

ARTMARGINS

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HISTORICALLY CONSIDERED

ART PERIODICALS TODAY

INTRODUCTION: ART PERIODICALS TODAY, HISTORICALLY CONSIDERED

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Immanuel Kant's answer to the question "What Is Enlightenment?" was not only a call to exercise reason, but also to have the courage to do so publicly. It was no accident, then, that Kant's *Sapere aude!* ("Dare to be wise!" or "Dare to know!") appeared in the pages of the Berlin periodical *Berlinische Monatsschrift* in 1784.¹ Periodical print culture is the true product of the modern age, born out of an urgent need to advance the idea of freedom and its universal application. Print periodicals turned into a battleground where words replaced swords and where skirmishes were fought over a wide range of issues and obstacles that were thought to hinder the way of universal progress toward greater autonomy and justice. The term *periodical*—which implies duration and iteration, but also pauses, or "writing in time" as in the German *Zeitschrift*—is suggestive of a temporality punctuated by short intervals during which the conditions of autonomy of the modern subject are renegotiated.

Art periodical magazines, journals, reviews, and quarterlies yield to the same historical necessity of bringing artistic, cultural, social,

1 Immanuel Kant, "An Answer to the Question: What Is Enlightenment?" *Berlin Monthly* (December 1784). Translating the phrase from Horace, Kant deployed *sapere aude* as his motto for the Enlightenment.

and political phenomena to public light, of questioning the obvious, and of keeping power in check. Art periodicals were born out of the contradictions of capitalism and the constant urge to revolutionize the means of production. Historically, they have reflected the parallel rise of various spheres of social activity (politics, economics, education, health care, news writing) as separate and self-governed entities, and in particular the advent of the institution of art as an autonomous sphere of bourgeois society. It is within this social context that art periodicals lent themselves to “using one’s own reason,” as Kant advised—specifically in relation to works of art, products of culture, and to the artist’s social and political position.

Since the self-published pamphlets of the 18th century—with limited circulation and readership among *philosophes*, *encyclopédistes*, and other *érudits* discussing the paintings displayed at the Paris Salon—the art bulletin, magazine, and journal have come a long way, evolving into a complex industry with its distinct media, critical and disciplinary methods, audiences, and market niches. Industrial capitalism, and the separation of art as a distinct sphere governed by its own rules and mores, led to an explosion of the cultural periodical press in the 19th century. Publications dedicated themselves to reporting on the *beaux arts* as an element of the bourgeois way of living, or to challenging this conception of art within the context of emerging theories of emancipation and revolutionary historical transformation, understood in terms of class struggle.

If the 19th-century art periodical can be perceived, more or less, as a passive medium used to disseminate knowledge about art or to question art’s social role, the early 20th-century art magazines and journals problematized the very apparatus of periodical publishing. It is to the historical avant-gardes that progressive contemporary art periodicals owe their true spirit of critique and negation. The avant-garde ethos and its revolutionary thrust positioned journals, magazines, and other periodical publications as one means of production amongst others, a means that had to be seized, revolutionized, and handed over to its true producer: the working class. And it is in this context that the avant-garde movements such as Dada, Constructivism, and Surrealism called into question not only the content but also—and even more forcefully—the medium itself, in its layout, design, and typography, treating these elements as signifiers of radical social rupture.

The struggle over ownership of the means of production and the

democratization of culture has remained a pertinent agenda for many art periodicals to this day, although this agenda appears in transformed historical conditions and without any social revolution on the horizon. Over the 20th century, this struggle has manifested itself in different forms in the pages of historical magazines and journals: from Proletkul't literary and art periodicals mass-publishing workers' clubs' poetry and art (encouraging extensive participation in the future of a proletarian culture), to periodicals serving a more narrow vanguard politics of radical social and artistic form in the 1920s, to journals engaged in the revolution of the unconscious, or those bringing before the public the constant wrangling over meaning and interpretation in the internationalist context of the Popular Front, antifascism, and the resistance to cultural Stalinism in the 1930s.² In the aftermath of the Second World War, art periodicals, including *ARTnews* and *Art Digest* in the USA, as well as *Iskusstvo* and *Dekorativnoe iskusstvo* in the USSR, fought the Cold War on different fronts. On one side of the Iron Curtain, such periodicals, often covertly aided by the CIA and State Department, promoted individual freedom and US-style liberal democracy as prescribed by art critics invested in Abstract Expressionism³; on the other side, they propagated a collective conception of freedom cast in concrete or "realistically" illustrated by painters and sculptors all over the Soviet Union and socialist Eastern Europe. Alternatively, within a wider context and the dynamics of anti-colonialism, progressive

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- 2 A large bibliography has focused on the 20th-century art periodicals. Some of these references include: Frederick J. Hoffman, Charles Allen, and Carolyn F. Ulrich, *The Little Magazine: A History and a Bibliography*, 2nd ed. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1947); Dawn Ades, ed., *Dada and Surrealism Reviewed* (Hayward Gallery, January–March 1978; London: Art Council of Great Britain, 1978), exhibition catalog; Andreas Berns, *New York Dada Magazines, 1915–1921* (Siegen: Universitäts- und Landesbibliothek des Saarlandes, 1986); Virginia Hagelstein Marquardt, ed., *Art and Journals on the Political Front, 1910–1940* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1997); Mark S. Morrison, *The Public Face of Modernism: Little Magazines, Audiences, and Reception, 1905–1920* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2000); Peter Brooker and Andrew Thacker, eds., *The Oxford Critical and Cultural History of Modernist Magazines* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009); Eric B. White, *Transatlantic Avant-Gardes: Little Magazines and Localist Modernism* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013); Charles Forsdick and Andy Stafford, eds., *La Revue: The Twentieth-Century Periodical in French* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2013); Gwen Allen, *Artists' Magazines: An Alternative Space for Art* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2011).
- 3 Many of the Abstract Expressionist artists did not welcome the blatant instrumentalization of their work for US foreign policy. For a nuanced discussion of the Cold War politics of Abstract Expressionism, see Frances Stonor Saunders, *The Cultural Cold War: The CIA and the World of Arts and Letters* (New York: The New Press, 2001).

art and literary periodicals became weapons in the hands of the international non-aligned movement against imperialism: e.g., see in the current issue the Artist Project dedicated to *Lotus* magazine, the literary mouthpiece of the Association of Afro-Asian Writers.

Over the last quarter of the 20th century, and into the 21st, the widening field of art periodicals has been riven by internal contradictions and Oedipal conflicts, from resistance to methodological and political authority to contestations over the right to exercise critique or interpret art works for an increasingly fragmented public. Art magazines and journals have rushed to occupy particular positions (local, national, global, historical, theoretical, cultural, political, technological, economic) from which to negate or affirm, critique or serve the expanding system of contemporary art or particular interests within the art world. In the meantime, the “invisible” hand of the market has also taken up a number of invisible editorial functions. Readers have had to learn a new set of skills—namely, how to distinguish between artistic practice and advertising, exhibition reviews, and commercial gallery ads. The art periodical—in its multiple hypostases, from the somber journal of aesthetics to the glamorous contemporary art magazine—has been increasingly affected, if not colonized wholesale, by the neo-liberal consumer spectacle whereby private universities and their publishing houses, commercial art galleries, auction houses, museums, art fairs, and various other products—whose brands are often shepherded by entire public relations departments—compete for visibility with works of art or critical thought. What this schematic historical overview means to stress is that periodical art publishing is a venture that cannot be detached from the totality of economic, political, and social processes that characterize an epoch.

In this special issue of *ARTMargins* dedicated to art periodicals, we ask: What is the function of the art periodical today, historically conceived along the outlines sketched above? If we live in a globalized world where the only progress is the progressive disintegration of history and politics, can we still conceive of the function of the art periodical in terms of critique, understood as a procedure that points at and questions the limits of truth, knowledge, and representation? Are art periodicals today mere handmaidens to the financial markets, to new cultural elites, or to a celebratory circle of global artists, curators, critics, and dealers; or are they still capable of rediscovering that critical



Covers of art periodicals participating in the Critical Machines: Art Periodicals Today conference (AUB Art Galleries, Beirut, 2014). Image constructed by Octavian Eşanu.

and disinterested attitude vested in the very first periodicals during the Enlightenment? Are there alternative ways to conceive of the role of art periodicals today?

In addressing these questions, this *ARTMargins* Special Issue takes as its point of departure a conference organized in 2014 at the American University of Beirut, titled *Critical Machines: Art Periodicals Today*. The organizers of the conference deployed the metaphor of “critical machines” to conceptualize the role played by art periodicals in contemporary art and culture. In the language of modern labor processes and manufacturing equipment, a “critical machine” is a piece of equipment that is programmed to monitor and report on other machines in the production chain. Critical machines are deployed as preventive maintenance measures to guard against equipment malfunctioning and disruptions in the flow of production. Today, art journals, art magazines, newsletters, websites, and blogs can be considered metaphorically as “critical machines” that monitor artists and their interactions with the cultural field. These periodicals often serve a gatekeeping function, endorsing and determining what counts as “good” or legitimate art, or criticizing and even excluding “foreign bodies” or experiences and practices that might disrupt and destabilize the established equilibrium in the contemporary art system.

The most explicit link to the conference appears in the form of an edited and abridged roundtable discussion, with an introduction by Octavian Eșanu. The conference brought together the editors of various art magazines, gazettes, and journals to discuss the state of art periodicals today, to share their critical aspirations, to identify and describe their readership, and to touch upon more sensitive issues of economics and politics. The organizers invited the editors of publications as diverse as *e-flux* and *Gahnama-e-Hunar*, *October*, *Mada Masr*, *Cabinet*, *Chto Delat*, *ArtLeaks*, and *Arteria*, among others. The Q&A at the end of Eșanu’s introduction provides a glimpse of the conversations that took place during the conference, addressing persisting contradictions, antagonisms, affinities, and sympathies.

Gwen Allen’s contribution, “Art Periodicals and Contemporary Art Worlds,” examines the *Artforum* of the early 1960s and the *October* of the mid-1970s to discuss some of the shifts that were taking place in the US art scene at the time. The two publications were important sites for catalyzing art world debates along distinct axes: the role of criticism in the public sphere, economic interests of the art market versus criti-

cal detachment, formalism versus anti-Greenbergian methodology. These debates outlined and influenced the ways in which contemporary art production was received and interpreted in the US art world. Allen places the discussion of *Art Forum* and *October* within the context of Arthur Danto's 1964 text "The Artworld" and Jürgen Habermas's theorization of the role of criticism in the early days of the bourgeois public sphere, as well as the birth of the media and spectacle society as precursors to our contemporary global condition. Ultimately, Allen argues, if *Artforum* and *October* began by creating counterpublics, they both ended up shaping influential mainstream discourses: the first for the benefit of the art market, the second in academia.

Catherine Hansen's article on the role of the rubric as an organizational and aesthetic device in Surrealist art periodicals since 1924 provides a glimpse into a surprisingly rich international network of contemporary Surrealist groups that keep the transgressive legacy of Bretonian Surrealism alive in today's more cynical and less revolutionary world. The rubric, in Hansen's view, is not merely a vessel for poetic content, but an implementation of Surrealism's "poetics of objectivation" and an occasion for collective action. Within the structure of this special issue, Hansen's contribution discusses a model of publishing, the Surrealist rubric, that presents an alternative to other, more frequently encountered models in contemporary art and its mainstream publishing apparatus.

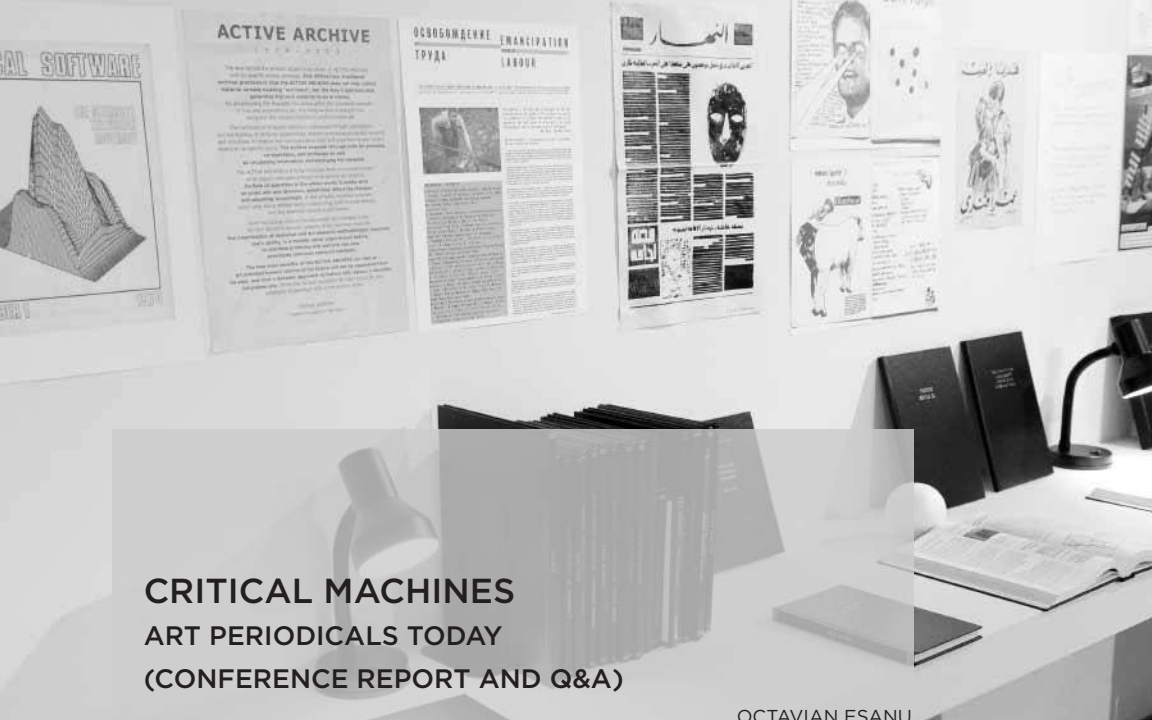
We also present, in the Artist Project section, curator and writer Nida Ghose's conceptual engagement with the trilingual literary publication *Lotus* (1968–early 1990s). This literary quarterly of the Afro-Asian Writers' Association, funded by the Soviet Union, Egypt, and the GDR—with editorial offices in Cairo, Beirut, and Tunis—presented an exemplary project of third-world nonaligned internationalism, where culture itself was seen as a viable weapon against imperialism. Entangled in the complex web of Cold War politics, the periodical slowly but surely disintegrated with the end of that era during the 1990s. Through a method of deduction and selection, Ghose juxtaposes visual, indexical, and textual elements from *Lotus* to hint at ruptures, erasures, and discontinuities between our present and the historical context that enabled the publication of the journal.

The Document section presents a 1975 editorial from the Slovenian journal *Problemi–Razprave* (Problems–Debates). Titled "Umetnost, družba/tekst" (Art, Society/Text), the essay was published

anonymously, but revealed the signature of the publication's editorial board at the same time, comprising a number of the representatives of the school of Yugoslav poststructuralism and psychoanalysis: Mladen Dolar, Danijel Levski, Jure Mikuž, Rastko Močnik, and Slavoj Žižek. Translated from Slovene by Vid Simoniti, edited by Samo Tomšič, and introduced by Nikola Dedić, the essay offers a polemic against the ideological mask of the bourgeois notion of high art, calling instead for a materialist critique of art and culture informed by poststructuralism and psychoanalysis. The text points at the ways in which editorial voices in art and culture periodicals, when tendentious and partisan, have the potential not only to reflect on the unfolding of events and address existing publics, but to change the very context in which they operate—be that context social and political, or artistic and theoretical.

Kant saw Enlightenment in terms of an *emergence*—"man's emergence from his self-imposed nonage," where nonage stood for "the inability to use one's own understanding without another's guidance."⁴ Today, entirely different things tend to be addressed as "emerging": markets, economies, companies, artists, curators. In this overall nonage of greed and self-interest—disguised as "limitless growth" and "profitability"—art periodicals are often assigned special roles. Small and independent art journals or blogs grow more aware of the extent to which they are conditioned to serve neoliberal "emergence," often functioning as promotional mouthpieces within a global art market driven by perpetual production and reproduction: of biennial and art-fair reviews, artist profiles, or "top 10" lists of the best-selling or fastest emerging artists, critics, and curators. Perhaps a historical consideration of the critical role of art periodicals can help to reconceive them as "critical machines," as apparatuses that can be stopped, started, monitored, adjusted, and transformed in the radical spirit of past historical ruptures.

4 Immanuel Kant, "What Is Enlightenment," trans. Peter Gay, in *The Enlightenment: A Comprehensive Anthology*, ed. Peter Gay (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1973), 384.



OCTAVIAN EȘANU

The questions and answers that follow this introduction were selected from the audio transcript of a two-day symposium organized in 2014 at the American University of Beirut Art Galleries.¹ For the conference, the organizers invited the editors of art and cultural publications from various regions of the world to discuss the role of art periodicals today. The aim was not to debate the state of art criticism alone, or exclusively,² but to take a broader view of the means of production and distribution of magazines, journals, newspapers, and other media platforms dedicated solely or partially to modern and contemporary art. In their selection of participants, the organizers were driven by the desire to represent different categories of publications (independent, academic, educational, politically or socially committed, local, regional, or global) in order to broaden the perspective on the field. The publications selected range from small periodicals whose impact is limited to the art scene of a particular country, to well-known and widely distributed international print and online journals that help set major trends in

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- 1 Critical Machines: Art Periodicals Today, organized by Octavian Eșanu and Angela Harutyunyan, American University of Beirut, Ada Dodge Hall, March 7–8, 2014. The conference program is available at www.aub.edu.lb/art_galleries/current/Pages/critical-machines-conf.aspx.
 - 2 This topic was addressed in “Round Table: The Present Conditions of Art Criticism,” *October*, no. 100, special issue on Obsolescence (Spring 2002), 200–28.

contemporary art criticism. Excluding, by and large, art magazines that cater to mass audiences, commercial galleries, or the art market, the conference was intended to mobilize not merely known or successful magazines and journals, but rather those representative of various types of art periodicals encountered today. In the end, the absence of so many important art journals and magazines from the conference was not only a matter of limited resources, but also a function of the sheer diversity, complexity, and scale of the field.

Any attempt to grasp the entire field of the art periodicals operating today seems as futile as to draw a map the size of the terrain it represents. Where should one even begin, given the seemingly infinite number of journals and magazines, gazettes and newspapers, archives, websites, podcasts, blogs, zines, tweets, posts, apps, links, and feeds that are producing, reproducing, or distributing—by means of old or new and hot or cold media—knowledge and information about art to, and across, the many hubs of the global infosphere? We might try to arrange them according to editorial format (magazine, journal, platform, or website); medium (printed, online, or both); methods of knowledge production or style of reporting (art historical, art connoisseurship, art and critical theory, general education, art appreciation, or art journalism); type of audience (local, regional, global, specialized, or general); or language. The conference organizers used the metaphor of the “critical machine” (a piece of industrial equipment programmed not for production but for monitoring and reporting on other machines in the production chain) to conceptualize and discuss the various modes of monitoring, reporting on, critiquing, or historicizing modern and contemporary artistic practices.³

The organizers divided the program of the conference into four panels: (1) Critical and Art Historical Machines, (2) Global and Regional Art Critical Machines, (3) Radical Practice and Social Justice Critical Machines, and (4) Educational and Curiosity Machines. These categorizations should be taken with a grain of salt. From the start, it must be said that attempts to pigeonhole an art periodical using pre-established criteria are not always successful, and some publications are more difficult to categorize than others. Take, for instance, *October*, which might easily stretch across all four of the categories listed above:

3 For a discussion of the concept of “critical machines,” see the conference program available at www.aub.edu.lb/art_galleries/current/Pages/critical-machines-conf.aspx.

it is an art historical and art theoretical journal; it was established to address local needs and audiences in the United States, but grew over the past decades (like other things American) to resonate within a wider, global cultural context; its editorial line conveys keen political awareness, but without a commitment to a particular political agenda; and it has been widely used in the production and reproduction of knowledge, and for educational purposes, on a wide scale. Not all the journals in the conference were like *October*, though, and one soon begins to realize that *October's* flexibility, its ability to fit into all the categories that organized the conference program, is also a sign of privilege. For instance, the Kabul-based art magazine *Gahnama-e-Hunar* (founded in 2000 in Peshawar, Pakistan; relocated to Afghanistan after the defeat of the Taliban) sees its main goal in strictly educational terms. The magazine was established by Rahraw Omarzad in order to educate the young—in particular, Afghan women—in matters of fine arts. Afghan writing about contemporary art or reporting on artistic and cultural events should be considered in light of the country's recent history. In the words of Omarzad, "Before the Americans came to Kabul, there were no funders for an art magazine; I started this magazine at a time when Afghan refugees were not thinking about artistic activities but mainly about how to stay alive."⁴ The only magazine to report on art in Afghanistan, *Gahnama-e-Hunar* is firmly anchored in its local milieu; it most definitely follows a political strategy, one that cannot be separated from the interests, people, or forces struggling for political authority in this country. Even though it regularly publishes art historical material, *Gahnama-e-Hunar* is not, strictly speaking, an art historical periodical with a consciously defined theory or awareness of its method of inquiry; rather, it is a publishing platform for broad cultural popularization, understood as a tool in the process of modernization.

Since the conference took place in Beirut, the largest number of invited art editors represented publications from the Middle East or publications dedicated to the coverage of Middle Eastern art and culture. As for Lebanon or Beirut itself—often advertised in the international art press as a dynamic hub of global contemporary art, with a vibrant artistic life—no lasting periodical is dedicated wholly or professionally to art historical scholarship and/or art journalism. Lebanon

4 Rahraw Omarzad, "Critical Machines," Session 4 Q&A.



Still from the exhibition *Critical Machines*. Reconstructed diagram of Art & Language group's *Home from Homes II*, 2014. Mixed-media installation, fragment. AUB Art Galleries, Beirut. Image courtesy of the author. Photograph by Octavian Eşanu.

was represented at the conference, by the cultural section of the Beirut-based *Al-Akhbar* newspaper, which was founded in 1938 (in its current version, 2006), and which is distributed throughout Lebanon and Syria. *Al-Akhbar* prides itself on being the only Lebanese newspaper that regularly dedicates several pages to art and culture, reporting on major cultural events in the region (from theater to the plastic arts, music, literature, cinema, and new media). The “Culture and People” section of *Al-Akhbar* views its mission as “filling the void created by the lack of modern Arab cultural periodicals in Lebanon and the Arab world,” and thus as trying to compensate by hiring “more than 50 journalists in Lebanon, the Arab countries, Europe, and the United States to offer its readers informative, analytical, and critical articles about the latest works of the Arab artists, wherever they are.”⁵ In terms of its format, *Al-Akhbar* can perhaps more easily be compared to the Egyptian *Mada Masr*, founded in Cairo in 2013 by a team of journalists who seceded from the English-language *Egypt Independent*. *Mada Masr* is an online platform that “attempts to secure a house for a dislocated practice of journalism that did not survive in mainstream organiza-

5 Roy Dib, from the conference introduction to *Al-Akhbar* newspaper.

tions and their associated political and economic conditions.” One of the objectives of the publication is to write “about culture in the widest sense.”⁶ A significant part of its mission is to encourage and support writing about the arts in Arabic, as well as to improve the quality of translated texts dedicated to art and culture. The situation in Egypt is comparable in many respects to that in Lebanon, for even though both countries have been at the forefront of cultural modernization—having been exposed to Western traditions of fine art and its institutions from an early stage—today they still lack specialized or dedicated contemporary art magazines and journals.

Those periodicals that concern themselves with Middle Eastern art more professionally, by seeking the collaboration of art journalists or academics, are usually based outside of the Middle East. *Bidoun* (a magazine launched in 2004 and subtitled “art and culture from the Middle East”) sees its mission in terms of “introducing new questions, images, and ideas about the Middle East and its diaspora into a global discourse.”⁷ The quarterly fulfills this goal quite successfully, though remotely and monolingually, from New York City. *Ibraaz* (an online platform, initiated in 2011) explores “the complexities of contemporary life across North Africa, the Middle East, and, increasingly, the Global South,”⁸ and does so only in English, but from the other side of the Atlantic. From its offices in London, the core editorial team of *Ibraaz* reaches out to editorial correspondents and contributors located throughout the Middle East and North Africa.

One can discern certain enduring historical patterns in the ways in which publications report on artistic events related to the Middle East. Excluding for the moment mainstream fine arts publications that appear on a regular basis in the Gulf countries or in Turkey (*Canvas*, *Contemporary Practices*, and *ArtAsiaPacific*), as well as more narrowly focused activist platforms such as *ArtTerritories* from Palestine, it could be said that when it comes to art periodicals dedicated to particular regions of the Middle East, one encounters a lasting dualism: between an autochthonous and long-lived tradition of cultural journalism, which reports on what is considered locally significant, in Arabic, using the wide brushstrokes of general connoisseurship and art

6 Lina Attalah, from the conference introduction to *Mada Masr* newspaper.

7 Negar Azimi, from the conference introduction to *Bidoun* magazine.

8 Anthony Downey, from the conference introduction to the *Ibraaz* platform.

appreciation, on one hand; and on the other, a more recent or “contemporary” type of art reportage, which deploys sharper art journalistic tools and more sophisticated academic methods, but applies them from a distance and only or mainly in English, covering “internationally significant” art events, soliciting expert opinions and knowledge, and catering to select audiences, venues, and readers in the global art world. The ongoing division between the central and the marginal, between autochthonous and global art journalism, can certainly be viewed through the prism of enduring colonial legacies and the attendant post-colonial debates, as well as the new cautiously curious attitude in the West toward art and culture from the Middle East in the post-9/11 world.

Some art periodicals form a separate and distinct category, in light of their firm political commitment. One such publication appears in the form of a question: *Chto delat’?*⁹ Founded in 2003 in St. Petersburg and published in Russian and English by a working group with the same name, *Chto delat’?* newspaper has been known for more than a decade for publishing leftist writers and artists. Vladimir Il’ich Lenin himself inspired the mission statement of this publication with his declaration, in 1902, that the role of a newspaper is not simply to spread ideas, but also to function as a collective organizer. Lenin compared the newspaper to a scaffolding erected around a building, suggesting that its main goal is to facilitate communication between construction workers, or in this case between cultural workers, helping them view and share the results of their collective actions.¹⁰ The *Chto delat’?* newspaper works hard to fulfill this role, providing space for discussion, debate, and militant writing to many Russian and international activist artists, political writers, and scholars. If the mission of the *Chto delat’?* newspaper is emancipatory politics, or concern for the masses (redistribution of wealth, internationalism, equality, and feminism)¹¹—a cause that the group behind the paper has advanced in print as well as in various global contemporary art venues—*ArtLeaks Gazette* (founded in 2011 by a group of editors residing in Bucharest, Belgrade, Moscow, St. Petersburg, and London) has a more narrowly defined activist

9 *Chto delat’?* translates from Russian as “What Is to Be Done?,” after the title of Lenin’s 1902 revolutionary pamphlet, inspired in its turn by Nikolai Chernyshevsky’s novel (1863) with the same name.

10 Dmitry Vilensky, from the introduction to *Chto delat’?* newspaper.

11 See “A Declaration on Politics, Knowledge, and Art,” in the “About” section at <http://chtodelat.org/category/b5-announcements/a-6/>, accessed July 26, 2015.

agenda. The *Gazette* was launched to defend the rights of artists and cultural workers, and to protect this category of global citizens from the abuses of cultural bureaucracy nested in and around contemporary art institutions. Building on the model of WikiLeaks, the collective editors of *ArtLeaks*, through their engaged politics, art criticism, and institutional critique, have used their publication as a tool of empowerment, seeking to mobilize artistic communities throughout the world to stand up for their rights.

Each of the socially engaged art periodicals participating in the conference can be viewed as a product of the political climate in which it originated. For instance, the British academic journal *Art & the Public Sphere* (established in 2011 in Bristol, UK) sees its role as theorizing the notion of art in relation to the “public sphere.” The editorial team (Mel Jordan, Dave Beech, Andy Hewitt, and Gil Whitely) has stressed the recent relevance of the notions of the “public” and the “public sphere,” especially at the intersection of contemporary art and liberal democracy. Their work critiques the cooptation of contemporary art and cultural policy by neoliberal regimes that serve narrow-minded economic agendas. The journal reports on artists’ interventions in an increasingly privatized public sphere, helping to share and forge new tools and tactics for resisting capitalism. The Istanbul-based *Red Thread* e-journal, on the other hand, which ceased publication in 2011, sought to transcend the local context and expand its political struggle well beyond Turkey’s national borders. During its publication, the e-journal’s editors pictured their mission in terms of an invisible red thread that ties together progressive critical forces across the Balkans, the Middle East, the Caucasus, North Africa, and beyond, with the goal of establishing long-term cooperation among intellectuals and artists from these regions.¹² *Red Thread*’s political horizon was gradually constituted by positions and theories ranging from Althusserian philosophy and the Praxis Marxism tradition of the former Yugoslavia to anarchism,¹³ with a main goal of historicizing modernist legacies in the so-called marginal regions.¹⁴ Even though these periodicals appear to be part of the same category, each journal carries on its

12 Erden Kosova, from the conference introduction to *Red Thread* e-journal.

13 Erden Kosova in the Q&A section of the conference.

14 A product of the 2009 Istanbul Biennial, the *Red Thread* journal ceased publication in 2012, reflecting the precarious political and funding landscape for politically engaged art publications in Turkey.

struggle under different conditions and for different goals: *Chto delat'*? attempts to give a second wind to the Russian political left (by way of preserving what has been left uncorrupted in Soviet Marxism-Leninism and injecting a “healthy” dose of Western Marxism); *ArtLeaks* deploys the grassroots tactics of the Occupy Movement against the overbureaucratization and abuses of contemporary art institutions; *Art & the Public Sphere* carries out an artistic critique of pervasive policies of governance informed by post-Thatcherism and New Labor; and, finally, *Red Thread* attempted to build a regional alliance among intellectuals.

