From the City as Cosmopolis to Cosmopolitan Spaces

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De la ciudad como Cosmopolis a los espacios cosmopolitas

Da cidade como Cosmópolis aos locais cosmopolitas

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Abstract

This paper examines the relationship between art and cities, and reflect on the need to imagine new spaces for cosmopolitanism. The author wants to step back and reroute the links between globalization and cosmopolitanism. It will involve not just a clarification of the contrasting orientation between globalization and cosmopolitanism, but also a rethinking of the role of cultural institutions which were once founded to either provide a coherent identity for the cultures within their civic space, or to elevate the city as a repository for the world's culture. the author will argue that these institutions are increasingly seeing themselves as part of a wider transnational dialogue on cosmopolitanism. This context is a space to rethink the way cultural values are also linked to institutional capacities. Cities and nation-states are mediating forces between the cultural ideals of cosmopolitanism and the ideology of globalization. Cities and nations are not neutral players. They come with their own baggage that includes primordial prejudice and hierarchies of exclusion.

Keywords:

City, cosmopolis, globalization, migration.

Resumen:

En este artículo se examina la relación entre arte y ciu-
dad, y la necesidad de imaginar nuevos espacios para
el cosmopolitismo. El autor revisita los vínculos entre
la globalización y el cosmopolitismo. Para ello no solo
se expone el contraste entre estas dos, sino también se
repiensa el papel de las instituciones culturales con el
fin de articular una identidad coherente para las cultu-
ras inscritas dentro de su espacio cívico, o de conferirle
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tuciones se entienden cada vez más como parte de un
diálogo transnacional más amplio en torno al cosmopo-
litismo. En este contexto, se repiensan los vínculos entre
los valores culturales y las capacidades institucionales.
Las ciudades y los Estados-nación son fuerzas que me-
dian entre los ideales culturales del cosmopolitismo y la
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quías de exclusión.

Palabras clave:

Ciudad, cosmopolis, globalización, migración.

Resumo:

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Palavras chave:

cidade, Cosmópolis, globalização, migração.

The early boom in biennales coincided with the post-1989 malaise of internationalism and a tentative burst in cosmopolitan thinking. It was also caught in a massive rebranding of cities as attractors of global capital and hubs for creative economies. Between the hype and massive investment in arts infrastructure there has been a spectacular growth in contemporary art as an event. Both contemporary art and the biennale phenomenon have had an uneasy relationship to nations and regions. The topography of cities and the will to globality have been seen as more congruent with the postnational or transnational context of contemporary art. Hence, artists have aligned themselves with specific cities, or else they have sought to situate themselves in the coupling of cities and aspired to be part of a new cosmopolitan networking of urban centres. Since 1989 the status of the city has assumed a new significance that includes an often unspoken relationship between symbolic and financial capital. Let us take this moment to look again at the relationship between art and cities, and reflect on the need to imagine new spaces for cosmopolitanism.

Cities are formed out of the need for security, in the pursuit of commerce, and through the expression of culture. The idea that the city (or at least a sacred portion of it) is a place of sanctuary is equally ancient. However, in general the city offers protection against invaders, fosters industries for processing raw products, and through the evolution of rituals and protocols it distinguishes itself from the ways of the "barbarians." The city is a place of fortification, assembly, and deliberation. By allowing people, things, and ideas to come together in a concentrated manner, it stimulates exchange, translation, and innovation. If we are to uphold that these values are best served in a concentrated form, and if the intensities afforded by urban life are maximized through a careful oscillation between proximity and distance, then we need to consider who are the "invaders" and "barbarians" that threaten the contemporary city? Does the revolution need to happen in the city in order, as Marx and Engels suggested, for it to also rescue us from the "idiocy" of rural life?

Today cities are interpenetrated by a complex array of global and local forces that are creating new divisions and hierarchies. The threats are not necessarily found from rival neighbors or even in the internal difference between urban and rural demands. Over two decades ago Saskia Sassen commented that global cities like New York, London, and Tokyo have more in common with each other than with other cities in their immediate regions.[1] As this globalizing trajectory has intensified there are now even more cities that are reconfiguring their priorities as they are becoming decoupled from their states. This may sound odd in Singapore, because the city is both state and region, but the island polis of Singapore is in fact both an outlier and in a way a paradigmatic version of the

1. Saskia Sassen, The Global City (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991).

global city. Everywhere else the contradictions of globalization and urbanization are more pronounced.

