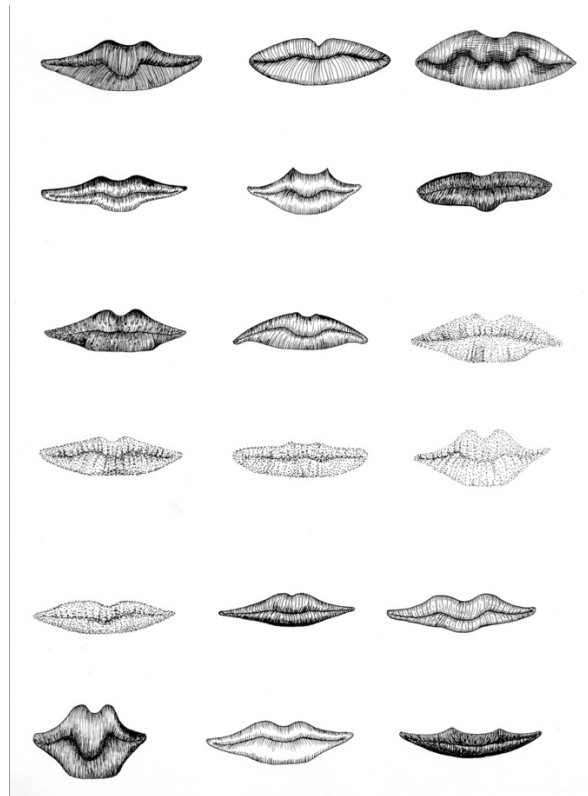


Art Manifestos: Then and Now



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COML 4940 Senior Essay

Art Manifestos: Then and Now

I. Ausgangspunkt: Understanding Manifestos

1) Affective representation of Art Manifestos in Literature and Film

To write a thesis on art manifestos, to generalize and define them, is almost an act of barbarism. The world of art manifestos is a world of *Lebendigkeit*, of plurality, beauty, and monstrosity. As in Hamlet, “O God! I could be bounded in a nutshell, and count myself a King of infinite space...” Yet forcing this infinite space into a nutshell of rational theorization is in some measure precisely what’s needed to understand the function and forms of manifestos generally, and of art manifestos in particular.

All language is a set of symbols whose use among its speakers assumes a shared past. Yet the artists writing these manifestos are conjuring up a “non-place” of the unknown with the language belonging to the past. The artists’ language isn’t confined to the conventional logic of a successive narrative. Inter-semiotic translation across a wide range of media creates a small iridescent sphere of a dizzying, imagined world:

To put out a manifesto you must want: ABC to fulminate against 1, 2, 3; to fly into a rage and sharpen your wings to conquer and disseminate little abcs and big abcs; to sign, shout, swear; to prove your non plus ultra; to organize prose into a form of absolute and irrefutable

evidence. I am against action; I am for continuous contradiction: for affirmation, too. I am neither for nor against and I do not explain because I hate common sense. I am writing a manifesto because I have nothing to say. I speak only of myself since I do not wish to convince; I have no right to drag others into my river, I oblige no one to follow me and everyone practises his art in his own way, if he knows the joy that rises like arrows to the astral layers, or that other joy that goes down into the mines of corpse-flowers and fertile spasms. Does anyone think he has found a psychic base common to all mankind? How can one expect to put order into the chaos that constitutes that infinite and shapeless variation – man.¹

The following selection of excerpts from manifesto writers demonstrates how the form of this “genre” waltzes from verse to prose to prose-poems. Its performativity and theatricality can also connect it to drama. There is a powerful plot in Roberto Bolaño’s *Distant Star* (2004; *Estrella distante*, 1995) that is essentially about art manifestos in the form of poetry and performance art:

Wieder’s plane emerged far from the airstrip, over an outlying suburb of Santiago. There he wrote the first line: **Death is friendship**...To the left, at nine o’clock, he recognized two enormous shanty towns, separated by the railway tracks. He wrote the second line: **Death is Chile**. Then he swung round to three o’clock and headed for the city centre. Soon the river-like avenues appeared, the lattice of full-hued snakes and ladders, the river itself, the zoo, the few high-rise buildings that were the city’s pride. Seen from the air, as Wieder himself noted somewhere, a city is like a photo ripped into pieces, which, counter-intuitively, seem to scatter: a fragmentary, shifting mask. Over the presidential palace of

¹ *Manifesto*. Directed by Julian Rosefeldt. Berlin: BR ,2015.

La Moneda, he wrote the third line: **Death is responsibility**...very few could decipher his words: the wind effaced them almost straight away...on the way back to the airstrip he wrote the fourth and fifth lines: **Death is love** and **Death is growth**. When the strip came into sight, he wrote: **Death is communion**...an electric storm was building in the sky. A captain who was not in the official box, remarked that in Chile, all poetic acts spelt disaster....and Carlos Wieder wrote: **Death is cleansing**...he wrote, or thought he wrote: **Death is my heart**. Then: **take my heart**. And then his name: **Carlos Wieder**, undaunted by rain or lightening. Undaunted, above all, by incoherence. And then he had no smoke left to write with (for some time it had looked as if the plane were on fire, or drawing out wisps of cloud, rather than sky writing), but still he wrote: **Death is resurrection**. And the faithful who had stayed by the airstrip were bewildered, but they knew that Wieder was writing something...and they knew that although they couldn't make head or tail of it, they were witnessing a unique event, of great significance for the art of the future.²

Through Wieder's skywriting in the language of poetry, accompanied by the subject matter of Death itself during the act of creativity, an act of daring that could fail at any moment were the plane to crash, Bolaño suggests the quintessential nature of the manifesto: First and foremost, it incorporates both the delightful and the awful. In this context, this entire skywriting about death can either be about a certain affirmation or self-identification with the Pinochet regime, or a certain condemnation that calls out for a spiritual "saving grace," a salvation for the lost souls tortured, or murdered. The ambiguity is related to the leniency for artistic writings, the room for incoherency.

² Roberto Bolaño, *Distant Star*. (London: Vintage, 2004), 80.

The artist, just like Carlos Wieder, is “undaunted by rain or lightening. Undaunted, above all, by incoherence.”³

Secondly, just as “very few could decipher his words: the wind effaced them almost straight away,” art manifestos very often have a limited audience and are destined to be evanescent, constantly replaced and rewritten. In a sense, this nature of the manifesto resembles street art in Berlin, where previous artworks are constantly painted over by new graffiti or new drawings by other artists or the original painter himself or herself. New manifestos constantly replace former ones, just as each new line of Wieder’s skywriting overlaps the previously fading ones, creating a palimpsest of writings and ideas. Today, even the genre itself has been considered by some as an outmoded form of expression, in need of annihilation. Thirdly, as Jonathan Monroe has pointed out in his brilliant work *Framing Roberto Bolaño*, the act of skywriting these statements can be regarded as “Bolaño’s parody of incomprehensible, ineffectual avant-garde strategies and intentions embedded in deadly serious, nonetheless humorous prose.”⁴ The performativity of manifestos can be, on the one hand, highly affecting and striking. Yet the concentration of affect also requires a *Verfremdungseffekt* (alienation effect). The poetics of some art manifestos leads to strategies of reading “at a distance,” so that the audience can actually engage with the ideas, instead of being merely swept away by the affective impact.

Another important artistic representation on the topic of art manifestos is undoubtedly Julian Rosefeldt’s 2015 film *Manifesto*. The film integrates various artist manifestos across different time periods with contemporary scenarios---the words within these manifestos roll off

³ Roberto Bolaño, *Distant Star*. (London: Vintage, 2004), 82.

⁴ Jonathan Monroe, *Framing Roberto Bolaño: Poetry, Fiction, Literary History, Politics*. (Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 96.

the tongues of a primary school teacher, a factory worker, a choreographer, a punk, a newsreader, a scientist, a puppeteer, a widow, and a homeless man. The identity of artists thus collides with a much broader spectrum of social roles, creating a collage of texts and visual performance. The highly organic process of scripting helps illustrate how the texts complement or interact with each other, creating a space of conversations and monologues. In his 4th July 2016 interview with Arts+Culture, Rosefeldt points out that it is crucial to read the context, especially when, in today's world, it is increasingly hard to provoke people who are free to say whatever they wish to say. Today, when everything seems to have been put down already, it's hard to spark a real provocation. Rosefeldt agrees with the Dutch painter and Situationist Constant Nieuwenhuys: "In this period of change, the role of the artist can only be that of the revolutionary."⁵ Artists have a voice and should take risks, but not necessarily act out clichés or be a modern-day Jeanne d'Arc. Artists, philosophers, and scientists have a great privilege, which is to speak out and say things that haven't yet been proven. Rosefeldt agrees with Gronlund's observation that "the manifesto has a complex relationship to temporality insofar as it constitutes and creates a future that is "already there and calling something that is not yet there into being."⁶ Manifestos are a forceful call for a specific group of people to make an alternate future present in the time and space of the "now." This specific relationship with temporality has been characterized by Lyon as "Manifesto time," as distinct from non-creative time, nineteenth-century utopian time, twentieth-century utopian time, and a Bergsonian-Deleuzian time of change. What the film *Manifesto* has achieved is manifesting how relevant past manifestos are in contemporary situations. Since its inherent temporal logic is constructed in a way that foregrounds a certain unacknowledged history to stage

⁵ Julian Rosefeldt, interview by Arts + Culture, Bonn, July 4th 2016.

⁶ Ibid.

the present moment, the urgent “now” as an inevitable, necessary moment of action, the manifesto is never an “outdated” form of writing. Thus, for instance, in a scene featuring Cate Blanchett as a homeless man, Rosefeldt includes quotations from the John Reed Club of New York, whose ‘Draft Manifesto’⁷ reads as though it had been written yesterday, even though it’s from 1932. A perfect critique of the crisis of capitalism, the scene even anticipates the rising insecurities of globalization and wars in the Middle East...

Another important point Rosefeldt’s film makes concerns the distinction between mindless rhetoric on politics and art and real manifestos. As he remarks in his interview: “We have all this loud talking without any substance or intelligence, whereas the authors of those manifestos were all similarly loud and angry, but also brilliantly sharp, intelligent and very poetic. Hopefully, *Manifesto* can remind people that if you want to say something, you should make sure it’s sharp and intelligent before you open your mouth.”⁸ The director’s decision to choose Cate Blanchett to reenact art manifestos is important in dismantling the “art-bro” domination in the 20th century, when so few manifestos were actually written by women. The film ends with a brilliantly orchestrated scene in a school room in which the teacher played by Blanchett informs her pupils that “nothing is original” and “it’s not where you take things from, it’s where you take them to.”⁹ These two lines are actually from Herzog, von Trier, and Jim Jarmusch’s *Golden Rules of Filmmaking*. The film asks us to consider where we will end up in the future. What is being constructed with the piles of debris rising skyward? It’s very telling when Rosefeldt ingeniously

⁷ Virginia Hagelstein Marquardt. ““New Masses” and John Reed Club Artists, 1926-1936: Evolution of Ideology, Subject Matter, and Style.” *The Journal of Decorative and Propaganda Arts* 12 (1989): 56-75. Accessed April 28, 2020. doi:10.2307/1504057.

⁸ Julian Rosefeldt, interview by Arts + Culture, Bonn, July 4th 2016.

⁹ Jim Jarmusch, “My Golden Rules.” *MovieMaker* 11, no. 53 (Winter 2004): 122. <https://search-ebscohost-com.proxy.library.cornell.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=edb&AN=19248407&site=eds-live&scope=site>.

collages another piece of *Manifesto* together with *Golden Rule of Filmmaking*. “Tomorrow we begin together the construction of a new city.” This city isn’t about the architecture, but rather a city of ideas.

