

Editors Editorial

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All things have borders that make them what they are. Some borders are spatial, like the edge of a painting, and some are chronological, like the end of a play. In this issue, Vivian Zihrl and Maria Iñigo Clavo both attempt to translate modernity from a historical, chronological teleology into a spatial geography. Zihrl does this by drawing our attention to the persistence, within contemporary space, of that supposedly historical borderline, the frontier, while Clavo provides a taxonomy of the various prefixes, like post-, pre-, and anti-, that have been appended to the “modern” in order to conceal its violent distribution in space within a false sequence of time.

Often, the role of a vanguard is to deploy one kind of limit against the other. Performance took its significance by insisting on chronological borders within a visual art context. By simply ending, the thinking went, and not repeating, performance resisted incorporation, and with it, the accumulation of value, which not only drew attention to the ubiquity of that motivation more generally, but was anyway required to establish the alternative credibility necessary for certain commitments, projects, and ideas to fall into relief.

In the opposite direction, vanguard performers often self-consciously subordinated the chronological to the topological, creating visual environments that threatened, like a landscape, to endure past all inherited understanding of an event’s ending. More mundanely, institutions organized around events or objects frequently find it necessary to treat the one like the other. Despite the fact that a Pollock persists in time, one typically has to buy a ticket to the museum that owns it – a ticket which is only good for this or that hour of this or that day. The painting may not be an event, but our encounter with it usually is. David Claerbout writes about the closure of a certain technological era when photography enabled such encounters outside the walls of the museum, and the implications for authorial subjectivity in light of what he calls “the silence of the lens.”

Event-producing institutions have likewise evolved to leave a corresponding trail of props, documents, or souvenirs: objects sufficiently implicated in what has transpired to become totems capable of sustaining its otherwise vanishing legacy. The problem with a vanguard then is that it relies on the very institutional practice it would subvert to provide the rationale for its own behavior. It cannot succeed, because to do so would erase the stated reasons for its own existence. This is why the oldest and most established institutions – like museums, temples, or academies – often house the most

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impressively dissident tribes. To be recognized for what they are, self-conscious interventions in a social-historical process require a community securely implicated in the reproduction of that same process. “The avant-garde,” Claire Fontaine writes, “provided no credible counterpoint, for it had not adequately resolved its relationship to politics as the governing of men, as administration, and as repressive apparatus.”

This is why Franco “Bifo” Berardi and Marco Magagnoli look at the recent destruction, by the street artist Blu, of his own murals to argue that the project of abolishing the distance between art and everyday life that characterized the twentieth century should be retired. Meanwhile Rebekah Sheldon looks at the recent work of vanguard queer theorists to show how this refusal might be more difficult in practice than it is in theory.

Finally, Giorgio Agamben concludes his monumental *Homo Sacer* project by arguing for an ontology of style that would raise matters of taste to the highest existential reality, reuniting the subject divided by power into bare life, *bios*, on the one hand, and social belonging, *zoe*, on the other.

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