



OCTAVIAN EȘANU

The questions and answers that follow this introduction were selected from the audio transcript of a two-day symposium organized in 2014 at the American University of Beirut Art Galleries.<sup>1</sup> For the conference, the organizers invited the editors of art and cultural publications from various regions of the world to discuss the role of art periodicals today. The aim was not to debate the state of art criticism alone, or exclusively,<sup>2</sup> but to take a broader view of the means of production and distribution of magazines, journals, newspapers, and other media platforms dedicated solely or partially to modern and contemporary art. In their selection of participants, the organizers were driven by the desire to represent different categories of publications (independent, academic, educational, politically or socially committed, local, regional, or global) in order to broaden the perspective on the field. The publications selected range from small periodicals whose impact is limited to the art scene of a particular country, to well-known and widely distributed international print and online journals that help set major trends in

- 
- 1 Critical Machines: Art Periodicals Today, organized by Octavian Eșanu and Angela Harutyunyan, American University of Beirut, Ada Dodge Hall, March 7–8, 2014. The conference program is available at [www.aub.edu.lb/art\\_galleries/current/Pages/critical-machines-conf.aspx](http://www.aub.edu.lb/art_galleries/current/Pages/critical-machines-conf.aspx).
  - 2 This topic was addressed in “Round Table: The Present Conditions of Art Criticism,” *October*, no. 100, special issue on *Obsolescence* (Spring 2002), 200–28.

contemporary art criticism. Excluding, by and large, art magazines that cater to mass audiences, commercial galleries, or the art market, the conference was intended to mobilize not merely known or successful magazines and journals, but rather those representative of various types of art periodicals encountered today. In the end, the absence of so many important art journals and magazines from the conference was not only a matter of limited resources, but also a function of the sheer diversity, complexity, and scale of the field.

Any attempt to grasp the entire field of the art periodicals operating today seems as futile as to draw a map the size of the terrain it represents. Where should one even begin, given the seemingly infinite number of journals and magazines, gazettes and newspapers, archives, websites, podcasts, blogs, zines, tweets, posts, apps, links, and feeds that are producing, reproducing, or distributing—by means of old or new and hot or cold media—knowledge and information about art to, and across, the many hubs of the global infosphere? We might try to arrange them according to editorial format (magazine, journal, platform, or website); medium (printed, online, or both); methods of knowledge production or style of reporting (art historical, art connoisseurship, art and critical theory, general education, art appreciation, or art journalism); type of audience (local, regional, global, specialized, or general); or language. The conference organizers used the metaphor of the “critical machine” (a piece of industrial equipment programmed not for production but for monitoring and reporting on other machines in the production chain) to conceptualize and discuss the various modes of monitoring, reporting on, critiquing, or historicizing modern and contemporary artistic practices.<sup>3</sup>

The organizers divided the program of the conference into four panels: (1) Critical and Art Historical Machines, (2) Global and Regional Art Critical Machines, (3) Radical Practice and Social Justice Critical Machines, and (4) Educational and Curiosity Machines. These categorizations should be taken with a grain of salt. From the start, it must be said that attempts to pigeonhole an art periodical using pre-established criteria are not always successful, and some publications are more difficult to categorize than others. Take, for instance, *October*, which might easily stretch across all four of the categories listed above:

---

3 For a discussion of the concept of “critical machines,” see the conference program available at [www.aub.edu.lb/art\\_galleries/current/Pages/critical-machines-conf.aspx](http://www.aub.edu.lb/art_galleries/current/Pages/critical-machines-conf.aspx).

it is an art historical and art theoretical journal; it was established to address local needs and audiences in the United States, but grew over the past decades (like other things American) to resonate within a wider, global cultural context; its editorial line conveys keen political awareness, but without a commitment to a particular political agenda; and it has been widely used in the production and reproduction of knowledge, and for educational purposes, on a wide scale. Not all the journals in the conference were like *October*, though, and one soon begins to realize that *October's* flexibility, its ability to fit into all the categories that organized the conference program, is also a sign of privilege. For instance, the Kabul-based art magazine *Gahnama-e-Hunar* (founded in 2000 in Peshawar, Pakistan; relocated to Afghanistan after the defeat of the Taliban) sees its main goal in strictly educational terms. The magazine was established by Rahraw Omarzad in order to educate the young—in particular, Afghan women—in matters of fine arts. Afghan writing about contemporary art or reporting on artistic and cultural events should be considered in light of the country's recent history. In the words of Omarzad, "Before the Americans came to Kabul, there were no funders for an art magazine; I started this magazine at a time when Afghan refugees were not thinking about artistic activities but mainly about how to stay alive."<sup>4</sup> The only magazine to report on art in Afghanistan, *Gahnama-e-Hunar* is firmly anchored in its local milieu; it most definitely follows a political strategy, one that cannot be separated from the interests, people, or forces struggling for political authority in this country. Even though it regularly publishes art historical material, *Gahnama-e-Hunar* is not, strictly speaking, an art historical periodical with a consciously defined theory or awareness of its method of inquiry; rather, it is a publishing platform for broad cultural popularization, understood as a tool in the process of modernization.