Who will be the architects? Probably the children themselves.

2)Theoretical Understanding of Manifestos

Moving away from fictional and cinematic representations of manifestos, a number of scholars have offered criteria for how to recognize their specificity, in terms of form and function.

In fact, the discourse on manifestos is itself filled with contradictions. First, in terms of the function of persuasion, while Melissa Gronlund proposes that manifestos differ from essays, advertisements, or political speeches in seeking not to persuade but to accomplish goals on behalf of an already persuaded ‘we’ (Gronlund 2019),¹⁰ Mary Ann Caws insists that manifestos are crafted to “convince and convert” (Caws, 2001)¹¹ As for form, while Janet Lyon argues that manifestos are “defined by a stridency of tone” in relation to the “passional state of frustration, disappointment, aggressive resolve that precedes or engenders the text,” Mary Ann Caws proposes that the manifesto is an “act of *démessure*, going past what is thought of as proper, sane and literary. Its outreach demands an extravagant self-assurance. At the peak of its performance, its form creates its meaning” (Caws, 2001).¹² The essential trait of the manifesto—its contagion, is closely linked to its performativity and affect. As Lyon puts it: “Manifestos aim to create the ‘we’ to whom they speak, and while many accomplish this through the fashioning of shared political identities, many

¹⁰ Melissa Gronlund. “The manifesto: what’s in it for us?” (2009).

¹¹ Mary Ann Caws. ed. *Manifesto: a Century of Isms*. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2001).

¹² Mary Ann Caws. ed. *Manifesto: a Century of Isms*. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2001).

also (and often at the same time) do so through the projection of affect. To project affect is to offer an intense point of connection on a non- or pre-rational level; to do so via a manifesto...is to gather an audience through a literal bodying forth of grievances.”¹³

This connection between performativity and affect can be better understood through Deleuze’s articulation of the inherent performativity of works of art, which, whether visual or literary, do not represent an existing people or audience but call forth a people to come, arguably, that is, as forms of manifesto. Artists, in other words, no longer invoke the people as an already constituted entity. The “people” Deleuze refers to is different from the existent majority, still in the process of “becoming”. But is this constituted entity still intact in the contemporary context? Are we already past the golden age of manifestos, “sadder and wiser,” “more circumspect and more divided?” Is this time of “doubt and worry” making us less comfortable with the “authority swagger” of manifestos? What exactly does that “swagger” amount to anymore? Does it lie in its masculinism, its commitment to binary logic, its status as a kind of “one-way radio?”

However we understand them, these traits could also be interpreted as historically constituted expectations that no longer apply to current reality. Thus the scholar Laura Cull has worked with Matthew Goulish and Lin Hixson on a “Diluted Manifesto,” a project that shows how the evolution of manifestos has led it to become self-reflexive. Beginning with Roland Barthes’ notion of *The Neutral* (*le neutre*), they have recreated the manifesto “as a form through which to explore the logic of contradiction and inclusive disjunction, rather than opposition” (Cull, Goulish, Hixson 2013, n.p).¹⁴ As Goulish strikingly puts it: “A manifesto makes apparent my beliefs. My beliefs hold that for each aesthetic position strongly held another springs up in equally strong

¹³ Lyon, J. *Manifestoes: Provocations of the Modern*. (Ithaca NY: Cornell University Press, 1999).

¹⁴ Cull, L., Goulish, M. and Hixson, L. (forthcoming), ‘Diluted Manifesto,’ in *Performance, Identity and the Neo-Political Subject*, eds. Matthew Causey and Fintan Walsh. (London; New York).

contradiction. In strong contradiction lies the beauty, provided I believe I both, and leave them unresolved and places in parallel relation” (Cull, Goulish and Hixson 2013, n.p.)¹⁵ Such an understanding of manifestos—echoing Whitman’s “Do I contradict myself? Very well, then I contradict myself, I am large, I contain multitudes” — echoes in many ways the nature of philosophical discourse, which contains a plurality of thoughts and theories corresponding to, contradicting, or completing one another.

The question then would be what distinguishes a manifesto from philosophical discourse? According to Foucault, a discourse is a way of constituting knowledge, together with the social practices, forms of subjectivity, and power relations that inhere in such knowledges and the relations among them. More than ways of thinking and producing meaning, discourses constitute the ‘nature’ of the body as well as the unconscious and conscious mind and emotional life of the subjects they seek to govern. They are forms of power that circulate in the social field and can attach to strategies of both domination and resistance. Such power dynamics are subtly different in the field of manifestos. However, the fact that a question such as “How are manifestos and philosophical discourse different?” spontaneously arises shows the fundamental issue we encounter with manifestos when trying to bestow a certain definition on them, the difficulty of finding balance. What is the right equilibrium before defining the concept of manifesto in a way that is neither so restricted and fixed that it excludes the “most radical parts of their production” nor so infinitely open that the work itself becomes “vacuous, allowing everything to be a manifesto that eventually nothing is a manifesto anymore.”¹⁶

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Cull, Laura., and Will. Daddario, eds. *Manifesto Now!: Instructions for Performance, Philosophy, Politics*. (Bristol, UK: Intellect, 2013) 10.

Combining affect and philosophy, an appropriate definition of the manifesto would be that it is a form of subversive writing that maneuvers around the three major fields of performance, philosophy, and politics. It is different from traditional philosophy in that it aims to democratize and pluralize marginalized forms of human thought. A “performance immanent to the real, rather than as if philosophy were a matter of representing reality from a position outside of it”¹⁷ it is closely intertwined with political activism and revolution mostly due to its affective power. The most apparent example would be Marx’s *Communist Manifesto* — the “poetry of revolution” — the forms and phrases that would make it sing. In this sense, manifestos are not just a form of writing, a genre, but rather a certain voice of anti-majoritarian and counter-discourse. Thus, in *Legitimizing the Artist*,¹⁸ Luca Somigli argues that “the manifesto becomes a specifically political mode of expression.” By the mid-nineteenth century, he argues, the purpose of the manifesto is “to oppose a certain dominant discourse with a counter-discourse designed to replace it, and to shift the power to define the subject to the subject himself. Here, the political valence of the manifesto emerges in the struggle for one to fashion one’s own subjectivity.”¹⁹ An important reading method of manifestos in terms of performance, philosophy and politics is to pair them in analogues, in order to transcend the academic/artistic binary. Each member of the pair completes or cooperates with the other, thus illustrating the manifesto’s potential as it relates to performativity, politics, and aesthetics.

¹⁷ Ibid 9.

¹⁸ Somigli, Luca. *Legitimizing the Artist: Manifesto Writing and European Modernism*. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2016.) <https://doi.org/10.3138/9781442621060>.

¹⁹ Ibid.

II. Art Manifestos Then

Everything that can be used to resist the culture of fear is a sign of our living culture.

Diving inside the archive of art manifestos in the past century, collected in such books as Jessica Lack's *Why Are We Artists? 100 Art Manifestos*, Jack Hirschman's *Art On the Line, Publishing Manifestos, Aufbrüche: Manifeste, Manifestationen in Berlin, Düsseldorf und München*, what's apparent are the commonalities shared in art manifestos written in different countries around a similar time period. Pinpointing three sites in particular, Beijing, East Germany (GDR/DDR), and New York, and with the arrangement and permutation of certain timelines, some particular trends become manifest:

New York (1940s-1950s) and Berlin (1910-1930s)

The 1910s to the 1930s witnessed a blooming of art manifestos in Berlin dedicated to the movements of Expressionism and New Objectivity. German expressionism was an early twentieth-century German art movement that emphasized the artist's inner feelings or ideas over reproducing reality, and was characterized by simplified shapes, bright colors, and gestural marks or brushstrokes. At the outbreak of World War I, in 1914, the bold colors and jagged angles of Expressionism found a new purpose. Many of the Expressionists were initially in favor of the war, believing it would lead to the overthrow of middle-class society and its pervasive materialism and cultural restrictions. As artists enlisted or were drafted, their firsthand experience of the war shattering this optimism and driving many to mental breakdowns, their art manifestos and actual paintings manifested battered minds and bodies, giving viewers insight into the nightmarish world of the front lines. Germany's Weimar Republic, established between the end of World War I and

before the Nazis rose to power, was a thriving laboratory of art and culture. As the country experienced unprecedented and often tumultuous social, economic, and political upheaval, many artists rejected Expressionism in favor of a new realism to capture this emerging society. Dubbed “Neue Sachlichkeit”—New Objectivity—its adherents turned a cold eye on the new Germany: its desperate prostitutes, crippled war veterans, and alienated urban landscapes, but also its emancipated New Woman, modern architecture, and mass-produced commodities.

The end of World War II was a pivotal moment in world history and by extension the history of art. Many European artists had come to America during the 1930s to escape fascist regimes, and years of warfare had left much of Europe in ruins. In this context New York City emerged as the most important cultural center in the West. In part, this was due to the presence of a diverse group of European artists like Max Ernst and the influential German teachers Josef Albers and Hans Hofmann who inspired the establishment of the Museum of Modern Art (1929), the Museum of Non-Objective Painting (later the Guggenheim Museum, 1939). Most importantly, a new form of art manifesto was born in New York City. Abstract Expressionism was developed in New York in the 1940s, and it was the first specifically American movement to achieve international influence and put NYC at the center of the western art world, a role formerly filled by Paris.

The street art in NYC also echoes the murals in Berlin. The drawings accompanied by graffiti are a form of manifesto itself. The impact of this subversive culture, recounted in Gastman and Neelon’s 2010 *The History of American Graffiti*,²⁰ was extraordinary in the 1970s and 1980s. These decades were a significant turning point, a time when young people, by responding to their

²⁰ Roger Gastman and Caleb Neelon. *The History of American Graffiti*. (New York: Harper Design, 2010).

socio-political environment, started creating a movement, taking the ‘battle for meaning’ into their own hands.

Beijing and New York (1989-21st century)

The most important meeting point for Beijing and New York is perhaps the group of Chinese Overseas Artists. The Chinese United overseas Artist manifesto was written during a brief but vibrant period of artistic activity in China known as the '85 Art Movement. Inspired by the influx of Western culture and liberal ideas that accompanied the foreign trade and investment encouraged by the Open-Door policy, the movement sought to establish its position as China's official avant-garde in exile, observing the homeland's rapid modernization, and calling on those intellectuals and artists still in China to seize this opportunity to agitate for freedom of expression. Museums like MOMA and Guggenheim offered them platforms to show their art that raised new questions: Does China have its own modern art? Are Chinese artists intentionally catering to the Western taste and projections?

