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## **Editorial. *Transitory Parerga: Access and Inclusion in Contemporary Art***

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# Editorial. *Transitory Parerga*: Access and Inclusion in Contemporary Art

Vlad Strukov

## Introduction

The issue of access and inclusion is both topical and integral to Garage Museum of Contemporary Art, one of the backers of *The Garage Journal: Studies in Art, Museums & Culture* (hereafter, *The Garage Journal*). Institutions (museums, art colleges), ideologies (value systems, the canon), architecture (buildings, urban planning), curatorial paraphernalia (interpretation, frames, plinths) frame contemporary art. They include and exclude, give and withhold access by centralizing contemporary art in Eurocentric urban areas, by creating precarious employment opportunities, and by catering, mostly, to non-diverse audiences. By looking at these structures that frame contemporary art—point to its significance, signal its value, and move in and out of the transitory focus of art itself—we have a framework that allows us to discuss art and its boundaries, without limiting our investigation of access and inclusion to art's 'intrinsic' qualities.

As a productive framework through which to reconsider access and inclusion in the arts, we suggest rethinking Jacques Derrida's concept of the parergon, first introduced in *The Truth in Painting* (1987). As Derrida (1987) writes, the *parergon* comes 'against, beside, and in addition to the ergon, the work done [fait], the fact [le fait], the work, but it does not fall to one side, it touches and cooperates within the operation, from a certain outside. Neither simply outside nor simply inside' (p. 54). The function of the *parergon* is thus to create a framework that recontextualizes that which is being framed.

In the first section of this editorial, I explore the meanings and functions of the term parergon, revisiting its early semantics and later, various incarnations in European philosophy. In this section, the term acquires a meaning that accounts for the theoretical, methodological, and ontological transformations most commonly associated with poststructuralism. I use the second and third sections to theorize the notion of access and inclusivity, capitalizing on the achievements of poststructuralist theory and its subsequent revisions, which have surfaced in recent debates on subjectivity, institutions, and technologies. In these sections, an original framework for thinking access and inclusivity in the 21st century emerges as the result of a collaborative thought process between artists, researchers, curators, and all those who have played a part in the making of this issue. I express my sincere gratitude to them in the final section of the editorial.

## 1. Different Parerga: Modern Philosophy and Art History

In its present-day usage, *parergon* (from para- 'beside' + ergon 'work'; pl. *parerga*) refers to 'something subordinate or accessory to the main subject' but not 'an in-dependent entity' (Oxford English Dictionary 2020). The term is used to identify the theme of an artwork and to reflect on this very process of identification. Some claim that viewers create meaning as a structure by making decisions about what is important and what is not; what is central and what is peripheral; what is meaningful and what is decorative. Others value the ability of the artist to make choices and avoid extraneous details or minor distractions, staying focused on the main subject with the help of a clear composition.<sup>1</sup>

One way or another, the *parergon* is something that is subordinate or supplementary to the ergon, and the relationship between the *ergon* and *parergon* can be characterized using the terms 'accessory,' 'embellishment,' and 'ornament'—all of which connote something that is superficial or inferior to the *ergon* in status or meaning. Indeed, in the *Republic*, Plato discoursed on the *parergon* as 'something that is additional' or 'something that comes after,' for example, after the work has been completed, or an idea has been proposed. A classic account of this kind of relationship appears in Strabo's *Geography* (1857), in which the 1st century BCE geographer and historian describes a painting by Protogenes that depicts a flute-playing satyr leaning on a column:

'On the top of the column was a partridge. The bird strongly attracted, as was natural, the gaping admiration of the people, [such that] [. . .] the Satyr, although executed with great skill, was not noticed. When Protogenes observed that the principal [ἔργον: ergon] had become the subordinate part [πᾶρἔργον: parergon] of his work, he obtained permission of the curators of the temple to efface the bird, which he did' (vol. 3, p. 30).

