

Playing by the Rules: Alternative Thinking/ Alternative Spaces



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Irene Tsatsos



edited with a preface by **Steven Rand**
and an introduction by **Heather Kouris**

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Playing by the Rules: Alternative Thinking/Alternative Spaces

Edited by Steven Rand and Heather Kouris

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apexart

291 Church Street

New York, NY 10013

t: 212 431 5270

f: 646 827 2487

www.apexart.org

info@apexart.org

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apexart is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit visual arts organization founded in 1994 by artist Steven Rand. Originally an exhibition venue its activities now also include an international residency program, book publishing, an active public program and occasional conferences.

Playing by the Rules: Alternative Thinking/Alternative Spaces is the third in the series which consider issues in the visual arts. The first book, *On Cultural Influence*, published in 2006, is a collection of essays from past conferences in Poland, Brazil, and Hawaii. *Cautionary Tales: Critical Curating*, published in 2007, addressed the changing role of the contemporary curator. Special thanks to NLW.

Steven Rand

Preface

Actually this is not a book about playing by the rules. It's a collection of essays intended to suggest that playing by the rules may not be the best way, the most interesting way, or your way.

The art world is surprisingly unchallenging and moribund. It is conservative, political, exclusive, and not very interesting or inspiring. While there's a lot of interesting creative work being done, we're looking in the wrong places, encouraging the wrong people and elevating questionable goals. The current structure of the gallery and collector actually discourages creativity by narrow definition and the pursuit of familiarity. Not everything can be art and just because it's in a gallery doesn't make it so. Who is in the art world and where did the artists go?

Art is small business but big money. Getting by, much less prospering, for an artist, writer, or curator is difficult; compromise may be necessary at times, and we all have to decide where that line is. An artist or curator having a "straight" job is not the sign of being unsuccessful, especially with success defined by income and name recognition. We have to work fast (production) and slow (concept) at the same time. It's not easy and slow often loses out. It's hard to be creative and follow through when we've learned that opportunity is more a result of personality than ability.

Consider the immortal words of Groucho Marx who cautioned, "I don't want to belong to any club that will accept me as a member."

Whether you're in the art club or applying for membership, consider your idea of what an artist is and what is important to you. The most valuable part of being an artist is freedom to do what you want. That freedom is the currency you have to spend. Joining the club can be expensive. And confusing.

Many creative disciplines feel particularly vital such as filmmaking, media, design, architecture, advertising, medicine, technology, science, and sociology, while the art world feels like a fashion show. Industrial fabrication creates magic that sculptors can't compete with. We will always have painters and sculptors, but a child growing up today will never look at a painting or sculpture the way someone did 100, 50, or even 20 years ago. We're in an increasingly non-contemplative time, flooded with exceedingly competent images. Fewer and fewer artists maintain a traditional "studio" and, increasingly, art making involves recognizing and capitalizing on that which is art as well as inventing it. It is referential and appropriated, not utopist, and often related to sociology. Many smart creative people who would have gone into art in the last ten years are now in technology or design related fields after assessing the inward directed collector/dealer structure and their future in it. We are reveling in digital ether while the art world is composing in analog.

New art, touted by curators, a hungry media, galleries and "market making collectors" moves quickly from the gallery, to the collector, and then to a museum, sometimes owned by the collector who employs the curator. We've become very sophisticated in promoting and marketing our work and there are artists working with these issues that are very interesting, but new art isn't known by roaming curators and hasn't landed in museums. Meanwhile, contemporary art museums are full of things that aren't really art. Museum and gallery attendance is up as a result of programming aimed at doing just that with many merely trying to survive after mostly unnecessary capital drives for new buildings. The ubiquitous new museum building has left a great deal of lost romance, debt, and

dubious design in its path. Creatively repurposed buildings around the world that were used to show art are being returned to the municipalities or demolished to allow for the capital campaigns so important to trustees and the museum. For most visitors, it is entertainment rather than a “driven interest” in the art.

Business is compelling and fun at first. There is immediacy and a quid pro quo that is easily understood—appointments, international travel, residencies, and promotion. Many artists and curators are playing business with a lot of interest and energy. Being wanted and involved feels good. Offering opportunity is a powerful opiate. Being creative and self-critical is hard. It can be very difficult doing work that doesn’t get positive response.

Many artists have moved from the art world to the creative commercial world where the public is the audience and creativity and marketing combine with clear purpose. It is immediate and immediately gratifying, the way business can be, and often feels more creative than the art world. Reality shows and reality “game” shows (my favorite was “The Moment of Truth”) are sometimes incredibly sophisticated in their development and production, and can be compelling mirrors of societal values. Too often dismissed as not even close to art, this manipulation of contrived situations with the viewer as voyeur is like paint pushed around a canvas, sometimes done consummately and other times not worth the effort. Stephen Colbert, the Cartoon Network, and Comedy Central are social canvases that are often far more compelling and reflective than a gallery visit while reaching a far greater and more involved audience.

Creating opportunity shouldn’t be more satisfying than fulfilling the obligation, even if we understand that putting it on our resume reaches more people than the exhibition or book will. You may even have the wrong job. Whether your interest is beauty, subversion, or somewhere in between, it’s the depth of the response by the artist or writer to the

problem (the work) that will transcend its physicality. Art is not confined to or confined by the art world.

Samuel Butler wrote, "The truest characters of ignorance are vanity, pride, and annoyance." Angry artists act out, angry business people burn out. Doing good work that is unfamiliar may take longer to develop an audience but will have greater endurance and potential than derivative or copied work.

Self-actualization. Defined in Wikipedia as a term used in various psychology theories, often in slightly different ways (e.g., Goldstein, Maslow, Rogers). The term was originally introduced by the organismic theorist Kurt Goldstein for the motive to realize all of one's potentialities. In his view, it is the master motive—indeed, the only real motive a person has, all others being merely manifestations of it. However, the concept was brought to prominence in Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory as the final level of psychological development that can be achieved when all basic and mental needs are fulfilled and the "actualization" of the full personal potential takes place.

I started apexart in 1994 much like someone would open a bar or pub with the idea that they were making the place they would like to go to. The idea was to put artists, writers, philosophers, and otherwise interesting folks in the role of curator and at that time there were not many independent curators. Curatorial studies programs began around that time, so there was clearly a larger desire to mediate between artists and the public. Most programs are well meaning, but as I've written in the past, many have helped nurture a corporate atmosphere of promotion and opportunism. Previously eschewed professional terms such as "networking" and "practice" heretofore used by doctors and lawyers have become accepted terms to describe one's art activities. These programs often have great faculty, however the offerings are rarely integrated or contextualized and the job market extremely limited. Many express criticism today that the art world is about business.

Business is compelling in its immediacy, pace, and ego gratification, and it's reasonable that these concerns be reflected in the art world. We've learned what business always knew—that smart promotion and networking are more remunerative than working outside of the public view. The art world is playing business even more than collectors and institutions are playing art.

We've done great shows at apexart and some "less great" shows but our greatest ability has been to create compelling juxtaposition. The more vexing the better. Some of our more confusing shows have made people ask questions about the structure, the essay, the installation, and the choice of artists. Getting people annoyed, offended, or generally pissed off creates a greater change in their tolerance and perspective than offering something easy and agreeable. A recent study of cognition noted that staying mentally agile was more the result of arguing with others than agreeing. Google and directed content sends you more of what they think you want, we send you what we hope is worth thinking about. We're agonists.

apexart does about six exhibitions a year in New York City and two "franchised exhibitions" elsewhere. We bring eight residents from around the world to NYC and send up to four folks, who have not traveled outside the art world, to distant locations where no significant contemporary art market exists. They are prohibited from "doing their work," encouraged to immerse themselves in a foreign culture as well as being open to new ideas and approaches.

apexart's residency program is not about trying to give people what they want. Or what they expect. It is not about creating career opportunity. We don't provide a studio or become their career advocate. NYC has so many interesting people and educational and cultural opportunities that putting people in a studio doing the same work they've been doing makes little sense. We create a schedule and make appointments with people that would be impossible for a "non-affiliated" visitor to arrange.

There are three “requirements” to be invited for a residency. You must be over 30 years old, this must be your first visit to NYC, and you have to be recommended by someone who knows you well. It is not unusual for the recommenders to be people we don’t know as we may contact an institution and ask an assistant curator or professor to be a recommender. We try to avoid the “cultural” gatekeepers who tend to give the same people opportunities. Our challenge is to explain the ideas and reasons behind the program well enough so that they understand and select the right person. To avoid diluting the process we ask each recommender for only one recommendation. Residents may not have had such experiences previously because of schedule, economics, complete immersion with their work, or possibly because their personalities did not create such situations. This process has been in effect for eleven years with a remarkable roster of past residents, who have returned to their homes with new ideas, perspectives, and opportunities.

The resident is provided with a studio apartment at 14th Street and Union Square, the hyperactive middle of NYC. They are then given a rigorous schedule of up to four appointments and activities each day, which include auditing classes and lectures outside of their discipline, touristic activities that explain the city, and visiting some of the smaller idiosyncratic museums from the more than 200 that exist in New York. The resident attends large and small performances of music, theater, and readings, all the while meeting with people from different disciplines who have been invited to be part of our “friends of apexart” list. They go to Washington, D.C., for two days to meet with folks, to go to museums and performances, and to get a sense of the image the U.S. has of itself in a place they often hear about and sometimes have to respond to. It is generally one of the compelling adventures of their residency.

The main intention is to fill their mind with as many ideas and experiences as we can and then let them sort it out on their own when they return home. We have no agenda other than making a creative place not

confined to the self-referential, often hermetic art world that discourages “outsider” activity. They have the chance to spend time in a way that can only be done somewhere else, displaced, with no sense of obligation, and alone. Mates or visitors are not allowed and many really do return home with a new sense of independence and energy. Our residents have come from every continent and from every socioeconomic level. The residency is only one month long and time passes quickly. We emphasize making friends rather than social networking, and we think one’s opportunities will increase if one’s work is more interesting. Do people rebel at the schedule? On occasion, but it makes for another good discussion opportunity. Most residents are too busy.

In addition to bringing residents to NYC, we have a mirror program that reverses the process with the same philosophy and sends local artists, writers, and curators who have become too entrenched in the hermetic and incestuous art world, to remote locations around the world. Past residents, familiar with the program, have assisted us in places outside of the art circuit that offer new experiences and personal reassessment. Residents have gone to locations such as Kellerberrin in the Australian outback and Addis Ababa, the capital of Ethiopia. A vacation for a businessperson can be research for an artist or writer that should be fun, exciting, new, and without guilt. Success for an artist is staying challenged by your work, and figuring out a way to do it for life. If the reality of artist as romantic bohemian has given way to artist as entrepreneur, provocateur, and entertainer, then let’s encourage thought, art, reaction, and commentary about it. Values change, let’s let the art change.

For everyone involved we want apexart to be an educational organization rather than a promotional one. We don’t do one person shows and consider ourselves in service to our audience first, and then the artists and curators who work with us. The white box of the gallery space continues to confound and perplex. We are idea centric, and place a great deal of emphasis on the essay that accompanies each

exhibition. Our documentation for each exhibition takes the form of a color brochure with an essay by the organizer. Each season there are two open calls for exhibitions: Unsolicited Proposals and The Franchise. Both programs are set up to allow anyone to compete on a level playing field with well-known curators, writers, and artists, by first anonymizing the proposal. No resumes, catalogues, or recommendations are accepted. Ideas for exhibitions are entered online and limited to 600 words for the UP and 400 for the Franchise (up from 250). In each of these evaluation procedures, a large number of jurors are invited to weigh in. We wrote a PHP script that allows people to submit online and then substitutes a number for their name. On the jury side, the script constantly randomizes the order of the submissions so no one proposal is always first or second. It is not unusual for us to invite more than 200 jurors and to have each proposal receive more than 25 votes. Relying on the idea of "crowd sourcing," the jurors are given unique usernames and passwords and asked to read at least a certain number of proposals, sometimes only 25 and other times up to 100, with the idea that fresh eyes and the overlap of readers will produce a more objective result. Additionally it means that we involve twice the number of people who would otherwise have been involved and eliminates the influence exerted by the most vociferous and powerful jury member on the others when done in a small group in person. This often amounts to undue influence rather than discussion, whereas our process gives each juror equal input. An art historian who prevailed in last year's Unsolicited Proposal process had submitted a proposal three times before his was selected; he continued to do so because he was comfortable that the process was a fair one. This process is very effective and we have offered the script to others. It makes the process fair, easy, and very efficient to conduct. At the conclusion of the process we provide a ranking by title of all proposals received to help the author get a better sense of how his or her proposal fared.

In 2010 we invited 371 jurors and 110 juried for the Franchise. In 2009 we received 455 proposals and invited 296 jurors with more than 150 actively involved. Each juror was asked to read at least 25 proposals with the idea that a larger percentage of people will gravitate to the best idea and that the relative jury process (crowd sourcing) is more effective than the traditional process of having five people sit around a table during a grueling multi-day process where keeping track of so many submissions is all but impossible. It is not unusual for us to receive submissions from more than 60 countries for each program with the jurors coming from as many countries. We consider the submissions process a creative writing exercise and submitters are advised: "We never know how our jurors will evaluate different aspects. Be creative and make it interesting." If you would like to be a juror, send us a note and tell us why.

So while the UP is an opportunity for people to do a project in NYC, the Franchise emphasizes that the center of the world is wherever you are. Also based on a creative writing exercise, this process is about branding and finance, as each year apexart leaves NYC for two exhibitions. It is about branding, in that no one needs us to be there to organize an exhibition, and about financing, in that we bring, well, financing. The first year we went to Los Angeles and the last to Thailand. Learning as we go, we impose arbitrary limitations to serve underserved places. Last year submissions were limited to cities and towns with 500,000 people or less and resulted in the involvement of people from the community, which would not have happened in a mega city center.

For each exhibition we print an edition of 10,000 100-pound cover stock, color brochures that are sent free of charge to individuals, institutions, and galleries in more than 105 countries. They contain an essay of about 1,300 words written by the curator/organizer and reproductions of the works in the exhibition in a way that clearly addresses the idea of the show and acts as much like a surrogate of the show as possible. They are short, interesting, and easy to carry, and easily recycled with no guilt if you choose not to keep

them. Over the years more than 1,200,000 of these mini catalogs have been sent. Being in service to our audience, we try to produce materials that they will read. Too many catalogs are produced each year for shows that don't warrant them and no one reads.

We have restructured the jury procedure so as to be more fair and objective than it often is, and have changed the form and concept of the residency program to promote new ideas and experiences rather than career opportunities. Our exhibitions are about asking questions and exploring ideas rather than validating the participating artists, curators, and writers. Everyone involved is encouraged to innovate his or her approach, enlarge his or her horizon and help us assess if we are doing what we say we are trying to do. We pursue creativity rather than art. For the fortunate folks who know what art is and where to find it, there is a massive structure in place. Stop reading this and go network or something. For the rest of you, maybe the "art world" isn't a club you want to be part of.

Change is good, regardless of the outcome. It makes you reconsider and helps suggest new directions. Too often art school becomes a place to refine your ability rather than experiment and grow. Art schools, universities, and curatorial programs really need to reassess how they are preparing their students while leaving them deeply in debt. This book is not about good and bad or right and wrong. It is about encouraging you to consider and reconsider situations and ideas as unencumbered as possible in an effort to understand better what you are doing and why you are doing it. Unfortunately we rarely grow up and only get older.

It is very important to try new things, go new places, spend time alone, and even cause a little trouble doing the unexpected. Acting out is important. Learn new skills that are interesting, can show up in your work and can help make you money. Poverty is not good for creativity and you never know where inspiration and new ideas will come from.

Steven Rand (stevenrand@apexart.org) is an artist with a requisite level of anxiety, hypersensitivity, paranoia, and an M.F.A. He started apexart instead of complaining about the commercialization of the art world, but hasn't stopped complaining. He doesn't get along well with others and is not a curator, a writer, or an architect, but is designing a house, and tries to write. He has had one-person exhibitions in New York, California, Germany, Poland, and China, been in quite a few group shows internationally and has traveled extensively. He lectures and gives talks around the world, and considers apexart an act of creativity and sincerely appreciates all the folks who have been part of the process, especially NLW.

Heather Kouris

Introduction

Alternative art spaces emerged in the 1970s as a vivid reflection of the openness to possibilities of that time. Seemingly anything was possible with little money, as people worked together for the greater good. The atmosphere was open to new ideas and fresh perspectives. Such a liberating moment then moved into large money and greater acceptance, which allowed even more alternative spaces to open and thrive into the 1980s. It has been argued that the decrease of federal funding initiated the initial decline of the alternative space in the 1990s. But the need for different ways of exhibiting art and the need for audiences to see something different, continuing the discourse on alternative practices, kept the majority of already established alternative spaces active.

Every institution must re-evaluate its mission on an ongoing basis. It is important to continually question the value of what a venue gives to its visitors. With alternative spaces it is all the more important, because the concept of what is normal is constantly changing, as such spaces require not only alternative practice, but alternative thinking. It isn't only the type of artwork being shown, but more about the voice that is heard. The programmatic approach becomes more important than what is on display.

The perceived rules and where they came from are among the questions answered by the authors of this publication. Some authors use specific examples of alternative spaces around the world to demonstrate

the various thinking in alternative spaces; some show alternative practices in other areas; while other authors present alternatives to the alternative space.

A few of the essays provide some history of alternative spaces. Robert Atkins (art historian, critic, and curator based in California) uses as an example the salons of the 1920s, specifically Mabel Dodge's, to show how a true alternative functioned; even such an old model can still hold relevance today. Questioning the value of history, Atkins calls alternatives in general "the impetus for change." René Block (gallerist and former director of the Kunsthalle Fridericianum in Kassel, Germany) gives a brief history of how alternatives began and an introduction to TANAS, a private organization in Berlin with funding from Turkey intended to provide opportunity to Turkish artists in Germany. Using case studies of art venues in China, Vietnam, and Cambodia over the last 20-30 years, Biljana Ciric (independent curator based in Shanghai) explores the potentials of alternatives in these locations, and the importance of connecting with the rest of the world. Ciric outlines how these venues are developing the infrastructure missing from these locations and working towards a more long-range view necessary for progress as well as a place for intellectual exchange.

Not only art has alternatives. Irene Tsatsos (writer and curator and former Executive Director of Los Angeles Contemporary Exhibitions) uses examples of permaculture housing as alternative living arrangement and Matta-Clark's restaurant Food as alternative venue in the 1970s to demonstrate the importance of critical thinking and unrestrained creative expression. Marina Grzinic (philosopher, artist and theoretician based in Ljubljana) presents the construction of "normality" to help define alternative. She suggests that few alternative spaces and alternative radical practices exist because they are not viewed as they once were. She uses necropolitics as an example of alternative practice and gives specific examples of "alternative radical practices" in the social/political realm. Naeem Mohaiemen (writer, artist, and technologist working in Dhaka

and New York) uses as main example the Paris exhibition of works from Bangladesh to show how an alternative approach to standard procedure is necessary. When the Bangladeshi people resisted a loan they saw as theft, their actions ended up changing the way art is exchanged.

Other essays reaffirm the importance of thinking critically. Sofija Grandakovska (academic, theorist, and poet in Skopje) uses the dissident, one who is inherently full of conflicts, as an example to explore the importance of critical thinking and searches for the alternative space for the dissident. Julie Ault (artist, writer, and editor based in New York) reviews her previous writing on alternative spaces and shares the importance of “reflexivity” in continually asking what we are doing and why. Winslow Burleson (Assistant Professor of Human Computer Interaction at Arizona State University; received his PhD from the MIT Media Lab) shares his work in the field of Human Computer Interaction to present a series of motivational tools and approaches for young people working in the arts today, such as “define success personally” and “seize the opportunity to fail.”

Some texts reveal ways to achieve a “new” alternative space. Renaud Ego (poet based in Paris) shows the alternative aspects in the field of writing and mentions technology, specifically the Internet, as a revolutionary method as it provides a place to be free to express oneself to the masses. Boris Groys (philosopher, essayist, art critic, media theorist; previously Professor of Aesthetics, Art History, and Media Theory at the Center for Art and Media Technology; now professor at New York University) also explores the power of the Internet as he argues that the de-professionalization of art is a “highly professional operation” and further that weak images have the most power. With the accessibility of the Internet, coupled with our lack of time, we don’t necessarily need to see a perfect work or text; it is enough to know that it exists somewhere out there.

The future of alternative spaces may lie in a non-venue. Pablo Helguera (artist and Director of Adult and Academic Programs at the Education Department of MoMA, NY) suggests we ought to (re)consider

our audience and that perhaps the public program and a traveling venue is a more appropriate approach to reaching current audiences. Raphael Rubinstein (New York-based poet and art critic and past editor at *Art in America*) reviews some of the changes that have evolved since alternative spaces began in the 1970s, including the market acceptance of “alternative” art, creating a situation where commercial galleries began showing work that was as “cutting edge” as the “true” alternative spaces. Rubinstein suggests a changing location as a better way for alternative spaces to adapt to change—especially considering the nomadic nature of our existence—and outlines specific examples of this approach.

In order to remain relevant and un-institutionalized, alternative venues must take chances and make changes, continually reconsidering what they do and how they do it. They must constantly consider how their audience is changing, and ask what more they can do to contribute to their field. All the essays in *Playing by the Rules* underline the importance of critical thinking as well as the need for alternative thinking. Art is not the only field in which to explore the non-traditional and we see alternative approaches in all areas: communes, vegetarianism, alternative medicine, alternative spirituality practices, swinging, political activism, green living, alternative schools, alternative music, working collectively, and so on. We hope these essays will provide some inspiration in your own critical thinking and give you some fresh perspectives.

Heather Felty Kouris began working at apexart in 1999 as Gallery Director and has served as Special Projects Director since 2002. Her Special Projects include co-editing apexart’s series of books, developing the growing apexart website/archive and other diverse activities. Currently based in Athens, Greece, her writing has been included in numerous artist catalogs and her curatorial projects have been held in Greece and New York. Her most recent exhibition, *Migrations*, explored the life-changing aspects of cultural relocation and was featured at the Municipal Art Gallery of Kalamata in June 2009.

Pablo Helguera

Alternative Time and Instant Audience (The Public Program as an Alternative Space)

Spaces hold objects; they also facilitate experiences. However, physical location is only one of the factors that play a role in the production of an experience. Experience—whether it is an art-related experience or not—emerges in the conjunction of a location, an event—a temporal space—and a social context, or social space. The perhaps intuitive, and appropriate, rationale for the creation of the alternative space model in the 1960s or 1970s was that it was necessary to have a physical location from where to present and support emerging and alternative art practices, and the same may be true today. Nonetheless, as art and the art world have evolved and as alternative art spaces struggle to redefine their identity, too much emphasis has been given to location and too little to other key components that constitute their character. I believe that the clue to that redefinition lies not in the reinvention of their physical space, but in paying attention to those other two spaces that facilitate art spaces: temporal and social context, or in other words, events and audiences. In its updated configuration it is increasingly clear that if there were any component of the alternative space that could be disposed of it would precisely be its physical location, but not the social or temporal context in which it roots itself. (The same is true, in fact, of more traditional spaces: The reason why a vernissage is so central to an exhibition is because spaces have become event-centered points of encounter where a particular community interacts.)

There appears to be an inherent contradiction in the original concept of an alternative space: while at the same time promoting the idea of an experimental, ever-evolving type of art making, their grounding in physical locations is about permanence, and more about continuity or longevity than about change. Furthermore, as much as a physical space can be an asset, it can also be a liability. For most alternative spaces, financial survival is a constant threat to their programming independence; real estate, maintenance and overhead costs can become a deciding factor on their existence and can limit its flexibility. This apparent contradiction is so perhaps because over the years we have become too used to think of the notion of alternative space as alternative location, instead of what I believe was the original impulse of creating a location where to show and think about art.

Back in the 1970s and early 1980s, alternative spaces in New York were created by groups of artists to support experimental practices that at the time did not have a home. This was long before artists, curators and dealers had to worry too much about real estate, but also before a number of events that transformed the art world, including the global explosion of art fairs and biennials, the increasing youth of artists exhibiting at major museums, the emergence of an art market thirsty for innovation, and the aggressive and experimental nature of commercial but status-seeking galleries. Today, partially as a result of the impact of those events, a regular viewer would be hard-pressed to see the difference between an exhibition or the artists showing at an alternative space and one at the New Museum or a for-profit cutting edge exhibition space in the city. Ironically, galleries, kunsthallen and contemporary art museums find themselves in a race to become more alternative, constantly finding ways to emulate the sound and smells of alternativity; they usually have better funding and attract talented individuals who can help facilitate the institutionalization of alternativity. Alternative art spaces are generally not-for-profit and lack with vast resources, and if anything, in a city like New York, they appear

to struggle in competing with less resources at games for which others are better equipped.

So are alternative spaces today truly “alternative”? Contrary to what its name may imply, an alternative space today rarely offers a real “alternative” to the kind of art that is shown elsewhere. Instead, they are inextricably connected to the critical and economic fabric of the art world. By retaining their original name, alternative spaces today create a semblance of mini-subcultures that actually function closer to clearinghouses of emerging artistic talent, providing room to experiment in the early stages of their careers, rather than representing counter-cultural or underground movements. The phenomenon is not circumscribed to New York: alternative spaces all over the world generally function in that in-between place of experimenting at the fringes, but always in dialogue with the art world at large. But while this is a valid function, we should ask if that is enough to claim a role as a true conceptual and practical counterpoint in the art system. I believe it is not.

So when we ask about the refunctioning of the alternative space in order to retain its original purpose of free experimentation and infusion of new blood into the art system, we need to look at the potential of the use of temporality and social space. When Marcel Broodthaers invented his itinerant Musée d’Art Moderne, Département des Aigles, he was creating an alternative space, one that was both nomadic and temporal and which existed only in the time and place where the appropriate conditions allowed it. The project would not have made sense if it had been created to last forever—it would have automatically erased its original critique of the institution.

Temporality is always part of the equation of alternativity. It is not just a space, but the conjunction of a particular place at a particular time when meaningful moments occur in art-making. This is a concept that today has been understood by many artists and curators, and more and more we have observed projects that set themselves temporal limits, with an official

date of death, which provides closure and curiously makes these spaces look more like large art projects. In New York, this was the case of Orchard, a temporal gallery in the Lower East Side, and of the X Initiative, a year-long temporal space. Similarly, many spaces nowadays operate in terms of public programming and less in terms of two-month length exhibitions. Curators like Hans Ulrich Obrist have now for some time explored the notion of duration-based exhibitions, such as *Il Tempo Del Postino*, presented with Philippe Parreno during Art Basel in 2009. Temporal limits provide artists, curators and entrepreneurs with additional benefits, which include the possibility to conceive the art space as a self-contained art project; to explore the potential of aggressive and dynamic programming that could not be sustained in a permanent way, and capturing the imagination and expectation of an audience who would be able to witness the birth, climax, and death of the project. Finally, it is a way to artificially, but effectively, predetermine a historical arch for a project: alternative spaces, like every other organization, movement or social group, often experience periods of gestation, growth, climax and decay until their final dissolution or until they evolve into becoming a different type of organization or structure.

While the public program cannot replace a physical space, the fact that time is the modifier of the space and not the other way around demands for a rethinking on how we produce an art experience for an audience. In cities like Los Angeles and Chicago, event-based spaces have become the natural response to the awareness that, as our world moves faster and faster, alternativity is about instant communities, about the spontaneous encounter between people. Time is today our real estate, and learning how to use it productively is as important, and perhaps even more, than how we use the four walls of a gallery.

If we are to accept then the premise that public programming is the realm where alternativity can grow, it may also be evident that to simply offer public programs does not necessarily reflect in itself an experimental

approach. The question to answer would be: what sort of experimental qualities should these public programs have in order to make them most interesting or opening new doors of discussion and experiences? This is similar to asking what kind of experimental art becomes successful, which is ultimately impossible to answer in an intelligent way. Nonetheless, based on my observations of many years of programming as an educator and as an artist, I believe there are commonalities to experimental programming.

Content-based public programs generally fall within two distinctive “genres”: art-centered events such as performances and education-centered events such as discussions, lectures, courses, and workshops. In my experience, the most recently innovative approaches to programming have emerged from an informed conjunction of the two, along with non-content components—such as food, drinks, a party atmosphere—that emphasize the sense of communion.¹ The reason for this has to do with the balance between program function and audience expectations. An education public program has the implicit function of providing a constructive experience by means of a discussion, an instructional dynamic such as the one of a workshop, or by simple exposition (a straight-forward lecture); and as such this is more or less the kind of expectation that those who attend it may have (“entertainment” is usually not the primary expectation amongst people attending a lecture, but “personal advancement,” “learning,” are more likely to be). An art-based public program, in contrast, rarely offers such a structured delivery of information, growth or learning, however, it provides a direct experience that can well result in all these, but is generally expected to be unmediated and direct. An audience that attends an education lecture delivered by a poor speaker, or a symposium where the speakers veer off a tangent that has nothing to do with the announced topic, leave frustrated because their expectation of having a particular topic addressed in a new or informative or thoughtful way, were not met.

Experimental public programs function somewhere in between the realm of delivering and upsetting expectations, that is, between

challenging and rewarding the viewer or the participant. Borrowing a page from performance art, these programs can engage participants to enter situations with a greater degree of ambiguity, which may include things like role-playing, enacting certain social rituals (like singing in a church, wearing a costume, etc.) and share personal aspects of themselves (this has been often identified as the “carnavalesque” [Mikhail Bakhtin]). At the same time, by using pedagogical structures such as the universally understood constructs of “workshop” or “group retreat,” participants are given the possibility to frame their experiences within a constructive model that will allow for reflection and discussion in the future.

These experimental public programs cannot, and should not, aspire to be art or education as outcomes, but rather, as their medium. More than a balance between informal and formal education, this type of experimental programming is closer to informal conceptual art and informal education structure with a formal social agenda.

How to achieve that balance is a site-specific question, one that directly relates to how one understands its own audiences.

For some, to try to ask what is the audience of a new and radical art or idea would appear to be a contradiction: if the art or idea is radically new, isn't it true that the audience for it doesn't exist yet? Under this logic, new ideas—or new types of art—create their own audiences. I would argue that the truth, however, is different. These ideas, and those new types of art, are built with an implicit audience in them.

In the 1980s movie *Field of Dreams*, an Iowa farmer (played by Kevin Costner) walking down a cornfield suddenly hears the voice of God saying: “If you build it, he will come.” He envisions a baseball playing field, and is strongly compelled to build it. The phrase (in the variation of “if you build it, they will come”) has entered the English language as if it had been an old adage of ancient wisdom and not from the pen of a Hollywood screenwriter. The implied message of the phrase is: Building

comes first, audiences second. Yet the opposite is true. We build because audiences exist first. We build because we seek to reach out to others, and those others will come because they initially recognize themselves in that which we have built. After that initial interaction, spaces start a process of self-identification, ownership, and evolution based on group interests and ideas. They are not static spaces onto which static viewers arrive, but ever evolving, growing or decaying communities that self-build, develop, and eventually dismantle.

Various sociologists have argued—David Berreby most notably—that in most of our actions as humans we are predisposed to express a tribal mindset of “us and them,” and each statement we make reaches out or against a set of pre-existing social codes that include or exclude sectors of people. The contemporary art practice, of all human endeavors, is most distinctively about exclusion, not about inclusion, because the structure of social interactions within its confines are based on a repertory of cultural codes or “passwords” that provide certain status and a role within a given conversation. And in a radical, countercultural or alternative practice, these exclusionary passwords are key to preserve in order to maintain a distance with the mainstream.