East Germany and Beijing (1949-1990):

The comparative study I wish to focus in greatest detail is the connection between art manifestos written in East Germany and Beijing between 1949 and 1990. This comparison is especially important because those art manifestos concern the point where artists' aesthetic goals and activism meet, art as a form of revolt, artists' roles in a world that grew increasingly dystopian, and the ways artists recorded the “normality” of everyday life under totalitarian regimes. Here is a generalization of the situation: The blooming of Chinese art manifestos occurred around the time period 1949-1989. The country was established in 1949, marked by

Mao's political manifesto in Tiananmen Square, after which came the planned economy demanding rationed household goods and food in the 1950s, the anti-rightist campaign, and the great cultural revolution. Such political events and the intense suffering of the people led to the establishment of underground art groups such as the Art Movement Society, Stars Art that ascended into public view after Deng Xiaoping's Reform and Opening, his Four Modernization Manifestos. This brief liberation was soon followed by the Tiananmen Square Student Protest and the government's suppression. Political manifestations like the Hunger manifesto and Yu Guangzhong's poem 妈妈我饿了 (Mama, I'm hungry) on Tiananmen Square²¹ gained wide public attention. A second "Great Wall" of censorship, discipline and punishment was built in China and artists were banned to the other side of the Pacific. Sent into exile, they found refuge in New York, forming the Chinese United Overseas Artists. Meanwhile, artists were also struggling in the GDR (DDR). With rationed household goods, communist propaganda, limitations of freedom, coups, young pioneers, surveillance, the lives of GDR citizens shared stark similarities with the Chinese during the same period. A fascinating point is that in East Germany, fewer art manifestos were actually written compared to the outburst of writings in China. Of course, the SED's official desiderata for artists could be considered manifestos of sorts. Sometimes, actual artists also issued these guidelines on behalf of the state. Most of these texts were collected in a volume titled *Kritik in der Zeit*. There were also several documented cases of experimental art Art Manifestos such as Klaus Schrenk's *The One-Way Street that Became a Fast Road – A New Impetus (Wie Aus der Einbahnstrasse eine Schnellstrasse wurde---Aufbrüche)*, Emmett William's *St. George and the Fluxus Dragons (St. George und die Fluxus*

²¹ Yu, Guangzhong, and Xuhui Ding. *Yu Guangzhong Ji*. (Tainan Shi: Guo li Taiwan wen xue guan, 2008).

Drachen), Lore Ditzen's *Memorable Moments: The Sixties in Berlin (Stationen der Erinnerung: ein Rückblick in die sechziger Jahre Berlin)*, Karl Ruhrberg's *Revolt and Acceptance--- Düsseldorf in the Sixties (Aufstand und Einverständnis --- Düsseldorf in den sechziger Jahren)*, Juliane Roh's *The SPUR Group (Die Gruppe SPUR)*, and Hans M. Bachmayer's *The SPUR Group- On Art, Fun and Politics (Die Spur-Zur Kunst, Gaudi und Politik)*.

What really connected the situation of art manifestos in Beijing and the GDR is at its core the relationship between artists and the state. In conventional scholarship, the relationship between experimental, “non-official” artists and state bureaucrats was depicted at best as one of division, opposition, and hostility. Artists were either victims or pawns of the state. A binary was established. However, the circumstances in these states were far more complicated than a strict binary and differentiation. In what follows, I place in conversation the aforementioned manifestos written in German and the dissertation *Infiltration and Excess: Experimental Art and the East German State, 1980-1989* by Sara Blaylock. 1980-1990²² is especially important for artists in Beijing and the GDR as in both sites the tight controls of authoritarianism have loosened, and a space for freedom and expression started to open up. While eventually the wall breaks down in GDR, the “Great Wall of China” remained intact. In studying art manifestos in this important phase of change, it is important to understand that revolutionary and experimental art practices are not only antidotes for, but also a diagnosis of, a weakening state, in Blaylock's terms a foil and a mirror to official culture. It is important to combine cultural studies with political studies when researching experimental art in both states so one can avoid the fallacy of homogenizing art or weaving an

²² Sara Blaylock. “*Infiltration and Excess: Experimental Art and the East German State, 1980-1989*,” 2017. <https://search.ebscohost.com.proxy.library.cornell.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=edssch&AN=edssch.oai%3aes-scholarship.org2fark%3a%2f13030%2ft5b89r7kb&site=eds-live&scope=site>.

oversimplified narrative of the cold war era, Communism and the actual lives of people under authoritarianism. It is also important to take note of the lack of materials—scholarly writings or archives of GDR art and art manifestos written by the artists themselves. However, there are an abundance of art manifestos in Beijing shown in public exhibitions. What's in abundance is also rock music lyrics—another type of artist manifesto that directly challenges state authorities. A direct link connecting Beijing and the GDR is the music band Herbst in Peking (Autumn in Beijing). Shortly after the Tiananmen Square Massacre in Beijing in May 1989 the band lost their license to play, which was due to Joswig's appeal for a minute of silence for the victims of the massacre during a previous concert. Their live shows featured a weird mix of Russian, Chinese, and Eastern European influenced personality cult. The Herbst in Peking song "Bakschischrepublik" became the hymn of the East German Rock music scene during the Wende. The lyrics included the line "Schwarz-Rot-Gold ist das System-morgen wird es untergehen."²³ Last but not least, the manifestos in Beijing and GDR illustrated that the two sites are not politically isolated islands, and that there have been devoted and bold efforts of revitalizing and globalizing despite the backdrop of cultural and political isolationism.

In GDR artworks, especially the experimental and avant-garde arts scenes have produced an alternative public—a counter-public committed to culture, community and interdisciplinarity that state socialism has aspired towards. Thus, it would have been an overgeneralization to say that artists are in direct antithesis to the state's ideologies. Ironically, experimental artists have in some ways fulfilled the goals of state socialism. The state constantly forces aesthetics to subordinate itself to politics, ultimately losing the audience it intended. Artists such as the autoperforation artists, Gundula Schulze and Gino Hahemann, on the other hand, helped identify such a hole in

²³ Herbst in Peking. *Doom*. 2019.

these anti-democratic systems by exceeding the conditions of the state. So, who are artists really? Were they dissenters or are they something beyond that? Blaylock has pointed out the significance of seeing the duality of their roles as both dissenter and witness. Blaylock is against the idea of viewing GDR non-conformist artists primarily as dissenters in a parallel world. They existed in the same dimension of reality as the socialist state, were situated in that particular political system, and were witnesses to it. The problem with seeing those artists only as dissenters “obscures their role as witness to a failing political system in one of the least understood cultural histories of the Cold War period.”²⁴

Culture plays an essential role in the failing political system of the GDR—not seeing the artists as witness would fail to see this. To that end artistic dissent became an outcome of the East German government’s weakening ideological control—specifically the decay of its cultural authority. In contrast to the artists in Beijing who explicitly stated their political goals, it is important to resist defining experimental practice in the GDR as deliberately politically motivated, that is to say, as a form of action that targeted the government system.

What about the so-called “state artists” who seemed to be directly working for the government system? Perhaps it is important to consider Czesław Miłosz’s *The Captive Mind*. “If imitation is the sincerest form of flattery.”²⁵ In a society which prescribed what to think and how to act, what is the survival method? An individual finds it possible to operate on two levels: the public subscription to the established thought system and then a devious clever realization of the power struggles by submitting to prevailing ideas and presenting them as their own; however,

²⁴ Sara Blaylock. “Infiltration and Excess: Experimental Art and the East German State, 1980-1989,” 2017. <https://search.ebscohost.com.proxy.library.cornell.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=edssch&AN=edssch.oai%3aesocholarship.org2fark%3a%2f13030%2fqt5b89r7kb&site=eds-live&scope=site>.

²⁵ Miłosz, Czesław. *The Captive Mind*. [1st ed.]. (New York: Knopf, 1953).

everybody knows that there is another life underneath and this must be preserved at any cost. Whoever manages to stay alive and in control in this system feels superior. That might explain the works of the GDR's most loved so-called "state artists," such as the painters Wolfgang Mattheuer or Bernard Heisig whose works were coded or couched in mysteries that veiled the politics of content. Blaylock argues that "artists infiltrated as they were themselves infiltrated; they exceeded, as the state itself made room for excess."²⁶ The artists in the GDR didn't self-ascribe a position of marginality, which is rather a situation determined by the state. Yet they moved in the official and unofficial realms or in between. The lack of written manifestos was both determined by the censorship of literature that often leads to transient pieces of writing on materials passed around underground, and the fact that the visual productions themselves are powerful means of protest against the visual propaganda that inundated the state.

The materiality of writings deemed "inappropriate" or even "illegal" is closely connected with the concept of *Materialzärtlichkeit* (material tenderness), which is basically about how a book is not a neutral container of language or images. Instead, the material form of the text can and should be consciously engaged and explicitly considered as an integral part of the overall work of art. The fragility of the book would account for the lack of literal documentation of art in the GDR, while lyrics which do not depend on such kinds of materiality can continue to thrive and be passed along.

What visual artists depended on in the GDR is a countervisuality, a term in Nicholas Mirzoeff's theory, which is about how "the hazards and vulnerability of oppressive system are in the fact that power is largely enacted through visual culture."²⁷ In this way, the countervisual

²⁶ Blaylock. "Infiltration and Excess: Experimental Art and the East German State, 1980-1989."

²⁷ Nicholas Mirzoeff. *The Right to Look: a Counterhistory of Visuality*. (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011).

describes the “contestation of hegemonic language” through “representations or forms of subjectivization that distress the normative definition of culture, upon which the state’s power depended.”²⁸ The authoritative discourse’s inflexibility led to the crumbling of its powers, which was manifested in the inconsistency between ideology and reality, a theme in GDR experimental art.

According to Jacques Rancière, the visual is defined as a potential act or opening that allows artwork to become a politics, rather than expecting it to announce a specific claim. The value of studying the GDR art and artists would be that it offers a model for the autonomous art practice so popular nowadays. Rancière’s aesthetic philosophy of dissensus requires that “in order for artwork to be politically impactful it must rupture and then forget itself. In this view, art should neither predict nor revel in its impact, but rather remain committed to a continuous, ongoing process of cultural expansion, which may eventually lead to political change.”²⁹ Indeed, creative actions that might be considered dissenting today often emerged inadvertently, that is to say without a specific political purpose. Describing “new, unanticipated meanings” in the late Soviet context, Alexei Yurchak explains that these emergences “should not necessarily be seen as ‘resistance’ to the norms and meanings articulated in [authoritative] discourse.”³⁰ This philosophy combined with Frankfurt School aesthetic philosophy as well as post-structuralist theory on power and subject formation are essential when relating Cold war creative individual agents with the contemporary art scene.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Rancière, *Dissensus*, 140.

³⁰ See Alexei Yurchak’s discussion on this topic in *Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More*, 6–7. Studies on consumer culture in the GDR, such as Katherine Pence and Paul Betts’ *Socialist Modern: East German Everyday Culture and Politics* (2008), or Mary Fulbrook’s recent histories of the GDR (i.e., *The People’s State. East German Society from Hitler to Honecker*, 2005), likewise carefully nuance the distinctions between official and unofficial culture.

Another crucial concept is the Germany artistic underground, what Christoph Tannert has called the *Notgemeinschaft*, “A self-sustaining niche society that was as contextually specific as it was temporary and requisite for its time.”³¹ Artists and their advocates imagined themselves extending Germany’s cultural legacy (from romanticism to expressionism to Dada) as well as contributing to global contemporary culture. Because, as limited as their access was to western—and often also other Eastern Bloc—developments in art, those active in the GDR’s experimental scene often wanted to define their work as relevant beyond their own milieu. Aesthetic resistance was thus a way for artists to define themselves as more than their context. “Their resistance to state definitions of culture equaled a rejection of the prescriptive, future-oriented picture advanced by state doctrine, particularly its principles of socialist realism.”³²

Authenticity was a common goal for the artists who worked across mediums. The activist Gabriele Kachold devised collaborative projects that brings her community of female artists together. Artists such as Cornelia Schleime picked up Super-8 film cameras when materials were scarce. Creative individuals also worked together consciously in constructing a solidarity in response to the frustration, depression, limitation etc. of living under authoritarianism. The experimental culture was in a marginal state, yet the artists themselves weren’t outsiders. The generation of the “Hineingeborene,” those who had been “born into” the GDR, established their own realities in a post-utopia country. The Prenzlauer Berg writers’ “poetic and visual practices evince an actively engaged attitude towards [the state] by formally mimicking the political and

³¹ Tannert cited in Elisabeth Jappe, *Performance, Ritual, Prozeß* (Munich & New York: Prestel-Verlag, 1993), 61.