Since the conference took place in Beirut, the largest number of invited art editors represented publications from the Middle East or publications dedicated to the coverage of Middle Eastern art and culture. As for Lebanon or Beirut itself—often advertised in the international art press as a dynamic hub of global contemporary art, with a vibrant artistic life—no lasting periodical is dedicated wholly or professionally to art historical scholarship and/or art journalism. Lebanon

---

4 Rahraw Omarzad, "Critical Machines," Session 4 Q&A.



Still from the exhibition *Critical Machines*. Reconstructed diagram of Art & Language group's *Home from Homes II*, 2014. Mixed-media installation, fragment. AUB Art Galleries, Beirut. Image courtesy of the author. Photograph by Octavian Eşanu.

was represented at the conference, by the cultural section of the Beirut-based *Al-Akhbar* newspaper, which was founded in 1938 (in its current version, 2006), and which is distributed throughout Lebanon and Syria. *Al-Akhbar* prides itself on being the only Lebanese newspaper that regularly dedicates several pages to art and culture, reporting on major cultural events in the region (from theater to the plastic arts, music, literature, cinema, and new media). The “Culture and People” section of *Al-Akhbar* views its mission as “filling the void created by the lack of modern Arab cultural periodicals in Lebanon and the Arab world,” and thus as trying to compensate by hiring “more than 50 journalists in Lebanon, the Arab countries, Europe, and the United States to offer its readers informative, analytical, and critical articles about the latest works of the Arab artists, wherever they are.”<sup>5</sup> In terms of its format, *Al-Akhbar* can perhaps more easily be compared to the Egyptian *Mada Masr*, founded in Cairo in 2013 by a team of journalists who seceded from the English-language *Egypt Independent*. *Mada Masr* is an online platform that “attempts to secure a house for a dislocated practice of journalism that did not survive in mainstream organiza-

---

5 Roy Dib, from the conference introduction to *Al-Akhbar* newspaper.

tions and their associated political and economic conditions.” One of the objectives of the publication is to write “about culture in the widest sense.”<sup>6</sup> A significant part of its mission is to encourage and support writing about the arts in Arabic, as well as to improve the quality of translated texts dedicated to art and culture. The situation in Egypt is comparable in many respects to that in Lebanon, for even though both countries have been at the forefront of cultural modernization—having been exposed to Western traditions of fine art and its institutions from an early stage—today they still lack specialized or dedicated contemporary art magazines and journals.

Those periodicals that concern themselves with Middle Eastern art more professionally, by seeking the collaboration of art journalists or academics, are usually based outside of the Middle East. *Bidoun* (a magazine launched in 2004 and subtitled “art and culture from the Middle East”) sees its mission in terms of “introducing new questions, images, and ideas about the Middle East and its diaspora into a global discourse.”<sup>7</sup> The quarterly fulfills this goal quite successfully, though remotely and monolingually, from New York City. *Ibraaz* (an online platform, initiated in 2011) explores “the complexities of contemporary life across North Africa, the Middle East, and, increasingly, the Global South,”<sup>8</sup> and does so only in English, but from the other side of the Atlantic. From its offices in London, the core editorial team of *Ibraaz* reaches out to editorial correspondents and contributors located throughout the Middle East and North Africa.

One can discern certain enduring historical patterns in the ways in which publications report on artistic events related to the Middle East. Excluding for the moment mainstream fine arts publications that appear on a regular basis in the Gulf countries or in Turkey (*Canvas*, *Contemporary Practices*, and *ArtAsiaPacific*), as well as more narrowly focused activist platforms such as *ArtTerritories* from Palestine, it could be said that when it comes to art periodicals dedicated to particular regions of the Middle East, one encounters a lasting dualism: between an autochthonous and long-lived tradition of cultural journalism, which reports on what is considered locally significant, in Arabic, using the wide brushstrokes of general connoisseurship and art

---

6 Lina Attalah, from the conference introduction to *Mada Masr* newspaper.

7 Negar Azimi, from the conference introduction to *Bidoun* magazine.

8 Anthony Downey, from the conference introduction to the *Ibraaz* platform.

appreciation, on one hand; and on the other, a more recent or “contemporary” type of art reportage, which deploys sharper art journalistic tools and more sophisticated academic methods, but applies them from a distance and only or mainly in English, covering “internationally significant” art events, soliciting expert opinions and knowledge, and catering to select audiences, venues, and readers in the global art world. The ongoing division between the central and the marginal, between autochthonous and global art journalism, can certainly be viewed through the prism of enduring colonial legacies and the attendant post-colonial debates, as well as the new cautiously curious attitude in the West toward art and culture from the Middle East in the post-9/11 world.

Some art periodicals form a separate and distinct category, in light of their firm political commitment. One such publication appears in the form of a question: *Chto delat’?*<sup>9</sup> Founded in 2003 in St. Petersburg and published in Russian and English by a working group with the same name, *Chto delat’?* newspaper has been known for more than a decade for publishing leftist writers and artists. Vladimir Il’ich Lenin himself inspired the mission statement of this publication with his declaration, in 1902, that the role of a newspaper is not simply to spread ideas, but also to function as a collective organizer. Lenin compared the newspaper to a scaffolding erected around a building, suggesting that its main goal is to facilitate communication between construction workers, or in this case between cultural workers, helping them view and share the results of their collective actions.<sup>10</sup> The *Chto delat’?* newspaper works hard to fulfill this role, providing space for discussion, debate, and militant writing to many Russian and international activist artists, political writers, and scholars. If the mission of the *Chto delat’?* newspaper is emancipatory politics, or concern for the masses (redistribution of wealth, internationalism, equality, and feminism)<sup>11</sup>—a cause that the group behind the paper has advanced in print as well as in various global contemporary art venues—*ArtLeaks Gazette* (founded in 2011 by a group of editors residing in Bucharest, Belgrade, Moscow, St. Petersburg, and London) has a more narrowly defined activist

---

9 *Chto delat’?* translates from Russian as “What Is to Be Done?,” after the title of Lenin’s 1902 revolutionary pamphlet, inspired in its turn by Nikolai Chernyshevsky’s novel (1863) with the same name.

10 Dmitry Vilensky, from the introduction to *Chto delat’?* newspaper.

11 See “A Declaration on Politics, Knowledge, and Art,” in the “About” section at <http://chtodelat.org/category/b5-announcements/a-6/>, accessed July 26, 2015.

agenda. The *Gazette* was launched to defend the rights of artists and cultural workers, and to protect this category of global citizens from the abuses of cultural bureaucracy nested in and around contemporary art institutions. Building on the model of WikiLeaks, the collective editors of *ArtLeaks*, through their engaged politics, art criticism, and institutional critique, have used their publication as a tool of empowerment, seeking to mobilize artistic communities throughout the world to stand up for their rights.

