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Theory for A Starving Obese

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Theory for a Starving Obese

By

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Fine Arts Studio Art, Hunter College The City University of New York

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Thesis Sponsor:

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Date

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Introduction

“The rhizome is an antigenealogy. The same applies to the book and the world: contrary to a deeply rooted belief, the book is not an image of the world. It forms a rhizome with the world, there is an aparaenal evolution of the book and the world; the book assures the deterritorialization of the world, but the world effects a reterritorialization of the book, which in turn deterritorializes itself in the world (if it is capable, if it can).”

– Deleuze and Guattari

During the years 2015-2017 I began writing Theory for a Starving Obese; a collection of essays and art criticism about exhibitions that took place in white cubes in New York. I was following my dissatisfaction, and hoped to delve deeper into the question “What is Contemporary Art?”

I was then and I am still now looking for a way out. Concurrently as the art criticisms started to pile up in a Word Doc file on an external drive, another question crossed my mind; I thought to myself that it is quite obvious and normal that a collection of writings should be gathered and distributed as a book. This is a product that is usually manifested out of writings. There are many kinds of books, but what kind of book should I distribute? How can I challenge the concept of a book? Can a book be published but still be private? As absurd as it seems, how can one decrease the publicity of criticism, or replace the public component of criticism with a personal attribution, yet inform the public that an object of desire exists but cannot be reached? Can a public be deprived of the legal right of reading a selection of essays? Why was I wishing to both declare and disguise? It is clearly horrible, and frankly twisted yet I had a good reason to do it. I was looking for a way of replacing the freedom to consume with a call for action.


As I am sure that in capital the freedom to consume is more important than any call for action. The two concepts are truly struggling to exist together as they activate each other. Thus, I thought that in order to create dichotomy (such as declare and disguise), a unity should be carefully divided. Meaning, neither the book nor the exhibition will be distributed equally as a whole, and thus the viewer or the reader will be able to read them in parts. It is similar to they way in which some sculptures cannot be perceived as a whole at one and the same time.

From my point of view, through contemporaneity the artist had manifested into becoming first and foremost a passive art viewer, or more accurately an art viewer that is living in a constant state of denial. This reminder suggests us a different entryway to art, one that we recognize and tend to forget; we ought to think that in fact the art viewer is a key player both in the artworld and simply in art; the art viewer as an allegory for the citizen, the art institution as an allegory for the state and the artwork as an allegory for nature.

Fig. 1
The exhibition and thesis is in fact a book. A book that was intended to be fragmentally divided and sent to specific addressees. A book that is a perverted emanation of an artist who is fulfilling his social role as being first and foremost an art viewer. I sent seventeen envelopes to artists who exhibited solo shows in New York and whose works I have criticized. Each envelope consists of one digital drawing (שרбот, pronounced Shirbut), DVD with the video Arabesque Mnemotecnichs (1&2&3), Preface for Theory for a Starving Obese and a piece of art criticism. This book, Theory for a Starving Obese, was published according to a concept of division. In each envelope there is one chapter that was sent as a piece or a fragment to its addressees, hoping to generate a chain reaction of collision of events.
A book, in terms of conception but also in means of practicality, always have a beginning and an ending; Whereas this book is always in between a beginning and an ending, traveling from the mailman to its addressee, it is an instrumental C-part that questions how a work of art may move or travel in the world. My book has no ending only “Anding”.¹ So am I willing to know how to navigate between things, how to maneuver in solitude through fields of chaos and transform the work into a feedback loop that operates in between things. My book, as you will read in the next pages, lives in contradiction, as I am living in contradiction. It fulfills both a thesis and an antithesis where I am going in search of my artistic siblings or ancestors in New York embracing and reusing contemporary arts’ practicality but on the other hand prosecuting it and therefore myself, and exhausting its middle ground and common sense – again and again and yet, again.