Theoretically, alternative spaces are open to all kinds of public, but in fact they tend to serve very specific types of audiences. Smaller and more informal spaces have the flexibility to be more direct about their constituency and generally it could be said that they operate within two registers: one being its immediate circle of participants and supporters and the second being the critical art world at large toward which they usually look for validation. Larger alternative art spaces, because they usually are nonprofit organizations, are officially open to all, but they instead serve a niche market within the art world: up-and-coming art professionals, individuals who are somewhat informed and interested in contemporary art, and, with lesser emphasis, more established artists and curators. Random visitors can walk into a space, but their presence or visitation is not crucial

to the survival of the organization—it merely counts as foot traffic. What is key is the sustained supporter who may become a member or help raise the reputation of the space in the social fabric of the art world. In some cases, like Art in General, spaces have sought to diversify their audience base more aggressively, by creating more neighborhood-oriented events and focusing on the ethnic groups that live next to the space. In some cases, even successfully, visual artists are commissioned residency projects to work with these audiences. While these initiatives are valid and often result in interesting art projects, they run the risk of limiting the support they can provide to an artist by prescribing set parameters of audiences and spaces and by trying to fulfill quotas previously set by grant-making bureaucracies.² Spaces in this situation often find themselves between a rock and a hard place, trying to sell a very hermetic product—very self-referential, cutting edge art—to people at a working class neighborhood with very different interests and concerns.

All this is to say that alternativity, when it comes to audiences, is an unhelpful adjective. Audiences are never “others”—they are always very concrete selves. In other words, it is impossible to create an alternative experience and take steps to making it public without also making some type of assumption about what kinds of people will eventually partake in them. Do they read Artforum? Do they watch CNN? Are they English-speakers? Do they live in Idaho? Did they vote for Obama? When we organize and promote an exhibition or create a public program, we are already making decisions regarding its hypothetical audience or audiences, even if it is an intuitive way. Sociolinguist Allan Bell coined the term “audience design” in 1984, referring to the ways in which the media addresses different types of audiences through “style shifts” in speech. Since that time the discipline of sociolinguistics has defined structures by which we can recognize the patterns in which speakers engage with audiences in multiple social and linguistic environments through register and social dialect variations. This is to say that if an arts organization is to be thought of as a “speaker,” it is

possible to conceive it operating—through its programs and activities—in multiple social registers that may or may not include an art “intelligentsia,” a more immediate contemporary art audience with their inner codes and references, and the larger public.

Most curators and artists, when I have articulated this view in one way or another, have expressed weariness on the notion of a pre-conceived audience. To them, it sounds too restrictive and prone to mistakes. It is true that to pre-establish a demographic and a social group is to oversimplify their individuality and their many idiosyncrasies. At the same time, I usually turn the question the other way around—is it possible to not conceive an audience, to create an experience that is intended to be public without the slightest bias toward a particular kind of interlocutor, be it a rice farmer in Laos or a professor of philosophy at Columbia? The debate may boil down to the art practice itself, and to the commonplace statement of many artists who claim that they don’t have a viewer in mind while making their work, in other words that they only produce to “themselves.” What is usually not questioned, however, is how our very notion of “ourselves” has come about. Our self is the construct of a vast collectivity of people who have influenced our thoughts and our values, and to speak “to ourselves” is already more than a solipsistic exercise, but rather a silent way of speaking to the portion of civilization that is summarized in our brain. It is true that no audience construct is absolute—they all are, in fact, fictional groupings that we make based on biased assumptions. Nonetheless, they are what we have to go by, and experience in a variety of fields has proven that as inexact as they may be, they are more productive ways of working than by blind or obstinate acting on ultimately subjective presuppositions.

The problem doesn’t lie on whether to reach for large or selective audiences but in understanding for ourselves our own definitions of those groups that we wish to speak to, and attempt to make conscious steps to reach out to them in a constructive and more methodical way. In this regard, an alternative space that attempts to find alternative audiences

doesn't benefit by trying experimental methods—it could be better served by traditional marketing. And this would not be possible unless one is clear with oneself about articulating the audience toward whom one is speaking.

The conjunction of temporality, community and space, and its creative combinations, are, of course, not enough. The larger question that lies within the foundation of most alternative spaces nowadays is the why of their making, their *raison d'être*. Ultimately, what makes an organization, a group, or even a single artist become consequential and contribute to the greater cultural dialogue is not its structural effectiveness, but the resonance of its artistic or philosophical message.

If the primary motivation for an experimental practice is status seeking, the transparency of such search becomes quite evident. What makes these spaces alive is the vibrancy of the ideas, the idealism of its founders, and the underlying political, cultural or social cause toward they fight through concrete actions—be it exhibitions, happenings, programs, marketing or political campaigns. This underlying motivation is what fuels the innovation of formats. And it, again, brings us back to the notion of temporality, or rather, timeliness. The public program and the instant community as alternatives to the alternative space offer the advantage that within their brief lives they can embrace their *raison d'être* more emphatically; like performance art, they are not rooted in permanence. Spaces on the other hand, have to evolve; many of them can't and some of them devolve and suffer painful deaths. A public program lives a short and happy life, affirming the integrity and individuality of art and ideas, without the need to be multiplied or be given an artificial, extended, afterlife.

NOTES

1. I have made mention of this phenomenon in a symposium I organized at the Museum of Modern Art entitled *Transpedagogy: Contemporary Art and the Vehicles of Education*, May 15, 2009.

2. On one occasion, at a project I was invited to create for a neighborhood museum, the stipulation was that I had to engage ten English as a Second Language adult students as collaborators in the making of the work, but the expectation was that the work would have to be museum-quality.

Pablo Helguera (Mexico City, 1971) is a New York based artist working with installation, sculpture, photography, drawing, and performance. Helguera's work focuses on topics ranging from history, pedagogy, and sociolinguistics, in formats that are widely varied including the lecture, museum display strategies, musical performances, and written fiction. His work as an educator intersects his interests as an artist, which results in his work often reflecting on issues of interpretation, dialogue, and the role of contemporary culture in a global reality. This intersection is best exemplified in his project, "The School of Panamerican Unrest," a nomadic think-tank that physically crossed the continent by car from Anchorage, Alaska, to Tierra del Fuego, making 40 stops in between. In 2008 he was awarded the John Simon Guggenheim Fellowship and is the recipient of a 2005 Creative Capital Grant. He is the author of various books, including *The Pablo Helguera Manual of Contemporary Art Style* (2005; Spanish edition; 2007, English edition), a social etiquette manual for the art world; *The Boy Inside the Letter* (2008) *Theatrum Anatomicum (and other performance lectures)* (2008), the play *The Juvenal Players* (2009) and *What in the World* (2010).

Robert Atkins

Alternatives & Aphorisms, Salon & Spectacle

Invited to contribute an essay for an anthology (tentatively?) called *Playing by the Rules: Alternative Thinking in Alternative Spaces*, I smile in... confusion. Will this be a manual for “playing by the rules”? Or, its (ironic) opposite; that is, a guide to undermining them? I receive the following editorial advice: “We want you to tell young aspirants what you think they should hear. What they can use as a motivator. The kind of thing that at that age makes you feel someone is talking to you. So, have at it without restriction.” My belief in the need for *mentoring*—I am a historian, after all—leads me unhesitatingly to accept this invitation. No matter that I can only imagine my audience and its needs, or that advice may become relevant only years after its distribution. So the value of my “talking to you” today is something that in the end, dear reader, only you will be able to determine.

Aphorisms

As prelude, I offer a few *aphorisms*, or *aphoristic* pieces of advice (which are original save for the first and last.) In these prescriptive times, the aphorism¹ is a form that seems to me surprisingly out of date.

- That which does not kill you makes you stronger.
- It is better to play *with* the rules than to play *by* the rules.

- To play by the rules is to *buy* into them. Buying into the rules invariably exacts and extracts a price.
- Accommodation with the rules may ultimately prove necessary or wise, but it is never a creative jumping off point.
- *Rules* are the products of culture—its punitive strictures and betrayals of possibility.
- *Laws*, on the other hand, are the stuff of nature, inviolable and absolute. To fuck your brother or sister, for instance, is to place yourself outside of nature.
- But the inviolate is neither static nor predictable. *Evolution*—the term itself embodies the notion of the incremental—is the *juris prudence* of our species, predicated on natural selection.
- The *revolutionary*—the dream of romantics—sometimes occurs, as with the asteroid-and-earth collision that resulted in the dinosaurs' extinction and the emergence of our primate ancestors. But humans—with the worrying exception of Dr. Strangelove—are incapable of tipping the quantitative balance of things to the point of affecting their qualitative character.
- Specific *traits* or instinctive behaviors are particular to species. (I watch in surprise as my dog eats her mal-formed pup.) The spectrum of traits particular to our species make us human, but does not make us humane.
- Capitalism rewards the *only human* at the expense of the *humane*.
- Alternative thinking is the creation of mental space sufficient for imagining the expansion of the realm of the *humane*. Art is one form such speculation can take.
- Cut your losses.

History

It's no easier to define *alternative space* now than at anytime during the four-decades-long history of this phenomenon. In 1998, I wrote in *Art in America* that:

For many of us baby boomers, at least, the term *alternative space* remains synonymous with the network of seemingly institutionalized [nonprofit spaces founded in the 1970s] such as San Francisco's New Langton Arts, Houston's DiverseWorks, Buffalo's Hall Walls, Atlanta's Nexus Contemporary Art Center [and] New York's Kitchen ... the new alternative spaces offered virtually the only venues for the development of conceptually oriented, non-commercial forms such as video, installations and actions... Most relied on artists to curate shows, rather than professional curators. And, most radical of all, artists received fees for exhibiting.²

Generational change soon manifested itself with the so-called return of painting in the mid 1980s and the emergence of hip, artist-run *commercial* galleries in places such as the East Village. In retrospect, it seems that the non-profit, National Endowment for the Arts-assisted alternative spaces (and their Parallel Space counterparts in Canada) were simply one alternative to the genteel gallery system of the 1950s that existed prior to the explosive growth of the contemporary art world embodied in the recent emergence of museums and auctions of contemporary art, academic programs in curating, criticism and contemporary art history, and the latest "development"—doctorates in studio art.

The original group of alternative spaces soon institutionalized itself. The most visible sign of this was the founding of the National Association of Artists Organizations (NAAO), the progressive Washington lobbying or advocacy group for the artists' organizations. During the Culture War assault on multi-culturalism that began in the late 1980s—many of the targets were its members—NAAO heroically resisted the gutting of artists' First Amendment rights, while its museum-oriented counterparts tended to capitulate to the oppressive, politically expedient cowardice of the day.

Despite its understanding and relatively effective championing of the needs of its constituency, NAAO sometimes had difficulty identifying the common character of its members. In addition to more-or-less conventional

presenting and exhibiting organizations, it represented publications like Atlanta's *Art Papers* and conceptual/media artworks such as Jeff Gates's *Artists For a Better Image (Art FBI)*, a one-man artist-advocacy outfit. I remarked in my article that for NAAO, an artists' organization "may be as much a mind-set as anything else." As time passes, this lack of boundaries (or positively stated, this *flexibility*) looks increasingly like a sign of strength, rather than weakness.

Similarly—and this is important—the apparent current hibernation of NAAO shouldn't automatically be interpreted as a sign of the feisty group's failure. (NAAO most recently surfaced to hold a conference in Los Angeles in 2007, but its website at the domain name www.naaonet.net no longer exists.) The history of the avant-garde is marked by change, transformation and the embrace of alternatives: the demise of a group or association of a specific (historical) character sometimes marks an organization's exemplary self-consciousness of its mission and relevance, rather than signaling only failure and irrelevance. In organic terms, institutions, like corporations, primarily exist to grow and reproduce, that is to perpetuate themselves. Those that put themselves out of business at the appropriate moment for appropriate reasons—like a politician or athlete who gracefully retires—are rare and usually deserving of congratulations.

Theory

Alternative practice is a term that ought to be easier to define—or at least identify—than *alternative space*. But it too is problematic: In this context because it implies a sort of professionalism that has nothing to do with my subject—the early modern salons in Europe and the US and the non-mainstream or alternative activities and attitudes they nurtured. One of their defining characteristics was a willingness to blur boundaries and explore the hybrid and the interdisciplinary. Simultaneously partaking of the ethos of art, politics, activism, community, and coffee *klatsch*, such *alternative* gatherings played an essential and inadequately known role in

the transformation of Victorian culture into modernist life. This epochal historical shift remains critically important to us today, too, as modernity recedes and we grope our way toward... something else. As Jane Heap, co-editor of the early 20th century literary magazine *The Little Review*, dryly observed: "It is a great thing to be living when an age passes."

Consider the moment just prior to World War I when an age passed, when the American empire was still in its infancy. I'm not thinking of the then soon-to-be-tested advances in the technology of war, despite their convenience as a symbol and symptom of this change. But rather of something larger: the tidal wave of modernity that swept over (submerged?) Western culture during the first two decades of the 20th century. The notion of the *tipping point*, that is the moment when quantitative change becomes qualitative, is useful here. It upends our conventional approach to history in two useful ways: it offers us a tacit (if temporary) acknowledgement that our awareness of the half-century of socio-political-artistic preparation that preceded and enabled this transformation is, in some contexts, insufficient or irrelevant; and it reminds us that our belief in the existence of perceptible chains of *causation* is a culturally determined, albeit central tenet of Western thought. (In fact, the notion of the *zeitgeist* points in contradictory, opposite directions.)

The early 20th century embrace of modern art and life was especially swift and thoroughgoing in the U.S. American provincialism was so hidebound it required that modernist art be imported from Europe for the epochal Armory Show in New York in 1913. (No matter, too, that those importing it tended to be non-Americans or Americans with expatriate experience in Europe.) Today much of the art exhibited at the Armory Show seems nearly as close to its Victorian-era roots, as to the cubism and other avant-garde styles we associate with the pre-war 20th century.

If the Armory Show signified the *arrival* of modernist art in the U.S., it seems astonishing that the modern novel *par excellence*, James Joyce's *Ulysses*, debuted just five years later. And no less remarkable that it was

first published in an American publication, *The Little Review*, where co-editors Heap and Margaret Anderson serialized it as Joyce wrote it. (For this achievement, the magazine was tried and convicted of obscenity in 1920.)

Another American little magazine, *POETRY*, introduced virtually the entire canon of modernist poetry—including Ezra Pound, T.S. Eliot, Wallace Stevens, William Carlos Williams, Marianne Moore and Gertrude Stein—to a small and global readership. A sort of alternative space, the little magazine was (and remains) first and foremost a laboratory for experimentation, a site of research and development. But the *little magazine* wasn't only an edgy alternative to the commercially published periodical, it was also a place where careers were massaged; where new talents' rough edges were smoothed to fit within established, professional parameters of both sensibility and personality. Ditto for the relationship between the alternative space and the museum, and the off-off-Broadway production and its big-bucks, Broadway counterpart. Each art form (or discipline) is an "ecosystem," which operates pretty much like all of the other arts ecologies in its attempt to maintain equilibrium and ensure *product*.

The avant-garde origination "myth" or narrative—all-too-familiar after a century of development and refinement—is encapsulated in *la vie Boheme*. Wherein, the protagonist is educated, hard working, rejected from the, say... Whitney Biennial, a participant in some *salon(s) des refuse*, all the while savagely *epater*-ing the bourgeoisie, and—ultimately—rising to the top as one of the lucky few lionized for biting the hand that's been feeding it. Caricature aside, this view invests the DIY origins of any avant-garde activity with authority as the low-investment, high-passion (and backbreaking) demonstration of the appeal of some new and original endeavor. Before the tidal wave of modernism engulfed Western culture, before the existence of (oxymoronic) modern institutions such as MoMA, and the more recent emergence of schools, auctions and art history courses devoted to contemporary art, there were few proponents of modernism's utopian vision. Many (a majority?) of them were regular guests at the salons

staged in a few large urban centers in Europe and the U.S. For the purposes of this essay, at least, think of these gatherings as the alternative spaces (no caps necessary) of their day.

Salon & spectacle

The early 20th century critic Paul Rosenfeld wrote that “Complex works of art speak not through individuals but ensembles.” Nowhere was this group dynamic more evident than in the salons of Florence, London, Paris, Chicago and (primarily) New York. Veritable crucibles of modernism, the salons were usually hosted by women, many of them Americans—including Mabel Dodge (whose successive salons were held in Florence, New York, and Taos), Gertrude and Leo Stein (Paris), and, in New York, the Stettheimer sisters and Louise and Walter Arensberg. At these gatherings, *new* and *revolutionary* (to employ two then-contemporary buzzwords) abstract art, atonal music, and imagist poetry, as well as psychoanalysis, feminism, and anarchism, were debated and later disseminated by a stellar rosters of talented and/or well-connected guests.

The salons of the second decade of the 20th century—slightly earlier in the cases of Dodge in Florence and Stein’s Parisian gatherings³—could hardly have differed more completely from the highly stylized social life of the turn-of-the-century elite. (Consult Henry James for an only slightly exaggerated description of tradition’s stranglehold on New York’s upper crust at the end of the 19th century.) By contrast, almost anybody was admitted to the new salons, although not everybody was invited back. Of disparate vocation, economic class, and social standing, the salon’s diverse guests were unlikely to have mixed at all during the 19th century. If this value placed on inclusion was radically new, some of the character of these “evenings” and “at homes”—including these terms—derived from 19th century social custom: Close friends received an open invitation for dinner, while the majority of guests came afterwards for discussion, or, at Mabel Dodge’s salons, for *general conversation*. (Dodge re-instated this 19th century social format,

which included a presentation or lecture followed by a lengthy discussion period, partly to differentiate her Greenwich Village evenings from other salons.)

Virtually the entire pantheon of early 20th century, avant-garde artists regularly attended one or more of the salons—the artists Picasso, Matisse, Duchamp, Man Ray, and Florine Stettheimer; the poets Wallace Stevens, Mina Loy, and William Carlos Williams; playwright Susan Glaspell; actress Eleonora Duse and writer/Provincetown Players founder George Cram Cook; composer Edgar Varese, theater designer Edward Gordon Craig, and dancer Isadora Duncan; the writers Andre Gide, John Reed, and Arthur Cravan; along with literally hundreds of notable salon regulars in Europe and the U.S. (Political visionaries were sometimes in attendance, too, especially in New York, where *salonistas* included labor leader Bill Haywood of the International Workers of the World (IWW) and leftist-feminist Emma Goldman.) Given the small number of creators *and* consumers of early-modern art and thought, it should come as no surprise that the relatively small circle of its makers and boosters found the same, few environs congenial. Guest lists at the New York salons overlapped and some guests—such as the writer and promoter of modernism, Carl Van Vechten—were welcome at all of them.

As the epicenter of modernism, the salon was the premier place for networking between producers, purchasers and promoters of avant-garde art. The art critic Henry McBride and the journalist Van Vechten enthusiastically spread the word about what they saw and experienced. Collectors Albert Barnes, Katherine Dreier, and sisters Claribel and Etta Cone, as well as the Steins and the Arensbergs, acquired iconic paintings from artist-*salons habitués*, which became the nuclei of the collections they later donated to American museums such as the Barnes Collection, and the Baltimore and Philadelphia art museums. Breathtakingly beautiful (and now incalculably valuable), the collecting of these artworks has sometimes overshadowed the salons' contribution to the cultural life of the day.

The most important was the sometimes-heated exchange of ideas about topics that were likely to be frowned upon around more “proper” dinner tables. These included—in both the general category (and the specific): Politics (from anarchism to unemployment); international affairs (from the exploits of Pancho Villa to Soviet collectivization); and gender or sexual relations (from suffragism to birth control). Like Margaret Sanger’s presentation about birth control, many of these talks were simultaneously informal *and* consequential. In 1914, for instance, Dr. A.A. Brill, founder of the New York Psychoanalytic Society, made the first presentation about psychoanalysis to “lay” New Yorkers at Mabel Dodge’s salon. This was one of many “firsts” Dodge could count and a reminder of the considerable energy and attention that running the successful salon entailed.

I should point out that my focus on Dodge and her gatherings seems to come at the unintended expense of the Arensberg and Stettheimer salons. I am attracted to Dodge, especially, because she organized the most wide-ranging of the New York salons, enlarging her guest list beyond the arts to include articulate representatives of politics and psychiatry as well. She also lived a wealthy, Bohemian existence that itself was riveting, larger than life. The downtown-centered fusion of alternative lifestyle and avant-garde art not only made her a paradigm of the sexually liberated “new woman,” but prepared her for the next chapter of her life as Mabel Dodge Luhan of Taos—collector, hostess, and wife of the handsome American Indian, Tony Luhan.

Such private “collaborations” frequently ignited at the salons, as did public programs, projects and pranks. Perhaps the best known of them initiated in New York was the production and attempted exhibition of Duchamp’s *Fountain*—a “readymade,” or unaltered manufactured object, in this case a urinal—created for the 1917 exhibition of the Society of Independent Artists. Pseudonymously submitted under the name R. Mutt, it was simultaneously both a spoof and a serious test of the exhibition policy of “no jury, no prizes.” Jury or no jury, *Fountain* was rejected from

the show, joining a notorious list of censored modern artworks headed by Gustave Courbet and his works' rejection by Paris salon juries, circa 1848.

One undertaking that falls into the ought-to-be-better-known category of collaborations unthinkable without the overlapping social and professional circles of the salon was the *Paterson Strike Pageant*. Staged at Madison Square Garden in New York in 1913, it was a *bouillabaisse* of performance and media art, politics and labor advocacy, mourning and anger.

As its title suggests, the pageant was a dramatization of actual events⁴: Early in 1913, the 25,000 silk workers of Paterson, New Jersey, struck the city's 300 mills, demanding increased wages and an eight-hour work day. Following its success in organizing the wool workers of Lawrence, Massachusetts, the previous year, the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) sent its most experienced organizers to Paterson. Paterson was seen both as a test of IWW leftism and a portent of potentially unchecked, anti-capitalist ferment. By May, the strikers and factory owners were deadlocked in a costly war of nerves. The IWW was determined to repeat its victory in Lawrence, while the intransigent factory owners believed their most valuable asset was the collusion of New York's newspaper publishers to blackout any news of the strike.

And there was plenty of it. As Bill Haywood told Mabel Dodge and the leftist writers Hutchins Hapgood and John Reed in early May, Paterson police had arrested strike leaders, trampled constitutional guarantees of free speech and murdered a worker named Valentino Modestino. Haywood excitedly described Modestino's funeral, for which each of the silk mill workers dropped a red flower on his coffin. "God! I wish I could show [the public] a picture of the funeral of Modestino," the exhausted labor leader said. Dodge, infatuated with John Reed and recognizing an opportunity to get closer to the charismatic writer, suggested "moving" the funeral from Paterson across the Hudson River to New York. There they could re-enact the funeral and the events that led up to it for the workers, and, of course,

for the press. Reed—a former Harvard cheerleader and future author of the brilliant firsthand account of the Bolshevik Revolution *Ten Days that Shook the World*—exclaimed, “I’ll do it!”

Others of Dodge’s circle were enlisted. On June 7, just three weeks after Reed first met several hundred striker-performers on May 19 in Paterson, the pageant was performed in Madison Square Garden. Virtually every account—especially those of the many New York newspaper theater critics who covered it (!)—deemed the Futurist-inflected pageant an artistic success: From the funeral procession of 1,000 factory workers to Haywood’s fiery demands for workers’ rights at the end of the production-cum-demonstration, the audience noisily refused to remain seated, as the spectacle played out against John Sloans’s glowing, 200 foot long, painted backdrop of a menacing-looking factory.

Artistic and political success cannot of course be equated. The record here is ambiguous, although it can be said with certainty that the workers never gained additional benefits, the IWW’s standing and Paterson’s economic well-being were disastrously diminished, and any ongoing alliance between political and artistic revolution did not emerge from the Pageant. While the strike’s outcome is attributable to the unwieldiness of the coalition of labor interests and organizations “managing” the strike, which long pre-dated the last-minute involvement of Reed, Dodge & Co., the Greenwich Villagers have sometimes been scapegoated for the poorly-handled, debt-ridden finances of the Pageant. (The debt was a simple consequence of too many strikers without tickets being let into Madison Square Garden.) On a positive note, the Pageant garnered extensive press coverage, both for itself and the strikers, whose actions and agitation were no longer blacked out.

Apart from these immediate outcomes, the historic legacies of the Pageant—artistic or political—seems virtually non-existent, although its media orientation seems to make it the spiritual ancestor—rather than an actual influence—of the impressive accomplishment of AIDS-art-activists in

the late 1980s and 1990s.⁵ Nor can this near-invisibility be ascribed simply to the press' anti-labor orientation and the trivialization of the arts endemic to American culture. (Not to mention the slanderous, discrediting attacks on the Dodge crowd by the tabloid press.) There was genuine confusion about the taxonomy of the Pageant, as there often is with the new. Uncategorizability and the blurring—or evading—of boundaries can render a subject invisible, particularly if those boundaries are especially sensitive as with those separating private from public, domestic site from political venue.

Might this also explain the parallel treatment—that is the lack of attention—accorded both the Pageant and the salon hostesses (save for those, like Gertrude Stein, with separate and successful “public” careers as artist or writer)? Unfortunately, it is difficult to assess or identify the (sometimes unconscious) condescension toward the realm of the domestic and products made by “loving hands at home,” or to determine the causes of a *lack* of attention that seems to result in unwarranted obscurity. Suffice it to say that despite the impact of those who attended them and the programs, collections, and associations that directly resulted from them, the New York salons seem only to have created a small ripple across the surface of collective consciousness or cultural memory, the *Paterson Strike Pageant* an even smaller one.

If the Greenwich Villagers' foray into the coupling of art and politics points to at least the possibility of their successful union, two aphorisms by leading avant-gardists of the day may be more telling. (Neither is a direct response to the *Paterson Strike Pageant*, although they are contemporaneous with it.) “Revolution *is* Art,” stated Margaret Anderson, co-editor of *The Little Review*. Her economical dictum gains considerable resonance considered alongside its fatuous, oft-stated inverse—“Art *is* Revolution.” Or, in contrast to Picasso's buffoonish description of painting as “an instrument of war.” A longer, equally astute observation by Provincetown Players' founder George Cram Cook that “Work done in the spirit of play has the only true seriousness,” similarly points in the direction of the avant-

garde's radical approach to process. A startling expression of optimism, it contrasts vividly with the tradition of dour American Puritanism. It also provides a (partial) explanation for John Reed's unlikely success producing the Pageant and expertly midwifing the collaboration between the factory workers and Dodge's coterie of artists and intellectuals.

The virtuoso execution and ambitious agenda of the *Paterson Strike Pageant* described in rapturous journal entries, letters, and in the extant photo-documentation hint at the apparent power of the production. The moral conviction and clear-eyed perception especially visible in the photos, recall similar impulses evident in drawings for the design of spectacles in Renaissance Florence. This historical analogy is hardly accidental, of course. I intend it to raise the issue of the use (or abuse) of history. That is, to restate the age-old question: "What is history's value?"

Although the question warrants a book-length reply, consider instead, and in conclusion, two more aphorisms: the dictum that ignorance of history leads to its repetition; and its reverse: that knowledge of history offers genuinely uplifting role models, as with the lives of saints. Both are undoubtedly true, history *does* instruct and inspire. It also operates in a more profound way, as a touchstone of humanity, and a signifier of membership in the sole speaking- *and* writing species. The ability to write also plays a central role in human development enabling the very existence of history as we know it, that is from (or *as*) the historical record, inconceivable without papyrus and stylus. This ability to write and record—admittedly I'm ignoring the sophisticated cultures that relied on the oral transmission of history—is what mainly differentiates humankind's pre-historic phase from its (recent) historic period.

In the six-or-seven-thousands-years' long written record of human endeavor, the *temporal*, characterized by the passage of time, is always associated with change, rather than stasis. And like the proverbial Borgesian archive or database, this comprehensive narrative encompasses all human thought and activity, both conventional and alternative. Ironically, it is the

alternatives that matter more than expressions of the mainstream. They are, after all, the impetus for change, or history's engine. So if, as the cliché goes, it is *only* change that is constant, then it's comforting to consider that in a world as appallingly inhumane as ours, history favors the future, and the alternative.

NOTES

1. An aphorism is a precept, or a concise statement of principle. Benjamin Franklin and Friedrich Nietzsche are among the most notable aphorists in history.
2. *Art in America* (November 1998): 57-61.
3. Credit for Stein's prescient interest in modernist art and the salon that sprang from it, belongs mostly to her older brother Michael, with whom she initially co-hosted the salon and from whom she became estranged in 1912. For a fascinating account of the salons see Steven Watson's *Strange Bedfellows: The First American Avant-Garde* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1991).
4. I am entirely indebted to *Strange Bedfellows* for this account of the Paterson Strike Pageant. *Ibid.*, 138-49.
5. In 1999, I opened the article "Off the Wall: AIDS and Public Art" (in the online journal, *Artery: The AIDS-Arts Forum* http://www.artistswithaids.org/artery/centerpieces/centerpieces_index.html) derived from an earlier essay on the Queer Arts Resources website) with this paragraph evoking the power and impact of media-oriented, public AIDS art:

Many of the most compelling artworks of the late-1980s and early-90s engage the specter of AIDS—in sorrow, rage, and remembrance. Although most critics and curators are well aware of the importance of AIDS-themed works by artists like painter Ross Bleckner or photographer Duane Michals, few have a clue that artists and art-activists created an alternative body of street- and public artworks about AIDS that was far more influential. Remarkably, the iconic images or symbols of this plague are not made-for-TV movies, photojournalistic pictures, or schmaltzy pop songs, but the "NAMES Project Quilt," a community artwork, and two artist-conceived emblems, "Silence=Death" and the "Red Ribbon." Their effectiveness is testimony both to the power of art and the limits of popular culture.

Robert Atkins is an art historian, critic, and curator, who has written for more than 100 publications throughout the world. A former, longtime columnist for the *Village Voice*, he is the co-editor of *Censoring Culture: Contemporary Threats to Free Expression* (New Press, 2006) and the author of *ArtSpeak: A Guide to Contemporary Ideas, Movements, and Buzzwords* (Abbeville Press, 1997, 2nd edition) and its modern-art companion *ArtSpoke* (1993). He is currently at work on an anthology of his writing and heads the planning group for *ArtSpeak China*, the first bilingual, collaboratively-authored, online resource about contemporary Chinese art. More info at: www.robertatkins.net.

Biljana Ciric

Searching for Tomorrow's Alternative China, Vietnam and Cambodia

The rationale for selecting these three countries is as follows: all three countries have very close political ties over the course of many decades, and still through to today. However, these political and economic ties have not produced an increase in cultural exchange between them. In fact, in order to fuel this exchange, in 2008 I curated, in Shanghai, one of the first exhibitions introducing Vietnamese and Cambodian contemporary art practices. Vietnam and Cambodia are related to one another in that they have very similar attitudes towards contemporary art. This is reflected in the fact that their museum venues still do not officially show contemporary art, while artist communities are trying to develop very different working strategies, much of which remains underground. This underground scene sometimes ventures above ground, but in doing so often breaks certain unwritten rules, and is usually suppressed. These political games generally force artists to invent different approaches to the production of exhibitions, and are often of an informal nature. Thus, the actual environment is an alternative nature already, and produces different reflections on the significance of being alternative in this region of the world.

Beyond this, the geopolitical relations between these three countries and the confluence of their recent social reforms (each country in its own stage of development) present the possibility of further contextualization. This entails the ways in which this context

could be seen both within the region as well as on a global level, and positions these countries in a way that is opposed to ideas of them being passive receivers of the already existing Western model of modernity. This could be understood as another alternative that introduces the importance of building local infrastructure and models more suitable to local traditions, and which will only continue to develop local knowledge and critical theories that are comparable to like achievements in the West.

Therefore, the concept of alterity in these respects involves the actual living conditions and cultural history and present environment in which the art is being produced, and these are significant divergences from the Western system and analysis of artistic production. These conditions introduce new potentialities that I will further discuss in this text.

Alternative Voices: Chinese, Vietnamese and Cambodian Case Studies

It is very difficult today to find a companion in the Chinese art world to discuss issues relating to alternative and nonprofit spaces. And it is clearly evident that market forces largely drive art production in China today. There are a handful of venues that can be defined as alternative, while many other venues claim to be “alternative,” but actually function as galleries, with simply a lower volume of sales than ones that are openly working in the commercial sphere. Recently there have been many new initiatives, from the development of guerrilla-like, fringe art infrastructures, alongside a plethora of self-identified museum spaces (which are actually just white cube spaces without much programming), and an increase in flow of galleries and auction sales, but all of which still cater to the needs of Western collectors that continue to search for Chinese phenomena of cynical realism, political pop, and gaudy art.