Each of the socially engaged art periodicals participating in the conference can be viewed as a product of the political climate in which it originated. For instance, the British academic journal *Art & the Public Sphere* (established in 2011 in Bristol, UK) sees its role as theorizing the notion of art in relation to the “public sphere.” The editorial team (Mel Jordan, Dave Beech, Andy Hewitt, and Gil Whitely) has stressed the recent relevance of the notions of the “public” and the “public sphere,” especially at the intersection of contemporary art and liberal democracy. Their work critiques the cooptation of contemporary art and cultural policy by neoliberal regimes that serve narrow-minded economic agendas. The journal reports on artists’ interventions in an increasingly privatized public sphere, helping to share and forge new tools and tactics for resisting capitalism. The Istanbul-based *Red Thread* e-journal, on the other hand, which ceased publication in 2011, sought to transcend the local context and expand its political struggle well beyond Turkey’s national borders. During its publication, the e-journal’s editors pictured their mission in terms of an invisible red thread that ties together progressive critical forces across the Balkans, the Middle East, the Caucasus, North Africa, and beyond, with the goal of establishing long-term cooperation among intellectuals and artists from these regions.<sup>12</sup> *Red Thread*’s political horizon was gradually constituted by positions and theories ranging from Althusserian philosophy and the Praxis Marxism tradition of the former Yugoslavia to anarchism,<sup>13</sup> with a main goal of historicizing modernist legacies in the so-called marginal regions.<sup>14</sup> Even though these periodicals appear to be part of the same category, each journal carries on its

---

12 Erden Kosova, from the conference introduction to *Red Thread* e-journal.

13 Erden Kosova in the Q&A section of the conference.

14 A product of the 2009 Istanbul Biennial, the *Red Thread* journal ceased publication in 2012, reflecting the precarious political and funding landscape for politically engaged art publications in Turkey.

struggle under different conditions and for different goals: *Chto delat'*? attempts to give a second wind to the Russian political left (by way of preserving what has been left uncorrupted in Soviet Marxism-Leninism and injecting a “healthy” dose of Western Marxism); *ArtLeaks* deploys the grassroots tactics of the Occupy Movement against the overbureaucratization and abuses of contemporary art institutions; *Art & the Public Sphere* carries out an artistic critique of pervasive policies of governance informed by post-Thatcherism and New Labor; and, finally, *Red Thread* attempted to build a regional alliance among intellectuals.

At the conference, respondents and members of the audience asked the editors of these politically committed periodicals delicate questions: if they form alliances with a contemporary political vanguard, as had been the case with the historical avant-garde; or if the “leaks” revealed within the art world (by *ArtLeaks Gazette*) are as disturbing as those in the real world. Other audience members were alarmed to find that certain radical left-wing political platforms receive funding from major European banks, while again others inquired whether reporting on artistic revolutionary actions choreographed in museums and centers of contemporary art across Western Europe and the United States does indeed alleviate the sufferings of those in whose name these actions occur.

One online platform, *e-flux* (established in 1999), can be regarded as being in a category of its own. *e-flux* has managed to integrate many functions at once: it is a “publishing platform and archive, an artist project, a curatorial platform, and an enterprise.”<sup>15</sup> The “About” section of its website informs the reader that the journal publishes monthly essays on various aspects of contemporary artistic production. *e-flux* is financially self-sufficient because its “enterprise” part—distributing paid press releases for museums and other institutions to over 90,000 readers worldwide (a model of email promotion that cofounder and editor Anton Vidokle introduced back in 1998)—provides the necessary means to support the journal’s publishing, archiving, and curatorial efforts. There is a frequently encountered view in contemporary cultural and artistic criticism that one of the main tasks of a radical artist today is not to develop new means of production or new artistic and

---

15 See [www.e-flux.com/about/](http://www.e-flux.com/about/), accessed July 25, 2015.

literary forms (the mission carried out most successfully by the historical avant-garde), but to find innovative ways of distributing, transferring, or recycling the constant flow of cultural products in contemporary consumer society. From this perspective, *e-flux* carries out a very important function. In its various activities, it fulfills the tasks of processing and channeling the flow of information about art and of managing continuously generated and regenerated cultural content. The *e-flux* editors do not see themselves solely as distributors, but also as content producers.

Most of the periodicals represented at the conference affirm, in their mission statements, their commitment to the dissemination, engagement, acquisition, production, and creation of knowledge, or critical reflection on contemporary art and culture. But even here, their approaches vary in accordance with the editors' and editorial teams' takes on what constitutes knowledge or culture. *Cabinet* magazine (established in 2000 in New York City), for instance, defines culture very broadly. Its editors place the notion of "engaged curiosity" at the center of their mission statement, which is also inscribed in *Cabinet's* mascot: a hedgehog and a fox facing each other on a diagonally split chevron, a graphical translation of a literary symbol that comes down from the pre-Socratic poet Archilochus, but which has been made popular in our time by Isaiah Berlin's essay of the same name: the fox knows many small things, the hedgehog one big thing. By choosing this symbol, the *Cabinet* editors suggest that the magazine is open to a variety of different approaches to knowledge: to both the inductive and pluralist foxes pursuing many theories at the same time; and to the intuitive hedgehogs, or thinkers in search of one big Idea, System, or Principle. *Cabinet* sets the stage for an encounter between these two, placing the category of curiosity along the line where scientific inquiry meets art and cultural discourse.

