

GLOBALIZATION FROM THE REAR: “WOULD YOU CARE TO DANCE, MR. MALEVICH?”

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On October 13, 1994, a European curator in charge of the Malevich room at the Bienal de São Paulo threw out some dancers who had entered the exhibition wearing Hélio Oiticica's Parangolés.¹ His exact words were “Get out.”² This micro-event, which took place fourteen years after Oiticica's death and a few months after the first international retrospective of his work,³ remains an informative example of how art history and art institutions have too often neglected artistic productions that fall, aesthetically or geographically, to the left of the canon.

What was at stake here? What exactly was supposed to “get out” of that room? One canon dominating the Malevich exhibition might be the notion that Western culture has been for more than two centuries the normative civilization, leaving indigenous cultures (Brazilian in this case) on the threshold of recognition, guilty of being marginal, “premodern.” Another canon relates to the now all-too-familiar tension between high and low cultures. Indeed, the dancers with whom Oiticica collaborated belonged to a neighborhood samba school and were training for the carnival. How dare such an impure, highly popular (in a social, not Pop art, understanding of the word), performative, if not downright subversive practice, where social hierarchies do not apply, enter the temple of high European modernism which Malevich exemplifies?

There are no easy answers to the issues raised by this incident, and blaming a curator after the fact won't help us understand the underlying **crisis in art and in the practices of cultural institutions: a crisis that echoes the historical ruptures, the political traumas, and the epistemological breaks that have occurred over the last thirty years and have challenged the centrality of the Western world.** The fact is that since the 1960s and the independence and liberation movements of decolonization, new kinds of discourses have emerged, irrevocably altering Eurocentric discourses and their fragile claims of universal validity.

In a closer and more critical historical framework, one could declare that the world is a different place since the uprisings and geopolitical restructuring that began in 1989. The revolutions in eastern Europe and the Soviet Union in 1989, the democratic revolution in Tiananmen Square in Beijing, also in 1989, the Gulf War in 1991, and the end of apartheid in South Africa in 1994 have opened a new era for the twenty-first century—one in which the world economy and new information technologies have “not only reconfigured centrality and its spatial correlates, [but] have also created new spaces for centrality.”⁴

¹ The Parangolés are colorful costumes intended to optimize body movements, conceived by the artist for dancers at a samba school with whom he was working.

² See Luciano Figueiredo, “The Other Malady,” Third Text 28/29 (autumn/winter 1994), pp. 105-116.

³ The exhibition Hélio Oiticica traveled from February 1992 to February 1994 to the Witte de With Center for Contemporary Art, Rotterdam; the Galerie nationale du Jeu de Paume, Paris; the Fundació Antoni Tàpies, Barcelona; the Centro de Arte Moderna da Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian, Lisbon; and the Walker Art Center, Minneapolis.

This era has been identified with the emergence of the globalized world, the world of globalization. What is globalization? Ali A. Mazrui provides a concise definition: "It is the processes that lead toward global interdependence and increasing rapidity of exchange across vast distances."⁵ This phenomenon, facilitated by political shifts, relies on international economic mergers—the intermeshing of money markets, stock exchanges, and banking systems—as well as on the development of new information networks across the globe, each of these different sectors being inextricably linked. In the economic world, this new form of internationalism—understood as the product of the association between late and predatory capitalism and the nation-state—is contributing to the development of deterritorialization, to the acceleration of environmental degradation, and to an increasing social gap within and across societies. Indeed, globalization could be seen as just another form of totalitarianism hiding new structures of economic or cultural power.

The question that arises is one of the indigenization or homogenization of other cultures and traditions, and more specifically, of an **Americanization of the world under the guise of globalization and multiculturalism**. These concerns were violently addressed by the recent protests in Seattle, Prague, and Genoa against the World Trade Organization (WTO) and the G8. It is fully legitimate to raise such issues, but it is equally important to understand—in a non-Manichean way—their full complexity, as Arjun Appadurai does when he expounds on Americanization: **"But it is worth noticing that for the people of Irian Jaya, Indonesianization may be more worrisome than Americanization, as Japanization may be for Koreans, Indianization for Sri Lankans, Vietnamization for the Cambodians, and Russianization for the people of Soviet Armenia and the Baltic republics."**⁶ This multicentricity critically alters the notion of Euro-American centrality by not stopping there. Such a binary division (the West versus the Others) must be exploded.

What we are witnessing in the era of globalization seems to be a new stage in world development, not unlike the Enlightenment, that is affecting the political, social, economic, historical, and cultural situations of people all over the globe. We are facing a chaotic world in which every cultural space, every edge, every form of theoretical knowledge is about to be epistemologically rearticulated in order to identify the genealogy of the global subject. This genealogy should be explored so that the others do not remain other.

