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# Festivals of Art, Carnivals of Representation: On Contemporary Art and Neoliberalism

Tijen Tunali

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**FESTIVALS OF ART, CARNIVALS OF REPRESENTATION: ON  
CONTEMPORARY ART AND NEOLIBERALISM**

**BY**

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DISSERTATION

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the  
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## **DEDICATION**

This dissertation is dedicated to the memory of my advisor Dr. David Craven (1952-2012), who left behind many inspired students that will continue his legacy.

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This project would not have been possible without the support of many people. Needless to say I dedicate this dissertation to the late Professor David Craven. I started this journey with Dr. Craven, who played an immense role in my intellectual development during my doctoral studies. Every time I felt down, he lifted me up with his great encouragements and he supported me endlessly. We lost Dr. Craven when I finished the earlier draft of this dissertation. I feel orphaned in many aspects. It is hard to describe this kind of loss. All the words seem to be clichés and Dr. Craven, David, was a man beyond all clichés. He was unique in his insatiable passion for art history, in his teaching style, in his relationship with his students and in his dedication to social causes, among many other things. Indeed, my thanks to Dr. Craven will always be capitalized with an exclamation mark in my heart all my life.

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**ABSTRACT**

In this dissertation, I look at the changing praxes of contemporary art and culture vis-à-vis neoliberalism. With examples from the Americas, the Middle East, and Eastern Europe, I acknowledge, but trespass the visible effects and outcomes of globalization with regard to art and culture. In current literature they often are interpreted as straightforward and homogeneous developments, but in this dissertation, I show the complexity, heterogeneity and inequality of new social, political, and cultural relationships wrought by and against the neoliberal ideology and processes that affect all corners of the world. My main focus is on the dialectics of contemporary art and neoliberalism: Are pluralization and dissemination of contemporary art an indication of a new democratic consciousness or the outcome of a rapidly expanding neoliberal market?

In postmodernist theory, the political dimension of the aesthetic experience has been the key to understanding contemporary forms of art. I argue that, at present, in this era of global revolt, the aesthetic dimension of the political experience is the key to understanding contemporary society, as well as radical politics. I offer a novel approach to understanding the relationship between aesthetics and politics that challenges greatly what is accepted as political in society and what is accepted as aesthetics in art. My aim is to bring the art history discipline closer to radical politics by showing how contemporary cultural, artistic, and activist activities are entangled in forming a new politics of resistance that envisions renewed forms of democratic life.



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## INTRODUCTION

*It is urgent to ask for freedom!*  
*It is important to question about those who are absent!*  
*It is time to talk about those who are always wrong!*  
*It is time to talk about Democracy!*

Song from the opening scene of  
Tony Gatlif's film *Exils*<sup>1</sup>

In this dissertation, I analyze the interplay between contemporary art and the dramatic expansion of neoliberal globalization that has taken place since 1989. Employing an interdisciplinary approach, this study examines the two sides of the relationship. On one side, the increasingly corporatist art market and the art world have defined, measured, and organized contemporary art in art institutions through the prism of commodity value and institutional discourse. On the other side, some emergent art practices have become more and more embedded in an anti-systemic resistance that defies all types of institutional power and neoliberal corporatism.

My contribution to art history lies in my attempt to challenge the perspective of what art can say about politics, and reframe that question as what art can and cannot do *as* politics. Out of the struggle against the system, and those who run it in this era of globalized revolt, new forms of political participation and democracy have been emerging. I focus on political communities and art communities that are constitutive of one another in order to understand the construction of new forms of subjectivities and thus the new forms of democracy arising from the concurrence of these communities, which constitute the core of the current agenda of radical politics. I also contribute to the field of social research by defining culture not only as a space for social interaction but also as a space for political intervention.

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<sup>1</sup> Manifest, *Exils*, feature film, directed by Tony Gatlif (France: Home Vision Entertainment, 2004).

Debates over the art world's expansion through new biennials, museums, art fairs, and commercial art galleries, as well as the extension of the scope of art criticism to include emerging financial markets in the neoliberal economy, such as India, China, Russia and the United Arab Emirates, tend to dominate current discussions of art and globalization. However, these debates obscure the far more important issue of art's power, which stems from its ability to ignite change. Nonetheless, in this study, I do not repeat exhausted questions, such as whether contemporary art can be an impetus for social change, or how much contemporary art is involved in politics. Instead, drawing from a variety of aesthetic expressions within and beyond the art world, I address the ways in which art, since the neoliberal turn has merged with rebellious and subversive political formations, has become a part of the constitution of a new understanding of political participation and radical democracy.<sup>2</sup> I analyze contemporary art's critical power to establish democratic spaces in and out of the institutions of art. However, instead of focusing on what a democratic art can or cannot be, I focus on what democracy is to art.

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<sup>2</sup> "Radical democracy" is a term used to refer to post-Marxist and autonomist Marxist criticism of the consensus making mechanism of representative democracy. Instead of liberal attempts to build consciousness, the core of radical democracy is dissent and antagonism. Since 1985, Chantal Mouffe and Ernesto Laclau's book has been considered the core text in contemporary political and social theory on radical democracy. Mouffe and Laclau suggest radical democracy is the extension of democratic relationships to a wide range of social relations, and the generalization of the equivalential-egalitarian logic. French philosopher Jacques Rancière refers to this as "true politics," while defining politics as a form of aesthetic action. Rancière introduces the concept of dissensus (disagreement/dissent) as disruption of the normal order (a police order) of the politics (distribution of the sensible). Similar to Rancière, Stanley Aronowitz, in *Radical Democracy: Identity, Citizenship and the State*, claims that radical democracy is a form of social organization in which each individual possesses the capacity for speech and exercises it. Examples of radical democracy can be seen in autonomous movements in Latin America, such as the landless workers' movement in Brazil, the unemployed workers' movement in Argentina (known as Piquetero) the KCK (Korn Civaken Kurdistan) United Communities in Kurdistan, which is a Kurdish liberation movement that is active in Turkey and Syria; and EZLN-Zapatista Army of National Liberation in Chiapas, Mexico. For more on the theory of radical democracy, see Chantal Mouffe and Ernesto Laclau, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics*, trans. Winston Moore and Paul Cammack (London and New York: Verso, 1985); David Trend, eds., *Radical Democracy: Identity, Citizenship and the State* (New York: Routledge, 1996); and Rebecca Abers, *Inventing Local Democracy: Grassroots Politics in Brazil* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 2000).

Immediately before and after the dramatic political changes in Central and Eastern Europe that culminated in the demolition of the Berlin Wall in 1989, liberal democracy and market capitalism triumphed, allowing Francis Fukuyama's proclamation of "the end of history"—meaning the end of ideological conflicts—to reverberate throughout the world.<sup>3</sup> The era celebrated a new kind of political and economic liberalism, proclaiming the dictatorship of the market and a minimal state as the only road for capital and disallowing alternatives.<sup>4</sup> For the past four decades, neoliberalism has come to define the economic project of a particular political philosophy—namely the product of a discursive combination of the logic of liberal democracy with the dictatorship of the market. Neoliberalism's relationship with culture has largely been described in terms of the networked society, information age, and technological era, as well as border crossings and multicultural societies.<sup>5</sup> From that angle, in this relationship, neoliberalism appears as an unchallengeable force with no alternatives. On the other hand, we have been witnessing a global revolt against neoliberalism that engages resistance through culture to spur action toward a systemic change.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Francis Fukuyama, "The End of History" (originally published in *International Interest*) in *The Geopolitics Reader*, ed., Gearóid Ó Tuathail, Simon Dalby, Paul Routledge (London: Routledge, 1998).

<sup>4</sup> For example, "There is no alternative," also known as TINA, is a catch phrase famously used by the former Prime Minister of Britain, Margaret Thatcher, in her attack on political alternatives.

<sup>5</sup> See especially Manuel Castells, *The Rise of the Network Society* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2000) and Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996).

<sup>6</sup> What I mean by "resistance through culture" does not entail cultural resistance or a culture of resistance; it entails the aesthetic sphere of the politics of resistance. For a comprehensive study on the movements against neoliberalism from the protests of Seattle to the recent occupy protests around the globe see Amory Starr, *Global Revolt: A Guide to the Movements against Globalization* (London: Zed Books, 2005); for an analysis of the activist practice of new political subjectivity in those movements see Geoffrey Pleyers and Alain Touraine, *Alter-globalization: Becoming Actors in the Global Age* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2010); for a radical take on the theory of the paradoxical aspects of the disperse movements that make up the global revolt, see Peter Lenco, *Deleuze and World Politics: Alter-Globalizations and Nomad Science* (New York: Routledge, 2013); and Raphael Schlembach, *Against Old Europe: Critical Theory and Alter-Globalization Movements* (Farnham: Ashgate Pub., 2014); also for discussions on these movements' challenges to democracy see Naom Chomsky and David Barsamean, *Power Systems: Conversations on Global Democratic Uprisings and the New Challenges to U.S* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2013).

In the last three decades, massive movements that target the neoliberal system have emerged all around the world. These movements range from the Zapatista Movement in the Chiapas Mountains to the workers' movement (Piqueteros) in Argentina, from the teachers' insurgence in Oaxaca to the peasants' resistance in Central India, from the Tahrir Square uprising to the Occupy Movement, and from massive anti-government protests in Spain, Greece and Brazil to the Gezi uprising in Turkey. We have found ourselves participating in "the rebirth of history" as Alain Badiou has framed it.<sup>7</sup> Badiou examines these movements in a framework of emancipatory universalism—the return of the masses onto the stage of history to confront the neoliberal ruling class.<sup>8</sup> According to Badiou, although the aftermath of these riots and uprisings have been the increasing repression of the state, what is different now is that those who have not been counted in their political situation as subjects, now enter the stage of history. This, for Badiou, is the coming to visibility of the "inexistent subjects" of history and a shift in the breakage of the order of the political space, which signals an opening of possibility for an alternative social organization. For Badiou, this openness to possibility is the necessary epoch, which he defines as an "intervallic period" that prepares the stage for a new figure

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<sup>7</sup> Alain Badiou, *The Rebirth of History: Times of Riots and Uprisings*, trans. Gregory Elliott (London and New York: Verso, 2012).

<sup>8</sup> Ibid. Badiou analyses the recent uprisings, riots and revolts from the riots in France, in 2005, to the Gezi Uprising in Turkey, in 2013. His theory of "the rebirth of history" is in a direct confrontation with Francis Fukuyama's take on the "end of history," and to the line of thought that followed Fukuyama on the death of radical subjects. A post-Marxist dialectician, Badiou takes history as a breakage in the causal order of things as opposed to history as a series of events. It is with his take on the principle of "event" and its role in the making of history that he diverges from the philosophy of Michel Foucault, Jacques Lacan and Gilles Deleuze, among others. His take on revolutionary politics finds resonance in activist circles and in far left political texts such as *The Coming Insurrection*—a book that has been very influential on the anarchist movement and other radical leftists in general. (This text is a publication/manifesto by anonymous leftist philosophers signed with the pen name, "The Invisible Committee." First published in French in 2007, the book rejects the official Left's reformist agenda and aligns itself with the new forms of resistance that have emerged in recent riots, general strikes and uprisings across Europe and around the world). This significant publication connects the Zapatista Movement to the banlieue riots in Paris with a take on "resonance politics" and decentralized revolution. See Comité invisible, *The Coming Insurrection* (Los Angeles, CA: Semiotext(e), 2009).

of politics.<sup>9</sup> I agree with Badiou that although horizontality and spontaneity is central to the “historical riot” in the aftermath of events, the political program of the riots and uprisings should be organized in a way that confronts the contradiction between the internal democracy of the movements and the authority of the state. And in my view, the contemporary battle over and against neoliberalism should be understood as a battle over the most needed political imaginary, which is shaping contested discourses and political practices, as much as a battle over and against economic, environmental, and political changes.

In this dissertation, I do not repeat the discussions on art’s critical power to open up democratic spaces in the institutions of art. Instead, I am interrogating what democracy is to contemporary art and if that has been changing in the time of global revolt against neoliberalism.<sup>10</sup> For this, I first look at the spaces of global art institutions, namely the biennials and their complex relationship with the local mechanisms of power and resistance. Later, I look at contemporary art outside of art institutions (the streets, the public spaces, the mountains and the jungle) to show how communal aesthetics, as opposed to the personal aesthetics of individual artists and/or curators, has been occupying the sphere of radical politics.<sup>11</sup>

The common understanding of engaged art, in the 1960s, asserted that a raised consciousness engendered by political art would provoke political action. Thus, the artwork’s message of revolutionary struggle, as intended by the artist, would allow us to see the inherent contradictions of capitalism, and this should be essential for the critical

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<sup>9</sup> Badiou, *The Rebirth of History*, 44.

<sup>10</sup> What is apparent is that, in the context of contemporary art, we are not dealing with just exchange and production; we are dealing with the politics of codification of artistic space.

<sup>11</sup> For a good analysis of communal aesthetics as opposed to personal aesthetics in cultural practices in common urban spaces see Preminda Jacob, “A Dialectic of Personal and Communal Aesthetics: The Yard Ornamentation in North Eastern America,” *The Journal of Popular Culture* 26/3 (1992): 91-105.

awakening of society. This body of thought has its roots in the eighteenth century Enlightenment, and it was carried forward by the 1968 revolutions. Especially in the 1960s and 1970s, the acts of artistic activism and political activism became increasingly blurred.

Recently, with what has been described as a “spatial turn of social theory,” or a “social turn of art,” we witness changes in art’s engagement with politics, from igniting critical awakening in society to creating communal and egalitarian relations in the public spaces and in the spaces of activism.<sup>12</sup> Since, this type of political engagement of art is ephemeral and the outcome cannot be calculated, the social and aesthetic viability of these practices are questioned and the never-ending tension between political activism and artistic representation is still wrapped up in the centuries-old conundrum: How exactly do artistic and political spheres interrelate, interact or intersect?

French philosopher Jacques Rancière’s recent works lead us to an important question in the relationship of politics and aesthetics: When a work of art is bound to a certain “aesthetic regime” (the already established imposed message, the target audience, the roles given to the audience) and when the “distribution of the sensible” (the way in which art is made visible and audible) is unequal, how can art be democratic and emancipating? In more simplistic words, how can art ever be democratic in light of the

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<sup>12</sup> Diversification in socially engaged art, along with contemporary art’s erasure of medium specificity, has prompted activist/artists to establish more direct dialogue with the public, and in public spaces. Claire Bishop announced these community based practices as “the social turn of art.” See Claire Bishop, “The Social Turn: Collaboration and Its Discontents,” *Artforum* 44 (2006):178-183. Edward Soja described the spatial turn as “a response to longstanding ontological and epistemological bias that privileged time over space in all the human sciences, including spatial disciplines like geography and architecture.” Edward Soja, “Taking Space Personally,” in *The Spatial Turn: Interdisciplinary Perspectives*, ed., Santa Arias and Barbara Walf (London: Taylor and Francis, 2008), 11-35.



capitalization of our culture, our urban space, and even our daily life?<sup>13</sup> When trying to answer this question, I anchor my discussion in Rancière's recent theory on aesthetics and politics, and especially on what constitutes political art. Rancière argues:

Art is not, in the first instance, political because of the messages and sentiments it conveys concerning the state of the world. Neither is it political because of the manner in which it might choose to represent society's structures or social groups, their conflicts or identities. It is political because of the very distance it takes with respect to these functions, because of the type of space and time that it institutes, and the manner in which it frames this time and peoples this space.<sup>14</sup>

For Rancière, the dialogical relationship between the invisible and visible, the unheard and heard, constitutes the aesthetic dimension of politics as much as the political dimension of aesthetics. Following Rancière's lead on this, I look at sites where the strategies of resistance and dissent occur within particular cultural instances in which the invisible makes itself visible or the inaudible makes itself heard. I show that what is at stake is not which art is made visible or what art makes visible, but the instances in which art becomes a contested arena where the excluded, the marginalized, and the oppressed become visible to power in a quest for equal representation. Since the revolts of 1968, the marginalized and oppressed have initiated movements that are not only anti-imperialist and anti-capitalist, but also aim to attack the core principles of contemporary democracy. In this dissertation, I do not question whether the subaltern can speak, because as the liberation movements of the twentieth century showed us, it indeed does. Instead, I aim to demonstrate to whom the subaltern speaks and in which specific ways.

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<sup>13</sup> For an excellent discussion on contemporary art as an institution, and its paradoxical relationship with democracy, see Ketj Chuckroy, "On the False Democracy of Contemporary Art," *Eflux* 57 (2014), accessed December 12, 2014, <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/on-the-false-democracy-of-contemporary-art/>

<sup>14</sup> Jacques Rancière, *Aesthetics and Its Discontents* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2009), 23.

Theoretically, this work also rhymes with the subversive initiatives of the post-Marxists who have argued for a new direction in the discourse and historicity of contemporary politics and aesthetics. To name a few, Chantal Mouffe's and Ernesto Laclau's take on "radical democracy;" Giorgio Agamben's theorization of the "coming community;" William Connolly's concept of "the New Pluralism;" Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri's notes on "Multitude"; and Alain Badiou's ideas on "emancipatory universalism" influence my argument on the radical direction of politics and new radical subjectivity.<sup>15</sup> As these philosophers argue, contrary to the end of ideological conflicts that Fukuyama insisted upon, "the return of a new theory and practice of revolution" is prevalent in today's political praxis.<sup>16</sup> What I am interested in is the aesthetic dimension of this radical political praxis.

This dissertation is comprised of two parts that correspond dialectically with each other. The first two chapters are on the critique of "festivals of art" (the ever-expanding biennial institution and the international art biennials) and the last two chapters look at "carnivals of representations" (subversive political and artistic representations in places that are outside of art institutions). This dialectical approach allows me to analyze and

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<sup>15</sup> For these concepts and theories see Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe eds., *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics* (London: Verso, 2001); Jürgen Habermas, "Constitutional Democracy: A Paradoxical Union of Contradictory Principles?" *Political Theory*, 29/6 (2001): 766-781; David Campbell and Morton Schoolman, eds., *The New Pluralism: William Connolly and the Contemporary Global Condition* (Duke University Press, 2008); Giorgio Agamben, *Coming Community*, (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1993); Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire* (New York: Penguin Books, 2005).

<sup>16</sup> Thomas Nail, *Returning to Revolution: Deleuze, Guattari and Zapatismo* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012), 1. Also, the highly publicized and sold-out conference, "On the Idea of Communism" at the Birkbeck Institute for the Humanities in 2009 and later "Communism, A New Beginning?" at Cooper Union, New York, in October, 2011 brought together the world's leading philosophers on the subject of emancipatory (radical) politics in the twenty first century. Participants included, Alain Badiou, Slavoj Žižek, Antonio Negri, Michael Hardt, Jean-Luc Nancy, Jacques Rancière, Peter Hallward, Terry Eagleton, Gianni Vattimo, Bruno Bosteels, Jodi Dean, Étienne Balibar, and Alberto Toscano.

acknowledge the two sides of the relationship of contemporary art to neoliberalism: contemporary art as resource and contemporary art as resistance.

In the first chapter, I draw on and extend existing scholarship on contemporary art and globalization through an analysis of various intersections between developments in the art world and neoliberal processes. I discuss contentious positions vis-à-vis the role of the art world and its institutions with regard to the dialectics of global/local dynamics after the fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of the Eastern Bloc, which transformed the landscape of contemporary art. I first look at often discussed but poorly documented art biennials. These spectacular art events, which boomed in the midst of the triumph of neoliberalism in the late 1980s and early 1990s, often dealt with concepts that tie the exhibition to social issues taking place within the public sphere. Within the multicultural spirit of the 1990s, the optimistic view posited that the international art biennials brought to the fore a type of localism, as well as a pluralism, which allowed those exhibitions to be a space of enunciation for peripheral voices. However, since the new millennium, biennials have been criticized for creating transnational discourses and standards indifferent to local economies, histories, and identities.

I direct attention to the fact that every biennial differs not only in its relationship with the local public, but also in its relationship with the neoliberal restructuring that uses urban space as its privileged instrument.<sup>17</sup> Biennials around the world have completely different infrastructures, sponsorship mechanisms, ideologies and conditions for integration (or resistance) to neoliberal globalization. Therefore, they cannot be lumped

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<sup>17</sup> For more on neoliberalism and the reconstitution of urban space see Neil Brenner and Nik Theodore, *Spaces of Neoliberalism: Urban Restructuring in North America and Western Europe* (Blackwell Publishing, Malden, MA, 2002). David Harvey, in his analysis of neoliberalism, also discusses postmodern space as an instrument of neoliberalism. See David Harvey, *Spaces of Global Capitalism* (London: Verso, 2006) and *Rebel Cities: From the Right to the City to the Urban Revolution* (London: Verso, 2012).

together in a single perspective of criticism with a deterministic conclusion on their submissiveness to neoliberalism. Art Historian David Craven aptly analyzes such perspective:

This is unsound thinking, among other reasons, because as David Harvey has observed, the uneven geographical development of neoliberalism, its frequently partial and lopsided application from one state and social formation to another, precludes any such overarching formulas about the automatic relationship of *all biennials* [writer's emphasis] to neoliberalism.<sup>18</sup>

In fact, all biennials are influenced ideologically, and, to a degree, practically, by international currents of the global art economy, the effects of which yield a certain standardization. However, each biennial also has its unique local dynamic that resists the imposed directives of the biennial model, and each biennial has a different dialogical relationship with its local art community that affects the level of its reception to international currents.

The Havana Biennial is a good example to help one understand how relations that interlock the corporate and artistic interests in the international art world have unique economic and political effects on the local level, and how the Bienal de La Habana plays an intermediary role between the cultural politics of the local government and the recent changes in contemporary art at the global level.

In my other case study in the first chapter, the Roma Pavilion of the 52nd Venice Biennale shows how, typically, the voice of Gypsy populations in Central and Eastern European countries is tightly framed and toned down while fulfilling the promise of their visibility in the world's biggest and most important international art event. I further reveal the local and regional political dynamics on the issue of Gypsy identity. I show

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<sup>18</sup> David Craven, "Institutionalized Globalization: Contemporary Art and Corporate Gulag in Chile," in *Globalization and Contemporary Art*, ed. Jonathan Harris (West Sussex, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 493.

that this discourse was incoherent and contradictory because of the competing and contesting ideologies and benefits of the agents behind this exhibition such as the Open Society Institute-Roma Initiative (an NGO of a Soros Foundation), the cultural elite of Roma, the academics who are experts on Roma, and the traditional Romany leaders.

In my attempt to divert attention toward the uneven and unique relationships between the local actors and global actors in each locality, in this first chapter, I endorse a relatively new understanding of global/local dynamics by arguing that global and local are co-constitutive forces. With this perspective, I acknowledge the contradictory position of local culture both as resource that benefits its chosen hegemonic form of appropriation, and as resistance that creates forms of local dissidence. I argue that it is in that contradiction that local's ability to reinvent itself against the processes of globalization fortifies it.

Rather than perpetuating the global/local and domination/resistance binaries, I propose to seek to make visible the constant contestations taking place between the global and the local because these contestations reveal the very void in neoliberalism's overarching and inescapable logic, which in turn makes visible the weak points of the neoliberal paradigm. Neoliberal discourse relies on the binary position of local/ global to expand its hegemony, because this dichotomy facilitates the reduction of local developmental issues and political unrest to a discourse of a mere lack of democracy founded upon the theme of so-called "backward" culture, so that neoliberalism can find a legitimate pretext for its "democratic" and "civilizing" discourse. I posit that the globalization of local art and the localization of global art happen simultaneously and in a dialectical dynamic that causes these two forces to reinforce each other. Here, what I

mean by localization of global art is the local anchoring of art in relation to its globality—the presumed end state of the processes of globalization. In other words, I talk about the self-representation and self-formulation of the local confronting the imposed directives of the globalized institutions in the neoliberal system. I conceptualize my understanding of the local within this framework.

In the second chapter, I focusing on the case of Turkish contemporary art and the Istanbul Biennial, I continue arguing that art biennials should not be interpreted simply as a phenomenon with a clear-cut and static relationship to neoliberal globalization and that biennials around the world present diverse strategies of both integration and resistance to neoliberalism at the local level. The accounts on biennial criticism often do not take into account the local reception of the public (for example, that of local intellectuals, politicians, local artists, art students) as well as the unique agendas of local actors who enter and exit the ideological, discursive, aesthetic and structural arena of the biennials. My chapter on Istanbul Biennial is significant to show that biennials are often a site of contestation for specific agendas of the local actors (also as seen in the Roma Pavilion of Venice Biennale) and in the case of Istanbul, by the way of this contestation, the political taboos are challenged.

For the past 20 years, the Turkish contemporary art scene has expanded both inward and outward with aid from the European Union, the sponsorship of the private corporations, and the attention of the international art world after the foundation of the Istanbul Biennial in 1987. In this chapter, I first trace the complete eradication of public funding for the arts with the implementation of neoliberalism in Turkey after 1980 coup. Later, I examine the historical and ideological reasons behind the opposition to Istanbul

Biennial coming from different sectors of the political arena in Turkey that are historical opponents to each other. While the Istanbul Biennial internationalizes Turkish contemporary art, the opposition grows against the increasing monopoly of this major art event in the local art scene. I show that the main reason of “discursive wars” waged over the Istanbul Biennial is rooted not only on the issue of whose power is being exercised in the domination of the visual arts realm in Turkey, but also on the issue of who has the right to make visible and audible the political taboos that constitute the ideological backbone of the Turkish republic. Thus, the dynamics of the discursive wars denotes the Istanbul Biennial’s role in the renegotiation of political and cultural geography in Turkey at present.

I further show how the Istanbul Biennial has played a great role in the development of the alternative art spaces and plural voices in the art scene in Turkey, while being subdued by corporate sponsorship. Those artist initiatives and collaborative practices stand in a semi-autonomous ground and engage in several strategies of resistance to the western art world system and to the market mechanism embedded in this system. Such critiques include the class-based concept of public space and hierarchical processes of producing and exhibiting art. These alternative art spaces and collectives opt for reconfiguring the separation of public and private spheres by challenging preconditioned capitalist relations in the public sphere. Included in relations challenged are those relating to immigrants, political refugees, gypsies, undocumented service workers, and the rest of the public in Istanbul. In light of Rancière’s theory of the aesthetic regime as political regime, I discuss Istanbul art collectives that have produced interdisciplinary projects that seek to rupture the reconfiguration of meaning and

visibility within the fabric of the metropolis. I believe that the collectives are significant in recognizing how some interdisciplinary art practices interrupt the conditions and discourses that produce the regime of art and question art's relationship to egalitarianism and democracy.<sup>19</sup>

In the third and fourth chapters, I analyze the crossroads of aesthetics and political dissent. I first discuss the contradictory nature of the free-market ideology of neoliberalism, disguised as democratic reforms and civil liberties. I then show how the new culture of neoliberalism is confronted by new forms of political subjectivity. I further demonstrate that, due to the changes and experimentations in the realm of aesthetics, as well as in new forms of political participation and representation in the era of global revolt, the aesthetics of civil disobedience and the politics of dissent are deeply connected. Rancière's perspective that the aesthetic always is accompanied by politics, and vice versa, inspires a new understanding for the relationship between the two, extending beyond the conceptualization of the existing political and aesthetic categories and their relationship.

Building on Rancière's ideas on aesthetics and politics, I argue that art's political potential resides in art's ability to change itself in relation to the ideological mechanisms that make up its regime. The examples of such can be found during some recent demonstrations, strikes, uprisings, sit-ins, marches, protests, celebrations, occupations, and revolts where art has been flourishing as both a practice and a product of communal aesthetics. In those spaces and instances art—that has a real and an immediate confrontation with the forces and the instruments of oppression—does not suddenly enter

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<sup>19</sup> For such criticism see Patricia C. Phillips, "(Inter) Disciplinary Actions," *Public Art Review* 15 (2003):11-15, and Claire Bishop, "The Social Turn."



the realm of politics and *become* “political art” or “socially engaged art,” rather it accentuates its existence *as* politics. In other words, for Rancière art is politics when it makes visible what is uncontested.

Aesthetic practices during the recent anti-globalization protests, that continued after the Reclaim the Streets movement in 1996 and Carnival Against Capitalism protests in 1999, are good examples to search for a new conceptualization of such aesthetic and political acts rather than merely lumping them into vague categories of “activist art” or political art.” I look at such practices during the anti-globalization (alter-globalization) movement, in the teacher’s rebellion in Oaxaca in 2006 and the Gezi movement in Turkey, and I focus on their visible carnivalesque character—the costumes, the masks and the interventional tactics. My main aim is to divert attention to the communal aesthetic experience of the masses for the capacity of this carnivalesque aesthetics to open a radical dimension of social and sensual encounters that enables the possibility of a radical subjectivity.

Borrowing from Mikhail Bakhtin’s theory of the carnival and carnivalesque and from Jacques Rancière’s theory of “communities of sense,” I claim that the carnival, as the sensuous and subversive experience of collective bodies, is the sphere where aesthetic and politics unite. Rancière frames aesthetic experience as a specific sphere that could invalidate the usual hierarchies incorporated in everyday sensory experience, which entails the erasure of the distinction between art and everyday life. Taking aesthetic experience as a form of collective life, Rancière argues for a radical link between “the separateness of aesthetic experience and the framing of political subjectivization.”<sup>20</sup> Similarly, in his old but recently much celebrated book, in *Rabelais and His World*,

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<sup>20</sup> Jacques Rancière, “From Politics to Aesthetics,” *Paragraph* 28 (2005): 15.

Bakhtin argues that during social events with mass participation, such as carnivals, bodies are de-individualized and they belong to a collective force.<sup>21</sup> While theorizing the relationship between corporality and subjectivity through his idea of *carnavalesque*, Bakhtin shows that social bodies are made from processes of transgressions: transgressing boundaries between bodies while also transgressing class boundaries. Thus, for me, similar to Rancière, Bakhtin links aesthetic and politics by arguing that the sensual experience of the masses is capable of diminishing social boundaries and creating revolutionary subjectivity.

To that end, I argue that the realization of revolutionary subjectivity lies within the process of de-individualization through the collective aesthetic experience during the riots, revolts, and uprisings—that is, connecting the subject to the other subjects in ways that the individual subject would not experience during the capitalist relations extant in the social order. With examples from various parts of the world, I contend that the carnivalesque practices within the contemporary mass protests can be considered as a potential site for both individual and collective transformation.

The Zapatistas in Chiapas, Mexico, and the Zapatismo ideology, seem to be the most important sources of the radical subjectivity observed in the anti-globalization movement. There are also clear affinities between the Zapatistas and other anti-neoliberalist movements in terms of the emphasis on local autonomy and participatory democracy that is rooted in a belief in the need to decentralize and devolve power. Thus, in the fourth chapter, I examine the visual representations of the Zapatista Movement that

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<sup>21</sup> Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, trans. Helen Iswolsky (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984).

are in the form of photographs and murals of the autonomous indigenous communities of the Chiapas State in Mexico.

The Zapatistas built their long-term struggle on the cultural front—more than in the political arena, mixing an indigenous cosmology that offers an alternative socio-political vision for social existence and an autonomist-Marxist discourse that argues for local autonomy and resistance through self-empowerment. The visual and literal imagery of the Zapatistas is also important because the attention is drawn to storytelling emphasizing the absurd and the comic, the poetic, and the everyday.<sup>22</sup> Rather than repeating a discourse on the Zapatistas' image-making strategies and their use of the media to sustain a popular, bottom-up struggle, I divert attention to their vision and practice of alternative politics and to their struggle for equal representation, which are based on the construction of unique forms of visibility and speech.

In this dissertation, I show that contemporary art is not limited to art that is institutionalized, but can be found in the most unexpected spaces, such as the streets, the plazas, the mountains and the remotest villages. The off-space art collectives and collaborative art practices in small and big cities, the public engagement for the production and visibility of art, and art's role in recent urban protests across the world are good examples for demonstrating that a plethora of art resists not only the institutionalization of the art world, but the mechanism that withers art's function as politics. Contemporary art, inside and outside of art institutions, has been seeking to establish a difference between representing what is political and acting politically. Thus,

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<sup>22</sup> See Nick Higgins, "The Zapatista Uprising and the Poetics of Cultural Resistance," *Alternatives* 25 (2000): 359-374.

contemporary art is not just about raising awareness but about sharing knowledge and sensibilities, creating solidarity, and affecting local situations.

The creative visual and performance space of early anti-globalization protests and recent uprisings that incorporated a domain of such aesthetics attracted the attention of the activists, artists, intellectuals, and sociologists. There is a great need in social theory to analyze these visual practices, especially by the way of overlapping spheres of participation (outside: disobedient aesthetics and activism) and representation (inside: the museums and biennials).<sup>23</sup> My aim is to show the dialectical relationship between art festivals in art institutions and carnivals of representation in spaces of political resistance, and discuss how, at times, these intersect, and at other times, the inside-outside relationship is reinforced by ideological borders.

Various art practices today do not necessarily engage in the matter of art's ability to change the world; they are rather involved in art's ability to change itself in relation to the capitalist system and in art's desire to subvert and provoke the ideological mechanisms that constantly threaten it. To me, what is at stake is the ways in which art has recognized, worked with, and pushed forward the emancipatory possibilities within the neoliberal global order. In the presence of a socio-political geography that makes visible the rigorous struggle for alternatives, it is essential to rethink the interrelationships between art and politics, to include new and different perspectives, and to ask meaningful questions. This dissertation is one attempt to fulfill this need.

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<sup>23</sup> Boris Groys. "Entering the Flow: Museum Between Archive and Gesamtkunstwerk." *e-flux*, (2013), accessed 12 December 2014, <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/entering-the-flow-museum-between-archive-and-gesamtkunstwerk/>

**CHAPTER I**  
**NEOLIBERAL GLOBALIZATION AND THE NEW**  
**CULTURAL CONDITION**

In this chapter, I argue that culture and art under neoliberal globalization have become a resource for political and economic pursuits and have been used to re-legitimize regressive social redistributions. On one hand, the much analyzed and talked about symptoms of globalization point toward the decentralization of culture; on the other hand, its economic and political program sustains the control of cultural diversity. Culture and art have been used as tools for uneven distribution of power, knowledge, and resources, but they have been tools for sanctioning dissidence and popular struggle in the late global order.

I stress that the critique of contemporary art must deal with a more complex situation than art being a hot commodity in the shop window of current visual culture. It has to address art's place within neoliberal policies and neoliberal relationships. For this I propose that there is a great need to first address the main question that has surrounded neoliberalism: "Is neoliberalism a mere ideology that expands the existing market systems or is it a reality controlled by free-market capital?"

It is important that the neoliberal globalization should be examined simultaneously as an ideological paradigm of the post-Fordist era and as a capitalist process that still carries forward the imperialist and neo-colonial imprints. I argue that the processes of the globalization of culture are complex and varied because of uneven relationships between producers and receivers of culture and thus contemporary art's condition around the world is also uneven and fluctuated.

## **The Historical and Ideological Roots of Neoliberalism**

Since the late 1980s, which marked the triumphal expansion period of the neoliberal capitalist economy, the biennial triangle of art market, media, and art has established new power relations in the world of art, all the while reproducing the existing ones. Art has entered into a different phase with the borderless connectivity of artists, critics, curators, and collectors. The enthusiasts in the ever-more-expanding art world explained these cultural changes with terms such as “global art world,” “global art,” or “globalization of art” while often ignoring the complex relationship of contemporary art and culture to the new political paradigms.<sup>24</sup>

Philosopher Susan Buck-Morss emphasized the fact that what is called the global art world is a historically unique phenomenon that emerged with this new global economic order: “The world trade in art intensified in the 1970s and 1980s as a part of the general financial revolution, along with hedge-funds, international mortgages, and secondary financial instruments of all kinds.”<sup>25</sup> What Buck-Morss calls “the general financial revolution” is the liberalization of the movement of capital and the re-emergence of global finance markets that prepared the ground for this expansion of the neoliberal economic system. Thus, the global art world embraced the neoliberal globalization phenomenon not only discursively but also practically.

After the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, the term “globalization” quickly became a popular way of talking about the demolition of visible and invisible borders, networks of information and production, transnational institutions, fast-traveling ideas and people, the hybridization or standardization of culture, the dissemination of fast-food culture, and

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<sup>24</sup> For this critique see especially Marina Gržinič. “Global Capitalism and the Genetic Paradigm of Culture,” *Seijo Journal of Aesthetics and Art History* 16 (2004): 91-104.

<sup>25</sup> Susan Buck-Morss, “Visual Studies and Global Imagination,” *Papers of Surrealism* 2 (2004):4.

the expansion of the art world and the art market.<sup>26</sup> Frequently, in the art world, the term projected an awareness of larger cultural horizons and thus an awareness of diversity and plurality in a given culture and society, removing itself from its political and economic roots. In the meantime, the world was going through significant economic and political changes. While the World Bank, International Monetary Fund, the World Trade Organization, and other U.S.-led global financial institutions continued to impose programs of development on under-developed countries through structural adjustment loans, politicians and businessmen in those countries pursued the neoliberal formula as a necessary economic realization. Many Third World countries could not lift the weights of international competition without protective tariffs, and thus the living standards of the people dramatically dropped.<sup>27</sup>

Until the turn of the millennium, while the ambivalent use of the term globalization has been further fetishized as a force of its own that is irresistible, the use of the term “neoliberalism”—the ideological and historical basis of those changes—has been neglected in the media, cultural industry, business world, and art world as well as in academia. Even in activist circles, the global anti-capitalist movement is referred to as “the anti-globalization movement,” especially in North America, even though the American movement is against neoliberalism, not against globalization, since the movement has emerged because of globalization and uses globalization to its advantage.

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<sup>26</sup> The term “globalization” emerged from the hands of a specialist in marketing, Theodore Levitt. He first used it in an article in *Business Review* magazine. Levitt argued that corporate management should assume a global rather than a domestic perspective. See Theodore Levitt, “The Globalization of Markets,” *Harvard Business Review* (1983): 93.

<sup>27</sup> As David Harvey makes clear, these processes of globalization also require acts of expropriation, which he associates with rising violence. See David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).

After the millennium, political economists in academia popularized neoliberalism with negative or positive connotations, but often produced only a vague definition of it for empirical research.<sup>28</sup> The term seems to suggest that liberalism at one point was an influential political ideology but that at some point it lost some of its significance, only to revive itself in a new form.<sup>29</sup> One of the fiercest critiques of neoliberalism, anthropologist David Harvey, argues that neoliberalism does not represent only a rejuvenation of liberalism in general but is a distinctive “theory of political economic practices” that must be recognized in a particular historical context.<sup>30</sup> So what is that particular historical context?

Until the first half of 1970s, the United States was the main power dominating the growth of capitalist accumulation, with its arms circling the globe through the transnational organizations it controlled. However, between 1968 and 1973, the worldwide energy and monetary crises, as well as unrest caused by uneven development in the periphery, started to undermine U.S. hegemony. This economic and social deterioration, the weakening of organized labor, the decline of working-class consciousness, and the growth of the middle class presented a challenge to the socialist aspirations of modern liberalism and Keynesianism.<sup>31</sup> Professors at the Chicago School

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<sup>28</sup> Political economists Taylor C. Boas and Jordan Gans-Morse point out that use of the term has especially exploded during the past two decades. They argue that between 2002 and 2005, the term appeared in nearly one thousand academic articles but remained undefined in empirical terms. See Taylor C. Boas and Jordan Gans-Morse, “Neoliberalism: From New Liberal Philosophy to Anti-Liberal Slogan,” *Studies in Comparative International Development* 44/2 (2009):137-161, accessed March 15, 2009, <http://link.springer.com/article/10.1007%2Fs12116-009-9040-5>

<sup>29</sup> Paul Treanor, December 2, 2005, “Neo-liberalism: Origins, Theory, Definition,” *Paul Treanor’s blog*, March 15, 2009, <http://web.inter.nl.net/users/Paul.Treanor/neoliberalism.html>.

<sup>30</sup> David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*.

<sup>31</sup> Keynesianism—referred to as the theories of English economist John Maynard Keynes (1936) and his followers—was the dominant theoretical framework in economic policy-making between 1945 and 1970. Keynesianism demanded the state assume a variety of responsibilities and deploy fiscal and monetary policies to stabilize business cycles. See Barry Smart, *Economy, Culture and Society: A Sociological Critique of Neo-liberalism* (Buckingham: Open University, 2003).



of Economics in the United States advocated for a reversal of modern liberalism, challenging the Keynesian model. Friedrich Hayek, Milton Friedman, George Stigler, Ronald Coase, and Gary Becker provided theoretical and rhetorical aid to the establishment of neoliberalism as the theory of contemporary political economic practices. When these economists advocated for a reversal of modern liberalism in the United States and Great Britain, the neoliberal plan that they created already had been tested in Chile.

In 1956, the U.S. State Department organized “the Chilean Project” to influence Chile’s economic thinking and policies. The program was funded by the Ford Foundation as a joint project with the Catholic University of Chile and the Economics Department of the University of Chicago. The program continued until 1970. From the beginning, it was intended to influence Latin American economic policies that perpetuated backwardness and, by 1965, it was extended to include students from all over Latin America. In 1973, a socialist alternative was growing in Chile, and the three major parties were in favor of nationalizing foreign companies and mining, most of which belonged to U.S. corporations. Augusto Pinochet’s coup d’état on September 11, 1973, overthrew the revolutionary socialist Salvador Allende’s democratically elected government. Pinochet’s four-day war left Allende dead and more than three thousand people executed or missing.<sup>32</sup>

Eight out of ten Chilean economists who wrote the junta’s economic plan were trained under Milton Friedman’s program in the Economics Department of the University of Chicago with generous scholarships from Ford Industries; these economists became

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<sup>32</sup> Naomi Klein, *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism* (New York: Metropolitan Books/Henry Holt), 96.

known as the “Chicago Boys.” After a private meeting with Pinochet, Friedman convinced the dictator to employ a “shock treatment of economy” and adopt his free-market policies.<sup>33</sup>

As early as 1974, the Chilean economy and its labor force were opened to world markets. Some fifteen years into a period of strict adherence to the neoliberal plan, unemployment hit thirty percent, and forty-five percent of the population lived below the poverty line, while the richest ten percent of the population saw their incomes rise by eighty-three percent.<sup>34</sup> Nevertheless, this plan became the economic model for all of Latin America and other Third World countries, such as Turkey and China, which implemented similar policies under dictatorial regimes.

In 1980, Chinese President Deng Xiaoping invited Friedman to China; hence, it was not the communists that the Chicago Boys were intimidated by but instead the democratic movements that opposed them. The massacre in Tiananmen Square in 1989 provided an ideal political background for the implementation of neoliberal economic policies without opposition. Only months before the massacre, Fukuyama, in his infamous speech on the “End of History,” at the University of Chicago, commented on the collapse of communist states that this represented: “not an ‘end of ideology’ or convergence between capitalism and socialism ...but an unabashed victory of economic and political liberalism.”<sup>35</sup> Fukuyama further predicted that democratic reforms and free market reforms are inseparable. In that same year, in September, the people of Turkey woke up to another bloody coup d’état. On the night of the coup, after taking over the state, General Kenan Evren announced this: “Turkey needed a surgery and we are doing

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid, 14.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Fukuyama, *The End of History*, 114.

it.”<sup>36</sup> And the people of Turkey soon learned that this “surgery” meant that fierce political repression and free market reforms would go hand in hand.

In the first instance, neoliberalism is a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade. The role of the state is to create and preserve an institutional framework appropriate to such practices. Post-war economic developments witnessed the rise of the welfare state, with the distribution of state wealth across education, health, and social security funds, but the neoliberal policies of the 1980s shrunk those funds in favor of new markets and international treaties. As historian Greg Grandin notes: “The ‘market’ rather than the welfare of the population has become the measure of all appropriate activity of the state.”<sup>37</sup> It also must set up those military, defense, police, and legal structures and functions required to secure private property rights and to guarantee, by force if need be, the proper functioning of markets. The state’s function is to guarantee the quality and integrity of money and not its citizens.<sup>38</sup>

Political economist Ray Kiely was one of the first scholars to argue that globalization is an extension of modern development that has changed in response to shifts in power relations.<sup>39</sup> He explains that many of the processes of globalization are historically repeated, but the multi-centeredness of economic forces, the seemingly

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<sup>36</sup> Kenan Evren, “12 Eylül Gerekliydi (September 12 was necessary)” *Hürriyet*, March 16, 1981, 1.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid*, 84.

<sup>38</sup> Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, 2.

<sup>39</sup> See Ray Kiely, *The New Political Economy of Development: Globalization, Imperialism, Hegemony*. (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007) and *idem.*, *Empire in the Age of Globalization: US Hegemony and Neo-liberal Disorder* (London: Pluto, 2005).

unlimited capacity of trade, and the “global division of labor” are relatively novel developments that emerged from the neoliberal philosophy.<sup>40</sup> While the new developments engendered discourses on globalization and globalism, these discourses were able to serve the ideological needs of neoliberal expansion by insisting on the radical separation between economic and social realities.<sup>41</sup> In fact, conceptions and theories of globalization carry with them not just understandings of what the world is like, but also what can and cannot be done about neoliberal globalization, which makes “globalization” a site of political contestation. For example, Mark Rupert shows how the hegemonic liberal narrative of globalization is being increasingly challenged by a cosmopolitan progressive leftism and an autarchic conservatism.<sup>42</sup>

In the late 1980s, Anthony Giddens and David Harvey were the two prominent scholars who developed the early theories of neoliberal globalization. Giddens, in his much-quoted definition, asserts that globalization refers to “... the intensification of worldwide social relations, which link distant localities in such way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice versa.”<sup>43</sup> Giddens saw economic globalization as the driving force of change in the new world order and established a popular globalization theory that explained current processes of social and political change; yet, he fails to articulate the forces that promoted change. Nevertheless, Giddens has triggered widespread discourse among social scientists on the topic. On the other hand, Harvey has argued that neoliberal globalization is a product of the historical

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *Acts of Resistance: Against the Tyranny of the Market* (New York: New Press, 1998), 84.

<sup>42</sup> Mark Rupert, “Globalization and Contested Common Sense in the United States,” in *Innovation and Transformation in International Studies*, ed. Stephen Gill and James H. Mittelman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 138-52.

<sup>43</sup> Anthony Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity* (Cambridge: Polity, 1991), 64.

development of the capitalist organization of production and is not a historical break from its past forms. Harvey's more recent analysis underscores the argument that neoliberalism arose to restore class power, power that was threatened by the collapse of the Keynesian approach to managing capitalist accumulation based on social democratic systems and the Bretton Woods system, which had regulated international relations.<sup>44</sup> Harvey also underlines that "the market, depicted ideologically as the great means to foster competition and innovation, was in practice to be the great vehicle for the consolidation of monopoly corporate and multinational powers as the nexus of class rule."<sup>45</sup> As such, for Harvey, neoliberal globalization is a political project of the ruling capitalist class that has to be recognized in its particular historical context.

Mainstream globalization theory in the social sciences often has concerned itself with flows of capital, people, commodities, ideas, networks of information and production, transnational institutions, the anti-globalization movement, and the hybridization or standardization of culture. Interpreters of the effects and outcomes of neoliberal globalization have adopted two main positions: The optimistic interpretation has been closely linked with development theories that saw international development as a means to expand modernization, industrialization, and economic growth into the so-called Third World countries in order to better their conditions and offer them a share of the global economic pie.<sup>46</sup> This view tried to establish that what in fact favors the particular interests of the capitalist classes also favors the general interest of all.

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<sup>44</sup> See David Harvey, "Neo-liberalism and the restoration of class power" in *Spaces of Global Capitalism: Towards a Theory of Uneven Geographical Development*, ed. David Harvey (London: Verso, 2006), 11-25

<sup>45</sup> Ibid, 18.

<sup>46</sup> See Milton Friedman, *Capitalism and Freedom* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962).

According to this globalist perspective, neoliberal globalization is a win-win situation, provided that each underdeveloped state adopts the correct policies. Although these advocates of globalization are hostile to the state, they welcome the United States as a benevolent force to regulate globalization processes. On the opposing side is the argument that globalization causes the weakening of states and diminishes divisions between core and periphery as well as continuing the diffusion of the United States' role as an imperial state.<sup>47</sup> According to this argument, empire is identified with a network of collaborating powers, none of which has dominance over the others.

Another perspective insists on the existence of a new dimension of imperialism emerging through contemporary processes of globalization and argues that the basic division of core and periphery has not changed, and neither has the U.S. position as the dominant imperialist power.<sup>48</sup> This approach is based on neo-Marxist theories of world systems theory and explains globalization as an ideology designed to protect the interests of the powerful, who are concentrated in the Western world. Another branch of neo-Marxist theory suggests that the above approach is inadequate for theorizing contemporary globalization and argues that, as much as hegemony and imperialism, we should take into account the character and functioning of the new ruling class that has arisen from the power relations of the contemporary global economy.<sup>49</sup> The common

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<sup>47</sup> See Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2000); Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity*; John Holloway, *Change the World Without Taking Power* (London: Pluto Press, 2005) and John Holloway and Eloína Peláez, eds., *Zapatista!: Reinventing Revolution in Mexico* (London: Pluto Press, 1998).

<sup>48</sup> See Samir Amin, *Capitalism in the Age of Globalization: The Management of Contemporary Society* (London: Zed Books, 1997); Henri Houben, "A Marxist Analysis of Present-Day Globalization," in *Nature, Society, and Thought* 19 (2006): 447-471; James Petras, *Empire with Imperialism: the Globalizing Dynamics of Neo-liberal Capitalism* (London: Fernwood Publishing, 2005); Immanuel Wallerstein, "Globalization or the Age of Transition? A Long-Term View of the Trajectory of the World-System," (2001) accessed March 12, 2010, <http://fbc.binghamton.edu/iwtrajws.htm>.

<sup>49</sup> See Ray Kiely and Phil Marfleet, eds., *Globalization and the Third World* (London and New York: Routledge, 1998); Kiely, *Empire in the Age of Globalization*; Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*;

thread in all of these neo-Marxist views is that globalization is inherently a contradictory and uneven process.<sup>50</sup>

According to many accounts of Orthodox Marxist thought, cultural imperialism has been accelerated with the processes of the neoliberal world order, and it is often tied to the globalization of culture. Although such discussion rightly points to the global tide for using culture as a commodity, it also constitutes the *modus operandi* of cultural imperialism.<sup>51</sup> John Tomlinson, a prominent cultural theorist, warns us about adopting a reductionist view of culture under globalization instead of taking into account the complexity of linkages that globalization has established between politics, society, technology, environment, and culture. Tomlinson directs our attention to the multifaceted character of neoliberal globalization and its diverse implications regarding different geographies and insists that:

... The cultural implication, rather less easily swallowed by some, is that globalization involves not the simple enforced distribution of a particular western (say, liberal, secular, possessive individualist, capitalist-consumerist) lifestyle, but a more complicated dissemination of the entire range of institutional features of cultural modernity.<sup>52</sup>

Similar to Tomlinson, Harvey stresses that neoliberal processes are uneven and contradictory and warns us about the difference between neoliberalism as theory and neoliberalism as process:

The uneven geographical development of neoliberalism, its frequently partial and lop-sided application from one state and social formation to another testifies to the tentativeness of neoliberal solutions and the complex ways in which political forces, historical traditions, and, existing

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idem., *The New Imperialism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), Alfredo Saad-Filho and Deborah Johnston, ed., *Neoliberalism: A Critical Reader* (London: Pluto Press, 2005).

<sup>50</sup> Bob Jessop, "Time and Space in the Globalization of Capital and Their Implications for State Power," *Rethinking Marxism* 14/1 (2002): 98.

<sup>51</sup> Sukomal Sen, "Globalization of Culture: To What End?" *The Marxist* 16 (2000), accessed September 11, 2010, [http://cpim.org/marxist/200002\\_marxist\\_culture\\_ss.htm](http://cpim.org/marxist/200002_marxist_culture_ss.htm).

<sup>52</sup> John Tomlinson, *Globalization and Culture* (Oxford: Polity, 1999), 272.

institutional arrangements all shaped why and how the processes of neoliberalisation actually occurred...The scientific rigor of its neoclassical economics does not sit easily with its political commitments to ideals of individual freedom, nor does its supposed distrust of all state power fit with need for a strong and if necessary coercive state that will defend private property...We have to pay careful attention, therefore, to the tension between the theory of neoliberalism and the actual pragmatics of neoliberalism.<sup>53</sup>

The way Harvey articulates this difference is important for the ideological implications of the scholarly analysis of neoliberal globalization. Any narrow claims that assume neoliberal globalization to be an even development that affects every place to the same degree (or intensity) and creates a picture of homogenous hegemony with a point of no return, undermine and block the avenues of resistance to neoliberalism that is as real and happening as neoliberalism itself.

In the 1990s, globalization became a popular term that articulated progress in abstract terms. It projected an awareness of larger cultural horizons—an awareness of diversity and plurality in culture and society—thus removing itself from its political roots. It is this use of the term that largely appealed to the art world. Cultural challenges to Eurocentric discourses and the appearance of new art zones around the world have caused the art world to take globalization seriously, and for the past three decades, the art world has swirled around the discussion of whether contemporary art is globalized or not, or how much it has been globalized.

In the late 1990s, India, China, and Southeast Asia emerged as new financial regions and rose to compete with the Western centers. Concomitantly, the contemporary art of the Far East started to create a huge demand in the art market, and appeared in large exhibitions and in the art canon of the West. All the while, the new, curious gaze of the

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<sup>53</sup> Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, 13-19.



Western world was accompanied by postmodern and postcolonial theory that seeks to break with modern and colonial ways of knowing. These theories informed the institutional art theory and created a shift in the art history discipline, opening new areas in the canon. This theoretical shift not only affected the reception of the non-Western art in the West, but it also institutionalized the art of the non-West within the ideas and structure of the Western art canon. As James Elkins explains it:

Indian, Chinese, and Southeast Asian scholars write Western-style essays and books, adopt Western armatures for their arguments, hold exhibitions and colloquia, create departments and curricula, all in the Western manner. The discipline itself has been exported and has found new homes, and countries such as China and India are producing art histories compatible with Western ones.<sup>54</sup>

In 1989, the same year that the Berlin Wall came down, the grand exhibition *Magiciens de la Terre* took place in the Centre Georges Pompidou, in Paris. The exhibition aimed to challenge the Eurocentric and exclusive exhibition formats found in Western art institutions but failed to show that Western art contexts have become increasingly integrated into an asymmetrical cultural network of connections with the non-Western world. The critique of Western grand narratives in the curatorial decisions of art exhibitions and in the art history canon appeared much earlier in different geographies. Thus, *Magiciens de la Terre* marked the institutionalization of contemporary art as “global art” in the globalized world with the same proposal of “inclusivity” that similar exhibitions had carried before.<sup>55</sup>

In 2012, during the *The Global Contemporary: Art Worlds After 1989* exhibition, which was curated by Hans Belting, Andrea Buddensieg and Peter Weibel for the ZKM

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<sup>54</sup> James Elkins, *Stories of Art* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 150.

<sup>55</sup> For further discussion, see Reesa Greenberg, “Identity Exhibitions: From *Magiciens de la Terre* to Documenta 11,” *Art Journal* 64/1 (2005): 90-94.

Museum of Contemporary Art, in Karlsruhe, the institutional art world once again intensely enunciated contemporary art's relationship with globality, globalism, and globalization (ideologically loaded terms), often articulating the position that contemporary globalization (thus, neoliberalism) is inevitable. Globalization as a discourse has been used as a theoretical blue print—and even a fashionable buzzword—not as something to be explained in its unique historicity and material conditions but instead as something that explains current cultural and artistic developments around the globe.<sup>56</sup>

In the first decade of the new millennium, many art biennials formed discursive platforms where the art world, academics, and intellectuals discussed the issues of globalization from multiple angles. Yet in these platforms they often dealt with the same outcomes of globalization, such as the dislocation of identities, the mobility of peoples and cultural objects, and borders and boundaries, none of which is unique to the contemporary globalization.<sup>57</sup> Examples include Dan Cameron's Istanbul Biennial, of 2003, which dealt with the concept of "global citizenship," and in 2005, Documenta 10, curated by Catherine David, which addressed globalization in terms of uneven urban development, and Robert Storr's symposium for the Venice Biennale, "Where Art Worlds Meet: Multiple Modernities and the Global Salon," for which Storr brought together some four hundred art world professionals, academics, and city officials.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> See Ben Rosamond "Constructing Globalization," in *Constructing International Relations: the Next Generation*, ed. Karin Fierke and Knud Eric Jørgensen (Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe, 2001), 182-198; Jan A. Scholte, "Beyond the Buzzword: Toward a Critical Theory of Globalization," in *Globalization: Theory and Practice*, ed. Eleonore Kofman and Gillian Youngs (New York: Pinter, 1996).

<sup>57</sup> International biennials were not the only big-scale exhibitions that tackled the concept critically. An international exhibition in *Neue Galerie* in Graz, Australia, opened in October 2002 with the title "In Search of Balkania." In February 2003, Walker Art Center in Minneapolis organized the international exhibition called "How Latitudes Become Forms: Art in a Global Age," which examined the ways in which the globalization of cultural has an impact on local artistic practices.

<sup>58</sup> Caroline A. Jones comments: "The Symposium could only mimic the pseudo-egalitarianism that is the art world's favorite scam, masking the much larger geopolitical structures that are actually at play, which

Further, Okwui Enwezor's Documenta 11, held in 2007, consisted of five "platforms" staged around the world, culminating with an installation in Kassel designed to investigate how the relationship of art, politics, and the process of globalization could be further questioned and explored. Simultaneously, Francesco Bonami's 50th Venice Biennale underscored the importance of "global" themes. Also in 2007, Hou Hanru curated the 10th Istanbul Biennial, which opened with the theme, "Not Only Possible but Also Necessary Optimism in the Age of Global War." In addition, the Havana Biennial of 2009 analyzed the topic "Integration and Resistance in the Global Era" and involved an attempt to address the peculiarities derived from the processes of globalization in a dialectical perspective. While these biennials aimed to show globalization from below or establish Marxist critiques of globalization, as I witnessed, they repeated the same intellectual discursive fanaticism in "globalization theories" and contributed to the numerous facts and fictions on the subject.

From the 1990s and into the millenium, the subject of the most heated debates over art was whether globalization caused the expansion, pluralization, and democratization of the art world, or, on the contrary, contracted it. The vague conclusion was that contemporary globalization both homogenized and fragmented engagements with and responses to the art world.<sup>59</sup> These debates eventually led to the use of the term "contemporary art" synonymously with "global art" to refer to current art from the remote corners of the world that respond to recent techonogical and conceptual shifts. Art critic Hans Belting has an interesting take on this:

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routinely demonstrate that biennials are global politics by other means." Caroline A. Jones, "Troubled Waters: Caroline A. Jones on Globalism and the Venice Biennale," *Artforum International* 44 (2006): 91.

<sup>59</sup> See John Byrne, "Contemporary Art and Globalization: Biennials and the Emergence of the De-Centered Artist," *International Journal of the Humanities* 3 (2003): 169-172 and Charlotte Bydler, *The Global ArtWorld Inc.: On the Globalization of Contemporary Art* (Uppsala, Sweden: Uppsala University Press, 2004).

...its global production and distribution that 'defines contemporary art.' But we encounter a certain resistance of Western critics to speak of global art, since they fear that the Western art scene will lose power when art is globalized. For the same reason, they would favor the notion 'contemporary art' as it is familiar and since it sounds neutral with regard to newcomers in the art world.<sup>60</sup>

While Belting critiques the Eurocentric art world he reveals the internal logic of the current institutionalization of art: As opposed to modernism's separation of the world into first, second, and third worlds and excluding the latter two from the historicity of modernity, now modernity is seen to be happening all over the world in an equalized historical setting. In fact, the difference in the usage of the two terms in new areas of interest in the art world, such as the Balkans, the Middle East and East Asia, where modernity and tradition, and second/third and first worlds are entangled, reveals the logic of neoliberal globalization that the Western art canon prescribes.

In these, now semi-peripheries of the art world, the term contemporary art is far from being politically neutral: It refers to art that engages, in one way or another, with the intertwined developments between the making and circulation of art and the changing economic relations. In those regions, where dramatic political and economic shifts happen continuously and rapidly, contemporary art not only indicates art that is produced since the "end of modernism" or with a certain medium, it indicates art that deals with the realities of the current and rapidly changing historical moment.

The contemporaneousness of contemporary art not only points to conjunctive flows but to disjunctive ones. In other words, there are artists, in both the Western and Eastern hemispheres, who simply do not participate in the production, circulation, and

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<sup>60</sup> Hans Belting, "'Mapping Global Art' GAM: Critical Perspectives on Current Issues" (2009), accessed April 29, 2010, <http://gam2.zkm.de/blog/2009/08/26/hans-belting-mapping-global-art-introductory-remarks/>.

reception of institutional art and who produce art that is fundamentally different from what may be called “contemporary art.”

