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Editorial

Could it be that contemporary art *is* neoliberalism in its most purified form? At the center of our December issue is a constellation of unusually frank essays mounting an indictment of contemporary art's complicity with gentrification and capital accumulation, with processes of divestiture and exploitation.

We would like to see a way out of this, but questioning whether cultural work can actually have a real effect on power relations, or whether capital, public or private, should really be a measure of art's civic or cultural value in the first place, only serves to accelerate the endless cycling—consuming life, finding work, making money, finding funding, spending it. And as you feel yourself somehow sitting next to your own working body, your last hopeful, analytical nerve pushes you to ask whether total withdrawal might be the key to reclaiming your life as you might have once known it. Or could it be the opposite: work harder, push the machine till it utterly collapses (or you do), and just see what happens? And the other question: What happened to art?

In the first of a three-part series on the creative class, **Martha Rosler** looks at the many ways artists have been deployed as agents of gentrification. When city municipalities found that the culture of bourgeois spectatorship could be a weapon for eradicating urban poverty precisely by driving the poor out of their homes, a painful chain of events was set in motion to reconfigure urban space to suit the needs of capital by way of the bohemian lifestyle. In this scheme, artists in search of cheap rent would function as the avant-garde, the first wave of attack, the pioneers.

Ekaterina Degot takes us on a fateful visit to Donetsk, recounting a visit to the Ukranian city for an event organized by a newly opened "platform for cultural initiatives" in a former factory. Amidst mystifying and cartoonish scenarios of infrastructural breakdown and privatization, Degot rides a roller coaster of contradictions around the desire to transform a crumbling Soviet relic into a dynamic center for contemporary art.

Hito Steyerl confronts contemporary art as a place of exploitation and postdemocratic pleasures, as a tool for extracting labor from the ambitious in exchange for visibility and for extracting visibility from labor in exchange for ambition. And while so many artists attempt to produce political work, "one could even say that the politics of art are the blind spot of much contemporary political art."

Liam Gillick interrogates "contemporary art" as a term that has outlived its application. Its very flexibility and all-encompassing character might give it a whiff of tolerance and even generosity, but its limited ability to accommodate much of the work now made under its gaze has begun to lend its original pluralism a hegemonic sense of inescapability in the midst of a mass of opportunities. But, as Gillick points out: "That is the genius

of the regime. It is the perfect zone of deferral."

In the second in a series of essays, **Franco Berardi** considers the radicality of exhaustion as a possible way out of the neoliberal cycle of monetarist competition and growth in Europe. At a time when contraction and deflation are the overwhelming trend both demographically and economically in Europe, we look to understand the figure of the elderly pensioner as embodying a potential alternative to the too-easily exploitable ethos of youthful drive and enthusiastic overproduction.

In **Hans Ulrich Obrist**'s expansive conversation with **Hakim Bey**, the anarchist writer best known for his book *T.A.Z.: The Temporary Autonomous Zone*, discusses his lifelong struggle to find ways of creating the autonomy to live as one pleases, with or without the prospect of revolution. Traversing the importance of traveling, the possibilities for anarchist institution building, the question of religion, the viability of pirate utopias and the communal movement, running a cultural center in Tehran under the Shah, and the vast and often bizarre local history of the Hudson Valley, we find that great projects are not necessarily compromised by limited durations, for not everything is meant to last forever.

—Julieta Aranda, Brian Kuan Wood, Anton Vidokle

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Julieta Aranda is an artist and an editor of *e-flux journal.*

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Franco “Bifo” Berardi

Exhaustion and Senile Utopia of the Coming European Insurrection

Figures such as Jürgen Habermas and Jacques Derrida, among many others, have stressed in the past that we need to create institutions for unified political decisions at the level of the European Union. In the aftermath of the Greek debt crisis, it seems that the Europhile intellectuals have gotten what they asked for. The EU entity has been subjected to a sort of political directorate that has unfortunately only served to reveal that financial interests lie at the heart of the Union’s priorities. The early stage of the European tragedy has manifested itself as a political enforcement of the financial domination of European society.

The institutions of the welfare state have been under attack for thirty years: full employment, labor rights, social security, retirement, public schools, public transportation—all of these areas have been weakened, neglected, or destroyed. After thirty years of neoliberal obsession, we arrive at a collapse. What comes next? The ruling class answers coarsely: more of the same. Further reduction of public sector salaries, further raising of the age of retirement. No respect for society’s needs and the rights of workers.

Thatcher said thirty years ago that there is no such thing as society, and today this statement comes across as a self-fulfilling prophecy. Society is in fact dissolving, leaving space to a jungle where everyone fights against one another. Following the Greek crisis, the monetarist dogma has been strongly reinforced, as if more poison could act as an antidote. Reducing demand will lead to recession, and the only result will be to further concentrate capital in the hands of the financial class and further impoverish the working class.

Following the Greek financial crisis, emergency law was declared: a self-proclaimed Merkel-Sarkozy-Trichet directorate imposed a deflationary policy to be forced on the various national governments of European countries. In order to rescue the financial system, this self-proclaimed directorate diverts resources from society to the banks. And in order to revive the failed philosophy of neoliberalism, social spending is cut, salaries are lowered, the retirement age is raised, and the younger working generation is precarized. Those who do not acknowledge the great necessities of competition and growth will be cut out. Those who choose to play the game will have to accept any punishment, any renunciation, any suffering demanded by the great necessity. But who said that we must absolutely be part of this?

So far, the result of the collapse of neoliberal politics has been its confirmation and consolidation. When the American financial system collapsed, there was a general expectation that capital concentration would be abandoned or at least diminished, as a redistribution of wealth seemed necessary to rescue the economy. This has not taken place. The Keynesian way has not even been explored, and Paul Krugman has been left to repeat a

series of perfectly reasonable options that no one is willing to consider.

Thanks to the crisis, American society has been robbed by big finance, and now Europe is following with its own mathematical ferocity. Is there any chance of stopping this insane race? A social explosion is possible, as it is apparent that living conditions will soon become unbearable. But precarious labor and the decomposition of social solidarity may open the way to a frightening outcome: ethnic civil war on continental scale, and the dismantling of the Union, which would unleash the worst instincts of nations.

In Paris, London, Barcelona, Rome, and Athens, massive demonstrations have erupted to protest the restrictive measures, but this movement is not going to stop the catastrophic aggression against social life, because the European Union is not a democracy, but a financial dictatorship whose politics are the result of unquestioned decision-making processes.

Peaceful demonstrations will not suffice to change the course of things and violent explosions will be too easily exploited by racists and criminals. A deep change in social perception and social lifestyle will compel a growing part of society to withdraw from the economic field, from the game of work and consumption. These people will abandon individual consumption to create new, enhanced forms of co-habitation, a village economy within the metropolis.

Unless one is seized by avarice or psychotic obsession, all a human being wants is a pleasant, possibly long life, to consume what is necessary to keep fit and make love. "Civilization" is the pompous name given to all the political or moral values that make the pursuit of this lifestyle possible. Meanwhile, the financial dogma states that if we want to be part of the game played in banks and markets, we must give up a pleasant, quiet life. We must give up civilization.

But why should we accept this exchange? Europe's wealth does not come from the stability of the Euro or international markets, or the managers' ability to monitor their profits. Europe is wealthy because it has millions of intellectuals, scientists, technicians, doctors, and poets. It has millions of workers who have augmented their technical knowledge for centuries. Europe is wealthy because it has historically managed to valorize competence, and not just competition, to welcome and integrate other cultures. And, it must be said, it is also wealthy because for four centuries it has ferociously exploited the physical and human resources of other continents.

We must give something up, but what exactly? Certainly we must give up the hyper-consumption imposed on us by large corporations, but not the tradition of humanism, enlightenment, and socialism—not freedom, rights, and welfare. And this is not because we are attached to old principles of the past, but because it is these principles that make it possible to live decently.

The prospect of a revolution is not open to us. The concept of revolution no longer corresponds to anything, because it entails an exaggerated notion of the political will over the complexity of contemporary society. Our main prospect is to shift to a new paradigm not centered on product growth, profit, and accumulation, but on the full unfolding of the power of collective intelligence.

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Platitudes

The European tragedy has been founded on a false representation of social reality, based on some assumptions that contradict daily experience, but are nevertheless delivered as absolute truth, as unquestionable dogma.

Platitude 1: Public spending must be drastically cut if European budgets are to be balanced. In fact, European states have been cutting their budgets over the last thirty years, and are now diverting financial resources from social infrastructure towards banks and corporations. This diversion has already produced extensive damage, and will produce more.

Platitude 2: The European economy must compete with the emerging economies of developing countries, and this can happen only by reducing labor costs. This means that in order to become competitive, in a strictly economical sense, European life should be impoverished. And this is what is happening: unemployment is rising, education is being privatized, and racism is spreading. Nobody has ever explained why the only criterion for evaluating wealth must be financial in nature.

Platitude 3: The European worker's productivity must be increased while salaries must be reduced. This produces an effect of low demand, deflation, and depression, but also overproduction. 40 percent of cars produced in Europe will not find buyers (thank God). So why should carmakers seek to increase the productivity of their already hyper-exploited workers? Consumption declines because salaries shrink, but also because Europeans simply do not need any more cars.

Platitude 4: The age of retirement must be raised, as there will be too many young people and too few old people in the future. The retirement age has already been raised in every European country, and now in France as well. But the rationale does not make sense. The productivity of the

average European worker has increased fivefold over the past fifty years, so when the time comes, fewer young people actually will be able to feed more old people. But in reality, raising the retirement age has nothing to do with any social concern whatsoever. Rather, it is a trick for reducing labor costs. Capitalists would much rather pay a poor, old worker a salary than a deserved pension, and leave the young to find their own way, accepting any kind of occupation, whether precarious or simply underpaid.

No European politician dares to question these fundamental platitudes. And those who protest against these devastating measures are accused of being unable to comprehend the task at hand: to advance the deregulation that produced the present collapse. The late-neoliberal ruling class states that if deregulation produced the systemic collapse, we need more deregulation. If lower taxation on high incomes led to a fall in demand, let's lower high-income taxation. If hyper-exploitation resulted in the production of unsold and useless cars, let's intensify car production. Are these people crazy? Perhaps they are panicking, in fear of their own impotence.

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Aesthetics of Europe

The aesthetics of the European Union is cold by definition. The European Union was born in the aftermath of World War II with the goal of overcoming old nationalist and ideological passions, and here lies its progressive and pragmatic nature. Lately, however, this founding anti-mythological myth seems to have been blurred, confused, forgotten. In the words of Eve Charrin:

> Europe is peace, Europe is prosperity … Granite, glass and concrete: depressing architectural neutrality … This modesty without grace is a way of pretending that we are not political (rather, we are only managing).[1]

Charrin expresses the aesthetic predicament of the European Union over the past decades, but such an apathetic way of being together was only possible under prosperous conditions. Insofar as a growing level of consumption could be guaranteed within the EU, monetarist rule could favor economic growth, and the EU could exist as an entity. It is a fiction of democracy governed by an autocratic organism, the European Central Bank. While the US Federal Reserve was established to stabilize the value of currency and maximize employment, the primary goal of the ECB charter is to fight inflation. Now this goal has become irrational, as deflation is the overwhelming trend.

Citizens can do nothing to influence the politics of the ECB, as the Bank does not respond to political authority, and this is why European citizens have been conscious of the vacuity of European elections. In the future, these citizens will come to view the EU as their enemy.

Social movements should focus on a founding myth of European history: the myth of energy. Modern culture and political imagination have emphasized the virtues of youth, of passion and energy, aggressiveness and growth. Capitalism is based on the exploitation of physical energy, and semiocapitalism has subjugated the nervous energy of society to the point of collapse. The notion of exhaustion has always been anathema to the discourse of modernity, of romantic Sturm und Drang, of the Faustian drive to immortality, the endless thirst for economic growth and profit, the denial of organic limits.

The romantic cult of youth is the cultural source of nationalism. In the colonial era, British and French nationalism was the cultural condition of colonial expansion, but in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, nationalism resurfaced to express the self-affirmation of young countries (Italy, Japan, and Germany), while the old empires (Russia, Austria, and the Ottomans) headed towards collapse. Nationalism also affirms the role of the young generation at the cultural and economic level. Old-fashioned styles are devalued, old people and women are despised for their weakness. Fascism always depicts itself as the young nation.

In late modernity, this depiction became an essential feature of advertising. But contrary to Fascist discourse, late modern advertising did not abuse old age, but denied it, claiming that every old person could be young if he or she would simply accept to partake in the consumerist feast. As Norman Spinrad showed in his novel *Bug Jack Barron* (1967), the denial of age and time marks the ultimate delirium of the global class.

The Fascism that triumphed in Italy after 1922 can be seen as the *energolatreia* (worshipping of energy) of the young. Now, Berlusconi re-stages the same arrogance, but the actors of the present comedy are old men who require make up and Viagra to inhabit an image of energy and potency. Like the heroic mythology of Fascism, as well as the mythology of advertising embodied by Berlusconi's subculture, the myth is based on a delirium of power. Where the former was based on the youthful virtues of strength, energy, and pride, the latter employs the mature virtues of technique, deception, and finance. And while the nemesis that followed the youthful violence of Fascism in Italy was World War II and its unthinkable mass of destruction and death, one must ask what nemesis will be brought about by the present *energolatreia* of the old people?

With very few exceptions, literature and cinema have scarcely dealt with the subject of love between the elderly. It is a subject we know very little about, simply because old people have never really existed. Until some decades ago, it was rare to find a person older than sixty, and while many that were would be surrounded by an aura of respect and veneration, many others were banished to the border of society, where they would find themselves alone, deprived of the means of survival, and unable to form a community. We know very little about growing old, and we know nothing about the emotions of the elderly and their ability of social organization, solidarity, and political force. We don't know because we have not experienced it. But that experience is now beginning.

The destiny of Europe will be played out in the biopolitical sphere, at the border between consumerism, techno-sanitarian youth-styled aggressiveness, and possible collective consciousness of the limits of the biological (sensitive) organism. The age of senilization is here, and Europe is the place where this experience will first find its voice.

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A Therapeutic Paradox

Exhaustion has no place in Western culture, and this has become a problem, for exhaustion now needs to be understood and accepted as a new paradigm for social life. Its cultural and psychic articulation will open the door to a new conception of prosperity and happiness. The coming European insurrection will not be driven by energy, but by slowness, withdrawal, and exhaustion. It will be the autonomization of the collective body and soul from exploitation by means of speed and competition.

Western people were first advised of exhaustion in 1972, when the Club of Rome commissioned the book *The Limits to Growth*.[2] For the first time, we became aware that the physical resources of the planet are not boundless. Some months after the publication of the report, the Western world experienced the first oil shortage following the Yom Kippur war in 1973. Since then, we are expected to be conscious of the fact that energy is leaving the physical body of the Earth. At the beginning of the twenty-first century, the collapse of the dot-com economy led to the pauperization and precarization of cognitive workers, while the financial meltdown of September 2008 initiated a process of pauperization and precarization of overall society. Western culture is unprepared to deal with the patterns exposed by these crises, because it is a culture based on the identification of energy and good, of expansion and social well-being.

At the moment the change in perception towards exhaustion seems rather dark and depressing, because the game is played following the rules of modern *energolatria*: growth. In the coming years one third of the European population—the generation born after World War II, when the fulfillment of the modern promise of peace, democracy, and well-being was apparently at hand—will reach old age. The new generation now entering the labor market does not possess the memory of this past civilization, nor the political force to defend their existence from the predatory economy. The age of senility is here, and it may introduce a generalized form of *dementia senilis*: fear of the unknown, xenophobia, loss of historical memory. But in a different scenario—one that we should anticipate at the cultural level—the process of senilization may open the way to a cultural revolution based on the force of exhaustion, of facing the inevitable with grace, discovering the sensuous slowness of those who do not expect any more from life than wisdom—the wisdom of those who have seen a great deal without forgetting, who look at each thing as if for the first time.

This is the lesson that Europe may learn if it can come out from the capitalist obsession with accumulation, property, and greed. In a reversal of the energetic subjectivation that animated the revolutionary theories of the twentieth century, radicalism should abandon the mode of activism, and adopt a passive mode. A radical passivity would dispel the ethos of relentless productivity that neoliberal politics has imposed. The mother of all the bubbles, the bubble of work, would finally deflate. We have been working too much over the past three or four centuries, and outrageously too much over the last thirty years. If a creative consciousness of exhaustion could arise, the current depression may mark the beginning of a massive abandonment of competition, consumerist drive, and dependence on work.

Anthropologist Gregory Bateson would define the European malaise in terms of a double bind, or contradictory injunction, with a paradoxical solution that could be this: don't be afraid of decline. Decline and de-growth imply a divestment in the midst of frenzied competition, and this is the paradox that may bring us out of the neoliberal double bind.

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All images by ISTUBALZ

Franco Berardi, aka "Bifo," founder of the famous "Radio Alice" in Bologna and an important figure of the Italian Autonomia Movement, is a writer, media theorist, and media activist. He currently teaches Social History of the

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1
Eve Charrin, “La Belgique, vertige de l’Europe,” *Esprit* no. 353 (March–April 2009): 31–42.