In the field of art and culture, we have been observing an expansion in the scholarship and methodologies used to investigate the cultural formation of the global subject. In the last twenty years, many exhibitions (for example, *Les Magiciens de la Terre*, the Johannesburg Biennial, the Istanbul Biennial, the Shanghai Biennale, *The Short Century*, the Gwangju Biennale, *Documenta*, to name a few) have opened the door to what economist Roger Burbach has called a "polycentrism," which challenges the established canon of Euro-American art.⁷ By questioning the cultural dominance of Western art and civilization, these projects compel the curators and the audience to look beyond what we understand as the "modern world" and **offer the possibility of an alternative that corrects a unilateral history of art**. These initiatives, along with an incredible range of scholarly research (from Edward Said and Fredric Jameson to Homi K. Bhabha, Stuart Hall, Arjun Appadurai, Masao Miyoshi, Saskia Sassen, and Etienne Balibar to Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Geeta Kapur, Sarat Maharaj, and Jean-François Chevrier), are forcing institutions to recognize that it is no longer possible to picture the world as it was envisioned by European and American foreign policies and strategies before the historical ruptures of 1989. In recent decades, the efforts of international biennials, freelance curators, universities, and think-tanks have clearly revealed that the old ways of planning and thinking about exhibitions; of programming films, performances, and concerts; and of writing art history no longer make sense.

4 Saskia Sassen, "Global Cities and Global Value Chains/The Topoi of E-Space," in *Politics, Poetics: Documenta X, The Book* (Ostfildern-Ruit: Cantz, 1997), p. 736.

5 Ali A. Mazrui, "Western Culture in a Globalizing Age," in *Unpacking Europe: Towards a Critical Reading*, eds. Salah Hassan and Iftikhar Dadi (Rotterdam: Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, 2001), p. 97.

6 Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), p. 32.

7 See Roger Burbach, Orlando Núñez, and Boris Kagarlitsky, *Globalization and Its Discontents: The Rise of the Postmodern Socialisms* (London and Chicago: Pluto Press, 1997).

Amazingly or not, institutions, museums, and art centers have been slow to react, having embraced these ideas only very recently and having learned a great deal from practices outside their purview. For example, it is fair to say that a project such as the XXIV Bienal de São Paulo introduced a very large range of art-historical scholarship stemming from a history of ideas and movements barely known within the Eurocentric perspective.⁸ This biennial offered an alternative history of art, not an institutionalized art history. Although many of the artists were familiar to an art-educated audience, the methodology implied that there are as many art histories as there are art historians, as many cultures as there are cultural lenses. In terms of methodology and exhibition practices, this biennial also broke new ground by aggressively developing educational strategies oriented toward a very broad range of audiences who were not only unfamiliar with the notion of modern and contemporary art but who also had their first encounter with a “museum” exhibition by attending the biennial.⁹ This focus on educational strategies in the context of art institutions is seminal if such institutions have an ambition to challenge their own protocols at every level. To borrow from Rosalind Krauss’ essay on experimental sculpture in the 1960s, it might be time for art institutions to think of themselves in an “expanded field.”¹⁰ In such a field, the institution, rather than being the figurehead or the voice of authority acting on an other, becomes a voice working in concert with others, including plural audiences and plural cultures. Such a nonhegemonic conception of the institution places the emphasis on conversation as a strategy for promoting, among other things, the idea of education as liberation that Brazilian educator Paulo Freire developed (not so surprisingly) as early as 1968.¹¹

To invite and encourage such dialogue is at the heart of *How Latitudes Become Forms: Art in a Global Age*. The project began by asking such questions as: How can the Walker Art Center as an institution contribute to a revamping of its own structures? How can we build an institution that generates at every level of its activities different practices, different scholarship, and different interpretative strategies growing out of the sedimentation of our history? The aim was not to replace one dominating model with a new one, in an antagonistic way, but to affirm at a structural level the inherent support and complementarity that different views and traditions provide. How can we acknowledge in our everyday practice that now more than ever “we are in the epoch of simultaneity ... the epoch of juxtaposition, the epoch of the near and the far, of the side by side, of the dispersed”?¹² In the context of a museum of modern and contemporary art, it means that the institution has to overcome a major contradiction: between its mission of preservation and permanence and its mission of change. The notion of “permanent change” might be the solution; it is also what distinguishes an art center from a strictly collection-based institution.

