The Making of a Caribbean Avant-Garde

Therese Kaspersen Hadchity

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Without attempting to definitively take stock of their complex and always evolving function, this chapter looks at the region’s alternative spaces as part of a creative network, that extends far beyond each venue’s national confines. They are here related to questions about art and the public sphere, about the role of civil society under neoliberalism, and about the current direction of Caribbean radicalism.

The Contemporary Salon, the ‘Network’ and the Public Sphere

It can be no coincidence that every one of the three spaces discussed in the previous chapter—Alice Yard, Fresh Milk and Popopstudios—are situated on premises that once were (or continue to be) domestic. I would like to propose that the obvious limitations of such locations in a certain sense enhance, rather than diminish their connotations of freedom and creative opportunity. In combination with the contemporary ‘grassroots’ profile each venue has crafted for itself, their semi-domestic character strongly opposes the image of the monolithic, alienating and bureaucratic (or altogether absent) institution, and is therefore not only a matter of necessity, but also of strategy and, it is tempting to suggest, virtue.

Notwithstanding their informal appearance (pan-yard, eco-conscious, bohemian, etc.), these spaces, moreover, have a compelling affinity with the eighteenth-century salon to which Habermas traces the origin of the public sphere. The typical salon was housed in rooms adjacent to (but separate from) the bourgeois family home—thus precisely, as in the present scenario, physically and symbolically lodged in the zone between private and non-private domains. The function
of the salon was to create an ideologically independent space outside the strictures of state and capital in which citizens could come together and engage in debate and self-expression. The eighteenth-century salon thus preceded the cultural institutions that subsequently became important elements of the public sphere and modern democracies.\textsuperscript{1} Supplementing Habermas, Negt and Kluge have, however, argued that there is not one, but several public spheres (particularly also a proletarian one), and Nancy Fraser contends that this plurality at any rate is preferable, since a singular public sphere would require a normative language of communication:

(P)ublic life in egalitarian, multicultural societies cannot consist exclusively in a single, comprehensive public sphere. That would be tantamount to filtering diverse rhetorical and stylistic norms through a single, overarching lens. (\ldots) (I)t would effectively privilege the expressive norms of one cultural group over others and thereby make discursive assimilation a condition for participation in public debate (\ldots) (W)e can conclude that the idea of an egalitarian, multicultural society only makes sense if we suppose a plurality of public arenas in which groups with diverse values and rhetoric participate. By definition, such a society must contain a multiplicity of publics.\textsuperscript{2}

Jodi Dean, on the other hand, dismisses the idea of multiple public spheres as nonsensical: there never was a public debate in which every citizen took part, and a discourse with a limited number of participants does not constitute a separate public sphere. It is, she argues, the totality of all societal discourses, which make up ‘the’ public sphere.\textsuperscript{3} Dean’s argument does not end here, but before tracing it further, a few more words about the nature of the Caribbean creative network are in place.

If one wants to get an impression of this network, a good starting-place would be the link labeled ‘Caribbean Art Map’ at the Fresh Milk website. Here one finds a map of informal spaces as well as art-societies, art schools and cultural institutions across the region. This may be the most concrete visualization of the transient network and its institutional counterparts in its actualized and latent form, but the network in principle expands in rhizomatic fashion with each visiting artist and its actual extent is always quite fluid and elusive. The ‘Caribbean Art Map’, and indeed the conception of the network itself is, needless to say, enabled by the Internet. Though interchangeably seen as liberating and democratizing, as an impoverished substitute for ‘real’ discourse, or as so chaotic and unregulated as to inhibit rather than further the enlightenment-process, the Internet has perhaps
most consistently been regarded as the most significant (and actively engaged) aspect of the contemporary public sphere. Due to the geographical dispersion of Caribbean nations, their history of failed integration and the low profile of culture on national agendas, the possibility of virtual connectivity holds particular promise for the region’s marginalized, feedback-starved cultural practitioners. To many, the Internet has, in other words, come to be seen as that public sphere, which many Caribbean artists feel they do not have at a national level.\(^4\) Dean, however, argues that the Internet cannot be considered a new public sphere in the Habermasian sense (or a ‘commons’ as in the work of Hardt and Negri). Rather than a rational, transparent, consensus-seeking forum for political debate, “the expansion and intensification of communication and entertainment networks yields not democracy but something else entirely—communicative capitalism”.\(^5\) She nonetheless concludes that there is no way to fight that system than through the system itself. While the Internet therefore cannot be regarded as a public sphere in the historical sense, it is a site of conflict, where matters of concern can be fought over by informal or transient groups and networks. It is, she concludes, a ‘neo-democratic’ arena without the inherent telos of a stronger and better nation (or world).