At the conference, respondents and members of the audience asked the editors of these politically committed periodicals delicate questions: if they form alliances with a contemporary political vanguard, as had been the case with the historical avant-garde; or if the “leaks” revealed within the art world (by *ArtLeaks Gazette*) are as disturbing as those in the real world. Other audience members were alarmed to find that certain radical left-wing political platforms receive funding from major European banks, while again others inquired whether reporting on artistic revolutionary actions choreographed in museums and centers of contemporary art across Western Europe and the United States does indeed alleviate the sufferings of those in whose name these actions occur.

One online platform, *e-flux* (established in 1999), can be regarded as being in a category of its own. *e-flux* has managed to integrate many functions at once: it is a “publishing platform and archive, an artist project, a curatorial platform, and an enterprise.”¹⁵ The “About” section of its website informs the reader that the journal publishes monthly essays on various aspects of contemporary artistic production. *e-flux* is financially self-sufficient because its “enterprise” part—distributing paid press releases for museums and other institutions to over 90,000 readers worldwide (a model of email promotion that cofounder and editor Anton Vidokle introduced back in 1998)—provides the necessary means to support the journal’s publishing, archiving, and curatorial efforts. There is a frequently encountered view in contemporary cultural and artistic criticism that one of the main tasks of a radical artist today is not to develop new means of production or new artistic and

15 See www.e-flux.com/about/, accessed July 25, 2015.

literary forms (the mission carried out most successfully by the historical avant-garde), but to find innovative ways of distributing, transferring, or recycling the constant flow of cultural products in contemporary consumer society. From this perspective, *e-flux* carries out a very important function. In its various activities, it fulfills the tasks of processing and channeling the flow of information about art and of managing continuously generated and regenerated cultural content. The *e-flux* editors do not see themselves solely as distributors, but also as content producers.

Most of the periodicals represented at the conference affirm, in their mission statements, their commitment to the dissemination, engagement, acquisition, production, and creation of knowledge, or critical reflection on contemporary art and culture. But even here, their approaches vary in accordance with the editors' and editorial teams' takes on what constitutes knowledge or culture. *Cabinet* magazine (established in 2000 in New York City), for instance, defines culture very broadly. Its editors place the notion of "engaged curiosity" at the center of their mission statement, which is also inscribed in *Cabinet's* mascot: a hedgehog and a fox facing each other on a diagonally split chevron, a graphical translation of a literary symbol that comes down from the pre-Socratic poet Archilochus, but which has been made popular in our time by Isaiah Berlin's essay of the same name: the fox knows many small things, the hedgehog one big thing. By choosing this symbol, the *Cabinet* editors suggest that the magazine is open to a variety of different approaches to knowledge: to both the inductive and pluralist foxes pursuing many theories at the same time; and to the intuitive hedgehogs, or thinkers in search of one big Idea, System, or Principle. *Cabinet* sets the stage for an encounter between these two, placing the category of curiosity along the line where scientific inquiry meets art and cultural discourse.

Some journals see their main task as reinventing or reforming the methods and languages used by critics and historians to interpret art and culture. Since *October's* inception in 1976 its founding editors, Rosalind Krauss and Annette Michelson, have sought to "introduce, and skillfully deploy European critical theory into Anglophone art historical debates."¹⁶ Under its Eisenstein-inspired name—suggestive of

16 David Joselit, from the conference introduction to *October* journal.

revolutionary rupture and the triumph of new forms of knowledge—the journal has interpreted various aspects of modern and contemporary art and culture through a montage of juxtaposed critical positions, from structuralism and poststructuralism, psychoanalysis, and deconstruction, to Marxist and post-Marxist thought and theories of postmodernism. *October* has recently experienced a second birth as its editors have worked to alter the deeply ingrained image of a publication with a Western-centric perspective on art and culture, to fashion a journal with a more international or global outlook. Recently the journal has turned its scholarly lens on other regions of the world and their art historical contexts, making a commitment to the interpretation of mid-20th-century art from Latin America and of various Eastern European modernisms.¹⁷

The Eastern Europeans, meanwhile, do not always await interpretations from New York, but deal with their modernisms, postmodernisms, and the contemporary arts in ways that are faithful to their own local historical context and the imperatives of the present. The online periodical *Arteria* (established in Yerevan, Armenia, in 2011), for example, is a platform for scholars, critics, writers, and artists that appears in Armenian and has been used primarily by local scholars and students to historicize modernist and postmodernist practices in this country. *Arteria* seeks new approaches to the interpretation of art and culture, but it does so locally and on a strictly voluntary basis. The journal was launched by four editors with common interests but differing perspectives, following a successful grant application to a foreign foundation (a very common beginning in the post-socialist landscape). When the dollars or the euros ran out, the group—whose members prefer to describe themselves as “romantics of necessity”—did not disperse, but kept working on the website, encouraging art historical and critical reflection on modern and contemporary Armenian art and culture, as well as publishing translations of key art historiographical and theoretical texts, among other literary and cultural material.¹⁸

The Beirut Critical Machines conference offered a chance to glimpse various positions that exist today within the broad and diverse field of contemporary art's media, information, and critical spheres.

17 Ibid.

18 Vardan Azatyan, from the conference introduction to *Arteria* journal.



Still from the exhibition *Critical Machines*. Shelf with artist magazines and journals, 2014. AUB Art Galleries, Beirut. Image courtesy of the author. Photograph by Octavian Eşanu.

It also offered an opportunity to place some of these positions in relation to each other, in order to bring to public attention the editors' distinct objectives, editorial policies, funding structures, publishing strategies, and critical methods. What follows are a few short excerpts from the much longer transcripts of conversations that took place at the conference. We hope they will at least partially convey the range of strategies and contradictions, disputes, and editorial decisions encountered today within the field of art periodicals. Moreover, the material below includes only selections from the Q&A sections that followed each of the panels, in which editors made short presentations of their periodicals (a summary of these panel presentations is available online¹⁹).

19 www.aub.edu.lb/art_galleries/Documents/Critical-Machines.pdf.

EXCERPTS FROM Q&A SESSIONS OF THE CRITICAL MACHINES:
ART PERIODICALS TODAY CONFERENCE (MARCH 2014)²⁰

SESSION 1: CRITICAL AND ART HISTORICAL PERIODICALS, with David Joselit (*October* journal, US); Sven Spieker (*ARTMargins* journal, US); Anton Vidokle (*e-flux Journal*, New York, US); Vardan Azatyan (*Arteria* e-journal platform, Yerevan, AM). Angela Harutyunyan and Rico Franses (discussants).

Audience member: In their introductory remarks and presentations, the editors of the art journals have been frequently referring to the term “global.” I am trying to understand what the editors of, for instance, *e-flux* or *ARTMargins* think about the global today. What does it mean to work in this global field? Is this globalism understood geographically, or are there other meanings to it? To me, *ARTMargins* thinks of the global as being specifically somewhere, literally by “going” to various places and informing us about different artistic practices; whereas for *e-flux* the global is a constant flux without geography and a specific place, without a starting point. And at the same time, when you think of *ARTMargins*, it questions this possibility or impossibility of the global, asking: what does it mean “to work in this global field?”

Sven Spieker (*ARTMargins*): My work with *ARTMargins* has forced me to think about what globalism might mean for somebody interested in contemporary art. On the one hand, there is the use of the term in the economic sphere, where it operates like a flat screen on which every point on the globe seems to be equivalent with every other, not unlike the network maps of the global airline alliances. We have tended to be

20 One of the biggest challenges of preparing this conference report was finding a consistent and comprehensive way to represent the locations from which these magazines, journals, gazettes, and platforms operate. In certain cases, the task was fairly simple: some periodicals have their editorial office fixed at a particular location, and their language of operation aims at attracting a specific readership, most often from within the boundaries of a nation-state (e.g., *Gahnama-e-Hunar* in Afghanistan, *Arteria* in Armenia, *Al-Akhbar* in Lebanon, and *Mada Masr* in Egypt). In other cases, however, art journals and magazines are edited by teams located in one country but aimed at a readership that is global; most often these are American periodicals (e.g., *October*, *e-flux Journal*, and *Cabinet*). But there is a third category, as well: periodicals produced by international editorial teams whose members reside in different corners of the planet, but who are working at times simultaneously on the same file accessed from the cloud; these periodicals by and large use English as their language of operation to reach a wider regional or global readership (e.g., *ARTMargins*, *ArtLeaks Gazette*, and *Umeš lec*).

critical of such a model. Through the articles, documents, and artist projects we publish, we try to rewrite such maps so they tentatively bypass the intellectual, methodological, or disciplinary “hubs” to which we have all become used. And then, *ARTMargins* confronts the neoliberal fiction of universal equivalence with more localized histories in order to complement the flat screen of the global with an element of time. We take the “con-” in “contemporary” seriously and understand it as a kind of parallelism of different temporalities in different places that allows for the resurfacing of certain traditions and “peripheral” understandings of modern and contemporary art that have not been taken into account to the extent that they should be.

David Joselit (October): I think you are right to bring up the term “global” because, as Sven said, it has different valences: one of these denotes, to put it bluntly, art from places outside of Euro-America that is included in big international exhibitions. Sometimes that’s the extent of it. There is a kind of tokenism at worst, or a good faith effort to do research beyond the usual art market precincts at best. As I see it, *ARTMargins* is interested in tracing lateral or underrecognized networks rather than telling a story based in traditional metropolitan art centers. Personally, I think, to use the term “globalization” rigorously, it’s necessary to think of it as an uneven distribution of aesthetic relations across spatial and economic borders. It is important to understand the genealogies of modernism that have developed in different parts of the world. In some cases, modernism is thought to be liberatory, and in others it is absolutely an imposition from above by power elites. To use the term “globalization” to signify something more than bland internationalism or multiculturalism, you have to look for different models of the modern—and how they are synchronized with one another in the contemporary. And that is actually in complete contradiction with the “stealth” universalism that globalization smuggles in.

Audience member: What kind of readership (imaginary or real) do you or would you work for? And secondly, what about the area outside of the art public and academia? How do you relate to a wider readership?

Anton Vidokle (e-flux): I’m not an art historian, a critic, or an academic. Primarily, I am a practicing artist. *E-flux Journal* was started by two artists: Julieta Aranda and me, as well as Brian Kuan Wood, who studied art history on the undergraduate level and later worked at the Townhouse Gallery, a nonprofit exhibition space in Cairo. We started the journal with the idea that it would be sufficient if our publication

were read by just a few hundred people—essentially artists and writers we knew personally—as a kind of conversation among friends who were separated by distances and time zones. The journal was one of the outcomes of the *unitednationsplaza*—an experimental school we ran in Berlin for a year and then in New York—under the name Nightschool. The artists and writers who were part of this project—Martha Rosler, Boris Groys, Walid Raad, Jalal Toufic, Natascha Sadr Haghghian, Liam Gillick, and others—were very prolific and generous with ideas, texts, and lectures, and it was clear that a new publishing platform was necessary so that they could publish on a regular basis. Liam Gillick at some point suggested a very beautiful approach to this: he suggested doing something that doesn't really have a set form, design, and appearance, that is not concerned with how it is printed and distributed, with the emphasis being on publishing urgent texts by any means possible and in whatever format—as Xerox copies, as emails, as handwritten pages. In other words, not to think so much about how a journal is published and what it looks like, but primarily to urgently address the ideas of artists and writers. To some extent this is still our approach. So maybe the journal is contemporary in the sense that it's dedicated to the expression of a certain kind of urgently expressed idea from many different places.

Vardan Azatyan (*Arteria*): As far as I can see, *Arteria* is the only non-English journal represented in this panel. . . . Our readership, accordingly, is very limited. Students constitute the largest number of our readers because they use the material we publish in their courses, which are held in Armenian. One of the reasons behind our decision to continue to publish is that we would be letting down our readers if we didn't. But it's hard to correctly define who they are.

Rico Franses (discussant): David, you mentioned earlier that you are constantly posing the question [whether *October* should continue to exist] and that there are various reasons to keep it going. Are there institutional reasons to keep it going? In other words, is the reason you keep publishing *October* the fact that it has become an institution?

David Joselit: I think a group of editors who publish a journal do so with the conviction that they have a worthwhile point of view. And I think that [in *October's* case] we do, though we are now in a very different set of conditions than when the journal was founded, and we have tried to respond to them by, for example, engaging with robust traditions of modernism in Eastern Europe and Latin America. As for your

institutional question, I don't know if you're politely trying to point out that *October* is closely aligned with a certain power structure in American academia—which is true. This is probably part of the reason why there is also a strong pushback from the field. But I think it's more interesting to try to think about what serious scholarship of the modern really means in terms of the contemporary or the global. I think it's important for practitioners of contemporary art—artists, critics, and historians—to have a sense of what was and what wasn't accomplished in modern art. This is something that *October* participates in; it doesn't have a corner on the market but it has a real contribution to make in that realm.

Audience member: What are the funding structures for your magazines, and how do they reflect or impact your content?

David Joselit: We receive a subsidy from MIT Press, which is probably the same with *ARTMargins*. It is enough to do a sort of barebones management; then, we make money from our *October* files and some subscriptions. And we've had a few artists' portfolios. We recently received a major Andrew W. Mellon grant to enhance our ability to do translations, but unfortunately that is coming to an end. We have a part-time managing editor, and the rest is voluntary.

Sven Spieker: It's more or less the same for us.

Anton Vidokle: *E-flux Journal* is a monthly publication, so the intensity is different than with quarterly journals: to put out an issue every month is very labor-intensive. Also, we pay all of the writers and editors; basically everybody who works on the journal gets paid, including interns, and if they work full time they also get health coverage and other benefits. Writers retain copyrights and are free to republish their work as books or in other places. In this sense we are very different from academic publications. To do things like this is rather expensive: it costs us several hundred thousand dollars per year to publish the journal. We do not look for grants and private or corporate sponsors, because the funds come from the *e-flux* announcement service.

David Joselit: I have long thought that the model of *e-flux* is amazing because it provides a very useful service whose profits are then invested in artists and writers in the form of commissions and projects. It is hard to imagine a similar model that would work in our [*October*] context, but it was hard to imagine *e-flux*, too. Being nonprofit, after all, does not bring perfect freedom; one is still subject to other kinds of economic forces. So being self-supporting gives you different kinds of freedom.

SESSION 2: GLOBAL AND REGIONAL ART PERIODICALS, with Shuruq Harb (*ArtTerritories* online platform, Ramallah, PS); Anthony Downey (*Ibraaz* online platform, London, GB); Lina Attalah (*Mada Masr* online newspaper, Cairo, EG); Palo Fabuš (*Umělec* magazine, Prague, CZ). Sven Spieker (discussant).

Audience member: We often work with artists in the Middle East, and one of the problems that comes up is translation. I would like to ask Shuruq Harb how *ArtTerritories* engages with the translatability but equally the untranslatability of the knowledge that is produced out of, for example, *ArtTerritories* or *Ibraaz* or any publication operating in or around the Middle East.

Shuruq Harb (*ArtTerritories*): When we started *ArtTerritories*, we did not find a lot of artists who wanted to write in Arabic, and that was quite challenging. So then the idea was that we translate the material. We felt uncomfortable because when we are speaking across languages we are not speaking to the same audience. In other words, simply translating does not really solve the problem. So part of what we feel we need to do, and one of the things that we would like to work on while we are in Amman, is actually working with writers who can write in Arabic.²¹

In terms of audiences, the scopes of *ArtTerritories* and *Ibraaz* are rather different—*ArtTerritories* is quite a small project. We do realize, for example, that a lot of our interviews are made with a very specific goal and for very specific people. So we always think about these interviews as references that artists could consult with. I think the difference between [*Ibraaz* and *ArtTerritories*] is that actually being on the ground is quite important because it generates a kind of audience that does not exist online. It's not only about creating reading material, but also about creating places where art can interact with other disciplines.

Audience member: Anthony, I wonder about the difference between a platform and a magazine. I feel that *Ibraaz* is not there for knowledge production, but more for its dissemination. I feel like there is this flatness that, I guess, goes well with the notion of platform, but which raises a fundamental question about the editorial voice.

Anthony Downey (*Ibraaz*): Our editorial voice, I hope, is much more discursive and it is not just me. What I presented today is more

21 Shuruq Harb participated in the conference over the Internet from an artist residency in Jordan.

my take, or what I consider a good editorial line to be. When I talk about art criticism being productive as opposed to reproductive—and you’re drawing a distinction here between production and dissemination—I think that it is a correct thing to do. I would think it has to be on a variety of registers. A platform also needs to be a form of dissemination, carry other voices and messages, reveal contradictions. Somebody mentioned the word “agonistic” earlier: perhaps there is some sort of agonistic message that is coming out of *Ibraaz’s* various registers—be they news, print items, artists’ projects, critical essays.

Audience member: I think that *Mada Masr* [Cairo] is a more successful model, because there is a genuine friction between its different spheres of operation: journalism, politics, art, and both specialized and nonspecialized audiences.

Audience member: Lina, we are now used to thinking about the newspaper as a reproductive medium. But there was a time when newspapers were considered revolutionary in social, political, and linguistic terms. They were really there to forge a new language and a new perception of life and maybe point out that another life was also possible. I wonder if that was part of your idea in working for *Mada Masr*.

Lina Attalah (*Mada Masr*): If right now, particularly in the Egyptian local context, we considered newspapers “reproductive,” then I think the newspaper as a medium would be really obsolete. We would be basically reproducing the constant butchering of meaning; we would be reproducing lies. I do think that by reimagining what a newspaper can and should do, it can definitely be part of the process of inventing a new grammar and a new vocabulary, not just for political discourse but even for cultural practices and for making sense of what is happening in art.

Audience member: Lina, my question has to do with the particular kind of art criticism you are thinking of developing for *Mada Masr*, and how you imagine it playing a role within the larger cultural politics in Egypt. I know things are happening as we speak, but perhaps you could also mention the Wikipedia project you are developing?

Lina Attalah: We are interested in having critics professionally reflect on art production in Egypt and the region, but also in seeing how less professionalized critics or writers relate to artistic production. In parallel, I do Wikipedia workshops as a means to use the syntax of Wikipedia as a tactic for narrative construction. Wikipedia has a series of very strict rules about objectivity. This kind of objectivity within the

Wikipedia community, at least as far as Egypt is concerned, can be quite counterrevolutionary. Our idea is to work with art students and young art professionals in Egypt on learning the Wikipedia logic and the Wikipedia syntax in order to populate Wikipedia with content on art. Even if we try to inhabit these conditions and just be factual, maybe we can fill Wikipedia with a different type of content.

SESSION 3: RADICAL PRAXIS AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

PERIODICALS, with Dmitry Vilensky (*Chto Delat'?* newspaper, St. Petersburg, RU); Corina Apostol (*ArtLeaks Gazette*, Bucharest, RO; Belgrade, RS; St. Petersburg, RU); Erden Kosova, (*Red Thread* e-journal, Istanbul, TR); Mel Jordan (*Art & the Public Sphere* journal, Bristol, GB). Marwa Arsanios and Octavian Eșanu (discussants).

Audience member: *ArtLeaks* is a publication that claims to represent the rights of artists, to defend them from institutions. Can you talk a little bit about the legal side of this struggle?

Corina Apostol (*ArtLeaks Gazette*): We don't have a legal army behind us. And we did get in trouble once with some people who tried to sue us for what we publish, but the way around that is that we never publish just one side of the story. When somebody comes to us with a case, we always contact the other side, whether it is an institution, a curator, or another artist. Then we say, "okay, this has been put on the table and we want to publish a story about it. What is your position?" Sometimes we get a response, sometimes we don't. Most of the time institutions do respond. What is on our website is never just one person making a claim against an entity or another person, but it's actually a claim and a response. We are interested in bringing up conflicts that are not obvious, and the situations of conflict that I think are structuring the art world today. The conflicts are very specific, as there are different laws, for example, in England and in Romania. But at the same time, we also want to emphasize that in the art world we're dealing with a similar kind of structural dysfunction. So that's why our approach is to bring in people who have been dealing with these issues in their own contexts. In some cases, we discovered that people—I mean artists in their own countries—were not aware of the legislation around artists' contracts or artists' rights. I think this information is very valuable.

Audience member: I would like to address the question of posterity

and the way it relates to publishing in print and online. Dmitry, how do you think the Internet and online content relate to the notion of posterity?

Dmitry Vilensky (*Chto delat'?*): I cannot take seriously things that are not present online, because today it's all about access, fair sharing, and so on. But, you know, you keep printing for a number of reasons because we all have that nostalgia for something on paper. But at the same time I think this should be combined with online content, so you have PDFs online and you have user-generated content.

Audience member: Corina, you basically deal with information. Do you have a strategy for its distribution? Because, for instance, what happened at the Sydney Biennial happened because of the rise of the artists.²² Are you planning a strategy on how to push things with the institutions, like how to expose them?

Corina Apostol: Our main strategy revolves around the section "Artleak Your Case," and we mostly rely on artists or groups to come to us; then we develop a narrative together. In some cases, this involves not just exposure and online publishing, but actually actions on the ground. Our collective is from different parts of the world; but we don't, for example, have anybody in England, so what we do there is we work with existing groups and sometimes they decide on an action. For example, in London we worked with PWB [Precarious Workers Brigade], Future Interns, and Ragpickers.

Audience member: Dmitry, as far as I know, *Chto delat'?* distributes its newspaper only at the exhibitions in which you participate, which limits its reach to the contemporary art public. This is not in the spirit of the mass distribution of a typical newspaper. Are you considering a form of distribution that might break the walls of the gallery space?

Dmitry Vilensky: Newspapers can be distributed in places like contemporary art exhibitions, but at the same time they can be present wherever, even outside of the art world. Our newspaper relates to all our events, not just the exhibitions; for example, we do theater, and so the newspaper is in the theater; other people from our collective play in concerts, and so the newspaper can be found in clubs. Also, our

22 At the 19th Sydney Biennial in 2014, twenty-eight artists threatened to boycott the event after ties were revealed between the organizers of the Biennial and Transfield Holdings, connected to Transfield Services, which operates overseas detention camps.

newspaper always balances very different types of texts. We strictly reject academic texts, but at the same time, some of the texts are very complex, so people can really choose.

Audience member: While the *Chto delat'?* newspaper publishes this militant Bolshevism, I see *ArtLeaks Gazette* more as a form of political activism made in the spirit of the Occupy Movement, some sort of radical democratic negotiation within the boundaries of the public sphere. And I see *Red Thread* continuing in the tradition of the Praxis philosophical movement in the former Yugoslavia, a kind of Althusserian Marxism that I notice in your collaborations with Prelom, WHW [What, How, & for Whom], and others. And I see the *Art & the Public Sphere* journal as a project that deals with the contemporary conditions created by Thatcherism in the UK. I would like to ask all of you a question that relates to the fact that historical artistic activism of the 1920s was most of the time allied with a political activism or avant-garde, as was the case in Russia but also in other places. Now my question: are you somehow connected to a contemporary political avant-garde that you work closely with, or are you just an avant-garde to entertain the art world?

Dmitry Vilensky: I think the situation today is really tragic because there is no such thing as a political avant-garde anymore. For example, I was always very skeptical about the Occupy Movement. I see it not as fulfilling the bright idea of communism; it's more a kind of *realpolitik*. For example, right now we insist that the Maidan Movement in Kiev was an incredible event of political rupture in Ukraine. But at the same time, we should be critical of what came in its wake. That's why for us, a big issue is how far we can associate with Russian politics, and we have the same question for our Ukrainian comrades: how can you cope with the open ultrafascists and ultranationalists now in power? So right now, I'm really very sad and skeptical about discussing social change.

Corina Apostol: You are right that we have some affinities with the Occupy Movement; in fact, one of the groups we collaborate with is called Occupy Museums in New York. They have recently done a protest action at the Guggenheim in collaboration with the Gulf Labour Coalition against the exploitation of workers during the construction of Guggenheim Abu Dhabi. Some of us in our group come from the left and identify with communism, some of us come from anarchism, some of us are Deleuzians—so we are not like a united political front. From the beginning, we didn't want to register as an organization or be

located anywhere. But in our workshops we do look at different historical models. We begin with Courbet, we introduce this notion of activism and the art worker and so on, and we look at the Art Workers Coalition and study historical examples of how artists organized.

SESSION 4: EDUCATIONAL AND CURIOSITY ART PERIODICALS, with Roy Dib (*Al-Akhbar* newspaper, “Culture and Society” section, Beirut, LB); D. Graham Burnett (*Cabinet* magazine, New York, US); Negar Azimi (*Bidoun* magazine, New York, US); Rahraw Omarzad (*Gahnama-e-Hunar* magazine, Kabul, AF). Ghalya Saadawi and Kirsten Scheid (discussants).

Audience member: I have a question for *Cabinet*. After hearing you speak, and after looking through your magazine, I was wondering how you would describe the magazine’s relation to the notion of critique or to the political? Or to put it in other words, where is politics in *Cabinet*?

D. Graham Burnett (*Cabinet*): So remember the catch phrase I used—it is the mission of *Cabinet* and its attendant undertakings to recover and deploy “curiosity” under the full range of that term’s ethical, political, and aesthetic significance. That stance is by no means politically neutral or indifferent. Curiosity posits an affective/appetitive *implication* of would-be knower and would-be known. It risks, it *courts*, contamination. It cannot be automated or mechanized. It hesitates. But not because it is uncertain—it hesitates because it feels the tug of love. Not sentimental love. But the love that would hold each person and thing before the light, hold each person and thing against the flow of time—if only for a moment. Each “politics”—each sovereign, each marketplace, each border-guard—must eventually suspend or abrogate or stipulate the conditions for that orientation to persons and things. And therefore the political stakes of resisting those forms of closure could not, in my view, be higher.

You ask about “critique.” In my talk earlier today, I tried to address the theme/conceit of this symposium—“critical machines,” machines that regulated other machines—in a very *Cabinet* way. I sifted out a forgotten story about a strange kind of machine, the “Dithering Machine,” which emerged during World War II as a kind of parasitic submechanism within complex mechanical bomb sights. The digital descendants of these systems continue to work within many data-intensive algorithmic devices. Dithering machines “dither”: they do not lift weights or

drive cybernetic controls. By humming a kind of meandering “white noise,” they prevent their host mechanism from seizing up or locking down. They resist inertia. They discourage computational protocols from settling on suboptimal solutions—but they do so by means of continuous micro-destabilizations. This was not an allegory. But it was an effort to think with a thing in a way that feels native to the idiom of our publication—and, along the way, to offer a kind of (counter)critical commentary on the idea of art magazines as critical machines. I was trying to show, rather than tell, how *Cabinet* works. And that is generally how we like to proceed.

Audience member: Rahraw Omarzad, you are the editor of *Gahnama-e-Hunar* art magazine in Kabul and have also founded the Center for Contemporary Art Afghanistan (CCAA). When the Berlin Wall fell, there were certain American foundations that came to Eastern Europe and started financing and founding centers for contemporary art that were radically different from existing local art organizations. So (and I’m just speculating here), is it a coincidence that the Center for Contemporary Art Afghanistan was launched soon after the US army entered Afghanistan?

Rahraw Omarzad (*Gahnama-e-Hunar*): My life history will give you the answer. Before the Americans came to Kabul, there were no funders for an art magazine; I started this magazine at a time when Afghan refugees were not thinking about artistic activities but mainly how to stay alive. At that time, I was living in a house that didn’t have water or gas. For one year, I collected many articles, and then I published the first issue of the magazine, I also established a women’s art center. When I was in Peshawar during the civil war, I had a meeting with Pakistani, Iranian, and Afghan women. I asked them why women were prevented from learning about art, and how many women they knew who were very famous in their countries. It was very difficult for them to mention even three names. When I was in Pakistan and received a salary of around \$80 or \$100, I started free art courses for Afghan refugees because they needed them and they didn’t have any money. During the years of the Russian occupation, there was no funding to do anything. When I came to Kabul in 2002, I was invited to take part in a panel discussion as an editor of our art magazine. That’s when I had the idea of starting a contemporary art center. We are receiving very little in financial support. The international NGOs have their own agendas, and art is not one of them.

Audience member: Are the activities of your Center for Contemporary Art Afghanistan reviewed in the newspapers?

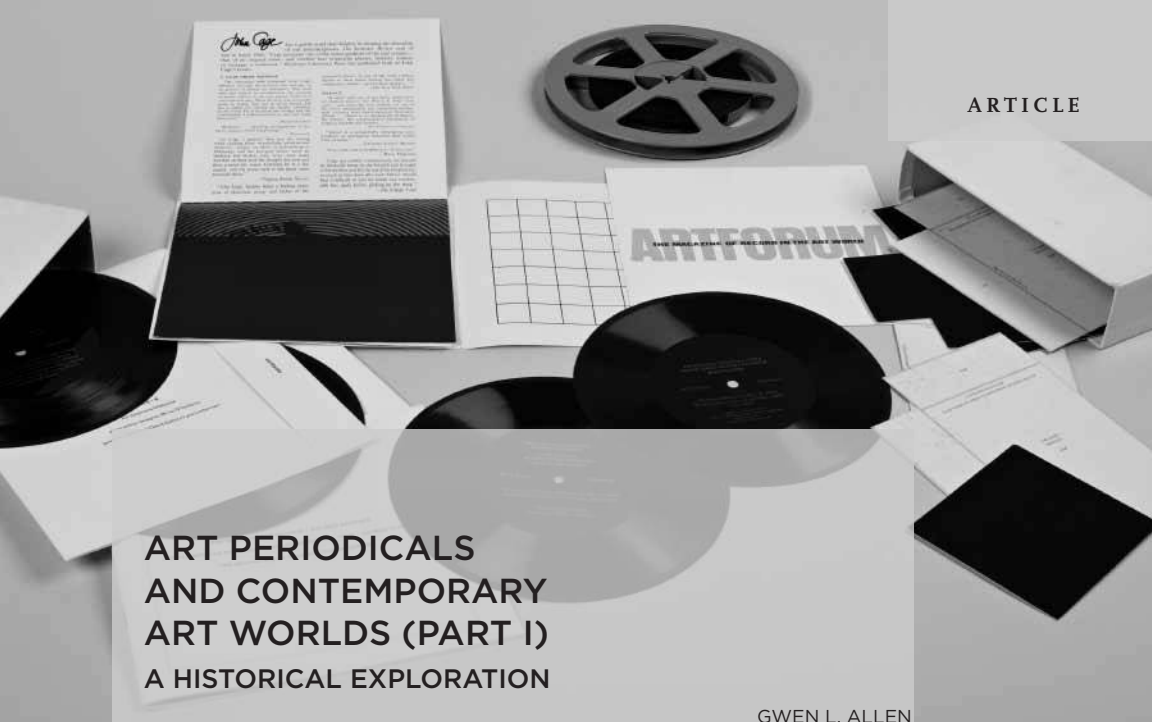
Rahraw Omarzad: Yes, of course the media do interviews with our students. But one of the problems in Afghanistan is that we don't have journalists specialized in art reportage. When we do an exhibition, they come and write a report about it; and they are always asking the same questions—how many art pieces are in this exhibition? how long does the exhibition last? how many artists? how much money? This is one of the problems. This is why I had this idea to train some journalists in the arts. Somebody asked me yesterday what the reaction of people to contemporary art was because we have no history of showing contemporary art to people. When we have an exhibition, nobody knows about it. Only one group of students and artists attend. After 2002, when I came back to Kabul, for a short time there were some donors for the art magazine—such as the Goethe-Institut, a Contemporary Art Center in Oslo, and the Prince Claus Fund. For one year, they supported our magazine. But soon even these donors lost interest because they did not think that it could grow to be independent. And that's why, for four years now, we are not publishing the magazine, even though we are continuing with other activities.

