

Editors Editorial

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Early in the new century, it is already clear that the vanguards of the last one were less a singular, sequential telos than a symptomatic cycle. Movements like impressionism, abstraction, conceptualism, or symbolism are more like weather patterns that recur under certain circumstances than historical exceptions never to be repeated. There are everyday sprinkles of impressionism which relate to a Monet in the same way that the average rainstorm relates to a hurricane. In “Towards the New Realism,” Boris Groys examines the revival of what is still the most suggestive and polyamorous of these commitments, the pursuit of the real. Under what circumstances does reality appear in need of partisan support? Is the real something that is produced by institutions or something betrayed by them?

Unlike “the real,” or the weather, the concept does not change of its own accord. The conditions of possibility for a renewed conceptualism are different than those of a reactivated realism. Writing to reinvigorate this tradition, Victor Skersis draws on the philosophy of mathematics to formalize the achievements of twentieth century art, which he describes as “Analytic Conceptualism.” Only by stating explicitly the theoretical achievements of a Duchamp or a Kosuth can we avoid endlessly reiterating them.

The idea of the autonomous concept is not without difficulties. Martha Rosler, in “Why is Everyone Being So Nice?” considers how shifts in the underlying political economy of the art world may impact its affective rhetoric. Has the global shift toward a rentier economy created a new culture of mannered courtliness? In “Institutional Liberation,” Not An Alternative resurrects Rudi Dutschke’s call for a “long march through the institutions of power,” by calling for a militant, critical realism toward contemporary museums.

Perhaps all this necromancy of old ideas is just the latest in a series of zombie attacks unleashed on the present by a past that refuses to die. Antonia Majaca and Luciana Parisi in “The Incomputable and Instrumental Possibility” argue that the ancient opposition between the political agent who uses and the instrument that is used needs to be overthrown due to the consistent misrecognition of agents as instruments. Instead, the relationship between being an agent and being an instrument needs to be understood as mutually reinforcing and constitutive. Responding to Hito Steyerl, McKenzie Wark examines several different

e-flux journal #77 — november 2016 Editors
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contemporary works to argue that art is better described as a derivative than as a currency. And Irmgard Emmelhainz reminds us that any history of the concept as such must reckon with the colonial reality that produced it. There is little in our intellectual arsenal that has not relied for its consolidation on accumulation by dispossession in one form or another.

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Finally, in “Citizen Subject,” Etienne Balibar unites in a single stroke the philosophical and political economic foundations of modernity. The relentless anxiety and concern for the fate of the subjectivity, in the philosophical (or artistic) sense, Balibar avers, cannot be considered separately from the revolutionary transformation that translates the subjects of an absolute monarchy, in the political economic sense, into the citizens of a representative republic. By linking these two senses of the term “subject,” Balibar provides us with a new way of revisiting decades-old questions about the relative stability and veracity of representation, while also reminding us that the institutional legacy of aristocratic privilege did not vanish in 1789. What if expressionism expressed a painter’s citizenship, rather than her subjectivity? Is realism something different when practiced by the loyal subject of a patrilineal regime than when it is pursued by the citizen of a nominally free state?

– The Editors

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