïveté, might actually be an interesting angle, because it's a completely different world from the theoretical and practical parameters we're used to working in. Although there's a degree of convergence, which is also kind of interesting to talk about. So maybe one could approach naïveté from that position.

Raven Chacon □
Krzysztof Kościuczuk /
David Riff *
Jasmin Trächtler ○

○ My name is Jasmin Trächtler, I studied art history and philosophy and then did my PhD in philosophy and work mainly in philosophy of language and feminist philosophy of science. I can relate very much to what you just said—that, from the perspective of a philosopher who tends to overthink and overreflect, naïveté is a very interesting concept to look at. So, I'm very excited to have this conversation today.

/ Thank you. So we're here today on the occasion of the previous exhibition, and, as I mentioned, we are here at the invitation of both Christoph Platz and Lara Favaretto. The title of the previous exhibition, which was curated by the outstanding artist Jeremy Deller, was *An Exhibition for Children (And Other People)*. I think it's no coincidence that Lara has selected this notion—this concept, this idea—of naïveté to accompany this particular meeting.

To kick things off, I think we are all coming from very, very diverse backgrounds, which is a very precious thing. I would like to ask for a quick backtrack, and I would ask you, Jasmin, first. As I think we tend to do, as artists and art historians—I'm speaking for myself now—we tend to think in images, although Raven is a great example of someone who thinks differently, maybe not immediately in images. But I would like to ask you, Jasmin, first: What is the image that comes to your mind when you think of naïveté?

○ I guess, of course, the first image is of a child, or a young person, someone who looks at the world in an unbiased way. But then, of course, there are also other, I think, interesting layers to this concept. When I started to think about this concept in a small preparatory way for this talk, I began with this everyday notion of naïveté, which often has a pejorative sense—someone who doesn't know something, although they should, or hasn't had a certain experience, although they should have. Then I noticed how complex and entangled this whole concept is, even carrying some political notions. For example, if you think of women's naïveté—because they lacked certain kinds of education, like sexual education—they couldn't know better in a way, although they should have, since they were adults. So I realized how difficult, entangled, and complex this concept is.

Also, sometimes you think of naïveté as a beautiful place—a state of being unbiased and good-hearted, maybe even too good-hearted for an evil world, or something like that. So, this is maybe my first picture of naïveté.

/ Raven, what about you?

□ Yeah, the same. I mean, on one hand, I think of a child, someone very innocent, a kind of natural naïveté. And on the other hand, I'm thinking of maybe the counterpart to that, somebody who is voluntarily ignorant about knowledge or wisdom or, you know, thinking about our interactions with other people.

So when I think of an image, it's not someone in isolation, it's somebody's interaction with others. And so a discussion about community becomes a big part of this,

I think, as well – interaction with others first, and then this becoming a way that one can start learning about what's beyond that, what the universe can teach somebody.

And yeah, so somewhere between the two, both the kind of natural innocence and maybe a lack of access to knowledge are also part of this, as well as somebody who just chooses not to engage with what they should be learning.

* Yeah, for sure. That's sort of the willful ignorance and a kind of feigned naïveté is part of our world. And I hadn't really thought of it before I read and mentioned it because I'm sort of, constantly being in a kind of cynical field where people are not naive, and where any kind of naïveté will be feigned basically, or is the sign of a newcomer. It always feels like that's really what you want most of all: a naive audience, an audience that isn't looking for cues and keywords and formal markers, but that's actually willing to engage with a work, for example. You're also looking for naive artists, actually, who aren't stuck in those same keywords and forms as a curator.

So, of course, to me, “naive” immediately seems like this shining, beautiful term of some other world, where, you know, that would only be possible in a world other than our own. It's actually completely true, because people pretend to be naive. You see that. I think that people also pretend to be politically naive about what's going on in the world a lot of the time, and pretend not to see things and sort of lead their lives idyllically untouched by, you know...

So that's really an important thing to say right away: any idyllic image we might have of naïveté always comes with a degree of willful ignorance. And, you know, I was thinking about children because you mentioned a child. And also, this is in the context of Jeremy's exhibition, at least sort of the afterglow of Jeremy's exhibition. The children, when they're naive—or so-called naive—there's a lot of parental production that goes into that too.

You know, like, to keep your children... in Germany, this is a big issue. When do you tell—not only when do you tell your children about sex, but when do you tell your children about the Holocaust? How long do you protect them from all this information about colonialism, about the crimes against humanity that are going on now—in Gaza, for example, or in Ukraine? Can you talk to your children about this? And... oh yeah, no, no, you shouldn't.

And so, you know, I have a 12-year-old son and in his school some of the parents actually really blocked this out. In fact, during COVID, they didn't really want to talk about COVID either. So, naïveté.

/ I think we're touching on something that's already extremely productive, I would say, because it seems to me we already come with a sort of understanding: what is the flip side of naïveté? By this, I mean we tend to define naïveté per se, in itself.

So, this is my next question that I wanted to ask: what is the opposite?

How can we define it negatively—maybe by subtraction—or how can we contextualize it?

So, what would be the opposite, David? Stupidity? What about... ignorance? No.

* No, no, I think—I think we're very familiar with the opposite of naïveté of this kind of, you know... we've seen it all. Everything's been done before. Jadedness, especially in art.

/ World.

* And the result of that is very strange. It's not necessarily to, you know, pull people up to yourself, but actually then to talk down to people and to sort of, you know... like, it's all very complicated. Let me explain it to you in simple terms.

I think art in the 20th century especially was very much a victim of its own jadedness. And at the same time, of the completely crazy attempts in some cases to get beyond that, or to, to sort of counteract that. You know, there's nothing worse than someone who's jaded and then pretends to be naive. This is what we were just saying before.

So, I hope we know what that is: the art world's jadedness, for example, vis-à-vis, just, you know... its own history, even—not only the world surrounding it. That's a whole other scandalous topic

/ Raven, what would be the flip side of naïveté for you?