The term re-emerges in Immanuel Kant's theory of distinction, namely, his understanding of *parergon* as an ornamental enclosure, conceptually and physically separate from the artwork, thus enabling modern theorizing about the boundaries of the artwork. In *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, Kant (2000) writes:

'Even what one calls ornaments (*parerga*), i.e., that which is not internal to the entire representation of the object as a constituent, but only belongs to it externally as an addendum and augments the satisfaction of taste, still does this only through its form: like the borders of paintings, draperies on statues, or colonnades around magnificent buildings. But if the ornament itself does not consist in beautiful form, if it is, like a gilt frame, attached merely in order to recommend approval for the painting through its charm—then it is called decoration, and detracts from genuine beauty' (§14, pp. 110–111).

Kant is less concerned with the frame itself (a gilt frame, or not) than he is with its purpose. In fact, he designates the frame as having the capacity to draw the eye to the artwork to infer its meaning. Moreover, the distinction

is not between the fragment or the whole, the central meaning and its diversions, nor is it between form and ornament; rather it is between 'meaning' and 'not meaning.' To confirm this, Kant invites us to consider the very process through which meaning emerges, and as a result, in terms of its meaning, the meaning can be viewed as either principal or subsidiary, depending on the subject's orientation and function. Hence, the notion of *parergon* is employed by Kant to speak of aesthetics and also of intelligence, in particular, the ability to organize thought ('to reason').

In *The Truth in Painting*, Derrida engages with Kant's notion of the *parergon* from a discursive position. For Derrida, Kant is the supreme figure of modernity, and Derrida's critique of Kant is thus a critique of modernity per se, in particular, of modernist notions of centrality, hierarchy, and agency. Derrida reintroduces the idea of *parergon* into contemporary critical theory, where it is then used to signify a threshold or boundary, and, in particular, that of the border of the artwork. However, for Derrida, *parergon* is more than a synonym for a frame. Rather, the *parergon* defines the process of expanding the field of vision—and the mode of thinking—to include matters that appear to be secondary or unimportant, such as ornaments and embellishments. Derrida's expansion of the concept provides a critical rethinking of essential(ist) philosophical, aesthetic, and conceptual terms such as canon, genre, composition, and, of course, meaning. In this regard, which transformations in institutional practice can we anticipate? How do access and inclusion work from multiple perspectives? And how can we think critically about access and inclusion as evolving concepts?

For Derrida, the *parergon* is another tool—alongside his notions of the gap, marginality, and a non-binary system of the sign—for identifying and working with structuralism and modernity with the purpose of de-constructing, de-centring, and de-stabilizing them. Indeed, in art history and cultural studies, *parergon* has been picked up both to critique notions of boundaries, borders, and frames in the constitution of the artwork, and to think about art and art practices from the perspective of boundaries, borders, and frames. The *parergon* allows us to see the value of that 'which is beyond,' or past, its relation to the frame or border. Ultimately, Derrida opposes the very notion of the frame, which, for him, equals singularity and thus attests to the violence of modernity. Instead, Derrida (1979) insists on multiplicity, or *parerga*:

'The violence of framing proliferates. It confines the theory of aesthetics within a theory of the beautiful, the theory of the beautiful within a theory of taste, and the theory of taste within a theory of judgment. These decisions might be called external: the delimitation has far-reaching consequences, but even at this cost a certain internal coherence may be retained. Another act of framing which, by the introduction of the border, violated the interior of the system and distorted its proper articulations, would not have the same effect. In looking for a rigorously effective grip, we must therefore first concern ourselves with this frame' (p. 29).

Derrida is interested in Kant's concept of the *parergon* insofar as he sees in it an entropic void, or a glitch in the enigma of aesthetic judgment.

Ultimately, Derrida speaks of kenosis, not of fulfilment or predestination. Hence, the *parergon* is a specific example—and one that is particular to art history and theory—of Derrida's central concept of 'différance' [emphasis mine], which takes up structuralist notions of the sign, in light of Saussurean theories of meaning, not to oppose, but to challenge notions of the whole and the part, interiority and exteriority, center and periphery, in order to propose that meaning is always in relation to a body of knowledge (discourse), whether this is overtly acknowledged by the writer or not.<sup>2</sup> So, how can we benefit from Derrida's philosophizing about meaning? How can we turn Derrida's analytical concepts into practical tools and methods for research?

