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**Editorial**

e-flux journal #50 — 50 december 2013 Julieta Aranda, Brian Kuan Wood, Anton Vidokle  
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01/02

Dear Readers, welcome to the fiftieth issue of *e-flux journal*. It marks our official five-year anniversary. It's hard to believe. To celebrate this, we invite all of you who happen to be in New York next Tuesday, December 17, to a party we are organizing at China Chalet. Join us for drinks and music, we will be there from 9pm until the night ends.

Remember our first issue? Issue #0, November 2008. Thinking back to that moment immediately following the financial crisis of 2007–2008, we realize what a profound shift has taken place in the field of art since then, and how so many of those changes have been reflected in *e-flux journal*. Yes, many of the changes have been negative and have had intensely destabilizing effects on art institutions and the lives of artists. But at the same time, we can now see how they have meshed with and further radicalized a geographic dispersal in art that had been advancing for some years. It is something we thought about in our first editorial, and in the five years since then, we have witnessed the basic understanding of what art is, and what art is supposed to do, become completely unmoored from any formal or historical narrative.

We have to admit that we are inside an incredibly interesting moment, because, really, when were notions of art fully stabilized if not in the most conservative or idealistic-heroic times? Yes, of course, it would be much easier to return to the grand narratives of the twentieth century, and in many ways we are still completely addicted to a certain voice and mode of address that they produced – the humanistic idealism, the heroic gesturing, the radical ruptures, a certain hostility to the state and to power in the abstract, to fantasies of eternal repose in some modernist fortress, and so forth. Art spaces, artworks, the art market, art publications still reflect the legacy of the twentieth century, which is strange considering how completely embedded contemporary art has been in the very processes that are overwriting these twentieth-century ideals, for better or worse.

The liquidation of infrastructure and the defunding of public support throughout Western Europe and elsewhere has been deeply regrettable, but it has also forced the realization that artists make do with or without structural support, and they never really distinguished between the public sphere and the private sphere in the first place. But maybe it would be better if they did, because what was also fascinating to watch following the crisis was that, rather than a new *Arte Povera*, we got a booming market together with a slew of museums cropping up in finance-driven or oil-

rich cities traditionally known for producing collectors more than artists or art publics. And while the staggering scale of budgets for acquisitions and commissions in these areas of the world are instrumentalizing art and artists in completely new ways, the institutions are themselves subject to an art world that has already assumed the form of a planetary-scale abstraction that totally confounds methodologies for understanding art in terms of formal resemblances or historical continuities. If no formal regime can survive longer than a few minutes, all historical claims are up for grabs; in addition, the careful archiving and conservation of artworks becomes unnecessary or even impossible. Should a national or municipal museum even bother with an art collection anymore? Absolutely – you never know when you'll need to pawn some art to pay the rent.

At the entrance to the building where *e-flux* is located in New York, two workers are installing generators in the basement to accommodate the next disaster. Whether bracing for the failure of infrastructure from below ground in the power grid, or from above in the atmosphere, whether due to hurricane or tornado or terrorist attack, we can see the shape of a more pervasive condition: it is not only that we can no longer peg our fortunes to the grid, but that our notions of infrastructure, economy, history, and identity have become increasingly destabilized and even absurd. What happens to art under these circumstances?

Individual people have become more important than institutions. The stabilizing role of art institutions has been transferred to a growing class of professionalized artists, curators, and practitioners who hold the whole thing together. We are severely underqualified and overqualified at the same time, and we like it that way. We are underappreciated and mistreated because, on the one hand, we consider ourselves celebrities, and on the other, we are being used to test cutting-edge labor extraction schemes. But we also know that we can exploit the art world in return by using its bloat to host the burdens and extremely high expectations of so many brilliant people who wasted years gaining PhD-level expertise in political science, programming, journalism, international law, or ethnomusicology. We left those fields for art either because we couldn't find a job or because we wanted our work in those fields to actually make sense and have an audience or even a public. The art world does not always deliver on its promises, but that is absolutely fine considering that it does better than most governments. And this is probably why it has become a massive refuge for the dispossessed, overambitious, overcreative,

undereducated prodigies of the planet to hang out, drink and smoke, and then try to decode the art world's assigned geopolitical task to navigate through the quagmire of post-infrastructure by identifying the forms that it simultaneously tries to renounce. We are completely inside some interconnected planetary financial-dementia machine defined by interruptions due to weird atmospheric and territorial warfare blending and meshing on a scale that surpasses representation, and we are here to represent it. It is a bit like meta-sculpture or a linguistic, semiotic origami that involves creating names for things that cannot be absorbed by capital flows, even while being absorbed by those very same flows. It sounds exhausting and it is. And that is why we are running on generators, and figuring out ways, as artists and thinkers, to homebrew and store our own energy in our own generators and in each other. What all this points to is information, energy, and vital life forces swirling around to become a new infrastructure defined by completely abstract flows. A certain purifying power that the white cube once commanded has withdrawn behind an economic realism that is totally fine with the sloppiness of the JPEG and the essayistic rant, and everything else that makes up the difference between the lightness of aura and the heaviness of a crate.

It is against this backdrop that so many of the essays published in *e-flux journal* have been commissioned, written, edited, and published. Art does not produce value so much as consciousness. From all of us at *e-flux journal*, thank you for reading over these five years, and hope to see you around somewhere very soon.

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