Some journals see their main task as reinventing or reforming the methods and languages used by critics and historians to interpret art and culture. Since *October's* inception in 1976 its founding editors, Rosalind Krauss and Annette Michelson, have sought to "introduce, and skillfully deploy European critical theory into Anglophone art historical debates."<sup>16</sup> Under its Eisenstein-inspired name—suggestive of

---

16 David Joselit, from the conference introduction to *October* journal.

revolutionary rupture and the triumph of new forms of knowledge—the journal has interpreted various aspects of modern and contemporary art and culture through a montage of juxtaposed critical positions, from structuralism and poststructuralism, psychoanalysis, and deconstruction, to Marxist and post-Marxist thought and theories of postmodernism. *October* has recently experienced a second birth as its editors have worked to alter the deeply ingrained image of a publication with a Western-centric perspective on art and culture, to fashion a journal with a more international or global outlook. Recently the journal has turned its scholarly lens on other regions of the world and their art historical contexts, making a commitment to the interpretation of mid-20th-century art from Latin America and of various Eastern European modernisms.<sup>17</sup>

The Eastern Europeans, meanwhile, do not always await interpretations from New York, but deal with their modernisms, postmodernisms, and the contemporary arts in ways that are faithful to their own local historical context and the imperatives of the present. The online periodical *Arteria* (established in Yerevan, Armenia, in 2011), for example, is a platform for scholars, critics, writers, and artists that appears in Armenian and has been used primarily by local scholars and students to historicize modernist and postmodernist practices in this country. *Arteria* seeks new approaches to the interpretation of art and culture, but it does so locally and on a strictly voluntary basis. The journal was launched by four editors with common interests but differing perspectives, following a successful grant application to a foreign foundation (a very common beginning in the post-socialist landscape). When the dollars or the euros ran out, the group—whose members prefer to describe themselves as “romantics of necessity”—did not disperse, but kept working on the website, encouraging art historical and critical reflection on modern and contemporary Armenian art and culture, as well as publishing translations of key art historiographical and theoretical texts, among other literary and cultural material.<sup>18</sup>

The Beirut Critical Machines conference offered a chance to glimpse various positions that exist today within the broad and diverse field of contemporary art's media, information, and critical spheres.

---

17 Ibid.

18 Vardan Azatyan, from the conference introduction to *Arteria* journal.



Still from the exhibition *Critical Machines*. Shelf with artist magazines and journals, 2014. AUB Art Galleries, Beirut. Image courtesy of the author. Photograph by Octavian Eşanu.

It also offered an opportunity to place some of these positions in relation to each other, in order to bring to public attention the editors' distinct objectives, editorial policies, funding structures, publishing strategies, and critical methods. What follows are a few short excerpts from the much longer transcripts of conversations that took place at the conference. We hope they will at least partially convey the range of strategies and contradictions, disputes, and editorial decisions encountered today within the field of art periodicals. Moreover, the material below includes only selections from the Q&A sections that followed each of the panels, in which editors made short presentations of their periodicals (a summary of these panel presentations is available online<sup>19</sup>).

19 [www.aub.edu.lb/art\\_galleries/Documents/Critical-Machines.pdf](http://www.aub.edu.lb/art_galleries/Documents/Critical-Machines.pdf).

EXCERPTS FROM Q&A SESSIONS OF THE CRITICAL MACHINES:  
ART PERIODICALS TODAY CONFERENCE (MARCH 2014)<sup>20</sup>

SESSION 1: CRITICAL AND ART HISTORICAL PERIODICALS, with David Joselit (*October* journal, US); Sven Spieker (*ARTMargins* journal, US); Anton Vidokle (*e-flux Journal*, New York, US); Vardan Azatyan (*Arteria* e-journal platform, Yerevan, AM). Angela Harutyunyan and Rico Franses (discussants).

**Audience member:** In their introductory remarks and presentations, the editors of the art journals have been frequently referring to the term “global.” I am trying to understand what the editors of, for instance, *e-flux* or *ARTMargins* think about the global today. What does it mean to work in this global field? Is this globalism understood geographically, or are there other meanings to it? To me, *ARTMargins* thinks of the global as being specifically somewhere, literally by “going” to various places and informing us about different artistic practices; whereas for *e-flux* the global is a constant flux without geography and a specific place, without a starting point. And at the same time, when you think of *ARTMargins*, it questions this possibility or impossibility of the global, asking: what does it mean “to work in this global field?”

**Sven Spieker (*ARTMargins*):** My work with *ARTMargins* has forced me to think about what globalism might mean for somebody interested in contemporary art. On the one hand, there is the use of the term in the economic sphere, where it operates like a flat screen on which every point on the globe seems to be equivalent with every other, not unlike the network maps of the global airline alliances. We have tended to be

---

20 One of the biggest challenges of preparing this conference report was finding a consistent and comprehensive way to represent the locations from which these magazines, journals, gazettes, and platforms operate. In certain cases, the task was fairly simple: some periodicals have their editorial office fixed at a particular location, and their language of operation aims at attracting a specific readership, most often from within the boundaries of a nation-state (e.g., *Gahnama-e-Hunar* in Afghanistan, *Arteria* in Armenia, *Al-Akhbar* in Lebanon, and *Mada Masr* in Egypt). In other cases, however, art journals and magazines are edited by teams located in one country but aimed at a readership that is global; most often these are American periodicals (e.g., *October*, *e-flux Journal*, and *Cabinet*). But there is a third category, as well: periodicals produced by international editorial teams whose members reside in different corners of the planet, but who are working at times simultaneously on the same file accessed from the cloud; these periodicals by and large use English as their language of operation to reach a wider regional or global readership (e.g., *ARTMargins*, *ArtLeaks Gazette*, and *Umeš lec*).

critical of such a model. Through the articles, documents, and artist projects we publish, we try to rewrite such maps so they tentatively bypass the intellectual, methodological, or disciplinary “hubs” to which we have all become used. And then, *ARTMargins* confronts the neoliberal fiction of universal equivalence with more localized histories in order to complement the flat screen of the global with an element of time. We take the “con-” in “contemporary” seriously and understand it as a kind of parallelism of different temporalities in different places that allows for the resurfacing of certain traditions and “peripheral” understandings of modern and contemporary art that have not been taken into account to the extent that they should be.