The location of culture is shifting. As Homi K. Bhabha has written, in his attempt to relocate the notion of Western modernity, “What must be mapped as a new international space of discontinuous historical realities is, in fact, the problem of signifying the interstitial passages and processes of cultural difference that are inscribed in the ‘in-between,’ in the temporal break-up that weaves the ‘global’ text.”¹³ **The relationship of globalization and the arts is not about “ecumenism or good will,”¹⁴ or about political correctness, or even worse, guilt.** Nor is it about finding an “insurance policy on humanness.”¹⁵ The complexity of the issue resides in the terminology of the issue itself. The minute one pronounces the words global art or global exhibition, one is already part of the problem, positioning oneself as the other, as a First-World protagonist, as a dominant signifier. **The question of globalization and art is about transforming the structure of Western modernity so that one is able to write other histories of forms and practices, other art histories.**¹⁶

8 The XXIV Bienal de São Paulo (1998) was curated by Paulo Herkenhoff on the theme of cultural anthropophagy.

9 Conversation with Paulo Herkenhoff, 2000.

10 See Rosalind Krauss, “Sculpture in the Expanded Field,” in *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1985), pp. 276–290.

11 See Paulo Freire, *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, trans. Myra Bergman Ramos (New York: The Continuum Publishing Corporation, 1983).

12 Michel Foucault, “Of Other Spaces,” in *Documenta X, The Book*, p. 262. Originally published in *Diacritics* 16, no. 1 (spring 1986).

13 Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), p. 217.

14 Arjun Appadurai, *Globalization* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2001), p. 15.

15 “The presence of the Negroes beside the whites is in a way an insurance policy on humanness. When the whites feel that they have become too mechanized, they turn to the men of color and ask them for a little human sustenance.” Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. Charles Lam Markmann (New York: Grove Press, 1967), p. 129.

The problem now is how to nail down this notion of modernity. Is modernity to be considered a purely European phenomenon born in the early nineteenth century with Kant and Hegel? Is modernity to be defined as an epistemological practice that privileges reason and knowledge over faith? Is modernity a theory that claims universal truth? Is modernity tied to a historical period, geographical latitudes, or philosophical attitudes? Or is it all of these things? Michel Foucault seems to embrace the "attitudes" interpretation when he writes about Kant: "It is the first time that a philosopher has connected, in this way, closely and from the inside, the significance of his work with respect to knowledge, a reflection on history and a particular analysis of the specific moment at which he is writing and because of which he is writing."¹⁷ In this case, modernity would be a way of relating to contemporary reality within a culture, within a history, within a location, and within a geopolitical construct. Even though the debate on modernity is much larger than the scope of the current project, the most satisfactory interpretation at this moment and in this specific context might be the one developed by Stuart Hall, in which he questions artistic modernity as a history of triumphal practices located in the Western world. He stresses the concept of modernity as a language or a set of languages to be translated: "The world is absolutely littered by modernities and by practicing artists, who never regarded modernism as the secure possession of the West, but perceived it as a language which was open to them but which they would have to transform."¹⁸ If we go along with Hall, does the history of modernities (and again the plural is crucial) trace the history of practitioners giving themselves latitude with regard to a language, taking liberty with a canon?

Perhaps for this reason of languages and translatability, the Walker Art Center decided to invite a multidisciplinary committee of advisors from seven different locations/latitudes in order to rethink its premises in light of the global discussion; this collaboration initiated *How Latitudes Become Forms*.¹⁹ Our seven "latitudes" were Brazil, Japan, China, India, Turkey, South Africa, and the United States (the Walker's home). Each location should be understood as an example that could, metaphorically, suggest other territories in the world. Each latitude is a case study for an analysis of current artistic forms and practices.

It may be useful here to trace the genealogy of the project's title. *How Latitudes Become Forms* builds on the exhibition that Harald Szeemann curated in 1969 in Bern, Switzerland, titled *When Attitudes Become Form: Live in Your Head*. This project was—and still is for many practitioners in the contemporary art world—a model, a starting point. It defined the form of many international exhibitions that followed (institutional or not). It marked the moment when the curator became an author, but more importantly, it gathered very early on a group of artists who radically affected the notion, the process, and the site of art-making.²⁰ Under the categories of "multiformal or non-rigid art," "conceptual or ideational art," "earthworks and organic-matter art," "geometric abstraction," and "procedural or process art," Szeemann identified a range of practices sharing at least two parameters. The first was that most of the artists in the show were developing site-specific works, or works that relate to their location. The second was that all of the artists liberated themselves from the illusionistic and anecdotal function of art in order to privilege forms and processes. They defined an international language of art, still available and active at the center of many young artists' practices today. It would be legitimate to

16 On this topic it is important to study the seminar that Jean-François Chevrier has developed since 1994 at L'École Nationale Supérieure des Beaux Arts in Paris, which is formalized in the exhibition and the box/book *Des Territoires* (Paris: École Nationale Supérieure des Beaux Arts, 1999–2001). Art Historian Sarat Maharaj has also developed a series of seminars at Berlin's Humboldt-Universität that challenges the methodologies of art history and art practices in light of philosophy, biology, and literature. Both Chevrier and Maharaj espouse a history of art that integrates heterogeneity and cultural diversity and embraces the voice of the "subaltern," the "oppressed."