Ghalya Saadawi (discussant): I have a question about readership. Someone mentioned the dearth or lack of art publications in the Middle East, and then we have the Afghan case of *Gahnama-e-Hunar* that Rahraw just described, or even the way in which Roy was talking earlier about the mission of the cultural section of *Al-Akhbar*, in the sense of a desperate need to educate or give a voice to the voiceless. This need did not come across in the parallels between *Cabinet* and *Bidoun*: here, there is no such urgency, and instead a kind of luxury, privilege, a kind of self-reflexive capacity to be epistemological machines. In a sense, there is something predetermined in giving a voice to the voiceless, because you already think you know who your readers are. So how do *Cabinet* and *Bidoun* position themselves in relation to their readership, or the said urge to educate and give voice?

D. Graham Burnett: *Cabinet* has a pretty large and loyal readership—about 11,000 subscribers, who renew at a high rate. We also have an event space that is free and where we host regular events—many, in one way or another, are committed to forms of nontraditional pedagogy. But there was a probing in this question that tipped open issues of luxury and privilege—and those are tough matters, important

matters. I totally acknowledge that in the context of such a fascinating presentation about *Gahnama-e-Hunar* and the role it fulfills in the Afghan art community, *Cabinet's* omnivorous appetites, its patience with the minor and marginal, and its attention to strong design—all this could look “decadent.” Let’s just call this out and make it clear. But different situations—different readers, different environments—call for different responses. In a world of established institutional hierarchies (in art and academe) and entrenched disciplinary regimes, which reflexively and pervasively canalize the richness of the past and the present into a narrow trough for the feeding of *Homo academicus*, a project like ours aims to expand and transform the realms of inquiry. And I think that we have had, that we continue to have, that effect. We publish a kind of work—imaginative, empirical, problematic, archival, creative, “queer,” learned, mixed, *mad*—for which there has not traditionally been anything like a *venue*. And I would say that over the years, through the print magazine and our space and our events, we have really even gone beyond just providing that venue. We’ve helped nurture something close to a community of hybrid-impure *discourse*—a far-flung and sublated republic of artists and scholars and makers and readers who share our commitment to recovering curiosity in its full political, ethical, and aesthetic registers.

Negar Azimi (*Bidoun*): Part of our founding instinct was certainly to fill some sort of vacuum; we recognized that there were interesting things happening in cities that we were close to: Beirut, Tehran, Cairo in particular. But we were self-conscious about our limitations. In other words, we couldn’t even begin to represent everything that was happening culturally in these places. As a side note, I still think there are too many artists per capita in the Middle East. Regarding readership, we never had a lot of subscribers. People tend to pick up *Bidoun* at their favorite independent bookshop or arts space. The readership is mostly cosmopolitan, mostly urban. That said, we never tried to cater to a specific readership per se, but we always tried to push for a culture of criticism that we thought was sorely missing, and we will continue to do that.



ART PERIODICALS AND CONTEMPORARY ART WORLDS (PART I) A HISTORICAL EXPLORATION

GWEN L. ALLEN

*Artforum is an art magazine published in the west—but not only a magazine of western art. We are concerned first with western activity but claim the world of art as our domain. Artforum presents a medium for free exchange of critical opinion.*¹

This editorial statement appeared in the first issue of *Artforum*, founded in San Francisco, California, in 1962. The “west” here referred not to Western culture in general, but specifically to the western region of the United States, reflecting *Artforum’s* initial goal to foster West Coast art, which was marginalized by the dominant, New York-centered art press at the time.² However, the editors also voiced their aspiration to inhabit a larger “world of art,” a phrase that at once anticipates the specialized social and professional realm that would come to be known as the art world, and hints at a nascent internationalism (with overtones of cultural imperialism), foreshadowing the role *Artforum* would come to play in the globalized art world of today. The 1960s marked a new historical understanding of the “art world”—a term that would, in fact,

1 Editorial note, *Artforum* 1, no. 1 (June 1962).

2 The New York art press in the early 1960s consisted of *Art in America*, *Arts Magazine*, and *Art News*. *Artforum* was specifically founded as “a counterpoint to *Art News*,” which under the editorship of Thomas Hess in the 1950s had become the leading art magazine in the United States at that time. John Coplans, quoted in “Art as News,” *Newsweek*, September 18, 1972.

be coined by the American philosopher Arthur Danto just a few years later, in 1964³—and during the subsequent decades, many of the conditions and institutions of our contemporary art world (globalization, the vast commercialization and expansion of the art market, spectacular media culture) developed or were substantially transformed under late capitalism.⁴ *Artforum's* founding editorial suggests how the art world was being imagined at this historical juncture and reveals the many different, contradictory roles that magazines played within this emerging world: vehicles of critical exchange, sites of regional identity, instruments of hegemony.

This essay considers how such contradictions informed the North American art world of the 1960s and 1970s by looking back at the early history of *Artforum*—its beginnings as a small regional art magazine; its rise to national and international prominence; and, along the way, the defection of several of its editors to found the critical journal *October*. It further contextualizes this history within a larger field of publishing practices stemming back to the Enlightenment, including self-published Salon pamphlets, 19th century art magazines, little magazines, and artists' periodicals. In different ways, both *Artforum* and *October* sought to provide alternative channels of critical publicity within the art world of their time: *Artforum* gave voice to an underrepresented, regional artistic community, while *October* attempted to counteract the increasingly promotional character of the commercial art press (of which *Artforum* had become, by that point, the prime example). As we think about the role of art periodicals and newer online media in today's globalized art world, this history offers important models of how magazines mediate publics and counterpublics within art worlds, how they may function as sites of criticality, and how their capacity to do so is strengthened and/or compromised within different social, economic, and political contexts, as well as by their own "apparatus" (i.e., the material and technological conditions of their production and distribution).⁵

In particular, the histories of *Artforum* and *October* serve as case

3 Arthur Danto, "The Artworld," *Journal of Philosophy* 61, no. 19 (1964): 571–84.

4 See Fredric Jameson, "Periodizing the 60s," *Social Text*, no. 9/10 (Spring/Summer 1984): 178–209.

5 This term "apparatus" references Walter Benjamin's essay "The Author as Producer." In *Reflections: Essays, Aphorisms, Autobiographical Writings*, ed. Peter Demetz, trans. Edmund Jephcott (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1978), 220–38.

studies for the ways in which publications that start off in the margins—to contest the conditions of the mainstream art world—so often end up becoming dominant, reinforcing the very conditions they set out to oppose. If these dynamics played out in the North American art world of the 1960s and 1970s, they now occur in a global context, characterized by the geopolitical hierarchies of the contemporary art world—a contested arena that signals both the unprecedented heterogeneity and multiplicity of artistic production around the globe today and the pervasive efforts to tame and exploit it by Western neoliberal institutions (processes in which magazines, including the two discussed here, certainly participate). To quote the editors of the independently published Spanish magazine *Brumaria*: “We live in a world that is politically unidirectional, economically anarchical, and socially unfair, where the international Art Institution has become a big circus. . . . The hegemonic magazines (*Artforum*, *Parkett*, *Flash Art*, *Frieze*, *October*) play a role that hardly questions the classist and perverse nature of this institution.”⁶ Yet, as the example of *Brumaria* itself attests, periodicals can also function as sites of critical publicity that challenge, resist, and reflect upon these processes. The point of this essay is not to reinforce the dominance of *Artforum*, *October*, and the North American models of publication and criticism they embody; rather, I hope to better understand and complicate the histories of these publications and to think critically about the examples they provide—whether touchstones or cautionary tales—as we seek out new, alternative modes of publication today.

ART WORLDS, ART MAGAZINES

Danto’s 1964 essay “The Artworld” marked a new understanding and theorization of the art world as a specialized institutional and interpretive framework that determines the status, meaning, and value of art. Danto defined the art world as a discursive and theoretical realm of possibility through which works of art become recognized and agreed upon as such. Discussing the work of Andy Warhol, he observed, “What in the end makes the difference between a Brillo box and a work of art consisting of a Brillo box is a certain theory of art. It is the theory that takes it up into the world of art, and keeps it from collapsing into

6 Dario Corbeira and Irene Montero, “The Big Lie,” *Radical Philosophy* 146 (November/December 2007): 46.



Marcel Duchamp. *The Blind Man*, no. 1 (1917). Image courtesy of Roger Conover.

the real object which it is.”⁷ Yet, the art world to which Danto was referring was much more than simply an “atmosphere” of language and artistic theory, as he described it.⁸ It was a complex set of relationships between works of art, artists, audiences and critics, markets, institutions, and publications, located primarily in the United States and Western Europe.⁹

In 1969, George Dickie expanded upon Danto’s observations to develop what is known as the institutional theory of art, defining the art world as a “social institution” whose practices “confer the

status of” art.¹⁰ Dickie illustrated his point with Marcel Duchamp’s *Fountain*, arguing that what transformed the ready-made urinal into a work of art was the fact “that Duchamp’s act took place within a certain institutional setting.”¹¹ While Dickie focused mainly on museums and galleries, his example of Duchamp’s *Fountain* is revealing of the equally crucial role of magazines in conferring the status of art. For it was in Duchamp’s self-published periodical *The Blind Man* that the original 1917 *Fountain* (which was rejected by the Society of Independent Artists and subsequently lost) was documented in a

7 Danto, “The Artworld,” 581.

8 *Ibid.*, 580.

9 To clarify, I am not suggesting that these were the only places that an art world existed, but rather that Danto’s concept of the art world was based on deeply Euro-American assumptions about who and what this world included.

10 George Dickie, “Defining Art,” *American Philosophical Quarterly* 6, no. 3 (July 1969): 255. Both Danto and Dickie have been influential on subsequent sociological theories of the art world, most notably those of Howard Becker. See Howard Becker, *Art Worlds* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982).

11 Dickie, “Defining Art,” 255.

photograph taken by Alfred Stieglitz. Thus it could be argued that the magazine was the actual vehicle through which this work entered the art world.

The role of art magazines would grow even more important during the 1960s and 1970s, as part of the expansion of media culture more generally.¹² By 1972, Lawrence Alloway would define the art world as itself a communication “network,” composed of “original works of art and reproductions; critical, historical, and informative writings; galleries, museums, and private collections. It is a sum of persons, objects, resources, messages, and ideas. It includes monuments and parties, esthetics and openings, *Avalanche* and *Art in America*.”¹³ As he pointed out, magazines were privileged sites in the art world’s power structure: they helped to organize its information system and mediated the communication among its various publics (though his examples of *Art in America* and *Avalanche* also suggest the contested nature of this power structure, and the roles of different kinds of publications in upholding or challenging it).

Observing the new importance of the art magazine in the American art world of the 1960s, the artist Dan Graham famously stated: “If a work of art wasn’t written about and reproduced in a magazine it would have difficulty attaining the status of ‘art.’ It seemed that to be defined as having value—that is, as ‘art’—a work had only to be exhibited in a gallery and then written about and reproduced as a photograph in an art magazine. This record of the no-longer-extant installation, along with more accretions of information after the fact, became the basis for its fame and, to a large extent, its economic value.”¹⁴ As Graham suggests, the art magazine’s role in producing cultural and economic capital had in some ways outstripped the traditional function of criticism itself as a process of aesthetic analysis and judgment. The critic Rosalind Krauss, writing in the first issue of the

12 These changes within the art world correspond to larger social and economic shifts associated with the late capitalist, post-Fordist information age or “network society,” wherein sites and processes of information and communication have assumed a growing importance in the creation of cultural and economic wealth. See Manuel Castells, *The Rise of the Network Society*, vol. 1 (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), and Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1991).

13 Lawrence Alloway, “Network: The Art World Described as a System,” *Artforum* (September 1972): 29.

14 Dan Graham, “My Works for Magazine Pages: ‘A History of Conceptual Art,’” in *Two-Way Mirror Power: Selected Writings by Dan Graham on His Art*, ed. Alexander Alberro (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999), 12.

journal *October* in 1976, would lament this situation (a situation that had in fact prompted her to found *October* to begin with): “In the last fifteen years the art world has been deeply and disastrously affected by its relation to the mass media. That an artist’s work be published, reproduced, and disseminated through the media has become, for the generation that has matured in the course of the last decade, virtually the *only* means of verifying its existence as art.”¹⁵ As Krauss points out, the growing influence of the media—and of the art magazine in particular—had altered the very functioning of the art world as Danto had theorized it. Instead of facilitating historical and theoretical knowledge, research, reflection, and analysis—modes of critique through which the modern art world had long instilled aesthetic meaning and value upon objects—the art magazine now conferred the status of art instantly and automatically as an effect of spectacular media culture’s self-perpetuating affirmative and “tautological” character, which Guy Debord described as follows: “The spectacle presents itself as something enormously positive, indisputable and inaccessible. It says nothing more than ‘that which appears is good, that which is good appears.’”¹⁶

If the 1960s and 1970s marked a new stage in the American art world as a networked communication system linked by mass media, we are now at a moment in which new communication technologies and processes of globalization are further transforming the categories of the magazine and the art world alike.¹⁷ Indeed, as Pamela M. Lee has argued, we are witnessing a dramatic shift in the art world as it was defined by Danto, that amounts to “a certain eclipse of a historical notion of the art world.”¹⁸ Globalization has brought into proximity multiple and diverse frameworks for art’s production and meaning, which in various ways have challenged the presumed universality of Danto’s modern, Western model. Yet while the actual experience of art around the globe may be characterized by “multiplicity,” contemporary art as it is canonized by the art world usually refers to a much narrower set of practices that continue to depend insidiously upon a broadly

15 Rosalind Krauss, “Video: The Aesthetics of Narcissism,” *October*, no. 1 (1976): 59.

16 Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle* (Detroit, MI: Black & Red, 1977), n.p.

17 For a detailed discussion of how the networked art world of the 1960s and 1970s set the stage for today, see Lane Relyea, *Your Everyday Art World* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2013).

18 Pamela M. Lee, *Forgetting the Art World* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2013), 3.

Western set of criteria and traditions.¹⁹ Despite the vast differences that characterize art in various parts of the world today—and hence, the many different art worlds that in fact coexist and coincide—the contemporary art world (singular) imposes a homogenizing (if diversified and deterritorialized) order upon this disparate reality, which is all too often compatible, if not complicit, with the tenets of neoliberalism and the global art market.²⁰

Art magazines participate profoundly in these processes. As the contemporary art world has morphed into a highly commercialized global arena—composed of biennials, auctions, art fairs, galleries, and museums—art magazines, as well as new online media, help to channel images and information into economic, political, and cultural capital.²¹ More than just a geographical expansion of the art world and an intensification of its spectacular media apparatus, such phenomena signal a structural transformation that Pamela Lee diagnoses in her 2013 book, *Forgetting the Art World*. She is particularly concerned with the wide-ranging effects that globalization has wrought on the art world, so that its activities and operations increasingly coincide with those of global capital and economic and political power. “The art world is itself both object *and* agent of globalization,” Lee writes, and she argues that the breakdown between art and formerly, at least nominally, separate spheres of activity (design, the market, and spectacular global media), along with culture’s instrumentalization toward economic and political ends, has led to “a new kind of *informe*: a new all-over,” which all but precludes the possibility of gaining traction or critical distance from which to reflect upon or resist these processes.²²

Indeed, as Lee notes, the loss of criticality resulting from these changes in the art world perpetuates them, creating a vicious circle that leaves us with even less of a foothold from which to critically

19 For an account of the multiplicity and antinomies of contemporary art, see Terry Smith, *What Is Contemporary Art?* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 4–5. For an account of the contested nature of this term, see Francesca Dal Lago, “The Global Contemporary Art Canon and the Case of China,” *ArtMargins* 3, no. 3 (October 2014): 77–97.

20 See Octavian Esanu, “What Was Contemporary Art?,” *ArtMargins* 1, no. 1 (2011): 5–28.

21 In her 2008 best-selling exposé of the art world’s inside workings, *Seven Days in the Art World*, Sarah Thornton devoted an entire chapter to “The Magazine,” in which she focused largely on *Artforum*. Sarah Thornton, *Seven Days in the Art World* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2008).

22 Lee, *Forgetting the Art World*, 4, 3.

analyze them. In what follows, I try to approach this situation historically, by tracing the emergence and development of one of the traditional sites of criticality and reflection—art criticism, and specifically the art magazine—in the hope that this history might offer some distance from which to reflect upon these changes today.

ART PERIODICALS, PUBLICS, AND COUNTERPUBLICS, 1837–1960

An important point of reference for the origin of the art periodical lies in the self-published pamphlets circulated in the wake of the earliest regular public exhibition of art, the Salon, which was first opened to the general public at the Louvre in 1737.²³ In his classic account of the emergence of the bourgeois public sphere in 18th-century Europe, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (1962), Jürgen Habermas stresses the importance of this early art criticism to the formation of a new kind of progressive and egalitarian publicity, grounded in rational-critical debate, which allowed the bourgeois class to oppose the ruling power's authority.²⁴ Indeed, one of the most remarkable things about 18th-century art criticism was its deeply political and ethical dimension. As Thomas Crow has described in detail in his account of 18th-century French painting, judgment of art was implicitly or explicitly commentary on the regime-backed Royal Academy of Painting and Sculpture that sponsored the Salon—and by extension, on the social and political establishment more generally.²⁵

However, if art criticism was born as a progressive and egalitarian form of commentary, its political dimension was gradually eroded as specialized art periodicals evolved during the late 18th and 19th centuries.²⁶ This can be witnessed in a magazine such as *L'Artiste* (1831–1904), one of the most important vehicles for art criticism in

23 For a more in-depth discussion of Habermas's concept of the public sphere in relationship to early Salon criticism, see chapter 1 of Gwen Allen, *Artists' Magazines: An Alternative Space for Art* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2011).

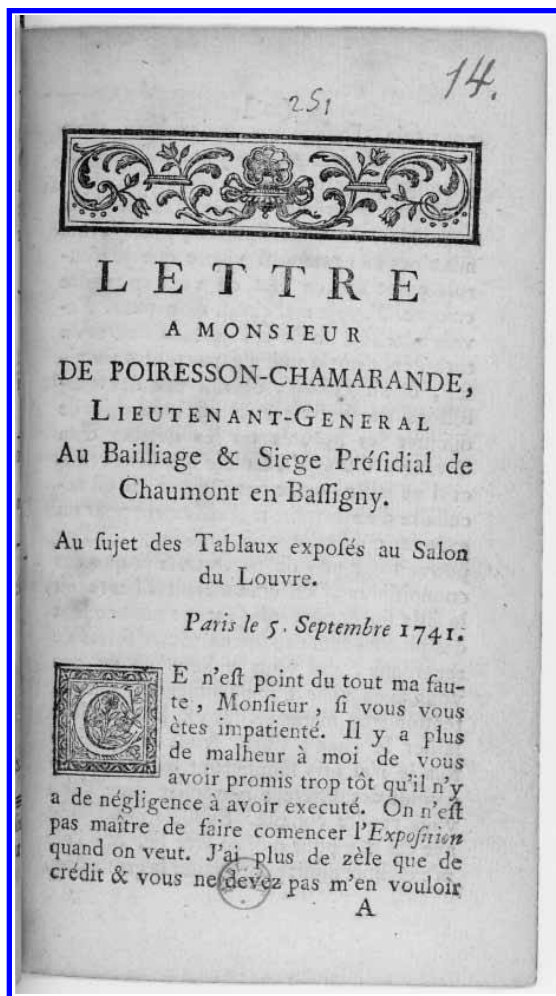
24 Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, trans. Thomas Burger and Frederick Lawrence (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1989).

25 Thomas Crow, *Painters and Public Life in Eighteenth-Century Paris* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1987).

26 Some of the earliest periodicals devoted solely to art were either organs of art academies themselves, and accordingly conservative and staid, or more specialized scholarly art historical journals, not intended for a general public. See Anthony Burton, "Nineteenth Century Periodicals," and Trevor Fawcett, "Scholarly Journals," in *The Art Press: Two Centuries of Art Magazines*, ed. Trevor Fawcett and Clive Phillpot (London: Art Book Company, 1976), 3–10, 13–20.

19th-century Paris, which published such critics as Charles Baudelaire and Honoré de Balzac. *L'Artiste* fostered a new, Romantic form of criticism, based on the doctrine of *l'art pour l'art*, and largely devoid of explicit social, political, or moral commentary. According to Nancy Allen Roth, *L'Artiste* cultivated an approach that was pluralist rather than polemical: it sought “to make the journal not so much coherent or persuasive as diverse, entertaining, and visually appealing”—a strategy that was especially well-suited to an emerging, market-based economy.²⁷

The commercialized, pluralist model of the art magazine exemplified by *L'Artiste* has remained fundamental up to the present day. As the British critic John Walker has noted, “Art periodicals are commercial products which are subject to economic criteria. They are vulnerable to competition, rising costs, falling circulations and changes in public tastes.”²⁸ The development of the commercial art magazine corresponds to the larger historical transformation that Habermas observed in the press, “from a journalism of conviction to one of commerce.”²⁹ He traces this shift to publications in France, England, and the United States in the 1830s, and argues that



First page of the “Letter to M. de Poiresson-Chamarande, . . . On the Paintings Displayed at the Salon du Louvre, Paris, September 5, 1741.” Image courtesy of Bibliothèque nationale de France.

27 Nancy Allen Roth, “*L'Artiste* and ‘L’Art pour L’Art’: The New Cultural Journalism in the July Monarchy,” *Art Journal* 48, no. 1 (Spring 1989): 39.

28 John Walker, “Periodicals since 1945,” in Fawcett and Phillpot, *The Art Press*, 45.

29 Jürgen Habermas, “The Public Sphere: An Encyclopedia Article (1964),” in *The Idea of the Public Sphere: A Reader*, ed. Jostein Gripsrud, Hallvard Moe, Anders Molander, and Graham Murdock (New York: Lexington Books, 2010), 118.

“since then [the press] has been able to abandon its polemical positions and take advantage of the earning possibilities of a commercial undertaking.”³⁰ According to him, this change precipitated the disintegration of the liberal bourgeois public sphere from a site of true critical publicity into the ersatz “pseudopublicity” that he observed in the 20th-century culture industry.

However, running alongside this history of the art magazine is another history of noncommercial artists’ periodicals, critical journals, and little magazines (so named for their small circulations), which have served as vital—if often precarious and short-lived—sites of progressive and critical publicity within the art world.³¹ Especially notable in this regard are the numerous artists’ periodicals associated with Dadaism, Surrealism, Futurism, Constructivism, *De Stijl*, and other avant-garde movements. Experimental in form as well as content, such publications circulated artists’ writings and manifestos and pioneered radical typographical and visual practices, such as photomontage. While such publications are too diverse in their editorial goals and audiences to be generalized here, they tend to be motivated by a position rather than by profit, and to support models of art and criticism that protest the dominant conditions of the art world and/or the world at large. To take an example mentioned earlier, Duchamp’s *Blind Man* was so named to suggest the shortsighted and narrow-minded parochialism of the New York art world at the time, which it sought to redress.

In some ways, such publications hark back to 18th-century Salon criticism, in that they keep alive the radical potential of print as a site of dissent and critical publicity. Yet, they also depart from Habermas’s model of the liberal bourgeois public sphere, since they actively question its institutions and represent ideas and opinions that are largely excluded from them. Further, where Salon criticism aspired to reach a general public—in theory, at least, if not always in practice—the publications in question address themselves to a much smaller, select (or self-selected) group of individuals, fostering communities of readers and counterpublics around specific interests and ideas. This term,

30 Ibid.

31 See Frederick J. Hoffman, Charles Allen, and Carolyn F. Ulrich, *The Little Magazine: A History and a Bibliography*, 2nd ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1947). For an important revision to the Western framework of this and other histories of the little magazine, see Eric Bulson, “Little Magazine, World Form,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Global Modernisms*, ed. Mark Wollaeger and Matt Eatough (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 267–87.

“counterpublic,” is associated with several revisionist theories of the liberal bourgeois public sphere that question its universalism and emphasize those publics that have been historically excluded from its dominant definitions and institutions, including “proletarian public spheres” and “subaltern counterpublics” who have been discriminated against based on class, race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, and so forth.³²

While we can certainly find many examples of artists’ magazines that function—at least implicitly or in part—as forms of counterpublicity in this way, for the most part they fostered counterpublics more in the sense described by Michael Warner, who argues that the term “counterpublic” may apply to any group that is “constituted through a conflictual relation to the dominant public.”³³ According to him, the notion of the counterpublic also implies the possibility of a particular kind of agency—not only to act in the world, but to change it: “Counterpublics are spaces of circulation in which it is hoped that the poesis of scene making will be transformative, not replicative merely.”³⁴ In this sense, the alternative publications described above might be conceived as forms of counterpublicity: they seek to critique and transform the dominant art world. As this admittedly brief and selective history of the art periodical suggests, the function of art criticism, its politics, and its public are deeply tied to the distribution form of the magazine, a category that has itself varied under different historical conditions—even as it has helped to shape those conditions.

REINVESTING IN THE ART MAGAZINE: *ARTFORUM* IN THE 1960s

In his 1962 article, “How Art Writing Earns Its Bad Name,” Clement Greenberg warned that art criticism was becoming discredited, singling out the writing published in art magazines such as *Art News* (then considered the leading art magazine in the United States) for its lack of rigor and its purple prose, which in his opinion amounted to “pseudo-description, pseudo-narrative, pseudo-exposition, pseudo-history, pseudo-philosophy, pseudo-psychology, and—worst of all—

32 See Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge, *Public Sphere and Experience: Toward an Analysis of the Bourgeois and Proletarian Public Sphere*, trans. Peter Labanyi, Jamie Owen Daniel, and Assenka Oksiloff (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993); and Nancy Fraser, “Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy,” *Social Text*, no. 25/26 (1990): 56–80.

33 Michael Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics* (New York: Zone Books, 2002), 118.

34 *Ibid.*, 122.

pseudo-poetry.”³⁵ Greenberg’s formalist method attempted to redress this situation by bringing to the practice of evaluating art a new kind of empiricism that could be rationally defended. It is revealing that Greenberg published his early Marxist criticism of the 1930s in the Communist-affiliated political and literary little magazine *Partisan Review*, and throughout the 1940s and 1950s he most frequently published in the progressive weekly political and cultural magazine *The Nation*. These facts suggest the lack of an art periodical for serious criticism (at least by Greenberg’s standards) in the United States at that time.³⁶ *Art News*, which had become associated with Abstract Expressionism in the 1950s, mainly published poets and critics, such as Frank O’Hara, John Ashbery, and Harold Rosenberg, who followed in the belletristic tradition of 19th-century Romantic criticism, stressing themes and artistic motives like individual creativity and existential freedom—a critical emphasis that clearly served an ideological purpose within the cultural politics of the Cold War, as exemplified by Rosenberg’s famous 1952 article “The American Action Painters.” It also published articles on more historical topics, as well as entertaining general-interest stories, such as its famous “Paints a Picture” series, which provided up-close, behind-the-scenes glimpses of artists’ studios. In keeping with the pluralist, commercialized model of the 19th-century art magazine, *Art News* essentially packaged art and art criticism as a consumer product.

Artforum, founded in 1962, would become the main venue for Greenbergian formalist criticism, representing a reinvestment in art criticism—and in the capacity of the art magazine to serve as its vehicle. While *Artforum* was a commercial art magazine, it would also foster a committed form of art criticism, suggesting—for a time at least—how the functions of conviction and commerce might not be so mutually exclusive after all, and might, in fact, overlap within a single publication. The story of *Artforum* has been told elsewhere, so rather than rehearse that history in full, I want to focus on a few key episodes in the magazine’s early years.³⁷ As I mentioned previously, *Artforum*

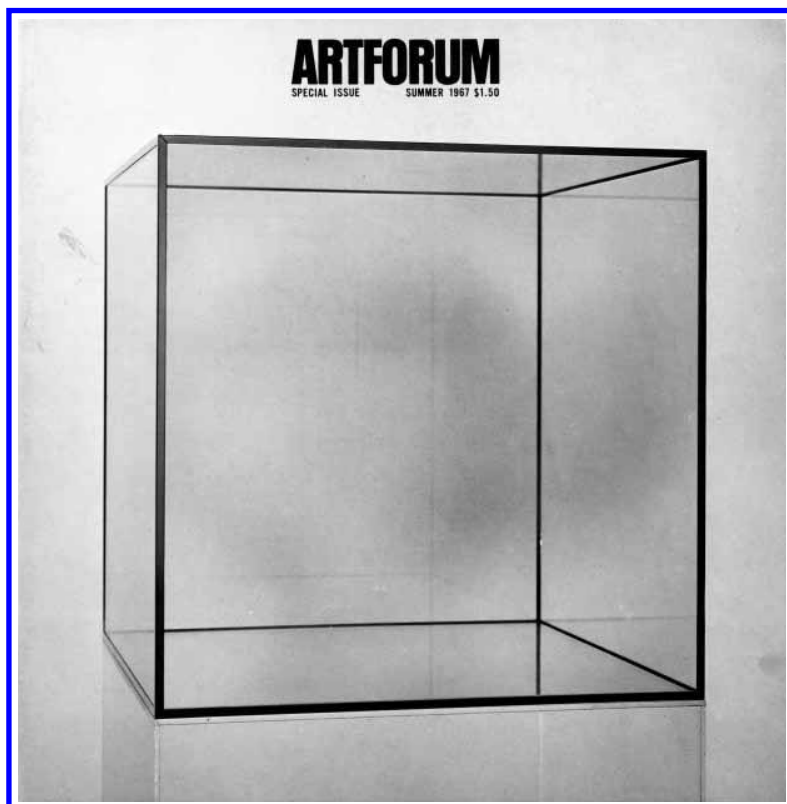
35 Clement Greenberg, “How Art Writing Earns Its Bad Name,” *Encounter*, no. 17 (December 1962): 71.

