

Introduction to an Excerpt
from Walker Thisted's forthcoming book *The Dis-Enclosure of Art*
as prepared for uturn.org

For the past several years the School of the Art Institute of Chicago has hosted a symposium called the Stone Summer Theory Institute that is comprised of fellows drawn from around the globe and students from the school. After attending the 2010 Institute devoted to considering the legacy of *The Anti-Aesthetic*, a collection of essays edited by Hal Foster, I set out to address a number of concerns that I felt went unaddressed during the week of intense debate. These concerns were largely driven by an intuition that the discourse on art remains largely bound to a line of thought that arcs from Pagan and Christian iconography to a crisis of representation under an intellectual framework defined by the philosophical musings of Kant and the historical absolute of Hegel that culminated in a critique that began in post-World War II Europe and that currently is in its final stages. In this context, the question that I felt needed to be raised was whether remaining ties to this arc and the critique of this arc limits our ability to understand the physicality and virtuality of art being made today and the ways in which this art relates to the world in which it is situated.

Having rehearsed this question prior to participating in the Institute, my intuition was that indeed this line obscured how art actually *is* by making it difficult to understand how technological, economic, spiritual, spatial, geo-political, and human terms limit art and its existence beyond a Western discourse. Faced with an inability to make sense of the chaos that is art and that surrounds it, we can either author a new system that might help us understand the chaotic conditions that we observe or we can see such conditions in the art that became the subject of Western Art History and through this understanding discover an alternative that lies in close proximity to the discourse that has been proven problematic by schools of post-colonialism and deconstruction. As a result of these critiques, I believe the former option to be largely impossible. The latter, however, offers an intriguing possibility of investigating threads that have been abandoned over the course of centuries in order to gain an exciting and refreshing image of art and its discourse that has supported a great deal of pleasure both through its materiality and through the manner by which it traces our evolution as a planet and as a species.

In selecting sections of the manuscript that resulted to present in the context of this essay, I have decided to focus on the line of thought that I believe allows art both past and present to be decoupled from the discourse of art history and the line of thought that I believe can be drawn in order to lead us beyond critique and to a framework for understanding art and how it is situated and situates the world. The former line of thought deals with how art is supported by the technology of the wall, how art has been engaged in a subversive critique of the wall in an attempt to find freedom, and how this critique is distinct from a critique on philosophical or spiritual terms that resulted in the autonomy of art in the 20th century as a liberation from Christian metaphysics and the bourgeois society that was its echo. The latter line of thought suggests that following both the conventional critique of the spiritual and a critique of the material, we are given the option of understanding art through how we sense art and how it might sense us. In attempting to offer access to these ideas, I have endeavored to provide various paths by which one might travel. If at any point you feel lost, please feel free to click on the "essay diagram" button to find your way.

[Introduction to the Critique of the Wall](#)
[Introduction to Sense, Sensors, and Sensation](#)

[Essay Diagram](#)