



**Richard Ibghy & Marilou Lemmens**

The lights constellating  
one's internal sky

# Copernican Skies

## Antonia Hirsch



### The Revolutions of Capitalism (2011)

Series of 9 diagrammatic drawings

Ink on stone paper

40" x 28" each

"All right," said Deep Thought.  
"The Answer to the Great Question..."  
"Yes...!"  
"Of Life, the Universe and Everything..."  
said Deep Thought.  
"Yes...!"  
"Is..." said Deep Thought, and paused.  
"Yes...!"  
"Is..."  
"Yes...!!!...?"  
"Forty-two," said Deep Thought, with infinite majesty  
and calm.

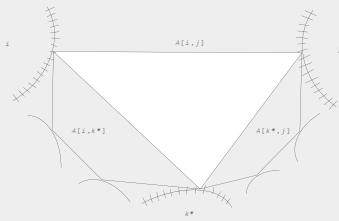
— Douglas Adams, *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*

The carefully evasive choice of words composing the title of Richard Ibghy and Marilou Lemmens' exhibition *The lights constellating one's internal sky*—proposing "lights," rather than stars—nevertheless brings to mind a romantically starry summer sky, perhaps with meteor showers, but definitely with winking stars. Theirs is a picture of the heavens one can sigh up to. A cold expanse of universe that exists for everyone to see, a blank waiting to be affectively

invested by individual dreams and desires directed towards a beyond, possibly even a beyond hope.

And in view of the exhibition's title, one may ask: what do these lights, these stars, these coordinates in infinite blackness constellate? Not for nothing does the term "desire" derive from the Latin *desiderare*, i.e., "to long for, to wish for; demand, expect" a term that, in turn, is thought to have arisen from the even earlier phrase *de sidere* "from the stars."<sup>i</sup>

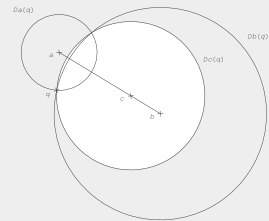
One of the key works in Ibghy and Lemmens' exhibition, the installation *Peter Pete Systems: A Post-Fordist Love Story* (2011), is a two channel video projection that from one perspective confronts viewers with a frustratingly rigid dialogue in which a supplicant attempts to penetrate corporate (telephone) hierarchies. What seems to play out in this Kafkaesque tragedy rendered in sheer spoken dialogue and text is a compendium of missed connections between people across a spectrum at the extremes of which stand certainty and failure. This dichotomy is formally embodied in the work's stoic dialogue: there is the certainty of text, of primary colours, of words that are not only enunciated but,



A polynomial solution to the potato-peeling problem

as if to hold extra-tight to their concreteness, also travel as letters across the screen for us to see, to ascertain. And it is certainty that Peter of Pete Systems is trying to sell, because it is in the promise of certainty in an uncertain field—the market—where profits are made and innovations advanced. Failure presents itself in the potential inability to rise to this challenge and is expressed in what the delivery of this verbal exchange forgoes: ambiguity and anxiety. Yet, the dialogue succeeds in transferring this economic paradigm subtly onto the level of the affective, and ultimately onto a question of desire. This desire constitutes itself as the promise of an infinitely receding redemption while simultaneously demonstrating that economy and affect are to each other like form is to colour: one cannot actualize itself without the other. Consequently, the aversive bureaucratic mode of communication asserted on one screen of the installation effectively demands a counterpoint—which duly appears in the second projection.

Here, the previously conjured stars are revealed to be the lights of a city at night, a working city, where the be-spangled sky seems to have been laid like a blanket over the topography of streets and buildings. Night—the day's



Optimizing brand loyalty with complementary worlds

unconscious—is the modality of this sequence of images accompanied by the ambient mixture of urban sounds emanating from humming ACs and city fauna. Light appears like a signifier of life within it: cold, white, and alienated, or coloured and gently affective. Intermittently, what at first appear to be visions of the moon or other celestial bodies slowly slip into motion, revealing colour, and thereby identifying themselves as no natural phenomena at all, but as emitters of manufactured light.

*“In this century we have developed new technologies that no longer connote a desire.”* This statement by the artwork’s central character, Peter, is countered by the otherwise anonymous voice of Henrick: *“Who even knows where desire is located?”*

\* \* \*

Nicolaus Copernicus is known as the eponymous author of the Copernican Revolution, describing the paradigm shift that marked the departure from a concept of the universe as centred around planet Earth and towards a heliocentric model.<sup>ii</sup> It is a lesser known fact that the author of the Copernican Revolution also wrote on economics. *On the*

*Value of Coin* was published in 1526, and so it is also Copernicus who is credited with originating the quantity theory of money, focusing on money supply in a given economy, in other words, on such problems as inflation.