Under this system, the commercial, economic side of the art world is over-emphasized. In the last few years local wealthy players have joined in the game, again stamping the contemporary art scene as a lucrative investment opportunity or leisure commodity. But where is the concept of national identity, of the country in the story of contemporary art in China? Without many funding opportunities, without grants for artists and projects, and annual budgets given over to state run art museums that, due to their small budgets, are forced to rent their venues for exhibitions in order to sustain. This situation is compounded by the fact that local critics and curators, who once provided a critical voice, have become mere promoters of commercial activities, curating commercial gallery exhibitions, and writing for gallery catalogues and other review formats. This is a very obvious outcome of the current situation, in which there is little support for an intellectual discourse, and does not allow for the people of the pen to survive solely through their writing (art magazines usually pay 100 RMB for 1,000 words, which is around \$12). So in this time when artists are selling their works for millions of dollars, critics and curators began opening galleries and working with the commercial sector in order to survive, thereby losing their own critical voice. As we say: Don't bite the hand that feeds you.

While many still continue to talk about the art market, museums continue to open and close, and the few museums that persist in what they are doing are still not placed on the global map in equal relation with other comparable institutions in other countries. The gap between museums and commercial galleries is usually connected by the alternative/nonprofit spaces in the art environment, and are in many cases the most important catalysts within the scene, particularly in this part of the developing world.

And the artists, one might ask? Artists are left on their own without any social benefit or incentives to re-invent their microcosms, and to develop strategies that will keep the work relevant. This very brief explanation, describing mainly the development of Chinese contemporary art over the last two decades or so, also relates to the countries of Vietnam

and Cambodia because of the similarity of these country's developments and art policies in particular, especially with the field of the visual arts. Continuing onward, I will now point out a number of individual examples that will help flesh out these ideas even further.

The Beginnings of an Alternative Strategy: China, and the need for new start

The early 1980s avant-garde movement in China began as a kind intuition on the part of the artists, in recognition of their need to express themselves in different ways after the passing of the Cultural Revolution. Many of the artists organized guerrilla exhibitions and events during the 1980s. This kind of working methodology came to a halt after the 1989 Tiananmen Square incident, after which artists again withdrew to their studios. The early 1990s began with the growing interest in Chinese artists abroad, and the building importance of cultural attachés of the various consulates that has continued to the present day. Each country during the past twenty years has developed different cultural exchange programs with China that are largely governed by the ideological, political and economic strategies of the given country with regard to the region at large. A recent example of this is the ProHelvetia program that will come to an end in 2010. Other similar strategies can still be found in places like Hanoi, where the Goethe Institute and other consulates function as venues for artistic activities.

These kinds of programs, along with the presence of Chinese artists abroad, contributed to the celebration of the flag of multiculturalism, in which exhibitions of Chinese art were often viewed as "other," a cliché that is still discussed around the world today. This discourse was cemented by the controversial exhibition *Magiciens de la Terre* (Paris, 1989), which paired contemporary art practices with traditional, spiritually based cultural production of indigenous cultures.

Slowly becoming aware of the importance of it's contemporary art production, China made a decisive move in 2000 with that year's edition

of the Shanghai Biennial, allowing contemporary works of art and different media to become part of the exhibition. This initiative, and many other strategic moves, lead to the building of the Chinese Pavilion in Venice, a venue that showcased the official recognition of the contemporary art sector as an important tool for the presentation of Chinese politics and culture to the outside world, but without changing its own internal infrastructure within the country.

Chinese artists believe that they had won a great victory by being recognized on their own turf in 2000, but at the same time they also lost their under-the-radar positioning that had been so important in shaping their attitude. Simultaneously, it put them in the rather embarrassing position of being institutionalized, and more or less consumed by others without as much control over their situation.

This general climate also influenced a handful of alternative spaces that heeded the call for the urgency of repositioning their role in the art system. At the same time this offered a much broader reflection on what kind of art infrastructure is possible today in order to create a more healthy local art environment, with a long-term, sustainable strategy.

One of the earliest nonprofit organizations in China is the BizArt center, which was in many ways a pioneer in its defining and positioning of what it means to be a nonprofit in China, as well as defining the meaning of an alternative role. Established in 1998 in Shanghai, over the years BizArt has presented some of the most experimental artists of the time and curated some of the most influential exhibitions of the last ten years. Always operating with a very low budget—usually from foreign funding sources—the organization has continued to avoid many of the commercial aspects of art production. Some of the young artists shown there have gained recognition in the art world through their BizArt exhibitions. But after 2000 it seemed as though the significant role that BizArt had played as an experimental venue began to wane in importance. One of the main reasons for this is that many other museums and galleries began to

venture into the nonprofit sector, and BizArt needed to reposition itself as something different from these other organizations. The question remains: What will the new role of venues like BizArt be like, and what kind of projects should they support and develop? This question as of yet remains unanswered as the group of artists that run BizArt slowly shift their working methods.

One of the first results of this shift was the website Art-Ba-Ba that serves as a platform for the discussion of art-related information and events, which came about as a reaction to the perceived loss of a critical discourse for the arts and media. The Art-Ba-Ba Web platform is a blog format that attempts to spread awareness and space for free speech that is not common in China generally. Another project is called HIPIC, which was developed as an endless flow of images that anybody can contribute to by uploading images to their website. Each image will be shown at some point within the enormous slideshow for 30 seconds, and the project has been screened in major cities across the globe, including Shanghai. In one aspect the project has failed to realize its true potential for exhibition in public spaces since so far its display has mostly been in the art districts of Beijing and Shanghai, or in art fairs. The HIPIC project aspires to reach a larger audience than merely the art world, particularly in light of its participatory nature and open format, deconstructing the relationship between artists and their artworks (all images are anonymous during their display).

Later on followed the commercial project known as the Shopping Gallery. This organization is a group of artists who work together and are mainly self-funded, or else they gain support from other galleries that represent them. This kind of working method asks for another level of organization in terms of its funding structures and audience outreach, as well as its temporary control of non-art-related spaces in society. This set of circumstances forces these types of operations to not only communicate within art circles, but also with a more general

audience, and even governmental bodies, which is often a much more difficult task than having an exhibition in an art space that is a relatively safe venture.

Another issue that I would like to put forward is the loss of the exhibition's voice, or the clear idea of what kind of exhibition program is appropriate for an environment like that in China at this very moment. This is an important consideration in determining the necessary steps that will move us towards the role of the alternative space in society today. Another important example of a possible approach is The Arrow Factory, a store front space (roughly 10 square meters in size) placed within a Beijing *hutong*, which serves as a bridge between the local community and artistic production, a venture that explores the relationship between art and everyday life. This is a topic that is not often mentioned with regard to Chinese contemporary art practices, beyond certain political perceptions. There are also a number of recent artistic strategies that are reflective of the current situation in Chinese art. Artist Tang Dixin established the Street Gallery, which is nothing more than a small wooden suitcase full of artists' works of a price of no more than 100 RMB (around US \$12). Tang moves his street gallery around town, selling art alongside fake DVD vendors, or socks, where one can find the works of very young artists alongside more well-known artists for the same price.

These examples can be understood as baby steps towards the creation of a space for contemporary art in public discourses within the country, and towards realizing opportunities for the visual arts to be a vehicle of social transformation. This may still be far off in the future, but the present moment is of a crucial point of departure in this process of repositioning the local art infrastructure without which China will never have a common ground with the rest of the world. These largely grassroots initiatives are important attempts that refer to what type of model of infrastructure should be implemented in this cultural context in order for it to have an affective contribution.

One of the things that is most lacking is any kind of long-term strategy in the arts. Here, I will provide an example of one: Last year I worked on a project called *Intrude: Art & Life 366*, a public art project initiated by Zengdi MoMA, with the aim of intruding art into everyday life in the public spaces of Shanghai. The project presented one project per day for the entire year, culminating in 366 different projects. Speaking candidly, it was a nightmare for us to find venues that would show our projects and work with us. At the end of the year the project ended, but actually it felt more like the beginning stage since we just then started to deepen the dialogues and established deeper lines of communication with different social groups and ways of collaborating. I suggested that the Museum should maintain a small office in order to keep working on public art projects in China, and which would continue to share and reflect on the experiences of the prior year, to foster further involvement in the public spheres that were yet to be fully realized. Unfortunately, my proposal was never taken into proper consideration, because the whole point of the project in the end was the spectacle of the 366 days of events.

The above aforementioned projects require the re-establishment of the role of the visual arts in China today, not only as commercial, profit-related organizations that are centers of investment, but also contributors to the larger culture of the country, wherein the arts are able to work as effective vehicles for the introduction of social change. That is what alternative spaces need to realize as their true potential, I believe, as one of the major activators of these processes of change. Only alternative spaces are in a position to achieve these goals, if they are able to avoid converting artistic experience into a mass spectacle and consumer item.

With most of the foreign funding being diverted away from China in recent years, the building of a local art scene and basic infrastructure are some of the most urgent calls to action. This will help China to develop its own ground, and this foundation needs to be built sooner than later. Mainly operated by private capital, private museums, and private galleries,

the economic base for artistic production is very unstable at this time. It is absolutely crucial to develop a non-bureaucratic facet that supports a wide range of artists, while also fulfilling governmental requirements. The fact that many artists' initiatives are rarely able to maintain their work is a blaring call for concern.

Vietnam

The Vietnamese art scene is in many ways reminiscent of the development of a contemporary art scene in China, especially as its first steps to this point have been largely supported by foreign embassies and foreign interests without much local infrastructure.

One of the first and most ambitious projects in this regard was Saigon Open City in 2006; the first biennial event in the country, and the brainchild of artist Dinh Q. Lei, was never fully realized because they were unable to secure official permission for the exhibition. Saigon Open City, despite its failure to successfully communicate with local governmental bodies, was the first big step in organizing a truly international event in Vietnam. Dinh Q. Lei initiated the biennial format, making an important move towards the opening of the first alternative space, known as San Art Center, supported by the Vietnam Art Foundation (which is registered in Los Angeles). The return of many Vietnamese-American artists, especially to Saigon, introduced different working methods to the local scene that are interesting to explore. The Mogas Station Collective, as part of their involvement in the Singapore Biennial in 2006, published the Aart magazine in reaction to the lack of writing and information with regard to what was happening in the region. This catalogue of information, artists' projects, and writings, which were not available in art colleges or various programs of study, provided information that was critical for the local, regional, and larger communities. Artist and curator Rich Streitmatter-Tran (also a member of Mogas Station) built up a small library in his home where he shares books with young students and artists. The Wonderful District

Collective is another group that organizes events in studio apartments, under the title of Atelier Wonderful. Places like A Little Blah Blah and Nhasan in Hanoi are also small, multifunctional venues that coordinate artists' projects, lectures, have an archive, and provide a space for artists' gatherings.

The above aforementioned events that have taken place in the last few years are interesting examples of the different steps taken within the Vietnamese art community that actually contributes to the differentiation of the process in Vietnam when compared to that of China or elsewhere. The Vietnamese art scene, despite the fact that the art market is still largely dependent on foreign collectors and galleries, expresses parallel developments in the creation of local infrastructure that is very daring in its approach. Saigon Open City is one good example of a community initiated event, and made a strong statement with regard to the urgency for change at a much higher level in the country. The show thus has already introduced a change that will one day force the Vietnamese government to start cooperating. From the text "Many Rivers to Cross, Ho Chi Minh and Phnom Penh," R. Streitmatter-Tran writes:

Vietnam on the other hand has enjoyed a relatively outstanding economy as it moves from socialist economic policies to global markets, yet suffers strict control of culture, speech and expression by the Communist authorities. Thus Vietnam maintains a partially developed arts infrastructure with very few spaces and organizations and little if any national support for the development of contemporary arts in international integration. Cambodia might be seen as the inverse of Vietnam, with a multi party elected government who rarely if ever interfere with cultural production and yet plagued by economy that reaped the benefits of WTO membership and is largely dependant on NGO's and foreign capital....

Cambodia

During the Khmer Rouge period in Cambodia, from 1975-1979, around ninety percent of the artists in the country were killed or fled. Today, the local culture is being built upon the shoulders of the very young Khmer who were born after this dark and violent period, or upon the return of survivors who, with their families, managed to escape abroad. The Phnom

Penh art community gathers around spaces like the Reyum Art Academy, Metahouse, Bophana, and the recently opened Sa Sa Art Gallery (an artists' initiated gallery space).

The Reyum Art Academy in Phnom Penh, aside from showing young artists, runs a free Art Academy that provides the chance for kids to get an art education instead of ending up on the streets. Supported by a minor foundation abroad, Reyum, through its publication of texts dedicated to the preservation of Khmer culture prior to the Khmer Rouge era, continues to hold lectures on this topic on a regular basis. This kind of initiative and many other works undertaken by the academy have developed the necessary ground for future Khmer generations to continue to develop.

The Bophana Audio Visual Resource Center in Phnom Penh, established by the Khmer acclaimed film director Rithy Panh, in collaboration with the local government, attempts to preserve and make accessible to a broader audience the history of Khmer culture. The name of the organization stems from one of his early films: *Bophana: A Cambodian Tragedy*, which depicts a young woman who is tortured and killed in the infamous S21 prison during Khmer Rouge campaign.

In the last few years, the so-called Mekong Region has become of increasing interest as a region to invest in and has attracted much interest from abroad. This shift also involves the field of culture wherein, for example, the prominent Rockefeller family has initiated a Mekong Art and Culture project that ran from 2006 to 2008, connecting Laos, Vietnam, Thailand, and Cambodia through a series of workshops, seminars and exhibitions focused on art production and education, working with different institutions in each country (primarily the Fine Arts Universities). This kind of project fosters the development of contemporary art and provides an atmosphere wherein intellectual exchange is possible, and where local knowledge can be produced and spread. This also provides the conditions to search for a new model that will fit the particularities of

the local context, and provides the opportunity to reposition countries like this on the global map.

In countries without local infrastructures, there is a very urgent call for such processes of repositioning. Today the edge between nonprofit and for-profit spaces is very blurred, and largely concerns the channeling of funds. Take for example the Frieze Art Fair in London, which curator and theorist Maria Lind presents in a book on European Cultural Policies in 2015 as part of one branding house: Frieze Art Fair, Frieze Foundation, and *frieze* Magazine, a situation that no one questions, since the outcome of all three has been extremely successful in recent years.

The major issues for the cultural milieu of every country in today's global map are recognizing its own position and defining its appropriate models of production and display within their particular region. The seemingly similar paths of the three countries presented here with regard to the development of contemporary arts actually have a number of important points of difference which conveys the need for different processes of development. In the last ten years there has been a steady flow of Vietnamese-Americans back to Vietnam; they have been instrumental in the building of a grassroots contemporary art field, and their initiatives are local while also maintaining connections with international communities. This is a very important point to make in terms of re-defining the hierarchy of who is the initiator and who is the selectee.

The lack of dialogue between China and the other countries of Southeast Asia, or the region in general, is one of the most crucial points. Not only because of the great opportunity for the exchange of projects, but also the possibility for dialogue. To get involved in such processes could also be a good point of departure for the construction of self-critical contexts. Many of the countries in the region share similar issues that could be viewed at the larger regional level, and it would be fruitful to consider how each

country is positioned within the region. This dialogue has yet to be initiated, at least in the field of culture.

It is probably very difficult for someone who has been working in a system that has a highly developed infrastructure to grasp the working methods in locations where there aren't any predetermined working methods, yet, where things are still being accomplished. Artists, not art institutions, nor galleries, nor museums, are the ones who have raised these important issues through their work and activities. But the time has come when activities such as these or implied strategies are not enough. Different social realities provide different contexts, and it is time to view these contexts in relation to one's own knowledge and how one presents his or her own culture. It is through the writing of history and challenging the possible models of production that we will no longer take for granted the systems of developed countries, and further explore how, with one's own critical contexts, each of us can establish dialogue with ourselves, our neighbors, or someone who we cross paths with momentarily. It is about re-defining what it means to be alternative; how alterity operates in local contexts; and what kind of dialogue we need to re-construct with the rest of the world. Challenging others first requires one to challenge oneself. This should be the starting point for the alternative.

Biljana Ciric works as an independent curator in Shanghai. She was the director of the Curatorial Department at the Shanghai Duolun Museum of Modern Art and was the China networking curator for the 2006 Singapore Biennale. Her ambitious ongoing project *Migration Addicts* was presented in Collateral Events at the 52nd Venice Biennale (2007) and in the Shenzhen/Hong Kong Bi-city Biennale of Urbanism and Architecture. Her recent projects are the exhibition *Strategies from Within*, at the Ke Center of Contemporary Arts, of contemporary art practices in Vietnam and Cambodia; a major retrospective of Yoko Ono in China that toured during 2008/09 to Ke Center for Contemporary Art and Guang Dong Art Museum; the exhibition of contemporary Shanghai culture, *History in making: Shanghai 1979-2009, 30 years retrospective* (2009). In 2009 she established Mommy Foundation, which supports young artists and their projects.

René Block

TANAS – the alternative “alternative space”

One of the special attributes of what are known as “alternative spaces” is that they can and should be open and flexible in the planning and design of their programs. No cumbersome administrative apparatus interferes with the freedom of planning. And no visitor expects the artworks to be shown in a perfect museum-style presentation. The salient criterion of well-known “alternative spaces” is an ability to act experimentally and spontaneously, something I remember about them from New York in the 1970s when the Kitchen, Anthology Film Archives, Printed Matter, and the Institute for Art and Urban Resources opened downtown in the SoHo area and complemented the programs of neighboring avant-garde galleries, not to mention those of the uptown museums. P.S.1, founded in 1975, could be considered an apex of this New York alternative scene, which received ample and international attention from the start. The galleries were by nature commercially oriented, that is, they represented only particular artists and showed their works regularly, and the museums’ programs were determined by the intrinsic demands of mounting exhibitions involving years of advance preparation.

Well, the great social upheavals of the 1960s had also redefined the artist’s role in society. The feminist revolution forced male creative artists, too, to reconsider their societal role and act on it accordingly. Creative spaces founded by artists’ collectives were a politically correct alternative within the cultural system and consequently were often supported by public

funding. But even in the spaces founded and directed by curators, artists also had a voice since they were heavily represented on advisory boards and so could influence and keep tabs on the programming.

From today's perspective, it is interesting to observe that many of these once "alternative" spaces have now become institutions, subject to the same rules. This is perhaps most clearly seen in the evolution of P.S.1, which through clever and intelligent management has managed to become part of the Museum of Modern Art, betraying the original intentions.

A corresponding evolution from alternative exhibition space to institution had already come to pass more than one hundred years ago in Europe, especially in the German-speaking countries of Switzerland, Austria, and Germany. With the emergence of the bourgeoisie, late in the 19th and increasingly in the early 20th century, came the emancipation of a social class that was more and more dissatisfied with the conventional and conservative state-controlled cultural policies.

Associations were founded so that alternative exhibitions and cultural programs could be realized. The bourgeois members financed these art associations in order to convey a picture of progressive contemporary art. Artists supported these initiatives by producing works for the members, usually editions of graphic art.

Like so much else in German history, these activities were suspended for the duration of the Third Reich. After the end of World War II, when the destroyed cities were still in ruins, the first associations formed to make a fresh start. The important work of cultural reconstruction accomplished by these associations was duly recognized by most municipalities, which later provided generous financial (and housing) support, so that at least in all the major cities, art associations have become institutionalized and are run by professional teams. But the original task still remains: to work out a program alternative to that of museums and private galleries.

In light of this evolution of "alternative spaces," it could in turn be said that TANAS in Berlin has been founded as an alternative

“alternative space.” A space that is neither an institution nor supported in any way by the state—neither the Berlin Senate nor the Turkish government. Funding comes solely from the private Vehbi Koc Foundation of Istanbul. This independence makes it possible to present a program in Berlin conceived exclusively as a platform for contemporary art in Turkey.

In an article in one of the endlessly proliferating biennial/triennial/quadrennial catalogues, South African artist Kendell Geers describes the problems of non-“Western” artists as that of the perennial guest who gets invited and must subordinate him/herself to the host’s rules, in this case the “white cube.” Geers asserts that to place the non-Western object in this context, without positioning the accompanying Western object in a non-Western context, is to conduct neither a dialogue nor an exchange, but rather to recreate colonial power structures. The non-Western object, in its role of guest, is expected to play by and respect the host’s rules, even if these are condescending or racist.

Even today, Turkish contemporary art still receives no funding from the Turkish state. There are no institutions comparable to England’s British Council, France’s AFAA, Finland’s FRAME or Germany’s ifa, just to name a few, that might assist artists with projects abroad. The artists have always been dependent on the contingencies and capabilities of those doing the inviting. With the founding of TANAS, it was possible to break through this standard operating procedure and to give Turkish artists a space that belongs to them, in another city in another country, where they can come into their own.

Located in a former industrial building close to the Museum for Contemporary Art (in the Hamburger Bahnhof), TANAS offers the opportunity for dialogue on an equal footing. Monographic exhibitions of young artists alternate with projects organized by young Turkish curators. Their projects, as a rule, usually involve the participation of an international contingent of artists.

TANAS opened in the spring of 2008 with a large show of the works of Kutlug Ataman. Additional solo presentations made it possible for artists Aydan Mutezaoglu, Esra Ersen, Bülent Sangar, Nasan Tur, and Ali Kazma to realize new projects. Guest curators opened the doors to global dialogue: Emre Baykal with *Mahrem* (2008) and WHW, a four member curatorial collective who have been running an “alternative space” in Zagreb for years and are the curatorial team of this year’s Istanbul Biennial, with an exhibition structured as a prologue to the Biennial.

When René Block (born 1942) was 22 years old he opened a gallery in Berlin whose initial exhibitions and performances were done by artists who back then were still emergent: Gerhard Richter, Sigmar Polke, KP Brehmer, KH Hödicke, Wolf Vostell, Joseph Beuys, and Nam June Paik. In addition to the gallery, in 1972 Block began to work as a curator for the Neuer Berliner Kunstverein, the Berliner Festwochen, as well as for the Academy of the Arts. From 1982 to 1992 he directed the departments Visual Arts and Music at the The Arts-in-Berlin Programme of the DAAD and from 1993 to 1995 the Exhibitions Department of the Institut für Auslandsbeziehungen (ifa) in Stuttgart. In 1990 he curated the 8th Sydney Biennial and in 1995 the 4th Istanbul Biennial. From 1997 to 2006 René Block was the director of the Kunsthalle Fridericianum in Kassel. He concluded to work on large art projects by curating the Nordic Pavilion (Welfare-Fare Wel) at the 52th Biennale di Venezia (2007) as his final large exhibition. That same year, in Berlin, he founded TANAS, a space for contemporary Turkish art, which opened its doors in 2008 with a solo exhibition of Kutlug Ataman.

Irene Tsatsos

What Now?

In other words, the aesthetics of the future are not mysterious. They exist along a blurry border between reality and fantasy, and will disappear over the horizon just as life will. But artists will be more engaged in life—no longer as a solidified reality with an original single meaning, but as a continuous flowing process.
- Hu Fang, "New Species of Spaces," *e-flux journal* #11
(December 2009), <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/view/101>

An interest in sustainable horticulture, a desire to enhance labor power, an aim to eliminate systemic redundancies, and a wish to move gracefully in the world have inspired the team at Bullocks Permaculture Homestead on Orcas Island, Washington. They have spent the last thirty years designing and building an autonomous, self-sustaining settlement on ten acres, home to fourteen people in six family units. On a remote island, with a population of only about 4,500 people and accessible only by ferry, this enterprise attracts approximately 1,000 visitors a year for tours and extended visits, offers an internship program with between two and sixteen interns at any given point, produces a range of courses and workshops, provides landscaping and design consultation services, and runs a plant nursery. Bullocks has created a viable living and working situation that is robust, radical, and independent, yet at the same time fully integrated within its communities—those of its immediate neighbors as well as its international network of permaculturists. It is a creative, socially-engaged, alternative space that reveals and nurtures experimentation, education, and a range of other creative endeavors.

“Permaculture,” a portmanteau of “permanent agriculture” and expanded to include the notion of “permanent culture,” was, along with the alternative space movement, founded more than thirty years ago. Based on agricultural efficiencies, the premise of permaculture is to reduce the drain on non-renewable and renewable resources while creating an abundant living environment. A permaculture system—which can range from building a home on ample acreage to an urban window box garden to renovating a building for an art center—is developed through observing, identifying, and analyzing patterns and habits already in place. A permaculture-based design would apply these modes to the project’s development, integrating environment and people while providing material and non-material needs harmoniously and sustainably.

Early advocates quickly realized permaculture has a sociological dimension, what those in the permaculture community call “invisible structures.” Any given permaculture community, while based on a common interest in matters of sustainability, is based around shared values. Bullocks Homestead is a sustainable system based on horticulture, because that was the passion that drew its founders together; a group of ceramicists in Vermont, storytellers in Wyoming, or conceptually-oriented visual artists in Manhattan will have completely different visions around which they might coalesce, driven to create a sustainable enterprise dedicated to pursuing their passion.

“Buildings are for eating,” said Gordon Matta-Clark.

So, it would seem, were whole sea bass encased in aspic, bone soup, and old shoes, all of which were menu offerings at Food, the restaurant-slash-artist project founded 1971 by Matta-Clark and Caroline Goodden that could, with some revisionist thinking, be considered among the first alternative spaces.

Matta-Clark was a galvanizing social force in SoHo in the late 1960s, before it was even called SoHo, until his death in 1978. Numerous accounts from the time characterize Matta-Clark as driven in part by a deep desire to connect socially—he was a founding member of the Anarchitecture group, was notorious for gleefully and spontaneously generating what came to be called mosh pits at loft dance parties, and engaged Wall Street passersby with projects such as *Fresh Air Cart* (1972), in which he offered high-rise office workers a whiff of fresh air while on lunch break.

Like its nascent art world exhibition counterparts, the team at Food, dissatisfied with the limitations of what options were then available within existing venues, identified a need and desire of members of its community, and took matters into its own hands. The menus at Food—creative and inexpensive—were ideal for its spirited artist community and neighbors. In addition to its eccentric offerings (the bones from Food’s famous bone soup were, after being served, washed off in the kitchen and promptly fashioned into jewelry worn home by diners), Food served dishes comprised of elements, and in ways, that are now standard restaurant fare: sushi and sashimi (a menu developed by guest artist/chef Hisachika Takahashi, who was Rauschenberg’s assistant), locally produced foods, and “house” made baked goods, well and adventuresomely prepared in an open plan kitchen, fully visible to diners.

“Gordon Matta-Clark’s generative ideas of community permeate almost every aspect of his art and life,”¹ said historian Judith Russi Kirshner. Matta-Clark and friends built out the space, planned the menus, and invited guest artists/chefs to prepare meals. Matta-Clark recognized that our ability to perceive art starts with the very primal need to sustain our bodies. He also realized that artists, at least those with whom he fraternized, craved connection and community with one another. In its three years Food is estimated to have employed about sixty artists as cooks, waiters, and busboys. “He layered his activities on top of already existent structures of daily living, economic networks, and circulation

systems, merging real estate, restaurants, or galleries. In the antic atmosphere recorded at Food, the labor of nurturing was paramount, and artists shopped, cleaned, cooked, and talked together.”²

Within the context of 1960s radicalism, the politics of Food, permaculture, and alternative spaces were rooted in an idealistic social critique grounded in a nurturing, proactive stance, rather than one based on militant, at times violent, resistance. A site for spirited and diverse engagement around art, eating, discourse, and collegiality, Food was, like the alternative space and permaculture movements, a part of and at the same time creating new ecosystems as well as new paradigms. Matta-Clark’s thinking “followed more closely the symbolic resonance of the nutritional cycle from raw materials to waste than it did anything that might be said properly to belong to architecture”³—or to food or performance, for that matter. Whether they would have considered the matter in such a way, the founders of Food, like permaculture practitioners and alternative space pioneers, observed social and work patterns of their friends, colleagues, neighbors, and businesspeople in the areas they lived and worked—their networks—and created systems that complemented them.

Art and artmaking can often be messy—and may arguably, in some ways *necessarily* be messy—as well as inefficient, laborious, and capable of much tedium and repetitiousness. That said, I am regularly struck by the amount of debilitating redundancy I see around me, particularly in the way people—most of whom are artists—live and attempt to produce their work. So many I know are struggling to make ends meet, simply to keep the roofs over their heads and to maintain the various conventions that exist within individual homes, from kitchens to studio spaces to rent or mortgage payments. This was particularly striking at one point at the start of the current recession,

in early 2009, when within a period of three days as many artists called to tell me they had lost their jobs—one with an institution and two as studio assistants for more established artists. Yet in an increasingly desperate effort to drum up work, any work at all, each of these artists was soliciting the same set of institutions, studios, and former employers as the other. Naturally enough, at challenging moments we return to what is familiar, though in order to resolve these challenges we are often better off seeking something entirely new.

Many artists and cultural practitioners, including those who had shared stories of their recent despair, are entrepreneurial, creative, socially and professionally connected, and essentially broke—and thus endowed with similar skills, and likewise faced with similar challenges, that catalyzed the founders of many alternative spaces years ago. Fortunately—and inspiringly—they have kept their wits about them, turning their liabilities into assets, putting their ingenuity toward creating innovative, alternative sites for action. Bicycle Kitchen, Machine Project, Telic Exchange, and Journal of Aesthetics & Protest (“a weirdo think tank”) are a few examples here in Los Angeles, while two online examples include Feel Tank (“a feel tank, but this does not mean we don’t think”) and Team Colors (exploring “questions of everyday resistance, mutual aid, ... and the commons”).

Back in the realm of permaculture, Bullocks Homestead’s challenges are met with solutions that attempt to simplify and at the same time sustain a practice. For example, the sleeping quarters surround a central, outdoor kitchen, which are adjacent to an upper cistern that leads to a lower garden. (One current project involves planting nut trees along a path so that years from now, when the trees bear fruit, the nuts will fall onto the path. The harvest, then, will be collected while taking a walk. As with the layout of the garden and residences, the path is designed to provide flow with as little resistance as possible.)

In every design solution, the product of one element supports the efforts of another system, become increasingly productive and integrated,

minimizing waste and needless effort. It is a beautiful, succinct, and potentially very rich concept; eliminate the backtracking and in so doing make room for other creative endeavors, for vital, productive forces—providing, to appropriate a kind of Marxian ideal, universal access to free time for a collective that gardens in the morning, fishes in the afternoon, and makes art at night.

“Utopia, like heaven, is kind of boring,” Nancy Spero said.⁴ She was right. Lest this all sound like jejune 1960s back-to-the-land stuff, it is important to note that permaculture, too, like every other living entity, experiences fluctuations and growing pains. Even though permaculture has produced constructive techniques and technologies for growing food, building harmonious buildings, and generating electricity, its greatest challenge remains one of effective, constructive social engagement. “The dislocations inherent to social relations in the world in which we live are deeper than in the past, so categories that synthesized past social experience are becoming increasingly obsolete. It is necessary to reconceptualize the autonomy of social demands, the logic of their articulation, and the nature of the collective entities resulting from them. This effort—which is necessarily collective—is the real task ahead.”⁵ Figuring out how to create thriving, fulfilling communities, organize socially, and pursue right livelihood are considered to be among the movement’s greatest challenges. This political/intellectual/social mandate applies to alternative spaces as well.

Just as permaculture has a core value of ethics and sustainability that remains constant irrespective of the system’s organizing principles, alternative spaces, now as much as in the past, exist to promote a deeper understanding of ourselves and the social and cultural context within which we live. This is because making art, viewing it, and thinking about it are, or should be, basic activities, fundamental to being human. Critical thinking, including unfettered creative expression, are vital cultural values; artists and contemporary art play essential roles in both testing and

strengthening these values. Fearlessness, a willingness to probe, to irritate, to ask questions were qualities critical to the inception of the alternative space movement, and they remain critical to the future of any relevant, engaged cultural practice.

(Parts of this essay are drawn from comments delivered at a panel organized and facilitated by Anne Pasternak of Creative Time, with panelists Will Wilkins of Real Art Ways and Rick Lowe of Project Row Houses, for a Warhol Initiative gathering in Miami during June 19-21, 2003.)

