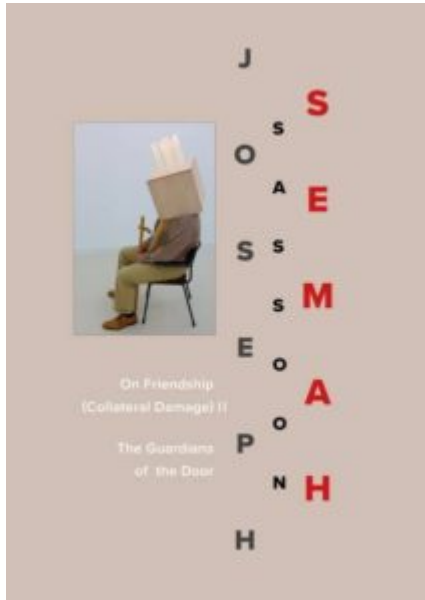


Wanneer kunst religie en politiek raakt



It is precisely this balance between exile and the emotion of the privileged which forms the unique originality of our 'Breathing in Reverse'. As this will be clear already, there is no past or future in Exile, only an immediate present.

Op 21 februari 2007 was ik op uitnodiging van Joseph Semah aanwezig bij de lancering van zijn kunstproject Next Year in Jerusalem: *Ein Projekt in 12 Kirchen in Niedersachsen* in de Markuskirche Hannover. Hem was gevraagd in dialoog te gaan met twaalf kerkgebouwen in Niedersachsen, van Hannover tot Osnabrück, vanuit het idee dat hedendaagse kunst het geloof kan verdiepen en extra aandacht kan genereren.

“Es sind vor allem künstlerische Äußerungen gewesen, die unsere Kultur geprägt, weiterentwickelt und immer wieder auch herausgefordert haben,” sprak de toenmalige Landesbischöfin Dr. Margot Käßmann, onder wier patronaat het kunstproject stond.

Hoe moeilijk het is echt in gesprek te gaan met de ander, bleek tijdens Joseph Semahs performance in de City Kirche St. Jacobi in Hildesheim. Tussen tweeëntwintig blauwe bergen (het aantal refereert aan de tweeëntwintig letters van het Hebreeuwse alfabet) bewogen zich, rug aan rug, een bisschop, een imam en Joseph Semah, respectievelijk citerend uit de Bijbel, de Koran en de Thora. Deze blauwe bergen hadden al eerder gefigureerd in het buitenproject *HaR VeKaCh-ChOL TzILO* (A Mountain and Its Blue Shadow, 1987). **[i]**

In Hildesheim werd het tussen de blauwe bergen een heel getrek en geduw, waarbij soms het Hebreeuwse, dan weer het Duitse of het harmonieuze Arabische

gezing domineerde. En heel soms kon je in de kakofonie van de stemmen een nieuwe versie beluisteren, een fascinerend geheel. Na de indrukwekkende interventie in de kerk werd de alledaagse realiteit meteen weer zichtbaar: tot een echt gesprek tussen de bisschop en de imam wilde het niet komen. Angst voor de ander en gebrek aan kennis leek het onmogelijk te maken.

Ik heb Joseph Semah steeds beter leren kennen in dat wat hem drijft. Zijn filosofische, theologische, politiek-culturele onderzoek is verbonden aan de positie van de ander, in zijn geval de derde ballingschap: Irak, Israël en het Westen.

“De gast (in ballingschap) in onszelf is vóór alles een kunstenaar met woorden, omdat woorden het medium zijn waarmee hij zijn naam heeft leren verheimelijken, zijn twijfel verbergen, en zijn angsten verminderen door zijn eigen behoefte om te participeren in het westerse paradigma te bekritisieren.

Maar de gast in ballingschap zal altijd blijven verlangen naar de nostalgie van een verloren paradijs. De westerse kunstgeschiedenis wordt gedomineerd door de bronnen en betekenis van de christelijke erfenis. Als je je dat realiseert dan wordt het evident dat het oeuvre van kunstenaars dat onderdeel is van het westerse paradigma vanuit die erfenis wordt gelezen, getoond en geïnterpreteerd. De kunstwerken in het publieke domein zijn ‘geritualiseerd’ en verbonden met een bepaalde ‘heilige’ tekst. Dat maakt het kunstwerk gelijktijdig leesbaar maar ook schimmig en diffuus.

Door ‘versluiert’ uit deze christelijke bronnen te putten, ze onzichtbaar te maken, blijft het christendom een grote rol spelen in de maatschappelijke, culturele en politieke context. In deze context wordt het onoplosbare dilemma van de gast manifest. Enerzijds wordt hij gedwongen te zwijgen over zijn hoogstpersoonlijke wijze van ‘lezen’, anderzijds maakt hij gebruik van de westerse tactiek om opgemerkt te worden zonder te worden ontdekt.” **[ii]**

De ‘nieuwkomer’ voelt zich niet erkend en blijft een gast in ballingschap.

Semah gaat nadrukkelijk wel in gesprek met de ander, het meest letterlijk in zijn performances. Ook in *Breathing in Reverse* (Galerie Ferdinand van Dielen - d’Eendt, 23-2- 2008), waar vertegenwoordigers van de monotheïstische religies gelijktijdig voordragen uit Spinoza’s *Tractatus theologico-politicus*.

In de performance *72 Privileges* [.....]: die hij speciaal ontwikkelde voor de Kochi-Muziris Biennale, India (2012-13) gingen een boeddhist, een moslim, een Zarathustra, een hindoe, een jood, een katholiek, een humanist en de curator in dialoog, gevolgd door een artistieke interventie met tweeënzeventig kinderen.

Ook in zijn teksten en verschillende kunstwerken zoekt Joseph Semah het gesprek op: reflecties op o.a. Albrecht Dürer, Kazimir Malevich, El Lissitzky, Barnett Newman, Piet Mondriaan, Joseph Beuys, maar ook Martin Heidegger en Paul Celan. Hij verzamelt argumenten voor zijn these dat hun werk te eenzijdig wordt geanalyseerd door de kunstwereld, namelijk vanuit een dominante christelijke invalshoek waardoor hun werk onderbelicht blijft.

