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31 READINGS ON ART, ACTIVISM & PARTICIPATION (IN THE MONTH OF JANUARY)

An Art & Activism Reader

Compiled by the Director of the Dept. for the Investigation of Neutrality & Palatability (DINP) and the Director of the Dept. for the Investigation of Radical Pedagogy (DIRP) of the Think Tank that has yet to be named

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01

THE FOLDS OF AN INSTITUTION

a conversation between Greg Sholette, Cesare Pietroiusti & Brett Bloom

2001. *subsol*. http://subsol.c3.hu/subsol_2/contributors0/groups&spacestext.html

THE FOLDS OF AN INSTITUTION

a conversation between Greg Sholette, Cesare Pietroiusti & Brett Bloom

|| Brett: Let's start this off with a discussion about working with institutions that can be seen as oppressive as opposed to "dropping out" of the art world. Cesare, an important thing you have mentioned in previous exchanges of ours was working in the "folds" of an institution - finding a way to create autonomy in what could be an oppressive structure. Do you want to recount the story you told us of the exhibition where you used your invitation to in turn invite many others to contribute?

|| Cesare: I think that a critical artistic practice doesn't take any advantage from a frontal contraposition with an oppressive institution. The strategy of complaining of being marginalized, or not considered, is also a losing strategy, because somehow it is too visible, too "declarative." I am more interested in strategies that are more lateral. A "fold" in a system can be seen as an interruption of its internal order, an irregularity in its rigid functioning. Artists can be flexible (easily moving and restructuring) and hopefully smart enough, to exploit the system's folds, and work within (or even thanks to) them.

In 1996 I was invited to the XII Quadriennale in Rome, a National survey show of "emerging artists." The Quadriennale is an old and bureaucratic institution (still working according to the rules established in the 1930s during the fascist period) whose curators are nominated by politicians, and whose cultural references are quite provincial. When I was invited, it seemed to me that the exhibition had no cultural content but the list of the 160 invited artists itself - with all the subsequent polemics about who-is-in-and-who-is-out. At that time I was working with a group of artists from Rome (the "Giochi del Senso e/o Nonsenso"), and together we decided to enlarge my invitation to the show to whoever wanted. Everyone willing to exhibit an image, a text, or anything else, was invited to do so at no charge during the two months of the XII Quadriennale. More than 250 pieces were collected and exhibited. The invitation to participate was passed on by word of mouth, through some newspapers and with a notice posted in the exhibition space itself. Such a project could not be accepted by the institution, but it was possible because of the general disorganization (basically, the day before the opening we "occupied" the space that was supposed to be that of the publisher of the catalogue) and the lack of understanding on the part of the curators - the chief curator realized what was happening a week after the opening, and when she called me and asked me to close the space, it was very difficult for her to exercise what, at that point, would have been an evident censorship, because it would only have created more visibility around our project. In other words we exploited the folds of this rigid institution and made our project "evident" when it was, for them, too late to exercise any censorship. A big discussion arose and, in the Italian cultural scene, our project is known for having been an effective challenge to institutional rigidity. Let's say that refusing apriori to be part of that show would have been in a sense more coherent, but definitely less effective.

|| Greg: Institutions are us. They determine our wages, track our debt, and brand our clothing. Still others collate this information and sell it to other institutions that in turn develop marketing strategies to target our "individual" needs all over again. To my way of thinking the standard opposition between institution and individual is no more. Instead I prefer the way Giles Deleuze describes the current state of affairs in his essay "Post-Script on the Societies of Control" - "We no longer find ourselves dealing with the mass/individual pair. Individuals have become "dividuals," and masses, samples, data, markets, or "banks." Deleuze goes on to argue that unlike the disciplinary mechanisms of the 19th and 20th centuries - schools, factories, prisons and we might include here the museum in certain instances - the new system of control operates through a generalized form of administration so diffuse that it is difficult to locate or represent. If we accept this depiction, it requires us to re-evaluate not only the shape of institutional boundaries but our potential opposition to them. This revision is especially necessary if, as Deleuze and other theorists indicate, the institutional border runs directly through each of us, penetrating even our cherished sense of autonomy.