NOTES

1. Judith Russi Kirshner, "The Idea of Community in the Work of Gordon Matta-Clark," *Gordon Matta-Clark* (Phaidon: London, 2006), 148.
2. *Ibid.*, 152.
3. *Ibid.*, 137.
4. As said to Hans Ulrich Obrist, quoted in the obituary of Nancy Spero (d. 2009), published by e-flux, <http://www.e-flux.com/shows/view/7365>. "Her work was never crudely utopian—as she told me, 'Utopia, like heaven, is kind of boring.'"
5. Ernesto Laclau, *On Populist Reason* (Verso: London, 2007), 250.

Irene Tsatsos is a writer and curator based in Los Angeles. From 1997 to 2005 Irene was the Executive Director of Los Angeles Contemporary Exhibitions (LACE), where she is credited with revitalizing the organization's reputation for experimental and rigorous programming. Prior to that, she worked at the Whitney Museum of American Art as the exhibition coordinator of the 1997 Biennial; she also held leadership positions at the Arts Club of Chicago and N.A.M.E. gallery, Chicago. Having worked with a range of museums and alternative arts spaces Irene enjoys a profile as a collaborative and forward-thinking facilitator of artist-initiated projects.

Raphael Rubinstein

Tributary or Source?

No cultural entity, no institution, no mode of art making, no style, can survive without changing, unless its constituents are prepared to be content with a frozen regime, a museum piece preserved and removed from any ongoing history. Some examples of successful evolution: the Tate Gallery (institution), Conceptual Art (mode of art-making). Examples of failure to evolve: Whitney Museum of American Art (institution), geometric abstraction (style).

Where does the alternative space fit in this scheme? Is it, at the present moment, an instance of successful evolution or a cultural dead end? Is it a vibrant, necessary participant in today's art scene or a pickled relic from another era? This question seems one worth asking just now, as we teeter (and some of us have fallen in) on the verge of an economic sink hole—just as earlier economic hard times helped make possible and necessary the alternative space movement of the 1970s.

There's no doubt that alternative spaces were necessary then: they exhibited art that had a difficult time making it into commercial galleries and museums because it was deemed unsaleable or declared itself not for sale or employed means that existing art institutions couldn't accommodate or (perhaps most often the case) was made by artists who simply didn't yet have the reputations that galleries and museums required.

Much has changed since those days. Art once considered too conceptual or unwieldy or ephemeral now has as good a chance as any

painting or sculpture of finding a ready market. Museums not only accept the kind of art that once flourished in alternative spaces, they actively commission it, often at an epic scale. Lastly, galleries and museums alike avidly seek out young artists, excited by new names as well as by new art.

A few years ago, when we were still in the midst of a smoothly running, seemingly infinitely expandable market for contemporary art, some observers feared that alternative spaces had lost their *raison d'être*; their function of providing venues for new and radical art, it was claimed, had been usurped by adventurous galleries and the “project spaces” of major museums. As a result, Manhattan gallery goers could no longer count on finding the next big thing in places like Artists Space and White Columns. (Here’s a thought: What if nonprofit status is no longer a prerequisite for alternative spaces? Judging by programming alone, the most “alternative” space in New York in recent years has been a nominally commercial enterprise: Mitchell Alpus Gallery.) Lately, art critics have been proclaiming or predicting a newfound relevance for alternative spaces. In October 2008, just as the economy turned ugly, Jerry Saltz wrote in *New York Magazine*: “Alternative spaces will become more important for shaping the discourse, although they’ll have a hard time making ends meet.”

Those who suspected the death of the alternative space by the turn of the century might have found further proof with the publication in 2002 of an anthology titled *Alternative Art New York, 1965-1985*, largely devoted to the history of alternative spaces and art collectives. Edited by Julie Ault, the book had its origins in a 1996 show at the Drawing Center. The appearance of such histories generally marks the eclipse of their subjects. In her introduction, Ault acknowledges as much: “In 1996 when I began this project, the notion of the alternative was not entirely outmoded. A mere six years later, the term has little currency. Only a vestige of an alternative network remains.”

If there were any truth to this view—that alternatives spaces became irrelevant by the dawn of the 21st century—it would be, first of

all, a testament to the success of the alternative space. The artist-created initiatives that began sprouting up in the 1970s eventually were able to set the agenda for what commercial galleries began doing in the 1980s and afterwards. And it was not only artists who moved from alternative spaces to galleries: quite a few dealers got their start among the nonprofits. One of the best known of these was Helene Winer, who, with Janelle Reiring, opened the New York gallery Metro Pictures in 1980. In Laura de Coppet and Alan Jones's 1984 book *The Art Dealers*, Reiring spells out the importance of the alternative space in the 1980s art world. "Because Helene had spent five years as director of Artists Space, she was absolutely invaluable to the early success of our gallery. She had in fact spent five years looking at new art, exhibiting it, and following the development of the artists she found most interesting." After naming some of the artists (Jack Goldstein, Robert Longo and Cindy Sherman) who came to Metro Pictures following shows at Artists Space, Reiring then says: "I think it is almost impossible for a commercial dealer to show a young, unknown artist who does not have this solid basis to their career and arouse interest in the show and the work. Our job is to capitalize, exploit, and enlarge an interest that had already begun, not to create that interest."

Reiring is clearly describing a vanished world. The prospect of young artists devoting years to building a "solid basis to their career" in the domain of alternative spaces before being ready to join a gallery is laughable in an age when artists so often move directly from MFA programs into commercial galleries. This isn't to deny that some careers do still develop more slowly, but I think that, for better or worse, we have lost the belief in the artistic benefits of a period of apprenticeship or minor-league experience.

But what about that word "alternative"? In Reiring's scenario, the alternative space is not an alternative to some mainstream but simply the mainstream's tributary or feeder. The supposed obsolescence of the alternative space a few years ago might well have had its origins in the shift

from offering artists and viewers an “alternative” to becoming simply a proving ground for commercial galleries.

But isn't this the risk of every type of “alternative”? Think, for instance, of alternative rock, a supposedly dissident musical style that sought to escape the restrictive conditions of the recording industry. While alternative and indie rock rather quickly devolved into mere stylistic options within the pop mainstream, and independent record labels often functioned as feeders for mainstream labels, the situation in the music industry lately has been changing. The driving force behind this change is technology, specifically the rise of the Web as a means of distributing music and communicating about music. With the eclipse of the CD, the rise of MP3s and file sharing (pirated and authorized), and the ubiquity of online social networking, it has now become feasible for bands to bypass record labels and connect with fans directly, via their own independently created websites. In effect, in the realm of music, the Web has seen the appearance of thousands (or perhaps hundreds of thousands) of alternative spaces.

Despite globalization, the art world in its bricks and mortar version is still extremely centralized and hierarchical. All those “major” galleries and museums, all those bureaucratic biennials, all those elegant mausoleums erected by mega collectors, still hold on to profits and power, and, by and large, art has to pass through them before it, too, is seen as major. This is the kind of structure that alternative spaces were once created to oppose.

If alternatives are flourishing in the online music world, in the art world they are relatively marginalized. In the online art world, “alternative” websites are even more marginalized. Maybe this is an inescapable consequence of the obdurate physicality of most works of art. Music can be converted into digital formats with much less loss than visual art. It's significant that what is perhaps the most important “alternative” art world website—Kenny Goldsmith's indispensable Ubu.com—is largely devoted to those art forms (video, film, and sound art) that are most easily transmitted in digital formats.

So, let's assume for the moment that if alternative spaces are to exist in an influential way they are not going to exist on the Web, or at least not exclusively. What shape, then, can they take? Having been deprived of their chief former rationales (if one accepts that there no longer seems to be any such thing as an alternative art and that galleries have bypassed the developmental function of alternative spaces), what is it, exactly, that alternative spaces have to offer? What productive role can they play?

As I think about two particular spaces I've seen lately that offer something emphatically different from what prevails in the official art world, I notice that they are not located in London, New York, Berlin, or Los Angeles, but in a converted gas station in Houston, Texas, (The Station Museum) and at the end of a rough dirt road in rural Pennsylvania (Mildred's Lane). Of course there are interesting alternative spaces in New York and London—some new and tiny, others venerable and commodious—but they generally follow some established model, usually of experimental-space-for-young-artist variety. Could it be that it has become virtually impossible to establish any new kind of alternative space amid art world centers? The problem is not just real estate values—we all know that it's hard to attain freedom with a hefty monthly rent to pay—but a more subtle psycho-social mindset that makes it difficult for anyone who has to negotiate daily with the gallery-museum-collector-complex to set out in an entirely different direction.

The two spaces I've singled out are very different. The Station Museum is a privately funded exhibition space in a large converted industrial building in one of Houston's historically African-American neighborhoods. Its founder and director, James Harithas, devotes much of his programming to art coming out of zones of conflict around the globe, hosting exhibitions of art from Iraq, Colombia, and Palestine; the Station Museum also presents solo shows of a wide range of maverick American artists such as Mel Chin and Norman Bluhm, I don't know of any other space like it. (Disclosure:

I am in the process of curating a show at the Station Museum of the political paintings of Paul Georges.) Mildred's Lane is a combination artist's retreat-art school-installation site set up on some 90 acres of woodland in northeastern Pennsylvania by artists J. Morgan Puett and Mark Dion. Artists are invited to create new works on the land and in its weathered barns and farmhouse. Each summer, small groups of young artists attend three-week-long seminars. Puett and Dion pursue quasi-archeological investigations of the farm's previous inhabitants.

The Station Museum and Mildred's Lane derive a refreshing artistic freedom from their locations, and from their self-sufficiency. They don't have to cater to existing audiences, nor are they desperate to attract visitors. If people come, I'm sure the people who run these two outfits are happy to see them, but because they don't have to prove anything to grant-giving institutions or to boards of trustees, they don't have to concern themselves with numbers or demographics. Their strength is largely in the degree to which they are not institutions.

In most cases, an alternative space that has fulfilled its original mission is confronted with two options: to close or to turn into an institution. Perhaps alternative spaces should be run along the lines of literary magazines: as Cyril Connolly observed when he launched *Horizon* in 1939: "A magazine should be the reflection of its time and when it ceases to reflect this, should come to an end." (*Horizon* folded in 1949.) If the people running a space choose the second route, the chances of it remaining "alternative" are pretty slim, so maybe the best kind of alternative space is the short-lived one. Is there a third option?

Let's imagine an alternative space that doesn't close and doesn't become an institution (or let itself be absorbed into some other institution), but finds a way to continually evolve, perhaps by changing its mission, its name, its location, its protagonists. In short, after a certain point, for an alternative space to remain alternative it must become an alternative to itself. Like certain artists when they find one mode of making at an end

and turn to something radically different (for example, Philip Guston circa 1970), independent exhibition spaces should be willing to change their styles, trying something completely different. Not because a change of style is automatically beneficial, but because flexibility is what they are all about.

But we still haven't answered the main question: how necessary are alternative spaces today? Do we need them? Do they do something that otherwise wouldn't get done? Show art that wouldn't otherwise be shown? Instead of trying to answer these difficult, if not impossible, questions, let's think about the role of alternative spaces beyond their function as exhibition spaces. In some circumstances, they can serve wider cultural purposes, especially by offering themselves as venues for other art forms. It could be argued that one of the most important achievements of Artists Space in the late 1970s was not in helping to start the careers of those Metro Pictures artists, but in hosting the music festival that launched the No Wave movement in 1978. A few years later, another downtown New York space, White Columns, sponsored a pair of influential music festivals, Noise Fest (1981) and Speed Trials (1983), with dozens of bands such as Sonic Youth and The Fall. No one these days thinks of Dia as an alternative space, but in the 1980s it functioned as one in its modest Mercer Street space, which was the site of regular readings by many of the best contemporary poets, including John Ashbery and James Schuyler. Are there any alternative spaces today with equally ambitious programs outside of visual art?

It could be that one of the best ways for an alternative space to become an alternative to itself would be to do something not about the problematic "alternative" in its name but the less obviously charged term "space." Above I proposed that an alternative space might consider changing its location as a way to become an "alternative to itself," but a better course of action might be to dispense with a location altogether, and turn into a completely nomadic project. A great model for this approach

is Performa, the performance-art biennial that presents works in dozens of different venues around New York City. More explicitly, this year, the Subvison festival in Hamburg, Germany, is inviting 12 artist initiatives from various countries that are explicitly “nomadic,” that is, which mount exhibitions in constantly changing venues. In a novel approach, New York-based apexart has set up a franchise program for which artist groups anywhere in the world can apply: apexart relocates to the winner’s city for a month-long exhibition.

Architect Zaha Hadid has also recently been experimenting with nomadic exhibition spaces by creating podlike and tentlike pavilions that are being transported around the world. Hadid isn’t the only person to be exploring nomadic architecture. Designer Chuck Hoberman has been making transformable structures that incorporate mobility and adaptability; it would be fascinating to see him tackle an exhibition space. Also relevant as historical precedents (recently rediscovered) are Jean Prouvé’s “nomadic structures” of the 1940s and 1950s and Gordon Matta-Clark’s *Open House* (1972), a dumpster converted into a walk-in sculpture/homeless shelter.

Matta-Clark’s dumpster reminds us that there’s no need for anything elaborate when it comes to mobile exhibition spaces. Of course, shipping containers have been a feature of art fairs for several years, and some cash-starved dealers have even operated from trucks. But, in fact, tents would probably be the best solution for mobile alternative spaces. Here’s one way they could be used: every alternative space in a given city acquires a tent, and on a particular weekend, each space sets up its tent in a park or some other open space. The result would be a tent city of completely new exhibition venues among which visitors could wander.

One thing accomplished by defining “space” as nomadic is to align exhibition practice more closely to the virtual world where “sites” are everywhere and nowhere at once. The challenge is to do so without losing touch with the tangibility that still defines most visual art. Ultimately,

the survival of alternative spaces depends not on nomadism or any other specific strategy, but on our ability to continue redefining the term, and on the resourcefulness of those who find themselves compelled to push into public view works of art that no one else is yet ready to acknowledge.

Raphael Rubinstein is a New York-based poet and art critic whose books include *Polychrome Profusion: Selected Art Criticism 1990-2002* (Hard Press Editions), *Afterglow of Minor Pop Masterpieces (Make Now)* and, as editor, the anthology *Critical Mess: Art Critics on the State of their Practice* (Hard Press Editions). From 1997 to 2007 he was a senior editor at *Art in America*; he continues to be a contributing editor to the magazine. Since 2007 he has been a professor of Critical Studies at the University of Houston and is also on the faculty of the Art Criticism and Writing MFA Program at the School of Visual Arts in New York.

Marina Grzinic

Art, Activism and Theory

I am interested in thinking about the possibility of an alternative space for art, culture, activism, and politics that can be termed as radical art and political space with practices, interventional logics, and subjects that bear the same name of alternative and radical at once. In order to come to the point of what these practices/spaces/subjects are, we should rethink what is the opposite side of the radical political practice today. To be even more precise, it is not that I want to ask what is its opposite, as it was the case in modernism where we could speak clearly about a certain binary mechanism in society, but I ask for the conditions of its im/possibility? My answer is clear: It is neoliberal global capitalism and its processes of normality and normalization.¹

Therefore, I want, firstly, to think about processes of how the norm is established or, better to say, to analyze the way normality is set to work in the neoliberal global capitalist world. Secondly, I want to give another view of what an alternative radical art and political space with practices, interventional logic, and subjects consist of today.

I decided first to refer to the construction of normality as it was defined by philosopher Ljubomir Bratic.² He argued that normality is a constructed consensual process. I want to develop this further. I will make reference to the recently published anonymous French text titled *Introduction to Civil War* (published in English³) which was developed by people associated with the journal *Tiqqun*,⁴ who were as well those who

were arrested in the village of Tarnac in France on November 11, 2008. They were arrested in conjunction supposedly with five incidents of “sabotage” against high-speed trains throughout France.⁵

In *Introduction to Civil War* we can read the following statement: “Under the regime of the norm, nothing is normal though everything must be *normalized*.” Therefore, we can think of the operation of construction of normality in two moves. First, what we have at work is a situation of exceptionality, a state of exception, so to say, which is followed by an abrupt violence—and this is extremely important—that immediately normalizes precisely what was an ab-normal act. As it is stated in *Introduction to Civil War*, “nothing is normal though everything must be normalized.” If nothing is normal (i.e. it is abnormal, a state of exception), things cannot be “gently” normalized, therefore a violent act is to be imposed in order that everything becomes normalized. However, I have to insist that the two moves (both of exceptionality) follow one after the other without a delay (precisely as digitalized media claim that today we can see “life” live on TV—in real time), therefore they follow precisely as something “normal.” Normality simulates continuity. This continuity is the one that displays “normality” (also if necessarily retroactively) not as a process of (immediate) brutal exclusion (as we customarily think that this is the way “normality” is applied), but as a process of limitless inclusion.

What is my point? As it is claimed in *Introduction to Civil War*, “nothing and no one is excluded from this space, or rejected into an identifiable exteriority. What is called ‘excluded’ is here only a modality of a generalized inclusion. [Normality] is therefore no longer anything but a single and same field, homogenous but diffracted into infinity of nuances, a regime of limitless integration that sets out to maintain the play between forms-of-life at the lowest possible level of intensity.” Therefore, the norm establishes a reversed process of exclusion, it is going on through “dissolving, digesting, absorbing, and deactivating all alterity *a priori*.”

The goal is an integration that positively eliminates exteriorities in order to permit their subsequent recirculation.

Moreover, even this process of the way normalization functions, which should be alarming for any critical and radical position, is, so to speak, today normalized. This goes so far that even the text *Introduction to Civil War* announces that “A nagging little neurosis makes one want to continue to distinguish the just from the unjust, the healthy from the sick, work from leisure, the criminal from the innocent or the ordinary from the monstrous. But we need to acknowledge the obvious: these old divisions are no longer intelligible.” And continues: “The differences have not been suppressed, however. They are still there, but *without consequences*.”

I want to draw attention precisely to this point. As it is obvious that even these revolutionary forces which wrote the text *Introduction to Civil War* and which are, despite being anonymous, situated in a social and political radical context, accept such way of thinking without, so to say, being irritated, disturbed any more by justice or injustice. This means that even such radical positions are indifferent (they are not irritated) to the fact, for example, that people are being secluded and labeled illegal just because they are migrants or because they are “captured” by European Union police on, as it is claimed, the “nonexistent ‘borders’ of free E.U.” It is due to such thinking that we have to be very clear that the PROCESSES of normality and normalization are not just a theoretical description, but operative even where they should be nullified.

Therefore, it is precisely because of such a process that can be labeled “normalization from within” that little by little we take as “normal” the excessive violence by police, for example, exercised on the border in between U.S. and Mexico, or on May 1, 2009, in Linz. On that day, on May 1, the ANTIFA (antifascist forces) and other activists, for example *maiz* – Autonomous Center by and for Migrants from Linz, who fight against racism and discrimination, attended the traditional demonstrations at

the International Workers' day. But they were all under harsh attack and brutal control by police forces, though it is claimed that in Austria and in other neoliberal capitalist states worldwide the rights to demonstrate is guaranteed by the constitution itself.⁶

The problem is therefore double. In *Introduction to Civil War*, on one side we see activists and theoreticians advancing a critique of normality and on the other we actually see precisely this "abnormality" being normalized. Even more, the *Introduction to Civil War* claims rightly that the norm works precisely because it presents itself without memory. As we could see in Linz on May 1, 2009, it was possible to use such enormous police forces that were even applauded by the conservative parties in power, since as it was precisely, stated normality has NO memory, and therefore the applauded normality of using abnormal police repression to prevent demonstrations on a national holiday prevents the so-called general public to link this repression with what happened at the heights of Nazism in 1934 in Linz. As formulated by the activists in Linz who constantly refer to memory and to history, precisely 75 years ago on May 1, 1934, those who were demonstrating were put in prison by the Nazis.

Therefore, the only way to stop the normalized amnesia of neoliberal global capitalism is actually to interrupt the logic of the norm. This interruption is what characterizes the alternative radical practice. Or to put this differently, in the past a subversive act was possible as it was subversion against the clear foreclosure and division in society. We had the borders. The big Other, the virtual symbolic order, the network that structures/d reality for us, was the one giving, so to speak, "consistency" to our acts. It guaranteed in the time of liberal capitalism a binary division of society, and this gave almost a guarantee for the intervention of the subculture against the dominant culture. Today the world presents itself in an endless circulation (the world "imperialism" is an excellent concept that captures the logic of neoliberal global capitalism) that is seen, as I stated above, as a limitless inclusion and an endless exchange.

In order to act it is necessary to draw a border. To draw a border within the inconsistency of the big Other, within the limitless inclusion means to act, to act politically. The act changes the very coordinates of this impossibility. It is only through an act that I effectively assume the big Other's nonexistence. This implies not only that s/he has to take the politics of representation into her/his hands, and set the border within the cynical situation that the only thing which is impossible today is impossibility as such, but, as is argued by Jelica Sumic-Riha,⁷ it is necessary to build the framework as well, the foreclosure that would set the new parameters, giving the new coordinates to the political act. The political act is a division, the setting of a border within a space. It reconfigures, closes, or stops, if you will, the imperialism of the circulation without differences by establishing new parameters within the space. It establishes a new structure to which to relate (de-coloniality of knowledge,⁸ de-coloniality of power, lesbian and queer political platform, etc.). An act is always performed through enunciation and it not only sets the parameters that initiate the act itself, but the parameters in relation to the Other to whom it is addressed, as well. Therefore, the question is always to which histories we attach our representational politics and how we position ourselves within a certain social, economical, and political territory.

Under the regime of the norm, negativity is never recognized as such, but reduced to a simple default of the norm. Groups and positions who fight against the process of normalization, but not proposing the so-called "constructive critique" that is another way to keep the status quo in society, but asking for the complete shifting of the parameters of the norm, are made to disappear, treated as not present in the space, simply not mentioned, evacuated, also through a rhetoric that accuses them of being ready to adapt to the new normalizing demands. Therefore, in order to prevent the empty norm from circulating and reproducing itself incessantly, it is necessary to expose precisely those projects that the norm makes unimportant, obsolete. We have to extract from this situation of

normalized amnesia such projects that politically interrupt the empty circularity of the norm. Such spaces and positions are radical critical practices that although their point of departure starts in different fields, they have the same objective—the formation of radical critical discourse which is not tautological, but has, as it was stated by Sebastjan Leban,⁹ at its core a constant struggle for a political subject, not as an individual entity but as a constitutive self-determined part of a larger social and political collectiveness.

Today normality is in direct relation to biopolitics. What does this mean? Biopolitics that was initially researched by Michel Foucault¹⁰ and extended further by Giorgio Agamben¹¹ presents today, I argue, not so much the direction of how life is administered, but the way of its differentiation. Agamben proposed the division in between on one side modal life, life that presents itself only as an infinite, I would say shopping mall, catalogue of forms-of-life, and on the other side life without a form, that is, bare or naked life. Or to say differently what I just stated about biopolitics. This process of differentiation of life, of life that was some decades ago seen as one, in terms that you had life or you hadn't (meaning "I am dead") is precisely what biopolitics is. Life is not anymore "one," but it is caught in a process of its pure formalization. The outcome which is what matters in the First capitalist world (that contrary to life it does not want to be called as such but rather just global world, as otherwise in the process of differentiation hierarchical divisions become disturbingly visible)—are only forms-of-life.

It is not claimed without an intensive analysis that what was in the past termed as "the subject" (a politically emancipated agency) presents today just a form of individualization in the neoliberal global capitalism. As it is pointed out in *Introduction to Civil War*, in the end what matters is only the differentiation between forms-of-life. All that is at stake today in the First capitalist world with its biopolitical procedures is forms of life seen in its smallest angle of torsion. These torsions are just a process of individualization

where the subject is only an individual, more or less successful, brand. The situation is a complete interiorization and this is what capitalism does: it changes every social or political dimension, or every commons in, so to say, individualization. Therefore, it does not come as a surprise the claim that there is no outside to the biopolitical of the first capitalist world. Everything that has its source in the "Outside" (misery, death, illegality, etc.,) has to disappear.¹² Or, as it is stated in *Introduction to Civil War*, what does not belong to the mode of presentation of the norm does not exist, and what does not exist cannot be part of the process of unveiling the norm or the process of normalization.

This is why as well nobody really thinks that alternative radical spaces are really possible. For the alternative radical political practice implies as well a clear negativity. On the other hand biopolitics establishes its power precisely through regulating life only as a battle of forms-of-life, as pure and constant positivization. Therefore all that is in any connection with misery, death, illegality, and so forth, and therefore as well any radical alternative political space as the space pointing a finger to these, has to disappear for real in terms that people are secluded or in a symbolical way being completely extracted from memory and history.

Introduction to Civil War exposes clearly that at the heart of biopolitics that exercises biopower and connects the First capitalist world to biocapitalism there is no such thing as death. Life in the First capitalist world is presented only through forms-of-life that compete as brands. Biopolitics is reserved only for the fictitious battle of forms-of-life, although death is all around the biopolitical First world and in its pure center as well; death is produced and reproduced constantly and thus constantly hidden. As argued by Rubia Salgado, from *maiz*, Linz, the interest in the lives of migrants may well be a hot topic today, but in reality is nothing but an instrumentalized topic. The biopolitical in the First World includes life as a political concern, but only, as stated in *Introduction to Civil War*, through its exclusion from the political sphere.

The first consequence is that there are practically no political subjects in the First capitalist world anymore. Or better, if it is true that there are almost no alternative spaces and alternative radical practices in the First capitalist world then we should start to think about defining the alternative spaces and political subjects differently. It is not that they have simply vanished, they are there but not recognized as such. Because in biocapitalism the alternative spaces and their subjects are seen only as brands competing for more or less stylish, as well as political forms-of-life. Only those able to draw a border in the space, presenting it as a border in the space that is not at all a binary act, take the active role in these new processes of rethinking alternative spaces and political subjectivity. In order to do this it is necessary to transcend the “genre” of the topic that is at stake and universalize it through its direct connection to the capitalist system of economical, political, social, and ideological reproduction, so to say, to the class struggle that points to the exploitation and expropriation for capital profit.

The second consequence is that precisely because of what has been said so far we can question biopolitics. I stated that it is not outside to the biopolitical of the first capitalist world. Everything that has its source in the “Outside” (misery, death, illegality, etc.) has to disappear. Therefore, it is not possible to conceptualize biopolitics without a process of its repoliticization—as what we see in the outside and in the inside is but misery, death, illegality everywhere (Sudan, Iraq, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Guantanamo, Gaza, Chechnya, New Orleans, etc.)—through what I, in relation to Achille Mbembe, bring to the floor of our discussion, and that is necropolitics.

Biopolitics is a horizon of articulating contemporary capitalist societies from the so-called politics of life, where life (via Agamben, no longer matters if bare/naked life or life with forms) is seen as the zero degree of intervention of each and every politics into contemporary societies. Today the capital surplus value is based on capitalizing from death (Latin *necro*) worlds. In the text “Necropolitics,” (2003) Achille Mbembe discusses this

new capital logic and its processes of geopolitical demarcation of world zones based on the mobilization of the war machine.¹³ Mbembe claimed that the concept of biopolitics due to the war machine and the state of exception being one of the major logics of contemporary societies might be better replaced with necropolitics. Necropolitics is connected to the concept of necrocapitalism, that is, contemporary capitalism, which organizes its forms of capital accumulation that involves dispossession and the subjugation of life to the power of death. The necrocapitalistic exploitation and expropriation imply new modes of governmentality that are informed by the norms of corporate rationality and deployed in managing violence, social conflicts and the Multitude.

Therefore to precisely articulate this non-existent outside that is as well an outside in the First capitalist world, it is necessary to repoliticize biopolitics with necropolitics. It presents a historization of biopolitics in terms of its intensification and as well brings back what is continually purged out of the biopolitical: death, exploitation, and expropriation. Necropolitics is not a simple process of the development of biopolitics, of making it exuberant by using a new adjective, but it is biopolitics' border, its internal negativity, its "truth." With necropolitics, we can precisely define the transformation of the regulation of life within extreme conditions produced by capital. Necropolitics regulates life through the perspective of death, therefore transforming life into a mere existence, below every life minimum and this process is as well taking place in the First neoliberal capitalist World.

In the very end I would like to discuss three positions that constitute the alternative radical practices positions: *The Research Group on Black Austrian History and Present* (Araba Evelyn Johnston-Arthur and Belinda Kazeem), Vienna; *maiz* – Autonomes Zentrum von & für Migrantinnen (Autonomous Center by and for Migrants), Linz, Austria; and Lëvizja VETËVENDOSJE ("The Movement SELF-DETERMINATION!") from Kosovo.

Albin Kurti, activist and theoretician from Prishtina, Kosovo, the core member of Lëvizja VETËVENDOSJE (“The Movement SELF-DETERMINATION!”), writes in his text “IN DEPENDENCE. From Stability of Crisis to the Crisis of Stability,” published in Reartikulacija no. 6, April 2009, that the aim of the international E.U. and U.S. forces in Kosovo is to assure “normality” through “stability.”¹⁴ Both words are out of joint. He states: “Over five billion euros have been poured into Kosovo in less than 10 years. Stability is therefore an expensive thing. To preserve the status quo, more efforts are needed than to make progress. Staying still requires more money than moving forward. But, what exactly is kept stable? The actual *order*, the present *state of things*.” And continues “The international rule in Kosovo propagates itself as a post-conflict mission.” Though, as he formulates, the international rule in Kosovo was not and is not a post-conflict mission but was always a *pre-conflict* mission aimed to prevent conflicts. If it were the other way around, he further explains, “it would have dealt with past conflicts; it would analyze the previous war’s causes, consequences, sources, patterns, and history. But it does not.” Stability as normalization prevents one thing; it suspends history. History will show that the International Mission (which considers the local population immature) itself is immature, as, Kurti says, it behaves “like a 10 year-old kid!”

The battle of the Movement SELF-DETERMINATION! (Lëvizja VETËVENDOSJE!) is in mobilizing people for self-determination. VETËVENDOSJE! organizes demonstrations and gatherings where people march, where activists deliver speeches, and where there is a massive action: 700 bottles with red paint have been thrown on UNMIK and the Government’s buildings. Kurti argued: “In our actions against the regime we act outside the regime’s experience. Creativity emerges as necessity in resistance.” Why is the question of self-determination so important? As Kosovo was defined as a *sui generis* case, *of its own kind/unique in its case* that implies that norms and experience teach us nothing, experimenting seems to be the only way to move “forward” and international rule

equals a club of scientists utterly objectifying Kosovo. Since we did not achieve independence through self-determination, the independence lacks sovereignty—it is a form without substance. Unique in its case means that Kosovo is not only treated, but is, within the international community, a case of *homo sacer*, preserved like a rare animal or a species threatened with extinction.

maiz – Autonomous Center by and for Migrants, founded in Linz in 1994 with the objective to expand the political and cultural participation of migrants in public life, focused its activities initially on education. *Rubia Salgado*, member of *maiz* and activist, explained the importance of cultural projects and art interventions that are consciously utilized in order to frame where they stand, what they want and what are the alternatives and perspectives for migrants. Salgado explained, “We do not wait to be invited, but we take every public event to invite ourselves.”¹⁵ Salgado stressed, lessons have ultimately been learned. Due to the current topicality of the migration issue, *maiz* is often invited to participate in a growing number of artistic projects launched to intervene against racism. Experience has shown, however, that such ostensibly anti-racist projects only reaffirm the stereotypical attitudes informing the prevailing racist discussion by, for example, reinforcing the cultural “otherness” of foreigners, thus condemning migrants to the role of objects and unscrupulously instrumentalizing them.