2
Donella H. Meadows, Dennis L. Meadows, Jørgen Randers, William Bahrens, *The Limits to Growth* (New York: Potomac Association, 1972).

Ekaterina Degot

A Letter from Donetsk: Art Amidst the Roses

Last year, I was taking a taxi into Kyiv's downtown from Borispol Airport. About midway through the trip, I noticed a large black jeep coming straight towards my taxi on the same side of the road. It was not that it was traveling fast—no, it was more likely driving quite slowly. But it was going in the opposite direction on our side of the highway, which is divided by a high wall stretching almost the entire way from Kyiv to the airport. It was not entirely clear how this rudderless Flying Dutchman had gotten there.

"It's goodfellas from Donetsk," said the driver as he dodged the jeep.

This had been my only association with Donetsk prior to my arrival in this lovely city.

Donetsk is graced by rather broad, green boulevards and vast expanses in which one senses something elusively Soviet. In the city's buildings, this Sovietness is far less elusive: it seemed to me that they had been built mainly in the fifties, and some of them feature elegant, sleek-bodied columns, that secondary sexual characteristic of an administrative branch with cultural ambitions. However, there is also something mirror-like in the city à la Dubai—a characteristic of an administrative branch with financial ambitions.

The secret of the Donetsk cityscape's elusive Sovietness was later revealed to me by artist Sergey Bratkov, who brought to my attention that there is very little advertising on the streets of this city, and no street kiosks whatsoever. The local authorities had decided that this was how they wanted it. Donetsk, by the way, is no mere city, but the hometown of Ukraine's current president.

In the evening, we decided to walk to the restaurant. My companions, who have some experience living in Donetsk, stopped at the crosswalk when the light turned red, although there were no cars to be seen on the horizon. When they noticed my look of amazement, they confessed they were afraid. When the lights of something broad-browed like a bison loomed somewhere in the distance, it became clear what they were afraid of. A black jeep raced by like a bullet, the desolate Sunday evening's smooth surface closing again in its wake.

On early Sunday evenings, the residents of Donetsk stay at home in the European manner and get ready for the workweek ahead. This was apparent when we arrived at the restaurant. There was almost no one there, and as we soon found out, almost nothing to eat. Lyubov Mikhailova, after being told that several items on the menu were unavailable, asked for buckwheat kasha, a simple porridge and the most basic staple food imaginable. When it was brought to her, it turned out that it was a leftover from the previous day, if not the day before. Lyuba refused to eat it. The waitress apologized and said that the kitchen staff had already gone home.

Lyuba Mikhailova is the person responsible for my coming to Donetsk. As far as I know, Lyuba Mikhailova owns the entire petroleum coke chemical industry in Ukraine and is probably a millionaire, although I don't know this for sure. She is not related to the Kharkiv artist Boris Mikhailov or his wife Vita, whose maiden name is also Mikhailova. Lyuba Mikhailova is the daughter of Ivan Mikhailov. Ivan Mikhailov was director of a factory that produced insulation, and by an amazing coincidence of the sort so common in the fairytale-like reality of the former Soviet Union, his daughter became the co-owner of the factory (along with numerous other assets). The factory has just been closed, and Lyuba Mikhailova is now turning it into a "platform for cultural initiatives."

Ivan Mikhailov is quite upset by this turn of events. It is something incomprehensible to him that his factory, which had always fulfilled its production quotas for mineral wool, must now for some reason be turned into a museum, when it could just as well have gone on fulfilling quotas. At the opening of ISOLYATZIA, people consoled him by telling him that the factory's new life was not a revocation of the past, but its continuation in a new form, because culture and contemporary art are in fact the new guise of industrial production. The head of the city's Budyonny District went so far as to say that the advent of art at the factory was akin to Christ driving the moneychangers out of the Temple.

True, this sounded like a Gogolesque mix-up, for it was the emergence of the market—that is, the moneychangers—that actually brought about the factory's demise. But this is essentially what lots of people think: work is hell, but culture is a temple. Where do people go on Sundays? To church. Well, they can also go to a contemporary art show.

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Alexander Laktionov, *To a New Apartment*, 1952, oil on canvas.
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The director of the new art institution is Anastasia Butsko, a German journalist and a friend of mine. She is a very positive person: she has the ability to pronounce the phrase "I'm new to Donetsk" utterly naturally (something I myself could not manage), and I am absolutely certain that everything will work out for her in her new job as well. The more so because it is very much part of the zeitgeist to fill the void left by a closed production facility with culture. This idea is something that people immediately understand: cultural leisure comes to a site where excruciating physical labor once took place, and besides, this leisure comes with the cachet of big money attached (the first thing everyone knows about contemporary art is that it is expensive). Nastya Butsko, who has lived in Germany for a long time, knows of course that contemporary art there has a completely different cachet—that of serving society (whether this is deserved or not is another matter). But she also knows that in the post-Soviet world the general public does not really appreciate it when they are served anything social and it does not like anything connected with public life, preferring private life instead. Maybe it was always this way. I realized this when I saw Alexander Laktionov's magnificent painting *Moving to a New Apartment* (1952), which I had only seen in reproductions before, at the Donetsk Art Museum. This anthem to insatiable Soviet consumerism is so grotesque that it seems like a specimen of Pop Art. This painting should be turned into an advertisement for a real estate agency, but portraits of war veterans line the streets of Donetsk instead of billboards.

I was driven around the city by another amiable, modest, and solicitous young woman named Yulya. To my surprise, Yulya turned out to be the director of a factory in Horlivka. She was just as solicitous when she spoke about her own factory, and her account was filled with sighs (there are problems there). Looking over her shoulder, she also told me in a whisper about the *kópanki*. *Kópanki* are illegal private coal mines located in the backyards of houses. They are practically holes in the ground, and illegal aliens, including women and children, break their backs inside these holes; as often as not they die there as well. When they die, cement is poured over them right where they lie. Everyone has heard about this, but few people have seen it or wish to see it. Actually, even in the legal private mines (there are no longer any publicly owned mines), coal is obtained using artisanal, open-pit methods.

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ISOLYATZIA, Platform of cultural initiatives, Donezk, Ukraine.

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I had come to Donetsk primarily for a conference where we were supposed to talk about "converting the values of the past." Because of a late flight, I missed the opening of the conference; when I walked in, the second panelist, an architect from Paris, was speaking. She had already finished presenting her projects for public centers and was fielding questions. "How do you think the interests of business and the interests of society can be reconciled?" asked someone in the audience. She did not respond, as she did not understand the question. The architect was followed by a certain bureaucrat from Holland, the head of an organization that oversees the use of industrial buildings. He said, archly, "When you invite people to your venue, you invite them along with their problems."

But I was still thinking about those interests of business and society. When I went up to speak, I began my talk by saying that I hoped there were people in the audience who, like me, think that the interests of business should

generally overlap with the interests of society, and that society should demand this. Then I also talked about the First Ural Industrial Biennale, which I had recently curated with Cosmin Costinas and David Riff; about the city of Yekaterinburg; about the mendacity of the new design and lifestyle advocated by "creative people"; about how the backbone of the way of life based on industrial production is being broken, about how contemporary art usually attempts to conceal and gussy up this fracture. And how it is not that the arrival of art in the factories runs into problems, but that it itself (this arrival) *is* the problem. (This is what we wanted to address in the Ural Biennale.)

The Euro-bureaucrat sat stiff as a poker. The French architect said that she understood my point of view, but that she tried to see something positive in everything, and so even if she was forced to build a shopping center, she tried to regard it as a kind of public space, although, of course... A portly little man in a pink t-shirt and bright-orange glasses—clearly an artist—had been seething and percolating in the front row for a while. He said that he was born in Czechoslovakia, but emigrated from there in 1968. The artist was outraged by how *judgmental* I was. He reminded me that I was shouldering the burden of totalitarianism, and as a positive counterexample he cited Osip Mandelstam, who was *not judgmental*, despite the fact that he had been killed by the regime, unlike me. I refused to get sucked into an argument about Mandelstam.

The ex-Czech also said that the real artist is free from politics, that one should not see ideology everywhere, and that one cannot simply diss Damien Hirst (it seems that I'd allowed myself to mention this name) just like that, because he is at the center of the establishment, and being at the center of the establishment is a very important thing. I recognized something Muscovite about this style of argumentation.

Then there was a fairly stormy roundtable in which journalists and cultural figures from Kyiv and Donetsk spoke. It was clear that chronic problems were being discussed. The names "Pinchuk" and "Hirst" were invoked. A Kyiv journalist said that one had to form an environment and not simply import culture, but on the other hand one should not condemn Pinchuk for his involvement with Hirst, because otherwise Ukraine would withdraw into itself.

"Yes, we want Hirst, we want him!" shouted a bearded man in the audience. "We just want something to happen, whatever it is!"

Then my friend Anne Durufle spoke; she had been the French cultural attaché for a time in Moscow, and now she holds the same post in Kyiv. She insisted that such ambitious projects cannot make it if there is no dialogue with the state, and she complained greatly about the fact that everyone in Ukraine believes only in private funding. She even attempted to convince the crowd that working with the authorities was interesting.

I don't know specifically how the crowd felt about private funding, but there was certainly no one there who believed in the authorities and intended to work with them. There was not a single Marat Guelman in the room. The same journalist said that the authorities do nothing for culture because they sense that they are temporarily in power and are thus concerned with pursuing their own agendas.

In response to this, a young woman right in front of me wearing a black pantsuit with shoulder pads sprang to her feet angrily. She introduced herself as a spokesperson for the powers that be.

"Why do you say that the authorities aren't doing anything? Have you visited the Palace of Culture and the City Day festivities?" asked Power Girl. "Have you been to the Song without Borders Festival? Have you seen the Wrought-Iron Figures Park? There are wrought-iron roses there! Have you seen wrought-iron roses in any other city in the world?"

I later noticed that the project for reconstructing the building that houses ISOLYATZIA was also decorated with roses of some kind, albeit moderately. Roses are apparently some kind of local symbol.

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Opening of *ISOLYATZIA*, Platform of cultural initiatives, Donezk, Ukraine.

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"We are helping to popularize Donetsk as a dancing tourist destination," said Power Girl. This truly amazed me. I imagined a city in which all the tourists move about by performing ballet steps, and I even thought I misheard her. But no one in the room was surprised. (Yulya the factory director later told me that in fact everyone in Donetsk learns to dance at a young age; for girls, it is considered obligatory, and it is almost obligatory for boys.)

The moderators closed the gathering. As the panelists were already leaving, someone yelled, "Is there music planned? Should we make way for the amateurs?"

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At the crowded dinner in the restaurant, the bureaucrat and the orange artist wanted me to sit next to them. I resigned myself to this and got ready to perform a genre I had long ago mastered—"lecture for foreigners on the peculiarities of Russian food and, more important, drink." I would have to hold forth on the Ukrainian variation on this theme. The salt pork, pickles, and greens were already on the table, but the vodka was still on the way (they were

serving horseradish vodka). After explaining what the purple leaves and long green stalks were, I refused the salt pork offered me, joking that it was against my principles to eat salt pork without vodka.

"We already heard enough about your principles at the conference today," said the bureaucrat. "At dinner you can keep quiet."

Wow! This was the first time my political criticism had proved so instantaneously effective. So outright deadly, so to speak. To force the Euro-bureaucrat to lose his self-control and lower himself (or raise himself?) to the level of an average Russian lout, now that was something to be proud of.

On the other hand, the conversation somehow lost its point right before my eyes. I turned my chair ninety degrees and directed my attention wholly to the ex-Czech in the orange glasses. It turned out that he had been itching to tell me a story.

It happened in the early seventies, when he was already a lucky citizen of the free Great Britain. He was flying from Japan to London. He told me why, but I didn't catch what he said because it was clear that the juicy part was still to come. His plane was forced by bad weather to make an unscheduled stopover in Moscow at a gloomy, dark, snowbound Sheremetyevo Airport. All the passengers were led into some kind of chilly holding cage lit by a bare bulb dangling from the ceiling and made to sit on a bench.

"She just can't be alone," said Pavel the artist, who was sitting opposite me. He said this in 2010, not 1972. He had probably been talking about this for a long time, but I hadn't heard what he was saying. Everything around me had somehow gotten mixed up. "She howls and howls, the poor girl. She's a Dalmatian, very pretty. That's why we almost never travel anywhere anymore. It's hard to take her abroad with us, let alone to Odessa in the car. So I don't go anywhere—I stay at home. I don't spend time abroad, and I don't go to exhibitions. But it's for the best: I make paintings. She's such a sweetie, my dog. I can't imagine life without her."

The KGB carefully inspected the papers of all the accidental arrivals at Sheremetyevo. The KGB was entirely of the female persuasion, dressed in pants, felt boots, earflap hats, and dark-gray uniforms. The commander was the most ferocious of the bunch. She sported a wedge cap (likewise gray) that had something red glittering on it. Somehow she had discovered that the British citizen seated before her was in fact a wretched traitor and defector from Czechoslovakia. The KGB probably knew everything. Or the woman had noticed his birthplace in his passport. Or it was simply his Czech surname. In any case, he still pronounces his "l" in the Czech manner, sweetly and moistly.

"And I have flowers," said Pavel the artist, opposite me. "Me and the wife raise flowers. The dog took such a liking to them, it's unbelievable."

The wicked KGB girl did not faze the Czech. He said something contemptuous to her—in Russian, with that moist "l" of his. He probably still knew how to speak Russian back then. I did not catch exactly what it was that he had said to her. The story had taken on a life of its own and began to slosh around in my head. The orange Anglo-Czech had somehow fused in my imagination with Joseph Brodsky and begun speaking—back then, in 1972—in verse. He proudly threw back his head, smiled ironically, and handsomely wrinkled his then-unwrinkled face. The KGB girl scowled and ordered him—the Anglo-Czech or Joseph Brodsky—to leave the room with her, to walk out from under the lone light bulb and into the darkness and the unknown.

"You of course were right in your lecture today," said Pavel the artist, who was as it were not quite addressing me. "I also often think about how unfair everything is under capitalism. We didn't expect this. But you know, I've decided for myself that as an artist I'm most free when I work with a private client, however strange that sounds. Because the state, society… we have no culture in Ukraine. But aside from that I do as I please. So for the most part I'm satisfied. Yes, I'm satisfied."

The KGB girl took the Czech to some other administrative office, also gloomy, its walls likewise painted a lettuce-green color. There was a desk in the room, leatherette chairs, and upholstered benches. Or maybe the Czech did not provide these details, and this is how I imagined the room. The KGB girl locked the door, turned towards the Czech, and with a single deft motion removed her wedge cap. Her golden hair cascaded to her shoulders (he definitely said this to me, using precisely these words, which he also accompanied with a gesture illustrating them), and she was transformed into a goddess. And then she began to make love to him.

"I'm satisfied. You know, private life is important to me now," Pavel the artist continued in parallel with this James Bond–style fantasy. "And art is part of life, after all, not something for whose sake you have to give up something else. At any rate, that's what I think nowadays. Like you, I also used to want to be a tribune of the people, make an impact, make someone listen to me… But not anymore."

Rendered mushy by memories and the horseradish vodka, the Czech Brit also told me that several years afterwards, in London, he had gotten a postcard from this goddess. She had written that she remembered everything, and she had marked the postcard with a red lipstick kiss.

"It's odd how much I like it here," said Pavel. "And I'm not even Ukrainian at all, did you know that? Not a drop of Ukrainian blood in me. I was born in Petersburg. But I've

put down roots here. It's hard to explain. When perestroika began, it immediately became clear to me that nothing good would happen with a country the size of the USSR. It's impossible to turn a big clunker like that around. But it's a different story with Ukraine. The scale here is smaller, there's less of everything. There's some kind of hope here. And what if suddenly something does work out?"

Flocks of cherry-filled dumplings had already begun flying out from the sleeves of the waiters sliding past our tables. The dinner was winding up. I headed to the next table, where my old friends Borya and Vita Mikhailov were sitting. Borya told me that he was certain that the Donetsk initiative would make a go of it. He said that Lyuba Mikhailova does not do anything just like that, which meant that she needed this project for some reason.

Lyuba came up to me right then. We had a drink and switched to using the informal "thou" form. She told me she didn't know why she needed to do this project. It was just that she had already done many things in her life, and she had been to the Venice Biennale many times and liked it there. And there is Pinchuk, but is he really the only patron of the arts in Ukraine? Her girlfriends ask her to sell them paintings to decorate their houses, and she could do that; only that's not what she had in mind. What she wants is for people to hear about Donetsk. And she could make a deal with the local authorities about anything whatsoever, but she sees no point in doing this. She doesn't want to deal with any state institutions. What she wants is something that belongs to her, something privately run, a place where no one can tell her what she can and cannot do and whether she can do anything at all, and whom she can invite.

"He got it right," she said, recalling the Euro-bureaucrat. "When you invite people, you invite them along with their problems."

