

The Backed and the Void: A Structural Call for Legitimacy in Contemporary Art

By Loy Luo

Abstract

This paper aims to analyze the **structural predicament** of the mechanism of **Legitimacy** in contemporary art under accelerated globalization and technological hegemony, and to seek a **structural way out** for artists that transcends traditional rebellion and external authorization. The article first argues that the **reasonable core** inherent in traditional institutions (such as art history, critical systems) has disintegrated into a **power shell** amidst capital acceleration and field alienation. It then analyzes how the **Politics of Visibility** constituted by algorithms and media forms a new disciplinary mechanism. Given that the artist simultaneously faces the failure of old institutions and the discipline of new ones, this paper proposes that "**Self-Endorsement**" is not an individualistic self-authorization or **absolute rejection** of external resources, but a **structural genesis** based on **Unpremeditated Actionism** as its methodological cornerstone. Finally, the paper predicts that Self-Endorsement will emerge as a new constituent of the institution, dynamically synthesizing with the function of institutional endorsement to form a new **dynamic structure of the art field**.

[Keywords] Self-Endorsement; Actionism; Crisis of Legitimacy; Structural Alienation; Politics of Visibility; Dynamic Synthesis

Chapter I: Introduction: The Structural Call for the Crisis of Legitimacy

1.1 The Structural Predicament of Contemporary Art and the Loosening of "Endorsement"

In the system of contemporary art, "endorsement" is an implicit institutional logic. It not only constructs the order of the art world but also determines the distribution of artistic legitimacy and value. Traditional "field endorsement" relies on external authority—institutional certification, curatorial discourse, and market price. However, with the complexification of art globalization, the accelerated intervention of capital, and the algorithm-driven visibility system, art's legitimacy faces a dual squeeze: **old institutions are failing, and new disciplines are taking shape**. This brings to the surface a long-suppressed question: **Is it possible, or even necessary, for the artist to transition from an institutional waiter to an institutional generator?**

1.2 The Core Question: Why Are Both Rebellion and Waiting Now Ineffective?

Artists in a predicament often adopt two traditional stances: **waiting** for external authority, or **rebell**ing against the existing system. However, history has proven the **structural failure** of both: reliance on the alienated institution leads to the loss of potential for **deep certification**, while rebellion based on content will ultimately be **co-opted** by the institution's powerful capacity for absorption. The search for a way out must move beyond content or posture and turn toward **structural** genesis.

1.3 The Core Concept: Self-Endorsement—A Structural Response of Actionism

This paper proposes the concept of "**Self-Endorsement**," a **structural genesis process** aimed at building an intrinsic legitimacy system that is both experiential and verifiable for the artist.

- **Actionism:** Self-Endorsement is not a **carefully predetermined plan**, but the artist's **holistic reactive response** to their environment and state of identity. This principle of **unpremeditated, immersive actionism** (the artist's self-created theory and methodology) is the first guarantee of its legitimacy, emphasizing the theoretical growth, honesty, and empathy of the work.
 - **Distinction:** Self-Endorsement is not an individualistic **self-authorization**. Self-authorization merely reuses the logic of **extrinsic legitimacy**, while the core of Self-Endorsement lies in **deep certification** and **intrinsic structural construction**.
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Chapter II: The Disintegration of Old Institutions: Structural Alienation of the Reasonable Core

Traditional art institutions are not **inherently flawed**. Their legitimacy once contained a positive **reasonable core** that safeguarded artistic value (e.g., the condensation of symbolic capital, the mediation of meaning structure). However, under the impact of external forces, this **reasonable core** underwent **structural alienation**, causing it to lose the capacity for **genuine endorsement**.

2.1 The Reasonable Core of Traditional Institutions: Value Stability and Meaning Mediation

The positive role of the institution is to act as a "**value stabilizer**," translating the artist's intellectual depth into **symbolic capital** to resist the immediacy of the market. Concurrently, the institution translates the complex language of art through criticism and curation to counter art's "**illegibility**" and "**nihilism**," safeguarding the autonomy of the field.

2.2 The Alienation Mechanism: When the Power Shell Consumes the Reasonable Core

The **reasonable core** that once guaranteed the autonomy of the field has undergone structural alienation due to capital acceleration and globalization:

- **Capital Acceleration and the Depreciation of Symbolic Capital:** The institution begins to **self-enclose**, serving the demand for "**capital circulation**," with its endorsement function regressing to **high-price certification**.
- **Self-Enclosure and the Residue of the "Power Shell":** The institution loses the ability to name the future but retains the **authoritative posture**, being mistakenly interpreted as **an external force displayed outward**.
- **Context Distortion and Cultural Hegemony:** Institutional certification often entails **context distortion**, simplifying non-Western art into **consumable "cultural symbols."**

2.3 Historical Limitations: Co-optation of Rebellion and the Failure of "Self-Authorization"

- **Co-optation of Rebellion and the Lesson of Duchamp:** Content-based rebellion will eventually be absorbed by the institution's immense elasticity. Furthermore, the historical misinterpretation and misuse of **Duchamp's "Ready-made"** strategy have contributed to art's surrender to capital and posture. This **"opportunism"** causes artists to abandon the pursuit of **intrinsic depth** and **Self-Endorsement**.
- **Failure of "Self-Authorization":** Phenomena like "Internet celebrity trends" use new media tools for the **externalized contest for resources**. They still pursue **external visibility** and **immediate consumption**, which is essentially a **continuation of alienated institutional logic**, not a reconstruction of core value.