Recently, the former mayor of New York City, Michael Bloomberg stated that Brexit was the most stupid thing a nation has ever done, with the exception of voting for Trump.[2] It was not his former constituents that supported Trump. The President's personal tower is in New York, but his political base lies in that territorial rump that is known as 'flyover America.' The turn to a populist right wing and neo-nationalist agenda, also evident in regions such as the former East Germany and the deindustrialized pockets of France, is now seen as the most pronounced threat to global capital and urban civility in the West. These interior regions are splitting further and further away from the coastal megacities and metropolises across the world.

Is this what the West has come down to: a showdown between Trump and Clinton? City vs. Country? These are two wrong options. They are not equally bad, just as Macron is not the same as Le Pen. However, the reduction of choices to these wrong options only confounds those who are right to register that their lives are hollowed out by ontological insecurity and environmental degradation. Globalization has generated unprecedented levels of mobility. Neoliberalism did a stunning job in decoupling state power from economic control. In the name of freeing the market to deliver services it transferred state-controlled assets into private companies, and in the name of deregulation it commodified the infra-structure for public services, environmental care, and social protection. However, it failed to provide a suitable platform for deliberation and the redistribution of public goods, and it effectively produced levels of inequality that the West has not seen since the 1910s and 1920s. In short, almost all the gains of the welfare state, democratic accountability, and human rights have rolled back, and new environmental threats, xenophobic fears, and illiberal modes of governance have become indistinguishable from each other.

The rhetoric of globalization was stitched into the modern promise of mobility. Modernity was driven by technical transformations and massive migra-tions. Movement underpinned the era of industrialization and increased the mixture of peoples and their cultures. The diasporas and networks have created alignments which exceed the conventional structures and feelings of belonging within the parameters of the nation state. The brutal changes were often glossed over by the success stories that either celebrated the heroic examples of migrants rising from rags to riches, or trumpeted the huge leaps forward in life chances. Globalization drew on this modernist commitment to a forward momentum and the transgression of borders. It was against closed markets, impatient with institutional procedures, and opposed to the inhibitors of traditional cultural values. Globalization promised to mobilize vitality and innovation through

2. Michael Bloomberg stated that Brexit was the most stupid thing a nation has ever done, with the exception of voting for Trump.

willful disruption. Yet, how many have been enlivened, enriched, and emancipated by this process? Has the nation withered away, or does it matter even more than ever before?

A decade ago many of us expressed a wide-eyed optimism about the possibilities of mobility extending the forms of cultural exchange and cross-cultural translation. As Craig Calhoun noted, "all the talk was about cosmopolitanization of everyday life, cosmopolitan democracy, and the ever-greater advance of supra-national unity in Europe."[3] The new technologies in communication and significant decline in the cost of travel also fostered a kind of naïve cosmopolitanism:

> So now that everyone is able to journey to distant countries, to experience other cultures and traverse geographical barriers; now that obstacles in the form of political systems, languages, cultures, differences between countries and regions are disappearing, and perpetual transformation is perhaps the one constant of our contemporary modernity, especially now that the foundations of national governance, in the sense of belonging to a nation-state, are becoming increasingly weaker. Nationalism is regarded as a feeling that doesn't fit the time, and people are starting to construct a new identity based on the city where they live. This is what characterizes the world we live in and artists are undoubtedly one of the social classes that possess more freedom of movement in this era.[4]