³² Sara Blaylock. “*Infiltration and Excess: Experimental Art and the East German State, 1980-1989*,” 2017. <https://search.ebscohost.com.proxy.library.cornell.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=edssch&AN=edssch.oai%3aescholarship.org2fark%3a%2f13030%2ft5b89r7kb&site=eds-live&scope=site>.

cultural context from which they emerge.”³³ It is then important to talk about rock song writers and actually consider their lyrics to be manifestos. An important historical event of the “Biermann Affair” happened after the singer-songwriter Wolfgang Biermann was expatriated from the GDR. Over one hundred writers, including the world-famous Christa Wolf, Heiner Müller, and Jurek Becker, banded together in an open letter that condemned the state for exiling the beloved singer. Yet, instead of receiving answers and having their requests fulfilled, these writers faced punishment. The “tabooless” cultural order was undoubtedly broken. With the Stasi’s increasingly draconian surveillance as well as the so-called [corrosion] [*Zersetzung*] strategy that targeted private life [*das Privatleben*]. Paintings, writings, poetry were passed around underground, hidden, trying to stay invisible. However, what the rock music artists did was the antithesis of being underground; it was all about visibility, about being heard and being seen. It was a direct, powerful and fearless contradiction. An example would be the lyrics of “Bakschischrepublik”. “Schwarz-Rot-Gold ist das System/ Morgen wird es untergehen / Der Götzendiener pisst sich ein / Es könnte alles falsch gewesen sein.”³⁴ The rock music lyrics also resemble Brecht’s poems in that the symbolism, the rhetoric doesn’t matter as much compared to the essential goal of communicating political thoughts. Why would these lyrics be considered as manifestos? They satisfy the criteria of bringing together performativity, philosophy, aesthetics, and affect. Down with the corrupt, authoritarian state, and up with the freedom of creative expression and human right!

The book *Alltag im anderen Deutschland* (1985) begins with the following opening: “Wie ist der Alltag im anderen Deutschland? Durchaus nicht phantasielos, durchaus nicht zufrieden,

³³ Anna Horakova, “*Mimicry as Critique: New Perspectives on the Prenzlauer Berg, Avantgarde Aesthetics and Communist Cultures of Dissidence*” (doctoral thesis, Cornell University, 2016), 9.

³⁴ Herbst in Peking. *Doom*. 2019

nicht leidenschaftlos, nicht lieblos...”³⁵ The experimental artists in the GDR had similar feelings “Berlin swallows its inhabitants without mercy. Layer by layer, the city covers them under a cloak of forgetting...In Berlin nothing lasts long. Sooner than normal, everything vanishes without trace.”³⁶ The experimental art manifestos and the artists’ visual works focused on how the state’s art and visual culture chose idealistic fantasy over reality that rendered the common man invisible.

A final point made by Boris Groys in his 1992 *The Total Art of Stalinism*³⁷ is that state socialist artistic practices provide a model for alternative, non-market dependent production, and suggest that the underexplored communist Cold War culture offered—if ironically—more democratic working conditions for artists than are available today. A similar idea manifests itself in Mladen Stilinovic’s 1998 manifesto *The Praise of Laziness*:

Artists in the West are not lazy and therefore not artists, but rather producers of something. Their involvement with matters of no importance, such as production, promotion, the gallery system, the museum system, the competition system (who is first), their preoccupation with objects—all that drives them away from laziness, from art. Just as money is but paper, a gallery is but a room. Artists from the East were lazy and poor because the entire system of insignificant factors did not exist. Therefore, they had time enough to concentrate on art and laziness. Even when they did produce art, they knew it was in vain, it was nothing.³⁸

³⁵ Werner Filmer, and Heribert Schwan. *Alltag Im Anderen Deutschland*. 1. Aufl. (Düsseldorf: Econ, 1985).

³⁶ Gundula Schulze Eldowy, “Im Herbstlaub des Vergessens” in *Berlin in einer Hundenacht* (Leipzig: Lehmanns Verlag, 2011), 13 & 16.

³⁷ Boris Groys, *The Total Art of Stalinism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 121.

³⁸ Michalis Pichler, ed. *Publishing Manifestos: an International Anthology from Artists and Writers*. (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2019).

In Beijing, at best, all visual objects were meant to reaffirm the national vision. Gilded, unrealistic images of a utopian proletarian community were conventional. Art manifesto writers in Beijing also turned to the actual everyday lives of people when creating art, especially for the artist Wen Pulin, who considered artworks in museums to be corpses; he was more interested in the actual lives of artists in their everyday habitat. An essential line in his manifesto on the avant-garde art in China in the 80s and 90s is “我恰好在场,” which translates into “I happened to be there.” The idea of being simultaneously a dissenter and a witness was what drives him to create a video archive, a series of visual documentation that defends the collective memories of that entire generation:

The 80s is crisp, urgent, sometimes with an over-accelerated heartbeat, while other times the heart stops beating at all. The discourse on Truth and Justice is the starting point of a liberation movement. The Chinese's captive mind has been unshackled for the first time after decades, with the infiltration of Western thoughts on the one hand, and the resuscitation of traditional Chinese culture on the other. The vitality of thoughts has led to huge transitions and creations of new concepts, and these concepts led to unprecedented actions. (Wen) ³⁹

In 1986, *Concept 21*, the first artist collective of performance art in China was formed in 1986 in Beijing by five students---Sheng Qi, Zheng Yike, Zhao Jianhai, Kang Mu and Xi Jianjun. A crucial performance was at the Great Wall of China, where the artists dressed themselves in

³⁹ Wen Pulin. *Archive of Chinese Avant-Garde Art*, #8234. (Ithaca: Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library.) n.d.

colorful strips of cloth while performing a variety of ritual-like actions. Wen Pulin in his manifesto observed that the art shows in 1989 were filled with conceptual artworks, but what mattered more was the performance art outside the galleries, that allowed Chinese modern art to stir international interest.

“Artists are like the Shaman, who can predict the coming changes on earth which led them to act first. Even though the artists’ capabilities are limited, they are the shaman who are ahead of their time at the verge of social reformations. But sometimes, the great earthquake that you thought has already encompassed everything is only the first seismic wave” (Wen).⁴⁰ In 1988, artists performed the art piece *Wrapping up the wound of the Great Wall*. It was also the era of “wrapping up the wounds of the Mother Tongue.”⁴¹ Chinese artists, famous or unknown, traditional or avant-garde, were all eager for expression through language. They wrote, and they published, profusely. The 80s, was indeed the era of idealism.

In 1989 however, the Chinese avant-garde art scene was about the so-called Seven Sins. The first “sin” started out when artist Kang Mu planned to depart from the Central Academy of Fine Arts and ran naked to the opening ceremony of the National Art Museum of China. Unfortunately, he was reported by a citizen of the Chaoyang District and was arrested in his sleep on the eve of his great plan. This led to the banning of performance art during art shows. Wen Pulin thus made a list of seven sinner artists as an ironic mocking of the government and “citizen’s mentality of pointing fingers and having witch hunts into his manifesto:

⁴⁰ Wen Pulin. *Archive of Chinese Avant-Garde Art*, #8234. (Ithaca: Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library.) n.d.

⁴¹ Ibid.

The first sin: Mourning. Sinners: Zhu YanGuang, Ren Xiao Ying

Reason: brining grief and mourning to the celebration of art that is supposed to be about joy.

The second sin: Business. Sinners: Wu Shanzhuan

Reason: Disturbing the economy of art's planned market

The third sin: Weirdness Sinner: Wang Lang

Reason: Strange Clothes.

The fourth sin: Sullyng. Sinner: Li Shan

Reason: He performed a piece called "Washing feet." It is vulgar and sullies the sacred temple of art

The Fifth Sin: Doubts Sinner: Zhang Nian

Reason: He dared to doubt and challenge the authority

The Sixth Sin: Decadence Sinner: Wang Deren

Reason: Immorality, debauchery

The Seventh Sin: Violence Sinner: Xiao Lu

Reason: Firing a gun in the public in the name of art

The big show in 1989 was suspended because of this performance by Xiao Lu, which also simultaneously brought the Chinese art to the international stage. The Times used "Gunshot, hatching eggs, condoms" as the title to cover this art show. Politics, violence and sex, these were the focus of the artists in China back then. In the lyrics of a song by Zuxiao Zuzhou called *Being Wronged*, the following lines captured the spirit of that era perfectly:

You have started an action, in order to be well at ease in your own skin,

That ease is freedom,
Freedom is a human right, but human right is also politics,
My comrade, even though you despise politics, you have unknowingly,
Stepped onto the stage of politics...

The 1990s was the era of unprecedented angst and desires. Everywhere there were potential golden mines of profit as well as the traps that awaited to steal the artists' virginity of sincerity. Some intellectuals in China at that time were eager to shed off their dignity and cast away the beliefs for self-profit.

Gold is the truth. Action is about a burst of strength. Performance is the spontaneous overflow of passions that invites attention and discussion. Yet capitalism is ready to purchase that passion and turn it into a game as well, transforming a photograph of the performing arts into a well sought-after and highly lucrative product during auctions.

With postmodern theories, the struggles faced by artists during the modernism phase have dissolved. Artists in China no longer bore heavy spiritual burdens, instead they enjoyed the games, the emancipation from conventional logic to the fullest extent. Da Zhang stated in his manifesto that all art is intentional, and that there is no sincerity from the very start. With love making becomes a performance, when an art piece becomes a product, and when concepts become business strategies, where is the world going to end up?

Throughout these periods, surveillance always played an essential role for Chinese artists, with fear pushing the artists to do self-censorship. This meant that the artists had to define the parameters of artistic freedom for himself/herself. From an anachronistic perspective, and an outsider's perspective, it is easy to perceive self-censorship as translating into categories such as

“dissident, nonconformist, underground” etc. However, the truth is that during the post cultural revolution era, many artists did not wish to be perceived as political at all, they looked instead for universal properties of art—beauty and truth.

In Wang Xiaobo’s famous essay “The Silent Majority,” he talked about how from his “rusticated youth” during the Cultural Revolution in the 1970s to being a students and teacher in the 1980s, he remained “quiet,” like the majority of intelligent people, until one day he decided to become a “distinctive pig.” The youth were eager to speak up at one point, however, the situation can be like what Wang Xiaobo depicted in one of his novels *The Golden Age*:

“Wang Er realize that society is nothing more than a series of power relationships. In the village, he notes, locals didn’t just castrate bulls, they also hammered their testicles into a pulp to make sure the bulls got the message. After that, he says, even the feistiest bull was a docile beast of burden. Only much later did I realize that life is a slow process of being hammered. People grow old day after day, their desire disappears little by little, and finally they become like those hammered bulls.”⁴²

Chinese artists were strong and powerful bulls in their youth, but with the dawning of capitalism, the age of profit and gold, many became hammered bulls.