17 Michel Foucault, "What Is Enlightenment?" in *Foucault Reader* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984), p. 38.

18 Stuart Hall, "Museum of Modern Art and the End of History," in *inIVA Annotations* 6 (London: Institute of International Visual Arts, 2002), p. 19.

19 See the listing of global advisory committee members on pages 8–9.

20 The artists in *When Attitudes Become Form* were: Carl Andre, Giovanni Anselmo, Richard Artschwager, Thomas Bang, Jared Bark, Robert Barry, Joseph Beuys, Mel Bochner, Alighiero Boetti, Marinus Boezem, Bill Bollinger, Michael Buthe, Pier Paolo Calzolari, Paul Cotton, Hanne Darboven, Jan Dibbets, Ger van Elk, Raphaël Ferrer, Barry Flanagan, Ted Glass, Hans Haacke, Michael Heizer, Eva Hesse, Douglas Huebler, Paolo Icaro, Alain Jacquet, Neil Jenney, Stephen Kaltenbach, Jo Ann Kaplan, Edward Keinholz, Yves Klein, Joseph Kosuth, Jannis Kounellis, Gary B. Kuehn, Sol LeWitt, Bernd Lohaus, Richard Long, Roelof Louw, Walter de Maria, Bruce McLean, David Medalla, Mario Merz, Robert Morris, Bruce Nauman, Claes Oldenburg, Dennis Oppenheim, Panamarenko, Pino Pascali, Paul Pechter, Michelangelo Pistoletto, Emilio Prini, Markus Raetz, Allen Ruppersberg, Reiner Ruthenbeck, Robert Ryman, Frederick Lane Sandback, Alan Saret, Sarkis, Jean-Frédéric Schnyder, Richard Serra, Robert Smithson, Keith Sonnier, Richard Tuttle, Frank Lincoln Viner, Franz Erhard Walther, William Wegman, Lawrence Weiner, William T. Wiley, and Gilberto Zorio.

ask if this language is the “language to be transformed” that Hall describes. The key idea of Szeemann’s exhibition was without a doubt liberation. Indeed, the exhibition and the artists designed forms that in a nondidactic, nonillustrative way were echoing the liberation movements that emerged across the world at the end of the 1960s. The methods and the results were in many ways exceptional, though one may regret that the protagonists were exclusively European or American.²¹

The current exhibition acknowledges the importance of this predecessor, but at the same time points out that the model it represented is not an exclusive one. If our history is one of “permanent changes,” looking back at a tradition started in 1969 allows us to free ourselves from it and to project ourselves in a different direction. This idea parallels the definition that Paulo Herkenhoff provides for the relationship between Brazilian culture and modernity: “Modernism in Brazil reconstitutes the past as a possibility of projecting itself in the future ... Brazilian culture reformulated rather than refused the relationship with tradition and past.”²²

Are we, today, facing comparable shifts in terms of politics, history, and aesthetics? Do those shifts define what could be called the global age? Our research for *How Latitudes Become Forms* took us once again to Brazil, and to a text by Hélio Oiticica, who was not in the Szeemann exhibition but might be seen as a point of departure for many of the practices we have encountered in our travels.²³ In 1966, in an essay in which he articulated what seems to be the nucleus of his activities, Oiticica wrote:

I intend to extend the practice of appropriation to things of the world which I come across in the streets, vacant lots, fields, the ambient world, things which would not be transportable, but which I would invite the public to participate in. This would be a fatal blow to the concept of the museum, art gallery, etc., and to the very concept of “exhibition.” Either we change it, or we remain as we are. Museum is the world: daily experience.²⁴

This short excerpt contains within it many of the elements that are feeding our reflection today: the notion of proximity and locality; the idea of in-betweenness symbolized by wasteland; the outline of an aesthetic of the slightest gesture; the performativity of audiences and artists across disciplines, which is a possible lead toward multidisciplinary; the critique of museum authority; the increasing importance of the everyday; and the subversive potential of art. These different concepts might serve as the constitutive elements of a specific aesthetic of “thirdness.” The term “third” here does not designate an aesthetic geographically located in the so-called Third World. Rather, its meaning derives from the Third Cinema, a body of film theory that explores how cultural practices driven by political and cultural emancipation can equally commit to aesthetic strategies.²⁵ Because the aesthetic of Third Cinema does not limit itself to a geographical meaning, it can be extended across disciplines and applied to other disciplines, such as performing arts and visual arts.