In extension of the public sphere debate, it may be possible to argue that the alternative spaces, which were discussed in the previous chapter, have three distinctive and slightly incongruous inflections—one that is national/democratic (educative), one that is national/professional (guild-like) and one that is transnational/professional (export-oriented). In their local context, each space thus establishes a physical frame around a particular cultural activity. They deliberately project a locally grounded, progressive, sustainable and inclusive image, which may be interpreted as an attempt to promote, demystify and educate about the visual arts. By being (in principle) open to all, by offering a forum for aesthetic and quasi-political discourse, and by contributing to social intercourse and public enlightenment, they seem committed to the core principles of maintaining a conventional public sphere as defined by Habermas: “The bourgeois public sphere may be conceived above all as the sphere of private people come together as a public”.\(^6\) They thereby assume a function, which either supplements or (effectively) replaces that of public institutions. In that sense, their inflection is national/democratic. From another perspective, their open and inclusive image notwithstanding (or rather, because of it), these spaces may, however, also be seen to divert attention from the elitist nature of their activity. It will be remembered that some artists and audiences felt, if not directly unwelcome, then neither strongly encouraged, nor quite entitled to participate in events hosted by some of these
spaces. On that note, I cannot help but dwell for a moment on the fact that I, practically every day, receive notifications about art-related events across the Caribbean and beyond—but that the majority of my family-members, neighbors and non-professional acquaintances will never know about these events. The region’s alternative spaces generally advertise their events online and through their extended network, and invitations may be circulated widely indeed, yet still remain within a particular target-group loosely defined by shared interests, habits and connections.\(^7\) As national/professional entities, they therefore function more like ‘guilds’ with their own attendant social codes and discourse and thus exemplify the just discussed compartmentalization (if not necessarily multiplication) of the public sphere. When these professional networks—to compensate for their relatively limited local impact—expand to diasporic (and other) counterparts overseas with both physical and virtual exchanges, the inflection, however, becomes increasingly transnational/professional and ‘export-oriented’. On this basis, it is difficult to determine to what extent this network is inclusive, and whether or not the proliferation of artist-driven spaces is indicative of a strengthening or a weakening democracy.\(^8\)

Meanwhile, as transnational/professional entities, the alternative spaces may also be examined collectively as a loosely structured, fluctuating and flexible and yet quite specifically designated forum run by artists for artists. Such a network assumes a more self-sufficient character—its main purpose being the creation of a circuit in which production and reception takes place in an atmosphere of mutual congeniality, and where the apparent criticality or political inflection of the works by and large remains within the aesthetic sphere and the network itself.\(^9\) Reflecting on the evolution of Alice Yard, Nicholas Laughlin suggests that “the collective is also a central node in a growing network of artists’ blogs, small magazines, and online galleries and screening-rooms. In the past two or three years, these have shifted the Trinidad contemporary art world’s centre of gravity towards a virtual, hyperlinked and inherently international space. Alice Yard is now a portal for artists in Trinidad and their contemporaries elsewhere to work and imagine collaboratively, and to extend their particular Caribbean-inflected ways of seeing into a global economy of attention.”\(^10\) Such stakeholder-networks seem to make a moot point of making the region’s conventional public sphere more inclusive (say, through the development of cultural institutions, or by stimulating debates on visual art in the news media), and raise the question of what ideological inscription the network now attains.
Empowerment or Co-Optation: 
Civil Society and the Neoliberal State