The Black Research Group on Austrian Present and History is an independent research group on Black Austrian history whose structural approach represents the basis for writing Black counter-histories in present Austrian reality. Black and Austrian represent a contradiction in terms of the goal of the research group to break the invisible and to undertake new ways of writing history—that are inseparable from the processes of self-definition and self-determination. By making visible and audible Black Austrian experience and presence, the group presents a way of writing history that no longer treats Black people as exotic objects and exceptional phenomena

but relocates them both as subjects and as a part of Austrian history. In the project “No! Against racism, exploitation and colonization!” presented in the cultural center Pavel house in 2008, in Laafeld, Austria, the group, notably its two core members, Araba Evelyn Johnston-Arthur and Belinda Kazeem, displayed a poster with dates when Marcus Omofuma, Seibane Wague, Richard Ibekwe, Edwin Ndupo, Yankuba Cessay, Rodney King, and many of them never named, died. The circumstances in which Marcus Omofuma died show that the police forces in Austria exceeded any border of legality, but were never prosecuted. The second demand of the Research Group on Black Austrian History and Present is a process of decoloniality of Austrian history and presence from structurally, institutionally, and historically incorporated racism, discrimination against the migrants, especially black migrants, and also those of the second or third generation living in Austria. They are made invisible, discrimination normalized. Therefore by claiming space for themselves The Research Group on Black Austrian History and Present connects two apparently different struggles in one single move of political self-determination.

What is important is that asking for self-determination today implies precisely a movement already asked by Frantz Fanon in 1961. In his book *The Wretched of the Earth*,¹⁶ being one of the most important books on decolonization in the 20th century, Fanon argued that the right to self-determination, borne on the wind of history will be effective only when we ask from self-determination to be clearly analyzed and implemented. In all the listed projects we see a step further from just a declaration of existence, what follows here is, as argued by Sumic-Riha, the rigorous practices of consequences, the logics of consequences (of the declaration), where the impossibility of the foreclosure of the capitalist discourse turns into the condition of a new possibility. In all these projects what is at work is precisely a new conceptual and paradigmatic political act, implying a setting of a new framework. The political act is an act that sets a border, a division and reconfigures, cuts, closes, if you want, stops the imperialism of circulation

without differences and establishes new parameters in the space of politics and art. This political act works hand in hand with history that could be understood as appropriated, and rearticulated as a powerful political tool of intervention.

NOTES

1. See Marina Grznic, "Political act as self-determination. Against scientific academism and empty art radicalization," in *NORMALITY IN [THE] CRISIS. Options for radical art practices in heterogeneous social space*, symposium conceived and organized by Martin Krenn on May 16, 2009, in Linz, Austria. Participants of the symposium: Alejandra Aravena, Marina Grznic, Ruth Noack, Gerald Raunig, Dmitry Vilensky, and Stephen Wright. The symposium was part of the Festival of Regions 09 – Normality at the Subversive Fair in Linz.
2. See Ljubomir Bratic, "A Strategy of Deployment. Reflections on the play *Liebesforschung*," text published as part of *translate. Beyond Culture: The Politics of Translation*, a multi-annual research project that aimed at exploring the political articulation of the notion of cultural translation in artistic practices as well as in political social movements from 2005 to 2008/9, Vienna. Text by Brati originally in German was translated into English by Mary O'Neill and published online February 2007. See <http://translate.eipcp.net/transversal/0307/bratic/en#redir#redir>.
3. See *Introduction to Civil War*. First published in French in the journal *Tiqqun*, a radical publication of theory, was translated into English by Jason Smith for the journal *Soft Targets*. All the quotations are from this online source. See <http://tarnac9.files.wordpress.com/2009/01/introcivilwar1.pdf>.
4. *Tiqqun* is the French transcription of the original Hebrew term *Tikkun olam*, a concept issuing from Judaism, often used in the kabbalistic and messianic traditions, which indicates all at once reparation, restitution, redemption, and which covers in large part, among others, the Jewish conception of social justice.
5. The most controversial of all these arrests is of Julien Coupat, who was detained for half a year (released in May 2009) without charges being filed against him. A petition on his behalf was signed among many others by Alain Badiou, Jean-Luc Nancy, and Giorgio Agamben.
6. The Declaration "Against Police Violence and for Freedom of Demonstration," issued on May 3, 2009, in Linz called for a common action to protest against brutal police repression.
7. See Jelica Sumic-Riha, "Jetniki Drugega, ki ne obstaja" (Prisoners of the Inexistent Other), in *Filozofski vestnik/Acta Philosophica*, journal, published by the Institute of Philosophy ZRC SAZU, Ljubljana 2007.
8. See Walter Mignolo statement that says: "Decolonizing Knowledge: Postcolonial Studies, Decolonial Horizons is part of a larger intellectual and political initiative generally referred to as the 'modernity/(de)coloniality research project.' A basic assumption of the project takes knowledge-making, since the European Renaissance, as a fundamental aspect of 'coloniality'—the mission of saving the world by imposing an ideal model of society, of economy, and of being. 'Decolonizing knowledge' becomes, then, a task and a process of emancipation from assumed principles of knowledge and understanding of how the world is and should be." Published at <http://tarragona.waltermignolo.com>.
9. See Sebastjan Leban, "De-linking from Capital and the Colonial Matrix of Power," in *Pavilion* no. 14, edited by Marina Grznic, Bucharest, 2010 (forthcoming).
10. See Michel Foucault, "Governmentality" (Lecture at the Collège de France, February 1, 1978), in: Graham Burchell, Colin Gordon, & Peter Miller, eds., *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 87-104.

11. See Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: sovereign power and bare life* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998). Taking his cue from Foucault's fragmentary analysis of biopolitics, Agamben argues that from the earliest treatises of political theory, and throughout the history of Western thinking about sovereignty, a notion of sovereignty as power over "life" is implicit.
12. Just one of the examples occurring on a daily basis in the First Capitalist world that can be counted to 100 (but they are in reality hidden) is the secret deportation of 100 Vietnamese families, men, women, and children on June, 8 2009, by Air Berlin from Berlin to Hanoi. Precisely because of alternative groups it was possible to get this secret information.
13. See Achile Mbembe, "Necropolitics," *Public Culture*, no 15 (1) (2003): 11-40.
14. See http://www.reartikulacija.org/RE6/ENG/positioning6_ENG_kurti.html. All references to Kurti are from this text.
15. See Rubia Salgado, "Participation and Documentary. Artists and Migrants in Participatory Art Projects," in *CITY VIEWS. A photo project: migrant perspectives*, Martin Krenn, ed. (Vienna: Verlag Turia + Kant, 2004), republicart, Bd. 3, http://www.republicart.net/publications/cityviews_index.htm.
16. See Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, new translation by Richard Philcox (New York: Grove Press, 2004).

Dr. Marina Grzinic is a philosopher, artist and theoretician. She lives in Ljubljana, works in Ljubljana and Vienna. Dr. Grzinic is Professor at the Academy of Fine Arts in Vienna, Institute of Fine Arts, Post Conceptual Art Practices. She is researcher at the Institute of Philosophy at the ZRC SAZU (Scientific and Research Center of the Slovenian Academy of Science and Art) in Ljubljana. She also works as freelance media theorist, art critic, and curator. Her latest book is *Re-Politicizing art, Theory, Representation and New Media Technology*, Academy of Fine Arts, Vienna and Schlebrügge. She has been involved with video art since 1982. In collaboration with Aina Smid, Marina Grzinic has realized more than 40 video art projects. She is the co-editor of REARTIKULACIJA artistic-political-theoretical-discursive platform from Ljubljana. For more info: <http://www.grzinic-smid.si/v>

Julie Ault

Of Several Minds Over Time

The following excerpts from earlier writings, and the current observations that follow them, track my thinking on the import and influence of alternative structures in the art field. First is an excerpt from the introduction to the catalogue that accompanied the exhibition *Cultural Economies: Histories from the Alternative Arts Movement, NYC, 1996*, which analyzed the growth, decline, and then-current potential of the alternative arts network. The second excerpt derives from my introduction to *Alternative Art New York, 1965–1985*, the book that extended from that inquiry begun several years earlier. This second piece reflects my thinking in the early 2000s, as the notion of alternative appeared outmoded, and the once-vital field became history. These revisited texts are followed by some thoughts that emerge from considering apexart's interrogation of the current relationships between alternative thinking/practice and alternative space. I combed the earlier writing to remind myself what I thought was at stake at key moments of shift, and combine them here to convey, albeit fragmentarily, the contextual condition of my relationship to the subject.

Why is today the same as every other day? (1995)

The very word *alternative* produces endless arguments. It is provocative and meaningless, and suggests simultaneously an opening up and a closing down. Naming oneself alternative sets up both distance from

and bondage to dominant institutions and ideas. It implies both a subordinate and a rebellious, perhaps productive, relationship to power. For critically constructive activities and structures it becomes essential to reject the term as a label. The more radical a group or effort, the more likely it is to resist the tag. “We are not alternative to anything” is a much-echoed sentiment that defies simple binary readings of power and its dynamics. Resisting the label positions margin as center: maybe not center center, but central in a given context. These are not just word games. Identifications and refusals have real consequences in the art world system, the real world.

Anarchy, hierarchy

The art world system. The social, economic, and political systems and forces that determine and influence what happens in the cultural field form an arena that has no central governing body, a space in which variously antagonistic, competitive, and harmonious institutional and individuated relationships occur. But of course, structures encourage certain behaviors and penalize those who do not respond.

Superficially, the art world configuration of entities and institutions locked in relativity defines itself along frictions and clearly delineated functions—between alternative and mainstream, nonprofit and for-profit, subordinate and dominant. Specialization and interdependence go hand in hand. Whatever the details, the system still operates and reproduces itself. A fundamental question arises from a purely positional picture of the art world as a system. What are the relations within that system? Relations refer to interactions between elements, and the positions they occupy vis-à-vis each other. The arrangement of units is a property of the system, not of the elements themselves.

A significant dilemma facing alternative spaces and structures is the onset of bureaucracy and hierarchy. Openness and commitment to flexibility in programming as well as in daily operations are frequently

sacrificed to the demands of funding constancy, which mandate conventional, static administrative processes. Financial stability takes center stage when salaries and rent are past due. Under these conditions it's difficult to be spontaneous or debate essential questions about philosophy and purpose.

Alternative spaces, mid-level organizations, and larger cultural institutions too often accept their roles as participants in the art world system with little tangible resistance. Consequently, a balance of power is achieved, expectations and functions are overdetermined, and creative approaches no longer flourish, and are perhaps no longer welcome.

The unwelcome associations of the label alternative—marginalization and diminishment—are further complicated by the perils of a market culture that smoothly incorporates alternatives as style—pressworthy and, until recently, fundable. Social critique and political meaning are often diffused by mainstream commercial processes.

Alternative is always contextual. Despite the predicaments, the idea of alternative, in some genuine sense, still carries exciting possibilities of being responsive—even reactive—but also constructive, creative, and generative. Ideally, alternative might refer to origins, beginnings, processes, and journeys. When an alternative becomes a container or destination, it takes on a structural function and becomes a form of official or accepted dissent within an established system.

Many of the activities represented in *Cultural Economies* have positively affected constellations of cultural power, which continue to shift. Yet economic, cultural, and social power (abstract and concrete) perseveres structurally, regardless of reformatory changes and redress. Despite possibilities for change, one truth seems evidenced by the cyclical nature of conflicts between artists and cultural institutions and audiences: the only remedies for structural problems are structural changes. This is why artist-run alternative spaces, and eventually alternative networks, evolved in the first place.

Alternative New York (2002)

Public funding for alternative spaces and structures was accompanied by a conflict. In order to comply with funding guidelines, hierarchical structures were required, and daily operations turned bureaucratic. Remaining open and flexible in programming became improbable within these conditions, which demanded program planning, sometimes years in advance, as well as adherence to regimented administrative procedures. Over time, as the venues and organizations that composed an alternative sector adopted business models of organization and became entrenched in routines resulting from guidelines for administration and programming imposed by funding agencies, new disillusionment and dissatisfactions occurred among artists, this time with the alternatives themselves. The symbiotic relationship between public cultural funding and the development of the alternative art sector is calculable. Amid that history many alternatives collapsed into their opposites, eventually coming to resemble that which they had originally sought to counter.

The number of alternative spaces, collectives, and collaborative structures that formerly constituted a vibrant cultural network but have closed their doors or dissolved in recent years seems to signal the disintegration—even the obsolescence—of an alternative art sphere as once known. There is only a vestige of an alternative network remaining, whereas previously there was an alternative art world made up of venues and voices, practices and projects, agendas and events, embedded in New York City's art world system.

Several questions emerge at this juncture. Where have alternatives and challenges to the status quo of the art industry since located? What forms have they taken? Is the concept of alternative as known through this movement any longer viable or desirable? What happened to the political, cultural, and social agendas and practices that provoked the alternative arts field initially? Is there a continuum? Some argue that significant changes have occurred within the art institutions that were criticized and challenged

by alternative initiatives. Some say, now, everything is possible within the mainstream art world. Having worked in this field for over twenty years, I can attest to some welcome changes—to more inclusive curatorial policies in many art institutions, to dislodged boundaries and hierarchies between mediums, and to new levels of cultural democracy. I can also attest to enduring opposition to substantive structural changes in the art system. In response to criticisms and charges of elitist and discriminatory policies—from artists, from actual and potential audiences, as well as from funding agencies—many institutions widened their doors and appear to be more democratic in recent years in terms of whose work gets exhibited, sponsored, commissioned, and collected. Yet, just when many mainstream cultural institutions sought to critically redress elitist museological practices, the virtual collapse of the NEA functionally undermined the potential civic roles they, and art, might play. In the early 1990s, small and large institutions went searching for corporate partnerships, and hired marketing consultants to develop moneymaking strategies in order to diversify their financial support. Simultaneously, what remained of public funding, as well as subsidies to artists from private foundations, got linked to the idea that noncommercial art must prove its social function through predetermined (and quantified ahead of time) community engagement. Collaborative, public, and socially engaged art practices have to some degree been codified and made bureaucratic at the expense of the real and risky social relations that might be engendered.

I would like to believe that critical alternative activities have permanently altered accepted notions of possible definitions and functions of art. But a casual tour of New York's art spaces, galleries, and museums on any given day of the week does not necessarily support that belief. Clearly the overhaul of the art industry and its social relations, posited by many alternative organizations and lobbied for by numerous individuals and groups, did not happen. Most art institutions are still hierarchically organized with boards composed of preeminent members of high society

and finance. Most art institutions have no artists on their boards. Currently, there is little evidence of experimentation, grossly insufficient exposure for unaffiliated artists, curtailed potential for art's infiltration into daily city life and publicly used space, and limited indication of cultural activism by or for artists. Art has not been reconnected to larger society, as was desired by some, or to political and social issues. The art world remains just that—a world unto itself that operates according to its own values and with its own economic system.

In spite of the alternative arts movement, during much of the 1990s and continuing into the present, the art field is marked by polarization, with “aesthetic” practice (and product) at one end of the spectrum, and “the political” at the other. The persistence of such obfuscation is one of the problematic binarisms that many participants in the alternative sphere aimed to disentangle and dislodge, through analysis, protest, dialogue, and example.

Institutional Pathology and Alternative Paths (2010)

Alternative is a contextual concept that requires its actions and manifestations be infinitely mutable. For some time now the notion of alternative has been confined to what is shown, discussed, and publicized rather than how and with what methods and forms. Alternative space is considered to be venue rather than medium or an end in itself—which is a far cry from artist-run, practice-centered, community-building models. Alternative structures took a philosophical hit from institutionalization and its concomitant economic dependency that in turn promoted hierarchical organization and conventional procedures. In many instances, missions, rhetoric, inner workings, and public programming became entanglements of contradictory agendas, with incongruous results. Reflexivity, which is innate to alternative structures, gave way to proverbial institutional pathologies. Customized organizational structures and methods representative of divergent values have been tragically neglected in favor

of standard bureaucratic reproduction. (There have been and are significant exceptions, but I'm referring to the norm.) For me, the lost opportunity in the alternative arts movement lies in the failure to effectively envision or create reflexive *modus operandi* that can persevere even as they mutate. (Again, there are exceptions, but I'm talking about the larger picture.) If institutions are going to reflect and advance alternative principles and produce culture differently, every aspect of organizational process requires rethinking and potential reconfiguring. As the young Soviet poet Vladimir Mayakovsky so aptly wrote early in the 20th century: "All things cry out, give us new forms." Starting from the core.

Assigned locations for alternative ideals and actions presume relative freedom while concurrently defining and delimiting: hence the paradox of alternative space. Was "free space"—freedom from and freedom to—ever achievable or is it more myth than lived experience? Specific situations may fleetingly seem free; in keeping with the paradox, however, the trajectory of the alternative arts movement verifies both yes and no.

Perhaps a useful analogy to the territorialized cultural economy lies in the structure of the romantic triangle. One partner in a primary relationship takes on a lover, thereby creating a harbor for transgression. Dissatisfaction with the main partner is diverted into satisfaction with the other. Competing arenas of convention and transgression interlock as they compose the field of intimacy. The unsatisfactory situation seems improved thanks to the inclusion of the structural substitute, which shifts the relational ground and everything that happens on it. How the circumstances, desires, and denials of the three individuals interface affects the configuration's duration. Inevitably though, rupture happens. When the lover departs, experimental modes of being and yearning for the unhindered lose their site of articulation. Typically it is then that the initial partners confront one another and work through their conflicting agendas to reinvest, recompose, or part. Whatever happens, the divergent proposition that was activated by the triangle must in its aftermath arrange

different means for expression. Now that the love affair artists and others initiated with alternative structures is largely history, we seem to be in a similar transition.¹

In the mid 1980s, on the cusp of his Soho gallery debut, an artist friend who had until then exclusively exhibited his art in alternative spaces and nonprofit venues confidently told me, “Now everything is possible within the market.” Some time later, in the mid 1990s, during a lecture to art students, a curator from a prominent New York museum was asked, “What *can’t* you show? What isn’t allowed into the museum?” Without skipping a beat he said, “There’s nothing we can’t show.” (Paul McCarthy was invoked as a case in point.) Incredulous on both occasions, I thought, these are delusions, fantasies that do not function at ground level. I still feel the claims are inaccurate, but now regard them less defensively than back when I believed in the need for and viability of alternative spaces.

Has the dissolution of margin and center occurred? The terrain of the art world and its sectors changed dramatically in the last decade and are continually in flux. Yet even though the old divisions do not prevail in name it is uncertain how they might operate in the social mind-set. What if, once and for all, we individually and collectively were to reject binaries including marginal and mainstream, radical and traditional, nonprofit and commercial, political and aesthetic—both in language and practice—and renounce convenient headers that mark cultural activity? Locatable containment a thing of the past, “alternatives” would cease to function as fetishized situations and potentially be anywhere and everywhere, transforming culture as we know it. Wouldn’t a widespread and unpredictable rerouting of thinking and practices commonly filed under different, oppositional, and transgressive arise? (Or is this already accomplished—not by purpose but by default—within current all-pervading, all-absorbing market culture?) It follows that the dislocation of alternative space should engender critical reinvestment in challenging and transforming existing art institutions on their structures, priorities, organizational forms, and programming

formats. (Or does cynicism only deepen in the absence of the refuge and sympathetic facility that the places of so-called alternative discourse seem to offer?) Segregation and integration are incredibly complex paradigms, which cannot be separated from the power dynamics that set the stage for cultural enactment. (Personally I am more ambivalent and at a loss about these issues than ever.)

Too many art institutions of all size and attitude seem hell-bent on preserving their authority and infinite self-reproduction as though solvency and existence were enough. Having been on a number of treadmills during my work history—first within the collaborative Group Material and subsequently on my own—I can confirm the deadening effects that full-on production and representation have on one’s creativity and spirit. In order to satisfy the system (use and be used), one has little choice but to enter into fixed participation and work at an industry-determined pace. Although I sometimes thrive on deadlines and pressure, at other times my optimal working process and pace (on either a particular project or in general) are in sharp contrast to external expectations and the demands of institutional machinery. The scary part of being on a treadmill is it could go on ad infinitum if the brakes are not deployed. No one will pull them for you. Reflexivity is an internal process. I have found it essential to periodically stop and remind myself this is not how I want to work, or spend my time. What comes after is the struggle to restore balance between public and private activities, between performing and artistic process, and to ultimately reclaim my prerequisites for new thinking and work—an empty calendar and mental spaciousness.

Institutions get on the industry treadmill just as individuals do. It’s no secret that the art industry collectively suffers from a cultivated form of Attention Deficit Disorder. Art institutions likewise appear unwilling and unable to entertain ambiguity or include periods for behind-the-scenes reflection and exploration geared toward deepening their work and their methods. Were cultural institutions to regard their process as a creative

one that is reflexive, doubt ridden, and productively discontinuous rather than a bureaucratic one that rigidly and arrogantly takes itself and its ways for granted, some benefits might ensue. The notion of the time-out—time to analyze, to think, to inquire and reflect—is essential to any dynamic enterprise. Perhaps the most important questions any institution, organization, or individual practitioner can periodically pose inward (as well as publicly) are, “Why do this? Is there need? Is there desire? Does my/our work fill a void? What is at stake beyond immediate pressures and deadlines? What would happen if we stopped and took stock? What if we closed our doors for a month? A year? Could it be productive? How would we do things differently if we didn’t do what we’re doing, if we threw the manual out the window? *Why is today the same as every other day?*”

Programming mania is a burgeoning problem germane to art institutions as they rival for funding and audiences in a less differentiated field, regardless of their orientation and scale. I wonder at the sheer volume of the habitual filling of calendars and spaces, which in the process applies institutional generalities that exhaust people (staff, art field practitioners, audiences), practices, and topics. Subject matter is hashed and rehashed with different participants, different titles, in different places, and on different dates. Programming by name artists (artists that embody or represent a specific classification or have marquee appeal) is common. Relentless programming is necessarily dependent on people’s willingness to repetitiously propagate their work and its portrayal, at once distributing ideas and contributing to the production of the hosting institution. Authoring artistic identity fluidly and subtly becomes a formidable challenge given cultural forces and their penchant for labels. The field is overrun with presentations, panels, events, and exhibitions; capable participants meet the expedient programming call of hosting institutions, but how can discursive mediums be taken seriously in such a setup? A detrimental cycle is in motion. (In my experience I increasingly encounter insensitive programming attitudes focused on “plugging me in,” with no

substantive dialogue whatsoever about the context, content, methods, or purpose.) No doubt such programming trends are symptomatic of the daunting institutional expansionism that has been de rigueur for some time as well as the imagined requisite that institutions do constantly project—to get and give their money's worth. As far as programming is concerned, small nonprofits, museums, and everything in between mirror one another, obliterating differences as they attempt to consolidate their identities and niche markets. (More evidence of the dissolution, albeit uncritical?) Bureaucratic and business model mind-sets with competition at their core guide all variety of arts institutions; even as the cultural field expands it is made narrower by these approaches.

People supposedly depend on routines and conventions for security and sanity, but ultimately such prescriptions are control devices. Many entrenched procedural rules are insensitive to practitioners and simply do not accommodate other ways of thinking and doing. While it might seem unrealistic to negotiate each activity anew within one's daily life or in the processes of institutional goings-on, generalizing social relationships continues to produce alienation all around. Courage and open-mindedness are required to do otherwise.

Reading through these earlier texts reminded me that the problems that played out in many alternative undertakings were inherent and present from jump. Possible effects on the art world system were likewise burdened. The arc from relative optimism to realism to pessimism in my current impressions is striking. Primarily this retrospection confirms my irreconcilable ambivalence about the art field cultural economy, and how I can productively function within it.

A lot of energy participating in the system goes to supplying prescribed shallow descriptions as well as formulaic events and exhibitions that fuel institutional reproduction while draining creative practitioners, short-circuiting ideas, and shortchanging viewers. Some might say, "Goes with the territory." "That's just how things work." "Sign of the times." But does it have

to be this way? Of course not. Let's start doing things intentionally. Seriously. If only with our individual manners of participating in the system and through what we ask of it, and through what we ask of one another.

NOTES

1. See Laura Kipnis, *Against Love. A Polemic* (New York: Vintage Books, 2003) for an insightful and entertaining reading of the social roles of love and adultery in contemporary culture. *Against Love* inspired my analogy of the romantic triangle to the alternative/mainstream dichotomy.

Note: The 1995 comments are excerpted from the introduction to the catalogue, *Cultural Economies: Histories from the Alternative Arts Movement, NYC* (The Drawing Center, New York City, Spring 1996), and the 2002 excerpt is from "Alternative New York" in Julie Ault, Martin Beck, *Critical Condition, Selected Texts in Dialogue* (Essen: Kokerei Zollverein/Zeitgenössische Kunst und Kritik, 2003). That essay was a revised version of "For the Record," introductory essay to Julie Ault, ed., *Alternative Art New York, 1965–1985* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press and The Drawing Center, 2002).

Julie Ault is an artist, writer, and editor who independently and collaboratively organizes diversiform projects. Her work emphasizes interrelationships between cultural production and politics. Recent projects include working with Danh Vo on the publication *where the lions are*, Basel Kunsthalle, 2009, *Wet and Wild: The Spirit of Sister Corita*, signal, Malmö, 2007, and *Installation*, Vienna Secession, 2006, in collaboration with Martin Beck. Ault is the editor of *Show and Tell: A Chronicle of Group Material* (Four Corners Books, 2010), *Felix Gonzalez-Torres* (steidl/dangin, 2006), and *Alternative Art New York, 1965-1985* (University of Minnesota Press, 2002), and is the author of *Come Alive! The Spirited Art of Sister Corita* (Four Corners Books, 2006).

Renaud Ego

The Forest in the Clearing

One evening, on my way to the theater at *La Friche de la Belle de Mai*, an alternative art space in Marseille, I saw a tag that read "CULTURE = CAPITAL – DEATH TO ARTISTS." The expression was violent, embodying a kind of schematic radicality, but it was equally disturbing to see the commercial and promotional devaluation of art summarized in this way. In France, Marseille is seen as a large, but poor, city, where for years municipal bureaucrats and the so-called political "elite" have shown a disconcerting contempt for culture. Within that context *La Friche de la Belle de Mai* has served as a place of resistance. Nearly sixty different venues are located here, covering a very broad spectrum of artistic expression, from the most marginal to the well established, and sometimes the most innovative. Confronted by the anger of the tag, I thought of the recent past, when violence had torn apart the disadvantaged neighborhoods of the urban periphery throughout the country. The rioters, very young for the most part, had burned schools, a media center, a library, as if those institutions had betrayed the promises they appeared to embody, namely, that education and culture guaranteed that everyone would find a job and have a role to play in French society. But that society is undermined by a level of social and ethnic segregation that education, much less culture or art, can rarely overcome.

There is a language of anger, and that language is violence. We can see it as a failure of expression. We can even see it as what remains

of an articulate being when deprived of language. But violence expresses anger in a way that is immediate, inseparable from the speaking body, and possesses an accuracy that mere argument would find difficult to preserve. People are shocked when I say I am surprised that it is not more widespread. It is not that I wish to see violence erupt, only that it would be natural. Yes, strangely enough, calmness is the norm. However, the effects of economic aggression are widespread, profoundly affecting “cultures,” in the sense given to the word by anthropologists: the uses, behaviors, and beliefs current in a society. Apathy is one of its manifestations. Rimbaud’s old imperative remains: “Find a language.”

That the aura of art and literature has paled, I have no doubt. Believing in the power of images because of their global distribution over digital or broadcast networks is one thing. But to evoke the magic associated with the earliest images, when humanity observed the inherent power of representation without really understanding it, is another. Yet, even with the transformations brought about by the passage of time, some of that prestige remains. Even when caricatured by the entertainment industry and derided by the widely held belief that equates wealth with money, something of the richness implicit in the idea of creation survives. But by defecting, by disengaging, as certain guerilla techniques recommend, or simply, by that invisible vagabondage through which the complex tissue of contemporary societies promotes movement, individuals and small groups trace subterranean lines that sometimes become issues when exposed to daylight. This is the vocation of those “minor leagues,” as Steven Rand proposed calling them, whose creativity overflows the field of art—this much is obvious.

How do they work? I will limit myself to what I am most familiar with. Through the cumulative action of the work of writers and artists, they have expelled art and culture from the ideal spheres in which a retrograde ideological apparatus has maintained them. By reinscribing them in the world, by chasing them from the paradise of ideas, they have enabled them to function quite differently: through capillary action, and

the use of a complex logic of contamination. The effects are barely visible, often ambiguous, and devoid of any claim to purity or grandeur. What in France are called “urban cultures”—artistic forms that have for years been considered marginal or minority, such as rap, graffiti, or hip-hop—have emerged into the open and even acquired a patina of respectability. A century ago this would have been impossible. Of course, in the process of their mediation, they have lost in aggressiveness what they have gained in recognition. Now they are exhibited in officially sanctioned venues and disseminated widely through record company catalogues. Conservatives see their very emergence (as always) as a sign of the loss of taste and, more broadly, as a form of relativism in which all things are equal: Gang Star and Henri Dutilleux, Fab Five Freddy, and the anonymous creators of the caves of Lascaux. Others focus on the commercial promotion of such transgressive icons. But with their official acceptance, their provocation and the artistic forms associated with it become a form of kitsch, inoffensive, and vaguely ridiculous. The balance is difficult to maintain. For my part, I note that these languages have spread their power of violation elsewhere to become the basis of artistic and social practices shared by a large part of the world’s youth. How can we remain deaf to this? How can we refuse to listen to them, aside from simple matters of taste?

Today, we work in a space where the different spheres of society are connected to one another. The marriage of art and power, and now fashion, luxury goods, advertising, and economic power, have a single face, even though they have been celebrated for countless years in other forms (we need only consider the courts of Europe or the cities where Bach, Velazquez, Titian, and Mozart were employed). The competition among the world’s capitals, which spend lavishly to build monuments ostensibly designed by the stars of modern architecture or open museums of contemporary art, is also an implicit recognition of the inherent value of the idea of creation. That it’s a question of capturing its effects or its images for very different purposes goes without saying. The market generates activity—architecture,

as the production of monuments, is flourishing today—and brings about a desire for creativity that escapes a logic that is not inherent to architecture but to its owners. The great virtue of norms is that we seek to surpass them. Cultural institutions know this, and they so deeply fear being seen as dated that they are always on the lookout for the latest fashions. Unfortunately, what is called new is most often merely pompous.

But in this incessant movement, genuinely fine works of art are discovered. An official institution like the Georges Pompidou Center in Paris has for years been an exemplary venue for the presentation of minority cultures. The Center has displayed sophisticated works that are largely unknown and, much more importantly, helped transform cultural habits by breaking down the barriers among artistic disciplines and the viewing public. An exhibit such as the 1989 *Magiciens de la terre* changed the way we look at primitive art. Has P.S. 1 lost its edge by becoming a satellite of MoMA or has it merely lost the prestige that ensured, in the eyes of a limited public, its earlier marginality? I don't know. Whatever the case, the distinction between official institutions, assumed to be inherently conservative, and marginal spaces, where real creativity emerges, has become fuzzy. We move at the shifting border between the two; exchanges take place in all directions and contribute to the sense of confusion. The strategies of infiltration are mutual, and there has never been such a diversity of art projects as today. We can get lost in this, the untarnished mirror of a confused era. However, I prefer the misuse of this freedom and even the vanity of certain kinds of excess to the comfortable self-sufficiency of a passionless art, bound up with a closed definition of itself or subject to a one-dimensional notion of the sense of history.

Yet, when speaking of the institutions and places necessary to the mediation of art or, in my case, literature, we are already beyond the margins defined by the time and space in which a creative work appears. For it is always a question of a nascent thought and, potentially, another thought generated by an experience that is both unexpected and shared

by all existence, reinvented in other languages, and aligned with different customs. And it is always the doing of individuals or very small, *local* groups: Dada, born in a cabaret in Zurich, where artists and poets from all Europe came together; bebop, in a handful of clubs in New York City; hip-hop in a Bronx ghetto; or cubism, in three or four studios in Montmartre and Montparnasse. I could multiply the number of examples, all of which (and this is reassuring) express the inherent ability of individuals to acknowledge and respond to the anonymous injunction addressed to us by humanity's quest for fulfillment. Once again, Rimbaud expresses the reasoning behind this with limpid concision: "The inventions of the unknown demand new forms." Forms of organization, life, love, action, forms of art—they are all one. Their articulation is a kind of expression, and that expression is sometimes capable of changing the direction of history.

