

through operations that consistently externalize, displace, or simply open up the hardwired connection between art and lifestyle.

In this type of work, design is just one element among others in an open-ended assemblage that associates stylistic articulation with the working of today's media apparatuses. The media paradigm evoked here is less that of photography and cinema than that of television and digital technologies: The works generally promote a sense of time that revolves around a continually unfolding present (and thus may be differentiated from the tracing of "pastness" that is often cited as the distinguishing characteristic of film and photography). On closer inspection, so many of these "design-oriented" artworks are not just time-based but real-time machines. Think, for instance, of the numerous lamplike artworks of recent years in which stylistic articulation and televisual or algorithmic forms of temporal processing are intimately associated: Pierre Huyghe's elegant grid of ceiling lights that double as an Atari computer game (*Atari Light*, 1999) are a case in point, as is Rehberger's long series of idiosyncratic lamps that use computer processing to transmit—in real time—the quality of light at some distant location (*7 Ends of the World*, 2003). And it is precisely through this association that such works engage the role of style within so-called cognitive capitalism: a form of production that extracts surplus value from what is generally thought of as the free time of thinking and experience. As Maurizio Lazzarato and others have pointed out, if real-time technologies emerge as the key machinery of our current stage of capitalist production, it is because they handle time in a way that is structurally similar to the way in which human memory manipulates past and future within a perpetual now.

The contemporary question of style must be pondered alongside this current "production" of subjectivity, whether emphasis is on regularized forms of self-fashioning or on the singular and less controllable aspects of becoming. But in order to do so, we need to follow Berel Lang's suggestion that a real account of style must move beyond the tendency to always see style as an attribute of something else and instead see it as a transitive quality or as a form of being always in the making, acting of its own accord and not on behalf of some other project or quality.

With this shift in focus, style may be seen as a key component of media apparatuses that are not just presentational frames but also social machines that integrate human minds and bodies as part of their functioning. This has obvious ramifications for the way in which art criticism and art history may handle a concept like style. By sidestepping its

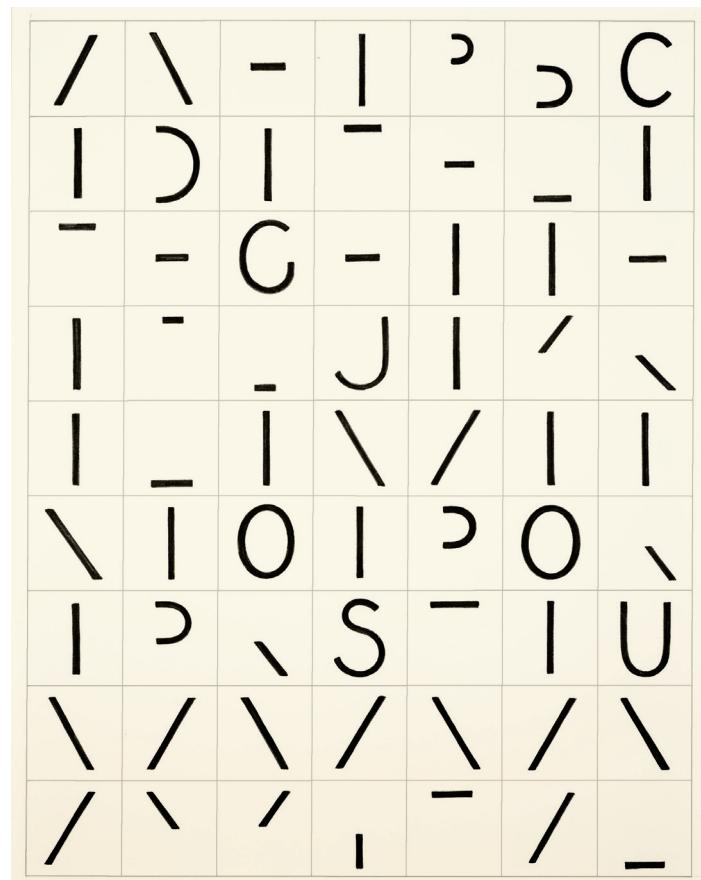
classificatory uses, and by pursuing the expanded idea of the site-specific artwork, we may in fact approach style as a social site. And—against any macro, wide-angled perspective—style sites necessarily represent *different* instances of sociality in the making, of politics in the making. This is, at least, the proposition emerging from those contemporary artworks that approach the contemporary question of style head-on. □

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TAUBA AUERBACH

WHEN I WAS IN PRIMARY SCHOOL, each student in my class had to write on a yellow legal pad for a little while every day. I recall one of my entries announcing that I had decided to make a change in my handwriting: My lowercase *a* would from then on have a flat top. Implementing this change in the entry, I expected the entire page to take on a different look from the rest of my journal. But somehow,

Tauba Auerbach, *Components*,
In Order, 2005, ink on paper,
18 ½ x 14 ½".