Joseph Semah bestudeert en onderzoekt al meer dan dertig jaar de relatie tussen het jodendom en het christendom en de bronnen van de westerse kunst- en cultuurgeschiedenis. Een omvangrijk en interdisciplinair onderzoek, waarbij hij kunst met andere terreinen, religie, politiek, filosofie, wetenschap, in contact brengt. Met de resultaten uit dit onderzoek brengt Semah 'correcties' aan op de geschiedschrijving van de kunstgeschiedenis, filosofie en de theologie.

In het project *The Wandering Jew / The Wondering Christian* (Universiteit Leiden, LAK Gallery 1998) staan de misverstanden in de relatie jodendom en het christendom centraal, met name in de reformistische periode die geen ruimte bood voor andere geloven dan het christelijke. Semah benadrukt de zwarte, destructieve kant van Maarten Luther, die andersgelovigen (joden) uitsloot.

Het embleem van de haas in de westerse iconografie gebruikt Semah als illustratie van het 'misverstand' tussen het jodendom en christendom, waarbij de jood wordt gesymboliseerd door de haas (een symbool dat veelvuldig is gebruikt door Hitler).

Luthers gedrukte teksten werden ruim verspreid in Europa. Hij schreef vlak voor zijn dood heftige, antisemitische pamfletten: in 1543 verscheen *Von den Juden und ihren Lügen*, dat in zijn tijd, maar ook voor Hitler een bron van inspiratie was. Ook nu nog speelt de haas een belangrijk rol in met name de Duitse cultuur: in het werk van b.v. Joseph Beuys, het meest pregnant in zijn 'Aktion' uit 1965 *Wie man dem toten Hasen die Bilder erklärt*.

In het project *On Friendship / (Collateral Damage) II - The Guardians of the Door* (2017) zijn de viering van 500 jaar reformatie en Maarten Luther het beginpunt. Joseph Semah gaat opnieuw in gesprek met Luther maar ook andere denkers, kunstenaars en religieuze vertegenwoordigers worden uitgenodigd te participeren in rondetafelgesprekken, installaties en performances en tentoonstellingen. De gelijknamige publicatie werd op 20 oktober 2017 in het Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam gepresenteerd. **[iii]**

De hoofdlocatie is De Nieuwe Kerk in Amsterdam, waar in 1948 de oprichtingsvergadering van de Wereldraad van Kerken plaatsvond. Doel was alle christelijke kerken te verenigen, maar zo vlak na de Tweede Wereldoorlog stond vanzelfsprekend ook het antisemitisme binnen het christendom hoog op de agenda. Joseph Semah is gevraagd artistiek te reflecteren op 500 jaar reformatie en Luther.

Joseph Semah is geen onbekende van De Nieuwe Kerk: in 1991 participeerde hij in de tentoonstelling *FUENTE* (met o.a. Marina Abramovic, Bill Viola en Daniel Libeskind, 1991) en meer recent in de tentoonstelling *Jodendom. Een wereld vol verhalen* (2011).

In *FUENTE* herschikt Semah in zijn installatie *Correction IV* (ijzer, schapenhersenen in brons gegoten, 200 cm hoog, diameter 300, in vier delen) de plattegrond van De Nieuwe Kerk (voor Semah een representatie van de schedel van een slang, zoals men kan zien in diverse plattegronden van Gotische kerken) door de vier pilaren, die het centrum van de kerk markeren, te voorzien van een bronzen omhulsel, waardoor de kruisvorm van de kerk wordt gecorrigeerd en opnieuw betekenis krijgt.

In de tentoonstelling *Jodendom. Een wereld vol verhalen* wordt zijn serie *An introduction to the principle of relative expression* (1979, oliekrijt op *Talmud Bavely, Tractate PeSaChIM*) prominent getoond tegenover de legendarische Dode Zee-rol. Semah refereert expliciet aan de joodse cultuur, traditie en identiteit die van oudsher wordt gekenmerkt door het becommentariëren, vragen en bevragen, reflecteren, interpreteren en analyseren. Hij ging in gesprek met een van de oudste heilige geschriften.

Voor *On Friendship / (Collateral Damage) II - The Guardians of the Door* in De Nieuwe Kerk ontwikkelde Joseph Semah een installatie die middels een bijzondere performance werd voltooid.

Het resultaat is een drieëndertig meter lange tafel ondersteund door schragen waarop 95 eieren met 5000 meter witte draden. De tafel verwijst naar de vele meters lange meterlange tafel die in de kerk stond bij de oprichtingsvergadering van de Wereldraad van Kerken.

De witte draden zijn een symbolische verwijzing naar de omtrek van de stadsmuren van Jerusalem van boven en Jerusalem van beneden (het goddelijke en het aardse). Het aantal eieren refereert aan de 95 stellingen die Maarten

Luther op de kerkdeur van Wittenberg zou hebben getimmerd.

Door de plaatsing van de tafel herschikt Semah opnieuw het grondplan van De Nieuwe Kerk en voegt de joodse betekenislaag toe in het hart van de kerk.

Joseph Semah bestempelen als een 'joodse' kunstenaar doet hem tekort. Semah, geboren in Bagdad, opgegroeid in Israël, kwam in 1975 in het Westen in aanraking met een cultuur die voor hem vreemd was. Door te 'lezen' in zijn moedertaal, het Hebreeuws, signaleert hij een gebrek aan joodse kennis en een gebrek aan aandacht in de joodse betekenislaag. Hij voelt de urgentie ook deze informatie toe te voegen en vult de 'lege pagina' met de verloren joodse elementen in de kunst- en cultuurgeschiedenis.