Disgust, anxiety, pleasure, disturbance, irritation, envy, elevation but mostly disappointment are only some of the sensory stimuli one could experience in front of a work of art made by a contemporary artist. It is not a new idea; a work of art is always given to a viewer. The fact that the work is given is a mandatory parameter whose incarnation obscures hierarchy between the artist (the giver), the artwork (the gift) and the viewer (receiver). If an artwork is given too easily, then a viewer would most likely toss away what is given. For that reason, I am sure that art operates at its best when it is not easily given; when everything is given, then nothing is to be taken. In other words, artworks are catalysts that are able to mediate a tip of an iceberg and only in particular

¹ *And* – is a concept borrowed from Deleuze and Guattari specifically from their article *Rhizome* (Ibid. 1), but this concept was also adopted by Franco “Bifo” Berardi in his book *And: Phenomenology of The End*, USA, Semiotext(e), Pg. 9-31, 2015
examples reveal the opportunity to experience something else, unknown, elsewhere; I honestly believe that art is always the measure for something else. This ‘given’ that may lead to cathartic experience can happen simultaneously, here and there, across multiple geographies, time zones, periods of time and cultures.

Generally speaking, each viewer may seek for a different entryway, for different hints that live outside of the white cube, but that are being catalyzed within a white cube. For that reason I believe that an exhibition does not necessarily have to indicate the end of an artistic process, or the beginning of one, rather the opposite is true; exhibitions should deal with a process. Unlike generous exhibitions that commonly tend to overexpose information, miser exhibitions such as mine would ask to direct the viewer into both an experience and an action.

Contemporary art is all about representation; starting with the representation of power structures, emotions and feelings, personal or public relationships, objects, situations, archives, histories, you name it. Let me try and constitute the appearance of contemporary art and redefine it as a fata morgana. The elements your eyes witness and your mind imagines are unfortunately not a sudden incarnation of an oasis, rather an illusion of water that obscures an endless desert. What is the obsession with representation? Can art operate otherwise? Is there a way out of representation? In an interview conducted by David Andrew Tasman for DIS Magazine, art critic David Joselit shared his opinion about what an artwork should do as he replied to one of Tasman’s questions, “We need to change our habit of thinking that art objects stand for something else; that their primary function is to represent. Instead, these objects act in various ways, including provoking future events or effects. Representing is always
retrospective: something has to pre-exist the art object in order to be re-presented. I think art’s special capacity is, on the contrary, its futurity. Joselit’s suggestion to replace temporality with futurity seems to be relevant. My writings consist of more than two hundred pages, aiming to define contemporary art as a genre rather than as a period of time. Interested in new forms of posing critical judgment upon works of art, while leaving sensational criticism or gossip columns and art tabloids aside, my aspiration was and still is to elevate the position and role of the incidental art viewer. My idea is that contemporary art is no longer created to produce a certain discourse and absolutely not for a general audience, but rather for a specific audience constructed from art critics, art dealers, artists, curators, art historians, art handlers or in short, for an elite of art practitioners.

The art practitioner I intend to discuss is a person who is actively engaged in the artworld. If an artist is most commonly thought as the creator of an art objects, then art practitioners are responsible for the preservation and maintenance of art objects throughout their lifespan. Preservation prevents decomposition and fermentation of art objects through time. For instance, fixing a broken sculpture or keeping the color of a painting from fading away is preservation. However, preservation is also the task of continuously providing a right context to a work of art at any given time. For that reason, art practitioners do not necessarily have much to do with a direct making of art objects, rather to do with preservation of an art object context. Since art making is usually referred solely to artists, here, I want to claim that the artist is no longer the only creator of an art object since art objects are in a constant flux. Therefore, the artist is a small

particle in a collaborative task, in which artistic objects are commemorated through time and by many *art practitioners*. From my own point of view, art practitioners share equal significance to artists, as they are responsible for promoting, marketing, designing, installing, writing, mobilizing, conserving, archiving and selling works of art.