36 Greenberg occasionally also published in art magazines, including *Art News* and *Arts*, in the late 1950s and 1960s.

37 See Amy Newman, *Challenging Art: Artforum 1962–1974* (New York: SoHo Press, 2000). Also see my *Artists’ Magazines*, chapter 1.

was founded in San Francisco as a mouthpiece for West Coast art—a fact that suggests its unlikely origin as a form of counterpublicity within the dominant New York-centered art world at the time. However, within its first five years, the magazine moved to Los Angeles, and then to New York, where it aligned itself with, and helped consolidate, the art world's center of power, prestige, and wealth. During the mid-1960s, under founding editor Philip Leider, it became associated with a group of modernist critics, including Rosalind Krauss and Michael Fried, who were deeply influenced by Greenberg's formalist method. (Greenberg himself also occasionally published in the magazine.) During this time, *Artforum* began to publish experimental artist writings by minimalist and conceptual artists, who defended the new work they were making that deeply challenged the modernist framework established by Greenberg. The result was an engaging, dynamic, and at times antagonistic conversation, as these different points of view

Artforum 5, no. 10 (Summer 1967), cover. © Artforum.



confronted one another within the pages of the magazine (which was designed by the artist Ed Ruscha during these years).

While these critics and artists also published elsewhere, it was in the pages of *Artforum* that American art criticism seemed to come together as a collective project, albeit one that was still very much unfolding. *Artforum's* signature square shape and Helvetica-derived logo gave the magazine a modern visual identity that distinguished it from other American art magazines at the time, reinforcing its contemporaneity. Old issues of *Artforum* from the mid-late 1960s convey a sense that writers were arguing over things that mattered, and that the outcome of these debates was far from a foregone conclusion. An especially striking example is the Summer 1967 issue, which included Fried's essay "Art and Objecthood," in which he passionately defended modernist art against Minimalism and condemned the latter as theatrical, alongside articles by Sol LeWitt, Robert Morris, and Robert Smithson, in which they advanced precisely the type of art that Fried was denouncing.

A number of subsequent commentators have remarked on the moral and ethical posturing of the modernist formalist criticism published in *Artforum*—a tone that was at odds with its otherwise dispassionate and apolitical methodology.³⁸ Likewise, the critics themselves have remembered it this way. As Fried recalled, "I was sure that what I was doing mattered—in fact I thought that nothing less than the future of Western civilization was at stake in 'Art and Objecthood' and the other essays of 1966–67."³⁹ Thomas Crow has characterized the moral fervor of such criticism as "compensatory," suggesting that it served as a marker for the political dimension of criticism that had been central to its origins in the Enlightenment but that had subsequently been lost or repressed: "Modernist criticism brought into the 1960s a surplus of moral commitment that was the relic of an earlier dream of art as the focus of an ideal public sphere."⁴⁰ Crow suggests that modernist criticism in some sense emulated or tried to re-create

38 See, for example, Hal Foster, "Art Agonistes," *New Left Review* 8 (March/April 2001): 140–49.

39 Michael Fried, interview by Amy Newman, in Newman, *Challenging Art*, 436. Fried added: "I'm being ironic, but only up to a point. That was thrilling, it remains thrilling to me, I wouldn't have missed it for anything."

40 Thomas Crow, "The Birth and Death of the Viewer: On the Public Function of Art," in *Dia Art Foundation Discussions in Contemporary Culture*, ed. Hal Foster (New York: New Press, 1987), 7.

the true public purpose that criticism had served in the 18th century. One of the ways it did so, I would argue, was through its very form of distribution, the medium of the magazine itself. Part of what provided the modernist art criticism published in *Artforum* with a public purpose *was* the very fact that it was published in a mass-produced commercial art magazine with the potential—in theory, at least—to reach a large public.⁴¹ In this sense, the high stakes of art criticism at this moment were inseparable from the stakes of the magazine itself, and its renewed capacity to serve as a site of critical publicity.

Yet, by the end of the decade, faith in both would falter. *Artforum* was firmly ensconced in New York by that point, and its regular roster of critics and artists had begun to feel formulaic. The artist Donald Judd, writing in 1969, complained of *Artforum's* narrow editorial focus: “There’s serious high art and then there’s everybody else, all equally low. . . . Bell and Irwin hardly exist; Greenbergers such as Krauss review all the shows. . . . *Artforum* is probably the best art magazine but it’s depressing that it’s gotten so bad and close to the others.”⁴² Meanwhile, a number of the magazine’s own writers and editors experienced doubts about Greenberg’s formalist method, which as Krauss—among those disillusioned—explained, came to seem “unself-critically prescriptive” and “innocent” of its own historicity and contingency.⁴³

Just as significantly, however, the magazine’s function as a site of critical publicity was increasingly compromised by its growing commercialism, a shift that can be witnessed in *Artforum's* swelling advertisement section, which increased from six pages in 1962 to forty-six pages in 1970.⁴⁴ This change was part and parcel of the growing commercialization of the art world itself as the art market escalated during the 1960s.⁴⁵ As Krauss described, critics were held “hostage to the gallery system. For example, if you didn’t review a particular artist’s

41 While the circulation of *Artforum* wasn’t huge in those years, it was growing. It grew from 2,000 to 13,770 in 1968, according to the Statement of Ownership, Management and Circulation printed annually in the November issue of *Artforum*. (The initial figure of 2,000 is based on Philip Leider’s recollection in Newman, *Challenging Art*, 24.)

42 Donald Judd, “Complaints I,” *Studio International* (April 1969): 184.

43 Rosalind Krauss, “A View of Modernism,” *Artforum* (September 1972): 50.

44 Figures based on the June 1962 issue and the April 1970 issue.

45 For an account of the explosion of the art market in the United States in the 1960s, see Jennifer Wells, “The Sixties: Pop Goes the Market,” in *Definitive Statements: American Art 1964–66*, ed. Kermit Champa (Providence, RI: Brown University Press, 1986), 53, 59.

show, the gallery would pull its advertising. They didn't care what you wrote, as long as there was a picture, or many pictures."⁴⁶ As she suggests, the promotional aspect of the magazine was deeply linked to its visual character, including coated pages and an abundance of high-quality and increasingly color reproductions, which were in turn linked to changes in printing technology and media culture more broadly during this time in the United States.⁴⁷ While it is true that these changes did not begin with *Artforum*, they intensified considerably during the 1960s, creating a new visual culture within which art and art criticism were being experienced. The integration of art criticism within the spectacular visual economy of the commercial art magazine altered its role in the evaluation of art, greatly amplifying its promotional tendencies. In 1975, Ron White and Andrew Menard, writing in the artist-run magazine *The Fox*, singled out *Artforum* as representative of criticism that "doesn't encourage creative participation, it encourages a voyeuristic consumption" and produces "art as exchange value."⁴⁸

REINVENTING THE CRITICAL ART JOURNAL: OCTOBER, 1976-

In the early 1970s, after John Coplans took over as editor of *Artforum*, many of the critics whom Leider had championed during the 1960s became increasingly dissatisfied with the magazine. Krauss has claimed that Coplans was hostile to the influence of continental philosophy and the new critical approaches that she and others, including Annette Michelson, were pioneering. For example, Coplans allegedly refused Michelson's proposal to publish a translation of Michel Foucault's "Ceci n'est pas une pipe" and also shot down a special issue on performance art that she conceived—editorial decisions that were felt to be a direct result of the magazine's relationship to the commercial art market.⁴⁹ The "last straw" for several critics was an advertisement taken out by the artist Lynda Benglis in the November 1974 issue of *Artforum*.⁵⁰ The ad was a two-page spread showing Benglis, nude and defiantly wielding a large, double-headed dildo. The artist had wanted

46 Rosalind Krauss, "An Interview with Rosalind Krauss," by Gregory Gilbert and Richard Paley, *Rutgers Art Review*, no. 11 (1990): 63–64.

47 See my *Artists' Magazines* for a more detailed account of these changes.

48 Andrew Menard and Ron White, "Media Madness," *The Fox*, no. 2 (1975): 114.

49 See Krauss, "Interview with Rosalind Krauss," 53–68.

50 Rosalind Krauss, interview in Newman, *Challenging Art*, 414.

the photograph to accompany an article about her work in that issue; however, when Coplans refused to run the image in the editorial space, Benglis instead took out a paid advertisement, in what has come to be seen as a critique of the commercialism of the art magazine as well as the gender politics of the art world at the time.⁵¹ Though Coplans evidently intended to preserve the integrity of the magazine's editorial section, the appearance of the ad had the opposite effect, underscoring the very breakdown between editorial content and advertising. In response to the advertisement, several critics, including Krauss and Michelson, wrote a letter to the editor in which they publicly disassociated themselves from *Artforum*, objecting not only to the vulgarity of the ad, but also to the "crudeness with which the advertisement has pictured the journal's role as devoted to the promotion of artists in the most debased sense of that term."⁵²

Shortly after the incident, Krauss, Michelson, and Jeremy Gilbert-Rolfé resigned to found the journal *October*, with which they wished, they wrote in the first issue, "to address those readers who, like many writers and artists, feel that the present format of the major art reviews is producing a form of pictorial journalism which deflects and compromises critical effort."⁵³ *October* was named after Sergei Eisenstein's 1926–27 film memorializing the October revolution, as a tribute to the radical aesthetics of Russian formalism—a lineage the journal's editors sought to reclaim, declaring, "We have named this journal in celebration of that moment in our century when revolutionary practice, theoretical inquiry, and artistic innovation were joined in a manner exemplary and unique."⁵⁴ However, *October's* title carried a further connotation, given that Eisenstein's film had been censored under Stalin. As Krauss later explained, it was a veiled reference to the market-driven repression that she and other critics had experienced at *Artforum*: "We felt this was a replay of the kind of repressive, Stalinist aesthetics Eisenstein had suffered from, beginning with his film, *October*."⁵⁵ Implicitly, then, *October's* title ironically compared the diminished public sphere of the American art world to the Stalinist

51 See Richard Meyer, "Bone of Contention," *Artforum* 43, no. 3 (November 2004): 73.

52 Lawrence Alloway et al., letter to the editor, *Artforum* 13, no. 4 (December 1974): 9.

53 Editors, "About *October*," *October*, no. 1 (Spring 1976): 5.

54 *Ibid.*, 3. In particular, I am thinking of Eisenstein's theory and practice of montage as a form of *ostranenie*, which *October* would go on to explore, publishing translations of Eisenstein's own writings and critical essays on his theory of montage.

55 Krauss, "Interview with Rosalind Krauss," 63.

OCTOBER

1

Michel Foucault
Richard Foreman
Noël Burch

Richard Howard
Rosalind Krauss
Jeremy Gilbert-Rolfe
and John Johnston
Jean-Claude Lebensztejn
Hollis Frampton

"Ceci n'est pas une pipe"
The Carrot and the Stick
To the Distant Observer:
Towards a Theory of Japanese Film
The Giant on Giant-Killing
Video: The Aesthetics of Narcissism

Gravity's Rainbow and the Spiral Jetty
Star
Notes on Composing in Film

Spring 1976

\$3.00

October, no. 1 (Spring 1976), cover. © *October* Magazine, Ltd., and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

Soviet Union, underscoring the failures of the commercial art magazine as a site of critical publicity in the art world of the 1960s and 1970s.

October was thus conceived as a form of counterpublicity, which sought to contest the conditions of the mainstream art world and its main vehicle of publicity, the art magazine. However, if the contents of *October* were important, so too was its "apparatus," in Benjamin's sense

of the “forms and instruments” of a publication, and its means of production and distribution.⁵⁶ In his article “The Author as Producer,” Benjamin made the distinction between “the mere supplying of a production apparatus and its transformation,” and argued that no matter how radical or revolutionary a piece of writing, it could not effectively protest the status quo without reflecting upon and seeking to transform its own apparatus.⁵⁷ *October* did so by carefully considering its own format and economic structure vis-à-vis those of the commercial art magazine: it carried no gallery advertisements, and in contrast to the visual excess of a magazine like *Artforum*, it vowed to be “plain of aspect,” allowing only sparse, black-and-white images.⁵⁸ As the editors wrote, “Long working experience with major art journals has convinced us of the need to restore to the criticism of painting and sculpture, as to that of other arts, an intellectual autonomy seriously undermined by emphasis on extensive reviewing and lavish illustration.”⁵⁹ *October* sought refuge from the commercial pressures of the art world in nonprofit and educational institutions. It was first published by the Institute for Architecture and Urban Studies (which also published the esteemed architectural journal *Oppositions*), and since its fifth issue has been published by MIT Press.

In contemplating their goals for the journal, the founding editors of *October* faced a dearth of models for the kind of magazine they wanted to create. But they did know what they wanted to avoid: “We didn’t want *October* to be an academic journal,” according to Krauss.⁶⁰ About this irony she later reflected, “I suppose we are technically an academic journal, although we struggle to keep the content of *October* from being academic.”⁶¹ They considered the early, radical years of *Partisan Review* as one prototype. But the publication they most tried to emulate was the French journal *Tel Quel* (1960–82), associated with the experimental writing of poststructuralist theorists such as Julia Kristeva, Roland Barthes, Michel Foucault, and Jacques Derrida—many of whom *October* would go on to publish as well. *October* paid homage to *Tel Quel* in its cover design—black text with red accents

56 Benjamin, “Author as Producer,” 228.

57 Ibid.

58 “About *October*,” 5.

59 Ibid.

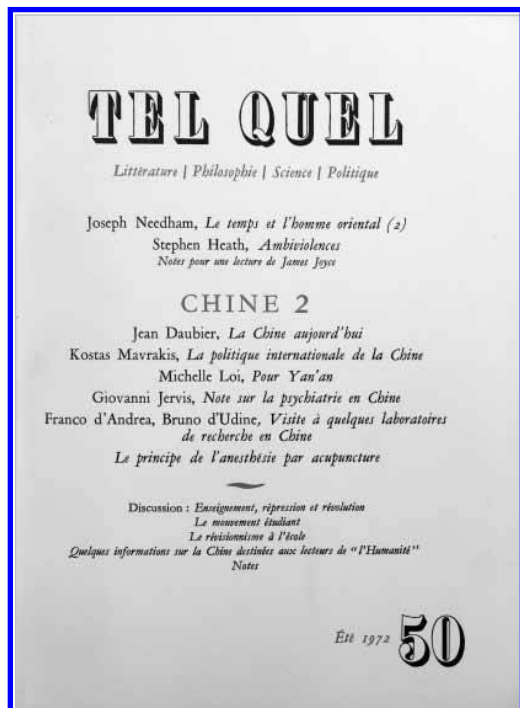
60 Krauss, “Interview with Rosalind Krauss,” 62.

61 Ibid.

on a cream background—and its subtitle, *Art/Theory/Criticism/Politics*, was clearly a reference to *Tel Quel's* subtitle, *Littérature/Philosophie/Science/Politique*. *October's* first issue included the translation of Foucault's text "Ceci n'est pas une pipe," which *Artforum* had refused to print, and focused heavily on those newer media, such as video, performance, and film, that had been underrepresented in the commercial art press. Especially notable during the first several years of the journal was its publication of texts by contemporary artists and practitioners, including Daniel Buren, Trisha Brown, Laurie Anderson, Hollis Frampton, Michael Snow, Samuel Beckett, Yvonne Rainer, Robert Morris, and Carl Andre. As the American art world grew more conservative toward the late 1970s and 1980s, with the rise of neo-Expressionism and right-wing attacks on public funding for the arts, *October* championed critical forms of postmodernism by publishing key texts by Craig Owens, Douglas Crimp, and Hal Foster. All of them would go on to become editors, as would the art historians Benjamin Buchloh and Yve-Alain Bois—both of whom had been involved in editing important

little magazines (*Interfunktionen* and *Macula*, respectively) in their native countries, Germany and France.

The history of *October* attests to the effectiveness of publications in not only incubating fledgling counterpublics, but enabling them to achieve legitimacy, even dominance within the public sphere. *October's* introduction of European structuralist and post-structuralist theory into art history has had an immeasurable influence on the theory, history, and practice of art, both in the Anglo-American context and globally. And yet *October* (like *Artforum* before it) would achieve a kind of dominance, becoming closely aligned with the power



Tel Quel, no. 50 (Summer 1972). Image courtesy of Éditions du Seuil.

structure of American academia. Its ivory tower status and (until recently) nearly exclusive focus on European and North American art has been seen as elitist and Eurocentric.⁶² “*October* is the father that must be killed,” as one commentator put it, describing the journal’s seemingly unassailable authority—and the need to challenge it—in Oedipal terms.⁶³ It is certainly important to question *October*’s authority and Eurocentrism. However, it seems equally crucial to remember the journal’s own history and the high stakes involved in its genesis as a form of critical counterpublicity within the art world—if for no other reason than to distinguish between progressive attempts to build upon *October*’s legacy and reactionary ones to undermine and erase it.⁶⁴ Among other things, *October*’s history serves as a lesson in how the politics of criticism—and its criticality—are deeply informed by its vehicle of distribution: the apparatus of the magazine itself.

In this sense, *October* must be contextualized within a larger history of alternative publishing practices, including little magazines and artists’ periodicals, as well as investigations of the magazine as a medium and exhibition space by artists—phenomena that proliferated during the period in question. In fact, one such investigation—Lynda Benglis’s *Artforum* ad—in many ways precipitated the founding of *October*. Benglis’s ad came on the heels of a number of such interventions into the pages of commercial art magazines by American artists, including Dan Graham, Mel Bochner, Steven Kaltenbach, and others, which in various ways challenged the authority and promotional role of the magazine by tactically manipulating its format, graphic design, content, and mode of address. The 1960s and 1970s also saw a surge of experimental artists’ publications, which, while they drew on an earlier tradition of avant-garde artists’ periodicals, transformed this legacy. As I have described in detail elsewhere, artists’ magazines from this time demonstrate an unprecedented self-reflexivity toward the formal

62 This has begun to change over the past decade. See Octavian Eșanu’s introduction to the Critical Machines Conference in this issue.

63 Rico Franses, panel discussion. Critical Machines Conference, American University, Beirut, March 7–8, 2014.

64 I am thinking specifically here of Roger Kimball’s right-wing, neoconservative attack on *October*. See Roger Kimball, “The *October* Syndrome,” *The New Criterion* (October 1988): 5–15.



Aspen, nos. 5+6 (Fall 1967), cover. The Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles (86-S1350 no.5-6).

conventions and conceptual possibilities of the magazine, as well as toward its artistic, social, and political potential.⁶⁵ Artists investigated the materiality, temporality, and seriality of the magazine, as can be seen in examples such as *Gorgona*, *Revue Integration*, *Zero, 0 to 9*, and *Aspen*, which in various ways foregrounded the tactility and interactivity of the printed page and drew attention to the act of reading it, and to its conditions of circulation and distribution.

These radical experiments with the form of the magazine were accompanied by attempts to alter its social, economic, and political function within the art world. For example, magazines such as *Avalanche*, *Art-Rite*, *FILE*, and *Interfunktionen* supported new experimental art forms outside the commercial gallery system and fostered alternative artistic communities, whether local or international, that were marginalized within the mainstream art world at the time. Other magazines, such as *Art Workers Newsletter*, *Intermedia*, and *The Fox*, promoted artists' moral and legal rights. Yet others supported feminist art practices (*Heresies*, *Lip*) and postcolonial theory (*Black Phoenix*). These magazines contested the institutions and economies of the

65 Allen, *Artists' Magazines*.

art world and functioned as vital counterpublic spheres, forging an alternative set of conditions for art and art criticism. Significantly, they did so not merely through their contents, but by transforming the very apparatus of the magazine—its printed format and graphic design, as well as its conditions of production, circulation, and distribution. They used advertising pages to broadcast political statements and support nonprofit artists' spaces rather than to sponsor commercial galleries. They pioneered new forms of writing, criticism, and interviews. They challenged the spectacular visual economy of mainstream media through their DIY formats and newsprint pages, and/or by tactically appropriating and détourning mainstream magazines.

If many of these examples were operating within the art worlds of North America and Western Europe, related yet distinct publishing practices were simultaneously being engineered in other parts of the world in response to vastly different social and political conditions. For example, in the countries of the former Eastern Europe, where artists were subject to varying levels of state supervision and censorship, artists' magazines resonated with the dissident, underground practices of samizdat. Likewise, there and in Latin America, where a series of repressive dictatorships swept across the region from the 1960s to the 1980s, mail art, rooted in private correspondence, was another significant site of artistic communication.⁶⁶

Situating *October* alongside these artists' publishing practices helps to contextualize its original project. While *October's* scholarly character may seem miles away from the inside jokes of *FILE* or the casual, colloquial tone of *Art-Rite*, seeing these magazines as part of a continuum reveals the social and political context they shared and stresses the initial urgency and relevance of *October's* own project, which did not begin in the academic institutions with which it is associated today, but stemmed out of a desire to challenge and transform the conditions of art and art magazines in the 1970s art world.

* * *

Even as we sometimes question their current authority, we nostalgically look back to the histories of *Artforum* and *October* (perhaps in much the way that Habermas looked back to 18th-century Salon criticism) as idealized moments when art criticism and its public somehow

66 See the special section "Artists' Networks in Latin America and Eastern Europe," *ArtMargins* 1, nos. 2–3 (June–October 2012).

mattered more than they do today.⁶⁷ On the occasion of its 100th issue, in 2002, *October* staged a roundtable in which it surveyed its own history and considered its legacy while reflecting upon the journal's present and future. The participants, including multiple generations of editors and contributors, collectively lamented a "discursive vacuum" in which serious criticism was sidelined by a growing market and culture industry.⁶⁸ Elaborating on the challenges facing contemporary criticism, the art historian and critic James Meyer observed: "There is a different situation in place for writers today. I think that the issue that we have been talking about—the lack of constituency or the lack of a coherent public to whom one speaks—is crucial, indeed defining. You don't know anymore for whom you are writing. The *Artforum* of 2001 is not the *Artforum* of 1970 where you knew for whom you were writing and that your writing counted somehow. Or one could say the same thing about the *October* of 1981 versus 2001."⁶⁹ Hal Foster, an editor at *October* since 1990, claimed that "*October* has become more historical, even archeological," suggesting both the publication's venerable status and the sense that its project, at least as originally conceived, is past.⁷⁰

While globalization is barely mentioned in the 2002 roundtable, its effects, along with those of related new communication technologies, are surely key to the "lack of a coherent public" these critics diagnose. Indeed, perhaps it is not so much a loss of the public as an expansion of it—an exponential multiplication of potential publics—that characterizes the situation of art criticism today. If *October* appears outmoded, this is due, in part, to the fact that the art world in which it emerged is itself becoming obsolete. As biennials have proliferated across the globe, and as communication and travel networks have expanded the art world's artists, audiences, cultures, and histories beyond its former Euro-American confines and prejudices, the publics and counterpublics of *Artforum* and *October*, as well as those of *Avalanche*, *Interfunktionen*, *Heresies*, and other publications, are revealed to have been but minuscule fragments of this larger arena.

67 See, for example, Thomas Crow, "The Graying of Criticism," *Artforum* 32, no. 1 (September 1993): 186–88; reprinted as "Art Criticism in the Age of Incommensurate Values: On the Thirtieth Anniversary of *Artforum*," in Thomas Crow, *Modern Art in the Common Culture* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1996), 85–93.

68 Rosalind Krauss, "Round Table: The Present Conditions of Art Criticism," *October*, no. 100 (Spring 2002): 202–28.

69 James Meyer, "Round Table," 222.

70 Hal Foster, "Round Table," 227.

The circumscribed boundaries of the art world of the 1960s and 1970s have given way to multiple, manifold worlds and contexts, which demand new models of the public sphere and publications alike.⁷¹

Artforum changed its name to *Artforum International* in 1982, signaling a new commitment to art and audiences outside the United States. It has since steadily increased its coverage of international exhibitions and biennials and has expanded its reviews section, first to places such as London, Paris, and Cologne, and increasingly since the 1990s to cities such as Beijing, Dubai, and São Paulo. Yet this increased coverage of previously underrepresented and marginalized art and artists does not necessarily challenge—and more often than not it reinforces—the global art world’s economic and geopolitical hierarchies. This is not only due to the content of art magazines. *Artforum*, for example, has made critical commentary on globalization part of its editorial mission, publishing progressive, trenchant writings that seek to self-reflexively analyze the processes and politics of globalization. Rather, the problem is the way such sites of publicity are instrumentalized within the global system of the contemporary art world.

While the promotional aspect of art magazines is not new (as the history of *Artforum* discussed above attests), its global expansion can be witnessed in the increasingly international character of *Artforum*’s advertising section, which now regularly includes ads not only for galleries but for high-end fashion, liquor, hotels, airlines, and financial services, underscoring the integration of art with other kinds of capital investment and with luxury and tourist economies.⁷² To take another example, the London-based Frieze corporation sponsors both an art magazine and a number of high-profile art fairs, attesting to the near-total merging of criticism with the market. Online platforms and social media have only compounded the speed with which art circulates globally, and the ease with which its cultural capital may be exchanged with

71 For two excellent discussions of the inadequacy of the liberal bourgeois notion of the public sphere in the contemporary art world and the need for alternative models, see Angela Harutyunyan, “When Matter Becomes Cultural Politics: Traps of Liberalism in the Tenth Sharjah Art Biennial,” *Red Thread*, no. 3 (2011), www.red-thread.org/en/article.asp?a=48; and Angela Harutyunyan, “Rethinking the Public Sphere: The Constitutional State and the ACT Group’s Political Aesthetics of Affirmation in Armenia,” *Art & the Public Sphere* 1, no. 2: 159–73. Also, for a critique of the Westphalian assumptions upon which both Habermas’s model and various revisionist models of counterpublicity have relied, see Nancy Fraser, “Transnationalizing the Public Sphere: On the Legitimacy and Efficacy of Public Opinion in a Post-Westphalian World,” *Theory, Culture & Society* 24 (2007): 7–30.

72 For a discussion of how *Artforum*’s advertising section and editorial content have changed since the 1980s, see Relyea, *Your Everyday Art World*, 181–87.

other kinds of economic and political currencies.⁷³ Meanwhile, even critical art journals, which were once seen as safe harbors from the market, can no longer claim autonomy from it. If *October* was born in reaction to *Artforum's* commercialism, today many of the same critics write for both publications. As *Artforum* Editor-at-Large Jack Bankowsky has observed, “Trickle-down criticism plays a big role in the market and the way art moves through the world. Someone like Benjamin Buchloh [an editor of *October*]—counterintuitively given his leftist disposition—has an enormous amount of influence on the way art is validated in the marketplace.”⁷⁴

It is not my intention to condemn these critics or these magazines, but rather to reflect upon and better understand the conditions under which we write and work in today's art world(s). While art magazines and online media participate in and facilitate globalization's homogenizing collapse of time and space, its erasure and/or exploitation of difference, and its ruthless conversion of artistic and intellectual labor into capital, these publications also provide opportunities to challenge, resist, and reflect upon these processes and reclaim the art world's sites of communication as forms of participatory and critical publicity. While the story I have told here highlights some of the failures of periodicals as sites of critique and criticality, it also draws attention to their possibilities—even if unfulfilled or co-opted. Around the world today, independent and critical art periodicals are seizing upon this potential, as they invent new models of publishing and transform old ones. These publications are creating their own languages, criteria, and publics—their own worlds—which operate in relationship to the art world, and within it, but also beyond it.

NOTE I further explore the critical potential of art publications today in “Art Periodicals and Contemporary Art Worlds (Part II): Critical Publicity in a Global Context” published at ARTMargins Online: www.artmargins.com. The author thanks Karen M. Rapp, as well as the ARTMargins editors (especially Angela Harutyunyan and Octavian Eşanu) and peer reviewers for their feedback and constructive comments.

73 See David Joselit, *After Art* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2013). Also, for a discussion of the online publication *Contemporary Art Daily*, see Michael Sanchez, “2011: Art and Transmission,” *Artforum* (Summer 2013): 295–301. Also see Martin Conrads, “Public Sphere and Experience: On the Booming of Art-and-Gossip Blogs,” *Texte zur Kunst* 61 (March 2006), accessed August 9, 2015, <https://www.textezurkunst.de/61/offentlichkeit-und-erfahrung/>.

74 Jack Bankowsky, quoted in Sarah Thornton, *Seven Days in the Art World* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2008), 176.