When contemporary art is concerned with its contemporaneity and not with its globality, it becomes hard to hide the subtle system of inclusion and exclusion in the art world, and contested relationships between local art and global art become more visible. Akin to globalization, popular discussions about “global culture” or “global art” neglect two important aspects of these developments: the unpredictable and resistive power of local communities as well as the unevenness of development and unequal access to technologies across different geographies.<sup>61</sup>

Similarly, institutionalization of the term “global art,” while indicating the pluralization and democratization of contemporary art, has concealed the economic disparities and the unevenness of access to, and the participation of, people in the high technology-oriented cultural and artistic productions of blockbuster global exhibitions.<sup>62</sup> These umbrella terms also hide the harsh realities of the daily life of a majority of people and issues pertaining to gender, class, and race in different localities around the globe.<sup>63</sup>

The core structural order of the current phase of global capitalism presents common issues and opens similar integration paths in the remotest parts of the world. However, the material conditions for economic and cultural developments are not equal everywhere. Cultural industries—where cultural goods and services are produced,

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<sup>61</sup> These umbrella terms also hide the harsh realities of the daily life of a majority of people and issues pertaining to gender, class, and race in different localities around the globe.

<sup>62</sup> For the discussion on the institutionalization of the term “global art” see Marc Kunstwelten Scheps, “Kunstwelten im Dialog,” in *Kunstwelten im Dialog—von Gauguin zur globalen Gegenwart*, ed. Marc Scheps et al. (Köln: DuMont, 1999), 16.

<sup>63</sup> Paul Hirst and Grahame Thompson, *Globalization in Question: the International Economy and the Possibilities of Governance* (Cambridge, UK: Polity, 1999).

reproduced, stored, and distributed—still are concentrated mostly in the United States, Western Europe, and China, which are the leaders of the global economy today.<sup>64</sup> Not only are the processes of neoliberal globalization uneven but they also are exclusionary. Sociologist Manuel Castells' observation sums up the exclusive dimensions of the neoliberalization:

The new global economic system is highly exclusionary... While the dominant segments of all national economies are linked into the global web, segments of countries, regions, economic sectors, and local societies are disconnected from the processes of accumulation and consumption... Most people in the planet do not work for or buy from the global economy... Yet all economic and social processes do relate to the structurally dominant logic of such economy.<sup>65</sup>

Contemporary globalization has exacerbated existing global inequalities. Thinking culture within the dichotomies of global cultural production and local reproduction also carries the weight of a dichotomization that works to the advantage of the more powerful, which is the center and the global. Thus, instead of regarding culture as reflection of power relationships in the global order, as suggested by social anthropologist Ulf Hannerz, we should analyze “culture as an arena of struggle and transformation.”<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> The recent UNESCO report indicates that three countries in the world—U.S., U.K. and China—produced the alarming figure of forty percent of the market in cultural property of the world, which means that the remaining sixty percent was produced by 117 countries. The UNESCO report, “International Flows of Selected Cultural Goods and Services 1994-2000,” accessed September 22, 2011, [http://www.uis.unesco.org/template/pdf/cscl/IntlFlows\\_EN.pdf](http://www.uis.unesco.org/template/pdf/cscl/IntlFlows_EN.pdf).

<sup>65</sup> Manuel Castells, *The Rise of the Network Society*, 102-103.

<sup>66</sup> See Ulf Hannerz, “Scenarios for Peripheral Cultures,” in *Culture, Globalization, and the World System: Contemporary Conditions for the Representation of Identity*, ed. Anthony King (Minneapolis, Minn: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 107-129.

### **Globalization of Art or ‘Glocalization’ of Art?**

For the past three decades, it has been widely discussed how and why neoliberal economic policies are applied at the global level and how political as well as cultural processes have been transforming the world into one global market. The way the term “globalization” is used in the policy, journalistic and corporate communities often differs markedly from the nuanced understandings developed across a range of disciplines.<sup>67</sup> At the same time, many academic commentaries on globalization, particularly in business studies, international economics and the political economy, also appear to converge for the most part upon a common economistic conception of the term.<sup>68</sup> In the humanities disciplines, such as cultural studies, globalization studies, sociology and art history, the study of globalization often has dealt with the cultural dimension of cross-cultural relationships, border crossings, migration and immigrant identities, communication networks, and transnational communities.<sup>69</sup>

On the other hand, views of global/local dynamics often take into account central and local governments, the United Nations, nongovernmental organizations, multinational corporations, national and international civic organizations, international and local institutions, and some transnational activists and artists. Hence, binary formulations used for discussing the relationship between local and global often reduce local to a submissive counterpart in a hegemonic discourse. Do contemporary art discourses on global/local dynamics in fact conceal the harsher realities of the neoliberal world order by upholding an impasse on the agency of the local? I will argue that while

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<sup>67</sup> See Ronald Robertson and Habib H. Khondker, “Discourses of Globalization: Preliminary Considerations,” *International Sociology* 13 (1998): 25-40 and Jan A. Scholte, *Globalization: A Critical Introduction* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2000).

<sup>68</sup> For a thoughtful discussion and justification of the intellectual focus on economic globalization see Grahame Thompson “Situating Globalization,” *International Social Science Journal* 160 (1999): 139-152.

<sup>69</sup> Roland Robertson, *Globalization: Social Theory and Global Culture* (London: Sage, 1992).

construction and exploitation of localism has proven to be useful to the logic of neoliberalism, local movements, individuals, and artists have taken advantage of neoliberal globalization to determine and redefine the meaning and praxis of localism altogether.

In the 1990s, hybridism, border cultures, cultural plurality, multiculturalism and networks of information were popular themes in academia as well as in large-scale art exhibitions. After the millennium, the crisis in the neoliberal system was felt throughout the globe, and the issue of the local resistance captured increasing attention in academia, on the basis of environmentalism, economic sustainability, nationalist ideology, and local alternatives to the processes of present-day, corporate-led globalization. “Localism” has been a popular trope to especially articulate contestations and oppositions to the globalization processes. In fact, localism emerged as a computing term that connotes the adaptation of computer software to different languages in order to overcome the regional differences and technical requirements of the local market. Eventually, this term has been appropriated by the oppositional movements that aim to decentralize and localize the political and economic power. While the discussions over localism shown as alternatives to globalism, neoliberalism has immensely fed on the self-upholding myth of the local as perpetuating itself as the cure to both global and local problems. Austrian curator Georg Schöllhammer commented on this in 1999:

... Nonetheless, much of that which is, for example, considered local—with reference to tradition or, as having the nature of a localized culture—which is put forward against this tendency as worthy of preserving, is based on just the same foundations—for example on the myths of unmediated social relations and cultural essentialism.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Georg Schöllhammer, “Art in the Era of Globalization,” *European Institute for Progressive Cultural Policies* (1999), accessed Oct. 26, 2012, <http://eipcp.net/transversal/0303/schoellhammer/en>



Discourses of localism and localization have been utilized in the art world, not so much as globalism and globalization, but as artistic strategies that portray the local as a dissident agent to the processes of globalization. For example, the 7th Sharjah Biennial, in 2005, focused on the issue of belonging in a globalized world. Okwui Enwezor's Documenta 11, of 2007, consisted of five platforms staged around the five continents in five localities around the world, and in each locality, specific local issues pertaining to the processes of globalization were addressed. The 6th Taipei Biennial, held in 2008, aimed to reflect on globalization and local resistances with the theme *A World Where Many Worlds Fit In*—a well-known slogan of the anti-globalization movement. The Havana Biennial of 2009 was organized around the theoretical framework *Integration and Resistance in the Global Era* and addressed the agency of the local against the global processes of neoliberalism. That same year, the 11th Istanbul Biennial evoked a Brechtian question, *What keeps the mankind alive?*, and included deliberate political statements concerning the processes of the neoliberal order from the perspective of the local. As a result of the postmodern emphasis on the local's identity as well as its discursive position in these biennials and many others, the local has become the new exotic trope in the exhibition space.<sup>71</sup>

Indeed, when dealing with concepts of the local and localism in art, we encounter artists whose local points of reference become the essential requirements for their success and fame in such exhibitions. In that light, Cuban art critic Gerardo Mosquera talks about the self-exoticism of the artists: "... But too frequently value has been placed on art that explicitly manifests difference or that better satisfies the expectations of otherness held

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<sup>71</sup> See Gerardo Mosquera, "Alien-Own/Own-Alien: Globalization and Cultural Difference," *Boundary 2* 29/3 (2002): 163-173.

by neo-exoticism. This attitude has stimulated the *self-othering* [writer's emphasis] of some artists who, consciously or unconsciously, have tended toward a paradoxical self-exoticism."<sup>72</sup> While the self-othering of the artists proclaims the continued colonialist logic within globalization discourses and satisfies the cravings of the art world for neo-exoticism, in some instances, artists consciously aim to overturn this logic. For example, Yinka Shonibare, with his decapitated figures, criticizes the neocolonial logic hidden behind the multiculturalist and pluralist mask of the new exhibition systems.<sup>73</sup>

Shonibare's installation, *Gallantry and Criminal Conversation* (2002), which participated in Enwezor's Documenta 11, deals with the construction of difference as a new exoticism (Figure 1.1). The work consists of 11 headless mannequins and stacked wooden trunks distributed around a white platform above which a green horse carriage is suspended in the air. A close look at the mannequins reveals that they are engaged in lustful homosexual and heterosexual activities. The headless mannequins are typically Black. The first presumed reference to heedlessness is the guillotined French aristocrats. In the Yoruba culture, in which Shonibare grew up, the head is the most elaborate part of the body and is considered to be the seat of the soul. The chopped-headed mannequins wearing aristocratic attire with African patterns on their black skins, and engaging in promiscuous activities, is an excellent Yoruba artist's representation of his otherness in the neo-colonial space of display.

Shonibare's mannequins' dresses and suits are sewn in the fashion of eighteenth century aristocratic attire while the patterned fabrics are that of African design. How Shonibare escapes self-exoticization is hidden in this subtle nuance: There is a bit of self

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid, 165.

<sup>73</sup> Some of these figures were exhibited at Documenta 11 in 2002 and at the 2007 Venice Biennial, as well as many other exhibitions around the world.

in the other. One sees the mannequins as Black subjects, but the symbol that depicts the colonial atmosphere--the aristocratic attire that those African subjects wear--is that of the White man. Shonibare, a British-Nigerian artist, rejects the way in which he is expected to treat popular subjects, such as belonging and identity, and most of all, the self-other binary. Georg Schöllhammer aptly explains the position in the art world in the era of globalization of artists such as Shonibare:

It is primarily the youth, namely the immigrant children of the second or third generation in London, Paris, Los Angeles, New York and other 'global cities who no longer fit into the identity models brought over and whose social positioning 'in-between' must be regarded as a typical phenomenon of our times who have become the darlings of the global exhibition scene. Their identities appear to be built for the needs of the European world-culture exhibition industry: they carry the genetic traits of the ethnic other, clearly bringing the cultural capital of family or social experience of break and continuity, the knowledge of another social or historical construction and a complex network of experiences into their work. The question of to what or for what they belong becomes an existential challenge for them.<sup>74</sup>

Here, Schöllhammer uses the term *glocal* to emphasize the craze of local in global exhibitions. I agree with Schöllhammer's observation on the glocal exhibition scene; however, there are many artists just like Shonibare, who carefully use voice and visibility in such exhibitions to overturn the new type of appropriation of the other in the arena of Eurocentric representation systems. One could argue that the exotic cults of authenticity and the concept of purity of colonial heritage have found their twin terms, like belonging and locality. However, the agency of the local or the other that determines the meaning of those terms in these international exhibitions should not be undermined. Therefore, we should take notice that while some artists participating in international exhibitions explicitly manifest "difference," to better satisfy curators' and the public's expectations

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<sup>74</sup> Schöllhammer, "Art in the Era of Globalization."

of otherness and neo-exoticism, other artists utilize native vocabularies as a strategy to critically engage with their globally recognizable visual languages.

A good example where the global language of contemporary art is negotiated by a native vocabulary was the 7th International Cuenca Biennial, held in Ecuador in 2001 and 2002. For this exhibition, the Biennial, which previously had been dedicated exclusively to painting, broadened its conceptual framework, and incorporated digital photography, video installations, and other forms of digital art as well as sculptures. It was announced as “the Globalization Biennial,” not only because a variety of media were incorporated but also because international artists had been invited to meditate on the trendy topics of globalization. The mixed-media work by Peruvian artists Alfredo Márquez and Angel Valdez, *Caja negra* (black box), was especially striking in the ways in which the artists responded to this call (Figure 1. 2). Their large, baroque canvas was dominated by the image of a trio--white, black, and mestizo men--dressed in Catholic mantels, while an amalgamation of cultural and political elements from pre-colonial and colonial times to the present demonstrated Peru’s imposed process of Christianization and, later, modernization.

The image is unevenly divided into two with dotted marks. The pagan symbols of sun and moon are situated in the parts that are lightened or obscured. On the left, in the lightened part, is the figure of a clergyman who covers his face with the Peruvian flag like a bandit. The rays that emanate from his hand, which look like sunrays, point to a series of nude girl figures with angel wings holding rifles, as well as to what seems to be an indigenous chief whose image is located in the middle. Two other figures of clergy, who wear ski masks on their faces like typical Latin American guerrillas, hold pictures of

regular people, possibly political victims. The bottom of the picture shows headshots of sixteen people, while the top part of the image is a text, which is impossible to decipher. While these artists adopt universal tropes such as “appropriation,” “inclusion,” and “hybridity” to participate in the current discourse of the international art world, their use of these tropes is quite different from their peers in the centers of the art world. While certain universal tropes, themes, and contexts perpetuate the colonialist logic of the globalization discourses, some artists like, Márquez and Valdez, reject participation in the discourse of pluralism and affirm difference for their own, different ends.

While the institutional art world continues to represent and disseminate the language of modern Western ideology, there seem to be gaps in the translation of this language around the globe that local subjects fill in. Gerardo Mosquera, the Cuban art critic and one of the founders of the Havana Biennial, explains this situation in his critique:

Today, more and more identities and contexts concur in the artistic ‘international language’ and in the discussion of current ‘global’ themes. From, and not so much in, is a key word for contemporary cultural practice. All over the world, art is being produced more from particular contexts, cultures and experiences than ‘inside’ them, more from here than there.<sup>75</sup>

When discussing local-global dynamics in the context of biennials and other large-scale global exhibitions, the observation of renowned Turkish curator and the director of the first three Istanbul Biennials, Beral Madra, is worth noting here. Madra says: “Istanbul has two faces: the apparent, which is promoted by the art experts of the global culture industry, and the real, as reflected in locally exhibited artworks and local critical

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<sup>75</sup> Gerardo Mosquera, “Spheres, Cities, Transitions, International Perspectives on Art and Culture,” *Art-e-fact* 4 (2008), accessed April 4, 2010, [http://artefact.mi2.hr/\\_a04/lang\\_en/theory\\_mosquera\\_en.htm](http://artefact.mi2.hr/_a04/lang_en/theory_mosquera_en.htm)

theory.”<sup>76</sup> During the international art biennials, while globalized art world professionals immerse themselves in a superficial review of the local art scene that is already filtered through the local art elite and their professional and political agendas, some local artists make opportunistic use of the global art networks, through the biennial system, to set foot in the global art market. On the other hand, if we look at the reception of the international art biennials at the local level, we notice that not all biennials succeed to limit the realm of art. On the contrary, directly and indirectly, some revitalize the local art scene and open a space for avant-garde art to enter into a complex relationship with local art world(s) and politics and international art world(s) and politics.

One example that testifies to the complex web of the relationship between local art-local politics and international art-international politics is Turkish artist Burak Delier’s 2005 street poster of a girl veiled in the European Union’s flag. Delier, a young artist of the art collective *Reverse Direction* and contributor to the post-anarchist journal *Siyahi*, has engaged in several social projects, with fellow artists and random workers in Istanbul, in which he has attempted to reveal the relationship of the art exhibition to the local art audience and to the layman. This relationship has been criticized often for the determination of the international art world elite to regulate what is to be said or shown, and how in whatever city that the biennial is held. Delier, instead of criticizing the art world in a direct manner, preferred to show that the monologue in which the international art world professionals are engaged is useless because there are many other constellations of dialogue an artwork can trigger once it is visible.

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<sup>76</sup> Beral Madra, “Hot Spot of Global Art: Istanbul’s Contemporary Art Scene and its Sociopolitical and Cultural Conditions and Practices,” *Third Text* 22/1 (2008): 105.

Delier took an irreverent picture of his girlfriend veiled in the European Union's flag and initiated a controversial dialogue among different parties (Figure 1. 3). In the image, the first thing to be noticed is that the girl's eyes are wide-open, expressing shock, awe, fear, or even amusement. Her expression highlights the curiosity of the juxtaposition of the Islamic veil and the European flag even more. Upon taking the photograph, Delier made one thousand posters out of this image and clandestinely plastered them on the walls of Istanbul's streets with his friends. The posters stayed on the walls no more than two days until other people glued advertisements on top of them. However, the reaction of the public was so extensive that every major newspaper made Delier's image headline news. It was immediately splashed over the Internet, and soon the image made its way even to the front page of the *Herald Tribune* and the *Financial Times*. As a result, Delier's work quickly became the most iconic image of 2005 in Europe and Turkey. The artist commented on the political language of the image: "I am not politicizing the commercial language; it is already politicized. I only aim to open holes in this language that suffocates us."<sup>77</sup>

Delier created a hole in the sign of the European Union, put his girlfriend's face through the hole in the flag, and took a picture of it. The flag and the veil, both of which are made of the same material, symbolize different ideologies. Although shocking at first glance, the image contains many layers of meanings that initially are undetermined. In every local context that the image was received, its meaning has changed. For example, for the secularist Kemalists in Turkey, becoming integrated into the European Union could result in more enforced changes in the legal system, which could be a positive

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<sup>77</sup> Erden Kosova, "Burak Delier ile Soylesi : Polis Dayagina Karşı Mont (Interview with Burak Delier: Coat Against Police Beating," *Birgün*, September 30, 2007, 7.

development for Islamists. For an Islamist, on the other hand, the ambiguous look of the eyes of the woman in the image might mean that, once in the European Union, Turkey's options for becoming an Islamic state would be over finally.

The controversy of the image shook the Turkish art scene and attracted the attention of the organizers of the Istanbul Biennial, one of the most exclusive spaces in the international art world. The art world community, which previously had shown no interest in this image in Delier's other works when Delier applied to participate in previous Istanbul Biennials, quickly included him and this image in a sideshow at the 2005 Istanbul Biennial.<sup>78</sup> In the exhibition titled *Free Kick* and curated by another artist, Halil Altindere, Delier disseminated one-thousand copies of the flag image to the visitors of the Istanbul Biennial. Some visitors took the poster to Europe, and it even appeared on the streets of Berlin and Paris subsequently. Some people spat on the poster, some looked at it with awe, some took pictures with it, some drew mustaches on it, some discussed it on the Internet, and some glued advertisements or sprayed graffiti on it.

The controversy of the image was so effective in raising public consciousness of the "threat of rising Islam in Europe" that it was utilized by a European party for propaganda. In 2007, the Austrian right wing party Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs, FPÖ (Freedom Party of Austria), which is a direct descendant of right-wing German groups, used this image, without the permission of the artist, for its electoral campaign under the title, "Soll das unsere Zukunft sein" (Shall this be our future). To a conservative European, following Turkey's acceptance into European Union, the image could signal a warning of further infiltration of the Muslim population into Europe. Another possible

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<sup>78</sup> After first setting foot in the Istanbul Biennial in 2005, Delier got invited to the 2007 and 2009 biennials as well. Author's Interview with Burak Delier Istanbul-Turkey, February 12, 2010.



reading could be on the opposite end of the political spectrum, namely, how the refusal of Turkey's membership to the European Union could drive this Muslim/secular country into the arms of fundamentalists.

As Delier's poster kept traveling from the street to the international biennial and back to the street and to the electoral campaign of a European party, it continued to be conceived in different manners and was used by different agendas. Nevertheless, this is a good example to observe that meaning, discourse, and fate of an artwork could not necessarily be determined with a grip of a particular group or agenda, however strong that grip might be. Delier took an oriental object, the veil, that is both an exotic and political symbol that easily could be fetishized in the global context of the international biennials, but he framed it in a way that generated particular meanings on both local and international levels.

In the cultural industry, media, and art institutions, being global often means being capable of directing events and being accessible to international currents. On the other hand, being local often refers to being isolated and excluded from the mainstream of global life. Thus, this global-local dynamic represents a repetition of the old modernity-traditionalism and center-periphery paradigms. There are also significant attempts in contemporary art that challenge the praxis of power structures without turning into a binary schema reproducing that power. The Chechen Biennial that was inaugurated on February 23, 2005, was one of those examples. Also called the Emergency Biennial this nomadic biennial questioned the authority of the global biennial art shows in establishing rigid local and global paradigms and shifted the attention to the critical commitment of art and the political responsibilities of artists.

In 2005, the Biennial opened simultaneously in various locales in Grozny and in the Palais de Tokyo in Paris. This nonbudget Biennial was made possible with the collaboration of more than sixty local and international artists, who produced traveling art to fit in a suitcase, as well as NGO and human right activists around the world. The Biennial then traveled to Brussels (Matrix Art Project), to Bolzano (EURAC), to Milan (Isola Art Center), to Riga (City Hall Exhibitions Center), to Tallinn (Tallin Art Hall), to Vancouver (Center A), to Puebla, (Plataforma), to Istanbul (Kadikoy Public Education Center), San Francisco (Play Space Gallery, California College of the Arts) and to the last stop in 2008 was Bialystok (Galeria Arsenal) in Poland. In 2009, it finally reached Grozny to become the foundation of an alternative art museum.

The Emergency Biennial, organized by curator Evelyn Jouanno, functioned as a laboratory for artist collaborations around the world. For each city, artists produced works in collaboration with a local curator, and at the end of the exhibition there were more suitcases to be sent to Chechnya. The Emergency Biennial defied all of the conceptions and practices that constitute the relationship of a global biennial to a local artist. It erased the mechanisms of center-periphery as well as global-local by showing the internationalism and collaboration of the artists across localities and temporalities of the biennial exhibition system. The Emergency Biennial also has been significant in showing that the art retains in its character a dialogical component that resists the binary order of things and that the situation of global art and local art is dialectical beyond the confined ideological space of the binaries.

In the late 1980s, glocalization as a term first was used by Japanese businessmen as an expression that merged the two worlds, global and local, in a way to raise

consciousness within the transnational business world about the importance of adapting to local conditions, market needs, and consumer attitudes. The initial use of the term referred to infusing the globalist agenda with a touch of local flavor; hence, within a decade glocalization had come to signify both universalizing and particularizing tendencies at the same time. Since the late 1990s, glocalization has been adopted by ecological, political, and artistic local movements and has become an increasingly popular term in part due to the slogan, “think globally, act locally.”<sup>79</sup> This slogan has captured the attention of an escalating number of multinational marketers, such as McDonald’s and Wal-Mart, that adapt their marketing strategies to local needs and tastes.

In 2008, the term “glocal” first was used in an exhibition that took place in and around Maastrich, near the Netherlands’ borders with Germany and Belgium in order to attract attention to global-local dynamics in contemporary art production. It was titled “Glocal Affairs Where Are You?” and featured one hundred visual artists linked to the Meuse-Rhine Euroregion. The exhibition was spread out over three nations and in various border cities including Maastricht, Heerlen, Roermond, Venlo, and Venray in the Netherlands, Aachen in Germany, and Liège in Belgium, thereby permitting the exhibition to put an equal emphasis on locality and globality.

Most of the artworks featured in the exhibition were site-specific works that expressed reflection of general and universal themes that have been popular in other regional or global exhibitions, such as the search for identity, the complexity of relationships between cultures, as well as the strong inclination of people’s psyches to belong to a specific culture. By covering everyday realities through photography,

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<sup>79</sup> Today, the meaning of this slogan stretches from consuming locally grown produce to supporting local businesses, from urban planning to support for biodiversity, from indigenous movements in far corners of the world that seek international support, to farmers who promote sustainable agriculture techniques.

performances, and interviews, artists thought and produced from their specific local context while they dealt with universal themes and issues. Eric Zoran, editor of the magazine, *Artefact: Strategies of Resistance*, in one of its editions titled *Glocalogue*, offers a bottom-up perspective of the processes of glocalization:

Does this mean that all local cultures should reproduce the Western art system, foster the global art market and indulge global artistic celebrities? No, on the contrary, for what could be at stake is a process of grassroots globalization in the cultural field, and the incorporation and contextualization of a variety of different histories of art. We might argue that the globalization of culture should not be understood merely as homogenization but as the interrelation between cultural homogenization and cultural heterogenization, which is beginning to emerge as one of the key issues of global interaction in our time.<sup>80</sup>

As Zoran suggests, the concept of glocalization enables us to notice the particularization process within the globalization process.

Internationally renowned art curator Hou Hanru and French philosopher and art critic Thierry de Duve argued that global biennials should be considered within the processes of glocalization rather than globalization, because of their ideological as well as spacial positions between the local and the global. Hanru states: “Events like contemporary art biennials, initiated by local authorities to promote the position of locales on the global map, are then global events by nature, while they claim to be locally meaningful and productive in terms of new localities.”<sup>81</sup> De Duve is one of the art historians who treats the term “glocal” as the amalgamation of global and local, warns us for the new fetishization of this term instead of “global art.”

With the proliferation of art biennials, all bearing the names of their hosting cities, the art community—by which I mean both the local art tribes

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<sup>80</sup> Erić Zoran, “Glocalization, Art Exhibitions and the Balkans,” *Third Text* 21/ 2 (2007): 210.

<sup>81</sup> Hou Hanru, “Towards a New Locality: Biennials and Global Art,” in *The Manifesta Decade: Debates on Contemporary Art Exhibitions and Biennials in Post-wall Europe*, ed. Barbara Vanderlinden and Elena Filipovic (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press), 142.

living in the said cities and the sophisticated nomadic art tribe that hops from one biennial to the next—has seemingly turned glocal... Now that all grand narratives, whether classical or avant-garde, have lost their currency, the art community seems to have found a new legitimization in glocal ethics, based on the free and fair trade of cultural goods under the umbrella of art.<sup>82</sup>

Since de Duve wrote this article, a well-received exhibition in Maasricht in 2008, as well as one held in 2010 at the Museum of Modern Art, in New York, and other large-scale exhibitions have been organized around the concept of glocal.

What I argue here is that, the process of glocalization should be viewed not simply as a local appropriation and local resistance to the global-universal, but as the contestation of the two competing forces of neoliberal globalization: consolidation of hegemonic power over the local and the agency of the local in creating alternatives for a different globalization. Even so, the outcome of this dialectical pull is multifaceted and unpredictable.

Indeed, this unpredictable nature of the complex relationships between the local production and reception of art, and the global art world, opens real possibilities for contemporary art to challenge the art system under neoliberal socioeconomic processes and to redefine art's role in these processes. Rather than the overplayed identification of the current condition of the art world actors or artworks as global or glocal, we should consider the praxis that makes up the complex and contradictory relationships between the local and the global.

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<sup>82</sup> Thierry de Duve, "The Glocal and the Singuniversal: Reflections on Art and Culture in the Global World," *Third Text* 21/6 (2007): 683.

## Neoliberalism and the Post-1989 Art World

The fall of the Berlin Wall, in 1989, and the series of other significant political events, including the collapse of the Soviet Union and of authoritarian regimes in South America and the end of apartheid in South Africa, have changed the political composition of the world and marked the beginning of the global domination of neoliberal doctrine in economic and political structures. The year 1989 also was a turning point for the unprecedented growth of contemporary art, not only vertically in art centers, but also horizontally toward the peripheries where international art markets had not been active. For example, the fall of the Eastern Block created an influx of Eastern European and Russian art that changed the landscape of European contemporary art. On the other hand, after the shock of the Tiananmen Square massacre, a new generation of Chinese contemporary artists produced art that challenged Western art criticism and the economic system of distribution. Subsequently, the increased audience and market for institutionalized contemporary art created a proliferation of art biennials and of private museums throughout the world.

Art historian Julian Stallabrass commented: “The global events of 1989 and after—the reunification of Germany, the fragmentation of the Soviet Union, the rise of global trade agreements, the consolidation of trading blocs, and the transformation of China into a partially capitalist economy—changed the character of the art world profoundly.”<sup>83</sup> Simply said, after 1989, art and the culture industry came to have a close relationship, unlike any they ever had had before. This relationship has shifted the vision of the institutional art world away from proud displays of national “high” culture to a

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<sup>83</sup> Julian Stallabrass, *Contemporary Art: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 7.

privileging of the spectacular potential of art exhibitions. Museums, large galleries, and international biennials have become increasingly dependent upon corporate funding to survive, and the institutional art world has become deeply connected to corporate capital in order to organize and manage the new art market system.<sup>84</sup> In the 1990 essay, “Selling the Collection,” Philip Weiss talked explicitly about this shift in the museum context: “To a great extent the museum community’s crisis results from the free-market spirit of the 1980s. The notion of the museum as a guardian of the public patrimony has given way to the museum as a corporate entity with a highly marketable inventory and the desire for growth.”<sup>85</sup>

From 1989 onward, art institutions also expanded vertically in the old centers of art as well as in the new zones. In France alone, more than twenty museums and art centers have been built. The new Museum of Modern Art in New York, the Musée D’Orsay and the Centre Pompidou in Paris, the Tate Modern and Saatchi galleries London, and the Guggenheim Museums in Bilbao and Berlin, and in development in Abu Dhabi, all have a lifespan of only three decades.

In addition to them, within the past decade, the contemporary artistic praxis in the Arab world has flourished in part due to renewed real estate investments and capitalistic ventures. In the Arabian Gulf region, the opening of auction house branches such as Bonham’s, Christie’s (March 2005 in Dubai), and Sotheby’s (its first sale of Modern and Contemporary Arab Art was held in October 2007 in London). The Guggenheim building in Abu Dhabi and the Louvre Museum by famous architects (the former, designed by

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<sup>84</sup> See Julian Stallabrass, *Art Incorporated: The Story of Contemporary Art* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004) and Chin-Tao Wu, *Privatizing Culture: Corporate Art Intervention Since the 1980s* (London and New York: Verso, 2002). However, it is important to emphasize that the institutional art world does not represent the entire production and organization of contemporary art in the world and that there are multiple worlds of art.

<sup>85</sup> Philip Weiss, “Selling the Collection,” *Art in America* 78 (1990): 124-131.

renowned architect Frank Gehry and the latter designed by Jean Nouvel, opening in 2012) attest not only to a growing demand for art works produced by Arab artists but also point to the globalized spread and brand-name appeal of these institutions. In the past few years, other sites of interest and investments in contemporary Arab art also have emerged, such as the establishment of the Arab Museum of Modern Art (Mathaf) in Doha, Qatar (which opened in December 2010 and was designed by architect Jean-François Bodin) and the Museum of Modern Art in Kuwait City. In a region formerly bereft of venues or institutions to support the arts, all of these new museums appear to promote further development of a specific art market and the cultivation of a clientele to support this market.<sup>86</sup>

The boom of art museums and galleries well indicates that, while private capital attracts art for the support systems and strong infrastructure it could create, art attracts investors to the new global cities. Indeed, a dynamic strategy of open-market capitalism has been to use culture and art as resource for local governments to market their respective cities to real-estate investors and global tourism, to corporate businesses seeking good public relations, and to cultural tourists who contribute to the global image of the global city. As a result, linkages between political, social, technological, environmental, and art spheres have been established.

A recent example for this linkage would be Art Basel's business agreement with Davidoff Group in 2012. At the time Hans-Kristian Hoejsgaard, president and CEO of Davidoff Group, explained:

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<sup>86</sup> The art world's interest in contemporary Arab art was augmented after the liberal wings of the "Arab Spring" in 2011. In the summer of 2011, the 53rd Venice Biennial reserved a big room in the Arsenal for Arab art. Until that time, some Arab countries were renting a space in Venice to exhibit as a part of parallel events.



Davidoff and Art Basel is a perfect fit, building on a well-established relationship between two organizations with joint roots in Basel. With historic ties to European markets, both companies have expanded rapidly in the US in recent years, while actively developing new markets around the globe, especially in Asia. Our customers share many common interests with Art Basel's patrons. As we forge closer ties with the world of art, Art Basel is the ideal partner, and we look forward to a long-term collaboration as our brands evolve worldwide.<sup>87</sup>

Art Basel's co-director, Marc Spiegler, responded: "As Art Basel is expanding, we seek partners like Davidoff who are intensifying their engagement with the arts."<sup>88</sup> It is interesting to note that, just before this agreement, The Oettinger Davidoff Group, headquartered in Basel Switzerland, developed the Davidoff Art Initiative in Miami as a part of the company's new public-relations campaign. Davidoff's investment in art not only smartens up its corporate image but also helps it to normalize cigar smoking and even make it fashionable. The company advertised this initiative: "Davidoff Cigars is extending the reach of contemporary art to Davidoff's products and environments worldwide."<sup>89</sup> This merger of art and business benefits both parts that aim to expand their market all over the globe. Through this initiative, Davidoff Company started an artist residency program in La Romana, Dominican Republic, which "seeks to help emerging and mid-career Dominican and Caribbean artists develop their skills, make connections within global artistic networks, earn exposure for their work and share their expertise with others in the region."<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> News release, "Davidoff Announces Major Sponsorship with Art Basel," (2012), accessed August 11, 2013, <http://www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/davidoff-announces-major-sponsorship-with-art-basel-147782555.html>

<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

<sup>89</sup> News release, "Davidoff Cigars, Associate Partner of Art Basel, Announces Three Major Steps for The Davidoff Art Initiative," (2013), accessed August 12, 2013, <http://bluemedium.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/07/Davidoff-Miami-Press-Release.pdf>.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

The first artist of Davidoff's residency program was Cuban-born Dominican artist Quisqueya Henríquez, a 1992 graduate of Instituto Superior de Arte in Havana, who is already a well-recognized global artist and was a participant of Art Basel in Miami in 2008.<sup>91</sup> Henríquez benefited from the Davidoff's residency program in 2013 by creating a series of artwork for the inaugural Davidoff Art Edition. The artist created 50 special collector's editions prints to be sold along with the special edition box of cigars. Her prints show the process of cigar making and its cultural significance in the Dominican Republic. In a recent news release, Davidoff Art Initiative announced: "The artworks created by Quisqueya Henríquez are inspired by her visit to the Davidoff manufacture in Santiago de los Caballeros, Dominican Republic, where she witnessed the exceptional craftsmanship and passion involved in cigar making."<sup>92</sup> Davidoff further announced that collectors and cigar aficionados could find this special edition of cigars and Henríquez's prints at Davidoff's Collectors Lounge during Art Basel in Hong Kong in May 2014. I should note that during Art Basel in Miami in 2013, as an associated partner of Davidoff operated a VIP lounge in the art collector's lounge. In this walk-in humidor, a cigar roller from the Dominican Republic demonstrated "the art of blending and the art of rolling a Davidoff Cigar."<sup>93</sup>

With Henríquez's artworks and the VIP lounges in Art Basel Davidoff romanticized the exploited labor of cigar workers of the Dominican Republic and this romanticization served as an outlet to sell cigars to the global elite in Hong Kong and Miami—adding another dimension to the exploitative mechanism of cigar manufacturing

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<sup>91</sup> The September 2007 issue of *ARTnews* named Henríquez one of twenty-five art world trendsetters.

<sup>92</sup> News release, "Davidoff Cigars."

<sup>93</sup> "One Year after Davidoff Announces Major Steps for the Davidoff Art Initiative," (2013), accessed August 12, 2013, <http://www.acigarsmoker.com/2013/06/12/one-year-after-launch-davidoff-announces-major-steps-for-the-davidoff-art-initiative/>

of the global companies in the Caribbean. On the other hand, this romanticization of cigar labor attracts rich tourists to the Dominican Republic, and the government of the Dominican Republic justifies the promotion of such tourism as a driving force for local economic development—another mechanism of exploitation of natural and human resources that has been worsened by neoliberal globalization.<sup>94</sup> Meanwhile, Hong Kong and Miami secured their position in the league of global cities created by real estate and financial markets, by hosting the world's premier art show, Art Basel, and welcoming the crème de la crème of global cultural tourists. Hence, the Davidoff Cigar example allows one to observe the ways in which neocolonial and neoliberal relations under globalization are integrated and how these mechanisms work interdependently on global and local scales. As seen in this example, culture and art have been instrumentalized as a resource not only to re-legitimize regressive social redistributions but also to conceal the logic and effects of neoliberal globalization.

Circulation of artists, dealers, curators, art works, and information mimic the networking of a global market while maintaining a hierarchical structure.<sup>95</sup> Among many factors are the unprecedented global roles of independent curators as well as the global division of art labor. These are indications that, in the neoliberal era, the art world has adapted the organizational model of the corporate system. In fact, it would not be an exaggeration to state that the art world consummated its marriage to the corporate world

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<sup>94</sup> Tourism services negotiations have been used particularly by the United States and European Union to increase pressure on governments of developing countries to abolish restrictions on foreign ownership and to allow a high degree of self-regulation by transnational corporations in the sector. This resulted in selling or leasing vast areas of land to private investors and allowed a massive unregulated exploitation of natural and human resources for tourism purposes. For more on the subject, see Richard Gehrmann, "Tourism, Exploitation, and Cultural Imperialism: Recent Observations from Indonesia," *Social Alternatives* 13 (1994): 12-26.

<sup>95</sup> Larissa Buchholz and Ulf Wuggenig, "Cultural Globalization between Myth and Reality: The Case of Contemporary Visual Arts," *Art-e-fact* 4 (2005), accessed July 12, 2009, [http://artefact.mi2.hr/\\_a04/lang\\_en/theory\\_buchholz\\_en.htm](http://artefact.mi2.hr/_a04/lang_en/theory_buchholz_en.htm)

not only by the privatization of the art sector and the overwhelming mechanism of private sponsorship but also by using the same technologies and organizing principles employed by corporatism to increase production, marketing, and exchange. Meanwhile art world professionals are being regarded as resourceful and creative entrepreneurs of the new economy that produce intellectual property and innovation, the immaterial labor that the neoliberal economy needs.<sup>96</sup>

When art started to be more dependent on the private forces in the market, mainstream art criticism ceased to be independent of those forces. After the 1980s, the major art magazines available in the United States, such as *Frieze*, *Flash Art*, *Artforum*, and *Art in America*, noticeably favored news releases and public relations-type works to a strong criticism of exhibition making. Very likely this development was mainly because the new private galleries and other private art institutions that boomed in this period financed these magazines. Nevertheless, by the 1990s, curators started filling in the gaps of “critical” art criticism and assumed the responsibility of emphasizing strong points of view. With that shift, the role of the curator changed from being someone “in the team” to a “professional consultant” who dominated the organization of discourses surrounding contemporary art exhibitions. Some artists reacted to this new hierarchy while they continued building careers in the biennial system. Hazel Friedman summarizes the new power of the curator:

In its most dynamic incarnation, curatorial power is about the ability to promote dialogue, to try and scramble the hierarchies, to bring new breath to old bodies. In its vulgar incarnation, curatorial power is about the might of right; right artists; right discourse. Right time, place, and response. It is about the ability to turn yesterday’s artist starving in a garret into the

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<sup>96</sup> Rosalinda Gill and Andy Pratt, “Precarity and Social Work: in the Social Factory?,” *Theory, Culture & Society* 25/7-8 (2008): 3.

brightest star in the art firmament; to condemn one genre to death and transform another into gospel.<sup>97</sup>

As Friedman argues, the curator now also functions as a significant creative agent in his or her own right, actively participating in the development of artists' projects and in the selection of mediating devices employed in the presentation of an exhibition—the exhibition's mode of dialogue with the intended public(s). For that matter, today, the curator must negotiate careful relationships between himself/herself (often representing international currents in the art world) and the local artist/local audience in the geographical location of a biennial or the museum.

Sociologist Pascal Gielen analyzes the current state of contemporary art by referring to Paolo Virno's argument on multitude and post-Fordism, and suggests that the dematerialization of artworks parallels the process of post-Fordization (the neoliberal economy is also called the post-Fordist economy, which emphasizes the transition from material to immaterial labor).<sup>98</sup> In a post-Fordist economy, even the immaterial goods are turned into commodities. Gielen argues:

Design and aesthetics—in other words, external signs and symbols—are major driving forces in today's economy, because they constantly heighten consumer interest. We are all too familiar with this point of view, which has been propagated by countless postmodern psychologists, sociologists and philosophers since the 1970s.<sup>99</sup>

Gielen looks at the proliferation of biennials from the point of social labor and calls this phenomenon "post-Fordization of the museum." In his analysis of the post-1989 art world Gielen concludes: "the museum is infected by the biennial virus."<sup>100</sup> This comment

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<sup>97</sup> Hazel Friedman, "The Curator as God," *Mail and Guardian*, October 9, 1997, accessed October 11, 2011, <http://server.mg.co.za?mg/art/reviews/97oct/9oc-biennale2.html>

<sup>98</sup> See Pascal Gielen, "The Art Scene: An Ideal Production Unit for Economic Exploitation?" *Open!* 17 (2009): 8-17.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>100</sup> Pascal Gielen, "The Biennial: A Post-Institution for Immaterial Labor," *Open!* 16 (2009): 16.

refers to the “increase in temporary exhibitions and an inversely proportional decrease in research into and attention to the collection.”<sup>101</sup> When the exhibition itself is regarded as an artwork, then one who has “the idea” to organize it becomes a quasi-artist—the author of the immateriality of the labor. Hence, when one’s labor is co-modified, the curator, typically working as a global agent, becomes a part of the co-modification of the artworks, as it is the curator’s ideas that utilize the artworks at will. On the other hand, although Gielen’s assumptions hold true for many large-scale exhibitions, the collaborative models for curatorial production contest the conventional notion of the curator. Interdisciplinary roles that now define the curatorial subject, especially in the extension of their activities beyond institutional frameworks, hold true in that there are multiple art worlds: the institutional art world that complies with neoliberal directives and the alternative art worlds that contest the over-arching logic of this relationship.

After the neoliberal restructuring of the economy through growing markets, the international flow of consumer goods has gone hand in hand with the flow of immigrant workers, and art world professionals have accompanied the circulation of artworks among transnational mega exhibitions, museums, and art fairs. The mobilization of art world professionals also has pointed to the emergence of a new, controversial type of “nomad” artist. This nomad artist often lives in one of the urban centers, exhibits in many others, and travels from one international biennial to another in the same way an executive circulates to secure new exhibition deals.<sup>102</sup> This type of artist is far from the genius, outsider, or bohemian figure that we encounter in the history of Western art.<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

<sup>102</sup> For more on the “nomadic art elite” see Carol Becker, “The Romance of Nomadism: A series of Reflections,” *Art Journal* 58 (1999): 22-29.

<sup>103</sup> As we know, the artist’s image changes when his role in society changes. For example, the concept of “genius artist” emerged in the fourteenth century Renaissance, with the rise of humanism, which asserted

The nomad artist promotes him/herself in an in-between existence instead of by proving genius or uniqueness. The way in which this nomad artist relates to the product of the global exhibition culture, which eliminates the artist's dependence on his/her studio, is a question to be explored elsewhere.

In the past two decades, the number of the art biennials has grown significantly. There were approximately ten biennials or triennials in 1989, and today, there are more than hundred, about sixty of which are international mega events.<sup>104</sup> Each year, new biennials are added from the remotest parts of the world, the majority of them sponsored by private corporations. It is not surprising to note that some successful biennials were associated with the emergence of neoliberal political and economic landscapes. The Istanbul Biennial, which was founded after the end of the military dictatorship (1989); Gwangju Biennale in South Korea, which was founded after the democratic revolution (1995); and Manifesta (The European Biennial of Contemporary Art), which emerged after the fall of the Berlin Wall and the recharting of Europe's geography, all indicate the start of the restructuring of the economy according to neoliberal principles. International art biennials have been so popular and so influential in defining and shaping the current condition of institutional art that some analysts refer to this phenomenon as "the biennialization of the art world."<sup>105</sup>

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an individual's worth and emphasized knowledge. In the nineteenth century, bourgeois attitudes developed at the same time as the rise of the bourgeoisie, and artists saw themselves as self-made unique individuals. The twentieth century artist as an "outsider" figure prevails along with the concepts of alienation in the visual arts and continues until the 1970s.

<sup>104</sup> Figures cited are from the website, [universes-in-universe.org](http://universes-in-universe.org)—a site dedicated to visual arts from Africa, Asia, the Americas, and international art biennials; accessed December 12, 2011, <http://www.universes-in-universe.org>

<sup>105</sup> The concept of "biennialization" was formulated by Gerard Haupt, in Berlin in the late 1990s, to refer to the phenomenon that achieved its peak force during the 1990s and consisted of the multiplication of contemporary art biennials in the world's large and small urban capitals. See Buchholz and Wuggenig, "Cultural Globalization between Myth and Reality."

International curator Dan Cameron describes the difference between a biennial exhibition and museum, gallery or public exhibitions:

...Of course, organizing a biennial for City X because its civic leaders want to draw favorable attention to their home is also not a disinterested rationale, but it isn't quite the same as a museum or public space presenting an exhibition of so-called 'cutting edge' art, in which every object on view has already passed through the hands of a blue-chip dealer. However, if through a biennial you can upload the principle that the world's art belongs together naturally, to be experienced on a regular basis by a broad cross-section of society, then you are also giving a solid form to a vision that only the biennial, and by implication its curator, can provide.<sup>106</sup>

As Cameron points out, the idea of global art is inherently a part of the biennial phenomenon and the idea and vision of a biennial is often in the hands of an international star curator. This "biennialization" process has been associated with the dictatorship of the curator and has also been criticized for producing extremely standardized exhibitions that no longer can harbor a level of intimacy among artworks, artists and discourses—a claim underlined by the fact that the artists and curators are generally the same ones traveling from one biennial to the other.<sup>107</sup> During the opening days of these biennials, while the art world professionals immerse themselves in a superficial review of the local art scene that is already filtered through the local art elite and their professional and political

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<sup>106</sup> Dan Cameron, "Interview," in *Time Present Time Past: Highlights from 20 Years of the International Istanbul Biennial*, Exhibition Catalogue (Istanbul: Istanbul Modern, 2007), 272.

<sup>107</sup> Lately, the ideological fortress of the art world, the biennial, has been going through serious changes. The prime example is Manifesta 6, which was organized in Italy in 2008 by a group of international curators: Mai Abu El Dahab, Anton Vidokle, and Florian Waldvogel. This format contested the static nature of the grand exhibition model, displacing the emphasis from the object to experience, and from discursive to pedagogical tactics. The Berlin Biennials since 2008, and the Istanbul Biennials in 2009 and 2011, also abandoned the large-scale exhibition format; they used multiple venues and sought to create a more intimate relationship between the artworks and the local public. The Brussels Biennial, which opened in November 2008, turned the mirror to face the biennial structure itself. With its exhibition, lectures, and publication *Open*, this Biennial dealt with the theme, "Biennial Phenomenon: Strategies in Neo-Political Times," and raised the critical question: Is it too late for biennials to really represent an alternative political voice?



agendas, some local artists make opportunistic use of global art networks by exploiting the biennial system to set foot in the global art market.

In the 1990s' climate of multiculturalism, optimistic observers regarded the biennialization of contemporary art as an emergent space for the redistribution of cultural power, especially in the non-Western world. After the millenium, observers have recognized the new phenomenon of art biennials as a continuation of the nineteenth century world exhibitions, where neo-colonial profits were subtly calculated and used as a tool for the globalist system of neoliberal expansion—a new form of hegemony and recolonization by the West.<sup>108</sup> The latter view suggests that, although peripheral biennials promised to end the hegemony of the United States and Europe in art, the contemporary art circulating the globe in the biennials still is judged by the international art world, based on institutional (i.e. Western) art standards, and creates standardization of postmodernist pluralism. Thus, the alternative spaces biennials might offer lose their credibility and any decentralizing effect, as Rasheed Areen, the founder and editor in chief of the journal *Third World*, has noted:

The recent globalization of capitalist economy, still dominated and controlled by the West, has attained a new power and confidence, which is now being translated through the globalization of world cultures. This has created a new space and job opportunities for the neo-colonial collaborators, and with this has emerged a group of ethnic or multicultural functionaries, in the form of writers-cum-curators from different parts of the Third World. With the rhetoric of exclusion on their tongues and an appeal to liberal conscience of Western society, these new functionaries of the system drag anyone and everyone, so long as they belong to their own ethnic or national groups, to the art market of the West. We thus have Chinese, Africans, Latin Americas, etc., promoting their Chinese (which

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<sup>108</sup> Two important anthologies of criticism of biennials bring together different perspectives on this phenomenon. See Barbara Vanderlinden and Elena Filipovic, eds., *Manifesta Decade* and Marieke van Hal, Solveig Ovstebo and Elena Filipovic, eds., *The Biennial Reader: An Anthology on Large-Scale Perennial Exhibitions of Contemporary Art* (Bergen: Bergen Kunsthall, Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2010). Also see Philip Auslander, "The Biennale and Its Discontents," *PAJ: A Journal of Performance and Art* 76/26 (2004): 51-57.

could include Southeast Asians), African and Latin American artists respectively. As for history or ideology, they are no longer needed.<sup>109</sup>

Areen sums up the contradiction in the art world very well. Just as the recent globalization of capitalist economy marginalizes nonwestern economies, the recent globalization of art under new liberalism cannot effectively address the ongoing structural marginalization of nonwestern artists. It is even complicit with it because, while the rhetoric of inclusion serves well the logic and philosophy of the liberal market, it does not ensure the representation of oppressed groups.

While the intellectual crisis surrounding identity politics continues to mark its importance to contemporary political philosophy and practice, the selection of artworks included in biennial exhibitions still has a lot to do with the art's (or the artist's) controversial character, capacity for igniting heated debates, and exchange value. For example, although tens of thousands of visual tactics and images have been employed around a variety of political protests around the world, only a handful of images that proved "marketable" attracted the attention of the art world, and those that did were almost immediately inserted into the biennial discourse.<sup>110</sup> A good example is Richard Serra's lithography poster of a thick, paint-stick silhouette of a hooded Abu Ghraib prisoner, with the text "STOP BUSH."

Serra's lithograph was produced to be carried in street demonstrations against U.S. policies in Iraq, and was distributed freely over the World Wide Web (Figure 1.4). The image shows a black figure wearing a Ku Klux Klan hat and with his hands open as if to

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<sup>109</sup> Rasheed Areen, "Beyond Postcolonial Cultural Theory," in *The Third Text Reader: On Art, Culture, and Theory*, eds., Rasheed Araeen, Sean Cubitt, and Ziauddin Sardar (London: Continuum, 2002), 342-343.

<sup>110</sup> The photograph showing a protestor in a cloud of gas, carrying a mask, and throwing a stone was on the cover of the 2009 Tirana Biennial's catalog. In 2009, as well as in 2011, the Venice Biennale was inundated with artworks that looked like political protest posters. For more on this, see Chapter 2 of this dissertation.

say, “I am not resisting.” What is haunting about the image is the reversal of the roles of the victim and the oppressor: the image of a tortured Abu Ghraib prisoner is transformed into that of a violent xenophobic. This kind of reversal creates unexpected and continuous leaps in a person’s psyche between the image of the oppressor and of the oppressed. After this simple but haunting drawing became popular on the Internet, in an excellent commercial maneuver, the art world made Serra’s work widely known through a poster advertising the Whitney Biennial in 2008. Serra’s lithography was included in the Biennial but with a slight alteration: The text said “STOP B S,” and 250 copies were sold on the Internet for \$2,500 each to attract attention to the biennial. Serra’s work is one of many examples of artworks that are made for the streets but get caught up in biennials’ fetishism of controversial political art.

The Whitney Biennial is one of the most criticized biennials after the Venice Biennale. A day before the opening day of the 2012 edition, a group called Arts & Labor (a workers group founded in conjunction with the New York General Assembly for Occupy Wall Street) protested and asked for an end to the Whitney Biennial in 2014.<sup>111</sup> Their criticism of the Whitney Museum and its Biennial targeted corporate hegemony in art institutions and stressed the exploitative art labor relations on the local level in a written statement:

We object to the Biennial in its current form because it upholds a system that benefits collectors, trustees, and corporations at the expense of art workers. The Biennial perpetuates the myth that art functions like other professional careers and that selection and participation in the exhibition, for which artists themselves are not compensated, will secure a sustainable vocation...The Whitney Museum, with its system of wealthy trustees and ties to the real estate industry perpetuates a model in which culture

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<sup>111</sup> Maura Judkis, “Occupy Calles and End to Whitney Biennial,” *The Washington Post*, February 28, 2012, accessed 25 March 2012, [http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/style-blog/post/occupy-calls-for-end-of-whitney-biennial/2012/02/28/gIQA55KEgR\\_blog.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/style-blog/post/occupy-calls-for-end-of-whitney-biennial/2012/02/28/gIQA55KEgR_blog.html)

enhances the city and benefits the 1% of our society while driving others into financial distress. This is embodied both in the biennial's sponsorship—represented most egregiously in its sponsorship by Sotheby's, which has locked out its unionized art handlers—and the museum's imminent move to the Meat Packing District, a neighborhood where artists once lived and worked which is now a gentrified tourist destination that serves the interests of the real estate industry.<sup>112</sup>

Arts & Labor's sound criticism on exploitative labor relations is shared by many artists and activists who try to carve themselves a place within and without the art institutions.

On the other hand, art historians and art critics, who often are critical of corporate influence in arts, look at neoliberal globalization as an overarching development that has changed economic and institutional relations in the art world everywhere. Chin-Tao Wu, an art historian and curator, has written in detail on the increasing privatization of art institutions and the involvement of corporations in the circulation and exhibition of art and in the art market. In her meticulous study, *Privatizing Culture: Corporate Art Intervention Since the 1980s*, Wu demonstrates the economic and ideological interests that lay at the root of American art institutions that are run by a handful of influential national elite on their boards, such as the Guggenheim Museums and The Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.<sup>113</sup> Art historian Charlotte Bydler, in her 2004 dissertation, *Global Art World Inc: On the Globalization of Contemporary Art*, explained that the migration of international art labor is on a south-north axis, just as are the majority of worker-immigrants. Hence, cosmopolitan art labor traveling from one biennial to the other has been given privileges that are not reachable for immigrants.<sup>114</sup> That same year, art historian and curator Julian Stallabrass launched his book, *Art Incorporated: The Story of*

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<sup>112</sup> For full text see Appendix III, "Letter Sent to the Whitney Biennale 2012 by OWS Arts & Labor Committee," 299-300.

<sup>113</sup> See Wu, *Privatizing Culture*.

<sup>114</sup> For a discussion of the art world system as a labor market, see Bydler, *The Global ArtWorld Inc*.

*Contemporary Art*, which shows that contemporary art has become increasingly linked with corporate capital, especially in the international biennial system.<sup>115</sup> However, Stallabrass assumes that neoliberal processes are homogenous—affecting all the globe evenly—and argues that all biennials are subsumed by the logic of neoliberalism and the same processes of neoliberal globalization.<sup>116</sup>

While it is crucial to acknowledge that the biennial as an institution sits on an interlocked relationship of corporate and artistic spheres, a critique of the relationship of contemporary art and globalization should take into account multiple discontinuities and contradictions flowing from this relationship and the biennial institution. In a dialectical approach, Craven warns us about the one-sided view of biennials and taking on the phenomenon as a homogenous system of institutional relations:

In fact, biennials, which never simply ‘reflect’ neoliberalism or globalization, are densely mediated institutions even as the terms of this mediation are quite diverse, depending on the nation at issue and the regional history under consideration, as well as contestation. As a group, the international biennials are multidirectional entities that embody contested meanings, which oscillate between colonialism and/or neocolonialism versus anti-colonialism, on the one hand, and nationalism and/or transnationalism versus internationalism, on the other hand. Consequently, it is simply an ahistorical assertion to write that ‘extraordinary proliferation of biennials is driven by the same forces,’ no matter on which continent they occur or in relation to which set of regional tensions.<sup>117</sup>

Art biennials are also criticized for standardizing contemporary art around the world to have a common use of medium—often video art, film, photography, and Internet art—the kind of art forms that are mechanically or electronically reproducible. These art forms express and emphasize an important aspect of neoliberalization: the enlargement of

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<sup>115</sup> See Stallabrass, *Art Incorporated*.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid, 4-5.

<sup>117</sup> Craven, “Institutionalized Globalization,” 493.

communication and networks. Although this is largely the case in Western biennials, for biennials of other geographies, where high-end technology is still for the privileged few, such generalization is invalid. Such criticism pointed to the spectacular character of the biennials and deemed artworks such as sound installations, large on site-installations, talking billboards, and interactive computer works, as “biennial art.”<sup>118</sup>

In 1999, Peter Schjeldahl, the art critic at the *New Yorker*, coined the term “festivalism” in to refer to the nonsalable art circulating the biennials that is celebrated for its spectacular potential.<sup>119</sup> Schjeldahl described the term as “the new order of universal frazzlement” overtaking biennials around the globe.<sup>120</sup> He argued that this type of art was spectacular and pointless, “heavy on information but resistant to contemplation.”<sup>121</sup> He also called this new order “global rationalization of the art game, whereby one kind of artist stays in the studio while another becomes familiar with many airports.”<sup>122</sup> Schjeldahl wrote:

I call it festivalism that has long been developing on the planetary circuit of more than fifty biennials and triennials, including the recent Whitney Biennial. Mixing entertainment and soft-core politics, festivalism makes an aesthetic of crowd control. It favors works that do not demand contemplation but invite, in passing, consumption of interesting—just not too interesting--spectacles.<sup>123</sup>

Here, Schjeldahl’s term “festivalism” generalizes all the biennials and emphasizes their spectacular potential. In fact, festival and spectacle are two different concepts and

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<sup>118</sup> Noël Carrol, “Art and Globalization: Then and Now,” *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 65 (2007): 131-143.

<sup>119</sup> Peter Schjeldahl, “Festivalism,” *The New Yorker*, July 5, 1999, 85.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid.

<sup>123</sup> Peter Schjeldahl, “The Global Salon,” *The New Yorker*, July 01, 2002, 79.

practices.<sup>124</sup> Festivals may contain elements of spectacularization—such as film festivals and art festivals—or they may retain elements of carnival such, as rave music festivals and community festivals.

I propose a critical application of Guy Debord's theory of spectacle and Bakhtin's perspective of carnival to analyze the interplay of spectacle and carnival on the global stage of international biennials.<sup>125</sup> I look at biennials from neither the perspective of the carnival, which points to experimental, democratic and transformative character, nor the perspective of spectacle, which is the control mechanism used by biennials to control public discourse to the benefit of corporations and local actors who seek to implement neoliberal doctrines. Those perspectives have very valid points, but they do not grasp the situation coherently and adequately because they look at only one side of the relation between biennials and neoliberalism. I situate my view within the framework of "festival," which is a concept that embodies a synthesis of the dialectical relationship between carnival and spectacle.

The biennials as art festivals often provoke contemporary art's potential as a spectacle rather than being an exhibition for a set of contemplative objects, on the other hand, they produce an environment of carnival that allows subversive and plural voices to confuse, surprise, and shock the audiences. In sum, carnival is expressive while spectacle is instrumental, and a festival of art can uphold both.<sup>126</sup>

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<sup>124</sup> David M. Boje, "Carnavalesque Resistance to Global Spectacle: A Critical Postmodern Theory of Public Administration," *Administrative Theory & Praxis* 23 (2001): 431-458.

<sup>125</sup> For theorization of carnival and society see Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World* and for theorization of spectacle and society see Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (New York: Zone Books, 1994).

<sup>126</sup> Carnival's principles are diversity, creativity, decentralization, horizontality, subversion and direct action, whereas the principles of the spectacle are appearances, conformism, consumerism, pacifism and hierarchy. Participants in carnival have direct bodily relationship with each other, on the other hand spectators have a relationship with each other mediated through images.

## **The Venice Biennale and the Havana Biennial: The Centripetal and Centrifugal Forces in the Institutional Art**

Much of institutional art production today is not predicated on notions of objecthood but rather on investigating the relationships between a particular art production and the globality of its context. Along these lines, international art biennials have been criticized for being ideological fortresses of the art world and creating standardized exhibition systems on one hand, and on the other, have been praised for being hubs of “global art.” However, the issue of the international biennial in the rapidly globalizing world under neoliberalism is more complex.

The institutional art world is not homogenous—neither globally nor nationally. The practices of contemporary art are as uneven and internally incoherent within the art world system as much as outside of it. For example, we cannot put the Ushuaia Biennial, Venice Biennale, Havana Biennial, or the Tirana Biennial on the same scale because their scale, audience, and ideological concerns are not the same. In this section, I argue that some peripheral biennials, such as the Havana Biennial, act as a centrifugal force that produces a multiplicity of spin-offs from the totalizing art discourse, while the Venice Biennale, organized for more than a century, acts as a centripetal force pushing peripheral exhibitions and discourses toward standardization and conformism.<sup>127</sup> I argue that the Havana Biennial performs in opposition to mainstream biennials, such as the Venice Biennale, which often positions the art of the global South or that of the minorities of Europe as a space for a new exoticism. Havana creates, maintains, and supports a third-worldism that, most of all, opens a possible crossroads for the engaged critique and

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<sup>127</sup> For more commentary on Bakhtin’s dialogical concept of two conflicting forces, see Renate Lachman, “Bakhtin and Carnival: Culture as Counter-Culture,” trans. Raoul Eshelman, and Marc Davis, *Cultural Critique* 11 (1988-89): 115-152.



practical struggles. The Havana Biennial consciously adds elements of carnival in its performances by means of neighborhood initiatives and by its careful use of public spaces, while at times yielding to a certain spectacularism that satisfies the cultural tourists flooding to Havana. The Venice Biennale also incorporates radical and subversive voices, but those are often overwhelmed by the grand spectacle of the event itself. Finally, the Venice and Havana Biennials are also great examples of art biennials that have created spaces and opportunities for various global and local forces to compete and contest. These examples are important for understanding that neoliberalism is a highly contested world order, and precisely because of that, they present opportunities for alternative formations.