In a relatively short time such emphatic declarations have disappeared. Sociologists, political theorists, and curators who predicted the appearance of a postnational identity—one that could find sanctuary in the cosmopolitan city or generate new horizons of connectedness through globalizing networks—have now adopted more circumspect perspectives and redefined the relationship between mobility and belonging. The discourse is now more jagged as the violent extremes have come closer to our attention. In terms of political rights, the proliferation of flexible citizens and stateless refugees mark the two ends of this spectrum. In relation to the cultural condition, there is a growing despair that mobility is fueling the McDonaldization of culture. When we see that humanitarian challenges have stumbled in the face of the neo-militarization of border controls, or note that new thinking on cultural hybridity has also stoked old fantasies of ethnic purity, then there is a strange sense of how the political is merging with the cultural. The political backlash against globalization has now been interpreted as the end of the cultural ideals of cosmopolitanism. This is not just a consequence of the debunking of the hype on mobility and hybridity that, in some instances, had blurred deeper inequalities and produced a chain of

3. Craig Calhourn, *Is There Anything Left After Global Spectacles and Local Events? Craig Calhoun in Conversation with Peter Beilharz and Nikos Papastergiadis* (Melbourne: RUPC pamphlets, forthcoming).

4. Barbara Vanderlinden, *Brussels Biennial 1: Re-Used Modernity* (Cologne: Walther König, 2008), 34.

equivalence between people with platinum frequent flyer cards and stateless refugees. It is more fundamentally linked to the material and symbolic questions of building a viable community and defining the forms of solidarity that can deliver, not just promise, institutions for the distribution of pleasure, justice, and opportunity. Unless we take comfort in platforms like Facebook we cannot believe that globalization is aiding the cosmopolitanism of society. On the contrary, the global condition is now registered not just in terms of accelerated flows, but also as a looming anxiety over endless crisis. In Greece crisis is now a way of life, and this is just the tip of a wider freezing up of the political imagination. Throughout the world one crisis merges with another. Causes that lay in economic inequity are morphed with anti-humanitarian consequences. It no longer makes sense to talk about a crisis. Crisis is not only plural: it is ambient.

However, I will argue that globalization and cosmopolitanism are neither equal nor co-dependent. This would be obvious to Immanuel Kant. Apart from two very short trips, Kant never left Königsburg. Reflecting on the current landscape, we can assert that globalisation has an integrative logic that seeks to facilitate flows by establishing transparent pathways, standardised classification services, consistent platforms, and totalising networks. In short, to enable mobility and lubricate exchanges it requires a hermetic, flat, homogenised world. This smooth machine has nothing to do with cosmopolitanism. In my view, to be cosmopolitan is to be open to the world in all its differences. There is a wonderful paradox at the heart of cosmopolitanism—it creates a radical equality among all people, but it accepts that the encounter with different people can only be meaningful if both our similarities and our differences are articulated, thus the tendency of cosmopolitanism is toward heterogeneity, it is a vivid world of generative differentiation. From this perspective, we can note not only a critique of the global commodification and instrumentalization of culture, but also glimpse another way of making the world. The globe in globalization is not the same as the cosmos in cosmopolitanism.

In this essay, I want to step back and reroute the links between globalization and cosmopolitanism. It will involve not just a clarification of the contrasting orientation between globalization and cosmopolitanism, but also a rethinking of the role of cultural institutions which were once founded to either provide a coherent identity for the cultures within their civic space, or to elevate the city as a repository for the world's culture. I will argue that these institutions are increasingly seeing themselves as part of a wider transnational dialogue on cosmopolitanism. In this context, I want to rethink the way cultural values are also linked to institutional capacities. Cities and nation-states are mediating forces between the cultural ideals of cosmopolitanism and the ideology of globalization. Cities and

nations are not neutral players. They come with their own baggage that includes primordial prejudice and hierarchies of exclusion.

Cities that proclaim the vitalism of diversity cannot function as a sanctuary for difference. If diversity is trapped in the principle of sanctuary, then it would spin the city into multiple spirals of withdrawal. Each difference would take sanctuary in its own sphericle. Dialogue would cease and an infinite regression would reign. However, in the context of diverse publics and networked public spaces the traffic in culture cannot survive in a relative isolation. No city can last for long if it installs rigid barriers on exchange, just as the endless fracturing of the public sphere is a surrender to noise. Once again, we seem stuck before bad options. In the neoliberal-hyper-communicative-city the choices for a museum are often reduced to either hanging on as a relic from the quaint past, or emerging as a service provider in the marketplace of spectacles. However, rather than either pragmatically resigning myself to the idea that civic identification is not as bad as neo-colonial corporatism, or indulging in the simplistic opposition between bad nationalism and good cosmopolitanism, I want to re-examine the basis of a cosmopolitical venture. This will involve a closer exploration of the way in which people mediate between different systems and the existence of institutions that realize collective cultural practices. Otherwise we are entangled in a dance of dependency and disavowal—the cosmopolitan agents are dependent on national institutions but disavow their dependency. Meanwhile the national imaginary is dependent on cosmopolitan values but disavows any binding force to anything that compromises its sovereign independence. How can we break out of these stultifying oppositions?