The ‘Empire’ invoked by Hardt and Negri in their book of that name, bears no resemblance to colonial empires, but is a vision of global capitalism as a diffuse, but ubiquitous power structure, that transcends national borders. In this scenario, it is argued, the authority and relevance of the nation-state has deteriorated to the point of irrelevance. While acknowledging that their perception of ‘Empire’ owes something to Guy Debord’s concept of ‘spectacular domination’, under which “what was once imagined as the public sphere, the open terrain of political exchange and participation, completely evaporates”, the two writers confidently assert that there is no need to despair: “As the old sites and forms of struggle decline, new and more powerful ones arise. The spectacle of imperial order is not an ironclad world, but actually opens up the real possibility of its overturning and new potentials for revolution.”

The instrument of this revolution is the multitude—the vast, mutating, global network of working people, which stands in opposition to ‘Empire’. The multitude, notably, does not merely refer to the conventional blue-collar working classes, but effectively eliminates the class-concept, for, in the postmodern informatics-era, labor and production have become immaterial and de-territorialized. The ‘revolutionary’ multitude is therefore not connected by a shared language, cultural traditions, legislative frameworks, unions, income-brackets or particular struggles, but, ostensibly, by needs and desires that generally differ from those of ‘Empire’. It is, moreover, horizontally and globally connected through an electronic network that is seen as the new ‘commons’. Because this network is non-hierarchical, rhizomatic and impossible to regulate, it provides the “potential for a kind of spontaneous and elementary communism,” and the multitude is merely waiting to release the oppositional power that lies embedded in its revolutionary nature: “the multitude is bio-political self-organization.”

The vision advanced in Empire is thus consistent with tendencies, on the new left (after the absorption of Gramsci, Foucault, Laclau and Mouffe) to re-think the Marxian dichotomy of ‘proletariat versus bourgeoisie’ as ‘the people versus the power bloc’. Hardt and Negri’s (admittedly rather more complex) claims have been controversial for a host of different reasons, though not least due to the conspicuous gap between the authors’ stridently revolutionary language and their astounding proposition that ‘the change’ has already happened. That contention has, unsurprisingly, unleashed a cascade of objections—perhaps most memorably Timothy Brennan’s wry observation that this sort of ‘communism’ serves ‘Empire’ extremely well: “The genius of capitalism, one might well conjecture, is that it
can create such allies in this costume. Anti-capitalist in impulse, but theoretically inoculated against the war of maneuver in all its forms (…)”.  

Exactly how, or to what specific ends, the multitude will begin (or indeed, has begun) to operate as a common front is neither clear, nor as relevant to the present discussion as the current optimism—both on the new left and in the post-nationalist movement I am attempting to portray—about informal and transnational networks, the idea of ‘globalization from below’, and of civil society, enabled by new technologies, as the nemesis of ‘power’. The latter may be conceptualized as governmentality, Empire, global capitalism, spectacular domination or, simply, the state.

Notwithstanding the centrality of the state in traditional Marxism, its legitimacy and relevance has come under pressure from both poststructuralism and globalization-theory, and even though its critics traditionally have been right-leaning, the state has thus become a divisive issue on the left. Whereas Hardt and Negri (ironically in the name of a new communism) now propose a complete departure from the concept of the state, Jameson, among others, insists on improving it. After a public event at which both Hardt and Jameson were feature-speakers, one attendee summarized their differences as follows:

Against Hardt’s call for abolishing the state, Jameson offered a call for universal inclusion in the state. Against Hardt’s endorsement of the direct democratic self-management of the commons—and of a new love—Jameson called (at least implicitly) for embracing and engaging hierarchical structures of command and leadership—for imposed discipline and the use of force. Against Hardt’s focus on the flowering of new and autonomous common spaces, Jameson insisted on the question of duration, on persistence in time.