None of this implies that these mechanisms of control operate unopposed. For me the difference comes down to accepting the articulation as given or actively producing points of dis-articulation within the terrain. In other words, we can choose to comply or instead to redirect, by hook or by crook so to speak, portions of these larger institutional structures for radically different ends. This re-direction might seek to re-distribute institutional resources as in the Quadriennale action that Cesare describes or it might link artists to issues of economic, legal and social justice. Here I am thinking of some of the work that REPOhistory has produced over the last eleven years. In practical terms however, these sundry actions might be confrontational and have a limited but precise target, or they might infect the "folds" that Cesare has discussed, folds that are inevitably produced by any institutional structure. In the long run it is this latter practice that is potentially most interesting but also one that obligates a state of near blindness by those sent to burrow into the depths of the institution. The down side is that in the dark it is hard to tell the difference between a genuine mole and a mere rodent.

|| Brett: I think that if you spend too much time working in opposition to institutions that you always do so according to their rules. They determine what is focussed on and what is important. This isn't very interesting. The dichotomy just reinforces the power and cultural authority that the institutions have. The tricky thing is to pose a systemic challenge without there being a recognition of what is really happening. There are also a lot of people deciding to work a lot less within institutions and engage things on their own. This can only be a healthy step.

My interest in helping Groups and Space get going was making a place where people who are working in independent and autonomous capacities could get direct information on what others like them were doing around the world - to speed this process up. Mainstream publications do not function in this way at all. They tend to reduce everything to the same flat, one month floor show without really articulating where ideas are coming from and the larger context they exist in.

Cesare, another thing you mentioned in a previous exchange was the "self-confirming" process of institutions. This is a really nice observation. I have never heard it put exactly this way. Could you explain this again?

|| Cesare: I think that a good way to define an "institution" is to outline the fact that most of its efforts go in the direction of a self-confirmation of the institution itself. Therefore its activities will be, to a large extent, a "celebration," a continuous effort to give an image of success, of richness, of effectiveness, of power. It's obvious that any critical position will be seen as a menace; and, as I am convinced that the artist's position is basically a critical one, there will be an inevitable contradiction between the artist and the institution. Having said that, I also think that not all the institutions are the same, nor that all their activities have always the same character. It's true that the institution can have the "power," so to say, of accepting and neutralizing even critical positions (making them become "trends" in the art market), but I do think that "institutional critique" is more interesting than neo-expressionist painting or sleek corporate photography, because in any case its content (especially in the beginning) provoke the public to pose questions. And then, when it has become a successful trend, no big drama. I think it just means that time has come, for another critical position to appear.

|| Greg: Cesare's definition that a large institution is one that celebrates itself is wonderful and suggests a string of metaphors - since celebration often involves fire works and spectacle. Perhaps we can differentiate between various species of institutional power by the degree of visibility a museum or university or a biennial can achieve and how that is many times more intense than what an Oreste or REPOhistory or Temporary Services can achieve. However, light requires dark. And this requirement is met by the tens of thousands of unrecognized artists, the amateurs and the "sunday painters" who make up what I call the art world's version of dark matter. Nevertheless, it is the tremendous gravity of this unseen creative effort that prevents the art industry and its hierarchies of value from flying apart. What is different today is the gradual lightening of this dark matter. (According to the 1990 US Census only 24 percent of self-described artists said they could actually make a living at their profession. Naturally a key difference between art and science is that nobody in the art world is actually looking for this "dark matter.")

I think this illumination is occurring for several reasons. One is the erosion of high modernism and its tenant of the artistic genius. This allows more room for other kinds of creative work - but not a lot really. Rather what is most curious is the role that digital technologies are playing in this development. Without assigning an epochal status to this shift, it seems clear that the Internet, email and even cell phone networks are opening up organizational and representational possibilities not previously possible. (Can I suggest that these technologies are helping to gather the folds?) Today, what was in the shadows of large institutional structures is suddenly more visible and not only to these centers of power. Those of us that are working in the folds are emerging into a field of light that is permitting us to see each other. Perhaps this even constitutes a new visualization of politics. Nevertheless, there has already been the development of numerous alternative networks for the distribution of work, of ideas, of strategies. The potential raised by this luminous space is exciting as well as dangerous since visibility means just that: we emerge into the scopic field of full-blown institutional mechanisms.

Of course it will be interesting to see how the institutional center with its need for routines and control will respond to the warmth of this "light" this time around.

|| Cesare: At the same time I actually see that the art system is in perfect shape, that its traditional ways, including biennials with big prizes (that were mostly abolished, during the 1970s and early 1980s) are expanding all over the globe; that, parallel to the diffusion of computers and electronic data, there are more and more contemporary art books and magazines and catalogues in paper; that the star system more and more seems to create an available desire for any area of "dark matter" in the art field... Like Greg, I think it's crucial to work on the channels of communication, and to problematize the generally accepted equivalence between possessing such channels and the power to legitimate a certain artistic production. One of the main goals that Oreste has had - for example in projecting the series of initiatives within the 1999 Venice Biennale - was to create a useful net of communication, of exchange of experiences and of resources among initiatives, groups, individuals. I can't say how successful we were or we will be. After a few years of attempts, however, I think that the "generalist" idea of creating "the" alternative network is beautifully generous (for the ones who really want to try to do it), but also ideological and, in the end, probably bound to fail. I think that the attitude of "replacing" a system we don't like with another one can be dangerous in the sense that one can just end up (beyond any good intention) replicating the same rules, games of power, exclusion etc.