**David Joselit (October):** I think you are right to bring up the term “global” because, as Sven said, it has different valences: one of these denotes, to put it bluntly, art from places outside of Euro-America that is included in big international exhibitions. Sometimes that’s the extent of it. There is a kind of tokenism at worst, or a good faith effort to do research beyond the usual art market precincts at best. As I see it, *ARTMargins* is interested in tracing lateral or underrecognized networks rather than telling a story based in traditional metropolitan art centers. Personally, I think, to use the term “globalization” rigorously, it’s necessary to think of it as an uneven distribution of aesthetic relations across spatial and economic borders. It is important to understand the genealogies of modernism that have developed in different parts of the world. In some cases, modernism is thought to be liberatory, and in others it is absolutely an imposition from above by power elites. To use the term “globalization” to signify something more than bland internationalism or multiculturalism, you have to look for different models of the modern—and how they are synchronized with one another in the contemporary. And that is actually in complete contradiction with the “stealth” universalism that globalization smuggles in.

**Audience member:** What kind of readership (imaginary or real) do you or would you work for? And secondly, what about the area outside of the art public and academia? How do you relate to a wider readership?

**Anton Vidokle (e-flux):** I’m not an art historian, a critic, or an academic. Primarily, I am a practicing artist. *E-flux Journal* was started by two artists: Julieta Aranda and me, as well as Brian Kuan Wood, who studied art history on the undergraduate level and later worked at the Townhouse Gallery, a nonprofit exhibition space in Cairo. We started the journal with the idea that it would be sufficient if our publication

were read by just a few hundred people—essentially artists and writers we knew personally—as a kind of conversation among friends who were separated by distances and time zones. The journal was one of the outcomes of the *unitednationsplaza*—an experimental school we ran in Berlin for a year and then in New York—under the name Nightschool. The artists and writers who were part of this project—Martha Rosler, Boris Groys, Walid Raad, Jalal Toufic, Natascha Sadr Haghghian, Liam Gillick, and others—were very prolific and generous with ideas, texts, and lectures, and it was clear that a new publishing platform was necessary so that they could publish on a regular basis. Liam Gillick at some point suggested a very beautiful approach to this: he suggested doing something that doesn't really have a set form, design, and appearance, that is not concerned with how it is printed and distributed, with the emphasis being on publishing urgent texts by any means possible and in whatever format—as Xerox copies, as emails, as handwritten pages. In other words, not to think so much about how a journal is published and what it looks like, but primarily to urgently address the ideas of artists and writers. To some extent this is still our approach. So maybe the journal is contemporary in the sense that it's dedicated to the expression of a certain kind of urgently expressed idea from many different places.

**Vardan Azatyan (*Arteria*):** As far as I can see, *Arteria* is the only non-English journal represented in this panel. . . . Our readership, accordingly, is very limited. Students constitute the largest number of our readers because they use the material we publish in their courses, which are held in Armenian. One of the reasons behind our decision to continue to publish is that we would be letting down our readers if we didn't. But it's hard to correctly define who they are.

**Rico Franses (discussant):** David, you mentioned earlier that you are constantly posing the question [whether *October* should continue to exist] and that there are various reasons to keep it going. Are there institutional reasons to keep it going? In other words, is the reason you keep publishing *October* the fact that it has become an institution?

**David Joselit:** I think a group of editors who publish a journal do so with the conviction that they have a worthwhile point of view. And I think that [in *October's* case] we do, though we are now in a very different set of conditions than when the journal was founded, and we have tried to respond to them by, for example, engaging with robust traditions of modernism in Eastern Europe and Latin America. As for your

institutional question, I don't know if you're politely trying to point out that *October* is closely aligned with a certain power structure in American academia—which is true. This is probably part of the reason why there is also a strong pushback from the field. But I think it's more interesting to try to think about what serious scholarship of the modern really means in terms of the contemporary or the global. I think it's important for practitioners of contemporary art—artists, critics, and historians—to have a sense of what was and what wasn't accomplished in modern art. This is something that *October* participates in; it doesn't have a corner on the market but it has a real contribution to make in that realm.

**Audience member:** What are the funding structures for your magazines, and how do they reflect or impact your content?

**David Joselit:** We receive a subsidy from MIT Press, which is probably the same with *ARTMargins*. It is enough to do a sort of barebones management; then, we make money from our *October* files and some subscriptions. And we've had a few artists' portfolios. We recently received a major Andrew W. Mellon grant to enhance our ability to do translations, but unfortunately that is coming to an end. We have a part-time managing editor, and the rest is voluntary.

**Sven Spieker:** It's more or less the same for us.

**Anton Vidokle:** *E-flux Journal* is a monthly publication, so the intensity is different than with quarterly journals: to put out an issue every month is very labor-intensive. Also, we pay all of the writers and editors; basically everybody who works on the journal gets paid, including interns, and if they work full time they also get health coverage and other benefits. Writers retain copyrights and are free to republish their work as books or in other places. In this sense we are very different from academic publications. To do things like this is rather expensive: it costs us several hundred thousand dollars per year to publish the journal. We do not look for grants and private or corporate sponsors, because the funds come from the *e-flux* announcement service.

**David Joselit:** I have long thought that the model of *e-flux* is amazing because it provides a very useful service whose profits are then invested in artists and writers in the form of commissions and projects. It is hard to imagine a similar model that would work in our [*October*] context, but it was hard to imagine *e-flux*, too. Being nonprofit, after all, does not bring perfect freedom; one is still subject to other kinds of economic forces. So being self-supporting gives you different kinds of freedom.

SESSION 2: GLOBAL AND REGIONAL ART PERIODICALS, with Shuruq Harb (*ArtTerritories* online platform, Ramallah, PS); Anthony Downey (*Ibraaz* online platform, London, GB); Lina Attalah (*Mada Masr* online newspaper, Cairo, EG); Palo Fabuš (*Umělec* magazine, Prague, CZ). Sven Spieker (discussant).

**Audience member:** We often work with artists in the Middle East, and one of the problems that comes up is translation. I would like to ask Shuruq Harb how *ArtTerritories* engages with the translatability but equally the untranslatability of the knowledge that is produced out of, for example, *ArtTerritories* or *Ibraaz* or any publication operating in or around the Middle East.