Semah signaleert niet alleen een misverstand in de representatie tussen het jodendom en christendom, een manier waarop kunst verbeeldt, maar ook dat kunst kan worden ingezet voor politieke en religieuze doeleinden. In zijn essay *Over vriendschap (Bijschade)* overtuigt hij de lezer met zijn analyse dat de CIA in het geheim naoorlogse Amerikaanse abstracte doeken gebruikt heeft als onderdeel van zijn activiteiten in de Koude Oorlog en tevens die naoorlogse abstracte doeken, nagenoeg verborgen voor de meeste betrokken kunstenaars, naar het centrum van de belangstelling heeft geschoven "als een soort strategische vloerbedekking, om op die manier als het ware de vernielde bodem van het naoorlogse Europe toe te dekken." **[iv]**

Met zijn performances, kunstwerken en teksten levert Joseph Semah een bijdrage aan het internationale, inclusieve kunst- en cultuurdiscours. Hij kijkt kritisch hoe de westerse kunst en cultuur worden gepresenteerd, en waarom. Hij voegt bronnen en tradities uit andere culturen toe en gaat op zoek naar nieuwe ordeningen, een andere conceptuele blik die meer overeenkomt met de realiteit van een pluriforme samenleving. Joseph Semah levert correcties en/of aanvullingen op theologische en politieke teksten, filosofische bespiegelingen en op bestaande kunsthistorische of theoretische beschouwingen. Hij pleit naar aanleiding van zijn onderzoek en de daaraan verbonden conclusies dat in de kunstgeschiedenis een belangrijkere en grotere plaats wordt ingeruimd voor verschillende bronnen en informatie, om zo een breder draagvlak voor andere visies te creëren.

Noten

[i] Ze stonden opgesteld naast *ARMON HaNaTzIV* (het vroegere hoofdkwartier van de Britse high commissioner, 1933), op de 'groene' grenslijn tussen Israël en

Jordanië (Armistice Lines, vanaf 1949 tot de Zesdaagse Oorlog 1967). De Palestijns-Amerikaanse literatuurwetenschapper en voorvechter van de Palestijnse zaak Edward Said vertelde Joseph Semah dat de blauwe bergen, kort na plaatsing op bevel van de Palestijnse leider Yasser Arafat, werden vernietigd. Weer later werd Joseph Semah door de gemeente van Jerusalem gevraagd de blauwe bergen te herplaatsen, hetgeen hij heeft geweigerd.

[ii] Fragment uit *Het antwoord is dit* – Joseph Semah.

[iii] In 2015 resulteerden dit onderzoek en de bevindingen in het artistiek-filosofische project en het gelijknamige boek *On Friendship / (Collateral Damage)*, red. Linda Bouws en Joseph Semah, Stichting Metropool Internationale Kunstprojecten, 2015, waarin Semah, maar ook derden een analyse maken van de voorlopige conclusie van deze uitgebreide verkenning. De vraag staat centraal in hoeverre aan de joodse en christelijke invloeden aandacht wordt besteed in de westerse kunst- en cultuurgeschiedenis en waarom de joodse betekenislaag, bewust of onbewust, onderbelicht is. En ook wordt de vraag gesteld waarom steeds vaker wordt gesproken over de joods-christelijke erfenis van Europa, een definitie die niet terecht is gezien de ontbrekende joodse pagina.

[iv] Zie *On Friendship / (Collateral Damage)*, redactie Linda Bouws en Joseph Semah, p. 75, Stichting Metropool Internationale Kunstprojecten, Amsterdam.

Joseph Sassoon Semah: On Friendship / (Collateral Damage) II - The Guardians of the Door 22-07-2017

In *On Friendship / (Collateral Damage) II - The Guardians of the Door* (June 22 2017 – January 2018), Martin Luther and 500 years of Reformation are the central subject: with art, performances, artistic interventions, round-table conversations, lectures and a book publication. There will be critical reflection on the image of

Luther as a 'superstar' and on his importance then and now. The Nieuwe Kerk, The Joods Historisch Museum, the Stedelijk Museum and the Goethe-Institut are all partners in this project.

The starting point was Joseph Sassoon Semah nailing his answer to Luther on the door of the Nieuwe Kerk, preceded by a 'procession' coming from the Dam square. Metropool International Art Projects

On Friendship / (Collateral Damage) II ~ The Guardians of the Door ~ Nieuwe Kerk Amsterdam 13-07-2017

On Friendship / (Collateral Damage) II - The Guardians of the Door

Blueprint For A Progressive US: A Dialogue With Noam Chomsky And Robert Pollin



1902, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, USA — Child labor strike in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Photograph 1902 — Image by © Bettmann/CORBIS

This is the first part of a wide-ranging interview with world-renowned public intellectuals Noam Chomsky and Robert Pollin. The next installment will appear on October 24.

Not long after taking office, it became evident that Donald Trump had engaged in fraudulent populism during his campaign. His promise to “Make America Great Again” has been exposed as a lie, as the Trump administration has been busy extending US military power, exacerbating inequality, reverting to the old era of unregulated banking practices, pushing for more fuel fossil drilling and stripping environmental regulations.

In the Trump era, what would an authentically populist, progressive political agenda look like? What would a progressive US look like with regard to jobs, the environment, finance capital and the standard of living? What would it look like in terms of education and health care, justice and equality? In an exclusive interview with C.J. Polychroniou for Truthout, world-renowned public intellectuals Noam Chomsky and Robert Pollin tackle these issues. Noam Chomsky is professor emeritus of linguistics at MIT and laureate professor in the department of linguistics at the University of Arizona. Robert Pollin is distinguished professor of economics and co-director of the Political Economy Research Institute at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst. Their views lay the foundation for a visionary — yet eminently realistic — progressive social and economic order for the United States.

C.J. Polychroniou: Noam, the rise of Donald Trump has unleashed a rather

unprecedented wave of social resistance in the US. Do you think the conditions are ripe for a mass progressive/socialist movement in this country that can begin to reframe the major policy issues affecting the majority of people, and perhaps even challenge and potentially change the fundamental structures of the US political economy?

Noam Chomsky: There is indeed a wave of social resistance, more significant than in the recent past — though I'd hesitate about calling it "unprecedented." Nevertheless, we cannot overlook the fact that in the domain of policy formation and implementation, the right is ascendant, in fact some of its harshest and most destructive elements [are rising].