While Jameson thus remains committed to dismantling capitalism, and maintains the utopian vision of a transparent and accountable state, Hardt and Negri’s resistance is not only posited against global capitalism (which they also see as an ally, arguing, like Dean, that there is no other way to combat the system, than through it), but also against a state which, as a matter of course, is vilified as either impotent, inherently corrupt, or both. In an effort to arrest this trend, Brennan, however, argues that “It is time for intellectual history systematically to take up the demonization of the always ‘criminal’ state in cultural theory—a state that is usually posed as an ontological category rather than a locally varied, or contradictory structure—leading to immense confusion between left and right variants of anti-capitalist positions”.

In a Caribbean context, a similar tendency to demonize the state (and na-
tion) almost by default was reflected in the discussion of post-nationalism and diaspora-theory in section 1. Though state and nation, of course, are different concepts, I submit that they converge in the national cultural institution, and that the post-nationalist sentiment in the region’s criticism has aimed equally at the Caribbean state’s active (i.e., opportunistic and instrumental) and inactive role vis-à-vis culture. The movement towards transnational creative networks and the growing investment and expectations in civil society agencies (such as alternative spaces) may therefore at once be seen as a genuine ‘uprising from below’ (though ‘below’ in this context may not exactly designate the lowest strata of society, but a fluid aggregation of well educated artists from former colonies and their diaspora), and as a departure from the pursuit of a Habermasian democracy, anchored in a dialectic between civil society and the institutions of the state. In a recent interview, Annalee Davis indeed proposes, that “It might be that an absence of infrastructure can generate new models, rather than mimic first-world infrastructures ill-suited to Caribbean needs, goals and circumstances.” 19 It is relevant here to return to David Scott’s Refashioning Futures, in which he argues for a Caribbean criticism that “distances itself from the Enlightenment project of both Marxism and liberalism and constructs a problematized relation to the claims and the categories of our political modernity.” 20 Drawing on Laclau and Mouffe, the radical democracy he wishes to put in place of the representative democracy pursued by the Caribbean nationalist movement, thus consists of a plurality of public spheres: “a diverse field composed of multiple public realms, constituencies, or ensembles that constitute in effect different ways of being-in-common, different ways of being citizens or women or black or whatever, and in which, therefore, different but mutually recognized modalities of collective identity are voiced and practiced”. 21 The objective of this permanent pluralism is notably not that of generating consensus, but of protecting ‘difference’. Given Scott’s centrality to the direction of Caribbean critical discourse, and his stake in the post-nationalist movement, this declaration does, I think, support the interpretation of the creative network’s aim as that of being one among several cultural spheres and public realms. From this perspective, its function is to create and maintain a designated, but arguably also self-serving space for a particular segment of the arts community. While its objective may be dialogue, and while this dialogue may continue to expand and reach further audiences, it is therefore implicitly accepted that it will remain, not a broadly inclusive disciplinary discourse as much as that of, to paraphrase Brennan, the internal dialogue of a particular ‘community of belief’: in addition to invitations for special events, a steady, but within this ‘progressive’ circuit largely un-divisive, stream of news-items and articles related to art or
broader social or political concerns, tend to emanate from the creative network on social media like Facebook. The sharing of such material is clearly not intended to win anyone over, but to indicate and reaffirm a group identity. (As discussed in chapter 2, the entrapment of the artwork in the semi-autonomous circuit of art producers and viewers has, nevertheless, incited a movement towards ‘participatory’ art, which often attempts to break into a wider public sphere). Unlike each alternative space on its own (which undeniably belongs to a national public sphere), the network on the whole can thus be seen as that informal, transient formation, which, according to Dean, fights for particular matters of concern—in this case, the continued visibility and ‘market-share’ of a particular contemporary formation with an attendant ethos and aesthetic direction. Whilst there is nothing odious about such (in fact quite impressive) initiatives, the point made here is that the consolidation and success of the 1990s avant-garde not only has been enabled by its postmodern and cosmopolitan aesthetic (as will be argued in chapter 7), but also by its organization into alternative spaces and a transnational creative network, which overrides its internal differences and particularities and creates a highly visible, dynamic, virtual and post-national(ist) presence in Dean’s ‘neo-democratic’ arena.

