

The Backed and the Void: A Study on the Institutional Genesis of the Self-Endorsement Mechanism

By Loy Luo, 2025

Abstract

This paper, continuing the structural analysis of the crisis of legitimacy from the previous article, takes the exhibition *The Backed and the Void* as a case study to argue for the possibility of **Self-Endorsement** as a mechanism for institutional renewal. The research points out that institutional power is derived from the regulation of viewing methods, the production of meaning structures, and the setting of subject positions. The artist, through the **visualization of the thought system**, the **generation of scopic regimes**, and the **occupation of political futurity**, forms a verifiable, experiential institutional alternative structure. This paper demonstrates that **Self-Endorsement** is not an individualistic self-proclamation, but a **reverse genesis** internal to the institutional structure, articulating art as a **structural condition of thought**.

Keywords: Self-Endorsement; Institutional Critique; Scopic Regime; Politics of Visibility; Cross-Cultural Subjectivity; Contemporary Art

Chapter I: Introduction: Self-Endorsement as a Symptom of Institutional Change in Contemporary Art

The institutional structure of contemporary art has undergone profound changes over the past decades. With the complexification of art globalization, decentralized cultural ecology, accelerated capital integration, and algorithm-driven visibility systems, art's **legitimacy** is no longer solely determined by a single authority. However, while the institutional framework is fragmented, its core control over the production of artistic value has not diminished. To secure sustainable space and theoretical positioning, the artist must still navigate complex visibility, media, market, and curatorial systems. This revives a long-suppressed question: **Is it possible for the artist to transition from an institutional waiter to an institutional generator?**

Traditionally, "endorsement" originates from external power: museums, galleries, critics, and collection systems. But in the transitional period, where old structures are rapidly aging and new ones are not yet consolidated, a fissure appears: can the artist, through the creation of a thought system, spatial action, and viewing mechanisms, form an experiential **Self-Endorsement**? *The Backed and the Void* is a complex experiment addressing this very question.

1.1 Continuing the Theoretical Framework: From Structural Call to Practical Genesis

The previous paper, *The Backed and the Void: A Structural Call for Legitimacy in Contemporary Art*, established the **theoretical necessity** and **Actionism** methodological basis for Self-Endorsement.

This paper shifts focus to the **structural verification in the practical field**. Through an in-depth analysis of *The Backed and the Void* exhibition, the research aims to answer the question: “**How is the Structural Genesis of Self-Endorsement achieved?**” We treat the exhibition as an **Institutional Simulation Device**, specifically demonstrating how the artist constructs an alternative structure capable of legitimacy functions through the **visualization of the thought system**, the **generation of scopic regimes**, and the **occupation of political futurity**.

1.2 Definitions of Institution and Self-Endorsement

Institution (Institutional Regime/Logic): In this paper, "institution" refers not only to physical entities but also to the **power structures and symbolic systems** that constitute artistic legitimacy, value, and modes of viewing.

Self-Endorsement: A **structural genesis process** where the artist creates a **Para-institution** that possesses the core functions typically held by institutions (such as prescribing viewing, producing meaning, and delaying judgment), thereby realizing intrinsic legitimacy.

Chapter II: Language as the Pressure Mechanism and Manifestation of the Institution

The dense Chinese handwritten text wall at the exhibition entrance, whose content is derived from systematic knowledge structures, is disassembled, enlarged, and transformed into visual materiality. This act compels the institutional logic to **manifest** with unprecedented density.

2.1 Transforming Institutional Discourse from “Transparent” to “Visible”

Philosophical texts, as institutional language, operate **transparently** in the field. In the exhibition, these hidden frameworks are **forced to be visible and materialized**. The handwritten method forces institutional language to **fall back to the friction of the hand**, revealing institutional power as a **tangible, oppressive** political act.

2.2 Text is Not Meant to be Read, but to be “Viewed”

The text becomes a “**visual resistance**”. It refuses to be easily penetrated, forcing the audience to experience the **structural suppression** of institutional discourse. This materialization of language, in a phenomenological sense, makes the institution itself—which carries meaning—into an **object of observation**, thereby temporarily **suspending its original function**. The text wall functions as an **Institutional Simulation Device** for pressure.

Chapter III: The Ladder: A Generative Model of the Cross-Cultural Subject

The ladder is the most sensitive structure, symbolizing the path of upward seeking. Covered by a mixed language structure, it transforms into a **subject structure**.