## 2. Terms in Transit: Revisiting Access and Inclusivity for the 21st Century

Two concepts, access and inclusion, are central to the first issue of *The Garage Journal*. Both gained prominence in the 1980s as part of the poststructuralist turn and the engagement with Derrida's ideas in the arts and humanities. Indeed, neither term forms a relationship akin to *ergon* or *parergon*, nor, certainly, a Saussurean dichotomy. Rather, conceived in the plural, as *parerga*, the terms reveal Derrida's *différance* and employ it as a discursive orientation. For example, it was in the 1980s that the social model of disability emerged. It looked at the ways in which different social agents, including museums and art institutions, construct situations of disability, exclusion, and inequality in disabled people's everyday lives. Derrida's reading of *ergon* and *parerga* implies that we should adopt an optic of multiplicity that can account for many processes, including the post-WWII attempt to make human rights a universal objective. The social model, then, viewed the issue of disability as more of a human rights concern. Whilst poststructuralists debated non-hierarchical, non-linear structures of knowledge, there was a discussion in museums about social inclusion and the possibilities of building a society without barriers. At the same time, the question of public spaces and access was at the center of the political and social changes of the time. What is more, it was possible to speak of public accesses—different modes of enabling the participation of different publics—just as it was possible for Derrida to speak of different knowledges.

These debates, originating in the 1980s, have produced a large body of research and facilitated changes in museum practices across different contexts. However, it would be wrong to assume that these debates are 'over' by now. On the contrary, in recent years, due to the rise of digital technologies and the ever greater mobility of people—before the Covid-19 pandemic, of course—the question of access and inclusivity has gained a new momentum. For example, Patricia Martins (2019) writes about the problems around including people 'with intellectual and visual disabilities, and the Deaf community' in Portuguese museums, such as the Centro de Arte Moderna (CAMJAP) and Gulbenkian Museum. Jessica Rocha (2000) argues that there remains 'an absence of institutional practices that might underpin any endeavor to take into consideration the inclusion of people with disabilities' in Latin American art

institutions and museums (p. 1). Her data, collected from over 109 institutions in 12 countries, shows that, whilst institutions offer some physical accessibility resources, they do not offer much in terms of communicational and attitudinal accessibility resources. And, in the Australian context, the question of access and inclusion has been taken up as a way of reimagining Australia as a nation: in this regard, the issue is not just with inaccessible environments and negative attitudes, but with people's self-identification with disability, as a marginalized group with a common history and culture (Ellis et al. 2018: 2).

There has been more emphasis placed upon considering access as a form of 'cultural inclusion' (Santagati 2019) and 'cultural competence' (Schuch 2020), which is measured through relevant gains in knowledge, acceptance, appreciation, and skills. In the U.S. context, there is an understanding that there is a need for museums and other cultural institutions 'to offer carefully constructed programming that pairs exhibits and community dialogue as a tool to build a foundation upon which deeper cultural awareness and competency can grow' (Schuch 2020: 1). Other research has shown that in the U.S., 'black and brown visitors experience a sense of alienation when visiting museums' (Kifle 2020: 13). Kifle and others have proven that this sense of alienation disappears when visitors feel that the museum is a self-reflective space. Combined with cultural competence, emotions are factors that are as important as physical accessibility resources. Recently, the affective aspect of access and inclusion has been studied in relation to discourses about illness, disability, death, and overall health (Diaz 2020). It is believed that these universal topics offer opportunities for real dialogue and can advance equity and inclusion; that museums can build emotional connections among visitors and between museums and visitors, spurring action for social justice.