Though many theorists presently are invested in the hope that popular forces and transnational networks will arise outside of traditional party structures to challenge current hegemonies, perceptions of civil society agencies differ considerably. Hardt and Negri themselves argue that the activities of certain NGOs in fact “coincide with the workings of Empire”22, and, in *The Expediency of Culture*, George Yudice offers a similarly critical assessment. His starting-point is a Foucauldian perception of culture as a resource for the neoliberal state, and therefore as a domain for which real autonomy is not possible. Irrespective of its forms, thematic preoccupations and political inflection, governments thus perceive of culture as a social, political and economic expedient, which can be applied to managing difference and alleviating social despair. Since artists today are little more than “content providers”, Yudice argues, “the content of culture recedes in importance as the usefulness of the claim to difference as a warrant gains legitimacy.”23 A peculiar pact has thus evolved between politics and culture (including civil society agencies in the form of alternative spaces), where the latter is at once co-opted and committed to relieving the social pressures that the neoliberal state cannot (or will not) address. In return, culture attains purpose and legitimacy, while also replacing a utopian ethos with more immediate goals (it may, for example, be remembered that both Fresh Milk and Popopstudios serve as ‘channels’ for visual arts students from local colleges).24 This notably happens,
not \textit{despite} cutbacks in funding for culture, but \textit{because} of them. According to Yudice, however, the upshot is that “civil society increasingly looks like an alibi for neoliberalism”.\textsuperscript{25}

Whereas the convergence between cultural and economic policy in the Caribbean has taken a rather more obvious direction in efforts to develop the cultural industries,\textsuperscript{26} I therefore contend that it extends to the civil society agencies that make up for the shortfalls of the state in respect of narrow experimental art-forms (doubly marginalized by neoliberal cut-backs in general, and by a policy focus on the culture industries). While alternative spaces in principle may be opposed to the state and its neoliberal policies, they do therefore, ironically, owe them their extraordinary success. On that note it is not irrelevant, that Caribbean culture, as Scher argues (see p. 98), increasingly is considered a vehicle for economic development, where the diversification and specialization, which is embodied in the alternative space, is seen as desirable.

Meanwhile, a Foucauldian approach to culture (i.e., its enlistment in identity-politics and the management of ‘difference’) may, according to Jim McGuigan,\textsuperscript{27} not only force it into a form of collusion with power, it eliminates the aesthetic dimension from cultural policy altogether: neoliberalism has forced a business-ethos onto entities that are not themselves businesses, to the effect that the only guideline presently available to policy makers is a managerial brief.\textsuperscript{28} On this background, I propose that even though Caribbean alternative spaces limit their commercial activity to a minimum, they too have a small enterprise affinity through their ethos of private initiative, efficiency, flexibility, high professional standards, ‘best practice’ solutions and stakeholder investment. But since such spaces are \textit{not} McGuigan’s policy makers (and in principle strive to maintain a high degree of autonomy from official policy), they can and do indeed fashion their practices according to aesthetic criteria. That the aesthetic pursued at these venues generally rests on Foucauldian perspectives \textit{anyhow} (so that governments and counter-culture come towards ‘difference’ and pluralism from different ends) merely substantiates Yudice’s suggestion of a complete political and cultural convergence. Whereas Caribbean alternative spaces may see their practice as counter hegemonic, they make an appreciable and welcome contribution to the diversification of each nation’s cultural spectrum, which amounts to more than a compensation for the deficiencies in public support for the visual arts. Not only do alternative spaces do the neoliberal nation proud (if only by doing what they do so well), they also inadvertently justify its withdrawal from cultural programming. In a situation where alternative spaces are products of and inadvertent alibis for neoliberal policy, I furthermore submit, that they cannot assume a truly ‘alternative’ role.
Indeed, as was implied in chapter 5, where public institutions are weak or absent (as in Trinidad and Barbados), the tendency has been for alternative spaces to become ‘mini-institutions’ themselves. By volunteering to do the job of representation and documentation, by archiving and publicizing works and events, they become cultural custodians, as well as reference-points and consulting agencies for international curators. With few other (and often less efficient) institutions in place to represent artists, who, for personal or ideological reasons, do not ‘fit in’ here, these spaces and their practices are, moreover, destined to become increasingly mainstream and dominant. Even though they may be critical of the state and its institutions, they therefore effectively take on and execute its functions with a high degree of proficiency. Where institutions conversely are relatively strong (as in the Bahamas — and, though it has not been discussed here, in Jamaica), the tendency has arguably been for these to assimilate the ethos of alternative spaces in reverse. They do so by opening up to young and experimental art and by cultivating a more open and flexible profile (hence initiatives like the ‘project room’ at the Bahamian National Gallery, and the Young Talent exhibitions at the National Gallery of Jamaica) — and indeed by adopting a networking strategy themselves.\textsuperscript{29}