After the cherry dumplings had been served, stout, meaty cabbage rolls also landed on our table for some reason. I had already made my peace with everything under the sun, including my defeat in the battle against neoliberalism in the land of Donetsk, where everything private still seems more encouraging, hospitable, and plain-old delicious than anything having to do with the public sphere and, all the more so, with the state. Where planning of whatever sort is still seen as a heavy chain, and the principal value is freedom. It is just that some people have the opportunity to interpret this term economically, while for others it remains a lovely spiritual metaphor.

"I wanted to support you," a young woman seated opposite me said suddenly with unexpected vehemence. "Nobody here understood anything, but I know what you were talking about. I study in London. I have big problems there because I read Negri: they're not letting me write the kind of dissertation I want to write. I see how capital strangles people. I see the injustice. I see how the law is directed against the weak. I see how people are exploited and how all this is covered up by the terrible neoliberal lie. I just wanted to tell you I understand what you were talking about."

I was quite surprised, because no one is persecuted for holding leftist views in the art world in the West, insofar as they are the norm there, but it turned out that the young woman was in law school. It also turned out that she was Lyuba's daughter.

The last person I spoke with that evening was the architect from London who designed the reconstruction of the factory. The project is quite considerate: in the sketches, the building, which looks almost the same, only slightly improved, is surrounded by crowds of people enjoying themselves—despite the fact that the factory is far from downtown by Donetsk standards, a half-hour's bus ride away, and the bus does not come often.

[figure 819727af0a163a532db9ca053e81343e.jpg Roses in front of the city hall, Donetsk.
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The architect looked somewhat lost. He had been given the chance to realize a prestigious large-scale commission, and I suspect that he was well paid and lavished with respect. But he was clearly ill at ease.

"One building is not enough, right?" he asked himself. "One building won't change anything here. You have to create infrastructure, you have to open up to the community. You have to make it so that people come here and so that there is something for them to do here. There are so many things that have to be changed, and this is an enormous responsibility… I don't know whether they understand this or not."

The evening was coming to an end. A fireworks salute in the shape of a blazing rose shot up on the horizon over the dead silhouettes of five-story apartment blocks. It was followed by another, then by an inexhaustible bouquet of these gigantic Donetsk roses. I thought it must have been some kind of Ukrainian state holiday I had never heard of, but I was told that it was more likely one of the Donetsk mobsters celebrating his girlfriend's birthday.

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Translated from the Russian by Thomas Campbell

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www.openspace.ru/art, an independent online magazine of art news, art criticism, and cultural analysis. Her books include: *Terroristic Naturalism* (1998), *Russian 20th-Century Art* (2000) and *Moscow Conceptualism* (with Vadim Zakharov, 2005). She teaches at Moscow Alexander Rodchenko school of photography and media art. Shows she has curated or co-curated include: *Body Memory: Underwear of the Soviet Era* (St Petersburg, Moscow, Helsinki, and Vienna, 2000 - 2004); *Moscow - Berlin 1950 - 2000* (Martin-Gropius-Bau, Berlin, and the History Museum, Moscow, 2003 - 2004); *Struggling for the Banner: Soviet Art Between Trotsky and Stalin* (New Manege, Moscow, 2008), *Citizens, Mind Yourselves: Dimitri Prigov* (Museum of Modern Art, Moscow, 2008), *Kudymkar - Engine for the Future* (Perm Art Museum - Winzavod Moscow, 2009), and *If. Ukrainian Art in Transition* (PERMM Museum of Contemporary Art, 2010). In 2010, she co-curated (with David Riff and Cosmin Costinas) the 1st Ural Industrial Biennial in Ekaterinburg under the title *Shockworkers of the Mobile Image.*

Liam Gillick

Contemporary art does not account for that which is taking place

The term “contemporary art” is marked by an excessive usefulness. The contemporary has exceeded the specificity of the present to become inextricably linked to the growth of doubt consolidation. At the same time, it has absorbed a particular and resistant grouping of interests, all of which have become the multiple specificities of the contemporary. The tendency is for artists to deny that they are part of something that is recognized and defined by others. Frustrations here are always unique. Donald Judd did not identify himself as a minimalist. Yet “contemporary art” activates denial in a specifically new way. It does not describe a practice but a general “being in the context.”

The people who leave graduate level studio programs are contemporary artists—that much is clear. They represent the subjective artist operating within a terrain of the general. Yet we now find that the meaning of contemporary art is being redefined by a new art historical focus upon its products, ideas, and projections. That means we are going through a phase in which—whether we like it or not—it is quite likely that a new terminology and means of delineation will be proposed. It is therefore necessary—for artists specifically (although never alone)—to engage with this process of re-describing what gets made now. What constitutes the image of the contemporary? And what does the contemporary produce other than a complicit alongsideness?

[figure 21_Gillick_1]

“Contemporary art” has historically implied a specific accommodation of a loose set of open-minded economic and political values that are mutable, global, and general—sufficing as an all-encompassing description of “that which is being made now—wherever.” But the flexibility of contemporary art as a term is no longer capable of encompassing all dynamic current art, if only because an increasing number of artists seek to radically differentiate their work from other art. In a recent essay I attempted therefore to re-term contemporary art as “current art,” as a way of dropping the association with the contemporary of design and architecture and simply find a term that could contain the near future and recent past of engaged art production rather than an evocative post-modernististic inclusion of singular practices.[1] However, this new adjusted definition also does not suffice as a description that can effectively include all the work that is being made with the intention of resisting the flexibility of contemporary work. It is increasingly difficult to ignore the fact that the definition contemporary art has been taken up by such apparently mutually exclusive arenas as auction houses and new art history departments as a way to talk about a generalization that always finds its articulation as a specificity or set of subjectivities that no longer include those who work hard to evade its reach.

Contemporary art has become historical, a subject for academic work. The Fall 2009 issue of *October* magazine on the question of the contemporary tended to focus on

the academicization of contemporary art while acknowledging extensively the existing unease that many artists have with being characterized within a stylistic epoch. Hal Foster noted that the magazine received very few replies from curators to his questionnaire.[2] This could be due to the *October* issue coinciding with the end of the usefulness of the term "contemporary art" for most progressive artists and curators—or at least with the reluctance of more and more to identify with it—while remaining a convenient generalizing term for many institutions and exchange structures including auction houses, galleries and art history departments, all of whom are struggling to identify the implications of their use of the term—some more than others, of course.

The dilemma of contemporary art, for the purposes of this text, actually refers to the period between 1973 and 2008, rather than the post-1945 definition common in Western museums. This is in an attempt to avoid what might be called the "late modern" period, where the legacy of modernist arguments is still the primary term of reference. By 1973 we find ourselves already operating within an institutional context of contemporary art museums and art centers while reflections on the reductive and conceptual endgames of the 1960s have given way to a new set of debates about performance, video, and institutional critique. There will follow an attempt to describe the current understanding of the term "contemporary art" and the way it is deployed towards the creation of a space of inclusion and potential

[figure 21_Gillick_2]

1.

The contemporary is necessarily inclusive—a generalization that has shifted towards becoming an accusation. Is there the possibility of merely saying "I make work now"? Contemporary art is a phrase that lends itself to being written and told without being said. It is always "everyone else." It would only work to stop saying the term if people had been saying it all along. It is as rare to hear an artist describe himself or herself as a contemporary artist as it is to hear an architect tell you that he or she is a contemporary architect. This sense of the unsaid has emphasized the role of the contemporary as a loose binding term that is always pointing away from itself rather than a term articulated and rethought from the center. That is the reason for its durability and stifling redundancy.

So what is contemporary about contemporary art? Does art itself point to the term or vice versa? What's going on? Have people forgotten to ask artists if they are contemporary artists? One answer is that the term is a convenient generalization that does not lend itself to reflection and constant rethinking in the manner of established theoretical terms such as Postmodernism. It allows a separation from the act of making or doing art and the way it is then presented, explained and exchanged. Both artists and curators can find a space in the gap between these two moments where they are temporarily considering an exceptional case with every new development or addition to the contemporary inventory. Yet, an inventory of art spaces alone, for example, cannot help us find a categorization of participation within the realm of the contemporary. The question is how to categorize art today in a way that will exceed the contemporary. The inclusiveness of the contemporary is under attack, as this very inclusiveness has helped suppress a critique of what art is and more importantly what comes next. We know what comes next as things stand—more contemporary art.

The installation—and by association the exhibition itself—is the articulation of the contemporary. Even paintings cannot escape this "installed" quality, the considered and particular installation of things and images, even when approached in a haphazard or off-hand manner. We all have an idea of what contemporary art represents while only knowing the specifics of any particular instance. It is this knowing what it means via evoking a particular that pushes people towards an attempt to transcend this generality.

2.

There has been a proliferation of discussions and parallel practices that appear to operate in a semi-autonomous way alongside contemporary art. They ignore it or take the work of the contemporary as an example of what not to do. Recent focus upon the documentary, educational models, and engaged social collaborations have attempted to establish and describe new relationships that operate outside and in opposition to the apparently loose boundaries of the contemporary. These are engaged structures that propose limits and boundaries and take over new territories, from the curatorial to the neo-institutional, in direct opposition to the loose assumptions of the contemporary (in both its instrumentalized and capitalized forms). A good example might be the Unitednationsplaza project in Berlin. A series of discussions and lectures framed within the idea of an educational setting. While the discussions and lectures appeared to address the possibilities of art now there seemed very little anxiety about the idea of actually bypassing the production of recognizable contemporary art forms. The project itself was a melding of the curatorial, the artistic, and the academic towards the creation of a series of discursive scenarios that might defy not the commodification of art, but the absorption of everything within the authoritarian tolerance of contemporary production. The mediation of one's own practice creates moments of escape from the contemporary. Still, seeing this production of parallel knowledge creates a dilemma when it becomes the

primary production of the contemporary artist. For even the "educational turn," as figures such as Irit Rogoff and Paul O'Neill have termed it, quickly produces its own coding as part of the contemporary.

Another key example of this production of nuanced contemporary aesthetics is the recent reassessment of the documentary, a tendency that must be re-examined for its claims to evade the contemporary. As Maria Lind pointed out, the documentary practices which we see now

> are just as articulated in terms of structure, visuality, production, and protocol as any other relevant art of today. But they tend to be less formally seductive. And yet they are as complex as some work that is known to be "complex." The look of objectivity is not objective, just as the look of commercial materials is not necessarily commercial.[3]

The most effective thing about this documentary strategy has been that the artists do not offer resistance to the contemporary by taking themselves out of the equation—even when they provide the narrative for escape. There is an implicit claim to objectivity that functions here as an aggressive option of neo-objectivity in the face of co-option. Without resisting that co-option structurally it becomes merely a way of standing offstage waiting for the moment to enter.

The documentary has become a way of avoiding the problem of de-sublimation in the face of excessive sublimation. It is a semi-autonomous location where everyone lives to fight another day at least. It is a place where there is still a them and us. A protest against the contemporary by refusing to acknowledge its scope. Art in this case has been formulated as a boycott of the subjective and has built barriers in the face of continuous and constant fragmentation. At best it has made exchange visible and created a new battle over what used to be called realism. So, new consciousnesses around education and documentation provide glimmers of clarity within the inclusive terrain. Inclusion and exclusion suddenly become moments of clear choice—political consciousness starts to affect the notion of specific practice. Thinking about the problem of contemporary art while producing new networks of activity that are marked by their resistance to contemporary art as a generality. It is the lack of differentiation within the contemporary that leaves it as an open speculative terrain. This is what drives the discursive and the documentary as somewhat passive yet clearly urgent oppositions.

A recent solution to the way the contemporary subdues differentiation has been to separate the notions of artistic and other political engagements, so that there can be no misunderstanding that only the work itself, in all its manifestations, might be part of the "contemporary art context." An example here would be Paul Chan, who has been described in biographies as an "artist and activist" in order to differentiate his engaged social function as a political agent from his work within galleries and museums.[4] We are aware that the activism feeds the art and the art feeds the activism, but in a distinct step away from the artists role in the shadow of conceptual art we find it is now necessary for many such as Chan to show that there is a limit or border to the embrace or effectiveness of contemporary art. Of course, there is a potential problem here in terms of how we might define activism, for example, along with the use of the documentary among progressive artists. Taking a term such as activism and combining it with an artistic practice that is clearly of the contemporary shows a tendency to associate with earlier forms of certainty. One form of a reluctant acceptance is that it is currently impossible to escape the hold of the contemporary, but it might be possible to separate life and action from contemporary art. In these cases, we continue to read the work through the hold of the contemporary in terms of what gets made but we do this via an understanding that there are these other daily social activities that are not part of the "contemporary art context"—they do not share its desires, projections, and results.

[figure 21_Gillick_3]

3.

The contemporary is more successful within cities. It relates to the increasing deployment of contemporariness as a speculative terrain of lifestyle markers that include art. The contemporary implies a sophisticated sense of networking. Making things with an awareness of all other things. Joining a matrix of partial signifiers "that will do." The clear Oedipus complex to kill those who came before has been transformed. Relativism in this case is merely defined by context and is a non-activated neo-political consciousness. Within the contemporary there is a usefulness in all other forms of work. And there is a paradox of an anti-relativism within the subjectivity of each artist and every artwork. Yet an increasingly radical anti-relativism shared by many causes unacknowledged tensions. The contemporary is marked by a display of self-knowledge, a degree of social awareness, some tolerance, and a little bit of irony, all combined with an acknowledgment of the failure of modernism, or at least a respect for trying to come to terms with the memory of something like that.

The contemporary necessarily restricts the sense in which you are looking for a breakthrough. An attempt to work is the work itself. Unresolved is the better way, leaving a series of props that appear to work together—or will do for now. In this case no single work is everything you would ever want to do. This is the space of its dynamic

contradiction. Hierarchy is dysfunctional and evaded by the contemporary, and therefore key political questions, whether ignored or included, are supplemented by irony and coy relations to notions of quality.

The contemporary comes to terms with accommodation. Fundamental ideas are necessarily evaded. For the idiom of the contemporary still carries the lost memory of a democratization of skill. Its grounding principles were based on universal potential. By your nature you are it by taking the decision to announce yourself. It is easy to "be"—just existing through work. The process functions in reverse sometimes as a coming-into-being through work. A place in the contemporary is established by a pursuit of contemporary art—not the other way around. Collective and documentary forms have attempted to escape, and to establish a hardcore, activist separation. A critique of anything and everything. There has developed a need to find a secondary ethics in order to establish a zone of difference. Tweaking tiny details and working as another character alongside the contemporary. For historically all profound "isms" in art were originated by artists—in the case of the contemporary the artist is the originator of all subjectivities. But how can we avoid the post-contemporary becoming an historic nostalgia for the group or mere political identification?

4.

The basic assumption of the contemporary is that all we need is a place to show—to be part of and just towards the edge of contemporary art. Everyone in this zone of the exhibited becomes the exception within the tableau. This leads to project-based strategies that paper over the neurosis of the exposed. Desire and drive and motivation are sublimated. Every project-based approach creates a hypothetical method that endorses the mutable collective. Seeing clearly combined with instinct moments and always building. All contributing to a matrix of existing forms and justifying them by continued reappearance. The work always projects into the future while holding the recent past close at hand. It predicts the implications of itself and builds a bridge between the almost-known-but-half-forgotten and the soon-to-be-misunderstood. The contemporary artwork is always answering questions about itself and all other contemporary art.

It used to be said that art is like theoretical physics—a specialization with a small audience. It could have been a perfect research-based existence. Yet in a world where the contemporary artist is considered cynical you never meet an artist who completely gives up. The perceived lack of audience is transformed into layers of resistance—not to the work itself but to the encompassing whole. The contemporary is therefore the place of dynamic contradiction where the individual work is never more than the total effect. No singular work has more value in terms of function than any other. The discourse of contemporary art revolves around itself. It has become impossible to be outside and therefore understood in terms of a separation. There is always an interest in showing something somewhere.

Politics and biography have merged. We are all tolerant of art that is rooted in specific stories. This is the inclusive zone where the artist plays his or her own perspective for a collective purpose. The drive is towards unhooking from who you are while simultaneously becoming only yourself. Some people can sleep with their eyes open. What does this process of constantly discovering yourself actually do? Is it a push for recognition? It creates exceptional individuals of globalization—"an aristocracy of labor," as Shuddhabrata Sengupta put it.[5]

Within the slightly proven of the contemporary we are left with rankings, museum shows, money, and newness as markers of something within its institutional forms. Working continues in a flow determined by economic conditions. And the obligation is to keep defending contemporary art in general even if you find it impossible. There might be an attempt to describe the free flow of ideas within the inclusivity. Audiences create barriers and obstructions in a soft war of aesthetic tariffs that regulate flow and consensus. Tiny flows and minor disagreements mimic drive and resist the external. The painful flow of life is sublimated. Change happens to other things but not within the realm of the contemporary. Boycotting everything is no longer an option; the strikes and protests will be included, too. The system is resistant. Moving against the stream is a problem, for it goes in every direction. Neurotic work is the reward. Something will happen.

Excessive work is the contemporary struggle. Where capital is globalized it is necessary to be everywhere. Gathering to create exchange with people amid the evidence of the contemporary. For despite the fact that each language has its own rules and gaps within it we find that it is impossible to find true contradiction within these boundaries. Where would we find this gap? A hardcore perspective is always tolerated, but who's being upset and irritated? Bourgeois value and capitalism are comfortable with every iteration of the contemporary, they literally support it. The contemporary offers a specific tangent with a narrative. No longer does anyone care who did what first, the idea of the original doesn't matter. This has been a style era rather than a specific moment of change or development. At the edge of practice we only find more things to be absorbed. At the center is a mass of tiny maneuvers.