Collaboration is one of the most important concepts for opening up the space for dialogue and exchange in contemporary culture. It is a term that has special significance in the museum and arts sector. From an instrumental perspective, it is a tool that coordinates the multiple roles that are necessary in cultural production. At a conceptual level, it is also useful to both debunk the mysterious hierarchies of artistic genius and highlight the creative interplay that occurs in the mess of cultural production. However, this still offers a small view on collaboration. It simply tracks the difference between the vertical process of implementation and command that emanates from above and the horizontal activity of collaboration that proceeds from the middle. Apart from the recognition that collaboration spreads outwardly, there is the further challenge of understanding it in a wider social space.

A decade after Maria Lind observed the accentuation of collaborative techniques in contemporary artistic practices, she proposed that it was also necessary to rethink the "systematization" of museums and contemporary art

institutions.[5] Given the scope and speed of flows in a globalizing world, and the entangled complexities of cosmopolitanism, it is a crucial moment to reflect on the utility of the museum. The capacity to offer a space for contemplation and reflection, as well as engagement and entertainment, has been stretched to breaking point in recent times. However, its privileged status as the platform for deliberation and the destination for 'fine art' also goes against the emergent trend of collective, ephemeral, and interactive practices in contemporary art. In this context, collaboration is not organized via a vertical command structure, but unfolds through a horizontal process of experimentation. The willingness to play together can only proceed if there is also an ambient process for generating trust. As artists connect their practice to the idea that the city, or in more general terms the urban condition, is the site of production and the zone for contestation, it also prompts double-edged questions about institutional roles and boundaries. On the one hand, it widens the museum as it embraces agents from outside the institution, on the other, it fractures the evaluative frame as it disperses the event of art into an unbounded zone. In either case, there is no more sanctuary for the world in the museum, and the museum is less and less a sanctuary for the history of the city.

DECOLONIZING THE INSTITUTIONS OF ART

Across the world there have been many artistic coalitions, working groups, confederations, collaborative networks, and transnational organizations that have not only sought to develop the "mutualisation of resources," but also aimed to provide a new basis for an "ethics of solidarity." Natasha Petresin-Bachelez calls this phenomenon a "network revolution."[6] She has mapped out this revolution with reference to Bruno Latour's influential theory.[7] Networks were designed to break up centralized authority structures, enhance peer-to-peer knowledge exchange, and capitalize on the democratic potential of new communication technologies. Thus, networks were not only important tools for dissemination, but also a vital element in a new conceptual framework. Latour's Actor-Network-Theory was proposed to highlight the interdependence between individual actions and the system that enables the flow of forces. From this perspective, agency exists insofar as there is a network, and in turn, networks are activated through the actions of individuals.

Petresin-Bachelez, alongside others like Maria Lind, co-founded Cluster, a network of small-scale institutions that are located in the peri-urban area of European cities and Holon in the Middle East. Other prominent transnational networks include Arts Collaboratory, which provides a platform of exchange for arts organizations in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. Coalitions of artists,

5. Maria Lind, "Collaboration: Ten Years Down the Line," in *Greater Together*, edited by Annika Kristensen (Melbourne: Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, 2017).

6. Natasha Petresin-Bachelez, "Time for a Network Revolution: Coalitions, Working Groups, Confederations." *Independent Curators International,* 29 May 2015, http://curatorsintl.org/research/time -for-revolution-coalitions-working-groups-confederations.

7. Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

activists and scholars have formed working groups such as Decolonial Aesthetics and The Southern Conceptualisms Network. New artist unions such as Gulf Labor and W.A.G.E. have been formed to tackle the abuse of rights in the construction of the Guggenheim Abu Dhabi. On a national basis there is CAOA, a network of contemporary art organizations, that offers knowledge-sharing and peer support in Australia. However, the most significant in size and scope is a confederation of six museums that Lind has called a "beacon of hope."[8]

As a step towards confronting the challenges that are posed in the era of precarious neoliberalism and complex globalism, I will turn towards L'Internationale, a confederation of six modern and contemporary art institutions in Europe, as an example in rethinking the function of the museum as part of a trans-institutional collaboration. L'Internationale is an ongoing collaboration between six European museums and contemporary art institutions. It was initiated by six directors: Vasif Kortun, Zdenka Badovinac, Bartomeu Mari,[9] Manuel Borja-Villel, Bart De Baere, and Charles Esche, and brings together staff and resources from Moderna Galerija (MG+MSUM, Ljubljana, Slovenia); Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía (MNCARS, Madrid, Spain); Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona (MACBA, Barcelona, Spain); Museum van Hedendaagse Kunst Antwerpen (M HKA, Antwerp, Belgium); SALT (Istanbul, Turkey), and Van Abbemuseum (VAM, Eindhoven, the Netherlands). While anchored in Europe, L'Internationale is connected with partners in different parts of the world. It formally commenced in 2010 and took its current form in 2013 with the project *The Uses of Art—The Legacy of 1848 and 1989.*

The idea of a confederation is a response to the limits of both the museum and the city as a space of sanctuary. Even the Reina Sofía is too small to offer a genuine base for artistic refuge, and today all cities are culturally already too big to be represented by any singular institution. In an age of mobility collaboration is inevitable. However, the counter-force of globalization and the ideology of neoliberalism prioritize competition and tethers creativity to the dictates of instrumental benefit and commercial returns. At a time in which the European Union is being dominated by cannibalistic economic and political objectives, the proposition of a new confederation, one that elevates the cultural values of difference and opens a new frontier for the exchange between local and global agents, seems not only to be going against the grain of history, but also to reiterate the faith in cosmopolitanism. As H.G. Wells pointed out, there is no evidence that the cosmopolitan city has ever been built, but it is also equally clear that, in each era, the dream of cosmopolitanism has been expressed anew.

So, what would a confederation look like, and how does it differentiate itself from either mega institutions such as the Tate, which has consolidated its central base through the development of satellites, or the strategies of the

8. Lind, "Collaboration," 22.

9. L'Internationale commenced in 2010 but SALT and Reina Sofía did not join until 2013. In 2016 Ferran Barenblit replaced Bartomeu Mari as director of MACBA. Julius Koller Society (SJK), a collection site and archive of Julius Koller's work, a research center and a place for public debate and reflection, was also a founding member but is no longer part of the confederation.

Guggenheim, which structures its growth through a horizontally distributed franchise system? Manuel Borja-Villel stressed that the emergence of the confederation was moved by the radical disruption of the bases upon which museums were established. "Neoliberalism," he claims "has taken away our ground," leaving us "trapped between a past in which we don't recognize ourselves and a present we don't like."[10] It is a kind of cultural version of prosopoagnosia—you stare at something familiar but none of the features are discernible. In Eastern Europe an old joke still circulates: "the situation is catastrophic, but not yet serious." The aim is not to laugh off the causes of lamentation, but to start again and imagine an alternative self-image. Thus, L'Internationale has adopted a molecular structure and a transversal orientation as the basis for their confederation. In order to distinguish this collaboration from either a temporary project or a tactical alliance they refer to their practice of working together as a confederation. This structure is defined as "a space for art within a non-hierarchical and decentralised internationalism, based on the values of difference and horizontal exchange among a constellation of cultural agents, locally rooted and globally connected."[11] This loose and dynamic structure is intended as a point of departure from both the unrecognizable past and the unlikeable present. It is an effort to gain differentiation from the classical museum's accumulative logic that aspires to maintain an encyclopedic grasp on world culture, and the already noted corporatist agenda. Manuel Borja-Villel's self-described aim is for L'Internationale to become a 'monster' transnational institution, too big to be controlled by any local power base, and diffuse enough to defy any singular aesthetic style.