□ I think this comes from thinking of one's own goals of trying to master something, you know... become a master of your own field, of the technique of the work that you do. And so I think it's having some kind of goal of knowledge that you've attained, and then feeling, yeah, that you can be in a position to tell others about what that is... that you have this knowledge, that one is very certain in that knowledge as well.

But, you know, I was thinking too... it was really interesting to go back to what parents might teach their children and shield them. And so I think, yeah... then what is it? When the time is right to expose them to, and give them these certain things that this person has learned, this parent has learned, that they believe they're so certain about.

And also it's the fabrication of other things. So, you know... not only shielding them from discussions that adults would have, but also fabricating new ones: Santa Claus, you know.

So... what is that doing? That's like generating more, I don't know... false truths, and creating a whole other kind of trajectory of knowledge that the young person would then fabricate on their own, you know... their own mythologies.

/ But that's extremely interesting, because I think that now we can see how the concept of truth kind of splits away from the idea of being naive or not being naive. It's exactly what you gentlemen mentioned. It's in the attempt to protect. I think sometimes we lean not towards the truth, but towards something that we know very well is far from the truth, or, in our understanding, that it's fabricated – it's a fable, it's a story.

And then I think, however simple this concept might sound to us, it really goes to show that there is a very broad field where ideas of truth and good do not really converge, and where they are something different. We do something with the intention of doing good, but we know very well that we are reproducing or sharing things that are not necessarily what we would accept as rational truths.

So I think it's extremely interesting, and I wanted to ask you, Jasmin, coming from a completely different field, how does that resonate with you? This idea – this perhaps split, or perhaps a crack – I'm not sure. I'm just trying to poke around it, between being naive and considering what is truthful, or what is true.

○ Yeah, thanks. I think I relate very much to what both of you, David and Raven, said. And I think maybe there is a connection in that, coming from this philosophical background, for me the opposite of naïveté would also be being skeptical, doubtful, suspicious – even paranoid, maybe.

And, for example, when we think of encounters with strangers we don't know, there is this question: Should we trust them? So there's this relation between naïveté and trust. And trust is both about knowledge, but also about something ethical, about being good or evil.

And if you think again about children, you spoke of protection, but that also requires a certain surrounding, or a family, that is able to protect you – and not all families are able to protect their children or other people. So, in that sense, naïveté is also a sort of privilege: you have not been made to *have to* know better.

So you don't have this idea of growing up on the street, where you constantly engage with difficult people, maybe even people with bad intentions. And then you learn that you just have to know better. You cannot stay naive, because naïveté would mean not being able to live.

So, in that sense, naïveté is also this: you have the privilege of trust, of being trustful towards other people, maybe?

/ But would that mean that this is something that's irreversibly lost once it's lost? Or is it a place that we can still try to inhabit?

○ I think, concerning trust, there's this idea that trust has – maybe not in every instance, but there is this notion of trust, and it's also similar to naïveté – that it has a posthumous character, as it's sometimes called in philosophy.

So you notice that you have trusted someone only after the trust is gone. And you notice that you have been naive only after you have, you know, been used or something. And I think that's interesting.

I think maybe, of course, you can regain trust in someone or in the world, but maybe there's also this notion that something has died. So the trust, or the naïveté, is gone.

And also, childlike naïveté: it's not something that we say of a child, that he or she is naive. We say that of adult people, that they have a childlike naïveté, because we expect adult people to know better. So there's a certain kind of asymmetry between ascribing naïveté to people, or to yourself.

To yourself, you can ascribe it maybe only retrospectively: "Oh, I have been so naive in that situation." But it would be maybe oxymoronic to say, "I'm really naive right now." So there's this, as I said, posthumous character of naïveté, maybe.

/ That's extremely interesting, I think. David, I wanted to ask you: Does this also resonate with your experience with regard to the avant-garde and Marxist philosophy? There is a lot of belief in that, I think. Sometimes it unfolds in a way that there's also a lot of...

* So I think what I was saying before is directly related to that somehow, and also to what you were saying now, in a different way. But I want to get back to this growing up and sort of understanding how naive we were. I think this is extremely interesting and extremely important, because indeed, you know, it's always when it's too late that you have the realization. It's not only post festum that you understand that you were naive, but it's always too late.

The moment of recognition, and how that relates to truth – what you were saying before – I was thinking that, you know, there's nothing greater than someone who naively desires the truth. What I mean by that is that people who can, when it's already too late, say, "how naive I was back then," what they've lost, if you will, is that burning desire. So actually, for me, my positive image of naïveté would be linked to a burning desire to know something that you don't know yet. And that's the thing you lose: you lose the impetus to go on.

And, you know, to give an example, and to bring this back to what you asked me about Marxism or aesthetics or whatever – Soviet this or that – there was this great moment in 1975 or '76, either the year I was born or the year after. There's a film that documents this, when the Mona Lisa was brought to Moscow, to the Pushkin Museum, for a short time. And it was a big deal because, you know, they had their collection of classic art, but they didn't usually have visiting exhibitions.

And of course, the whole Soviet Union knew – or knew little else – that the Mona Lisa was the greatest artwork of all time.

So there was really a line around the block. And Soviet television made this film about it, which is probably the kitschiest, weirdest film you could ever see. It really looks like a porno movie from the '70s. It has the music of a porno movie and the same kind of aesthetic.

/ It's a documentary.

* Yes, it's a quasi-documentary. People are just standing in line, waiting to see the Mona Lisa, and what happens to their faces when they see her. And, you know, this rapture of meeting the Mona Lisa, and all the projected desires onto her. There's something very perverse about the way it's filmed and the way it's done. But it doesn't change anything about this incredible desire that people had, you know, that they were inculcated with in socialist countries.

I mean, you know, this desire for the truth – the privileged truth that you would find through art. And it was something that, naively – how naive we were – we believed in. But that's actually the big difference between Soviet Marxism and Western Marxism: Soviet Marxism does still believe in that privileged truth that's accessible through art.

And we can argue whether that's a naive belief or not. You know, how naive we are. Yeah, probably.