Self-consciousness constantly rebuilds this site of continuity. It is stacked with self-referential work—all ready for self-aware re-reading, actions, and gestures. Certain terms have been established as a kind of lingua franca. It is a zone where it is possible to trust yourself

within confusion. Learn communication skills. All the while students get smarter and recognizably different—ironic in a way that levers the critical tone a little higher and eases the zone a little broader. Within this vague contemporariness people see more and more than they saw before.

That is the genius of the regime. Contemporary art is the perfect zone of deferral. No clarity can be overcomplicated when it is reproducing itself endlessly. Here we can encounter slightly different situations every day. Feuds with good men will not create a rupture here any more than the condemnation of obscenity. The problematic cannot be destroyed. Jealousy in this environment is exhausting and unproductive. Instrumentalization at the institutional level is always in place in order to defy the idea of a them and us. Why should I tell you whether what is produced is good or bad? No one can ever really understand the basis of what I'm telling you. What's readable? Tell me about your work. How many voices are in your head? This has been the time of the curatorial text. In the service of many.

[figure 0f74979298a460cfab7ea211ca801e44.jpg]

5.

Current art cannot be left to idle within the contemporary as a question of taste or preferred subjectivity. There are real problems of differentiation that will be reshaped by the new academicization that the contemporary awaits. The contemporary offers a multiplicity of artists whom we hope will coalesce like one of Negri's global tribes into a force of implicit resistance, but the contemporary creates anxieties ensuring that all operators within it are forever awaiting a specific cue for action. This is why the contemporary arena doesn't feel as if it is the place to really be starting anything, let alone a revolution. Constant and arbitrary reversal of positions has come to be expected like a nervous twitch to keep us intrigued. The contemporary displays a disruption between intentions and results, leaving a contingent gap that makes it futile to look for contradictions. The displaced is uniquely discoverable here. An inability to project into the future, to finish narratives—having, by an accident of birth, missed the end of everything. Functioning on surplus energy, with a clear desire to get organized. They are about to become organized by other people—instrumentalized, exchanged, and redefined by others.

Knowing which "personal" to occupy is of help here. We must assume that everyone is true. Trying on different personalities is forgiven within this realm. The decision to change an obligation. Burning paintings is the originating myth. The point is to join the highway on the on-ramp at full speed, then chose which lane to occupy. Slowing down or getting on or off again is difficult and undesirable. Difficulty is internal in this place, and a completely different person emerges to occupy this internal space of thought and action. The contemporary is always an internal thing that is expressed only partially on the external. It is full of ways to be misled and involves the avoidance of totalizing shifts masked by stylistic changes. History defying becomes a complete rupture. Defying history is part of the past. The regime of the contemporary becomes more and more inclusive of its own past and eternal future. Bloated and on the edge of usefulness, it reaches out endlessly in all directions. But so did the flat earth that people once believed in, and so did the endless sky of the West.

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Gillick has published a number of texts that function in parallel to his artwork. *Proxemics: Selected Writing, 1988–2006* (JRP|Ringier, 2007) was published in 2007, and the monograph *Factories in the Snow*, by Lilian Haberer (JRP|Ringier, 2007), will soon be joined by an extensive retrospective publication and critical reader. He has in addition contributed to many art magazines and journals including *Parkett*, *Frieze*, *Art Monthly*, *October*, and *Artforum*. Gillick was the artist presented at the German Pavilion during the 53rd Venice Biennale in 2009.

1
See Liam Gillick "The Good of Work" *e-flux journal*, no. 16, (May 2010), https://www.e-flux.com/journal/16/61277/the-good-of-work/ ; and Liam Gillick, by Artspace, Auckland, New Zealand as the book *"Why Work?"* (Auckland: ARTSPACE, 2010).

2
Hal Foster for the Editors, "Questionnaire on 'The Contemporary,'" *October* 130 (Fall 2009): 3.

3
Correspondence with the author, November 2010.

4
For example, see "Carnegie International Artists Bios, 2004/2005," and "Laurie Anderson, Paul Chan, Richard Chang, Adam Kimmel, and Diana Picasso Join MoMA PS1's Board of Directors," http://web.archive.org/web/20100708063500/press.moma.org/images/press/ps1/PS1Board.pdf .

5
Quoted from Liam Gillick and Anton Vidokle, *A Guiding Light*, Shanghai Biennale; Performa, New York, 2010.

Hans Ulrich Obrist

In Conversation with Hakim Bey

Hans Ulrich Obrist: To begin at the beginning, how did you start writing?

Hakim Bey: I always wanted to be a writer, an artist, or possibly a cartoonist. Or a pirate. Those were my ambitions. But I didn't have enough talent for cartooning. And I've discovered that art is very hard to do when you're not sitting in one place. I don't know if everybody finds this to be true. But when I took up a life of travel in the 1960s, I gave up art because writing is so much easier to do when you're traveling. But I always felt equally called to all of these things. It's a question of fate. Fate made me a writer more than anything else.

HUO: And how did you begin traveling?

HB: Well, when I was a child I was of course fascinated by adventure stories, figures like Richard Halliburton and other world travelers who wrote books for children, and *National Geographic* magazine—I inherited a whole closet full of *National Geographic* issues going back to 1911 from a friend. And then when I grew up, I became interested in Eastern Mysticism, the way everybody began to be in the 1960s. I specifically wondered whether Sufism was still a living reality or whether it was just something in books. There was no way of telling at that time. There were no Sufis practicing in America, or at least none that we could discover. I was a conscientious objector during the Vietnam War, and then we had May '68, and that revolution failed. It clearly wasn't going to happen. So I decided to make my trip to the East and discover whether Sufism was a living reality or not. And, of course, it turned out that it was. And so were a lot of other things that I hadn't even anticipated, like tantric Hinduism, which I also became fascinated by while I was in India. So that all lasted from 1968 to 1980 or '81, when I went to Southeast Asia. I also went to Indonesia for a short, but very influential, trip. And after 1970 I lived in Iran, where I wrote criticism for the Shiraz Festival of the Arts. That's how I got to meet Peter Brook and Robert Wilson and all the people that I later worked with or was influenced by. I also met an Indonesian artist named Sardono Kusumo, who I later found again in Jakarta when I was traveling in Southeast Asia. He gave me the names and addresses of all these uncles everywhere in Java who were all involved in dance, puppetry, or mysticism; a fantastic family. So I traveled around Java from uncle to uncle, and performance to performance. And they have a special kind of mysticism there called Kebatinan, which is kind of like Sufism but not quite. It's different, and it would take a long time to explain why.

HUO: In 1974 and '75 you were part of the Shiraz Festival of the Arts, and you were also Director of the English

Language Publication at the Imperial Iranian Academy of Philosophy in Tehran, where you published books by Henry Corbin, S. H. Nasr, etc.

HB: Well, it's weird. When I was living in Iran, I was studying Sufism, and I needed a job. So I started working for the Shiraz Festival of Arts and freelanced for local newspapers. Everybody needed something written in English in those days. Pay was very good. And eventually this idea of forming an academy came up. But it involved taking money—not necessarily from the government, but from the Empress, the Shahbanu, the wife of the Shah. She was the patron of this organization. And as it turns out, she was—I should say *is*, as she's still with us—a very intelligent and sensitive woman, quite aware of the ironies of her position. Basically her husband had told her that she could take care of charity and the arts. So she said, "Well, by God, I'll do it," and she did. And she was quite an activist. I have a lot of admiration for her, even though, as you know, the regime itself deserves no admiration at all. Incidentally, his family hated her, but let's not go into that. In any case, she was the patron, and she set up this academy, and it was all very idealistic. People could come and study without taking a degree, or if their home institution wanted to give them credit that was fine too. We would sign their letters and so forth. But basically it was meant to be a pure research and teaching institution, not degree-granting, much more along the lines of traditional Iranian education in the madrasa, that style. She gave us a beautiful building in downtown Tehran, and we had it fixed up. It was quite beautiful and quite comfortable. And we had a budget to buy a library and a budget to publish and so forth and so on. It was all, you might say, at the expense of a very unpleasant political reality that I was kind of naıve about at the time. But I think what we ended up doing was fairly valuable and interesting. I mean, just the support that we gave to people like Henry Corbin was fairly important for world thinking, I believe. And even though we were in a kind of far away place, people came to visit us. When we invited somebody, they would become extremely curious. Even Ivan Illich, who certainly was no monarchist—quite the opposite! But when I got to know him I asked, "How come you accepted our invitation? How come you accepted this invitation from the Empress of Iran? It's not like you." And his answer was: "I was just too curious!"

HUO: At the moment I'm editing a monograph on Monir Shahroudy Farmanfarmaian, the pioneering Iranian artist, and she has been telling me something similar, that in the visual arts there was this moment in Iran—Andy Warhol went there...

HB: Money certainly had something to do with it. I mean, the Shiraz Festival of Arts offered so much money that every good left-wing artist in the world couldn't say no, with a few noble exceptions, I would say. There were some who didn't come. The Living Theatre never came. John Cage, sure, he came. So did Merce Cunningham, Karlheinz Stockhausen, the list goes on. Everybody came because there was incredible money. They would tell Stockhausen, "Come and put on every piece of music you ever wrote, in a beautiful town in the desert of Iran with minarets and domes and camels in the courtyard." And how can anyone resist this!

[figure a7ebb7aeb048404ce84df5dc3eae3e78.jpg Hakim Bey, *Pang Yang & the Universal Friend*, 2010, mixed media. The Pang Yang action itself (April 7, 2010) consisted of taking an expensive funeral flower arrangement of white blossoms to the graveyard in Pang Yang and leaving it there to decay.
]

HUO: And after all this traveling, you moved to the Hudson Valley ten years ago. You mentioned that you're making a local history of this place. Can you tell me about the area and how you chose it?

HB: It's the big backyard of New York City. It's always been very pleasant up here, a mixture of farmers and millionaires from the city, or artists. It's the Hudson River—which is a beautiful river—and all the rivers that flow into it. It's an amazing water system, the Catskill Mountains, one of the most beautiful spots in America, etc., etc. I spent a lot of time up here in the 1960s with Timothy Leary, who had his estate in Millbrook, just across the river from where I am now. And I of course took a lot of LSD there, and you might say that I imprinted on the Hudson Valley as one of the most magical and beautiful spots in the world, as this place where I wanted to eventually live. And it just happens to be an hour away from New York City, where I always lived. But I had no idea what a rich and bizarre history this region had. I'm finding all kinds of things. Just to give you an example, the second artwork in this series I'm working on was devoted to a woman called the "Publick Universal Friend" who died in 1776 and came back to life—just popped up in her coffin and announced that she was the female Messiah. And she had followers around here in a village called Pang Yang. She lived very far away, close to the Finger Lakes up in the Frontier Region, and she used to communicate with her followers here through telepathic dreaming—by appearing in their dreams. After she died, her community of followers here became very, very strange—inbred, leading extremely primitive lives, hunting and fishing and not working, getting into trouble with the police, that kind of group. And her ghost would still appear in the graveyard of this village. The people of Pang Yang are well-known locally, but nobody outside of this little region has ever heard of them. By the 1970s the village was completely abandoned, and so I did a piece there in honor of this woman, who was called the Lady in Gray.

HUO: Can you tell me more about her?

HB: Her ghost was still seen in the 1970s, and a few of her followers were still around then. Their descendants still live here, but they no longer live like they used to. They're

just normal people. But to honor the strangeness of their lives and the mysticism of their leader, and her courage as a pioneer of, I don't know, women's liberation and communism, which she practiced, I did this piece in the Pang Yang graveyard, which is not marked. It took me months to find it. It's on private land, but nobody seems to know who owns it. I just went back in there with a few friends and left a huge pile of white flowers in the graveyard, about $200 worth of flowers that I bought, and that was the piece basically.

HUO: Could you speak a bit about your work as an artist? As you know, we're working on this book and about maps for the twenty-first century and mapmaking. We've received your wonderful page for the book, and I'm very curious to know more about these maps you've done.

HB: Well, I have to say that I had so much fun doing that for you that I decided to go back to art. There's nothing more satisfying than working with your hands. So basically I devised this idea to do what I call vanishing art, which means that the art comes into existence in the very moment that it disappears. For example, the first piece I did involved throwing gold rings into a river—like the ancient druids used to do. Each of these works is based on a place in the region where I live, and each one is based on a historical event or person that I find inspiring, either because they were mystical or revolutionary, or for some other reason. In each case I find a way to do an artwork that vanishes, either immediately or over the course of a few days. I have plenty of plans for other ways of doing this, but so far I've been throwing things into water and burying things. In the future I'll be burning a lot of things as well. I want to get into pyrotechnics.

And then in each case, I make a map similar to the one that you have, using collage, which is meant to be a sort of magical manipulation of the toposphere, of the map world, the image of the place. I use photographs and found objects and so forth to make these, and I also keep a box of documentation for each one, with photographs, drafts, essays, poems, souvenirs, and so forth. So even though the art disappears, the map and the box remain behind as a record of the work.

[figure e16abde0a16a68cea48b05f8073f6f71.jpg Hakim Bey, *Esopus maps #2*, 2010, mixed media.
]

The one that I sent you originated as a nineteenth century Hudson River navigation chart. The important place there is Esopus Island, which is where Aleister Crowley camped out in 1918. I visited it with William Breeze, who is the official representative of Aleister Crowley's occult and literary remains. He's the literary executor, and he's also the head of the Ordo Templi Orientis, which is the occult lodge that Crowley left behind. So Bill Breeze and I hired a sailboat for the day and went to that island and explored it. We had a nice time, came back, had a nice dinner, and that was pretty much the start of this whole series of works. I realized that I've been living up here and studying the local history for ten years, and I don't know what to do with all this material about this place where I live. I didn't want to turn it into some stupid guidebook for tourists. I didn't want to turn it into a stupid academic book for an academic press. So for now I'm putting all this historical and topological knowledge into these works I make in a very private way, just for friends. Maybe sometime I will have an exhibition of the maps. But I would like to wait a year or so, until I've really got a good, solid collection before doing something like a gallery show. So next year, God willing, I'm going to do another seven or eight of these works, and that might be enough to start thinking about doing a show. But in the meantime I sort of like the idea that it's private and secret, driven by word of mouth and magical influences rather than publication or publicity.

HUO: So if you were to look back at your work over these many decades, what would you say were the moments of epiphany?

HB: There are big epiphanies and small epiphanies. I could mention the time I was crossing Hammersmith Bridge in London late at night on my way back from a friend's dinner party and I had a vision of the lost Imam of Shi'ism hovering in the air over the bridge in the rain. The vision told me to end my association with orthodox Islam and become a heretic, which I then did. And I've been a heretic ever since. That would be a moment of epiphany. But this doesn't necessarily relate so much to my writing and art as it does to the totality of my inner world, if you know what I mean.

HUO: Sure, and it's interesting because it also leads us to the question of religion.

HB: Well, I always say that we have to be careful about our terms here. If we're defining religion as institutional religion—with all the problems that come with institutions going tenfold for religion—then we have to be very, very careful to be clear about what we're talking about. If we're talking about spirituality, as we like to say in our hippie way, then we're having another conversation, one that isn't necessarily about religion. Or maybe we're having another conversation altogether. As an anarchist, I've always been a spiritual anarchist, and naturally this annoys my more left-wing type anarchist friends who are all, of course, good atheists. But, it's an old tradition, after all. Maybe the oldest. If you look at the tribal societies that people like Pierre Clastres or Marshall Sahlins visited and wrote about, you find people who live without authority, but you never, ever find that they don't have spirituality. They always have a spiritual view of things. Take shamanism, which is a broad and hard-to-define term, but it is not religion, because it has no dogma. It doesn't have priests. It doesn't have temples. It doesn't have taxes that you have to pay. It doesn't make rules about sexuality, or maybe it does, but not the same kind that a religion makes.

And in any case, those rules would only apply to the shaman and not to anybody else in the tribe. So, that's to say that there's a big difference between free spirituality on the one hand and its betrayal in organized religion on the other hand. Having said that, we can begin to discuss ways in which even organized religion can be interesting. I often say that what I really am is a historian of religion or religions. And that's what unites all my work and has for many, many years. It's a subject that I take very, very seriously indeed, but without subscribing to any orthodoxy.

[figure 6a9d5386ceaa0ddef80c45f29077cc2b.jpg Hakim Bey, *Oscar Wilde*, 2010, mixed media.
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HUO: Who are your heroes? Who do you feel to have inspired you?