The best things that have come out from the Oreste experience are something, I would say, quite banal: small groups' relationships (on both personal and working levels), among people who would have probably had less chance to meet. And most of this is somehow outside of any control, happening outside the boundaries that Oreste has constituted (the web site, the residencies, the public meetings, the books etc.). I like Greg's point about self-recognition, the possibility of knowing about each other's work, ideas, etc. This is very important; I think that Oreste's contribution has been that of not only exploiting the technologies that makes this easier today, but also of stressing the importance of the actual personal face-to-face meeting, talking, but also eating and living together - the residency as a model for an extended time experience, the attempt to combine existential with poetic positions (the "real" with the "symbolic"), something that usual "restrictions" within the art system do not give as a possibility.

|| Brett: This is nice. I also agree that it is an abuse trying to replace one set of power relations with another. This won't do us any good. The internet is often said to be a place where this can really happen... that we can truly challenge abusive power and create democracy. This has happened, but in a really limited capacity.

But, it is important to always point out that the internet was created by the U.S. military. Its very foundations are not democratic and are meant to insure that the status quo persists (in the case of a global nuclear war). Businesses very quickly colonized cyber-space and made it a part of the mainstream. However, decentralized media groups like the Indy Media Center are a very interesting phenomenon in terms of organizing an alternative, in this case, to mainstream global corporate media. The internet has created a million "folds" in globalized culture in which we can act and build our independence.

|| Greg: I think it is worth adding that the entire history of art including its many technologies, from frescoes to photography and beyond, were always at the disposal of the church, the state, the police and so forth. The internet is no different. But, to pick up on something I was saying a few minutes ago... I alluded to past attempts at creating an alternative network that linked groups and individuals who were not central to the art world structure with artists. One of these attempts was the mission of an artist group I was involved with beginning in 1980. Political Art Documentation and Distribution or PAD/D sought to create an archive documenting the scattered and autonomous activities of individual artists and art groups with an explicit interest in social or political change. More than just collecting the work, PAD/D hoped to re-distribute this material using its newsletter and using university galleries and community centers, to inspire and educate other artists and activists. This desire to produce a living archive that would be a tool for visualizing oppositional works was ultimately hampered by the lack of a viable means of distribution and this is what the new technologies appear to offer.

Today, the PAD/D Archive is now part of the Museum of Modern Art's library (in NYC). And while the PAD/D Archive is now being used by scholars to revise the art historical picture of post war art, it is not the activist, organizing tool we in PAD/D once hoped it would be. The groups mission statement as it appeared in its newsletter "Upfront" in February of 1981stated that "[PAD/D] can not serve as a means of advancement within the art world structure of museums and galleries. Rather, we have to develop new forms of distribution economy as well as art..." One way that PAD/D sought to develop this new form of distribution economy was to seek out actual alliances - often temporary and sometimes contentious - between socially engaged artists on the one hand and organized Left political movements on the other. And not only PAD/D was attempting this, other small art organizations such as Group Material and Carnival Knowledge were making similar connections between themselves and non-art institutions and activists.

What happened in my opinion by the end of the 80s was this: the art world selected a few, individual artists making "political art" or "art with social content" and set about legitimating them within the museum and within the art historical canon. Meanwhile, the broad base of such activity that had led to the very possibility of this recognition was thrust back into darkness, a darkness I should add that made us invisible not just to the institutional center but also each other. It is apparent that today a similar kind of cross-over phenomenon in which artists move away from a strictly art world context and into an activist or autonomous mode, is taking place. This new activism is most visible in the WTO counter-actions in various international cities. Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt have even described these new activists as "Nomadic Revolutionaries." What one finds is the participation of academically trained artists working beside "non" professionals and political activists all involved in transforming collective dissent into an energetic and pleasurable carnival. Let me repeat that it is invigorating to see this cross-over activity happening and perhaps this time, thanks to the self-awareness and cleverness Cesare describes as well as the increased visibility and networking potential afforded by new technologies, things will go differently.