**Shuruq Harb (*ArtTerritories*):** When we started *ArtTerritories*, we did not find a lot of artists who wanted to write in Arabic, and that was quite challenging. So then the idea was that we translate the material. We felt uncomfortable because when we are speaking across languages we are not speaking to the same audience. In other words, simply translating does not really solve the problem. So part of what we feel we need to do, and one of the things that we would like to work on while we are in Amman, is actually working with writers who can write in Arabic.<sup>21</sup>

In terms of audiences, the scopes of *ArtTerritories* and *Ibraaz* are rather different—*ArtTerritories* is quite a small project. We do realize, for example, that a lot of our interviews are made with a very specific goal and for very specific people. So we always think about these interviews as references that artists could consult with. I think the difference between [*Ibraaz* and *ArtTerritories*] is that actually being on the ground is quite important because it generates a kind of audience that does not exist online. It's not only about creating reading material, but also about creating places where art can interact with other disciplines.

**Audience member:** Anthony, I wonder about the difference between a platform and a magazine. I feel that *Ibraaz* is not there for knowledge production, but more for its dissemination. I feel like there is this flatness that, I guess, goes well with the notion of platform, but which raises a fundamental question about the editorial voice.

**Anthony Downey (*Ibraaz*):** Our editorial voice, I hope, is much more discursive and it is not just me. What I presented today is more

---

21 Shuruq Harb participated in the conference over the Internet from an artist residency in Jordan.

my take, or what I consider a good editorial line to be. When I talk about art criticism being productive as opposed to reproductive—and you’re drawing a distinction here between production and dissemination—I think that it is a correct thing to do. I would think it has to be on a variety of registers. A platform also needs to be a form of dissemination, carry other voices and messages, reveal contradictions. Somebody mentioned the word “agonistic” earlier: perhaps there is some sort of agonistic message that is coming out of *Ibraaz’s* various registers—be they news, print items, artists’ projects, critical essays.

**Audience member:** I think that *Mada Masr* [Cairo] is a more successful model, because there is a genuine friction between its different spheres of operation: journalism, politics, art, and both specialized and nonspecialized audiences.

**Audience member:** Lina, we are now used to thinking about the newspaper as a reproductive medium. But there was a time when newspapers were considered revolutionary in social, political, and linguistic terms. They were really there to forge a new language and a new perception of life and maybe point out that another life was also possible. I wonder if that was part of your idea in working for *Mada Masr*.

**Lina Attalah (*Mada Masr*):** If right now, particularly in the Egyptian local context, we considered newspapers “reproductive,” then I think the newspaper as a medium would be really obsolete. We would be basically reproducing the constant butchering of meaning; we would be reproducing lies. I do think that by reimagining what a newspaper can and should do, it can definitely be part of the process of inventing a new grammar and a new vocabulary, not just for political discourse but even for cultural practices and for making sense of what is happening in art.

**Audience member:** Lina, my question has to do with the particular kind of art criticism you are thinking of developing for *Mada Masr*, and how you imagine it playing a role within the larger cultural politics in Egypt. I know things are happening as we speak, but perhaps you could also mention the Wikipedia project you are developing?

**Lina Attalah:** We are interested in having critics professionally reflect on art production in Egypt and the region, but also in seeing how less professionalized critics or writers relate to artistic production. In parallel, I do Wikipedia workshops as a means to use the syntax of Wikipedia as a tactic for narrative construction. Wikipedia has a series of very strict rules about objectivity. This kind of objectivity within the

Wikipedia community, at least as far as Egypt is concerned, can be quite counterrevolutionary. Our idea is to work with art students and young art professionals in Egypt on learning the Wikipedia logic and the Wikipedia syntax in order to populate Wikipedia with content on art. Even if we try to inhabit these conditions and just be factual, maybe we can fill Wikipedia with a different type of content.

### SESSION 3: RADICAL PRAXIS AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

PERIODICALS, with Dmitry Vilensky (*Chto Delat'?* newspaper, St. Petersburg, RU); Corina Apostol (*ArtLeaks Gazette*, Bucharest, RO; Belgrade, RS; St. Petersburg, RU); Erden Kosova, (*Red Thread* e-journal, Istanbul, TR); Mel Jordan (*Art & the Public Sphere* journal, Bristol, GB). Marwa Arsanios and Octavian Eșanu (discussants).

**Audience member:** *ArtLeaks* is a publication that claims to represent the rights of artists, to defend them from institutions. Can you talk a little bit about the legal side of this struggle?

**Corina Apostol (*ArtLeaks Gazette*):** We don't have a legal army behind us. And we did get in trouble once with some people who tried to sue us for what we publish, but the way around that is that we never publish just one side of the story. When somebody comes to us with a case, we always contact the other side, whether it is an institution, a curator, or another artist. Then we say, "okay, this has been put on the table and we want to publish a story about it. What is your position?" Sometimes we get a response, sometimes we don't. Most of the time institutions do respond. What is on our website is never just one person making a claim against an entity or another person, but it's actually a claim and a response. We are interested in bringing up conflicts that are not obvious, and the situations of conflict that I think are structuring the art world today. The conflicts are very specific, as there are different laws, for example, in England and in Romania. But at the same time, we also want to emphasize that in the art world we're dealing with a similar kind of structural dysfunction. So that's why our approach is to bring in people who have been dealing with these issues in their own contexts. In some cases, we discovered that people—I mean artists in their own countries—were not aware of the legislation around artists' contracts or artists' rights. I think this information is very valuable.

**Audience member:** I would like to address the question of posterity

and the way it relates to publishing in print and online. Dmitry, how do you think the Internet and online content relate to the notion of posterity?