I feel urgency in proving this claim, by establishing closed relationships that are censored from the viewer. One would argue that this is how the artworld has operated for centuries: art had always been the bread and butter of an elite; but I would suggest that this lineage is breakable as I am interested in art and I think we should move from what is known as contemporary art. As we all know, usually criticism is published on designated platforms and contemporary artists are hoping that they would at least briefly cover their exhibitions. My priority is to re-establish a long gone personal interaction that is based on letter correspondence. I sent the letters first to the artists whose exhibitions I wrote about, realizing that criticism in fact should be first mailed and read in person. It was as if I was leaving the artists – from Cameron Rowland to R.H Quaytman, Lutz Bacher and Asad Raza, Jeffery Joyal or Allyson Vieira among others – messages in a bottle to be interacted within the future. Instead of exposing the criticism on their exhibitions to the public, I left an open ending, leading my viewer to ponder about the titles of their shows, detaching them from the actual objects, allowing the viewer to wonder about the actual meaning and context of titles displayed next to each other. The titles of all these exhibitions are now structured as an incoherent sentence:

“*Raze the little feelers! To this day the incidental tourist is eating biscuits and green sox maaike. In retrospective he is a resident evil that was being kept in my twilight zone. As unemployment knocked on every other door, he preferred to deal with private matters and stay inside a home show, as he disinherited a blue room. Dial 9102000 and ridicule on anemine*” – ð.ð.ð
מִשְׁפַּט (In Hebrew Mishpat) is a word. Its linguistic definition refers to both a sentence and a synonym to the word trial. *Mishpat* is Xerox printed on Mylar and bound with nylon and resin to the edge of a surface made out of styrofoam (mostly used for wrapping breakable materials when sent via mail). The artwork’s framing device is made out of metal. These materials are not simply used for aesthetic reasons but for their sociological and historical resonances as they offer an unflinching portrait of contemporary Western life. The plastic itself holds many cultural and symbolic references, especially to the packaging industry and the distribution of consumer goods.

This sentence is printed on the edge of the artwork since I believe that in contemporary art the center of a work of art is a blind spot. While looking at a work of art, one may find a center of gravity. If one does, from this point forward, the eyes and
therefore the retinal experience is choreographed to dart in a perfect balance as one’s gaze moves across the surface. As time passed by to the contemporary so did the traditional perspectives and the technical illusionistic representation of focal point as they moved to the edges of the surface. Today’s art viewer is looking at details as if god is in the small details. But in fact, capital is the small details. Capital invaded into the edges of painting, transforming its edge into the focal point, creating an almost 360 degrees of experience as it also dictates the movement of the art viewer’s body. Capital aspires to conquer the margins if those living in the margins are considered to be innovative. This centralization of the margins is in fact an investigation that stands in the core of contemporary art. It begins from the social structure of the artworld and ends up moving to the aesthetics of the surface.
On the exact same kind of surface *Mishpat* was being produced, my digital drawings are sometimes enlarged and other times diminished. They are printed out of tiny JPEGs or out of Gigabytes of PSD files. In the exhibition there is one kind of printings that were chosen out of a series of hundreds of digital drawings named *Shirbut* (In Hebrew שרבוט). The Hebrew word *Shirbut* means *scribble* or *doodle*. Inside the envelopes each addressee received a small version of *Shirbut*. Here, however, it is printed out on a large format that focuses the attention to an already existing digital tool of a brush stroke designed by Adobe™. *Shirbut* describes an action that is inherent to my own writing process. It
reflects the importance of visual processing while creating a conceptually based work of art, but it also frees the writing from itself. Each Shirbut is drawn on the same grid of Adobe Photoshop™ with specific instructions that are set as a working document. In the Shirbut, the only free moment is the small gestural hand movement that is marked on the mouse pad and on a monitor – a testimony for an electric impulse that activates the browsing-scrolling experience while sitting in front of iMac. In the exhibition the hierarchy of the writing and the Shirbut changes. Shirbut takes the form of a large format whereas the written piece of criticism does not exist in the actual space.

Fig. 6
Arabesque Mnemotechnics (1&2&3) is an autobiographical video essay that serves as a referential index for the act of writing art criticism. The video is edited as a clean 21st century browsing exploration where personal data information is presented on personal desktop IMac. Through the duration of the video the desktop color defaults on 18% gray and it is set to function as representational background determining IMac presence. The artificial sense of clicking on the keyboard and scrolling the mouse is reflecting upon a mundane navigation in which one advances the daily routine of explicitly sitting in front of a monitor. However, instead of escapism, one will confront simulations of reality. What is mostly known as an improved accentuated imitation for user experience tutorials or user guides, here, creates a degrading uncanniness. Instead of receiving primary information the viewer is misled and forced to stray into a psychological space that is
organized out of archived folders, JPEG, TIFF, WAV, ANI and QuickTime files. Once captured, the viewer is drawn into a world of references, anecdotes and objects that serve as an index for a deformed reality of a post studio practice.