But how can we encourage this? And in asking this question, I am not referring to forms of collective action, an expression that has imprinted some of its melody on the world, but to the infinitesimal and primary vantage point of the individual, without which it would not exist. For example, the individual that I am. How can one preserve the alert readiness that guarantees critical and creative freedom, when everything conspires to make this impossible? Basically, by safeguarding for oneself a "temporal space" for observation and attention. In my case this coincides with the table in the café where I write these lines, or the train where I began them a few days ago, or the house where I will continue them. Thus understood as a mental rather than a physical space, the "studio" is the possibility of a withdrawal that is also an opening. This does not mean having to sacrifice oneself to an outmoded vision of art, literature, or any other activity brought to its conclusion, but to evoke the work, the concentration, the care needed to construct thought liberated from its constraints. To express this somewhat more crudely: sometimes it's a struggle, and it requires a kind of stoic discipline to achieve that coincidence with ourselves when we stop struggling. In the studio of the painter Gérard Fromanger, I read the

following quote from Picasso, which was pinned to the wall like a discreet invitation not to disturb him for too long: “Nothing is accomplished without solitude. I created a solitude for myself that no one suspects.” It’s true, the invention of solitude, an interior space both spiritual and physical, is a form of combat. And nothing is more threatened by the instruments of fascination that seek to occupy our thoughts than the very possibility of such interiority. In that sense, how can we avoid thinking of advertising’s invasion of the public space, which our sight pays for and which makes use of our eyes, without our consent, to accomplish its goals? This is merely the most obscene form of a much more insidious intrusion, permanent and profound. Our future depends on our resisting it. Otherwise, all we have is the syrupy lie of universal commercial distraction that, draped in its ludic and seductive attributes, tries to grab our attention in order to make us its captives. Although threatened, this interiority remains the meaning of the clearing. The clearing lies in the heart of the forest, as we are truly in the heart of the world, to negotiate a withdrawal, and it is the very place where the forest takes over. “The solitary will be soiled by all,” wrote Henri Michaux in his luminous expression, defending, in withdrawal, an equitable relationship to others, to the city, and to the world. The last of the silent, the last of the invisibles is a solitary individual who preserves a way of life essential to everyone. Like the shepherd or the last nomadic tribe. Faced with the uniformization of ways of life, it is a justification of biodiversity understood as the sustained possibility of a plurality of individual becomings, necessary for humanity’s survival.

That this withdrawal threatens the social order, there is no doubt. For, such a position also means taking a stand, if only in the form of a categorical refusal of the pressure of society to use, and co-opt, our time. The marginality of such withdrawal is coincident with the room for maneuver it affords, but exclusion may also be the price we pay. We would have to be naïve or inconsistent not to acknowledge the risk. As Gérard de Nerval wrote, “there are doctors and government officials who make

sure the field of poetry is not broadened at the expense of the public thoroughfare." If, as a writer and, especially, a poet, I have for a long time belonged to an avant-garde, it is one of precarious freedom, shared by those whose actions involve a kind of defection, even at the price of the economic uncertainty such a situation implies. It is neither a privilege nor a gift, much less a peremptory demand for acknowledgement. It is simply a condition of existence, a condition necessary to the intensity with which one chooses to live one's life. Compared to my friends, overcome by bitterness and sometimes despair, I at least have the advantage of my own inabilities: inept at holding a job, resistant to any form of discipline that is not self-imposed, for a long time I have lived by inventing, for better or for worse, my own means of subsistence. Without compromising or disguising my words, but with the luxury of a non-negotiable independence.

This withdrawal is no more a form of detention than solitude is a form of isolation. Both are an opportunity that, in my experience, creates exchanges, encounters, and a word-of-mouth network, even within the micro-economy it generates. Such a network is one kind of minor league; there are many others. It is a community without attachments but one that is secretly active, just as combinations of chemical elements give rise to new compounds. It is a constellation of work, reflection, and activity that, like the constellations of stars, is visible only in the night sky. In my case, it consists of friends, writers, artists, journals, publishers large and small, newspapers, the various institutions I work with, the schools where I lecture, the podiums where I read. Within it, "small" structures (publishers, for example) are frequently the boldest, for their agility prevents loss of energy. This constellation has no stable form and no clear limits, for it possesses multiple, crossed extensions, which each of us is capable of giving it. Nor does it have a center because, since we are all within it, we are also a center. Finally, it has no origin and no limit, because it is the metamorphosis of the various groups or networks to which everyone supplies a piece of their own history. Is it a space? Yes, but

not in the sense of having extent. It embodies an elusive (and therefore free) form of interconnecting relationships. Is it an alternative space? Yes, but more like a “possibility,” which exists in every social organization when individuals not connected by some shared sense of belonging (religious, ethnic, political) are able to act in concert. There is no model, even if every era reinvents the modalities of operation. Ultimately the veiled permanence of such constellations is the proof of their effectiveness and value, the inestimable value of escaping any monetary estimate. That is why such minor leagues are “priceless” in both senses of the word: within a civilization whose general value system is based solely on the monetary dimension given to the notion of “price,” nothing and no one can buy them. They have no equivalent and that is why they escape the problem of market value.

What I have described as my working and living space, could just as easily apply to what is happening today on the Web and which has made that space, although on a much different scale, such a fascinating environment. The reasons for this can be found primarily in the libertarian egalitarianism of its architecture, its fundamental lack of hierarchy, its metamorphosis, and its development, which makes mapping it difficult, if not impossible. Computer tools, digital language and its variants, represent a major revolution that, far beyond the technology itself, affect the way we live, work, and interact. We all observe this in our own life. But it is equally true, and in a much more subversive way, because of the quality of the content that each of us places at the disposal of others, without the anticipation of recompense. The philosopher Bernard Stiegler sees in this the emergence of an ethics of contribution that erases the distinction between producers and consumers, and the capitalist model based on such an organizational structure. He cites the examples of Wikipedia and open-source software, which is based on the collective transformation of software through improvements made by users, without any one individual profiting from those improvements. Likewise, there are many

websites where individuals with similar interests or animated by a shared commitment, exchange information and make it available to anyone, without any recompense other than participating in the construction of a common space. Such behaviors point to a symbolic extension of capitalism and are an intuitive recognition of the inherent value of the gift. That is why, in France, the culture industries are fighting tooth and nail to criminalize exchanges that threaten to overturn their economic model. The laws that have been voted in, at their initiative, are ridiculous because they are inapplicable, and they are retrograde because their proponents do not see in these new forms of behavior an anthropological rupture that no one can stop.

Of course, the question of remuneration comes up. But it is also because they present themselves as inimical to the organization of capitalism that alternative models of exchange have come into existence. Yet, in these practices of sharing, other forms of payment are involved. The advantage one gets may take the form of prestige (access to a certain kind of fame), self-esteem (through generosity), or even a kind of sociability (being a member of a group), but it is one that cannot be reduced to commercial benefit. In that sense, it embodies something that ruins the classical utilitarianism of business theory, as the anthropologist Marcel Mauss had already shown in 1924 in *The Gift*, which revealed how egotism and cupidity are not the exclusive motives for individual action, far from it. We are forced to conclude, therefore, that such contributions, and the pacific virtue that Mauss recognized in them, have found on the Web a place in which to manifest the creativity of other modes of existence, freed of the violence inherent in competitive economic models. Collective knowledge spaces based on the contributions of participants express an impassioned individual relationship to an object. The sharing of knowledge, like the ethics of scientific research, and an openness to strangers—an underlying principle of the work of art—serve as a challenge to the capitalist logic of expropriation. The Web is already the theater of

their confrontation, and giving credibility to the idea of an alternative is not the least of its virtues. Faced with an ideological model that terrorizes the imagination by claiming that “there is no alternative,” another world clears a path to the invention of other outlets.

Every technology is Januslike. Television could have been a tool of awareness and understanding but instead has become an instrument of total mindlessness and mind control, which the president of the leading French network expressed as follows: “For an advertiser’s message to be understood, the viewer’s brain has to be accessible. The job of our broadcasts is to make them available. That means entertaining them, relaxing them so they are accessible in the interim between two messages. What we’re selling to Coca-Cola is the human brain time available.” His statement has the virtue of clarity. Such tensions already exist on the Web, but if I am naïve enough to believe it might escape such a fate, it is because it is still made by all of us and not managed only by a few. In its decentered and headless character, I perceive a very strange echo of the vow made by Lautréamont: “poetry must be made by all, not by one.” We should not interpret this to mean that everyone must become a poet, but rather that the work of the poem, like the work of art, is the creation of a space accessible to all, in which each of us participates from wherever we happen to be, just as the reader and viewer also make the poem or painting, or the play that is performed on stage. The universality of the work of art lies in its claim that it is intended for us all. And even though something tells me it won’t be equally accessible to everyone, I have no proof that this is the case. The success of an aesthetic intention, which is another way of saying the effectiveness of a work of art, is unverifiable. That is its enigma, the condition of its possible universality, and what commits it to perpetual reinvention.

The connection I wish to establish between what is at play in a work of art and practices that have been developed on the Web is not one of straightforward equivalence. But in either case we find an energy and

a desire that reflect the richness of existence as well as possible strategies for escaping the powers of repression or the capture of that vitality. If the poem possesses for me the greatest experiential intensity I have found, it is because it is not work but life. My being is not divided among the different individuals that I am. They all participate. Each of my experiences—friend, lover, parent, neighbor, flâneur—has a place, and this too is the sense of Lautréamont's statement. I am united in a relation of equanimity with all the beings who compose me. It seems that this is the best way to be in the world; I even have the sensation that I am in this way reborn to the world at every moment. In this can be found the alternative I have invented to escape the violence—the intimate divisions, internal walls, and unhappy schizophrenias—inherent in every social order, especially one that seeks to reduce my identity to that of a worker or consumer. There is a sense of violation inherent in creation. The minor leagues are its conductive bodies and the emblematic forms of its implementation. It is also their spirit that holds sway, in certain Web spaces, with enhanced efficiency. That their voices will grow louder is a foregone conclusion; in fact, they have only just begun to be heard.

Translated by Robert Bononno.

Born in 1963, Renaud Ego lives and works in Paris. He is a French writer, active in the field of literature and art studies. With other writers he founded in 1999 the literary review *La Pensée de Midi*. In addition to his books of literature—poetry and novels—his essays and studies deal, more or less, with the question “what is an image?” shared by literature and visual arts. Among his books of poetry are *Le Désastre d'éden*, *Le Vide étant fait*, *La Réalité n'a rien à voir*. He wrote the poetry book *Calendrier d'avants* with Matthieu Messagier, a poet about whom Renaud Ego wrote the essay *L'Arpent du poème dépasse l'année-lumière*. Among his essays are also *San*, a book on rock paintings in Southern Africa, and various studies on art. Recently published, his last book, *Une Légende des yeux*, plays with the boundaries of literary categories and mixes various narrative writings to tell the biographical story of a gaze.

Boris Groys

The Weak Universalism

In our times we know that everything can be an artwork. Or rather, everything can be turned into an artwork by an artist. There is no possibility for a spectator to distinguish between artwork and a “simple thing” on the basis of this spectator’s visual experience alone. The spectator must know that a particular object is used by an artist in the context of his or her artistic practice to be able to identify this object as an artwork or as a part of an artwork.

But who is the artist? And how the artist can be distinguished from a non-artist—if such a differentiation is possible at all? That seems to me to be a much more interesting question than the question of how we can differentiate between artwork and the “simple thing.”

Meanwhile, we have a long tradition of institutional critique. During the last few decades, the role of collectors, curators, trustees, museum directors, gallerists, art critics, and so forth. has been extensively analyzed and criticized by artists. But what about the artists themselves? The contemporary artist is obviously also an institutional figure. And contemporary artists are mostly ready to accept the fact that their critique of art institutions is a critique from within. Thus, it seems that, today, the artist is defined simply as a professional fulfilling a certain role in a general framework of the art world that is based—as any other bureaucratic organization or capitalist corporation—on the division of labor. And one can also argue that part of this role is to criticize the art world with a goal to

make it more open, more inclusive, better informed—and because of that also more efficient and more profitable. This answer is certainly plausible, but at the same time not really persuasive.

Let us remember the well-known maxim formulated by Joseph Beuys: “Everybody is an artist.” This maxim has a long tradition going back to the early Marxism and Russian avant-garde and therefore is almost always characterized today—and was already characterized at Beuys’ time—as being Utopian. Namely this maxim is understood as an expression of a Utopian hope that in the future the mankind that currently consists predominantly of non-artists becomes a mankind consisting of artists. Now one can agree that such a hope is somehow implausible. But I would never say that it is Utopian if the figure of the artist is defined as it was just defined. A vision of the world that is completely turned into the art world and in which every human being has to produce artworks and compete for the chance to exhibit them at this or that Biennial is by no means a Utopian vision. Rather, it is a dystopian vision—in fact, a complete nightmare.

It can be said—and, indeed, it was often said—that Beuys had a Romantic, Utopian understanding of figure and role of the artist. And it is also often said that this Romantic, Utopian vision is passé. But this diagnosis does not seem to me to be very persuasive. The tradition in which our contemporary art world functions—including our current art institutions—was formed after the Second World War. This tradition is based on the art practices of the historical avant-garde—and their updating and codification during the 1950s and 1960s of the last century. Now, one does not have an impression that this tradition changed a lot since that time. On the contrary, through time it became more and more solidified. The new generations of professional artists find their access to the art system predominantly through the network of art schools and educational programs that have become increasingly globalized during recent decades. This globalized and pretty uniform art education is based

on the same avant-garde canon that dominates other contemporary art institutions—and that includes, of course, not only avant-garde art production itself but also the art that was made later in the same avant-garde tradition. The dominant mode of contemporary art production is the academicized late avant-garde. That is why it seems to me that to be able to answer who is the artist one should first of all turn back to the beginnings of the historical avant-garde—and to the role of the artist as it was defined at that time.

All art education—as any education in general—has to be based on certain types of knowledge or a certain mastery that is supposed to be transmitted from one generation to another. Thus, the question arises: What kind of knowledge and mastery is transmitted by contemporary art schools? This question, as we all know, produces a lot of confusion in contemporary minds. The role of the pre-avant-garde art academies was well enough defined. There it had to do with the well-established criteria of technical mastery—in painting, sculpture and other media—that could be taught to the art students. Today, art schools partially return to this understanding of art education—especially in the field of new media. Indeed, photography, film, video, digital art production, and so on require certain technical skills that can be and are taught in art schools.

But of course, art cannot be reduced to the sum of technical skills. That is why today we see the reemergence of the discourse on art as a form of knowledge—a discourse that becomes unavoidable when art becomes to be taught.

The claim that art is a form of knowledge is by no means new. Religious art had a claim to present the religious truths in a visual, pictorial form to a spectator who could not contemplate them directly. And traditional mimetic art pretended to reveal the natural, everyday world in a way in which the common spectator could not see it. Both of these claims were criticized by many authors—from Plato to Hegel. And both of these claims were endorsed by other authors—from Aristotle

to Heidegger. But whatever one can say about the corresponding philosophical pros and cons, both of these claims about art being a specific form of knowledge were explicitly rejected by the historical avant-garde—together with the traditional criteria of mastery connected to these claims. Through the avant-garde, the profession of the artist became de-professionalized.

The de-professionalization of art has put the artist in a pretty awkward situation because this de-professionalization is often interpreted by the public as a return of the artist to a status of non-professionalism. Accordingly, the contemporary artist begins to be perceived as a professional non-professional—and the art world as a space of “art conspiracy” (to use the Baudrillard’s term). The social effectiveness of this conspiracy seems to present a mystery that can be deciphered only sociologically (see the writings of Bourdieu and his school).

However, the de-professionalization of art undertaken by the avant-garde should not be misunderstood as a simple return to non-professionalism. De-professionalization of art is an artistic operation that transforms art practice in general, rather than merely bringing an individual artist to the original state of non-professionalism. Thus, the de-professionalization of art is in itself a highly professional operation. Later I will discuss the relationship between de-professionalization and democratization of art. But at the moment I would like to discuss knowledge and mastery that are needed to de-professionalize art.

In his recent book, *The Time That Remains* (2005), Giorgio Agamben describes—using the example of Saint Paul—the knowledge and mastery that is required to become a professional apostle. This knowledge is messianic knowledge—knowledge of the coming end of the world as we know it, of contracting time, of the scarcity of time in which we live—the scarcity of time that annuls every profession because the practicing of every profession needs a perspective of *longue durée*—needs the duration of time and the stability of the world as it is. In this sense the profession

of the apostle is, as Agamben writes, to practice the “revocation of all the vocations.” One can also say “the de-professionalization of all professions.” The contracting time impoverishes, empties all our cultural signs and activities—turning them into zero signs or, rather, as Agamben says, weak signs. Such weak signs are the signs of the coming end of time being weakened by this coming, already manifesting the lack of time that is needed to produce and to contemplate strong, rich signs. However, at the end of time these messianic weak signs triumph over the strong signs of our world—strong signs of authority, tradition, and power. But also strong signs of revolt, desire, heroism, or shock. Speaking about the “weak signs of the messianic” Agamben obviously has in mind “weak messianism”—a term introduced by Walter Benjamin. But one can also remember—even if Agamben does not—the term “kenosis” that in the tradition of Greek theology characterized the figure of Christ—the life, suffering, and death of Christ being a humiliation of human dignity, and an emptying of the signs of divine glory. The figure of Christ is in this sense also a weak sign that can be easily (mis) understood as a sign of weakness—a point that was later extensively discussed by Nietzsche in his “Anti-Christ.”

Now, I would suggest that the avant-garde artist is a secularized apostle, a messenger of time who brings to the world the message that time is contracting. That there is a scarcity of time, even the lack of time. Modernity is, indeed, a time of the permanent loss of the familiar world and of traditional conditions of living. It is a time of permanent change, of historical breaks—new ends and new beginnings. Living within modernity means to have no time, to experience a permanent scarcity, lack of time because modern projects are mostly abandoned without being realized—every new generation develops its own projects, its own techniques and its own professions for the realization of its projects—that become again abandoned by the following generation. In this sense, our present time is not a post-modern but an ultra-modern time because it is the time in

which scarcity of time, lack of time became increasingly more obvious. We know it: today, everybody is busy—nobody has time.

Through the time of modernity we saw all our traditions and inherited lifestyles being condemned to decline and disappear. But today we do not trust also in the longevity of our present, actual fashions, lifestyles, and ways of thinking. In fact, already at the moment of the emergence of new trends and fashions we immediately begin to imagine their unavoidable disappearance that we anticipate to come rather sooner than later. (Indeed, when a new trend emerges the first thought that comes to one's mind is: how long will it last? And the answer is always: not so long.) One can say that not only modernity but—and even to a much greater degree—our own time is chronically messianic, or, rather, chronically apocalyptic. Everything that exists and everything that emerges is almost automatically seen by us under the perspective of its impending decline and disappearance.

The avant-garde is often associated with the notion of progress—especially, technological progress. Indeed, one can find many statements of the avant-garde artists and theorists that are directed against the conservatives and insist on the futility of practicing old forms of art under the new conditions that are determined by the new technology. But this new technology was interpreted—at least by the first generation of the avant-garde artists—not as a chance to build a new stable world but as a machine of destruction of the old world—and also of the permanent self-destruction of the modern technological civilization itself. The forces of progress were perceived by the avant-garde predominantly as destructive forces.

Thus, the avant-garde asked the following question: how could art continue or, rather, how could artists continue to make art under the conditions of the permanent destruction of cultural tradition and the familiar world through the contracting of time which is the main characteristic of the technological progress? Or, to say it in different terms: how to resist the destructiveness of progress. How to make art that would escape the

permanent change—art that would be atemporal, transhistorical. The avant-garde did not want to create art of the future—it wanted to create transtemporal art for all times. Time and again one hears and reads that we need change, that our goal—also our goal in art—should be to change the status quo. But the change *is* our status quo. The permanent change *is* our only reality. We are living in the prison of permanent change. To change the status quo we have to change the change—to escape from the change. In fact, every Utopia is nothing else—the escape from the change.

When Agamben describes the annulment of all our occupations and the emptying of all our cultural signs through the messianic event, he does not ask a question about how we can transcend the border that divides our time, our era, from the coming one. Agamben does not ask this question because the Apostle Paul does not ask it. Saint Paul believed that an individual soul—being immaterial—would be able to cross this border and would not perish even after the end of the material world. However, the artistic avant-garde wanted to save not the soul but art. And it tried to do so by the means of reduction—the reduction of the cultural signs to the absolute minimum so that one could smuggle them across the breaks, shifts and permanent change of the cultural fashions and trends.

This radical reduction of the artistic tradition had to anticipate the full degree of its impending destruction by the power of progress. By the means of reduction the artists of the avant-garde began to create images that seemed to them to be so poor, so weak, so empty that they would survive every possible historical catastrophe.

When Kandinsky speaks in his *On the Spiritual in Art* (1911) about the reduction of all painterly mimesis, all representation of the world—the reduction that reveals that all paintings are actually combinations of colors and shapes—he wants to guarantee the survival of his vision of painting through all possible future cultural transformations, including even the most revolutionary ones. The world that is painterly represented can disappear—but the combination of colors and shapes will not. In this sense Kandinsky

believes that all the images already created in the past or to be created in the future can be seen also as his own paintings—because whatever the images were, are, or could be, they remain necessarily the combinations of certain colors and shapes. And that relates not only to painting but also to all other media such as photography, cinema, and so forth. Kandinsky did not want to create his own individual style but use his paintings as a school for the spectator's gaze—a school that would allow the spectator to see the invariable components of all possible artistic variations, the repetitive patterns underlying the images of historical change. In this sense Kandinsky does interpret his own art as being timeless.

Later, Malevich undertakes an even more radical reduction of the image to a pure relationship between image and frame, between contemplated object and field of contemplation, between one and zero—to the *Black Square*. In fact, we cannot escape from seeing the black square—whatever image we see we see simultaneously the black square. The same can be said about the ready-made gesture introduced by Duchamp—whatever we want to exhibit and whatever we see as being exhibited presupposes this gesture.

Thus, we can say that avant-garde art produces transcendental images using here the Kantian meaning of this notion. These are images that manifest the conditions for emergence and contemplation of any other image. Art of the avant-garde is the art not only of the weak messianism but also of the weak universalism. That means: it is not only an art that is using zero-signs being emptied by the approaching messianic event. It is also the art manifesting itself through weak images—images having weak visibility, images that are necessarily, structurally overlooked when they are functioning as components of strong images having a high level of visibility—such as images of classic art or mass culture.

The avant-garde is non-original because it did not want to invent—it wanted to discover the transcendental, repetitive, weak images. But, of

course, every such discovery of the unoriginal was understood as an original discovery. And like in philosophy and science to make transcendental art means also to make universalist, transcultural art because to cross a time border is basically the same operation as to cross the cultural borders. Every image made in a context of any imaginable culture is a black square too—because it will look like a black square if it is erased. And that means that it always already looks like a black square—for a messianic gaze. This makes the avant-garde a true opening for a universalist, democratic art. But the universalist power of the avant-garde art is a power of weakness, of self-erasure. Avant-garde became so universally successful because it produced the weakest images possible.

Still today one can hear at exhibitions of avant-garde art: “Why should this painting, let say by Malevich, be here, in the museum if my child can do it—and maybe even does?” On the one hand, this reaction to Malevich is, of course, a correct one. It shows that his works are still experienced by the wider public as weak images—notwithstanding their art historical celebration. But, on the other hand, the conclusion that the majority of exhibition visitors draw from this comparison is a wrong one. One thinks that this comparison discredits Malevich, instead of using this comparison as a reason to admire one’s own child. Indeed, through his work, Malevich opened the door into the sphere of art for weak images—in fact, for all possible weak images. But this opening can be understood only if Malevich’s self-erasure is duly appreciated—if his images are seen as transcendental and not as empirical images. If the visitor to Malevich’s exhibition cannot appreciate the painting of his or her own child, this visitor can also not truly appreciate the opening of the art field that allows the paintings of this child be appreciated.

Avant-garde art remains also today de facto unpopular—even if it is exhibited in major museums. Paradoxically, it is generally seen as a non-democratic, elitist art not because it is perceived as a strong art but because it is perceived as a weak art. That means: The avant-garde is rejected—or,

rather, overlooked—by the wider, democratic audiences precisely because it is a democratic art. The avant-garde is not popular because it is democratic. If the avant-garde were popular it would be non-democratic. Indeed, the avant-garde opens a way for an average human being to understand himself or herself as an artist—to enter the art field as a producer of weak, poor, only partially visible images. But an average person is by definition not popular—only stars, celebrities, exceptional, and famous personalities can be popular. Popular art is made for a mankind consisting of spectators. Avant-garde art is made for a mankind consisting of artists.

But, of course, here the question arises: what has happened historically to the transcendentalist, universalist avant-garde art? In the 1920s this art was used by the second wave of the avant-garde movements as an allegedly stable basis, as a fundament for building a new world. This late avant-garde's secular fundamentalism was developed in the 1920s by Constructivism, Bauhaus, Vkhutemas, and the like—even if Kandinsky, Malevich, Hugo Ball, and some other leading figures of the early avant-garde wave rejected this fundamentalism. But, even if the early generation of the avant-garde did not believe in the possibility to build a solid new world on the weak basis of their universalist art they still believed that they had effectuated the most radical reduction, and produced works of the most radical weakness. But meanwhile we know that this was also an illusion. It was an illusion not because these images could be made weaker as they were, but because their weakness was forgotten by the culture. Accordingly, from the historical distance they seem to us either strong (for the art world) or irrelevant (for everyone else).

That means that the weak, transcendental artistic gesture could not be produced once and for all times. Rather, it should be repeated time and again to keep distance between the transcendental and the empirical visible—and to resist the strong images of change, the ideology of progress, and promises of economic growth. It is not enough to reveal the repetitive patterns that transcend historical change. It is necessary to constantly

repeat the revelation of these patterns. The repetition itself should be made repetitive. Because every such repetition of the weak, transcendental gesture produces, as I said, clarification and confusion—by the same move. Thus, we need further clarification that again produces further confusion. That is why the avant-garde cannot take place once and for all time, but must be permanently repeated to resist permanent historical change and chronic lack of time.

This repetitive and at the same time futile gesture opens a space that seems to me to be one of the most mysterious spaces of our contemporary democracy—social networks like Facebook, My Space, You Tube, Second Life, and Twitter that offer global populations the opportunity to place their photos, videos, and texts in a way that cannot be distinguished from any other Conceptualist or post-Conceptualist artwork. In this sense this space has been opened initially by radical neo-avant-garde, conceptual art of the 1960 and 1970s. Without the artistic reductions that were effectuated by these artists the emergence of the aesthetics of these social networks would be impossible—and they could not be opened to the mass democratic public to the same degree.

These networks are characterized by the mass production and placement of weak signs that have low visibility, instead of the mass contemplation of strong signs that have a high visibility as was the case during the 20th century. What we are experiencing now is the dissolution of the mainstream mass culture as it was described by many influential theoreticians: as era of Kitsch (Greenberg), of “cultural industry” (Adorno) or as a society of spectacle (Debord). This mass culture was created by the ruling political and commercial elites for the masses—for the masses of consumers, of spectators. Now, the unified space of mass culture is going through a process of fragmentation. We still have the stars, but they don’t shine as bright as before. Today, everybody writes texts and places images, but who has enough time to see and read them? Obviously, nobody—or it could be only a small circle of likeminded co-authors, acquaintances, and

relatives. The traditional relationship between producers and spectators that was established by the mass culture of the 20th century has become reversed. Earlier a chosen few produced images and texts for the millions of readers and spectators. Today, millions of producers produce texts and images for a spectator who has either scarce time or no time at all to read or see them.

Earlier, during the classical period of mass culture one was expected to compete for public attention. One was expected to invent an image or a text that would be so strong, surprising, and shocking that it could capture the attention of the masses—even if it happened only for a short span of time. Andy Warhol famously spoke in this context about fifteen minutes of fame.

But at the same time Warhol produced films like *Sleep* or *Empire State Building*, which were several hours long and so monotonous that nobody could expect spectators to remain attentive during their whole length. These films are very good examples of messianic, weak signs because they demonstrate the transient character of sleep and also architecture that seem to be endangered, put in the apocalyptic perspective, ready to disappear. At the same time these films, actually, do not need any time of attention—in fact any spectator at all—just as the Empire State Building or a sleeping person do not need any spectator. It is not accidental that both of these films by Warhol function at their best, not in a cinema theater, but in a film installation, where they are as a rule shown in a loop. The exhibition visitor can look at them for a moment—or maybe not at all. The same can be said about the websites of the social networks—one can visit them or not. And if one does visit them then only this visit as such becomes registered, and not how much time one has spent looking at them. Contemporary art's visibility is a weak, virtual visibility, the apocalyptic visibility of contracting time. One is already satisfied that a certain image can be seen or that a certain text can be read—the facticity of seeing and reading becomes irrelevant.

But, of course, also the Internet can become—and partially becomes—a space for the strong images and texts that begin to dominate it. That is why younger generations of artists are increasingly interested in weak visibility and weak public gestures. Everywhere we witness the emergence of artistic groups in which participants and spectators coincide. These groups make art for themselves—and maybe for the artists of other groups if they are ready to collaborate. This kind of participational practice means that one can become a spectator only when one already has become an artist—otherwise one simply would not be able to get an access to the corresponding art practices.

Now, let us come back to the beginning of this text. Avant-garde, contemporary art that stays in the avant-garde tradition is an art that operates by reduction—producing in this way atemporal and universalist images and gestures. It is an art that has and represents the secular messianic knowledge that the world in which we live is a transitory world, subject to permanent change and that the time of any strong image is necessarily short. And it is also an art of low visibility that can be compared to the low visibility of everyday life. And it is, of course, not accidental because it is primarily our everyday life that survives through historical breaks and shifts precisely because of its weakness and low visibility.

In fact, today, everyday life begins to demonstrate, to communicate itself as such—through design or through contemporary participatory networks of communication—and it becomes impossible to differentiate the presentation of the everyday from the everyday itself. The everyday becomes a work of art—there is no more bare life, or, rather, bare life demonstrates itself as artifact. Artistic activity is now something that the artist shares with his or her public on the most common level of everyday experience. The artist shares art with the public as earlier s/he shared with it religion or politics. To be an artist has ceased to be an exclusive fate; instead, it has become an everyday practice—a weak practice, a weak gesture. But to establish and to maintain this weak, everyday level of art one has to

repeat permanently the artistic reduction – resisting strong images and escaping status quo that functions as permanent exchange of these strong images.

At the beginning of his *Lectures on Aesthetics*, Hegel asserted that art was already during his time a thing of the past. Hegel believed that in the time of modernity, art could no longer manifest anything true about the world as it is. But the avant-garde art has shown that art still has to say something about the modern world, that it can demonstrate its transitory character, its lack of time, and at the same time to transcend this lack of time through a weak, minimal gesture that needs a very short time or even no time at all.

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Naeem Mohaiemen

Asterix & the Big Fight: Proxy Wars, Temporary Coalitions

“The deaf mute has no enemies in this city.” This was the only advice from the director of a Dhaka art center. I had returned to the city after a month break. In the interim, I had been hearing on email, on Facebook, on blogs, all sorts of chatter about a big conflagration between Bangladesh and France. About art of all things, over a big museum loan.

I expected to come back and get inside the fray. But she was sounding a word of caution. Take some time to absorb. Think before you dive in. It was halfway through 2007. The controversy, brewing for a few months, was over the Musée Guimet’s *Masterpieces of the Ganges Delta: Collections from the Bangladesh Museums* show in Paris. By the time I returned to Dhaka, it had taken on Rashomon tones. Each side had a passionate reading of the event. Seen one way, it was French diplomatic arrogance, and cultural imperialism over-reach, presuming the Bengalis didn’t know how to handle their own heritage. Seen another, it was also partially Bengali shadow politics over internal schisms that was disrupting the project.

At issue was whether a loan of Bangladeshi artifacts could be made to a French museum on fair terms. Very soon after that “deaf mute” conversation, the Guimet loan was overtaken by a maelstrom of events: the attempt to take artifacts out of the Dhaka museum was met by protestors, the French embassy waged ham-fisted diplomacy, court cases blocked the museum loan, and finally, a crate full of artifacts were stolen from the airport

tarmac. After the airport theft, the Bangladesh government canceled the entire loan, the Musée Guimet suffered “*Annulée*” signs on Paris posters and at least half a million euros of losses.