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1. Gwen Allen. Magazines as Alternative Sites of Artistic Practice 261-277. [[Crossref](#)]

SURREALISM IS A THING RUBRICS AND OBJECTIVATION IN THE SURREALIST PERIODICAL, 1924–2015

CATHERINE HANSEN

What Will Be is the title of a 2014 anthology compiled by members of a 21st-century international network of Surrealist groups, announcing the continuing ambitions of a movement that first began amid the sleeping fits and Dada-inspired provocations of the early 1920s. The anthology includes a special feature on the publishing activities of the various groups, which frequently coordinate their efforts across group and national boundaries—operating as a kind of dispersed organism whose vital functions have never seen fit to cease, even as Surrealism has come to be considered a historical and concluded phenomenon. There is particular emphasis on the Surrealist attitude, in general, toward publishing, publicization, circulation, the digital revolution, and the rise of on-demand printing. Contributors, for example, speaking on behalf of the Montreal- and Miami-based Surrealist publisher Editions Sonámbula, state: “any attempt aiming to expand the field of the real and of the poetic has necessarily to reflect on the means of communication to use.”¹

Surrealism has always claimed to extend the domain of what is

1 “The Utility of Surrealist Editions and of the Surrealist Gallery: An Inquiry,” in *Ce qui sera/What Will Be/Lo que serà: Almanac of the International Surrealist Movement*, “hors-série” number of *Brumes Blondes*, ed. Her de Vries and Laurens Vancrevel (Amsterdam: Brumes Blondes, 2014), 438–39. The translation here is my own, as are all subsequent translations not otherwise attributed.

accepted and experienceable as real, and the means of communication to be employed for this purpose have been a perennially and productively open question. They remain so across many periodicals and magazines, both printed and digital, as well as the limited editions and re-editions, blogs, and anthologies through which present-day Surrealist groups communicate and collaborate with each other and with a public that is, itself, something of an open question. But what I argue here is that the periodical itself, across Surrealism's various incarnations, and from its beginnings to the newest channels of its broad delta, has a central say in this question—and particularly one aspect of the periodical, the rubric. The *rubric*—defined as a heading or category under which a certain kind of text or image appears, and in the name of which more of such texts and images are solicited from contributors—is a crucial element of Surrealism as a poetics of *objectivation*, which is defined precisely as an expansion of the domain of the real. Rubrics in periodicals—whether or not they are formally titled, as with the “textes surréalistes” or “dreams” divisions of the early Surrealist magazine *La Révolution surréaliste*—are not themselves texts, but spaces into which texts fit. These spaces are on the page, but they are also in the world, since they classify and solicit the acts and experiences that give rise to certain kinds of texts or documents. Texts, acts, and experiments able and/or made to fit into this space gain a thicker consistency as realities and call forth others of the kind that might not otherwise have been undertaken. And because the rubric can serve not only to reframe texts that already exist but to organize the future activities and submissions of contributors, texts and rubrics are constantly in dialogue. Each new contribution can both fulfill and modify the meaning and requirements of the rubric, which thus imposes itself in continually recalibrated fashion upon further productions, as in a game of facing mirrors. In this way, as instruments of objectivation, the serial rubrics of Surrealist periodicals not only link the disparate projects of Surrealist groups—here, there, past, and present—but also link the printed page to the public and collective act.

Surrealist publishing today is a modest endeavor, and often militantly so. Speaking for the entity that pointedly calls itself “the Paris group of the Surrealist movement”—André Breton with his internationalizing efforts would have approved of this wording—one Surrealist points out that the group's serials are funded entirely by limited subscriptions and by its members, who are also solely responsible for

layout and distribution (the printer is part of a fellow-traveling anarchist cooperative). Its printed productions are emphatically not “merchandise,” and have no greater ambition than to be made available to the “Surrealist constellation.”² The key is not to amass a collection of works that might stock a bookshelf, but to initiate projects that engage this constellation. The Paris group sees its efforts as “inadmissible and rendered inaudible”—perceived as a ghost of the past insisting on a present materiality—and neither does it feel any “messianic vocation” to make up for this, short of tempting chance by putting up a poster or two. The editors of the long-standing Surrealist review *Brumes Blondes*, responsible for the *What Will Be* anthology itself, also feel the necessity of publishing specifically for and within a fugitive, half-occulted Surrealist network, explaining that at least at their home base in the Netherlands, “most young promising painters and poets [are] reluctant to be called Surrealists, as this would harm their reputation.”³ On the other hand, a Surrealist might rejoin that it would harm the movement’s reputation to be associated with any but the most marginal of publishing or cultural endeavors, since most remain highly vulnerable to corruption by power and politics.

The Madrid-based Surrealist group, along these lines, calls for “cooperation between kindred alternative groups (anti-capitalists, anti-industrials, environmentalists, libertarians, Marxists, etc.),” and also proposes forms of collective activity other than publishing that would accomplish something analogous to it: transforming a collectively written text, for example, into graffiti that can be disseminated throughout a city; leaving anonymous works of art in public places, and doing so in a repeated and ritual way; or creating an “IMAGINATION LABORATORY where we experiment with the different possibilities of imagination (oneiric, conceptual, visionary, etc.) through its various tools: photography, painting, video, object, gommage, drawing, etc.”⁴ However, for all its manifestations beyond the printed page, the Madrid group’s “Laboratorio de lo imaginario” finds its coherence and continuity precisely on the pages of *Salamandra*, its journal founded in 1987. The Laboratory, in other words, is one of the rubrics of the magazine.

A rubric is one of the ways, albeit modest, in which an exception

2 Ibid., 428–29.

3 Ibid., 441.

4 Ibid., 432–34.

becomes a rule. Think of the expression, most often wry or bemused—“Is that a thing now?”⁵ What this question asks is whether a phenomenon or event is an exception, a bizarre fluke, some nameless mote drifting beyond the pale of intelligibility, reason, iterability, or communicability. Do and can others besides oneself recognize it, or perform it, or think of it? Can a form of collectivity coalesce around it? To the extent that a rubric names a form of writing, thinking, or doing; causes (or permits) a number of individuals to engage in it; and, by so doing, creates conditions in which a community of sorts might grow around it, a rubric is a thing that makes *things*.

The Surrealist Grupo Decollage of São Paulo explains its work, to this effect, as a collective practice of “mak[ing] things turn real.” Its publishing efforts, as with other groups, are “micro,” and are not a form of commerce but of “copyleft”-inspired “collective adventure,” meant to “feed dialogue between groups, non-groups, and dispersive groups and individuals.” Its relationship with a public, if any, would develop “in an analogous way to the process of searching, almost initiatory, and identification with our cause, which itself is the dynamo of a collective action.”⁶ This is to say that Surrealist periodicals tend to be, and should be, difficult of access, unpublicized, occulted—while their content, likewise, concerns and demands a search for what is occulted, repressed or oppressed, latent or marvelous, and for a form of collectivity to share it with. In the same way, the form of a rubric doubles its function: by reframing what exists or by drawing a new, empty frame to be filled, and by soliciting collective participation in and recognition of that act, it models exactly how one “makes things turn real.” This is one reason why the periodical is such a fundamental expression of the

5 Casual researchers have recently taken notice of this relatively new use of the word “thing”—as in “that’s not a thing” or “that’s a thing now”—and taken a preliminary stab at a social history and/or etymology (the Oxford English Dictionary Online has not yet registered its advent in the language). See, for example, Ben Yagoda, “I Guess ‘It’s a Thing,’” in the Chronicle of Higher Education online (December 13, 2012). Yagoda references similar attempts around the Web, most of which date the emergence of this linguistic phenomenon to the early- to mid-2000s, mostly on TV and in blogs, and inflected by the rise of Internet memes. See the English Language & Usage Stack Exchange site (<http://english.stackexchange.com/questions/144171/phrasal-verb-be-a-thing>); the Straight Dope message board (<http://boards.straightdope.com/sdmb/showthread.php?t=653604>); and Reddit (https://www.reddit.com/r/etymology/comments/2tyuo7/not_sure_where_to_post_this_but_what_is_the/). Significantly, the example of a new “thing” chosen for this last (“lemon coated garden rats”) recalls Surrealist imagery.

6 “The Utility of Surrealist Editions,” 439–40.

Surrealist project, and why the rubric, functioning both within and beyond the printed page as an impetus to action, a seed of a minor community—and perhaps even inauguration of a minor literature—is so central to that project.

* * *

La Révolution surréaliste (LRS; 1924–29) laid the ground for work to come to a great degree through its rubrics. One of the rubrics from issues 1 through 11 was “Rêves,” beginning with accounts of dreams dreamed by Giorgio de Chirico, Breton, and others. Another was “Textes surréalistes,” which were often, but did not have to be, pieces of automatic writing. Benjamin Péret’s issue 1 “Surrealist text” is a dialogue in which “Le monsieur obèse” vows to a certain Nestor, “by Palmolive soap, sir, I shall not salute you, and this cloud which delivers to my brother a freight of orange blossoms shall burst open upon your head.”⁷ Other rubrics, outlining what would later become well-established Surrealist genres—for example, the exquisite corpse (*cadavre exquis*) and the “waking phrase” (*phrase de reveil*)⁸—appeared alongside more familiar categories such as “poems.”

Still other rubrics were not explicitly formatted as such, but on the pages of LRS or future publications they would soon come to function in this way. Take, for instance, the dictionary, or rather the Surrealist counterdictionary, whose workings shed some light on how the Surrealist rubric works in general. In an early example of a Surrealist dictionary, Michel Leiris’s “Glossaire j’y serre mes gloses” (published in

7 For Péret, see *La Révolution surréaliste*, facsimile edition (New York: Arno Press, 1968), no. 1: 9.

8 Exquisite corpse: This is a game that got its name from the first sentence that it resulted in: “The exquisite corpse will drink the new wine.” To quote from *A Book of Surrealist Games*: each player “writes on a sheet of paper a definite or indefinite article and an adjective, making sure their neighbors cannot see them. The sheets are folded so as to conceal the words, and passed round to the next player. Each player then writes a noun, conceals it, and the process is repeated with a verb, another definite or indefinite article and adjective, and finally another noun. The paper is unfolded and the sentences read out” (25). This can also be done with drawings. For “phrase de reveil,” see the *First Manifesto of Surrealism* (1924): “One evening, therefore, before I fell asleep, I perceived . . . removed from the sound of any voice, a rather strange phrase . . . a phrase, if I may be so bold, which was knocking at the window . . . it was something like: ‘There is a man cut in two by the window.’” He incorporates this phrase into his “material for poetic construction,” and it is immediately followed by a “gratuitous” series of other phrases (21–22). There is another example of a “phrase de reveil” in *L’Amour fou* (“le cendrier cendrillon,” or “Cinderella ashtray”) that becomes significant in the context of Breton’s famous stroll with Giacometti through the St. Ouen flea market (33). See also issue 3, p. 28, “Douze phrases de reveil” by Maurice Béchet.

issues 3–5 of *LRS*), the “glosses” upon words are not only rewritings of their definitions, but reimaginings of what the act of definition might be, created through a combination of free association, wordplay based on sight and sound, and combinatorial rearrangement (for example, “Porte: Protée” or “Vie: Un Dé la sépare du viDe”). The point, as Leiris puts it, was to discover in words “their most hidden virtues and the secret ramifications that circulate across all language.”⁹ Surrealists, for all their championing of the irrational, cannot seem to get enough of the dictionary, that epitome of the rational partitioning of the sensible and the notional. This is because, as appropriated by the Surrealists, the dictionary form—similarly to the Surrealist magazine rubric itself—provides an excellent opportunity to reveal, in existing categories of thought, knowledge, experience, and language, a marvelous arbitrariness. Rather than a series of givens, it proposes a series of inventions that might at any time be reinvented.

“Dictionnaire Critique” was a rubric in the journal *Documents* (1929–30), edited by Georges Bataille. Providing definitions for words like *architecture*, *absolute*, *materialism*, *metaphor*, *eye*, and *factory chimney*, written by Bataille himself and by collaborators including Michel Leiris and Robert Desnos, this dictionary’s task was to catalyze the irruption of the *informe* and the impossible-to-classify via the “hidden virtues” and *besognes* (“tasks,” but also “excreta”) of words. Yet it is more than this: the “Critical Dictionary” represents “the success of a [form of] writing capable of overturning the codes of knowledge without constituting itself as closed, completed knowledge”—and if *Documents* as a whole uses the language of disciplines including philosophy, ethnology, economics, and psychoanalysis, it is not to “borrow their results, but to open [them] to new, illegitimate, unacceptable, but productive meanings.”¹⁰ Or alternatively, as one of the magazine’s early press announcements put it:

the most aggravating works of art, and certain heteroclite productions, neglected till now, will be the object of studies as rigorous,

9 *La Révolution surréaliste*, no. 3: 7. Jed Rasula and Steve McCaffery convincingly translate Leiris’s punning title “Glossaire j’y serre mes gloses” as “Glossary: My glosses’ ossuary.” Jed Rasula and Steve McCaffery, eds., *Imagining Language* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1998), 503.

10 Dominique Lecoq, in “Documents, Acéphale, Critique: Bataille autour des revues,” in *Georges Bataille: Actes du Colloque International d’Amsterdam (21 et 22 juin 1985)*, ed. Jan Versteeg (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1987), 125.

as scientific as those of the archaeologists. We consider here . . . the most disquieting facts, those whose consequences have not yet been defined. In these diverse investigations, the sometimes absurd character of the results or the methods, far from being dissimulated . . . will be deliberately underlined.¹¹

The Surrealist magazine rubric, insofar as it can be compared to a dictionary entry (and also the Surrealist magazine, insofar as it can be compared to a dictionary) works along the same lines. It uses structures of rational organization, definition, and framing to make what is heteroclitic, neglected, disquieting, and undefined an object of persistent and illuminating attention.

The Surrealist rubric is also closely linked to another category of activity that makes its appearance in *LRS* and elsewhere: the collective “recherche.” Issue 2 of *LRS* announces that the “Bureau of Surrealist Research,” established in October 1924,

employs itself in gathering, by all appropriate means, communications relative to the diverse forms that the unconscious activity of the spirit is susceptible of taking. No domain is specified a priori for this enterprise, and Surrealism proposes to gather the greatest possible amount of experimental data, for a purpose that cannot yet be manifest.¹²

“Experimental” results might include an account of a “new system of psychic investigation,” a report on “striking coincidences” and curious dreams, but also one’s “most instinctive ideas on fashion as well as on politics” or a “free critique of mores.” As a definition of research, this is a fair summary of the various tasks of the Surrealist periodical as a whole, along with its role, doubling that of the Bureau, as an “organe de liaison,” a node around which a community gathers and grows.

The relationship between rubrics and research is somewhat ambiguous, since “research” is a frequently used Surrealist magazine rubric, but the rubric itself can also be understood as a form of research—both as a general category and in its various instances. The questionnaire (*enquête*)—which, as a rubric, is perhaps the *sine*

11 Ibid., 118.

12 *La Révolution surréaliste*, no. 2: 31.

qua non of Surrealist periodicals and forums—is also a prime method of research. The function of the *enquête* also resembles that of the rubric as general category, since it has the effect of calling together a community, temporary or otherwise, whose task is to address itself to a field of endeavor or of thought only just defined. An *enquête* in the first issue of *LRS*, in 1924, for example, “indiscriminately appeals to everyone,” asking “Is Suicide a Solution?,” and issue 12, in 1929, asks, “What sort of hope do you place in love?” Later generations of Surrealists took these early surveys as models and improved upon them; in 1947, for example, an *enquête* was used as an instrument to collectively reboot and revitalize the Surrealist movement among the ruins of the Second World War. Its purpose was to separate the wheat from the chaff, identifying those willing to represent and defend “absolute liberty.” What hope can be placed, it asked, in Surrealism today? In what domain should Surrealism act, and by what means? And after the death of Breton in 1966 and his second-in-command Jean Schuster’s announcement of the official dissolution of the movement in 1969, it was an *enquête* circulated by Vincent Bounoure (“Rien ou quoi?”) that catalyzed the regrouping of those, particularly in Paris and Prague, who believed that this announcement of the end of Surrealism was utter nonsense.¹³

The relationship between research, rubrics, and Surrealist games is similarly complex. The presentation in word and image, for example, of the results of collective games is another tried-and-true Surrealist periodical rubric, up to the present. It would not be difficult, in turn, to define the Surrealist rubric as a form of Surrealist game, since the two are meant to function in similar ways. Take, for example, the game of question-and-answer, where, unlike in the *enquête*, the questions are hidden from those answering. The results range from cynically satisfying (“Q: What is equality? A: It is a hierarchy like any other”) to mysterious (Q: What is fraternity? A: It is perhaps an onion).¹⁴ Such pairings, drawn from the rich quarries of chance and published for all to puzzle over, are thereby given an oracular significance that their

13 The Surrealist London Action Group, in its blog *The Robber Bridegroom*, speaks disparagingly of Schuster’s “notion of the ‘eternal surrealism’ which supposedly ‘escap[es] history in its latent continuity’ (‘The Fourth Canto,’ 1969),” and which “served as an alibi for the abandonment of concrete Surrealist activity in Paris.” See <http://robberbridegroom.blogspot.com/>.

14 “Le Dialogue en 1928,” *La Révolution surréaliste*, no. 11.

mere semantic content or (unintentional) wit could not afford. In general, the basic heuristic purpose of the Surrealist game, aside from its making-strange of the obvious and its experimentally serious treatment of the absurd, is juxtaposition and analogy. This is the case with the game of “one into the other” (*l’un dans l’autre*), where the player is tasked with describing a thing using the properties and vocabulary associated with another thing.¹⁵ Issue 3 of the postwar Surrealist magazine *Medium* takes this particular game to the next stage with its “New Elements of a Unitarian Dictionary of One into the Other,” which is simply the entire ensemble of efforts to this effect. Breton explains here that “nothing more than the game ‘One into the Other’ has the power to expose the precarious and even ultrafallible character of the notions upon which what we agree to understand by the ‘real’ world rests,” as it can also provoke a collective “effervescence” of percepts and images, “the only constitutive elements of the spirit.”¹⁶ Ideally, then, Surrealist recreations, in the sense of gaming and play, are to be literal re-creations.

The goal of any act of Surrealist research is not so much to generate and present facts, but to do so as a secondary phenomenon in the course of generating and collectivizing forms of conduct and experience. On the one hand, the Surrealist “revolution” aims, as Antonin Artaud puts it, toward “the general devalorization of values . . . the demineralization of the obvious . . . and the renewal of languages, the radical leveling of all thought.” But on the other, its result is “the spontaneous reclassing of things following a finer and more profound order, impossible to elucidate by the means of ordinary reason, but an order all the same.” The purpose of Surrealist research, in fact, is to “apply all [its] forces to this reclassing of life”¹⁷—not to totally dismantle order as such, but to open it to reordering. Furthermore, it works to redefine what sorts of things, thoughts, values, and languages are possible in

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- 15 For example, the Czech artist Toyen’s “I am a gleaming NECKTIE knotted around the hand so as to run across those throats at which I’m placed”—in other words, a sword. Alastair Brotchie and Mel Gooding, eds., *A Book of Surrealist Games* (Boston: Shambhala Redstone, 1995), 31.
- 16 *La Révolution surréaliste*, no. 3: 56. Other types of games are difficult to distinguish from enquêtes. See, for example, “Ouvrez-vous?” in the November 1953 issue of *Medium*: the question is whether, if one of a number of well-known personages were to knock on one’s door, one would invite them in, and why.
- 17 Antonin Artaud, “L’Activité du Bureau de Recherches Surréalistes,” in *La Révolution surréaliste*, no. 3: 31.

the first place. In short, the goal of Surrealist research—a category that includes, as I have said, the periodical rubric—is both to objectivate and to reobjectivate.

Objectivation, as Surrealists use the concept, is the simple process of imagination or construction by which an object that does not yet conceptually or materially exist acquires existence, or the gradual process by which an inchoate movement of the mind (belonging to the domain of personal reverie, of dream, of paranoia or pareidolia, of coincidence or fleeting glimpse) can become an accepted and definable unit of collective discourse. It represents “the paradox that man is capable of producing a world that he then experiences as something other than a human product,” and a moment in the continuing dialectical relationship between producer and produced.¹⁸ The classic formulation of what Breton calls Surrealism’s “will to objectivation” [*volonté d’objectivation*]¹⁹ is in his 1935 Prague lecture “Situation surréaliste de l’objet/Situation de l’objet surréaliste,” where he speaks of poetry’s will to attain “the precision of sensible forms.” Poetry clothes the “inner representation” or “the image present to the mind” in the “concrete forms of the real world,” but without limiting it within the specific arrangements that the latter have hitherto assumed.²⁰ Words, objects, and concrete forms exist within certain configurations that uphold structures of sense, authority, and action. The creation of new configurations—new circuits, or “forcefields,” as Breton puts it—returns each of their building blocks, whether verbal or material, to an “uninterrupted series of latencies”²¹ and drafts an alternative text of reality—a new “objectivity.” This new objectivity requires, to continue taking shape and presence in the world, the participation of a collectivity, a group.

In his “Introduction au discours sur le peu de réalité,” Breton writes that words tend to group themselves “according to particular

18 See Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge* (Harmondsworth, UK: Penguin, 1971), 78. “Objectivation” often translates the Hegelian-Marxist term *Versachlichung*, as “the process by which the externalized products of human activity attain the character of objectivity” (p. 61).

Elsewhere in Berger, the word “objectification” has this meaning, that of “naming, of knowing and of communicating knowledge to others . . . mak[ing] various aspects of reality objects for consciousness,” and is an a priori condition of lived reality (see Octavian Eșanu, *Transition in Post-Soviet Art* (Budapest: CEU Press, 2013), 280).

19 This specific phrase appears in his 1936 essay “Crise de l’objet,” in *L’Objet surréaliste*, ed. Emmanuel Guignon (Paris: Jean-Michel Place, 2005), 144.

20 André Breton, *Œuvres complètes*, vol. II (Paris: Gallimard, 1992), 477.

21 Breton, “Crise de l’objet,” 146.

affinities, which generally has the effect of making them recreate, at each instant, the world upon its old model.” In other words, what has already been said—or thought, or made—conceals what *could* be said, thought, or made. As Breton adds, “does not the mediocrity of our universe essentially depend on our power of enunciation?”²² Thus what is called for is a kind of textual experimentation, which is what Surrealist dictionaries, games, researches—and rubrics—do. The specialty of the latter, in fact, is to transform subjective significance into collective significance, personal experience into a shared language. One might succeed, in this way, in realigning the grid of language upon the field of experience—in other words, in retextualizing reality. This is a process, of course, that occurs naturally, repeatedly, and on a historical scale; linguistic and socio-material changes instigate and reinforce each other, and together they continually reweave the tapestry of the “objective.” What the Surrealists wish to do, however, is to accelerate or quite literally to “game” this process. It is something like this that Alain Joubert, of the present-day Paris group of Surrealists, has in mind when he writes that Surrealist work on language has the purpose of “radically remaking human understanding” and “revealing the invisible that lies within the visible.”²³

It could reasonably be argued that Surrealism itself should not be defined by, for example, its visual or literary style or its peculiar genres (automatic writing, gaming, object-making, simulation of exceptional mental states, and so forth), but as a collective and conscious discipline of objectivation. More radically, one could posit that even central desiderata such as the exploration of the unconscious are actually only corollary to this mission—the unconscious serving as only one of several preferred backdrops (also including dream imagery, for example, or chance) for its operations. Acts of objectivation, to say the least, are not exclusive to Surrealists. One’s life as a social being is caught up in the constant generation of new “things,” a never-ending stream of objectivations—and at a particularly frantic pace, in the Internet age. This, however, is the very battlefield upon which Surrealism sets itself the task of generating things that further its own ends: love, desire, the marvelous.

Games, alternative dictionaries, *enquêtes*, and *recherches* are effective, if modest, means of generating and nurturing things, and

22 Breton, *Œuvres complètes*, II 276.

23 Alain Joubert, “La controverse du pouvoir,” in de Vries and Vancrevel, *What Will Be*, 334.

are thus exemplary mechanisms of Surrealist objectivation. Each of these categories of activity also appears as a rubric in Surrealist periodicals—and as I have been suggesting, the periodical rubric also partakes of the nature of each of these. The rubric is a kind of survey and also a kind of research, in that its empty frame resembles a question that demands answers or a problem that needs solving; like a game, it presents special rules of interaction to the collective constituted by the periodical’s editors and contributors; like a dictionary, it partitions acts and thoughts into the definable. The relationship of the Surrealist periodical rubric to many of its various types is one of Möbius-like entanglement.

This is also the case with Surrealist collective actions and public events: the report or write-up of a group action may appear as a rubric in a Surrealist periodical, while the periodical rubric in both form and function can be said to resemble a public collective action. Vangelis Koutalis (of the contemporary Athens Surrealist Group and the Surrealist London Action Group) writes that Surrealist knowledge is produced as the result of a “concerted ritual, voluntary collective activity that transforms . . . objective reality.”²⁴ In the summer of 2013, the Madrid Surrealist Group organized (and then wrote up and documented) a ritual, voluntary, collective activity that had this very aim: a public “Object Event.” The event included three days of debate to “reflect on the object” in light of the massive Spanish anti-austerity protests of 2011 and the call to “appropriate” the public sphere. But the group also took over a vacant lot and populated it with slogans (e.g., *todo es inutilizable*), objects, and ad hoc constructions; members of the public were invited to pass through, intervene, ask questions, and thus continually “suspend the meaning” of the proceedings. “Our discourse could only be verified in that elemental relationship with others,” the group states.

The public participated not only in the Madrid group’s “discourse” but in that of Surrealism itself, in its past and present manifestations—specifically, as a result of how the group framed, and thus to an extent predetermined, participants’ activities and the vocabulary it used to describe these activities. For example, adding to an already abundant variety of Surrealist object types—found, ready-made, “mobile,”

24 Vangelis Koutalis, “Into the Forest of the Symbols,” in *Hydrolith: Surrealist Research and Investigations*, ed. Eric W. Bragg (Berkeley, CA: Oyster Moon Press, 2010), 172–77.

“interpreted”²⁵—participants proposed the “succubus-object” (“small objects [that] sneak into our home, becoming [a] harmless (but horny) demon.”). One participant reported that he often dreams of objects he needs or will need, confirming that “dreams increase our general knowledge about our relationship with objects”; others continued afterward to send in stories and comments to this effect. A certain episode recalls the visual vocabulary of what one has come to think of as Surrealist painting:

A substantial number of people became silent, but almost frenetically. A man took a small porcelain female bust and hit one of the eyes with a hammer until making a hole in it. Another offered him a cup filled with sand to pour into her head. A girl revealed a toy train track onto which a shell had been placed. Someone put another shell into the mouth of a white mask, out of whose eye a small doll protruded. Two people uprooted weeds with their hands and placed them into an old suitcase. An imaginary bestiary was materializing on the lot; a tiger-headed giraffe, a swan with a body of metal, a doll with a lightbulb head. . . . there were strangers jumping into the game, all restoring those more or less dormant powers within themselves, recovering perhaps anesthetized abilities, overcoming the dictatorship of skill, mocking every principle of authority and displaying great disdain for seriousness.²⁶

One has come to expect “Surrealist objects” to look something like the bestiary described above. “Surrealist objects” have long been a thing, in other words; and for this reason, they function as a preset schematic for the Madrid object event. It is nonetheless true that the purpose of the object event is not specifically the creation of Surrealist objects, but rather to make the spontaneous, collective construction of hybrid objects a thing, or more of a thing. Not just here, but in Surrealist objectivation in general, there is a kind of dialectical hesitation between form as limit and form as opening—between the inertia of the building blocks, which must of necessity be composed of what

25 These appear in a catalog of types of objects on the cover of the issue of *Cahiers d'art* (nos. 1–2, 1936) devoted to the Surrealist object.

26 Madrid Surrealist Group, “Chronicle of the Object Event,” in *Hydrolith 2: Surrealist Research and Investigations*, ed. Eric Bragg and Ribitch (Berkeley, CA: Oyster Moon Press, 2014), 44–50.

already exists, and the not-yet-existent that they are capable of building. Within the frame, upon the blank-yet-delimited canvas of both the empty lot and the periodical rubric, the hesitation between fixity and spontaneity, the already and the not-yet, is crucial for objectivation, or for what the Madrid group calls, in this case, “collectivization.”

Alongside “texts, poems, collages, and paintings,” the first issue of the Madrid group’s magazine *Salamandra* includes space for “objetos colectivos”; future issues (with “photomorphoses” and “photographisms” accompanying the “photographs”) include as rubrics, in quite unique fashion, the categories “cambiar la vida” and “transformar el mundo.” These latter, drawn from the conclusion of Breton’s 1935 “Discours au Congrès des écrivains” (“‘Transform the world,’ said Marx; ‘change life,’ said Rimbaud; these two watchwords for us are one”),²⁷ are shorthand for two domains of Surrealist action, the first broadly social, and the second personal and perceptual.²⁸

Beginning with issue 5, *Salamandra* included the rubric *Más realidad! Emblemas de la magia cotidiana* (“More reality! Emblems of quotidian magic”), the title likely inspired by Breton’s “Introduction au discours sur le peu de réalité” mentioned above. The titles of the contributions tend to refer to spans of time—for example, “Morning of Saturday, December 5, 1992”—and are examples of a Surrealist genre that has no equivalent (or at least, not one with a commonly recognized name) outside of the movement: the narrative of objective chance.²⁹ This is a highly personal and detailed narrative, weaving patterns of dense and oracular significance around coincidence and chance, incorporating the debris of dreams and of city dérives, images within and without the mind, texts, and memories—all following like an

27 Breton, *Œuvres complètes*, II 459.

28 “Changing life” includes, for example, inventing (or recognizing) new types of objects (e.g., in *Salamandra* issue 19–20, “suicidal objects”); articles falling under the category of “transforming the world” include reflections on anticorruption protests in Burgos, on capitalism and antifascism, or, in issue 17–18 “for a discourse of desire before the advent of industrial collapse.”

29 In *L'Amour fou* (Paris: Gallimard, 2001), André Breton defines what Surrealists call objective chance as “the meeting [*rencontre*] of an external causality and an internal finality,” later as “the form manifested by exterior necessity as it strikes a path through the human unconscious” (pp. 28, 31). Rosalind Krauss has notably interpreted these lines as referring to the process by which “the subject’s unconscious thoughts will operate upon reality, recutting it to the measure of their desires.” It is also the “seemingly happenstance return of this now refashioned world in the form of a revelation that will, like the message in a bottle, announce to the subject the hitherto buried nature of these phantasms.” Rosalind Krauss, *The Optical Unconscious* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1994), 172.

argument of insidious intent, to lead one to an overwhelming question—and sometimes to an answer. The standard examples are by Breton and can be found in *L'Amour fou* and *Les Vases communicants*, where chains of correspondences and coincidences link his own writings to others', and fleeting encounters to the most persistent memories.