The other issue that the Chinese artists had to face is the feeling of being abandoned and dislocated. How to be recognized by the Western art world and be selected in exhibitions? How does the Western art critics perceive the Asian art? Do they spontaneously project their pre-

⁴² Sebastian Veg, Utopian Fiction and Critical Examination: The Cultural Revolution in Wang Xiaobo’s “The Golden Age,” *China Perspectives* [Online], 2007/4.

conceived conceptions upon Asian artists and thus see what they wish to see? Are Asian artists catering to their taste for success? Jacques Derrida has argued that “no translation would be possible” without “difference”:

In the limits to which it is possible, or at least appears possible, translation practices the difference between signified and signifier. But if this difference is never pure, no more so is translation, and for the notion of translation we would have to substitute a notion of transformation: a regulated transformation of one language by another, of one text by another. We will never have, and in fact have never had, to do with some “transport” of pure signifieds from one language to another, or within one and the same language, that the signifying instrument would leave virgin and untouched. (Derrida 1981, 20. Derrida’s emphasis) ⁴³

Pierre Bourdieu has argued that “The literary or artistic field is a field of forces, but it is also a field of struggles tending to transform or converse this field of forces” (Bourdieu 1993, 30. Bourdieu’s emphasis).⁴⁴ According to Bourdieu, in the field of cultural production, the struggle for power and dominance in the space of positions and position- takings is characterized by a displacement of the structure of the field of existent positions by new or advanced positions, which leads to a displacement of the structure of tastes (58, 107–8).

Just as Bertolt Brecht used Mei Lan Fang’s Peking Opera performance as a proof for his own Alienation Effect, sometimes the Asian art could be used as a support for a Western theory

⁴³ Jacques Derrida. *Writing and Difference*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978).

⁴⁴ Richard Jenkins. *Pierre Bourdieu*. (London: Routledge, 1992).

or concept even though that might only be true under a certain context. In Brecht's case, when he was seeing Mei Lanfang's performance, Brecht was already armed with a formulated theory and synthesizing concept; his resultant interpretation of Chinese acting was actually a subjective concretization and elaboration of his own theory, a displacement of Mei Lanfang's art and Chinese acting in terms of his own theory.

Chinese overseas artists faced similar issues around dislocation. Dislocated and banned from creating at home, working in a foreign environment meant a lot of "showing" – an intentional performance of being avant-garde and underground. The artists thought they could dominate the media, yet they were consumed first. Conflicts arose when Chinese artists that stayed in the country criticized those who intentionally demonstrate that their work is "made in China" for the Western collectors. They preferred to be vagrants, mavericks in society, quoting the Water Margin reference in Chinese folklore. The Water Margin, set in the Song Dynasty, tells of how a group of 108 outlaws gather at Mount Liang to form a sizable army before they are eventually granted amnesty by the government and sent on campaigns to resist foreign invaders and suppress rebel forces. The attitude of displacement, of being constantly on the road, of not having a home is the major concept of many overseas Chinese art manifestos. This reminds me of Bensmaïa's quote, "Kafka knew that to find justice — the justice that he was seeking, that traversed him — it was necessary to move, to go from one room to another, from office to office, from language to language, and from country to country, always following his desire."⁴⁵

The key political and aesthetics agendas are shown in the following collection of Chinese art manifestos:

⁴⁵ Bensmaïa, Réda, and Alyson Waters. *Experimental Nations, or, The Invention of the Maghreb*. (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2003).

1. Huang Rui. Preface to the First Stars Art Exhibition

Background: The Stars Group was a provocative art collective that emerged in China in 1977, during a brief period of political liberation following the end of the Cultural Revolution and the death of Mao Ze Dong. They took their inspiration from Kathe Kollwitz, who had sought to depict the harsh lives of working-class women in Germany at the turn of the century and argued that for art to have any significance it must be actively involved in society.

The manifesto, written by the artist Huang Rui, was printed on posters announcing the exhibition. Two days after the opening, a hundred police seized the artworks. They were given permission to restage it, attended by thousands of people, yet Deng Xiaoping banned all further unofficial group activities and organizations in China.

We, twenty-three art explorers, place fruits of exploration here. The paintings contain all sorts of expressions, and the expressions speak to individual ideas.

There are no mysterious indications guiding the action. We cannot remove the element of temporality; the shadow of the past and the glow of the future are folded together, forming various living conditions. Resolving to live on and remembering each lesson learned: this is our responsibility.

We love the ground beneath our feet. Seizing the moment of the 13th anniversary, we give our harvest back to the land, and to the people. This brings us closer. We are full of confidence.⁴⁶

2. Chinese United Overseas Artists, Manifesto Chinese United Overseas Artists (1985)

Background: The first wave of avant-garde artist groups had emerged in China in 1977 after the end of the Cultural revolution and death of Mao Zedong---most notably the Stars group. But their promotion of free artistic expression was regarded as an unacceptable challenge to the communist regime, which retaliated with outspoken criticism, driving them out of the country in the early 1980s. The Chinese United overseas Artist manifesto was written during a brief but vibrant period of artistic activity in China known as the '85 Art Movement, which had been inspired by the influx of Western culture and liberal ideas that accompanied the-foreign trade and investment encouraged by the Open-Door policy. It sought to establish their position as China's official avant-garde in exile, observing their homeland's rapid modernization, and calling on those intellectuals and artists still in China to seize this opportunity to agitate for freedom of expression.

We are artists from China. We have seen the profound influence of classical Chinese art on the world. We have also seen the rapid development of modern Western art in the last century. What concerns us is the current state and future of Chinese art.

We must conclude that Chinese art has just experienced its darkest century in history.

⁴⁶ Jessica Lack, ed. *Why Are We 'Artists'? : 100 World Art Manifestos*. (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 2017).

In the face of the realities of Chinese culture as a whole, the greatest responsibility of China's intellectuals and artists is to exert every effort at any cost to help the people of China to shed the past and transform into a society of free and creative spirits. This will a new beginning for Chinese art and the dawn of Chinese modernization. We look at the concept of modern art and study its trends in our search for a new beginning for Chinese art.

Freedom is the condition for creativity; only through creativity can we truly experience freedom. The creative spirit honors tradition by breaking with tradition. Only by continuously moving away from tradition can we cultivate tradition. Opposites complement each other. We respect differences and uphold pluralism. These are our beliefs. The world is watching closely the future of Chinese art.⁴⁷

3. 85 Art Movement

Background: Wang GuanYi articulated in the manifesto “We-participants of the 85 Art Movement” in the radical new journal *Fine Arts in China*, in which he articulated the need for a strong, healthy civilization, espousing humanist beliefs, which would give birth to a new and exciting visual culture: a new Chinese Renaissance.

Life's inner force has arrived at its supreme movement! We thirst for and “happily embrace all forms of life!” by giving rise to a new, more humanistic spiritual model, to bring order to the evolutionary process of life. The ideas of art have already exceeded its traditional

⁴⁷ Jessica Lack, ed. *Why Are We 'Artists'? : 100 World Art Manifestos*. (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 2017).

conceptual definitions. Although conceptual art is regarded as art's alienation from itself, before a new culture of art arrives, we can only accept this kind of alienation. We can only use the concept of alienation to express the concept of anti-alienation. Not creating art for art's sake but advancing a process of articulation and behavior that is not merely the philosophy of a philosophical concept. The '85 Art Movement is grounded in the context of modern civilization and is intent on elevating humankind's sublime and health. Avoid pure artistic forms because excessive discussion of these questions will lead to the unchecked spread of a morbid state of formalism. "Content determines form". What our images articulate is not art! They prophesy a new culture. The reason why we choose painting as the medium for transmitting our predictions is because the act of painting itself possesses an unknowability in its deeply layered semantics that approaches the ultimate essence of existence.⁴⁸

4. Red Brigade Precept

Background: Surrealistic painting group founded by the artist Ding Fang. They formed part of the 85 Art Movement--- the nationwide wave of artistic activity that swept China in the mid-1980s in the wake of Deng Xiaoping's Open-Door Policy. "The artist's search for the sublime, and the spiritual consolation that can be found in simple creativity. Many paintings associated with the Red Brigarde focus on mystical or religious themes. In the solemnity of self-sacrifice, we find common points of support."⁴⁹

⁴⁸ Jessica Lack, ed. *Why Are We 'Artists'? : 100 World Art Manifestos*. (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 2017).

⁴⁹ Ibid.

5. The Storm Society

“To hit the rotten art of contemporary China with a powerful wave.”⁵⁰

A progressive art that embraced modernism as well as personal expression, sharing the revolutionary spirit of avant-garde European art and especially, the ideas promoted by Dadaism, Surrealism and the Fauves. The Storm society emerged at a time of brief stability in China, during the rule of the conservative nationalist government. They could not survive the ascendance of communism in 1940s.

III. Art Manifestos Now

The blooming of art manifestos is also correlated with art publishing, and the culture’s “linguistic turn” in the 1960s and 1970s. While “the linguistic turn” refers, of course, to a particular “seeing” of the world and the individual’s situated existence, as well as a radical reconceptualization of the nature of philosophy and its methods, it is often used to refer to any interest in language and discourse. When manifestos are published in print, artists receive more tangible recognition and visibility. In the early 20th century, it was said that one would easily run into a polemical manifesto of an avant-garde art movement —Suprematism, Vorticism, Futurism, Fluxus, Surrealism, Dada —while flipping through the pages of a European newspaper. It is important to note that these statements weren’t written by critics but rather by the artists themselves, each with the same literary force. With contemporary society’s paradigm shifts and transitions in media, the publishing of art manifestos has come to be strongly correlated with the internet, the society of spectacles, and the deluge of languages and images these produce. One can often find a

⁵⁰ Ibid.

“new manifesto” written, for example, in the form of a PDF, readily available to readers and capable of going viral with each “click” and “like.” Today’s new art manifestos, such as those for “relational aesthetics,” “bio art,” and “new media” also have in common the transcending of national boundaries and are more likely refer to global trends in contemporary art as a whole than to specific groups or schools. According to Ian Wallace, another feature of the “New Art Manifestos” is their difference from more traditional manifestos with forward-looking aesthetic or political agendas. New manifestos tend instead to be more defensive than aggressive, more supplementary and complementary than constructive.

One noteworthy art manifesto that deals with the primary and indispensable material of manifestos — that is to say, language— is an entire book called “Khhhhhhh” created by the artists Slavs and Tatars. Here is an important passage:

Coaches, athletes, and sports enthusiasts alike tell us there's no 'me' in 'team.' Despite their expertise in the field, linguists themselves don't seem to enjoy the plethora of catchy slogans—or the hefty yelling of pep-rallies, for that matter. After all, there are certainly many *me*'s in phoneme, lexeme, and morpheme. Notwithstanding the occupational hazards of those devoted to the tongue—misunderstandings, the untranslatability of language, Babel's broken record—language is 'not a place of closure and retreat; rather, it constitutes the always finite anthropological commitment to the world.⁵¹

⁵¹ Slavs and Tatars. *Slavs and Tatars*. Edited by Pablo Larios. (Warsaw: Ujazdowski Castle Centre for Contemporary Art, 2017).

As the material of art shifts and varies in contemporary society, art is no longer just about silent visual language, but also the verbal language of discourse and representation. The language of art manifestos is a communal space for dispersed, isolated creative individuals to be united by the common ties embedded in the deep grammar of linguistics. Art manifestos play more significant roles in contemporary art scenes inundated by an avalanche of information, scattered and duplicated images as well as tiny bits of free-floating ideas. While art itself possess semiotic aspects, and that art is, a “specific socio-cultural system operating various sign formations that include the elements of both simple signals and more complex nature like signs and their systems as well as symbols forming the most difficult class of sign systems”; the combination of visual art and natural language in art manifestos explains why some of today’s most interesting artists are involved with publishing and operate unaffiliated with galleries.

