



14th Triennale di Milano 1968—Occupation of the Triennale.

Source: Archivio Fotografico Triennale di Milano

No Order: Art in a Post-Fordist Society N° 1 / 2010
Review by Francesco Gagliardi

“What does the appointment of art dealer Jeffrey Deitch as director of the Los Angeles Museum of Contemporary Art have to do with the trend of global financialization restated at the Toronto G20 Summit in 2010? And how does the 25 percent attendance increase at the 2010 Gwanju Biennale fit in the picture?” In his editorial note to the first issue of *No Order: Art in a Post-Fordist Society*, a new annual “bookzine” published by the Visual Arts and Curatorial Studies Department of Milan’s New Art Academy (NABA), Marco Scotini suggests that these events are among the symptoms of a global transformation of labour whereby knowledge, creativity, sociability, and ultimately life itself, are taking on the role played by machines in the Fordist era. The magazine’s focus, as its tag line states, is the analysis of the role of art as a mirror of and catalyst for the transition to this new socioeconomic and political order. (“A country with human rights violations? Bring on the Gehry gallery!”

as Hito Steyerl quipped in a recent essay.)¹ Over the last few years, the discussion of these topics has gained considerable momentum, as attested by the number of conferences on immaterial labour and cognitive capitalism, as well as the wealth of new publications devoted to these issues, such as the recent “Post-Fordism, Precarity, and the Labor of Art,” e-flux collection.² *No Order* enters this discussion head-on: at nearly 400 pages (only one of which is occupied by a commercial advertisement), with a severe black-and-white cover image of the 1968 occupation of the 14th Triennale di Milano, and interspersed with artist projects reflecting an austere research aesthetic (maps, diagrams, grids, text), the new bilingual (English and Italian) publication makes for a dense, sometimes challenging, and often rewarding read. The magazine is divided into three sections. The first, “Time Zone,” tackles the issues at the magazine’s core in perhaps the most direct way, providing an alternative cartography of the emerging artistic systems of countries whose belated embrace of a modern capitalist model has made them, in recent years, into

ideal testing grounds for the transition to post-Fordist forms of capitalism. Under examination are Russia, the Czech Republic, Romania, Croatia, and Turkey; future issues will be devoted to Africa and the Middle East. A first-hand analysis of the interconnections between the markets, exhibition institutions, education systems, and communication networks of each country is accompanied by actual maps visualizing these complex webs of influences and interests in a spirit somewhat reminiscent of the work of the late Mark Lombardi. “Play Time,” the magazine’s central section, is in turn divided into three subsections. The first looks at the changing role of education under a regime in which “cultural production can no longer be separated from economic factors, and the economy cannot do without culture,” as Andris Brinkmanis puts it in the introductory note. It includes a conversation between Alexei Penzin and Dmitry Vilensky on the role of theory in the production of contemporary art and subjectivity; a text by Stephen Willats reflecting on the relevance of “random networks” to art practices; and art-historian Astrit Schmidt-Burkhardt’s study of George Maciunas’s Learning Machines, the painstakingly hand-written paper-and-glue atlases of factual knowledge whose taxonomic obsession suggestively resonates with the maps and charts in “Time Zone.” “Market,” the second subsection in “Play Time,” includes essays by sociologist Maurizio Lazzarato and economist Christian Marazzi, along with a compelling case study of the history of the Manifesta biennial by Marco Scotini. The third and final subsection focuses on current politics and practices of display; it includes contributions by Will Bradley, Roger M. Buerger, Société Réaliste and, again, Scotini, who here discusses the 2009 Istanbul Biennial as a successful “meta-exhibition” offering a much needed reflection on the conditions of exhibition-making under the current politico-economic regime. The final section, “Time Machine,” focuses on contemporary artists (including Vangelis Vlahos, Yervant Gianikian and Angela Ricci Lucchi, Rossella Biscotti, Eugenio Dittborn, Harun Farocki, and Peter Watkins) whose work, often in the mode of experimental documentary and alternative archival practices, engages with the past as a way of dialectically reflecting

upon the present. Exploring the conditions that make representing history possible, the essays in this section try to articulate an account of the shifting role of time in a global scenario defined by the logic of the neoliberal information economy. Overall, the first issue of *No Order* makes a compelling case for the need to turn our attention to the conditions of art’s production and display; to art as a place of labour, conflict, and potential subversion. At the same time, its very size, the range of its coverage, and the star status of several of its contributors beg the question of the role of competitive theoretical overproduction under the current regime of cognitive capitalism—a question, incidentally, that Penzin and Vilensky explicitly raise in their contribution to the first section of the magazine. An additional, related source of uneasiness is the absence of any acknowledgment of the fact that some of the essays are reprints. Willats’s text, for one, was originally published in 2003 by Artlab in collaboration with Control Magazine, the pioneering artist magazine published and edited by Willats himself since 1965. Similarly, Penzin and Vilensky’s conversation is illustrated with reproductions of covers (designed by Vilensky) of the magazine *Chto Delat?*/What is to be done?, but the latter is nowhere acknowledged as the text’s original source (the conversation appeared in the March 2009 issue). Let’s be clear: the issue here is not intellectual ownership, but the transparency of networks of cultural production—those very networks whose exposure is so convincingly positioned by *No Order* as one of the essential functions of art discourse in the present historical moment.

Francesco Gagliardi is an artist based in Toronto.

Notes

1. Hito Steyerl. “Politics of Art: Contemporary Art and the Transition to Post-Democracy,” *e-flux journal* 21 (Dec. 2010), accessed November 7, 2011, www.e-flux.com/journal/view/181
2. Julieta Aranda, Anton Vidokle, Brian Kuan Wood, eds., *Are You Working Too Much? Post-Fordism, Precarity, and the Labor of Art* (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2011).