The works of Japanese artist Tabaimo—anime films that are bittersweet and seductive, yet repulsive—belong to such an aesthetic (pp. 241–243). Colorful, naive, clumsy, and fragile at first sight, these narrative and poetic playlets achieve a sharp deconstruction of Japanese social systems. Her critique relies on a manipulation of Japanese stereotypes (images of the “salary man,” the “Japanese woman,” public baths, sumo fighters, and commuter trains) using the form of yet another Japanese stereotype: the underground anime aesthetic. The critique that results from the problematization of these stereotypes focuses on nationalism and its relationship to economic achievement or failure, reflecting a period of deep crisis of values (work, patriarchy) that alters the hierarchical construct of Japanese society. As a result, gender politics (in Japan as elsewhere) come under the gun in Tabaimo’s work, though it may appear cute and girlish on a superficial viewing. The complexity of her work is that it reconciles the terms of political struggle with an attention to form and to aesthetic strategies.

²¹ One exception was Philippine artist David Medalla.

²² Paulo Herkenhoff, introduction to *Núcleo histórico: antropofagia e histórias de canibalismos*, exh. cat. (São Paulo: XXIV Bienal de São Paulo, 1998), p. 42.

²³ “We” includes the Walker Art Center curators who joined me in organizing this exhibition: Douglas Fogle, for Brazil and India, and Olukemi Ilesanmi for South Africa.

²⁴ Hélio Oiticica, “Position and Program,” in *Hélio Oiticica*, exh. cat. (Rotterdam: Witte de With Center for Contemporary Art; Minneapolis: Walker Art Center, 1992), pp. 103–104.

²⁵ See Michael Wayne, “The Critical Practice and Dialectics of Third Cinema,” *Third Text*, no. 52 (summer 2000). In this article Wayne uses Gillo Pontecorvo’s 1966 film *The Battle of Algiers* as a primary case study for his reflections on the aesthetics of the Third Cinema.

Embracing the same sort of tension are works by Turkey's Gülsün Karamustafa and India's Sheela Gowda. In her installation *Mystic Transport* (1992; p. 205), Karamustafa gives poetic form to the issue of deterritorialization that is so much a part of our imagination when thinking about urbanization and late capitalist development in many of the locations selected for this project. *Mystic Transport* presents twenty colorful oriental blankets stored in twenty wheeled buckets. On one level we identify with the blanket as the smallest common denominator of nomadic populations. Karamustafa's strength in this particular work is in keeping the emotional association of the blanket with a body at a distance. The installation suggests that the audience/protagonist can manipulate and reconfigure the location of each bucket/blanket/body as he or she sees fit. This estrangement effect—wherein the audience is the center, the decision maker—raises questions about the responsibility of the viewer and the nature of his or her engagement. The seductive quality of the work does not sacrifice the content, and in fact it reinforces a concern for avoiding being overly anthropological.

Sheela Gowda adopts a comparable, though not identical, pattern in her work *And Tell Him of My Pain* (1998/2001; p. 193). To create this labor-intensive piece, she passes an unbroken 700-foot-long thread through a sewing needle and doubles it in the middle. She then repeats this action with another eighty-nine needles, coats the threads with Kum Kum,²⁶ and glues them together to make a 350-foot-long thin rope. Like a drawing in three-dimensional space, the long cord is installed in the architecture of the white cube, looping up and down the walls, across the floor, marking the physical environment. In many ways, this piece, and the work of Ranjani Shettar (pp. 233–235), can be read according to the sculptural language described in *When Attitudes Become Form* and by Krauss in her essay "Sculpture in the Expanded Field" as belonging to a modernist aesthetic of abstraction and dematerialization of space. But such a reading of the work would trap it in a mold cast by Euro-American language and its hegemonic, nominative strategies. Gowda works with traditional materials and traditional skills identified with female labor. In doing so, she produces a work that not only comments on a specific Indian cultural situation but also implies a critical stance toward art history, aesthetics, and the perception and production of artworks.

The complexity of practices, in whatever media, associated with the notion of thirdness stems from the fact that these artists locate themselves on the periphery of dominant aesthetic models and distribution networks, but do not embrace a Manichean opposition to the question of form. They do not seek to reinvent language from scratch but instead choose to twist it, distort it, translate it. These practices lie in the narrow gap that Swiss artist Thomas Hirschhorn identified when highlighting the distinction between making political art and making art politically. Robin Rhode's work, merging hip-hop culture, fashion, sports, and other aspects of the everyday (pp. 225–227), seems to echo such a notion of thirdness and pulls it toward a resistance that is not necessarily oppositional. Rhode tries to identify a practice that allows him to take pleasure in the reductiveness of youth culture and popular culture while remaining critical of them.

The notion of thirdness, of in-betweenness, is central to the practices we are considering here as well as to larger theoretical constructs developed to analyze recent cultural shifts. For Homi K. Bhabha, thirdness is a key element in enunciating and conceptualizing a new international culture based on hybridity: "It is the inter—the cutting edge of translation and negotiation, the in-between space—that carries the burden of the meaning of culture."²⁷ He locates culture in what he calls a "third space," a space that collapses new cultural practices and historical narratives.