Every two years, renowned art critics, art writers, museum directors, gallerists, and auction house owners make a pilgrimage to Venice. During the opening days of the Biennale, this privileged art crowd dines at the same restaurants, runs from one opening to another, and meets at the same rooftop bars of their luxurious hotels to discuss what is new, which curator or artist was rather lame or exciting, and plans to meet in the another upcoming biennial somewhere.<sup>128</sup>

The Venice Biennale is known as “the mother biennial” for being the oldest, largest, and the most influential in the art market. Every other year, the crème de la crème of the institutional art world see hundreds of works in single day in the national pavilions of the Giardini (a six thousand-square meter park), in the Arsenale, a huge former ship production complex, and in dozens of other spots scattered around the city. What’s expected from these art professionals is to take the pulse of contemporary art production

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<sup>128</sup> These notes are from my own observations as well as from the observations of sociologist Sarah Thornton. For more, see Sarah Thornton, *Seven Days in the Art World* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 2008).

around the world and to “make sense” of their rapid consumption of the artworks when they return to their offices in New York, London, Paris, Cologne, and Milan. The institutional expectation, to capture the spirit of art from all over the world that has been selected and judged by a few art elite, is unrealistic.<sup>129</sup>

Most of the national pavilions are sponsored by private institutions, and most of the artists are put forward by dealers and curators who have, directly or indirectly, a financial interest in seeing their work on display.<sup>130</sup> *Chicago Sun-Times* writer Margaret Hawkins describes the atmosphere very well:

Imagine an amusement park of ideas where people stand in line for attractions dreamt up by artists to assault the senses and dazzle the mind. Imagine an Olympics of contemporary art, a World’s Fair of galleries where a dozen languages can be heard in an hour. Then drop that into the elegant ruin of Venice, city of Titian and Marco Polo, canals and gondolas, and you can only begin to imagine the Venice Biennale.<sup>131</sup>

The Venice Biennale attracts approximately one million visitors every two years, hence remaining a tourist destination. It is quite notable that while other biennials are making great efforts to engage with local citizens and locatable audiences, Venice remains for professionals—for cataloguing, marketing, and prestige. Nonetheless, within the bedazzlement of the Mother Biennial, some exhibitions seek to make a mark in the international landscape of art. In the 52nd Venice Biennale of 2007, the Biennial’s theme was *Think with the Senses Feel with the Mind: Art in the Present Tense*. In addition to the Italian Pavilion in the *Giardini* (biennial gardens), African Pavilion, which was incorporated that year in the *Arsenale*, and the Latin American Pavilion in the city center, the Biennale featured another transnational exhibition, but this time, it was an ethnic

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<sup>129</sup> Ibid, 42.

<sup>130</sup> Roundtable, “Global Tendencies: Globalism and the Large-Scale Exhibition,” *Artforum* (2003): 154-161.

<sup>131</sup> Margret Hawkins, “Carnival of Art,” *Chicago Sun-times*, June 18, 2003, 21.

collective: the Roma Pavilion. The pavilion uses a politically correct term, “Roma,” the plural for “Rom,” to represent the Romanese-speaking populations, which are traditionally also known as Gypsies across Central and Eastern Europe (CEE).

The sudden interest of the organizers of the biggest international art exhibition in the contemporary cultural production of the Roma population reveals the political and economic interests underlining such international mega art shows. Rather than the consequence of a sudden and spontaneous humanitarian interest, post-1989 political and economic developments spurred governmental and nongovernmental entities to get involved in Romany representation. It was the continuation of a complex set of political, economic, and discursive relations marked by the collapse of state socialism and European Union expansion that was part of the ongoing liberalization and democratization of Central and Eastern European countries.

Since 1989, an improved situation for the Roma has become a key condition for the entry of CEE countries into the European Union. New political interests that focus on this particular ethnic group have started growing as a result, and the rhetoric of “Roma inclusion” in these states, which had politically and socially excluded the Roma for centuries, has taken a different turn.<sup>132</sup> It is therefore not surprising that, for the past decade, research foundations and the academic community have become very interested in “the Roma problem” alongside along state institutions, international organizations, and human rights groups. The fact that the international art world had not previously paid attention to Romany artists, and no Roma had yet represented his or her home country in

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<sup>132</sup> The European Union’s expansion has added approximately one and half million Roma to the EU population; the accession of Romania and Bulgaria in 2007 added another three million. However, there are only two Roma members in the European Parliament. In 1999, the accession partnerships for Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Romania, and Slovakia in the European Union specified “Roma integration” as a priority.

the Venice Biennale, reveals the difference between the politically correct rhetoric of Roma “inclusion” and the actual realization of this rhetoric.<sup>133</sup>

The Roma Pavilion’s main sponsor was the *Open Society Institute*, which is a Budapest-based international NGO (non-governmental organization) that is a part of the U.S.-based Soros Foundations network.<sup>134</sup> Other financial sponsors were the Alliance Cultural Foundation, based in Munich, and the European Cultural Foundation, based in Amsterdam.<sup>135</sup> George Soros, the global financier and philanthropist, is also the founder and chairperson of the Open Society Institute and the Soros Centers of Contemporary Arts (SCCA). Within this socio-political context, the Roma Pavilion presented itself with an immediate question: Was this blockbuster representation a part of the institutional creativity aimed at the socio-political integration of the former communist Europe into the global economic circuits?

I argue that the overexposed bohemian and transient Romany identity fed multicultural discourse in the EU and in international art institutions rather than offer an

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<sup>133</sup> The international art community has been rather late to respond to the cultural productions of the Romany peoples across Europe and thus is quite ignorant of the historical developments in Romany art since May 1979, when the first Romany Group exhibition, organized by the Institute of Hungarian Culture, opened in Hungary. Since then, Romany artists have succeeded in carving themselves a space in European art institutions. The Museum of Roma culture opened in 1999 in Brno, in the Czech Republic, with a permanent exhibition. An exhibition dedicated to Romany experience in World War II was called “Hidden Holocaust” and took place in the Mucsarnok/Kunsthalle Budapest, which opened in March 2004. Another one was a traveling exhibition titled “We are what we are: Aspects of Roma Life in Contemporary Art.” It first opened in 2004 in the Minoriten Galerie, Graz, Austria, and traveled to CEE countries in 2006. In May 2005, *North and South Lab*, in Vienna, and Camden Art Center, in London, organized an exhibition that included Roma artists. Omara, one of the artists in the pavilion, also participated at the Rijeka Arts Biennial. Three other artists, Daniel Baker, Damien Le Bas, and Delaine Le Bas, have widely exhibited in England.

<sup>134</sup> “Soros foundations are autonomous institutions established in particular countries or regions to initiate and support open society activities.” Soros Foundation website, accessed October 22, 2010, <http://www.soros.org/about>.<sup>135</sup> “The Allianz Cultural Foundation was established in summer 2000 by the former Allianz AG, now Allianz SE as a public and legally autonomous foundation with an initial capital of fifty million euros...” The Allianz Cultural Foundation Website, accessed October 25, 2010, [http://www.allianzkulturstiftung.de/allianz\\_en/stiftung.htm](http://www.allianzkulturstiftung.de/allianz_en/stiftung.htm)

<sup>135</sup> “The Allianz Cultural Foundation was established in summer 2000 by the former Allianz AG, now Allianz SE as a public and legally autonomous foundation with an initial capital of fifty million euros...” The Allianz Cultural Foundation Website, accessed October 25, 2010, [http://www.allianzkulturstiftung.de/allianz\\_en/stiftung.htm](http://www.allianzkulturstiftung.de/allianz_en/stiftung.htm)

alternative view for equality of representation for minorities. Following the policies of the project called “Decade of Roma Inclusion 2005-2015,” the Roma Pavilion in Venice was curated around identity discourse. The exhibition organizers intended to counter romantic stereotypes and misconceptions about the Romany culture in the effort to produce a constructive reconstruction and representation of Romany identity.

Overall, the exhibition represented stereotypes in an ironic manner. At times the Romany identity was essentialized as “the other”—running against the rhetoric of “inclusion”—and other times, offered a new exotic territory for the art world. The problem is best pronounced by Gottfried Wagner’s question in the exhibition catalogue: “Are we creating an ethicizing, socially motivated ‘special case’ sponsored by philanthropy, in the hybrid environment of the art establishment?”<sup>136</sup> To give an example, Szentandrassy István’s paintings, presented in a small and poorly lit room behind thick, red-velvet curtains, strongly reinforced Romany stereotypes. Szentandrassy is a student of János Balázs, whose works are regarded as the quintessence of Roma painting. The exotic and mysterious figures and wild horses depicted in vivid colours with high-contrast light were literally the embodiments of the Romany stereotype in nineteenth century art and literature (Figure 1.5). Szentandrassy’s paintings presented the Roma as a-historical subjects living in a dreamlike world that appealed very much to the Orientalist gaze, which fosters the idea that marginal populations live a life of fantasy away from modern-day material realities.

All of the agents involved with the Roma pavilion—cultured Gypsy elites, the Soros foundations, and the Venice Biennale organizations—had their own agendas. It has

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<sup>136</sup> Gottfried Wagner, “The Roma Pavilion in Venice: A Bold Beginning.” In *Exhibition Catalogue: Paradise Lost*, ed. Timea Junghaus and Katalin Székely (Open Society Institute, Budapest, 2007), 36.

been argued extensively that international biennials, which proliferated after 1989, have been linked intrinsically with corporations that are interested in specific cultures, and often have exhibited those aspects of each culture that open up ways to their consumption. On the other hand, the cultural products of ethnic minorities have been pushed into international art markets that in turn gain credibility in relation to certain political and cultural institutions behind the biennial exhibitions. As seen in the Roma exhibition, the politics of inclusion is embedded in contradiction: In spite of the diversity of the Roma population, which is characterized by multiculturalism and multi-territoriality, Romany intelligentsia formed their activism within the project of “ethno-identity.” This political framework supports the efforts of the “Decade of Roma Inclusion 2005-2015” founded by the Open Society Institute of the Soros foundations, the World Bank, and the European Commission, which also are the same financial supporters of contemporary Roma art in the international scene across Europe.

This exhibition space, created by the Romany intellectuals and sponsored by the Soros Foundation, existed in a delicate zone between the politics of inclusion of Roma as the cheap workforce of Europe and Roma nationalism. Nevertheless, the alarming issue that this exhibition made visible was that Roma nationalism has been sustained primarily at an élite level that hinders democratic participation of the rest of the Roma people. The danger of this identity politics of the Romany élites lies in its appeal more to the CEE nationalists, who believe that Roma is a distinctively alien population, than to the diverse Roma communities with different socio-political needs, capabilities, and interests. Moreover, the promotion of difference above the rhetoric of a distinct nation has been used as a cheaper alternative to material equalization of Roma’s economic conditions. It

provides the basis for the ideological, political, and institutional dislocation of Roma minorities from the majority population of the European Union nation, thus freeing their governments from the costly part of their citizenship.

It seemed to me that rather than giving international visibility to the Romany artists and the socio-political situation of the Roma in Europe, the exhibition aimed at satisfying the expectation of the Venice public in respect to Gypsy art. For examples, in the paintings of Gabi Jimenez and Kiba Lumberg, Damian Le Bas's cartoonish maps, Nihad Nino Pusija's photographs, and Delaine Le Bas's installations, decorativeness, naiveté, and kitsch were exaggerated to the degree that it masked social commentary. On the other hand, works such as András Kállai's sculpture *Fat Barbie* (2006), Dusan Ristic's installation titled *Global Warming* (2007), André Jenő Raatzsch's mixed-media work *Sommersault* (2005), and Mihaela Ionela Cimpeanu's large-scale sculpture *Wings* (2007) adopted a universal contemporary visual language, thus making no reference to Romany culture stylistically or conceptually. Overall, the artworks lacked a historical grounding in social issues; it appeared that they could have been made in any period of post-modernism. For example, none of them make any reference to the Communist past of the Roma or comment on historical positions during the post-communist era. The works chosen transmitted the idea that the Roma people are, on one hand, different and exotic, and on the other hand are modern and open to cultural assimilation.

If the display of Roma art seeking equality in representation had been at stake, instead of an exhibition that stimulated the Orientalist gaze for the undiscovered culture of the uncultured, the organizers could have created an alternative setting to the biennial model in Budapest, where the curator of the exhibition, as well as the sponsoring

exhibition, resides. In 2003, the Roma community in Hungary erected a space of representation symbolically called the “Hungarian Roma Parliament.” The place functions as a cultural and community center. Varieties of cultural programs and facilities are available, such as a theater stage, a Roma painter’s gallery, concert series, a film club, language courses, and a playhouse for children. Some 100 works of art on the walls of this space belonged to Hungarian Roma artists, including some who had no formal education beyond grade school. Most of the artists lived in poverty and had no steady income.

The artists participating in this cultural and political public organization produce visual works that engage with their community in a direct and dialogical way, in order to raise consciousness of the reasons for their social exclusion. Attention to this space, instead of the directions chosen for the Venice Biennale, could have presented an opportunity to establish systematic and effective social inclusion of the Roma population as an alternative to its self-ethnicization that feeds nationalist and conservative politics. The dissident voice of Roma/Gypsy existence has much to offer to other counter-hegemonic formulations in Europe and the rest of the world. Indeed, many lessons can be learned from Roma and their historical opposition to the structures of European domination and the systems of capitalist modernity. The Roma Pavilion, without a doubt, boosted self-confidence among the Roma and partially achieved its goal to dip Romany artists’ feet in the international art circuits. From here on, would the Romany artists take the challenge to overcome their systematic disqualifications from broader cultural and political representations, both in the art sphere and in the political sphere?



In contrast to the Venice Biennale, which positions the art of the global south and/or the minorities of Europe as a type of new exoticism, as exemplified by the Roma pavilion in the 52nd edition, the Havana Biennial creates, maintains, and supports a dialogical platform that opens possible avenues for engaged social critique.<sup>137</sup> The Havana Biennial plays a big role in Cuba's search to resolve the complex relationship between local cultural expressions and international languages, especially with issues pertaining to the hegemonic biennial "model" that boomed in every corner of the world.<sup>138</sup>

During the economic crisis of the 1990s, an important part of the cultural policy of Fidel Castro's government was to promote cultural tourism and the creation of wealth through cultural production. Since then, just like the Venice Biennale, the Havana Biennial has been one of the instruments for the capitalization of culture and tourism, the two axes that have supported the Cuban economy during the past two decades. Nevertheless, the opening of the Cuban art market to the world has created a class division among Cuban artists and has shifted the Havana Biennial toward the promotion of Cuban art internationally as an integral part of the new Cuban economy. Yet, I argue that the Havana Biennial rests on a complex set of relationships with the international art world, the local art market, and the Cuban government.

The biennial system arose from the culture of the international capitalist system, and Cuba's role in the international arena has largely involved influencing the culture of revolutionary societies. Although, over three decades, a tension between these two

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<sup>137</sup> For more on the Roma Pavilion in the 52nd Venice Biennial, see Tijen Tunali, "The Politics of 'Roma Inclusion' at the 52nd Venice Art Biennale," *Studia Politica: Romanian Political Science Review* XI, *Special Issue: Art and Politics in (Post) Communism* (2011): 701-711.

<sup>138</sup> For more, see Luiz Caminitzer, "Between Nationalism and Internationalism," in *Signs of Tradition: 80's Art from Cuba*, Exhibition Catalogue (New York: Museum of Contemporary Hispanic Art, 1988).

polarities has existed in its curatorial and exhibition structure, the Havana Biennial has been viewed as a key space of contestation between the international art system, largely embedded in corporate funding, and local pressures that push the Cuban art community to open up to international markets.

Since its launch in 1984, the Havana Biennial has acted as a buffer zone between local art institutions and the international art market: While acknowledging the powerful hand of international markets, it has supported and guarded local art interests. Because of the direct engagement of the state with cultural productions in Cuba, through cultural policies and institutions, the Havana Biennial depends on other art institutions, as is the case of other biennials that are privately sponsored. Centro de Arte Contemporáneo Wifredo Lam (Wifredo Lam Center of Contemporary Art) is the state institution that organizes the Havana Biennial and controls a majority of visual art activities in Cuba. It produces most of the exhibition catalogs published in Cuba and the art magazines *Arte Cubano* and, more recently, *Arte por Excelencias*, which celebrated its first edition during the 10th biennial in 2009.

The curatorial team for the Havana Biennial includes experts in the arenas of art and culture, who also are regular contributors to those art magazines. Even Cuba's two major private galleries, *Galería Habana* and *HB*, which handle the Cuban art trade overseas, are connected to the Wifredo Lam Center of Contemporary Art through the Havana Biennial. Those galleries contribute to the biennial by housing performances, collective activities, and workshops as side venues for the biennial and providing exposure of their collections of contemporary Cuban art to the international biennial crowd.

As the primary sponsor, the Cuban government's goals for the biennial should be considered within the framework of the ongoing revolutionary struggle within the cultural and educational sectors of Cuba. The Havana Biennial was one of the many cultural festivals and institutions that were born in Cuba in the early 1980s. Others include the Festival of New Latin American Cinema, the Havana Ballet Festival, the House of the Americas, the National Print House, as well as the New Latin American Cinema Institution, which followed the establishment of the Ministry of Culture and the foundation of the Instituto Superior de Arte, in 1976. Cuban cultural institutions and the Havana Biennial were founded to challenge Western value systems embedded in colonialist discourses with the cultural solidarity of Latin America, Africa and Asia, geographies with a historical resistance to Western hegemony. La Biental de la Habana, since its inception, has worked as a venue for negotiations, not just of stylistic differences between various artists and art collectives but also for disputing agendas on the socialist utopia and the discourses regarding Cuba's ideological and economic struggles in the new world order.

At the time the Havana Biennial was launched in 1984 by the Wifredo Lam Center of Contemporary Art, young graduates of the Instituto Superior de Arte had been marking their presence—not only artistically but socially—and had been building a rigorous artistic platform that questioned social problems as well as the subordinate relationship between art and authority. A generation of artists, later known as the “80s generation,” opened a new way of dialogue with their society, while confronting the international art scene with better self-awareness.<sup>139</sup> As a result, the Ministry of Culture, with its open-minded leader, Armando Hart, started to play the role of a negotiator between the

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<sup>139</sup> See Luis Camnitzer, *New Art of Cuba* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2003).

artists/writers and the state in order to satisfy the political needs for a more open and sincere dialogue with the rest of world and Cuba's longing for cultural prestige in the international arena. With that, the Havana Biennial came to embody a distinct space of negotiation between the Cuban state's cultural program and the demands of a generation that struggles for changes within an autocratic social order.

I argue that the Havana Biennial continues to be the site of political, linguistic, and artistic struggle between the state and participating artists. However, the voice of the locals is not completely lost within the ideological dominance of the state's language. On the contrary, in certain circumstances (and a prestigious international festival of art is one of them) artistic subjecthood and authority become present as a counterpart to the state in a dialogical interaction. This dynamic was especially prominent in 2009, during the 10<sup>th</sup> Biennial. One could easily argue that the subjectivity of local artists and intellectuals is not completely lost within the dominance of the state's ideological language. Among many examples, the long-term, performance-like project titled *Cátedra Arte de Conducta* (Behavior Art School), organized by Tania Bruguera from 2002-2009, is especially significant.

Bruguera's work at the 10th Havana Biennial at the Wifredo Lam Center of Contemporary Art literally dealt with the idea of official language and dialogue (Figure 1.6). Bruguera, the founder of *Cátedra Arte de Conducta* (department of art conduct) at the Instituto Superior de Arte in Havana, created a stage and invited Cubans to talk about "anything" for one minute. She also provided 200 disposable cameras to the public to document the event. During one-minute speeches, two actors—a man and a woman dressed as officials of the ministry of interior—tried to put one of two doves on the

shoulder of each speaker. This gesture invoked an event that had occurred on January 6, 1959, when a white dove landed on Fidel Castro's right shoulder while he gave his initial speech of the revolution. At the time, the dove had provided proof for the followers of Santería—the Afro-Cuban religion—that the gods supported Castro because he was spiritually “crowned” as the leader of the Cuban people. Upon taking the stage in Bruguera's performance, one woman cried hysterically, another screamed, and a young man kept silent for a minute. One participant acted like Castro and said, “This should be banned.” Another was thrown off the stage because she exceeded the one-minute rule. Approximately thirty speakers criticized the government's actions against the freedom of speech and the use of the Internet.

At the start of the 2009 Havana Biennial, the Cuban Minister of Culture, Abel Prieto, was interviewed by Pablo Espinoza for Cuba's popular communist newspaper *La Jornada*. In that interview, Prieto spoke highly of the Biennial, asserting that one of its principles is to build an alternative to the concessions market, and describing it as a vehicle to defend the idea of the Cuban utopia. When asked about Bruguera's performance, he condemned some of the participants for being provocateurs but also defended free speech: “This is one of the subjects of critical art in Cuba. We are promoting a critical art of reflection to help us pinpoint our flaws, so that we can defend the utopia. If the criticism comes from a position of commitment to the country, the results can be really fruitful.”<sup>140</sup> In a convincing way, he showed that the Ministry of Culture continues to serve as a buffer between the demands of the Castro government and

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<sup>140</sup> “Ése es uno de los temas del arte crítico en Cuba. Estamos fomentándolo para reflexionar, que nos ayude a descubrir nuestras distorsiones, que nos ayude a defender la utopía. Cuando se hace crítica como lo hace Tania Bruguera, desde una posición de compromiso con el país, los resultados son realmente fecundos.” Pablo Espinoza, “Bienal Habanera Cuba fomenta un arte crítico para defender la utopía: Abel Prieto,” author's translation, *La Jornada*, April 5, 2009, 12.

the demands of young artists, most of whom were born after the period when Cuba enjoyed the reputation of being the “true utopia” for leftist intellectuals and artists. Prieto added that, “It’s a healthy thing, this criticism since the revolution, from a position committed to the revolution, which often coincides with the critical analysis we’re doing to achieve greater efficiency, fighting the same bureaucracy that we ourselves have created.”<sup>141</sup>

This conundrum is at the core of Cuban life and culture today: With two legal currencies, minimal Internet access, growing international investments, and stark social divisions between those who can and cannot access external resources, cultural life in Cuba revolves largely around social negotiations. Bruguera’s performance provides a good example of how the Havana Biennial has built a dialogical space where multiple agents—the sponsoring state, local Cuban artists and other Third World artists, as well as the mainstream art world dominated by Western interests—navigate local and universal cultural domains.

Mainstream biennials often are detached from their local environments, with the biennial inserted into the visual space of the city only by means of billboards, airport advertisements, signs and pictures of the venues, and maps. By way of contrast, the 10th Havana Biennial actively involved public development projects that constructed valuable experiences from the contextual practice of art. One of those projects was LASA (*Laboratorio Artístico de San Agustín*), which took the biennial to one of Havana’s peripheral neighborhoods, San Agustín. The project was initiated by painter Carlos

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<sup>141</sup> “Es sano, es una crítica desde la revolución, desde una posición comprometida con la revolución y muchas veces esas críticas coinciden con el análisis que estamos haciendo para lograr una mayor eficiencia, luchar contra las mismas trabas burocráticas que nosotros mismos hemos creado.” Ibid. Author’s translation.

Ariel Candelario and was created with the collaborative work of fifty artists from Venezuela, Cuba, Canada, the Netherlands, Austria, Germany, Italy, Mexico, France, Puerto Rico, Japan, and Brazil, who were engaged in a variety of visual artistic disciplines, including architecture, urban planning, music, dance and film. The experimental space erased the border between the artists and the inhabitants, as well as spectacle and the spectator, and aimed to inspire egalitarian social relations in the economical, educational, and ecological systems. The residents actively participated in the experimental transformation of their neighborhood through a variety of architectural, sculptural, photographic and film projects while they discovered joyful aspects of the places they live in and enjoyed their environment from completely new viewpoints. The laboratory and the actions, performances, and interventions it created—although each year in a different neighborhood—continues today.

As is the case in Havana, every biennial incorporates elements of carnival and spectacle to different degrees. The Havana Biennial makes a conscious effort to create an atmosphere of carnival, so much so that, at times, one could forget that it is an exhibition. Manuel Mendive's unannounced, spontaneous and ritualistic performance was one of the most unforgettable moments of the carnival atmosphere that the Havana Biennial created. For the opening of his exhibition *El espíritu, la naturaleza y las cabezas and corazones*, (Spirit, Nature and Heads and Hearts) at the Galería Orígenes, in Havana's Gran Teatro, Mendive painted the dancers from Cuba's Contemporary Dance Ensemble, the National Folkloric Group, and the Caribbean Dance Company, and prepared them for the performance. Huge crowds joined in when a group of dancers, dressed in carnival costumes Mendive designed, started their parade at the Saratoga Hotel and danced

through the infamous Prado Promenade to the rhythm of percussion. They engaged in a dance mimicking the rituals of transformation, resurrection, and renewal. The event resembled a mixture of the Rio Carnival and African religious rituals evoking the symbolism of carnival rituals and the African spirit world.

Every year, Havana ensures that the Biennial pours out into the streets like a carnival and includes the public of Havana in variety of collateral events, workshops, and collaborative projects. However, Havana is also concerned with the kind of popularity and attention that boosts tourism and economic activity in the city during the Biennial, and so, now and then, it opens a space for spectacle and entertainment, as well. For example, one of the main plazas of Havana witnessed a grand spectacle. The artist Kcho (Alexis Leyva Machado) organized a spectacle at one of the largest plazas in Havana, in front of the Convent of San Francisco de Asis. He “burned the ship” with the help of Cai Guo-Qiang, who carefully mounted hundreds of fireworks on the wire that raised the boat off the ground as well as in the boat, which had only a wooden skeleton. With thousands of locals and Biennial visitors watching, clapping, screaming, and yelling, the boat, raised four stories high above the ground, exploded and burned.<sup>142</sup> All the Cuban TV stations were present for broadcasting live.

The Havana Biennials since 1984 have exposed the domination strategies established as irreversible hegemonic models of the sphere of art. While other peripheral biennials, such as those of Istanbul (1989), Sharjah (1991), and Gwangju (1995), after gaining prestige in the Western art world, lost focus on challenging Eurocentric art

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<sup>142</sup> After the devastating effects of recent hurricanes, Kcho organized the Martha Machado brigades, with the young artists, musicians, actors, dancers to help improve the living conditions and well-being of the Cuban people. A branch of this project was mounted at the La Cabaña ditch to allow an open space for the Biennial artists to live, interact, and create together, adding another layer of energy to the Havana Biennial's landscape.



discourses and supported the inclusion of the host city in the post-1989 economic order, Havana remains insistent upon the activist and radical seal of its *raison d'être*.<sup>143</sup>

Havana's strategic attempts to unleash rebellious energies and practices in geographies and cultures in the Global South also has influenced a handful of other peripheral biennials, such as Cuenca (1987), Dak'Art (1992), Johannesburg (1995-1997) and most recently, Ushuaia (2007). Following the Havana Biennial's lead, Manifesta 6, which was held in 2006, and biennials held in 2007, including the Biennale de Montréal, the 5th Berlin Biennale, and the Biennale of Sydney, featured record numbers of artists from the Global South and fostered dialogue among artists in the North-South axis.

Cuba today is in constant flux trying to adapt to the changing circumstances in the world and maintain the Revolution at the same time. The Havana Biennial occupies an important space for social negotiations between the Cuban state and Cuban artists and between the Cuban artists and the global art market. And the government's goals for the Biennial should be considered within the larger frame of the ongoing revolutionary struggle in the cultural and educational sectors of Cuba.

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<sup>143</sup> For the comprehensive history of the Havana Biennial from a dialectical perspective see Miguel L. Rojas-Sotelo, "Cultural Maps, Networks, and Flows: The History and Impact of the Havana Biennale 1984 to the Present" (PhD diss., University of Pittsburgh, 2009).

**CHAPTER II**

**THE ISTANBUL BIENNIAL: AN INSTRUMENT OF NEOLIBERAL  
RECONSTRUCTION OR AN OPPORTUNITY FOR ALTERNATIVE  
FORMATIONS?**

Contemporary art in Turkey has emerged from a set of conceptual, as well as a concrete, contestations between Islamism and secularism, modernism and post-modernism, and nationalism and globalism. This rich, creative environment has been jeopardized by three military coups and the intervention of the corporate sector. For the past two decades, the growth of the Istanbul Biennial and the proliferation of private art institutions and galleries have strongly impacted contemporary art practice in Turkey. Countless studies, discussions, lectures, artistic, and activist activities have dealt with the privatization of the art sector and the obvious agenda behind the Istanbul Biennial, which is to turn Istanbul into a fashionable trademark in the world of global cities.

After discussing the history of the Istanbul Biennial through the lens of local politics and neoliberal developments in Turkey, I examine the historical and ideological reasons behind the hostile environment during the 2007 and 2009 editions generated by some nationalists, anti-globalization activists, and the Faculty of Fine Arts at Marmara University. I argue that the heterogeneity of responses to the Istanbul Biennial reveal the complex and contradictory nature of the union between local institutional art and global capital, as well as contestations between anti-systemic praxis on the streets and the systemic praxis of the art world. The case of Istanbul is a good example to observe various contradictions through which the biennial system is contested with alternative propositions coming from both inside and outside the art world.

## **Privatization of Culture and the Istanbul Biennial as a Trademark**

In Turkey, state support for the cultural sector declined in the 1970s and 1980s, and the growing private sector took matters into its own hands. When the state cut subsidies for large cultural events, a group of art-loving industrial families decided to establish a foundation that would promote and organize the artistic and cultural sector. In 1973, fourteen businessmen gathered under the leadership of Dr. Nejat F. Eczacıbaşı founder and former CEO of the Middle East's leading Pharmaceutical Corporation—to found the *Istanbul Kültür ve Sanat Vakfı, IKSİ* (Istanbul Foundation for Culture and Arts) as a leading cultural institution in Turkey. An internationally recognized art critic and curator of the first three Istanbul Biennials, Beral Madra explains the goal of this institution from the vantage point of its founders:

The primary aim of the new elite that founded the institution was to break away from a Soviet-like state hegemony and establish their class power. That started in the late 1970s and culminated in the 1980s with Prime Minister Turgut Özal's government, which adopted the neoliberal economic program word by word. This new economic elite tried to exercise its hegemony not only in contemporary art but in all cultural fields. We may easily call this a 'post-bourgeois' movement in Turkey, where the character of the bourgeoisie changed from being a modernist, bureaucratic or state-guarded class to a liberalist class that created its own destiny. IKSİ and the Istanbul Biennials played an instrumental role for that matter, especially for this new elite class to connect itself to the global elite.<sup>144</sup>

The first International Istanbul Festival, organized by the IKSİ, occurred during the same year as the 50th anniversary of the Turkish Republic. The Istanbul Festival, until the 1980s, consisted of film screenings, theater productions, jazz concerts and ballet performances, as well as art exhibitions held in the historic venues of Istanbul. In 1987, the Istanbul Biennial was inaugurated; in 1989, the Istanbul Film Festival and the

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<sup>144</sup> Author's interview with Beral Madra, Istanbul-Turkey, December 18, 2009.

Istanbul Theater Festival were founded and organized as separate events. In 1994, the Istanbul Festival changed its name to the Istanbul Music Festival and let other, separately organized festivals emerge in the city. Among these, the Jazz Festival, the Electronic Music Festival, the Rock'n Coke Festival, and Minifest for kids were the most popular.<sup>145</sup> The IKSVM continues to be the largest cultural organization in Turkey with its visual arts, music, theater, and film festivals, and receives funding and sponsorships from the leading Turkish companies that favor the Kemalist nation-state ideology—the founding ideology of the modern Turkish state.

On its website, IKSVM states that the Istanbul Biennial's mission is to be a vessel for the rapid economic and ideological integration of Istanbul with the "global art world."<sup>146</sup> Madra explains the process:

After the Berlin wall collapsed, the walls of art were also demolished. Before, half of Europe was closed to the outside world. This affected Turkey a lot. When the wall collapsed, Turkey got connected to the Balkans not only geographically but economically. Our art market became internationalized along with that of the Balkans. When Europe turned to the Balkans, it noticed us too. Although we were a NATO country, we were in a black hole of the Soviet World. We can easily say that Turkish contemporary art internationalized after the interest and economic support of the post 1989 EU.<sup>147</sup>

In her dissertation, Turkish sociologist Sibel Yardımcı analyzed the Istanbul Biennial from the point of urban festivals and demonstrated that the Istanbul Biennial always has received a different type of attention from the IKSVM and its sponsors.<sup>148</sup> For Yardımcı, this occurs because contemporary art in Turkey has been increasingly used to present

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<sup>145</sup> Sibel Yardımcı, *Kentsel Değişim ve Festivalizm: Küreselleşen İstanbul'da Bienal* (Cağaloğlu, İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2005), 15. As Yardımcı observes, traditional Turkish performances such as *Mevlevi* (of Rumi) acts and Shadow Theater were dropped from Istanbul's Festival agenda as individual festivals occurred.

<sup>146</sup> See IKSVM webpage, "The International Istanbul Biennial History," accessed December 12, 2008, <http://www.iksv.org/bienal/english/bienal.asp?cid=3&ms=1>

<sup>147</sup> Author's interview with Beral Madra.

<sup>148</sup> See Yardımcı, *Kentsel Değişim*.

Istanbul as a trademark to the world.<sup>149</sup> Istanbul, with its centuries-old role as a commercial bridge between the West and the East, and given the fact that it was so far off the main route of the art world, made it an ideal site for a new art market. Thus, it would be unrealistic to disregard the implementation of a neoliberal program in Turkey when considering the ideological and economic roots of the Istanbul Biennial.

Since its foundation in 1923, the cultural and political terrain in the Turkish Republic has been marked by a conflicting dynamic between Islamic religious commitment and secular institutionalism. The Turkish military is the guardian of the founding principles of the modern Republic and its commitment to secularism. Thus, for 86 years, the Turkish military has continued its heavy influence in politics with bloody interventions in 1960, 1971, and 1980. Finally, the 1980 military coup supplied the necessary conditions that replaced the processes of “democratization” with institutional oppression and modernist development through a variety of neoliberal projects.

While the U.S. support of this coup was suppressed quickly, three decades later two artists from Paris, Leonore Bonaccini and Xavier Fourt, who founded the media collective “Bureau d’etudes” in 1998, commented on the U.S. interventionist policy in their work titled “Administration of Terror,” which appeared in the 11th Istanbul Biennial in 2009. The artwork resembled a map of military operations revealing important historical data, and included an informative text:

On April 4th of 1952, before Turkey became a part of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), there existed a secret service called “contra-guerilla.” The headquarters of this service in Ankara was in a building of CIA operations called “American Aid Committee.” This organization along with Turkey’s national secret service MIT, prepared the ground for the two military coups (1960 and 1980). They are responsible for 5,000 killings by unidentified assassins in the 1970s, what was then announced

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<sup>149</sup> Ibid.

by the media as the work of the extreme rightists or Kurdish terrorists. This organization in 1978 alone organized 3,319 fascist attacks in which 813 civilians were killed and 3,121 people were injured.<sup>150</sup>

On January 24, 1980, while Turkey was going through dramatic economic and political turmoil, a decree was passed in the Turkish parliament that allowed a neoliberal economic program, prepared by the International Monetary Fund (IMF), to transform the Turkish economy.<sup>151</sup> This decree removed all legal obstacles for Turkey to become an open-market economy. The Prime Minister Süleyman Demirel appointed Turgut Özal, who was known for his admiration of American foreign policies and the IMF, as the sole person responsible for the economic restructuring. On September 12, 1980, Turkey was shaken with yet another coup. But this time, the coup ensured that political repression and forced economic restructuring of neoliberalism would go hand in hand.

As the founder of Koç Holding, which was the sole sponsor of the Istanbul Biennials from 2009 to 2019, Vehbi Koç said: “September 12 involved a re-establishment of the state.”<sup>152</sup> The 1980 coup revived the Kemalist doctrine in a way that situated Turkey’s future inside the capitalist rather than in the socialist world.<sup>153</sup> The officials in power supported the January 24 decree, which prescribed the IMF’s program word for word, giving Turkish companies the ability to market their products and services globally and to participate in the global economy of big corporations. In 1983, the election, under the auspices of the military, replaced the junta with a right wing, liberal

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<sup>150</sup> This text is part of the artwork, *Administration of Terror*, by Leonore Bonaccini and Xavier Fourt, and also was printed on a leaflet that was distributed by the artists to visitors to the 11th Istanbul Biennial.

<sup>151</sup> Soon after, he was appointed as the Assistant to the Prime Minister in charge of economy when the military junta took power.

<sup>152</sup> Sibel Özbudun and Temel Demirer, “Kemalizm ve 12 Eylül: Ya da Tarih Olamayan ‘Güncel Tarih’” *Özgür Üniversite Forumu* 5 (2007): 41.

<sup>153</sup> For more on this discussion, see Sedat Laçiner, “Turgut Özal Period in Turkish Foreign Policy: Özalism,” *International Strategic Research Organization–USAK Yearbook of International Politics and Law Volume 2* (2009):153-205.

government.<sup>154</sup> While the persecution of journalists and other intellectuals continued, the enforcement by the IMF and the World Bank of what President Özal called “bitter drugs” for the economy, hit Turkey in the form of a swift and massive privatization of state-owned factories and institutions.

Since its founding in 1923, the processes of modernization in Turkey, in the Kemalist ideological tradition, were built upon a kind of Westernization that was designed to simultaneously battle Westernization. The Kemalist reforms were forged to invent a new citizen, and this operative principle not only was enforced by laws but also entrenched itself in vast arenas of life, from universities to the subjects of artistic and cultural works, for decades to come. The state founded and funded hundreds of Village Institutes (*Köy Enstitüleri*), People’s Houses (*Halkevleri*), as well as cultural centers, theater and opera buildings, and art institutions in the cities to organize and to enlighten all Turkish citizens in cultural, artistic, intellectual, and economic aspects. This top-down modernization also produced the development of largely administrative, middle-class gatekeepers of the Kemalist ideology who served as part of the state apparatus. However, the transition to a neoliberal program of the privatization of state assets and a loosening of the state’s control over the market significantly weakened this hegemonic class in the 1990s. The attempt to maintain an ideological grip, which involved values filtered from the West in order to mold a Turkish, Westernized cultural sphere, also was weakened.<sup>155</sup>

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<sup>154</sup> After the approval by referendum of the new Constitution in June 1982, the junta organized general elections, held on November 6, 1983. Three parties created by the junta entered the elections, and Özal became the 19th Prime Minister of Turkey. In 1989, Özal was voted by the parliament to become the President of the Republic.

<sup>155</sup> In Turkey, when popular segments of society entered into the post-modernization of culture in the 1990s—especially due to immigration from rural Turkey to economic centers—it created a new system of values. Those values included a new lifestyle, music, architecture, and fashion that eventually constituted a new postmodern Turkish identity that had decolonized from Western influences. However, the politics of the new political elite that came into power during the neoliberal turn and established “political Islam” also

The 1990s marked an entirely different era for Turkey's social and cultural spheres, which assured that the previously isolated state would be integrated into the globalized economy with free-flowing capital. While the funding of cultural activities by private corporations had positive impacts on the symbolic economy of the mega-city, the state continued its privatization campaign. With minimum state support, some cultural sectors disappeared. The Istanbul Biennial, which located itself in a semi-central position on the international map of contemporary art in the 1990s, enabled growing cultural traffic between Europe and Istanbul. This traffic also increased the demand for Turkish contemporary art, usually with a focus on Istanbul, in the international art market—and especially in Germany, where there is a significant Turkish migrant population.

This was a golden decade for many young Turkish artists. Following depoliticization during the 1980s, Turkish artists, showing abroad, found a long-awaited space for representation loaded with the potential for political expression in their works. Since then, many have been actively engaged in major international exhibitions, art fairs, and artist residencies. The visual culture of nationalism, the traumas of gender oppression, the social effects of rapid industrialization and urbanization, as well as the new cultural conditions that were followed by the mass immigration from rural areas to big cities, constituted the main themes that the new generation of artists continually delved into as the new millennium approached.

In the 2000s, the shrinkage of the Ministry of Culture and its merger with the Ministry of Tourism resulted in a major deficit in the states already minimal support of

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merged with this popular culture. Eventually, populist politics, popular culture, and the culture industry together created an “entrepreneurial culture.” For further discussion of this point, see Hasan B. Kahraman, *Postmodernite ile Modernite Arasında Türkiye: 1980 Sonrası Zihinsel, Toplumsal, Siyasal Dönüşüm* (Istanbul: Agora Kitaplığı, 2007).



the arts. The new ministry cut its relationship with independent artist initiatives and collectives and found a “solution” to the issue of art funding by leaving it to the mercy of big corporations. Two of the most prominent and prestigious families in Turkey, the Koç and Sabancı families, opened private museums with their own private collections; these museums took the names Pera Museum (2005), Istanbul Museum of Modern Art (2004), and Sakıp Sabancı Museum (2002). A few privately owned banks opened large art centers—two of the most influential ones are named Aksanat, the cultural foundation of Akbank, and Garanti Platform of the Garanti Bank (2001)—while several large companies joined them by creating, for example, Siemens Sanat (2004). In sum, by the beginning of the twenty-first century, a major portion of Istanbul’s nonprofit arts sector had moved to the hands of private corporations.<sup>156</sup>

Alongside these changes in the art world and current affairs in Turkey, perhaps surprisingly, the number of art academies increased remarkably during the same years. When the Istanbul Biennial was founded in 1987, there were twelve art academies. By the time the Biennial celebrated its 10th edition in 2007, they numbered no less than fifty-seven, and almost all of them were privately funded. It should be emphasized that the Justice and Development Party (AKP) government, which came to power in 2003, has been assessing this situation in a pragmatic way and looking at it favorably so that it can absolve itself of any public responsibility. For example, unlike any other European country, Turkey dedicated only about twenty percent of the funding to the Turkish pavilion at the Venice Biennials, and by 2007, state support for the Istanbul Biennial had

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<sup>156</sup>Azra Tüzünoğlu, ed., *Dersimiz Güncel Sanat* (Istanbul: Outlet, İhraç Fazlası Sanat, 2009), 90. Additionally, there is the Art Center/Istanbul, which is a contemporary art venture launched in 2008 by the Borusan Center for Culture, and the Koç Contemporary Art Museum is forthcoming. Here, it might be of interest to also note that these institutions do not engage in research. They also do not collect with a stated mission. It is not clear, for examples, how they distinguish themselves, what kind of institutions they collaborate with, or how they make their decisions.

diminished to approximately two percent. This decline in state sponsorship, to some extent, reflects the AKP government's policies, which are informed, on the one hand, by Islamist precepts and practices and, on the other hand, by the neoliberal market economy and Turkey's membership in the European Union (EU). Of course, the change already had taken place after the 1980 coup; the AKP government merely marked a culmination of that process.

The Istanbul Biennial, like the IKSIV's other festivals, lost state economic support in the early 1990s. Thirty percent of the sponsorship for first two Istanbul Biennials, in 1987 and 1989, which were then called "International Contemporary Art Exhibitions," came from public institutions, such as the Ministry of Foreign Relations and the Ministry of Culture and Tourism. By the 4th Biennial, in 1995, private sponsorship was fully established. The 5th and 6th Biennials were sponsored by various Turkish corporations that gave substantial funding, space, and equipment to each biennial.

In 2001, the 7th Istanbul Biennial opened with the main sponsor being the Istanbul Stock Exchange Market. In 2003, the 8th Biennial was officially sponsored by Japan Tobacco International (JTI), which is the world's third largest transnational tobacco company.<sup>157</sup> Various Turkish companies co-sponsored the ninth Biennial. Finally, in 2007, Koç Holding, Turkey's largest industrial corporation, which also produces armor-plated warships for ten countries, became the main sponsor of the Istanbul Biennial for the next ten years, with a pledge to contribute 2.5 million euros per

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<sup>157</sup> Ironically, Japan Tobacco International sponsors big sports events for youth throughout the world. According to U.S. Department of Agriculture, between 1970 and 2000 cigarette consumption in Turkey increased by 207 percent despite the economic crises, high inflation rate, and reduced purchasing power of the population. After sponsoring the Istanbul Biennial, in 2005, JTI secured the necessary license to build a new plant in Turkey. Now it is the largest selling tobacco company in the Middle East. See Haluk Kasnakoglu and Erol H. Çakmak, "Economics of Tobacco in Turkey," December 12, 2000, accessed December 1, 2009, <http://www1.worldbank.org/tobacco/pdf/country%20briefs/Turkey>

biennial.<sup>158</sup> Additional support has been increasingly available, since 2003, through the European Union (EU) integration process, foreign national funding organizations, and international foundations. EU resources have been funding private museums and galleries, fine arts faculties, artists associations and collectives, as well as workshops, panels, and forums, primarily in Istanbul. Istanbul has become the symbol of Turkey's new, modern face that is turned to the West, even more than in previous decades of its history. As Vasıf Kortun explains:

The contemporary production has integrated itself into the Euro-American circuit, and is being integrated by it. The integration has been provided by the Istanbul Biennial and less than a handful of independent curators and writers. The Biennial has become the index, but also the most organized institution of guidance and patronage, and by default a monopoly.<sup>159</sup>

As discussed earlier, since the neoliberal turn of the late 1980s, there has been an increasing interest from the business world in the arts, owing in large measure to the shifts in sponsorship of the arts. Over the last decades, art sponsorship has evolved from philanthropy and patronage to sponsorship that contributes not only to the company's prestige but also to its brand name awareness.<sup>160</sup> Now, the social responsibility projects of large businesses locate their interest in the arts and culture within the corporate and strategic structure of the company, rather than by casting their involvement as representing traditional acts of charity with no return.

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<sup>158</sup> Koç Holding was founded by Vehbi Koç in 1926, three years after the foundation of the Turkish Republic and it emerged as the first corporation in Turkey in 1938.

<sup>159</sup> Vasıf Kortun, "Weak Fictions, Accelerated Destinies" in *İskorpit: Recent Art from Turkey*. House of World Cultures (Karlsruhe: Berlin and the Badischer Kunstverein, 1998), 12.

<sup>160</sup> In Turkey, like everywhere else, this event created an academic field where many emerging private universities established art management programs under either the Business Administration or Fine Arts Departments, while art history and theory programs remained nonexistent. Hundreds of young artists graduate every year in fine arts and enter into a very small art world, with only a handful of professionals. Art managers are being educated at private universities to bridge the gap between the business sector (sponsors, connoisseurs, buyers and collectors) and artists, while the critical field in art is filled primarily with sociologists.

In 2007, when Koç became the main sponsor of the Istanbul Biennial, Rahmi Koç, the honorary CEO and son of the founder of Koç Group, received the most prestigious Hadrian Award—named after the Roman emperor and given by the World Monuments Fund—for Koç’s support and preservation of art.<sup>161</sup> After sponsoring the exhibition, “Beyond Babylon: Art, Trade, and Diplomacy in the Second Millennium B.C.,” at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, Koç Holding informed us through its websites about its sponsoring activities in culture and the arts: “Such exhibitions are crowning opportunities for promoting Turkey as an advantageous place to do business as well as for advancing Turkish businesses and cultural tourism and for developing our country’s brand identity in the U.S.”<sup>162</sup> During the press conference for the 11th Istanbul Biennial in 2009, Ömer Koç, the new CEO responsible for Koç Holding’s support of the Istanbul Biennial, declared once again that: “The Istanbul Biennial makes Istanbul a trademark that it deserves in the globalized world,” while he sat next to the curators, the What, How and for Whom (WHW) curatorial collective from Belgrade, which organized the Biennial in an explicitly Marxist-revolutionary tone.<sup>163</sup>

In the following days, fierce criticism targeted the WHW on Internet blogs and in some daily mainstream newspapers for the hypocrisy of their work. It is interesting to observe that after their manifesto-like talk at the press conference, quoting heavily from Bertolt Brecht and Rosa Luxemburg, the WHW sat at the same table with the corporate sponsors, while Ömer Koç seemed to have been very pleased with an exhibition that was saturated with a fierce socialist critique of the current system.

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<sup>161</sup> Previous recipients of this award were the Rockefellers, the Agnelli family of Fiat, and the president of the World Bank, James Wolfenson.

<sup>162</sup> Koç Holding Website, accessed October 20, 2009, [http://www.koc.com.tr/en-us/Corporate\\_Social\\_Responsibility/Holding\\_Activities/Pages/CultureandArts.aspx](http://www.koc.com.tr/en-us/Corporate_Social_Responsibility/Holding_Activities/Pages/CultureandArts.aspx)

<sup>163</sup> Author’s notes from the press conference of the 11th Istanbul Biennial, Istanbul-Turkey, September 9, 2009.

To a significant degree, since the neoliberal turn, the interests of the corporate elite have challenged the validity of radical strategies and emancipatory schemes in an artwork and/or an exhibition.<sup>164</sup> Nevertheless, sponsoring mechanisms at international and local art events have limited efficacy in controlling local art production. First of all, such investments control only the structural (economic and institutional) organization of the event, and second, corporate sponsors might have motives that are more economic than ideological.<sup>165</sup> Except in an extreme case, such as when the sponsor is directly attacked, the corporate sponsor does not interfere because the exhibition is seen—even the most radical exhibition—as a good opportunity to look “liberal” in the economic sphere.

Simply stated, for the maintenance of corporate power, there is no bad PR for sponsoring a cultural event. Those of the oppositional front (even without visiting the exhibition and seeing the artworks) conclude that the Istanbul Biennial unavoidably serves the ruling class. I emphasize that when the influence of corporate power over the arts is conceived as inevitable and irreversible, there cannot be a question of emancipation to begin with.

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<sup>164</sup> For further discussion, see Wu, *Privatizing Culture*; Stallabrass, *Art Incorporated*; and Mika Hannula, ed., *Stopping the Process?: Contemporary Views on Art and Exhibitions* (Helsinki: Nordic Institute for Contemporary Art, 1998).

<sup>165</sup> Here, I do not discuss whether auto-censorship is exercised by the artists, or how some strategic decisions are not made in favor of the corporate sponsor. There is also a difference, for instance, between the role of the Soros Foundation, which controls much of the art production and dissemination in Central and Eastern Europe through many cultural and political channels and Koç Holding’s sponsorship for the Istanbul Biennial for ten years.

## Corporate Sponsorship and Opposition vis-à-vis the Istanbul Biennial

During the course of the Istanbul Biennials presented since 1987, the critical, as well as skeptical, attitudes of the general public, and those of intellectuals from different spectrums of the Left, toward contemporary art have become more prominent.

Sociologist and art critic Süreyya Evren articulates these attitudes in the catalogue of the 11th Biennial: “Even when they refer to political concepts or discuss political issues, it is believed that these contemporary artists speak from a pseudo-leftist viewpoint; they are either regarded to be far from convincing, or simply, hiding behind a mask.”<sup>166</sup>

Critics of the Istanbul Biennial, which include both nationalist and leftist sectors of Turkish politics, are quite hostile to the biennial phenomenon. They often base their arguments, which directly parallel the biennials to the processes of neoliberal globalization, not only on the expansion of the art market but also on art’s relationship with the corporations that circulate global capital through financial markets, real estate investments, and global tourism. A common argument is: “What the biennials present around the world as the art of our day, in fact, destroys the real art both in Turkey and everywhere else.”<sup>167</sup>

In Turkey, while the modernism-oriented art schools have questioned the strength and formal qualities of the artworks in past biennials, emerging young artists also have protested the exclusive character of the Istanbul Biennial that allows the participation of the same small number of Turkish artists who are known internationally. Some of this criticism also has linked the newly recognized power of independent curators with the

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<sup>166</sup> Süreyya Evren, “Neither with nor Without You,” in *İnsan Neyle Yaşar?: Metinler : 11. Uluslararası İstanbul Bienali, 12 Eylül-8 Kasım=What Keeps Mankind Alive?:The texts : 11th International Istanbul Biennial, September 12-November 8*, ed. Ilkay B. Ayvaz and Nazım Dikbaş (İstanbul: İstanbul Kültür Sanat Vakfı, 2009), 375.

<sup>167</sup> Adnan Turani, and Zafer E. Bilgin, “Söyleşi: İnsan Önüne Her Konulanları Yemek Zorunda Değildir.” *Sanatçının Atölyesi* 1 (2008): 210.

globalization of art under neoliberal hegemony. Thus, the foreign curator often is treated as the “other” and is not to be trusted by the local art world.<sup>168</sup> Another criticism suggests that the Istanbul Biennial has been acting as a double-edged sword: On one hand, it presents new Western trends to local audiences and thereby challenges the local culture that oscillates between modernity, postmodernity and tradition, and on the other hand, it markets Turkish art, as well as the city of Istanbul, to Europe as an oriental marvel.<sup>169</sup>

While corporate sponsorship and cultural imperialism are the two main targets in arguments against the Biennial, there is ample evidence that these arguments are merely rhetorical. For example, neither the Istanbul Contemporary Art Fair, the private museums founded by the industrialist families, or large art galleries founded by banks have received the same type of criticism regarding the power of the ruling class on the contemporary art scene. Another example is that, since the 1990s, EU resources funded private museums and galleries, fine arts faculties, artists’ associations and collectives, workshops, panels, and platforms. In 2006, Istanbul was named as the cultural capital of Europe, and the cultural sector received generous funding from the EU to realize this project. Neither mainstream Left nor Orthodox Marxists took on these issues to argue over cultural imperialism of the West; rather, a big fuss was made about to whom all this funding went. Thus, I argue that the cold shoulder given to contemporary art in Turkey is rooted in more complicated issues than simply the structural and ideological tribulations of the biennial institution.

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<sup>168</sup> Beral Madra, “Poetry is Here, Justice Will Come,” accessed October 12, 2009, [http://universes-in-universe.org/eng/nafas/articles/2003/8th\\_istanbul\\_biennial](http://universes-in-universe.org/eng/nafas/articles/2003/8th_istanbul_biennial)

<sup>169</sup> Turkey does not have a history of colonization; hence, there is no display of goodwill from the Western Europeans that are customarily doled out to former colonies. Instead, Turkey inherits a sense of otherness and difference from the Ottoman Empire, and Turkish contemporary art has a haughty attitude that makes it difficult for Western European cultural practitioners to handle. Thus, it sometimes yields to orientalist expectations for the sake of financial and structural support.

The reasons that lie behind the discursive wars waged by some leftists against contemporary art and the Istanbul Biennial can be found in four areas. The first is the aesthetic factor that reveals the missing link between the mainstream Turkish media and the experimentalist, postmodern avant-garde, which is due to the fact that Kemalism—as the founding ideology of the Turkish State—has had close ties to modern progressivism, while modernism and postmodern/contemporary art in Turkey have developed as critical stances in relation to those.<sup>170</sup> The second is the economic factor that affects older generation of artists because within the international space that the Istanbul Biennial created, the Turkish art market favored the work of young experimentalist, technology-driven, and nonconformist contemporary artists. As a result, modernists who enjoyed their share of the small, local art market have, for a long time, lost their fame and fortune. The third factor is political. Since 1989, in Turkey just as many other places around the world, capitalist manifestations in culture have been more visible in the visual arts than in any other art form.

Despite the common agenda of anti-neoliberalism, the Turkish Left has not reconciled differences among its own ranks to establish a common front for contesting the latest privatization campaigns in the cultural sector of the recent neoliberal governments. The fourth factor is the ideological factor. Turkish society is dangerously divided into two opposing ideological formations, the Kemalist-nationalist bloc, and the neoliberalist-Islamist bloc. The Kemalist-nationalists manipulate the Istanbul Biennial's discursive space in order to indirectly criticize the ideology of the ruling party and they use this space for nationalist propaganda. The anarchists on the other hand, who have

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<sup>170</sup> Evren, "Neither with nor Without You," 374.



been the historical political enemies of the nationalists, attack the Biennial mainly with their view that associates the biennials to elitism and corporatism in arts.

While corporate sponsorship and cultural neo-imperialism have been the two main arguments used to target the Istanbul Biennial, there is ample evidence that this is only a discursive matter. For example, the Istanbul Contemporary Art Fair, the private museums founded by the industrialist families, and the large art galleries founded by banks, as previously mentioned, have not received the same amount of criticism regarding the power of the ruling classes over the contemporary art scene. Interestingly, it was not until the 10th and 11th editions of the Biennial, under the main sponsorship of Koç Inc.—the largest corporation in Turkey—that some Kemalists, modernist artists, anarchist activists, and academics in fine art schools fiercely protested the Istanbul Biennial in the media and in public. Nevertheless, as will become clear in the following pages, the main factor in what I label as “discursive wars” is rooted in the issue of whose power is exercised in the domination of the visual arts realm in Turkey.

To discuss the Turkish Left’s relationship to contemporary art is very problematic for reasons that are ingrained both in the character of the widely dispersed Turkish Left and the historical divide between multiple camps that represent avant-garde art in Turkey. The formations that comprise the Turkish Left are outlined with firm political views on the one hand, and porous ideological borders on the other. For example, Turkey has a total of fifty-three registered and non-registered communist parties, which have divided and re-divided many times within themselves because of their different positions on the ideas of socialism, Maoism, Leninism, Trotskyism, internationalism, and nationalism as

well as the political representation of Marxist thought in Turkey.<sup>171</sup> The Left is further divided on the ideas of Kemalism—the ideological backbone of the Turkish Republic and the military. Due to the fact that the Turkish state itself has exercised colonialist oppression over Kurdish and Armenian citizens and other minorities, the Turkish Left could not reconcile the anti-colonialist ideology of Marxism with the nationalism that a majority of the Left is associated with. This exacerbates even more the political and discursive rivalry among the scattered Left. In addition, official nationalism had filtered into Turkish socialist thought, right from the start, due to the influence of Maoism. Interestingly, even some Internationalist Marxists turned into fierce nationalists after the collapse of the Soviet Bloc. It should also be noted that there are militant parts of the working class, but the domination of the unions and the influence of bourgeois ideology, such as Islamism, nationalism, and national liberationism, have effectively prevented workers from uniting on a class basis.

The 1980 coup d'état was another major blow on the Turkish Left. For the junta, any other political philosophy except Kemalism (the *idée force* of the republic) was rotten and measures should be taken to revitalize the society. Political repression and forceful economic restructuring had to go hand in hand.<sup>172</sup> Bedrettin Cömert, a Marxist art historian and theorist, was among those intellectuals killed by the radical nationalists. Many writers, poets, actors, and film directors were prosecuted and jailed. The new constitution, to which Turkey still adheres, assured the authority of the army in the states

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<sup>171</sup> Sırrı Öztürk and Mehmet Gül, “Sistemin Krizi-Solun Gündemi,” Tüyap Book Fair Conference, Büyükdada Salon, Beylikdüzü, İstanbul, November 1, 2009.

<sup>172</sup> The repressive strategies of the state ruptured the political organizational ability of the socialist movement, and the Turkish Left entered into chaos.

fundamental organs. This last coup, after others in 1971 and 1960, finally produced an apolitical environment, which Bülent Kahraman calls a “tutelage society” in Turkey.<sup>173</sup>

The anti-imperialist/nationalist camp that follows Kemalism—the ideas of the founder of Turkey, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk—constitutes a large portion of the leftist political spectrum. However, in 1998, after seventy-five years of being in power, the Kemalists lost their power to the neoliberal Islamist party, the Justice and Development Party (AKP). The AKP has been supported by culturally and socially marginalized segments in conservative parts of the country, the emerging neoliberal bourgeoisie, the old pro-EU bourgeoisie, the part of the working class that is unemployed or outside of syndicate support, non-separatist segments of Kurdish society, and some liberal intelligentsia who had been trying to challenge the authoritarian structure of the republic.

While the Kemalist-nationalists argue that real democracy in Turkey should come through “Kemalist enlightenment,” the neoliberal Islamists argue that it is through the processes of globalization and liberal politics that bottom-up democratization is possible. In this climate, Turkish society is polarized on two fronts: on the one hand, nationalism versus pluralism, and on the other, secularism versus Islamism. Dangerous outcome of this polarization is the concealment of the political class-base separation that is the manifestation of real division in Turkey, with the question of secularism under the threat of political Islam and nationalism under the threat of Kurdish separatists. Thus, while the political and cultural opposition to the neoliberal/Islamist government is organized along the ideas of secularism and nationalism, the class-based anti-globalist resistance is left to some marginal anarchist and communist formations.

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<sup>173</sup> Hasan B. Kahraman, “The End of the ‘New’ As We Know It,” *Third Text* 22 (2008): 22.

