

Correcting and Clarifying

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Anita Di Bianco's ongoing publishing project *Corrections and Clarifications*, often given the subtitle *Apologies and Amplifications, Denials and Distinctions, Retractions and Refusals* by the artist, is a counter-flow—a timeline read in reverse chronology from right to left, a gesture of antagonism, and perhaps, *almost* literally, the verso. Produced since 2001 and published on the occasion of exhibitions in Banja Luka, Berlin, Derby, Istanbul, Leuven, Ljubljana, Nuremberg, and Zurich, *Corrections and Clarifications* borrows its format—and most of its content—from newspapers. The organizational principle of this irregular periodical is rather simple: The editor, in this case the artist, re-prints a selection of corrective declarations taken from newspapers. The only other recurring features are a brief, minimally altered editor's note on the second page of each volume and a list of sources toward the end of each publication. Anita Di Bianco re-presents this accumulation with the belief that "perhaps what is conveyed unintentionally, and by repetitious mistakes, is more revealing, more historically identifiable, and substantially less conciliatory than it is meant to be."

While there are subtle alterations in the graphic design from volume to volume, *Corrections and Clarifications* replicates the well-established, familiar graphic and tactile parameters of newspaper printing. Produced in either tabloid or broadsheet format, it is printed in black serif typeface on newsprint. The corrections are arranged in columns under the date, with certain selections accentuated by grey boxes. Di Bianco also replicates the comfortably familiar world order of bold and italics, using these editorial tools as she sees fit. Each edition of *Corrections and Clarifications*, printed in runs ranging from 500 to 5,000 copies, is either distributed gratis within the context of the exhibition for which it was printed or available later at the price of one US dollar at Printed Matter in New York. As the project progressed over the last decade, *Corrections and Clarifications* has not only expanded in its source material with a larger selection of newspapers and other sources such as Twitter, but also ventured out of the Anglophone world, with some issues available in bilingual editions, such as Slovenian, German in addition to English and most recently, a volume printed only in Turkish.

The first issue of *Corrections and Clarifications* covers the period September 1, 2001, to July 4, 2002.¹ It comprises twenty-four broadsheet pages and includes corrections gathered from predominantly widely

¹ This first issue of the publication was produced in conjunction with the Rijksakademie van Beeldende Kunsten, Amsterdam, and printed in Amsterdam.

distributed English-language newspapers covering a diverse range of angles from The New York Times to The Jakarta Post. In her editorial, Di Bianco draws attention to the apparently arbitrary end date of the volume "... in the US, [4th of July] being that annual reminder of the original intention of the colonies to create a nation based on democratic principles." While this symbolic gesture of resurrecting the revolutionary aspirations of a national holiday is significant—and sets the tone for the political engagement and social bend that continues throughout the project—it is the start date of *Corrections and Clarifications* that is perhaps more revealing.

Here, I am using the same creative license to suggest that the artist must have intuitively (or alternatively, remarkably consciously) chosen a date range covering the before and after of 9/11. This was a moment of derailment that both marked the immense representative power of media and its seemingly inexhaustible potential for instrumentalization in shaping a narrative, which in turn justified a series of actions and events—most notably, the United States' invasion of Afghanistan and in 2003, Iraq. The social, political and economic ramifications of these events still shape our present day the world over. The artist reveals her motivations for the project in this first volume through a story that she will repeat in each of her minimally altered editorials in the volumes to come:

In defense of granting TV/entertainment producers access to US troops in Afghanistan for the production of a reality TV show, Admiral Craig Quigley told reporters: "There are a lot of other ways to convey information to the American people than through news organizations." (February 22, 2002). Ignoring for the moment what is at least a subtle threat. That one cannot argue with such double-talk is obvious, and no less promising than simply reframing the contradictions this type of speech invariably produces, coerces, and demands. So this is a newspaper without headlines, allowing double-talk to talk to itself.

The first iteration of the project embodies the motivations and interests of the artist more openly and visibly than subsequent issues. Starting on July 4, 2002, with several entries under each consecutive date arranged in reverse historical order, Di Bianco stresses her own interest in these corrective announcements by italicizing certain parts. A sampling of these italicized portions quickly reveals her own motivations in political and social agents of economy, surveillance, representation or law in informing the selection process of chosen corrections; "changes in the way UN prices Iraqi oil," "the police initiative focused on CCTV," "images of the bombed Afghan bases," "an example of the way a nuclear war was avoided," or "there is no way to fool an audience that has remained loyal to the company for decades (not 'There is a way')."

Di Bianco's inherent belief in the revelatory power of misprints, factual mistakes, slips (Freudian or not), editing errors, misstatements is evident, and her decision-making process emerges through these graphical accents of bold, italics, or grey box frames. With the first volume of *Corrections and Clarifications*, this exercise takes the shape of a somewhat ethnographic look at mishaps and euphemisms, a presentation of alternative knowledge, and an exposé of undercurrents.