As with the operations of the “narrative of objective chance” rubric itself, the experience of objective chance is made possible, even brought into being, by what delimits and frames it: in this case, a sustained state of acute attention that blurs the lines between discovery and invention, paranoia and insight. In *Salamandra* issue 10 (1999), for example, the text “The Night of 21-V-1997” recounts how the Madrid group spent some hours in the Malasaña neighborhood posting slogans on the surfaces of various evocative objects—following the echt-Surrealist logic that the “sistematización” of such actions (“systematization” being one of many Surrealist synonyms for objectivation) might crack the “monolithic [foundations] of manifest reality” and contribute to the “liberation of the sensible.” At the heart of the narrative lies the fact that, precisely as this action was occurring, a low-intensity earthquake shook Madrid. The group seeks correspondences of both the obvious and the subtle kind between the details of the two events (Eugenio Castro, for example, had written the phrase “A stomach-ache that laughs through its mouth” on a maintenance hatch leading to underground piping). However, any firm conclusions drawn from these correspondences, the group insists, would be arbitrary, and their exegesis must be continually posed as a question.³⁰ Another contribution under the “Más realidad!” rubric, from issue 13–14, is a series of events centered around a constant re-encounter with the letter H in various guises, over some years and across various countries, also involving disturbing dreams of cats.³¹ Still another concerns a building collapse in Madrid, two books by Apollinaire, and a line-by-line treatment of a collage-text by Breton, taken to be darkly prescient, called “Une maison peu solide.”³² To Breton’s line “Watchman falls victim to his devotion to duty” corresponds the fact that the only casualty of the Madrid collapse was someone who had been working during the break hour; the line

30 See <http://gruposurrealistademadrid.org/jose-manuel-rojo-la-noche-del-21-v-1997>.

31 <http://gruposurrealistademadrid.org/vicente-gutierrez-h-oro>.

32 <http://gruposurrealistademadrid.org/julio-monteverde-otra-casa-poco-solida>. Breton performs a similar line-by-line treatment, of his own text, in “La Nuit du tournesol,” published in *Minotaure* 2 (1935) and appearing in *L'Amour fou*.

“for a long time the method used to build an apartment house located on the Rue des Martyrs was deemed unreasonable by the people of the neighborhood” corresponds to the fact that the collapse was caused by illegal and reckless building practices.³³ The “Más realidad!” rubric, in these examples and others, opens up a space in which these eccentric forms of action, inquiry, or attention are revealed, constituted, or sustained as things.

This is also the case for another rubric in *Salamandra*, “Exenciones” (“Derogations”), with the subtitle “pamphlets, declarations, polemics.” The “derogation,” to use the Madrid group’s term, is as much a native Surrealist genre as the narrative of objective chance, or even automatic writing. Derogations are not simply statements of position, political or otherwise (for an example, see issue 2 of *LRS*: “Open the prisons, disband the army!”); they model a particular way of taking a position, highly rhetorical and calculatedly outrageous, with a wide, scorched-earth radius of critical ire. A display of both militant intransigence and literary agility, the Surrealist derogation aims high, setting itself, to quote Chicago Surrealist Franklin Rosemont, against “church, state, capital, the fatherland, the military, and all authoritarianism”—as well as what Surrealists have called, after a 1956 essay by Breton, “miserabilism,” which “gives a name to the ruling ideologies of our own time, as epitomized in . . . all the McMiserias of globalization.”³⁴ In the tract “Revolution Now and Forever”—which followed the Paris Surrealists’ 1925 statement of support for the Rif rebellion, led by Abd-el-Krim in Morocco, and preceded their scathing denunciation of the 1931 Colonial Exhibition in Paris—they go so far as to declare their “total detachment from, in a sense our uncontamination by, the ideas at the basis of . . . European civilization.”³⁵

When a rubric in a Surrealist periodical is given over to the derogation, the effect is to keep open a space for a particular kind of unreasonable demand upon the status quo, a particular kind of reaction to injustice that easily incorporates the absurd, play, and wild optimism. It also creates a space in which Surrealism must be posed as the only

33 Bill Zavatsky and Zack Rogow, trans., *Earthlight* (Los Angeles: Sun & Moon Press, 1993), 30.

34 Introduction to Franklin Rosemont and Robin D. G. Kelley, eds., *Black, Brown, and Beige: Surrealist Writings from Africa and the Diaspora* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2009), 6.

35 *Ibid.*, 9–10.

reasonable answer to problems of planetary import, and where events can be arrayed upon a wider field where life, desire, and the marvelous square off against misery, capital, and oppression. After the shooting of Mike Brown in August 2014 in Ferguson, Missouri, for example, the St. Louis Surrealist Group expressed its condemnation and “complete revulsion,” and closed its statement by calling for

the immediate dissolution of the police and other structures of authority, brutality, exploitation and conformity, as well as the creation of cities of wonder where people of all races, ethnicities, genders and other diverse affinities can mix in an environment of creative fecundity based on absolute freedom. In this sense we invoke *surrealism* as the antidote to the current *barbarism* in Ferguson and everywhere else.³⁶

These were, to say the least, not immediately practical responses to the events in Ferguson, nor were they likely to be fielded as policy options for addressing the legacies and realities of institutional racism in the United States. However, the St. Louis Group’s text is not merely a statement of outrage, but a Surrealist derogation, where nothing less than the outrageous and the utopian will do, even on the level of “immediate demands.” As the Inner Island Surrealist Group explains, when it comes to solutions, “instead of crumbs from the cafeteria table, we desire a lavish feast.”³⁷

In late 2011, the Turkish Surrealist Group signed a statement in the wake of the Arab Spring movement, the global anticorporate and anti-austerity protests in May and October of that year, and the 2011 Egyptian revolution. The group declares that, rather than tying itself to any party, union, identity, ideology, or lifestyle, its revolt comes directly and “autonomous[ly]” from the spirit. The Turkish group references the Paris Surrealists’ tract “Declaration of January 1925”—in which the latter name themselves “specialists in Revolt”—as well as Louis Aragon’s address to Madrid students in that same year: “Western world, you are condemned to death.”³⁸ Whether it is from the heart or the borderlands

36 “Ferguson 2014,” in Bragg and Ribitch, *Hydrolith* 2, 70.

37 Bragg, *Hydrolith*, 51. Its “immediate demands” regarding ferry services in British Columbia are less serious in tone, but still fit within the genre: “An end to wage slavery for all ferry workers; The total eroticization of ferry work; Absolute sexual freedom on all ferries; . . . Unscheduled ferries randomly gliding into strange and unexpected harbors.”

38 This is quoted in Rosemont and Kelley, *Black, Brown, and Beige*, 9: “First of all we shall ruin this civilization . . . in which you [bourgeois students] are molded like fossils in

of this Western world that such a call comes, whatever “West” is made to stand for, and whether or not one believes it is possible to channel a kind of pure, trans- (or sur-) historical revolt beyond all ideology, is not the point. The point is rather that the “thing-ness” of the Surrealist derogation holds the door open for this pure revolt, whether or not it has managed to make itself manifest in the world; it maintains a space in which it is possible to see such a pure revolt as the common substrate of everything—to quote the Turkish group—from the 2005 Paris suburb riots to Tahrir Square (and soon, Gezi Park). The derogation, as a rubric, not only groups texts together but events as well, letting subsequent events be glorified by association. Here, history weighs toward the benefit of protest and activism, instead of against it. (One recalls how frequently, for example, Occupy Wall Street protests were compared to haplessly theatrical reenactments of a more authentic midcentury countercultural movement that was now, irrevocably, history—the farcical counterpart, borrowing from Marx, to a now-distant tragedy.)

In the Surrealist derogation, as history keeps repeating itself in the martial form of despair versus the marvelous, misery versus desire, the great revolts of the past can easily and seamlessly lend their language and imagery to those of the present, and the subtlest verbal gestures can heft all their weight. In the tradition of the Surrealist derogation falls the 2004 statement signed by “Surrealists International” titled “Breaking the Leash: A Surrealist Statement against Torturocracy on the Occasion of the Imperial Coronation of George W. Bush,” directed at the 2004 Republican National Convention at Madison Square Garden. It begins, significantly, by quoting one of its predecessors (in both genre and content), the 1947 Surrealist tract “Freedom Is a Vietnamese Word,” which was directed against the First Indochina War. And it closes with the title of one of the first Surrealist derogations:

It is for these reasons that we feel obligated to re-assert surrealism against this ghoulish and self-congratulatory revival meeting in New York City this week. . . . Every time one of them spouts some

shale. Western world, you are condemned to death. We are the defeatists of Europe, so take care—or, rather, laugh at us. We shall make a pact with all your enemies.” It is taken from “Fragments d’une Conférence,” printed in *La Révolution surréaliste*, no. 4 (1925), 24. The Turkish Surrealists’ statement “Revolt: The Game of the New Millennium” can be found in Bragg and Ribitch, *Hydrolith* 2, 54.

twisted balderdash about “freedom,” we ask that you remember their feverish efforts to build a prison planet, a sprawling carceral archipelago of violence, rape and fear. . . . We denounce the snow-balling totalitarianism practiced domestically and internationally by the Bush-Cheney regime that is being applauded and honored at the Republican National Convention. Out of solidarity with the elegant wildfires of liberty, imagination, spontaneity, and sensitivity, we stand united and resolved against war, occupation, and murderous humanitarianism. Freedom now, against jailers and police everywhere! Open the prisons! Disband the army!³⁹

A statement signed in 2002 by the Surrealist Movement in the United States, “Another Stupid War,”⁴⁰ also incorporates language from past derogations. Against the “miserabilist obfuscation” of “carnage apologists, militarist demagogues, war profiteers, and their fundamentalist Christian cheerleaders,” the signers declare: “Neither ruling class war nor imperial peace!” In September 1938, the Paris Surrealists signed the tract “Neither your war nor your peace!,” which begins with words that might easily have been used for the 2002 declaration: “The war augured in the hypocritical form of repeated and increased security measures, the war which threatens to rise up from the inextricable conflict of imperialist interests”⁴¹ Such frequent and pointed quotation of the language and heightened diction of the collective texts of the past is a generic feature of the contemporary derogation, but it also functions as a declaration of unbroken continuity with this “past,” which can now no longer be disarmed as mere history—a declaration that Surrealism does not need to be resurrected because it never ended, and that Surrealists are not reenacting history but simply continuing to act in and on it.

In Surrealist objectivation, the political and the imaginative often inevitably coincide—if the word “politics” is taken to mean the possibility and praxis of large-scale social change, of an alteration of the inter-human fabric. It repeatedly and tendentiously models the process by which the smallest gesture, act, or thought can suddenly burgeon and take off (or, say, go viral), with massive consequences. After all, every

39 Bragg, *Hydrolith*, 233.

40 See www.Surrealistmovement-usa.org/pages/news_iraq.html.

41 Michael Richardson and Krzysztof Fijałkowski, eds., *Surrealism against the Current: Tracts and Declarations* (London: Pluto Press, 2001), 120.

new *thing* begins modestly, of necessity—since it is from the domain of nonthings that things are wrested, of everything that falls beneath notice, definition, memory, and recognition. In acts of objectivation both personal and collective, what was once virtually invisible and wholly beneath attention now leaps to greet it as an identifiable and even poetically (or politically) charged thing. Here, just as new things are sifted out and brought into focus against a backdrop of nonthings, the act of doing so—the Surrealist act—is brought into focus against a backdrop of nonacts and nonce acts, and itself becomes a thing.

LOTUS NOTES

NIDA GHOUSE IN COLLABORATION WITH
SHREYAS KARLE AND SACHIN KONDHALKAR

“*Lotus Notes*” began in 2014 as a monthly series of texts for the online platform *Mada Masr*. It traces a partial biography of a forgotten Afro-Asian trilingual literary quarterly from a bygone, bipolar world and its interrupted historical networks. Riddled with chance encounters and missing links, the fragmented form of the series simultaneously charts a contemporary biography of research. Written from outside the archives of *Lotus* with little access to its chronological evolution, “*Lotus Notes*” draws out an improbable story that may otherwise not have been told. It brings into memory signs of a time that has been obscured by a post-Cold War, neoliberal order.

“Periodical diplomacy,” as Michael Vazquez has called it, was at its height in the 1960s, when “an array of state-sponsored international magazines fought pitched battles—against imperialism or communism and/or their own governments—across the entire length of the first, second, and third worlds.”¹ Often founded independently by non-communist leftist intellectuals, many of these journals—such as London-based *Encounter*, *Paris Review*, Kampala-based *Transition*, Bombay-based *Quest*, and Beirut-based *Hiwar*—were in fact funded

¹ Michael C. Vazquez, “The Periodical Cold War: Tales from the Bidoun Library,” (lecture, Sackler Centre of Arts Education, London, August 13, 2011).

covertly by an anticommunist advocacy group called the Congress for Cultural Freedom. In 1966, *The New York Times* revealed that the Congress was a front organization established and bankrolled by the United States’ espionage arm, the Central Intelligence Agency.

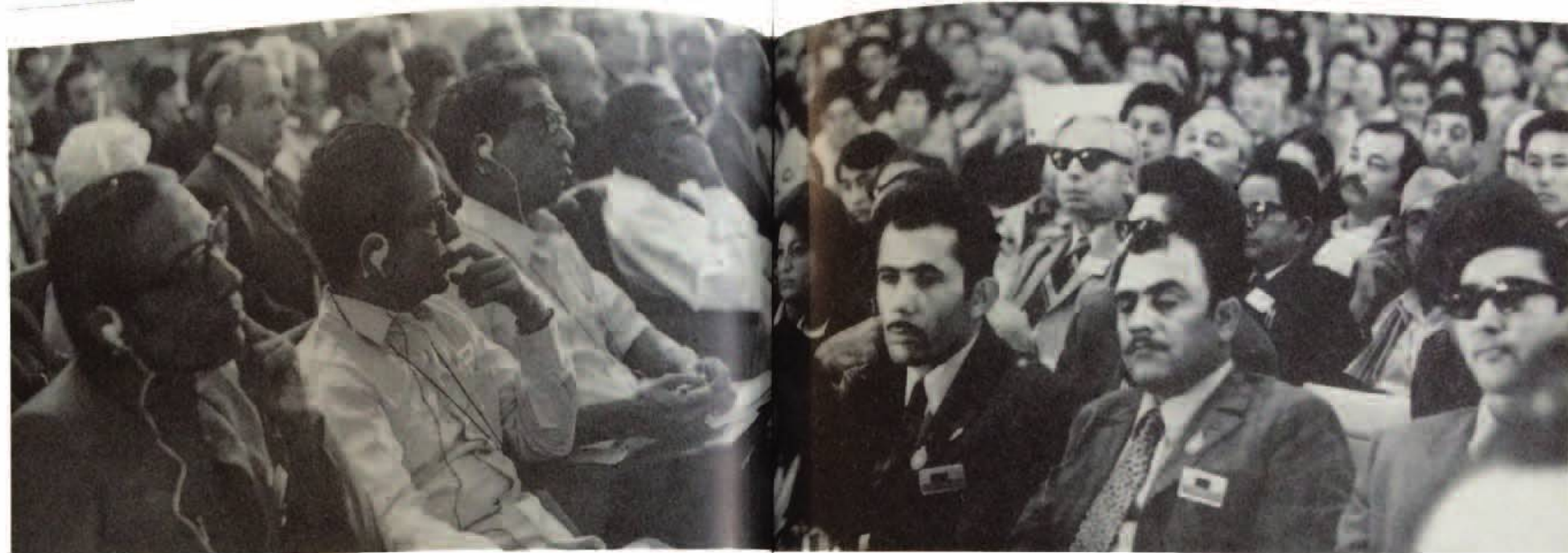
The scandal, which exposed the ideological implications of American cultural imperialism, sent ripples across the literary world—editors resigned, magazines folded. In the wake of this news, and carrying out the recommendations of a counteractive directive,² the first issue of *Afro-Asian Writings* appeared in March 1968 in Arabic and English, followed a few months later by the French edition. Published by the Afro-Asian Writers’ Association, sponsored by the Soviet Union, printed in the German Democratic Republic,³ and housed initially in Egypt and eventually by the Palestinian Liberation Organization, the journal would acquire the name *Lotus*.

In recent years, interest in this literary landscape has been growing, and more copies of *Lotus* have been found in second-hand bookstores in Cairo, Beirut, and Tunis, as well as in reference libraries in Berlin, London, and New York, whose catalogs had them listed all along.

This project in *ARTMargins* carries the same title as the earlier series in *Mada Masr*, but deals with the magazine differently: through its very material content. It isolates visual and textual elements from scanned pages of *Lotus* and juxtaposes them to construct evidence of a concealed cultural infrastructure and an uneven political trajectory. Each set of images explores a movement across languages of production and territories of translation and comes together with the writing to offset a revivalist impulse that celebrates *Lotus* on its own terms.

NOTE Copyright permission for the elements from the pages of *Lotus* used in “*Lotus Notes*” was granted by Mohamed Salmawy, Secretary General of the Writers Union of Africa, Asia, and Latin America and member of the committee for the revival of the Afro-Asian Writers’ Association. The author thanks Annett Busch, Jenifer Evans, and Rosette Francis for the various ways in which they helped make this project happen.

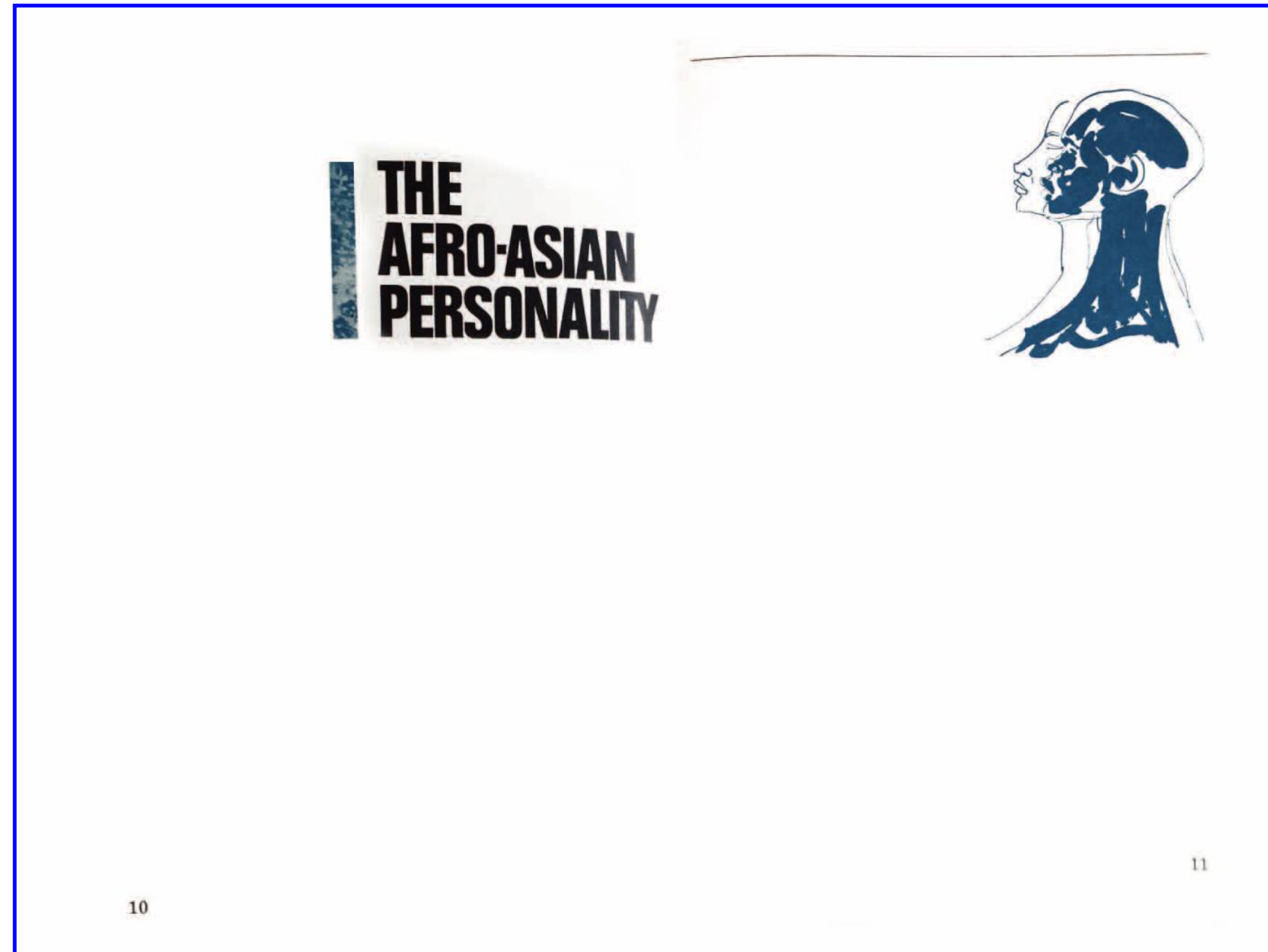
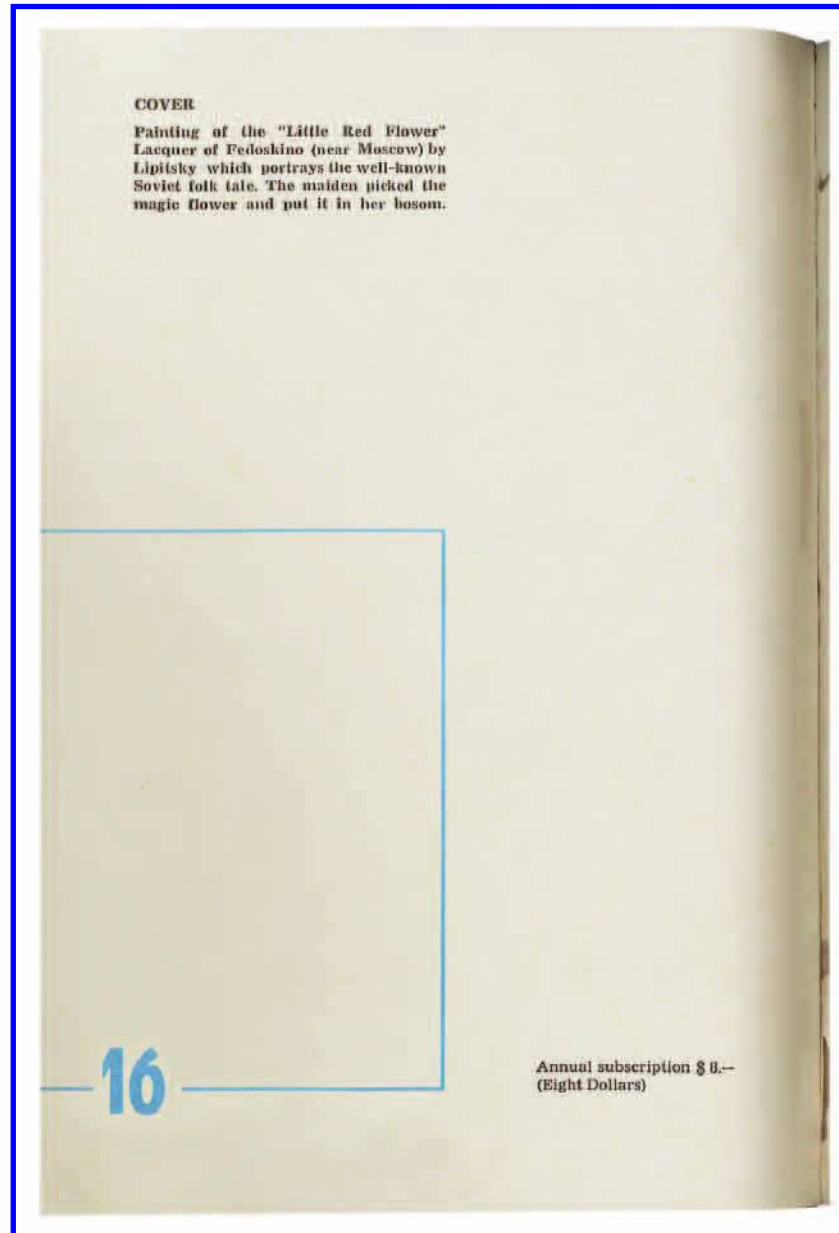
- ² The directive, titled “On the Counter-Action to the Imperialist and Neo-Colonialist Infiltration in the Cultural Field,” was formulated at the third conference of the Afro-Asian Writers’ Association, which was held in Beirut in 1967. It appears in the closing pages of the inaugural issue of *Afro-Asian Writings* and makes mention of the Congress for Cultural Freedom and its disguised imperialist activities.
- ³ The first issue of the journal was printed in Cairo. By 1971, the English and French editions were printed in the GDR, whereas the Arabic edition continued to be printed locally.



8

« LOTUS » ist a Quarterly published
in English, French and Arabic.

Lotus was, if anything, an operation in translation, on a supranational scale. Not only did texts move across English, Arabic, and French in each issue of the quarterly, but over the course of its history, essays, stories, plays, and poems made their way into these three languages from the multilingual literatures of more than seventy African and Asian countries.

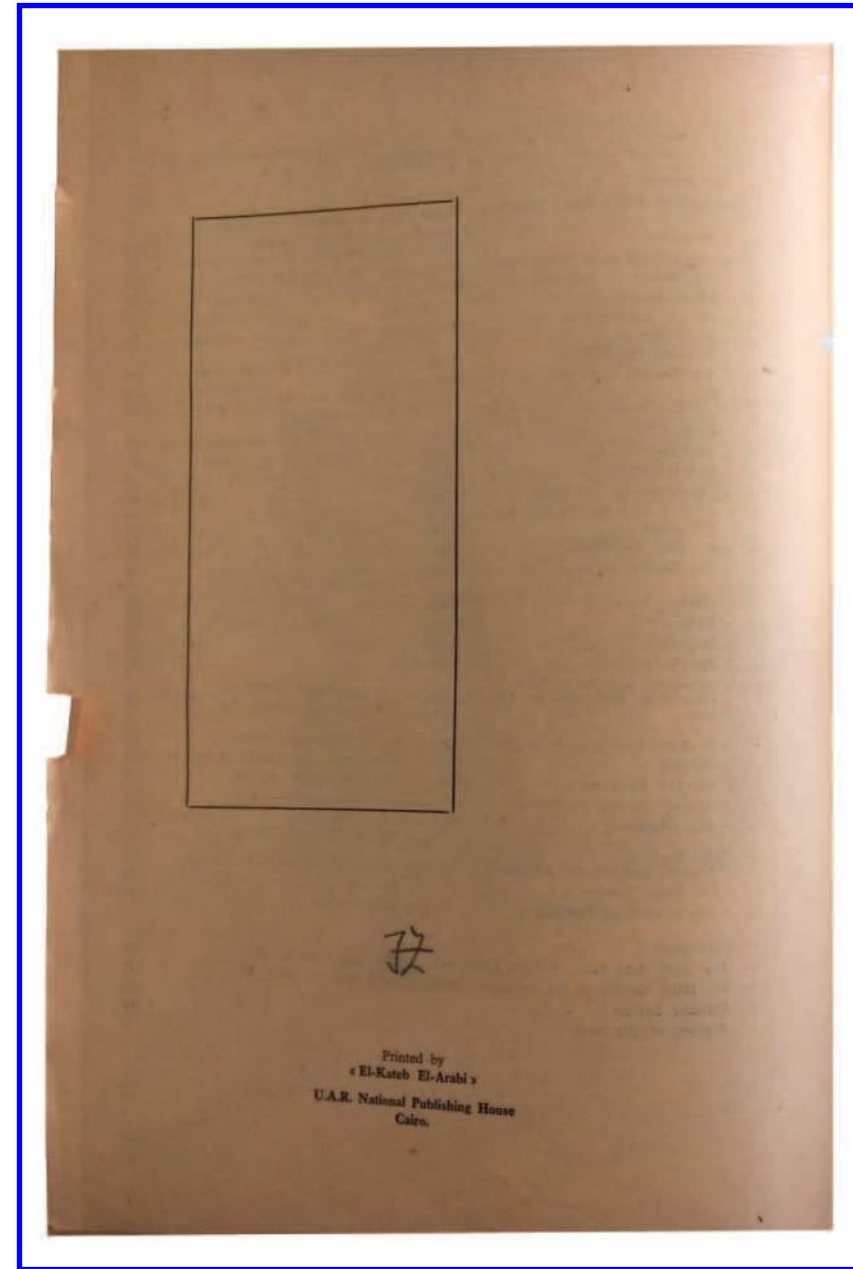
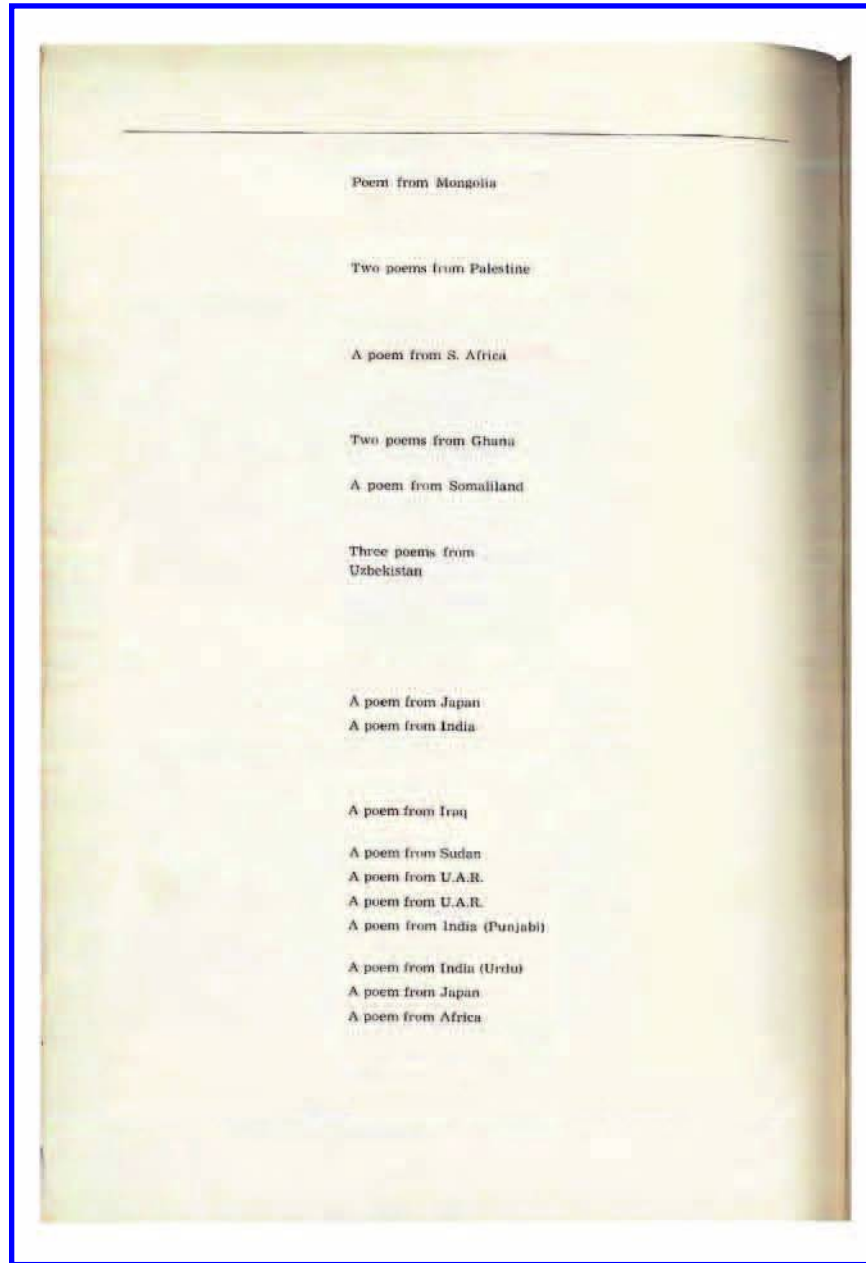