This issue of *The Garage Journal* contributes to current debates about access and inclusivity in the following ways. First, it places a lot of emphasis on collaboration: between institutions and publics, between different publics, and between particular communities, in both national and international settings. The contributors believe that access and inclusion are achieved as a result of collaborative action, not as a top-down execution of policies. Collaborations lead to a creation of a new, inclusive museum, which is simultaneously shaped by space, physical access, and access to knowledge, understood as a multi-directional process that includes both knowledge production and consumption. Collaborations also help chart new trajectories for the development of an inclusive museum, not always immediately apparent to artists and curators. This approach resonates with Derrida's understanding of *par-erga*, which is about meaning emerging in-between, in gaps in discourse and through mobile networks.

Second, contributors to the issue consider the question of access and inclusivity through the lens of intersectionality, which, of course, is an established approach. Yet they extend intersectionality to also implicate interdisciplinarity. They advance a flexible, interdisciplinary intellectual paradigm that continuously re-conceptualizes access and inclusivity—as terms and practices in transition—with the belief that it is possible to erase, relocate, and deactivate

boundaries within and around the museum. Rather than over-focusing on categorizations (*ergon*), the contributors advocate the integration of multiplicities (*parerga*). Thus, consistency is to be found not in a catalogue of identities and similar categorizations, but in the diversity and intensity of connections among different subjects. The ultimate value is, then, the intellectual agility and the emergence of inclusive sites of knowledge production. In this system, the museum is a site that provides opportunities for venturing into other spaces, experiences, and disciplinary traditions. Instead of being a utilitarian and instrumental assignment, access and inclusivity emerge as collaboratively produced bodies of knowledge.

Third, the discussion around access and inclusivity is based on practical knowledge. I do not mean to suggest that the discussion is informed by research looking at specific cases. It is more than that. The discussion is informed by the experience of those involved in the realization of access and inclusivity as their collaborative practice. Of great interest is a cluster of submissions looking at the case of Russian institutions: Garage Museum of Contemporary Art and The Pushkin State Museum of Fine Arts. The former is a privately-funded public institution, and the latter is a state-funded institution. Garage pioneered the practice of access and inclusion in museums in the Russian context, which disproves claims that in the Russian Federation it is only state-sponsored, government-funded initiatives that can work. Moreover, contributors in this cluster are practitioners based in these institutions, meaning that their research is self-reflexive. In the manner of Derrida's *différance*, they offer a critique that is pointed both toward their own institutions and the Russian context in general, and toward their own subjectivities, thus fostering a collaborative, polycentric approach to thinking about access and inclusivity.

### **3. Transitory and Polycentric: Thinking about Access and Inclusivity from the Global Perspective**

This issue provides a response to global challenges that include the ongoing emancipatory movements galvanized around issues of disability, race, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality (the 'Black Lives Matter' movement, the '#metoo' campaign, and others). The contributors consider these issues in a constructivist vein, aiming to understand the historical, political, social, and cultural agendas that underpin these constructions. Altogether, the contributors take an intersectional approach to access and inclusivity considered from a multidisciplinary perspective, encompassing aesthetics, art history, cultural studies, disability studies, film theory, philosophy, and other disciplines. The contributions vary in method, too, drawing upon textual and contextual analyses, self-reflexive considerations, archival work, historical excavations, artistic interventions, and practice-based research, placing this issue of *The Garage Journal* firmly within the arts and humanities. The contributions showcase different formats and forms of presentation for their research findings; among them, we include a research article, a self-reflexive, practice-based essay,

a visual essay, an interview, a roundtable, archival materials, and an artwork. The contributions focus on a number of contexts, such as Ghana, France, the Russian Federation, South Africa, the U.K., and the U.S., and these discussions are made possible thanks to contributors from 15 different countries. Their collective effort provides a panorama of approaches to access and inclusion in different settings, putting forward a polycentric, transitory framework for thinking about equality and diversity.