The prologue of *Arabesque Mnemotechnics (1&2&3)* begins with a montage that merges two simple layers. The first layer reveals and repeats a slow motion low-fi video footage of a hand lighting a match; meanwhile the second layer is carefully crafted from a distorted soundtrack that may be heard as a declaration about the state of contemporaneity. Narrated by a lower pitched male voice, the monotonous monologue invites art practitioners to open each other’s tool kits and share their contents with one another. This scene allows the viewer to wonder about the sincerity or maybe insincerity that commonly operates within contemporary art. Alas the morbid atmosphere that
accompanies the fifty seconds prologue and maybe the other parts of the video is set as a binding eulogy, a tribute or naïve ballade for ideological manifestos that flooded the 20th century. They were proposed as premises for artistic beliefs in the name of changes and modifications that de facto never landed upon civilized modernity whose ideological foundations have almost completely vanished from its following era of contemporaneity. Those manifestos were usually written in a literal authoritative language, and at their core was a trust in knowledge, and urgency to discover an objective truth. They explored art as if it had potential for a social change. Such an example for instance can be found in Tristan Tzara’s Dada Manifesto in which he wrote, “To put out a manifesto you must want ABC to fulminate against 1,2,3”, he continued, “Affirm the cleanliness of the individual after the state of madness, aggressive complete madness of a world abandoned to the hands of bandits, who rend one another and destroy the centuries”. 5 Whereas this call for change can only be proved through the course of time and events in which even one hundred years did not free any subject from authority nor stopped any mad bandit from taking over the world. From our point of view those manifestos revealed themselves as historical failures, as dishonest "agreements" between maker and viewer. These agreements highlight the inability of their makers to fulfill the necessary conditions they set to themselves in order to achieve a global transformation led by art. Instead of a world full of blossoming promises, those manifestos were reenacted as withered testimonies determined by a temporal zeitgeist. In practice the commemoration of the subjective realities and aspirations of their makers emphasized themes based on inevitable narcissism. The manifestos are testimonies for human interest in subjectivity; but only by

5 Tzara, Tristan. Dada Manifesto (1918), 391.org December 16, 2016
losing interest in subjectivity a group can achieve a certain transformation. Politically, socially, artistically, conceptually and so on, manifestos were allegories for ideals that according to their writers should have been reached by sacrifice; however, this sacrifice had never happened.

“Regardless of the potential of art to affect reality, contemporary art is truly disappointing”. This is the first sentence of Arabesque Mnemotechnics (1&2&3) which is heard as soon as a match starts burning and decaying. The sentence introduces the agenda that art should be distinguished from contemporary art. Between the years 2009-2010 E-Flux editors Julieta Aranda, Brian Kuan Wood and Anton Vidokle published two issues on that topic trying to elaborate a broader discussion about the title for these issues, “What is Contemporary Art?”6 They wrote in the preface to the first issue: “The term has clearly replaced the use of “modern” to describe the art of the day. With this shift, out go the grand narratives and ideals of modernism, replaced by a default, soft consensus on the immanence of the present, the empiricism of now, of what we have directly in front of us, and what they have in front of them over there. But in its application as a de facto standard this watery signifier has through accumulation nevertheless assumed such a scale that it certainly must mean something”. Among innovative and less fascinating articles that were written by famous art practitioners such as Hal Foster, Hans Ulrich Obrist, Jorg Heiser, Boris Groys and others I was mostly interested in the autonomous circle of people who were invited to contribute essays about the topic of contemporary art. Their association mirrors the nonexhibited features of art. Art critic Suhail Malik postulated quite a bit on this topic as he simply wrote, “You may know it (Contemporary art) when you see it – because one or another institution tells you it is art, because it’s