The mainstream media celebrated the AKP government as a “democratic change.” Yet the Kemalist-nationalist camp has interpreted this development as a “counter-revolution” against Mustafa Kemal Atatürk’s modernist revolution. Although this branch of the Turkish Left has allied its version of progressivism with the issue of secularism, it has used secularist thought as a weapon to contest the new political elite. Kemalists have especially exploited the anti-imperialist sentiment of Kemalism with the hope of restoring their power, and they have organized giant demonstrations (sometimes exceeding two million people), displaying nationalist symbols, and slogans in the major cities.<sup>174</sup> The Kemalist-nationalist camp typically has dismissed the Istanbul Biennial as an instrument of the “neoliberal imperial project.”<sup>175</sup> These critical discussions culminated during and after the 10th Istanbul Biennial in 2007, which was themed “Not only Possible but also Necessary, Optimism in the Age of Global War.” Internationally renowned Chinese curator Hou Hanru created what is now a longstanding local debate that started with this theme. Hanru’s aim with that Biennial was summarized in his words in an article published in the Biennial Catalogue:

In the age of global wars and globalization of liberal capitalism, it is not impossible but also necessary to revitalize the debate on modernization and modernity and put forward activist proposals to improve social progress...to reinvent effective models of modernization to face the challenges of globalization, which are driven by liberal capitalism and dominated by Western powers.<sup>176</sup>

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<sup>174</sup> Issues such as entry into the EU, the Armenian Genocide, and the states negotiation with the Kurds also have been used by the Kemalists to ignite chauvinistic sentiment in the public.

<sup>175</sup> Adnan Turani et al. “Söyleşi: İnsan Ölüme.”

<sup>176</sup> Hou Hanru, “Not only Possible but also Necessary, Optimism in the Age of Global War,” in *10. Uluslararası İstanbul Bienali, 8 Eylül - 4 Kasım 2007=10th International Istanbul biennial, September 8-November 4, 2007*, ed. Hou Hanru and Ilkay B. Ayvaz (Beyoğlu, Istanbul: Istanbul Kültür ve Sanat Vakfı, 2007), 15.

This theme, in fact, was a smart and calculative strategy by Hou to please the corporate sponsors, who responded by donating a record amount of money to the 10th Biennial, while at the same time injecting a dose of hope for change in a country where the 1980 coup had destroyed the revolutionary spirit while corrupt politicians destroyed the last bit of belief that people had for social reformation. Hence, the winds of hope that the curator aimed to create did not blow in intellectual circles but instead blew at the Global Compact Leaders' Summit, organized by the United Nations. Ali Koç, the representative of Koç Holding, in his talk to hundred high government officials and more than one thousand CEO's of transnational corporations, proudly announced: "The Istanbul Biennial that Koç Holding will sponsor over the next ten years emphasizes optimism that we need in the world of global wars, global warming, and big social and economic problems."<sup>177</sup>

The 10th Istanbul Biennial was the focus of local media coverage for several months after the Biennial, not because of its theme or some controversial artworks that were exhibited but because of the sensitive local political issues that curator Hanru touched upon in his catalog essay. Hanru wrote:

Turkey, as one of the first non-western modern republics and a key player in the modernization of the developing world has proved to be one of the most radical, spectacular and influential cases in this direction. But a fundamentally crucial problem is that the modernization model promoted by the Kemalist project was still a top-down imposition with some unsolvable contradictions and dilemmas inherent in the system; the quasi-military imposition of reforms, while necessary as a revolutionary tool, betrayed the principle of democracy; the nationalist ideology ran counter to its embracing of the universality of humanism, and the elite-led development generated social division. Populist political and religious forces have managed to recuperate and manipulate the claims from the "bottom" of the society and have used them to their advantage.<sup>178</sup>

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<sup>177</sup> Ali Koç, "BM Liderler Zirvesinde Konuştu," *Bugün*, July 14, 2007, 9.

<sup>178</sup> Hanru, "Not only Possible," 18.

The Kemalist-nationalist media singled out this paragraph from the rest of the essay and interpreted it as a direct attack on the ideas of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk and his modernist reforms. After a media call to protest, 131 academics, led by the dean of the Fine Arts Faculty at Marmara University, issued a declaration condemning Hanru for referring to Atatürk's reforms as "top-down" impositions and for accusing the founder of the Turkish Republic of being a "non-Humanist."<sup>179</sup> The protest letter addressed the "delicate times in Turkey" and called on the curator "to be more sensitive."<sup>180</sup> The so-called "delicate times" terminology pointed to the "approaching" sound of military boots that could crash the anti-secularist and anti-Kemalist demands of the new neoliberal status quo, which also had gained economic power in Turkey. As stated by Elif Çağlı:

The Turkish parliamentary system, which was not established by a bourgeois revolution encompassing a mass of the people as occurred in the West, is used to being recurrently shaken by military coups. Alongside the coups of 27 May 1960, 12 March 1971 and 12 September 1980, the military intervention, defined as a postmodern coup, on 28 February 1997 and finally the e-coup military declaration issued on 27 April 2007 by the Head of the Army clearly demonstrate this... The political and social traces of the military-fascist regime of 12 September have not been completely purged... During such times when the parliamentary system is deadlocked and political life is dragged into chaos, a backward part of the working class and the majority of the petty bourgeoisie look to the army as a saving grace. Thereby the road to military dictatorship is paved by the passive support of the people.<sup>181</sup>

The Kemalist media and the academics' protests towards Hou's biennial should be considered within this political context. In Turkey, it is not only a political but also a social taboo to criticize Atatürk because the society at large embraces him as the "Father

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<sup>179</sup> A later article in the daily newspaper *Radikal* explained that the faculty from Marmara University was forced to sign the protest letter days after the opening of the Biennial, and were threatened with losing their jobs unless they took a stance against Hou Hanru. In Turkey, after the 1980 coup, all state universities were bound to be governed by YÖK, Turkey's Higher Education Board, whose committee in charge is appointed by the President of Turkey.

<sup>180</sup> Hou Hanru'yu Kınıyoruz," *Milliyet*, November 12, 2007, 1.

<sup>181</sup> Elif Çağlı, "Darbe Tehdidinin İşaret Ettiği Gerçekler," *Tutum* (2007), accessed December 12, 2008, [http://marksist.net/elif\\_cagli/darbe\\_tehdidinin\\_isaret\\_ettigi\\_gercekler.htm](http://marksist.net/elif_cagli/darbe_tehdidinin_isaret_ettigi_gercekler.htm), author's translation.

of the Turks.”<sup>182</sup> Recently, for example, Kemalists have started a campaign to pass a law that protects “Atatürk and Kemalism” from any criticism. Nevertheless, on some occasions, critics of Hanru in the mainstream media also condemned Armenian artist Atom Agoyan’s video in the 10th Biennial, a video that questioned the Armenian Genocide—another taboo topic in Turkey that is not discussed in public and is usually dismissed as a “Western lie.”<sup>183</sup>

The debate over Hanru’s essay intensified the already clear polarization of Turkish artists and intellectuals, as some protected Hanru and freedom of speech, while others went so far as to accuse him of being “an agent” of neoliberal Islamist power. IKSIV, the organizing institute, issued a statement protecting Hanru that said: “As an art and culture establishment, we would have expected the Fine Arts Faculty to regard free thought at least as sensitively as we, and to approach such events as the Biennial from an art perspective.”<sup>184</sup> Hanru’s essay, once again revealed the nature of the discussions on the democratization in Turkey. While Kemalist-nationalists argued that real democracy in Turkey should come through the Kemalist enlightenment, the neoliberal Islamists currently in power argue that it is only through processes of globalization and neoliberal politics that bottom-up democratization is made possible. The dialectical pull between these two discourses—statist modernizations against globalist development—constitutes the core of contemporary political and economic life in Turkey.

Hanru’s criticism in the Biennial’s catalogue not only brought the academy, the artists, the organizers, the curator, the state and the media face to face in discussions

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<sup>182</sup> Mustafa Kemal took the name Atatürk as his last name during the revolutionary period (1923-1933), which literally means “the Father of the Turks.”

<sup>183</sup> The winner of 2006 Nobel Prize for literature, Orhan Pamuk also was condemned and tried in Turkey in 2007 for suggesting in his novel that the Armenian genocide happened.

<sup>184</sup> “Biennial Finds Itself in Age of Expression War,” *Turkish Daily News*, September 27, 2007, 01.

concerning what a foreign art curator may and may not dare to say about “us” in “our” Biennial, it also provoked a series of creative protests. For example, an anonymous group of artists added to the carnivalism of the Biennial atmosphere by hanging a dozen dirty pairs of underwear on the wire fence of the biggest venue with a big note saying, “They should clean up their own dirty underwear first (Figure 2.1).”<sup>185</sup>

Hanru’s biennial was successful in opening the Pandora’s Box and creating a public discussion of taboo subjects that urgently needed to be put on the table. For several months, the 10th biennial was discussed in the daily newspapers. In the archives of the IKSŞ, I encountered more than 120 articles published by the local media during the months following the biennial, all on the debate over Hanru’s essay. In a country such as Turkey, where coverage of art and art festivals rarely gets beyond a brief paragraph, the attention that this biennial received was unprecedented. This event also demonstrated that the impact of a biennial could extend far beyond the actual spatiality and temporality of the event itself. Massive reactions to Hanru’s biennial showed the common ground for all kinds of justification for controlling the artistic and discursive practices in order to hide layers of conservatism and the ultranationalist consciousness—a central feature of contemporary Turkish society. The Istanbul Biennial has yet to spark heated, in-depth debates about art, culture, and politics. Although some progressive voices are drawn into the abyss of pessimism and cynicism, others have taken every opportunity to foster public discussions on these issues.

One of such engaged artists is Burak Delier. Anarchist, activist, and artist, Delier, in 2005, inaugurated a dummy company called “Reverse Direction,” which, in his words,

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<sup>185</sup> “İstanbul Festivali Kürotörüne Kirli Çamaşırılı Protesto,” *Sabah*, October 23, 2007, 26.



“says No!” to conservative politics and the repressive tools of governments.”<sup>186</sup> This imaginary company, housed in a local shop front, will sell a real product. The idea, notes Delier, is not just to take on an economic system as the subject for the artwork but to get “inside” it.<sup>187</sup> Delier aimed to question society’s present forms of production and consumption by using those same forms to sell a controversial product: Through this company, Delier designed and produced clothing and uniforms that protected those who wanted to defend their subjective responses and those who attempted to write clandestine alternative histories from the open violence of the consumption-focused, pseudo-democracy of neoliberalism and nationalism. So far, Delier has manufactured two products via Reverse Direction: *Parkalynch*, a lynch-proof demonstration jacket, and *Madımak ’93*, a fire-resistant suit inspired by an arson attack that killed many people during a leftist congregation. *Parkalynch* was selected by curator Hou Hanru for the 2007 Istanbul Biennial (Figure 2.2). It immediately captured the attention of the leftist media, and the work singlehandedly gained more notice than hundreds of other artworks found in the mega exhibition.

Delier seemingly created a commodity object, a jacket to be worn against lynching during street demonstrations. The work had a price tag of one hundred euro, and it was advertised as if it could be bought and sold during the Biennial. This work not only commented on the art object as a commodity and the biennial institution as the window display of art, it also attacked the biennial logic from multiple angles. It is a red coat with multiple functions, to be worn in demonstrations and riots. Delier explains: “Parkalynch is made for those who read history backwards, and it is also for those who resist the

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<sup>186</sup> Author’s interview with Burak Delier Istanbul -Turkey, December 9, 2009.

<sup>187</sup> Ibid.

political and cultural violence of neoliberalism as well as official nationalism and for those who do not want to yield to corporate hegemony in art.”<sup>188</sup>In a country where hundreds of workers, while peacefully celebrating May Day, are attacked by armed forces, Delier’s work embraced multiple dimensions of meaning. Delier’s intention was to approach the art object as a commodity but as a commodity with a political as well as an exchange value. Moreover, this art object was not produced exclusively for the art world elite, but literally for the “man on the street,” fighting against oppression. With an ironic twist, Delier’s advertisement for rebellion against neoliberalism used the Istanbul Biennial, which itself was born of the neoliberal system, as a cultural space for opposition. With that, Delier became the voice of outsider protests and criticism of the Turkish anarchists and the anti-globalization activists who managed to penetrate through the fortress of the corporate art world.

Another piece of art that left a mark on the 10th Istanbul Biennial was the work of Slovenian artist Tadej Pogačar, titled, “CODE: RED, Brazil, Daspu,” in collaboration with the P.A.R.A.S.I.T.E Museum of Contemporary Art founded by Pogačar and DAVIDA, the local organization in Brazil founded by a sex worker named Gabrielle Silva. DAVIDA’s activities concentrate on the areas of education, health, documentation, communication, and culture, in addition to doing research and publishing a newspaper called *Beije Rua* (Kiss from the Streets). “Daspu,” a brand name in the fashion world, was used to foster the struggle of prostitutes against prejudice. The work was exhibited with the subtheme, “World Factory,” in IMC—one of the five venues of the Biennial—which is a mall of textile shops.

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<sup>188</sup> Kosova, “Interview with Burak Delier.”

Pogačar is the curator and founder of the cyber platform P.A.R.A.S.I.T.E, which is based on an alternative cultural and social activity known as the “new parasitism.”<sup>189</sup> P.A.R.A.S.I.T.E is both a cultural foundation and a mobile organism that searches for alternative cultural and socioeconomic operating methodologies, while developing relationships with local activist groups around the world. In 1993, it developed to be the P.A.R.A.S.I.T.E. Museum of Contemporary Art, which is a virtual organization that serves as a parallel institution to the museum model and criticizes the museum institution by introducing alternative forms of communication and establishing new connections. With his interventionist logic and institutional critique, Pogačar spotlights hidden or ignored social phenomena, groups, practices, and relations. “CODE: RED, Brazil, Daspu,” was part of a larger project that has run at conferences and seminars, as well as at exhibitions concerned with the victims of global neoliberalism in different countries of the world, such as Brazil, Estonia, and Thailand.

At the 10th Istanbul Biennial, Pogačar and DAVIDA installed samples from their fashion brand, Daspu. These were various T-shirts and a bridal gown made from sheets and the cloth of “love hotels” in Brazil, and as such, they blurred the lines between struggle, pleasure, leisure/carnival, and activism. Daspu, which is made up of designs created by prostitutes, was founded in 2005 to strengthen the struggle of prostitutes against prejudice. The clothing installations were accompanied by video installations showing Pogačar’s project “Street Economy Archive,” which documents simultaneously various facets of the informal economy in different cities around the world. Pogačar calls attention to the post-1989 period, when global capital under neoliberal policies declared

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<sup>189</sup> For more on this see, Yeşim Kartaler, “Boycott in Global Capitalism and Against It,” *rh+sanart* 43 (2007): 37.

its triumph. The prime impact of this process in Brazil was that, after the devastating economic crises of the 1990s, prostitution (especially child prostitution) had risen drastically.<sup>190</sup> The fashion brand/artwork, distilled from political ingredients in its conventional signs, opened up a fresh political disclosure that seeks to identify alternative models to create social transformation. “CODE: RED, Brazil, Daspu,” is a unique example of a long-term collaborative and participatory project that explores models of self-organization, marginalized urban minorities and parallel models of economy. With a multi-layered strategy, Pogačar and DAVIDA criticized the normative and discriminative society that has at its core capitalist neoliberal subjugations based on exploitation, dispossession, racialization, and privatization.

Both Delier and Pogačar, just as Hans Haacke, Daniel Buren, Michael Asher, and many others before them, engage in a serious institutional critique from within the biennial institution. These two examples in the Istanbul Biennial, and many others that we encounter in the biennials around the world, show us that, although the biennial is an art institution and as such could be used as a resource to legitimate dominant ideologies, it would be a narrow assessment to conclude that all biennials are essentially subservient to the dominant order and that the artworks exhibited in them are ultimately bound within the neoliberal logic that influences the cultural sector. The kind of criticism that targets the Istanbul Biennial dismisses the artworks as simply reflecting the neoliberal directives and serving to the elites’ agendas and needs. David Craven, talking about dissident

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<sup>190</sup> According to the International Child Resource Institute Report, Brazilian Center for Childhood and Adolescence (CBIA) has estimated that, from 1990-1995, about five hundred thousand girls turned to prostitution to earn a living, some of them as young as 9 years old. Selma B. de Oliveira, “Child Prostitution on the Rise in Brazil,” *International Child Resource Institute Report* (1995), accessed July 27, 2011, [http://pangaea.org/street\\_children/latin/prost.htm](http://pangaea.org/street_children/latin/prost.htm)

artworks in biennials, rightly criticizes this view, which has more and more become a common criticism also in the art world and the academia:

None of these artworks and others like them, simply ‘reflected’ the ideology of neoliberalism, nor did they merely mirror either the nation-state aspirations of an art institution or the local concern of regional forces financially sustaining it. Instead these artworks stood as ideological challenges to their respective audiences, even as they stand as interpretative challenges on the intentional level to any scholar who tries to disentangle them from the cliché of globalization or neoliberalism.<sup>191</sup>

During the 11th Istanbul Biennial, in 2009, local criticism toward the Biennial increased, this time coming from young anarchist activists. This criticism, differently from that of the nationalists, focused on the apparent contradictions between this edition’s overtly Marxist rhetoric and the fact that one of Turkey’s biggest corporation that produces warships and tanks for eight countries including Israel sponsored it and the founder of Koç Inc., Vehbi Koç is publicly known for his support of the 1980s coup. Nevertheless, such criticism, which was highly innovative and creative, revealed the complex and contradictory nature of anti-systemic engagement on the streets and the critical position of some biennials toward the neoliberal system.

In this 11th edition, the WHW's members and curators from Zagreb, Ivet Ćurlin, Ana Devic, Natasa Ilic, and Sabina Sabolovic, used the theme “*Den wowon lebt der mann?*” (What Keeps Man Alive?) –a song from Bertolt Brecht’s 1928 “The Threepenny Opera.” The Biennial catalogue—which was available to visitors for a very small fee—had an image on its cover of the world reversed from its usual north-south orientation, signaling a determination to turn the established order on its head, at least metaphorically. The Biennial was inaugurated on September 12, 2009, a day when eighteen people lost their lives in Istanbul due to a flood (caused by poor city planning and the vulnerability of

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<sup>191</sup> Craven, “Institutionalized Globalization,” 494.

the poor to natural disasters). It was also the 29th anniversary of the 1980 coup. The roundtables and lectures of the Biennial took place on the Istiklâl Caddesi, a pedestrian street that was home to many political protests over the decades. While the international art world discussed popular postmodern topics, such as “who needs a world view” and “politics outside art,” the Kurdish mothers—known as Sunday Mothers—were protesting for their missing children during the reign of the military junta and another group was pleading for the release of political prisoners, were located just outside the doors (Figure 2.3). This discussion of “everyday politics” behind the doors, being so detached from the everyday reality of the street outside, became a good example for the rightful criticism that the art biennials’ discussion platforms are often more discursive than practical.

During the days that those meetings and roundtable talks took place, on the same busy street of Istanbul that receives approximately one million visitors a day, the anarchist organization *Resistanbul*—founded specifically to protest upcoming IMF and World Bank meetings—circulated an open letter to the curators, artists, and participants of the 11th International Istanbul Biennial and to all art enthusiasts, reading in part:

We have to stop pretending that the popularity of politically engaged art within the museums, and markets over the last few years has anything to do with really changing the world. We have to stop pretending that taking risks in the space of art, pushing boundaries of form, and disobeying the conventions of culture, making art about politics makes any difference. We have to stop pretending that art is a free space, autonomous from webs of capital and power... We have read the conceptual framework of the 11th International Istanbul Biennial with great interest and a grin on our faces. We have long understood that the Istanbul Biennial aims at being one of the most politically engaged transnational art events. And what a coincidence! This year the Biennial is quoting comrade Brecht, dropping notions such as neo-liberal hegemony, and riding high against global capitalism. We kindly appreciate the stance but we recognize that art should have never existed as a separate category from life. Therefore we are writing you to stop collaborating with arm dealers such as the Koç Holding, which white wash themselves in warm waters of the global art

scene and invite you to the life, the life of resistance. ...Join the resistance and the insurgence of imagination! Evacuate corporate spaces, liberate your works. Let's prepare works and visuals (poster, sticker, stencil, etc.) for the streets of the resistance days. Let's produce together, not within the white cube, but in the streets and squares during the resistance week! Creativity belongs to each of us and can't be sponsored.<sup>192</sup>

This call was interpreted as “naïve” and “biased” by some Turkish contemporary artists who participated in previous Istanbul Biennials and as “premature” and “inadequate” by others. For example, regarding the letter, Ahmet Ögüt, one of the artists displaying works in the Turkish Pavilion at the 2009 Venice Biennale, said: “Such a choice between street and the white cube is not necessary.”<sup>193</sup> Delier, who came to be known for his strategic criticism of neoliberalism at the 9th and the 10th Istanbul Biennials, said: “It is true that this group reacted fiercely upon only hearing the contextual title of the Biennial. One cannot judge an exhibition without seeing it.”<sup>194</sup>

It is because of their opposition to the undemocratic consequences of the modern state-building in Turkey, which has been ongoing since 1923, these activists who passionately protest the Istanbul Biennial have declared that contemporary art has been losing its shield against the spectacularization of culture in the age of globalization and it needs to be autonomous from politics.<sup>195</sup> In fact, what was being uttered rhetorically by the Brechtian slogan of the 11th Biennial “what keeps the man alive?”—the merging of aesthetics and politics in the spontaneity of the everyday—had just been occurring outside the Biennial venues, if not inside.

During the opening week of the Biennial, the protestors adopted creative strategies from the activism of the anti-global movement. The anarchist group that called

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<sup>192</sup> For full text see Appendix I, “Open Letter from Anarchist Resistance Groups in Istanbul, September 9, 2009,” 296-297.

<sup>193</sup> Author's interview with Ahmet Ögüt, Istanbul-Turkey, November 9, 2009.

<sup>194</sup> Author's interview with Burak Delier.

<sup>195</sup> See Appendix I, “Open Letter.”

themselves “cultural commissaries” circulated subverted images of Biennial posters with symbolic mockery in the streets of İstiklâl Caddesi and also disseminated them through the Internet (Figure 2. 4). They also organized gatherings for the upcoming anti-global resistance days in popular spots in town. These anti-IMF and anti-globalization meetings merged with anti-biennial meetings, where the group prepared to protest both the IMF meetings in Istanbul and the Istanbul Biennial. Additionally, in some popular bars and locales of İstiklâl Caddesi, some creative performances took place. For example, anarchist-artist collective *İç Mihrak* (internal enemy) presented a three-minute performance called “Beğenal” (changing the word “bienal” to “beğenal,” meaning in Turkish to choose and buy), whose theme was on corporatism in the arts and “Koç’s invasion” of the Istanbul Biennial. An anonymous group circulated short videos of animated images on social media networks mocking the ironic relationship of the Marxist biennial under the sponsorship of Turkey’s biggest corporation, which is known for its support for the 1980 coup and thus the prosecution of many intellectuals and artists.

The artist groups, which are a part of the anarchist organization *Resistanbul* and called themselves “the culture commissaries,” also were present at the exclusive opening gala of the 11th Biennial. They disseminated a leaflet with the title *Direnal!* (mocking the world “biennial” and literally meaning in Turkish to resist and take) and read a declaration to the public that talked about the basic consequences of the decisions forced by the IMF and the World Bank. They ended with the call: “You and your loved ones can now resist these privileges and declare your *zaart* (a mockery term for art that also means in Turkish “flatulence”) to art bureaucrats, art traders and toadies who domesticate art in



the limelight spectacle, like that of IKSÜ.”<sup>196</sup> When an executive representative of Koç Holding was making a speech about the importance of the Biennial for the economy of Istanbul, protest noises from outside were heard. Then the curators staged a theatrical show in place of an opening speech, which added another Brechtian element to the carnival. They shouted Brecht’s slogan, “A criminal is a bourgeois, and a bourgeois is a criminal!” while the founder of the Eczacıbaşı Corporation, Dr. Nejat Eczacıbaşı, the Minister of Culture, and Koç Holding’s CEOs were present and applauding in the front seats. Meanwhile, the activist crowd that was led by the group *Resistanbul*—some wearing clown costumes—was performing an intervention by shouting slogans, whistling, and playing drums and trumpets outside the venue to protest the hypocrisy of the event (Figure 2.5). At the news conference for the 11th Biennial, Mustafa Koç announced that he found the criticism of his sponsorship a healthy reaction and added that, for Koç Holding, it is out of the question to censor the critical freedom of an artist.<sup>197</sup> By being the sponsor of the event, Koç Holding proved its liberalism, while organized criticism to Koç’s sponsorship was interpreted by the mainstream as well as by radical leftist media as proof that the Istanbul Biennial had been completely institutionalized.

In fact, most of the 120 projects, by seventy artists from forty countries in the three venues, were inundated with political (socialist) messages, thoughts, stories, documents, comments, and questions. Strewn across the floors of the biennials three spaces—the Antrepo warehouse, the Feriköy Greek School, and the old Tobacco Factory—were occasional texts printed with “turn Left,” with an arrow showing Left (Figure 2.6). This was not a directional message literally but a suggestive political orientation for the

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<sup>196</sup>For full text see Appendix II, “Manifesto Disseminated by Anarchist Resistance Groups in Istanbul, September 12, 2009,” 298.

<sup>197</sup> Hikmet Yavus, “Bienal, Koç Holding ve Sponsorluk,” *Zaman Gazetesi*, September 20, 2009, 4.

public that puzzled many who were confronted by it. It was striking that most of the artists involved in the Biennial were simultaneously activists engaged in social change with leftist inspirations. In this edition of the Biennial, the curators from Zagreb looked far beyond the familiar matrix of Western galleries and their star artists. Instead of inviting big names from the art world, they invited artists mainly from Eastern Europe, the Middle East, and Central Asia, many of whom had no dealers or galleries supporting them and therefore were “unknown” to art world specialists.<sup>198</sup> The curatorial collective What, How and for Whom (WHW) explained the aim of their role in the 11th Istanbul Biennial:

As a collective, we believe that within the exhibition context it is possible to take a critical position and that the format of an exhibition can produce temporary yet polemical agencies for contesting the dominant social frameworks. We are especially interested in contesting the negative aspects of these frameworks—representational, paternalistic, hegemonic, etc. —and exploring how those can be transcended into more flexible platforms that generate knowledge and mobilize certain critical potentials and public attention.<sup>199</sup>

Perhaps the most prominent aspect of the 11th Biennials relationship with Brecht was not the questions or the problems it presented through citing his well-known slogans but instead that it opted to create a space that would reflect the contradictions of the latest capitalism, just like a Brechtian theater stage. Thus, the reactionary responses right in front of this stage also can be seen as a part of the Brechtian theater, giving the audience the agency to break away from the rules of the conventional theater. Not unlike what Brecht did in his projection of the dialectical tensions between art and industry in his theater, the WHW staged the tension between the cultural industry and contemporary art,

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<sup>198</sup> Only twenty-eight percent of the artists were from the West and those who live and work in the West constituted the forty percent.

<sup>199</sup> Joshua Simon, “Da Mi Moze,” *Programma* 12 (2009): 46.

which paved the way for the protests of diverse groups—an attempt that would have been appreciated by Brecht. After all, the dialectical pull between oppositional and commercial art is as persistent today as it was in Brecht’s time.

While the curators were severely criticized by some intellectuals and artists for using Brecht as their clown for the biennial entertainment industry, they indeed took very seriously Brecht’s dictum of “making the creation of art transparent.” For example, “The classroom project” was one of the most interesting parts of the biennial, providing exhibited information ranging from biennial demographics to the curatorial research process, from background information on the choice of locations, to how the budget was spent. The fact that this project was sponsored by Koçtaş—one of the Koç Holding’s companies specializing in marketing Africa’s so-called “blood diamonds”—gave it an undeniably ironic twist.

The Istanbul Biennial is a battleground for the traditional camp of the art world—a battleground that encompasses academics, collectors, gallerists, who mainly constitute the Kemalist-nationalist camp, and the younger, active generation of artists as well as others from various disciplines engaged in art activities and criticism. The former camp is powerful in the local arena but is weak internationally, while the latter depends on international funding as well as on international exhibitions and residencies for their existence and visibility. This stark division is prominent not only in what I called “the discursive wars” but it also reveals itself in the form of exclusion as well as of censorship. For example, in the 9th Istanbul Biennial in 2005, Delier’s photographic work “Guard” was expelled from the exhibition after being viewed during press-preview days.

The image showed a man standing in front of a ceremonial soldier, holding a knife behind his back (Figure 2.7). Thus, as the viewer confronts the back of the man, the knife becomes the focal point of the picture, representing a visible but silent threat to the Turkish soldier. The removal of the photograph demonstrated that a threat to the Turkish army was not something the conservative and Kemalist-nationalist art world could tolerate, even in the environment of an international biennial. Ironically, during my interview with him, Delier revealed to me that it was not the Biennial authorities who wanted the work being taken down from the wall but some other participating Turkish artists.<sup>200</sup> In the end, while the mainstream media did not take up the issue for fearing it would create dangerous publicity, government prosecutors sued the catalog publishers of the Biennial for including this “anti-patriotic” work.<sup>201</sup>

In 2009, perhaps the most interesting critical development was that of an alternative biennial, which took place during the 11th Istanbul Biennial. While the IMF and World Bank meetings led to counter-meetings and demonstrations on the streets, ninety-seven independent artists and eighteen art collectives, none of whom were represented at the Istanbul Biennial for various reasons, gathered to stage an artistic activism to present their radical perspective on the processes of the new global order, called neoliberalism, and its relationship with art.

The exhibition was called *Hayalet* (which can be interpreted simultaneously as “imagine” and “ghost” in Turkish) with the subtitle “My name is Casper (Emre

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<sup>200</sup> Author’s interview with Burak Delier.

<sup>201</sup> Here, it is important to note that the war between the Turkish army and Kurdish rebels has exacerbated since 2001. The Turkish government and the nationalist media continue to manipulate the chauvinistic sentiments of the Turkish public especially that of the petit-bourgeoisie, which has been politically powerful since the foundation of the republic, and which lost power to the Islamist/neoliberals in the 2001 elections. Had this image been circulated in the media, it could have damaged the image of the Turkish army and could have triggered dangerous reactions by the nationalist public.

Zeytinoğlu's catalogue article).<sup>202</sup> To produce this exhibition, 265 participants worked collectively for two years on an interdisciplinary project called "The Alternative Work Platform." It was organized on horizontal and communal principles without the usual advisory board, directors, curators, or sponsors. Without any intermediaries, the exhibition also sought to bandage the long-damaged relationship between contemporary art and the Turkish public. Although the event was announced in the local newspapers as "the alternative biennial" and the works in the exhibition openly targeted to mock the Istanbul Biennial, the organizers insisted that they prepared this artistic platform to transcend the biennial model and not to contest it.<sup>203</sup> The artists insisted they were not "anti-biennial," but they criticized the authority of the Istanbul Biennial for having such a dominant voice in the public sphere of art.

The exhibition focused on the ways in which the Istanbul Biennial has maneuvered Istanbul's creative impulse and its political terrain on the national and international scene. Moreover, it aimed to demonstrate that a radical artistic experience and a democratic exhibition not only are necessary but are possible. The artists/organizers made this clear in their manifesto: "150 years after, the interpretation of the ghost (read communism) and art has been transformed. When the first ten years of the twenty-first-century staged the crises in every aspects of life, we encounter the Ghost once again. To face the reality and to transform it...For another look, another word, another reality."<sup>204</sup>

The project started during the course of the previous Biennial. In 2007 a group of artists published a comprehensive critique of Hanru's Biennial and distributed it to the

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<sup>202</sup> Theater lovers in Istanbul had already met Marks' ghost before the 11th Biennial. Just before the opening of the 11th Biennial, an independent theater in Istanbul, Dostlar Tiyatrosu, exhibited a play titled "The Return of Karl Marx."

<sup>203</sup> Erkan Doğanay, "Casper Bienal'e Karşı," *Taraf*, October 8, 2009, 12-14.

<sup>204</sup> Ibid.

visitors in front of the doors of the Biennial venues. On the last day of biennial the artists organized a panel called “After the Biennial” at *Nazım Hikmet Kültür Merkezi* (Nazım Hikmet Cultural Center)—a meeting place for radical leftists. To make it an international dialogue, the group contacted artist initiatives in Cuba and Greece and exchanged thoughts on how a biennial could be possible without corporate involvement. Two years later, three generations of artists culminated their research, criticism, and dialogue with a giant independent exhibition, the only one of its kind in Turkish history.

Ironically, the exhibitions space was an old state bank building, which went bankrupt when facing a boom of private banks in the 1990s. The artworks were placed in the attic, on corners, in bathrooms and in—what used to be—the safe of the bank building. Although what these artists attempted to voice in this alternative exhibition was not a critique of any particular exhibition of the Istanbul Biennial but instead a critique of the structural and sponsorship mechanism of the Biennial, there were particular works that mocked, attacked, and made fun of the slogans and themes of the 10th and 11th Biennials (Figure 2.8). The venue was only two blocks from the Biennial’s main building, the Antrepo in Tophane, and the neighborhood also housed the Istanbul Modern, Turkey’s first modern art museum.

The event was advertised on social media and in artist blogs as well as in some alternative art magazines as “the historical exhibition in a historical building: For an alternative view, alternative voice, alternative art, a ghost is among us!”<sup>205</sup> In the catalog for the exhibition, which was published mostly electronically, Emre Zeytinoğlu’s article, “My Name is Casper,” in the catalog pointed to the exhibitions overtly Marxist line and incorporated many Marxist slogans. Zeytinoğlu begins his article with a quote from the

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<sup>205</sup> “Hayalet Aramızda,” *Birgün*, September 14, 2009, 12.

Communist Manifesto: “There is a ghost among us in Europe, the ghost of communism.”<sup>206</sup> He continues with a thorough analysis of the ghost of communism in nineteenth century Europe to clarify how the concept of ghost should be perceived in the exhibition: “Those in power in the nineteenth century were very afraid of the ghost of communism. Today, those in power are not afraid of the ghost that Marx skillfully created. Because the language that lost its context, a state that has been a puppet of the new power mechanisms and subverted texts, turn the ghost of communism to the Casper the friendly ghost!”<sup>207</sup> Yavuz Tanyeli, one of the artist/organizers of the exhibition, agrees with this idea in his interview with *Hürriyet Daily News* and adds that:

It is the first time in many years that we are talking about this idea openly. It was erased from people’s minds but came back due to the economic crisis. We don’t claim the idea of socialism should be implemented the way it is, without questioning it. It has to be questioned, but at the same time we should try to find in it something practical. This art movement is a way to start rethinking socialism.<sup>208</sup>

The project aimed to create an artistic movement that would bring together diverse tendencies, multiple generations of artists, and a plurality of voices, all raising their voices against the existing hierarchical mechanism and corporate hegemony in art. Hence, most importantly, it was a one-of-a kind event, which demonstrated that contemporary artists could negate and resist existing structures with an activist zeal and even that an alternative new order of art is possible.

Both the discursive and the economic field of the Istanbul Biennial have made possible numerous projects and events that were unimaginable for Turkish artists in the 1970s and 1980s. Before the Istanbul Biennial was established in 1987, the local art

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<sup>206</sup> Emre Zeytinoglu, “My name is Casper!” (2009), accessed January 28, 2011, [http://www.gursoytrak.com/turkish/guncel\\_det.php?recordID=14](http://www.gursoytrak.com/turkish/guncel_det.php?recordID=14)

<sup>207</sup> Ibid.

<sup>208</sup> Marzena Romanowska, “The Friendly Ghost Casper,” *Hürriyet Daily News*, October 4, 2009, 10.

infrastructure in this mega city was literally nonexistent. Madra summarizes the situation of the art sector in Turkey before the Biennial:

We had three small museums/galleries that the state totally ignored for years, that couldn't afford to buy two paintings a year nor could they afford to repair their buildings...Nobody wanted to support the young Turkish artists who achieved considerable success in Europe by themselves. The art environment was closed to any relationship to international artists, curators, or art critics. There was almost no art historical or critical research of the works being rotten in artists' studios for thirty years.<sup>209</sup>

Since the 1980s, through the channels that the Istanbul Biennial has built, international ideas and concepts have flowed into Turkey, and Turkish contemporary art has become visible internationally. The Biennial vitalized the local art scene to such an extent that young Turkish artists, who had been deemed too radical for the local art market, such as Taner Ceylan, Mehmet Dere, Burak Delier, Genco Gülan, Elif Çelebi, Inci Furni, and Esra Ersen and many others, found opportunity for visibility and represented their political attributes both locally and internationally.

In Turkey, the lack of institutional support for art and culture has provided an inquisitive distance of the artists and intellectuals to the state apparatus—and thus the state ideology, which allowed a new generation of antinationalist artists to emerge. Unlike the old generation of modernists, a young generation of artists collaborated with its peers from the Kurdistan part of Turkey, such as in the cities of Diyarbakır (Kurdish: Amed) and Mardin (Kurdish: Mêrdîn).<sup>210</sup> The interactive dialogue between Istanbul and the

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<sup>209</sup> Beral Madra, and Ayşe O. Gültekin, *İki Yılda Bir Sanat: Bienal Yazıları* (Istanbul: Norgunk, 2003), 44. Author's translation.

<sup>210</sup> Although the Kurdish nation has historically faced similar problems in neighboring countries, the Kurds in Turkey have faced frightening discrimination, dangerous nationalism, and a systematic repression of their language and identity since the nineteenth century, as well as the dogmatic and assimilationist ideology of the Turkish state since 1923.



southeastern Turkey enabled some Kurdish artists such as Halil Altındere, Ahmet Ögüt and Şener Özmen to be visible in the contemporary art scene in Turkey.

When their work caught the attention of the international art world and the war-deprived zone of Turkey has received art funding from the EU institutions. As a result, contemporary art centers flourished in the zone after the Diyarbakır Arts Center (DSM) founded in 2002 and the contemporary art activities boosted immensely in this much-neglected part of Turkey. The 9th (2005) and the 10th (2007) Istanbul Biennials included parallel events in Diyarbakır Art Center and organized tours for the international art world guests. Soon, private galleries and entrepreneurs flocked into region. The Sakıp Sabancı Mardin City Museum and Dilek Sabancı Art Gallery opened, and in 2010, the International Mardin Biennial was founded with the intention “to bring contemporary art from Turkey’s west to the east “in the same year.<sup>211</sup> And Diyarbakır (the ancient city of Mesopotamia, the capital of Kurdistan)—after being known as the center of the war between the Kurdish rebels and Turkish army for thirty years—have come to be called “Paris of Kurdistan” by the international art world.

Istanbul Biennial is a good example that each biennial has the capacity to stimulate not only structural but also artistic and critical mechanisms in the local art scene. The fierce criticism toward the Istanbul Biennial is continuous. In the most chaotic days of the Gezi uprising in the summer of 2013, the anti-neoliberalist anarchists targeted Istanbul Biennial as a part of their protests. The posters mocking the Biennial posters were glued on the walls of Istanbul along with other plethora of visual disobedience on the walls.

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<sup>211</sup> See the official website of the Biennial, accessed October 10, 2011, <http://www.biennialfoundation.org/biennials/mardin-biennial-turkey/>

The 13th edition was titled “Mom, am I barbarian?” and curated by Fulya Erdemci.<sup>212</sup> During the heat of the Gezi uprising a photograph appeared in the social media, showing a child coming out of a cloud of pepper gas, with police following him and holding a paper that reads “mom, are police human?” (Figure 2.9). The photograph that circulated on the Internet was real and taken during the Gezi, but it had a stamp that said “Isyanbul”—an alteration of the world Istanbul with *isyan* (revolt)—that announced the act as a staged protest toward the Istanbul Biennial.

Erdemci openly supported the Gezi and answered to the discussion of protests of the biennial during the uprising: “Yes, art is a part of the system, but while protesting the system we should not come to the point to say ‘art is dirty, let’s kill it.’ Art has an inherent capacity to be critical to the system.”<sup>213</sup> The conceptual framework of the Biennial “urban transformation” was the fundamental concern of the Gezi uprising. Erdemci canceled the installations and exhibitions that are in the occupied area of the Gezi protestors to let the creative process on the streets take over. Hence, this time, the Biennial was not in the role of the producer of the discourse and an analyzer of the local situations, it had to remain as an observer while Gezi was creating a political space for both discourse and action.

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<sup>212</sup> For the conceptual framework of this edition see Fulya Erdemci. “Curator’s Text.” In *Mom, Am I Barbarian? 13th Istanbul Biennial Guide* (Istanbul: IKSİV, 2013).

<sup>213</sup> Author’s interview with Fulya Erdemci Istanbul-Turkey, September 9, 2013.

## Off-Space Artist Collectives and the Emerging Alternative Art

### Scene in Turkey

In the 1980s Turkey witnessed a new atmosphere of economic restructuring and depoliticization of social life. On September 12, 1980, a right-wing military junta led by General Kenan Evren took state power, established martial law, abolished political parties and trade unions and eradicated all democratic rights. After the 1983 election—heavily guarded and influenced by the junta—a right-wing “liberal” government replaced that of the military government that came to power with the 1980 coup d’état. This preserved the state’s fundamental conservative ideology while taking forward the new economic mentality of the neoliberal system such as intensive privatization of state-owned factories, institutions, and other public assets.

Political repression and forceful economic restructuring went hand in hand. Many writers, poets, actors, artists, and film directors were prosecuted and jailed. In the 1990s, the intellectuals and artists have started to come out of a morose existence they were thrown into during the junta period the decade before. In fact, through the 1990s, the large exhibitions that took over the public spaces emptied by the junta were produced and organized by the independent artist collectives without presence of a curator or sponsor. Those exhibitions, such as *Genç Etkinlik 1, 2, 3 (Young Activity 1, 2, 3)*, *Performans Günleri 1, 2, 3, (Performance Days 1, 2, 3)*, and *Seratonin (1, 2)*, with their continuing editions, initiated long-lasting dialogues with the public as well as with the young art students in the art academies and have become the predecessors of the civic artist initiatives.

At the turn of the century, the shrinkage of the Ministry of Culture and the merger with the Ministry of Tourism resulted in major cuts in the states already minimal support to art. The new ministry cut its relationship with the independent artist initiatives and collectives and found a solution to the issue of art funding by leaving it to the mercy of big corporations. As I have argued earlier, in a few years, ninety percent of Istanbul's art world establishment changed hands to the private sector.<sup>214</sup>

The Istanbul Biennial has been important, not only for the corporate business world to attract international private investments and for Turkish contemporary art to expand outward, but also for revitalizing the art infrastructure in Istanbul as well as in all major cities of Turkey. This also inevitably allowed the growing of underground cultural activities and antiestablishment art spaces in the 1990s, which were invisible after the 1980s—after the military junta's cultural directives. The Istanbul Biennial has become a powerful institution that is capable of being a magnet that, ideologically and politically, affects the alternative artistic energies inside and outside the Turkey's art world. In this part, I will talk about the artist collectives and off-space art practices that have been systematically resisting the domain of the “global” art world over the market and the art discourse in Turkey.

A variety of art practices around the world have been emerging on the margins of the institutional art world and challenging what is accepted in culture as aesthetics. In the so-called “off-spaces,” which are simultaneously connected and disconnected from art world institutions, often political and aesthetic tactics interplay with each other to form an experimental and dialogical platform. These interdisciplinary art activities often do not seek to challenge political positions or ideological perspectives; they create a space of

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<sup>214</sup> Tüzünoglu, ed., *Dersimiz Güncel Sanat*, 90.

interaction, exchange, and communication, with spontaneous collectivism and activist zeal. Open-ended collaborations are often a true interdisciplinary interaction wherein artists, sociologists, architects, philosophers, activists, and the public work together.<sup>215</sup>

Collaborative practices produce a creative, cognitive process on a premise of establishing a novel relationship between one small group and a broader community in an attempt to create a reciprocal dialogue. Moreover, to participate in a collaborative project means that, through the act of collaboration, different ideas are cast, synthesized, and regenerated. These projects, based on interaction and dialogue among actors on different ranks of the social ladder, create new ways of asking questions as much as they create new ways of understanding art and social phenomena. I argue that instead of criticizing these works for not presenting a collective disruption to the instrumentalization of contemporary art or measuring their immediate impact in the social fabric, the analysis of these practices should focus on their potential capability to organize and develop a novel formation of art praxis that challenges what is conceivable as art in the society.

The off-space artist initiatives in Turkey that started flourishing in the 1990s are founded on the principles of civic and public with an ethic of working collectively in a horizontal relationship.<sup>216</sup> The exhibitions by these artist-initiatives have allowed contemporary art to gain unprecedented public visibility in Turkey. There have been arguments that, after the implementation of neoliberal free-market reforms and the vast privatization campaign they enforce, collective struggles have become private struggles.

For example, in the 1980s, Cuban contemporary art was vivid, with numerous art

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<sup>215</sup> Art historian Patricia Phillips asserts: "Interdisciplinarity is not simply an indiscriminate amalgamation of conventions from different fields, but a faceted way of looking at the formation of knowledge and the public realm. Interdisciplinary aesthetic practices are a way to think critically and act publicly." Patricia C. Phillips, "(Inter) Disciplinary Actions," *Public Art Review* 29/11 (2003): 15.

<sup>216</sup> See Levent Çalıkoğlu, "Modern Birey, Sivil İniyatif," in *Çağdaş Sanat Konuşmaları 2: Çağdaş Sanatta Sivil Oluşumlar ve İniyatifler*, ed. Levent Çalıkoğlu (Beyoğlu, İstanbul: Yapı Kredi, 2007), 7-14.

collectives flourishing not only in Havana but in all major cities throughout Cuba.<sup>217</sup> And Rachel Weiss argues that, by the 1990s, when capitalist market forces entered Cuba, the characteristics of Cuban collectives had changed: "...while the figure of collective remained more or less constant during the period of new art, its fundamental meaning and vision has now inverted, from a vision that was public and civic to one that is often private and hermetic."<sup>218</sup> I argue instead that, in each locality, art entails an array of creative practices that are not all in a direct correlation to economic interests, especially when those interests themselves are contradictory. This is also true for works produced by artist collectives: While some yield to standardization and the institutionalization of market mechanisms, others create a multiplicity of split-offs from these mechanisms.

Nonprofit art spaces, collaborative project groups, and off-space art exhibitions, which are produced by various artist collectives, first appeared as a reaction to the privatization of art institutions and the hegemony of the Eurocentric art world in artist residencies, art fairs, and international biennials. Nevertheless, in time, they presented a rich array of criticism, with multiple viewpoints and a variety of creative impulses. These artist collectives, in their relationship to one another as well as in their relationship to the public, have constituted different forms of interactions that have emphasized the making of art rather than the consumption or reception of it, but the main difference lies in the way that they problematized the public space. The artists, as well as the sociologists, architects, and philosophers, have formed these initiatives with a political consciousness

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<sup>217</sup> *Volumen Uno*, *4x4* and *Hexagono* are good examples.

<sup>218</sup> Rachel Weiss, "Performing Revolution," in *Collectivism after Modernism: Art and Social Imagination after 1945*, ed. Blake Stimson and Gregory Sholette (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2007), 145.

that questions the ways in which framing and re-framing of the visible and the invisible are constructed through the collective experience of the community in the public space.<sup>219</sup>

In Turkey and elsewhere, the main issue that these artist initiatives have often raised was the reconfiguration of the separation of the public and private spheres and questioning of hierarchies in what is defined as “public.” There have been significant discussions within the radical Left suggesting that the break between art production and state support had deeper consequences than just an ideological shift and the privatization of cultural production since the 1980s.<sup>220</sup> According to this discussion, what was at stake was the “publicness” of artistic and cultural expression:

First is that the public potential of art and culture was suppressed. What was originally an ethical quandary of asking support from the State, turned later into the evaporation of the concept of the public... We are yet to evaluate the damage implicated by the absence of the concept of public and consequently of citizenry, belonging, and a shared sense of ethics and core values.<sup>221</sup>

As the production of public culture was transferred to the entertainment industry in the private sector, the “publicness” of culture lost its social capability for the public.

Thus, what the variety of nonprofit alternative art practices in Istanbul are apt to achieve has been precisely what Nicolas Bourriaud means by “the re-configuration of the separation of the public and private spheres” in order to create a true dialogue between

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<sup>219</sup> These intellectuals/artists have been influenced largely by Henri Lefèbvre’s discussions of the “social production of urban space” and “spatial justice,” by Rancière’s articulation of the “distribution of the sensible,” and Nicolas Bourriaud’s concept of “relational aesthetics,” which points to interactive relationships among individuals, communities, individuals, groups, social networks, etc. See Nicolas Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics* (Dijon: Les Presses du réel. 2002) Lefèbvre, *The Production of Space*, D. Nicholson-Smith, trans. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991) and Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics*.

<sup>220</sup> For more, see “Notes for Navigation Arts & Culture and Their Institutions in Turkey in the Last 25 Years,” *Resmi Görüş*, accessed November 12, 2009, <http://anibellek.org/en/?p=488>

<sup>221</sup> Ibid.

the public and visual arts—a dialogue that the modernist republicans and the Istanbul Biennial could not achieve.

Especially in Istanbul, some artist collectives have taken every opportunity to be visible within the cultural agenda of the city and have tried to establish themselves as a part of the social and political terrain of the rapidly changing urban space. The survival of these artist initiatives depends on careful calculations regarding the strategic entering into and exiting from the institutionalized art system. Some examples: *Extra Mücadele* (1997), *Extra Struggle* engages in designing imaginary objects for imaginary customers; *Apartman Projesi* (1999), *Apartment Project* space constructs a relationship between the street and trespassers; *Oda Projesi* (2006), *Room Project* exhibits collaborative artistic activities in a room of artists apartment; *Xurban\_collective* (2000) creates web-based art projects and is involved in activist art projects on the Internet; *Nomad* (2002) is an association that experiments with new patterns in digital art production using a cross-disciplinary approach; *K2* (2003) targets immediate neighborhood responses to interdisciplinary, independent art projects in Izmir; *Karşı Sanat* (2003), *Reverse Art* establishes a non-gallery space that exhibits independent projects; *PIST* (2006) exists as an interdisciplinary project space for any artist collectives that want to participate; *Altı Aylık* (2006) produces wearable, displayable, and saleable textiles that read confessions as an open expression of political beliefs (sales support women's shelters throughout the city); *Tershane* (2006) is a large factory-like atelier that functions as a transformative space for contemporary thought and art; (2006); *Hafriyat Karaköy* (2007) is a venue that hosts alternative visibilities on sinister topics, located on one of Istanbul's busiest streets; *Garaj Istanbul* (2007) is a nonprofit performance art cooperative also functioning as a



nongovernmental organization; *Masa Projesi* (2007), *Table Project* exhibits artworks on a table placed in unexpected spaces throughout the city; *Daralan* (2007) aims at widening the narrow-space of producing and exhibiting art with games, plays, and spontaneous performances; *Artık Mekan* (2008), *Discarded Space* operates as an interactive art space in the nonfunctional space of an historical apartment building; *IMC 5533* (2008) experiments on independent curatorial practices.<sup>222</sup>

The underlying context of the works and events produced by these artist initiatives concerns the cultural and political processes on a global level that led to immense changes in the local urban environment over the past two decades.<sup>223</sup> These alternative formations, apart from the projects they produce, also struggle to keep the visual art scene vibrant with artist meetings and panels, workshops and discussions, film screenings and video shows, and open studios and lectures. Madra explains the desperate attempts of these young artists to become visible within the social fabric of the city:

All these underground activities emerged because of necessity. We have an abundance of young artists graduating from fine art schools every year. But interestingly for the last couple of years, the contemporary artists come from other disciplines besides art, such as sociology and political science. It is nearly impossible for a young art graduate to emerge as an artist in Turkey because there is no strong art system. So they have only one solution: become a group and try to be visible as a collective. They not only put their creativity and energy together but their money too.<sup>224</sup>

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<sup>222</sup> For more information, see 5533, <http://imc5533.blogspot.com>; Apartman Projesi, <http://www.apartmentproject.com>; Artık Mekan, <http://artikmekan.blogspot.com>; Masa Projesi, <http://masaprojesi.blogspot.com>; Nomad <http://nomad-tv.net>; OdaProjesi <http://www.odaprojesi.org>; Xurban\_collective, <http://xurban.net>; Tersane <http://www.tersane.org/>; Pist, <http://pist.org.tr>, BAS, <http://www.b-a-s.info/>; Daralan <http://daralan.blogspot.com>; Galata Perform <http://galataperform.com>; Alti Aylık <http://www.altiaylik.blogspot.com/>; Garaj İstanbul <http://www.garajistanbul.org>; Hafriyat <http://www.art-hafriyat.com/>

<sup>223</sup> For further discussion on neoliberal urbanization in the context of Turkey, see Şebnem Oğuz, *Globalization and the Contradictions of State Restructuring in Turkey*, (Phd diss, York University, 2008); Ayşe Öncü and Çağlar Keyder, *İstanbul and the Concept of the World Cities* (İstanbul: Friedrich Ebert Foundation, 1993); John Lovering and Hade Türkmen, "Bulldozer Neoliberalism in İstanbul: The State-led Construction of Property Markets, and the Displacement of the Urban Poor," *International Planning Studies* 16 (2011), 73–96.

<sup>224</sup> Author's interview with Beral Madra.

In May 2006, Didem Özbek and Osman Bozkurt founded the PIST *Disiplinlerarası Proje Alanı* (Interdisciplinary Project Space) in a neighborhood that is distant from the entertainment-art district of Istanbul. This part of town is known for its low income, cosmopolitan populations, including Armenians, Greeks, Gypsies, and immigrants from East Asia and Africa. A couple of floors of each apartment building are typically transformed into unregistered ateliers that produce textiles to be sold in luxurious boutiques just across the main avenue. The rest of the businesses are small grocery stores, traditional coffeehouses, small shops, car repair shops, and restaurants. During the day, the division between public and private space becomes unclear, with shopkeepers having tea in front of their shops, housewives chatting from balcony to balcony, and children playing on the street.

The artists, having been attracted to these dynamics, rent three adjacent shops on a corner. They prefer not to tell curious neighbors that it is indeed an art space, because their aim is not to educate people on how to view or think about contemporary art. What the artists aim for is to mix performance on the street with performance in the art space: to engage in the daily activities of street life.<sup>225</sup> The window display is sixty meters wide, allowing for ample visibility from the street.<sup>226</sup> At any time of day, video and photography installations on the windows will draw the attention of a couple of passersby, which can turn into tens of people joining the crowd in curiosity. However, the window is by no means the only space of display. With different projects, the sidewalk, even the asphalt street itself, are transformed into an exhibition space.

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<sup>225</sup> Tüzünoğlu, ed., *Dersimiz Güncel Sanat*, 85.

<sup>226</sup> The Apartment Project is another project space that aims at the direct exchange with the general public on the street.

For example, in 2009, English artist Michael Coombs joined the PIST for a project of sculpture. The men in the car shop in the neighborhood helped him to make a cast of a broken car to produce a sculpture. The car sculpture then was carried and placed in front of the PIST. For the public in Turkey, public sculpture often means the statue of Atatürk, the founder of the Turkish Republic. The stunned public participated in this odd sculpture installation—a clandestine occupation of the street—by examining it, sitting on it, wanting to paint it, and even making a cover to protect it from the rain. Neighbors did not hesitate to question the work on their street, but soon accepted it as if it were a piece of furniture in their home, like a chair on which they sip tea in front of their building or shop. Another project that questioned the division between private and public spaces were 24-hour video shows in the windows. People would sometimes pull up a chair and watch the film from the sidewalk, as if they were in their own living room. Strangers, sitting next to each other, discussed the short film among themselves and asked questions to the directors of the PIST.

As explained earlier, since the 1990s, the emergent corporate art system in Turkey has become even more exclusive in terms of its local audience. The Istanbul Biennial, Istanbul Modern Art Museum, and other art venues often are visited only by members of the privileged class and by art students. For the Turkish public, the concept of artwork is typically limited to public sculptures, and some of these recently have become sites of debate when either the prime minister, Tayyip Erdoğan, or a local municipality want to demolish a sculpture for its political content. The impact and duration of the public reception of artworks such as those in and around the PIST, which try to establish a

dialogue with “the man on the street,” can be questioned, but it is precisely that questioning that makes these projects successful.

PIST literally means dance floor and runway in Turkish. It is not just an alternative exhibition space for young artists but is a space that many different actors in society could land in and take off from. In January 2009, a young artist, Delier, along with another artist friend Güneş Terkol, and with sociologist Eylem Akçay, launched a new project at PIST called S.T.ARGEM (Street Collectors Research and Development Center). This multidimensional art project operated with a conception of art as a set of social relations and designed to collaborate with the street garbage pickers in Istanbul. S.T.ARGEM’s main goal was to investigate and identify the relationship between artistic practice and public service, or that between an artist and variety of people with different social origins and class compositions.<sup>227</sup> The project created a social environment where different people, included artists, sociologists, garbage pickers (mainly wastepaper collectors) working illegally on the streets, and various paper companies came together to exchange ideas as well as to participate in shared activities, such as discussions of alternative recycling policies in the megalopolis, making ecological banners, engaging in street activism, producing protest videos, and making public sculptures from discarded materials.<sup>228</sup>

When I interviewed them, Delier, Terkol and Akçay enthusiastically claimed to have founded an alternative institution—an institution of trans-class relations.<sup>229</sup> The reason for labelling this “an institution” was to direct attention to the way it contests

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<sup>227</sup> Author’s interview with Güneş Terkol, Eylem Akçay, and Burak Delier in Istanbul-Turkey, December 10, 2009.

<sup>228</sup> STARGEM had a small gathering place in close proximity to the district of Istanbul where the paper companies are located.

<sup>229</sup> Author’s interview with Terkol, Akçay, and Delier.

traditional class hierarchies.<sup>230</sup> The project lasted for three months, from January to March 2009. During that time, the project space worked as a platform for interaction among artists, musicians, activists, researchers, and public workers, in a way that expanded the public sphere in a post-bourgeois direction.<sup>231</sup> These dialogues produced situations for the expression of multiple subject positions and promoted the kind of exchange that could overturn the existing social relationships.

The projects included object-based designs, such as a garbage bag with the image of a favorite singer of the garbage collector (Ferdi Tayfur) that garbage picker Osman Gülek hung on his trolley while he roams the streets of Istanbul, as well as other collaborative works, such as a series of video projects, performances, art-project days, protest meetings, and workshops. In the “Video-Action Workshop: The Paper-men” 13 paper-garbage collectors filmed their daily life encounters with various people in the society. Those who are constructed as “objects of gaze” in TV shows, which show the lives of people living on the fringes of the city and looked upon as “possible criminals” have become the “subject of the gaze” with a camera in their hands.

The street paper garbage pickers, numbering approximately 100,000 in Istanbul, are self-employed members of society, usually Gypsy families who have been doing this job for decades or new waves of impoverished immigrants from Central and Eastern Turkey, a group that also makes up the lowest and most impoverished class in the metropolis. These public workers roam the streets and pick up recyclable garbage, such as plastic and metal cans, but mostly paper, and sell them to paper companies or recycling companies. They decide for themselves when or how long to work and which

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<sup>230</sup> Ibid.

<sup>231</sup> Ibid.

zone of the metropolis to cover, hence the paper companies determine the price and the quantity of the purchase. Rivalry often exists within this large group of workers based on the territory in which they work, the length of time the worker has spent in this job, and the type of relationship established with buyer companies.

These garbage collectors often are regarded in public statistics as unemployed and thus are considered to be an unproductive force. Their position as an underground worker also reduces them to an invisible position in society. Philosopher Brian Holmes talks about the French jobless movement in the 1990s and articulates that for workers, “To be a surplus (laid off, redundant) was to be reduced to silence in a society that subtracted the jobless from the public accounts that made them into a kind of residue—invisible and inconceivable except as a statistic under a negative sign.”<sup>232</sup> The garbage collectors, in this case, did not march on the streets or protest in plazas with banners proclaiming, “We are not surplus, we are plus,” as French workers did. They just kept on doing what they always did on the streets of Istanbul, hence making themselves the subject of the “gaze” and “speech.”

S.T.ARGEM questioned how autonomous a working-class activity could be from capital and how social relations could be subverted through interclass and trans-class encounters. This project also invited us to rethink the social perspective of recycling politics in Turkey, including the re-commodification of recycled garbage from already consumed commodities and the role of local and daily practices in the implementation of neoliberal reforms. But, most importantly, it made visible the possibility of another world

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<sup>232</sup> Brian Holmes, “Hieroglyphs of the Future: Jacques Rancière and the Aesthetics of Equality,” *Animals* 4 (2001), accessed February 22, 2012, <http://www.cabinetmagazine.org/issues/4/Hieroglyphs.php>.

by creating horizontal collaborations in a country where art has been commercialized by a handful of powerful elite for narrow social and economic aims.

During my interview with him, one of the artists on the project, Delier, underlined his thoughts about the master-slave dichotomy of such trans-class relationships and argued that their aim was to form parallel relationships as opposed to vertical ones in order to “...not to be a part of the solution but to be part of the problem.”<sup>233</sup> Thus, what Delier and his friends’ objective was not to create a “critical awakening” in the society, but instead to have a democratic collaboration with “the man on the street.” Delier identified this project as “an experiment that not only targeted the rigid class relationships, but also aimed to break the usual subject-object formation in those relationships.”<sup>234</sup> Delier also added that their goal was not to reach a certain number of illegal garbage collectors, but to stay at a close proximity and openness to them.