Contemporary art is often characterized by a lack of uniformity, an eclecticism that is reflective and responsive to changing ideologies, cultural diversity, and technological advancement. There is, of course, some value to the identification of variables that might alienate or welcome various individuals or communities. Some of the most frequently cited issues are often lumped under an assertion of existing cultural, economic, intellectual and/or physical barriers, perceived or actual. Unless this exercise is used to remove obstacles to engagement and participation, it can quickly become a mere snapshot of a time and place in the history of art. More conducive to an analysis of access and inclusion, one that would not be limited in time and reach, is a conception of the art world as a mobile, permeable locus of attention and production, the center of which moves with external and internal factors that give shape to its periphery. Yet in this issue we do not propose to think from, about, and through the margins; instead, we propose to stage cross-border, cross-media, and cross-disciplinary transgressions for the purpose of inclusion. We ultimately wish to learn to appreciate instabilities, permeances, and transitions, knowing that the only stable thing is change. The concept of transitory *parerga* allows us to see contemporary art and its institutions from an inclusive and mobile perspective.

The issue opens with a section that includes an introductory note from the director of Garage, Anton Belov, ruminations by members of the journal's advisory board, and an intervention by Meriç Algün, a Stockholm-based Turkish artist who was specially commissioned to produce a research-based artwork for the issue. All three contributions reflect on issues of access and inclusivity from the perspective of their discipline: art management, art research, and art practice, respectively. Belov highlights Garage's leadership in terms of advancing access and inclusivity as an institutional practice. The members of the editorial board speak about the issue from the perspective of the contexts in which they work, namely, Australasia, Eurasia-Europe, the Middle East, South and North Americas, and Southeast Asia. Algün critiques notions of access and inclusivity through a performative and interactive artwork, which documents her experience as an artist vis-à-vis the structures of international contemporary art markets. It is in this section, too, that the contributors reflect on the opportunities that arise from research in the art institution. They believe that initiatives like *The Garage Journal* should maintain a focus on experimentation and innovation in terms of research and collaborative practice, something that is less available to traditional institutions, such as universities.

The subsequent section offers a reflection on what we understand to be an institution of contemporary art. The section includes three items:



a specially-commissioned translation into Russian of an original research article by Charles Garoian (Penn State University), first published in 2001; a curatorial essay by Ekaterina Andreeva, a curator and scholar from The State Russian Museum (St. Petersburg), and a visual essay by Katerina Suverina, an editor of *The Garage Journal*, who is also in charge of Garage's book publishing program. These three items—although they use different methodologies and are presented in different formats—reflect on the very notion of the museum and the art institution. Taking the standpoint of a researcher, curator, and a visitor to an art gallery, respectively, they interrogate the changing values of art institutions. Cumulatively, these three items comment on the evolution of museology over the past four decades, thus revealing major transformations in the field and in the related discipline of museum studies. Like Algün's artwork, Suverina's visual essay challenges common assumptions about museums and their role in society. Both contributions adopt an ironic stance toward the discourse around access and inclusivity by engaging with concrete experiences.

These two introductory sections are followed by three others that approach issues of access and inclusivity from the perspective of disability, race, and sexuality, respectively. These items constitute the core of the issue, inviting a multi-disciplinary, cross-sectoral, and polycentric investigation of access and inclusivity.

The section on disability focuses on the Russian context, looking at the discourse that surrounds disability (Maria Shchekochikhina), approaches to framing disability theoretically in Russia (Evgeniya Kiseleva), and the ways in which practices of the inclusion of disabled communities have been implemented in Russian art institutions (Lyudmila Luchkova). The Russian case is preempted by a round table discussion on disability art, chaired by Aleksandra Philippovskaya, head of the inclusion department at Garage Museum of Contemporary Art, with contributions from researchers and practitioners of disability art. The discussion helps to better understand the challenges of working with disability in a post-communist state, and the global relevance of disability discourse in art institutions.