/ But would it be right to say that this film, the way you described it, shows people queuing, where you can sense the excitement and the anticipation? And then perhaps you see some of the people who have seen the artwork, and there is a sort of post-coital, almost, sense that something has happened.

* It's like *A Thousand Plateaus* of desire, you know. They're all standing in line, and they're overjoyed – and this is Soviet television. There can be nothing, nothing like a letdown here. It's just going into outer space, basically, in the end.

And that's also quite, you know, a strange thing to watch these days. Also because there's the position of the camera, which is not naive, and which is, you know, making a bit of a joke. Because you don't film somebody's lips like that, right? You know, quivering at the...

/ Do you happen to remember the title? Maybe we can find the title. I'll show notes.

* It's online somewhere I can find it.

/ Raven, I wanted to ask you... It's the same question, and I think we're also so different. Would you say that being naive is inherently – as I think we've come to this point, maybe we can venture to say – that it's inherently tainted with a sense of loss, or something that happened too late, and something that we are only, like you said – I think it's a brilliant observation – able to notice retrospectively?

We never say that children are naive; I mean, that's the default state. We only use this to describe grown-up behavior, and quite usually, I would say, in a pejorative manner. So it already carries a built-in value judgment. And I think what we're looking for, what we're touching on now, is something that's positive about this notion.

□ Yeah, I think, you know, Jasmin said earlier too, about the possibility of saying, "I am naive." And I think there's something about that that speaks to the self – the self-awareness of being naive. I don't know if that is possible, right? Maybe part of it is that you are not aware that you are naive, and that's what naïveté is.

And it's really interesting then, thinking about what seems to be a paradox: gaining wisdom, so you are no longer naive, but at the same time, as you are seeking this truth, your world is becoming smaller, and you're setting up your own new naïveté, I suppose, with a very limited worldview about what is possible.

So, thinking back about the innocence that a child has – that it could be seen as the most expansive moment in one's life, where anything is possible and anything being told to you could be true.

/ Like the Santa Claus?

□ Like Santa Claus. Yeah. And so, just to think more about the positivity of the term – that it is a goal in itself to actually be in a position where everything could be possible. And yeah, in thinking about what is the opposite, I guess that brings up the negative connotation of being naive: thinking that you have attained the wisdom you were seeking.

/ A stupid person doesn't know that they're stupid, right? Maybe. But I also wanted to follow up on that, because we're meeting on the occasion of your exhibition. In my understanding, your practice carries a lot of – if not a willful attempt at being naive – then perhaps a reconsideration or challenge of certain set standards or what is accepted.

By this, I mean your engagement with classical music notation, vis-à-vis what you decide to do by implementing symbols, signs, and references. So yeah, I think I wanted to ask you quite straightforwardly: do you think this is a version of naïveté that you try to employ in your practice, or is that too much to say?

□ Yeah, I hadn't thought about it until, you know, preparing for this, I suppose. I was thinking about trying to find ways in which it relates to my practice. And I'll be thinking about that with the notation, because the notation is really just to solve the problems of music that Western notation can't convey to anybody who's playing it. And so sometimes it expands classical notation as well.

And I think there is this kind of naïveté among classical musicians who believe that the pinnacle of music-making is achieving virtuosity on their instrument, being able to play complex, fully notated music.

And yeah, I think complexity is a big part of some of that role, especially in Europe versus the United States. In the 20th century, you had more focus on complexity in Europe, whereas in the US you had more minimal gestures – John Cage, more chance-based approaches in composition.

Thinking about my own practice on Thursday, I'll be performing with electronics, and I often think about what that is. People ask: Is it improvised? Is it something planned? These solo performances consist of me bringing my tools. These tools are chosen because they're unwieldy. I know how they work, but I also know they might change every time I perform. These are effects pedals, microphones, different objects, mixers, and tape machines. I've chosen them because they're very unwieldy.

So I don't really know what they're going to do. I know they will work in a certain way, but there's no fixed outcome. There's a plan, I suppose, that I will turn them on, but I just don't know what's going to happen. And that's how I like to make music.

When I'm composing music, writing a score for somebody, that's a problem I have to solve – I'm writing the score to solve some kind of musical problem. But when I'm performing improvisations, alone or with others, I like to have these unwieldy situations where the problem is just figuring out where it's going to go next, and maybe correcting that if you will. It shouldn't have to be a problem to play music with your friends – that's not something to be solved.

So for me, it's just the unknowable about the situation I've set up on the table in front of me.

/ I think it's extremely interesting because we are far from the perhaps immediate association of a person being naive as someone who would gloss over things, who would look superficially at things, or not engage willfully. But I think of it as something that is an active cognitive process.

And I wanted to ask you about this. Do you think – because I think, I mean, all of us have thought about this meeting, and somehow we come to the table with certain ideas – that there's a certain potential for renewal in this idea of naïveté? Something that, of course, like you said, is always too late. But in seeking it, there is this potential, as you said, for looking at things from a genuinely different perspective.

Yeah, I would say it's a potential for renewal. I would call it that

○ Yes, I think maybe naïveté could also be something like a lack of reflection. But then, of course, when you go to the extreme, where you overreflect, you become doubtful, skeptical, paranoid. Then you seek a certain kind of naïveté, or at least – what I heard when you were talking, Raven – maybe a naïveté in the sense of intuition: going with your intuition, or also, again, trust. You don't know how, whether, or how all things work, but you trust that somehow it will work, and maybe you go with your intuition.

I think what gets lost in overreflecting is this intuitive access to the world, to engaging with the world. And then there's this other aspect: in the moment when it's too late, when you've been betrayed by someone, for example, you say, "I was so naïve." But you can decide for yourself: okay, I don't want my good picture of humanity to be destroyed by this one experience. I still want to be trusting in humanity or in people.

So you can maybe willfully decide not to overreflect, and to decide for a certain kind of naïveté — although, of course, I think it is a bit contradictory to say, "I want to be naive now." But in a less strong sense, you could maybe return to, or renew, a certain kind of good-mindedness towards the world, like you said.