In her editorial statement, Anita Di Bianco paradoxically diverts all credit of authorship away from herself. She identifies four actors deserving of this credit; the creators of the statements she re-prints (writers, i.e. the correctors): "those who have provided the material for this publication by having seen fit to correct themselves, or having seen themselves fit to correct others"; the editors: "those seekers, processors, middle managers, and ultimate regulators of public information who take it upon themselves (or impose it upon others) to re-name, re-classify, disguise, de-fuse or be de-briefed..."; those whose misstatement caused the grounds for the correction "who, regardless of stated intentions, occasionally reveal something, piece by piece, through slips in language and naming systems"; and finally, the readers of *Corrections and Clarifications* "who regard these revisions and retractions with the same skepticism they have for the originals." Anita Di Bianco's statement is rich in underlying currents of passionate criticism of this well-established filtering

system and her clever appropriation is in fact revealing; however, by this reattribution of credit, Di Bianco tactfully disguises her own presence in *Corrections and Clarifications*. While highlighting certain patterns of speech and coverage through others' words, she is speaking through others in the same way newspapers speak through current events, bending them to their own agenda.

The volumes that follow the ambitious first edition stay loyal to the initial framework; however, the visibility of the artist's interests inherent in the selection process of each one of the included corrections fades noticeably with each volume. Italics and bold have disappeared from the volume which traces corrections dating from August 15, 2004 to January 1, 2005. As the editions continue, there are fewer grey boxes and alterations of bigger font sizes that highlight certain entries. In two instances, the artist's presence is reinstated; in her editorial for volume six, Di Bianco draws attention to an omission; "whose absence hints at their eventual admissibility as evidence," she states that there have been no market corrections to the massive rises in quarterly profits to oil companies, hinting at her expectation and interest in the significance of this information. Here, her interest in the direct economic impact of political decision-making processes is evident. In the eleventh volume, *Corrections and Clarifications* adopts a new filter; it "specifically interrogates the frequency and repetitive nature of errors and limits in breadth and vision, either

incidentally or directly, in news reporting on issues of gender and sexuality." Another politically and socially charged cause revealing the personal politics and priorities of the artist is revealed openly.

The most recent volume of *Corrections and Clarifications*, which covers localized news reporting in Turkey from January 2, 2012, until July 27, 2014, is published only in Turkish, with some alterations to the format.² This publication features not only corrective statements published in newspapers, but letters of correction sent to be collected and made public in the reports of a voluntary media watchdog organization active in Turkey, *Medya Tekzip Merkezi* [The Media Correction Center] as well as expanding the range of publicly shared corrections to personal Twitter accounts, in line with the dominance of social media as the increasingly popular mode of receiving news—a key resort especially in a country where the level of freedom in popular printed media is very low. Perhaps unsurprisingly, this issue features many corrective statements denying any truth at all in what is deemed speculative reporting; letters of rebuttal came from the presidential office, members of parliament, municipalities, soccer players, and celebrities, and were often signed by their attorneys. There is an especially

2 The most recent issue of *Corrections and Clarifications*, titled *Düzeltilmeler ve Açıklamalar* in Turkish, was produced in collaboration with the Istanbul non-profits collectospace and BAS, and printed in Istanbul. It proceeded from the exhibition *Corrections and Clarifications from the BAS Collection* displayed at collectospace February 5–March 22, 2014.

high concentration of pronouncements with reference to defamation of character in this Turkish volume. The underlying belief in the intentionality of misrepresentations, factual errors and a strong conviction thinly disguised in these rebuttals admit to the commonality of reporting with ulterior motives. In this case, the corrections act more as a barometer of the ethical standards in news reporting in Turkey, or lack thereof. When deployed by public figures such as politicians, officials and government offices, these corrections often function as allegations and intimidations. The phenomenon quickly morphs into a seismic measure of political undercurrents.

While *Corrections and Clarifications* is a conceptual exercise in public service, providing information that reveals complex bureaucratic, political, social, psychological, and legalistic structures that regulate our perception of current events through journalism's convoluted processes of knowledge production, the gradual disappearance of the hand of the artist illustrates an embodiment or repetition of some of the very news reporting schemes that Di Bianco sets out to reveal. The decision-making process of what makes it to print is invisible: The numerous conditions motivating the selections of the editor are inaccessible to the reader, the reasons of selected sources are often not apparent, and limitations of access via language or errors in translation come into play, as in the bilingual issues when the artist is dependent on other researchers, their motivations, and

intricacies involved in translation. The obscured editorial mechanism, ironically but evidently, ends up repeating itself in *Corrections and Clarifications*. Anita Di Bianco says "perhaps what is conveyed unintentionally and by repetitious mistakes, is significantly more revealing, and more historically identifiable, than it is meant to be," which begs the question: Can you correct the corrections? And if so, and somewhat naively, who will do it? The artist's final call for the necessity of doubt, her hope that "[the] readers who regard these revisions and retractions with the same skepticism they have for the originals" is fulfilled within the means of her own production. An infinitely intriguing artistic exercise revealing different facets of societal complexity in different geographies, Di Bianco's project produces the skeptic reader that it calls for.

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