Chapter III: The Phantom of New Institutions: Discipline of the Politics of Visibility and Strategic Coexistence

Concurrently with the disintegration of old institutions, a new power structure is forming—the **Politics of Visibility**—which constitutes the second structural predicament for artists seeking Self-Endorsement.

3.1 The Politics of Visibility: Discipline Replaces Prohibition

The new form of power lies in the "**distribution of the sensible.**" Algorithms, media, and decentralized curatorial systems constitute a new "**Calculated Visibility Regime.**" The essence of this discipline is the **flattening of symbols**, forcing art to transform into "**visibility metrics**" (e.g., traffic, clicks). It demands that art be rapid, clear, and quantifiable, contradicting art's depth and complexity.

3.2 Self-Endorsement: Strategic Coexistence and Transformative Occupation

The complete rejection of external resources and visibility is **overly idealistic** and impractical. The theory of Self-Endorsement must be **realistic and strategic**.

- **Strategic Coexistence:** The artist must acknowledge that technology, money, and geographical location are **structural conditions** that constitute the contemporary

field. The true challenge is not to **evade** these external resources, but how to **transform them into elements for intrinsic structural genesis**.

- **Transformative Occupation:** The task of Self-Endorsement is to transform institutionally distributed external resources into **internal strength**: utilizing technology is not to compete for traffic, but to **generate new scopic regimes**; choosing emerging areas is a **pre-judgment and preemptive intervention** on the **future direction of institutional migration**, achieving **occupation in the politics of time**.

This transformative occupation is the **structural risk** that the artist, appearing as a **challenger**, must assume, but it is also the only path to breaking the discipline of visibility.

Chapter IV: Conclusion: The Structural Way Out of Self-Endorsement and Future Synthesis

4.1 Summary of the Structural Predicament and the Necessity of Self-Endorsement

The artist is simultaneously abandoned by the **alienation** of old institutions and disciplined by the **visibility** of new ones. **Self-Endorsement** is the only **structural way out**, demanding that the artist no longer waits for external naming but generates their own **legitimacy** through a specific structure.

4.2 The Ethical Responsibility of Self-Endorsement: Unpremeditated Structural Growth

The legitimate core of **Self-Endorsement** stems from its **actionist principle**:

- **Unpremeditated Honesty:** Both theory and practice must **organically grow** as an **empathetic response** from the artist's **holistic action**.
- **Ethical Responsibility:** The mission of Self-Endorsement is to construct a **new structural foothold for subsequent, marginalized, and unnamed subjects**. This is the necessary **ethical responsibility** for art to regain **intellectual power** amidst field alienation.

4.3 The Ultimate Prediction: Dynamic Synthesis of Institutional Endorsement and Self-Endorsement

Self-Endorsement is the **logical inevitability of institutional renewal and reform**. The future art field structure will no longer be a **static structure** where the artist waits for institutional endorsement, but a **dynamic synthesis** of their functional reconstruction:

1. **Functional Reshaping:** Self-Endorsement will assume the function of "**mechanism genesis**" and "**deep certification**"; while institutional endorsement will return to its **reasonable core**, assuming the function of "**historical archiving**" and "**public meaning-making**."

2. **Dynamic Equilibrium: Self-Endorsement is the new constituent of the institution**, serving as the **supply side** for institutional renewal. The artist first generates a new, effective legitimacy structure, and the institution will be **forced to absorb** this structure.
 3. **A New Landscape: Self-Endorsement is the new constituent of the institution**, and a new field structure is born from it.
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Author Biography (Biographical Note)

Loy Luo (罗一) is a **Theorist-Artist**, independent curator, and cultural critic whose practice and research focus on **Contemporary Art Institutional Critique, the Politics of Visibility, and Cross-Cultural Subjectivity**. She is the founder of the theoretical system of **Unpremeditated Actionism**, emphasizing that theory must emerge from **immersive, unpremeditated creative action**. Her core research, including the structural analysis of the **Self-Endorsement mechanism**, aims to reconstruct **intrinsic legitimacy** for artistic practice amidst field alienation. Her personal website is loyluospace.com.