HB: Well, I'd like to think of my heroes now as the people I'm doing these artworks about, the people I'm dedicating them to. For example, another one was a member of the local Indian tribe who was called Big Indian because he was seven-and-a-half feet tall. Now it was actually fairly common for Native Americans to have these giants among them, there are many examples known to archaeologists, and this was the real thing. There's a town nearby that was named after him, because supposedly a Dutch settler murdered him there for running away with his wife. But when I looked into this story, which is already fantastic, I found it was even more peculiar and interesting because it was known that Big Indian—whose real name was Winnisook, which means "snow falling reflected in his eyes" in Algonquin—was actually gay. He was queer, and his real companion was not a white woman but another Indian man, who was short, older than him, and was probably what they call a berdache, a cross-dressing shaman. That's speculation. But the relationship itself was not speculation, and is acknowledged not only in history, but also in oral tradition amongst what remains of the native population around here, which is not much. So I did a piece to commemorate him up in the mountains, in the beautiful forests full of hemlock where there are four waterfalls called Otter Falls. This is where I started thinking about this idea of queering the landscape, that there's something queer about the whole modern love of nature, and that that could be a very good thing. This is the thesis I'm working on. Critics would say that my relationship to nature is reflected through layers of literature and art and class relationships and so forth, and this is true. Yet there is something strange and queer about falling in love with nature in the modern world, and it seems that the landscape itself is in need of a queering of some kind. That's also why I did the piece for Oscar Wilde, though it's not a matter of mere homosexuality. That actually has nothing to do with it. It's a matter of accepting that the unnatural is also the natural, as Goethe said. And if it's unnatural for us to be involved with nature, if there is no first nature, but only second nature, or even third nature, it's not a problem—rather, we should rejoice in this queerness. So in this sense, Big Indian became a great hero for me. And actually there's a 10-foot high statue of him in the local park in this little town. I have a picture of myself next to this statue.

[figure cb5702e6e20cd55a51065f3bce389036.jpg Hakim Bey visiting Big Indian, Shandaken, New York State.
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HUO: It sounds like these mapping projects have a lot to do with memory. The historian Eric Hobsbawm always speaks about a protest against forgetting, and Rem Koolhaas suggested to me recently that amnesia might be at the very core of the digital revolution. It seems that with more and more information, there might be less and less memory. Would you agree? Has it become urgent now to protest against forgetting?

HB: I think so. I mean, I probably have a much more dire view of cyberspace and the internet than Rem Koolhaas. I think of it as a black hole of memory, and I think memory is disappearing at an alarming rate, thanks to this idea that everyone now has a prosthetic memory. The idea is that this prosthetic memory means that no one needs to remember anything anymore. You just push a button and get any information you want. Well, you first of all need to know what questions to ask. If you don't even know what you want to know, how can you know it? That's what I mean about the black hole—it sucks in knowledge. It's actually worse than forgetting—it works against memory itself.

HUO: It's like an antimatter of memory. But was there any moment when you believed that the internet would provide possibilities for new forms of freedom? Did you always have this position that the internet is a black hole?

HB: Well, I have to admit that, like everybody else in the 1980s, I was much more optimistic about these things. And in some of my writing I may have given the impression that I would become some sort of cyber libertarian. I have many friends in that camp, but then as time went on, I became more of a Luddite. I believe that technology should not consist of an attack on the social. And if you think about the symptom that everybody talks about, the loss of privacy, or even the redefinition of what privacy could possibly be, well, I see this as an actual attack on society. And it's interesting that it comes at the same time as Thatcher saying that there is no such thing as society. It's an ideological move against the social. And it's not for the glorification of the individual, either. To me, the individual also loses in this formula. But it's primarily meant to break society down into individual consumer entities, because that's what money wants. Capital itself wants everyone to have everything. It doesn't want you to share your car with anyone, it wants each person to have their own. And by the way, the US has achieved this—we now have one car for every adult in the country. Capital

wants everybody to have to own everything, and to share nothing. And the social result of this is ghastly. It's scary, frightening. For me it's apocalyptic.

[figure d4eed118ffa11c7ce8979d7c535d2614.jpg Hakim Bey, *The Esopus Wars*, 2010, mixed media (map, box, and Canto VI of Riverpeople), concerning the seventeenth century wars between the Dutch and the native Esopus Indians.

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HUO: Do you also see it as anti-democratic?

HB: As an anarchist, I've never been a fetishist for democracy per se. I think democracy, to be interesting for an anarchist, has to be direct democracy. Representative forms of democracy share the same problem with all the other forms of the state. But yes, in a broad, general sense, I do think technology is becoming anti-democratic.

HUO: Antonio Negri has recently described the ongoing obliteration of the notion of exteriority, which seems interesting in relation to this.

HB: You have to admit that it's happening, that space becomes more meaningless as it accelerates. This is Paul Virilio's position, that speed takes away the meaning of place, and I have to agree. It's very simple. If you go from point A to point B on a plane, you don't see anything, there's no space, nothing. There is no cultural existence. How can you have organic travel, if I can put it that way, at a speed quicker than that of the camel? I'm not sure it's possible. Maybe there was a weird situation in the 1960s and '70s in which part of the world still ran at the speed of camels. And if you could get to those parts of the world and experience it, then you could experience that kind of time. I'm not sure it still exists, though I hope it does. I think it's very important, just as it's important to have rainforests and things like that. There should be parts of the world where other kinds of time can be experienced.

HUO: Perhaps it has to do with embodiment, with very physical experiences. Negri also spoke about migrating through cities to do nomad seminars, and I'd be very curious to know about how this embodiment is possible in the context of traveling. For example, I recently read an interview with you in which you said

> living in the body, being aware of the positivity of the material bodily principle (to quote Bakhtin) is in fact a form of resistance, a martial art, if you will. In a world where the body is so degraded, so de-emphasized on the one hand by the empire of the image and on the other hand where the body is degraded by a kind of obsessive narcissism, athletics, fashion, and health, that somewhere in between these extremes to me is the ordinary body which, as the Zen masters would say, is the Zen body.[1]

Can you explain that to me?

HB: Well, you have to experience time and space in the body. And if we're no longer in the body—that is, if the body is de-emphasized to a point at which people no longer experience time and space firsthand—how could there be such a thing as real travel? We can also look at it in another way. In the Stone Age, say, everybody in the tribe had to know how to do pretty much anything. You have to know how to fix your own shoes. You have to know how to herd sheep. You have to know how to sing songs, because if you can't sing, you're nobody. You have to know how to have visions, because if you don't have visions, you're just a boring, stupid person. You have to be able to make pots. You have to be able to plant corn. You have to be able to be a warrior. You have to do all these things yourself. Your hands and your body must know many, many things. Modern technology mediates between you and all of those things, so you don't have to know how to do them anymore. Some mechanical prosthesis will do all those things for you while you carry out some incredibly boring, repetitive task on behalf of capitalism, so that you can make a measly living while some other bastard becomes rich. And that's pretty much how the modern world relates to the real technology, which would be art—or what is now called craft, a term I despise. Craft in the modern world means pots and pans that are too expensive to actually cook beans in. The whole idea that the things you use in your daily life could be beautiful and embodied and made by bodies to be beautiful, that's so rare. And generally only rich people are able to have that experience, which is not fair.

HUO: I also wanted to ask you about the origins of *T.A.Z.: The Temporary Autonomous Zone*, which is a book that changed the way I approached exhibitions when I began working as a curator.[2] Growing up with this idea that the exhibition has a master plan and the curator is the one who does a checklist, reading *T.A.Z.* for the first time in the early '90s really triggered a whole set of exhibitions for us, like Life/Live, Cities on the Move, and Laboratorium. Most of my exhibitions in the '90s, and then also Utopia Station in the 2000s, relinquished the curatorial master plan in favor of being temporary autonomous zones in which we would basically invite collectives and artists to curate shows within the show. So for me it was a toolbox for curating, and I always wondered how you came to write that book, how its genesis came about?

HB: Well, the real genesis was my connection to the communal movement in America, my experiences in the 1960s in places like Timothy Leary's commune in Millbrook. And of course the main criticism of this activity is that it didn't last. But these things tend to be very

ephemeral—if a secular commune lasts in America for ten years, it's a miracle. Usually only the religious ones last longer than a generation—and usually at the expense of becoming quite authoritarian, and probably dismal and boring as well. I've noticed that the exciting ones tend to disappear, and as I began to further study this phenomenon, I found that they tend to disappear in a year or a year and a half. In the '60s we had a lot of communes that lasted for a year and half, two, three years. I think the only one that survived was The Farm, and that's due to a number of things that made it very different, such as the fact that it had what I would say was a rather authoritarian leader, Steve Gaskin. What a brilliant guy. I think the place held together because he was willing to be its leader. A lot of the other communes fell apart because they were so anarchistic that they had no leaders, and so nobody washed the dishes. The movement was still going on in the 1980s. I had friends who were deeply involved in intentional communities, and I myself got involved. And everybody in the '80s was giving a good deal of thought to the whole idea of what intentional community could mean and how it could improve your life to be in one, or if it even could at all. That was the question. I think it unquestionably does. People have great fun for at least a year or a year and a half, and then when the problems start, that's usually when it breaks up. After thinking about that for a while, it occurred to me that, well, it's not such a great tragedy that these things don't last. You shouldn't condemn the experience of the people at Brook Farm, for example, just because it only lasted a few years. Those people had an incredibly deep experience that changed their lives. They had fun while they were there. They had a more intense existence, with everything geared up to a higher charge. All you have to do is read a little Emerson and a little Thoreau, see what the people who visited Brook Farm had to say about it. It was buzzing with energy and good vibrations.

HB: Exactly. So it occurred to me that you could make a virtue of the temporary nature of these things. If these organizations fall apart after eighteen months or so, well, let's just plan on it. Let's have these communities and say that they're only going to last for a short while. And as soon as the intensity fades, then it's over. It's finished. We wrap it up, go somewhere else, do something new. But I also have to admit that by the 1980s, waiting for the revolution for thirty years had gotten a little tiresome. When I was really young and full of enthusiasm in the 1960s, we really, actually, sincerely believed that a major transformation was imminent. And as it turned out, we were all naıve, perhaps like those Christian fundamentalists who are so certain that the end of the world is imminent. I don't know. It could have been a form of millenarian insanity, but we believed in it in any case. The older we got, the more this receded into history, at least for me. And for others it became a futile, youthful dream they had to give up. But I'm still working for that transformation, though I'm no longer convinced it's around the corner, or that it's going to happen in my lifetime. So as I began wondering how we could have a taste of revolutionary life without the revolution, since it was apparently not going to happen, this new Temporary Autonomous Zone seemed the only possible answer to that. There was no single moment of genesis really, but a whole series of light-saturated moments throughout American history—including the 1960s, which I had lived through myself—that all culminated in that theoretical work.

HUO: So if one considers Temporary Autonomous Zones as these pockets of anarchy, do you find any now, in the twenty-first century? Where are they? Can they be expanded? And what forms do they take?

HB: Well, I've always said that I didn't invent the TAZ. I just noticed that it existed. It's always existed. For some reason, most people have to believe that what they're doing is going to last forever in order to find the enthusiasm to do anything at all. The only thing that changed was thinking of the temporary itself as a possible good, instead of an obstacle. A good dinner party is a Temporary Autonomous Zone. Nobody tells you what to do at a good dinner party. Nobody gives orders. Nobody collects taxes. It's an experience of giving and being given to, of filling the body and emptying the mind, having good conversation and good wine and so forth. This is already a TAZ, but you have to conceptualize it that way for it to be that way. It's simply a matter of consciousness. But once you find that consciousness, the forms of organization begin to open up. You begin to see all the different forms of organization that this could take. It could be anything from a picnic by the riverside to a community that lasts for two years. Where is it actually happening? Well, I have to say that the current moment at the end of this decade is, to me, one of the low energy points of history. Maybe I'm just getting old, but I feel that it's actually hard to find a good TAZ now. And it's more important than ever to do so. One reason being that communism is no longer. We now live in the world of the triumph of capital. And in this world, it would seem that the TAZ is, perhaps, the last possible revolutionary form. I hope that's not true, but it may be. Either way, the idea is certainly more important now than it was around 1989 when I dreamed the idea up in the first place.

HUO: The medium of the exhibition, has a limited lifespan. An exhibition usually lasts a month or two, and if the show travels it lasts a year or two. So it actually falls in that limited lifespan between a day and eighteen months. Can you talk about this idea? Do you think exhibitions can be Temporary Autonomous Zones? Have you seen exhibitions that you've felt were Temporary Autonomous Zones?

HB: Yes, there was a group in the 1960s called USCO. They seem to have disappeared without trace, but they did exhibitions in which they would move into a museum and change it into a playful participatory space. They came

and did something at the Riverside Museum, which isn't there anymore, on the Upper West Side in New York. USCO transformed this space, and they kept it transformed for a couple of months. This was in the early hippie days, probably 1964 or '65. And all the hippies in the neighborhood would go and hang out at this exhibition every day because it was such a comfortable, welcoming, and charming space. That's also where I first came across the idea of an art exhibition as a community space. It had a big influence on my thinking.

HUO: I'm very curious to know your ideas on cultural institutions. Like an exhibition, we can also say that an institution has a limited lifespan. Can an institution also be a Temporary Autonomous Zone? I'm very curious as to whether you would build an institution, and if so, what kind?

HB: It's a very interesting question. People ask me all the time whether there can somehow be a permanent autonomous zone. Well, sure, in theory there could be. But if you've studied the sociology of institutions, you know that there's—how should we put it—a wavelike energy pattern that moves through an institution over time. It starts low because, let's say, the institution begins without money and with only a few people. And then, if it sets out to do anything at all, it quickly reaches a peak of energy, a peak of enthusiasm. It can flow on that for a number of years, but not forever. The original people get old, they get tired of what they're doing, they start to worry about health insurance, their marriages go bad, whatever, but the energy level starts to go down and the level of institutionalization begins to go up. Ivan Illich is a big hero of mine, and I think his sociology of institutions is absolutely correct. At a certain point, the institution starts trying to monopolize the field that it entered, and begins to have the opposite effect of its original intentions. So even public schooling becomes a monopoly, and suddenly it's no longer educating you, but making you stupid, right? So that's Illich's idea about institutions, and in my experience this is how things have worked out every time, every single time without exception. I mean, it's amazing that the Catholic Church has lasted for two thousand years. How do they do it? Well, clearly not by being good anarchists. But anyway, most institutions would never be able to last that long, even the ones founded with eternity in mind won't last that long. The ones that have, I think, are exclusively religious ones. So if you're going to start an institution and think of it as an autonomous zone, you can do one of two things. You can say, "As soon as this starts to become boring for us, we're going to quit, just quit." Or you can say, like Trotsky, that there has to be a permanent revolution inside the institution—you have to be always stirring it up from inside. And as soon as that process stops, then the sclerosis, the stiffening of the arteries sets in, and before you know it you have an Illich scenario of paradoxical counter-productivity, as he rather clumsily termed it.

HUO: That's exactly why Cedric Price always said he wanted to do the Fun Palace, which was the institution he imagined. It uses a completely flexible sort of shipyard technology with hanging and suspended, ever-changing functions. And from the outset its lifespan was meant to be limited to five years.

HB: I think it's an excellent idea. Of course, it sounds absolutely ghastly to anyone who has to think about the budget. If you're talking to your accountant about this, better not mention your plans to stop after five years, because it's going to be a nightmare to raise and administer the money. That's mostly why it doesn't happen, because capital doesn't work that way. Maybe you could have these kinds of institutions in some kind of ideal, democratic, socialist situation. If we looked at Holland or Denmark in the 1970s with the paradise of social democracy—it's sort of ironic, but that's about as close as humanity ever got.

HUO: Or Sweden in the 1960s when Pontus Hultén was head of Moderna Museet. Around '68, '69, and '70, basically everything happened at the Moderna Museet, to the point where if there was nothing happening late at night, the guards would begin to wonder whether something had gone wrong. It wasn't the other way around.

HB: We can find examples in Scandinavia during that brief decade or two of social democracy. It would be hard to find other examples—I certainly don't think we're going to find any in modern capitalist America or England. But now, you have an advantage. You can tell people you're a curator and that what you're doing is an art exhibition. And then they understand it in a certain way, say, as a temporary project. But if you told people that you're founding an institution, then their reactions are going to be very different, right?

HUO: Exactly, and the other question is whether the establishment of institutions runs counter to the notions of autonomy—even if they're your own institutions.

[figure aee61d4dd0ff33071b90cbe9ab2eede4.jpg Hakim Bey, *Otter falls art action*, 2010, disappearing artwork.
]

HB: That's right. So you can use this notion of a permanent revolution—I mean, I did work for many years at the Jack Kerouac School of Disembodied Poetics at Naropa University in Boulder Colorado. It was founded by Allen Ginsberg and Chogyam Trungpa. At a certain point, it looked to me like they were headed for that moment when the institution begins to change, to stiffen up. And I told them that that was the moment they should have a revolution—get rid of all these buildings, fire all the bureaucrats, split off from the other departments, go up into the mountains, live in tents, do something weird. But of course they couldn't do it. They were already getting old

enough to worry about their health insurance and retirement pensions. And when that kind of thinking starts, forget it. It's over.

HUO: How do you see the future? Do you think civilization will survive the next century?

