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**Editorial**

01/02

e-flux journal #21 — december 2010 Julieta Aranda, Brian Kuan Wood, Anton Vidokle  
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Could it be that contemporary art *is* neoliberalism in its most purified form? At the center of our December issue is a constellation of unusually frank essays mounting an indictment of contemporary art's complicity with gentrification and capital accumulation, with processes of divestiture and exploitation.

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

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

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

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

Liam Gillick interrogates “contemporary art” as a term that has outlived its application. Its very flexibility and all-encompassing character might give it a whiff of tolerance and even

generosity, but its limited ability to accommodate much of the work now made under its gaze has begun to lend its original pluralism a hegemonic sense of inescapability in the midst of a mass of opportunities. But, as Gillick points out: “That is the genius of the regime. It is the perfect zone of deferral.”

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

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

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