In a review of the fourth conference of the Afro-Asian Writers' Association, held in New Delhi in November 1970, the literary critic R. K. Kaushik reported:

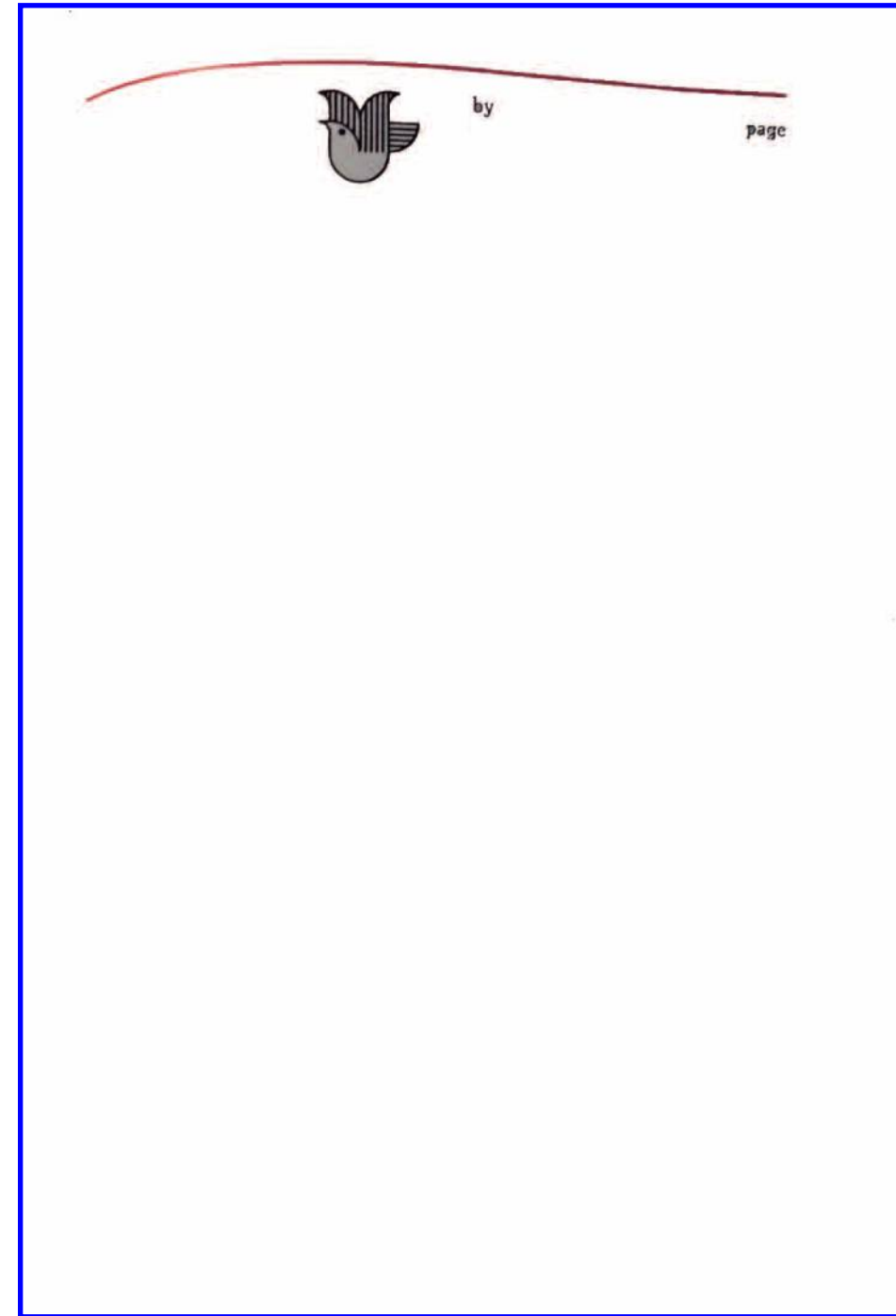
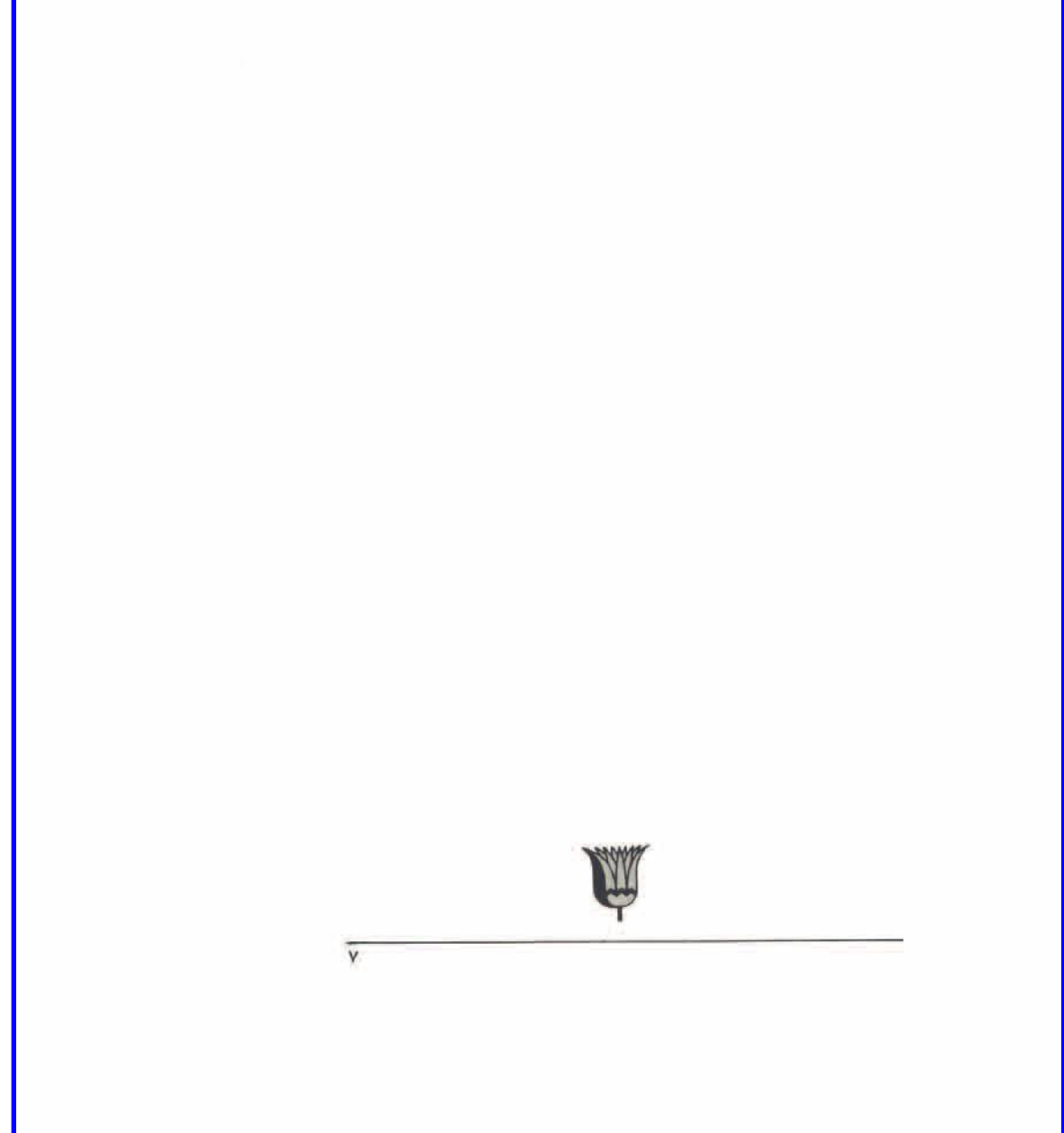
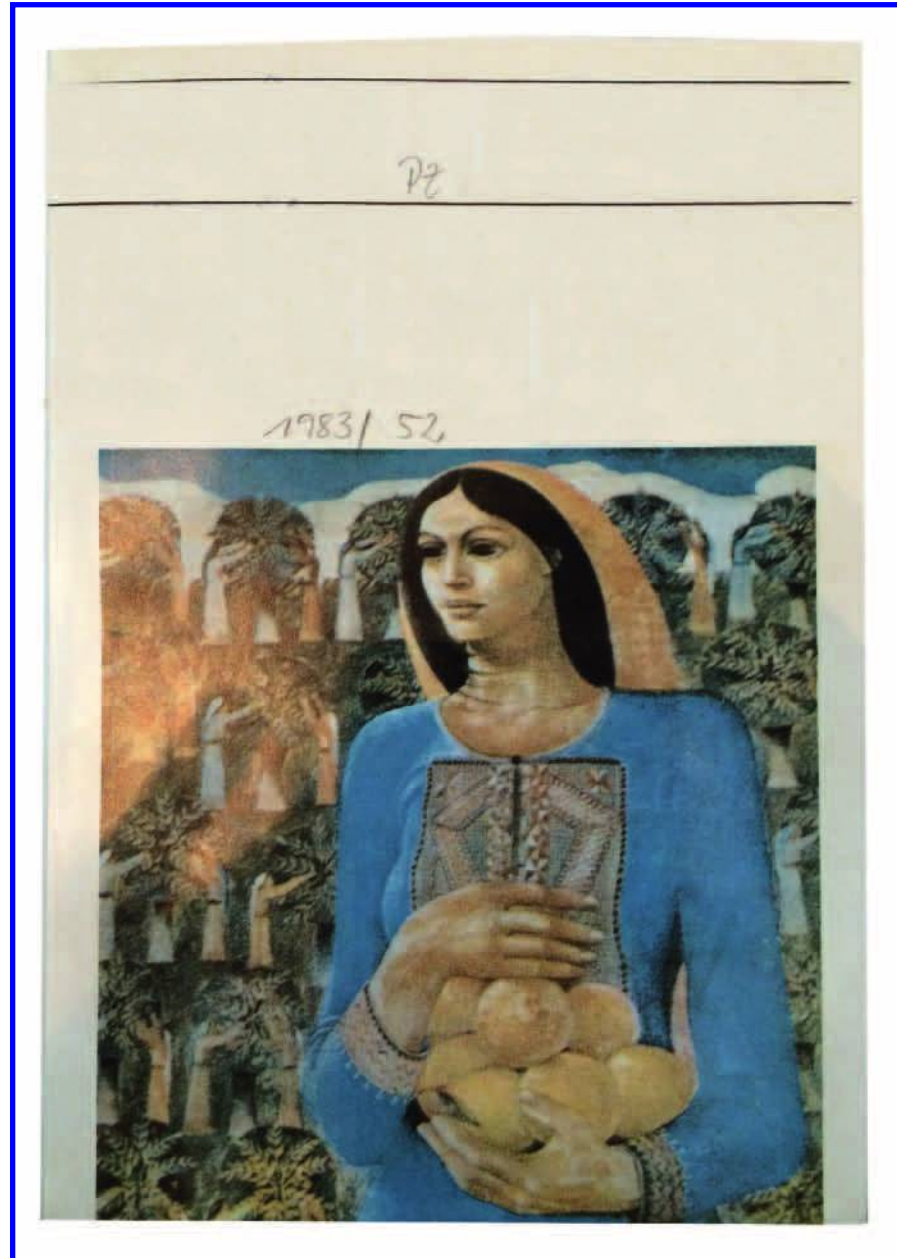
But this toy sputnik which was fired with so much fanfare to spotlight the Red Star on the Indian horizon failed to go into a viable orbit and came down like a damp squib, raising more stink than shock waves.¹

The crux of his account is this: the "babel of rabid anti-U.S., anti-Israel hysteria" and "blatant anti-West propaganda" bogged down a literary conference with "extra-literary issues." Save for the inaugural address, delivered by the chairman of the Indian organizational committee, Suniti Kumar Chatterjee, who cautioned against transforming the event into "a mere political forum," the speeches made by the other leaders of the conference—V. K. Krishna Menon, Mulk Raj Anand, Sajjad Zaheer, Kamil Yashen, and Youssef El-Sebai—peddled a Kremlin-sponsored agenda. Besides endless platitudes of resistance against neo-imperialism and easy celebrations of the inherent greatness of the shared Afro-Asian condition, not much was said. A few of the delegates staged a walkout, and many others, feeling humiliated for being treated like "morons," simply stopped attending. For Kaushik, Chatterjee's was "a lone cry in the wilderness." His words gestured to the limitations of espousing ideological positions that risked reducing the relationship between the two continents to nothing but geography.

¹ R. K. Kaushik, "Tin Hawks and Clay Gods," *Mahfil* 8, no. 2/3 (Summer/Fall 1972): 237-45.



After the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982, the editorial offices of *Lotus* shut down for a while. The Palestinian Liberation Organization was bombed out of Beirut that summer and its headquarters moved over to Tunis. Faiz Ahmed Faiz was granted safe passage through Damascus, via Tripoli and Homs. He went to London, then stayed in Moscow working on *Lotus*, before returning eventually to Lahore. He died two years later, but carried on as editor-in-chief posthumously for the single issue that came out in 1985. The PLO continued to house the Afro-Asian Writers' Association until the Soviet Union collapsed and funding dissipated. But it took a bit of time for the editorial structure to reconstitute itself, and during that transition the colophon ceased to carry a postal code or cable address. Where were submissions being mailed? Eventually, a location emerged: Villa 94 in Manar 3 on Route X in Tunis. But between 1983 and 1984, *Lotus* appeared only when it did, as if out of nowhere.



In 1986, while the position of editor-in-chief was still vacant, the graphic identity of *Lotus* changed. The following year, Ziad Abdel Fattah, the head of the Palestinian news agency WAFA, was promoted from his role as first deputy. In an interview published in an Arabic magazine in Paris on the occasion of his appointment, Fattah recounted the history and significance of the Afro-Asian Writers' Association and declared plans to extend the trilingual quarterly to a fourth language—Russian. Was delusion at play? Or were there real aspirations in the air? Both, maybe. In 1991, the Soviet Union would break up and the PLO would lose its base in Tunis; but two years prior to that, the editorial staff reprinted Fattah's interview in what was (most likely) the last issue of *Lotus*.

This article has been cited by:

1. Frank Schulze-Engler. Entangled Solidarities: African–Asian Writers’ Organisations, Anti-colonial Rhetorics and Afrasian Imaginaries in East African Literature 117-139. [[Crossref](#)]

RAZPRAVE

ON YUGOSLAV POSTSTRUCTURALISM INTRODUCTION TO “ART, SOCIETY/TEXT”

NIKOLA DEDIĆ

“Umetnost, družba/tekst” was an editorial published in the Slovenian journal *Problemi-Razprave* (Problems-Debates) in 1975. It was written by the journal’s editorial board at the time: Mladen Dolar, Daniel Levski, Jure Mikuž, Rastko Močnik, and Slavoj Žižek.¹ The journal, which is still published today under the name *Problemi*, was the central outlet of the so-called Slovenian Lacanian school, and as such the most important place for the reception of French antihumanist philosophy in the former Yugoslavia. The journal’s concept was based on interpreting French poststructuralism in the spirit of *Tel Quel* magazine; anti-humanist Marxism in the spirit of Louis Althusser; theoretical psychoanalysis in the spirit of Jacques Lacan and his followers; as well as the special blend of Lacanian psychoanalysis and Althusserian ideology critique that characterized the French journal *Cahiers pour l’analyse*.² For this issue of *ARTMargins*, the original text’s first two parts are translated, in which the theoretical orientation of the whole magazine is elaborated; the excised third and fourth parts, which I will also

1 “Umetnost, družba/tekst: Nekaj pripomb o sedanjih razmerjih razrednega boja na področju književne produkcije in njenih ideologij” [Art, Society/Text: A Few Notes on Contemporary Relations in Class Struggle in the Domain of Literary Production and Its Ideologies], *Problemi-Razprave* XIII, nos. 3–5 (March–May 1975): 1–10.

2 One might also find theoretical and conceptual similarities between *Problemi* and other French poststructuralist periodicals, such as *Peinture*, *cahiers théoriques* and *Cahiers du cinéma*.

discuss briefly in this introductory commentary, focus on debates around the local literature scene in Slovenia and Yugoslavia at that time.

Problemi was a unique example of a journal seeking to introduce structuralism, poststructuralism, and Lacanian psychoanalysis into debates about society, culture, ideology, and art in a socialist country. In so doing, it realized a critique and deconstruction of humanist philosophies, including Marxist variants of existentialism and phenomenology, which had hitherto dominated Yugoslav theory (the protagonists of which were the philosophers gathered around the journal *Praxis*—Gajo Petrović, Milan Kangrga, Danko Grlić, Rudi Supek, and others). In relation to art, *Problemi* represented a gradual overcoming of the Yugoslav neo-avant-garde utopian experiments of the 1960s and '70s. Most notable here, at least in Slovenia, was the neo-avant-garde utopianism of the OHO group, which sought to bridge *Arte Povera*, land art, and process art through a “mystical” conceptualism in the spirit of the hippie movement. The journal also anticipated the post-modernist strategies of the Yugoslav retro-avant-garde nearly a decade later, especially the cynical and citational-eclectic strategies of the Neue Slowenische Kunst collective, which did not seek a utopian transformation of the world so much as an anti-utopian transgression in the field of ideology. Although *Problemi* was basically a journal in the mold of *Tel Quel*, its greatest difference from many similar French journals in the 1960s lay in the absence of radical Maoism from its purview. This was due to the specificity of the Yugoslav context at the time, which rested on the ideal of already-realized self-managed socialism.³ The journal, as well as the editorial discussed below, had none of that characteristically French “zeal and ecstasy that *Tel Quel*-ian writings had,” according to critic Miško Šuvaković, “precisely because it emerged in a postrevolutionary society that no longer allowed for *charismatic* revolutionary rhetoric, but sought to relocate it to *remote*

3 The concept of socialist self-management was introduced in 1950. It emerged through a revision of revolutionary state Marxism of the Bolshevik type toward a state that would proclaim and implement direct democracy: it was based on the concept of debureaucratizing productive labor by switching from planned, statist policymaking to workers' self-management and a socialist free market. The postulates of self-management were elaborated by Edvard Kardelj, Boris Kidrič, Milovan Đilas, and others, by relying on Marx's slogan of “factories to the workers” and a revolutionary implementation of the social-utopian teachings of the Paris Commune, and by forging active political ties with British Labour and Scandinavian, Belgian, and German social democrats.

historicizations of the revolution or to theoretical and philosophical distances between the revolution and analysis of class struggle, divided into different registers.”⁴

Problemi was not alone in its endeavors, but part of a broader culture advancing Slovenian poststructuralism and Yugoslav readings of Lacan’s psychoanalysis. Among these were the Society for Theoretical Psychoanalysis in Ljubljana and the *Analecta* publishing house, especially its series *Filozofija skozi psihoanalizo* (Philosophy through Psychoanalysis), which initially published lectures given at the Society, based on Lacanian structuralist analysis of classical German philosophy such as Hegel and Marxist social theory. We can also think of the continuation of the Slovenian “alternative,” based on a blend of punk, 1980s youth cultures, and the Slovenian retro-avant-garde’s radical artistic procedures—Lacanian psychoanalysis, as a form of ideology critique, acted as the theoretical framework for the emergence of this amalgam.⁵

As noted above, the article comprises four sections: the first contains the journal’s programming policy, which was based on a Marxist, materialist theory of art interpreted through poststructuralism and psychoanalysis; the second, third, and fourth sections analyze the local Slovenian situation in the domain of art and culture under self-managed socialism, observed through the journal’s antihumanist lens.⁶

4 Miško Šuvaković, *Diskurzivna analiza* [Discursive Analysis] (Belgrade: Univerzitet umetnosti, 2006), 466.

5 The authors of “Umetnost, družba/tekst” went on to become the chief representatives of Yugoslav antihumanist philosophy. Mladen Dolar, for instance, applied Lacanian psychoanalysis in his interpretations of German classical idealism (the most important of which concerns Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Spirit*), as well as music and opera. Rastko Močnik generated unique ways to apply Althusser’s theories of ideology to political philosophy, the sociology of art, theoretical psychoanalysis, semiotics, linguistics, and leftist political activism. Jure Mikuž is an art historian who later undertook historical anthropology and art criticism, while Slavoj Žižek today is the most prominent international philosopher in the field of Lacanian ideology critique. He published his first books soon after the emergence of this editorial, proceeding to his current global fame only after 1990.

6 The notion of humanism within Marxist theory implies a striving for a kind of holistic thought, which views Marxism as a great synthetic philosophy of the teleological emancipation of the entire society. It is based on reading Marx within a dialectic of alienation and (self-)emancipation; in that sense, totality is interpreted as a normative aim to be attained in the process of social emancipation. By contrast, within an antihumanist perspective, history is viewed not as a teleological, diachronic process leading toward the self-realization of the human subject or society, but as a synchronic field of structures, or relations. As such, structure (or social process) precedes the human subject. Antihumanism abandoned the ideas of universality, rationalism, absolute truth, linearity, and so on.

The text's main purpose is to offer a materialist critique of the bourgeois concept of artistic autonomy, which was an inherent characteristic of the phenomenon now known as Yugoslav socialist modernism. Following the country's break with Stalin and the Cominform in 1948, Yugoslavia rejected socialist realism as its official artistic doctrine, instead adopting the formalist procedures of international modernism as signs of the country's liberalization of art and culture. At first, this turn brought cultural emancipation under the conditions of socialist self-management; yet, by advocating artistic autonomy and the apolitical, socialist modernism was often a locus of bureaucratized art and culture, as well as a stronghold of conservative resistance against the radical experiments of the Yugoslav neo-avant-garde (in that regard, art historians have described this phenomenon as "moderate modernism" and "socialist aestheticism," as well).⁷ The *Problemi* editorial offers a deconstruction of socialist modernism as a relic of a traditional European humanism that was also highly aestheticized—that is, arguing that the dominant ideological paradigm in Yugoslav culture at the time was predicated on a bourgeois fetishization of art.

Instead of the humanist concept of artistic autonomy, the editors insist on interpreting art as a form of material practice (in a traditional Marxist sense, the notion of "material practice" implies that human life is not determined by consciousness, but rather by its material and social conditions of existence—modes of production, ideology, social relations, etc.) that is fundamentally linked to class struggle. Nonetheless, whereas classical Marxist theory links materialism and class struggle with economic processes, the editorial insists on reconceptualizing and associating those concepts with the *Tel Quel*-derived concept of *signification* or *textual practice*. In that regard, the materialism of *Problemi* is not that of economic processes as the basic determinant of history and society, but of language and culture viewed as complex systems of producing meaning in a historically given society. Its materialism, in other words, is that of *discourse* in the poststructuralist sense. As their central term, the authors single out the classic Marxist concept of *reflection*, but not in its humanistically understood

7 For a more detailed discussion, see Ješa Denegri, "Inside or Outside 'Socialist Modernism'? Radical Views on the Yugoslav Art Scene, 1950–1970," in *Impossible Histories: Historical Avant-Gardes, Neo-Avant-Gardes, and Post-Avant-Gardes in Yugoslavia, 1918–1991*, edited by Dubravka Djurić and Miško Šuvaković (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2003), 170–208.

Marxist sense through the traditional dialectic of base and superstructure. According to that tradition, the base comprises the domain of economic exchange, whereas art, as part of the superstructure, mimetically reflects whatever goes on in the base's economic domain. Slovenian Lacanians rejected this view of social structure and instead emphasized the claim that art reflects society not in terms of mimesis, but through a process of exclusion in the field of ideology. Society is not a homogeneous or undivided whole; on the contrary, the social field is established by excluding a traumatic "remainder" or lack. In that sense, society is negatively determined. Art presents precisely this point of exclusion in the social field.

Slovenian antihumanist theorists thereby imply that both the human subject and society itself are fragmentary and inconsistent entities, a concept they draw from what Lacan called the *nonwhole*. According to Lacanian psychoanalysis, nature and culture do not form two circles that might come together to form a unified whole; only their intersections are apparent, from which something falls out. Antihumanist philosophy thus deconstructs the 2,000-year-old Western tradition of complementarity, totality, wholeness, and consistency. (This means that antihumanist philosophy is reluctant to ground discourse in any theory of metaphysical origin; it insists on plurality and the instability of meanings, and it doubts systematic scientificity, rationalism, and linear thinking.)⁸ Using the concepts of disinterested art and its autonomy, bourgeois ideology seeks to posit society as a whole, undivided unity; by negating this elitist concept of autonomy, critical art, by contrast, points to the fact that society is fragmented. It strikes at the locus of social antagonism and thereby rediscovers the signifying, productive nature of art, and in the process reveals the revolutionary potential of cultural production.

What is important to note is that by reinterpreting Marxist theory, then dominant in the Yugoslav framework, the Slovenian theorists neither rejected nor sought to revise Marxism ideologically; rather, by deconstructing Marxian humanism in a Lacanian and Althusserian spirit, they insisted on radicalizing it. In lieu of the humanist belief that the subject and society's self-realization were meant to reconcile the contradictions of the economy, Slovenian post-Marxist theory

8 Miško Šuvaković, *Postmoderna (73 pojma)* [Postmodernity (73 Concepts)] (Belgrade: Narodna knjiga/Alfa, 1995), 46–47.

insisted on the impossibility of reconciling social antagonisms, reflecting the poststructuralist concept of difference, as opposed to the idealist category of totality. What it sought to deconstruct, then, was the economic basis of classical Marxism: whereas vulgar Marxists situated social antagonisms in the field of economy, Slovenian Lacanians, including the editors of “Art, Society/Text,” located them in the field of culture, which for them was the field of signification. In other words, social antagonisms relate not only to class differences, but also to those of gender, race, nation, generation, subculture, and so on. No society is free of inherent antagonisms—any society that declares itself non-antagonistic inevitably falls into totalitarianism. Marxism is thereby transformed from a utopian idea of synthesis into a materialist theory of transgressivity, gaining a basically negative or antinormative determination.

The editorial’s third and fourth parts (omitted from our translation) analyze the state of Slovenian literature at the beginning of the 1970s. As in the visual arts at that time, so-called sober modernism or socialist aestheticism dominated in Slovenian literature. The editors critique these dominant trends in Slovenian national culture and link them with philosophical idealism in interpreting art and culture. The editors also deal with the contemporary Slovenian literary scene: they emphasize the importance of artists such as Rimbaud, Lautréamont, and Mallarmé in literature, Cézanne in painting, and Schoenberg in music, all of whom marked a radical materialist *cut* in Western culture, from art as a disinterested and beautiful object toward interpreting art as a material, signifying practice. The authors stress that such a radical materialist cut had yet to happen in Slovenian and Yugoslav culture, and especially in literature, notwithstanding the efforts of individual avant-garde artists. They further highlight the significance of the Slovenian neo-avant-garde, explicitly mentioning the poetic works of Boris Paš, Aleš Kermanauer, and Istok G. Plamen, and especially the OHO group’s experiments in the domain of poetry, even as the authors maintain that while OHO came “to the brink of making such a break,” they did not ultimately achieve it.

The OHO group was active between 1966 and 1971 and went through a number of stages in its neo-avant-garde experimentation; one of them was so-called reism. In its work, the group was inspired by phenomenology, and especially by the Slovenian philosopher Taras Kermanauer’s theoretical thinking; during its reistic phase, the group

acted in the domain of pure perception, working with phenomena themselves—that is, with forms of appearance in their unmediated presence. In line with that thinking, Marko Pogačnik, a member of the group, used a simple procedure to make impressions of quotidian objects and then gave them, in the space of a gallery, the appearance of immediate presence. Reistic poetry, for instance, entails working to transform text into a book-object (or a box as a collection of objects, or to transform a spatial object in the spirit of visual poetry). It insists on a tautological relation between the meaning of a word and its visual phenomenality—a word literally points to visual phenomenality, and vice versa. The authors of the editorial accept the significance of the reistic poets' neo-avant-garde experiments, but criticize precisely this engagement with phenomenologically closed, essentialist, and ontologically founded systems that disregard the productive, heteronomous, intertextual, rhizomatic, open, and transgressive nature of language. Throughout the history of *Problemi*, especially in the 1970s, literary contributions were not published very often; instead, each issue consisted mostly of papers that dealt with Lacanian psychoanalysis, a fusion of psychoanalytic theory and traditional philosophy, linguistics, antipedagogy, and so on. But an important part of every issue was dedicated to art, and particularly to film and literary theory. Similarly to *Tel Quel*, those contributions promoted so-called textual writing, in which the linguistic or material aspect of the text prevailed over the representation of external reality. The authors of those articles privileged blurring the divide between theoretical and fictional writing and the aesthetics of “the unfinished” and “the infinite.” In line with this method, the editors' critique of the OHO group pursued a deconstruction of phenomenological essentialism through a structural analysis of language.