HB: I don't have a very good record with the crystal ball, and I don't know what to predict exactly. Obviously one of the worst predictions you can make is that things continue as they are, only becoming more and more intensified, like a J. G. Ballard-type future where the whole universe is one big shopping mall. That would be the worst. Any catastrophe might be a relief compared to that. But on the other hand, catastrophes are bad for you and me, and we don't want to get caught in one. It might be good for history, but would be awful for individuals, especially artists, who never had that much going for them in the first place. I'm not one of these people waiting for the big ecological catastrophe. I don't want to see it happen. I'm still hopeful. And in the end, what else can you do? You have to have, as Ernst Bloch said, revolutionary hope.

X

Hans Ulrich Obrist is a Swiss curator and art critic. In 1993, he founded the Museum Robert Walser and began to run the Migrateurs program at the Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris where he served as a curator for contemporary art. In 1996 he co-curated Manifesta 1, the first edition of the roving European biennial of contemporary art. He presently serves as the Co-Director, Exhibitions and Programmes and Director of International Projects at the Serpentine Gallery in London.

Hakim Bey is an American political writer, essayist, and poet, known for first proposing the concept of the Temporary Autonomous Zone (TAZ), based in part on a historical review of pirate utopias. He has worked with the not-for-profit publishing project Autonomedia in Brooklyn, New York, and has written essays on such diverse topics as Tong traditions, the utopian Charles Fourier, the Fascist Gabriele D'Annunzio, alleged connections between Sufism and ancient Celtic culture, sacred pederasty in the Sufi tradition, technology and Luddism, and Amanita muscaria use in ancient Ireland. Currently he writes regularly in publications such as *Fifth Estate* and the NYC-based *First of the Month*. His most recent book is *Black Fez Manifesto* (poems) published by Autonomedia (Brooklyn, NY).
For further information please see →.

1
See “Interview with Hakim Bey,” http://deoxy.org/hakim/interview.htm .

2
Hakim Bey, *The Temporary Autonomous Zone, Ontological Anarchy, Poetic Terrorism* (Brooklyn: Autonomedia, 2004). Also at http://hermetic.com/bey/taz_cont.html .

Martha Rosler

Culture Class: Art, Creativity, Urbanism, Part I

PART ONE: ART AND URBANISM

When Abstract Expressionists explored the terrain of the canvas and Pollock created something of a disorientation map by putting his unstretched canvases on the floor, few observers and doubtless fewer painters would have acknowledged a relationship between their concerns and real estate, let alone transnational capital flows.

Space, as many observers have noted, has displaced time as the operative dimension of advanced, globalizing (and post-industrial?) capitalism.[1] Time itself, under this economic regime, has been differentiated, spatialized, and divided into increasingly smaller units.[2] Even in virtual regimes, space entails visuality in one way or another. The connection between Renaissance perspective and the enclosures of late medieval Europe, together with the new idea of terrain as a real-world space to be negotiated, supplying crossing points for commerce, was only belatedly apparent. Similarly, the rise of photography has been traced to such phenomena as the encoding of earthly space and the enclosing of land in the interest of ground rent. For a long time now, art and commerce have not simply taken place side by side, but have actively set the terms for one another, creating and securing worlds and spaces in turn.

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Jackson Pollock in his studio.

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My task here is to explore the positioning of what urban business evangelist Richard Florida has branded the "creative class," and its role, ascribed and anointed, in reshaping economies in cities, regions, and societies. In pursuit of that aim, I will consider a number of theories—some of them conflicting—of the urban and of forms of subjectivity. In reviewing the history of postwar urban transformations, I consider the culture of the art world on the one hand, and, on the other, the ways in which the shape of experience and identity under the regime of the urban render chimerical the search for certain desirable attributes in the spaces we visit or inhabit. Considering the creative-class hypothesis of Richard Florida and others requires us first to tease apart and then rejoin the urbanist and the cultural strains of this argument. I would maintain, along with many observers, that in any understanding of postwar capitalism, the role of culture has become pivotal.

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I open the discussion with the French philosopher and sometime Surrealist Henri Lefebvre, whose theorization of the creation and capitalization of types of space has been enormously productive. Lefebvre begins his book of 1970, *The Urban Revolution*, as follows:

> I'll begin with the following hypothesis: Society has been completely urbanized. This hypothesis implies a definition: An *urban society* is a society that results from a process of complete urbanization. This urbanization is virtual today, but will become real in the future.[3]

Lefebvre's book helped usher in a modern version of political geography, influencing Fredric Jameson, David Harvey, and Manuel Castells, among other prominent writers and theorists of both culture and the urban (Harvey, in turn, is cited as an influence by Richard Florida). In his introduction to Lefebvre's book, geographer Neil Smith writes that Lefebvre "put the urban on the agenda as an explicit locus and target of political organizing."[4]

Succumbing to neither empiricism nor positivism, Lefebvre did not hesitate to describe the urban as a virtual state whose full instantiation in human societies still lay in the future. In Lefebvre's typology, the earliest cities were political, organized around institutions of governance. The political city was eventually supplanted in the Middle Ages by the mercantile city, organized around the marketplace, and then by the industrial city, finally entering a critical zone on the way to a full absorption of the agrarian by the urban. Even in less developed, agrarian societies that do not (yet) appear to be either industrialized or urban, agriculture is subject to the demands and constraints of industrialization. In other words, the urban paradigm has overtaken and subsumed all others, determining the social relations and the conduct of daily life within them. (Indeed, the very concept of "daily life" is itself a product of industrialism and the urban.)

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Lefebvre's emphasis on the city contradicted the orderliness of Le Corbusier, whom he charged with having failed to recognize that the street is the site of a living disorder, a place, in his words, to play and learn; it is a site of "the informative function, the symbolic function, the ludic function."[5] Lefebvre cites the observations of the foundational urban observer Jane Jacobs, and identifies the street itself, with its bustle and life, as the only security against violence and criminality. Finally, Lefebvre notes—soon after the events and discourses of May '68 in France—that revolution takes place in the street, creating a new order out of disorder.

The complexity of city life often appears, from a governmental standpoint, to be a troublesome Gordian knot to be disentangled or sliced through. A central task of modernity has been the amelioration and pacification of the cities of the industrializing metropolitan core; the need was already apparent by the middle of the nineteenth century, when the prime examples were those at the epicenter of industrialism, London and Manchester.[6] Control of these newly urbanizing populations also required raising them to subsistence level, which happened gradually over the succeeding decades, and not without tremendous struggles and upheaval. Industrialization also vastly increased the flow of people to cities, as it continues to do—even in poor countries with very low-income levels per capita—to the extent that Lefebvre's prediction regarding full urbanization is soon to come true; since 2005, there are more people living in cities than in the countryside.[7]

In the advanced industrial economies, twentieth-century urban planning encompassed not only the engineering of new transportation modalities but also the creation of new neighborhoods with improved housing for the working classes and the poor. For a few brief decades, the future seemed within the grasp of the modern. After the Second World War, bombed-out European cities provided something of a blank canvas, delighting the likes of W.G. Witteveen, a Rotterdam civil engineer and architect who exulted in the possibilities provided by the near-total destruction of that port city by Nazi bombing in May 1940. In many intact or nearly intact cities in the US and Western Europe, both urban renewal and postwar reconstruction followed a similar plan: clear out the old and narrow, divide or replace the dilapidated neighborhoods with better roads and public transport.[8] While small industrial production continued as the urban economic backbone, many cities also invited the burgeoning corporate and financial services sectors to locate their headquarters there, sweetening their appeal through zoning adjustments and tax breaks. International Style commercial skyscrapers sprouted around the world as cities became concentrations, real and symbolic, of state and corporate administration.

The theoretical underpinning for a renovated cityscape came primarily from the earlier, utopian "millennial" and interwar designs of forward-looking, albeit totalizing, plans for remaking the built environment. It was not lost on the city poor that so-called urban renewal projects targeted their neighborhoods and the cultural traditions that enlivened them. Cities were being remade for the benefit of the middle and upper classes, and the destruction of the older neighborhoods—whether in the interest of commercial, civic, or other forces, such as enhanced mobility for trucks and private cars—extirpated the haunts of those beyond the reach of law and bourgeois proclivities, adversely affecting the lives and culture of the poorer residents.

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Meeting of the Situationist International, Göteborg, 1961.
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One may trace the grounding of the mid-century European

group the Situationist International in a recognition of the growing role of the visual—and its relation to spatiality—in modern capitalism, and thus the complicit role of art in systems of exploitation. The core French group of Situationists—Lefebvre's sometime students (and, some might say, collaborators and certainly occasional adversaries)—attacked, as Lefebvre had done, the radiant-city visions of Le Corbusier (and by implication other utopian modernists) for designing a carceral city in which the poor are locked up and thrust into a strangely narrow utopia of light and space, but removed from a free social life in the streets. (Le Corbusier's housing projects called "Unités d'Habitation," the most famous of which is in Marseille, were elevated above their garden surrounds on pilotis. The floors were called *rues*, or streets, and one such "street" was to be devoted to shops; kindergartens and—at least in the one I visited, in Firminy, near St. Etienne—a low-powered radio station were also located within the building, together suggesting the conditions of a walled city.)

> We will leave Monsieur Le Corbusier's style to him, a style suitable for factories and hospitals, and no doubt eventually for prisons. (Doesn't he already build churches?) Some sort of psychological repression dominates this individual—whose face is as ugly as his conceptions of the world—such that he wants to squash people under ignoble masses of reinforced concrete, a noble material that should rather be used to enable an aerial articulation of space that could surpass the flamboyant Gothic style. His cretinizing influence is immense. A Le Corbusier model is the only image that arouses in me the idea of immediate suicide. He is destroying the last remnants of joy. And of love, passion, freedom.

—Ivan Chetcheglov[9]

Perhaps it is the primacy of the spatial register, with its emphasis on visuality, but also its turn to virtuality, to representation, that also accounts for architecture's return to prominence in the imaginary of the arts, displacing not only music but architecture's spectral double, the cinema. This change in the conduct of everyday life, and the centrality of the city to such changes, were apparent to the Situationists, and Debord's concept of what he termed "the society of the spectacle" is larger than any particular instances of architecture or real estate, and certainly larger than questions of cinema or television. Debord's "spectacle" denotes the all-encompassing, controlling nature of modern industrial and "post-industrial" culture. Thus, Debord defines the spectacle not in terms of representation alone but also in terms of the social relations of capitalism and its ability to subsume all into representation: "The spectacle is not a collection of images; rather, it is a social relationship between people that is mediated by images."[10] Elements of culture were in the forefront, but the focus was quite properly on the dominant mode of production.

[figure 7aa81ec3b54635b143a89b9cd261f3f4.jpg
Paul Gavarni, *Le Flâneur*, 1842.]

The Situationists' engagement with city life included a practice they called the *dérive*. The *dérive*, an exploration of urban neighborhoods, a version of the nineteenth-century tradition of the *flâneur*, and an inversion of the bourgeois promenade of the boulevards (concerned as the latter was with visibility to others, while the *flâneur*'s was directed toward his own experience), hinged on the relatively free flow of organic life in the neighborhoods, a freedom from bureaucratic control, that dynamic element of life also powerfully detailed by Lefebvre and Jane Jacobs. Both Baudelaire and Benjamin gave the *flâneur* prominence, and by the end of the twentieth century the *flâneur* was adopted as a favored, if minor, figure for architects wishing to add pedestrian cachet to projects such as shopping malls that mimic public plazas—thus closing the book on the unadministered spaces that the Situationists, at least, were concerned with defending.

The Western art world has periodically rediscovered the Situationists, who presently occupy what a friend has described as a quasi-religious position, embodying every aspiring artist/revolutionary's deepest wish—to be in both the political and the artistic vanguard simultaneously. The ghostly presence of the Situationists, including Debord, Asger Jorn, Raoul Vaneigem, and Constant, predictably took up residence at the moment the very idea of the artistic vanguard disappeared. The cautionary dilemma they pose is how to combat the power of "spectacle culture" under advanced capitalism without following their decision to abandon the terrain of art (as Duchamp had done earlier). To address this question, context and history are required. Let us continue with the events of the 1960s, in the Situationists' moment—characterized by rising economic expectations for the postwar generation in the West and beyond, but also by riot and revolt, both internal and external.

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Paris, May '68.

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By the 1960s, deindustrializa-tion was on the horizon of many cities in the US and elsewhere as the flight of manufacturing capital to nonunion areas and overseas was gathering steam, often abetted by state policy. In an era of decline for central cities, thanks to suburbanization and corporate, as well as middle-class (white) flight, a new transformation was required. Dilapidated downtown neighborhoods became the focus of city administrations

seeking ways to revive them while simultaneously withdraw-ing city services from the remaining poor residents, ideally without fomenting disorder. In Paris, riven by unrest during the Algerian War, the chosen solution encompassed pacification through police mobilization and the evacuation of poor residents to a new, outer ring of suburbs, or *banlieues,* yoking the utopian high-rise scheme to the postwar banishment of the urban poor and the dangerous classes.[11] By 1967, the lack of economic viability of these *banlieues,* and the particular stress that put on housewives, was widely recognized, becoming the subject of Jean-Luc Godard's brilliant film *Two or Three Things I Know About Her*.

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In other countries, conversely, the viability of "housing projects" or "council housing" in improving the lives of the urban poor has been increasingly challenged, and it is an article of neoliberal faith that such projects cannot succeed—a prophecy fulfilled by the covert racial policies underlying the siting of these projects and the selection of residents, followed, in cities that wish to tear them down, by consistent underfunding of maintenance and services. In Britain the Thatcherist solution was to sell the flats to the residents, with the rationale of making the poor into stakeholders, with results yet to be determined (although the pitfalls seem obvious). With the failure of many state-initiated postwar housing schemes for the poor supplying a key exhibit in neoliberal urban doctrine, postmodern architecture showed itself willing to jettison humanism in the wake of the ruin of the grand claims of utopian modernism. In the US, commentator Charles Jencks famously identified as "the moment of postmodernism" the phased implosion in 1972—in a bemusing choreography often replayed today—of the Pruitt-Igoe housing project, a 33-building modernist complex in St. Louis, Missouri. Pruitt-Igoe, commissioned in 1950 during an era of postwar optimism, had been built to house those who had moved to the city for war work—primarily proletarianized African-Americans from the rural South.

[figure 418dd113790e929c7d95444b687fb76a.jpg
Pruitt-Igoe housing project in the 1950s and in the process of implosion.

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The abandonment of the widely held twentieth-century paradigm of state- and municipality-sponsored housing thus properly joined the other retreats from utopianism that constituted the narratives of postmodernism. Either blowing up or selling off housing projects has subsequently been adopted enthusiastically by many US cities, such as Newark, New Jersey, which happily supplied a mediatized spectacle of eviction and displacement—but so far has not reached my home city, New York, primarily because, as a matter of policy, New York's housing projects have never occupied the center of town. In post-Katrina New Orleans, however, the moment of Schumpeterian creative destruction allowed for the closure *tout court* of the largely undamaged, 1200-home Lafitte Public Housing Development in the Lower Ninth Ward (the project was demolished without fanfare or fireworks in 2008).

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Photograph by Richard Layman of poster in the collection of the Washington, DC, Department of Transportation.]

Throughout the 1960s, as former metropolitan empires schemed, struggled, and strong-armed to secure alternative ways to maintain cheap access to productive resources and raw materials in the post-colonial world, the Western democracies, because of unrest among young people and minorities centering on increasing demands for political agency, were diagnosed by policy elites as ungovernable. In a number of cities, as middle-class adults, and some young "hippies," were leaving, groups of other people, including students and working class families, took part in poor people's housing initiatives that included sweat equity (in which the municipality grants ownership rights to those who form collectives to rehabilitate decayed tenement properties, generally the ones in which they are living) or squatting. In cities that have not succeeded, as New York and London have done, in turning themselves into centers of capital concentration through finance, insurance, and real estate, the squatter movement has had a long tail and still figures in many European cities. In the US, the urban homesteading movement, primarily accomplished through the individual purchase of distressed homes, quickly became recognized as a new, more benign way of colonizing neighborhoods and driving out the poor. Such new middle-class residents were often referred to by real-estate interests and their newspaper flacks—not to mention an enthusiastic Mayor Ed Koch— as "urban pioneers," as though the old neighborhoods could be understood according to the model of the Wild West. These developments surely seemed organic to the individuals moving in; as threatened communities began to resist, however, the process of change quickly enough gained a name: gentrification.

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In some major cities, some of the colonizers were artists, writers, actors, dancers, and poets. Many lived in old tenements; but artists did not so much want apartments as places to work and live, and the ideal spaces were disused factories or manufacturing lofts. In New York, while poets, actors, dancers, and writers were moving to such old working-class residential areas as the Lower East

Side, many artists took up residence in nearby manufacturing-loft neighborhoods. Artists had been living in lofts since at least the 1950s, and while the city winked at such residents, it still considered their situation to be both temporary and illegal. But loft-dwelling artists continued agitating for city recognition and protection, which appeared increasingly likely to be granted as the 1960s advanced.

