

On “About *Grey Room*”

THE EDITORS

Grey Room is a journal dedicated to the theorization of modern and contemporary architecture, art, media, and politics. Published quarterly, it is devoted to the task of promoting and sustaining critical investigation into each of these fields separately, into their mutual imbrications, and into the historical forces that mediate their interactions.

—The Editors [Branden Joseph, Reinhold Martin, Felicity Scott], *Grey Room* 1 (Fall 2000)

Revisiting the founding manifesto of *Grey Room* is a fitting way to mark the transition to a new editorial group at the journal. Looking back on the twelve-year history of *Grey Room*, we can see how successful the journal, its editors, and contributors have been in delivering on the original editors’ initial statement of intent. The journal has been instrumental in establishing a “multi-disciplinary aesthetic discourse” that spans not only disciplines but continents and that has greatly assisted in determining the shape of a critical discourse that is “uniquely relevant to the current historical situation.” In particular, the journal’s attentiveness to both past and emerging discourses and practices of technical media has served to counter a disturbing tendency in architecture and art history to cling to outmoded narratives of “medium specificity” and “autonomy,” which foreclose a profound engagement with broader and more powerful historical agencies. Yet this engagement has never come at the loss of a close, material analysis of the cultural practices at hand. In this respect, *Grey Room* has also provided an important forum to work through the false dichotomies posited between visual studies and art and architectural history, which was one of the legacies of the 1990s.

When Branden Joseph, Reinhold Martin, and Felicity Scott founded the journal in 2000, they were remarkably prescient not only in observing the importance of multidisciplinary dialogue—situating their project at the intersection of architecture, art, and media—but also in anticipating its expansion in the twenty-first-century academy and studio alike. Their further ambition to have the journal represent “the highest levels of scholarly and theoretical achievement” has, in the view of the incoming editorial team, been met through an intensive collaboration between editors and contributors, a process to which the more recent additions to the editorial team, Karen Beckman and Tom McDonough, have

proved every bit as committed. If the expediency of *Grey Room*'s intervention within its founding moment has become clear in retrospect, the current potential of the journal to continue redrawing the lines of debate within a publishing field dominated by journals of a more disciplinary signature remains undiminished. We are confident that the limits of what *Grey Room* can accomplish on behalf of scholars and its broader readership have not been reached.

Revisiting "About *Grey Room*" also helps us to note an additional conviction that motivated the journal's founders, which is that the related disciplines of art history and theory, architectural history and theory, media studies, history of science and technology, and anthropology—in short, those disciplines that take specific objects and material practices as their foci of study—could contribute meaningfully to debates in philosophy and critical theory by concretizing otherwise abstract tracts and treatises. *Grey Room*'s articles have grounded, so to speak, postmodernisms in the real, all the while recognizing the tenuousness and malleability of claims to that reality.

The new editors of *Grey Room* affirm their commitment to this ethos. We do plan, however, to push further, exploring the possibilities for greater interaction among editors, contributors, and readers through the use of the Internet; increasing the number of translations of past and current scholarship from abroad; and bringing together scholars from across the world to collaborate on and debate shared concerns. The generosity of the journal's publisher, MIT Press, has given our ambitions in these areas an enormous boost, and we thank the press for its efforts to preserve and expand the journal through this exciting series of transitions.

What can our readers expect to see in these pages in the issues ahead? We wish to continue to expand the salutary inclusion in these pages of the work of scholars from beyond the narrow confines of the North American university. The pressing scholarly, political, economic, and aesthetic conundrums of an increasingly networked and globalized society demand *Grey Room*'s expanded attention to the global East and South. And in view of the pressing need to question strictly Western narratives of "world history," *Grey Room* will continue to encourage reflection on the uneven temporalities that trouble our present. The journal's new editors include representatives from one European and two Canadian universities, while the new editorial board includes a group of exceptional scholars from abroad. We hope that readers and contributors from the world beyond the United States view this renewed set of partnerships as an invitation to participate in the life of the journal.

We are convinced, as well, of the need to open *Grey Room* to a

more extended form of genealogical thought and reflection. The kind of multidisciplinary, rigorous inquiry that has characterized *Grey Room's* critique of the vast, complex landscape of modernity and postmodernity is just as necessary in so-called early modernity. We thus aspire to make *Grey Room* a discursive space in which the inseparableness of scientific, technical, economic, and aesthetic practice that characterized cultural production from the Renaissance through the Enlightenment and industrialization, from the colonial periods to the postcolonial, can be historicized, theorized, and critiqued alongside analyses of modern and contemporary art, architecture, and technical media.

The purpose of these expansive moves is not to reaffirm the periodization of history as it stands but, to the contrary, to develop a more profound understanding of the genealogies of power, knowledge, and technology that underpin our present. We have no interest in simply “covering” the field; quite the opposite. *Grey Room* was founded with the insight that the rediscovery by historians and critics of, say, the multimedia art practices of the 1960s coincided with the increasingly multilayered, multimedia approach of art practitioners in the 1990s. In 2013, although many of our problems remain the same, *Grey Room* finds itself in a slightly different historical and political situation. Among the most vital scholarship in art, architecture, and media today are projects that concern themselves with tracing unexpected (even counterintuitive) genealogies of cultural production that reach far back into the past, that span vast geographical distances, that include otherwise neglected voices, and that challenge conventional readings of art, architecture, and media as being overdetermined by the narrowly construed social and discursive boundaries of the institutions in which they are produced. We remain true to *Grey Room's* original dedication to “the history of politically oppositional aesthetic practices and to the most rigorous theorizations of their contemporary continuation and transformation.” Yet in surveying the past twelve years, we observe that many of the best essays in *Grey Room* have produced substantive critiques of mass media, corporate and “vernacular” architecture, scientific consensus, military apparatus, and so on. We will continue to brandish the partisan motto “Architecture, Art, Media, Politics” that has been displayed on the cover of *Grey Room* from its beginning.

We are delighted that Branden, Reinhold, and Felicity will remain on the masthead of the journal as founding editors and members of the advisory board, and that Karen and Tom will remain part of *Grey Room* as members of the advisory board as well. Their scholarly and critical achievements over the past twelve years and in the future will serve as a model and guide to

the new editors. We extend our profoundest thanks to them for their years of inspired service to the multitudinous fields of inquiry represented by the journal, and we wish them the best in the years to come.

All that is left to do is the work. Once again . . .

“Photo falling – Word Falling –

Break through in Grey Room – Towers, open fire”