This is a reconstruction (the recording of the call was lost) of a conference call between Greg Sholette (REPOhistory), Cesare Pietroiusti (Nomads + Residents, and Oreste) and Brett Bloom (Temporary Services and Groups and Spaces): The conversation originally appeared in the Groups and Spaces e-zine in July, 2001.

about Brett Bloom >>

about Cesare Pietroiusti >>

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02

IDEOLOGY, CONFRONTATION AND POLITICAL SELF-AWARENESS

Adrian Piper

1981. *The Citizen Artist, 20 Years of Art in the Public Arena*. edited by Linda Frye Burnham and Steven Durland. http://www.communityarts.net/readingroom/archivefiles/2002/09/ideology_confro.php

communityartsnetwork
readingroom

Ideology, Confrontation and Political Self-Awareness

By Adrian Piper

Adrian Piper is a conceptual artist with a background in sculpture and philosophy. Her performance work and writing during this period asked the observer to consider the construction of his/her own beliefs and their relation to action in the world. Art historian Moira Roth has written that Piper's work of this period "deals with confrontations of self to self and self to others, exposing the distances between people and the alienation that exists in our lives—personally, politically, emotionally." Here she puts forth some basic considerations about ideology. —Eds.

The Citizen Artist
20 Years of Art in the Public Arena
An Anthology from High Performance Magazine 1978-1998
edited by
Linda Frye Burnham
and Steven Durland
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We started out with beliefs about the world and our place in it that we didn't ask for and didn't question. Only later, when those beliefs were attacked by new experiences that didn't conform to them, did we begin to doubt: e.g., do we and our friends really understand each other? Do we really have nothing in common with blacks/whites/ gays/workers/the middle class/other women/other men/etc.?

Doubt entails self-examination because a check on the plausibility of your beliefs and attitudes is a check on all the constituents of the self. Explanations of why your falsely supposed "X" includes your *motives* for believing "X" (your desire to maintain a relationship, your impulse to be charitable, your goal of becoming a better person); the causes of your believing "X" (your early training, your having drunk too much, your innate disposition to optimism); and your *objective reasons* for believing "X" (it's consistent with your other beliefs, it explains the most data, it's inductively confirmed, people you respect believe it). These reveal the traits and dispositions that individuate one self from another.

So self-examination entails self-awareness, i.e., awareness of the components of the self. But self-awareness is largely a matter of degree. If you've only had a few discordant experiences, or relatively superficial discordant experiences, you don't need to examine yourself very deeply in order to revise your false beliefs. For instance, you happen to have met a considerate, sensitive, nonexploitative person who's into sadism in bed. You think to yourself, "This doesn't show that my beliefs about sadists in general are wrong; after all, think what Krafft-Ebing says! This particular person is merely an exception to the general rule that sexual sadists are demented." Or you think, "My desire to build a friendship with this person is based on the possibility of reforming her/him (and has nothing to do with any curiosity to learn more about my own sexual tastes)." Such purely cosmetic repairs in your belief structure sometimes suffice to maintain your sense of self-consistency. Unless you are confronted with a genuine personal crisis, or freely choose to push deeper and ask yourself more comprehensive and disturbing questions about the genesis and justification of your own beliefs, your actual degree of self-awareness may remain relatively thin.

Usually the beliefs that remain most unexposed to examination are the ones we need to hold in order to maintain a certain conception of ourselves and our relation to the world. These are the ones in which we have the deepest personal investment. Hence these are the ones that are most resistant to revision; e.g., we have to believe that other people are capable of understanding and sympathy, of honorable and responsible behavior, in order not to feel completely alienated and suspicious of those around us.

Go here for additional reading...
- Arts and Activism
- The Citizen Artist
- Community Arts Criticism and Theory

Or: Some people have to believe that the world of political and social catastrophe is completely outside their control in order to justify their indifference to it.

Some of these beliefs may be true, some may be false. This is difficult to ascertain because we can only confirm or disconfirm the beliefs under examination with reference to other beliefs, which themselves require examination. In any event, the set of false beliefs that a person has a personal investment in maintaining is what I will refer to (following Marx) as a person's *ideology*.

Ideology is pernicious for many reasons. The obvious one is that it makes people behave in stupid, insensitive, self-serving ways, usually at the expense of other individuals or groups. But it is also pernicious because of the mechanisms it uses to protect itself, and its consequent capacity for self-regeneration in the face of the most obvious counterevidence. Some of these mechanisms are:

(1) The False-Identity Mechanism

In order to preserve your ideological beliefs against attack, you identify them as objective facts and not as beliefs at all. For example, you insist that it is just a fact that black people are less intelligent than whites, or that those on the sexual fringes are in fact sick, violent or asocial. By maintaining that these are statements of fact rather than statements of belief compiled from the experiences you personally happen to have had, you avoid having to examine and perhaps revise those beliefs. This denial may be crucial to maintaining your self-conception against attack. If you're white and suspect that you may not be all that smart, to suppose that at least there's a whole race of people you're smarter than may be an important source of self-esteem. Or if you're not entirely successful in coping with your own nonstandard sexual impulses, isolating and identifying the sexual fringe as sick, violent or asocial may serve the very important function of reinforcing your sense of yourself as "normal."