This idea is presented almost literally in the work of Turkish architect Can Altay, notably in his investigation of what he has termed the "minibar." Through photo-documentation he focuses on those no-man's lands in urban areas where teenagers gather to socialize (pp. 162–163). By reinventing underground communities—often controversial aspects of a neighborhood—these minibars carry new cultural information and problematize the construct of urban spaces. The Japanese architectural firm Atelier Bow-Wow displays a similar interest by establishing an inventory of what they call "pet architecture"—a type of architecture that relates to small units built between larger buildings, existing almost like parasites. The Atelier strives to develop a new architectural language based on every possible solution for utilizing such "leftover" spaces (pp. 169–171). Both the minibar and pet architecture stand as metaphors for locating an alternative space that can generate new knowledge,

²⁶ Kum Kum is a red pigment used in rituals and as decoration. It is also used as a mark of marriage on women's foreheads.

²⁷ Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, p. 38.

new practices. Nevertheless, as important and reassuring as the notion of thirdness and in-betweenness is, it might only be the third step on the way to change. It is not sufficient merely to acknowledge the notion of thirdness; one needs to make it active, to pull it toward an alternative center. If not, thirdness might become a definition that restrains and limits new knowledge rather than one that empowers it.²⁸

For Atelier Bow-Wow and Can Altay, the starting point for their respective projects involves inventory and documentation. This impetus to record one's own environment is apparent in many artistic practices today, most obviously in the practice of film, but not exclusively. The logic of the documentary has increasingly emerged in the visual arts over the last decade, as demonstrated by the incorporation of moving images into art practices, using models borrowed from popular culture and entertainment, including Hollywood movies, music videos, and video games.

The exigency of information and realism reveals itself in Chinese artist Wang Jian Wei's film *Living Elsewhere* (1999–2000; pp. 245–247). The film, which documents a failed real-estate development project in the suburbs of Beijing, seems motivated by the need to record a socioeconomical and cultural mutation. The same drive applies to Zhao Liang's film *Bored Youth* (2000; pp. 253–255), which focuses on Beijing's predatory urban development, even though the pure documentary language is mixed with editing strategies inherited from music videos. In both cases, documentary filmmaking becomes a means for sustaining a tradition that has almost disappeared from art practice: the tradition of storytelling.

Although she does not use moving images as a medium, Yin Xiuzhen participates in this strategy when she documents—through installations or interventions—the way in which memory vanishes with the destruction or dislocation of communities (pp. 249–251). Such artists seem to embrace a sense of civic responsibility that redefines activism as a quiet subversion rather than a frontal and oppositional attack. The powerful body of work that has erupted under this logic of documentary has also allowed the practitioners to reassert their own proximity and to locate their practices, and the consequences thereof, on a very local or regional level. Again, this movement can be seen as an effect of a widely globalized culture. Here, the urgency is to find a way to make a difference. The local is becoming the alternative, and it contributes to a redefinition of the nature of the audience through the involvement of communities.

The paradox of the increasingly globalized world is that many artists are attempting to reinvent, or to establish, their difference. This movement, which might be the unavoidable flip side of globalization, was the cornerstone of the Gwangju Biennale in 2002.²⁹ One outstanding feature of this exhibition was the presence of twenty-six collectives or independent organizations from Europe and Asia. These groups have emerged over the last decade as fundamental protagonists in art-making and diffusion, developing alternative strategies that affect the relationship of art to the larger world. These groups/platforms, all active in their communities as exhibition venues, educational structures, or production units, serve as a metaphor for a new arena of negotiation that lies in between the global and the local.³⁰

In many ways, the projects of Kaoru Arima, developed through his Art Drug Center in Inuyama-City, Japan, echo such concerns. In his own house, Arima opened an art center to provide a platform for fellow artists who might not otherwise find venues for showing their work. With a similar attention to the value of proximity, the New Delhi-based Raqs Media Collective, composed of filmmakers and new-media practitioners, is working on a series of initiatives motivated by the desire to interpret, understand, and engage the urban construct of the city in which they live and work. One of their projects is based on the creation of a “cyber neighborhood,” a center for digital intervention with kids in a working-class settlement in New Delhi.

²⁸ On this topic see Leslie A. Adelson, “Against Between: A Manifesto,” in *Unpacking Europe*, eds. Hassan and Dadi, p. 245.

²⁹ The 2002 Gwangju Biennale, titled *Pause*, was co-curated by Charles Esche, director of the Rooseum Center for Contemporary Art, Malmö, Sweden, and Hou Hanru, freelance curator, director of the 2000 Shanghai Biennale, and member of the Walker Art Center's global advisory committee.

³⁰ For more on this topic, see Hou Hanru's essay on page 36 in this book.