Nor should we overlook a crucial fact that has been evident for some time: The figure in charge, though often ridiculed, has succeeded brilliantly in his goal of occupying media and public attention while mobilizing a very loyal popular base — and one with sinister features, sometimes smacking of totalitarianism, including adoration of The Leader. That goes beyond the core of loyal Trump supporters.... [A [majority of Republicans](#)] favor shutting down or at least fining the press if it presents "biased" or "false news" — terms that mean information rejected by The Leader, so we learn from polls showing that by overwhelming margins, Republicans not only believe Trump far more than the hated mainstream media, but even far more than their own media organ, the extreme right Fox news. And half of Republicans would back postponing the 2020 election if Trump calls for it.

It is also worth bearing in mind that among a significant part of his worshipful base, Trump is regarded as a "wavering moderate" who cannot be fully trusted to hold fast to the true faith of fierce White Christian identity politics. A recent illustration is the primary victory of the incredible Roy Moore in Alabama despite Trump's opposition. ("Mr. President, I love you but you are wrong," as the banners read). The victory of this Bible-thumping fanatic has led senior party strategists to [conclude](#) "that the conservative base now loathes its leaders in Washington the same way it detested President Barack Obama" — referring to leaders who are already so far right that one needs a powerful telescope to locate them at the outer fringe of any tolerable political spectrum.

The potential power of the ultra-right attack on the far right is [illustrated](#) by the fact that Moore spent about \$200,000, in contrast to his Trump-backed opponent,

the merely far-right Luther Strange, who received more than \$10 million from the national GOP and other far-right sources. The ultra-right is spearheaded by Steve Bannon, one of the most dangerous figures in the shiver-inducing array that has come to the fore in recent years. It has the huge financial support of the Mercer family, along with ample media outreach through Breitbart news, talk radio and the rest of the toxic bubble in which loyalists trap themselves.

In the most powerful state in history, the current Republican Party is ominous enough. What is not far on the horizon is even more menacing.

Much has been said about how Trump has pulled the cork out of the bottle and legitimized neo-Nazism, rabid white supremacy, misogyny and other pathologies that had been festering beneath the surface. But it goes much beyond even that.

I do not want to suggest that adoration of the Dear Leader is something new in American politics, or confined to the vulgar masses. The veneration of Reagan that has been diligently fostered has some of the same character, in intellectual circles as well. Thus, in publications of the conservative Hoover Institution at Stanford University, we learn that Reagan's "spirit seems to stride the country, watching us like a warm and friendly ghost." Lucky us, protected from harm by a demi-god.

Whether by design, or simply inertia, the Republican wrecking ball has been following a two-level strategy. Trump keeps the spotlight on himself with one act after another, assuming (correctly) that yesterday's antics will be swept aside by today's. And at the same time, often beneath the radar, the "respectable" Republican establishment chips away at government programs that might be of benefit to the general population, but not to their constituency of extreme wealth and corporate power. They are systematically pursuing what Financial Times economic correspondent Martin Wolf calls "pluto-populism," a doctrine that imposes "policies that benefit plutocrats, justified by populist rhetoric." An amalgam that has registered unpleasant successes in the past as well.

Meanwhile, the Democrats and centrist media help out by focusing their energy and attention on whether someone in the Trump team talked to Russians, or [whether] the Russians tried to influence our "pristine" elections — though at most in a way that is undetectable in comparison with the impact of campaign funding, let alone other inducements that are the prerogative of extreme wealth

and corporate power and are hardly without impact.

The Russian saboteurs of democracy seem to be everywhere. There was great anxiety about Russian intervention in the recent German elections, perhaps contributing to the frightening surge of support for the right-wing nationalist, if not neo-fascist, “Alternative for Germany” [AfD]. AfD did indeed have outside help, it turns out, but not from the insidious Putin. “The Russian meddling that German state security had been anticipating apparently never materialized,” [according to Bloomberg News](#). “Instead, the foreign influence came from America.” More specifically, from Harris Media, whose clients include Marine Le Pen’s National Front in France, Benjamin Netanyahu in Israel, and our own Donald Trump. With the valuable assistance of the Berlin office of Facebook, which created a population model and provided the needed data, Harris’s experts micro-targeted Germans in categories deemed susceptible to AfD’s message — with some success, it appears. The firm is now planning to move on to coming European races, it has announced.

Nevertheless, all is not bleak by any means. The most spectacular feature of the 2016 elections was not the election of a billionaire who spent almost as much as his lavishly-funded opponent and enjoyed fervent media backing. Far more striking was the remarkable success of the Sanders campaign, breaking with over a century of mostly bought elections. The campaign relied on small contributions and had no media support, to put it mildly. Though lacking any of the trappings that yield electoral success in our semi-plutocracy, Sanders probably would have won the Democratic Party nomination, perhaps the presidency, if it hadn’t been for the machinations of party managers. His popularity undimmed, he is now a leading voice for progressive measures and is amassing considerable support for his moderate social democratic proposals, reminiscent of the New Deal — proposals that would not have surprised President Eisenhower, but are considered practically revolutionary today as both parties have shifted well to the right [with] Republicans virtually off the spectrum of normal parliamentary politics.

Offshoots of the Sanders campaign are doing valuable work on many issues, including electoral politics at the local and state level, which had been pretty much abandoned to the Republican right, particularly during the Obama years, to very harmful effect. There is also extensive and effective mobilization against racist and white supremacist pathologies, often spearheaded by the dynamic

Black Lives Matter movement. Defying Trumpian and general Republican denialism, a powerful popular environmental movement is working hard to address the existential crisis of global warming. These, along with significant efforts on other fronts, face very difficult barriers, which can and must be overcome.

Bob, it is clear by now that Trump has no plan for creating new jobs, and even his reckless stance toward the environment will have no effect on the creation of new jobs. What would a progressive policy for job creation look like that will also take into account concerns about the environment and climate change?

Robert Pollin: A centerpiece for any kind of progressive social and economic program needs to be full employment with decent wages and working conditions. The reasons are straightforward, starting with money. Does someone in your family have a job and, if so, how much does it pay? For the overwhelming majority of the world's population, how one answers these two questions determines, more than anything else, what one's living standard will be. But beyond just money, your job is also crucial for establishing your sense of security and self-worth, your health and safety, your ability to raise a family, and your chances to participate in the life of your community.