3.1 The Language Structure on the Ladder: Not Hybridity, but Cultural Cleavage

The texts on the ladder constitute a “**linguistic heterotopia**”. The artist writes non-Chinese texts in Chinese, revealing that the cross-cultural subject’s languages **derail, cleave, and cannibalize each other**. This is not simple cultural mixing, but **structural deformation**. The subject is not a container of culture, but the **cultural translation process itself**.

3.2 The Ladder: Subject Structure and the Fracture Point of Viewing

The ladder as an installation **interrupts viewing**: it compels the viewer to detour, obstructs direct sight, creates bodily imbalance, and pulls the line of sight from horizontal to vertical, creating **visual fissures**. It becomes the **vertical organ of language, the fissure of the subject, and the fracture point of viewing**.



Installation view, The Backed and the Void, Loy Lu Space, New York, 2025.

Chapter IV: The Partial Manifestation of the Image and the Structure of *Différance* in Viewing

The images in the exhibition are the “**ineffective center**”. They are obscured, intervened upon by text, and suspended in an incomplete state.

4.1 Partial Manifestation Transforms the Image into a “Meaning Fault Line”

The image is deprived of its ability to provide immediate, complete information, becoming a **Meaning Blockage Point**, a laboratory for the invisible. This strategy denies the image the role of **meaning source**, making it the **meaning fault line**.

4.2 The *Différance* Structure of Viewing: The Mechanism of Meaning Delay

The obscuring of the image is the **visual structure of *Différance*** (Derrida): the viewer's desire is mobilized, but completeness is refused, and meaning is suspended. This **non-normative viewing** forces the audience to realize that **viewing itself is prescribed by structure, not freely chosen**. This delay mechanism prevents the artwork from being quickly archived and co-opted by the institution.



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Chapter V: Anti-Zen and Anti-Pop: Appropriation as a Two-Way Critical Art Method

The bracelets placed casually on the calligraphy form the exhibition's most complex semiotic structure. Appropriation here is the stripping and reconstruction of the meaning system—a **reverse occupation of symbolic power**.

5.1 Replacing the Zen Circle with Bracelets: The Zen of Anti-Zen

The materiality and desirability of the bracelets contrast sharply with the emptiness and asceticism of the Zen circle. This is a profound **anti-Zen act**: using “**commodities**” to replace “**emptiness**”. The artist forces “**form**” back into the material world, colliding abstract Zen with the reality of the desire structure, revealing the cultural reality of “**Zen's secularization**”.

5.2 Replacing Pop Images with Real Objects: The Pop of Anti-Pop

While Pop Art uses commodity “**images**” (like Warhol's soup cans), Loy Luo uses the **commodity itself**, non-aestheticizing it within a **spiritual context**. This is a **cross-cultural semiotic battle** that transcends the Pop method.

5.3 Appropriation is the Redistribution of Symbolic Power

The work's **Two-way Appropriation** produces a rare theoretical result: the commodity disrupts the spiritual, and the spiritual rewrites the commodity. Zen is no longer sacred, and the commodity is no longer secular; they form a **mutual genesis structure**.



Installation view, *The Backed and the Void*, Loy Luo Space, New York, 2025.

Chapter VI: The Exhibition as an Institutional Simulation Device

The Backed and the Void is a structural viewing mechanism that transforms viewing from a naturalized experience into an **institutionalized experience**.

6.1 Viewing is an Institutional Product: Corroboration by Foucault and Rancière

Institutional power lies in prescribing “**how to view**” and “**what is worth viewing**”. Foucault noted that **visibility itself is a form of power**, while Rancière stated that politics is first a “**distribution of the sensible**”. The exhibition's mechanisms reorganize power:

- **Language Wall:** Creates illegibility and captures viewing through language.
- **Ladder:** Creates bodily imbalance, severing direct sight.
- **White Cloth:** Obscures the space above the center, symbolizing the “**future void**”—a domain not yet named by the institution.



Installation view, *The Backed and the Void*, Loy Luo Space, New York, 2025.

6.2 The Exhibition as an Institutional Simulation Device

The exhibition structure collectively generates a **non-institutional institutional structure**. The artist does not wait for the institution; instead, she creates the institution's **precursor structure**.