6 Ibid. 2.
advertised or declared as such, because you have the experience to call it, and so on”\textsuperscript{7}. Malik clearly marks the social relational aspect as a basic foundation necessary for contemporary art to happen, depicting contemporary art as a closed centralized autonomous group of art practitioners, precisely as George Dickie pointed out in his 70’s essay “What is Art? An Institutional Analysis”\textsuperscript{8}. According to Dickie, until the 19\textsuperscript{th} century art definition was based on imitation theory, then on expression theory. People who upheld both theories did not believe that art could be defined they maintained the possibility of forcing us to looking deeper into the concept of art. Unlike his predecessors Dickie tried to define art according to two necessary conditions, “artifacuality” and “candidate for appreciation”. In order to create a definition for the artworld, I will explain “artifacuality” and leave “candidate for appreciation” aside. “Artifacuality” is the action of pointing the classificatory [work of art] without the evaluative sense. We rarely use the classificatory sense [work of art] because it is such a basic notion, just like Malik pointed out above, we generally know immediately whether an object is a work of art because it is defined by a third party (institution) so there is no need for questioning classification. Another component for “artifacuality” is a nonexhibited property vis-à-vis the “artworld”.

Dickie borrowed the term “artworld” from the institutional nature of art by Danto, “To see something as art requires something the eye cannot descry – an atmosphere of artistic theory, a knowledge of history of art: an artworld”. It is important to say that Dickie changed the term completely. For Dickie, taste and expression theories were obsolete. Dickie aimed for having an institutional theory. Meaning, art is what the artworld

\textsuperscript{7} Malik, Suhail. \textit{You Are Here}, Manifesta 8: The European Biennial of Contemporary Art, Region of Murcia (Spain) in dialogue with northern Africa. Milan: Manifesta, pp. 58-61

acknowledges art. Dickie defined what is the artworld. In addition anybody who wishes to become a member of the artworld is a member of the artworld. The artworld is constantly dealing with a conferring action; therefore, whether if an object would transform into a work of art or not, the statuses of artifacts and objects are always dependent on confirmations of the artworld. Nonexhibited property invites us to think about works of art in their social context, or to be more precise; it allows us to think about the concept of using an already existing institutional device, such as the white cube for instance, in order to create a classification of an object as a work of art. On the contrary I am passionately seeking to find out, maybe naively, what is art on my own without having to rest on an institution. Am I even capable of identifying art that is other than contemporary art? I will try and answer this question as we go along with the text.
Arabesque Mnemotechnics (1&2&3) is exhibited on an IMac that is displayed on top of a custom made version of a coffee table. The second scene and the following chapter of the video reveal both the possibility of a contemporary artist such as myself to be born as a son of a general. Therefore my first experience of an aesthetic judgment happened inside a military base. The scene, as it is presented in the video, scrolls a succession of three photos. In the first one my father, who was back in the 80’s and 90’s a young officer serving in the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) is at first shown walking as part of an Israeli delegation, as he escorted Israel’s Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir and Shimon Peres to London. Shamir remained reluctant to change the status quo in Israel’s relations with Arab nations, and blocked Peres’s initiative to promote a regional peace conference as agreed in the same year with King Hussein of Jordan in what has become known as the London Agreement. In the second photo my father is seen receiving a gift from Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin who was later assassinated by Yigal Amir. In the third photo my own image as a child appears in a personal fragmented memory of a military ranking ceremony, in which my father became a colonel and I was given a key chain from Ehud Barak, back then the IDF commander in chief who later served as a Prime Minister. In this scene a voice over narrates both the act of exploration through images of a family album and it also tells my first memory of a work of art. I had no need for an institution to point out the object; as I remembered it, it was bigger than a coffee table. Through the eyes of eight years old child it might have been a desk, or maybe an escritoire, where in reality the object was in fact a coffee table. After doing a research, as I usually do when something irritates my mind, trying to recover a more than two decades old memory, I decided that the object was a coffee table called Arabesque, designed by the Italian
designer Carlo Mollino. In an act of endurance the voice repetitively reads the list of materials from which *Arabesque* was designed. I suppose there are many works of art that deals with memory, but only some conceptual works investigate furniture. I am not going to give you Joseph Kosuth all over again, as this register may be observed in comparison to a similar conceptual move made by Stephen Prina in his 2013 exhibition “As He Remembered” that was presented at LACMA. Throughout the exhibition Prina dealt with a memory he had in the 1980s of walking down La Brea Avenue in Los Angeles with his fellow artist Christopher Williams. They inspected bright pink furniture by architect R. M. Schindler. The built-in desk had been taken out of its original context and displayed as a freestanding object. Prina chose two houses built in Los Angeles during the early 1940s by R. M. Schindler and since demolished. Using surviving plans and photographs, he had copies made of the unit furniture, which Schindler designed to be arranged to follow the lines of the room.