The fallacy of the false-identity mechanism as a defense of one's ideology consists in supposing that there exist objective social facts that are not constructs of beliefs people have about each other.

(2) The Illusion of Perfectibility

Here you defend your ideology by convincing yourself that the hard work of self-scrutiny has an end and a final product, i.e., a set of true, central and uniquely defensible beliefs about some issue; and that you have in fact achieved this end, hence needn't subject your beliefs to further examination. Since there is no such final product, all of the inferences that supposedly follow from this belief are false. Example: You're a veteran of the anti-war movement and have developed a successful and much-lauded system of draft-avoidance counseling, on which your entire sense of self-worth is erected. When it is made clear to you that such services primarily benefit the middle class—that this consequently forces much larger proportions of the poor, the uneducated and blacks to serve and be killed in its place—you resist revising your views in light of this information on the grounds that you've worked on and thought hard about these issues, have developed a sophisticated critique of them, and therefore have no reason to reconsider your opinions or efforts. You thus treat the prior experience of having reflected deeply on some issue as a defense against the self-reflection appropriate now, that might uncover your personal investment in your anti-draft role.

The illusion of perfectibility is really the sin of arrogance, for it supposes that dogmatism can be justified by having "paid one's dues."

(3) The One-Way Communication Mechanism

You deflect dissents, criticisms or attacks on your cherished beliefs by treating all of your own pronouncements as imparting genuine information, but treating those of other people as mere symptoms of some moral or psychological defect. Say you're committed to feminism, but have difficulty making genuine contact with other women. You dismiss all arguments advocating greater attention to lesbian and separatist issues within the women's movement on the grounds that they are maintained by frustrated man-haters who just want to get their names in the footlights. By reducing questions concerning the relations of women to each other to pathology or symptoms of excessive self-interest, you avoid confronting the conflict between your intellectual convictions and your actual alienation from other women, and therefore the motives that might explain this conflict. If these motives should include such things as deep-seated feelings of rivalry with other women, or a desire for attention from men, then avoiding recognition of this conflict is crucial to maintaining your self-respect.

The one-way communication mechanism is a form of elitism that ascribes pure, healthy, altruistic political motives only to oneself (or group), while reducing all dissenters to the status of moral defectives or egocentric and self-seeking subhumans, whom it is entirely justified to manipulate or disregard, but with whom the possibility of rational dialogue is not to be taken seriously.

There are many other mechanisms for defending one's personal ideology. These are merely a representative sampling. Together, they all add up to what I will call the *illusion* of *omniscience*. This illusion consists in being so convinced of the infallibility of your own beliefs about everyone else that you forget that you are perceiving and experiencing other people from a perspective that is, in its own ways, just as subjective and limited as theirs. Thus you confuse your personal experiences with objective reality, and forget that you have a subjective and limited *self* that is selecting, processing and interpreting your experiences in accordance with its own limited capacities. You suppose that your perceptions of someone are truths about her or him; that your understanding of someone is comprehensive and complete. Thus your self-conception is not demarcated by the existence of other people. Rather, you appropriate them into your self-conception as psychologically and metaphysically transparent objects of your consciousness. You ignore their ontological independence, their psychological opacity, and thereby their essential personhood. The illusion of omniscience resolves into the fallacy of solipsism.

The result is blindness to the genuine needs of other people, coupled with the arrogant and dangerous conviction that you understand those needs better than they do; and a consequent inability to respond to those needs politically in genuinely effective ways.

The antidote, I suggest, is confrontation of the sinner with the evidence of the sin: the rationalizations; the subconscious defense mechanisms; the strategies of avoidance, denial, dismissal and withdrawal that signal, on the one hand, the retreat of the self to the protective enclave of ideology, on the other hand, precisely the proof of subjectivity and fallibility that the ideologue is so anxious to ignore. This is the concern of my recent work of the past three years.