The concluding paragraphs of the article provide guidelines for the journal's future activities. From today's perspective, the text offers clear indications about the development of Slovenian and Yugoslav poststructuralism, which would operate in the domain of deconstructing the national(ist) understanding of culture. It is also an example of “cleansing” Marxist theory of all remnants of idealism (such as economism, humanism, mechanical interpretations of the categories of reflection and class struggle, etc.), and especially linking up with the historical avant-gardes' heritage (symbolism, zenitism, surrealism, dada, and Russian avant-gardes) of interpreting art and culture. In the

years that followed, Slovenian poststructuralism developed in multiple directions, reinterpreting classical aesthetics from a humanist study of the beautiful into a materialist, interdisciplinary platform for studying culture (in that regard, especially relevant is the work of Aleš Erjavec), via an Althusserian-Lacanian philosophy of science (Rado Riha), the semiotics of painting (Braco Rotar, Tomaž Brejc, Jure Mikuž), and a definite crystallization of the Slovenian Lacanian school as ideological critique (Slavoj Žižek, Rastko Močnik, Mladen Dolar, Alenka Zupančič, Renata Salecl, etc.). What was merely suggested by the theoretical work of the authors gathered around *Problemi* culminated, during the 1980s, with the emergence of the Slovenian youth alternative and the development of retro-avant-garde artistic strategies by collectives such as Laibach and Borghesia in music and the visual arts, IRWIN in painting, and the Scipion Nasice Sisters in theater.

Yugoslav poststructuralism represents a unique place in the development of the humanities among Europe's other post-communist countries, where, due to their specific political and historical circumstances, no reception of French poststructuralist philosophy was possible, let alone a nuanced critique of poststructuralism's revision of Marxist theory. The Yugoslav variant of self-managed socialism was liberal enough to permit such a synthesis. Moreover, the reception of poststructuralism in Yugoslavia was no mere importation of ready-made models of French philosophy, but rather their reinterpretation according to the conditions that prevailed in Yugoslavia at the time. Most of the theorists gathered around *Problemi*, and later the Slovenian Society for Theoretical Psychoanalysis, had a thorough education in Marxism, a consequence of socialist Yugoslavia's "ideological horizon." At the same time, this generation lived in a system that enabled them to study and pursue further education abroad, typically at universities in France (Rastko Močnik studied at the École Pratique des Hautes Études and the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales in Paris, Slavoj Žižek studied at Université Paris VIII Vincennes à Saint-Denis, and other Slovenian poststructuralist thinkers pursued similar paths in their educations). This mix of Marxism, poststructuralism, and psychoanalysis eventually enabled Yugoslav theory to make an original contribution internationally (culminating in Žižek's international success after the 1989 English translation of *The Sublime Object of Ideology*). Slovenian Lacanian theory, sketched out in this 1975 editorial of *Problemi*, effected a sort of paradigm shift in discussions of psycho-

analysis as a critical theory, enabling the materialist transition of psychoanalysis from a metamedical theory into an all-encompassing theory of culture. Indeed, in the hands of its Yugoslav advocates, psychoanalysis would become a late-materialist, poststructuralist ideological critique.⁹ Curiously, we can see the seeds of this transformation of Lacanian psychoanalysis in the work of the French authors gathered around Jacques-Alain Miller at the *Cahiers pour l'analyse*. The *Cahiers* were discontinued after only ten issues, and its editorial board dispersed in different directions, from political Maoism to academic work in other, non-Marxist areas.¹⁰ The transformation would find its foremost proponents, however, in the Yugoslav philosophers of *Problemi-Razprave* and their application of Lacan's nonwhole of discourse to issues of ideology. Precisely for that reason, the editorial presented here provides an important testament to the beginnings of a dynamic and, within the confines of what used to be called Eastern Europe, unique intellectual scene.

9 Interestingly, unlike their French colleagues, the Slovenian authors have not pursued psychoanalytic practice, but have acted only in the field of social theory.

10 See Peter Hallward, "Introduction: Theoretical Training," in *Concept and Form: Volume 1. Selections from the Cahiers pour l'Analyse*, edited by Peter Hallward and Knox Peden (London: Verso, 2012), 1–55.

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ART, SOCIETY/TEXT

A FEW REMARKS ON THE CURRENT RELATIONS OF THE CLASS STRUGGLE IN THE FIELDS OF LITERARY PRODUCTION AND LITERARY IDEOLOGIES

ANONYMOUS (AUTHORIZED BY
THE EDITORS OF *PROBLEMI-RAZPRAVE*)

At this time, when a certain escalation of the ideological struggle in the field of high culture has yet again brought the (idealist) “question of literature” to a point, where the dividing lines between idealism and materialism are being drawn, and where, in the last instance, what arises is a class struggle in this specific sphere of the social superstructure

— whereby the very idealist form of this question is such that it already forecloses the field of possible answers, that is to say, it is a momentary incidence of the function of general dominance that the bourgeois class ideology today perpetuates in the field of high “culture”—which is at the same time a sufficient warning to every materialist intervention, that in **this** area, materialism is moving in the opponent’s terrain; a terrain, where, at least for now, every confrontation, this one included, inevitably begins with the opponent’s attack —

“Umetnost, družba/tekst,” *Problemi-Razprave* XIII, nos. 3–5 (March–May 1975): 1–10.

Translator’s note: The present text is stylistically rather difficult, perhaps in order to upset the “normalization” of language, which the authors attack in Section I. Here I have attempted to preserve the original style, particularly the authors’ preference for long sentences with multiple subordinate clauses. I have only broken up the sentences or varied punctuation marks when I felt that not doing so would introduce a new ambiguity. I have also followed the authors’ use of bold type and their occasionally inconsistent capitalization of theoretical terms. However, to ease the flow of argument, I have standardized their interchangeable use of double and single quotation marks as double quotation marks.

Razprave are introducing a new section of the journal, dedicated to dialectical-materialist theory of (mostly Slovene) literary production, and more generally dedicated to the problem of production in “language” (*langage*) (i.e., in spoken language: this includes the problems of criticism, translation, questions about “correct” and “incorrect” language, as well as the more explicit ideological questions of “style” and rhetoric),¹ and also dedicated to the struggle against the up-to-now dominant ideological conceptions in the field of “literary theory.” What is in fact hidden behind the regressive question of literature is the problem of language and—through it—the problem of a signifying practice and its effects—the social symbolic. The questions opened up by “literature” are therefore not solvable at the level where these questions are directly posed.²

In this essay we will, perhaps in somewhat disorganized fashion, draw attention to a few elementary points, which despite their “elementariness,” that is to say precisely because of it, belong to distinct conceptual planes.

I

Today, what we call “literature”—or indeed the whole domain of “artistic” practices—occurs in the **conditions of class struggle** (if we are to use this sufficiently concise formulation from a discussion that appeared in *Komunist*). There is **no** universal-humanistic “human essence,” **no** “human heritage,” which is not in its very **kernel** marked with the split introduced by this struggle. Emphasizing universal humanism in whatever version is always only a specific effect of a

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- 1 One can easily see how deeply the bourgeois ideology has penetrated everyday speech by looking at this sentence at the beginning of some newspaper editorial, in which the author discusses the class struggle: “It is in man’s nature to protect his life and property.” Here, some such commonplace rhetorically serves as prosthesis, while at the same time one can clearly see the specific, class-based nature of this “generality” (man, nature, life, property): an ideological determination will intervene precisely in the most neutral and innocent claim.
 - 2 When these days people talk about critique, about how it is needed and how there is not enough of it, we should draw attention to two things: every materialistic intervention into this field must first deal with an understanding of the critical discourse as a **meta-language**, i.e. as a discourse that claims to possess the “truth” (“sense”) of the discourse, which it takes for its object. In relation to this much-discussed problem we merely want to emphasize that within the ideological struggle, this position of meta-language is **today** the main stronghold of bourgeois idealism. However, the materialist theory must specify the problem of the meta-language in the very field of literature, i.e. the way in which literature never wants to exclude this “meta” level from itself.

concealed affirmation of a **specific** pole in the class struggle. This is where the analysis must go all the way: in the most “neutral” themes, in impressionistic still life, in an innocent love poem, one must—as its “absent,” “negative” determination—recognize a historically specific class position; it ought to be noted that seemingly “neutral” and “universal” themes are especially appropriate for such an analysis, because here one may nicely show the “alienating effect,” which disperses the innocent neutrality into a web of historical concreteness.³

The question of humanist ideology is complex, since it is a relatively autonomous systematization of that very relation, which is, in the form of the legal term “the natural person,” the structural condition for the capitalist mode of production. What is especially important for our framework, however, is that the humanist ideology finds in literary production the specific structuring of its work process, which it may then use as its **particular fetishism**. The “factors” or elements of the labor process in literary production are linked in a way that is the opposite of the way in which they are linked in the **dominant** industrial production of material goods: and the fact that literary production is determined by the **craftsman’s** unity of labor power and the means of labor (in opposition to the mechanistic unity of technology, i.e. of the means of labor and the object of labor, which is typical for the capitalist industry)—this fact is the material basis for the ideological mystification, according to which the literary or any artistic “act” counts as a model of non-alienated labor (cf. Jameson’s analysis of Hemingway, in his *Marxism and Form*). The fact that the entire ideological privilege of literature is based on the societally nondominant structure of its specific labor process, retroactively acts upon the textual process, which then the ideology defines as **literature** (i.e. the specific historical structuring of the textual process) exclusively *per oppositionem* (and perhaps *per negationem*) in relation to the dominant capitalist process of production. This means that the cultural-idealist mystification of literature depends on the mystification of the radically excluded understanding of literature

3 A symptom of this is a recent review of Forte’s play about Tomáš Münzer, published in *Delo*: in the name of a polemic against a vulgar-economic simplification, against a disregard for psychological forces at play, etc., this review in fact argues against the very “distancing effect,” against a demystification of the particular fetish of “Western art”—i.e. “eternal internal problem,” “eternal themes of passion, love”; such fetishizing always only understands the specific-historical determination of “eternal themes” merely as a set of “external circumstances.”

as production similar to the dominant production: it is only on the basis of this opposition, which already recognizes the capitalist category of production as the basis for the comparison, that it is possible to culturally **fetishize** a text as literature and art. This fetishization, which is the active suppression of the textual negativization and its subversive action within the bourgeois organization of the social symbolic, has two main effects: it gives the bourgeois ideology of humanism a “material base”—and at the same time it allows for the literary structuring of the text only *sub specie* of the ideology, that is, a structuring already adapted to the interests of the ruling class.

This suppression, which always presupposes a Productivist understanding of literature, but can never enunciate it (first of all because Productivism as an ideology never wants to deal with production as a material social relation; and secondly because the—scientific—question of literary production already broaches the materialist question of negativization in the very production process), may of course never be properly overcome by the so-called contemporary “avant-garde” literary ideologies, which replace the old naturalist-“spontanist” vocabulary with the technicist-cybernetic one: this is an internal matter for the bourgeois ideology, completely relatable to the notions of the ideologues of the McLuhan type, and which directly corresponds to that which this same ideology calls the transition from the industrial to the postindustrial society (whereby the **regressive** ideal of literature remains typically untouched; we would recommend that literary history analyzes the Catalogue on the basis of **these** principles: its nonantagonistic syncretism clearly shows the limits of the ideology involved—and at the same time suppresses that which in fact happened within it; and which of course happily escapes the history in question).

We therefore must firmly occupy the position that art **reflects** (mirrors) its social content. However, it is crucially important that when following this formula we do not fall in with an empiricist and/or idealist mechanism, which is often attached to it—that is, our process should remain worthy of the materialist dialectic. This means:

It is not the case that art is a sign “on the one side,” and that such a sign reflects some social content, which would be on “the other side.” On the contrary, art as a “sign” is **internal** to the social practice, or in other words, this very relation of being external, which is typical for art in its relation to social practice (exteriority, which only allows art to appear as “sign,” “appearance,” etc.), is **an internal exteriority**, so that

only through this exteriority is the “social content,” which is then “reflected” in art, constituted.

The relationship of exteriority, in which we find art in relation to the field of the Social, therefore does not suggest that we remain on the level of **mechanistic** reflection, whereby for example literature “imitates” “real” reality, which is outside literature and which literature in vain attempts to capture; it does not suggest this because this exteriority is an “internal exteriority”:

What the Social excludes, and through the exclusion of which the Social is constituted, is not—as many would have us believe—some sort of “pre-human chaos,” some undeterminable abyss of “nature”; rather it is **an already determined practice, a signifying practice**, “the actual basis” of that which Freud calls “the unconscious.”

From the point of view of the materialist theory we should understand that the “emptying,” or the “disinvesting”—through which spoken language manifests itself as an empty/neutral form, as a form external to the content—is the very act through which this “content,” i.e. the field of the Social, or the field of the social “reality,” **is first constituted.**

The signifying practice “reflects” its “social content,” but so that **it is already at work in the very “social content,”** as its “negative, absent determination,” since the very field of “the social” is constituted through the expulsion of its own level of the signifying practice. In other words: because there is a void in the midst of the Social, because the very “positivity” of the Social contains some “non- . . .,” it has to be defined “negatively.”

The exclusion of the signifying practice is the “existential condition” for the social—and precisely because of this, “art” reflects something different from and other to it, because art is itself the space for representing the other within the same, because it is—as “one among” the practices in the field of the social—the very practice, which in this field represents its excluded **other**, the differentiating-rearranging, the constituting (i.e. the oppositional, the same/other) negativization; it is understandable that this representational instance will contradict that discourse, which establishes the unity of this field as a noncontradictory generality, whereby this generality itself posits some **already established** “illusory” completeness of the social against its constant and **pre-existing** constitutive negativity—the negativity at work in this very field, but only in a tension between a dominant instance and other

instances, a negativity at work within a distance (even though this is an “internal,” and therefore all the more radical, distance) between the dominant and the determinant, that is to say, within overdetermination—that is to say, within the contradiction of the social itself. The discourse, which supports generality, is nothing self-standing, but is instead—except in the pretentious fullness of the ideological discourse—a marker inseparable from every discourse, a marker of the fact that every discourse belongs to some totality, it is its **politicality**, general shadow, in which every particular discourse obtains its specific “weight” — — and so: 1. Politicality is present in “art” primarily as an ideology, but is always also the “object” of specific treatment within an “artistic process”; 2. “Art,” even though it cannot be reduced to a pure ideological discourse, therefore depends on ideology, lives from it and “within” it; 3. In opposition to its “illusory” belonging to the totality, the specificity of literature, and its articulation through other practices—instances, is revealed within this totality as a textual subversion.

The signifying practice is what the field of the Social needs to exclude, if it is to be constituted, and is allowed only within marginal, governable fields, already marked with an ideological falsification: as the field of the “sacred,” religion, “art,” “madness,” etc., whereby every actual determination of these marginal fields is always historically determined: from the mythical opposition “sacred/profane” to the modern schism between the “logic of the heart” and “logic of the mind.”

It is not for nothing that already Freud compared religious rituals with obsessive neurosis: permitted/counterfeit forms of the signifying practice, art, religion, etc., are all literally the “**return of the repressed**” social processes of production. They are the “return” of those processes that need to be repressed, so that this field can be at all constituted.

In this way the signifying practice, for example a “work of art,” “reflects” the social content, delivers the “truth” about the society through the fact that it is not its bare “reflection,” but rather that it “**reflects the social content in its own medium, which is the medium of that which the society represses.**” The truth about society is not the truth of the society itself, but rather the truth of that which the society needs to “kill” if it is to exist.

In other words: it is only in this “reflection” that society arrives at its own truth. The “reflection” of the society in art is not a **reflection of truth**, it is rather a reflection through which the reflected itself **arrives at its own truth.**

Of course, none of this is to suggest that art is some kind of unmediated/nonalienated “measure,” an exalted viewpoint, from which we should judge society; on the contrary, artistic practice—as a form of historical specification of the signifying practice, as an intra-social, permitted re-presentative of the signifying practice, which has been suppressed with the arrival of the Social—is the “medium” in which the contradictions of the Social are most sharply “expressed,” **including** that contradiction which constitutes the Social itself.

Here we have a specific dialectic of art: as Adorno already claimed, it is both social and extra-social. If abstracted from the Social, art would fall into a “pre-phallic regression,” into fetishism, which would be bare negation (*Verneinung*) of the Social; however, without the extra- and presocial, art would no longer be art; it would change into a pure sign, which would “sublate” the materiality of the signifying process into empty ideological mist.

The basic assumption is an irreducible “dualism” of practices: the social-productive practice and the signifying practice. This dualism had several names throughout history, beginning with the split between the “sacred” and the “profane.”

The relation of the artistic practice to the totality of social practices is therefore not equal to the relationship of “part and the whole”; it is not the Hegelian relation of the whole, which is expressed/reflected in each of its parts; one has to maintain a kind of **exemption** of the artistic practice from the field of the “social” as a whole.

We could also put it this way: these marginal fields (the artistic practice, the religious practice, the erotic practice, etc.) each act within their own historical-social determination as **replacements** for the absent signifying practice, which had been repressed with the arrival of the social. In other words: the social-productive practice can never encompass the whole, it remains in the field of the “finite,” its **totality** is always “totality with a lack,” decentered, elliptical totality, within which there is always a void, a void that always prevents it from filling itself out into a “circle of circles,” a “set of sets,” etc. And this constant, socially permitted form of the signifying practice (religion, art, sexuality—the organization of the field of the “infinite,” enjoyment, “the general economy”) acts as a “plug,” which allows an imaginary “completion of the circle,” which as such “holds together” the Totality and without which that same totality would fall apart. It is in this way that we can call art, religion, etc., an “imaginary supplement” to the “earthly mis-

ery,” a supplement to the structure of the social-productive process; it is from this viewpoint that one should reinterpret Marx and Engels’s sentences, which address this problematic.

Precisely as a plug or a stopper does, literature acts as a reception center for the kinds of ideological investments that are most concisely described by the well-known demand that literature should be the mirror of its time. As the kind of production in which the lost unity of the craftsman artist is preserved—for just a little, little longer—literature becomes that very hook, upon which the most intimate desires of every bourgeois can be hung: in the civil society, literature performs that same function as the state performs in the sphere of political representation—and thereby it enables the individual to recognize himself in an imaginary way as a potato in the sack of the nation. In this way, literature becomes the chosen means of class domination in the field of the social symbolic.

It is quite clear that once the bourgeoisie loses its nation state it will turn to literature to support its class struggle, and more generally to “culture,” i.e. to “its own” organization of the social symbolic. The aesthetic-elitist ideology, which complains about the overintellectualized abstraction of philosophy, prefers to put literature in the place of the most exalted (i.e. dominant) discourse (for this ideology, literature performs the function of philosophy, i.e. the function of representing the **political** in the field of theory); the ideology escalates its struggle just when it loses its “social basis” (the regressive nationalist bourgeoisie in power): because the “social basis” of some “fact” of the superstructure is not a substratum, but a **relation**, an economic relation, which is shown (represented) as the relation between the classes and as the class struggle.

From what has been said here one might also want to illuminate the issue of the so-called “crisis of language,” which in Slovenia we all too often address in the naïve belief (which is actually merely an automatism of a particular class ideology) that language is something objective, general, and neutral—and that therefore we might “solve” the “problems” of language with a direct, “conscious” action (this position is not too far from the no less naïve and perhaps even more rigidly ideological conviction of the avant-garde poet that with every little poem he “invents” a language). The linguistic degeneration brought about by the upwardly mobile petite bourgeoisie is in direct structural relation with the linguistic purism of the “traditional” bourgeoisie. The

ideologues of each side can relax or constrain the linguistic “norm”; however, the Marxist analysis is only interested in what structures this relation. Let us merely recall at this point that the crisis of the linguistic norm—in this instance, we need to establish a kind of immediacy—is merely the crisis of a class, which is existentially linked to this norm as a linguistically-signifying normativity; and if this class was once “established” with the establishment of the norm, the norm will now collapse together with the demise of the class; and with the norm, and this we should really emphasize, the **sign itself**, its ideologeme will fall—and the Saussurean *langue*. Therefore, the “crisis of language” cannot be solved—quite the opposite: it is our present task to escalate the crisis until the end, until the end of *langue* as a normalizing, normative language that follows the ideologeme of the sign. Until then, however, we find the present situation important especially because it shows ever more clearly the **specific class nature** of that which has been up until now presented as the **general**, all-binding, and therefore the neutral-totalizing “linguistic norm.” The Slovene bourgeois ideology, even though it still dominates the sphere of the social symbolic, is no longer capable of ensuring a fundamental unity of this sphere in its “infrastructural” organization, in the organization of spoken language as a normal, neutral means of communication between individuals-persons.

It should be clear that we are not here concerned—in our understanding of the reflection of the duality of the signifying and the social-productive practices—with any kind of “revision” of Marxism-Leninism, nor with a revision of dialectical and historical materialism; after all, not only do we accept all, even the most “radical,” positions/pronouncements on the class-based nature of art, about art as a reflection of the social content, in addition we even demand that these positions be radicalized; we care to show—together with the dialectic starting point—those conditions and assumptions that enable artistic reflection in the first place, and through which it is possible to constitute the distance between the reflected “content” and the “medium” of reflection—the conditions that are necessarily overlooked in the direct, fetishistic inclination to study merely the reflected “content.”⁴

4 Some will complain at this point that what is ultimately at stake here is an age-old, irrational understanding of art as an effect of asocial/unconscious forces. In reply, we must immediately emphasize that we are here only interested in a **particular** interpretation of

II

Today it is possible to talk about “art”—without losing ourselves in ideological mystifications—only if one starts out from a basic historical breaking point that determines the entirety of our relationship to art, the breaking point which can be noted in all of the artistic “disciplines” at the end of the 19th century: in literature, that is the end of “realism” in the most basic sense of an artwork’s direct-naïve “quasi-realism,” the direct, naïve belief in language as a neutral medium for expressing the “interior” or the reflection of an “objective reality”; in painting, the end of imitating the “objective reality”; in music, the end of the classical tonal structure; etc. This breaking point may be quite clearly delineated with names: in poetry the late Rimbaud, Lautréamont, Mallarmé (**not yet** Baudelaire); in prose fiction we find the border (one of the borders) within Joyce’s oeuvre itself, from *Ulysses* onward (**not yet** *Dubliners* nor *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*); in painting Cézanne (**not yet** the Impressionists); in music Schönberg (**not yet** Debussy). This breaking point is a “commonly known” fact, and yet here the question of how to theorize this “fact” remains open, as does the question of its scope. Here we will not attempt to develop the thesis, already well-developed within “structuralism” and “poststructuralism,” about the parallel between this breaking point and the breaking points of Marx/Nietzsche/Freud, but one should note that even as of this day, this dividing line has not been completely thought through, and that its scope is still suppressed. Today, these breaks may seem like mere beginnings, long since “overcome” and “radicalized” (what does a Schönberg amount to—of course, when it comes to being “radical”—in comparison to contemporary electronic music; what does a Mallarmé amount to in

psychoanalytic theory, within which we see the only properly preserved dimension of the psychoanalytic discovery, half-observed even to Freud himself: that is, in the direction of Lacan, which understands the Unconscious as a specific **signifying** practice, and which sharply contrasts with the Jungian obscurantist revisionism. Here one may of course open the question of how Freud has been understood in Slovenia. The polemic between V. Zupan and T. Svetina is useful as an indicator of the level of this understanding: on the one side, we have cultured-and-complacent, pseudo-“objective” “refutations,” consistently blind to the central point of Freud’s discovery; on the other side, an entirely obscurantist, “Jungian” version of “deep archetypal forces,” etc., ideologically bound to **Lebensphilosophie**.

At the same time, some “radical” psychiatrists—with their symptomatically persistent denial of links to “anti-psychiatry”—try to sell us the “crisis” of psychoanalysis as their latest discovery, and demand a redirection toward a “socially” directed analytical revision of “neo-psychoanalysis” (Rapport, Horney, Fromm, Sullivan), the concealed ideological conformism of which has already been revealed by Marcuse in *Eros and Civilization*.

comparison to postwar Dadaism⁵), but all these “radicalizations” and “continuations” are after all mere practical **revisionisms**, mere specious “developments,” which mostly only obfuscate the fundamental point of the cut: that is, a break with the fundamental characteristic of “Western art,” that is to say with **art itself** in its concrete-historical determination, a break with the **suppression of its own productive process**; a break, which at the level of the signifying practice is made by this fundamental artistic cut at the end of the 19th century, which at the level of the analysis of the social-productive process is made by Marx, which at the level of the analysis of the “production” of ethical-ideological categories is made by Nietzsche, and which at the level of “production” of the unconscious is made by Freud.

“Such is the fright that seizes man when he discovers the true face of his power that he turns away from it in the very act—which is his act—of laying it bare” (Lacan). Everywhere—in “theory” as much as in “practice”—we witness the effects of a retroactive awareness, the effect of having overlooked the scope of one’s own act, of having overlooked this historical cut, and this very oversight is what allows the aforementioned revisionisms. It is only the field of “structuralism” and “poststructuralism,” more precisely (if we are to let go of these ideological nicknames) the field of **materialist theory of the signifying practice**, that is the field of this later awareness, a repetition/return of the historical cut; that is indeed the purpose of the whole conceptual apparatus, which concerns the de-centering of production in relation to re-presentation, “the process of enunciation” in relation to the “process of the enunciated,” the signifier in relation to the signified, geno-text in relation to the pheno-text; in relation to meaning as the later effect of “autonomous” signifying operations, in relation to textual practice as non-sense, which first produces sense, etc. etc.

These days, after the break, it is simply no longer possible to **write** (to write in the strict sense of the word, which this word acquires in the

5 In the “visual arts” we can also notice a deviation, that is a “radicalization,” that is a revision of the break: Cézanne is “radicalized” by Cubism; then Dada between the wars and partly after the war, this anticipation of the cultural revolution (which is necessarily double since it includes within itself not only the elements of the break but also elements of bourgeois liberalism, anarchism, etc.; in short, we must understand Dada as a coalition of “free thinkers,” within which we see both the realization of the break—e.g. in the works of Schwitters, Ernst, Picabia, Tzara—and the revision of the break—e.g. in the works of Arp, Chirico, and most of Dada after the war) is “radicalized” first by its “continuation” after the war, and then is finally deviated from by Surrealism and the Bauhaus.

theory of the signifying practice), without knowing the basic laws of the materialist dialectic—this is the end of the myth of the “naïve,” “pure” poetic “creativity,” “unsullied” by reflection. Consider **any** name which means anything within the avant-garde: Mallarmé, Schönberg, Pound, Brecht . . .—a “reflection” upon the practice is an **irreducible** component of each of their practices (internal to the practice, not external to it), a reflection, which aims, even if still in a “wild,” mystified form, to break up the fetish of the “work of art,” within which the process of its production is obfuscated.⁶

The dilettantism of Slovene literature, which especially comes to the fore in various modernisms and “avant-gardes,” should therefore be understood—today more so than any time before—to have **an entirely class-based** meaning.

To consider a real “archetype” of the misunderstanding of what the breaking point means, we may turn to the book **The Structure of Modern Poetry** by H. Friedrich, also translated into Slovene—where the author says: “I admit that in the new edition I would much rather avoid the word ‘structure,’ because since the time when the first edition of this book came out, this fashionable word has spread through all kinds of academic disciplines” (foreword to the 9th edition). The “fashion” mentioned here probably refers to “structuralism”—but let us consider what this word means for the author himself: “‘Structure’ here means the common form of a group of several poems, which could not have influenced each other, but the particularities of which nevertheless do match and can be explained by reference to one another, and which certainly occur often enough and in the same order so that they may not be treated as mere coincidences.” Here, then, structure is taken to be a mere abstract generality of an “ideal type,” indifferent to real historical concreteness, and indifferent to its “particular” forms, something that, of course, is in its very formal-methodological aspect

6 In response to those naïve scientific ideologues who believe that here we are merely talking about a “scientification” of art itself, let us merely note that the necessary **other** side of this process is the “artification” of science itself; the process which—as the “crisis of critique”—has already been described by Roland Barthes, in sufficiently popularizing terms. However, this double relationship implies no symmetry: if science today takes over certain “functions” of art; if, for example in Slovenia, the so-called history of language occurs, to the extent that it does, mostly in the field of theory, and only here and there, in a completely secondary way, also in the literary practice (and even then mostly in **translation**, which has really become something of a tradition by now)—then the so-called scientification of poetry is merely an ideological counterattack, which ought to prevent, stop, and dismiss this entirely subversive rhythm of the historical matter.

far away from the “structuralist” notion of a structure as a **differential set**—indeed, it would be better for the author to avoid this word, since now we should worry that the author will be taken for a structuralist, at least here in Slovenia, if the current “understandings” of structuralism here are anything to go by!

It would be almost unnecessary to add that such an abstract-general use of the notion of “structure” always necessarily ends up in an ahistorical approach to the question, in a methodological understanding of “structure” as opposed to “history,” which the author himself often emphasizes. Therefore we also should not be surprised, when in the name of this emphasis on “structure” some of the **fundamental** writers of the break are excluded: “The notion of a structure renders quite redundant any attempt to gather a historically complete set of materials, especially when the materials in question merely offer us variations of the basic structure. This is for example the case with Lautréamont, who appears to be quite popular today, even though he is merely a weaker version of Rimbaud. . . .”

It is quite a comical sight, observing how Friedrich classifies “modern poetry” by means of merely repeating those markers which are recognized as typical of it by that very “ideological consciousness” that “modern poetry” tried to evade: Hermeticism, chaos, flight toward the unreal, magic/suggestive power of words that is independent of their everyday/literal meaning, etc.; how Friedrich still “measures” avant-garde poetry by the measure of the “classical”—it is for that reason that most of his fundamental classifications are negative. In this abstract-empirical enumeration of “features,” one easily loses sight of Friedrich’s occasionally quite incisive views on the difference between the classical and modern poetic use of metaphors, on the fundamental dissonance of modern poetry, etc.

Here we can see quite clearly how methodological **idealism** (here by using the notion of a “structure”) and **empiricism** support one another: because Friedrich lacks every **theoretical notion** of the breaking point of the “avant-garde,” he lists its “features”: and this may include **both** the real characteristics of the break and those characteristics that already belong to its ideological mystification, and especially to a certain spiritualist obscurantism.

TRANSLATED BY VID SIMONITI