/ What would you say, David? I think of this especially in relation to the Soviet avant-gardes, and the kind of what I would identify as willful naïveté — perhaps because, on the other hand, I would say it's a very self-righteous effort. I mean, I don't know what the motivation is, but the will to change the world, and to step into the world and into society with, I suppose, more good intentions than mad. It's a sort of willful inhabiting of this "I."

* I don't know. I think so. Anyway, to talk about the October Revolution and its implications is something very, very exotic today, first of all. It puts us all in a kind of strange position, naturally, of being — well, you know, not naive, but actually ignorant about what it was, because it's a long time ago somehow. There are lots of myths and stories out there about it. But what do we really know?

So that's the first problem. I'm almost reluctant to open that can of worms, but since we are, if we're going to go there, we can maybe talk generally about exactly what art is, you know. One thing that has always fascinated me about the October Revolution and everything that happened in the 20th century is that this issue — and it's a problem in all societies all over the world, it's a global problem — is that art, until the 20th century, was something really completely elitist, if you talk about high art.

So what you were talking about before, about musical notation: of course, this existed only for the upper middle class. It was needed for them to entertain themselves, like Netflix or something. You needed this notation so that the daughter of the house could play Schubert.

* It's a sad form of democratization of, you know, Schubert. That wasn't really what it was for, although he was writing this for that. So, you know, he was not naive either in writing this music that sounds so beautiful, for example, and just improvising here.

But I think what happened — what's so incredible in these moments after 1917, and maybe in other similar moments in history that you could put into a kind of revolutionary sequence — is that there's a huge interest from people who had no interest and no access to culture previously, and suddenly they look at it and they want something from it.

And it's always a big question: Can culture provide this?

So maybe the desire is too great, and actually culture itself – and professionals who are no longer naive – will say that culture cannot provide any of this.

/ But would you say it's a naive desire? Perhaps It's interesting to think.

* It's interesting, it's interesting. I'm very much with Raven here – I really like this image of a child. What's great about children is that, first of all, anything is possible, and second, anything is true. So there's this incredible openness, and also this incredible responsibility: when something becomes true or false in that proposition, it really means something. It's the moment where meaning happens.

To say, "Oh, I was so naive," is almost from another position, where no meaning is possible anymore – where you're blocked, and nothing is possible. "I was so naive" – you said this and that and that and this.

I always have to say that the avant-garde never fascinated me. What never fascinated me was the jaded gesture of someone trying to break with painterly culture. For example, Malevich saying, "All painterly culture..." This is also sophisticated; he was a participant in that painterly culture.

/ Beneficiary of it.

* He wanted to be naive, or wanted to be childlike – wanting to erase everything he knew, but at the same time retaining his privileges. So that never really interested me so much. I was always more interested in the incredible pressure of all these people coming from, you know, the middle of nowhere, wanting something from art that other people would already dismiss: "Oh, how boring. Who wants to listen? Who wants to listen to... I don't know, Mozart anymore?"

Someone who's all into Stravinsky and Prokofiev might think that, and yet maybe some workers actually want *Figaro* for the first time. They can't help themselves. And I always thought that was the more interesting part, because it also puts us, with our avant-garde or post-avant-garde practices, in a very tricky position.

These are ourselves. And, like you were saying before, you're trying to perfect your craft as a person working in a post-avant-garde field – honestly trying to re-attain some position of knowledge, and then finding that it's also somewhat futile at a point, having to build encumbrances for yourself, and so on. I completely sympathize, and yeah, often find myself doing similar things.

/ Now, I thank you, because for myself, as a Polish person – at least the way I understood it when I was still at the Academy – it's a story of disappointments. It's a story of undelivered promises. But I think it's very interesting to look at it the way you're saying.

You're not interested in that kind of idea – the prophetic, mythical presence of an artist – but rather in the feeling it creates: the genuine interest that perhaps people want to participate in this moment, when culture becomes, well, if not universal, then definitely way more accessible than it used to be. I can't say that.

So I find it extremely interesting. But what I'm thinking of now is: if we think of being naive as we were talking about it, I think there is a very strong component of intuition, like you said, Jasmin, and of, if not challenging, then perhaps opening oneself to way more opportunities or readings.

But then, what about the idea of verifiability? Isn't this something close to that – this kind of experiment that can no longer be replicated, maybe? What would you say?

Yes, I think it's because it's a different kind of science, I would say.

○ So maybe also what David just said: there is certainly a romanticization of naïveté, and that comes from a very arrogant place, and at the same time, maybe a colonizing view, when you say, "Okay, only Western education is real education." So whoever lacks that education is naive or innocent or doesn't know something. Meanwhile, there are completely other forms of knowledge that are just not acknowledged as knowledge, or as education.

Of course, there is something to knowledge in a more narrative, oral sense. And because European and Western cultures are so fixated on written things, they only acknowledge written forms as knowledge. At the same time, there is something necessary about reproducing knowledge, especially in the context of Western science, in empirical experiments – sometimes in social sciences as well.

When they do qualitative research, and there are different kinds of methods and ways of asking questions to people conducting the experiments, they often use students in the early stages of their career or program because they are not biased. There's a very positive aspect of not knowing things: being unbiased, maybe naive about methods and how to conduct research properly. That actually can result in greater knowledge afterward, or in a more objective, more neutral knowledge, because they don't yet know how, according to this school of thinking or methodology, they are supposed to ask a question. That makes it more basic, or more naïve, but in the end it will be better for knowledge production.

/ Yeah, but then we're very close to this idea of, you know, "move fast and break things" – just being reckless, perhaps, which also has its own consequences. But I'm very much interested in what you're saying. I know personally a few people who are, surprisingly to me, in very high-ranking positions in finance, and they absolutely do not come from a financial background. The way they were accepted to their posts, and the way they were tested, was absolutely not immediately relevant to the economy or the economic system as we understand it.

So I think this is very much in play. It's yet another understanding of being naive, perhaps, that we carry unknowingly.

○ Again, I think it's also apparent in the notion of naive art, right? Which is, of course, highly problematic. But this idea of "you have not been spoiled or ruined by knowing, by knowledge" – that you have not been spoiled by artistic methods or painting techniques, or so.