In the past five years this confederation has yielded countless publications, conferences, and projects. However, the significance of this collaborative turn cannot be measured in terms of increased productivity, it must generate new knowledge about the historical place of the museum, adopt alternative models of institutional governance, rethink the spaces of aesthetic production, and ultimately accept the role of the publics as constituents. Across each of these four domains we can also identify the need to pursue three aims that have been palpable for some time across the whole sector but that remain unresolved. Thus, there is a zig-zag process of practical identification and testing, as well as a mercurial method of conceptual articulation and reflection that transpires in the pursuit of these three aims: decolonizing the imagination, democratizing the institution, and instituting the commons.

10. Manuel Borja-Villel, email to author, Feb 7, 2017

11. http://www.internationaleonline.org/confederation (accessed November 6, 2017).

1. Decolonizing the imagination compels a departure from colonialist orientations and modernist attitudes. The cultures of the South can no longer be seen as if they were mere 'raw' materials that could be extracted and processed by the agents of the North. It calls for an

appreciation of the fact that the interpenetration of the world's cultures has also brought forth new demands of equality and respect, as well as greater understanding of the hybridity in all forms of cultural production. The decolonizing of the institutions of art is more than an attitudinal shift, it has also spurred a rethinking of the organization of collections, the identification of multiple historical narratives, the partnership with artists to expand archival sites, the development of transnational curatorial programs, and, in more general terms, the reorientation of historical knowledge around issues of urgency and the exploration of affects. The challenge is to generate pluriversal narratives in which identity is defined in a relational rather than fixed manner, and the interplay between the part and the whole is an opening towards multiple worlds rather than confirmation of a singular nation-centered perspective.

2. Democratizing the institution is not just a matter of expanding public access to the museum, it has also meant a radical rethinking of the public as a constituent whose presence shapes the museum. This expanded notion of public agency was at first evident in the evolution of artistic practice, in the shift of emphasis from creative autonomy to cultural collaboration. In opposition to the vertical hierarchy, or pyramid-like structure of creative agency that positions the artist at the peak, as the sole creator, and appends the curatorial and education staff as mediators whose function is to transfer and translate the message that is embedded in the artwork for a general audience, it is now necessary to embrace an alternative model where creativity is distributed more openly and the artist collaborates with curators, mediators, and the public to co-produce the realization of an aesthetic proposal within a collective and reflexive context.

3. Instituting the commons is distinct from both an imaginary proposition of alternative culture and the modernist hierarchy that elevated a specific worldview as the pinnacle of universal culture. Instituting the commons is produced through the coming together of diverse agents to interpellate a shared agenda, and in the context of L'Internationale it has found its most vivid articulations through initiatives such as the archive of the commons, where multiple stories are generated through tactical pooling of resources and people in artistic collectives, social movements, and universities.

Pursuing and testing these aims in a world of heightened mobility is full of challenges. Understanding how ideas, symbols, and aesthetic objects change as

they move is difficult enough, but seeing how they operate and mutate in a field of other flows will also require attention to the cascading effects of geo-political shifts, ambient communication platforms, and the institutional pressures that arise in each specific setting. Mobility is therefore not just a phenomenon that is reshaping our sense of place but also altering our ways of seeing and sensing the world, and this has significant implications for the way in which museums organize representation and opportunities for the dissemination of knowledge. The new communication technologies are spawning new forms of intimacy at a distance, accelerating feedback relationships between producers and consumers, and collapsing many of the traditional boundaries from which critical distance was gained and upon which the authority of the museum rested. The outsider perspective is no guarantee of objectivity and neutrality. New kinds of cross-cultural intimacies and complicities are necessary to gain not just trust but also familiarity with the complex webs of cultural formation. In this context knowledge will cease to be definitive and universal. It is contingent, pluriversal, and interwoven within the struggles between hegemonic and counter-hegemonic public cultures.