Since the 1990s, the emergent corporate art system in Turkey has become even more exclusive in terms of its local artists and audience. The Istanbul Biennial, Istanbul Modern Art Museum, and other art venues often are visited only by members of the privileged class and by some art enthusiasts. For the Turkish public, the concept of artwork is typically limited to public sculptures, and some of these recently have become sites of debate when either the prime minister, Tayyip Erdoğan, or a local municipality want to demolish a sculpture for its political content. The impact and duration of the public reception of artworks such, as those in and around the PIST could be questioned but it is precisely that questioning that makes these projects successful.

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<sup>233</sup> Author’s interview with Burak Delier.

<sup>234</sup> Ibid.

In another interview, another collaborator, sociologist Akçay told that what they encountered in the art world was mostly the questions, such as “what are your solutions to the problems of the garbage collectors?” and “what do you hope S.T.ARGEM’s outcome would be?” Akçay stated that what science, art, and theory does is to try to construct the subject of the given question or problem and that these questions were raised from this mentality. Akçay further explained that, “what we were trying to do was to dismantle the established form of identifying and naming the problem in collaboration with those seen as ‘the problem’ or ‘having the problem’”<sup>235</sup>

Contrary to the conventional approach of the avant-garde, where an artist or an intellectual should be the one who shows the others where to go or what to discover in themselves, this type of dialogue, which these artist collectives have been producing in Turkey, create possibilities for realizing French philosopher Jacques Rancière’s idea of closing the distance between ignorance and knowledge.<sup>236</sup> According to Rancière, if there is no gap between two intelligences, then the equality of intelligence in all of its manifestations is possible. The collaborative art projects in Istanbul, such as in the example of S.T.ARGEM continue to defy the distribution of roles that exist within the hierarchal logic of “who gets to make-visible or make-sayable” in the public place—and thus who exercises political power.<sup>237</sup>

In his argument on “the distribution of the sensible,” Rancière emphasizes that politics entails, among other things, the struggle for equal representation in the established order, and this equality pertains to a “certain form of the neutralization of

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<sup>235</sup> Author’s interview with Eylem Akçay, in Istanbul-Turkey, December 10, 2009.

<sup>236</sup> For more see Rancière, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster: Five Lessons in Intellectual Emancipation*, trans. Kristin Ross (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991).

<sup>237</sup> For more on this see Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics*.



hierarchies,” nevertheless “the world is divided between those who can and those who cannot afford the luxury of playing with words and images.”<sup>238</sup> Thus, the battle for self-representation is bound with the contested images in society—specifically who is “allowed” to say or to show as well as what is allowed to be said and shown.

In Turkey and elsewhere, the collaborative art practices have been producing new forms of social relations as much as they have been creating new openings for more democratic conditions for speech and visibility. Rancière explains that: “Art is more and more to-day about matters of distribution of spaces and issues of re-descriptions of situations. It is more and more about matters that traditionally belonged to politics. But it cannot merely occupy the space left by the weakening of political conflict. It has to reshape it, at the risk of testing the limits of its own politics.”<sup>239</sup> PIST and S.T.ARGEM have emerged from a need to struggle for inclusive democracy in which the public space encompasses the entire citizen body, and where decisions at the macro level are part of an institutional framework of equal distribution of political power among citizens.<sup>240</sup> This connotes a different concept of freedom than defined by neoliberal ideology. This is a struggle for freedom to achieve self-determination and equal participation in society’s deliberative activities in the public sphere.

The two examples discussed here demonstrate that, when the public/citizen already is conceived as involved actor and the aesthetical already is conceived as political, then the question of how we (art historians and critics) should assess the

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<sup>238</sup> Fulvia Carnevale and John Kelsey, “Art of the Possible: In Conversation with Jacques Rancière,” *Artforum* (2007):12-19. Rancière explains: “I call the distribution of the sensible the system of self-evident facts of sense perception that simultaneously discloses the existence of the common and the delimitations that define the respective parts and positions within it.” Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics*, 12.

<sup>239</sup> Rancière, “Contemporary Art and the Politics of Aesthetics,” in *Communities of Sense: Rethinking Aesthetics and Politics*, eds. Beth Hinderliter and Vered Maimon (Duke University Press, 2009), 49.

<sup>240</sup> For description and theory of inclusive democracy see Takis Fotopoulos, *Towards an Inclusive Democracy* (London and New York: Cassell, 1997).

political import of artworks becomes meaningless. In *Art Incorporated*, Stallabrass argues: “If the work is shown without any prospect that it will have an effect, its display becomes mere performance and its viewing a form of entertainment.”<sup>241</sup> One could argue that this view not only confines art in formal terms but also regards the display and reception of such projects and many other socially engaged art as involving closed monologues rather than open dialogues.

Open-ended, socially engaged art projects do not always propose or aim for a concrete effect in the society, and for the reasons I have explained, they do not need to. Such projects also do not always generate democratic interactions. For example, the exhibition of documentary photography in the controversial art space *Karşı Sanat* on September 4, 2005, which showed the lynching of the members of the Greek Orthodox community in Istanbul in 1955, was prepared with the collaboration of the grandchildren of the victims. On the opening day, the street-passers and the people who live in the neighborhood attacked the exhibition by throwing stones through the windows. What was alarming about this spontaneous attack, which brought to mind the attacks and lynching of 1955, was that it was not the shadow of the army, the brutal aggression of police, or the motivation of the far-right nationalist party; it was a conscious decision of the public that mimicked the violence shown in the work of art. Turkish art critic and art historian Erden Kosova has argued that the inadequacy of contemporary art in Turkey, in terms of producing a democratic space for the perception of art, may be related to the inability of the Turkish progressive-radical Left to influence the masses.<sup>242</sup> Thus, with these kinds of projects (such as those of the S.T.ARGEM), which are designed to create the kind of

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<sup>241</sup> Stallabrass, *Art Incorporated*, 42.

<sup>242</sup> Kosova, “Dışarı Çıkma Cesareti,” *Varlık* 17 (2007): 9-12.

open dialogue that allows for many possible responses, we should recognize that the realization of these possibilities depends on the larger and complex socio-political and cultural resonations in the society, which differ from one particular society to the next.

Here, it is important to recall Michael Hardt's reading of Rancière: "Politics involves not only the distribution but also the production of the common that is, the production and reproduction of social relations and forms of life..."<sup>243</sup> These collaborative art practices have been producing new forms of social relations as much as they have created openings for the democratic distribution of the sensible, although the outcome is unpredictable and immeasurable. Rancière's observation is, once again, significant here: "Art is more and more today about matters of distribution of spaces and issues of re-descriptions of situations. It is more and more about matters that traditionally belonged to politics. But it cannot merely occupy the space left by the weakening of political conflict. It has to reshape it, at the risk of testing the limits of its own politics."<sup>244</sup>

The PIST and S.T.ARGEM have emerged from a need to struggle for a democratic society in which the public space encompasses the entire citizen body, and where decisions at the macro level are part of an institutional framework of equal distribution of political power among citizens ("inclusive democracy" as theorized by Takes Fotopoulos).<sup>245</sup> This connotes a different concept of freedom than one defined by neoliberal ideology. This is a struggle for freedom to achieve self-determination and equal participation in society's deliberative activities in the public sphere.

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<sup>243</sup> Hardt, "Production and Distribution of the Common," *Open* 16 (2009), 14.

<sup>244</sup> Jacques Rancière, "Contemporary Art and the Politics of Aesthetics," in *Communities of Sense: Rethinking Aesthetics and Politics*, ed., Beth Hinderliter et al. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009), 49.

<sup>245</sup> For description and theory of inclusive democracy, see Takes Fotopoulos, *Towards an Inclusive Democracy: The Crisis of Growth Economy and the Need for a Liberatory Project* (London: Cassell, 1997).

### CHAPTER III

#### THE ART OF NEW POLITICS AND THE POLITICS OF NEW ART

In this chapter, I discuss how the neoliberal market value system is theoretically encoded as a natural pattern of social organization through manipulation of concepts of freedom and democracy. I also discuss the fact that a new social movement to dismantle neoliberal instrumentalizations of concepts of freedom and democracy has been growing by creating an inclusive and horizontal praxis of grassroots struggle.

I argue that, unlike the liberation movements of the 1960s and the worldwide protests of 1968, the global anti-capitalist movements that have grown in the past three decades have no leading ideology. Rather, they retain common revolutionary characteristics, such as the struggle against power, praxis of participatory politics, and promotion of horizontalism.

The struggle against neoliberalism is also the struggle for the regime of equal representation—a struggle for dismantling the existing system of representative democracy. Rancière’s understanding of “the aesthetic field” as the distribution of what is visible and sayable is useful in rethinking what it means “to be visible” and what it means “to speak” in the current era of globalized revolt.<sup>246</sup> Finally, borrowing insights from Mikhail Bakhtin (1895-1975), we can identify the communal aesthetic experience of the masses in anti-capitalist protests and uprisings as a carnivalesque aesthetics because it opens a new dimension of social and sensual encounters creating a radical subjectivity that transcends the immediate reality of existing social relations.

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<sup>246</sup> For the first theorization and usage of “the aesthetic field,” see Arnold Berleant, *The Aesthetic Field: A Phenomenology of Aesthetic Experience* (Springfield: Charles C. Thomas, 1970).

## **The New Society of Neoliberalism and the New Political Subjectivity**

Neoliberalism, with its promises of freedom and democracy, lived its triumphal days from 1989 until 2008, when the global economic crisis began with Wall Street's fourth largest investment bank, Lehman Brothers, going bankrupt.<sup>247</sup> In neoliberal philosophy, economic freedom, which is founded on voluntary capitalist exchange among well-informed agents, also claims to guarantee political freedom. In fact, the core of neoliberal philosophy involves liberating private enterprises from any restrictions and regulations imposed by states, and it is clear on its preference of economic freedom over political freedom.<sup>248</sup> In a neoliberal economy, while the power of the state decreases as a protector of tariffs, bonds, and transnational economic agreements, its *raison d'être* as the protector of the nation, with its military actions, greatly enlarges. The U.S.'s missions in Afghanistan and Iraq, as well as Turkey's subsequent massacre of the Kurds in Iraq and Syria, are sufficient examples to illustrate greater militarization of the state at the expense of the political freedom of citizens.<sup>249</sup>

In the neoliberal era, the praxis of freedom and democracy—both discursively and practically—has been the terrain of contestation between who established and ensured the dissemination and continuation of this world order and who has been organizing to resist

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<sup>247</sup> Neoliberalism has been recognized as a failed utopia not only by its critics, but by neoliberals themselves. In his latest book, *Freefall: America, Free Markets and the Sinking of the Global Economy*, Joseph E. Stiglitz, the Nobel Prize winning former chief economist at the World Bank, explains that America's economic hegemony is at great risk with the indubitable failure of neoliberalism. See Joseph E. Stiglitz, *Freefall: America, Free Markets and the Sinking of the Global Economy* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 2010). For an earlier discussion of neoliberalism by the same author, see Stiglitz, *Globalization and Its Discontents* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 2002).

<sup>248</sup> Milton and Rose Friedman, *Free to Choose: A Personal Statement* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1980), 21.

<sup>249</sup> For more on the subject, see Noam Chomsky, *World Orders, Old and New* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994); idem., *Profit over People: Neoliberalism and Global Order* (New York: Seven Stories Press, 1999); and Noam Chomsky and David Barsamian, *Power Systems: Conversations on Global Democratic Uprisings and the New Challenges to U.S. Empire* (New York: Metropolitan Books/Henry Holt and Company, 2013).

it.<sup>250</sup> The global grassroots movement against neoliberalism challenges and changes the state paradigm that has dominated revolutionary thought for more than a century: from changing the world through the state by parliamentary means to changing the world without conquering state power.<sup>251</sup> Thus, I will explain that the concepts of freedom and democracy under the neoliberal capitalist system are at once a systemic and anti-systemic problems.

Neoliberalism, as the economic philosophy of contemporary capitalism, not only fabricates the system of free trade agreements, finance market speculations, privatization, and economic reforms, it also constructs a new type of society with a new value system based on the principles of the market. Belgian psychologist Paul Verhaeghe in his recent book, *What About Me? The Struggle for Identity in a Market-Based Society* makes significant connections between neoliberalism and psychosis, and argues that the self-interest incubated in such a society, claimed by neoliberals to encourage innovation, simply serves to damage morality and reward psychopathy.<sup>252</sup> On the other hand, celebrated Polish sociologist Zygmunt Bauman succinctly summarizes the paradox of freedom in contemporary society: “Never have we been so free. Never have we felt so powerless.”<sup>253</sup> What Bauman means is that we are free to question religion, our society, our government, etc. because this kind of freedom is indeed prompted by indifference. David Harvey, in his widely celebrated book, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, concludes that, with the establishment of neoliberal market principles, we have moved away from a

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<sup>250</sup> Institutional implementation of neoliberalism was brought about by Washington Consensus, the policies of the IMF and WTO.

<sup>251</sup> For a more detailed discussion on the anti-systemic global movements, see John Holloway, *Change the World without Taking Power: The Meaning of Revolution Today* (London: Pluto Press, 2002).

<sup>252</sup> See Paul Verhaeghe, *What About Me? The Struggle for Identity in a Market-Based Society*, trans. Jane Hedley-Prôle (Brunswick, Vic.: Scribe Publications, 2014).

<sup>253</sup> Zygmunt Bauman, *Freedom* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988), 32.

society marked by democratic governance to a new type of society in which the conditions for politics have been curtailed severely because of the conservative political reforms informed by neoliberal thought and theories.<sup>254</sup> How does neoliberalism as the *idée-force* of current political economy affect our contemporary society? What are these conservative reforms?

Neoliberal philosophy has been popularized because of its potent message of economic and political freedom. The mastermind of this philosophy, Milton Friedman, in his book, *Capitalism and Freedom* (1962), criticized twentieth-century liberals for betraying freedom by viewing welfare and equality as either prerequisites or as alternatives to freedom.<sup>255</sup> According to Friedman's understanding of political freedom, the area over which political power is exercised should be limited because the neoliberal economy enables people to cooperate with one another without coercion or central direction.<sup>256</sup> For Friedman, market economies in which consumers are free to choose are therefore both more efficient and ethically superior to economies with strong government controls. If the market economy is dispersed, it also is able to disperse and decentralize governmental power so that the so-called "protective measures" can be lifted and freedom can be preserved.<sup>257</sup> Tariffs, restrictions on international trade, high tax burdens, regulations, government price fixing, wage fixing, and a host of other state interventions, in this view, simply mean to exploit individual consumers. In sum, freedom for neoliberals is exercised through an individual desire to pursue self-interest and as a voluntary contribution to free trade.

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<sup>254</sup> Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, 47.

<sup>255</sup> Friedman, *Capitalism and Freedom*, 6.

<sup>256</sup> Friedman and Friedman, *Free to Choose: A Personal Statement*, 21.

<sup>257</sup> *Ibid*, 3

In his theorization of freedom, Friedman neglects the significance of non-market relations for the development of capacities required to exercise self-determination. He applies the logic of the neoliberal economic system to all spheres of life, such as education, health, and welfare. Friedman believes in either directly transforming non-market activities and goods into commodities that are subject to sale in the market, or indirectly subjugating them to the norms and meanings of the market. Nevertheless, his articulation of freedom does not address the crucial questions of whether the conditions through which the autonomous agency of the individual consumer can be constituted equally and what is supposed to happen to people who have limited access to education and/or high-paying jobs due to a legacy of discrimination on the grounds of race and gender.

In his book, *The Road to Serfdom*, published first in 1944, Friedman's mentor, Friedrich Hayek, warns that government interventions and restrictions over the markets would lead to the loss of freedom in economic as well as political life, and thus, the state should concentrate only on tasks that create security-net for neoliberal markets.<sup>258</sup> Hayek, who is known for his sympathy for transitional dictatorship and his closeness to former Chilean dictator Augusto Pinochet, is the most influential person among neoliberal thinkers. For Hayek, freedom of the market is essential for the market to expand endlessly: "Parties in the market should be free to buy and sell at any price, so long as they can find a partner to the transaction—free to produce, buy and sell anything that can be produced or sold at all."<sup>259</sup> As much as this concept of freedom sounds like individual

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<sup>258</sup> See Friedrich A. von Hayek, *The Road to Serfdom* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 42-45.

<sup>259</sup> Ibid, 42.



autonomy and self-determination, it refers only to the consumer's buying capacity.<sup>260</sup> As long as the consumer has enough money to make purchases, he or she can engage in any sort of "free" transaction. Nevertheless, given that more than twenty percent of the world's people do not have enough money to purchase basic necessities, it follows that under the rules of the free market, some individuals do not have the right to live. In his book, *Unequal Freedoms*, John McMurtry notes:

This measure of consumer freedom entails an unlimited inequality of freedom. The more money one has, the more freedom one is entitled to, from none at all to limitless rights to consume. This is the ground of individual freedom of citizens with its strong claims of equality of opportunity for all the same time. These contradictions do not detain market believers, for they know that the market confers on them the unlimited freedom to choose, to have, and to enjoy consumer goods the more money they have.<sup>261</sup>

In this value system, our individual rights to partake in society depend on having "more" money that grants us rights to "freely" partake in the market system as consumers. This means that one's commitment to freedom is connected indirectly to one's commitment to capitalism. McMurtry uses the phrase "value imperialism" for the underlying logic of the neoliberal market philosophy and adds: "Because advocates believe that its system provides for people's lives better than any other that can exist—which is every value program's master assumption—then it follows that any other value ground or formation that is other to or resists it must be overridden."<sup>262</sup> Key here is the technique of transfer from citizen to consumer. What this concept of freedom does is to

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<sup>260</sup> Another emphasis given to the concept of freedom by Friedman's mentor, Friedrich A. von Hayek, concerns "voluntary contractual agreements," which allow independent and informed agents to "freely" agree to the conditions of the open market. Wage-workers also are included in selling their labor at the highest price they can get "freely." Nevertheless, forced adult labor, such as uncontracted immigrant labor, sexual labor, unpaid prison labor, and global human trafficking also have been on the rise as part and parcel of the neoliberal life of freedom.

<sup>261</sup> John McMurtry, *Unequal Freedoms: The Global Market as an Ethical System* (West Hartford, Conn.: Kumarian Press, 1998), 166-167.

<sup>262</sup> Ibid, 28.

make individuals and communities subservient to their commodity value. In neoliberal logic, “free” societies should be exposed to political processes as little as possible, and much is to be left to the “free” market, where individuals “freely” partake. With that, democratic society altogether changes its meaning. What Harvey refers to as “conservative political reforms,” is this shift from the democratic society to a new type of neoliberal society, where the rulers reinforce counter-revolution through war and fascist repression, the dead-end reformism of elections, as well as control of grassroots actions and civil societies with the hand of corporate initiatives.<sup>263</sup> In the same vein, Dag Einar Thorsen and Amund Lie have observed:

...if the democratic process slows down neoliberal reforms, or threatens individual and commercial liberty, which it sometimes does, then democracy ought to be side stepped and replaced by the rule of experts or legal instruments designed for that purpose. The practical implementation of neoliberal policies will, therefore, lead to a relocation of power from political to economic processes, from the state to markets and individuals, and finally from the legislature and executives’ authorities to the judiciary.<sup>264</sup>

For Rancière, neoliberalism ties itself to democracy by creating consensus—an agreement on the order of things and relationships. Moreover, in this consensus there is only one reality—the reality of the market, therefore, the demand to be equal in social life is always a consumerist demand because it is eventually a fight for the individual’s rights to consume what has not been equally distributed.<sup>265</sup> More specifically, in Rancière’s view, consensus should be understood as a universal agreement on the rights of human subjects who support a type of symmetrical exchange but not the equal distribution of rights and interests. On the other hand, Rancière’s concept of “dissensus” proposes an

<sup>263</sup> Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, 47.

<sup>264</sup> Dag Einar Thorsen and Amund Lie, “The Neoliberal Challenge: What is Neoliberalism?,” *Working Paper* (2009), accessed, December 12, 2009, <http://folk.uio.no/daget/neoliberalism2.pdf>

<sup>265</sup> Jacques Rancière, *Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics*, ed. and trans. Steve Corcoran (London and New York: Continuum, 2010).

unexpected opening to counter the consensus of the market. Dissensus for Rancière represents a disagreement that is not expressed as a demand for equal rights to consumption, but instead is formulated as a demand to make possible an equal distribution of power exerted over the order of things.<sup>266</sup> Building upon the Aristotelian idea that politics is based upon the human capacity for speaking and discussing, Rancière explains that:

Political dissensus is not a discussion between the speaking people who would confront their interest and values. It is a conflict about who speaks and who does not speak, about what has to be heard as the voice of pain and what has to be heard as the argument on justice. And this is also what class war means: not the conflict between groups which have opposite economic interests, but the conflict about what an ‘interest’ is, the struggle between those who set themselves as able to manage social interests and those who are supposed to be only able to reproduce their life.<sup>267</sup>

With that discussion, Rancière diverts our understanding of politics to realization that it encompasses the realm of aesthetics. Thus, consensus politics inevitably represents a kind of policing of the political space, which is also the aesthetic space—the organization of the public sphere by whom possesses the ability to “be heard” and “be seen.” For Rancière, democracy is neither a form of government nor a way of social life but is politics itself in its true form. In the following pages, in light of Rancière’s understanding of dissensus, I will analyze the praxis of the contemporary anti-capitalist social movement and question its potential for the realization of radical democracy.

Neoliberalism’s claim to democracy through the market’s language of freedom and plurality concomitantly creates the antithesis—depoliticization of democracy. As explained above, the neoliberal ideology employs and reinforces capitalism using

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<sup>266</sup> Ibid.

<sup>267</sup> Jacques Rancière, “The Thinking of Dissensus: Politics and Aesthetics,” in *Reading Rancière: Critical Dissensus*, ed. Paul Bowman and Richard Stamp (London and New York: Continuum, 2011), 2.

concepts of “freedom” and “liberty.” Concomitantly, an era of globalized revolt has been taking root in the persistent rage against systemic conditions that fortify globalized capital, which in its determination transcends the traditional boundaries of nationalist liberation and challenges the dead-end reformism of the representative democracy. Beginning in the 1990s, a new anti-capitalist movement has emerged to challenge neoliberal capitalism with the motto: “globalization from below.” Unlike the fragmentary nature of identity politics, this anti-globalization (or alter-globalization) movement often advances radical visions and crosses various political lines and geographical boundaries to form alliances against global capitalism. It advocates for radical change in a plural sense in which diverse people draw upon shared values and common problems as opposed to class interests. It lacks a self-organization or political identity and operates with a vision of revolution that is beyond the classical Marxist discourse of class contradictions. This grassroots social movement is considered more as a “diverse manifestation of a new proletariat made up of new and intrinsically plural agents of social transformation.”<sup>268</sup> It is thus very difficult to frame this movement as a whole with the structural definition or organization of the previous anti-capitalist movements; what is striking is that its power is embedded precisely in its broad ideological and social appeal.<sup>269</sup>

This anti-neoliberalist global movement is rooted in the concept of horizontal representation of civil resistance across ethnic and racial borders as much as across national and regional borders. For example, in May Day demonstrations in 2008, British blue-collar workers carried images of Zapatistas and shouted, “We are all Zapatistas.” In

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<sup>268</sup> David West, *Social Movements in Global Politics* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2013), 73.

<sup>269</sup> Barry K. Gills, *Globalization and the Politics of Resistance* (New York, NY: St. Martin’s Press, 2000), 25.

Istanbul, after the assassination of Armenian newspaper editor and activist Hrant Dink by a nationalist, on January 19, 2007, the large crowd attending his funeral shouted, “*Hepimiz Hrant’iz Hepimiz Ermeniyiz*” (We are all Hrant, we are all Armenian). Dink’s funeral turned into an antifascist demonstration, with thousands of protesters wearing badges and stickers bearing an image created by Turkish artist Evrensel Belgin. The image, which also appeared in Belgin’s web project, *anti-pop*, was a black obituary design with the name Hrant Dink and the date 2007-1915. Dink’s birth date is shown as the date of his death, and the date of death is shown as the year of the Armenian genocide. Thus, it could be argued that the writer’s death is converted into a sign for the end of the process of coming to terms with the Armenian genocide.<sup>270</sup> Given the rise of fascism in Turkey that led to the assassination of Dink, the masses shouting, “We are all Hrant, we are all Armenian,” demonstrates the new logic for the coalescing of the multitude against the threat of contemporary representations of power, as it is often repeated during protests. Hence, these kinds of representations of solidarity are not formed through a common political identity or ideology but through a common agenda: the inequality in political representation.<sup>271</sup>

A crisis affecting previous anti-capitalist movements until the late 1990s can be understood by considering diverse views on the issues of sovereignty and power; that is, the position of the state and the strategy for the conquest of this power. Recently, the widening-gap between the progressive left and autonomist Marxists is prominent *vis-à-vis* their relationship with post-politics and the alter-globalization movement. In 2004,

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<sup>270</sup> Armenian Genocide refers to the Ottoman government’s systematic extermination of Armenians in 1915. For detailed information on Armenian Genocide and its denial by the Ottoman and Turkish authorities see Fatma Müge Göçek, *Denial of Violence: Ottoman Past, Turkish Present, and Collective Violence Against Armenians, 1789-2009* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

<sup>271</sup> Here “inequality of political representation” does not entail the identity politics of the postmodern era, but points at the crisis of political representation.

three years after the release of their controversial book, *Empire*, Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri spoke of a conceptual and structural shift in the character of global anti-systemic resistance.<sup>272</sup> They called the concept of self-determination of the masses “multitude”—a term that has captured the imagination of activists around the world. In their discussion of multitude, there is no clear vision for an alternative social formation, but instead a suggestion that our political task is not only simply to resist these processes but also to reorganize them and redirect them toward new ends for radicalizing politics.<sup>273</sup> Similarly, as vague and abstract as it seems, Hardt and Negri’s oppositional force against the Empire--the multitude--establishes a subjectivity that is not organized around class lines or national or ethnic identity.

In their book *Multitude*, Hardt and Negri focus on the “convergence in Seattle,” optimistically announcing that “old oppositions between protesting groups seemed suddenly to melt away.”<sup>274</sup> I do not think that it is yet realistic to say so, but Hardt and Negri’s concept of the multitude aids understanding of today’s diverse movements, which are local, regional, and global all at the same time.

During the World Trade Organization (WTO) meeting in 1999, the “Battle of Seattle”, as it was labeled, was a significant momentum in the global struggle to boost local, transnational, and global organizations and movements in protest against the undemocratic sites of global corporate power. Although the corporate mainstream media cast it as an urban mobilization of random activists, the resistance was in fact organized by two major networks: People Against Free Trade Agreements (PAFTA), a network of

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<sup>272</sup> For more, see Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2000).

<sup>273</sup> For more, see Hardt and Negri, *Multitude*.

<sup>274</sup> Ibid, 287.

labor, trade, and environmental groups that opposed the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), and NO! WTO, a network opposed to the activities of the WTO in the Third World. Since Seattle, a significant global revolt has been growing. Large protests take place especially during the meetings of the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), G8 summit, and GATT and its successor, the WTO, in the same way protests against structural adjustment programs of global financial institutions had taken place in London (1999), Prague (2000), Genoa (2001), Santiago de Chile (2001), Okinawa and Washington, D.C. (2001), Québec City (2001), Mar de Plata (2005), and Istanbul (2009).

Another significant moment of popular uprising involved the Zapatista movement in Chiapas surfaced on January 1, 1994, and captured the imagination of not only autonomists/anarchists but of the liberation theology movement, the women's liberation movement, gay rights activists, anti-corporatist activists and so forth. Zapatistas rose up in arms on the day NAFTA was implemented. Zapatismo, the political philosophy of the Zapatistas, implements a new political subjectivity by struggling to become a legitimate voice, a reciprocal partner in political dialogue and the exercise of power. The Zapatistas have continually stated that Zapatismo is not limited to the indigenous people of Chiapas or Mexico; it is instead a practice and a commitment—a way of building a revolutionary path that is not invested in any singular subject or identity.<sup>275</sup> Zapatismo reveals the defining features of the revolutionary movements of the past two decades.

Viennese philosopher Gerald Raunig, in his book *Art and Revolution*, calls the kind of activism found in the Zapatista movement and its extension, World Social Forum

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<sup>275</sup> John Holloway, *Change the World Without Taking Power* (London: Pluto Press, 2002).

(WSF), “transversal activism.”<sup>276</sup> With the geometrical term “transversal,” Raunig proposes that it is not that you discover change when you arrive at a point but that you change in the moment you speak at a particular place. This type of praxis allows the spectator to discover herself as a political subject and her potential as subject in the path from resistance to change. According to Zapatismo, there is no single historical subject imbued with revolutionary potential; rather, we are all capable of imagining, building, dreaming, and living revolution. The Zapatistas’ political practice, which I will discuss in the next chapter, and their poetic language, moving between politics and life, constructs participants, not supporters, or spectators.

Due to its ambiguous political program and its inclusiveness, what constitutes the new anti-globalization movement or what should be considered as a part of the movement has been an open and highly debated question. Perhaps the best example of its horizontality is found in “The First Intergalactic Encounter against Neoliberalism and for Humanity,” a Zapatista event held in the Lacandon Jungle of Chiapas in July 1996. The call for the *encuentro* (meeting) against neoliberalism through the Internet as well as through alternative media was made to anarchists, artists, students, union organizers, workers, environmentalists, human rights activists, academics, gays/lesbians, media workers, cyberpunks, indigenous peoples, fishermen, natural disaster victims, peasants, housewives, prostitutes, and extraterrestrials.<sup>277</sup> This meeting could be thought of as the origin of the alter-globalization movement initiated “by all the rebels around the world,”

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<sup>276</sup> See Gerald Raunig, *Art and Revolution: Transversal Activism in the Long Twentieth Century*, trans. Aileen Derieg (Los Angeles: Semiotext (e), 2007).

<sup>277</sup> The first *encuentro*—the “intergalactic” meeting—took place in five different sites in the Lacandon Jungle in July 1996 with 3,000 attendees of 3000 representatives from 43 countries. The second *encuentro* took place in July 1997 in Spain. Nevertheless, this is often associated as a “popular front politics for social democracy,” dismissing the fact that whom Zapatismo appeals to—peasants, workers, middle class, students, blue collards, housewives, etc.—is the new complex working class composition of the neoliberal economy.



as Subcomandante Marcos put it. The goal was simply to provide a network across which all of the world's struggles against neoliberalism could connect with one another and take collective action. People from more than forty countries gathered in La Realidad, one of the five *caracoles* (political centers) of the Zapatistas in the middle of the Lacandon Jungle. In this "intergalactic" meeting against neoliberalism, the seeds were planted for the international network called People's Global Action (PGA).

PGA was founded in February 1998 by a diverse group of people from social movements as diverse as the Brazil's Landless Workers' Movement (MST), Reclaim the Streets (RTS) in the UK, the Zapatistas in Mexico, radical ecologists from the Ukraine, Maori activist groups in New Zealand, and squatters from across Europe, all of whom had gathered in Geneva for the founding conference. The PGA Network was created as a tool for co-ordination and communication between groups, movements, and individuals wanting to organize global anti-capitalist resistance and to draw attention to the possibility of alternative forms of social organization. The PGA and the movements involved within it were instrumental in initiating and coordinating the global days of action against the G8 on its Birmingham, England, Summit, held in May of 1998, and the day of action in financial centers around the world, held on June 18, 1999, now famously known as the "Carnival Against Capitalism." The PGA also made the call for the historical 1999 WTO protests in Seattle.

The international meeting in La Realidad, Chiapas, also culminated with the founding of the WSF in January 2001, in Porto Alegre, Brazil.<sup>278</sup> The WSF has been organized by a committee of representatives from prominent civil society groups

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<sup>278</sup>The first two forums were held in 2001 and 2002 in Porto Alegre, Brazil. Since then, the forum has been held every year in a different part of the world. While the first WSF hosted some twelve thousand participants, subsequent forums have drawn crowds of more than 100,000.

throughout the world. The forum provides a space for local and national social movements to network and strategize for future action, and remains active as a unified international movement. In 2002, the second forum drew more than fifty thousand delegates from more than one thousand organizations. From then on, it has been organized every two years and functions as the backbone of the anti-globalization movement. Although some Orthodox Marxists criticized the WSF for being detached to working class, it has been welcomed by Autonomous Marxists who see all kinds diverse struggles as a part of the anti-capitalist movement as a whole.

Hardt and Negri commented on the monolithic view of struggle as to its inclusive character in support of their theory multitude: “This shift, however, signals no farewell to the working class or even a decline of worker struggle but rather increasing multiplicity of the proletariat and the new physiognomy of struggles.”<sup>279</sup> The economic and environmental crises following the global expansion of the neoliberal economic system created unrest all around the world, and the people have been uniting to fight it. For Immanuel Wallerstein, such crises present a real historical alternative and a global transformation.<sup>280</sup> Wallerstein believes that the world system crises exist in the global sphere (structural and economic), in the field of action (anti-systemic movements), and in the area of reflection (sciences).<sup>281</sup> He posits that crises present a rare “circumstance” in which a historical system has evolved to a point where the cumulative effect of its

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<sup>279</sup> Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Commonwealth* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2009), 110.

<sup>280</sup> Immanuel Wallerstein, “Structural Crises,” *New Left Review* 62 (2010): 133-42. For an earlier more extensive discussion of this topic, see idem, *Utopistics: or Historical Choices of the Twenty-First Century* (New York: New Press, 1998).

<sup>281</sup> Ibid.

internal contradictions prevents the system from resolving its own dilemmas through adjustments of “institutional force.”<sup>282</sup>

In the early 1970s, Wallerstein coined the term “anti-systemic movement” as an expression that might include movements involving a single group that, historically and analytically, had been positioned under two very different poles under the categories of “social” and “national.” The contemporary anti-systemic movement is generally rooted in one of three ideological branches.<sup>283</sup> The Global-Justice Movement—also known as Anti-Globalization Movement or Alter-Globalization Movement—includes green activists, cyber punks, radical anarchist networks, the labor movement, the women’s liberation movement, antiwar, and antiracism groups, international solidarity for anti-capitalist initiatives, and movements for indigenous autonomy and radical participatory democracy.<sup>284</sup> The Post-Washington Consensus Movement includes civil societies that aim to democratize globalization by making governments and corporations accountable to people instead of to elites, along with some groups that attract attention to sustainable development and U.S. unilateralism.<sup>285</sup> Third World Nationalism includes religious and

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<sup>282</sup> Ibid.

<sup>283</sup> A detailed categorization of international ideological currents can be found in Patrick Bond, “‘Global Governance’ or the World Social Forum: Divergent Analysis, Strategy and Tactics” (paper presented at the Civil Society and Human Security Conference, Bangkok, Thailand, July 9-12, 2006), accessed September 1, 2010, [http://c.ymcdn.com/sites/www.istr.org/resource/resmgr/working\\_papers\\_bangkok/bond.patrick.pdf](http://c.ymcdn.com/sites/www.istr.org/resource/resmgr/working_papers_bangkok/bond.patrick.pdf)

<sup>284</sup> The actors of this movement are the Seattle generation of activists, journalists and authors (e.g. Naomi Klein, John Holloway, Eduardo Galeano, etc.) Zapatistas in Chiapas and the solidarity organizations in Europe, such as *Ya Basta*, *Green Left Weekly*, *Indymedia* (e.g. *Pacifica*, *Pambazuka*, *Radio Votan Zapata*, etc.) and various civil society organizations. The movement is called the anti-globalization movement by the media approaching critically to it. The civil societies and activists that make up the movement itself call it “globalization from below” or “alter-globalization” or “other globalization,” emphasizing that they are not “anti” globalization, instead they are trying to build an alternative globalization.

<sup>285</sup> Such agents are: some UN agencies, Open Society Institutes, large environmentalist groups, and peace and human rights groups.

non-religious nationalist groups that advocate for regional autonomy, that are rhetorical anti-imperialists, and that are reformists of the interstate system.<sup>286</sup>

As Wallerstein argues, today's anti-systemic movements were produced by a significant shift in the political-ideological sphere, a shift ignited by the 1968 revolution. Wallerstein explains:

...The second consequence, for the left, was the end of the legitimacy of the Old Left's claim to be the prime national political actor on behalf of the left, to which all other movements had to subordinate themselves. The so-called forgotten peoples [women, ethnic/racial/religious 'minorities,' 'indigenous' nations, persons of non-heterosexual sexual orientations], as well as those concerned with ecological or peace issues, asserted their right to be considered prime actors on an equal level with the historical subjects of the traditional anti-systemic movements. They rejected definitively the claim of the traditional movements to control their political activities and were successful in their new demand for autonomy.<sup>287</sup>

The new anti-systemic movements spreading to all corners of the world appear as a paradigm shift, moving away from the politics of state parties or Marxist-Leninist sects awaiting their turn to play the role of vanguard. This form of political opposition is based on the so-called "counter-power" that does not seek to overtake state power or to constitute a government body or a political party and to de-nationalize the concept of action in civil society. This way, what is political becomes no longer limited to nation-states, to the ruling class or political parties seeking state power, nor even to the proletariat seeking to overthrow the bourgeoisie. At present time, anti-systemic movements are largely organized in horizontal networks and mark their praxis within anti-statist and anti-parliamentary ideology. The kind of anti-power of "anti-politics"

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<sup>286</sup> The actors of this ideology are the Third World network and the intelligentsia in often authoritarian regimes such as that of India, Turkey, China, Russia, South Africa, Nigeria, and Egypt as well as that of Cuba and Venezuela, which have leftist governments.

<sup>287</sup> Immanuel Wallerstein, "Structural Crisis in the World System: Where Do We Go From Here?," *Monthly Review* 62/10 (2011), accessed September 12, 2011, <http://monthlyreview.org/2011/03/01/structural-crisis-in-the-world-system>

seeks not to engage capital on its own terms and reproduce capitalist social relations that are embedded in the state as well as society. It is this character of creating revolution that dismantles the meaning of freedom, politics, and even revolution. Revolution is no longer about aiming to attack contemporary forms of capitalism but is about refusing to recreate and reproduce it. Holloway, in his latest book, reminds us that: “The revolutions of the twentieth century failed not because they were too radical but because they were not nearly radical enough.”<sup>288</sup>

The protests that raged around the world in 1968 included a large number of workers, students, and the lower class who were facing increasingly violent state repression. At present, civil unrest and protests around the world share similar aspects of the 1968 revolution; hence, the main focus has shifted from the issue of sovereignty and class struggle to issues of equal representation (voice and visibility) and democracy.<sup>289</sup> WSF, Zapatistas, anti-IMF demonstrations in various cities since Seattle 1999, the mass anti-government demonstrations all around the world, the violent riots in France, in 2005, and in England, in 2010, Occupy Wall Street, the People’s Revolution in Arab countries, in 2011, as well as the mass revolts in Greece and Spain, in 2012, and Turkey and Brazil, in 2013, are responses to the multiple dimensions of the neoliberal systemic crises. In one way or another, they address the political crisis (related to democracy and civil rights), energy crisis, climate change, ecological crisis, and food crisis.

In the 1990s, the protests against the WTO, IMF and the G8 summit were held in wealthy western cities such as London, Seattle, Montréal, Genoa, and Prague, but by

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<sup>288</sup> John Holloway, *Crack Capitalism* (London: Pluto Press, 2010), 260.

<sup>289</sup> Even the ethnic movements that have forged an armed struggle with their army, such as that of Zapatistas and Kurdish separatist movements in Turkey, Iraq, and Syria, have oriented themselves toward non-national solutions. See Petar Stanchev, “From Chiapas to Rojava: Seas Divide Us, Autonomy Binds Us,” accessed February 20, 2015, <http://roarmag.org/2015/02/chiapas-rojava-zapatista-kurds/>

2011, the occupy protests spread to 951 cities in eighty-two countries, which showed the horizontality and continuity of the movement against neoliberal globalization. These protests and revolts do not have a particular common ideology or a program within themselves or even under the auspice of the larger anti-globalization global movement, but they are ideological and have a common enemy: neoliberal capitalism and its oligarchy.<sup>290</sup> I believe anthropologist and activist David Graeber explains very well the character of this movement as related to the new concept of democracy:

It's distressing that, two years after Seattle, I should have to write this, but someone obviously should: in North America especially, this is a movement about reinventing democracy. It is not opposed to organization. It is about creating new forms of organization. It is not lacking in ideology. Those new forms of organization are its ideology. It is about creating and enacting horizontal networks instead of top-down structures like states, parties or corporations; networks based on principles of decentralized, non-hierarchical consensus democracy. Ultimately, it aspires to be much more than that, because ultimately it aspires to reinvent daily life as whole.<sup>291</sup>

At the present time, civic movements against the neoliberal globalization consist of disparate identities and even different political struggles that aim at the core of power: recreating political subjectivities to reinvent democracy. The protests around the world during the IMF, the World Bank, and G8 meetings since Seattle 1999, the WSF gatherings since 2001, the teacher's uprising in Oaxaca, in 2006, the Arab Spring and the

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<sup>290</sup> For more on the anti-globalization movements, see Amory Starr, *Naming the Enemy: Anti-Corporate Movements Confront Globalization* (London: Zed, 2000); A. Anand, Arturo Escobar, J. Sen and Peter Waterman, eds., *Are Other Worlds Possible? The Past, Present, and Futures of the World Social Forum* (New Delhi: Viveka, 2003); Christophe Aguiton, *Le monde nous appartient* (Paris: Plon, 2001); Susan George, Emma Bircham and John Charlton, eds., *Anti-Capitalism: A Guide to the Movement* (London and Sydney: Bookmarks Publications, 2001); Jackie Smith and Hank Johnston, eds., *Globalization and Resistance: Transnational Dimensions of Social Movements* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2002); Naomi Klein, *No Logo: No Space, No Choice, No Jobs* (London: Flamingo, 2001); Peter Waterman, *Globalization, Social Movements and the New Internationalisms* (London: Continuum, 2001); François Houtart and François Polet, eds., *The Other Davos: The Globalization of Resistance* (London and New York: Zed Books, 2001); and Tom Mertes, ed., *A Movement of Movements: Is Another World Really Possible?* (London and New York: Verso, 2004).

<sup>291</sup> David Graeber, "The New Anarchists," *New Left Review* 13 (2002):70, accessed October 10, 2011, <http://newleftreview.org/II/13/david-graeber-the-new-anarchists>

Occupy Wall Street Movement that followed in 2011 and spread to more than 2,556 cities across eighty two countries and more than six hundred communities in the United States the same year, the occupation of government buildings by *Indignados* in Spain and massive revolts in Greece that took place in 2012, and the Gezi uprising that wrote history in Turkey in 2013, all responded to systemic crises and sought for an opening to an alternative avenue for political representation beyond that of neoliberalism.<sup>292</sup>

That these movements do not present a clearly unified set of demands indicates a significant mistrust of the very form of political representation that would respond to such demand by co-opting it. Another important reason is that the defeat of the revolutionary Left paved the way to an unexpected critical angle on revolutionary praxis: the taking into account the network of capitalist social relations in which the state is embedded. As Holloway argued, in a way, the fall of Soviet Union and the neoliberal world order not only liberated the market but also liberated revolutionary thought from the conquest of power.<sup>293</sup> To a greater extent, the character of global revolt is marked more by organized spontaneous events than by organized politics. Hence, on the revolutionary capacity of the movement Takes Fotopoulos notes:

The fight to build a new anti-systemic movement inspired by the paradigm for a true (inclusive) democracy, which to be successful has to become an international movement, is urgent as well as imperative. The anti-

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<sup>292</sup> Since the latest economic crisis that started with the collapse of the Lehman Brothers, the anti-systemic movement is referred to as the alter-globalization movement. The millennium's movement is the continuation of the global justice movement in its embrace of the new forms of democracy from below, rejecting politics and embracing radical diversity. Hence, the target is different: The global justice movement "was directed at the power of unprecedented new planetary bureaucracies (the WTO, IMF, World Bank, NAFTA), institutions with no democratic accountability, which existed only to serve the interests of transnational capital; now, it is at the entire political classes of countries like Greece, Spain and, now, the US—for exactly the same reason. This is why protesters are often hesitant even to issue formal demands, since that might imply recognizing the legitimacy of the politicians against whom they are ranged." David Graeber, "Occupy Wall Street Discovers the Radical Imagination," *The Guardian*, September 25, 2011, accessed September 30, 2011, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/cifamerica/2011/sep/25/occupy-wall-street-protest?fb=optOut>

<sup>293</sup> Holloway, *Change the World without Taking Power*, 9.

globalization movement has the potential to develop into such a movement, if it starts building bases at the local level with the aim to create a new democratic globalization based on local inclusive democracies that would reintegrate society with the economy, polity and Nature in an institutional framework of equal distribution of power in all its forms.<sup>294</sup>

As Fotopoulos stresses, the continuity and anti-systemic rigor of the movement depend on the level of consistent consciousness of participants towards anti-systemic change, and only “if direct action is an integral part of an anti-systemic movement then the chances are very high for the creation of a democratic majority for anti-systemic democratic change, something that has never happened in History.”<sup>295</sup>

I posit that the communal spirit of resistance among the villagers in India, inventive student strikes against the raising of school fees in Argentina and Chile, the call for creative demonstration tactics by alternative radio stations during the five-month occupation of the government buildings by the peoples of Oaxaca, Mexico, the occupation of parks and streets through the occupy movement around the world, as well as the commune tent village in the middle of Istanbul during the Gezi uprising, in Turkey, are good examples that indicate an anti-systemic consciousness in various geographies in the world, which constructs itself as the first elements of direct democracy. These are not merely a few reformist protests; students, workers, small farmers, the unemployed, the indigenous, and urban dwellers have been fighting against neoliberalism and new forms of power and spaces of democracy have been built.<sup>296</sup> This “movement of movements”–

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<sup>294</sup> Takes Fotopoulos, “The End of Traditional Anti-systemic Movements and the Need for A New Type of Anti-systemic Movement Today,” *Democracy & Nature: The International Journal of Inclusive Democracy* 7/3 (2001): 415-455, accessed on April 12, 2013, [http://www.democracynature.org/vol7/takis\\_movements.htm](http://www.democracynature.org/vol7/takis_movements.htm)

<sup>295</sup> Ibid.

<sup>296</sup> Amory Starr, *Global Revolt: A Guide to the Movements against Globalization* (London and New York: Zed Books, 2005), 9.



as the Zapatistas called it—is diverse and disperse, yet share a common area of collective aesthetics.

In the beginning of the twentieth century, with the emergence of the anti-globalization (alter-globalization) movement, both political protest and artistic protests have taken a new form and space. It is in this creative arena that new political subjectivities are created. Belgian sociologist Geoffrey Pleyers argues that many features of the anti-globalization movement only become intelligible once the movement is conceived of “not as a homogeneous movement but as an uneasy convergence of two tendencies, one centered on subjectivity, the other on reason, and both asserting the will to be an actor within and in the face of globalization and against neoliberalism.”<sup>297</sup>

According to Pleyers’ observations, activists, by defending the autonomy of their lived experience, counter the infiltration of neoliberal capitalism into all spheres of their lives. In their everyday lives and relationships, these activists seek to overcome personal traits and social relations that have grown out of the logic of the market. They do this by creating the so-called spaces of experience that are “sufficiently autonomous and distanced from capitalist society [to] permit actors to live according to their own principles, to knit different social relations and to express their subjectivity.”<sup>298</sup> Pleyers explains that these are spaces where imagination, and pleasure are embraced and celebrated as integral to political engagement. They stress horizontality instead of hierarchies, strong participation instead of delegation and representation, and a rotation of

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<sup>297</sup> Geoffrey Pleyers, *Alter-globalization: Becoming Actors in the Global Age* (Cambridge, UK; Malden, MA: Polity, 2010), 22-23.

<sup>298</sup> Ibid, 39.

tasks instead of specialization.<sup>299</sup> Graeber also takes note of the aesthetics of activist organizations that he observed during anti-globalization protests:

In fact, from the perspective of the activists, it is again process—in this case, the process of production—that is really the point. There are brainstorming sessions to come up with themes and visions, organizing meetings, but above all, the wires and frames lie on the floors of garages or yards or warehouses or similar quasi-industrial spaces for days, surrounded by buckets of paint and construction materials, almost never alone, with small teams in attendance, molding, painting, smoking, eating, playing music, arguing, wandering in and out. Everything is designed to be communal, egalitarian, and expressive.<sup>300</sup>

As I argued earlier, neoliberal ideology perpetuates itself in person to person exchanges Dimitris Papadopoulos reminds us that: “The pervasive strength of neoliberalism should perhaps be sought in the combination of more effective strategies or the accumulation of capital with a transformation of government chiefly supported by a new understanding of the relations between the individuals which stresses the aspect of exchange between them.”<sup>301</sup> Transversal social encounters in the spaces of activism and rebellion transcend the immediate reality of existing social relations. While the regeneration of neoliberal domination revolves around the manipulated ideas of freedom and democracy, a new political subjectivity in the spaces of resistance reconstruct these ideas for the actualization of an egalitarian society.

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<sup>299</sup> Ibid, 43.

<sup>300</sup> David Graeber, “On the Phenomenology of Giant Puppets: Broken Windows, Imaginary Jars of Urine, and the Cosmological Role of the Police in American Culture,” in *Possibilities: Essays on Hierarchy, Rebellion and Desire*, ed. David Graeber (Oakland, CA: AK Press, 2007), 382.

<sup>301</sup> Dimitris Papadopoulos, “Dialectics of Subjectivity: North-Atlantic Certainties, Neo-liberal Rationality and Liberation Promises,” *International Journal of Critical Psychology* 6 (2002): 108.

## **Rethinking Politics and Art: Aesthetics, Carnival, and Revolution**

In a global order under neoliberal rationalities, practices and regimes with new technological possibilities, economic crises, climate change, ecological destruction, disastrous wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, and growing inequalities both within nation states and between nation states, we are confronting resistance of a new kind that questions traditional concepts of power and power relations. Also owing to this new world order, the forms and means of the resistance have been dramatically altered, by changes in communication technologies, such as social media in addition to other transformations in social and cultural processes and practices. Resistance to power has emerged from the most unexpected places, establishing new relationships between aesthetics and politics with the vision of radical democracy on one hand, new strategies of disagreement and rebellion on the other. With that, the sphere of aesthetics has become a key site where new political communities can be produced. This has erased the boundary between today's visual and political culture, and it requires a new direction in art criticism.

It is the dearth of art historical scholarship that has been disappointing, having inadequately interrogated the sphere of aesthetics of recent movements and uprisings, which—with their communal, egalitarian, as well as expressive practices—have inspired many contemporary philosophers to produce a robust body of research on the contemporary return to revolution.<sup>302</sup> For example Art Historian Julia Ramírez Blanco recently analyzed the Reclaim the Streets protests, of the early 1990s, from the

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<sup>302</sup> Hardt and Negri, Žižek, and Badiou have been quite vocal about interpreting recent uprisings as return to revolution by the way of practice of direct democracy and the aesthetics of commons that was egalitarian and expressive. See Hardt and Negri, *Multitude*, Badiou, *The Rebirth of History*; Slavoj Žižek, *The Year of Dreaming Dangerously* (London and New York: Verso, 2012).

perspective that “all political movements develop their own aesthetic strategies.”<sup>303</sup> In fact, “aesthetic strategies” are specific to social and cultural movements in the twentieth century. In her article, “Reclaim the Streets! From Local to Global Party Protest,” Blanco introduces the idea that “there is a certain ‘artistic’ or ‘creative turn’ of activism in the beginning of 1990s with the Reclaim the Street parties.”<sup>304</sup> Blanco further explains, “in a society where mass media plays such an important role in the creation of meaning, activism becomes spectacular in order to reclaim attention.”<sup>305</sup> This is not only a redundant view of the current aesthetic realm of activism, but it is also redundant view of aesthetics.

Since the early 1990s, institutional contemporary art has been increasingly influenced by the art of social movements that is poorly described under the general labels of “activist art” or “artivism.” To understand contemporary art, especially in regard to its relationship with neoliberalism, it is essential to understand the visual representations that occupy directly the sphere of radical politics.

Rebellious actions have always contained the elements of carnival, but since the Reclaim the Streets protests in London in 1996 (an early movement that stressed its character as a joyous street party), which tactically influenced other anti-globalization (alter-globalization) movements, these actions have become so explicitly carnivalesque that they have often been referred as carnivals against capitalism. The common elements of the carnivalesque—the erotic, the grotesque, the laughter, the shock, and the subversion—can be found in the radical art interventions of the 1960s, which introduced

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<sup>303</sup> Julia Ramírez Blanco, “Reclaim the Streets! From Local to Global Party Protest,” *Third Text* 4, special issue, *Global Occupations of Art* (2013), accessed on January 14, 2014, <http://www.thirdtext.org/reclaim-the-streets>

<sup>304</sup> Ibid.

<sup>305</sup> Ibid.

artistic expressiveness to the political movements. The interventions of the Situationist International, Fluxus and the San Francisco Diggers dealt with urban space to create new social experiences. On the other hand, *Happenings* by performance artists Robert Whitman, Carolee Schneemann, Jim Dine, Claes Oldenburg and Yayoi Kusama (and many others in Europe) confronted the conventional categories of art and delineated the borders of art and daily life through using spontaneous carnivalesque actions as the negative force for the “society of spectacle.”<sup>306</sup> In this decade, these interventions remained as actions of the artistic avant-garde and did not take form of a massive street protest. Nevertheless, Raoul Vaneigem, one of the participants of the Situationist International, anticipated the merging of such carnivalesque art interventions with street activism decades in advance. Vaneigem wrote:

The Street Party can be read as a situ-esque rehearsal of this assertion; as an attempt to make Carnival the revolutionary moment. Placing what ‘could be’ in the path of ‘what is’ and celebrating the ‘here and now’ in the road for rush for ‘there and later,’ it hopes to reenergize the possibility of radical change.<sup>307</sup>

As with the interventions of the 1960s, in today’s anti-globalization street protests that derive from the character of street carnival, the acts themselves become as important as the revolutionary moment.

The two action groups that were visible catalysts in the Reclaim the Streets protests, the Pink and Silver bloc and Clandestine Insurgent Rebel Clown Army (C.I.R.C.A) as well as Tute Bianche—the Italian anarchist/activist group active in the Carnival Against Capital protests across Europe, from 1994 to 200—have clearly derived

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<sup>306</sup> See Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*.

<sup>307</sup> Quoted from John Jordan, “The Art of Necessity: The Imagination of Anti-Road Protest and Reclaim the Streets,” in *Cultural Resistance Reader*, ed. Stephen Duncombe (London and New York: Verso, 2002), 353.

their tactics of confusion and subversion from the Situationist International and other avant-garde art interventionists of the 1960s.<sup>308</sup> Those activist groups make visible a cultural criticism on issues of gender, bio-politics, and racism while their practical goal is to confuse the police and avoid violent confrontations in the frontlines.

A good example for such carnivalesque acts in protests would be that of the *Masquerade Project*, a New York collective's intervention organized by L.A. Kauffman, Mark Leger, and David Crane in the summer of 2001.<sup>309</sup> The participants of the project foresaw that, instead of anarchists with banners in their hands confronting the law, their version of corporate mainstream media "would feature a much more slippery image—queer bodies in a carnival together and in contradiction to these strange and oppressive police officers in their cookie-cutter uniforms."<sup>310</sup> They converted the gas masks that police wear during demonstrations when they are ready to release chemical gases to suppress masses into props for drag performances (Figures 3.1).

In the hands of these artist activists, gas masks became carnival masks, while they transformed the identity of the person who wore them, the masks themselves were transformed from an object of utility to a queer prop. They made dozens of such masks to distribute at the September 2001 meetings of the IMF and World Bank protests in Washington, D.C. On the Internet, they published their manifesto and asked for donations to pay for the cost of the masks. The activist/artists announced: "We believe our movement should reflect the world we want to create. And for us, that is a world with loads of color, sparkle, variety, and individual creativity... We are using bright paints,

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<sup>308</sup> Tute Bianche activists covered their bodies with padding and formed a block on the frontlines that resist the blows of police. The padding usually was made of doormats, cardboard, and inner tubes.

<sup>309</sup> Marc Herbst, "The Masquerade Project," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Protest* 1 (2002), accessed September 15, 2011, <http://www.joaap.org/1/globalization/index.html>

<sup>310</sup> Ibid.

rhinestones, sequins, glitter, and trim to transform the masks we will be giving away into splendid and sassy creations.”<sup>311</sup>

Similar to the theatrical attacks of the 1960s, where political performance avant-guardists aimed to fuse art and life, the creators of *Masquerade Project* produced a street cabaret for hundreds in order to reveal a contrast between life and the forces of oppression. While the queer activists masked themselves with the symbolism of carnival, with extravagantly decorated masks, those masks also served the practical purpose of protecting them from chemical gasses. By giving away the masks for free, the participants of this project denied the exchange value of the objects that they labored to produce, all the while showing the world that, on the streets against oppressive forces of the state, they cared for each other. In other words, they gave the world a glimpse of the kind of new world they want to build.

Spanish artist Marcel Expósito’s work, *Tactical Frivolity + Rhythms of Resistance* (39 min., 2007) captures the praxis of carnivalesque very similarly to that of the *Masquerade Project* (Figure 3.2). Expósito together with artist Nuria Vila explore the key aspects of new activism during anti-globalization protests in Prague with the concept of “tactical frivolity.”<sup>312</sup> The term explains the multiplying frontlines of protest that use an ironic sense of femininity and kitschy representations of the body in direct confrontation with the police. Expósito and Vila’s video shows women dressed in outrageous pink dresses with nine-foot-high fantails. With giant bouffant wings on their heads and magic wand in their hands, these women try to confuse the police. The video further shows that music and dance provide this radical redefinition of street protest, not

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<sup>311</sup> The Masquerade Project Manifesto, *Infoshop News*, August 20, 2001, accessed September 30, 2011, <http://news.infoshop.org/article.php?story=01/08/20/7917059>.

<sup>312</sup> The video can be found at <http://www.archive.org/details/tacticalfrivolity>

only with a powerful tool to practically dissolve or detour police violence but also with the strongest possible image (and soundtrack) to show how, during street demonstrations, one can unleash hidden desires as much as rage in the moment of protest itself.

With this video, Expósito builds on his earlier work, *Radical Imagination* (*Carnivals of Resistance*) (61 min., 2004), where he traces the origins of the counter-globalization movement by documenting the occupation of the financial center in London, one of the main protests that took place on the The Global Action Day in June 18, 1999, which came to be known as “J-18” and “Carnival Against Capital.” The video opens with series of images from historical paintings and scenes from black and white movies that ties together ritual, carnival art and performance, then continues with the interviews of the activists and scenes from the carnivalesque street demonstrations. The organizers produced nine thousand masks and explained the significance of the masks in their publication *Do or Die*:

Those in authority fear the mask for their power partly resides in identifying, stamping and cataloguing: in knowing who you are. But a Carnival needs masks, thousands of masks; and our masks are not to conceal our identity but to reveal it...The masquerade has always been an essential part of Carnival. Dressing up and disguise, the blurring of identities and boundaries, transformation, transgression; all are brought together in the wearing of masks. Masking up releases our commonality, enables us to act together, to shout as one to those who rule and divide us ‘we are all fools, deviants, outcasts, clowns and criminals.’ Today we shall give this resistance a face; for by putting on our masks we reveal our unity; and by raising our voices in the street together, we speak our anger at the facelessness of power. On the signal follow your color. Let the Carnival begin...<sup>313</sup>

Expósito’s video emphasized the role and symbolism of the mask and the significance of the carnivalesque in activist praxis and, as he says: “the mask expresses the joy of sequence of reincarnation, of light-hearted relativity and the negation of

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<sup>313</sup> Anon, “Friday June 18th 1999. Carnival Against Capital!” *Do or Die* 8 (2000): 20.



identity and the single meaning, it is an expression of a transferral, metamorphosis, breaking down frontiers, ridiculing, of new name...”<sup>314</sup> One of his interviewees in Expósito’s video asserts: “...Unless you create a space where people enjoy changing the world, a space of joy and conviviality, you are not going to change anything ... We wanted to get away from a traditional confrontational protest situation and prefigure our imagined world in the moment of the joy of the protest itself.”<sup>315</sup> Expósito, as an artist and activist, in those two video works highlights the free and joyous contact among the people who intend to break the usual hierarchical relationships in the society.

Since the Revolutionary Anarchist Clown Bloc made its appearance in Philadelphia, in 2000, with their unicycles, squeaky mallets, and big shoes and confused the police, dressing up in clown costumes or other types of carnival costumes has become a visual mark of today’s young activist generation (Figure 3.3). This tactic symbolizes the awareness that when confronted with humor and nonviolence, the hands of the establishment are tied. A bunch of clowns beaten by police, or people in fantasy costumes being tear-gassed, disturbs the image of any government.