★ Interesting, because, you know, I'm just thinking about different artistic practices and what's spoiled and what's not. I'm also a musician, somehow, and I've been playing my whole life. I used to be against knowledge in a way – musical knowledge, at least. I just wanted to play and be true to the original naive beauty of my playing.

But I got extremely bored with it at some point. Suddenly, I understood that the knowledge I had – out of a position of privilege – I had really rejected. I didn't even want to read about it. Suddenly, you find yourself wanting to study music theory, wanting to learn all this, to have all the chops – even if you're never going to use it. You know that, but you still want to. And that was actually the first time I had some energy again about all of that.

I've got to say, it works that way in other fields too.

/ And you started to to learn those things and you.

★ Yeah, the second you start to reject knowledge because you think you know it all, or you think you don't need it – and who needs that anyway? Why would you? You put yourself in the position of a kind of superior, actually. You think you're being original and true to your own subjectivity, but what you're actually doing is just being stupid. And I say that about myself, not about you.

/ But it's not about thinking you know it. It's also about thinking you can always access it, right? I think it's like – it's always there, you know. One day, everything happens. We don't die, we do everything. It's just that we don't realize there will never be a single moment to fully reach for this. And I find that extremely interesting.

□ Yeah. I mean, David reminded me of something that happens in my own practice. People ask me all the time, you know, "What are you listening to?" And sometimes I tell them I'm not listening to anybody else's music because I have a deadline for the project I'm working on. If I listen to that person's music, I'm afraid it'll end up in this new thing I'm creating. So I try to isolate myself to finish the project.

But that is another kind of self-imposed naïveté. And then, when the project is done, I do crave it: "What should I be listening to?" So it's kind of back and forth too. I'm purposefully isolating myself from this knowledge. I could be listening, but I don't. I won't even go see live music because I'm afraid something will encroach, or I'll become too influenced by it, or distracted.

○ That's really interesting, because in the beginning you said naïveté is all about community, and now it's about isolation. I mean, I totally relate — it has both aspects.

/ That is extremely interesting, and I have to say — that's how it is. I have no artworks at home. I just find it extremely distracting. It's such a load of energy that I identify with them that I'd rather not. I appreciate — I mean, I would go on a Sunday, I would go and look at stuff — but I just feel that this is something so intense. When I'm also in the midst of a creative process, trying to write or work with other artists, it feels like such a strong presence.

Raven, I wanted to ask you — maybe not so much to apply the idea of being naive, but I think there is something in this particular work, or this series *For Zitkála-Šá*, because it's an homage to that one person, but also to other people. I wanted to invite you to say a few words about this series. I'm also curious about this rift in her biography. I think there is something extremely strong there, which I wouldn't call naive, but I think she put a huge effort into her life to work around the idea of being perhaps forcibly taught, or perhaps having to understand things differently. I find that very productive.

Perhaps you would like to expand on that, and maybe just say a few words about the work itself so that we could all understand.

□ Yeah, the work upstairs is a series of graphic notated scores, and the series is called *For Zitkála-Šá*. I had come upon Zitkála-Šá in research years ago and discovered that she had written an opera in the 1930s. Zitkála-Šá is a Native American woman from the Dakota tribe. The only thing I initially found about her was that she had made this opera, notated in Western notation. It was also said that the work was co-composed with a man — I can't remember his name — so they had a co-credit for the opera.

I was trying to find the score and researching her life, and I found all these other amazing things she had done that she wasn't necessarily known for. She had written poetry and fiction, and many political essays on the state of American Indian people at the turn of the century. She was a musician, she taught violin, and she was also an activist who helped found the National Congress of the American Indian, which still exists today.

But it was complicated too. She was, for instance, an early advocate for Native American people's right to vote, and she would go around to different communities speaking about this. Yet, at the same time, some Native communities were saying, "I don't want the right to vote. I don't even want to be part of this country. Why are you representing this country and trying to get us to opt into this system?" She was also opposed to some of the plant usage that certain tribes were using, such as peyote, which she thought was destructive. So she was a complicated figure within the Native American community at that time, underappreciated and underrepresented.

It has only been recently that more writings about her work have appeared, though the musical work remains mysterious. She was classically trained and could read music notation, but there are no other known compositions aside from this Sundance opera. There was also an assumption – or had been an assumption – that the man she collaborated with actually wrote it, and she only sang the songs for him. No one knows if that's the case. So her musical work was often diminished or attributed to him.

I thought about writing an opera about her, or some other vocal work, but I decided that a series of scores would better acknowledge contemporary Indigenous women in North America who are navigating the 21st century, working in experimental music, and also engaged in activism and other creative pursuits. Those are the 12 scores on the wall. They all include references to tribal geometries from the tribes of the women, numerologies, and other actions in the pieces that perhaps replicate some of the work they do. You'll also see references to classical music notation, because each woman also works with classical notation in some way.

I think the scores themselves have the potential to be very mysterious, but at the same time there are instructions to share with people what they are about and how to perform them. There's an invitation for anyone to perform them – you don't even need mastery of an instrument. One of the pieces is for lamps and radios, moving around a space or even a country, turning them on and off. A lot of my scores are invitations for people at any level to engage with the work.

I've tried to create a large spectrum with this. I even have works for kids – for example, a piece for drums that children can play. And the kids often do it better than adults, because it's meant to allow variation in what they play. It's like a broken telephone: I hit the drum, then you hit it, and it continues around. Adults take it too seriously; they try to replicate exactly. The more “masterful” the drummer, the more accurately they try to reproduce it, whereas kids turn it into a playful mimicry.

Even a teasing, you know. I play something and you do it, maybe even making the same funny face I make when I do it. The kids end up doing this, and it turns into a much more expansive piece as a result.

/ What do you think? I'm thinking about the notion, David, of accessibility versus jadedness in our industry. I very consciously refuse to use the term “art world” because I'm quite allergic to the idea. I mean, we have the music industry, we have the film industry, and I firmly believe that this is nothing less than an industry that we are complicit in.