In *Arabesque Mnemotechnics (1&2&3)* the ghostly moving images and footages are rapidly shifting from protests’ videos of the stormy political reality of Trump’s inauguration, to quoting Bas Jan Ader’s 1973 video *I am too sad to tell you* or looking on archival material of penguins’ images and through them realizing the aesthetics of bodies through public spheres. The different scenes present a life through the obscure hyperlinked culture we are currently engaging. The spectator like the artist is able to shuttle between different moments in time – participating with diverse levels of desire, confusion and elation.
Let’s get straight to the point: committed simultaneously for and against humanism, contemporary art is truly a crime. Contemporary arts’ practitioners are criminals and frankly, when on trial, most criminals usually claim their innocence. According to this provocative synonymity between contemporary art and crime, creativity has something to do with obedience. I do not mean that creativity resists obedience; rather I am making the opposite claim that the laws it obeys shape creativity. The decision to break a law or embrace the system and its institutions, if those two actions are not representing the same ideals, lies at the core of creativity. Since contemporary art’s institution has turned breaking laws into a doctrine, art practitioners have reached a level of pure obedience. Therefore, in contemporary art, the principle of breaking a law is overdetermined activity that is no longer related to disruption of order. This principle rather reveals creativity’s subjugation to an existing order. The departure point of contemporary art’s practitioners usually derives from the complex field of resistance. According to their belief and their speculation a necessary change will arrive after a revolution. The attempt to combine artistic practices with social action is rooted in political correctness that shaped the constricted identity of the contemporary art practitioner. He or she prefers to debate statistics instead of disputing the quality of an art object, to check the CV of the artist rather than looking at a painting, i.e., to analyze rather than to experience.

It is the domain of constructed identity that turns a provocation into a predictable value. I have no doubt that revolutions are provocations. The infrastructure of
contemporary art produced a crowd of art viewers who simultaneously turn into art practitioners. They all cherish controlled and harmless provocations.

In art academies they are educated under the same tradition of liberal thought, learning how to perform their current role in the art market, listening to the same music, reading the same art magazines, adopting similar styles, aspiring for formulated success, but the worse transgression is how they recite political agendas that are being revealed through façades of criticism. Those contemporary art practitioners share the same spectrum of opinions without doubting – and doubt in most cases can lead to sobriety.

So did it happen that the art practitioner was institutionalized to the point of becoming ineffectual individual who is living as part of an ineffectual community.

According to Boris Groys⁹ the establishment of this seminal identity of contemporary art practitioners was imitated from the historical image of French Revolutionaries, who wished to exhibit the corpse of the bourgeois. Instead of demolishing artifacts identified with the aristocracy, as it was common until the French Revolution, The French Revolutionaries exhibited the possessions and artifacts to the public. By not buring the charged symbolism of the bourgeois, rather exposing them spectacularly to the general public, The French Revolutionaries were convinced that the old ideologies could not be resurrected in the future. This violent revolutionary act of representing the bourgeois as defeated has partly started the critical discourse we use today. It is important to remember that they, unlike the contemporary art practitioner, wished to have the right for emancipation, whereas, in most cases, contemporary art practitioners had already been born as emancipated subjects.

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If we look at human behavior, the assumption that society can ultimately be repaired and redeemed from its own bad habits is an already misleading utopian distortion. Yet contemporary art's self-prioritized pretension is to carry redemption and to posit resistance as its hymn. This hymn sings the opposition to a world full of crime. Should art act as a moral compass for society?