They’re attempting to invent what many call a ‘new language’ of civil disobedience, combining elements of street theatre, festival and what can only be called non-violent warfare—non-violent in the sense adopted by, say, Black Bloc anarchists, in that it eschews any direct physical harm to human beings. Ya Basta! for example is famous for its ‘tute bianche’ or white-overalls tactics: men and women dressed in elaborate forms of padding, ranging from foam armor to inner tubes to rubber-ducky flotation devices, helmets and chemical-proof white jumpsuits (their British cousins are well-clad Wombles). As this mock army pushes its way through police barricades, all the while protecting each other against injury or arrest, the ridiculous gear seems to reduce human beings to cartoon characters—misshapen, ungainly, foolish, and largely indestructible. The effect is only increased when lines of costumed figures attack police with balloons and

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<sup>314</sup> Marcelo Expósito, *Radical Imagination: Carnivals of Resistance* (video recording, 61 min., 2004), accessed October 11, 2011, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SBg6rzc8OBE>

<sup>315</sup> Ibid.

water pistols or, like the ‘Pink Bloc’ at Prague and elsewhere, dress as fairies and tickle them with feather dusters.<sup>316</sup>

Often clowns, giant puppets, effigies, drums, and people in all sorts of circus characters join the carnival. Effigies, drums, and other musical instruments are usually passed from one activist to the next because the act is meant to be that of a collective imagination. Sometimes puppets can be worn as masks or used as gas masks, as well. Commenting on this visual carnival, Graeber emphasizes the transgressive character of the circus representation:

In fact, there’s usually no clear line between puppets, costumes, banners and symbols, and simple props. Everything is designed to overlap and reinforce each other. Puppets tend to be surrounded by a much larger ‘carnival bloc,’ replete with clowns, stilt-walkers, jugglers, fire-breathers, unicyclists, Radical Cheerleaders, costumed kick-lines or often, entire marching bands—such as the Infernal Noise Brigade of the Bay Area or Hungry March Band in New York—that usually specialize in klezmer or circus music, in addition to the ubiquitous drums and whistles. The circus metaphor seems to sit particularly well with anarchists, presumably because circuses are collections of extreme individuals (one can’t get much more individualistic than a collection of circus freaks) nonetheless engaged in a purely cooperative enterprise that also involves transgressing ordinary boundaries.<sup>317</sup>

The use of costumes and the mask, fluid identities, the concept of the upside-down world, the comic violence, transgression, the satire and laughter, and all other subversive acts that could disturb the submissiveness of everyday life. An influential figure of the 1968 Revolution, Vaneigem noted in his widely celebrated book by the activists *The Revolution of Everyday Life*: “Revolutionary movements are carnivals in which the individual life celebrates its unification with a regenerated society.”<sup>318</sup> Nevertheless, the question is: Could the chaotic, undetermined, and subversive acts during protests and

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<sup>316</sup> Graeber, “The New Anarchists,” 66.

<sup>317</sup> Graeber, “On the Phenomenology of the Giant Puppets,” 384.

<sup>318</sup> Raoul Vaneigem, *The Revolution of Everyday Life*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Oakland, CA: PM Press, 2012), 93.

revolts of the masses on the streets eventually disturb the organization of time and space, consensus-based thinking, and value creation processes of the market? I believe that the declaration of the ACME Collective after the “Battle of Seattle” is pertinent here:

When we smash a window, we aim to destroy the thin veneer of legitimacy that surrounds private property rights. At the same time we exorcize that set of violent and destructive social relationships which has been imbued in almost everything around us. By ‘destroying’ private property, we convert its limited exchange value into an expanded use value. A storefront window becomes a vent to let some fresh air into the oppressive atmosphere of a retail outlet ...A dumpster becomes an obstruction to a phalanx of rioting cops and a source of heat and light. A building face becomes a message board to record brainstorm ideas for a better world...The number of broken windows pales in comparison to the number of broken spells cast by a corporate hegemony to lull us into forgetfulness of all the violence committed in the name of private property rights and of all the potential of a society without them. Broken windows can be boarded up (with yet more waste of our forests) and eventually replaced, but the shattering of assumptions will hopefully persist for some time to come.<sup>319</sup>

The ACME Collective’s declaration not only insists that the meaning of a building or a dumpster or a window is not fixed in this reading, the statement is made within the context of a meeting of a global political body (the WTO) whose only objective is to value capital as expressed through property rights, human beings and the environment—to reduce the world to exchange value.<sup>320</sup> Graeber has a significant take on this:

The targets—often carefully researched in advance—are corporate facades, banks and mass retail outlets, government buildings or other symbols of state power...Consumer capitalism renders us isolated passive spectators, our only relation to one another our shared fascination with an endless play of images that are, ultimately, representations of the very sense of wholeness and community we have thus lost. Property destruction, then, is

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<sup>319</sup> Quoted in Robby Herbst, “My Friends Are the Universe: Globalization’s Protest Expand the Political,” *The Journal of Aesthetics and Protest* 1(2002), accessed September 15, 2011, <http://www.joaap.org/1/globalization/index.html>

<sup>320</sup> Diverting forms of exchange value into use values is clearly directly inspired by Situationists.

an attempt to ‘break the spell,’ to diver and redefine. It is a direct assault upon the Spectacle.<sup>321</sup>

Then I ask: “Is this a revolutionary moment that has the potential of the constant remaking of communities with an unpredictable and uncontrollable activity, or is it a transient form of engagement that tones down social critique and sanitizes political expression by spectacularizing it for popular appeal? In searching for the answer I take the concept of carnival not as an observed form of interventionist art, but as a revolutionary principle that creates a breakdown of existing social relations and the sudden emergence of quite different relations between people. This could also be paraphrased as unexpected relations of support and solidarity, as theorized by Bakhtin and referred to by Subcomandante Marcos of the Zapatista movement, and academics/activists John Holloway, David Graeber, and Gavin Grindon, to name a few.<sup>322</sup>

As I argued earlier, the global anti-capitalist movement, which lacks a program with localized and understood forms of politics—in other words, anti-political politics—reinvents the political praxis of today’s anti-systemic movement. Precisely under this creative and subversive practice of this movement, the carnivalesque aesthetics occurs. This is perhaps best explained by the words of Subcomandante Marcos: “The Revolution, in general, is no longer imagined according to socialist patterns of realism, that is, as men and women stoically marching behind a red, waving flag towards a luminous future.

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<sup>321</sup> Graeber, “On the Phenomenology of the Giant Puppets,” 381.

<sup>322</sup> See Holloway, *Crack Capitalism*; Graeber, “On the Phenomenology of Giant Puppets,”; Graeber, “The New Anarchists”; Gavin Grindon, “The Breath of the Possible,” in *Constituent Imagination: Militant Investigation, Collective Theorizations*, ed. Erika Biddle, David Graeber and Stephen Shukaitis (Oakland, CA: AK Press, 2006); and Grindon, “Carnival Against Capital: A Comparison of Bakhtin, Vaneigem and Bey,” *Anarchist Studies* 12 (2004): 147-161.

Rather, it has become a sort of carnival.”<sup>323</sup> Here, the carnival both points to the aesthetic sensibility of the revolution-in-the-making and to the practice of politics as anti-politics.

In his oft-quoted work by the activists and theorists alike, *Rabelais and His World*, Bakhtin analyzes the social function of carnivalesque and the role of grotesque symbolism, imagery, and language in the work of the sixteenth-century writer François Rabelais and argues that carnival is an art form because it is a spectacle, but it is an inverted spectacle.<sup>324</sup> Bakhtin sees the carnival as a popular expression of subversion, a “world turned inside out,” in which people can attack, resist, and invert the systems of power that structure their everyday existence. Bakhtin focuses on the “carnival spirit” precisely because of its power to reconfigure established official social relations and beliefs. In *Rabelais*, Bakhtin implicitly criticizes the Soviet intellectual and political circumstances of his times when Stalinization of culture reached its peak. Bakhtin states on the significance of the carnival: “They offered a completely different, nonofficial, extra-ecclesiastical and extra-political aspect of the world of man, and of human relations; they built a second world and a second life outside officialdom...”<sup>325</sup> His criticism against the establish order and his conceptualization of carnival as a vehicle for the symbolic expression of representations against power make Bakhtin a popular theorist at present in activist circles.

In light of Bakhtin, carnival could be thought of as the festive organization of a crowd—sensual and subversive—that is charged with political as well as aesthetic experience. It also could be thought of as a multitude of shattered unities, a displaced

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<sup>323</sup> Quoted in Notes from Nowhere, ed., *We Are Everywhere: The Irresistible Rise of Global Anti-capitalism* (London and New York: Verso, 2003), 176.

<sup>324</sup> Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*.

<sup>325</sup> Ibid, 5-6.

spectacle within life, where the new utopian order replaces its sovereign. This kind of union celebrates people's freedom, equality, and brotherhood in an exultation of sensory experience. At this in-between stage of existence, one is transferred to the other, with the euphoria of change and renewal. Thus, I theorize carnival as the aesthetic process of regeneration with a collective experience of self-awareness. In this sense, to me, carnival is the aesthetical dimension of the process of creating radical subjects.

Bakhtin's emphasis on the collectivist angle of the carnivalesque also gives anarchists and other activists an anti-hierarchical model that appeals to their revolutionary aspirations. Bakhtin theorizes that during social events, such as carnivals, bodies are de-individualized and belong to a collective force.<sup>326</sup> Those collective bodies represent an altogether different social structure, where the emphasis is shifted from the life of the individual to the life of "the people." Individual bodies, then, are representative less of individual subjects and more of a community. While theorizing the relationship between corporality and subjectivity, Bakhtin shows that social bodies are made from a process of transgressions: transgressing boundaries between bodies while also transgressing class boundaries.

Revolutionary subjectivity depends on the disavowal of corporal boundaries as much as on diminishing social boundaries. I argue that the realization of new political subjectivities lies within the combinative process of de-individualization that occurs behind the barricades. Disparate groups that participated in the protests find means to express their anger and disappointment for the existing system, while experiencing a social bond that connects them across their racial, class, and identity differences. This alternative forms of sociability generate egalitarian relationships that strengthen social

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<sup>326</sup> Ibid, 178.

bonds between different classes and social groups that otherwise identify themselves through an antagonistic relationship with one another.

During the biggest public uprising in the Turkish Republic's history, the Gezi uprising, there were some unusual scenes. For example, the anarchists made a wall with their bodies to ensure the protection of the Muslims who pray, the LGBT groups' overtly sexual language composed the subversive slogans, and the football hooligans of Turkey's four biggest teams, who would never come together in a single photograph, enjoyed their brotherhood and posed for cameras in their football clubs' uniforms. According to Bakhtin, the "mass body" in the carnivals is rebellious and subversive in spirit and action because people experience "the utopian realm of community, freedom, equality, and abundance."<sup>327</sup> The experience of the protesters during the Gezi resistance was summed up in many national and international media as well as in social media with the conclusion "nothing will ever be the same again!"<sup>328</sup>

Influenced by the ideas of Bakhtin, activists often use the term carnival to describe the character of the movement. In a book compiled of activist accounts from all over the world on anti-globalization or alter-globalization protests, the activists declare: "We attempt, through our aesthetic and our fierce commitment to the politics of joy and desire, to create a space of carnival where all rules are broken and anything is possible. We seek to dissolve all barriers between art and politics, participants and spectators, dream and action."<sup>329</sup> Every other year, the World Social Forum opens with a carnival-like march. Since 1999, when the big global organization Reclaim the Streets (RTS) took place in London and was called "Carnival Against Capital," phrases such as the "carnival

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<sup>327</sup> Ibid, 9.

<sup>328</sup> I will elaborate on this experience in the next section.

<sup>329</sup> Notes from Nowhere, ed., *We Are Everywhere*, 224.

of resistance” and “carnival of the oppressed” have become more popular to describe both the aesthetic and political dimension of the protests.<sup>330</sup> In their book *Multitude*, Hardt and Negri also reference Bakhtin’s notion of carnival in their added section titled “Carnival and Movement,” and acknowledge that the global protests against capitalism are carnivalesque, “not only in their atmosphere [but] also in their organization.”<sup>331</sup>

Carnival, after all, makes the rebellion more enjoyable, inclusive, joyful, irresistible, and continuous. The anti-globalization movement embodies principles such as diversity, creativity, decentralization, horizontality, egalitarianism, and direct action—the same principles that are in the heart of the carnival. On the common aspects of carnival and direct action of today’s activism, the activists comment:

It [carnival] demands interaction and flexibility, face-to-face contact and collective decision-making, so that a dynamic and direct democracy develops—a democracy which takes place on the stage of spontaneously unfolding life, not raised above the audience but at ground level, where everyone can be involved. There are no leaders, no spectators, no sidelines, only an entanglement of many players who do their own thing while feeling part of a greater whole.<sup>332</sup>

The visual, conceptual and practical aspects of carnival in the alter-globalization protests are undeniable. Looked from a pragmatic view these acts appear to be only effective momentarily on the frontlines and their long term effects have been questioned—especially by sociologists who lump many spontaneous disruptive acts in the protests under a category of “activist art.”<sup>333</sup> Here, my aim is not to question the effectiveness of interventionist tactics of the Clandestine Insurgent Rebel Clown Army, the Revolutionary

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<sup>330</sup> See “Friday June 18th 1999. Carnival Against Capital!” and Notes From Nowhere, ed., *We Are Everywhere*.

<sup>331</sup> Hardt and Negri, *Multitude*, 211.

<sup>332</sup> Notes From Nowhere, ed., *We are Everywhere*, 178.

<sup>333</sup> See for example, Christian Scholl, “Bakunin’s Poor Cousins: Engaging Art for Tactical Interventions,” in *Cultural Activism: Practices, Dilemmas and Possibilities. Thamyris/Intersecting: Place, Sex and Race*, ed. Begüm Ö. Fırat and Aylin Kuryel (Amsterdam, New York: Rodopi, 2011), 157-178.



Anarchist Clown Bloc, the Tute Bianche or that of the Reclaim the Streets party, but to further the discussion on carnival aesthetics as a way of creating revolutionary subjectivity and political communities as experienced in the spaces of rebellion, revolt, and resistance.

Aesthetics, defined traditionally as the “science of the sensible,” entails the constitution of specific forms and orders of visibility and speech, which, for Rancière, is where politics is staged. Rancière borrows his concept of aesthetics from Immanuel Kant and Friedrich Schiller, and regards it as a form of experience. More bluntly, Rancière aesthetics involve making visible what we share in common, in the realm of the visual and the sayable, and politics is the way in which this kind of sharing takes place.<sup>334</sup> Carnival is a sphere where social representations, which are never articulated or spoken, can be erected. As Denis-Constant Martin puts it: “The multiple modes of expression activated during the celebrations and highly symbolic nature of carnival practices offer ways and means to escape the censorship of verbal language and the exclusive logics of politics.”<sup>335</sup> Carnival serves a particular space for the unseen to be seen and the unheard to be heard.

Rancière’s thoughts on the link between aesthetics and politics are concentrated on the “distribution of the sensible,” that is, the unequal distribution of what we share in common in a community in terms of common wealth, knowledge, and sensibilities. According to Rancière, aesthetics does not just imbricate in politics per se but reconfigures the political systems of power with a specific historical organization of

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<sup>334</sup> For Rancière, aesthetics must be understood as “the system of *a priori* forms determining what presents itself to sense experience.” Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics*, 13.

<sup>335</sup> Denis-Constant Martin, “Politics Behind the Mask: Studying Contemporary Carnivals in Political Perspective,” *Questions de Recherche/Research in Question 2* (2001), 19.

social roles and communality that he calls “communities of sense.”<sup>336</sup> In Rancière’s terms, power in the political space corresponds to power over the regime of production and the distribution of speech and images. This, he calls the “aesthetic of politics”. On the other hand, the “politics of aesthetics” can be understood as specific “communities of sense” that constitute object and subject relations as well as representations and meanings. Thus, Rancière concludes: “The relationship between art and politics is more precisely a relationship between the aesthetics of politics and politics of aesthetics.”<sup>337</sup> In that regard, I argue that political spaces of dissent aim to establish a difference between representing what is political and acting politically. The difference lies in the practice of aesthetics as a mode of communal, perceptual experience that creates civil disobedience and dissensus (disagreement).

I argue that today’s anti-systemic resistance involves the movement of the “unseen” and “forgotten” people, not that of a political party, group, or ideology. Many forms of contemporary political activism—whether on the mountains, on the streets, or on Internet pages—aim to construct the means for being “seen” and “heard” rather than for taking power. Struggle for a direct democracy is precisely related to the struggle of the democratic use of public and virtual space, which also could be understood as the battlefield on which the conflicting interests of the dominating and the dominated are contested.<sup>338</sup> The struggle for a democracy is thus a struggle for the means to be visible and audible—a struggle to constitute the means for equal representation. The intersection of aesthetics and politics is where this struggle takes place. The uprising in Oaxaca,

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<sup>336</sup> For more on “communities of sense,” see Rancière, “Contemporary Art and the Politics of Aesthetics.”

<sup>337</sup> Ibid, 32.

<sup>338</sup> Simon Springer, “Public Space as Emancipation: Mediations on Anarchism, Radical Democracy, Neoliberalism and Violence,” *Antipode* 43/3 (2011), 526.

Mexico, against the repressive neoliberal regime of Governor Ulises Ruiz Ortiz, also popularly known as the teachers' resistance, could be a good example to start such discussion.

In May 2006, the annual teachers' strike took an unexpected turn when the state's Governor Ruiz refused to increase the education budget and raise teachers' salaries. The teachers responded to this hasty refusal by a sit-in protest that's known as *plantones*, in front of public buildings, in the center of town Zócalo. In the early morning of July 14, the teachers and their supporters were confronted by police in riot uniforms, bullets, tear gas, helicopters, and death squads. The neighborhood peoples retaliated by bringing to the *planton* a collective support in the form of food and first aid. The police were ordered to extricate the strikers by force. The same day, three hundred different groups—from students to indigenous communities that came together to form the Popular Assembly of the Peoples of Oaxaca (APPO, in Spanish)—took over the *Radio Universidad* and began calling for the immediate resignation of Ruiz. When Ruiz answered this demand with thousands of fully armed police, what had begun as a sit-in of civil servants became a full-fledged conflict between the people of Oaxaca and the state authorities.<sup>339</sup>

In spite of repeated police brutalities, violent conflicts, and random arrests as well as the disappearance of several people whose whereabouts remain unknown, the APPO firmly took control of the Zócalo and about fifty blocks around it. In the early days of the uprising, the APPO called upon all Oaxaqueños to participate in the conflict according to their skills and *savoir-faire*. This led to the creation of several artist collectives, ASARO, *Asamblea Revolucionaria de los Artistas de Oaxaca* (Revolutionary Assembly of

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<sup>339</sup> For the first-hand testimonies of Oaxacans on the occupation, see Lynn Stephen, *We Are the Face of Oaxaca: Testimony and Social Movements* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013).

Oaxacan Artists) being the largest with thirty-five artist participants. *Coatlicue*, *Revolver*, *Arte de Pistola*, and *Arte Jaguar* were the other artist groups that collaborated with the ASARO behind the barricades. During a six-month occupation of government buildings around the center of the town of Zócalo, the self-organized public APPO unleashed the powerful reunion of the collective resistance forces and creativity against the power of their oppressors within the city, state, and global economy.

There was an immediate representation of the movement with vandalism and an unconstitutional attack on the democratically elected governor. Those included the images of burning street barricades, masked people, gas bombs, firecrackers, burning cars, and raised fists, shown in print media accompanying relevant articles in newspapers. The street battle between repressive and resistant forces soon became “the battle of images,” as I would call it, when the artists formed collectives and occupied the walls of the city with their visual works. The two-dimensional images of rebellion on the walls confronted the three-dimensional images of the brutality of vehicles transporting the police, assassins, and paramilitary groups as well as the army in bulletproof vests and with AR-15 rifles ready to move in any attempt to break the authority of power and violence. While the clashes with the police continued, the art assemblies were created spontaneously by the young painters and graphic artists who wanted to put their talent to work in the service of the cause espoused by the APPO:

We have retaken the form of the assembly because we believe in the possibility to recover the power of the collective in art and because the assembly is the form in which the pueblos have a dialogue and hold decisions based on collective interests. In this way, we respond as well before the call of the APPO to create an ample front of civil resistance.<sup>340</sup>

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<sup>340</sup> Interview with the two members of the ASARO, Yeska and Mario, by the author on April 24, 2010 in Oaxaca, Mexico. Unfortunately, the narrow critiques of collaborative art and artist collectives in the art world seem to have completely missed this point of democratic dialogue among the makers of art.

Given the danger on the streets (the police were still cordoning off the center of town at the time), the strategy of functioning as an art collective had the advantage of offering anonymity, greater tactical movements, and speedy coverage when pasting posters or painting stencils on the city's walls. Today, these works testify not only to the specific events that shook Oaxaca in the summer of 2006, they also testify to an understanding of the larger history of the resistance movements of the Mexican indigenous peoples going back five hundred years. After the uprising, to capture the memory of the resistance, art collectives continued to produce posters that now hang on the walls of cafes, art centers, and cooperatives in Oaxaca.

One of the posters that captured the true image of the protests and became a historical document for the Oaxaca people, as it memorializes the conflict, is the poster titled "Oaxaca 2006: Women's Resistance." This caption, written in both English and Spanish, immediately connects the uprising of underpaid government workers to the women's resistance in Mexico and beyond (Figure 3.4). Under the text is another caption, which says "Celebrate People's History" and a large paragraph (again in both English and Spanish) that explains what happened during the fall of 2006. The poster contains the stencil images of four women of different ages in local costumes, marching with pots and pans in their hands. Other women, depicted by the lithographic print, hold a giant mirror. Across their reflection in the mirror is written, "we are rapists" as a twisted response to police's use of sexual violence and rape as a repressive tactic.

This image literally represents hundreds of women behind the barricades who shouted, "We are rapists." The mirror reflects a black-and-white photograph of fully armed federal police in their protective gear. The women exchange their image with the

police on the mirror. Their reflection becomes the heavily armed representation of their oppressor. Here, rape signifies not only its literal meaning but also signifies all that has been taken by the state from the peoples of Oaxaca.<sup>341</sup> This distinct and direct confrontation defies the logic of the oppressor while using the oppressor's own language. Fascist representation that represses the possibility of resistance becomes the representation of resistance. The occupation of government buildings in Oaxaca, for six months, was not intended to send a message to the governor; it was a representation of what belongs to the common people, who should construct and enunciate the real political existence of the commoners.

The way in which the people of Oaxaca, the teachers, workers, housewives, students, artists, street sellers, and the homeless defined "representation" in their own way shows us what it means to make oneself visible to power and what it means to speak for oneself.<sup>342</sup> This is a mass of people shining forth with self-confidence and a feeling that it is they who represent what is just and right. With that, they defy all conventions and limitations of the existing legal system, regulating what constitutes a legal political activity and democratic rights. I claim that creative representations of resistance aesthetics, as experienced in Oaxaca, are capable of a rupture in the "consensus," where there is one reality that is framed by the political powers. This is the outcome of the fundamental marriage between politics and aesthetics behind the barricades.

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<sup>341</sup> Oaxaca has the highest number of different indigenous tribes in Mexico. The state repression continues in the form of military and paramilitary attacks to the autonomous communities.

<sup>342</sup> Although this uprising was suppressed by the Federal Army after the death of American journalist Brad Will, the resistance of the Oaxacan people—the women, the indigenous, the workers—continues today with daily demonstrations in Zócalo of Oaxaca City.

In *On the Shores of Politics*, Rancière makes the poignant claim that “politics is the art of suppressing the political.”<sup>343</sup> Of course, what Rancière means by politics here is electoral politics, and the global revolt is precisely against this kind of suppression. As I explained earlier, at present, new forms of political demand by the excluded and the outsider today happen in different ways than the previous movements. The strategy of anti-political politics has been described smartly by the new generation as “unproportioned creativity against unproportioned suppression.”<sup>344</sup> Although this is a motto used to describe the creative strategies and art of resistance during the Gezi uprising, it also speaks for similar visual and textual strategies in the uprisings and protests in Oaxaca and around the world.

I argue that each of the mass revolts, such as that in Oaxaca, particularizes the global rebellion against the neoliberal world order within its particular local political vocabulary and sensibility, while being connected to the global struggle for the constitution of new forms of political participation and direct democracy. The events in Oaxaca captured the imagination not only of the Mexican people but also of the whole world. The world still sees the Oaxacan people’s resistance and demands with the plethora of visual works documented and printed in the books and catalogs, displayed in exhibitions in Mexico, the United States, Spain, and Cuba and more often on posters and flyers circulated at the university campuses, at the sit-ins and demonstrations throughout Mexico. Such visual legacy of the uprising has become one of the catalysts for the larger anti-globalization movement. The connection of the global movement to the Oaxaca uprising was quite apparent in the Havana Biennial’s 10th edition, in 2009.

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<sup>343</sup> Jacques Rancière, *On the Shores of Politics*, trans. Liz Heron (London and New York: Verso, 1995), 11.

<sup>344</sup> This was the most widely used motto during the Gezi movement in Turkey against the government.

On the second floor of the convent and lesser basilica of San Francisco de Assisi (built in 1719), one of the main venues of the biennial, the collective exhibition “Bisagra: muestra multiple de arte, de re-accion, situaciones plasticas y otros reveberaciones” (Hinge: multiple exhibitions of art, reaction, plastic situations and other reverberations) invited the biennial audience to contemplate the aesthetics of street activism (Figure 3.5). Curated by Patricia Mendoza, director from the Graphic Arts Institute in Oaxaca (IAGO, in Spanish), “Bisagra” erased the borders between art and street politics.

The images of 2006 Oaxaca mixed with the traditional images of strong cultural roots, such as those of Emiliano Zapata (Figure 3.6). Those photographs of the Oaxaca uprising hung side by side with printed images of Zapatista women on batik material as audiovisual testimonies of Qaxacans played in the room. The artists who were active in the movement transformed street activism into what they called “audiovisual activism” and “editorial poetics” to be exhibited further. The exhibition made strong references to the global solidarity of the many heterogeneous activities—known as the anti-globalization movement, and what I prefer to call the global anti-capitalist movement—which makes use of communication networks as well as those of digital communication.

Although it is now common to “exhibit” aesthetic activities in protests by way of reproducing them in photographs and video recordings, banners and posters, the artistic space created during the street protests defy the institutionalized meaning and definition of art. Another important aspect about these impulsive, regenerative, and communal aesthetics I call “carnival aesthetics” that come to fore in the spaces of rebellion, revolt, and resistance, is the attempted demolition of current art as a system as well as current political system. The divide between artist and activist is suppressed. The artist, in his/her



political activism, ceases to become an artist, which means s/he ceases to participate in the system of art. This figure leaves his/her superior position in the society as an artist and denies his/her role as the avant-garde driving force of the society. If, then, there is no figure of the artist, can we still speak of art? How different is that from the anti-art of the conceptual artists and Dadaists? In 1970, Theodor W. Adorno, in his book *Aesthetic Theory*, noted: "...even the abolition of art is respectful of art because it takes the truth claim of art seriously."<sup>345</sup> What if the abolition of art takes place in places where, who the artist is and what art is, is an extraneous discussion?

Contemporaneously, in locations from the Saharan desert to a University campus in Chile, the Chiapas Mountains to the narrow streets of Oaxaca, from Tahrir square to Taksim Square, an anti-institutional aesthetic sphere has been visible and already inscribed in the public consciousness. Perhaps this signals the end of art as a system of definition, representation, presentation, and consumption. I argued that the carnival of representation on the streets makes visible the imagined revolution in the real and ordered political (public) space and that any alternative that comes out of this system also should ensure the democraticization of everyday life.<sup>346</sup>

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<sup>345</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 43.

<sup>346</sup> For theories of everyday life and revolutionary praxis, see Vaneigem, *The Revolution of Everyday Life* ; Howard R. Pollio, Tracy B. Henley and Craig J. Thomson, *The Phenomenology of Everyday: Empirical Investigations of Human Experience* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997); John G. Roberts, *Philosophizing the Everyday: Revolutionary Praxis and the Fate of Cultural Theory* (London: Pluto Press, 2006); and Kanishka Goonewardena *et al.*, *Space, Difference, Everyday Life: Reading Henri Lefebvre* (New York: Routledge, 2008). For the intimate relationship between everyday life and the aesthetics, see Sherri Irvin. "The Pervasiveness of Aesthetics in Ordinary Experience," *British Journal of Aesthetics* 48 (2008): 29-44; and Yuriko Saito, *Everyday Aesthetics* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).

### **The Art of Resistance: Aestheticizing the Revolt**

The Gezi uprising, of early summer 2013 in Turkey, added to earlier, worldwide civic unrest, in response to political repression and material inequality. Even as the Gezi demonstrators inveighed against neoliberal transformations of Turkish society and the authoritarian interventions of state actors that have enabled these transformations, their networked heterogeneity was characteristic of the globalized revolt. Like other recent protest movements, the Gezi uprising became the largest civil protest in the Republic of Turkey, since its foundation 90 years prior, and manifested an important characteristic of contemporary global revolts in which globalized modes of communication and public spectacle were marshaled against the dominant political economy of neoliberalism.

On May 31, 2013, the people of Turkey, cowed by a history of coup d'état and civil authoritarianism, woke up to a nationwide revolt without knowing that it would be the biggest civil mass revolt of its history. The resistance was started on May 27 by a few dozen protestors occupying the Gezi Park in the center of Istanbul in order to protect the last piece of green space from turning into another superfluous shopping complex in the city. The protestors often only read their books in the park and planted trees to replace those ripped out by municipal workers as a way of demonstrating that they claim their commons. Sometimes they also would read to police as an act of passive protest against the armed forces of state. They held vigilance day and night to stop the trees from being cut and construction bulldozers digging. Four days later, at dawn on May 31, police set protesters' tents on fire while people were sleeping in them and the police evicted the park using tear gas and water cannons excessively. That day, the police brutality left more than two hundred people injured and more than a dozen badly wounded. By dusk,

thousands of people had gathered in all the regions of the state, in Ankara, Izmir, Mersin, Adana, Antakya, Izmit, Konya, and Manisa, to protest.

While the mainstream media played the three monkeys in the most heated days of the protests, the images of police violence upon peaceful environmentalists circulating through social media burst the bubble of long-standing silence in Turkey. When the state fiercely refused a few urgent demands made by a few environmentalists and responded to them with excessive use of force by police, a long-standing time bomb against the state went off. The protests on the streets and in the parks all around Turkey lasted about three weeks, and afterwards the resistance entered a passive phase that is still alive today. What I will discuss here are the ways in which collective shared sensibilities, which could be identified as the aesthetic sensibilities of the community of people, can ensure the continuity of the resistance, just as a popular Gezi slogan says: “This is just the beginning, we carry on the struggle.”

My key point is that police violence as a collective trauma creates a social bonding between people as well as collective laughter, as in Bakhtin’s theory of carnival. I will argue that both violence and laughter, experienced collectively, function as triggers to sensual experiences that allow individuals to transgress the borders of identity, ethnicity, sexuality, and ideology. The kind of experience created by laughing and crying—literally because of the inflammation caused by the tear gas—together with strangers in an environment that could be life threatening, has a transformative effect on individuals in terms of how they perceive others and even how they perceive the world around them. I further argue that this kind of collective experience of aesthetics disturbs common-sense-making mechanisms and enables a true dialogue between people, and

thus creates channels of community mobilization, collective action, and communal distribution.

To mask the root causes of the revolt, the national mass media portrayed the protests as a “clash of civilizations” between secular and religious, or in other words, Kemalist/nationalists versus Islamists. However, the voices of the participants were quite heterogeneous. Workers, students, artists, housewives, communists, Kemalists, anarchists, environmentalists, trade unions, anti-capitalist Muslims, the Kurdish movement, feminists, LGBT activists, *Alevi*s (a religious minority that is arguably a branch of Islam), and the most notable and largest group, the middle-class-educated youth in their early twenties, who have been stigmatized as an apolitical and lost generation, constituted the profile of Gezi uprising.

What is today Turkey is a true ethnic mosaic of various Anatolian civilizations. The Greeks, Armenians, Kurds, Roma (Gypsies), Turkmens, Jews, and modern day Turks (the vast majority) make up this mosaic. In 1923, upon the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire, the nationalist and secularist regime took over and founded the Turkish Republic. A monolithic national ideology shaped the modernist principles of the founder, Atatürk (Kemalist), along with the new political elite that defined public space and the rules by which politics should be conducted. This state regime produced its cultural, social, and juridical mechanisms to marginalize and penalize those who did not identify themselves as Turks and adhere to the principles of national ideology. As a result, the multiplicity of voices and colors of Anatolia has been repressed. Although Recep Tayyip Erdoğan came to power with his populist propaganda and his promise for democratic change, in 2002, he thrived on the political mechanism that undermines democracy. He

then held himself in power long enough to become an elected despot. Gezi uprising, with its multiplicity of voices, cracked the political as well as social code that had held together the mechanism of systematic repression of those who rejected or resisted the state system. One of the main pillars of this system had been the Turkish army, which functioned as the guardian of the Kemalist ideology and secularism. The military coups in 1971 and 1980 not only repressed the Leftist sect and religious sect, they created an environment of fear that would continue generation after generation.

Revolution, or mass revolt, in Turkey, does not constitute the same culture as that of the Latin American countries that experienced military coups around the same historical period. In Turkey, the masses have been apoliticized, and staying silent in the most unthinkable condition has become the norm. For example, just before the onset of the Gezi events, thirty miners died because of neglect in working conditions, an event to attributed by Prime Minister Erdoğan simply to “fate.” No mass protests ensued. Erdoğan then compared abortion to the bombing by the Turkish army of thirty-five Kurdish civilians in Uludere (Roboski, in Kurdish), and there were no mass protests. In addition, a few days before the Gezi uprising, fifty-two people (mostly *Alevi*) died in Reyhanlı in the bloodiest terrorist attack in Turkey, after which Erdoğan responded with a muted voice and there were no mass protests. A few people were tear-gassed by police for protecting the trees, and the whole country rose up. Nothing is, of course, that simple. The sudden burst of the revolt only showed that dissent against the Turkish government and the social unrest was a result of a long process of forced neoliberal processes and conservative

politics.<sup>347</sup> The Gezi uprising sparked not only a nationwide resistance but created a nationwide culture of revolt.

Although the prime minister and his puppet media insisted on dragging the events to a safe zone of environmental resistance by repeated announcements that the Gezi uprising is about “a handful of *çapulcu* (looters, plunderers) creating a mess over a few trees, the issue, even his supporters knew, went far beyond that.”<sup>348</sup> Erdoğan preferred first to ignore and insult the protestors, but when this tactic enraged more people and the plazas got more crowded, he chose to terrorize them. The Gezi uprising was the result of the swift and heavy-handed neoliberal restructuring of the economic as well as social makeup of Turkey by Erdoğan’s Justice and Development Party (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi, AKP) since coming to power in 2002. With AKP’s neoliberal program and conservative Islamic agenda, middle class and lower class religious conservatives who had been excluded from of secular modernization processes since the foundation of Turkish Republic in 1923 suddenly benefited from the drastic privatization campaign as well as from the dismantling of the military—the insurance of the secular republic. Those who did not agree with the AKP’s conservative orientation and its neoliberal program found themselves on the edges of society, being increasingly impoverished and facing the consequences of state repression. In addition, the privatization of public space, abolition

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<sup>347</sup> For the links between the crisis of neoliberalism and the Gezi uprising, see Immanuel Wallerstein, “Uprisings Here, There, and Everywhere,” Fernand Braudel Center: Commentaries No. 356, accessed July 1, 2013, <http://www2.binghamton.edu/fbc/commentaries/archive-2013/356en.htm>, and Slavoj Žižek, “Trouble in Paradise,” *London Review of Books* 35/14 (2013): 11-12.

<sup>348</sup> After Erdoğan dismissed the protestors as *çapulcu*, the protestors started to use the term proudly to identify themselves within the movement. The next day on a wall in Istanbul, graffiti appeared that said, “Every day I am *chapulling*” and became an immediate humorous sensation. Soon, protesters spread the concept of *chapulling* on social media among humorous videos and slogans inspired by the crisis. Afterwards, *chapulling* as a word has entered into English language, meaning, “fighting for one’s rights.”

of public services, and an increase in authoritarian politics crippled the social life in the urban environment.

Since the early 1990s, after the onset of drastic neoliberalization of the economy, the popular segments of the society entered into the post-modernization of culture (especially with immigration from rural Turkey to the economic centers), which created a new system of values. Those values included a new lifestyle—new kinds of music, architecture, and fashion--that eventually constituted a new post-modern Turkish identity that had decolonized from Western influences. Eventually, populist politics, popular culture, and the culture industry together created an “entrepreneurial culture that is the hallmark of reactionary neo-conservatism.”<sup>349</sup> The cultural politics of the new political elite of Erdoğan’s AKP party that came in power flourished in this environment. What looked like a progressive development in culture, for the processes of democraticization, eventually turned into an instrument of fascism.<sup>350</sup> Erdoğan and his pro-Islam conservative party seized the opportunity very well. His government, while boasting of its role in the fall of military tutelage, behaved in even more authoritarian and antidemocratic ways than the Kemalist elite’s statist modernization projects did, and at any cost.

As argued earlier, neoliberal ideology is marked by liberalization of the markets and privatization of public assets. In this system, while a strong hold on the state’s economy is a great obstacle to be overcome, the authoritarian hand of the state is essential for systematic privatization and stabilization of the economy in the face of inflation or crisis in the financial markets. The state, for neoliberal economy, is also an essential

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<sup>349</sup> Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change* (Cambridge, Mass.: Blackwell, 1990), 116.

<sup>350</sup> Hasan B. Kahraman, *Postmodernite ile Modernite Arasında Türkiye*, 105.

instrument to marginalize, repress, and penalize those who resist. Thus, neoliberalism weakened the state in order to liberate the market and strengthen the state as its watchdog. Consequently, authoritarian statism accompanied the restructuring of the local economy through neoliberal reforms. In turn, not only the promotion of competitiveness and conceptualization of extreme individualism in society but also repression of personal and collective freedom have become characteristics of neoliberal states. Pierre Rosanvallon, French intellectual and historian, describes this new phenomenon, which replaced the ideological totalitarianism of the past century, as an “elected despotism”; other intellectuals prefer the term “neoliberal authoritarianism.”<sup>351</sup> In the case of Turkey, the rise of authoritarianism as a dominant state form has become the political feature of neoliberal transformation since the 1980 coup d’état.

While neoliberal policies have become part and parcel of the Turkish economic administration since the 1980 coup, the AKP amplified the processes to an unprecedented level.<sup>352</sup> Almost every remnant of the state, from bridges and power plants to the tobacco monopoly (TEKEL, a parastatal company), state-owned banks and factories, have been sold for pennies. The telecommunication, banking, energy, and manufacturing sectors have been privatized. This enormous privatization campaign of the AKP in the past decade has been used mostly to patch up budget deficits that soared after the 2001 economic crisis. And dissent, in any form, has been repressed with the record number of arrests made against students, activists, academicians, writers, journalists, and lawyers in the same decade.

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<sup>351</sup> Pierre Rosanvallon, *Democracy Past and Future*, ed. Samuel Moyn (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 123. See also for example, Ian Bruff, “Authoritarian Neoliberalism, the Occupy Movements, and IPE,” *Journal of Critical Globalization Studies* 5 (2012): 114-116.

<sup>352</sup> The implementation of 380 dollar million of annual privatization before 2003 has skyrocketed to a staggering six billion dollars during Erdoğan’s third term in office.



But the clear difference between the neoliberal regime of the AKP and its predecessors has been the outlandish construction boom and planned urban restructuring through the privatization of the public sphere, which constituted the backbone of the AKP reign. For example, in Istanbul Karaköy, the Tophane and Salıpazarı coastal lines have been restricted to public access as part of Erdoğan's ostentatious project Canal Istanbul that is estimated to create a grand investment market endangering the city's already debilitated ecological balance. The giant Turkish Mass Housing Administration (Toplu Konut Idaresi, TOKI) has been operated under the direct control of the prime ministry since 2003.<sup>353</sup> TOKI and local municipalities, mostly under the AKP's control, have acted out as local agents of neoliberal urban restructuring.

With the Disaster Risk Management and Urban Transformation Act (2012), Erdoğan's government centralized urban planning, and thus, TOKI and the Ministry of Environment and Forestry (T.C. Çevre ve Orman Bakanlığı) seized the single-handed power to confiscate property, agree to terms, demolish, and rebuild. With that law, TOKI could act like a private enterprise and lead unprecedented gentrification projects that replace the poor and ethnically diverse communities with middle class and upper middle class neighborhoods. In the highly volatile atmosphere of global financial markets, the AKP placed betsoin the construction sector, attracting local and global capital flows. The immense profit mechanism generated by the neoliberal urban development has provided the AKP with unprecedented economic power that has greatly enhanced its political clout in the country.

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<sup>353</sup> TOKI's public housing projects that are mainly in Istanbul, Ankara, and a few other large cities on land and capital owned by public, are measured to have constructed two million apartment buildings.

The rise of the real estate enterprises, gentrification in the name of urban clearance as well as rescaling and connecting all neighborhoods to the reproduction of urban capital are the most visible outcomes of neoliberal globalization, which has transformed the urban culture and affected people's daily lives. Many campaigns and collaborations with NGOs, activists, and academicians have taken place, and numerous artistic platforms, projects, and interventions have been realized—especially in regards to the urban projects in Istanbul's historical districts that had been housing the Roma and Kurds who immigrated from eastern and southeastern Turkey because of the consequences of the battles between Kurdish freedom fighters and the Turkish army since 1983.<sup>354</sup> The Taksim urban renewal project, which includes building an Ottoman-style urban museum and shopping mall in Gezi Park, was a part of the mega-project toward the complete gentrification of the Beyoğlu district—the historical and central and thus most profit-generating area of Istanbul. Demolishing Gezi Park reflects almost all of the characteristics of the shady urban politics of the AKP, which I briefly explained above. Erdoğan's insistence of this project at all costs should be understood within this context. Thus, I argue that within the backdrop of these realities, the Gezi resistance was at once a public outcry for true democracy, opposing to the neoliberal urbanization, and resistance to the violence of the authoritarian state—all of which were outcomes of the neoliberal globalization.

For those in power, reorganizing urban structure and urban life not only generates enormous accumulation of capital in the face of the financial market crisis, but, most importantly, it is a way to dominate and control restive populations. The reason that

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<sup>354</sup> Protests by the Istanbul Chamber of Architects (Istanbul Mimarlar Odası) and Istanbul Branch of the Turkish Chamber of City Planners against urban destruction and gentrification projects are such examples, as well as artist platforms such as *Sulukle Platform*.

contemporary resistance movements are mostly urban-based uprisings is to reclaim the common right to the urban public space and the right to decide how to use the public space. Regarding the “right to the city,” Harvey, in his most recent book, *Rebel Cities* explains, “It is, moreover, a collective rather than an individual right, since reinventing the city inevitably depends upon the exercise of a collective power over the processes of urbanization.”<sup>355</sup> Harvey further states that in the heart of the multitude of diverse urban struggles, there is one collective aim: “...their right to change the world, to change life and to reinvent the city more after their heart’s desire.”<sup>356</sup> As much a romantic political idea as it seems, what Harvey means is to claim the power over the process of urbanization entails claiming the power of self-determination over life and the social relations in the city. As I discussed earlier, we are in a radically different phase of anti-capitalist struggle. Urban public spaces are the site of both political dominance and political resistance.

The first couple of images of the peaceful protesters being wounded by the police attack in Gezi Park marked the sensory momentum in people’s minds and ignited a mass protest at the somatic level. The psychological effect of the image of a woman in red, being gassed by police aiming at her face, was picked up by other people who have been suffocated in many other ways (Figure 3.7).<sup>357</sup> And after this point, the choir of voices screamed together: “We can’t take it anymore! We need air!” Erdoğan’s recent law that

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<sup>355</sup> David Harvey, *Rebel Cities: From Right to the City to the Urban Revolution* (New York: Verso, 2012), 4.

<sup>356</sup> Ibid, 25.

<sup>357</sup> Recent surveys indicate that in the initial phases of the uprising, the images of police’s brutal attack on the peaceful protestors made people leave their comfortable houses and take to the streets. Later the image of the lady in Red became a symbol of the heroic protester, who stood firmly with courage against the extreme measures of the police force. At some point in Izmir I saw the young people capturing the moment as remembrance of the uprising by putting their head in the whole where there is a life-size representation of the women in red (facing a miniscule police officer spraying gas at her) and taking pictures with the image.

restricts alcohol consumption, his comments on abortion, his public speech about how many children a woman should bear, his censorship on Internet and his threats of banning social media altogether were a few of the many recent intrusions of Erdoğan to public life that stripped people of their dignity and interfered their daily life decisions. His commentary on social life was especially insulting to women; thus, it was not surprising that fifty-one percent of the protestors were women.<sup>358</sup>

During the Gezi uprising, people started to call Erdoğan “dictator,” and the signs and banners especially emphasized that they were fighting for a democratic life. Certainly, the protestors did not mean an electoral democracy but freedom for self-representation (a more localized governance), freedom of expression, and freedom to conduct their personal lives without infringement from the state. Thus, it is not an exaggeration to state that Gezi was a war of two different ideologies of democracy: the one that turned the electoral democracy into authoritarianism and the one that seeks democracy beyond the ballot box and in places where repression of false democracy takes its toll—the everyday lives of the ordinary people.

It is the police and social media, to name just two of the institutions, that played a key role during Gezi uprising. The police violence was the major trigger for people to act upon the authoritarianism of Erdoğan and the social media, as well as the walls of the streets, provided the space for communication, mediation, organization of opposition, and at the same time, a platform for a series of creative outbursts.

Immediately after the first police attack on the protestors who had been camping in Gezi Park for three days, in the main plazas of Istanbul, Izmir, Ankara, Hatay, and

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<sup>358</sup> KONDA *Gezi Parkı Araştırması* (2003) accessed August 14, 2013, [www.konda.com.tr](http://www.konda.com.tr). For a detailed discussion on the class character of Gezi, see Erdem Yörük and Murat Yüksel, “Class and Politics in Turkey’s Gezi Protests,” *New Left Review* 89 (2014):103-123.

Eskisehir, the physical protests were accompanied by visual protests in virtual space and in public spaces. When Taksim Square resembled a war zone with gas bombs covering the crowds in a vast area, several TOMAs, (Toplumsal Olaylara Müdahale Aracı- Intervention Vehicle to Social Events), burning vehicles, and hundreds of injured people, the mainstream Turkish TV channels were continuing their scheduled shows.

The prestigious news channel CNN Türk showed a two-hour documentary of penguins in Antarctica and repeated it again afterwards on the most violent nights of the uprising. Immediately after, the altered images of the penguin documentary on CNN Türk circulated on social media networks, with penguins in Antarctica as militant rebels with a humorous caption “Antarctica is Resisting! Penguins: The problem is not the melting ice!” (Figure 3.8). On the following day, the visual and textual reaction to the brutality of the police intervention and negligence of the media was rather amusing. The graffiti of penguins representing Gezi protestors appeared everywhere in the city, from blank walls to billboards, from bus-stop advertisements to pavements to declaring a visual war on censorship and neglect of the mainstream media. Perhaps that was the moment the visual resistance started to assume the character of the carnivalesque laughter. From that moment on, there was a limitless creativity that turned the uprising into a visual revolt as well.

The media of this visual carnival was so diverse that wherever we looked, we were bombarded with photographs, graffiti, paintings, cartoons, murals, dance and music performances, photo installations, live art performances, Internet memes, and altered pinup images. Even the traditional art of miniature was one of the media used for unprecedented creative explosion. There was not a day without a theatrical, musical, or

dance performance taking place at the squares. The walls, pavements, and billboards of the cities turned into canvases for amazing creative activities. In this particular case, art was not struggling to make new connections among citizens of the city; art was the struggle. The Gezi uprising is not only the biggest grassroots political resistance in the history of modern Turkey but is also the biggest aesthetic rebellion, with a giant artistic boom not only of street aesthetics but also of countless painting, graphic, and photography works that have been in view after the street clashes were over.

Street graffiti that is updated daily, bowdlerized humor, political cartoons, creative use of twitter and other social networks, and swearing and inflammatory language through these networks to criticize those in authority, added to the visual carnival (Figure 3.9). The carnival started with the first day of occupation of Gezi Park—with people walking around in clown costumes, all sorts of drummers playing, people chanting, dancing and drinking in the park, and with the chapuller penguins (çapulcu penguener, in Turkish) appearing on the walls in the city (Figure 3.10). People did yoga on one corner, prayed on the other, and danced *halay* (a traditional folk dance) on the other. The Turkish Airline workers added another element to the carnival of resistance. Two dozen of them performed an usual flight demonstration, with a comic twist: “Your life jacket is the fellow protestor next to you. In case of emergency, physical aid as well as morale and motivation will be provided to you by your life jacket. In such cases, grab your life jacket, pull it toward you and hug it tightly. Afterwards, laugh and cry together.”<sup>359</sup>

As I explained earlier in this chapter, according to Bakhtin’s theory, one of the most subversive elements of the carnivalesque spirit is the carnivalesque laughter.

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<sup>359</sup> Author’s translation.

Bakhtin talks about the upside down world perspective of medieval humor that mocks the grotesque elements of authority and crowns the town idiot as king. For Bakhtin, this foolish humor creates a common humane bond between people and also acts as a social force that allows an unusual perspective to enter a sociopolitical discourse, while enjoying impunity, and thus brings about cultural transformation. In the context of today's global revolt against the system, Bakhtin's theory of carnival and laughter has been a great influence to the urban uprisings around the world because it is understood as a temporal crack in the patterns of domination. Although, it is only temporal—and thus is subject to harsh criticism—I believe that the reason Bakhtin's view of carnival is important today because a collective laughter acknowledges the possibility of a subtle shift in the individual's world view and social consciousness that would be continuous. John Holloway interprets this as a crack in the capitalist relations and explains it: "This is a time too in which laughter breaks through the seriousness of the business of domination and submission, not individual laughter but a collective laughter that opens towards another world."<sup>360</sup>

During the most active days of the Gezi uprising, the graffiti on the city walls, satirical magazines, caricatures and posters circulating in social media moment by moment not only enhanced the carnivalesque spirit but also provided people with an astonishing resilience and morale (Figure 3.11). People literally were crying because of the tear gas and the wit on the street's walls, at the same time. After a while, tear gas completely lost its ability to disperse crowds; on the contrary, slogans such as "this gas is fabulous," "do you have it in strawberry flavor," and "we are gassed, it is not possible to stop" were written on the walls, and people were chanting at police to gas them so that

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<sup>360</sup> Holloway, *Crack Capitalism*, 31.

they could get going. The humorous spirit helped the protestors to pass the threshold of fear that for decades was the most powerful weapon of oppression of the state in Turkey.

“Laughter is a revolutionary act” has become one of the slogans of the Gezi spirit; the slogan was borrowed from the young radical revolutionaries of the 1960s. The image of the selfie taken by two young people in front of a large group of police (as a tribute to the selfie taken during the Oscar ceremony that became the most seen photograph in history) is a good example of this spirit (Figure 3.12). The young people, when taken into police custody, often smiled at the cameras with a gesture of victory. A smiling person, hands cuffed, being dragged by a dozen police and knowing that mistreatment and even torture is waiting at the police station, has proved to be the most subversive act against the extreme act of police violence. Another image, popularly posted on social media with a caption, “This is why we will win,” was that of a boy laughing at a wall of a dozen heavily armed police lined up with their bulletproof shields (Figure 3.13).

During the two-week occupation of Gezi Park a commune emerged. Leaving their quotidian existence behind, people experienced a harmonious and autonomous society in the absence of the state. It was an experiment of communal organization and life. Free stores, called “revolutionary markets,” libraries, public bathrooms and showers, a medical clinic tent (where even minor surgeries were performed), media production zones, discussion platforms, cultural events, a podium for music and art performances, a Gezi museum (where photographs, posters, and other objects of resistance were being exhibited), and food tents were established and run with mutual aid. It was a large utopian (even surreal) camp where money did not exist, and horizontal dimensions of collective organization determined life. People abandoned the logic of capitalism and



created the world they dreamed of living. It was truly inspirational, not only for the people of Turkey but also for the people of the world who seek social transformation. However utopian this experience was, the collective power, which raised its visibility in this urban space of conflict, created its own heterotrophic and democratic existence. It was in the instant when the public re-dwelted and reclaimed urban space, collectively and embracing their differences, that the meaning of public space was re-formed.

A critical Turkish journal called *Express* dedicated its June 2013 issue to the Gezi uprising. In the editorial article, it writes; it happened exactly as Alan Badiou formulated, as an “event.”<sup>361</sup> Badiou argues that: “An event is a rare and unpredictable immanent break from the prevailing language and established knowledge of the situation. That is why it cannot be foreseen, or easily recognized.”<sup>362</sup> Badiou, who came for a conference and visited certain neighborhood forums right after the Gezi Park occupation asked very prompt questions on the democratic character of Gezi:

Is the action being guided by the Idea of popular emancipation and equality? Or by a desire to create a solidly established middle class that will be the mainstay of a Western-style ‘democracy,’ that is, completely subject to the authority of Capital? Do they want a democracy in its genuine political meaning, namely, a real power of the people imposing its rule on landlords and the wealthy, or ‘democracy’ in its current Western meaning: consensus around the most ruthless capitalism, provided that a middle class can benefit from it and live and speak as it wishes, since the essential mechanism of business, imperialism, and the destruction of the world won’t be tampered with? This choice will determine whether the current uprising is just a modernization of Turkish capitalism and its integration into the world market, or whether it is truly oriented toward a creative politics of emancipation, giving new impetus to the universal history of Communism.<sup>363</sup>

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<sup>361</sup>Anon, “Hadise: Can ile Canan,” *Express Dergisi* 136 (2013), 3.

<sup>362</sup> Alain Badiou, *Ethics: An Essay on the Undersanding of Evil*, trans. and intro. Peter Hallward (London and New York: Verso, 2001), 43 and 68. For more on Badiou’s conception of “event” see *The Rebirth of History*.

<sup>363</sup> Cengiz Erdem, June 19, 2013, comment on Alain Badiou, “Alain Badiou on the Uprising in Turkey and Beyond,” *Senselogi© Blog*, August 15, 2013, <https://cengizerdem.wordpress.com/2013/06/19/alain-badiou-on-the-uprising-in-turkey-and-beyond/>.

I believe Ali Rıza Taşkale's response is perhaps the best the Turkish people could come by to answer those questions for now: "What we could and should learn from Gezi uprising is that the people of Turkey aren't powerless, indifferent, depoliticized, they have a choice. The event is not far away. Central, then, to Gezi revolt is the idea of event, which enables an opening to the virtual within the actual."<sup>364</sup>

On the dawn of June 16, the police, under orders from Erdoğan, cracked down on protestors in Gezi Park by throwing gas bombs into the tents while people were sleeping in them. After a few hours of attacks with water cannon and gas canisters directly pointing at the tents, people ran away in panic, the park was emptied, and Taksim Square was cleaned out of the debris of barricades. Very early the following morning, the police did the same thing to the occupiers of the parks in Izmir, Ankara Eskisehir, and Hatay, and Erdoğan declared his victory over chapullers (looters).

Instead of rejecting and opposing being called "looters," protesters embraced it. Giving a name to people that cannot be reduced to one single identity resulted a feeling of belonging to a pluralistic identity of multitude. Plural identities were not eroded but co-existed under the name "looters." Being a looter enabled communication regardless of identitarian prejudice. Identities are not eroded but in a way unified under another identity given by the Prime Minister. In that sense, the Gezi uprising did succeed in demolishing the power of the identitarian fiction.<sup>365</sup> As Costas Douzinas points out regarding this identification: "the relatively neutral term 'crowd' is accompanied by a number of negatively charged words which express fear and contempt towards a social

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<sup>364</sup> Ali Rıza Taşkale, "Gezi Revolt: Critique, Courage," *Society and Space* (2014), accessed February 11, 2014, <http://societyandspace.com/material/discussion-forum/forum-on-turkey/taskale/>.

<sup>365</sup> Badiou, *The Rebirth of History*, 78.

category that acts outside accepted and tolerable norms.”<sup>366</sup> This relentlessly subverts the conscious-making mechanism of socially accepted identity of a political group, while overturning the logic of a tyrant who goes by using degrading adjectives for the oppositional public just for the sake of exercising his power on them.

A few days after the violent eviction of the Gezi Park and demolition of the commune, a completely different dynamic took over the streets just when the people had lost all hope of continuing the resistance. A photograph of a man standing still in the middle of Taksim Square, once again made eyes turn to the center of Istanbul. Erdem Gündüz, a performance artist, stood for eleven hours until AKP and Erdoğan alarmed the mayor, Hüseyin Avni Mutlu who until then had said the police would not intervene in such a peaceful protest. After the arrest of Gündüz “for standing,” his performance was picked up all over Turkey and later around the world by young and old people from all walks of life, in solidarity with the Gezi uprising (Figure 3.14). For more than a week, in social media and mainstream media, the standing performances of ordinary people in parks, avenues, plazas, and sidewalks were shown. Sometimes, people spontaneously organized a collective stand-up performance in their neighborhood at a spot culturally or politically significant to them. The street resistance transformed into passive civil resistance all over the country. People in the major cities of Europe and the United States also performed this passive resistance of standing still in solidarity with Gezi uprising.

It was understood that, although the Gezi protestors were not just emotionally exhausted but physically injured as well, “the Gezi spirit” was alive with full force. Consequently, people started gathering in their local parks all over the country to discuss

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<sup>366</sup> Costas Douzinas, *Philosophy and Resistance in the Crisis: Greece and the Future of Europe* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2013), 130.

the new phase of the movement.<sup>367</sup> The neighborhood assemblies were organized and the parks of the major cities of Turkey have been transformed into democratic platforms where everybody can speak and be listened to. The meetings were organized through social media with a certain theme to be discussed and held every day in the evening in the parks of large and small neighborhoods. Just like the protests, there were diverse groups of people of all ages and ideologies. Even the groups, which are historically antagonistic to each other—those that could never tolerate each other's existence in public spaces, such as the football hooligans and gays, the Kemalists and Kurds, the Sunnis and *Alevi*s—listened to one another and acknowledged each other's views in a democratic way. The platforms not only made the resistance discursively tangible, they were successful in solidifying the momentum created by the protests.

In late August, another spontaneous civil disobedience across the nation began when a 64-year-old retired engineer, Hüseyin Çetinel, living in Taksim-Beyoğlu district, started the most colorful protest in the city. One night, Çetinel decided to paint a large staircase in front of his house to give the citizens something colorful to look at instead of gray, crumbling concrete (Figure 3.15). However, his unintended activism was picked up by LGBT groups, and after images of the rainbow-colored stairs circulated on social media, the historic staircase immediately became the site of contestations between the government and the Istanbulites. When municipal officials sent workers after nightfall to repaint the stairs gray, a quiet warfare broke loose.

The color of Turkish politics has been gray for a much longer time than the AKP's reign, literally and metaphorically. The landmark of Ankara, the capital of Turkey

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<sup>367</sup> At that time, five people were dead, some eight thousand were injured, and a few were in critical condition.

since 1923, is its massive modernist, gray buildings.<sup>368</sup> The colorful tones of the Anatolian ethnicities also have been painted to gray by monolithic politics and the intolerant attitude of the nationalist state since its foundation. After thousands of calls on Twitter to repaint the stairs again, Istanbulites of all colors united against the state of gray, not only in Istanbul but in many cities all over the country. The repainting of the rainbow stairs seemed to Istanbulites to be yet another sign of intolerance and a lack of respect for their right to claim public space. Within three days, proud people posted hundreds of photographs on social networks of the colorful stairs, walls, pavements, and cobblestone pathways in their neighborhoods (Figure 3.16).

By the end of the week, some people took their children to see the newfound colors of the city's streets; some took bridal pictures in front of the staircase and some just hung out there with friends. With that, not only big squares and parks but narrow streets and alleys became a space for public gatherings and a colorful unification of those who refused to be grayed out. It was the moment for ordinary people to voice their resistance by means of color, and this time, the rainbow colors were not the symbol of LGBT activism but were a carnivalesque symbol of unification of the people of all backgrounds who stubbornly said no to the authoritarian state.

Another incredible example of the aesthetics of resistance came from an 85-year-old woman living alone in the city of Elazığ. Nadire Kaya protested the police barricades in front of her house in both humorous and practical ways. She hung her vegetables to dry on the iron bars of the police barricade (Figure 3.17). Her answer to the alternative

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<sup>368</sup> In May 2011, a Turkish nurse named Şule Yüksel Yılmaz won a memoir contest organized by the Turkish Medical Union. Yılmaz's story, based on her real-life experiences, was about how the municipality had opposed her after she painted the public clinic that she worked for in rainbow colors. "This is not the color of the state," the municipality officials had told her before painting the clinic in gray again.

media personnel who came to interview her was this: “I am poor. I live in a small house without balcony. Where would I dry my peppers?” Kaya then added, “But, I made the police barricade beautiful, didn’t I?” Drying vegetables at the end of the summer to be used later in the winter is a well-known, cultural practice in Turkey. An 85-year-old woman made her poverty visible by aestheticizing what she thought was ugly in front of her house. This simple act of passive resistance turned upside down the symbolic and practical meaning of a police barricade. Unfortunately, those barricades are now a part of mundane life in the cities of Turkey, and one cannot escape those ugly iron barriers. Kaya’s act is a good example of how ordinary people make their dissent visible via simple aesthetic statements.

Kaya, like Çetinel, wanted to determine what she would see in front of her house, instead of the ugly sight of the demonstration of power. The citizens of the city reclaim the spaces that belong to them by aestheticizing their surroundings with their sensibilities. Kaya’s act also showed that the commonly established meanings and significance of things should be questioned and even undermined, even through a small act of subversion. Perhaps the aestheticization of daily life as seen in the examples of rainbow stairs and bell peppers on police barricades is the antidote to hegemonic-sense-making mechanisms and the grayness of our collective thinking.