What has evolved is therefore a scenario where both alternative spaces and institutions strive for legitimacy by reaching for the supposed margins. But while former margins are being drawn to the centre, new ones emerge with practices that have less traction in this cosmopolitan network. In fact, the current invisibility of such practices makes it hard to determine whether they merely fly under the radar or have all but ceased to exist.

It was argued in section 1 that, while the post-nationalist avant-garde rarely declares itself unequivocally for anything, it knows well what it is positioned against (i.e., the concept of ‘nation’, the postcolonial state, collective representation, essentialist identity claims, the picturesque, and the anti-colonial legacy as it found expression in Creole modernism). This section, ironically, suggests that since the alternative network has a very clear purpose, namely that of maintaining its symbolic market-share,\textsuperscript{30} its supportive role within a neoliberal policy climate makes it difficult to determine what — at the level of cultural policy — it is against. In this context, the post-political expressions of ‘concern’ so typical of the 1990s avant-garde, becomes a cosmetic distraction from the uncomfortable fact of the challenger’s dependence on the incumbent. In circumstances, where the alternative space becomes an alibi for the neoliberal state, however, it is no longer possible to maintain a counter hegemonic profile. As the political autonomy desired by one faction of the Caribbean postmodern thus at once becomes an enforced and a
false autonomy, the result is therefore a foreclosure on a productively contestatory dynamic between centre and margins, between institutions, policy-makers and their self-proclaimed opponents.

Summary of Chapter 6

This chapter has drawn the alternative spaces portrayed in chapter 5 into a discussion of the public sphere and the role of civil society under neoliberalism. It has been argued that each space must be considered in a national as well as in a professional context, and as an element in a fluid transnational network. In their national capacity, the spaces appear to be invested in the broadening and diversification of the public sphere. Upon closer examination, however, it is possible that each space is more attuned to a professional, transnational or diasporic ‘network’ than to a surrounding community. While the alternative spaces vary in their alignment with or distancing from ongoing ‘nation-building’ efforts and official policy, and while they seem determined to project a socially progressive and locally grounded image, it does, however, appear that their actual function depends on external factors, especially the presence and relative strength of official institutions. Where such institutions are weak, these spaces—despite their (legitimately) idiosyncratic character—tend to become ‘institutions’ themselves, thus confirming Yudice’s view that culture not only has become an ‘expedient’, but that civil society initiatives implicitly justify a cultural policy based on stakeholder investment and privatization. I therefore conclude that, largely for reasons outside their own control, and notwithstanding the incontrovertibly important role these spaces play in encouraging professional discourse and individual development, they are unable to produce or engage in an altogether ‘healthy’ dynamic between public and private agencies and between the centers and margins of Caribbean arts communities.