The success of the antidote increases with the specificity of the confrontation. And because I don't know you I can't be as specific as I would like. I can only indicate general issues that have specific references in my own experience. But if this discussion has made you in the least degree self-conscious about your political beliefs or about your strategies for preserving them; or even faintly uncomfortable or annoyed at my

having discussed them; or has raised just the slightest glimmerings of doubt about the veracity of your opinions, then I will consider this piece a roaring success. If not, then I will just have to try again, for my own sake. For of course I am talking not just about you, but about *us*.

This essay originally appeared in High Performance magazine, Spring 1981.

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03

PARTICIPATORY ART: A PARADIGM SHIFT FROM OBJECTS TO SUBJECTS

Suzana Milevska

2006. *Springerin* 2/06. http://www.springerin.at/dyn/heft_text.php?textid=1761&lang=en

Participatory Art

A Paradigm Shift from Objects to Subjects

Suzana Milevska

The shift that has been recognised recently in the field of art from establishing relations between objects towards establishing relations between subjects is not the result of an overnight turn, as it may seem at first sight. It has been greatly influenced by philosophical or sociological theories and today is mainly appropriated by post-conceptual, socially and politically engaged art, or by art activism, although some similar art discourses and practices existed before, anticipating contemporary theory and practice. This text is envisaged as a kind of assessment in which I want to focus on the way some theoretical discourses have shaped this recent »participatory shift« in the arts.

My main aims are to follow the trajectory along which the established theoretical concepts turn into art projects and to locate the gaps between the promise of participation in theory and its shortcomings in concrete art projects in different contexts.
In such a limited space, I cannot undertake an in-depth analysis of the prehistory of the participatory turn. It is clear that, besides the theoretical background of this cultural shift, there have been some other overlooked participatory art phenomena, media and artists that long precede those starting in the early 90s, the period to be examined in this text. Let me mention only a few examples: the video art practice of the independent and guerrilla TV stations (e.g. Top Value TV), participatory theatres such as The Living Theatre, or the early happenings by Alan Kaprow and Mike Kelly from the 60s, as well as the »new genre public art« coined by Suzanne Lacy.

Besides avoiding any in-depth analysis of previous participatory art practices, I will also have to circumvent any analysis of the political circumstances during the late sixties and early seventies. However, it has to be stressed that they somehow invite a comparison with today's political context, e.g. the great number of armed conflicts in the world involving the USA or the international threat of anarchy and terrorism that incited the newly awakened social and political conservatism.

At this stage, I also find it important to differentiate between participatory art practices and the much broader term »interaction", wherein the relations established between the members of the audience or between them and the art objects are much more passive and formal (usually directed by certain formal instructions, given by the artists, that are to be followed during the exhibitions).
I have to make all these distinctions to narrow the framework of this text because I want to reflect particularly on the most recent shift of the artists' focus: from dealing with objects and installations towards dealing with subjects and enabling their participation in art activities. I am interested in the processes of establishing certain unique relations with these subjects that are initiated by the artists and in examining the effect of these projects as reflected in the real life of the participants (not only within the »laboratory conditions« of art galleries). Participation is the activation of certain relations that is initiated and directed by the artists and often encouraged by art institutions, and that

sometimes becomes the sole goal of certain art projects.

While inviting the audience to actively participate, the artists of the participatory projects create certain interfaces that are well prepared in advance and highly contextualised in a certain social, cultural and political environment. This shift, I will argue, happens both as an inevitable response by the art practice to the philosophical texts dealing with the re-definition of the concept of community and communitarian, and as a kind of reaction to the societal demand to include and make visible the marginalised groups of citizens who have been excluded from the social environment or from participation in public cultural life. Nevertheless, it becomes obvious that art stemming from theoretical and societal participatory discourse invites severe criticism and this text will therefore look at the sources of this criticism as well.

Aporias of »we«

Among the many different categorisations of various participatory art practices I present the one suggested by the art market researcher Alan Brown:

- Inventive Arts Participation - engages the audience in an act of artistic creation that is unique and idiosyncratic.
- Interpretive Arts Participation - a creative act of self-expression that brings alive and adds value to pre-existing works of art.
- Curatorial Arts Participation – a creative act of selecting, organising and collecting art according to one's own artistic sensibility.
- Observational Arts Participation - encompasses arts experiences motivated by some expectation of value.
- Ambient Arts Participation - experiencing art, consciously or unconsciously, that is not consciously select.[1]

In order to be able to locate the reasons for the vehement criticism directed at participatory projects, let me go back to certain theoretical concepts that I find relevant to such projects. Several references can be used as starting points when discussing participatory art. They are interconnected and interwoven, since all of them concentrate on intersubjectivity, communitarianism or Hardt/Negri's »multitude«.