A canny observer of this process was New York City-based urban sociologist Sharon Zukin. In her book *Loft Living: Culture and Capital in Urban Change,* published in 1982, Zukin writes about the role of artists in making "loft living" comprehensible, even desirable. She focuses on the transformation, beginning in the mid-1960s, of New York's cast-iron district into an "artist district" that was eventually dubbed Soho. In this remarkable book, Zukin lays out a theory of urban change in which artists and the entire visual art sector—especially commercial galleries, artist-run spaces, and museums—are a main engine for the repurposing of the post-industrial city and the renegotiation of real estate for the benefit of elites. She writes:

> Looking at loft living in terms of *terrain* and *markets* rather than "lifestyle" links changes in the built environment with the collective appropriation of public goods. ... studying the formation of markets ... directs attention to *investors rather than consumers as the source of change*.[12]

Zukin demonstrates how this policy change was carried forward by city officials, art supporters, and well-placed art patrons serving on land-use commissions and occupying other seats of power.

> The creation of constituencies for historic preservation and the arts carried over a fascination with old buildings and artists' studios into a collective appropriation of these spaces for modern residential and commercial use. In the grand scheme of things, loft living gave the *coup de grâce* to the old manufacturing base of cities like New York and brought on the final stage of their transformation into service-sector capitals.[13]

Reminding us that "by the 1970s, art suggested a new platform to politicians who were tired of dealing with urban poverty," Zukin quotes an artist looking back ruefully at the creation of Soho as a district that addressed the needs of artists rather than those of the poor:

> At the final hearing where the Board of Estimate voted to approve SoHo as an artists' district, there were lots of other groups giving testimony on other matters. Poor people from the South Bronx and Bed-Stuy complaining about rats, rent control, and things like that. The board just shelved those matters and moved right along. They didn't know how to proceed. Then they came to us. All the press secretaries were there, and the journalists. The klieg lights went on, and the cameras started to roll. And all these guys started making speeches about the importance of art to New York City.[14]

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One of Zukin's many exhibits is this published remark by Dick Netzer, a prominent member of New York's Municipal Assistance Corporation, the rescue agency set up during New York City's fiscal near-default:

> The arts may be small in economic terms even in this region, but the arts "industry" is one of our few growth industries ... The concentration of the arts in New York is one of the attributes that makes it distinctive, and distinctive in a positive sense: the arts in New York are a magnet for the rest of the world.[15]

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Detroit Renaissance Center.
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Many cities, especially those lacking significant cultural sectors, established other revitalization strategies. Efforts to attract desirable corporations to post-industrial cities soon provoked the realization that it was the human capital in the persons of the managerial elites were the ones whose needs and desires should be addressed. The provision of so-called quality-of-life enhancements to attract these high earners became urban doctrine, a formula consisting of providing delights for the male managers in the form of convention centers and sports stadia, and for the wives, museums, dance, and the symphony. An early, high-profile example of the edifice complex as proposed urban enhancement is provided by the John Portman–designed Detroit Renaissance Center of 1977—a seven-skyscraper riverfront complex owned by General Motors and housing its world headquarters, and including the tallest building in Michigan—meant as a revitalizing engine in the car city that has more recently been cast as the poster child for deindustrialization. But eventually, despite all the bond-funded tax breaks paradoxically given to these edifices, and all the money

devoted to support of the arts, cities were failing to build an adequate corporate tax base, even after the trend toward flight from city living had long been reversed. This strategy has continued to be instituted despite its failures, but a better way had to be found. The search for more and better revitalization, and more and better magnets for high earners and tourists, eventually took a cultural turn, building on the success of artists' districts in post-industrial economies.

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1960s poster and Moratorium to End the War in Vietnam, 1969.

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During the turbulent 1960s, the rising middle-class members of the postwar "baby boom" constituted a huge cohort of young people. Whereas the older generation lived lives that seemed primarily to revolve around family and work, the upcoming generation seemed to center theirs primarily on other, more personal and consumerist sources, including the counterculture: music, newspapers, cheap fashion, and the like, coupled with rejection of the corporate "rat race," majoritarian rule, repressive behavioral codes, and "death culture," or militarism (nuclear war and Vietnam)—and often rejection of urbanism itself. This highly visible group was closely watched for its tastes. Advertising and marketing, already at what seemed like saturation levels, could segment the market, aiming one set of messages at traditionalist consumers and the other at young people, and "culture" was transformed into an assemblage of purchases. The youth theme was "revolution"— political "revolution," whether real, imaginary, or, as it gradually became, one centered on consumerism.

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VALS chart.

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Constellations of consumer choice were studied by research institutes such as the Stanford Research Institute (SRI) based at Stanford, an elite private California university. Founded by Stanford trustees in 1946 to support economic development in the region, SRI International, as it is now officially known, currently describes its mission as "discovery and the application of science and technology for knowledge, commerce, prosperity, and peace." It was forced off the university campus into stand-alone status in 1970 by students protesting against its military research.

"Lifestyle," an index to the changes in the terrain of consumerism, was a neologism of the 1960s that quickly became comfortable in everyone's mouth. In 1978, SRI announced a lifestyle metric, the Values and Lifestyles (VALS) "psychographic," dubbed by *Advertising Age* as "one of the ten top market research breakthroughs of the 1980s."[16] VALS today seeks "to find out about a person's product ownership, media preferences, hobbies, additional demographics, or attitudes (for example, about global warming)."[17] (Its categories are innovators, thinkers, achievers, experiencers, believers, strivers, makers, and survivors, which articulate in primary and secondary dimensions.) The VALS website establishes its connection to other survey vehicles that provide in-depth information, among other preferences, about how each of the eight VALS types uses, invests, and saves money. Such detailed data helped marketers early on to determine how to tailor their pitches—even for matters that should be subjects of debate in the public square.

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88a7b1ba03cc52f46bc2be6ad9c0013e.jpg
Advertisement for a Roy Lichtenstein exhibition at the Walters Art Museum, Baltimore, in late 2006.]

Thus, the concept of taste, one of the key markers of social class—understood here as determined by one's economic relation to the means of production—became transformed into something apparently lacking in hierarchical importance or relationship to power. Rather than representing membership in an economic or even a social group, taste aligns a person with other consumer affinities. In the 1960s, the Greenbergian paradigm based in a Kantian schema of faculties in which taste is the key operator for people of sensibility, also fell. While it would be absurd to conflate the Kantian faculty of taste with consumer taste, there remains a case to be made that the ideas energizing vanguard art shift along with shifts in the social worldview. In a pre-postmodern moment, so to speak, when artists were exhibiting a certain panic over the relentlessly ascending tide of consumerism and mass culture, and Pop art was bidding for a mass audience, the terms of culture shifted.[18]

A great deal has been asked of artists, in every modern age. In previous eras artists were asked to edify society by showing forth the good, the true, and the beautiful. But such expectations have increasingly come to seem quaint as art has lost its firm connections to the powers of church and state. Especially since the romantics, artists have routinely harbored messianic desires, the longing to take a high position in social matters, to play a transformative role in political affairs; this may be finally understood as a necessary—though perhaps only imaginary—corrective to their roles, both uncomfortable and insecure, as handmaidens to wealth and power. Artists working under patronage conditions had produced according to command, which left them to express their personal dimension primarily through the formal elements of the chosen themes. By the nineteenth century, artists, now no longer supported by patronage, were free to devise and follow many different approaches both to form and to content, including realism and direct social commentary.[19]

Still, the new middle-class customers, as well as the state, had their own preferences and demands, even if a certain degree of transgression was both anticipated and accepted, however provisionally (the Salon des Refusés was, after all, established by Napoléon III). The fin de siècle refuge in formalist arguments, in aestheticism, or "art for art's sake," has been called by such scholars as John Fekete a defensive maneuver on the part of the era's advanced artists, establishing a professional distance from the social and honoring the preferences of their high-bourgeois market following a century marked by European revolutions and in the midst of industrial-labor militancy.[20] In the US, the lionization of art by social and political elites in the new century's first fifty years had been effective in the acculturation of immigrants, and of the native working class to some degree. Especially in the postwar period, the ramping up of advanced, formalist art provided a secular approach to the transcendent. The mid-twentieth-century rhetorics of artistic autonomy, in the US at least, reassured the knowing public that formalism, and, all the more so, abstraction, would constitute a bulwark against totalitarian leanings. This tacit understanding had been especially persuasive in keeping prudent artists away from political engagement during the Cold War in the 1950s. Under those conditions, only autonomous art could claim to be an art of critique, but advanced, let alone abstract, art could hardly expect to address large numbers of people. Thus, the "professionalization" of art also doomed it to be a highly restricted discourse.[21]

[figure partialpage a8088b5e0bccde9c900e1c54ce67fd54.jpg]

Let us look at taste not as a decision reflecting the well-formedness or virtue of an artistic utterance but through the wider popular meaning of the exercise of choice among a range of goods, tangible and intangible (but mostly the former)—that is, as an expression of "lifestyle." Taste has expressed class membership and social status in every modern industrial society. In 1983, the American cultural historian and English professor Paul Fussell, author of the acclaimed book *The Great War and Modern Memory* (1975), published a slim, acerbically acute book called *Class: A Guide Through the American Status System*.[22] There were earlier treatises on ruling elites, such as American sociologist C. Wright Mills's *Power Elite* or British linguist Alan Ross's 1954 article on distinctions between U and non-U speech patterns, in which U refers to the "upper class" (a discussion that caused an Anglo-American stir when picked up by Nancy Mitford) and Arthur Marwick's *Class: Image and Reality* (1980), cited by Fussell.[23] Fussell meant his book as a popular exposé that taste is not a personal attribute so much as an expression of a definable "socioeconomic" grouping, and in his preface he gleefully describes the horrified, even explosive, reactions middle-class people displayed to the mere mention of class. His scathing description of the missteps of the non-elite are well situated in economic class categories; it is only when he arrives at a class of taste he calls Class X—of which he considers himself a member—that he loses his bearings, besotted by this motley group of self-actualizing people who are mostly university-based and float free of the demands of social codes of dress and behavior, pleasing only themselves. We should recognize in this group not just the expression of the counterculture, now grown up and college educated, but also of the gold mine that had just begun to be intensively lobbied by niche marketers, the "creative class"—a social formation and process that seems to have escaped Fussell's notice.

A couple of decades later in 2000, the conservative ideologue and US media figure David Brooks, in his best-selling book *Bobos in Paradise: The New Upper Class and How They Got There,* quipped that "counter-cultural values have infused the business world—the one sphere of US life where people still talk about fomenting 'revolution' and are taken seriously."[24] His thesis is that in this new information age, members of the highly educated elite "have one foot in the bohemian world of creativity and another foot in the bourgeois realm of ambition and worldly success."[25] Brooks's barbed witticisms claim the triumph of capital over any possible other political world that young people different from him, in the Western democracies and particularly the US, had hoped to create:

> We're by now all familiar with modern-day executives who have moved from SDS to CEO, from LSD to IPO. Indeed, sometimes you get the impression the Free Speech movement produced more corporate executives than Harvard Business School.[26]

To decode a bit: "SDS" denotes the emblematic 1960s radical group Students for a Democratic Society; "IPO" stands for a corporation's initial public offering; and the Free Speech movement was the student movement at the elite (though public) University of California, Berkeley, that agitated on several fronts, sparking the worldwide student movements of the 1960s.

[figure c95dd1b4cd05e2b80aa706fc5f029155.jpg

]

The French intelligentsia have derisively extracted Brooks's neologism "Bobos" from his celebratory analysis, and the book is worth dwelling on here only because of its concentration on taste classes and their relationship to power and influence, and, less centrally, their relevance to literature and criticism.[27] Brooks traces his own intellectual forebears to "the world and ideas of the mid-1950s," remarking regressively:

[W]hile the fever and froth of the 1960s have largely burned away, the ideas of these 1950s intellectuals [William Whyte, Jane Jacobs, J.K. Galbraith, Vance Packard, E. Digby Baltzell] continue to resonate. [28]

[figure 4040fcc3049665ebcbf3c207f741fd89.jpg

]

Lowering expectations of rigor, Brooks refers to his work as "comic sociology." He compliments his readers on their quirky tastes while ignoring those who do not fit his consumer taste class. The "conspicuous consumption" pattern first described by Thorstein Veblen in *The Theory of the Leisure Class,* published in 1899 during the robber baron era, seemingly does not fit the preferences of the Bobos, who unlike the gilded-age business (but not, it should be noted, technical) class, prefer to spend lots of money on things that appear to be useful and "virtuous"—an adjective often employed ironically in *Bobos*.

A decade later, the laid-back, tolerant wisdom of the benign "Bobo" class-in-ascendancy now appears ephemeral, since in the interim the ostentatious rich have led us into crushingly expensive wars, destroyed the financial markets, restored nepotism, and mobilized the old working class and rural dwellers using a dangerous breed of hater-malarkey to grab and keep political control, all the while becoming vastly richer. Reviewing Brooks, Russell Mokhiber writes,

> Most people in the United States (let alone the world) do not share [the Bobos'] expanding wealth and may have markedly different views on important issues, including concepts of "deservedness," fairness, government regulation, and equitable distribution of wealth. For this majority of the population, more confrontation, not less, could be just what is in order.[29]

Soon after the collapse of the millennial New Economy that was supposed to raise all boats, Richard Florida, in his best-selling book *The Rise of the Creative Class* (2002), instituted a way of talking about the effects of the needs and choices of Sharon Zukin's, as well as, more broadly, Brooks's and Fussell's, target group that framed the positioning of the "creative class"—that cooperative group—as a living blueprint for urban planners.[30]

[figure fd5f638fb6593ba631c9988d7517b55f.jpg
Richard Florida on TV.
]

Turn-of-the-century changes in the composition of the productive classes in the United States and Western Europe as a result of "globalization"—in which mass industrial work shifted East and South and white-collar technical labor in the developed industries rose to ascendancy during the dot-com boom—led to further speculation on the nature of these workers, but seemingly these were more solidly empirical efforts than Brooks's mischievous rendition. Enter Richard Florida, professor at postindustrial Pittsburgh's Carnegie Mellon University, with theories catering to the continuing desire of municipalities such as Pittsburgh to attract those middle-class high-wage earners.

The next installment of this article will address Florida's hypotheses and prescriptions.

X

→ Continued in **Culture Class: Art, Creativity, Urbanism, Part II: Creativity and Its Discontents.**

Martha Rosler is an artist who works with multiple media, including photography, sculpture, video, and installation. Her interests are centered on the public sphere and landscapes of everyday life—actual and virtual—especially as they affect women. Related projects focus on housing, on the one hand, and systems of transportation, on the other. She has long produced works on war and the "national security climate," connecting everyday experiences at home with the conduct of war abroad. Other works, from bus tours to sculptural recreations of architectural details, are excavations of history.

1
See, for example, Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* , trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), *passim*. See also Georg Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics* , trans. Rodney Livingstone (London: Merlin Press, 1971); Lukács, interpreting Marx on the development of abstract labor under capitalism, writes that "time sheds its qualitative, variable, flowing nature; it freezes into an exactly delimited, quantifiable continuum filled with quantifiable 'things' ... in short, it becomes space," 90.

2
A more substantial discussion would need to take account of how the space-time continuum privileges one or the other dimension and how the primacy of each changes with economic regimes.

3
Henri Lefebvre, *The Urban Revolution* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 1.

4
Ibid., vii.

5
Ibid., 18.

6
Consider such basic matters as the management of violent crime, prostitution, sanitation, and disease.

7
See Mike Davis, "Planet of Slums," *New Left Review* 26 (March–April 2004): 6. "The present urban population (3.2 billion) is larger than the total population of the world in 1960. The global countryside, meanwhile, has reached its maximum population (3.2 billion) and will begin to shrink after 2020. As a result, cities will account for *all* future world population growth, which is expected to peak at about 10 billion in 2050." (See also Davis's subsequent book, *Planet of Slums* (London: Verso, 2006) for further data crunching.) Concomitantly, urban poverty is also increasing faster than rural poverty.

8
I leave out of consideration here the reconstruction of cities and countrysides that served—primarily or secondarily—military and police functions, whether local ones on the order of Baron Haussmann's mid-nineteenth-century reconfiguring of Paris, among other things securing it against insurrections, or more ambitious national ones such as the construction, under President Eisenhower, of the US's Cold War-oriented interstate highway system.

9
Ivan Chtcheglov, "Formulary for a New Urbanism," trans. Kenn Knabb, *Situationiste Internationale* , no. 1 (June 1958). See http://www.cddc.vt.edu/sionline/presitu/formulary.html .

10
Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle* , trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (New York: Zone Books, 1994), 12.

11
Today, a few generations on, the dystopian effects of the relegation of the poor and the immigrant to these high-rise ghettos, are there for all to see, if not understood by French xenophobes, in the regular eruptions of fire and revolt among unemployed young men with no future. (Today, however, the young of France and elsewhere recognize in this only a more extreme version of their own condition of economic "precarity.")

12
Sharon Zukin, *Loft Living: Culture and Capital in Urban Change* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1989), 190–191.

13
Ibid., 190.

14
Ibid., 117–118.

15
"The Arts: New York's Best Export Industry," *New York Affairs* 5, no. 2 (1978): 51. Quoted in Zukin, *Loft Living* , 112.

16
See http://www.strategicbusinessinsights.com/vals/about.shtml .

17
See http://www.strategicbusinessinsights.com/vals/presurvey.shtml .

18
See Alvin Gouldner, *The Dialectic of Ideology and Technology: The Origins, Grammar, and Future of Ideology* (New York: Seabury Press, 1976).