What is required is a take on style that does not automatically predicate itself on "the look of things."
—Ina Blom

though I had reconfigured a symbol that appears more than 8 percent of the time in English, the whole thing still looked like something I *would* have written. I was disappointed.

Style is finer grained than choice. It is a complicated amalgam of microscopic tendencies. Choices yield categories in handwriting, like the bubbly teenage girl's letters or the designer's printed caps; but tiny weaknesses and strengths in each person's hand inflect their script with uncalculated nuance. For the past ten years, I've hardly written in anything but capital letters—a conscious decision—but within that, there are things that just seem to happen whether I want them to or not. My horizontal lines bow slightly downward; the top stroke of each *E* extends farther than the bottom stroke; there is increased pressure at the bottom of each *S*. All of these things are exaggerated when I'm writing quickly—when I'm thinking less about writing.

My father, an architect who still does all of his drawings by hand, has a loose version of the trained architect's script: crossed perpendiculars with certain, even pressure, but also something rogue that escapes the conventions of the classification. He "winds up" before beginning his signature. My mother, originally from Germany, still has a whiff of the European lilt in her writing, but with a large

amount of space between each letter, and scooping, reversed italics. Looking at my parents' penmanship is a bit like looking at each of them—shaped by their environments but distinguished by their particular automatic inclinations. This meeting point between the intentional and the unconscious shifts within various mediums. I recently read about a motion to create a reversed italic setting for digital fonts, to distinguish sarcasm from plain meanness in text-based electronic communication. This acknowledges that meaning in written language is not only content but gesture.

Despite knowing my parents' handwriting so well, it would be nearly impossible for me to forge it. I'm sure I could manage to re-create the shapes, but some ingredient in the alchemy of their styles would be missing. They both also write in all caps. □

TAUBA AUERBACH IS A NEW YORK–BASED ARTIST.



Tauba Auerbach, *The Whole Alphabet, from the Center Out, Digital, V*, 2006, gouache on paper on panel, 30 x 22".



Giotto, *The Crucifixion* (detail), ca. 1305, fresco, Scrovegni Chapel, Padua, Italy.

ALEXANDER NAGEL

BEFORE IT WAS a record-player needle, a stylus was a tool used to write or draw. We go from *stylus* to *style* when we shift from reading these marks in a drawing as symbols and begin looking at them seismically, as traces of an activity. But even that is not enough. To say that a line must have been produced by a vigorous stroke of the hand is still a forensic, not a stylistic, observation. When we say that such a stroke indicates a fiery mood or temperament in its maker, or that it embodies an ideology of freedom, then we are talking in terms of style. If you extend this mode of interpretation further, you get to the idea that products of all kinds—shoes, say, or cathedrals—bear the mark of a community, or of a time now past. Style is “never anything but metaphor,” as Roland Barthes wrote.

The art historian Heinrich Wölfflin once said that a concept of style could be applied to past eras of art but not to modern works. Earlier works of art actually expressed their time, whereas in modern times styles change like fancy dresses being tried on for a masquerade. “We have really no longer any right to talk of styles, but only of fashions.” This fable of style devolving into fashion represents a remarkable effort to stave off the unthinkable—that there has never been style, that there have only ever been fashions. It also reverses what is likely to have been the actual historical sequence, which is that the fascinating and disturbing spectacle of changing fashions, put on view by the art of different periods, made it seem necessary to come up with a theory of style. I am still trying to understand why this theorizing began happening in the fifteenth century in Europe.

Clothes perform a fairly limited range of functions, and yet, as observers since antiquity have noted, they vary wildly from place to place and over time. The words for custom and costume are identical in some languages. Yet even as we try to fix the image of fashions—this is the way “the Turks” dress, this is the fashion of the Directoire—fashions themselves are in continual change, recycling old