I will start my account with a discussion of the philosophical concept of »being singular plural« as it is formulated by Jean-Luc Nancy, or the »coming community« by Giorgio Agamben.2 I will then move towards the sociological concepts that emphasise participation as a crucial societal tendency, vitally necessary today to control the all-embracing neo-liberalism driven by the »consumerisation« of human relations. At the end, I will focus on the discourses that are very closely related to art theory and art practices, such as the concept of »relational aesthetics« coined by Nicolas Bourriaud.

Nancy's concept of »being« is always already »being with«. According to him, »being« always entails »with« as an inevitable conjunction that links different singularities.3 Nancy is a philosopher of the »coessentiality of being-with« because he does not believe in any philosophical solipsism or any »philosophy of the subject in the sense of the final [infinite] closure in itself of a for-itself.«4 He goes as far as saying that »there is no ›self‹ except by virtue of a ›with‹, which, in fact, structures it.«5 He finds Heidegger\'s existential analytics incomplete because, according to him, even though »Mitsein« is coessential with »Dasein«, it still has a subordinate position.6

When Nancy claims that the sharing of the world is a co-implication of existence he refers to the problem that at this moment we cannot truly say »we«: that we have forgotten the importance of »being-together«, »being-in-common« and »belonging«, and that we live »without relations«. In order to attain this knowledge and the praxis of »we«, according to Nancy, it is important to understand that »we« is not a subject in terms of self-identification, nor is that »we« composed of subjects.7 Here Nancy reminds us that the aporia of the »we« is actually the main aporia of intersubjectivity and he points out the impossibility of pinning down a universal »we« that consists of always the same

components.8

Whatever participation is to be discussed in the context of art, it always necessarily refers to a certain »we«, to a certain identification with a particular community in which different members of selected communities (members of the audience, professional groups, homeless people, or children) are to become co-existing parts of a certain »we«.
Even when the conditions of participation of the audience or a selected group or community of people are clearly marked, it is always the »we« that needs to be created in order for a project to start functioning as a participatory one.
The other part of this »we« is the artist, the curator, the art institution, or even the state (in some public art projects) that supposedly cares for the invisible, marginalised or neglected »other« as the counter-part of the very same »we.« The usual problem with this imaginary »we« is that it mostly exists only for the duration of a particular art event, except for rare examples where the artists create self-sustainable projects that continue even when they leave with the circus.9 Interestingly enough, the always newly created »we« contains different parts and counter-parts each time when necessary, but it is never stated what happened to the previous parts/participants.
Often the lack of a feeling of belonging to a common group, the lack of having a common identity with the artist-initiator prevents a thorough participatory effect. However, a real participatory effect in fact happens exactly when the conditions of participation are not based on strict commonality and predictable decisions for participation, or on a clear identification with the artist or the concept in terms of social, cultural or political commonalities. In addition, the clearly distinct »inoperative communities« that refuse to be state »accomplices« can always be more easily seduced by art methods and practices, as they are less involved in official political structures.10 For Nancy, the fear of communitarian work is related to the fear of totalitarianism that has existed ever since Stalin was associated with communist ideas; he therefore suggests that we should re-think the question of community.11

Fragmented community
In this context it is important to look at Nancy's remark that community cannot arise from the domain of work.12 He states that community takes place through the withdrawal from work or »unworking« (»désoeuvrement«), to use Blanchot's term. Interruption, fragmentation, suspension: that is where community happens for Nancy. »Community is made of interruption of singularities...community is not the work of singular beings, nor can it claim them as its works...«13
This interpretation of community as being intrinsically inoperative and fragmentary helps in understanding the way in which participatory art projects function or fail to function in practice, especially when they are to be controlled by institutions.

This is linked to Agamben's warning about the fact that »what the State cannot tolerate in any way, however, is that the singularities form a community without affirming an identity, that humans co-belong without any representable condition of belonging (even in the form of a simple presupposition.«14 Similarly to Nancy, Agamben sees »being-in-common« as distinct from community. In fact, the most frightening community for the State, according to him, is the one that rejects all identity and every condition of belonging, that is based on singularity and that wants, not to belong, but itself to appropriate belonging.15
Participatory art projects are distinct from the sociologically highly valued communitarian projects and they differ exactly in the possibility they offer for circumventing the conditions of belonging to a certain pre-existing and socially defined community.