For contemporary artists, writing art manifestos is also an act against alienation and invisibility. In *Power Relations Within Existing Art Institutions*, Adrian Piper talks about the process of aesthetic acculturation and how “the division of labor between artists and other art practitioners often relegates the conceptual articulation, evaluation, and validation of artworks to art critics, thus promoting a critical hegemony of Eurocentric, formalist art values which in turn leads to the invisibility of much non-formalist art. Moreover, the legal control over the distribution, exhibition, and exchange of artworks is often left solely to art dealers.”⁵² In fact, in the manifesto “Riot Grrr” a major point is to take over the means of production—texts, books, the container of language — to create the artists’ own meanings. It has always been an enigma whether a work of art ultimately belongs to the artist or exists as an independent, autonomous entity of itself. An even

⁵² Adrian Piper and Begum Yasar. *Adrian Piper*. (New York: Lévy Gorvy, 2017).

more curious question is whether it would be possible for artists to truly understand their own works of art. But the same questions apply to art critics as well. By setting up frameworks of art history and art theories and placing the individual artworks within them, art critics, historians, and theorists impose on or “enframe” works of art as an orderly resource. As long as a review remains within the boundaries of the framework, it actually conceals the revealing. When artists write their own manifestos, by contrast, they are not only setting up a boundary of “us” and “them,” leading their various art movements, they are also offering the most intimate and creative understandings of their work, reclaiming their voices and creating their own non-alienating systems of conceptual articulation. Distance is not an issue for the artists themselves — the closer they are to the artwork, the better they “resonate” with each other on the subtlest and most complicated levels, both affective and conceptual. To offer one analogy, the visual languages used by artists are concrete materials such as the words referring to “trees,” “rocks,” “flowers,” “birds” ...The materials directly extracted from nature and reality constitute the most primary relationship with what Kant calls “things-in-themselves.” The language of art critics is often based on their scholarly training, which is based on a vocabulary of more abstract language that’s further from what Kant calls “thing-in-themselves.” This, of course does not refer to a strict binary of abstractness and concreteness that an artist must adhere to, but a manifestation that the artists’ visual language is the first layer of language that makes the world present, with the art critics’ language being the second layer in the process. And yet, Piper’s criticism that “the legal control over the distribution, exhibition, and exchange of artworks is often left solely to art dealer” contradicts the idea that artists should just stick to their art and stay away from production, promotion, the gallery system, the museum system, the competition system etc.

The following “New Art” Manifestos by Hito Steyerl, Artie Vierkant, Seth Price and Andrea Fraser will frame the contemporary world of art manifestos in regard to language, image qualities, the Internet, and art’s participation in the Capitalist economy as well as a society of control, the *Leistungsgesellschaft* (achievement society) of over positivity and productivity.

[Hito Steyerl In Defense of the Poor Image]

In Hito Steyerl’s thought - provoking manifesto *In Defense of the Poor Image*, the so-called “poor image” is defined as an image of bad resolution and quality, easily accessible, downloaded and reedited multiple times. “The poor image is a copy in motion... The poor image is a rag or a rip, an AVI or a JPEG, a lumpen proletarian in the class society of appearances...an illicit fifth generation bastard of an original image...” (Steyerl, 10).⁵³ The poor image is tightly correlated with issues of piracy and privatization, the imperfect cinema, as well as the communist comradeship of visual bonds. With its low resolutions, it is an outcast in the society of archives and cinemas like a proletarian in the “class society of appearances” but what’s more important is its lack of substance. Disconnected from the vault of images, cast into the void of digital uncertainty, “a visual idea in its very becoming” —it also mocks the digital technology itself. The 1990s saw the blooming of the digital medium at an unprecedented speed, and since artists have always been among the first to reflect on the culture and technology of their times, they were experimenting with the digital medium decades before the digital revolution had been officially proclaimed. Yet the emergence and proliferation of “poor images,” often a “bastard” of the original image, a replica that often transgresses copyrights and national cultures, mocks the digital technology itself in that it renders the technology “kaput” in a certain sense. As Heidegger has

⁵³ Hito Steyerl, Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev, and Marianna Vecellio. *Hito Steyerl*. (Milano: Skira, 2018).

warned us, the danger of technology is that it threatens the “essence” (das Wesen) because “the rule of enframing threatens man with the possibility that it could be denied to him to enter into a more original revealing and hence to experience the call of a more primal truth.”⁵⁴ It is true that there are limitations to the philosophy of Heidegger on technology, especially in terms of a lack of real understanding of social and economic processes, and of the power of institutional framings. His pessimism with technology is also directed towards technology itself, instead of our way of using it, which seems to be more of the problem. However, his philosophy is important in understanding the phenomenon of the “poor image”. In *The Question Concerning Technology (Die Frage nach der Technik)*, Heidegger invites us to prepare a relationship that will only be free if it “opens human existence (Dasein) onto the essence of technology.” “Technology is “a means to an end and a human activity,” he writes, “and to posit ends and procure and utilize the means to them is a human activity.”⁵⁵ According to Heidegger, if technology is a means to a human end, we can understand the idea of technology in instrumental, anthropological terms. The relationship between means and ends opens onto the question of the four forms of causality: the *causa materialis*, *causa formalis*, *causa finalis* and *causa efficiens*. When these four elements work together to bring something into appearance, this bringing-forth “brings out of concealment into unconcealment.”⁵⁶ Against the traditional sense of “unconcealment,” modern technology has its essence in this sense in *Gestell*, or “enframing.” In defining the essence of technology as *Gestell*, Heidegger posits that “all that has come to presence in the world has been enframed. Such enframing pertains to the manner reality appears or unveils itself in the period of modern technology and people born into this mode of ordering are always embedded into the *Gestell* (the

⁵⁴ Martin Heidegger. *The Question Concerning Technology, and Other Essays*. (New York: Harper & Row, 1977).

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

enframing).”⁵⁷ Enframing is a way for *Dasein* to exist, “zu sein,” to be seen, heard, perceived and understood in the world. This concept of Enframing is essential in reading Steyerl’s argument that the poor image is a mockery of digital technology. With multiple reedits, reproductions, and distributions, the aura of the original piece of art is reduced to a nonentity, a hurried blur, eliciting doubts whether the poor image could even be called an image at all. At once obeying and challenging the rules of Heidegger’s Enframing (*Gestell*), they are simultaneously absent and present, visible and fading, understood and incomprehensible with each blurry moment of being out of focus. In this sense, the poor images themselves are vivid manifestations, in a sense, of the violence of modern technology: “When Gestell holds sway, it drives out every other possibility of revealing in that it conceals that revealing which, in the sense of poiesis, lets what presences come forth into appearance” (Heidegger, 17). As Steyerl also points out in her manifesto, since high-resolution images look more brilliant and impressive, seductive and magical, the “rich image” has established its own hierarchies, with new technologies offering more and more possibilities to degrade it. In regard to privatization and piracy, Steyerl has stated that “The poor image is not only connected to the neoliberal restructuring of media production and digital technology; it also has to do with the post-socialist and postcolonial restructuring of nation states, their cultures, and their archives.” (Steyerl, 5) ⁵⁸The poor images are like the proletariats that bond together all over the world, united to seek a space of survival in a world dominated by the “aristocratic” rich images. As their lack of resolution attests to their appropriation and displacement, the poor images are poor because “they are not assigned any value within the class society of images.” Steyerl connects this phenomenon with the classic Third Cinema Manifesto, *For an Imperfect Cinema*, by Juan Garcia

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Hito Steyerl et al. *Hito Steyerl*.

Epinosa, which argues that “perfect cinema---technically and artistically masterful—is almost always reactionary cinema.” Yet poor images overcome divisions of labor by merging art with life, creating art for the masses, a popular art for the people. (Combine in same paragraph as follows) The circulation of poor images thus eventually creates visual bonds, almost like those communists that organize viewers. Steyerl’s manifesto can be also be read as a self-explanation for his video art piece, “How not be seen: A Fucking Didactic Educational.MOV File.” Highly satirical, the entire video seems to want to teach the audience common sense. How not to be seen: by disappearing, by hiding, by erasing, by painting... Yet never is the artist’s body completely invisible. Reedited, distributed, reduced to two dimensions, her own body becomes itself a poor image that goes viral, a body that’s a hurried blur, constantly visible and fading.

[Artie Vierkant The Image Object Post-Internet]

Artie Vierkant’s manifesto *The Image Object Post-Internet* begins with the following statement: “This PDF is to serve as an extended statement of artistic purpose and critique of our contemporary relation to objects and images in Post-Internet culture. More than anything, it poses a survey of contemplations and open questions on contemporary art and culture after the Internet.” (Vierkant, 9)⁵⁹ First and foremost, it is very telling when the artist uses the word “PDF” to describe his manifesto. The audience’s familiarity with the medium of the manifesto is just another manifestation of being “Internet Aware,” when the Internet is more about banality than novelty. In the Post-Internet era, the PDF of the manifesto becomes better circulated and accessible than print;

⁵⁹ Phil Taylor. “Artie Vierkant: New Galerie.” Artforum International, 2016. <https://search-ebscohost.com.proxy.library.cornell.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=edsgao&AN=edsgcl.463953023&site=eds-live&scope=site>.

as Guthrie Lonergan puts it, “the published copy and the digital photos of an artwork (including photography) becomes more widely dispersed and viewed than the object itself.” Art reacts to technological changes, and thus it’s not surprising that the term “Post-Internet Art” appears. The term is coined by artist Marisa Olson and developed further by Gene McHugh. While it’s of course spontaneous to connect the term ‘Post-Internet Art’ with discourses on the infinite reproducibility of digital materials, the society of spectacles and authorship, Vierkant’s manifesto is important in that it draws a semantic distinction from two artistic modes with which (Post)/ Internet art and digital media are most often associated : New Media art and Conceptualism. This “PDF,” following the tradition of manifestos in its aggressiveness, attacks New Media as “relying too heavily on the specific materiality of its media,” and Conceptualism as “lacking the attention to the physical substrate in favor of the methods of disseminating the artwork as idea, image, context, or instruction” (Vierkant, 12).⁶⁰ Vierkant regards New Media and Conceptualism as two poles of materialism and conceptual deconstruction. He states that “Post-Internet” Art exists in the zone created in between the two distinctive poles, and that “Being Post-Internet is a distinction which carries ramifications beyond the art context as a societal condition at large, and that it would be antithetical to attempt to pinpoint any discrete moment at which the Post-Internet period begins” (Vierkant, 30).⁶¹ One justification for Vierkant’s critique of conceptualism is that the pre-Internet modern era dominated by the linguistic turn is inundated by the volume of language, and thus artworks are surrounded by language, because language is the most available material for disseminating an object. Yet in the Internet/Post-Internet era, natural language’s dominance is increasingly challenged by the formal language of the Turing machine. In fact, a number of recent

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid.

thinkers have contested in different ways the assumption that the “finitude” or decompletion of language dooms to failure any attempt to know, construct, or transmit the real. They have turned to practices of mathematical formalization such as those of Badiou and Meillassoux, or to such concepts as figurality and plasticity to elaborate approaches to construction or transmission that are characterized either as extra-linguistic or as modalities of language not conditioned by lack or substitution, approaches that pretend to “write the real” rather than to represent it tropologically in the mode of repression or negation. As Vierkant writes in an important passage in the manifesto: “Even if an image or object is able to be traced back to a source, the substance (substance in the sense of both its materiality and its importance) of the source object can no longer be regarded as inherently greater than any of its copies.” In other words, Vierkant is asserting that in our current post-internet era, there’s often functionally no difference between engaging with the copy or the embodied original. Even if the original artwork has, as Benjamin argues, a special aura that copies can’t convey, it no longer matters that much since we are constantly and obsessively engaged with copies of copies of images all the time. The representation is constantly put on display while the original copy with the “aura” is diminished to the state of an amorphous idea, a concept: “A source video exists. The idea of a source video exists. But the way the object is instantiated denies both the necessity of an original and adherence to the representational norms that follow the creation of ‘video’ as both technical device and terminology” (Vierkant, 28).⁶² In the era of mechanical reproductions, it’s a pity when the aura of authenticity and physical uniqueness is lost. This aura is crucial and irreplaceable because it represents the artwork’s unique presence and existence in time and space, a cultural context so to speak. Yet according to Vierkant, the unique presence in