How do we get to full employment, and how do we stay there? For any economy, there are two basic factors determining how many jobs are available at any given time. The first is the overall level of activity — with GDP as a rough, if inadequate measure of overall activity — and the second is what share of GDP goes to hiring people into jobs. In terms of our current situation, after the Great Recession hit in full in 2008, US GDP has grown at an anemic average rate of 1.3 percent per year, as opposed to the historic average rate from 1950 until 2007 of 3.3 percent. If the economy had grown over the past decade at something even approaching the historic average rate, the economy would have produced more than enough jobs to employ all 13 million people who are currently either unemployed or underemployed by the official government statistics, plus the nearly 9 million people who have dropped out of the labor force since 2007.

In terms of focusing on activities where job creation is strong, let's consider two important sets of economic sectors. First, spending \$1 million on education will generate a total of about 26 jobs within the US economy, more than double the 11 jobs that would be created by spending the same \$1 million on the US military.

Similarly, spending \$1 million on investments in renewable energy and energy efficiency will create over 16 jobs within the US, while spending the same \$1 million on our existing fossil fuel infrastructure will generate about 5.3 jobs — i.e. building a green economy in the US generates roughly three times more jobs per dollar than maintaining our fossil fuel dependency. So full employment policies should focus on accelerating economic growth and on changing our priorities for growth — as two critical examples, to expand educational opportunities across the board and to build a green economy, while contracting both the military and the fossil fuel economy.

A full employment program also obviously needs to focus on the conditions of work, starting with wages. The most straightforward measure of what neoliberal capitalism has meant for the US working class is that the average wage for non-supervisory workers in 2016 was about *4 percent lower than in 1973*. This is while average labor productivity — the amount each worker produces over the course of a year — has more than doubled over this same 43-year period. *All of the gains* from productivity doubling under neoliberalism have therefore been pocketed by either supervisory workers, or even more so, by business owners and corporate shareholders seeing their profits rise. The only solution here is to fight to increase worker bargaining power. We need stronger unions and worker protections, including a \$15 federal minimum wage. Such initiatives need to be combined with policies to expand the overall number of job opportunities out there. A fundamental premise of neoliberalism from day one has been to dismantle labor protections. We are seeing an especially aggressive variant of this approach today under the so-called “centrist” policies of the new French President Emmanuel Macron.

What about climate change and jobs? A view that has long been touted, most vociferously by Trump over the last two years, is that policies to protect the environment and to fight climate change are bad for jobs and therefore need to be junked. But this claim is simply false. In fact, as the evidence I have cited above shows, building a green economy is good for jobs overall, much better than maintaining our existing fossil-fuel based energy infrastructure, which also happens to be the single most significant force driving the planet toward ecological disaster.

It is true that building a green economy will not be good for everyone’s jobs. Notably, people working in the fossil fuel industry will face major job losses. The

communities in which these jobs are concentrated will also face significant losses. But the solution here is straightforward: Just Transition policies for the workers, families and communities who will be hurt as the coal, oil and natural gas industries necessarily contract to zero over roughly the next 30 years. Working with Jeannette Wicks-Lim, Heidi Garrett-Peltier and Brian Callaci at [the Political Economy Research Institute], and in conjunction with labor, environmental and community groups in both the states of New York and Washington, we have developed what I think are quite reasonable and workable Just Transition programs. They include solid pension protections, re-employment guarantees, as well as retraining and relocation support for individual workers, and community-support initiatives for impacted communities.

The single most important factor that makes all such initiatives workable is that the total number of affected workers is relatively small. For example, in the whole United States today, there are a total of about 65,000 people employed directly in the coal industry. This represents less than 0.05 percent of the 147 million people employed in the US. Considered within the context of the overall US economy, it would only require a minimum level of commitment to provide a just transition to these workers as well as their families and communities.

Finally, I think it is important to address one of the major positions on climate stabilization that has been advanced in recent years on the left, which is to oppose economic growth altogether, or to support “de-growth.” The concerns of de-growth proponents — that economic growth under neoliberal capitalism is both grossly unjust and ecologically unsustainable — are real. But de-growth is not a viable solution. Consider a very simple example — that under a de-growth program, global GDP contracts by 10 percent. This level of GDP contraction would be five times larger than what occurred at the lowest point of the 2007-09 Great Recession, when the unemployment rate more than doubled in the United States. But even still, this 10 percent contraction in global GDP would have the effect, on its own, of reducing carbon dioxide (CO₂) emissions by precisely 10 percent. At a minimum, we would still need to cut emissions by another 30 percent within 15 years, and another 80 percent within 30 years to have even a fighting chance of stabilizing the climate. As such, the only viable climate stabilization program is to invest massively in clean renewable and high energy efficiency systems so that clean energy completely supplants our existing fossil-fuel dependent system within the next 30 years, and to enact comparable

transformations in agricultural production processes.

The “masters of the universe” have made a huge comeback since the last financial crisis, and while Trump’s big-capital-friendly policies are going to make the rich get richer, they could also spark the next financial crisis. So, Bob, what type of progressive policies can and should be enforced to contain the destructive tendencies of finance capital?

Pollin: The classic book *Manias, Panics, and Crashes* by the late MIT economist Charles Kindleberger makes clear that, throughout the history of capitalism, unregulated financial markets have persistently produced instability and crises. The only deviation from this long-term pattern occurred in the first 30 years after World War II, roughly from 1946-1975. The reason US and global financial markets were much more stable over this 30-year period is that the markets were heavily regulated then, through the Glass-Steagall regulatory system in the US, and the Bretton Woods system globally. These regulatory systems were enacted only in response to the disastrous Great Depression of the 1930s, which began with the 1929 Wall Street crash and which then brought global capitalism to its knees.