**Dmitry Vilensky (*Chto delat'?*):** I cannot take seriously things that are not present online, because today it's all about access, fair sharing, and so on. But, you know, you keep printing for a number of reasons because we all have that nostalgia for something on paper. But at the same time I think this should be combined with online content, so you have PDFs online and you have user-generated content.

**Audience member:** Corina, you basically deal with information. Do you have a strategy for its distribution? Because, for instance, what happened at the Sydney Biennial happened because of the rise of the artists.<sup>22</sup> Are you planning a strategy on how to push things with the institutions, like how to expose them?

**Corina Apostol:** Our main strategy revolves around the section "Artleak Your Case," and we mostly rely on artists or groups to come to us; then we develop a narrative together. In some cases, this involves not just exposure and online publishing, but actually actions on the ground. Our collective is from different parts of the world; but we don't, for example, have anybody in England, so what we do there is we work with existing groups and sometimes they decide on an action. For example, in London we worked with PWB [Precarious Workers Brigade], Future Interns, and Ragpickers.

**Audience member:** Dmitry, as far as I know, *Chto delat'?* distributes its newspaper only at the exhibitions in which you participate, which limits its reach to the contemporary art public. This is not in the spirit of the mass distribution of a typical newspaper. Are you considering a form of distribution that might break the walls of the gallery space?

**Dmitry Vilensky:** Newspapers can be distributed in places like contemporary art exhibitions, but at the same time they can be present wherever, even outside of the art world. Our newspaper relates to all our events, not just the exhibitions; for example, we do theater, and so the newspaper is in the theater; other people from our collective play in concerts, and so the newspaper can be found in clubs. Also, our

---

22 At the 19th Sydney Biennial in 2014, twenty-eight artists threatened to boycott the event after ties were revealed between the organizers of the Biennial and Transfield Holdings, connected to Transfield Services, which operates overseas detention camps.

newspaper always balances very different types of texts. We strictly reject academic texts, but at the same time, some of the texts are very complex, so people can really choose.

**Audience member:** While the *Chto delat'?* newspaper publishes this militant Bolshevism, I see *ArtLeaks Gazette* more as a form of political activism made in the spirit of the Occupy Movement, some sort of radical democratic negotiation within the boundaries of the public sphere. And I see *Red Thread* continuing in the tradition of the Praxis philosophical movement in the former Yugoslavia, a kind of Althusserian Marxism that I notice in your collaborations with Prelom, WHW [What, How, & for Whom], and others. And I see the *Art & the Public Sphere* journal as a project that deals with the contemporary conditions created by Thatcherism in the UK. I would like to ask all of you a question that relates to the fact that historical artistic activism of the 1920s was most of the time allied with a political activism or avant-garde, as was the case in Russia but also in other places. Now my question: are you somehow connected to a contemporary political avant-garde that you work closely with, or are you just an avant-garde to entertain the art world?

**Dmitry Vilensky:** I think the situation today is really tragic because there is no such thing as a political avant-garde anymore. For example, I was always very skeptical about the Occupy Movement. I see it not as fulfilling the bright idea of communism; it's more a kind of *realpolitik*. For example, right now we insist that the Maidan Movement in Kiev was an incredible event of political rupture in Ukraine. But at the same time, we should be critical of what came in its wake. That's why for us, a big issue is how far we can associate with Russian politics, and we have the same question for our Ukrainian comrades: how can you cope with the open ultrafascists and ultranationalists now in power? So right now, I'm really very sad and skeptical about discussing social change.

**Corina Apostol:** You are right that we have some affinities with the Occupy Movement; in fact, one of the groups we collaborate with is called Occupy Museums in New York. They have recently done a protest action at the Guggenheim in collaboration with the Gulf Labour Coalition against the exploitation of workers during the construction of Guggenheim Abu Dhabi. Some of us in our group come from the left and identify with communism, some of us come from anarchism, some of us are Deleuzians—so we are not like a united political front. From the beginning, we didn't want to register as an organization or be

located anywhere. But in our workshops we do look at different historical models. We begin with Courbet, we introduce this notion of activism and the art worker and so on, and we look at the Art Workers Coalition and study historical examples of how artists organized.

SESSION 4: EDUCATIONAL AND CURIOSITY ART PERIODICALS, with Roy Dib (*Al-Akhbar* newspaper, “Culture and Society” section, Beirut, LB); D. Graham Burnett (*Cabinet* magazine, New York, US); Negar Azimi (*Bidoun* magazine, New York, US); Rahraw Omarzad (*Gahnama-e-Hunar* magazine, Kabul, AF). Ghalya Saadawi and Kirsten Scheid (discussants).

**Audience member:** I have a question for *Cabinet*. After hearing you speak, and after looking through your magazine, I was wondering how you would describe the magazine’s relation to the notion of critique or to the political? Or to put it in other words, where is politics in *Cabinet*?

**D. Graham Burnett (*Cabinet*):** So remember the catch phrase I used—it is the mission of *Cabinet* and its attendant undertakings to recover and deploy “curiosity” under the full range of that term’s ethical, political, and aesthetic significance. That stance is by no means politically neutral or indifferent. Curiosity posits an affective/appetitive *implication* of would-be knower and would-be known. It risks, it *courts*, contamination. It cannot be automated or mechanized. It hesitates. But not because it is uncertain—it hesitates because it feels the tug of love. Not sentimental love. But the love that would hold each person and thing before the light, hold each person and thing against the flow of time—if only for a moment. Each “politics”—each sovereign, each marketplace, each border-guard—must eventually suspend or abrogate or stipulate the conditions for that orientation to persons and things. And therefore the political stakes of resisting those forms of closure could not, in my view, be higher.