19
See Caroline A. Jones's interesting study, *Eyesight Alone: Clement Greenberg's Modernism and the Bureaucratization of the Senses* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006).

20
John Fekete, *The Critical Twilight: Explorations in the Ideology of Anglo-American Literary Theory from Eliot to McLuhan* (Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1977).

21
See the analyses of Pierre Bourdieu in many works, including *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* and "The Market of Symbolic Goods," Part One, Chapter One, of *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984); as well as, following him, Jürgen Habermas, "Modernity, An Incomplete Project," in Hal Foster, ed., *The Anti-Aesthetic. Essays on Postmodern Culture* (Port Townsend, WA: Bay Press, 1983).

22
Paul Fussell, *Class* (New York: Ballantine, 1983). The cover of the firstpaper back edition says "Class: A Painfully Accurate Guide Through the American Status System."

23
Alan S. C. Ross, "Linguistic class-indicators in present-day English," *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen* (Helsinki) 55 (1954), 113–149; Nancy Mitford, ed. *Noblesse Oblige* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1956); Arthur Marwick: *Class: Image and Reality in Britain, France and the U.S.A. Since 1930* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980).

24
David Brooks, *Bobos in Paradise: The New Upper Class and How They Got There* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2000). The quotation is taken from a review by Russell Mokhiber, *YES! magazine* , posted Oct 27, 2000, at http://web.archive.org/web/20130318021633/http://www.yesmagazine.org/issues/a-new-culture-emerges/review-bobos-in-paradise-by-david-brooks .

25
Brooks, *Bobos*, 11.

26
Ibid., 39.

27
...and art. In the section "How to Be an Intellectual Giant" Brooks points out that rather than writing, say, *War and Peace*, it is better to seek success by presenting "a catchy new idea in a lively format and casting light on what it all means," a formula dominating art reviewing and infesting art production, the arts section of periodicals, and much else.

28
"Books like *The Organization Man* , *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* , *The Affluent Society* , *The Status Seekers*, and *The Protestant Establishment* were the first expressions of the new educated class ethos, and while the fever and froth of the 1960s have largely burned away, the ideas of the 1950s intellectuals continue to resonate." Brooks, *Bobos*, Introduction, 11–12. Brooks is selective in those whom he cites; several reviews have suggested his indebtedness to the work of César Graña, a professor at UC San Diego, especially *Bohemian vs. Bourgeois* (New York: Basic Books, 1964); Graña, who had studied sociology, anthropology and urban planning, published several other works centering on bohemianism and authenticity but died in a car accident in 1986.

29
Russell Mokhiber, *YES! magazine*, posted Oct 27, 2000, at http://www.yesmagazine.org/issues/a-new-culture-emerges/review-bobos-in-paradise-by-david-brooks .

30
Richard Florida, *The Rise of the Creative Class: And How It's Transforming Work, Leisure, Community and Everyday Life* (New York: Basic Books, 2002).

Hito Steyerl

Politics of Art: Contemporary Art and the Transition to Post-Democracy

A standard way of relating politics to art assumes that art represents political issues in one way or another. But there is a much more interesting perspective: the politics of the field of art as a place of work.[1] Simply look at what it does—not what it shows.

Amongst all other forms of art, fine art has been most closely linked to post-Fordist speculation, with bling, boom, and bust. Contemporary art is no unworldly discipline nestled away in some remote ivory tower. On the contrary, it is squarely placed in the neoliberal thick of things. We cannot dissociate the hype around contemporary art from the shock policies used to defibrillate slowing economies. Such hype embodies the affective dimension of global economies tied to ponzi schemes, credit addiction, and bygone bull markets. Contemporary art is a brand name without a brand, ready to be slapped onto almost anything, a quick face-lift touting the new creative imperative for places in need of an extreme makeover, the suspense of gambling combined with the stern pleasures of upper-class boarding school education, a licensed playground for a world confused and collapsed by dizzying deregulation. If contemporary art is the answer, the question is: How can capitalism be made more beautiful?

But contemporary art is not only about beauty. It is also about function. What is the function of art within disaster capitalism? Contemporary art feeds on the crumbs of a massive and widespread redistribution of wealth from the poor to the rich, conducted by means of an ongoing class struggle from above.[2] It lends primordial accumulation a whiff of postconceptual razzmatazz. Additionally, its reach has grown much more decentralized—important hubs of art are no longer only located in the Western metropolis. Today, deconstructivist contemporary art museums pop up in any self-respecting autocracy. A country with human rights violations? Bring on the Gehry gallery!

The Global Guggenheim is a cultural refinery for a set of post-democratic oligarchies, as are the countless international biennials tasked with upgrading and reeducating the surplus population.[3] Art thus facilitates the development of a new multipolar distribution of geopolitical power whose predatory economies are often fueled by internal oppression, class war from above, and radical shock and awe policies.

Contemporary art thus not only reflects, but actively intervenes in the transition towards a new post-Cold War world order. It is a major player in unevenly advancing semiocapitalism wherever T-Mobile plants its flag. It is involved in mining for raw materials for dual-core processors. It pollutes, gentrifies, and ravishes. It seduces and consumes, then suddenly walks off, breaking your heart. From the deserts of Mongolia to the high plains of Peru, contemporary art is everywhere. And when it is finally dragged into Gagosian dripping from head to toe with blood and dirt, it triggers off rounds and rounds of

rapturous applause.

[figure partialpage
e6385b5887537459e44bbef8b578e4be.jpg
Frank Gehry wedding ring.

]

Why and for whom is contemporary art so attractive? One guess: the production of art presents a mirror image of post-democratic forms of hypercapitalism that look set to become the dominant political post-Cold War paradigm. It seems unpredictable, unaccountable, brilliant, mercurial, moody, guided by inspiration and genius. Just as any oligarch aspiring to dictatorship might want to see himself. The traditional conception of the artist's role corresponds all too well with the self-image of wannabe autocrats, who see government potentially—and dangerously—as an art form. Post-democratic government is very much related to this erratic type of male-genius-artist behavior. It is opaque, corrupt, and completely unaccountable. Both models operate within male bonding structures that are as democratic as your local mafia chapter. Rule of law? Why don't we just leave it to taste? Checks and balances? Cheques and balances! Good governance? Bad curating! You see why the contemporary oligarch loves contemporary art: it's just what works for him.

Thus, traditional art production may be a role model for the nouveaux riches created by privatization, expropriation, and speculation. But the actual production of art is simultaneously a workshop for many of the nouveaux poor, trying their luck as jpeg virtuosos and conceptual impostors, as gallerinas and overdrive content providers. Because art also means work, more precisely strike work.[4] It is produced as spectacle, on post-Fordist all-you-can-work conveyor belts. Strike or shock work is affective labor at insane speeds, enthusiastic, hyperactive, and deeply compromised.

Originally, strike workers were excess laborers in the early Soviet Union. The term is derived from the expression "udarny trud" for "superproductive, enthusiastic labor" (udar for "shock, strike, blow"). Now, transferred to present-day cultural factories, strike work relates to the sensual dimension of shock. Rather than painting, welding, and molding, artistic strike work consists of ripping, chatting, and posing. This accelerated form of artistic production creates punch and glitz, sensation and impact. Its historical origin as format for Stalinist model brigades brings an additional edge to the paradigm of hyperproductivity. Strike workers churn out feelings, perception, and distinction in all possible sizes and variations. Intensity or evacuation, sublime or crap, readymade or readymade reality—strike work supplies consumers with all they never knew they wanted.

Strike work feeds on exhaustion and tempo, on deadlines and curatorial bullshit, on small talk and fine print. It also thrives on accelerated exploitation. I'd guess that—apart from domestic and care work—art is the industry with the most unpaid labor around. It sustains itself on the time and energy of unpaid interns and self-exploiting actors on pretty much every level and in almost every function. Free labor and rampant exploitation are the invisible dark matter that keeps the cultural sector going.

Free-floating strike workers plus new (and old) elites and oligarchies equal the framework of the contemporary politics of art. While the latter manage the transition to post-democracy, the former image it. But what does this situation actually indicate? Nothing but the ways in which contemporary art is implicated in transforming global power patterns.

Contemporary art's workforce consists largely of people who, despite working constantly, do not correspond to any traditional image of labor. They stubbornly resist settling into any entity recognizable enough to be identified as a class. While the easy way out would be to classify this constituency as multitude or crowd, it might be less romantic to ask whether they are not global lumpenfreelancers, deterritorialized and ideologically free-floating: a reserve army of imagination communicating via Google Translate.

Instead of shaping up as a new class, this fragile constituency may well consist—as Hannah Arendt once spitefully formulated—of the "refuse of all classes." These dispossessed adventurers described by Arendt, the urban pimps and hoodlums ready to be hired as colonial mercenaries and exploiters, are faintly (and quite distortedly) mirrored in the brigades of creative strike workers propelled into the global sphere of circulation known today as the art world.[5] If we acknowledge that current strike workers might inhabit similarly shifting grounds—the opaque disaster zones of shock capitalism—a decidedly un-heroic, conflicted, and ambivalent picture of artistic labor emerges.

We have to face up to the fact that there is no automatically available road to resistance and organization for artistic labor. That opportunism and competition are not a deviation of this form of labor but its inherent structure. That this workforce is not ever going to march in unison, except perhaps while dancing to a viral Lady Gaga imitation video. The international is over. Now let's get on with the global.

Here is the bad news: political art routinely shies away from discussing all these matters.[6] Addressing the intrinsic conditions of the art field, as well as the blatant corruption within it—think of bribes to get this or that large-scale biennial into one peripheral region or another—is a taboo even on the agenda of most artists who consider themselves political. Even though political art manages to represent so-called local situations from all over the globe, and routinely packages injustice and

destitution, the conditions of its own production and display remain pretty much unexplored. One could even say that the politics of art are the blind spot of much contemporary political art.

[figure partialpage a1ac0af266c371ad68a21959791e18ef.jpg Image found in a technology news website accompanying the following opening sentence "The multinational Joint Photographic Experts Group, responsible for the JPEG standard (...) has announced the next iteration of its format will be based on the format Microsoft HD Photo." see →.
]

Of course, institutional critique has traditionally been interested in similar issues. But today we need a quite extensive expansion of it.[7] Because in contrast to the age of an institutional criticism, which focused on art institutions, or even the sphere of representation at large, art production (consumption, distribution, marketing, etc.) takes on a different and extended role within post-democratic globalization. One example, which is a quite absurd but also common phenomenon, is that radical art is nowadays very often sponsored by the most predatory banks or arms traders and completely embedded in rhetorics of city marketing, branding, and social engineering.[8] For very obvious reasons, this condition is rarely explored within political art, which is in many cases content to offer exotic self-ethnicization, pithy gestures, and militant nostalgia.

I am certainly not arguing for a position of innocence.[9] It is at best illusory, at worst just another selling point. Most of all it is very boring. But I do think that political artists could become more relevant if they were to confront these issues instead of safely parade as Stalinist realists, CNN situationists, or Jamie-Oliver-meets-probation-officer social engineers. It's time to kick the hammer-and-sickle souvenir art into the dustbin. If politics is thought of as the Other, happening somewhere else, always belonging to disenfranchised communities in whose name no one can speak, we end up missing what makes art intrinsically political nowadays: its function as a place for labor, conflict, and...fun—a site of condensation of the contradictions of capital and of extremely entertaining and sometimes devastating misunderstandings between the global and the local.

[figure f7abe3756d9fc84a4c5d2f96d22ce658.jpg Fashion production for Harper's Bazar, September 2009, titled *Peggy Guggenheim's Venice*.
]

The art field is a space of wild contradiction and phenomenal exploitation. It is a place of power mongering, speculation, financial engineering, and massive and crooked manipulation. But it is also a site of commonality, movement, energy, and desire. In its best iterations it is a terrific cosmopolitan arena populated by mobile shock workers, itinerant salesmen of self, tech whiz kids, budget tricksters, supersonic translators, PhD interns, and other digital vagrants and day laborers. It's hard-wired, thin-skinned, plastic-fantastic. A potential commonplace where competition is ruthless and solidarity remains the only foreign expression. Peopled with charming scumbags, bully-kings, almost-beauty-queens. It's HDMI, CMYK, LGBT. Pretentious, flirtatious, mesmerizing.

This mess is kept afloat by the sheer dynamism of loads and loads of hardworking women. A hive of affective labor under close scrutiny and controlled by capital, woven tightly into its multiple contradictions. All of this makes it relevant to contemporary reality. Art affects this reality precisely because it is entangled into all of its aspects. It's messy, embedded, troubled, irresistible. We could try to understand its space as a political one instead of trying to represent a politics that is always happening elsewhere. Art is not outside politics, but politics resides within its production, its distribution, and its reception. If we take this on, we might surpass the plane of a politics of representation and embark on a politics that is there, in front of our eyes, ready to embrace.

X

This text is dedicated to the people who bear with me through digital hysteria, frequent flyer syndrome, and installation disasters. Thanks especially to Tirdad, Christoph, David, and Freya. Also Brian for the edit, as always.

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She teaches New Media Art at University of Arts Berlin and has recently
participated in Documenta 12, Shanghai Biennial, and Rotterdam Film Festival.

1
I am expanding on a notion developed by Hongjohn Lin in his curatorial statement for the Taipei Biennial 2010. Hongjohn Lin, "Curatorial Statement," in *10TB Taipei Biennial Guidebook* (Taipei: Taipei Fine Arts Museum, 2010), 10–11.

2
This has been described as a global and ongoing process of expropriation since the 1970s. See David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005). As for the resulting distribution of wealth, a study by the Helsinki-based World Institute for Development Economics Research of the United Nations University (UNU-WIDER) found that in the year 2000, the richest 1 percent of adults alone owned 40 percent of global assets. The bottom half of the world's adult population owned 1 percent of global wealth. See http://www.wider.unu.edu/events/past-events/2006-events/en_GB/05-12-2006/ .

3
For just one example of oligarch involvement, see http://www.nytimes.com/2010/04/28/nyregion/28trustee.html . While such biennials span from Moscow to Dubai to Shanghai and many of the so-called transitional countries, we shouldn't consider post-democracy to be a non-Western phenomenon. The Schengen area is a brilliant example of post-democratic rule, with a whole host of political institutions not legitimized by popular vote and a substantial section of the population excluded from citizenship (not to mention the Old World's growing fondness for democratically-elected fascists). The current exhibition "The Potosí-Principle," organized by Alice Creischer, Andreas Siekmann, and Max Jorge Hinderer, highlights the connection between oligarchy and image production from another historically relevant perspective.

4
I am drawing on a field of meaning developed by Ekaterina Degot, Cosmin Costinas, and David Riff for their 1st Ural Industrial Biennial, 2010.

5
Arendt may have been wrong on the matter of taste. Taste is not necessarily a matter of the common, as she argued, following Kant. In this context, it is a matter of manufacturing consensus, engineering reputation, and other delicate machinations, which—whoops—metamorphose into art-historical bibliographies. Let's face it: the politics of taste are not about the collective, but about the collector. Not about the common but about the patron. Not about sharing but about sponsoring.

6
There are of course many laudable and great exceptions, and I admit that I myself may bow my head in shame, too.

7
As is also argued in the reader *Institutional Critique* , eds. Alex Alberro and Blake Stimson (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2009). See also the collected issues of the online journal *transform* : https://web.archive.org/web/20101215022514/http://transform.eipcp.net/transversal/0106/#redir .

8
Recently on show at Henie Onstad Kunstsenter in Oslo was "Guggenheim Visibility Study Group," a very interesting project by Nomeda and Gediminas Urbonas that unpacked the tensions between local (and partly indigenist) art scenes and the Guggenheim franchise system, with the Guggenheim effect analyzed in detail in a case study. See http://www.vilma.cc/2G/ . Also see Joseba Zulaika, *Guggenheim Bilbao Museoa: Museums, Architecture, and City Renewal* (Reno: Center for Basque Studies, University of Nevada, 2003). Another case study: Beat Weber, Therese Kaufmann, "The Foundation, the State Secretary and the Bank – A Journey into the Cultural Policy of a Private Institution," http://transform.eipcp.net/correspondence/1145970626 . See also Martha Rosler, "Take the Money and Run? Can Political and Socio-critical Art 'Survive'?" *e-flux journal* , issue 12, https://www.e-flux.com/journal/12/61338/take-the-money-and-run-can-political-and-socio-critical-art-survive/ , and Tirdad Zolghadr, "11th Istanbul Biennial," https://www.frieze.com/article/11th-istanbul-biennial .

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This is evident from this text's placement on e-flux as an advertisement supplement. The situation is furthermore complicated by the fact that these ads may well flaunt my own shows. At the risk of repeating myself, I would like to emphasize that I do not consider innocence a political position, but a moral one, and thus politically irrelevant. An interesting comment on this situation can be found in Luis Camnitzer, "The Corruption in the Arts / the Art of Corruption," published in the context of The Marco Polo Syndrome, a symposium at the House of World Cultures in April, 1995. See http://www.universes-in-universe.de/magazin/marco-polo/s-camnitzer.htm .