A heated culture war, where a French museum became embroiled in controversy, larger issues of cultural appropriation and theft played out on Dhaka streets. But at a distance of three years, I started to think through whether other readings were possible: a showdown as an attempt by local cultural activists to create new spaces for resistance. The real target was not only the French Embassy, or the museum, but also indirectly the military government on whose watch the loan was going through. A museum exchange as a proxy war, a rehearsal or proving ground for uniting cultural movements that were creating alternate spaces for resistance. A faulty and jittery performance of resistance in one space (cultural nationalism), allowing resistance communities to be built up on the main stage (democracy movement).

Mercury Rising & Airport Capers

In 2007, an agreement was signed to host *Masterpieces of the Ganges Delta* at the Musée Guimet in Paris. There was excitement in the world archaeological community, because many of these fragile masterpieces have never been shown outside Bangladesh. The region is associated with dynasties going back to 4th century BCE, and Paharpur is identified as one of the oldest Buddhist monasteries in the subcontinent (on UNESCO's list of protected monuments). The 188-piece collection that was to be loaned is mostly Buddhist, Hindu, and Jain artifacts, and a smaller section of Islamic material. The exhibition was part of a Bangladesh-France joint project, which started with the 1992 excavations at Mahasthan. After the exhibition of the excavation results at Bangladesh National Museum in 1999, a larger show was to be organized in France. The French Embassy also expressed a wish to train local experts in museum preservation science as part of knowledge and technology transfer.

The Guimet staff started coming to Bangladesh from 2002, to organize training seminars for the staff of the National Museum and the Department of Archaeology. The exhibition, which became an official project in 2005, was to be another step in this Bangla-French cooperation. The Guimet's website announced: "Bangladesh possesses an immensely important cultural heritage, this arising from the fact that the eastern half of Bengal has been one of the culturally richest regions of the Indian world."

Some time in 2006 a group of protestors started charging irregularities in the Guimet show arrangements. Bangladesh has an unfortunate history of art theft. Thin borders with India and Burma, little enforcement, and corrupt officials make stealing archaeological objects relatively easy. When the 1977 Ad Hoc Committee on the Return and Restitution of Cultural Property to its Countries of Origin (ICOM) carried out a case study of countries that had lost part of their cultural heritage, Bangladesh was one of the countries identified. Firoz Mahmud and Habibur Rahman also document art theft in *Museums of Bangladesh* (Dhaka, 1987). The trade in stolen objects is assisted by local collaborators, and in one case the former director of a national museum was alleged to be involved in art smuggling.

A group of "concerned citizens" filed a lawsuit in court blocking the Guimet loan. Protest letters started appearing in newspapers. The lawsuit, weakly framed during petition, was rejected by the court. Now, more heavy-hitters became involved, and another lawsuit was filed. In the interregnum between lawsuits, one shipment was sent to the airport. Here, it was intercepted in the cargo holding by the National Intelligence Agency, and sent back to the museum. Things were getting serious. Intellectuals lined up on both sides of the debate—it felt like civil war within Bangladesh's urban middle class (civil society a.k.a. *shushil shomaj*).

The press went high intensity: "Guimet can't be trusted." This was a bit puzzling, as the French are not usually targets for local suspicion (at best, indifference). It's usually India whose involvement makes for tense

politics (as per Zafar Sobhan, “India is the third rail of Bangladeshi politics. You touch the issue at your peril”). But here, suddenly, anti-French sentiment bubbled up with no past history and certainly no colonial relationship. The French embassy was a key factor, continuously aggravating tensions with their undiplomatic statements: “It is time for the few opponents to this event to recognize they are a tiny minority and *act accordingly*.” The mercury shot up. How dare the French, wrote bloggers, we won’t be treated this way. A second concentric circle (anthropologists, art historians, and journalists) now formed around the nucleus of protesters.

The substantial issues being raised repeatedly were: inconsistent inventory numbers, missing accession numbers, and poor paperwork. Much of this could have been the result of incompetence on both Bangladeshi and French side, but it took months to clear up the confusion (in a series of increasingly disorganized press conferences). The core conflict was over the insurance value for the collection—initially reported to be one million euros. This amount was later called “financial fraud” by an international archaeological expert. In the face of protests, the insurance was “upped to two million euros and then doubled to four million euros through custom bonds” (French embassy statement). By then, it was too late—suspicion had bled over the entire project.

Time was running out, the court battle had already caused Guimet to miss its opening date. A Thursday decision by the higher court made it legal for the artifacts to go abroad, again. On Friday, delivery trucks arrived at the museum. But word spread fast (even on the weekly holiday, when we’re usually asleep). Protesters scaled museum walls, rocks were thrown at the trucks, a man was arrested. Seemingly undeterred, the shipment rolled out to the airport.

The blogosphere went nuclear. The arguments turned very bitter, with supporters of the show called *Forashi dalal* (French agents). In a letter to the French government, protestors wrote: “Recent actions of the museum have removed any semblance of trust in the organization, and we

are no longer willing to loan our prized possessions to an organization with such standards of behavior.” Cultural theorist Brian Holmes interjected on a blog:

there’s something all-too neocolonial about the shiny, refurbished, spectacular Musée Guimet and the booming tourist economy into which it fits, where visitors take such exquisite pleasures in thousand-year antiquities without any particular concern for the present-day cultures of the former European colonies. When the official reps don’t show a little respect while getting the goods out today, then the veneer cracks and lots of bad memories can rise to the surface...

The controversy is a crucible—power dynamics made solid. The Guimet was taking on the burden of its own history—especially the post-1945 acquisition of the Louvre’s Asiatic collection, which contains, as per Kwame Opoku, “thousands of stolen objects.” It was also becoming a signifier for a whole set of colonial/postcolonial museums’ bounty of illegally acquired artifacts. Protestors pointed to the 2002 Declaration on the Importance and Value of Universal Museums which the Louvre has signed—it can be used to argue that if an artifact is endangered in its home country (famously with the Buddhas of Bamiyan), a museum can keep it for safekeeping. The Guimet is not linked to Louvre beyond the Asiatic collection acquisition, but things became rapidly blurred in the controversy.

During the Eid holidays, with the legal battle exhausted, the second shipment was sent to the airport. At one am, French officials completed all customs formalities and the government videotaped proceedings. At two am, one of the airport officials recounted the crates and discovered one had vanished. In a panic, Joint Forces sealed off the airport. Airport guards, museum officials, cargo workers were all arrested. The Culture Ministry held an emergency meeting. Trucks were stopped at Indian borders. The empty crate was eventually found floating in a pond. Missing were two invaluable pieces: a terracotta statue and a bust of Vishnu. A slow-motion tableau played out, like the pages from a noir novel. The police recovered “smashed pieces” from a local garbage dump. Astoundingly, authenticity of these broken pieces was confirmed only through a “manual inspection.”

Supposedly the thieves got “scared” and broke the statues. Some local art smugglers were arrested. These smalltime operators managed to penetrate a high-security airport? This seemed very unlikely, at least to me.

The French embassy, in its usual diplomatic fashion, called it “conspiracy by a very small nexus of persons to embarrass France and Bangladesh.” This did little to calm the situation. As foretold in the fiasco script, the Bangladesh government canceled the show. *ANNULÉE* signs were plastered over Guimet posters in the Paris underground. Astonished at the turn of events, the Guimet staff started repacking the crates, to send it all back to Dhaka. They had already spent 400,000 euros out of their operating budget on show expenses, a huge loss to their pocketbook. Culture Affairs Advisor Ayub Quadri, who earlier announced that if “one single piece went missing” he would pay out of his own pocket, resigned. In a tragic coda, Bangladesh ambassador to France Ruhul Amin, under fire from all sides, had a brain hemorrhage after a meeting with French counterparts. Dead at 48.

British *Archaeology* magazine said the whole affair had gone “bizarrely, Pete Tong” (“Sad tale of the Guimet Museum’s cancelled Bangladeshi exhibition,” March 2008). No winners in this affair, but a lot of collateral damage. Protestors stood up to the French. Culture wars were fought and won. But where will ground reality take us? I had been trying to get some answers from the French organizers (all incredibly wary of contact with the Bangladeshi side). Now one of them wrote me a bitter email, sounding a funereal tone: “All the echoes I received from different museums around the world (e.g., Metropolitan, British Museum, V&A, etc.) lead me to think that no one will try to organise such an exhibition before many years.”

Standing In the Shadow of Main Stage

Step back for a moment and look at the political context within which this culture war played out. This was never about the French (as country, concept, or empire). the Alliance Française Dhaka is known for an open

cafe, a for-rent gallery, and sparsely attended film screenings. It has no history as a flash-point for anti-French sentiments (or even pro-French, more a mild passing glance level curiosity). Clearly the real instigator for the energy behind the confrontation was elsewhere, embedded within local country history. For a turbulent four decades since independence in 1971, Bangladesh has grown economically in spite of an extremely intermittent democracy. Various shades of military or quasi-military regimes ruled from 1975 until 1991. Since 1991, full democracy has also been a mixed outcome, with the two main parties carrying out a ferocious feud (both led by women leaders, dubbed the “Battling Begums” by trite Western press). Confrontation between government and opposition has led to blockades, strikes, and riots. Bangladesh’s history of street protest, from colonial India, to neo-colonial Pakistan, to anti-army movement of the 1980s, complicates matters. The line between anti-autocracy protests and opportunistic vandalism is always a blur.

After 2001, Bangladesh’s internal stability became a worry for Northern blocs, due to a sizable Muslim population (fourth largest in the world). From 2005-2006, Bangladesh seemed to be experiencing a democracy meltdown: rigged voter lists; crooked judges; debates and battles. As street protests reached a crescendo, the United Nations, the Asian Development Bank, and local Embassies all actively intervened. On January 10, 2007, the U.N. announced that if the Bangladesh Army supervised elections in this chaos, they could endanger their own U.N. peacekeeping role. Bangladesh is the largest contributor of troops to U.N. peacekeeping operations, a major opportunity and revenue generator for the Army. As predicted by many, on January 11, the Army responded to the U.N. statement, removing the civilian leaders and installing themselves as a “Caretaker Government.”

The Army is savior and *bête noire* in Asian histories. Always claiming to intervene to stabilize countries, but at a terrible price to local institutions, democracy, and human rights. Some regimes, like Burma’s SLORC, are still

in control after decades and there's no return to civilian rule. In Bangladesh, with the recent history in mind, pro-democracy activists immediately began to put pressure on the "temporary" Army government, to prevent this "interim" period from becoming permanent. But in the gradual buildup of anti-army organizing between 2007-2008, we noted the relative absence of cultural players—artists, actors, writers, filmmakers.

Before there was a professional middle class under the banner of *shushil shomaj*, culture workers were a primary force of resistance to anti-democratic forces. When Bangladesh was still part of Pakistan, this started with the 1952 language riots (in protest against the announcement that Urdu would be the state language of Pakistan). In the 1960s, the Pakistan state tried to insist that the "Hindu" poet Rabindranath Tagore be replaced by more "Muslim" voices like Kazi Nazrul Islam. By 1968, radio, books, and magazines were all waging hidden sorties against the Pakistani military junta. This reached surreal heights in the late 1960s when Shawkat Osman's satirical novel *Kritodasher Hashi* ('Slave's Laugh') received the National Award from the same military dictator who was the object of not-so-hidden satire.

After Bangladesh became independent from Pakistan in 1971, the cultural arena focused on building up "national identity," "new nation." This usually meant the arrival of an unquestioning cultural politics, with a focus on institutionalization and material rewards for the artists (chairmanship of institutions for the older guard, fame and money for the younger). Perhaps, disappointingly, this demonstrated that alternative cultural spaces take on their sharpest political positions under oppressive regimes. Oppositional cultural politics came back to the forefront under the Ershad military junta of the 1980s. The General was an amateur poet, and in addition to force-feeding his poems and songs on national television, he founded a "National Poetry Council" which recruited careerist (and courtier) poets. But this cultural investment boomeranged, hardening the position of "refuseniks" within the arts. By the end of the military

regime in 1991, cultural activists were at the front lines of the democracy movement. Veteran artist Quamrul Hassan (attributed to be designer of the country's flag), scrawled a satirical drawing of the General, and wrote underneath "country in the grips of the world's most shameless." Opposition came also from absence—all newsreaders (including my aunt) walked off the sets of national television, refusing to read the pre-packaged bulletins of the junta. Actors also started boycotting dramas on national television. The military scrambled to fill empty eight and ten o'clock news slots with new faces, but fears of being considered "scabs" made this a difficult task.

Within this history of continued cultural activism on a national stage (the artist as a public intellectual with direct impact), I look back at the Guimet affair through an altered prism. During the years 2007-2008, Bangladesh feared another resumption of a long period of military rule. The military also started with a hard clampdown: an indigenous rights activist was tortured to death, a CNN stringer was brutalized and fled to exile, newspaper editors were arrested, talk shows were told to stop live phone calls, and pugnacious TV hosts were blacklisted. As a chill of fear descended, safe spaces were needed where democracy movements could gather strength. We can then look at the confrontation over the French museum show as a mobilizing tactic for larger, more risky confrontations against the state. Putatively, the target was the French museum and embassy's high handedness. But very soon it expanded to include the military's handpicked "Culture Advisor," and finally, by unvoiced extension, the military government itself. I recall watching an angry guest on a talk show, asking, "how dare they take away our statues, like prisoners in a box" and thinking this was on-screen shadowboxing. His main target, indirectly, seemed to be the military government. Using the Guimet issue as a platform, artists were able take to the national stage. A debate on culture politics became an indirect referendum on the military, after all it was happening on their watch.

Early opposition to Guimet came from professors at a few universities. As the circle widened, anthropologists and art historians who were focused on North-South dynamics entered the debate. Their participation expanded the issue beyond the mechanics of a museum loan, to larger questions of cultural theft. Finally, the gravitational pull of events pulled in activists, writers and many young artists. Many of these temporary coalitions lasted beyond the Guimet affair, and even beyond the military regime. Although there seems to be a national syndrome of post-crisis exhaustion and demobilization, some of the alliances lasted at least until this year. Today, some artists who first connected during this debate are focused on new areas of activism. In particular, artists, and musicians have become active in organizing around oil-gas exploration (where multinational involvement is subject to controversy) and around state power through security agencies.

A Manifesta Parallel

After hearing my reframing of the artifact drama, a friend quipped, “You’re trying to make lemonade out of lemons.” According to him, we have not, in the end, rewritten global art power dynamics. The artifacts are back in dusty conditions in local museums, where they will be poorly lit, badly maintained, and eventually stolen by international smugglers. The cancellation of the show is, in his opinion, a small irritation for the French, but a larger net loss to Bangladesh. Other friends scoff at this position as one that is fundamentally “weak-kneed” in the face of European cultural institutions. Seen from that point of view, the confrontation has energized the Bangladeshi museums to be more assertive in future negotiations, to act as equals not submissives.

I search for new framings to recover positive results from these confrontations. A few years back, the collapse of Manifesta 6 in Cyprus was a small quake within the artworld/biennial space. The roving European biennial project ensnared in a battle over a divided city, political oversight

of government officials, and the rights of visiting international artists to traverse the borders easily during the project. The city officials sent a sudden press release declaring they had fired the curators. The curators responded with a press release that stated city and political interference had stopped the project. Perhaps there was more going on behind the scenes, but this is what I discerned from “official” statements. The collapse was very public, and seemingly all sides lost out (the city, the curators, the audience, the Manifesta institution). An epitaph by Jeffrey Kastner sounded, at least in part, resonant of the Guimet incident: “...the saga of Manifesta 6 does raise intriguing questions for contemporary curatorial practice—about the nature and scope of temporary exhibitions mounted **in complex local contexts via collaborations between native and international groups**; about the risks and rewards of exhibition concepts that have dramatic, high-profile public components; about the functioning of multiperson (and multistrategy) curatorial teams.” (*Artforum*, September 2006; emphasis added)

After the press duel and ensuing legal battles (over financial loss) faded out, part of that original curatorial team, as well as participating artists, took the cancellation as an opportunity to do something new with the demolished Manifesta concept—that of a “school in exile.” Instead of Cyprus, they now chose Berlin (I suppose for “formerly divided city” symbolism, but also where a lot of artist energy was migrating at that time from New York). Later these strands evolved into *United Nations Plaza*, grouped under the (hopefully tongue-in-cheek) title “History of Productive Failures: From French Revolution to Manifesta 6.” The failed divided city biennial became a starting point for new conversations, and certainly some of the initial interest of the Berlin audience may have come from wanting to see how the exile portion would work out. The opening event even had Cyprus officials in audience, although they lost interest soon after—perhaps the four hour Diedrich Diederichsen session on day three was the killing blow. It would be hyperbole and overreach to say that the Cyprus

collapse was the sole factor behind this new quasi-institution (which also recently ended, but fragments possibly found their way into *Night School* at New Museum and elsewhere). But it certainly was a creative use of the remnants of a failed project and an overheated political confrontation.

Can something similarly positive emerge, in the long run, from the cancelled Guimet show? The oppositional energy that galvanized that movement has dissipated. The Army has stepped down and a new democratic government has taken over. The left-leaning Awami League, which has deep inroads into cultural space, is now in power. As in the past, many cultural workers have reverted to an insular, celebratory mode. But in this time of temporary stability, we could imagine that the unruly coalitions that came together to challenge the Guimet could now channel their energy and relationships into building other projects. They can possibly leverage the unlikely alliance between anthropologists, lawyers, archaeologists, and artists to reach out to other partners and builders. The intention would be to evolve and channel oppositional culture wars into a productive end state. These would not be projects to resurrect a failed idea, but rather creative binding together of tactically useful elements within the aftermath. The intent would be to generate new structures that can provide alternatives to unequal, fetishistic, or unstable culture exchanges.

Naeem Mohaiemen [shobak.org; naeem.mohaiemen@gmail.com] is a writer, artist, and technologist working in Dhaka and New York. His art projects look at histories of the international left and utopia/dystopia slippage. He has shown at the Whitney Biennial (Visible Collective, "Wrong Gallery"), Bangladesh National Shilpakala Academy, Dubai Third Line, Finnish Museum of Photography, Kolkata Experimenter, Art Basel, etc. Naeem writes on problems of majoritarianism for Ain Salish Kendro (www.askbd.org) and Drishtipat (www.drishtipat.org), and has worked on technology projects such as CellBazaar (mobile phone market; corp.cellbazaar.com). His essays were published in *Rest of Now* (Manifesta 7, Rana Dasgupta/Raqs ed.), *Indian Highway* (Serpentine Gallery, Hans Ulrich-Obrist ed.), *Sound Unbound* (MIT Press, Paul D Miller ed.), *Men of Global South* (Zed Books), *Nobody Passes* (Seal Press), and *Asian American Superhero Comics* (New Press).

Winslow Burleson

Flying Solo: Rules to Live By

A wise man, recognizing that the world is but an illusion, does not act as if it were real, so he escapes the suffering.
—Siddhartha Gautama

Within Buddhism, the idea of the world as an illusion is central. Tied down to our misleading expectations for what is possible, what is probable, what is real, we often forget we have the ability to reframe reality. We become stuck, and in this stagnation we fail to create or to try something new. Our limitations bind us from our potential. We settle for being merely mediocre. A wise man, though, may remove himself from this perceived reality. As the Buddha explains, if we act as though the world were not reality, we can move beyond the illusion of reality and touch something deeper, something truer.

Buddha's wisdom can shed some light on your aspirations and actions. Throughout life, we all face numerous "rules" about what you are to do and to avoid. These rules, often fabricated by individuals who have already succeeded in the field, many times by breaking the rules themselves, have their purpose, but it is critical for you to remember that they are not the sole reality. The greatest successes and, perhaps, the greatest wisdom, emerge out of new realities and new lenses. Stripping yourself of these notions of right and wrong will open you up to paths never seen before. You will find yourself working within a whole new reality, a reality that is essentially limitless.

In my work in the transdisciplinary field of Human Computer Interaction applied to motivation, learning, and creativity, I have a pointed interest in what we define as reality and how this effects how we act and what we can achieve. One of my mentors, Allan Kay, widely credited with envisioning and motivating the realization of the laptop computer said, “The best way to predict the future is to invent it!” In fact, this is precisely what we do, in real-time, all the time, as the future unfolds. Another researcher whom I’ve been fortunate to interact with offered a kernel of wisdom that is particularly valuable to our present consideration of rules. Dr. James Blascovich, a psychologist at UC Santa Barbara, conducts experiments on social motivation and social influence using virtual reality. His work has led him to the following pervasive understanding of the “real” world: “it, everything around us, it is all virtual reality.” That is to say, that we create our own perceptions of what happens and what is possible. We (perhaps all too often) play by the rules, even in realms where rules do not exist. In this way, we often restrict ourselves from the potential we have to transform the world.

I invite you to visit the Motivational Environments research group, at: <http://ame2.asu.edu/projects/intrinsic>, to see how my students and research is engaged in transforming the rules. One of our projects, “game as life, life as game” does this explicitly, through reflective and proactive augmented experiences that alter the rules of everyday living. This is a mixed-reality game that asks you who you are and who you want to become (to define your aspirational self), the experience then unfolds through any number of channels, motivated by the difference in your answers. The game-engine behind this application gathers self-reported and sensed data from physical activities and through wearable sensors, your physiology, even elements of your emotion and engagement are incorporated. Your levels will increase as you engage in activities that you aspire to; as you exercise, sleep, meditate, and engage in beneficial social interactions the game provides a reflective interface, and at times

a motivating lens on your opportunities. Through sounds, lighting, even robotic pets (e.g., similar to iRobot's roomba), your exercise equipment can invite you to it through sounds that motivate exercise; your kitchen might create an inviting ambience welcoming you to prepare and enjoy a healthy meal and deep social experience; your computer and bedroom can collaborate to prepare a smooth empowering transition to relaxation and sleep. Through these forms of envisioning the possible and mediating reality we are empowering people to live actualized lives. Within this experience there is opportunity to embed any number of transformative experiences and wisdom. One of my recent favorites comes from Tina Seelig, Executive Director for the Stanford Technology Ventures Program, who provides, "insights on life, leadership, and the little things that make a big difference in an entrepreneurial setting." In her presentation titled, "What I Wish I Knew When I Was 20" (<http://ecorner.stanford/authorMaterialInfo.html?mid=1549>), she presents, among a wealth of wisdom, her admonition to, "never miss an opportunity to be fabulous."

In a second example of my research, our development of Affective Learning Companions, we echo and buttress Seelig's sentiments. These companions are on-screen characters that engage learners in ways that attend not only to their cognitive needs but also to elements of their social and emotional experience and reflection. These characters are literally becoming learners' personal tutors and coaches. With these systems we employ the power of Stanford Psychologist Carol Dweck's motivating message: "the mind is like a muscle, and that even though it may be difficult, if you keep trying you will learn and grow your mental muscles." Dweck's work demonstrates that believing and taking to heart this simple credo dramatically improves learners' motivation to engage, persevere, and master the material at hand. Again, we find, life, reality, learning, and possibility, is malleable, and to a great extent based on our perspective.

A third example, from my research, of transforming perspective and asking, what is possible, comes in our development of the pervasive paradigm shifts exposed by *Slow Computing*, a perspective that considers interactions with Stonehenge, Pyramids, sundials, water clocks, and many modern kinetic and acoustic sculptures to be forms of pervasive human computer interaction, that are in many (if not most) ways richer than *fast computing* experiences that too often limit us, for far too many hours a day, week, or lifetime, to a keyboard, mouse, and screen.

Considering the illusory and actualizing nature of “reality,” from Buddha to Blascovich, and Seelig to Dweck, we might ask ourselves, “Why do we get bogged down in what we are supposed to do or not supposed to do in our life?” Moreover, how can creativity flourish—and your work and experience expand—if we remain trapped in terms of appropriate paths towards success? Both Buddha and Blascovich attest to our self-imposed limitations. Their wisdom points to our potential to unearth alternatives in our perspectives, our societies, our world, and our everyday practice. Recognizing what determines our own limitations and expectations and actively questioning and experimenting broadly with the removal and reinterpretation of these, will allow us to reframe our entire experience, our definition of what the rules, of success, of curation, “ought to be.” Just think of the potential!

Do not allow yourself to be barred from your chosen paths because the practical voices in your heads dictate that you play it safe and remain within the acceptable lines. Rather, challenge yourself to break onto the stage with a fresh new and unexpected approach (for how else can you truly learn?). The alternative—sticking fundamentally to the status quo—is far too dangerous.

Let me share with you some tools and approaches that you may find useful throughout your journeys. Experiment with these concepts and

build upon them. As Dr. Seuss says in *Oh the places you'll go!* you never know where you'll end up!

Define Success Personally

An important step in becoming successful is to develop your own definition of success. If you have not already, I challenge you to consider fundamentally your own goals. What do they look like? How do they fit your ideal for your life? What are the highest priorities? Why are you doing anything else?

If you're unsure of how to evaluate balance and meaning in your priorities, Harvard Business School's professors Laura Nash and Howard Stevenson's study on success might be an important resource for you. Their research explained that high achievers found success in the four spheres of life (happiness, achievement, significance, and legacy) by seeking "just enough." As these researchers point out in their book *Just Enough: Tools for Creating Success in Your Work and Life*, "If we value achievement and adopt celebrity standards, we will certainly fall victim to our own excess. Nothing will be enough, and success will never satisfy. If we're high achievers, we may be plagued with self-doubt, feeling that we've never done quite enough."¹ Unobtainable terms of success actually undermine the achievements individuals have accomplished. They are left feeling uncertain, disappointed, and, often, depressed. Do things that make you happy, do things that build skill and have impact.

Diminishing your goals may appear counterintuitive, but remember that you must be the resident of your own life. Without your own set of standards, you will not experience your life in its fullness and diversity. Don't fall into the trap of suffering with the illusory "rules"; Buddha and Blascovich point to the fallacy of that approach. Remember: you have your own inner voice. Listen to it!

Seize the Opportunity to Fail

I've missed more than 9000 shots in my career. I've lost almost 300 games. 26 times, I've been trusted to take the game winning shot and missed. I've failed over and over and over again in my life. And that is why I succeed.
—Michael Jordan

Michael Jordan's fame and fortune may prevent us from realizing just how much failure is integral to his success. Sometimes these opportunities materialized, other times they slipped through his grasp. The fact that he continued to try allowed him to actually achieve his goals. He clung to the opportunities offered him, and was able to bring them to fruition, through dedication, practice, and perseverance.

A successful person must be able to seize opportunity. No paradigm shifts nor new art movements, no creativity has every occurred without a motivation or willingness to add something new to the mix. In their vision and their willingness to challenge the established rules of the arena, successful and creative individuals have been able to mold art, culture, and life in new ways. Their success was invariably tied to their ability to take hold of new opportunities. That said, few—if any—were able to create such an impact on their first attempt. You cannot welcome success into your life without becoming comfortable with failure. As Michael Jordan explained, his career records would not have been possible had he not been willing to fail, and to fail often. Numerous artists reiterate this concept, both in their lives and in their art. In fact, it typically takes ten years or 10,000 hours of expertise (trial and error progress) before great work is achieved. Your preparedness to fail will lay a strong foundation from which you can launch your success.

Stanford University's Product Design motto offers an excellent mantra for you as you begin to seize new opportunities: "Express, Test, Cycle." Every new experience, new application, and new interpretation is an expression of the idea you are trying to create. Know your idea, and work to give it actuality. Then take the opportunity to test it. Who knows what the result

will be! Regardless of what happens, whether it is failure or through-the-moon success, be ready to try again. No two attempts will be the same. Each one offers new opportunities for victory or failure. But making the attempt will teach you something new and give you the chance to reach someone. Remember: A spectacular failure is better than a moderate success. Stretch yourself!

Own your Responsibility

The next significant characteristic for success is responsibility. Many will assume that responsibility to the task equates to a business-sense responsibility. While commissioners, gallery owners, and the like, all may consider this rule-based business-like approach important; it cannot be your first priority. Your first responsibility is to yourself, your ideas, to create a space, realize a vision, advance an idea, and create a masterpiece. Be responsible to your ideas, to yourself, through your actions.

While it might feel safer to do something that you know you can do, your sense of responsibility should remind you not to be satisfied with the safest path. Try (and maybe fail) when there is the opportunity to do something different. If you hold yourself accountable to your potential, you will allow yourself to explore *new* perspectives, whether you succeed or fail. Such an exploration demands responsibility in pursuing those perspectives.

Whenever you take the chance to try a new perspective, there will invariably be numerous options and paths you may take. The greatest temptation—and the greatest trap—is to spend all of your time evaluating your options instead of committing to one path and holding yourself responsible to it. In my time as a Junior Watch Officer, at Sea Education Association, I was frequently given key responsibilities in docking a tall ship. Every time we pulled into port, we had to make a choice: either to pull in forward, or pull alongside the dock. Both options brought numerous other predictions to mind: Would the wind be against me when it came time to

depart? Would a swell rise that would press the boat onto dock? How many lines would be needed to secure ship? With each of these questions came a new challenge. In the end, I had to predict, prepare, and *commit*. Choosing to wait wouldn't dock the boat, and failing to commit would result in damaging the vessel. Taking the responsibility to execute one option, while leaving other contingencies open, if needed, was the only way to actually accomplish the task.

I tell this story of my experience to demonstrate a point. You will face numerous options every day. While some of these may seem safe, some interesting, some daring, and some unappealing, you will ultimately be in control of your own decisions. Hold yourself accountable to what your vision is. Remember your definition of success. Take advantage of the opportunities that speak to your goals and your perspective. Maintain a sense of purpose. And be ready to fail and try again—to persevere and succeed.

Taking responsibility for your decisions will also open the doors to your success. Knowing your limits, recognizing opportunities, remaining faithful to the completion of your idea, returning to the task at hand after failure, and a healthy dose of creativity will go well for you in building towards achievement. When you are entrusted with resources—space, materials, time, and galleries—you get to choose how best to use these. Taking chances on something new and executing it will allow you to have an impact. It is in the taking of responsibility that the other tools in your toolbox may be of use. And when you gain a sense of responsibility to yourself, you'll find it to be an actualizing resonance through which to realize your creativity.

Unleash Creativity

Perhaps the most important tool in your toolbox is your creativity. Many people look to artists and curators as creative forces. While it is true that the artist is the driving force of the art, within society creativity must navigate and

find a place where it can shine. Creators confront their philosophical place within the art world every day. They must justify why their opinions matter, and why the work and ideas they choose to advance means something. Their appreciation of creativity—and finding an avenue to advance their own creative vision—can be the difference between an obscure painter and a Picasso.

Consider for a moment, Stephen King. Now one of the most well-known writers in the country, his first novel, *Carrie*, was thrown out by every publisher in the business. It wasn't until King thought that he had exhausted his options that someone finally picked up the book. Look where he is now! King is not alone. Madeline L'Engle, J.K. Rowling, even the collection of McArthur fellows (genius grant recipients) reached their success thanks to the vision of their reviewers. Their creativity could only flourish through the creative actualization provided by society, through their publishers, curators, and evaluators.

In a similar fashion, you possess the opportunity to give voice to new forms of creativity. The most spectacular successes are rooted in something vastly different from the commonplace. In this way, you too can discover a phenomenon. But discovery requires stepping outside of your comfort zone and looking around. Be a force that fosters creativity, not merely mediocrity. Challenge society and speak to something not seen before. If your creative vision surpasses others, always try again in a new way.

Use any and all internal and external resources:

Throughout life we all face great challenges and we each have the opportunity, every day, to take the next step toward realizing our full potential. In my own life, I have been diagnosed with learning disabilities and attention deficit disorder, I have struggled in school and in jobs, and have benefitted greatly from the support of others who have nourished and enriched my experiences and potential. Writing teachers and centers,

college counselors, and mentors have stood by me through thousands of hours and have helped me when I needed it most. At one of these moments, my father offered, "You know I would go to the moon for you." Knowing that he was there for me, that I was not alone, made a huge difference. I smiled and replied, "No Dad, if you get a chance to go to the Moon, you let me go!" In a course I took at Stanford, "The Psychology of Peak Performance," taught by Dr. Jeffery Wildfogel, he emphasized the importance of knowing and using, "any and all internal and external resources." Knowing that you can call upon others, and furthermore actually enlisting them to help you explore and achieve your goals, is a fundamental part of the creative process. You never know how far you can go, until you truly leverage your resources. I have had the opportunity to spend a day with astronauts and the Space Shuttle Mission Director for the Hubble Space Telescope Repair Mission; to participate in the daily planning meetings to guide Mars Rovers and conduct an Astronaut Robot Mission Simulator field study at the Mars Yard at the Jet Propulsion Lab; and to collaborate with Elizabeth Streb's Lab for Action Mechanics SLAM in advancing radical choreography, flying across virtual lunar landscapes in front of thousands.