Resistance is now acting as a given condition for creativity. Although one may find resistance to be an important value, I am afraid that contemporary art practitioners can recite resistance only as an allegorical act since those individuals represent a class that is somehow recent, privileged and abnormal – a class who Richard Florida termed as “The Creative Class”.10

But until any revolution descends upon us, and as long as none of the art practitioners are willing to share the cultural capital they have accumulated in the course of time, an antinomy arises. This antinomy is the paradox of making art as a "public good" meanwhile, for instance, gentrifying neighborhoods. While actually attempting to fuse culture with capital, contemporary art’s practitioners falsely claim to prove their prudence, sagacity and above all self-reflected criticism. And so, the imperative ability to pose a question, to call for change, or even to doubt one thing or another, is supposedly the action to be taken by the contemporary art practitioner. These motivations stand as a result of institutional education that is not accessible to the general public. Moreover, and here I must be careful, the aspiration for radical transformations (whether they take the form of a social, a political or an aesthetical change) comes in contradiction with the lustfulness for centralization of power. Above all, these moral measures are expected to be found in artistic practices. At one and the same time contemporary art practitioners

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exist on the spectrum of capitalistic fulfillment and the realization of their role as protectors of morality in times of crisis. Prima facie this paradoxical status, which may be criticized as double standard or understood as stipulation of contemporaneity, is the reason for many accusations that expose the complexity of contemporary art.

This antinomy grips the art practitioners in all aspects of their lives. In this context value best represents this antinomy.

Ostensibly, value relates to currency, but the linguistic definition of value also serves as a symbol for morality and moral values. From my own point of view, the actual merging between the two meanings of the word value translates into what we identify today as cultural capital. For example art practitioners can speak fluently about goodwill; create meaningful shows, write manifestos, present ideas addressing deprivation or inequality that echo the will for social change, whereas in fact their actions also simulate wrongdoing. Jacques Rancière wrote “And yet, freedom also means the freedom to do wrong”\(^\text{11}\). I think on the contrary that in contemporary art wrongdoing is not the decision of a free will; rather it is the result of determined consequences. For instance, most artists who move to metropolises for whatever reason are fundamentally set to gentrify neighborhoods. Municipal awareness of gentrification is not a new idea, but it remarkably reflects the complexity between morality, ethics and unconscious actions taken by artists in opposition to the local communities to which the creative class assimilates.

So it happened that in this antinomy modern ideological terms such as *Liberté, égalité, fraternité* were included in contemporary arts’ glossaries and vocabularies, but the daily actions of the contemporary art practitioner turned into gentrification, denial, and helplessness.

The criminality of the creative class, which arguably is recent phenomenon, is reoccurring cyclically. This criminality may be seen through the lens of past criteria of judgment. Through artistic periods of time there were different do’s and don’ts that had been changing constantly. According to these do’s and don’ts, one was able to judge works of art and understand their logical, philosophical, rational or aesthetic meanings. In each alternation and evolution of art some don’ts remained and some transformed into do’s. Thus, once the institution embraced new criteria of judgment, those who were not considered artists were once again given the chance to be reevaluated as artists and their objects were rethought as works of art. Hence, as soon as criteria were legislated “criminals” were pardoned and became legitimated or even canonized. The following institution pardoned the criminals and accused the old institution for its blindness or inability to conceive what is art and what is not art, or in other words what is moral and what is immoral. David Lowenthal wrote, “The past is a foreign country”, and therefore we must not forget that in future days contemporary art will also be read through its erroneous assumptions. If contemporary art is about temporality then it leaves only a tiny space for messages in a bottle to be thrown into the metaphoric ocean of ideas to be picked up on faraway seashores by younger audiences who will be willing to dispute, embrace and get excited with the bottle's content. Moreover, I assume it is probably impossible for someone of my generation to break free of contemporary arts’ dialectical criteria of judgment and its absolute aesthetic regime. Thus, in order to confront this aesthetic regime, I prefer to define contemporary art as a genre rather than as the art of a period of time. Subtracting contemporary art from art allows me to examine its

institution’s criteria of judgment and segregate it as an autonomous genre of creativity.