Showing such practices in the context of an exhibition, as the 2002 Gwangju Biennale has done, radically jostles the nature, the form, of what constitutes an exhibition. Objects are no longer on display; rather, projects are being activated in a "gallery" environment. The space of contemplation is challenged by the notion of direct experience. One category of experience relates to the passage between artistic disciplines—between visual arts and cinema, cinema and performing arts, performing arts and visual arts. This represents a classical and historical take on multidisciplinary: historical because these intersections have a tradition that can be traced in art history from early avant-garde movements such as Dada, Surrealism, and Bauhaus to Gutai, Neo-Concretism, Fluxus, Happenings, body art, etc. It does not mean that such an aesthetic is obvious and shared at an institutional level. Art history remains in many cases a discipline-oriented field, and moving images and sounds are often still considered too impure and irksome to be allowed into the temple of permanent-collection galleries. And as we have seen, in 1994 it was still forbidden to dance in front of a Malevich. The performances of Brazilians Franklin Cassaro and Cabelo fall into this category of cross-disciplines, the former with a strong interest in process and formal solutions using everyday materials, the latter with the influence of rock-and-roll culture combined with a very subjective, obsessive knowledge of science.

Another category of experience that appears between the emergence of locality in a global world and the manifestation of global data into local activities borrows ideas from pedagogy, sociology, anthropology, urbanism, and the humanities in general. The consequence is that the modern white cube dedicated to the display of artworks is consciously transforming itself into a place where artists no longer consider themselves to be creators of objects for contemplation but rather instigators of processes in which the audience is the center, the active protagonist.³¹

The merging of the practices described above leaves us in front of an "object" that is redefining the parameters of what constitutes an art institution, an institutionalized artwork—a product, a "thing," that emerges from the tension between the expectations of communities and practices within an institution. Etienne Balibar and Jean-François Chevrier have identified this phenomenon as the "artistic event."³²

In a search for alternatives, artists have relocated practices to the left of the dominant model, toward an aesthetic reinvestment in modesty and frailty as well as in the notion of the everyday. This idea of modesty—which can be identified in the works of Zon Ito (Japan), Kaoru Arima (Japan), Usha Seejarim (South Africa), and to some extent Song Dong (China)—is formalizing, whether consciously or not, a position on the periphery of artistic and institutional practices that give preference to works with high production values. Producing a project "from scratch," with reduced means, from what is available at hand, has become once again both an aesthetic and a political statement. It matches a desire to slow things down, to reinvest the value (metaphorically speaking) of the "leftover," in a nonmonumental, nondemonstrative way. This trend can be defined as the production of meaning and content from the rear, from a position of a revitalized "underground," a position itself outside the mainstream of a normalized network.³³

Ito's *Scrap Works of Scum* (1999; pp. 198–199) is an almost too perfect example of this idea (as are his embroidery paintings). An underrated medium in standard exhibition practices, the artist's book is a unique (perhaps even out-dated) commingling of craftsmanship and materiality. The content of *Scrap Works of Scum*—acid landscape paintings, Day-Glo illustrations, twisted collages, snuggle-baby-blue pottery, little furry animals—asserts a position of non-innocent innocence and deliberate juvenility. It is a punk attitude, but quieter, which underplays direct confrontation without sacrificing its inherent critique.

³¹ "A space is always a construct. It is a theoretical articulation that claims to render and represent operations or, put simply, the reality of a place, that is, a primary experience. A space is, to say the least, a second-order plane reflecting upon a first-order practice of life and human experience." Valentin Y. Mudimbe, "The Surreptitious Speech," in *The Short Century: Independence and Liberation Movements in Africa, 1945–1994*, exh. cat., ed. Okwui Enwezor (Munich, London, and New York: Prestel Verlag, 2001), p. 17.

³² See Etienne Balibar, et al., "Globalization/Civilization," in *Documenta X: The Book*, p. 783.

³³ Japanese critic Midori Matsui has identified this trend in Japanese art as the "New Hippie" movement or "Zero, Zero Generation"; see *Bijutsu Techo* (Japan) 54, no. 816 (February 2002).

Arima expresses a comparable demeanor in his fragile drawings (pp. 165–167). They are executed on a variety of paper supports—notebooks, newspapers, etc.—and are outgrowths of an iconography drawn from traditional Japanese iconography³⁴ as well as from an underground, highly subjective and sexualized, strangely naive and familiar realm of images. All of these drawings share a haiku³⁵ quality that reflects the world through Arima’s own cultural referents, and they focus on the moment when meaning is suspended between sense and nonsense.

A similar critical absurdity can be found in Song Dong’s work (pp. 237–239). When he decides to jump endlessly in the middle of a crowd in Beijing’s Tiananmen Square—completely indifferent to his surroundings—his absurd action becomes, if not a cry for attention, then a bittersweet comment on both the status of the artist in society and his relationship to his audience. His concern relates to public discourse, or more accurately to the lack thereof. His work relies on the identification of a poetic language made up of small gestures or everyday rituals. When he writes his diary using only water on a stone, Song not only questions the evaporating nature of memory, but he also attempts to establish a language of forms that lies in between the contemplative Zen Buddhist tradition and contemporary conceptual art issues such as the acceleration of time.