Here, I have attempted to provide you with a set of tools to hone your skills, tools you can use to further your success in life. While remembering your definition of success, knowing your approach to space, seizing opportunity, taking responsibility, unleashing creativity, and using any and all internal and external resources may prove to be invaluable to you, if they are not, throw them out. They are not rules, but rather tools. Remember that. Everyone will offer you advice. Keep the wisdom in mind, test it, synthesize it, and work with it. But always remember that not only are you still in the driver's seat, you are the driver. Pursue your work free of anyone's expectations except your own. In this way you will achieve your ever-evolving idea of success.

Art is invariably subjective. Yet we often approach the field as though there were a right and a wrong. Recognizing the limitation of the rule-makers, and even sidestepping them, will give you the opportunity to break free of expectation. Remember each of the tools in your toolbox, and allow them to build up your creative vision. Whether you work within our notions of reality or transcend these, trust yourself and stay committed.

NOTES

1. Laura Nash and Howard Stevenson, *Just Enough: Tools for Creating Success in Your Work and Life* (Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2004). Found on Harvard Business School Working Knowledge <http://hbswk.hbs.edu/item/3966.html>.

Winslow Burleson is an Assistant Professor of Human Computer Interaction in the School of Computing, Informatics, and Decision Systems Engineering at Arizona State University. He is the Founding Director of the Motivational Environments research group, and author of over 50 scientific publications, including “best paper” at AIED 2009, and 10 patents. He received his PhD from the MIT Media Lab, working with the Affective Computing and Life Long Kindergarten research groups, and the Entrepreneurial Management Unit at Harvard Business School on creativity research. He is a Kavli Fellow and serves on NAE, NAS, and NSF committees. He has a BA in Biophysics from Rice University and an MSE in Mechanical Engineering from Stanford University, where he taught product design, creativity, and visual thinking. He has worked at IBM Research, NASA-SETI Institute, the Space Telescope Science Institute, and UNICEF. Supporters of his research include NSF, NASA-JPL, Deutsche Telekom, iRobot, LEGO, Microsoft and Motorola.

Sofija Grandakovska

Lightness of the Dissident, Brightness of the Critical Mind

Who is “the dissident” and what is his message?

This text has no intention of hurting anyone, or for that matter evoking any religious, national, ideological, emotional, or other like insults. This text intends to speak about the openness and resonance of the intellectual’s critical mind, of the artist and the cultural worker, as seen through the prism of the dissident’s narrative, and his credibility, which is positioned without the institutional matrix of power of his native land. Amongst other things, this text intends to speak also about that which valorizes the critically-theoretical activities of the dissident—namely, that he stands, always, markedly at the vanguard of his time, and the time of his actions.

Throughout life we may acquire, but we may also lose each professionally gained status, as seen from an institutional standpoint. A loss of status may occur, too, due to ideological reasons that could serve as the basis of a political platform looking for a way to launch its ascertained profile of knowledge, which in turn, would shape the state’s citizenship, its youth, and with that, its present, while such a strategy of knowledge would remain in accordance with the needs of the given timeframe. The key moment which gives birth to the dissident is the very antagonism existing between: a) mechanical knowledge, as imposed criteria, and b) creative and creating knowledge, as a result of an evaluation of the first bureaucratic one, and a participation in all that would come with a future, therefore, taking action as a humanistic goal. Hence, through these attributes of knowledge, now

freed from the ideological matrix of a political party structure in a given time, the creator of a “different kind” of knowledge is positioned—the dissident, as a so-called “outlaw” from the conventional system, yet he is launched in the so-called zenith of a space as another space itself—an alternative to the production of critical and creative thinking. Thus so, the dissident always brings forth new ideas, begets a new, open concept, and strives for a way out of the outdated forms of the system’s knowledge. The dissident is the harbinger of the thirst for new knowledge, which represents a new ark, a new path, a new horizon, a new alternative for a more comfortable, nicer, and more humane world. In such a world, knowledge of and about the world is never a stasis, or a bland political platform; rather, it is a *spiritus movens* which strives, always, to beget new ways of reaching a higher level of being.

Dissidence, in its most elemental sense, refers to the semiotics of *disagreement*. On that note, it positions itself as a stepping-away from the official byline. The dissident represents the intellectual immigrant from the ideological matrix and the official ideologically-religious truth. Thus, he opens up his sphere of influence as a form of thirst, which, in turn, represents more than a simple lucidity in the openness of the spirit towards truth, knowledge, other-ness, alternative-ness as the highest possible category. Consequently, the dissident and the resonance of his critical mind become a permanent opportunity to fight with the ideological, the political, and the religious. This binary creates an open conflict, whence there are only—enemies.¹ Along those lines, the dissident, due to the fact that he stands without the official line of the absolute, or the totalitarian truth of a given political or religious system, is placed within the category of: *enemy*.

On the other hand, the dissident does not believe that there is an absolute knowledge, given in the format of permanence, lodged within a specific historical context. Henceforth, the contents of knowledge as an archetype must be enriched with new forms of knowledge and meaning, since all things are changeable, and with that, each one may end in any

given moment. This is why critical insight, a position of distancing oneself through the power of creative thought as the only possible “way out” from the absolute of things—since a certain institutional format that belongs in the hands of certain governance launches it as an irreversible truth—is more than needed.

The discourse of the dissident positions itself on the liberation of his thoughts from any time-bound political “avant-garde” of the system, whilst at the same time, for him, representing the greatest source of critical insight. Far from it, that the dissident represents “the avant-garde.” That is precisely why this text chooses to speak about the resonance of the critical mind of the dissident. Thus, here, in this text, relying on the example of the archetypal values as a constant given, while also employing well-known cultural symbols, we are to develop their fullness into the possibility of attaining a multiplicity in value, and with that, a new semiotic relevance as seen in the context of the message and the contemporary times: *dancing in accordance with the rules of the critical mind—and not according to the rules of the institutions of power*, controlled by the bureaucracy discourse. This way, the intellectual, the artist embracing creative thinking, the one who can never be satisfied with the imposed forms of knowledge, since they are a surrogacy, decides to step outside the mechanized product as offered by the political authorities, voices his thoughts against it, with a resounding NO, thus marks his own position, one “without the institutions’ claim,” that is, a dissident’s position, with the aim of producing new knowledge.

Dissident’s impetus for taking such a stance—throughout which the archetypal constant exhibits fullness and expressiveness through new forms, which do not subjugate or alter its contextual value—is quite simple: since the dissident believes that each repetition of the historical narrative, as seen through the old formats, would mean its reversion into a parody.

What would then be the alternative? What would be the possibility of the new format, through which the critical mind could nurture its distance from the absolutes of the institutions of governance, and with that, too,

nurture the constant (archetypal) context by acquiring new knowledge that in turn would produce new forms of contextual value for the cultural and humanistic advancement as its common goal?

The Noble Savage, the first dissidents and the thirst for knowledge

In the beginning, there were the heavens and the earth (Genesis, 1). God created them, and ever since then, man has been trying to reconcile them—through his wish for knowledge. But something else also happened and ever since then this is how things stand. History has run its course, the dissidents have grown in number. If we are to examine the history of Eurocentric culture and the foundations behind its creation, we are certain to come across a foundational story from Old Hebrew Literature, which discusses man's understanding of good and evil. Within the context of our subject matter, involving the dissident's narrative, this story points towards the semiotics of the first banishment:

And the Lord God said, "The man has now become like one of us, knowing good and evil. He must not be allowed to reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life and eat, and live forever." (Genesis 3, 22-23)

The reason for addressing this Old Testament literary pre-text does not stem from a desire to dig deep into mythically-historic reality, rather to point towards an example of the archetypal constant that is tied to the dissident's narrative. With that, to point towards the constant through the law of repetitiveness in culture, which carries, in its foundation, that is, maintains, the ancient Hebrew religious-ideological discourse. Its "leftover" exhibits active and recognizable forms throughout history, almost with no interruptions, up until the contemporary debate over: slave, master, emperor, pope, monarch, president, prime minister, member of parliament, guard at the ministries in the government, and so forth. This "leftover" points towards a visible presence of the archetype of power within the apparatuses of institutionalized power targeting the banished, the dissident, the content and the message of the critically-theoretical thought. This built-in matrix of

activity, as exerted through these various and multifarious representatives of the system's regimes of power, from all man-times, without a doubt has caused and does cause each subsequent example of dissidence in history, and with that, it reveals the bond of the religious-ideological structure with the opposition of the power of knowledge, of the critically-theoretical, of the dissident.

Along those lines, it is not that difficult to recognize the dissident-character of the biblical parents who had tasted from the apple of knowing/knowledge, the only thing that they were forbidden to taste, by God. Thus, they became dissidents and were de-localized from the imaginary Eden, a banishment equal to a punishment, an exile due to the thirst of knowledge and understanding, standing against the premise "And God envisioned man according to his image." Showcasing difference, exemplifying otherness, through a thirst for knowledge, which stands apart from the so-called "official" one, defines not only the dissident's narrative, but also the dissident's character of knowledge, different from the divine (envisioned concept of God), as an absolute, irreversible archetypal model. The archetype's most significant characteristic is its constancy, its irreversibility, its permanence. Henceforth, the historic examples of the ideologically-religious system, without a doubt, point towards a presence of the archetypal constant, its multiplication, as well as a maintaining of such a mechanical productivity, first and foremost within the framework of a tribal community, then a cultural community, a nation, a people, a state. Thus, by maintaining the archetypal constant in the expression of such a power, the ideological concept only changes the format through which its imperialist goal of keeping the community together is realized. Thus, the concept of the dissident becomes a "taboo," and the concept of the "master" (each man-time gives it a different moniker: God, priest, healing man, emperor, prime minister, institution, etc.) remains as "the totem" of the highest value of knowledge and knowing, acting as the focal point for all knowledge and knowing in the world.

Let us digress a bit. If primitive thoughts are constituted around the

formats of myth, magic, and ritual, whence power lies in the *repetition* of things so as to achieve some sort of *good* in the most elemental (existential) sense, later on in the development of human thought, through the formation of a religious system as a perfected system of understanding and experiencing the world, repetitiveness is not lost, rather speech gains its discourse, now labeled as theology. Theological truth begs an absoluteness. Absoluteness contains power. Power implies governance. Hence, governance is always tied to an ambition for power over a collective, a larger group, people, nation, state. Would it be excessive, here and now, to talk of the foundations of political discourse and its constitutive (archetypal) value for the *repetitiveness* of the absolute truth? Should we be talking of its formation due to the effectuality of the possibility of reconstructing the primitive thought, its primitive religious speech, and its essential connectivity with the future which followed it, after man exited the stage of the noble savage and its nomadic phase, thus starting to become a sedentary, cultural, national (et al.) being, set within the framework of a certain collective, beginning, with time, to attain his master, ruler, king, statesman, up to its most contemporary incarnations? That is all for the ideal of the theological foundation of politics.

Now let's return to the wish for knowledge and the wish for new kinds of knowing. Doesn't the primitive knowing of the world, as expressed through the wish of the primitive consciousness to make its life easier, and to understand the changes around it, in the earliest existential sense of things, imply a wish for knowledge and a stepping-out of the system of its ignorance? Doesn't the shift from magic to religion imply another such form, which points towards, historically, man's consciousness containing thirst for new knowledge, yet this same wish is tied to the primitive consciousness of self-knowing? To make a long story short, we position the rhetorical concept as a possible premise for the wish for knowing and new knowing: isn't the intellectual's mind anything else but a beautiful example of a highly developed consciousness of a self, and an example that does not belong in such a

dynamics since it possesses knowledge of the Other? Is it the highest form in the evolution of the noble savage, who once, through a visual experiencing of the world, as primary, carried the same such thirst for the secret of knowledge that the critical mind speaks of today? Of the evolution's power of knowledge. And, if we are discussing the wish as a system which is open towards knowing that is different from the wish as a system of maintaining a sameness, then we could speak of the eternal aspect of things, as seen through two different formats: on the one hand, the irreversibility of the wish for new knowledge, whilst on the other, the irreversibility of the wish to control knowledge. Thus, the primary form of the archetypal constant allows for a kind of cosmic valorization, since it positions itself towards the dynamics of the mind and the theoretical capacity of the spirit. It belongs to the dissident. The secondary form of the archetypal constant allows for a satiation of the thirst towards higher knowledge; while, maintaining a form which has been accredited by the institutional, politically-religious system of a state.

In the beginning of the world, there is the battle, there is antagonism. Since the world is paradoxical, and with that, entirely impossible to solve, the fight remains, the archetype of the noble savage persists as an example which showcases the fact that the wish to change things which are limiting, to act within the framework of the wish to change things through knowledge which brings meaning to the future and its progress, exists, luckily, from a humanistic and aesthetic point of view. And, since the world is a true paradox, the critical mind does not choose any politically-religious mentor in the quest to explain the truth about itself and the world. The critical mind, simply, does not share a "kinship" with the "fallen angels" on Earth or with their earthly theology as an institutionalized décor. On the other hand, the wish of the system to remain within those closed frames of knowledge, points towards a fear of critical thought, since the dissident's narrative is not only open to its self-knowing, but also towards sensing the Other. The stance of institutionalized governance is never in sync with the

stance of the power of critical thought. Due to the fact that the former is shifty, time-bound, whilst the latter strives towards a solution, creates, moves, constantly seeking out a solution for man and mankind.

It is apparent that within both narratives, the dissident's and the ruler's, there is a *wish*, as a movable force with the willingness "to do something." But, this wish develops and valorizes itself in two different directions: the first one, the wish of the dissident is a wish for knowledge and a critical stance towards reality, so as to change that which controls, terrorizes, manipulates, saddens. Whilst, in the other, the wish is a thirst for control, that is, in a sense, for castration of all that is critical, creative, moving, vanguard, thus controlling the change so that it does not happen through the sanctity of knowledge as an act which enlightens. The enlightening power is easily curable. Critical thought is a content which broadens the perspective. The institutionalized one stands against the depth of the former, through a power that manifests itself as ideologically-religious, which in fact is a denial of its inferior position in front of the unpredictability of the path which follows and which may lead certainly outside and far from the gates of the institution. One story cancels the other, yet both are permanently bound through the various forms of the wish for knowledge. Here, we can find constituted the center of the source of the world's paradoxical nature.

Alternate space and freedom

The experience of the biblical ancestors exhibits a form of primacy. Before them there was no experience which could have served as an educational primer. The experience of knowing, here, finds its bearings in the Edenic understanding of things. On the other hand, the incentive for new knowledge does not point solely towards a lucid experience for each future dissident, rather towards a repetitive experience serving as a praxis. The lucidity of the first human couple (Adam-Eve) cannot lie only in their disobedience of God, or within the realm of man's ignorance, as can be

found in the theological rendition behind the exile of the biblical couple.² The lucidity lies in the truth of disobedience—it is a wish for knowledge to understand(...), to choose between(...), to give meaning different from the one God had envisioned as an “absolute consensus” between man and Him, and according to that consensus, man would have no other choice. But, within this “pact,” still, the ur-couple points towards a willingness not to participate.

Although, of the act undertaken by the first human couple which represents a kind of humanist action, we cannot speak about it as a rational act, still, in accordance with archeo-poetics, there is something called a cry, a call, an *evocation*, an *invocation*,³ a dynamics which stems from the internal spheres of man’s irrational and discursive understanding of the world, but one which leads towards an act of choice. Literary-historical examples point towards an understanding that such a primitive knowing of the world does not take away the strength of choice in the early man. The intellect is an abstraction too, and an abstraction is a kind of knowledge. The intellect is movement. The intellect is change. The intellect is an image. The intellect is a word. The intellect is, also, a choice. A choice implies freedom. Freedom is knowledge. Choice is, also, wisdom. But wisdom is also an ability to adapt to the conditions of freedom as a choice. Is the mind, the one close to the act of differentiating things, but also feeling about them, even the one close to (ideological) punishment as a feeling, capable of allowing the self to remain entrenched within the framework of the ideologically-religious moment of subjugation? Then, such a mind is not a critical mind (for it has lost its sense of differentiating things, and with that, the ability to valorize them); it is neither wise (since the reality produced by the ideologically-religious system disavows critical and theoretical activity), nor is it free, so that it can produce and learn in such a “freedom.” Why the alternative then? Since it, unlike the ideologically-religious system, which is the so-called official one, always remains its own, as its own alternative of the mind as a space-home. And this space is not a physical one. That is why it

is always more free. That is why critical thinking is tied to the abstract, the creative (as opposed to the schematized and imposed ideology), and that is why critical thinking is always on the lookout for solutions, for ways out of bestiality. True critical thinking cannot be ordered; no government can order critical thinking. Such an alternative space is in fact the sacred place of the dissident. Space, land, homeland, the heavens...without the mediation of a politically-religious mentor. These very attributes constitute and establish the alternative spaces of the dissident as a *sacred space*.

Surviving within such a space is no easy task. I do believe that each of us who have embraced the scientific, the critically creative call as our lives' "calling," carry within us at least some of the resonance of the Odyssean metaphor. Research asks for "alone time," for "thinking time," for "knowing time;" it asks of us to give up so much, often times to choose a painstakingly uncertain path. But most of all, it asks us to show a sense of seriousness. And that, in turn, implies a solitary atmosphere. But there is a dialogue that requests a second side: one that will hear, evaluate, learn, respond, say things. However, the scientist is not a monk, who is thought of as a solitary figure praying for the multitude; but then again science is a heightened reality, one where each occurrence is different from those in everydayness. Science is shared with the collective. Which is why the world is into results. The world is interested in new knowledge. Knowledge is always interested in *an open dialogue with the world*, and one which does require a good deal of seriousness. Thus, the world is not just a small or an extended metaphor. It is not just one people or the science of one people. Henceforth, the world is interested also in the dissident. And the dissident is interested in the world, that is to say, the world in whose name he fights—against mechanized ideological knowledge. That is exactly why he enters, consciously, into a bind with the repressiveness of ideologically-political knowledge, since to the dissident, the meaning of and the need for knowledge are to be found without the framework of the national and state discourse of one's birth-land, as he sees this path as the only one possible to valorize and partake on the critical and the creative thought,

as a sacred thought, as a pure defense against ideological absolutism. Along those lines, we should nurture knowledge. Along those lines, we should educate the young. To fight for the knowledge they believe in, to expand on the knowledge they believe could indeed change the world, to nurture knowledge as a sacred space which can never become an ideological space. And, indeed, this is a battle worth fighting. When such a sacred space is fortified as a beacon of knowledge, then the meaning behind knowledge as a driving force loses its power to move the world onwards. The sacred space of knowledge is not one that should be invented. It stands just on the outside of the conventional, the repressive, the local, the political. Taking up root in such a sacred space is equal to taking up a definitive position within the active and productive space of knowledge. This is the dissident's alternative. Since it is the only alternative for a new world. A new world, always, is imprinted on the palms of the young, which is why it is they who should take the first steps, bravely and proudly, of such a dissident's alternative. The young are the world's keepers. The young mind will win over and will win again and anew the world, surrendering itself to the beauty of the creative and critical thought and expanding its knowledge through such thought.

The Knightly attribute of the Dissident

Krzysztof Kieslowski (1941-1996), in one of his talks, dedicated to the theme of return, says:

In the school for theatrical technicians, we were shown a world of values which did not have to be bound by the everyday and socially-acceptable values, such as a comfortable life, owning material possessions, money, a good job. We were shown that things can sometimes be realized through that other, so-called higher world. I do not know if it is a higher one, but it certainly is a different one.⁴

Emanating the respect towards the personal and professional legacy of the famed director, we do appreciate the fact that he did not refer to the world of resurrection in its religious sense, let alone referencing the political world as one of a higher order. Politics has simply no interest for that other and varied world, a world which is interested in examining

the essence of man's destiny and humanistic queries. A world which is interested in the freedom of the spirit. A world of the justice of the creative mind of the artist, the dissident. A world about the justice towards the critically-theoretical mind.

Henceforth, the old biblical tale again comes in contact with the archetypal foundation of the religiously-political concept of standing in obedience in front of it, as if in front of God. Thus, God from the Old Testament is an unforgiving God, who punishes mercilessly due to a disobedient behavior in front of his ascertained principles about the "Tree of Knowledge." He punishes freedom whilst allowing it. According to the theological exegesis, "the fall" is an act which exemplifies man's weakness. Politics, on the other hand, through its absolutist principle punishes the dissident because of its critical mind, which in turn represents a threat to the system, since the critical mind is a force that rises over any political strategy, and leads towards another, higher world, which is most definitely different, and which thinks without the closed institutionalized system of strategic activities and produced values of the regime.

In such a position, what does the world of the dissident look like? Is it a punished world, a condemned world, a world in whose direction fingers are pointed, so as to mark its visibility, thus to point out what punishment looks like, and with that forgetting the fact that each act of finger-pointing is an act of indecency? Politics initiates and creates victims which are not it. It is a *systemic replacement of a victim*, or rather *a replacement of the true victim by its simulacrum*. The profile is an image. An image is a simulacrum of the real show. Just like the case with God. Just like the dissident. The image, in a semiotic sense, only references the truth. It is not what we see, but rather it points towards that which we cannot see. Just like God. Just like the dissident.

The image of the dissident seemingly does not share anything in common with the irreversible literary character of the sad knight by Miguel de Servantes, Don Quixote, but together, they share a bond with

understanding and shaping man and the world, henceforth, with the clash with the world, through a specific kind of struggle, and not just a mechanized feistiness. They are lone individuals. They do not belong to any social club. They are heroes, and their greatness is tragic when placed against the wide spectrum of social, un-mythologized events. They are individuals entrenched in reality and they are irreparable individuals faced towards the future. They are exalted. Both are knights of the pure idea for a search and the fight to acknowledge the idea for a better world. And that world is indeed different, another.

What does that other world mean for a critical mind? What does that clash, that disagreement between the intellectual and the government, between the criticism of the intellectual's mind and the official ideological truth, mean? It definitely implies a position of antagonism, an open-combat field.

The Archetype and its constants: the Dissident

There isn't a time without its dissidents. There isn't a state or for that matter a society that does not record the appearance of a dissident. The examples from the past that are tied to the destiny of the dissident and which stem from the countries that were under the former protection of the communist regime, are examples which address the discourse of terror: exile, job bereavement, imprisonment, mental institutions, banishment, and not seldom, real death. Thus, the presence of the dissident is not an imagined reality, neither is it an idea. He is a reality, and as such deserves to be treated as a discourse.

What does the profile of the dissident contain, as an archetypal constant? First and foremost, the dissident *problematizes the question of knowledge*. He, representing the so-called "underground or grey I" within the frameworks of a given social system, confronts himself with the same system, through his struggle for *de-politicizing knowledge* and *allowing for its insatiability*. On that note, public political knowledge is determined

and mechanized, and as such produces pressure. The dissident wishes to maintain the purity of the critical mind which cannot be found within the realm of the ideologically-imperialist thought of the state. Along those lines, the dissident represents the micro world, which as a result of its struggle with the “big world,” is almost always marginalized—alone, as a knight, in its limitless field of its resonant mind, without the institutionalized and official system that possesses the power to act and control the process of the idea and its realization. Thus, the intent for creation of the ideologue-author remains present in the cookie-cutter production of values, and the overtly ambitious application of the profile of the collective cookie-cutter. I am here referring to the Balkans. I am referring to Europe, too. I am referring to the world as well. Since there are empires everywhere. Since there are dissidents everywhere.

Preventing the artist from actively thinking and engaging, and with that from living peacefully, on the behalf of the official ideological program, understands that he is not just mechanically de-located, but also placed in a colonized position, and with that in a position which asks of something else, an alternative place for its artistic and critical spirit, the only thing it cannot relinquish. (I am not, with this, referring to the hypocrisy of those dissidents who stopped being dissidents, thus relinquishing their critical stance by throwing themselves in the hands of the new regime!) On the other hand, requesting one’s alternative space also implies an escape from the imperialist discourse of ideology. Therefore, a field for the multiplication of discourses is created, that is, a creation of a new discourse and new meanings through the discourse of the dissident.

Which then would be the alternative space for the dissident to choose as its niche? I am convinced that we would not point towards anything new, if we pointed out that the dissident remains in pursuit of a re-location to another space, mostly outside its homeland, and with that, pursuing the right of personal happiness without the ideological matrix of its land. Such a de-localization of the dissident implies a diligent protection

of his ethics: the critical, healthy, and last but not least, the humanist dimension of the creative, artistic, and critical mind.

Today, I am not quite certain that the alternative space of the dissident should always imply exile, but am personally convinced that his alternative space will always remain to be “his room,” which in turn, needs not be localized within his land, or for that matter de-localized without. More and more, I become convinced that whence the dissident is, hence it travels, on the same path and in the same place with the critical and the artistic thought of knowledge, of intellect and the wish for a nicer, and with that, free-er world.

Although present day is a time of individuality, the notion should not be assumed that it is a time when critical thinking is active. Also, I do not believe that our actual historic time is a time of individuals-dissidents, alike those we recognize in the names of some of the greatest minds from the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th centuries, which became the leading intellectual force of all of the world’s science;⁵ also, the artists from the age of the Russian Avant-garde who created through the format of the *samizdat*;⁶ and, lastly, let us remind ourselves of the dissidence of Mikhail Bakhtin (1895-1975) in his homeland.⁷ Bakhtin spent the better part of his life creating and living under an assumed name so that he might not be prevented from creating that which the world today could have only dreamt about if it had not existed, to covet his chronoscope, his dialogism, and in the end, the Bakhtin-Dostoyevsky hero. Should we remind ourselves of the other names which had consciously chosen to belong to the dissident “caste”? Luckily, there is no more Siberia, as a place for the “irresolute intellectuals.” There is no more Goli Otok,⁸ as a place whence few returned. Otherwise there would have been so much more sadness in recollecting and retelling of history.

I am not certain if today dissidence is active in the format that the previous examples discuss. I am interested in the attributes of dissidence we can speak of today. Dissidence is not just an exile, dissidence is not just

an imprisonment. Dissidence implies also an impenetrability of institutions for the young, the student, the future intellectual, and the hopeful future leader's mind, due to the impossibility of the state to hold on to the great intellectual capacity of the young man, strategically, as the finest capital for the future of his country and his people. When discussing this narrative in conjunction with my country, then definitely, for me, the most worrisome form would be "the brain drain." Each dissidence, in its own way, is a sad act, and for me, this type of dissidence is one of the saddest ones. That way, the political discourse produces another kind of dissidence, due to a negligence of the research potential of the creatively critical engagement undertaking by the young mind. All this entails a powerful message, a message which young minds are to spread outside the gateways of such an ideological strategy: never to stop believing in the power of new thinking, in the power of art, since this is the only way the young have to protect the critical thought, that is, by sharing it with the world, by nurturing its being. Only thus can the young, by trusting and investing in the power of knowledge, continue to believe in the world's progress and in its change. Believing in knowledge, in its new forms and its production, is a force greater than any ideological strategy set to produce mechanized knowledge.

Once, not that long ago, I too was a dissident within my own country. It happened so, since I was recognized with The Best Young Scientist of the Year Award, in the area of the literary sciences, given by the highest institution for science and art MASA (The Macedonian Academy of Sciences and Arts) in my homeland, and in accordance with international arbitration, while the State University bequeathed me with a special plaque, due to my affirmation of the University as the recipient of this "Vita Pop-Jordanova" Award, given for the first time in my research area. I was never allowed to take the assigned job post,⁹ "created" in my honor, at the State University, since the position was given to someone else. Then, openly, in front of all of Macedonia's public, in front of the Government of the

Republic of Macedonia, the then President, in front of MASA and all the scientific and educational institutions in my country, I voiced the following question: what is that which opens the doors, and what is that which closes the gates for the young, for the young scientists and artists in the Republic of Macedonia? This in turn, taught me that hypocrisy, nepotism, and damaging bureaucracy are deeply entrenched in my country, and that it is they who, although not as often, give birth to the dissident within my own country, while they bear no connection whatsoever with the power of knowledge. With that, being a dissident within my own country, a country I have never forsaken, I sought to do the work I had already firmly believed in, ever so diligently—the power of knowledge outside of political control and decision-making. I did not have a real opponent. The only opponents I ever had were the unworthy ones, disinterested in producing knowledge, only looking to court the politicians. But they have never held an interest for me, since that is a world where I, and the thirst for new knowledge, find no home. With that, my work is no longer my own. It stops being my own property the moment it shakes hands with the world, to whom it belongs.

The essence of dissidence allows for a wide spectrum of meanings which conjoin in the following: to withstand the desire to be obedient and to have a politically-religious surrogate as a mentor. To remain within the desire to change and maintain a critical stance towards reality. This implies an asceticism. Asceticism is always bound to loneliness. The dissident is always alone, but not necessarily lonesome. His only empire is the critical and artistic thought which is open to mankind, and which looks after mankind. The dissident is a kind of apologue. It is more than politics, more than religion, more than a nation; it is so much more, and more than all of these things together.

Epilogue

They say wish is the essence of the world. They say there are good, but also bad wishes. I have one good wish. I wish the world were struck by the lightening of new knowledge. I wish it were nicer. I wish it were more humane. I wish there were more dissidents. Real ones. How about you?

NOTES

1. Gill Anidžar, *Jevrejin, Arapin* [Jew, Arab] (Belgrade: Beogradski krug, 2006), 56.
2. St. John of Damascus, *An Exact Exposition of the Orthodox Faith* (Belgrade, 2001), 346-7.
3. Marcel Mauss, *On Prayer* (New York/Oxford: Durkheim Press/Berghahn Books, 2003), 43-55.
4. Danusia Stoc, ed., *Kieslowski on Kieslowski* (London: Faber and Faber, 1993; as quoted in the translated edition, Beograd: Hinaki, 2002), 41.
5. N. Berdyaev, N. Onufriyevich Lossky, P. Alexandrovich Florensky, P. Evdokimov, etc.
6. For example, Vladimir Kazakov.
7. Siberia and six years exile in Kazahstan.
8. Prison camp, opened in 1949, well-known as "Hell in the Adriatic," a place for mental and physical torture and suffer of the "non obedient."
9. It was a national recognition given for the first time for this purpose from the then Government of Republic of Macedonia, according the Governmental decision in May 2006, signed by then President of the Government Professor Dr. Vlado Buckovski. This National Award was bequeathed to me due to my recognition as The Best Young Scientist of the Year (2006) and recipient of Vita Pop-Jordanova Award from Macedonian Academy of Sciences and Arts. The purpose of this Governmental decision was to promote a long term goal and aimed to start a new tradition: in the future each award winner of this highest recognition according international classification (Vita Popo Jordanova Award) was to work at the University in Republic of Macedonia. Apart of this goal, this "case" became a scandal with no precedence, and the former President of the Government dedicated two texts for my "dissident question." Please, see: V. Buckovski, "When knowledge is a handicap," *Vreme* n.1265 (4 January, 2008) and n.1276 (18 January 2008), Skopje.

Sofija Grandakovska, academic, theorist, and poet, engages in interdisciplinary studies in comparative literature and visual semiotics. She is the author of the scholarly books *Discourse of the Prayer* (2008) and *The Portrait of the Image* (2010), and the two books of poetry *The Eighth Day* (2005) and *The Burning Sun* (2009). Currently, doc. dr. Grandakovska works as Assistant Professor at the Institute for Social and Humanities Research "Euro-Balkan," Republic of Macedonia, where she teaches cultural and political theory.

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"Never stop believing in the power of new thinking, in the power of art, since this is the only way the young have to protect the critical thought, that is, by sharing it with the world, by nurturing its being." - Sofija Grandakovska (Skopje, Macedonia)

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