Here, in this particular context, I may be permitted to speculate on the somewhat surprising dual expertise of Mr. Copernicus: the obvious connection between the two areas of his interest being circulation: planetary and monetary. But what of that rotating movement causing things to stand on their head, or, depending on the observer's viewpoint, be righted? Of things that continually alter their aspect while in motion? When evoking the Copernican Revolution, we understand this to be an innovation of fundamental and literally universal magnitude. Ibhgy and Lemmens' series of prints *The Revolutions of Capitalism* (2011) slyly pervert this notion of importance, focusing on the minutely mundane, as well as on macro economical phenomena such as the circular flow of capital, now rendered abstract to the point of meaninglessness. Their diagrams are as confoundingly concrete as they are conceptually opaque.

This formal attitude, gesturing toward scientific positivism in the guise of schemata, numbers, and clear delineations is again echoed in *Oscillations of Faith* (2011), a set of wall drawings with a striking semblance to polar map projections. Consisting of a concentric array of what appear to be longitudinal lines radiating out from a centre, the numerical coordinates denote a 24 hour span, distinctly conjuring a depiction of planet Earth. However, what we are presented with in the form of a graph are the eponymous oscillations of faith. Scientific certitude is once again applied to the immeasurable. (Interestingly, the graph levels during the time that we must assume depicts sleep: does faith not waver when we are unconscious?)

Ibhgy and Lemmens' work seems to take its cue from Keynesian theories<sup>iii</sup>—and their visualization—that attempted to capture affective behaviour in scientific models that would assist in making them fungible: an economy's motor is the immeasurable, the subjective, the ambivalent—yet it requires the measurable, the ostensibly objective, in short, certainty, to operate and to permit (trans)action.

It is the absurdity of the artists' demonstrations that lend urgency to the demand expounded in George Bataille's introduction to *The Accursed Share: An Essay on General Economy* in which he calls for "...a Copernican transformation: a reversal of thinking—and of ethics... An immense industrial network cannot be managed in the same way that one changes a tire... It expresses a circuit of cosmic energy on which it depends, which it cannot limit, and whose laws it cannot ignore without consequences. Woe to those who, to the very end, insist on regulating the movement that exceeds them with the narrow mind of the mechanic who changes a tire."<sup>iv</sup>

Ibhgy and Lemmens have handed us this tire, just removed from the broken apparatus. And here we stand, the spinning wheel in front of us, contemplating its capacities.

#### Endnotes

- i. [http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?l=d&p=16&allowed\\_in\\_frame=0](http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?l=d&p=16&allowed_in_frame=0)  
Last accessed October 9, 2011.
- ii. Copernicus published his book *De revolutionibus orbium coelestium* (*The revolutions of the heavenly spheres*) in 1542.
- iii. Cf. Keynes's "liquidity preference" and "propensity to consume" in John Maynard Keynes, *The General Theory of Employment, Interest and Money* (New York: Classic Books America, 2009).
- iv. Georges Bataille, *The Accursed Share: An Essay on General Economy*, Volume I, Consumption. Brooklyn: Zone Books, 1989, p. 26-27.

# THE MANY WAYS TO GET WHAT YOU WANT

know what you want



know how to get it



The Many Ways to Get What You Want (2011)

Wall Graph

Paint, vinyl

180" x 140"



**Peter Pete Systems:**  
**A Post-Fordist Love Story (2011)**  
 Two-channel HD video projection

In their collaborative practice, **Richard Ibghy** and **Marilou Lemmens** seek to heighten the allusive and deconstructive features of language to interrogate knowledge-formations, institutional contexts, and social and political entanglements. Their work is characterized by a minimalist approach to the form and construction of the art object and a use of materials as a way to make ideas visible. Recent projects explore how desire and belief influence economic discourse and practices, sustain current economies, but also carry the potential for inciting new forms of doing economy. Their work has been presented at galleries and institutions including Labor K1, Berlin, Galleria Alkovi, Helsinki, Morris and Helen Belkin Art Gallery, Vancouver, VU, Quebec City, Owens Art Gallery, Sackville, the European Media Art Festival, Osnabrück, and Trafó, House of Contemporary Arts, Budapest. Most recently, they have been invited to present their work at the 10<sup>th</sup> Sharjah Biennial, Sharjah, UAE. More information on Ibghy and Lemmens' practice can be found at [www.ibghylemmens.com](http://www.ibghylemmens.com).

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**Antonia Hirsch** lives and works in Berlin. Her practice consistently engages with systems—economic, geographical, quantitative, syntactic—that underwrite the most basic understandings of the world. She questions the often invisible hierarchies of these epistemological structures by relating them to more familiar territory: embodied experience. Her work has been exhibited at the Taipei Fine Arts Museum, Power Plant in Toronto, the Contemporary Art Gallery in Vancouver, and ZKM Museum of Contemporary Art, Karlsruhe, among others. Her work can be found in public collections such as that of the Vancouver Art Gallery, the Canada Council Art Bank, the National Gallery of Canada, and the Sackner Archive of Concrete & Visual Poetry, Miami Beach. Her artist projects and writing have been published in magazines and journals such as *Fillip*, *The Happy Hypocrite*, *C-magazine*, *Westcoast Line*, and *artecontexto*. More information on Antonia Hirsch's practice can be found at [www.antoniahirsch.com](http://www.antoniahirsch.com).

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