The impulse to slow things down, rather than speed them up toward a “better future,” is just one aspect of a broad spectrum of strategies that aim to reconsider critical practices no longer from beyond, from above, or from within, but from the rear—from a neglected location. We are talking here about practices comparable to those of a guard that operates from off center in an attempt to slow down, to disturb, a dominant model with which they disagree. Such an aesthetics of the maquis, of the underground, strives to prevent, through a quiet but abrasive subversion, the avant-garde from falling into a consensual mainstream culture. It is paradoxical and striking to note that after at least two decades dominated by “glorious” and “progressive” internationalism, a reinvention of difference is being realized through practices that fold together notions of tradition, modesty, the local, and the quotidian.

The work of Japanese filmmaker Hiroyuki Oki is a precise embodiment of such a reinvention. In *Heaven-6-Box* (1995; pp. 215–217), a moving journey through small-town Japan, Oki unfolds what he identifies as a “queer” film—somewhere between documentary and fiction—that brings together, with no visible premeditation, the everyday experiences of his encounters. He focuses his attention on the periphery of the mainstream, the seemingly irrelevant stuff of life. These are the moments that never make it into history books, that never become the subject of monuments.

In looking at the practices we are considering here, the word *queer* is a very useful descriptor for understanding their status. The local, the frail, the everyday stand as anomalies. They appear as strategies of resistance. Not an explicitly oppositional resistance, but one that is rooted in the desire to be slightly “off” center and that allows for an alternative location of the self. It must be stressed that such an aesthetic is not the monopoly of distant locations or distant artists—the so-called global ones (as opposed to European or American ones). In different guises, these same concerns can be found within Western practices. For instance, American artist Cameron Jamie provides a spooky analysis of the “other” through his films, which focus on the dysfunction of American suburbs and their everyday rituals and cultural constructs (pp. 201–203). And such an aesthetic arises in other cultural phenomena as well. For example, the “social engineers” of the Imitation of Christ design label create one-of-a-kind remakes of thrift-store clothing and blend performance art, design, and social activism in their runway shows, which broach such issues as death, suicide, and child labor. Musician Daniel Johnston, who performs using only a modest acoustic guitar—no fancy digital sampling here—is a conduit, in terms of content, for achieving greater awareness of cultural alienation. His voice is off, his topics are off, but he is the center, the cult figure of a possible and viable alternative.

³⁴ For instance, Arima’s drawings often are formally close to the tradition of Hungry Ghost or Gaki scroll painting in medieval Japan. Their absurdity, their nonrational nature, seems to reinforce this similarity, as does their role as critical visions of and cognitive comments on a pedestrian “everyday.” For more information about this tradition, see William R. Lafleur, “Hungry Ghosts and Hungry People: Somaticity and Rationality in Medieval Japan,” in *Zone 3-5: Fragments for a History of the Human Body*, vol. 1 (New York: Urzone, 1989).

³⁵ As practiced in Japan, haiku poetry consists of three lines of five, seven, and five syllables respectively. The images in haiku should be concrete, leaving profound concepts unsaid but perhaps somehow evident to the reader in a nonverbal way.

It is not clear whether anything “new,” as understood by the historical avant-gardes, is emerging from the arts in a globalized world situation. Nevertheless, the shifts of focus described above do lead to a reevaluation of what Carol Becker has called the “subversive potential of art”³⁶ and, by extension, the subversive potential of institutions dedicated to the arts. This subversion is not necessarily one that derives from the perception of a specific injustice. It is a subversion that suggests that there are no permanent models, no acquired tastes or situations, that everything is subject to change and nothing is a given. **This subversion is a state of permanent alert that proposes the arts as a site for infinite experimentation, the location of a quiet resistance against barbarism and against all attempts to codify and systematize the world. The effect of globalization on artistic practices might be to place at the center of the arts and their institutions the very question of their own object(ive)s.** What determines a work of art? What legitimates the work? Whom is the work for? How should we address it? How can we write a different history of art that entails a multiplicity of disciplines and theories in determining the structure and the genealogy of art practices? In this light, globalization is the permanent urge toward other latitudes and might be, in fact, an unachievable project—a project that would have encouraged Kasimir Malevich to dance with Hélio Oiticica, and above all, to immensely enjoy it. In terms of the history of art practices and exhibitions, such a step would have been equivalent to a butterfly flapping its wings in Brazil and inducing hurricanes around the world.

³⁶ See Carol Becker, “Herbert Marcuse and the Subversive Potential of Art,” in *The Subversive Imagination: Artist, Society, and Responsibility* (New York and London: Routledge, 1994).