You ask about “critique.” In my talk earlier today, I tried to address the theme/conceit of this symposium—“critical machines,” machines that regulated other machines—in a very *Cabinet* way. I sifted out a forgotten story about a strange kind of machine, the “Dithering Machine,” which emerged during World War II as a kind of parasitic submechanism within complex mechanical bomb sights. The digital descendants of these systems continue to work within many data-intensive algorithmic devices. Dithering machines “dither”: they do not lift weights or

drive cybernetic controls. By humming a kind of meandering “white noise,” they prevent their host mechanism from seizing up or locking down. They resist inertia. They discourage computational protocols from settling on suboptimal solutions—but they do so by means of continuous micro-destabilizations. This was not an allegory. But it was an effort to think with a thing in a way that feels native to the idiom of our publication—and, along the way, to offer a kind of (counter)critical commentary on the idea of art magazines as critical machines. I was trying to show, rather than tell, how *Cabinet* works. And that is generally how we like to proceed.

**Audience member:** Rahraw Omarzad, you are the editor of *Gahnama-e-Hunar* art magazine in Kabul and have also founded the Center for Contemporary Art Afghanistan (CCAA). When the Berlin Wall fell, there were certain American foundations that came to Eastern Europe and started financing and founding centers for contemporary art that were radically different from existing local art organizations. So (and I’m just speculating here), is it a coincidence that the Center for Contemporary Art Afghanistan was launched soon after the US army entered Afghanistan?

**Rahraw Omarzad (*Gahnama-e-Hunar*):** My life history will give you the answer. Before the Americans came to Kabul, there were no funders for an art magazine; I started this magazine at a time when Afghan refugees were not thinking about artistic activities but mainly how to stay alive. At that time, I was living in a house that didn’t have water or gas. For one year, I collected many articles, and then I published the first issue of the magazine, I also established a women’s art center. When I was in Peshawar during the civil war, I had a meeting with Pakistani, Iranian, and Afghan women. I asked them why women were prevented from learning about art, and how many women they knew who were very famous in their countries. It was very difficult for them to mention even three names. When I was in Pakistan and received a salary of around \$80 or \$100, I started free art courses for Afghan refugees because they needed them and they didn’t have any money. During the years of the Russian occupation, there was no funding to do anything. When I came to Kabul in 2002, I was invited to take part in a panel discussion as an editor of our art magazine. That’s when I had the idea of starting a contemporary art center. We are receiving very little in financial support. The international NGOs have their own agendas, and art is not one of them.

**Audience member:** Are the activities of your Center for Contemporary Art Afghanistan reviewed in the newspapers?

**Rahraw Omarzad:** Yes, of course the media do interviews with our students. But one of the problems in Afghanistan is that we don't have journalists specialized in art reportage. When we do an exhibition, they come and write a report about it; and they are always asking the same questions—how many art pieces are in this exhibition? how long does the exhibition last? how many artists? how much money? This is one of the problems. This is why I had this idea to train some journalists in the arts. Somebody asked me yesterday what the reaction of people to contemporary art was because we have no history of showing contemporary art to people. When we have an exhibition, nobody knows about it. Only one group of students and artists attend. After 2002, when I came back to Kabul, for a short time there were some donors for the art magazine—such as the Goethe-Institut, a Contemporary Art Center in Oslo, and the Prince Claus Fund. For one year, they supported our magazine. But soon even these donors lost interest because they did not think that it could grow to be independent. And that's why, for four years now, we are not publishing the magazine, even though we are continuing with other activities.

**Ghalya Saadawi (discussant):** I have a question about readership. Someone mentioned the dearth or lack of art publications in the Middle East, and then we have the Afghan case of *Gahnama-e-Hunar* that Rahraw just described, or even the way in which Roy was talking earlier about the mission of the cultural section of *Al-Akhbar*, in the sense of a desperate need to educate or give a voice to the voiceless. This need did not come across in the parallels between *Cabinet* and *Bidoun*: here, there is no such urgency, and instead a kind of luxury, privilege, a kind of self-reflexive capacity to be epistemological machines. In a sense, there is something predetermined in giving a voice to the voiceless, because you already think you know who your readers are. So how do *Cabinet* and *Bidoun* position themselves in relation to their readership, or the said urge to educate and give voice?

**D. Graham Burnett:** *Cabinet* has a pretty large and loyal readership—about 11,000 subscribers, who renew at a high rate. We also have an event space that is free and where we host regular events—many, in one way or another, are committed to forms of nontraditional pedagogy. But there was a probing in this question that tipped open issues of luxury and privilege—and those are tough matters, important

matters. I totally acknowledge that in the context of such a fascinating presentation about *Gahnama-e-Hunar* and the role it fulfills in the Afghan art community, *Cabinet's* omnivorous appetites, its patience with the minor and marginal, and its attention to strong design—all this could look “decadent.” Let’s just call this out and make it clear. But different situations—different readers, different environments—call for different responses. In a world of established institutional hierarchies (in art and academe) and entrenched disciplinary regimes, which reflexively and pervasively canalize the richness of the past and the present into a narrow trough for the feeding of *Homo academicus*, a project like ours aims to expand and transform the realms of inquiry. And I think that we have had, that we continue to have, that effect. We publish a kind of work—imaginative, empirical, problematic, archival, creative, “queer,” learned, mixed, *mad*—for which there has not traditionally been anything like a *venue*. And I would say that over the years, through the print magazine and our space and our events, we have really even gone beyond just providing that venue. We’ve helped nurture something close to a community of hybrid-impure *discourse*—a far-flung and sublated republic of artists and scholars and makers and readers who share our commitment to recovering curiosity in its full political, ethical, and aesthetic registers.

**Negar Azimi (*Bidoun*):** Part of our founding instinct was certainly to fill some sort of vacuum; we recognized that there were interesting things happening in cities that we were close to: Beirut, Tehran, Cairo in particular. But we were self-conscious about our limitations. In other words, we couldn’t even begin to represent everything that was happening culturally in these places. As a side note, I still think there are too many artists per capita in the Middle East. Regarding readership, we never had a lot of subscribers. People tend to pick up *Bidoun* at their favorite independent bookshop or arts space. The readership is mostly cosmopolitan, mostly urban. That said, we never tried to cater to a specific readership per se, but we always tried to push for a culture of criticism that we thought was sorely missing, and we will continue to do that.