⁶² Ibid.

temporality and space no longer exists with post-internet image objects, which are not mere duplicates of the original image or video but represented in an entirely different medium such as a video rendered sculpturally in Styrofoam. In this sense an alternative method of representation exists in a certain space or temporality without offering a route leading directly to the source of the original creation. The “original copy” lacks physical form, and thus the aura might not exist in the first place. Everything is anything else in the post-internet age when objects already “exists in flux between multiple instantiations” (Vierkant, 35).⁶³ What then is the role for artists engaged in the production of image-objects after the internet? For artists like Guthrie Lonergan and the Surf Clubs who release works in the form of Youtube playlists, the artist’s role is more closely aligned to that of the “interpreter, transcriber, narrator, curator, architect.” In this way artists fit into the historical trajectory of the development of art. The final work of creatively is so visually and conceptually close to the everyday image of banality the audience surfs and is inundated with that the lack of distance creates the difficult in which situation everywhere Man looks he sees himself. In this sense, Vierkant’s artwork refocuses our attention more on the distribution of art as information than the material aspect of using technology as a material or an overly conceptual discourse. It also offers an interpretative manual to approach such artworks of his own, “Image Object,” a video that is also available for free at the Apple iTunes store, an artwork in the form of an app.

⁶³ Ibid.

[Seth Price Manifesto Dispersion]

Seth Price's "Manifesto Dispersion" offers a coherent interpretation for a fashion show he collaborated on with Tim Hamilton. The costumes in the fashion show use-logos of Paychex, UBS, and other financial corporations as decorative patterns, and their fashion line does exist and was for sale at Leffer's department store throughout the show of "Documenta 13" in 2012. It is apparent that the logos of Paychex and UBS have in common being encoded symbols of the financial world, symbols used, rather violently, in the realm of creative design and fashion aesthetics. Beginning with a formulation borrowed from Marcel Broodthaers: "The definition of artistic activity occurs, first of all, in the field of distribution,"⁶⁴ the manifesto by Seth Price fundamentally describes what he sees as the maladies of Conceptualism. The malady is a deficiency of clear boundaries—Conceptualism does not necessarily stand against objects of painting, or for language as art; it does not need to stand against retinal art; it does not stand for anything certain, instead privileging framing and context, and constantly renegotiating its relationship to its audience. Such an ambivalence thus makes Conceptualism vulnerable and dependent on institutional framing, such as museums, and refereed journals. Without such framing, Seth claims the Conceptual work would be cloaked in other disciplines, especially philosophy. How to avoid institutional framing? What if the orchestrated discussions such as those in journals generate more inspiring and organic responses? These are the two most important questions established by Price. The answer to these questions would involve first of, all a blurring of the boundaries between art and life, and seeing through the bourgeois myth of pure genius as a manifestation of the circuits of power and money that regulate the flow of culture: "Suppose an artist were to release the work directly into a system

⁶⁴ Marcel Broodthaers, Marie-Puck. Broodthaers, Wilfried. Dickhoff, and Bernard. Marcadé, eds. *Marcel Broodthaers*. (New York: D.A.P./Distributed Art Publishers, 2013).

that depends on reproduction and distribution for its sustenance, a model that encourages contamination, borrowing, stealing, and horizontal blur. The art system usually corrals errant works, but how could it recoup thousands of freely circulating paperbacks?" In other words, if an artist wants to free himself or herself from the strangulating forces of the market-driven establishment, try unleashing an artistic DDS against the system by flooding it with confusing work. While creating a counter bourgeoisie, lots of artists would hold the belief that cultural doings somehow take place above the marketplace. Yet as Benjamin Buchloch points out:

“While it emphasized its universal availability and its potential collective accessibility and underlined its freedom from the determinations of the discursive and economic framing conventions governing traditional art production and reception, it was perceived as the most esoteric and elitist artistic mode. Why the classical avant-garde’s shunning from social communication doesn’t work, it excommunicates itself through incomprehensibility. But this isn’t useful if the goal is to use the circuits of mass distribution.”⁶⁵

Price has proposed a theatrical mode of production for artists to present their work, a collective experience, based on simultaneous private experiences, on the verge of being public art. This mode of artistic production promoted by Price could be summarized as a mode of “theatrical-counter-productions.” For artworks off the gallery walls, the only way to get mass distribution is to seek visibility and exposure, as if putting on a performance. Artists must remove themselves from the classical and elitist notions of their artworks being silently placed on the gallery walls before being

⁶⁵ Elisabeth Caillet. “À Propos de l’art Contemporain. Benjamin Buchloch : Essais Historiques, Tome I : Art Moderne ; Tome II : Art Contemporain.” *Publics et Musées* 4, no. 1 (January 1, 1994): 145–50. <https://search-ebSCOhost.com.proxy.library.cornell.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=edsper&AN=edsper.pumus.1164.5385.1994.num.4.1.126.6.t1.0145.0000.2&site=eds-live&scope=site>.

documented inside magazines, though connecting with the public and performing mass distribution. Another important method is to incorporate “production” into the process of “counter-production.” By tackling the themes or disparate fields governed by neo-liberal policies such as cultural institutions, contemporary banking, urban construction, or regional developmental planning, and the abstract world of global finance, the artist is able to articulate a mode of “counter-control” built with the organization of individual experiences for infiltrating hegemonic structures. The term “counter-production” dates from the early 1970s, more precisely, 1972. The main figures for the establishment of the concept are Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge, whose “basic text of the New Left”, in their book *Public Sphere and Experience*, formulated the concept of a critical counterpublic art. Ever since 1988, Kluge has broadcast his “counterproductive arts” programs weekly. This concept has since continued to circulate, thus directly or incidentally subject to inquiry and inspiration in the works of contemporary artists.

[Andrea Fraser L’1%, c’est moi]

The next new manifesto I want now to explore, Andrea Fraser’s “L’1%, c’est moi,” investigates statistically the relationship between inequality and the art market, more specifically, as her incisive, far-reaching questions put it: “How do the world’s leading collectors earn their money?” “How do their philanthropic activities relate to their economic operations?” “And what does collecting art mean to them and how does it affect the world?” Fraser’s conclusion is that the profits of art collectors are based on the growth of income inequality all over the world. Her conclusion is also based on an important text from 1968, William J. Baumol’s “Unnatural Value”, which includes Baumol’s analysis of several centuries of price data and conclusion that the real rate of return on art investments is basically zero, hardly an encouragement for art collectors.

Another phenomenon Fraser observes is that the money of the wealthy drives art prices and that the booming of art is expected to occur whenever there's a quick rise in income inequality. Countries such as the US, China, and Britain have both witnessed the greatest rise in inequality as well as significant art booms. With the decline of public funding since the 1980s, the accumulation of private wealth has served to fuel a proliferation of museums, biennial exhibitions, studio art and art related degree programs, art publications, art residencies, and awards. The important issue for artists is how to rationalize contemporary artists' participation in an economy dominated by anti-tax politics, corporate and financial deregulation, legal and political assaults on organized labor, a lack of restraints for skyrocketing executive compensation, and falling wages? How to be the lotus flower that grows out of a muddy pond while remaining pure and uncontaminated? How to remain honest if the system is filled with deception and lack of integrity? Or is it only possible to be, as Marcel Broodthaers puts it a liar: "Perhaps the only possibility for me to be an artist is to be a liar because ultimately all economic products, all trade, all communication, are lies. Most artists adapt their production like industrial goods to conform to the market."⁶⁶ Fraser too honors the importance of being truthful and having integrity: "If our only choice is to participate in this economy or abandon the art field entirely, at least we can stop rationalizing that participation in the name of critical or political art practices or--- adding insult to injury---social justice. Any claim that we represent a progressive social force while our activities are directly subsidized by the engines of inequality can only contribute to the justification of that inequality--- the (not so) new legitimization function of art museums."⁶⁷ What is the alternative? Fraser encourages artists, first of all, to recognize the irony of the artists' participation in an economy lacking justice, and to

⁶⁶ Broodthaers, Marcel., Marie-Puck. Broodthaers, Wilfried. Dickhoff, and Bernard. Marcadé, eds. *Marcel Broodthaers*. (New York: D.A.P./Distributed Art Publishers, 2013).

⁶⁷ Andrea Fraser and Yilmaz Dziewior. *Andrea Fraser: Works, 1984 to 2003*. (Köln: Dumont, 2003).

confront it in a direct and immediate way. She also believes in a discourse that will promote the establishment of institutionalized structures with “the properly social magic of institutions, will be able to produce, reproduce and reward specific and more equitably derived and distributed forms of capital.”⁶⁸ Her own video artwork *Untitled* (2003) offers great visual support for her beliefs. In this performative art piece, the artist arranged to videotape a sexual encounter with a wealthy art collector, who agreed to participate in the event if it were “to be understood as the commissioning of an artwork.”⁶⁹ This piece of art manifesto is also naturally intimately related with counter-production movements. In fact, the artists’ manifestos featured in the exhibition “Counter-Production” at Generali Foundation include critiques of Fraser’s notions of counter-production, especially evident in the manifesto “Working against (Art)work” by the artist Luke Skrebowski. The first aspect of controversy is Fraser’s proposal of an art strike as a means of counter-production. According to the artists in the “Counter-Production” exhibition, counter-production does not mean forgoing the act of artistic creations, but rather a practice of stepping precisely to be able to position themselves critically. By establishing the necessary distance, “counter-production is used as an instrument of showing and of resistance. “Why would ceasing art productions be an irrational decision? Luke Skrebowski’s manifestos discusses this issue from dual perspectives, first by quoting Theodor W. Adorno as he condenses it: “Artworks are plenipotentaries of things that are no longer distorted by exchange, profit, and the false needs of a degraded humanity. In the context of total semblance, art’s semblance of being-in-itself is the mask of truth.”⁷⁰ If Adorno’s statement about the autonomous nature of art and its capacity of embodying a utopianism, however fragile,

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Rolf Wiggershaus. *Theodor W. Adorno*. Originalausg. München: C.H. Beck, 1987.

holds true, and if to make art is to pronounce the possibility of things being otherwise, then the renouncement of creating art would be “to withdraw the evidence that another world is possible. Skrebowski also points out that the act of ceasing all art productions in order to fight against the corrupt system is most likely to end up in vain, because ceasing to produce artwork does not necessarily mean deactivating the artworld. The contemporary artists’ value is mostly based on the secondary market, thus ceasing the primary production does not spontaneously lead to stopping the business. Second of all, the art world has always been partly supported by the increasing inclusion of previously undiscovered figures from the past or an exotic region. Thus, the ceasing of “living artworks” produced by “living artists” won’t be able to crush the system, at least temporarily. Aside from Fraser’s art strike, Skrebowski also takes issue with her suggestion that European museums have the potential to be the birthplace of a new art field: “European museums have the potential to be the birthplace of a new art field...where new forms of autonomy can develop: not as secessionist “alternatives” that exist only in the grandiose enactments and magical thinking of artists and theorists, but as fully institutionalized structures, which will be able to produce, reproduce, and reward specific and, let’s hope, more equitably derived and distributed forms.”⁷¹ As Skrebowski points out, however, Fraser is perhaps excessively optimistic about European institutions— she does not fully register the underlying rationale for the tenuousness of public funding for the arts in Europe, the zombification of the institutional forms of the bourgeois public sphere, which is historically consequent on the triumph of corporate power (in Habermasean terms, the previously separate realm of the public sphere has collapsed into the marketplace). In other words, according to Skrebowski, we do not only lack the funding, but also the social agent