Conclusion to Section 2

Section 2 has attempted to contextualize the rise of alternative spaces in the Anglophone Caribbean, and to describe them as vehicles for the consolidation of the Caribbean postmodern described in section 1. The region’s first ‘alternative’ spaces, which emerged in the 1970s and 1980s with such grassroots venues as DePAM and Studio 66, were unequivocally committed to the development of a distinctive Caribbean culture and can be described as proto-institutional. The
subsequent trajectory of shallow policy declarations, political hi-jacking and disillusionment, and the neoliberal transition from ‘arts that cost to arts that pay’, has, however, engendered an atmosphere of mutual suspicion and resentment between artists and governments. To compensate for the absence of cultural infrastructure, a later artistic generation has thus established its own ‘infrastructure’ in the form of artist-led spaces, residencies and transnational networks. Due to their extraordinary success, these artist-led spaces have arguably (unlike their predecessors) become ‘proxy-institutions’.

Many of these spaces are intrinsically tied to the Caribbean postmodernism described in section one (some are indeed founded by its pioneers), and entirely resonant with that movement’s principles of process, activism, transient collectivities, suspended authorship and ideas-in-perpetual-development. Whereas such art forms may defy instant commodification, it was argued that they may yet be ‘system preserving’ in other ways. How consciously the spaces produced by this movement position themselves vis-à-vis a neoliberal cultural policy is, however, difficult to determine. While the purposely ‘localized’ physical features of the venues I have discussed (Alice Yard and Fresh Milk in particular) may signal a locally grounded pan-Caribbean orientation, their cosmopolitan aesthetic, the increasingly diasporic scope of their activities, and their effective privatization of cultural management, is perfectly compatible with a neoliberal agenda. Indeed, the once so unlikely alliance between an alternative space and a large corporation, which occurred in the Bahamas, lends some force to the uncomfortable point that the former polarization between cultural radicalism and neoliberal pragmatism has been eroded. Altogether, these issues raise tough questions about the current possibilities and pitfalls of the alternative movement, and I contend that the function of the region’s alternative spaces is far less counter hegemonic and resistive than appearances seem calculated to suggest.

The overwhelming success of these enterprises may nevertheless have been largely determined by government policy and by the prevalent tendency (not least by visiting curators) to assume that civil society agents and artist-led spaces are inherently more progressive than Caribbean institutions. However, while the region’s alternative scene undeniably has created exposure and opportunities for many of the region’s artists, where governments and institutions have fallen short, such spaces are neither able, nor inclined, to fulfill a broadly representative democratic function. This is a particularly insidious problem for artists, who do not have the prerequisite networking-skills or compatible aesthetic orientation, and who are left with few other vehicles for becoming visible as contemporary Carib-
ean artists. I therefore wish to end this section by reiterating Erica James’s appeal (p. 123) to the region’s artists to keep putting pressure on their governments. It will take formalized and skillful local institutions to produce a healthy center-margin dynamic, both locally and globally. The rapport between the Caribbean art-world and the metropolitan curatoriat is the focal point of section 3.
Photo credit: National Gallery of Jamaica
Plate 6. Ras Akyem Ramsay: Migration. Oil on canvas. 1996. Photo credit: Dan Christaldi
Photo credit: The artist
Photo credit: The artist
Plate 10. Annalee Davis: Still from Migrant Discourse. Video. 2009. Photo credit: Omar Estrada
Photo credit: The artist

Photo credit: Marvin Bartley

Plate 16. Alice Yard, Port-of-Spain, Trinidad. Photo credit: Arnaldo James
Plate 17. National Museum and Art Gallery, Port-of-Spain, Trinidad. Photo credit: The author
Plate 18. Fresh Milk, Walkers Dairy, Barbados. Photo credit: Charles Phillips

Plate 19. Versia Harris: At the Side of Something. Public bench with digital design. 2014. Photo credit: Dondre Trotman
Plate 20. Queens Park Gallery, Bridgetown, Barbados. Photo credit: William Cummins
Plate 21. Popopstudios, Nassau, Bahamas. Photo credit: Nadia Huggins

Plate 23. Ras Ishi Butcher: 400 Years New World Order. Oil on canvas. 1994. Photo credit: Dan Christaldi