Institutions usually have gatekeepers or commissars and so does the institution of contemporary art. From my point of view, contemporary art is defended by a sacred neoliberalism which in the last few decades has occupied the modern art institution, or was born straight into the first layer of its archeological mound, one that was built above the ruins of modernity. Contemporary art practitioners' took part in the rapid transformation of art into the numbing formal mission named contemporary art. Epoch transitions, such as the transformation from modernity to contemporaneity, often point to necessary historical actions that should have been taken by art practitioners and for multiple reasons. Alas, while occupying the old aesthetic regime, for the purpose of setting their agenda, contemporary arts’ practitioners did not necessarily take the right path. It is important to mention that I am not writing on behalf of modernity; rather I am accusing our acquiescence to contemporary arts’ project and our inability to imagine emancipation.

Since contemporary art had conquered the field of artistic production, its institutions continued to exclude those who wish to create art that is no longer supported by criteria attributed by the contemporary. In other words, today it is unfortunate to realize that every form of art has the potential to exist only if it becomes appropriated by contemporary art. Yet, before the problem of contemporary arts’ crimes had even appeared, its laws were determined. In fact contemporary art practitioners' are either turning a blind eye to everything that is not considered contemporary or actively and unendingly continue to replace and constitute new contemporary art laws.

As we all know, in art, there are no laws but only criteria of judgment.
The moment art transparently obeys to laws, is the moment in which art ceases to be democratic. Laws that art will obey are bound to history and to nations in which art exists, but artistic criteria of judgment are legislated through zeitgeists. Such an example of a zeitgeist belief would be; “If everyone is an artist everything can be art”. Meaning, if an artist points at an object, stating, “this is art”, the appropriation of the object depends both on his or her claim and on its presentation inside an institution that distribute the object as an art object. In this case, the art viewer is being deprived from any right of asking the simple question “Is this art?” – his or her judgment is no longer relevant or appreciated by the institution. The art viewer capitulates his or her rights to decide whether it is art or not; rather he or she is solely capable to decide whether he or she likes it or not, whether the work is pleasurable or not. Thus, the artist and the institution dismiss “pure” critical thinking to be disputed by what seems to be the manifestation of a passive art viewer. Dismissing criticality is one of the cornerstones of contemporary art.

Discussions about exhibitions usually attempt to emphasize the sensational instead of the critical. The simple fact that something is shown at prestigious venues seems more important than what is actually shown there. The art world gossips about what is shown but not about the quality of what is shown. In other words, these kinds of semantics symbolize the critical discourse whose characteristics used to foster criticality but somehow turned into conversations, or small talks about the sensational. As Hal Foster wrote, “The relative irrelevance of criticism is evident enough in an art world where value is determined by market position above all”; this is why Foster concludes, “today criticality is frequently dismissed as rigid, rote, passé, or all of the above”.13

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The state of contemporary art obligates the artist to endlessly unpack artworks, rather than primarily make artworks. Artists judge other artists’ works of art before they make their own works of art. Thus, the artist is first and foremost an art viewer that ceased to use reality as a substance and started to realize art by looking exclusively at art that is detached from reality. Therefore, all art practitioners are trapped in the state of pseudo criticality and I am struggling to identify these criteria that determine present artistic reality. Contemporary art’s criteria are always set as goals of determination not only for what is forbidden and permitted, but also for what exists obediently under a strict definition that is hyper normal. Thus, criticality cannot really be experienced unless identified with or by the institution. Varied sets of criteria maintain a status quo that allows hyper-normality to be experienced as the ultimate aspiration for the art practitioner to achieve, however, the desire to exist artistically carries blindness for otherness. One who chooses to follow criteria is probably deciding to exist within the norms of making. But as we all know, experiencing criticality is not always about rejoicing. Rather, experience of criticality is about the correlation between fields of production, discourse and action.

The structure of contemporary arts’ criteria may be seen as Gaussian bell curve, either oppressing the margins aside or plausibly convincing them to join its crowded yet hyper-normative common sense. And so, regardless of the outcome, the pseudo-pluralistic mask of the contemporary has become the common ground, adorned by a seemingly nonchalant lack of a unified ideology, organizing principles or undifferentiated processes of production – leaving us no place for hesitation in taking part in this haphazard visual circus.
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