Consensus in a given society has a strong grip on social life. It operates with a fixation on the same, repeated ideological concepts that have been fed to the mind by various visual, textual, and oral sources. This process blocks the avenues in an individual’s mind to reach awareness that there are multiple perspectives and alternative

possibilities for ideas, events, and ways of life.<sup>369</sup> Historical fascism has showed us that fascism is not outside of collective thought; on the contrary, it is a radical outcome of thinking together but in singular form, and thus creates a culture of consent.<sup>370</sup> As opposed to the experience of the mind—the thought process—the sensible experience of violence creates a memory of trauma on the body, and in the case of a mass uprising, on the collective body.

The impact of traumatic bodily experience is thus both heterogeneous and singular at once. It is heterogeneous because every individual has a different physiological and psychological reaction to traumatic experiences; it is singular because fear in the face of direct confrontation with life-threatening violence is a universal human experience. This is when ordinary thought process is broken, and collective thought, with its entire ideological anchor loses its firm grip. In this case, the fabric of sensory experience of the masses—the aesthetical experience—is not controlled by a political mechanism but is reconfigured spontaneously by the masses within the vehemence of the moment. Thus, in such instances, a very difficult kind of political solidarity can be witnessed among different classes in society.

Months after the streets have become quiet in Turkey, the death of Berkin Elvan, after being in a coma for 269 days, tapped the collective memory of the people who participated in Gezi and prompted them to, once again, remember the vulnerability of life in the face of state terror. A 14-year-old boy was shot in the head by a tear gas canister pointed directly toward him. His struggle for life for nine months became inspiration for continuous resistance. When his death was announced on March 10, 2014, enraged

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<sup>369</sup> For more on this subject, see Israel W. Charny, *Fascism and Democracy in the Human Mind: A Bridge Between Mind and Society* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2006).

<sup>370</sup> Roger Griffin, *The Nature of Fascism* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1991).

people flocked to the streets in cities, towns, and villages all over Turkey. People who went to the child's funeral went there knowing that it could be them the next time who would be severely injured or dead. Nevertheless, within an hour, the news of the two deaths and the number of heavily wounded circulated in social media. People who participated in the funeral procession overcame the fear of death and put themselves in a dangerous position, knowingly acting on their conscience, not logic.

One may think that the police force also formed a collective body during the protests. However, there are significant differences that completely disturb the sensory experience of a police collective. The police trained to minimize their sensory experience and to become machines themselves. All of the rituals of their training are about sterilization from human-to-human contact. Their contacts with other bodies are through sterile police instruments such as handcuffs, the baton, the gun, the shield, and the belt, etc. We also can add to the mechanization process the ritual of watching or participating together in the physical and mental torture of the detained individual who is in the "privacy" of a detention facility or a special interrogation room at a police station. Even in the face of fear, the police are not drawn into human contact like the protestors; their bodily contact with each other is through the contact of the armors, shields, gas masks, helmets, weapons, and bulletproof vests in the ritualistic manner in which they are trained. Within the fascist aesthetics of collectivism, whether it be in the form of soldiers marching in a divine order through the avenues of a city, police forming an impeccable barricade on a street corner, or planned neo-Nazi demonstrations, no possibility of subversion is retained.



To talk about the aesthetic of the masses as a subversive act, the key is to recognize the rituals of the bonding process. Fascist aesthetics of collectivism are choreographed and well-thought performances that turn people into things (also the multiplication or replication of things) around an all-powerful, hypnotic leader figure.<sup>371</sup> On the other hand, the rituals of collectivism and commons are generated spontaneously within the moment of creative fervor and joyful exaltation in community festivals, carnivals, celebrations and collective resistance, and in the case of other collective sensory experiences, such as a massive mourning.

More than one million people attended a Kurdish and *Alevi* boy's funeral procession, which was one of the most crowded funerals in the history of Turkey. The Gezi spirit once again was evoked during this funeral with a rage toward Erdoğan's despotism and his unending provocations condemning the child and his family as terrorists and ordering his riot police to attack the people protesting upon news of the child's death the day before funeral. The collective rage made more people attend the *Alevi*-Kurdish funeral (that ethnic group is the most marginalized in Turkey) despite the expected heavy-handed police intervention. As in the tradition after the passing of a martyr, in which people usually walk with carnations in their hands, this time they walked with a loaf of bread, symbolizing the violent attack of the police on the boy who had left home to buy bread.

The tradition of demonstrating oneness by pinning the martyr's black and white photograph on the clothing over one's heart, this time, changed to wearing facemasks bearing the cartoon image of Berkin's face (Figure 3.18). In this gathering, Berkin's mask

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<sup>371</sup> For the most critical writing on the appeals of fascism in various cultural forms, see Susan Sontag, *Under the Sign of Saturn: Essays* (New York: Picador, 2002), 73-105.

substituted for the usual mask of the protestors—the Gay Fawkes mask, popularized by the comic book series and film adaptation “V for Vendetta” and prevalently used during the Gezi protests, just like other protests around the world. The traditional symbolism of similar funerals changed within the spontaneity and context of the event, while the rituals of social bonding were repeated. Thousands of people became invisible under Belkin’s image.

Protest is in itself a ritualistic performance: the gathering of the masses, the slogans, songs and dances, the building of barricades, and finally the confrontation with police forces. According to sociologist William Turner, rituals are the “social glue” that holds a given society together in spite of social and class conflicts and competing social norms and values.<sup>372</sup> One of the rituals of bonding during the Gezi uprising was a traditional dance called *halay*. In this dance, a large group of people holds hands and dance together in a circular fashion. While rhythmically moving together, not only the hands but also the entire body of a person touches the body of the others. Although in different styles and tunes, *halay* is practiced in all regions in Turkey. During weddings, it is a joyful celebration, and after one’s passing, it becomes an act of mourning. It is a dance of coming together, emphasizing the brotherhood and enacting the oneness of the community. In the southeast and east of Turkey, where the majority of population is Kurds, *halay* has become a political symbol of unity and liberation from oppression. The painting by an anonymous artist with the caption “Dancing *halay* is an ideological act” was one of the most popular images circulated through social media that depicted a group of young people dancing *halay* in front of the burning barricades (Figure 3.19).

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<sup>372</sup> Victor W. Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (London: Aldine Pub. Co., 1995), 216.

During the occupation of the parks in major cities, people danced *halay* to the tunes of drums or the recorded folk songs. In some of those instances, Turkish people danced to the Kurdish songs of liberation, holding hands with Kurds. Now, many people have stories of seeing a boy with the Kurdish rebels' flag rescuing another person holding a Turkish flag (or vice versa) in the most heated moments of the clash with police. What I argue is that collective grieving—as much as collective joy, as in Bakhtin's theory—strengthens social bonds between different classes and ethnic and religious groups that otherwise identify themselves through an antagonistic relationship with one another.

During the Gezi uprising, oppositional communities engaged in the same civil war resisted police attacks together in the daytime and danced together in the nighttime. From these intimate bodily encounters and social bonds emerged a dialogical relationship between Kurdish and Turkish people. They talked and discussed the battles with police, the state violence, and the singular view of the Turkish media. Through these dialogues, many Turks had to come to grips with the fact that their perceptions of war in Kurdistan were mediated by the same media and through the same state channels of oppression that now are silencing them. This kind of coming-together with the enemy inspired an unthought-of reconciliation and a revolutionary union. For the first time in Turkey, after thirty years of active war in Eastern Turkey between Kurdish rebels and the Turkish army, people in the West—far away from witnessing the reality of the war and having learned about it through mediated sources—had second thoughts about it. After some thirty five years of state propaganda, visual and textual bombardment, and systematic brainwashing about the Kurdish people, the idea that the Kurds, who were merely seeking freedom and justice, constituted the evil party in the war lost its credibility. As

Hardt and Negri emphasize, “participants experienced the power of creating new political affects through being together.”<sup>373</sup>

Another unimaginable development was the record number of participants in this year’s gay pride march. More than fifty thousand people were adorned in rainbow colors in the face of an excessively homophobic Turkish society. Friends in the parade told me that the majority of the people were straight and were in solidarity with the LGBT crowds. The LGBT organization had an office in the liberated zone of Taksim and provided a crucial infrastructural support to the Gezi uprising; they also had succeeded in smashing patriarchal and homophobic manifestations during the Gezi protests. There are numerous interesting stories about the interactions between the homophobic groups and the LGBT activists. One of them is about Çarşı Beşiktaş (a football team support group that played a key role in the uprising) that entered the LGBT office to apologize for their homophobic and sexist slogans and behaviors. They explained that this was what they had been taught by society, and now they understood the ill outcomes of it. In Turkey, especially during the AKP governance, women and LGBTQ people, have been subjected to violence more and are less and less tolerated in public space. Erdoğan’s idea of reimagining the society contributes to this environment of discrimination, as he and his male cabinet often make homophobic and misogynist comments. Yet, at Gezi, women and queer people were present, perhaps more than ever, in making public space truly public.<sup>374</sup>

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<sup>373</sup> Hardt and Negri *Declaration* (2012), 14, accessed 12 January 2013,

<https://antonionegriinenglish.files.wordpress.com/2012/05/93152857-hardt-negri-declaration-2012.pdf>

<sup>374</sup> According to KONDA public surveys %50.9 percent of the Gezi protestors were women. KONDA, *Gezi Parkı Arastirmasi* (2013), accessed August 14, 2013, [http://www.konda.com.tr/tr/raporlar/KONDA\\_12\\_Temmuz\\_2013\\_GeziParkiArastirmasi.pdf](http://www.konda.com.tr/tr/raporlar/KONDA_12_Temmuz_2013_GeziParkiArastirmasi.pdf). For a detailed discussion on the class character of Gezi, see Erdem Yörük and Murat Yüksel, “Class and Politics in Turkey’s Gezi Protests,” *New Left Review* 89 (2014):103-123.

I am aware that such a statement might look like a romantic reading of the resistance. However, in the context of Turkey, one must witness such a thing to know that it is fact. The people of Turkey, with diverse religious, ethnic, sexual, and ideological backgrounds, experienced an unprecedented togetherness in the history of Turkey. The egalitarian life of the commune and this togetherness has become known as “the Gezi spirit.” Sociologist Meyda Yeğenoğlu, in her article “Smells Like Gezi Spirit,” talks about Talal Asad’s distinction between “democratic sensibility as an ethos” and “democracy as the political system of the state” to understand the nature of Gezi spirit. Yeğenoğlu comments:

By remaining indifferent to democracy as a political system that is instituted in a top-down fashion, they are now accomplishing a carnivalesque displacement of existing enmities. But, as Asad’s analysis reminds us, it will become clear in the coming period whether the democratic sensibility that flourished in the park will have the power to permeate and determine the state’s politics or whether the state’s sovereign politics of democracy will undermine the democratic sensibility that has emerged through the protests.<sup>375</sup>

Many Gezi protesters I talked to, and many of who have been interviewed or whose opinions have been published, have expressed that what they experienced in Gezi changed them and their perspective of the world around them. For example, their vision of homosexuals and of the Kurdish movement has been greatly subverted because they have realized that what they have been told by the media is a perverted version of the truth and must be questioned.<sup>376</sup> The revolutionary carnival is precisely this: It is not simply a letting off of repressed energies in a brief period and returning to normal life the

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<sup>375</sup> Meyda Yeğenoğlu, “Smells Like Gezi Spirit: Democratic Sensibilities and Carnavalesque Politics in Turkey,” *Radical Philosophy* 182 (2013): 2-3.

<sup>376</sup> For a sociological analysis on the effects of the Gezi Park movement on potential political consciousness that could change the configuration of social forces in Turkey, see Efe C. Gürcan and Efe Peker, *Challenging Neoliberalism at Turkey’s Gezi Park: From Private Discontent to Collective Class Action* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015).

day after. The everyday of the individual is never the same after. This is also emphasized in the popular slogan during Gezi: “Nothing will be the same Again!”<sup>377</sup>

The Gezi uprising should be thought of as a part of many local movements against neoliberal urban transformation and mega real estate projects—small and large hydroelectric, nuclear and thermal power plants—as well as part of the wave of anti-globalization demonstrations, the Arab Spring and the Occupy Movement.<sup>378</sup> Gezi spontaneously created democratic encounters for diverse and rival subjects—socialist revolutionaries, Kemalist nationalists, Kurdish militants, LGBT activists, environmentalists, football fanatics and feminists—and their struggles.

During the occupation of Gezi Park, which lasted two weeks, one could literally see the much talked about “Gezi spirit” on the façade of the Atatürk Cultural Center (Atatürk Kültür Merkezi) that faces Taksim Square (Figure 3.20). This building is one of the most prominent architectural symbols of Kemalist modernization. First a giant banner established the main slogan of Gezi, “Do not bend your neck!” Soon, others followed with pictures of Che Guevara and the leaders of the 1960s leftist movement who were hung after the coup d’état of March 12, 1971. One noticed, with awe and inspiration that, on the walls of the most controversial building in Turkey, the representation of Atatürk and the representations of the nationalist party along with those of Kurdish party and

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<sup>377</sup> Reporting on Gezi, some local and international news took up that slogan as a headline. See Deniz Alan Held, “Turkey Will No Longer Be The Same,” (2014), accessed February 15, 2014, <http://www.bianet.org/english/politics/152971-turkey-will-no-longer-be-the-same>

<sup>378</sup> The occupation of Gezi Park and the neighborhood forums as an attempt for grassroots activism are two of the many similarities between the Occupy movement and Gezi resistance, although there are also many differences, such as the urban guerilla groups of the radical left and their clashes with the police during the occupation of Taksim square. For the Gezi Revolt from a global perspective, see Cihan Tuğal, “Resistance Everywhere: The Gezi Revolt in Global Perspective,” *New Perspectives on Turkey* 49 (2013): 157-172 and Yavuz Y. Yıldırım, “The Differences of Gezi Parkı Resistance in Turkish Social Movements,” *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science* 4 (2014): 117-185.

communist party came together—something that Turkish politics had not been able to achieve since the foundation of the Turkish Republic in 1923.

This democratic togetherness—a carnival of representation—was the first thing Erdoğan ordered his police to destroy when the heavy-handed police intervention started the eviction of the park after sixteen days of occupation. Hence, it is the plurality of representations that people saw, the possibility of true democracy they envisioned, the solidarity of disparate voices they heard, and the egalitarian life they experienced, that will be permanently held in the collective imagination as a glimpse of a possible future society worth fighting for. *C'est Une Révolte, Pas (Encore) Une Revolution!* This is a revolt, not [yet] a revolution!” is the famous phrase that King Louis XVI said to his advisers during the outbreak of the French Revolution. If this significant bottom-up pressure were to bring a radical change in Turkey, we cannot foresee it at this moment. Yet, the path is wide open for new possibilities. Gezi showed that a new politics is in its awakening.

## **CHAPTER IV**

### **THE POLITICS AND POETICS OF SELF-REPRESENTATION: THE ART OF THE ZAPATISTA MOVEMENT**

Since the nineteenth century, popular struggles around the world have emerged to resist the ways capitalism establishes culture as a great representation, a pattern of order, and an identity system. In the late 1960s and the 1970s, indigenous movements arose in response to development projects imposed by states and multilateral corporations. Since then, culture has been instrumentalized not only for power groups to use to support unequal social distributions but also to inspire local popular movements in their struggle for autonomy and resources.

The recent Zapatista movement emerged as a solution to a contemporary problem that has confronted the anti-capitalist movement: how to link up a diverse array of linguistically and culturally distinct peoples, and their struggles. For the Zapatistas, culture and political resistance are inseparable, as political resistance has become their world vision. Their everyday life is organized around the struggle for political and cultural self-determination. They struggle to keep the social system they have been building since 1994: self-governance with a direct representational system and communal land as the basis for economic and cultural production. Their struggle continues under the direst of socioeconomic conditions because the practice of the social and political system they have created is not separate from their daily lives. For the Zapatistas the art of the possible consists in extending it to all aspects of life: it is the art of creating possible from the impossible.



## **Zapatista Movement in Chiapas and Zapatismo**

As noted in an article in *We are Everywhere*, a publication produced by a collective of international activists who are on the frontlines of the anti-systemic global movement, the date January 1, 1994, marked the beginning of the global rebellion: “a rebellion which is in constant flux, which swaps ideas and tactics across the oceans, shares strategies between cultures and continents, gathers in swarms and dissolves, only to swarm elsewhere.”<sup>379</sup> On this day, the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional or EZLN) rose up in arms and took over government buildings in six cities of the state of Chiapas, Mexico, and called the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) a “death sentence.”<sup>380</sup> The NAFTA accord, involves Mexico, the United States, and Canada, removes most barriers to trade and investment among those countries and implements neoliberal economic processes in the Americas. From the early 1980s onwards, in Mexico, just as in Chile, Argentina, South Africa, Turkey, and Southeast Asia, the structural adjustment program of neoliberal reforms began to take its toll. NAFTA was designed to drive large numbers of farm workers off the land, increase rural misery, and result in surplus labor.<sup>381</sup> In Mexico, like everywhere else, deprivation has dramatic effects, especially on people living in rural communities.

As Chomsky observes:

In the past decade of economic reform [referring to the 1980s] the number of people living in extreme poverty in rural areas increased by almost a third. Half the total population lacks resources to meet basic needs, a dramatic increase since 1980. Following International Monetary Fund (IMF)-World Bank prescriptions, agricultural production was shifted to export and animal feeds, benefiting agribusiness, foreign consumers, and affluent sectors in Mexico while malnutrition became a major health

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<sup>379</sup> Notes from Nowhere, ed., *We Are Everywhere*, 14.

<sup>380</sup> “First Testimonies,” *La Jornada*, January 1, 1994, 1-2.

<sup>381</sup> Holloway and Peláez, *Zapatista! Reinventing Revolution in Mexico*, 2.

problem, agricultural employment declined, productive lands were abandoned, and Mexico began to import massive amounts of food. Real wages in manufacturing fell sharply. Labor's share in gross domestic product, which had risen until the mid-1970s, has since declined by well over a third. These are standard concomitants of neoliberal reforms.<sup>382</sup>

For the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), Mexico presented an exemplary story of neoliberal success, a result of the government quickly privatizing most state assets. Around this time, the Institutional Revolutionary Party of Mexico (Partido Revolucionario Institucional or PRI)—the party that governed Mexico for more than seventy years (1929-2000) had lost its class-transcending hegemony in the wake of the Tlatelolco massacre, of 1968, and economic reforms of the 1970s that had left the urban middle class in discontent. The PRI viewed neoliberalism as an opportunity to restore its political and hegemonic power by reorienting the social relations of production to favor a particular class.<sup>383</sup> Adam Morton articulates it this way: “Neoliberalism in Mexico did not involve the dismantling, or retreat of the state, but the rearrangement of social relations into a new hierarchy.”<sup>384</sup> This new set of relationships also allowed the Mexican state to complete the process of class formation that had not been settled since the Mexican Revolution. Hence, for the peasant and working classes of Mexico, just as anywhere else in the world, neoliberalism brought increasing poverty and exclusion.<sup>385</sup>

In Mexico, the 1990s marked a decade of guerrilla insurrection, which included operations conducted by the Popular Revolutionary Army (EPR) in states with significant

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<sup>382</sup> Chomsky, *Profit Over People*, 122.

<sup>383</sup> Adam D. Morton, “Structural Change and Neoliberalism in Mexico: ‘Passive Revolution’ in the Global Political Economy,” *Third World Quarterly* 24/4 (2003): 642. Also for further discussion, see Harvey, “Neoliberalism and the Restoration of Class Power.”

<sup>384</sup> Morton, “Structural Change,” 646.

<sup>385</sup> See Sam Moyo and Paris Yeros, ed., *Reclaiming the Land: A Resurgence of Rural Movements in Africa, Asia and Latin America* (London and New York: Zed Books, 2005).

indigenous populations, such as Oaxaca, Michoacán, Puebla, and Tabasco, and, in Chiapas and other places, by the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN). Despite the efforts of the Mexican government to prove otherwise, the Zapatista rebellion turned into an uprising that included several different indigenous peoples who were interrelated through cultural practices. In their battle against neoliberalism, which they call “global decomposition” and “the Fourth World War,” the Zapatistas initially emerged in response to the “bad government of Mexico” on the day of the ratification of NAFTA.<sup>386</sup> Since then, they have built their long-term struggle on the consciousness of anti-neoliberal and anti-capitalist thinking; all the while, they have constructed their own democratic system in the Lacandon Jungle.

The Zapatistas, with all of their national and international support, did not try to begin a national insurrection to challenge the government, as did revolutionaries of the past. Their understanding of power is not that of the old revolutionary movements. Marcos comments: “If we asked for an independent Mayan state, we would immediately be recognized by the UN, the IMF and the World Bank. They’d say to us, look, we recognize you, we will finance you, we will give you weapons and soldiers, and whatever you want, because it is what suits us.”<sup>387</sup> The Zapatista movement is significant because it resists corruption by the existing political system. Moreover, by rejecting any attempt to take national power, they establish themselves as a struggle of “non-power,” a notion difficult to classify in the contemporary vocabulary of political science.<sup>388</sup> Their fight for

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<sup>386</sup> Subcomandante Insurgente Marcos, videotaped message to the activists in attendance at the Freeing the Media Conference, New York City, NY, January 31, 1997 (Author’s translation), Spanish version, accessed March 5, 2010, <http://chasque.apc.org/brecha>

<sup>387</sup> Subcomandante Insurgente Marcos, “Globalization Doesn’t Break Down Borders, It Creates Them,” *La Jornada*, Feb, 2, 2001, trans. Irlandesa, accessed March 12, 2010 <http://www.nettime.org/Lists-Archives/nettime-lat-0102/msg00060.html>

<sup>388</sup> See Holloway, *Change the World Without Taking Power*.

equal representation and autonomy rejects and challenges the legitimacy of the state as the authority of political representation in favor of autonomous Marxist principles of participatory (direct) democracy.<sup>389</sup>

The ideology that ties the Zapatista movement to the Italian labor movement and autonomist Marxism are embedded in the concept of new internationalism, which is not bound to a party or grounded in any specific socialist model. Not only do the Zapatistas bring fresh perspectives into the modern concept of democracy, which traditionally was strictly defined within bounded national spaces and rooted in national sovereignty, they aim to strengthen civic society. Most importantly, for the anti-globalization (alter-globalization) movement, what the Zapatistas set in motion has been a worldwide discussion about the current state of class struggle and a worldwide mobilization aimed at finding new and more effective ways of interlinking opposition to capitalism and elaboration of an alternative system.<sup>390</sup> The Zapatistas did not create a Marxist guerilla movement to spark a revolution of the proletariat, but they did influence a civic, democratic movement.<sup>391</sup>

As mentioned in the Chapter 3, Zapatismo, the self-coined ideology of the Zapatistas, does not have the character of a systematic philosophy. It dismantles preconceived notions of how social change should occur. It borrows from both the radical

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<sup>389</sup> For more on direct democracy and Zapatistas, see Mihalís Mentinis, *Zapatistas: The Chiapas Revolt and What It Means for Radical Politics* (London: Pluto Press, 2006); Luis Lorenzano, “Zapatismo: Recomposition of Labor, Radical Democracy and Revolutionary Project” in *Zapatista! Reinventing Revolution in Mexico*, 126-58; and Amory Starr, María Elena Martínez-Torres, and Peter Rosset, “Participatory Democracy in Action: Practices of the Zapatistas and the Movimiento Sem Terra,” *Latin American Perspectives* 38/1(2011): 102-119.

<sup>390</sup> Henry Veltmeyer, “The Dynamics of Social Change and Mexico’s EZLN,” *Latin American Perspectives* 27/5 (2000): 88-110.

<sup>391</sup> The EZLN in 1993, clearly stated Marxist views in the NFL’s, “Declaration of Principles,” which declared their goal was to establish the dictatorship of the proletariat, understood as a government of the workers that will stave off counter-revolution and begin the construction of socialism in Mexico; hence, gradually, the EZLN has downplayed its role as a revolutionary guerrilla army and presented itself more as an anti-neoliberalist revolutionary struggle for land and democracy.

and anti-capitalist protests of the 1960s and the spontaneous peasant revolutions of the nineteenth century; yet it calls for a participatory democracy exercised by indigenous villagers across Mexico, before as well as after the conquest. The notion of autonomy, with localized direct and understood forms of structure and of power within non-power, reinvents the concept of Zapatismo. Marcos, on every occasion possible, underlines the path of Zapatismo as “a form of rupture in the continuation of domination” in its political, social, and cultural trajectory.<sup>392</sup> Moving along this path, Zapatistas not only have challenged the paradigms of traditional revolutionary strategies but also those of neocolonial thinking that, for five hundred years, had not allowed alternative local politics to develop.<sup>393</sup>

As I argued previously, the Zapatistas directly and indirectly have played a role in developing the concepts for new radical politics and shaping the emergence of the anti-globalization (alter-globalization) movement. They also visibly influenced the indigenous movements in the Americas, local movements across North America and Europe, and elsewhere.<sup>394</sup> The Zapatista movement is also significant in practical terms as well as ideological terms. In Mexico, peasants and indigenous groups, completely independent of EZLN have been taking up its battle cry by occupying municipal government buildings, blockading banks, and demanding their right to land. Students and workers all over Mexico have been inspired not just to support those indigenous peasants, but also to launch their own struggles against domination and exploitation. Mexican factories that

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<sup>392</sup> Marcos, “Globalization Doesn’t.”

<sup>393</sup> Author’s notes from the Andrew Aurby Conference, “La Planeta Tierra y la Construcción de Movimientos Antisistémicos Colloquim Internacional, CIDECI, San Cristóbal, Chiapas, December 31, 2009. (Author’s translation). For more on criticism of neocolonial thinking in Latin America, see Anibal Quijano, “Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism and Latin America,” *Nepantla: Views from South* 1/3 (2000): 533-580.

<sup>394</sup> Starr et al., “Participatory Democracy in Action,” 103.

once could repress militant workers with impunity are now subject to observation and sanction by workers from the United States and Canada, who increasingly have been intervening to constrain repression, just as indigenous militants and human rights activists have intervened to help the Zapatistas.

The Zapatista movement and Zapatismo have been received in different ways by autonomist Marxists (those in academia and in activist circles), who embrace the movement as giving momentum to a worldwide struggle, and by the “ultra-left,” who identify it as a limited indigenous struggle with a nationalist framework.<sup>395</sup> Although both tendencies define themselves in autonomous class-struggle terms, they have different theoretical approaches to the Zapatista movement.

The general criticism, based on what seems like a contradictory ideological stance, can be summed up in five viewpoints: (a) Zapatistas do not seek to abolish the nation state; thus, they are reformists. (b) Zapatistas use national symbols—the national anthem and the Mexican flag—and have national demands so they can only constitute a national movement. (c) Zapatistas claim to negate power but they use power. (d) Zapatistas are not proletariat so they do not constitute a revolutionary class. (e) Zapatistas are not revolutionary because they have neither a revolutionary program nor an internationalist agenda.

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<sup>395</sup> “Ultra-left” is a term that generated by the 1920s in Germany, which describes a breed of antiauthoritarian Marxism (it is also associated with left sectarianism). For more on the criticism of “ultra-Left,” see “Unmasking the Zapatistas,” *Wildcat* 18 (1996): 30-35 and Pedro Pitarch, “The Zapatistas and the Art of Ventriloquism,” *Journal of Human Rights* 3/3, (2004): 291-312. And for more on autonomist Marxist’s take on the Zapatistas, see Alex Khasnabish, *Zapatismo Beyond Borders: New Imaginations of Political Possibility* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008); George A. Collier and Elizabeth L. Quaratiello, *Basta!: Land and the Zapatista Rebellion in Chiapas* (Oakland, Calif: Food First Book, The Institute for Food and Development Policy, 1994); Holloway and Peláez, *Zapatista! Reinventing Revolution in Mexico*; Holloway, *Change the World*; John Ross, *¡Zapatistas! Making Another World Possible: Chronicles of Resistance, 2000-2006* (New York: Nation Books, 2006); Mentinis, *Zapatistas: The Chiapas Revolt*; and Neil Harvey, *The Chiapas Rebellion: The Struggle for Land and Democracy* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998).

In fact, the Zapatistas are reformists and revolutionaries as well as nationalists and internationalists at the same time. That is to say, they seek specific democratic transformations in Mexico on the one hand and build a radical logic of change that calls for global transformation on the other—a challenge to more traditional Marxist thought. In short, the character of the movement should be understood neither solely in terms of traditional Marxist philosophy nor by focusing on indigenous folklore. Instead, they should be understood through a dialogical perspective that analyzes both knowledge systems.

For Zapatismo neoliberalism is the new world conquest, a battle for the conquest of the markets. Thus, fighting against neoliberalism is a continuation of the indigenous fight for land rights, self-determination, and autonomy. The Zapatistas build their vision of the “other politics” by constructing a visual and oral world, which is hard to articulate in the traditional Marxist vocabulary and imagination of revolution. Therefore, not only it is essential to understand their philosophy that oscillates between autonomist Marxism and Mayan rebellion, but it is essential to understand their unique representation of language, visual symbols, humor and stories that presents the idea of revolution with another sensibility. This deserves attention because the Zapatistas have captured the imagination and of a large creative audience around the world that is engaged with another vision “to form another world.”<sup>396</sup>

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<sup>396</sup> Peter Rosset et al., “Zapatismo in the Movement of the Movements,” *Development* 48/2(2005): 37.

### **Interplay of the Visible and the Invisible: Creating Radical Subjectivity**

Zapatistas are pioneers of a social movement that uses social media, which has helped make their aspirations for a future revolution and their practice of direct democracy an inspiration and example for others.<sup>397</sup> The Zapatistas First Intercontinental *Encuentro* for Humanity against Neoliberalism, held in 1996, provided a model of form and expression to those who animate protests globally. In 1999, as I mentioned previously, many activists, who were present at this meeting, set out to create the “June 18 Carnival Against Capitalism” in London, and the Seattle showdown with the WTO—two events that represent an important turning point of the anti-globalization movement.

Zapatistas have not only challenged modern Mexico’s notion of the political subject but they also have created an alternative practice of being a political subject. “People the color of the earth,” as they call themselves, say, “we chose words to be heard and symbols to be seen.”<sup>398</sup> On the Zapatista rebellion, Naomi Klein wrote: “Yet the paradox of Marcos and the Zapatistas is that, despite the masks, the non-selves, the mystery, their struggle is about the opposite of anonymity—it is about the right to be seen.”<sup>399</sup> This paradox of being visible without being seen is a critique of the current representation system but it also allows for the creation of a collective subjectivity where the individual subject, the “I,” dissolves into a plural third person subjectivity: the “we.” Thomas Nail explains this in his take on the visibility of political subjects:

Political parties and states, no less than the capitalist market, require some form of identity to represent: a citizen, a voter, a consumer, etc. Even minorities are compelled to display identities to be represented. If they want to be counted by the state, they must show their faces. But if the

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<sup>397</sup> Ibid, 221-222.

<sup>398</sup> This slogan can be seen at the entrance of the first and largest *caracol* of Oventik, San Cristobal de las Casas, Chiapas, Mexico.

<sup>399</sup> Naomi Klein, *Fences and Windows: Dispatches from the Front Lines of the Globalization Debate* (New York: Picador, 2002), 212.



political problem of our time is to become not simply the problem of who is represented by parties, states, and capital, but the unraveling/undoing of the apparatus of representation itself, a new strategy is called for: the mask. By wearing masks and costumes, global social movements reject the traditional presupposition that political minorities are seeking a party to represent them precisely by refusing to allow visible signs of participants' specific identities to be identified.<sup>400</sup>

When the Zapatistas took up arms in 1994, it was a revolt against their invisibility.<sup>401</sup> At every opportunity, Zapatistas have stated that they mask themselves to be seen and to represent all those unseen. They have declared: "We cover our face, so that we can be seen, our struggle is the struggle of those without faces."<sup>402</sup> Wearing black balaclava masks precisely serves their critique of the way in which they have been denied a subject position within the Mexican nation (Figure 4.1).<sup>403</sup> In the opening ceremony of the First Intercontinental Meeting for Humanity and Against Neoliberalism (the first *encuentro*), held July 27, 1996, Subcomandanta Anna Maria remarked:

... This is what we are. The Zapatista National Liberation Army. The voice that arms itself to be heard. The face that hides itself to be seen. The name that hides itself to be named. The red star that calls out to humanity and the world to be heard, to be seen, to be named. The tomorrow that is harvested in the past. Behind our black mask. Behind our armed voice. Behind our unnamable name. Behind what you see of us. Behind this, we are you. Behind this, we are the same simple and ordinary men and women that are repeated in all races, painted in all colors, speak in all languages and live in all places. The same forgotten men and women. The same excluded. The same untolerated. The same persecuted. The same as you. Behind this, we are you. Behind our masks is the face of all excluded women. Of all the forgotten native people. Of all the persecuted homosexuals. Of all the despised youth. Of all the beaten migrants. Of all

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<sup>400</sup> Thomas Nail, "Political Theory of the Mask," accessed December 12, 2013, [http://mysite.du.edu/~tnail2/Thomas\\_Nail/Research.\\_files/political%20theory%20of%20the%20mask%20%C2%AB%20the%20medes.pdf](http://mysite.du.edu/~tnail2/Thomas_Nail/Research._files/political%20theory%20of%20the%20mask%20%C2%AB%20the%20medes.pdf)

<sup>401</sup> Klein, "The Unknown."

<sup>402</sup> Holloway, *Change the World Without Taking Power*, 98. Marcos also said that: "We cover our faces in order to show the world the true face of Mexico." Subcomandante Insurgente Marcos, *Our Word is Our Weapon: Selected Writings* (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2002), 265.

<sup>403</sup> Neil Harvey, "Review of The Chiapas Rebellion: The Struggle for Land and Democracy," *Foreign Affairs* (1999), accessed February 15, 2012, <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/54737/kennethmaxwell/the-chiapas-rebellion-the-struggle-for-land-and-democracy>

those imprisoned for their words and thoughts. Of all the humiliated workers. Of all those dead from neglect. Of all the simple and ordinary men and women who don't count, who aren't seen, who are nameless, who have no tomorrow.<sup>404</sup>

Perhaps this is the aspect of Zapatismo that is the most inspiring. Zapatismo is not only philosophically significant for being the representation of the oppressed it also has a symbolic significance. The Zapatista mask plays a symbolical role in constructing radical subjectivity “immanent not to a consciousness who represents an “I” to itself, but to the political event of Zapatismo Itself.”<sup>405</sup> Many diverse groups around the world struggling and resisting against the neoliberal system gather around the universality of the mask and what it represents.<sup>406</sup> Zapatista masks, along with Guy Fawkes masks, have been the symbols of “critique of party, state, and capitalist (mis)representation, and as an experiment in direct democracy.”<sup>407</sup> This is precisely why we have seen Zapatistas’ ski masks as much as Guy Fawkes masks at almost every anti-globalization (alter-globalization) protests, and lately at occupy movements around the globe.<sup>408</sup>

For Mihalís Mentínis, the Zapatistas’ use of the mask is central to their success as a social movement. The anonymity provided by these masks is the means through which the Zapatistas are able to construct and perform a transformative collective subjectivity “by hiding that part of the body most clearly connected to one’s identity by no longer

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<sup>404</sup> The Zapatistas, *Zapatista Encuentro: Documents from the 1996 Encounter for Humanity and Against Neoliberalism* (New York: Seven Stories Press, 1998), 24.

<sup>405</sup> Nail, “Political Theory of the Mask.”

<sup>406</sup> Nail stresses that: “The use of masks as a political technology against representation has a global history unique to the radical Left. This history begins with the use of masks in the 1970s and 80s by the German and Italian Autonomists, but was launched into global popularity by the Zapatistas.” Ibid.

<sup>407</sup> Ibid.

<sup>408</sup> There are also practical uses of the mask during the protests such as concealing one’s identity from police cameras, avoiding to be singled out as well as creating a feeling of being a part of a collective struggle.

existing as individuals... By transcending the individual identity, they become a revolutionary collective force, a force more powerful than the individual entities.”<sup>409</sup>

The Zapatistas’ ability to produce a surprising array of visual images, declarations, *communiqués*, letters, metaphorical stories, and news bulletins has provided political activists, thinkers, radical academics, anarchists, and students an almost unprecedented breath of material for discussion. Such information and analyses were downloaded and transformed and circulated as pamphlets, leaflets, newspaper articles, teach-ins, lectures, and letters to the editor, as well as into many Internet blogs and discussion sites. Through this entire communication network, one image has become iconic and has been circulated repeatedly as the symbol not only of the Zapatista movement but of the anti-globalization movement: the image of Subcomandante Marcos, one of the leaders of the EZLN and spokesperson for the Zapatistas.<sup>410</sup>

Taken by different photographers between 1994 and 1996, Marcos is often shown smoking his pipe under his balaclava (a black ski mask), and wearing a khaki hat featuring three faded red stars. On his right shoulder is resting an assault rifle that overlaps an ammunitions belt or bandolier, which, since 1910, has often signified armed opposition to the federal government and foreign capital. (Figure 4.2). He wears two watches, one on each wrist, and the old hat, which he says he has been wearing since he arrived in the Lacandon Jungle in 1983. This perfectly constructed image of a charismatic and mysterious leader captured the imagination of the young generation almost as much as Alberto Korda’s iconic photograph of Che Guevara captured the Cuban Revolution

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<sup>409</sup> Mentinis, *Zapatistas: The Chiapas Revolt*, 170-171.

<sup>410</sup> Both by the Subcomandante Marcos himself and other subcomandantes and Zapatistas, it has been emphasized that Marcos is not the leader but is one of the spokespersons of the movement along with Subcomandante Tacho and Subcomandanta Ramona.

generation.<sup>411</sup> As an icon, the Marcos image, or very similar ones, have been sold in tourist shops and craft markets, on the Internet, and even in museum shops in the form of posters, postcards, T-shirts, buttons, key chains, refrigerator magnets, and hand-made dolls.<sup>412</sup>

From the beginning of the rebellion, the image-making strategies of Subcomandante Marcos often caused him to be called the “masked clown.”<sup>413</sup> Other times, he was said to be in competition with former president Carlos Salinas to be the TV persona of the day. Nevertheless, I argue that the way the Zapatistas can be “seen” behind this persona, who is their spokesperson, is precisely about their take on their visibility and representation. Marcos is the face of the Zapatistas as well as of all oppressed people in the world. Ironically and intentionally, no one has seen the face behind the ski mask.

What is appealing to today’s young rebels and activists is not what a “face” represents; it is the anonymity of this “persona” who makes him an icon. Marcos could be the representation of anybody. Although the image of Marcos alone does not represent the complete social imagery of the Mayan rebels of Chiapas, it embodies important aspects of the cosmological and ideological imagery of the Zapatista movement. In a communiqué commemorating the death of Emiliano Zapata, on April 10, 1995, Marcos deployed the image of Votán-Zapata within the context of the five hundred year indigenous resistance:

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<sup>411</sup> In most of the iconic photographs of Marcos, he looks at the camera, he is aware that his photograph is being taken, which is part of his image-making strategies. In another iconic image, Marcos shows his middle finger to the camera –yet not to the cameraman but to the establishment.

<sup>412</sup> This image has even been used for the advertisement of the condom brands such as *Marcondones* and *Alzados*. While avoiding to be co-opted by the state, being co-opted by the commercial market is a serious risk for the Zapatistas.

<sup>413</sup> Marcos, to mock his critics, sometimes signs the communiqués as “the three hundred [referring to the movie] and the masked clown who commands them.” John Womack Jr., *Rebellion in Chiapas: An Historical Reader* (New York: New Press, 1999), 356.

...United with Votán, Guardian and Heart of the People, Zapata rose up again to struggle for democracy, liberty and justice for all Mexicans. Even though he has indigenous blood, Votán-Zapata does not struggle just for the indigenous. He struggles also for those who are not indigenous but who live in the same misery, without rights, without justice in their jobs, without democracy for their decisions, and without freedom for their thoughts and words. Votán-Zapata is all who march under our flag. Votán-Zapata is the one who walks in the heart of each and every one of the true men and women. All of us are one in Votán-Zapata and he is one with all of us.<sup>414</sup>

Votán represents the third day on the Tzeltal Mayan calendar. It is also a mythical symbol that embraces “the heart of the people” and corresponds to the man sent by God to distribute land among the indigenous.<sup>415</sup> In this messianic call, Marcos’s role is not just that of a spokesperson and military commander of EZLN, but is also that of “a quasi-mythical persona who incarnates the past, present, and future of the Maya world.”<sup>416</sup> Born to a middle-class *mestizo* family, the Subcomandante was reborn as “Marcos” and baptized as a Tzeltal man in the Lacandon jungle, transforming his role from that of an intellectual bandit to that of a messianic guerrilla.

In Zapatista communities, Marcos’s portrait can be seen in the offices of *buen gobierno*, positioned above the place where representatives sit. It also takes its place in churches next to the icons of Christ and the saints. In the Marcos’ image Votán—the guardian of Tzotzil and god of Tzeltal—merges with Emiliano Zapata to symbolize the power inherent in the multitude as one and in one as the multitude.<sup>417</sup> This is best explained in Marcos’ words: “With this name we name the nameless. With this flag

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<sup>414</sup> This is from the General Command of the Zapatista Army of National Liberation Mexico published in *La Jornada*, April 10, 1995, trans. Cindy Arnold, accessed February 12, 2010.

[http://www.struggle.ws/mexico/ezln/ccri\\_zapata\\_apr95.html](http://www.struggle.ws/mexico/ezln/ccri_zapata_apr95.html)

<sup>415</sup> De Leon, ed., *Our Word Is Our Weapon*, 21.

<sup>416</sup> Mentinis, *Zapatistas: The Chiapas Revolt*, 166.

<sup>417</sup> José Rabasa, “Of Zapatismo: Reflections on the Folkloric and the Impossible in a Subaltern Insurrection, in *The Latin American Cultural Studies Reader*, ed. Ana del Sarto, Alicia Ríos, and Abril Trigo (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), 562.

covering our face we have a new face, all of us. With this name we name the unnamable: Votán-Zapata. guardian and the heart of the people.”<sup>418</sup> In the age of World Wide Web reproduction, in the social imaginary of the world’s radical youth, the hybrid cultural and political practices that combine modern and non-modern forms have a lot of resonance.

The figure of Votán not only talks to indigenous Mayans but also engages the imagination of young urban Mexicans who do not have an interest in the oral traditions of young Zapatistas. After a communiqué featuring the image was issued following an April 1995 meeting, Votán-Zapata and the ubiquitous ski masks often appeared as representations in the articles of *La Guillotina*, an anarchist student publication of the National Autonomous University of Mexico in Mexico City (UNAM), with the motto “demand the impossible.”<sup>419</sup> Soon after another communiqué was released on Mayday of 1995, a popular slogan “*Todos Somos Marcos*” (We are all Marcos) was first heard in Mexico City, where more than one million supporters marched.<sup>420</sup> Marcos responded in a further communiqué that his mask is a mirror:

Marcos is gay in San Francisco, black in South Africa, an Asian in Europe, a Chicano in San Ysidro, an anarchist in Spain, a Palestinian in Israel, a Mayan Indian in the streets of San Cristobal, a Jew in Germany, a Gypsy in Poland, a Mohawk in Quebec, a pacifist in Bosnia, a single woman on the Metro at 10 p.m., a peasant without land, a gang member in the slums, an unemployed worker, an unhappy student and, of course, a Zapatista in the mountains.<sup>421</sup>

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<sup>418</sup> De Leon, *Our Word Is Our Weapon*, 20.

<sup>419</sup> See articles in *La Guillotina*, 30 (1995).

<sup>420</sup> *Communique* stands for the community dialogue that is essential in Zapatismo. At the onset of the revolt, the mainstream media in Mexico and the United States dismissed the first *communiques* and denied NAFTA as the motivation of the rebellion. They also tried to condemn Zapatistas for illegal violence and even suggested that the international drug dealers financed the EZLN.

<sup>421</sup> Subcomandante Insurgente Marcos, “Chiapas: The Southeast in Two Winds,” in *Zapatistas! Documents of the New Mexican Revolution* (New York: Autonomedia, 1995), 310-311.

The hybrid image of Votán-Zapata, which represents the rebirth of oppressed people everywhere, is at the core of Zapatista social imaginary. Representing Marxist aesthetics, Marcos typically opens a communiqué by quoting a poet, such as Paul Éluard, and finishes with an indigenous folk tale. Thus, his dual-subject position defies any redundant identity discourse and strategically represents him as both a revolutionary intellectual and a faceless rebel. In his communiqués, letters, and videos, Marcos represents an icon, not a person.

In May 2014, Marcos appeared for the last time in the *caracol* (cultural and political center) of La Realidad, on the occasion of the memorial procession of José Luis Solís López (known as Compañero Galeano), a teacher in the Zapatista's "Little School", who had been assassinated by paramilitaries.<sup>422</sup> He explained why his character had been created:

And so began a complex maneuver of distraction, a terrible and marvelous magic trick, a malicious move from the indigenous heart that we are, with indigenous wisdom challenging one of the bastions of modernity: the media. And so began the construction of the character named 'Marcos. 'I ask that you follow me in this reasoning: Suppose that there is another way to neutralize a criminal. For example, creating their murder weapon, making them think that it is effective, enjoining them to build, on the basis of this effectiveness, their entire plan, so that in the moment that they prepare to shoot, the "weapon" goes back to being what it always was: an illusion.<sup>423</sup>

In his final communiqué (also broadcast through Radio Zapatista), Marcos explained that the "hologram" was no longer necessary and that the cult of the individual had to be destroyed for the sake of the collective:

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<sup>422</sup> According to the Good Government Junta, those responsible for Galeano's murder were paramilitary forces that came from two right wing parties, the Green Ecologist Party and the National Action Party, as well as the Independent Center for Agricultural Workers and Historic Peasants.

<sup>423</sup> Subcomandante Insurgente Marcos, "Between Light and Shadow: Marcos's Last Words," accessed May 26, 2014, <http://enlacezapatista.ezln.org.mx/2014/05/27/between-light-and-shadow/>

Those who loved and hated *SupMarcos* now know that they have loved and hated a hologram. Their love and hate have been useless, sterile, hollow, empty... There will not be, then, museums or metal plaques where I was born and raised. There will not be someone who lives off of having been Subcomandante Marcos. No one will inherit his name or his job. There will not be all-paid trips abroad to give lectures. There will not be transport to or care in fancy hospitals. There will not be widows or heirs. There will not be funerals, honors, statues, museums, prizes, or anything else that the system does to promote the cult of the individual and devalue the collective. This figure was created and now its creators, the Zapatistas, are destroying it.<sup>424</sup>

Therefore, the character of Marcos dies, only to be resurrected as Subcomandante

Galeano. The Subcomandante ended his farewell with these final words: “My name is

Galeano, insurgent Subcomandante Galeano. Is anyone else called Galeano?” The crowd

answered: “We are all Galeano.”<sup>425</sup> Marcos is now only a visual representation on the

murals, in the photographs and postcards, and in the collective memory of those who

followed the movement.

The Zapatista rebellion has at its heart the confrontation between the indigenous

traditions of self-organization and the Guevarist-inspired model of guerilla warfare

against the state. Considering the initial ties of EZLN with the Forces of National

Liberation (*Las Fuerzas de Liberación Nacional* or FLN)—a leftist guerilla group that

formed a coalition with liberation theologians in Chiapas in the 1980s—a third component

can be added.<sup>426</sup> It is typical to see images of Che Guevara, Zapata, and Marcos next to

each other on murals in autonomous communities, where they represent a trinity of

revolutionary symbols: Che Guevara, the military commander of Marxism; Zapata, the

symbol of the agrarian revolution; and Marcos, the symbol representing the anonymity of

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<sup>424</sup> Ibid.

<sup>425</sup> Ibid.

<sup>426</sup> Neil Harvey and John Womack Jr. trace the long and complicated history of indigenous leftist struggles for land and representation in southern Mexico. It was from these movements, especially the leftist urban guerilla organization, the National Liberation Forces that the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN) emerged in 1983. See Harvey, *The Chiapas Rebellion* and Womack Jr., *Rebellion in Chiapas*.



the current Zapatista movement (Figure 4.3). The Zapatistas intentionally revived these icons of Mexican popular culture that have a special place in the hearts of Mexicans. Historian Anne Rubenstein notes that the Zapatistas have managed to wrench Mexico's collective memory and popular culture from the grasp of the PRI.<sup>427</sup> In doing so, the Zapatistas constructed their image on a double-edged sword: attracting national and international public attention, while risking popularization in a way that could reduce the movement to a co-modified rebellion in popular culture.

The Zapatista Virgin of Guadalupe is another icon that not only embodies the representation of the most revered religious symbol in Mexican culture, it also popularizes the Zapatista rebellion. Known as the Virgin of Guadalupe or Our Lady of Guadalupe in Mexico, the Virgin Mary depicted in the image of an indigenous woman is perhaps the single most prominent symbol of Mexican identity and culture. In the nineteenth century, with the dissemination of popular religion in Mexico, the expansion of the devotional cult of Guadalupe especially contributed to non-clerical aesthetic manifestations as well as to practices of popular devotion. In the Zapatistas' imagery, the popular icon Guadalupe—the Virgin as a celestial being standing on a crescent with her blue mantel—is converted into the Zapatista Virgin of Guadalupe. In this image, Guadalupe's nose and mouth are covered with the red Zapatista *paliacate* (a bandana that looks like an anarchist prop but is also a popular tourist item in Chiapas), and she wears a

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<sup>427</sup> Anne Rubenstein, "Mass Media and Popular Culture in the Post-revolutionary Era," in *The Oxford History of Mexico*, ed. Michael C. Meyer and William H. Beezley (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 670.

cross-cartilage—the symbol of Emiliano Zapata at the time of the Mexican Revolution 1910-1920--while carrying a rifle on her back (Figure 4.4).<sup>428</sup>

This image is repeated on posters, postcards, handmade toys, and other souvenir items bought and sold through the Zapatista corporate and other Zapatista organizations in the city of San Cristobal de las Casas and elsewhere. Although often adorning murals and tourist items, in some instances, the image takes the form of an oil-on-canvas painting, one of which today adorns the entrance wall of a restaurant-café and corporate in San Cristobal, which is a common place for gatherings of Zapatista sympathizer intellectuals, civil society members, and activists (Figure 4.4). On the Internet, the image is sold in other media as well. In addition, of course, a large mural of the Zapatista Virgin of Guadalupe adorns the façade of the Clinica Guadalupeana in Oventik.<sup>429</sup> In this image, Guadalupe holds a red star in her hand—the symbol of communism as well as of the Zapatista movement (Figure 4.5).

Another visually enticing painting of Guadalupe as a Zapatista guerilla can be seen on a mural covering the west wall of the community chapel in San Pedro Polhó (Figure 4.6). This autonomous municipality, a sixty-mile climb from Oventik, is largely a refugee center for some nine thousand Zapatistas. This mural and others covering the chapel's outside walls were created by Gustavo Chávez Pavon and a team of international and Zapatista volunteers in 2002. From the outside, the place looks like a little Catholic chapel with a typical colonial façade; however, inside, there is a large Mayan altar adorned with offerings and decorations made of cornhusks. Candles are placed on the

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<sup>428</sup> For a detailed analysis of the origins of Zapatista soldier imagery, see David Craven's analysis of Rivera's painting "the Zapatista Landscape." David Craven, *Diego Rivera: As Epic Modernist* (New York: G.K. Hall, 1997).

<sup>429</sup> Oventik is the main cultural and political center of Zapatista communities. It is the second *caracol*, the *caracol* of "Resistance and Rebellion for Humanity," in the mountainous region of Los Altos. This clinic is the only full-equipped health clinic in the Zapatista communities that serves Zapatistas and non-Zapatistas.

floor in the shape of a square, which, in Mayan cosmology, symbolizes the four corners of the earth.

On the same western wall of the chapel next to Guadalupe is the depiction of a young Zapatista woman whose nose and mouth are covered with the same Zapatista *paliacate* that covers the Guadalupe. She wears a cross-cartridge belt and carries a rifle on her shoulder. In her left hand, raised into the air, is a white dove that contrasts with the rifle on her shoulder. This already synthesized image (an indigenous woman as the Virgin Mary) is manufactured in yet another way to promote indigenous values in the space of colonial repression, this time in the twenty-first century revolution of the Zapatistas.

Here the Zapatista Virgin of Guadalupe does not cover the wall alone but is paired with the image of an EZLN woman, which, in turn, strengthens the Guadalupe's representation not only as the patron saint of the movement but as the symbolic personification of women guerrillas. In fact, in Zapatista communities the image of the Guadalupe Zapatista is much more popular than the infamous image of Subcomandante Marcos.

After many interviews I conducted with Zapatista women, I have concluded that Zapatistas subvert the conventional, established meaning that the Guadalupe has in Mexican culture: the Guadalupe is not represented as a Zapatista woman, but a Zapatista woman is represented as the Guadalupe. By representing themselves in her image, Zapatista women embody the role of Guadalupe as a conflation of peasant, warrior of the revolution, and mother of earth, land, and *patria* (the beloved Mexico).

## Visual and Political Representation of An-Other Democracy

Zapatismo is not a romantic revival of a typical indigenous struggle nor is it a new political organization of Mexican peasants in Chiapas. Rather, it is a newly constructed political process that has interwoven tradition and radical change on the one hand, and attachment to the land and the struggle of wage labor on the other. Their slogans, “Everything for everybody, nothing for us,” and “To fight for a world which fits all the worlds,” are eloquent expressions of the intended realization of the interests of entirely oppressed and exploited classes, not just of the indigenous. Anthropologist George Collier explains: “The movements from peasant to indigenous concerns, from class to identity, and from individual human rights to indigenous collective rights have all been apparent within the Zapatista movement itself.”<sup>430</sup> The Zapatista movement is significant precisely because it aims at making particular reformist demands locally and waging a larger political battle for more revolutionary changes in society worldwide.

The amalgamation of the old ways of indigenous struggle for land still under the influence of Mayan cosmology and the new radical activism that operates under the autonomous Marxist system of knowledge, not only signals an alternative scope for radical politics, it also captures the imagination of Mexican youth and young activists who are connected to anti-capitalist movements around the world.<sup>431</sup> As I will show in the following pages, this dual character of the movement is especially prominent in the visual representations of the Zapatistas.

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<sup>430</sup> George Collier, “Zapatismo Resurgent: Land and Autonomy in Chiapas,” *NACLA: Report on the Americas* 33/5 (2000): 22.

<sup>431</sup> Alain Gresh, “The Dream of a Better World is Back,” *Le Monde Diplomatique*, May 8, 2009, accessed May 9, 2013, <http://www.middle-east-online.com/english/?id=31942>.

In the social memory of indigenous Mexicans, the struggle for land symbolizes a common resistance and constitutes a foundation for a strong social bond that connects villages and communities. While land rights and democracy constitute the core agenda of their political struggle, the image of Zapata marks the core of this struggle as the personification of the new Zapatista movement.<sup>432</sup> Since the Mexican Revolution (1910-1920), Emiliano Zapata's dignified persona, with cross-cartridges and riding on a white horse, embodies the ideological symbolism and myths of the Zapatistas. Although the horse was introduced in South America by Spaniards, its meaning as a symbol of victorious strength has been appropriated by the Zapatistas, and combined with the crossed cartridge belts to symbolize the eternal existence of the hero and ongoing resistance. The image evokes the historical past of indigenous rebellion, and is set against the stigmatization of identity and erasure of Zapatista culture.

In 1910, under the command of Zapata and Pancho Villa, rural peoples rose up in arms for "land, freedom, and justice." During the combative phase of the Mexican Revolution, these slogans also generated unique visual symbols. Zapata and Villa almost immediately became icons of the revolution, and with their horses and cartridge belts they represented a dignified image of the peasants. Zapata's representation as a symbol of liberty and justice grew and spread during the revolution through popular songs (*corridos*), stories, and photographs.<sup>433</sup> The body of the rebellion was the peasant, and the representation of the peasant was Zapata. In the reconstructive phase of the revolution (1920-1940), this expressive dimension of Zapata's agrarian revolution became the

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<sup>432</sup> For more on the meaning of Emiliano Zapata has had as the great symbol of land reform and human rights, has had and now has for rural Mexicans, see Lynn Stephen, *Zapata Lives! Histories and Cultural Politics in Southern Mexico* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002).

<sup>433</sup> For an excellent analysis of the images of Zapata see, Teresa Avila, "Images of Zapata and the Construction of National Ideology" (MA thesis, University of New Mexico, 2005).

greatest inspiration for the industrial proletariat, and later, for some of the progressive artists who became the revolutionary vanguard.<sup>434</sup>

That the new Zapatista uprising began on the day the NAFTA agreement was ratified was no coincidence. The movement coalesced in the Lacandon jungle after ten years of military as well as ideological preparation. In order for the NAFTA agreement to be signed by all parties, in 1992, Article 27 of the Mexican Constitution had to be eliminated. This article ensured the reform of collective *ejido* landholdings for which Zapata and his peasant revolutionaries fought during the Mexican Revolution.<sup>435</sup> The main aim of the reform was to incorporate the strategic location of Chiapas and its rich resources into the international market. As Noam Chomsky noted in his book, *Profit over People*, the president of Mexico's leading environmental organization, Homero Aridjis, sees the NAFTA agreement as the third conquest that Mexico has suffered and concludes "The first was by arms, the second was spiritual, third is economic."<sup>436</sup> The reversal of the land reform meant taking the common land (*ejido*) away from the indigenous communities and giving it to rich farm owners (*haciendistas*). This action not only condemned the indigenous communities to extreme poverty, but also destroyed the conditions of their communal social life that depended on communal decision-making processes—an indigenous democracy of direct representation, and, in Zapatistas' words, "an opportunity to practice a different life."<sup>437</sup> The spokesperson of the movement, Subcomandante Marcos, explained: "The moment the agrarian land distribution is closed, the Indigenous farmer loses his means of production, but he also loses his history and

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<sup>434</sup> For more on this see Craven, *Diego Rivera*.

<sup>435</sup> With the amendment of the Article 27 in 1992, the Mexican government eliminated the guarantee of communal property of *ejidos*, allowing them to be sold, rented, or mortgaged.

<sup>436</sup> Chomsky, *Profit Over People*, 127.

<sup>437</sup> Massimo de Angelis, "Zapatista's Voice," *L'acéphale* (October 1997), accessed September 22, 2011, <http://libcom.org/library/zapatistas-voice-massimo-de-angelis>

culture.”<sup>438</sup> For this reason, the Zapatistas wage their struggle for autonomy on the cultural front.

The representation of the resistance of the landless peasant against state repression repeats itself not only as a means of political rebellion but in the visual (as much as oral) language of this rebellion. In a photograph taken in black and white, as in the Zapata image, Subcommandante Marcos and Subcommandante Tacho are seen on horses as they lead EZLN soldiers (Figure 4.7). This image can be interpreted as an apparent reference to the image of Zapata and Villa leading peasant cadres in the Mexican Revolution. No doubt, the image evokes the successes achieved by dignified peasant rebels during the Mexican Revolution. When revolutionary peasants occupied Mexico City, in December 1914, the workers of Europe were drowning in their own blood, and the Russian Revolution was still three years away. The peasants of Morelos and Puebla and the *mestizo* middle classes constructed not only a revolutionary army but they also produced, in the Ayala Plan, a coherent political program that asserted their needs against those of capital.

The photograph shows EZLN soldiers marching to one of the meetings that were held in August and September of 2005, where plans for the Sixth Declaration of the Lacandon Jungle were prepared. Arrival at those gatherings from the jungle or from other remote places often involved a march, not just of the EZLN but also of Zapatista peasants and indigenous groups from elsewhere, along with the civil society activists and NGOs who joined them. One of the commanders on the horse carries a large Mexican flag, which often adorned the reunions. The Zapatistas’ use of national symbols, such as the

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<sup>438</sup> Samuel Blixen and Carlos Fazio, “Interview with Marcos about Neo-liberalism, the National State and Democracy,” *Brecha*, October 12, 1995 (Author’s translation), accessed September 25, 2011, <http://chasque.apc.org/brecha>

flag and the national anthem, has generated criticism for binding them within the politics of national struggle.

Since 1994, through their declarations and other forms of communication, the Zapatistas have been situating their struggle in the trinity of democracy, liberty, and justice for the *patria* (Mexico). In Mayan languages the land (*tierra*) and homeland (*patria*) are the same word and the Zapatistas use it interchangeably not to highlight their nationalism but to emphasize their ties to the land. The word *patria*, when used in place of *tierra*, also cosmologically connects the Mayan past, present, and future. The autonomous lands of Zapatistas is the experimental land for radical democracy, and it implies both the Mayan relationship to land that does not constitute any institutions or individuals reclaiming it as a property or ruling it.

As many indigenous peoples around the world, the Tzeltals, Tzotzils, Chols, Mams, Zoques, and Tojolabals in Zapatista communities believe that the land was passed to them as a gift from their ancestors and not only it is absolutely vital for the continuation of their existence it constitutes their identity as Mayan people. Therefore, land is both an ideological and cosmological link to their Mayan past and it is in the core of their responsibility to both nature and society. As Gustavo Esteva explains: “Their cosmic attitude before nature, in which they feel themselves immerse, prevents conceiving the possibility of appropriating it in an excluding way: how to ‘own’ your mother?”<sup>439</sup> Zapatistas, within a common territory, they allocate land to their members without transforming them to private properties.