Of course, the big Wall Street players always hated being regulated and fought persistently, first to evade the regulations and then to dismantle them. They were largely successful through the 1980s and 1990s. But the full, official demise of the 1930s regulatory system came only in 1999, under the Democratic President Bill Clinton. At the time, virtually all leading mainstream economists — including liberals, such as Larry Summers, who was Treasury Secretary when Glass-Steagall was repealed — argued that financial regulations were an unnecessary vestige of the bygone 1930s. All kinds of fancy papers were written “demonstrating” that the big players on Wall Street are very smart people who know what’s best for themselves and everyone else — and therefore, didn’t need government regulators telling them what they could or could not do. It then took less than eight years for hyper-speculation on Wall Street to once again bring global capitalism to its knees. The only thing that saved capitalism in 2008-09 from a repeat of the 1930s Great Depression was the unprecedented government interventions to prop up the system, and the equally massive bail out of Wall Street.

By 2010, the US Congress and President Obama enacted a new set of financial

regulations, the Dodd-Frank system. Overall, Dodd-Frank amount to a fairly weak set of measures aiming to dampen hyper-speculation on Wall Street. A large part of the problem is that Dodd-Frank included many opportunities for Wall Street players to delay enactment of laws they didn't like and for clever lawyers to figure out ways to evade the ones on the books. That said, the Trump administration, led on economic policy matters by two former Goldman Sachs executives, is committed to dismantling Dodd-Frank altogether, and allowing Wall Street to once again operate free of any significant regulatory constraints. I have little doubt that, free of regulations, the already ongoing trend of rising speculation — with, for example, the stock market already at a historic high — will once again accelerate.

What is needed to build something like a financial system that is both stable and supports a full-employment, ecologically sustainable growth framework? A major problem over time with the old Glass-Steagall system was that there were large differences in the degree to which, for example, commercial banks, investment banks, stock brokerages, insurance companies and mortgage lenders were regulated, thereby inviting clever financial engineers to invent ways to exploit these differences. An effective regulatory system today should therefore be guided by a few basic premises that can be applied flexibly but also universally. The regulations need to apply across the board, regardless of whether you call your business a bank, an insurance company, a hedge fund, a private equity fund, a vulture fund, or some other term that most of us haven't yet heard about.

One measure for promoting both stability and fairness across financial market segments is a small sales tax on all financial transactions — what has come to be known as a Robin Hood Tax. This tax would raise the costs of short-term speculative trading and therefore discourage speculation. At the same time, the tax will not discourage “patient” investors who intend to hold their assets for longer time periods, since, unlike the speculators, they will be trading infrequently. A bill called the Inclusive Prosperity Act was first introduced into the House of Representatives by Rep. Keith Ellison in 2012 and then in the Senate by Bernie Sanders in 2015, [and] is exactly the type of measure that is needed here.

Another important initiative would be to implement what are called asset-based reserve requirements. These are regulations that require financial institutions to maintain a supply of cash as a reserve fund in proportion to the other, riskier

assets they hold in their portfolios. Such requirements can serve both to discourage financial market investors from holding an excessive amount of risky assets, and as a cash cushion for the investors to draw upon when market downturns occur.

This policy instrument can also be used to push financial institutions to channel credit to projects that advance social welfare, for example, promoting investments in renewable energy and energy efficiency. The policy could stipulate that, say, at least 5 percent of banks' loan portfolios should be channeled to into clean-energy investments. If the banks fail to reach this 5 percent quota of loans for clean energy, they would then be required to hold this same amount of their total assets in cash.

Finally, both in the US and throughout the world, there needs to be a growing presence of public development banks. These banks would make loans based on social welfare criteria — including advancing a full-employment, climate-stabilization agenda — as opposed to scouring the globe for the largest profit opportunities regardless of social costs.... Public development banks have always played a central role in supporting the successful economic development paths in the East Asian economies.

Editor's note: This interview has been lightly edited for length and clarity.

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On Friendship / (Collateral Damage) II - The Guardians of the Door ~ Summary



Joseph Semah - MaKOM
 The doubling of the
 House 1979 - 2017
 cellenbetonblokken 200
 x 200 x 200 cm Photo:
 Ilya Rabinovich

Artist Joseph Sassoon Semah (1948) was born in Bagdad, where his grandfather Hacham Sassoon Kadoori (1885-1971) was Chief Rabbi of the Babylonian Jews. In 1950 he was 'relocated' with his parents to the State of Israel. In the mid-70's Semah decided to leave Israel, speaking in this context of his self-chosen exile. He lived and worked in London, Berlin and Paris; but has been settled in Amsterdam since 1981, where he has positioned himself as '*the Guest*'. By reading in his native language, Hebrew, he has detected a shortage of Jewish awareness. Jewish significance receives too little attention in western history of art and Semah feels the urgent need to append this and to fill the '*empty page*'.

During his long-term project *On Friendship / (Collateral Damage)* in which he collaborates with Metropool International Art Projects / Studio Meritis MaKOM (Linda Bouws), the main question is how western art and culture are presented and why. In Part 1 (2015) Semah searches for the specific Jewish implications in Kazimir Malevich's *The Black Square* and Barnett Newman's work, and also critically researches the claim by a growing group of people that refer to the Jewish-Christian origin of European culture.

Through his lawyer Bob Vink, Semah makes contact with Beatrix Ruf, director of the Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam and asks her to account for the '*empty page*' in

art history on behalf of the art world.

In *On Friendship / (Collateral Damage) II – The Guardians of the Door*, Luther and 500 years of Reformation are the central subject: with art, performances, artistic interventions, round-table conversations, lectures and a book publication. There will be critical reflection on the image of Luther as a 'superstar' and on his importance then and now. The Nieuwe Kerk, The Joods Historisch Museum, the Stedelijk Museum and the Goethe-Institut are all partners in this project.

The starting point was Semah nailing his answer to Luther on the door of the Nieuwe Kerk, preceded by a '*procession*' coming from the Dam square.

The Answer is this:

And in the background we still see the unsolvable dilemma of the Guest. On the one hand he is forced to be silent about his highly personal way of reading, while on the other hand he uses Christian tactics to be noticed without being discovered. The Guest in ourselves is primarily an artist with words, for words form the way he has learned to conceal his name, hide his doubt and suppress his fear by publicly criticising his wish to participate within the western paradigm. Please note, the nostalgia for a lost paradise, will pursue the Guest from the start and during his whole active life in exile.