But then, how do we make things accessible? How do we find this energy that you, Raven, just mentioned? I'm thinking, David, if there's an example of a work, an institution, or something that comes to your mind.

* Not necessarily, but there are – I think what Raven was just saying. And there are countless instances in any practice where you actually manage to reclaim, to open up new possibilities.

You regain some of that and fight against jadedness. If we were all just jaded and energyless, it wouldn't work, right? There would be none of this. But it's more a question of society and what happens outside artistic practices. What happens with an audience? Who is this even for? What is it done for? When does a community arise around the work? What kind of community is it?

It gets really complicated, and you have to start talking about a larger politics. Why do people prefer not to know any of this stuff, not to be involved, and just not care? It's not just us in a defensive position — it's a whole system of relations, a totality of relations. And then you go in the opposite direction of what we would want as artists. It's almost impossible to work in this paranoid mode: constantly looking over your shoulder like Benjamin's Angel of History, seeing nothing but ruins and not looking forward at all. That's the most depressing thing on earth. After several decades in this field, that's my biggest fear.

To be able to turn your head, look forward, and have an open road before you is incredible. You don't want to be encumbered by the feeling of "I know it all." You want to hear a musical piece or look at a work you've seen a thousand times as if you've never seen it before. Many practices aim to approximate that.

The bigger problem is how to get it out there and involve other people, and that's very hard work. Too few people do it. Among curators, not enough are doing the hard legwork. Among artists, it's more common because most studio practices aren't completely self-contained. You're forced to build a community and a context where something becomes possible, instead of being locked in mutual recriminations and paranoia.

The general paranoid tenor of our time makes this really hard. It also makes it easier to be naive toward culture from a position of "I don't want to know anything about that. I don't go to museums. I don't go to shows. I don't read books. I just watch Netflix and go to sleep." That's the bad kind of naïveté — pretending to be a child who needs to be spoon-fed all information. This is the kind of naive that actually knows it's doing wrong.

It's hard for me to talk at the moment without bringing it down to basic political realities. We've been having such an abstract conversation, but I deal with people from Russia and Israel, and it's hard to talk without addressing what's happening across those borders. Ignoring it is a form of bad naïveté: "Let's talk about the weather, birds and bees, nothing serious." That fake childishness is also tied to a kind of fascist mentality, and I find that very interesting.

/ Like happy-go-lucky?

* Like, "If the sun is shining and it was the best time of my life, and if Hitler hadn't killed all the Jews, it would still have been a great memory." For a lot of Germans who grew up young when that was happening, that's what it was — being

protected and insulated, being told, “No, no, no, you don’t see the full picture, and you don’t have to. We’ll take care of you,” in this kind of... in German, you know, just ensconcing people

□ I guess there's also the other side of that. They're completely nihilist, like, there is no solution. So let's not talk about it. Let's see... it's true. We're not going to ever learn anything about this. It's all going to hell, and there's no solution. So, conversation over, you know... that... there's that too. You know, where they think that nothing is going to resolve.

/ No, the reason I'm asking this question is I'm also asking myself about being complicit in this industry—like, how we could do a better job—because I think artists are one of the few last standing who are not jaded, and they have almost a privilege, I would say. But the rest of this industry is making it very difficult, in my understanding, to do their job in the sense of having the energy. And paradoxically, David, I wouldn't agree with you because I think there's a very weird thing: jadedness does come hand in hand with energy in this industry, quite a lot of it. And this is the biggest danger, because there are a lot of people who are disillusioned in this—they're still very, very active. So this is what I was getting at.

* Kind of Tony Blair energy, the ghoulish energy.

/ It is a zombie energy.

* Nobody remembers Tony Blair, but...

/ What we're talking about—the exhibition done by Jeremy at the invitation of Christoph, your exhibition, Raven—I think those are really different points of access, and something that's genuinely outside of, like, the manual as we have come to understand it. That's why I find it very precious. But yet, maybe this is what it is. Maybe it just doesn't happen very often. But then, am I jaded in saying that? I might be.

Jasmin, I wanted to ask you how you, as perhaps not so directly complicit—but you also studied art history as a not-so-directly-complicit person—look at this, meaning the infrastructure and the access, and how we try to mediate the work of artists and the job we're doing.

○ I worked as an art mediator in some institutions, and what I think is so special about art—or maybe that's only to me—is that it is not this kind of “everything has to be clear and there is one definite answer,” as it is in many other fields, or even in other museums, where they explain nature or technology or so. These have very different approaches in how they show things and explain things to visitors. And in art, things are a bit more open-ended, maybe.

But of course, once I was writing these brochures for the visitors of an art exhibition, and I was writing them together with colleagues, and it was awful.

It was not understandable at all. It was very artsy language that sounded sophisticated but didn't explain anything, especially not to someone outside of—I use the word “artworld” now—working in the industry.

And so, I think that is also maybe the difficulty of mediating art: you keep it a little bit open-ended, in the sense that it can mean different things to different spectators. At the same time, you have to give some hints, especially with modern or contemporary art, where you have to have some knowledge, even of the theoretical backgrounds of the discussions that were taking place at the time—or are taking place now. Sometimes contemporary artworks are very political, and they refer to very specific political events that you maybe don't know about. And just knowing about the event can open up the artwork like a key—like, maybe, as you, Raven, said about your artwork upstairs: you have a little legend that tells you how to read the notation.

I found that very interesting because the symbols up there—geometrical symbols—looked very mysterious. But once you have the key, it's very intuitive; it's very easy to understand how they, or at least some parts of it, are to be read. So, I think this is what it means to mediate art: you have to give some keys, and maybe they wouldn't work for everyone, but they have to open things up a little bit, but not too much. Also, because this is so nice about art: everyone can relate to it, in principle at least, and see different things in it, maybe. But yeah, I'm still sort of an outsider, so maybe you see these things very differently.