Chapter VII: The Three Theoretical Pillars of Self-Endorsement: Visibility, System Genesis, and Future Occupation

Self-Endorsement is difficult to conceive because traditional legitimacy is built upon the logic of "attribution by the Other." However, *The Backed and the Void* transforms endorsement into a **verifiable, experiential process of structural genesis**.

7.1 Condition I: The Self-Sustained Nature and Forced Visualization of the Thought System

Self-Endorsement is the **result of the thought system's capacity for institutionalization**.

- (A) **Intrinsic Coherence (Coherence)**: The thought forms a deep, self-supporting philosophical system, independent of external logic.
- (B) **Thought Visualization (Visibility)**: The artist adopts a structural reversal: **thought is translated into the space itself. Visible content enters the institutional exchange circuit, while the invisible remains absent from the discourse distribution.** Thought's visualization is a prerequisite for its inclusion into the power structure.
- (C) **Thought Must Become a Scopic Regime**: When thought transforms from "content" into a "viewing system," and **determines how viewing occurs**, it acquires **institutional function**.

7.2 Condition II: The Genesis of the Para-institution

The artist constructs a **Para-institution** that possesses all essential institutional elements: a thought structure, viewing rules, a mechanism for meaning delay, a position for subject genesis, and the occupation of a future point.

- **Text Wall**: Prescribes viewing rhythm (language replaces institutional discourse).
- **Ladder**: Prescribes subject position (cultural rift becomes the subject structure).
- **Partial Manifestation**: Prescribes meaning delay, making meaning uncooptable and unarchivable.
- **White Cloth**: Prescribes the presence of the future void (the institution cannot presuppose the future).

7.3 Condition III: Pre-institutional Occupation of the Future Point (Politics of Futurity)

This is the **core theory of Self-Endorsement**.

- (A) **The Institution is Always a Lagging Indicator:** The institution only certifies history that has already occurred; it is always lagging behind the artist.
- (B) **If the Artist Preemptively Occupies the Future Space, the Institution Will Be Forced to Acknowledge Her:** The artist anticipates and preemptively occupies the future point where institutional migration may occur.
- (C) **Spatial Occupation = Temporal Occupation = Institutional Future Occupation:** The artist establishes the structure before the institution arrives, achieving a **reverse endorsement**.
- (D) **The Institution Cannot Refuse the Future:** Self-Endorsement is a **Politics of Futurity**.



Installation view, *The Backed and the Void*, Loy Lu Space, New York, 2025.

Chapter VIII: Conclusion: Self-Endorsement as the Starting Point for Institutional Renewal

The Backed and the Void suggests that the artist can make the institution their own **delayed product** through the genesis of thought, viewing, and space.

8.1 Self-Endorsement is the Reverse Genesis of the Institutional Structure

When the artist independently generates the viewing mechanism and occupies the future space, the institution's power is rewritten: the institution becomes the artist's **delayed attendee**. The artist becomes the **precursor to institutional genesis**.

8.2 The Ultimate Proposition: Self-Endorsement is a Structural Fact

The subject's legitimacy is derived from **structure**, not discourse. The artist gains legitimacy by: letting thought become space, space become the viewing mechanism, the viewing mechanism become the institutional structure, and the institutional structure become the inevitable future. **Self-Endorsement is a structural fact**.

The Ultimate Proposition: When the institution cannot lead to its own ungenerated future, and the artist is able to initiate the experiential structure of that future, **the artist becomes the precursor to the institution**. In this sense, Self-Endorsement is the manner in which: the institution is **reborn**; art is **transformed back into thought**; and the subject **regains the structural power over the world**.

Author Biography (Biographical Note)

Loy Luo (罗一) is a theorist-artist based in New York. Her practice encompasses painting, installation, exhibition-making, critical writing, and the operation of artist-run spaces. Her work focuses on the theory and practice of abstraction, as well as the structural conditions of contemporary art, politics of visibility, and cross-cultural subjectivity.

In recent years, she has articulated the concept of **Unpremeditated Actionism**, an immersive and non-prescriptive approach to artistic action that emphasizes process, temporal accumulation, and structural coherence rather than predefined concepts or outcomes. Her research and practice explore how thought can operate directly through spatial, perceptual, and institutional configurations.

Luo's projects and writings examine how artistic practice can generate its own conditions of legitimacy both within and alongside existing institutional frameworks. She has exhibited internationally and runs **Loy Luo Space**, an artist-run platform in New York dedicated to experimental exhibition formats and critical inquiry.

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Artist: Loy Luo's Portrait