Signed by JOSEPH SASSOON SEMAH

JOSEPH SASSOON SEMAH

After this intervention at the church-door there was a round-table conversation about Luther's influence on the arts. From every angle that one looks at Luther's influence, we must acknowledge the background of the speakers: christianity, judaism and art world.

Irene Zwiep, professor of Hebrew and Jewish studies at the University of Amsterdam, entered the discussion on the influence Luther's Reformation had had on Judaism.

"The basic thought is that 'a' Judaism does not exist. It has by definition always been a many-voiced matter, within which dissidents could voice their different opinions. For that reason a reformation, meaning a radical restructuring, was unnecessary. '*Chiddush*' (renewal) was for centuries synonymous to 'massoret' (tradition). Until, according to Zwiep, in 1820 a group of young Jews from Berlin decided to implement Luther's Reformation nonetheless. Because of their interference 'massoret' became history and 'chiddus' judaism.

On the 13th of July 2017, Joseph Semah pursued the case with a public intervention/installation in the Nieuwe Kerk, observed by a large audience. At the end of the performance the audience is invited to fasten the 5000 meter of long threads to the table. They are finally pinned down with a boiled egg (95 in all, in reference to Luther's 95 theses), leaving a fan shape of threads on the church floor.

In the Joods Historisch Museum there will be a special selection of Semah's work on show, from the 5th of October 2017 until the 7th of January 2018. An exhibition directly reflecting upon *On Friendship / (Collateral Damage) II - The Guardians of the Door*.

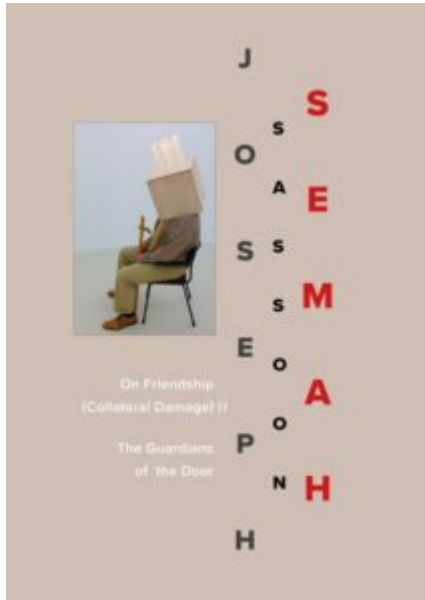
On the 20th, 21st and 22nd of October the conversation continued with the Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam, including a round-table session, the presentation of the book publication *On Friendship / (Collateral Damage) II - The Guardians of the Door*, five unique performances by Joseph Semah and a three-day reading session in a specially constructed MaKOM house made of concrete blocks set at the entrance, in which Semah will read from selected texts of his 30-year research into the 'empty page'.

This way the Stedelijk Museum agrees to the question of our times that a museum must be more than just a place of presentation, but also a place where different interpretations and visions on art can be fully appreciated.

Visions formulated in the book by Egbert Dommering, Maarten Doorman, Arie Hartog, Paul Mosterd, Margriet Schavemaker, Emile Schrijver, Rick Vercauteren, Felix Villanueva en Jan Voss, and including texts by Joseph Semah en Linda Bouws.

At the Goethe-Institut (9th of November) there will be a meeting with Arie Hartog, director of the Gerhard-Marcks Haus in Bremen and five pieces of art by Semah will be exhibited.

We thank everyone who has collaborated on *On Friendship / (Collateral Damage) II - The Guardians of the Door*, and made it possible for us to realize this project.



Publicatie

Linda Bouws & Joseph Semah (red.) - *On Friendship / (Collateral Damage) II - The Guardians of the Door*
Reflectie vanuit de kunst en cultuur op 500 jaar reformatie en Maarten Luther, met en rond Joseph Sassoon Semah.

Auteurs:

Joseph Semah - Pretext en The Guardians of the Door: how to explain hare hunting to a dead German artist

Emile Schrijver - Flarden van associaties: een soort brief aan een vriend

Arie Hartog - Over het onderzoek van Joseph Semah: begrijpen wie aan tafel zit

Paul Mosterd - In situ: kunstenaar en kerk

Linda Bouws - Wanneer kunst religie raakt

Egbert Dommering - Luther, Reuchlin en Joseph Semah

Jan Voss - "That's too bad even for an ice cream parlour"

Maarten Doorman Luther als open zenuw van de Duitse geschiedenis

Felix Villanueva - Todnauberg (Re)Visited. Over de ontmoeting tussen de dichter en denker

Rick Vercauteren - Next Year in Jerusalem

Margriet Schavemaker - Dwingende voetnoten: Joseph Semah en het Stedelijk Museum<

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Hurricanes Make The Need To Dismantle Colonial Economics In The Caribbean Increasingly Urgent



Sint-Maarten, 6 september 2017

Photo: Wikimedia Commons

Hurricanes have always been a part of life in the Caribbean. The destruction they cause and inhabitants' subsequent recovery have been observed throughout [human history](#). What is alarming now, however, is the apparent increased frequency and intensity of hurricanes due to climate change.

For the Caribbean territories, the climate change challenges are even more severe than they are for most other places around the globe because they have an impact on the entire coastal and terrestrial ecosystems. The already poor state of the Caribbean marine environment restricts the ability of habitats such as [seagrass meadows](#) and coral reefs to recover from the effects of severe storms. Poor water quality and over-fishing, for example, promotes the overgrowth of algae, preventing recovery. With repeated hurricanes occurring over time periods that are insufficient for recovery to occur, this will only get worse.

Moreover, climate change can be expected to have negative effects on the tourism and hospitality industry. According to the [Caribbean Planning for Adaptation to Global Climate Change Project](#), virtually all the Caribbean territories are highly vulnerable to climate changes and can expect to experience

a “linear increases in the number of storms and hurricanes ... loss of land from rising sea level ... increased susceptibility of coastal infrastructure ... negative impacts in the tourism sector.”