The section on race encompasses contributions that question Eurocentric assumptions about race and ethnicity. Sela Kodjo Adjei addresses the issue of race by interrogating Western modernist notions of aesthetics and beauty. He points out the ways in which African art has been excluded from the Western art canon and puts forward a proposal for African art by engaging an alternative aesthetic system. His article is both theoretical and practice-based, insofar as Adjei reflects upon his own artistic and curatorial practice. Ashraf Jamal radically reconsiders the notion of race: the essay examines the role of whiteness—as an idea, rather than as a racial category—in sustaining existing systems of power. The essay makes reference to global anti-racism movements, but its main point is to draw our attention to the fact that whiteness is an ideological project that relies upon exclusionary and controlling forces. Sven Christian discusses practices of access and inclusion at the level of the representation of artists in and by art institutions. Taking

a scroll created by the artist Dumile Feni as his case study, Christian looks at the technological, contextual, and curatorial aspects of inclusion. The final item in this section is an interview with the artist Renzo Martens, conducted by Sasha Pevak. The interview offers a reflection on the international economy of value and resource extraction: the Institute for Human Activities, founded by Martens, has developed a collaboration with the cooperative *Cercle d'Art des Travailleurs de Plantation Congolaise* on a former palm oil plantation in the Democratic Republic of Congo. The discussion focuses on the conditions of (post-)colonialism and value production and extraction in the art world and symbolic economics.

The section on sexuality consists of three contributions. These items offer a queer perspective on sexuality, meaning that they explore art and sexual practices aimed at challenging heteronormativity in a variety of contexts. Building on the notion of *ergon* and *parerga* as a relationship between normative and other discourses, the contributions examine different cultural contexts in their transitory, polycentric dimensions. Cüneyt Çakırlar analyzes representations of the queer, migrant subject in two documentaries. He reveals how two particular films construct a drama of conflicting intersections between religion, national belonging, and sexual identity. He also argues that these documentaries' (re)domestication of the queer subject promotes a neoliberal identity politics of sexual humanitarianism. His article is followed by a curatorial essay authored by Clare Barlow, a U.K.-based curator responsible for the major exhibition *Queer British Art, 1861-1967* at Tate Britain and the new, permanent exhibition *Being Human* at Wellcome Collection, London. Specially commissioned by *The Garage Journal*, the essay explores the challenges of the museological landscape and the transformative potential of queer curating through Barlow's projects. The essay offers an honest reflection on Barlow's own curatorial practice, evaluating the successes and limitations of the two exhibitions, and the different ways in which queerness shaped their conceptual frameworks. The relationship between heritage, museums, and archives, and queer sexuality that Barlow explores in her essay is also addressed in the final item in this section: a selection of archival materials collected and edited by Valerii Ledenev, in collaboration with the archive department at Garage Museum of Contemporary Art. These materials offer a queer reading of the collections that are in Garage's possession. It is, in fact, the first attempt in scholarship on Russian art and visual culture to consider archival materials on contemporary art through a queer lens. The materials include a conceptual introduction, which accounts for the uses and misuses of queer theory in the Russian context, as well as visual documentation of queer artefacts and critical commentary on them. The last contribution is authored by the staff at the Garage Archive, which is a brilliant example of how Garage supports research collaborations that are producing an entirely new paradigm of knowledge.

The final section includes reviews of recent, relevant book-length publications. Elena Iarskaia-Smirnova and Nikita Bolshakov critically survey Russian-language scholarly publications and guides that have appeared

in the past decade. On one level, this item is a review of available publications dealing with the issues of access and inclusion. On another, it works as a history of access and inclusion in Russian museums. In fact, the item supplies an original conceptualization of institutional developments in Russia during the 2010s. The last two items are reviews of two English-language books on inclusion and diversity in the art sector, released by two leading British publishers, Leeds Arc Humanities Press and Bloomsbury. What makes these reviews extremely valuable is that they were written by art curators, Ekaterina Inozemtseva and Ilmira Bolotian, both representing Garage Museum of Contemporary Art. Indeed, both of the reviewers hold doctoral degrees, but it is their curatorial experience that informs their particular reading of the books. Rather than providing an assessment—something that a lot of academic reviews do—they engage in a critical dialogue with the books' authors, thus advancing horizontal, peer-to-peer, intellectual engagement, and proposing new arenas for polycentric, multi-disciplinary collaborations to advance access and inclusion.

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1. On historical uses of the term, see Duro (2019).
2. Derrida is famous for privileging writing: see his *Of Grammatology* (1997/1967).

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