★ I agree. I think there's an interesting thing here, though, that you just referred to, which is: because things have to be kept open and sort of vague, you need a really complicated, vague language to describe that—which actually closes things completely and makes them inaccessible. This is—I really want to dwell on that for a second—because I think it's the paradox that we sort of live in. And it's also a bit of a social paradox, really, because on the one hand there's this desire, you know, like “come and see the work,” and on the other hand, “no, no, but you won't understand it.” This is the kind of weird situation that we're in somehow, always.

And I think, I mean, you know, for curators, an art mediator is probably the most useful thing to do is to force themselves, at least once in their life, to really force themselves to write simple English. There's this thing called simple English—there's even a whole Wikipedia written in simple English—where you prohibit yourself from using fancy words and you explain everything. For example, you don't say, “Oh, this work refers to the commodity form,” or something like that. You explain: “What's a commodity? What's the commodity form? When did this go... you know, as this philosopher says,” and so on.

If you start really mediating all bits of it, instead of just glossing over it and hoping that people will sensually engage with the work—which, I think, is actually another really terrible thing—you come to a museum or a show and there are no labels, no annotations, nothing, no contextualization.

And you'd really treat people like they're stupid, because like, "Why would I put this on the wall? If you read it, you won't even understand it." So maybe you can understand a little bit, like the feeling, of course—not as much as the artist. And that, I think, is the most disdainful of all moves: just to eliminate the whole discourse entirely.

I think it is, though, what it creates—the whole system of art mediation that we're stuck with, in a way, creates the situation of people who are actually very naive about older art history that isn't so vague and isn't so open-ended. All that stuff that we had to study when we were studying art history... actually, now nobody knows it, right? Nobody even gives a thought to it: problems of realist painting, and so on. Or in classical music, it's similar: people are not invested in understanding.

/ It's probably not even in the language models. It's probably so remote to knowledge that even, you know, those AI models...

* You can't.

/ It's ancient knowledge.

* It's very hard to get ChatGPT to draw. That's a really interesting thing. It's like—I've been trying to tell ChatGPT to make a drawing of this and that, you know, what to do, and it's... an idiot. It doesn't know anything about that. It can write you a kind of postmodern text—fine, that's perfect, better than humans, you know—but not with figurative art, for example.

And that's an interesting thing because people are naive about the laws of those things. And those were very, you know, propositionally law-based systems somehow, where if you didn't know the rule, you wouldn't... people would look at you... I mean, at some point in history, you could probably get burned at the stake for pointing out a certain interval by accident. And you play the 5th—that's it, you're out. You know? But no, I mean, it's true.

But then, you know, now who would know any of this? Who would appreciate it? And who would have the language to talk about it? We have the language to talk about some kind of postmodern or modernist key, but so much knowledge has been lost.

So, seeing that, there's also what I find really problematic: there's a discourse that comes from the cultural world saying, "Oh, all of that knowledge is harmful, actually," because it dominated the world until the early 20th century as this incredibly repressive, Eurocentric system—and yes, all true. But if you don't know something, how can it repress you? This is a really interesting question. If you declare something harmful from the start and push it out of sight and mind, you end up truly naive about the violence it caused, because you have no way to appraise or understand it at all.

I think culturally, we are much more discursively advanced—that only really happened in the last 10 or 15 years. But for 100 years or so, all of this mimetic,

classical, harmony-based, rule-based tradition had already eroded fully by the early 20th century. Nobody believed in it at all, except some naive workers trying to get hold of some kind of culture, any culture.

That's an interesting thing that we lack. Every time you go into a museum, like a museum of classical art, with contemporary art people, and look at a painting... it's kind of weird, if you studied art history, to hear some of the things people say—really, about Bruegel, or Rembrandt, or whatever. Things that people don't know. For example, the difference between *alla prima* and a *grisaille*-based painting. This stuff seems, if you studied art history, like kindergarten-level problematic.

/ I don't think so, but I think it's one of the things that we pretend to know. That's the crux of the matter. It's this kind of knowledge that is, again, somewhere. I mean, you think you'll reach for it when you need it, but it turns out you don't necessarily need to reach for it. It doesn't mean you know things. It's like those basic— as much as I understand what you're saying—kind of basic things that come before the discourse. I don't think they are common knowledge, even among art historians. I don't think they are.

* But like, even the ability just to say, because there was this thing in the beginning of the 2000s—there was this incredible fetishization. You were talking before about naive art and naive painting, where, you know, any painting was good because it was like the return of painting. And, oh yeah, somebody still paints. And it could be naive, or better in a way—it just, you know, as long as it's colored.

And to people who come from cultures where painting was valorized because it was politically important, especially in Eastern Europe and Russia, painting was almost like writing: to make an important painting was to write a novel. It was really politically fetishized. And the quality—the formal quality—was important, for what that's worth. And they were bigger formalists in some ways than Western artists, in their figurative world,

/ But no longer so. You think we you think we miss this, kind of subconsciously?

* I do, yeah. I mean, I miss the—let's say—the understanding that this is shit and this is not: like, the ability to differentiate between something that's truly just awful.

/ And how did you learn the difference?

* I don't think I ever really did, fully, I mean.

/ OK, you're being humble, but I can speak about myself, and then let's see what you say to that. Because I felt I have been bombarded with all of those masterpieces for years and years. And when I saw something that's not in the handbook, I was completely helpless. I couldn't see the scale, I couldn't see.

Another thing is, as many of my friends who work in this industry, they wanted to be artists, but they know how much it takes, what an effort it is to create something. And they are very quick to assess if something is perhaps of quality or not. But for me, it took a long time, because I just had to see a lot of haphazardly created stuff to understand. And I still—modestly, as you said—I would still not say I have this skill, but I had to have a serious reality check to understand what I have been equipped with.

Perhaps I could relate to you, Raven. It's like you're being bombarded with some kind of knowledge, and what does this do to you in the end? Because it changes you. But in what way? You would never understand until you are somehow confronted with perhaps the opposite of it, or a lack of it, or the need to deploy it in a different way. Yeah.

○ When I studied art history in Kassel, the historians—the theoretical art historians—were in the same building as the artists. And what was really interesting to me was when we had a project together with the artists, and we were supposed to write texts for the artworks, but we were also accompanying the process of how the artworks were made. I was very surprised by how rough the feedback was.