In this context, the severity of hurricanes Irma and Maria, which caused catastrophic destruction, should be a wake-up call, even though the devastation was not equally distributed across the Caribbean, and it will be far more challenging for some countries than others to recover from their tragic situations.

Caribbean policy makers need a fundamental shift in how marine environments are protected to enable long-term sustainability for the food and income they provide. Many locations in the Caribbean — [for example, Puerto Rico](#) — have ineffective marine protection rules and so destructive practices continue unchecked, meaning that when a disaster does occur, the environment is unable to recover. Besides, previous hurricanes, cyclones and typhoons across the globe have shown the severe negative effects storms can have on the marine environment. Hurricane Irma — one of the strongest on record to hit the region — recently scoured the islands leaving catastrophic damage in its wake, [even in Cuba](#), “a country that prides itself on disaster preparedness.”

And just as the Caribbean began to piece together the devastating and potentially long-term impacts of Irma, Hurricane Maria has now left another path of destruction. Puerto Rico, the British dependency of the [Turks and Caicos](#), and many other Caribbean islands have suffered what have been described as “[apocalyptic conditions](#).” [More than 30 cruise ports](#) were damaged by these two hurricanes.

Some of the most severely affected areas of the recent hurricanes in the Caribbean — Florida, Turks and Caicos, Cuba, the British Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico — all house extensive seagrass meadows. These shallow water marine habitats support valuable [lobster fisheries](#), as well as [shrimp, conch and finfish fisheries](#). Seagrass also stabilizes sediments and protects the white sand beaches that attract so many tourists to the region. The devastation of coastal environments, particularly seagrass meadows, can also result in long-term losses of the benefits that humans receive from them, such as fisheries support or coastal protection. Damage to these ecosystem services consequently impacts [human well-being](#), because people can no longer rely on them for their livelihood and food supply.

Breaking Away From a Colonial Past

The Caribbean region is a distinctive socioeconomic order, determined by experiences of a historical formation rooted in colonialism and the plantation system and all the consequences manifested in social stratification, cultural contradictions and endemic economic limitations — as Caribbean nations developed under the tutelage of different European empires, and more recently under North American dominance. The persistence of Caribbean plantation system “variables” is a fact, and the economies of the region eventually evolved typically into monocrop production, which is mostly foreign-owned and export-oriented. Later, since the 1960s, emphasis on crops such as sugar, coffee and bananas was replaced by an excessive emphasis on tourism, which has been heralded as the road to modernity and prosperity.

The world economy is expanding rapidly despite chronic economic crises. Yet large segments of Caribbean population [live in poverty](#). Inequality in the region has reached dramatic levels in the last few decades and continues to grow — and this is not by chance. Small elites are making themselves richer and richer, acquiring ever-increasing levels of power. Even though Caribbean countries are signatories to a wide variety of conventions and international agreements such as the Cotonou Agreement in 2000 and the EU-Cariforum Economic Partnership Agreement in 2008, economies in the region have been grappling with the challenges of blocked development and neoliberal globalization, along with the tyranny of financialization. Furthermore, the nature of the current financial integration of Caribbean countries has created new forms of external vulnerability.

Evidently, globalization has already impacted the economies and societies of the Caribbean: exacerbation of economic instability and vulnerability, rising current account and fiscal deficits alongside high debt obligations, a slowdown in productivity growth, limited adjustment in traditional sectors, high unemployment and underemployment, the growing distance between rich and poor, reduction and deterioration of public services and the quality of infrastructure, increasing social problems, marginalization and social exclusion, unfair competition arrangements which put Caribbean nations in a situation of ever-increasing inferiority, and degradation of the environment and natural resources.

Tourism is one of the most important economic activities in the

Caribbean, [contributing](#) a third to half of GDP in most countries. The fundamental environmental resources used in Caribbean tourism are basically the “sun, sand and sea.” Whether tourism is based on stopover visitors or cruise ships, Caribbean countries rely on their natural environment as the main lure to visitors, as well as an important source of welfare for their own citizens. However, the resources upon which the tourism industry is based are very fragile. Except for the sun, each of these resources — as well as supporting resources such as potable water — are subject to damage and depletion. Threats to environmental resources used by the tourism sector can arise both within and outside the sector.

Establishing the relative impact of different environmental threats is important but often difficult. For example, in St Lucia, tourists generate twice the amount of waste per day that residents generate. They contribute, however, only about [5 percent of total waste](#), because of the short length of their stay. The magnitude of the threats posed by environmental damage to tourism ranges from minor inconveniences to severe threats, so large portions of local resources become unusable. Similarly, disposal of waste and untreated wastewater and sewage into the sea in Negril, Jamaica, severely curtailed diving, leading to a substantial reduction in visitors. This vexing problem still exists. As tourists become both more environmentally aware and better informed of possible environmental problems, it is likely that the costs of inaction will rise, with a possible decrease in tourism to the region.

Taking these important issues into consideration, it becomes crucial that the Caribbean transforms from a region enduring colonial woes to one in which each society becomes self-reliant, economically viable, eco-friendly, technologically responsive, politically stable and culturally secure. Protecting the tourism sector, in particular, and the economic benefits it brings, requires ensuring that the environmental resources the sector relies upon are [managed sustainably](#). But the sustainable development of tourism in the Caribbean territories — an industry which does indeed generate incomes, creates jobs and alleviates poverty — implies the need for climate change adaptations and disaster preparedness by the respective governments and communities in the region.

Although local actions against climate change are difficult to achieve, it is possible to focus on small-scale immediate actions, such as implementation of marine protected areas to limit direct damage to coastal resources. Coordinated actions on this scale will ultimately help enhance the resilience of the Caribbean

Sea, and make sure that the environment can better recover from any future extreme events.

On the broader political front, sociopolitical endeavors should center around labor-led struggles for development, which can empower even poor Caribbean societies to overcome many of the obstacles that halt social progress. To this end, collective actions by progressive intellectuals, laboring classes and social movements can help improve overall conditions, as well as social and business infrastructure, while generating new forms of human development and local skill banks.

Previously

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