⁷¹ Luke Skrebowski, “*Working against (Art) Work*,” pp. 20–27 in the present volume.

that would conceivably make such funding available and dispense it in the ways Fraser imagines Sholette has acknowledged that “activist art self-consciously engages in ‘skirmishes’ rather than revolutionary battles.” Such a distinction between ‘skirmish’ and ‘revolutionary battles’ also leads to another point of disagreement between Fraser and Skrebowski, as Skrebowski believes that Fraser’s dismissal of artists’ attempts to make change as “secessionist alternatives” does injustice to art’s revolutionary values. Ultimately, what the cohort of artists represented in “Counter-Production” art show strives to achieve is not an alternative to strike, sabotage or institutionalization, but rather, in Luke Skrevowski’s words, “to address themselves to the issue of how the art world’s normative structures might be inhabited and resisted internally to their own normative logic by holding to the fragile utopianism of artistic practice as a different type of work while acknowledging that this promise is travestied and parodied by the ‘creativity’ of capitalism’s new spirit.” (Skrevowski, 40) ⁷² To counter-work is to work against productivity and to create nonproductive production. The artists in this group has recognized the dangers of (art)work becoming a form of alienated, productive work, an observation gained from a distanced, critical self-observation. With this meta-critique in mind, they strive to insist on the necessity of making art become an alternative to alienated, productive work. “Counter-Work” shows itself as an attempt to achieve both goals: “Counter-production works to the side of or out of line with conventional professional protocols. It refuses immediate visibility, seeks to avoid formal completion, resists circulation, employs distributed authorship. Counter-production thus wavers between affirmation and negation in such a way as to destabilize the opposition through the constant flip-flopping of the binary polarity” (Skrevowski, 62).⁷³

⁷² Skrebowski, “*Working against (Art) Work*,” pp. 20–27 in the present volume.

⁷³ Ibid.

IV Immanent aesthetics and *Le pays où tout est permis*

With our world currently in a limbo with COVID-19, and people staying at home, the value of art is more manifest than ever. Art is what people use to fight against the bare life, and the over stimulus of negative, contradictory news. For a well-privileged person who doesn't have to work outdoors or every day, or who is fortunate enough to be fully healthy right now, another source of angst might come from the current shifted position within temporality, as well as a sense of confusion that accompanies it. By reading, painting, watching a film, a person learns to train himself or herself to adapt to the mode of vita contemplative: "learning to see meaning getting your eyes used to calm, to patience, to letting things come to you. That is, making yourself capable of deep and contemplative attention, casting a long and slow gaze. Such learning-to see represents the 'first preliminary schooling for spirituality. One must learn not to react immediately to a stimulus, but instead to take control of the inhibiting, excluding instincts" (Han).⁷⁴ There's very likely future artists working on the theme of this global crisis and create manifestos on it.

An important collaboration of art manifestos by David Laundy and Hans Skott-Myhre focuses on art as revolt against the acceleration and alienation in our society of control. The framework of these manifestos is immanent systems theory. In Negri's words, "the market and its power have absorbed every potentiality in order to deny them the possibility of becoming singular, of being valid for someone or for something. Of producing. Creativity is withdrawn. Impotence is the very fabric of discoursing, of communicating, of doing. Not emptiness but impotence. The

⁷⁴ Byung-Chul Han and Erik Butler. *The Burnout Society*. (Stanford, California: Stanford Briefs, an imprint of Stanford University Press, 2015).

great circulatory machine of the market produces the nothing of subjectivity. The market destroys creativity. Potenza is withdrawn.”⁷⁵

What follows is premised on two integrally related philosophical concepts: immanence and aesthetics. Their interaction affords the opportunity for complex experimental connectivities and relationalities that open intersections and entanglements of subjectivity, creativity, perception, and culture. Immanence seems to open the capacity produced in the confluence of sheer agential materiality and thought.

According to Spinoza, the impetus for an immanent system is the expression of its own capacities. The set of capacities is both infinite and utterly contingent. Immanence is an infinitely emergent system composed of elements each of which has an idiosyncratic capacity of singular expression. Each unit of infinite and singular expression can only discover what it can do through an encounter with another element.

In attempting to think art and aesthetics as revolutionary possibilities for the twenty-first century, it is crucial to focus on what Deleuze and Guattari describes as vacuoles of non-communication, stuttering or static. As Fancy points out: “Like all immanent systems, capitalism’s sole impetus is to express the various codes within the function systems that comprise its social form. The tricky thing is that it needs human communication as a raw data to produce its code. In this sense, although it is immanent as a self-producing system. It co-evolves with human language as a nominalized coding system.”⁷⁶

⁷⁵ Pierre Lamarche, Max Rosenkrantz, and David Sherman. 2011. *Reading Negri: Marxism in the Age of Empire*. Creative Marxism. Chicago: Open Court. <https://search-ebscohost-com.proxy.library.cornell.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=nlebk&AN=479400&site=eds-live&scope=site>.

⁷⁶ David Fancy and Hans Arthur Skott-Myhre, eds. *Art as Revolt: Thinking Politics through Immanent Aesthetics*. (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2019).

This parasitic nature of capitalism thus opens a field of vulnerability----the ineffable aspect of human experience. Deleuze and Guattari (2014) points out that “all art is produced in relation to chaos and that while capitalism as a social system certainly produces a great deal of social disturbance, it is not truly chaotic given its axiomatic character. Capital only operates on a binary code that takes chaos and turns it into profit/nonprofit. Art, however, transmutes chaos into form that is evocative of living capacity. It stimulates patterns that operate kaleidoscopically rather than mutagenically.”⁷⁷ Thus, art as an expressive capacity of living immanence holds a counterweight to capital as abstract, overcoding and mutagenic immanence. Thereby resisting capitalism’s determination to create a world which “annuls passions, that is, the only forces which render life worth living.”⁷⁸

This understanding of a far-reaching capacity of artistic expression situates art as being central to the overall ontological dynamics operating in the immanent systems. In his 2005 book *Art as an Abstract Machine* Stephen Zepke uses Deleuze and Guattari’s notion of “Art as an abstract machine” to argue that only art, opening out on to chaos, has the capacity to generate a newness that can destabilize capital’s axiomatic of capture. Importantly, and unlike the reductive and stratifying axiomatic of capital, the abstract machine remains “entirely unaffected by any transcendent ambitions.”⁷⁹ Instead, it opens to experimentation and expression in the living materiality and processes of the world: the abstract machine is simply the unfolding of complexity of the world of which art, with its tendencies toward counterpoint, improvisation and actualization

⁷⁷ Robert Porter. 2009. *Deleuze and Guattari : Aesthetics and Politics. Political Philosophy Now*. Cardiff: University of Wales Press. <https://search-ebscohost-com.proxy.library.cornell.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=nlebk&AN=281684&site=eds-live&scope=site>.

⁷⁸ Lamarche et al. *Reading Negri: Marxism in the Age of Empire. Creative Marxism*.

⁷⁹ Stephen Zepke. *Art as Abstract Machine: Ontology and Aesthetics in Deleuze and Guattari*. (New York, New York: Routledge, 2005).

of the new within the real, is ontology's and thus the world's most intense and "purest" manifestation. Thus Art "does that is yet to come, a new type of reality. It revolts against a constraining present composed of captured possibilities with the continuous promise of the generation of potential."⁸⁰ The binary of the Kantian perspective that "aesthetics has been seen as a form of possible experience," or on the other hand, Deleuze's "art as reflection of real experience." The work of art would really appear as experimentation; with not only materials traditionally conceived as being "artistic" leading to art practice (paint, rarified language, codified forms of sound and movement), but also with an extensive array of quotidian kinds of sensory experiences contributing to the human experience of the artistic.

Here is a beautiful passage from Negri on beauty "The beautiful is an invention of singularity which circulates and reveals itself as common in the multiplicity of subjects who participate in the construction of the world. The beautiful is not the act of imagining, but an imagination that has become action. And in this sense, is multitude."⁸¹

There will always remain a surplus of unsalable beauty just as there is always an abundance of poet-artists and independent artists writing their manifestos. Where they are writing from is a country that doesn't exist yet, a country that Sophie Podolski called *Le pays où tout est permis* (The Country where Everything is Permitted). She inhabited a world ruled by cruel orders of capital and male domination of women: a certain world where love, gender, and health are fixed properties ruled by production and life outside is not permitted. "je commencerai par un suicide, I'll begin as a suicide: to get into one world requires an exit from the other. It's because we're in Heaven that everything in the world hurts us. Outside of Heaven, nothing

⁸⁰ Fancy and Skott-Myhre, eds. *Art as Revolt: Thinking Politics through Immanent Aesthetics*.

⁸¹ Lamarche et al. *Reading Negri: Marxism in the Age of Empire. Creative Marxism*.

disturbs for nothing counts.”⁸² Artists suffer from being able to imagine otherwise. To see possible worlds overlaid on the existing one is violent; to write this necessarily transmits violence. Yet for these poetic artists, they always have the right to dream, or the right to madness, the right not to be criminalized and interned for instances of “abnormal” and “unbecoming behavior.” The country and characters that one creates, as a refuge and riposte, are necessarily a construct. Fictional, hybrid, symbolic, and queer, they allow their creator to leap over the walls of self and society. “Work a lot. Working is not the right term. You should continually fix, like an endless drawing or text, who you are” (Podolski). The revolution, however, is not fought on barricades; it is a revolution of the imagination, a struggle in which one confront both internal and external forces of control, conformism and morality.

When writing these manifestos, whether in the GDR, Beijing or New York, the artists wrote in a way that defies disciplinary boundaries. In the beginning, they were all visual artists. After that, they began working on ‘things’ charged with words and slogans. “Dream is certainly not better than reality--- it is better suited to our sense of realities” (Podolski).⁸³ It is not a matter of trying to discern the internal coherence of the writings, but of “hooking up thought to the outside, of pushing the limits of the latter towards magical lands where things seen, sung, written, sketched, touched---rub shoulders with weighty political, religious and artistic ideas.”⁸⁴ How to avoid turning these artists, who lived in a turbulent period that is often idealized for its radical social-emancipatory movements, into the subject of our romantic projections? One way is

⁸² Valentin Gleyze. 2019. “*Sophie Podolski : Le Pays Où Tout Est Permis/The Country Where Everything Is Permitted.*” Critique d’art. <https://search-ebscohost-com.proxy.library.cornell.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=edsrev&AN=edsrev.509A7745&site=eds-live&scope=site>.

⁸³ Gleyze. 2019. “*Sophie Podolski : Le Pays Où Tout Est Permis/The Country Where Everything Is Permitted.*”

⁸⁴ Ibid.

to zoom in and make a close reading of the work itself as a way to see it not as yet another manifestation of the era's ethos that it is forbidden, but as a compelling body of work that continues to resonate and engage even if some of the ideas from that era have become suspect to us.

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