When the artwork was still in process, everyone discussed it openly and assessed it, evaluated it—and it was kind of a rough tone, very honest and open, which is, of course, necessary, I guess. But I wasn't aware of that; I was only ever confronted with the perfect result. When you study art history, it's about these high-culture products and never really the making. You see some sketches, of course, but often only from masters.

So, this was something I really learned in this project: the kinds of difficulties artists confront while making their artwork, and how you just see, “OK, this works, this doesn't work.” And you think, “I couldn't say that at this moment, at this stage, because it's unfinished, it's undone.” It was very interesting to see the feedback—how quickly they could assess which direction the artwork could go or could not go.

And then, of course, maybe this again goes back to our starting point: in what sense knowledge can at the same time be a burden. Maybe when you're too technical or stubborn, sticking strictly to a textbook, that could be a burden. But at the same time, you need to know something to assess and evaluate an artwork properly. Naïveté can be both bad and good, I guess.

/ So what we're saying is that knowledge is in some kind of weird dynamic with being naïve—it could kind of dismantle it eventually. I don't know. I'm thinking: is knowledge dangerous?

* Knowledge is always dangerous. No, I mean, some forms of knowledge can be really paralyzing, right? There are some things that people seemingly feel the need to protect themselves from. I mean, how do you... I don't know how it is.

My dad lives in the United States, in New Jersey, and I have the feeling that he's only able to survive this moment by sort of half-lobotomizing himself in certain directions—like just cutting off certain parts of his brain and preventing them from operating.

And I don't know... I mean, it's really hard, especially with the finer things in life, to continue with all that—like writing a novel or translating poetry, or... how are you going to do it? Not that my dad is doing that, but you know, somebody who does—how do you compose music in a moment when people are getting arrested next door? That's very, very hard, actually, to do. And in that, it becomes heroic.

/ In a way.

* Because, you know, the easiest thing of all is just to say, “You know what, I'm going to bed. I can't work anymore. The war is on. That's it.” You know? So I think there it becomes a real skill to do this—that kind of harmful, optimistic move—and to go full on into artistic autonomy. It's very tempting, and it'll make people a lot angrier at us socially.

I think that's what's happening now: a lot of people are like, “I have to keep going.” So you retreat back into your own thing: “I don't want to know about any of this. I don't want to know about that.” And then people are looking at you like, “But just look at the world! What are you doing, and why are you doing only this?” So I think there's a whole new set of problems that comes up.

□ Yeah, there are two things—well, a few things happening. I mean, as it relates to the US and Trump, and as you're telling the story of your father: the first kind of shielding that has happened is that this is already the second term. Everyone's fatigued from having to even talk about this guy.

But then what's now coming up, especially with younger people, is that everything is a lie or everything is AI-generated. This video you saw of something happening—it's fake, it's not real, somebody made it with AI. If you read the comments on almost any video you see online, it's “AI.” Kids will say, “It's AI, this isn't real.”

So this is a second shield for dealing with this as well—for staying naive—of assuming either there's not enough information and there never will be, or that it's all going to hell and there's no chance of anything being decoded, no truth is going to be revealed. And that's the scary thing. I mean, at least where we're at, this is the next kind of stage of shields. Yeah—self-imposed shields.

○ Would you say then that we could, like going back to the concept of naïveté, that we could say that a whole time or a whole generation or *Zeitgeist* could be more naive than another one, like one is very disillusioned or something and the other one is more naive maybe?

□ Yeah, I think it's compounded, maybe, with an older generation's fatigue. Yeah, the result with the next generation is this hopelessness that anything can be uncovered or solved.

* Some, I think for sure. I mean, if I think of the generation of the '60s or whatever—which definitely varied from country to country, right—but like, you think about people who experienced the '60s in Germany, which were specific because of all the ex-Nazis and Nazi parents and grandparents around, or the '60s in the socialist world, which were also specific because of Stalinism and how people really were.

I think in the US, people thought of it as a kind of social revolution, sexual revolution, whatever. But I don't think it was as cosmic an event as in the socialist countries—people there, for sure, were different. And you see some of that in, like, a Tarkovsky movie or something. If you watch a bit of that, you can sort of feel it. That's a naive society in that sense—also naively embracing capitalism, for example.

I mean, if we can talk beyond all the intellectual stuff for a second, that's what this is about a lot of the time: people buying into something that they actually like. Should you have been duped? You've been tricked. People were very naive about that. They thought all their dreams would come true.

/ And they did. I would say—I mean, I appreciate a lot of what you just said—but from my perspective, if we apply this term to recent history, I would say that for a Polish person, what started in the Northeast in the 2000s was the period of naïveté. We really thought... And of course, let's not bring Fukuyama into this, but we really thought nothing was going to get worse. Everything was just going to get gradually, slowly better. Maybe there was a war or two somewhere on TV, but you could just switch it off, no problem.

This was the biggest naïveté of the generation of the '80s. I would say we bought into the idea that, you know, the country sends a little bit of money into some unknown, remote place called Brussels, and all of a sudden you have a highway. Well, that happened more than once. But then it turned out that reality was way more complicated, and it was built on the backs of a lot of people.

And this current... I mean, recently, the right-wing government that has been in power in Poland was a democratically elected government by the people—mostly those who voted for it. I spent quite some time thinking about this. I would say it was very much along the lines of how Brexit voters voted: big cities, so the center-left or center parties—and everything else was just a huge backlash and a surprise to everyone.

And I think, if we are talking about naïveté in recent history, and this kind of negative connotation of it, I would say the last two decades in Europe were brutal.

So, again, I'd like to say thank you to everyone for joining this discussion.

It's been a pleasure. With us today are Raven Chacon, David Riff, Jasmin Trächtler, and I'd also like to thank Christoph Platz and Lara Favaretto, whose invitation brought us together today. My name is Krzysztof Kościuczuk, and I wish everyone a very good afternoon. Thank you.

* Thank you.