In short, to grasp the significance of what Petresin-Bachelez called the "network revolution" will require a new evaluative and conceptual framework. In museum studies, most evaluations tend to focus on the impact of individual museums in terms of their support of artistic practices, development of cultural knowledge, interaction with local communities, influence on national culture, or economic partnership in cultural tourism. As a confederation, the significance of transnational collaboration requires more than widening the frame and extending the points in a comparative evaluation. Therefore, the study of L'Internationale should not be confined to a longer list of artistic programs and a wider network of cultural impact. The point of a confederation should be more than either scaling up in order to generate greater purchasing power or shielding the partners from the turbulent forces of change. Similarly the knowledge produced through a confederation should be more than the sum of the contents in six silos. Such a complex formation is neither akin to the standard object of attention in museum studies nor comparable to the phenomenon of corporate franchises. We can propose that networks, coalitions, and confederations are more like discrepant objects in this field. They should open new horizons and confront some of the old problems. For instance, in the first collection of texts that L'Internationale produced they set out to revisit some old and unresolved questions on the means, status, and context of art. What is the purpose of dialogue in a relational field of visual practice? Is it a means to more object-based work or a material end in and of itself? How do issues that figure on a planetary scale fit with the old discourse of the local and the global? What is the status of ephemeral debris and does the

sacred still require a protective barrier in a contemporary art institution? Is it possible to reconstitute the common in the context of radical plurality?[12]

I will end this essay with a brief reflection on a vexed issue: the imbrication between aesthetics and politics. This issue has been central to a number of projects that have been pioneered by L'Internationale, and a brief examination of how it has been tackled may provide some insight into the conceptual advances that have emerged from this collaborative project. From the outset of modernity artists, curators, and theorists have pursued this issue along one of two diametrically opposing trajectories. On the one hand, there is the claim that the beauty of art has no other function than its pursuit of the autonomous and internal logic of disinterested spectatorial pleasure. On the other hand, there is the equally widely held claim that art acquires beauty through the subordination of form to function, so that it becomes the expression of an externality—such as a pre-existing conceptual parameter or the will inherent in a political ideology. In a recent response to this conundrum the philosopher Jacques Rancière has offered the contention that "life is the notion that allows us to overcome those contradictions."[13] This contention is tested through his examination of a surprising alliance of sources—the writings of Immanuel Kant and John Ruskin, as well as the visual practices of the Soviet avant-garde. Through these high points in modernist thinking and aesthetic practice he finds a twist in the conventional definitions of beauty, claiming that it is neither the consequence of mechanical integration nor the outcome of formal resolution. Beauty is neither measured against its resemblance to organic perfection, like a flower, nor in its abidance to an *a priori* conceptual form. On the contrary, the function of art arises from its capacity for expanding and intensifying communication. All forms of communication are necessarily oriented outwardly. They point towards the social and are enhanced by collective practices of exchange and translation. Thus, the beauty of art is not defined by internal criteria that are derived from either aesthetic autonomy or political utility, but in the "coupling" or the "socialization" that occurs through communication. Art and life are brought together in the unconstrained conjunction of social utility and sensory pleasure. It produces a space that we could call a heterocosmos that is both inviting for the other and affirmative as a "place for life."[14] Rancière is insistent that this is not a form of unification in which art and life dissolve into each other, but a concordance that is represented as "supplementary" and therefore yields a perpetually open space.

Rancière's formulation of the emancipated spectator stands in relation to the idea of the disinterested spectator that was so influential in early modernity. It must be noted that the use of avant-gardist visual techniques to disrupt the normative order and rattle sensory modalities operated in a context in which the centrality of the visual in the urban condition was in its early stages. Given the

12. Christian Holler, *L'Internationale. Post-War Avant-Gardes Between 1957 and 1986* (Paris: JRP Ringier, 2013), 38-39, 96-105.