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<sup>439</sup> Gustavo Esteva, “The Zapatistas and People’s Power, accessed 21 September, 2012, <http://vlal.bol.ucla.edu/multiversity/Gustavo/Zapatistas.htm>



The Zapatistas' main demand is to establish an organic link to the Mexican Nation (the homeland–the whole) by means of political representation and ownership of their communal land. Massimo Angelis explains: “The Zapatistas refer to this organic unity as “nation.” Marx calls it *Res Publica*, or true democracy, or communism, but they all mean the same thing: people recognizing each other as human beings and therefore governing themselves.”<sup>440</sup> The Zapatistas often emphasize the indigenous sense of “place” and “belonging” when they use the concept of “nation,” more than they use the term “nation” to signify a particular identity or ethnic characteristics. Hence, the Zapatistas national rhetoric constantly oscillates between the particular (e.g., being included as a part of the Mexican Nation as indigenous peoples seeking autonomy for two hundred years) and the universal (e.g., the larger movement against neoliberalism). As explained in their words:

And then we also said we wanted democracy, liberty and justice for all Mexicans although we were concentrated on the Indian peoples. Because it so happened that we, the EZLN, were almost all only indigenous from here in Chiapas, but we did not want to struggle just for own good, or just for the good of the indigenous of Chiapas, or just for the good of the Indian peoples of Mexico. We wanted to fight along with everyone who was humble and simple like ourselves and who was in great need and who suffered from exploitation and thievery by the rich and their bad governments here, in our Mexico, and in other countries in the world.<sup>441</sup>

In 2007, a group of international artists from the United States and Canada, with the name *Red de Solidaridad con Mexico* (network of solidarity with Mexico), painted a mural on an exterior wall of the secondary school in Oventik, Chiapas. The mural features a Zapatista woman, a man, and a child, holding banners inscribed with the words *Libertad* (liberty), *Tierra* (land), and *Equalidad* (equality). Another, more infamous,

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<sup>440</sup> De Angelis, “Zapatista’s Voice.”

<sup>441</sup> Sixth Declaration of the Lacandon Jungle, CIDECI website, (2009) accessed July12, 2011, <http://www.cedoz.org/site/index.php> .

Zapatista motto is written across the sky in the image: “*Nuestra Palabra es Nuestra Arma*” (our word is our weapon) (Figure 4.8). For Zapatistas, it is very important that their indigenous cosmovision, as well as their autonomous views for building a bottom-up revolution, are visible and understood by larger populations beyond Mexico.<sup>442</sup>

In this mural you see Zapatistas walking along with snails, *Caracoles* in Spanish, which is where their cultural and political centers take their name from. In the Zapatista communities I encountered more than hundred murals and many of them include this symbol of *caracol*. In those images, the snail usually also masks his face with a typical red Zapatista handkerchief. The ancient Maya ancestors used a conch shell as a horn to summon people to gather in one place as a community. Zapatistas say that their ancestors lived when the life moved at a much slower pace than today, much like the slow-moving *caracol*. The *caracol* symbol connects the Zapatista present with a conception of the Maya past as a direct historical trajectory and represents the ideals of an autonomous Zapatista government on two levels. It represents both the opposition to the division of time after industrial capitalism and its imposed way of life on the colonized people and it also represents the communal spirit of small community government in the face of globalization.

Outside the entrance to each *caracol* as well as to all autonomous municipalities, the visitor is stunned by a large metal board that announces the main idea of the *buen gobierno*: “You are in the Zapatista territory in rebellion. Here the people govern and the government obeys.” On another metal board, a Mayan saying becomes the slogan:

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<sup>442</sup> In 2013 Zapatistas created “the Zapatista little school” and invited people of all ages and political directions to come and experience the Zapatista way of life the first hand. In the two little schools organized in 2013 and 2014 thousands of people around the world became Zapatista’s students and learnt about Zapatistas’ vision of revolution and experiments of direct democracy. It was also their way of sending the message to the world that their struggle is alive and still strong.

“Command by obeying.” These mottos, essentially derived from the Mayan way of decentralized communal life, aptly summarize the Zapatistas understanding of power and their concept of radical democracy. For Zapatistas power is not delegated in rulers “autonomizing” themselves from the ruled for the period of their mandate. The position of the delegate of *buen gobierno* (good government) is assumed as a duty, a service, not as a power and they do not have an income for it. When their system of participatory democracy in the form of *buen gobiernos* is being criticized for being disorganized and slow Zapatistas has an answer: and however it moves, just like a snail (Figure 4.9).

Zapatistas seek to present to the world a new approach to the problem of state hegemony and power. As Luis Lorenzano said: “The Zapatistas are not guerrillas with a particular social base; they are the social base themselves”<sup>443</sup> Lorenzano further explains: “By engaging in this process, the indigenous community has become the “polis,” a community not just of land, language and culture, but a political community, with deliberate legislative capabilities.”<sup>444</sup> Rebel communities in highland Chiapas now reach up to one thousand in number, each with three hundred to four hundred people. These villages are connected to thirty-two autonomous municipalities. In August 2003, alternatives to the official county government, called *juntas de buen gobierno* (juntas of good government), were formed. Delegates from each village included in the *juntas* are chosen based on the Mayan practice of participatory democracy.<sup>445</sup> Indeed, in many ways their successful creation of new political spaces already has led to the demotion of the

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<sup>443</sup> Luis Lorenzano, “Zapatismo: Recomposition of Labour, Radical Democracy and Revolutionary Project,” In John Holloway and Eloína Peláez eds., *Zapatista!*, 126.

<sup>444</sup> Ibid.

<sup>445</sup> Each community chooses six to ten candidates and at the end, two of them are voted to represent their community in the *junta* in one of the caracoles. Each delegate serves maximum 4 years.

Zapatista Army to a largely symbolic role. The need for such an organization is explained in the Sixth Declaration:

And we saw that the military being above and the democratic below, was not good, because what is democratic should not be decided militarily, it should be the reverse: the democratic-political governing above, and the military obeying below. Or, perhaps, it would be better with nothing below, just completely level, without any military, and that is why the Zapatistas are soldiers so that there will not be any soldiers. Fine, what we then did about this problem was to begin separating the political-military from the autonomous and democratic aspects of organization in the Zapatista communities. And so, actions and decisions which had previously been made and taken by EZLN were being passed, little by little, to the democratically elected authorities in the villages.<sup>446</sup>

This type of governance involves direct representation instead of elections, and consensus seeking instead of voting. The *juntas* periodically come together in assembly halls that are almost as common as churches. These meetings are often very long, lasting for two or three days until a consensus is reached. The ability to reach consensus is aided by the vitality of the traditional decision-making process. The *juntas* have been asserting administrative control over all within the territorial boundaries of their county, Zapatistas and non-Zapatistas alike. In other words, they have been implementing the San Andrés Accords, agreements designed to provide indigenous peoples throughout Mexico with control over their lands and territory, as well as the right to self-government. The San Andrés Accords on Indigenous Rights and Cultures were signed by government representatives, but since then the government has refused to implement it. It is now clear that the government was using the peace talks to buy time to further militarize eastern Chiapas. Nevertheless, the continuation of the Zapatista struggle for democratic representation in their autonomous lands has had enormous appeal, not only throughout

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<sup>446</sup> Sixth Declaration of the Lacandon Jungle.

Mexico but in many other countries, and has promoted the organization of creative and viable alternatives outside of the state.

In the autonomous lands of the Zapatistas, one of the most visually notable characteristics is the prevalence of murals. Almost all community buildings (i.e., schools, clinics, offices of the juntas, assembly halls, corporative) in the seven *caracols*, and those of other larger communities are covered with colorful murals. Activist artist Miranda Bergman notes: “The painting of murals in any community in the world is an empowering process. It breaks down apathy, low self-esteem, and hopelessness, while transforming a space.”<sup>447</sup> Murals in the United States, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Cuba, and Palestine (among other nations) have been painted to inspire communities in their fight against repression. Zapatista murals serve even larger goals.

The community murals in autonomous Zapatista territories, created with national and international solidarity groups, is way of clarifying the principles of their political vision and practice that is at times contradictory combination of various ideologies and methods, drawing from the old and the new, focusing at once on the local, the national, and the global. Zapatistas have not only inspired people to seek an alternative way of thinking or imagining social change, they have also shared their solid experiences, such as the discussion of alternative approaches in light of diverse situations and the mistakes that were committed in certain circumstances.<sup>448</sup> Sociologist Abigail Andrews explains that inspiring reflexivity among the activists around the world is the lasting legacy for the

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<sup>447</sup> Miranda Bergman, “Mural Mural on the Wall,” in *Art on the Line: Essays by Artists about the Point Where Their Art and Activism Intersect*, ed. Jack Hirschman (Willimantic, CT: Curbstone Press 2002), 362.

<sup>448</sup> The Little School’s four textbooks, *Autonomous Government* part I and II, *Women’s Participation in the Autonomous Government*, and *Autonomous Resistance*, as well as the two DVDs that accompany the books were all created by Zapatistas to share their experiences as well as failures.

Zapatistas because for many of them Zapatismo entails the interrogation of their own position of power at home.<sup>449</sup>

Zapatista murals function in part as a conscious image-making strategy of the movement, helping to boost the revolutionary spirit and solidarity of the Zapatista communities and their supporters.<sup>450</sup> When the mainstream or alternative media covers the “intergalactic” gatherings of thousands of people around the world in Oventik, the murals are always shown in the background. During these gatherings, especially the most recent, known as *dignia rabia* (dignified rage), participants from around the world painted murals on the walls of new buildings (i.e., halls added to the secondary school) (Figure 4.10) in a ritualistic way, in order to show solidarity. The journal of the Zapatistas, called *Rebeldia*, has been printed for the past eight years and circulates nationally through solidarity organizations. It is common to see an image of a Zapatista mural accompanying an article even if it is not always on the cover.

The websites of Zapatista solidarity groups around the world also include the images of these murals to show “the Zapatista world.” Often, these groups use the same images in their posters with themes based on “solidarity with Zapatistas.” At present, visiting the murals is a major tourist activity in San Cristobal de las Casas. There are even guided tours to Oventik to see the *caracol* and the murals. Usually, there are only a few administrative people in the *caracols*, and the tourists take photographs of the murals and purchase souvenirs from the cooperative.<sup>451</sup> In this way, the Zapatista murals, although

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<sup>449</sup> Abigail Andrews, “How Activists Take Zapatismo Home: South-to-North Dynamics in Transnational Social Movements,” *Latin American Perspectives* 38/1(2011): 138-152.

<sup>450</sup> As expressed by Gustavo Chávez Pavon the artist who painted dozens of Zapatista murals in Zapatista communities as well as in Scotland, Denmark, Chile, and Palestine. Author’s interview with Gustavo Chávez Pavon, Mexico City-Mexico, September 12, 2011.

<sup>451</sup> The hospital in Oventik operates with one volunteer doctor and one or two volunteer nurses. The elementary school and the secondary school are closed due to a lack of teachers. Apart from the

their physical life is only semi-permanent, circulate and become permanent and accessible in photographs and other small tokens. For Zapatista communities, the murals function as a historical document:

The murals are very important for us, because it is through murals that we manifest our way of being, our culture, and our resistance as indigenous people, that for many years has been attempted to be erased from the map of our land, but now with the help of brothers and sisters, we will no longer be able to disappear. They will never be able to erase the knowledge of our people.<sup>452</sup>

The educational role of the murals is also notable. In places such as the Zapatista communities in Chiapas, where there exist high levels of marginalization and illiteracy, public murals play an important role in providing education, consciousness raising and self-awareness, especially among the youth. The large-scale murals are effective in relaying information about the historical events that led the people to their current social and political position, and they preserve the memory of leaders who fought for social justice.

In Oventik, as well as in other *caracols*, with names such as La Realidad, Garruchá, Moisés Gandhi, Roberto Barrios, Primero de Enero, and Morelia, the buildings of primary, secondary, and high schools are covered with colorful murals.<sup>453</sup> The schools as well as the clinic in Oventik were built by the collective effort of volunteers from communities from all over Mexico, as well as volunteers sent by international organizations in Europe. Inside the classrooms, there is usually a board and

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representatives of the *buen gobierno* and the people who work the cooperatives to sell souvenirs to tourists, Oventik (the biggest *caracole*) looks deserted apart from the galactic gatherings when thousands flock to Oventik. However, there is a large village next to the *caracole* where outsiders are not allowed to enter.

<sup>452</sup> Author's interview with a Zapatista woman, *caracol* Oventik, Chiapas-Mexico, December 18, 2009.

<sup>453</sup> I must hereby note that Zapatistas' work in implementing their urgent needs, such as land, housing, health, education, work, and food varies from *caracol* to *caracol*. Some *caracols*, such as La Garrucha that is located on the outskirts of the Lacandon Jungle, have collective economic projects such as stores or cattle to fund political activities, other *caracols* like Oventik in the highlands of Chiapas only have collective economic projects in some towns.

a mural from ceiling to the floor; thus, when the students are looking at a teacher, they also see the mural. The themes of these murals can be listed: the importance of literacy and education, the history of solidarity, indigenous struggles for land, and struggles for gender equality. In one of the classrooms at the secondary school in Oventik, there is a wall-to-wall dream-like image of a young girl holding a book (Figure 4.11). One side of the book cover portrays the brutality of colonization, and the other depicts the determined resistance of the Zapatistas. The girl's hands and face are surrealistically framed by long, blue hair that flows horizontally across the wall like ocean waves. This same image, by Mexican muralist Gustavo Chávez Pavon, is repeated on the façade of the primary school (the building that welcomes the visitors on the highway just outside of the *caracol* of Oventik) and is currently the icon of a literacy campaign launched by the Zapatistas.<sup>454</sup>

The muralists provide a mechanism that helps to articulate the overall vision of the people in a community. For example, the designs of murals in Zapatista communities typically are created by piecing together ideas that will further a communal message. It usually originates from a proposal by the artist or activist group, is drafted and modified through consensus, and evolves according to who participates in the actual collaboration. In most cases, the designs and images are chosen through community assemblies, consistent with the indigenous custom of collective decision-making. The communities decide how many community members will work on the mural and what will be depicted. The roles of the artists and volunteers are not to impose ideas for content or to appropriate the community's voice in the creation of the mural, but instead to contribute to the process of creative expression. They occasionally produce an initial sketch, prepare

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<sup>454</sup> Nevertheless, because of the lack of teachers, those schools are remained closed for long periods of time.



the wall or surface, and later guide the participants through the development of the work.

In my interview with Gustavo Chávez Pavon, who has executed a large number of Zapatista murals in the Zapatista *caracols* and other parts of Mexico, as well as in Scotland, Denmark, Chile, and Palestine, he said:

As in all acts in our lives, the ways of relating to each other, and the ways we make our dreams and put them together, are part of creating our cultural values. And to put them up on the walls, as with these murals, is not an easy job. It is not a one-person job either, or a job for just a specific group of people. It is a job for a whole society that could impact on other people, who, in return want to contribute to community. In this way a dynamic and enriching relationship of collective creation takes place, which can lead to many other dreams and possibilities.<sup>455</sup>

Between 1997 and 2005, an international artist collective, called “L.I.P la Gárgola” (including the young Mexican painters Luiz Urbina Valdez, Gildardo Nombe Pano and Gustavo Chávez Pavon) has painted a large number of murals that exist in the communities now. The initial group, from 1997, included artists from Mexico, Argentina, and Uruguay. Then, in 2000 and 2002, many other volunteer artists from the United States and Canada joined the group in Chiapas. In August 2005, while meetings for the launch of “the Other Campaign” and the Sixth Declaration were continuing, L.I.P la Gárgola and the Babylon Collective (a Minneapolis-based political art collective) organized *La Caravana de las Artistas en Resistencia* (the caravan of artists in resistance). The artists, mainly from the United States and Mexico, traveled to Chiapas and painted many murals in different *caracols* during a three-month period. While some of these murals repeat earlier themes, including portraits of Che Guevara, Zapata, and Marcos, along with the typical symbols of corn and snails, a new group of solidarity murals emerged, starting with this mural cycle. Later, in 2006, 2007, 2008, and 2010, *Red*

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<sup>455</sup> Interview with Gustavo Chávez Pavon.

*de Solidaridad con Mexico* (network of solidarity with Mexico), continued to paint murals to show their solidarity with the Zapatistas.

Visual images of solidarity with Zapatistas also take the form of the posters and postcards sold in the Zapatista cooperatives in Oventik, as well as various venues in San Cristobal de las Casas that sell the products of the cooperatives to the tourists. One of those posters, the *Solidaridad Chiapas* poster, is the work of an anonymous artist (Figure 4.12). The bottom of the image reads, “*Los Zapatistas no estan solos*” (the Zapatistas are not alone). During a street march in January 2011, the image was carried as a banner to represent solidarity with the movement. In the Zapatista cooperatives, this image, among other works of other artist/activists, was available for the tourists to take with them to their own countries in exchange for a small donation. Featuring a typical representation of Zapatista aesthetics that mixes folkloric and dreamlike sensibilities with a realistic representation of the world, the poster calls for solidarity with the Zapatista movement in Chiapas. In the middle are peasants in a colorful village in colorful costumes—a common visual language with a naïve painting style that is used as visual material to be sold to tourists sympathetic to the Zapatistas. This part of the image is borrowed from a painting by Beatrix Aurora, who is a Chilean artist/activist based in Chiapas. Her paintings portraying Zapatista communities are reproduced on many postcards and posters to be sold to help fund the movement. Aurora’s utopian image of an ideal co-operative and happy society is disturbed by the photomontage of two black and white images. The colorful and peaceful life of the village is shown surrounded by a photograph of two hands stopping bullets, which provides stark contrast between mundane and peaceful elements of peasant life along with the shocking, tragic, and violent events that also

reflect the daily life of the Zapatistas. The realism of the hands and the riffles disturbs the pleasant depiction of the rural world in the middle of the work; hence, it serves as a reminder of the reality—constant military and paramilitary danger—that surrounds the autonomous communities.

The plethora of images, by known and unknown artists, that circulate in tourist shops and online, as well as the Zapatista's sophisticated use of World Wide Web and international media, ensured that the world would be watching as the Mexican state continued its military and economic repression of the region.<sup>456</sup> Through to the twentieth-year celebrations in 2009, and on every occasion, Zapatistas chose perform their struggle in front of the cameras. For some analysts, the Zapatista rebellion was a public performance version of a declaration of war. A well-known analyst of Zapatistas, Andrés Oppenheimer, notes:

As Zapatista military leader Sub-commander Marcos himself would concede to me later, his military strategy consisted of surrounding San Cristobal with elite troops armed with AK-47 rifles, Uzi submachine guns, grenade launchers, and night vision devices, which he placed in the four major access roads to the city, while allowing lesser-armed rebel foot soldiers—some of them only armed with sticks, machetes, and hand-carved wooden toy guns—to march toward the center of town and take the municipal palace... The television cameras would focus on the... ragtag army of landless Mayans mostly armed with toy guns... it worked exactly as planned.<sup>457</sup>

For the past two decades, as the Mexican government deployed more troops in the region and paramilitary activities took hundreds of innocent lives, international sympathy and support has remained crucial for the survival of the Zapatista communities and other municipalities sympathetic to the movement. Hence, creating a good public image is not

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<sup>456</sup> The federated Zapatista areas are surrounded by hundreds of army checkpoints and bases. The militarization is immense: seventy thousand troops, one third of the entire Mexican army, armed with the most sophisticated weapons.

<sup>457</sup> Andrés Oppenheimer, *Bordering on Chaos: Mexico's Roller-Coaster Journey Toward Prosperity* (Boston: Little Brown and Co., 1998), 25.

enough to build international support. To provide for the continuation of the movement and the survival of the autonomous communities, the Zapatistas have constituted “a new concept of solidarity that involves a reconfiguration of the relationship between the local, the national and the global.”<sup>458</sup>

Since the founding convention of the Zapatista Front of National Liberation (Frente Zapatista de Liberación Nacional or FZLN) in Mexico City, in September 1997, a political wing of the Zapatistas that is separated from the EZLN army, and the Zapatistas and their supporters, have reiterated their calls for new forms of politics, which has facilitated the emergence of Zapatista solidarity groups around the world, from Bristol in the U.K. to Adelaide, Australia, from Toronto, Canada, to Nicosia, Cyprus.<sup>459</sup> Nevertheless, except for occasional aid in the form of food, clothing, and medicine from international organizations, and some volunteers who help to build school, hospitals, community centers etc., the Zapatistas have received no economic support. Thus, the most significant aspect of the transnational solidarity network surrounding the Zapatistas is that it is less material and more political than most movements.

In fact, an army of volunteer translators and web junkies have been ensuring that anyone can engage directly with the communiqués, stories, and letters of the Zapatistas. For this reason, Manuel Castells called the Zapatistas “the first informational guerilla movement.”<sup>460</sup> By the time NAFTA went into effect, the Zapatistas, through both image and word, were known by the people around the world who are engaged in any type of activist politics. The civic supporters of the Zapatista movement in Europe have been

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<sup>458</sup> Thomas Olesen, “Globalizing the Zapatistas: From Third World Solidarity to Global Solidarity?” *Third World Quarterly* 25/1 (2004): 256.

<sup>459</sup> For more on the influence of Zapatistas’ new form of politics and Zapatista solidarity groups around the world, see Alex Khasnabish, *Zapatismo Beyond Border*.

<sup>460</sup> See Manuel Castells, *The Power of Identity* (Malden, Mass: Blackwell, 1997), 79.

successfully using the Internet to build a campaign for pressuring their own governments to prevent Mexico's federal army from taking further military action against the Zapatistas, who have had to endure military planes start circling over the Zapatista villages in Chiapas.<sup>461</sup> Zapatista communiqués published on the Internet as well as their *encuentros* thus far have ensured an intercontinental network of communication and solidarity.

The three Intercontinental Encounters for "Humanity against Neoliberalism"—first in Chiapas (1996) then in Spain (1997)—were organized to ensure that their struggle reached beyond Mexico. The first "intergalactic" *encuentro*, as mentioned before, took place in the Lacandon Jungle in 1996, with a meeting of more than three thousand activists and civil society representatives from around the world. In the second *encuentro*, in Barcelona a year later, thousands of people gathered from fifty countries—groups as diverse as *campesinos* occupying land in Brazil, refugees from Western Saharan camps in Southern Algeria, workers from Britain, First Nation activists from Canada, those running a pirate university for workers in Turkey, environmental campaigners from Colombia, academicians from South Africa, and anarchists from Poland. It was at these first two meetings that the inspiration for the global anti-capitalist coordinating network and solidarity organization, called People's Global Action against free trade and the

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<sup>461</sup> For example, a website called *Zaps Flood Net* uses the 404-error code to create Internet art out of tactical media. Now a legendary operation, this also is called "tactical net sculpture" among both art enthusiasts and cyber activists, but the site itself declares that error-log spamming is conceptual Internet art. Internet users are familiar with "File not Found" or an "Error 404" message, appearing when requesting a document with HTTP. This message, which is itself an HTTP document, also records the URL that was being asked for in the server's error log file, which is used by system administrators to track down bad links coming from other sites and in some instances to trace security threats or break-in attempts. By making an intentional mistake while searching an HTTP document, you can upload a message. *The Zaps Flood Net* site is designed in such a way that all you have to do is to place your message in the appropriate box to be sent "by mistake" to the Mexican government's HTTP URL. It found so many participants that it eventually crashed the Mexican government's server.

WTO, was sparked, directly connecting the Zapatista movement to the larger anti-neoliberalist global movement.<sup>462</sup>

In 1999, less than a month before the famous Battle of Seattle, a third *encuentro* was held in the Amazon capital city of Belem, Brazil. This *encuentro*, was called for by a wide array of Zapatista solidarity organizations, anarchist collectives, black consciousness/power and indigenous rights groups, the Workers Party (PT), state-level chapters of the Movement of the Landless (MST), and the Unified Trade Union Federation (CUT), among many others, and constituted the base for creating the World Social Forum (WSF) in Porto Alegre, Brazil in 2001.

In January 2006, the Zapatistas launched a new political initiative called *La otra campaña* (the other campaign) to build a common front with other local movements in Mexico against the neoliberal world order. Throughout the campaign, which lasted several months and encompassed all thirty-one states in Mexico, Zapatistas traveled, met, and established solidarity with a diverse number of groups and organizations, including trade union organizers, indigenous leaders, intellectuals, factory workers, women's rights activists, gays, lesbians, advocates for human rights, students, teachers, environmental activists, fishermen, natural disaster victims, peasants, housewives, and prostitutes. In their search for the creation of a common anti-neoliberalist front, the Zapatistas not only

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<sup>462</sup> PGA's founding conference was held in February 1998 in Geneva, Switzerland, and brought together more than three hundred delegates from seventy-one countries. It was there that the now ubiquitous Global Days of Action against the meetings of the elite were born. Building off of two decades of revolts against "structural adjustments" in countries around the world, they started with global protests against the G8 spring meetings in the UK in Birmingham and the World Trade Organization (WTO) in Geneva, Switzerland.

sought to join forces with workers and peasants, as well as organizations on the Left, but also with the “humble people,” as they articulated it.<sup>463</sup>

A mural on the side of a barn next to the secondary school in Oventik, which was painted by volunteers from the Zapatista communities, shows a group of diverse people marching with banners and a flag representing sex workers, *campesinos*, environmentalists, the *sin fronteras* society, and students (Figure 4.13). The mural next to it is inscribed with the famous Zapatismo motto, “*un mundo donde quedan muchos mundos*” (a world that fits many worlds), and announces the Zapatistas’ vision for a world that is horizontal, inclusive and hopeful. This Zapatismo concept of “a world that fits many worlds” has a double meaning, one that generates out from the Zapatismo vision of revolutionary subjects in the plural (all the oppressed people), and one that calls for a micro revolution in your own life and in your own home.

Klein reminds us that, from the beginning, the legacy of Zapatismo has been: “...a global call to revolution that tells you not to wait for the revolution, only to start where you stand, to fight with your own weapon. It could be a video camera, words, ideas, ‘hope’—all of these Marcos has written ‘are also weapons.’”<sup>464</sup> Here, “hope” stands out as an unusual weapon for the continuation of a revolutionary movement. Rosario Ibarra de Piedra, the founder of Mexico’s human rights movement, declares that: “Hope...the Zapatistas represent hope, and we must preserve hope at all costs.”<sup>465</sup> The preservation of hope in an era of hopelessness is the most enduring legacy of the Zapatistas. Nevertheless, “hope” for Zapatistas is something beyond a utopian category, it

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<sup>463</sup> Subcomandante Insurgente Marcos, “Words of Subcomandante Insurgente Marcos: Meeting with Political Organizations of the Left,” Tzeltal Selva Region, trans., Irlandesa, August 6, 2005, accessed February 12, 2010, <http://www.zcommunications.org/the-other-campaign-by-subcomandante-marcos-1-2>

<sup>464</sup> Klein, *Fences and Windows*, 221.

<sup>465</sup> Jorge Mancillas, “The Twilight of Revolutionaries?” in *The Zapatista Reader*, ed. Tom Hayden (New York: Thunder’s Mouth Press/Nation Books, 2002), 165.

is the ground upon which the politics of everyday life stands. In their ethnographical analysis of Zapatistas, the authors of *Uprising of Hope*, Duncan Earle and Jeanne Simonelli, note: “Without the overlay of the world of everyday life, the autonomous movement might seem to be no more than impractical rhetoric, a utopian dream.”<sup>466</sup> Hope, for Zapatistas, is the social force that allows the actualization of another world, another way.

Zapatismo is a way of life—a life of community defined by egalitarian relationships and organized around direct democracy in the middle of the capitalist world. What they have created is not separate from their daily lives. This what José Gomez Molina who was my host and *compañero* during my visit to the Lacandon jungle, meant when he said to me: “You comrades think about and write about the revolution, we live the revolution.”<sup>467</sup> The Zapatistas’ visual world is the expression of their vision of what they call the “other politics,” is hard to articulate in the traditional Marxist vocabulary and imagination of revolution. Hence, as I argued here, their visual legacy is important to map the visible but disregarded ground of aesthetics in recent social movements.

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<sup>466</sup> Duncan Earle and Jeanne M. Simonelli, *Uprising of Hope: Sharing the Zapatista Journey to Alternative Development* (Walnut Creek, Calif: AltaMira Press, 2005), 292.

<sup>467</sup> Author’s interview with José Gomez Molina in Pueblo Libre, Lacandona, Chiapas-Mexico, December 12, 2013.



## CONCLUSION

In today's world, daily life is shaped by economic, social, and environmental crises. In a global order under the neoliberal capitalist system that has fostered new technological advancement, climate change, ecological destruction, and armed conflicts, we are confronting challenges of a new kind that question traditional conceptions of power. Activists create new possibilities for alternative politics, artists seek new visual languages, and intellectuals strive to capture and influence the constantly shifting terrain of social conscience. The search is for new ways to make systemic change possible. Art and culture are in the middle of this search, perhaps more so than in previous decades.

This dissertation demonstrates that there is no single, valid category of political art in the artistic field. Art is, and has always been, politics in and of itself. Politics has always been embedded in the production, exhibition, reception, and theorization of art. Even the very definition of art, as a privileged human activity compared to other forms of labor, is political.<sup>468</sup> Art, by its current definition, cannot exist out of its system of identification, categorization, and presentation. As Jacques Rancière notes: "What the term 'art' designates in its singularity is the framing of a space of presentation by which the things of art are identified as such."<sup>469</sup> In the neoliberal world the work of art is not designated as "art" according to the criteria of technical perfection or a standard of virtuosity, but by the ways in which it is presented and perceived in the intellectual and institutional realm. The way in which institutional art has been implicated in reproducing power patterns is not something new or unusual. But this pattern has merely become more pronounced with the thriving of post-1989 neoliberalism, in terms of the character

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<sup>468</sup> The art labor does not fit in any traditional conception of labor or labor surplus (in Marxian terms) and this is precisely what allows the exploitation in art labor to be so hidden.

<sup>469</sup> Rancière, *Aesthetics and Its Discontents*, 23.

of the institutional art world as a quasi-corporation; it certainly relates to the new society of neoliberal culture that recreates itself with the values of the corporate world and post-democracy politics.<sup>470</sup> What is called, and exhibited as “political art” is used as a safety valve to show that politics is happening elsewhere, all the while ignoring everything else that challenges its own system of manipulation and exploitation, such as exploitation in art labor.

Thus, for radical art to be sponsored by corporations that produce war weapons, multinational banks that are puppets for neoliberal onslaught, philanthropists and businessmen whose inclination is towards social engineering, or state organizations that use artistic space for city branding—is indeed a common contradiction of institutional art in the neoliberal world. Having said that, dismissing all art in this system—art in the current system of biennials and museums or socially engaged art in public spaces—as being submissive and subservient is also a political act. This kind of perspective analyzes art’s capacity in relation to its own institutional, ideological, and economical structures at best. Yet, to disregard art’s autonomy once and for all also disregards art’s emancipatory potential—the aesthetic experience. Rancière’s notes on autonomy and aesthetic experience are significant:

First, the autonomy staged by the aesthetic regime of art is not that of the work of art but that of a mode of experience. Second, the ‘aesthetic experience’ is one of heterogeneity such that, for the subject of that experience, it is also the dismissal of certain autonomy. Third, the object of that experience is “aesthetic” insofar as it is not, or at least not only, art.”<sup>471</sup>

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<sup>470</sup> For an excellent take on contemporary art and post-democratic politics, see Hito Steyerl, “Politics of Art: Contemporary Art and Transition to Post-Democracy,” *e-flux* 21 (2010), accessed December 12, 2014, <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/politics-of-art-contemporary-art-and-the-transition-to-post-democracy/>

<sup>471</sup> Rancière, *Dissensus*, 116–117.

In Rancière's view, art is at once a heteronomous and autonomous aesthetic activity, and thus it has the capacity to create the conditions for an experience that could interrupt the relationship between art and its use-value, art and established forms of the visible and audible, art and the habitual practices in daily life.<sup>472</sup> Therefore, denying art's emancipatory capacity is also a political act that not only confines art to its spectacular potential but it also blocks the avenues that art could open to emancipate itself from such confinement.

My aim in analyzing the festival aspects of art biennials, in the first chapters of this dissertation, was to underline the loopholes in the existing literature on the subject. In those chapters, I criticize two views that are prominent in art criticism. The first is the globalist view that sees neoliberalism as an even and uncontestable process that affects all corners of the world and renders all relations between art and its local/global structures evenly and in a static and predictable form. The second is the critical view that sees contemporary art as a homogenous and subservient entity that reflects and reproduces neoliberal directives and processes, and thus, implicitly, cripples art's inherent potential for emancipation.

The aesthetic dimension of the recent political protests, revolts and uprisings not only challenges and reformulates what is acceptable as politics in the society but also problematizes what is acceptable in society as art. As early as 1964, Arthur Danto, in his infamous article, "The Artworld," proclaimed the death of art and wrote:

What in the end makes the difference between a Brillo box and a work of art consisting of a Brillo box is a certain theory of art. It is theory that

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<sup>472</sup> Rancière explains this as art's capacity to disrupt the "distribution of the sensible"—the politics that constitutes the aesthetic regime, which is the making sense mechanism in the society, in other words, the order of the sensuous productions. See Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible*.

takes it up into the world of art, and keeps it from collapsing into the real object, which it is [in a sense of is other than that of artistic identification] It could have not been art fifty years ago...It is the role of artistic theories, these days as always, to make the artworld and art, possible. It would, I should think, never have occurred to the painters of Lascaux that they were producing *art* [writer's emphasis] on these walls. Not unless there were Neolithic aestheticians.<sup>473</sup>

Danto was fascinated by historical change and he argued that the reasons and conditions that made Andy Warhol's Brillo boxes acceptable as art, in 1964, had a particular historicity and particular roles in the art world and art canon in that historical moment. Warhol's Brillo boxes and Marcel Duchamp's ready-mades demonstrated to Danto that the grand narrative of progression for art by itself had ended at this particular moment of capitalism. I agree with scholars and critics that art, as an autonomous activity, has been dead for a long time. I argue that, at present, all types of art and aesthetic practices exist at the same time as a political activity; therefore, we can no longer theorize and categorize "political art" as such, and this requires a new understanding of current political and aesthetic practices.

I insist that the relationship of contemporary art and neoliberalism, as well as art and politics today, should be analyzed with a multidimensional perspective that acknowledges bottom-up and top-to-bottom political developments, inside-outside relationships in the art world, and global and local social dynamics from a point of complex and dialectical contestations and the contemporaneity of the meaning and practice of art. My particular aim is to contest the institutional theory of art that categorizes some art objects, practices, and forms as "political art" or "socially engaged art," or condones them for not being as such. I challenge this view by showing that some artistic and aesthetic activities, such as those seen in the spaces of communal political

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<sup>473</sup> Arthur Danto, "The Artworld," *The Journal Philosophy* 61/19 (1964), 581.

resistance and various types of collaborative art, defy any categorization framed by the art historical canon. Those practices invert common thought patterns, challenge established social and economic exchanges, and change what is accepted as aesthetics in art. I reveal that this flux of change occurs because politics is challenged and pushed forward by a rich array of new aesthetic praxis, and aesthetics is challenged and pushed forward by the new conviction, direction, and practice of new politics that arise from the complex and contemporaneous interrelationships of art, politics, economics, and culture in the neoliberal world.

For example, the movement without leaders that lacks localized direct and understood forms of structure and anti-political politics reinvent the political theory and practice of today's movements for democracy, including but not limited to the anti-globalization (alter-globalization) movement, teacher's revolt in Oaxaca, the peasant movement of Zapatistas in Chiapas Mexico, the Occupy movements around the world, and lately the Gezi uprising in Turkey. The aesthetic activities visible in those movements, uprisings and revolts have both challenged and constituted the character of the movement. Thus far, those activities, described as "visual disobedience" and "carnivals of resistance" by the activists, have mostly attracted the attention of sociologists and anthropologists, who have not situated them in the field of aesthetics, but in the field of tactical activism.<sup>474</sup>

I am not concerned with whether such activities should or should not be recognized as "art" and be inserted into the art historical discourse and canon. Rather, I emphasize that such activities pronounce the political sphere in the aesthetical sphere in

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<sup>474</sup> For a more detailed discussion on tactical art activism of the anti-globalization movement, see anthropologist David Graeber, "The New Anarchists," and sociologist Christian Scholl, "Bakunin's Poor Cousins".

such a way that they challenge the critical theories that have been prominent since the 1960s, those which conceptualize aesthetics and politics as different but, at times, overlapping spheres.

Broadly, this dissertation addresses the following dialectical question: Is neoliberal globalization the ultimate victory of capitalist modes of production, or could this be a new opportunity to break away from existing capitalist relations? Specifically, it argues that, at present, aesthetic practices of dissent stem from and constitute the struggle of the economically exploited, the politically underrepresented, and the culturally invisible to become visible to power. I propose a rethinking of what political power and aesthetic visibility mean for the new art of politics and the new politics of art in the current era of the neoliberalized world and globalized revolts.

To do this, I have benefited greatly from Rancière's theories, among others, on aesthetics and radical politics. For Rancière, political action has the potential to dismantle the uneven relationship between those who can and those who cannot command words and images. It is when the housewives, prostitutes, or students, for examples, reconfigure their struggle as a struggle concerning the common, which is to say, to question who is able or unable to speak and demonstrate about or on behalf of the common. Both for Rancière and for anti-globalization campaigns and struggles, politics does not constitute the exercise of power but is a political relationship that allows one to think about the possibility of a new political subjectivity. But ultimately, Rancière's theory shows us that, in the spheres where art and politics interact with each other, that which looks like resistance may not yield to constituent power, and that which does not appear as resistance to power may contain fundamental nodes of emancipation.

In addition to paying close attention to Rancière's theory of aesthetics and politics, I also account for complex neoimperialist relations—and their new forms of knowledge production—to dismantle the logic that sees neoliberal globalization as an inevitable form of capitalist expansion. In doing this, I locate my argument between the discourses of colonialism and neocolonialism, imperialism and empire, nationalism and transnationalism, and globalism and localism, all simultaneously. I also emphasize a very important aspect of neoliberalism that has been largely ignored. While neoliberalism gives concrete form to the privatization and expansion of the corporate system by various institutions, it restores class power and undermines democratic impulses. At the same time, it also produces a situation in which, for the first time, the people, both in the northern and southern hemispheres, have gathered around a common agenda for creating alternative systems of democracy.

I use the term “neoliberal globalization” to emphasize that any discussion concerning the conjuncture of culture and politics within the framework of globalization should be rooted in concrete historical developments that have occurred as a result of the restructuring of the world economy in the wake of the Washington Consensus.<sup>475</sup> Such a view offers us much more than a picture of either the global economy or global culture; it helps us understand the entanglement of various social processes: the reorganization of the world order has not merely been about an economic, political, or technological transformation, but about a significant change in the very axial principles of society.

My aim has been to broaden the larger field of art history by bringing into play local receptions of international biennials and alternative artistic formations inside and

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<sup>475</sup> For more on the Washington Consensus, see Mike Mason, *Development and Disorder: A History of the Third World since 1945* (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1997).

outside the art institutions. I opt to redefine the conventional, static, and undifferentiated understandings about the conditions and modalities of contemporary art, especially in respect to neoliberal economic and political programs. I demonstrate that while neoliberal globalization reorders differences by controlling them through aesthetic conformism, institutionalized framework, and corporate sponsorship, the artistic experiences—born of local and idiosyncratic events and politics—participate in the urgent needs and struggles of human beings globally. I conclude that contrary to many convictions on the dynamics of art and globalization, in the contested relationship of contemporary art and culture to neoliberal globalization, neither the processes of domination nor the strategies of resistance are fixed and predictable.

Recently, Slovene philosopher Slavoj Žižek invoked Walter Benjamin's dictum that "it is not enough to ask how a certain theory (or art) declares itself with regard to social struggles; one should also ask how it effectively functions in these very struggles."<sup>476</sup> Through the theorizing and researching process of this dissertation, I mainly had one troubling thought on my mind. Rancière puts it in better words than can I: "What landscape can one describe as the meeting place between artistic practice and political practice?"<sup>477</sup> In this dissertation, I describe this landscape and argue that what has been happening at the crossroads of artistic representation and political engagement is different and more diverse now than in the time of aestheticized politics in the early twentieth century or politicized aesthetics in the late twentieth century.

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<sup>476</sup> Slavoj Žižek, "The Prospects of Radical Politics Today," in *Democracy Unrealized: Documenta 11, Platform I*, ed. Okwui Enwezor (Ostfildern-Ruit: Hatje Cantz, 2002), 68.

<sup>477</sup> Carnevale and Kelsey, "Art of the Possible," 14.



## FIGURES



FIGURE 1.1. Yinka Shonibare, *Gallantry and Criminal Conversation*, Installation, 2002.  
Source: <http://accessibleartny.com/index.php/2009/09/yinka-shonibare-mbe-at-the-brooklyn-art-museum>, accessed July 11, 2007.



FIGURE 1.2. Alfredo Márquez and Ángel Valdez, *Black Box*, Mixed Media, 2001.  
Source: [www.revistaaufere.com](http://www.revistaaufere.com), accessed January 18, 2009.



FIGURE 1.3. Burak Delier, *Untitled*, photography, 2004. Source: <https://burakdelier.wordpress.com/works/afis-3/>, accessed December 2, 2009.



FIGURE 1.4. Richard Serra, *Stop Bush*, lithograph, 2004. Source: <http://www.robertbermangalleryarchive.com>, accessed January 31, 2009.



FIGURE 1.5. István Szentandrassy's paintings in the "Paradise Lost" exhibition at the 52nd Venice Biennial. Photograph taken by the author at the Venice Biennale in Venice, Italy, July 11, 2007.



FIGURE 1.6. Tania Bruguera, *Tatlin's Whisper #6*, installation with stage, podium, loudspeaker, video camera, microphones, and color video, with sound, 2009. Photograph taken by the author at the Havana Biennial, Cuba, March 12, 2009.





FIGURE 2.1. Protest against the 9th Istanbul Biennial by a group known as “Grup Gunizi.” Photograph taken by the author in Istanbul, Turkey, September 10, 2005.



FIGURE 2.2. Burak Delier, *Parkalynch*, Mixed Media, 2007. Source: Burakdelier.worldpress.com, accessed September 13, 2007.



FIGURE 2.3. Protest against the 1980 Turkish coup d'état killings, held on the 29th anniversary of the coup d'état, September 12, 2009. Photograph taken by the author in Istanbul, Turkey, September 12, 2009.



FIGURE 2.4. Poster mocking the 11th Istanbul Biennial. Photograph taken by the author in Istanbul, Turkey, September 5, 2009.



FIGURE 2.5. Protest against the 11th Istanbul Biennial. Photograph taken by the author in Istanbul, Turkey, September 12, 2009.



FIGURE 2.6. One of the graffitied signs on the floors of the venues at the 11th Istanbul Biennial. Photograph taken by the author in Istanbul, Turkey, September 15, 2009.



FIGURE 2.7. Burak Delier, *Guard*, photography, 2005. Source, <https://burakdelier.wordpress.com/works/guard-2005/>, accessed December 2, 2009.

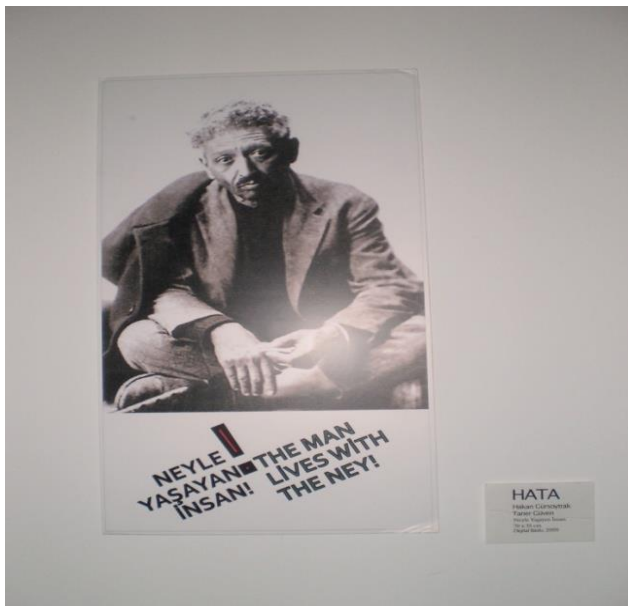


FIGURE 2.8. Anonymous, *Hata*, Silkscreen poster, 2009. Photograph taken by the author in Istanbul, Turkey, September 15, 2009.





FIGURE 2.9. A boy holding a sign showing the caption, which mocks 12<sup>th</sup> Istanbul Biennial: “Mom, are police human?” Source: [www. internetajans.com](http://www.internetajans.com), accessed July 12, 2013.



FIGURES 3.1. Photographs showing the masks used for the performance *Masquerade Project* during the 2001 IMF and World Bank protests in Washington D.C., 2001. Source: <http://realchangenews.org/art-and-activism>, accessed March 12, 2008.





FIGURE 3.2. Marcelo Expósito, *Tactical Frivolity: Rhymes of Resistance*, video still, 2007. Source: [www.apexart.org/radicalimagination/php](http://www.apexart.org/radicalimagination/php), accessed January 17, 2010.



FIGURE 3.3. Anti-globalization demonstrations in Seattle, 1999. Source: [www.democracyuprising.com/2004/Seattle1999/anti-globalization-movement](http://www.democracyuprising.com/2004/Seattle1999/anti-globalization-movement), accessed April 11, 2010.



FIGURE 3.4 Anonymous, *Oaxaca 2006: Women's Resistance*, silkscreen poster, 2006. Photograph taken by the author in Oaxaca, Mexico, March 12, 2009.



FIGURE 3.5. A general view of the *Bisagra* exhibition on the Teacher's Uprising in Oaxaca in 2006 at the 10th Havana Biennial. Photograph taken by the author in Havana Cuba, March 12, 2009.



FIGURE 3.6 Woodblock print on cloth by ASARO showing Emiliano Zapata with a gas mask in the *Bisagra* exhibition at the 10th Havana Biennial. Photograph taken by the author in Havana, Cuba, March 12, 2009.



FIGURE 3.7. Young people in Kordon-Izmir taking pictures with the iconic image of the Gezi uprising “the woman in red.” Caption reads “souvenir of resistance.” Source: <http://www.theverge.com/2013/6/7/4405412/ceyda-sungur-lady-in-red-photo-becomes-symbol-of-turkey-protests>, accessed June 10, 2013.





FIGURE 3.8. An image that circulated on social media mocking the TV channel CNN Türk that broadcast a documentary of the penguins for two hours instead of reporting the Gezi uprising. Caption reads: “Antarctica is Resisting! Penguins: The Problem is Not the Melting Ice!” Source: <http://gezidirenisikulturu.tumblr.com/post/52551131613>, accessed July 2, 2013.



FIGURE 3.9. Street graffiti in Istanbul making use of video surveillance cameras to mock Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan during the Gezi uprising. Photograph taken by the author in Istanbul, Turkey, July 10, 2014.



FIGURE 3.10. Street graffiti in Istanbul during Gezi uprising that shows a Penguin as a protestor—a humorous commentary about the TV channel CNN Turk that broadcast penguins instead of the Gezi uprising. Source <http://direnisteyiz.net/fotograflar/stencil/>, accessed July 10, 2013.



FIGURE 3.11. A poster with a satirical image of Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan as a Sultan, hung at a bus stop in Istanbul. Caption reads “This public does not bow to you.” Photograph taken by the author in Istanbul, Turkey, July 11, 2013.



FIGURE 3.12. A popular image that circulated on social media during Gezi uprising that mocks the excessive police force in Istanbul. Source: [www.anatolianpress.com](http://www.anatolianpress.com), accessed July 24, 2013.



FIGURE 3.13. A popular image circulated on social media during Gezi uprising that mocks the excessive police force in Istanbul. Source: [www.anatolianpress.com](http://www.anatolianpress.com), accessed July 24, 2013.





FIGURE 3.14. The performance/protest of Erdem Gündüz (standing man) in Taksim Square to protest the young men killed by the police during Gezi uprising. Source: <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/turkish-protesters-civil-disobedience-act-in-taksim-ends-in-custody>. June 17, 2013.



FIGURE 3.15 A view of the public enjoying the first rainbow stairs painted by Hüseyin Çetinel in Istanbul. Source: [www.thelede.blogs.nytimes.com](http://www.thelede.blogs.nytimes.com), accessed September 7, 2013.



FIGURE 3.16. Images of rainbow stairs in various parts of Turkey. Source: <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/Default.aspx?pageID=447>, accessed September 7, 2013.



FIGURE 3.17. An image of Nadire Kaya's display of discontent with the excessive police force in front of her house in Elazığ, Turkey, 2013. Source: [www.cnnturk.com](http://www.cnnturk.com), accessed September 10, 2013.





FIGURE 3.18. An image of a boy holding a mask of Belkin Elvan, who was shot-dead by the police during Gezi revolt, at the largest funeral procession in Istanbul. Source: [www.anatolianpress.com](http://www.anatolianpress.com), accessed March 10, 2014.



FIGURE 3.19. A popular image circulated on social media during Gezi uprising showing a *halay* dance. Caption reads “Halay is an ideological act.” Source: [www.everywheretaksim.net](http://www.everywheretaksim.net), accessed June 24, 2013.





FIGURE 4.2 Photograph of Subcomandante Marcos of the Zapatistas. Source: [www.taringa.net](http://www.taringa.net), accessed March 15, 2010.



FIGURE 4.3. Mural on the wall of a middle-school building of the Zapatistas in *caracol* Roberto Barrios. Photograph taken by the author in Roberto Barrios, Chiapas-Mexico, December 12, 2009.



FIGURE 4.4. Anonymous, *Guadalupe as Zapatista Guerilla*, oil on canvas. Photograph taken by the author in San Cristobal de Las Casas, December 4, 2009.



FIGURE 4.5. Mural on the outside wall of the Clinica Guadalupe, Oventik, Chiapas. Photograph taken by the author in Oventik, Chiapas-Mexico, January 5, 2010.





FIGURE 4.6. Mural on the outside wall of the chapel in the village of San Pedro Polhó. Photograph taken by the author in San Pedro Polhó, Chiapas-Mexico, January 30, 2012.

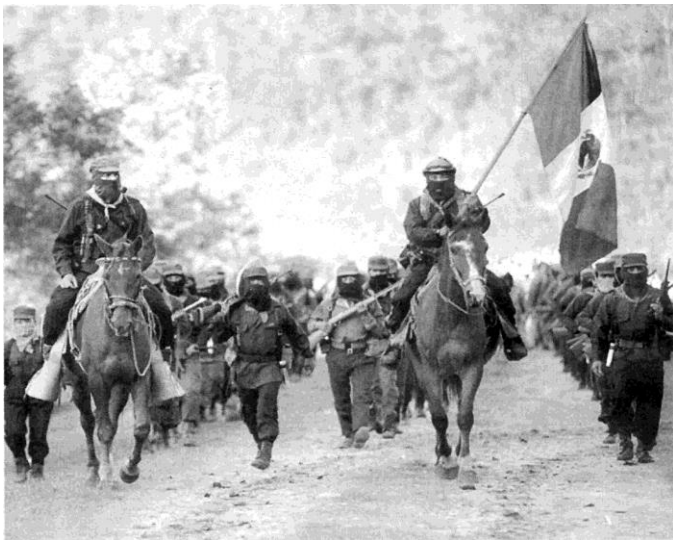


FIGURE 4.7. Photograph of Subcomandante Marcos and Subcomandante Tacho leading the Zapatista Army of National Liberation. Source: [www.revistaamatauta.org](http://www.revistaamatauta.org), accessed August 22, 2010.



FIGURE 4.8. Mural by the solidarity group Red de Solidaridad in *caracol* Oventik executed in 2007. Photograph taken by the author in Oventik, Chiapas-Mexico, January 22, 2012.



FIGURE 4.9. Community mural in *caracol* Oventik. Caption reads “Slowly But I Advance.” Photograph taken by the author in Oventik, Chiapas-Mexico, January 22, 2012.



FIGURE 4.10. Photograph of the young Zapatistas and the artists painting murals on the walls of the secondary school in *caracol* Oventik. Photograph taken by the author in Oventik, Chiapas-Mexico, January 22, 2012.



FIGURE 4.11. Mural by Gustavo Chávez Pavón in one of the classrooms of the secondary school in *caracol* Oventik, executed in 2002. Photograph taken by the author in Oventik, Chiapas-Mexico, January 22, 2012.





FIGURE 4.12 Anonymous, *Solidaridad Chiapas*, poster, 2010. Photograph taken by the author in San Cristobal de las Casas, Chiapas-Mexico, January 10, 2009.



FIGURE 4.13. Mural by the solidarity group Red de Solidaridad in *caracol* Oventik, executed in 2009. Photograph taken by the author in Oventik, Chiapas-Mexico, January 22, 2012.



## **APPENDICES**

### **Appendix I**

Open Letter from Anarchist Resistance Groups in Istanbul, September 9, 2009

### **Appendix II**

Manifesto Disseminated by Anarchist Resistance Groups in Istanbul, September 12, 2009

### **Appendix III**

Letter sent to the Whitney Biennale 2012 by OWS Arts & Labor Committee

## Appendix I

### **An open letter disseminated to the public as a leaflet by anarchist resistance groups in Taksim Square and Beyoglu District in Istanbul on September 9, 2009**

*An open letter to the curators, artists, participants of the 11th International Istanbul Biennial and to all artists and art-lovers.*

September 9, 2009

We have to stop pretending that the popularity of politically engaged art within the museums, and markets over the last few years has anything to do with really changing the world. We have to stop pretending that taking risks in the space of art, pushing boundaries of form, and disobeying the conventions of culture, making art about politics makes any difference. We have to stop pretending that art is a free space, autonomous from webs of capital and power.

It's time for the artist to become invisible. To dissolve back into life.

We have read the conceptual framework of the 11th International Istanbul Biennial with great interest and a grin on our faces. We have long understood that the Istanbul Biennial aims at being one of the most politically engaged transnational art events. And what a coincidence! This year the Biennial is quoting comrade Brecht, dropping notions such as neoliberal hegemony, and riding high against global capitalism. We kindly appreciate the stance but we recognize that art should have never existed as a separate category from life. Therefore we are writing you to stop collaborating with arm dealers such as the Koç Holding which white wash themselves in warm waters of the global art scene and invite you to the life, the life of resistance.

The curators wonder whether Brecht's question 'What Keeps Mankind Alive' is equally urgent today for us living under the neoliberal hegemony. We add the question: 'What Keeps Mankind Not-Alive?' We acknowledge the urgency in these times when we do not get free healthcare and education, our right to our cities our squares and streets are taken by corporations, our land, our seeds and water are stolen, we are driven into precarity and a life without security, when we are killed crossing their borders and left alone to live an uncertain future with their potential crises. But we fight. And we resist in the streets not in corporate spaces reserved for tolerated institutional critique so as to help them clear their conscience. We fought when they wanted to kick us out of our neighborhoods, from our houses in Sulukule, Güleusu and Ayazma, we also fought against those who would smear the land with cyanide to search for gold in Bergama and the Kaz Mountains, those who aggrieved hazelnut producers in Giresun and cotton producers in Cukurova, those who blackened the lives of jeans sandblasting workers with the silicosis disease, making them work for 12 hours a day in unhealthy conditions in workshops, those who turned the docks into a death camp at Tuzla by not providing the workers safe working conditions, those who endanger the lives of the people in the region in Sinop and Akkuyu by wishing

to construct nuclear power plants, and those who caused workers in Desa and Yorsan to be fired for registering with trade unions. And our fight and hope keep us alive.

The curators also point out that the one of the crucial questions of this Biennial is “how to ‘set pleasure free,’ how to regain revolutionary role of enjoyment”. We set pleasure free in the streets, in our streets. We were in Prague, Hong Kong, Athens, Seattle, Heilegendamm, Genoa, Chiapas and Oaxaca, Washington, Gaza and Istanbul.... Revolutionary role of enjoyment is out there and we cherish it everywhere because we need to survive and we know that we are changing the world with our words, with our acts, with our laughter. And our life itself is the source of all sorts of pleasure.

And we are in İstanbul and preparing ourselves to welcome 13.000 delegates of the IMF and the World Bank as we do wherever they go. We declared that we are not hospitable. We will take it to the streets in the carnival of resistance (1-8 October) and shut their meetings down down.

Join the resistance and the insurgence of imagination! Evacuate corporate spaces, liberate your works. Let’s prepare works and visuals (poster, sticker, stencil etc.) for the streets of the resistance days. Let’s produce together, not within the white cube, but in the streets and squares during the resistance week! Creativity belongs to each and every of us and can’t be sponsored.

Long live global insurrection!

Direnistanbul Commissariat of Culture  
Direnistanbul Popular Propaganda Network  
Beğenal Rascal Army Choir  
Direnistanbul Committees of Proletkult.

## Appendix II

### **Manifesto disseminated to the public as a leaflet by anarchist resistance groups in Tophane Antrepo in Istanbul during the opening of the Istanbul Biennial on September 12, 2009**

*A Contribution to the Critique of the Political Biennial: Zaaaaaaaaart!*

September 12, 2009

At the night of September 11, we were also at the Antrepo for the opening of the 11th International Istanbul Biennial. We were there, however, not for adding our words to the absurd cacophony of “radical” statements which were floating in the air like over repeated tongue twisters but to “zaart” this spectacle. There is only one answer to your statements like “socialism or barbarism” echoing in the saloon filled with your sponsors, bodyguards, ministers with fake smiles and old wine smells—catering was so poor indeed; if two peanuts are enough to be sponsor, then we are willing to do it next time!—and it is: “zaart!”. The rest is empty words.

Last night was yet another example of the age of cynicism in which statements do not make much sense and the fact that we live in an in a conceptual emptiness that swallows and empties every word. What is enthusiastically clapping the speeches of the CEO of the Koc Holding and the Minister of Culture, right after shouting out “every bourgeois is a criminal”, if not a symptom of cynicism?

Fortunately, we don’t need this game to remember the dreams of liberty that you were whispering to our ears last night. Don’t worry, we also remember things. For instance, we remember the appreciative advice letter written by the deceased father of Koc Holding, which granted us this exceptional night, to the generals of the 12 September, right after the military coup d’état. Maybe you would like to use it for your next spectacle?

Thirty years ago, they dampened us; they hurt us bad in this country. Today we were mourning but tomorrow we will continue from where we left off. 13.000 robbers under the name of the IMF and the WB will be in Istanbul on 6-7 October. In those days, we will dampen them; the streets of Istanbul will be shut down for them. Let the carnival of our resistance be their nightmare! Our shadow is enough!

Direnistanbul Commissariat of Culture  
Direnistanbul Popular Propaganda Network  
Beğenal Rascal Army Choir  
Direnistanbul Committees of Proletkult

### **Appendix III**

#### **Letter sent to the Whitney Biennale in late February 2012 by OWS Arts & Labor committee in New York**

Dear Whitney Museum of American Art,

We are Arts & Labor, a working group founded in conjunction with the New York General Assembly for OccupyWallStreet. We are artists and interns, writers and educators, art handlers and designers, administrators, curators, assistants, and students dedicated to exposing and rectifying economic inequalities and exploitative working conditions in our fields through direct action and educational initiatives. We are writing to call for an end to the Whitney Biennial in 2014.

Biennials were born in the nineteenth century, in an era when many nations were young and wished to showcase their greatest cultural products and achievements. The Whitney annuals grew out of this, championed by the patron and sculptor Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney, in a period when American art had little critical or financial support.

Much has changed since the founding of the Whitney Studio in 1914 and the advent of the current biennial format in 1973. The absorption of contemporary art into museums, the rise of a speculative art market, and the need for artists to obtain advanced degrees to participate in the current system have changed how art is produced and exhibited.

We object to the biennial in its current form because it upholds a system that benefits collectors, trustees, and corporations at the expense of art workers. The biennial perpetuates the myth that art functions like other professional careers and that selection and participation in the exhibition, for which artists themselves are not compensated, will secure a sustainable vocation. This fallacy encourages many young artists to incur debt from which they will never be free and supports a culture industry and financial and cultural institutions that profit from their labors and financial servitude.

The Whitney Museum, with its system of wealthy trustees and ties to the real estate industry perpetuates a model in which culture enhances the city and benefits the 1% of our society while driving others into financial distress. This is embodied both in the biennial's sponsorship – represented most egregiously in its sponsorship by Sotheby's, which has locked out its unionized art handlers – and the museum's imminent move to the Meat Packing District, a neighborhood where artists once lived and worked which is now a gentrified tourist destination that serves the interests of the real estate industry.

We therefore call upon the Whitney in its centennial year to end the biennial and to support the interests of art workers over the capital interests of its trustees and corporate sponsors. As the Declaration of the Occupation of New York City states, "We come to you at a time when corporations, which place profit over people, self-interest over justice and oppression over equality, run our governments." Art institutions have come to mirror

that ethos. We therefore call upon the Whitney to terminate its collusion with this system of injustice and use its resources to imagine sustainable models of creativity and culture that are accessible not just to Americans but to people around the globe.

Sincerely, Arts & Labor

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