13. Jacques Rancière, "Art, Life, Finality: The Metamorphoses of Beauty." *Critical Inquiry* 43 (2017), 603.

14. Rancière, "Art, Life, Finality," 603.

condition of hyper-visuality in late modernity, the condition of spectatorship is as much ironic as it is critical. In response to this shift, theorists and curators have noted a paradigm shift in the function of art—from spectatorship to usership. Steven Wright has referred to artistic practices that are indistinguishable from social activities, where there is no attempt to use art as a representation of society, but rather, the social and artistic actions are coterminous with each other, as examples of "double ontology." Wright argues that these practices, such as shared meals, have a "primary ontology as whatever they are, and a secondary ontology as artistic propositions of the same thing."[15] This conceptual framing is different from Rancière's. While Rancière stopped with the avant-garde's aim to produce a "concordance" between art and life, one of the challenges in the "network revolution" is the quest for "meaning in relationships."

In relation to the recent trends of collective and collaborative practices that are engaged with everyday life, the aim is not to overcome polarization by making a place that is attractive for the other and finding in art a place for life, but rather for art to both flee from the institutional constraints and to be in the instituting of the common. Where the avant-garde sought to overcome separation by means of a radical supplement, the contemporary assemblages constituted by collectives like Ruangrupa make the boundaries between art and life both redundant, because there is no representation of anything and, at the same time, the material conditions of everyday life, which are inevitably bounded, are used as they are, hence, the relationship between art and life operates on a 1:1 scale. This orientation towards usership, rather than bringing up yet another critique of spectatorship, is important for Wright, and for many of the projects initiated by L'Internationale, because it marks a break with modernist claims regarding the function of art, and also speaks to both collective practices that disrupt institutional expectations on authorship and the artistic constitution of environments that refuse the museal logic of collection, classification, and commodification. Amidst these practices there is no audience, because they do not stand before it, they must be involved in it. They are made of, and contribute to the spatio-temporal making of the project, which is at one and the same time the stuff of the artwork. Wright defends this re-orientation of conduct towards usership, whether it occurs inside or outside the walls of the museum, as a means of liberation from the corrosive delusion of exceptionalism "which has left the autonomous artworld rife with cynicism."[16]

It is uncertain whether this monstrous anti-capitalist option is in itself sustainable. To date, it thrives because it has found ways to exploit the contradictions within European funding structures. I cannot predict whether the confederation is like a temporary eddy formed by an outgoing current, or whether it will thrive as it outruns its rivals. However, as a bare minimum, this structure alerts us

15. Steven Wright, *Toward a Lexicon of Usership* (Eindhoven: Van Abbemuseum, 2013), 22.

16. Wright, *Toward a Lexicon*, 12.

to an existential problem within the museum field. The lines of fracture between the interests of artists and civic movements such as Gulf Labor Coalition, and institutions like the Guggenheim are evident on a global scale. This conflict is also playing out in Europe. Can the pursuit of democratic equality and open cultural exchange gain any traction in a time in which the European project is moving towards increased forms of fragmentation and inequality?

If we were to map the activities and aspirations in contemporary art, what would it really look like? It is not hard to draw the lines of movement that plot the sites of origin with the places of work.[17] This would produce a familiar map, one that is not that different from the global flight paths of the major airlines. However, we are equally familiar with the resistance that artists generate when critics and curators categorize them according to regional identities. Can we therefore produce a different mapping of the structures of belonging, one that flows from a sense of place in the world in relation to three scales—our body, a community, and the world as a sphere, and then overlap this with civic, national, and cosmopolitan forms of belonging? I am sure this kind of map would resemble a kind of wobbly Venn-diagram. However, beyond a diagrammatic sense of interconnectedness, this image also speaks to the complex forms of political solidarity and institutional networking that are necessary in the art world. Contemporary art now operates in a bundle of social relations and is entangled in a multiplicity of cultural references and artistic media. This has produced a radical challenge in both aesthetic evaluation and normative critique. The good and the worthy are neither equivalent nor impervious to each other. Given that museums are no longer sanctuaries for the preservation of art for art's sake, and they are implicated in the global crisis of deindustrialization, decolonization, migration, and climate change, as well as having to both navigate through the ideological terrain of neoliberalism and interactive communication platforms, then surely it is time to develop tools that enhance transnational-transinstitutional collaborative practices.

17. http://www.internationaleonline.org/research/politics_of_life_and_death/94_data_visualisation_on_artists_migrations_research_in_progress (accessed 12 November 2017).

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