The main question for Nicolas Bourriaud in his »Relational Aesthetics« stems from Guy Debord's »Society of Spectacle«, and is related to Debord's claim that our society is »a society where human relations are no longer ›directly experienced‹.«16 In line with Debord's critique of representation and its mediation of the world, Bourriaud asks: »Is it still possible to generate relationships with the world, in a practical field of art-history traditionally earmarked for their ›representation‹«?17 For him, the answer to this question lies precisely

in the direct relations that artists can establish through their art activities as »social interstices«, which, according to him, is an effect of urbanisation.
Bourriaud contrasts Jean-Jacques Rousseau's »natural state«, which was dense and »trouble-free«, with the city as a »tangible symbol and historical setting of the state of society.«18 By referring to Althusser's notion of a »state of encounter imposed on people«, Bourriaud interprets this system of intensive encounters as a direct source of linked artistic practices, as »an art form where the substrate is formed by inter-subjectivity, and which takes ›being-together‹ as a central theme.«19
Perhaps Bourriaud's interpretation of works of art in Marxist terms as social interstices, using the term »interstice« as a space in human relations that suggests alternative »trading possibilities than those in effect within this system«, best explains the basis for his »relational aesthetics«, but it does not explain very well the participation of these relational projects within the overall societal functions.20

In one of her texts, Marie Gee cites Arza Churchman's discussion of various kinds of participation. According to Gee, Churchman defines participation as »decision-making by unelected, non-appointed citizens, or the incorporation of community members in planning and design. Without that decision-making element in participation, or if decisions are made by elected or appointed representatives, she will not even call it ›participation‹ but rather ›involvement‹.«21
Two additional contradictions are at work in participatory art practices:
- the limits of participatory and relational theories of art in the light of a postcolonial critique of art and cultural institutions
- the inclusion/exclusion binary and the tension between its social and political definitions in different contexts (e.g. liberal democracy and transitional societies)

One of the main criticisms of the impact of relational theory and the extent to which it is applicable to artists influenced by postcolonial critique is that the participatory art projects can easily be captured in the vicious circle of criticism without taking into account positive perspectives and any proposition for »real« participation. These kinds of projects can be more easily accepted by the society as a welcome, mild social critique instead of a more direct political critique.
There is another problem with participatory art in activist circles, when art is understood as a call for revolution and its success or failure is measured according to its revolutionary prerogatives. The interpretation of art as an agency that should circumvent the main societal and ideological obstacles that artists face outside of European democracy is prescriptive and expects too big an impact from art activism projects.

Finally, I would argue that art has yet to find a position that would reconcile the contradictions between these two radical ends: between »critique for critique\'s sake« and art that can be turned into a revolutionary instrument.

1 »The Five Modes of Arts Participation«, January 31, 2006
http://www.artsjournal.com/artfulmanager/main/005967.php
2 Jean-Luc Nancy. Being Singular Plural. Trans. Robert D. Richardson and Anne O'Byrne. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000. Giorgio Agamben. The Coming Community. Minneapolis, MN: Minnesota University Press, 1993.
3 Nancy, Being Singular Plural, p.13.
4 Nancy, Being Singular Plural, p.29.
5 Nancy, Being Singular Plural, p.94.
6 Nancy, Being Singular Plural, p.93.
7 Nancy, Being Singular Plural, p.75.

8 Nancy, Being Singular Plural, p.75.
9 Thomas Hirschorn's project »Bataille's Monument« during Documenta 11 is a typical example of a participatory project that provokes many hopes among the targeted local community that later cannot be fulfilled (a criticism addressed at Hirschorn during the public debate after his lecture held in the Victoria Miro Gallery in London, organised by Goldsmiths College's Visual Culture Department as a part of the conference »Field Work: Reports from the Fields of Visual Culture«, 2003).
10 Jean-Luc Nancy. The Inoperative Community, ed. Peter Connor, Minnesota University Press, 1991, p.80-81. Nancy writes about the inscription of »infinite resistance.«
11 Nancy, The Inoperative Community, p.2.
12 Nancy, The Inoperative Community, p.31.
13 Nancy, The Inoperative Community, p.31.
14 Agamben, The Coming Community, p.86.
15 Agamben, The Coming Community, p.87.
16 Nicolas Bourriaud. Relational Aesthetics, Paris, 2002, p.9.
17 Bourriaud, Relational Aesthetics, p.9.
18 Bourriaud, Relational Aesthetics, p.15.
19 Bourriaud, Relational Aesthetics, p.15.
20 Bourriaud, Relational Aesthetics, p.16.
21 Marie Gee, »Yes in My Front Yard: Participation and the Public Art Process«, High Performance #69/70, Spring/Summer 1995, 31 Jan. 2006, <http://www.communityarts.net/readingroom/archivefiles/1999/12/yes_in_my_front.php>.

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04

NEWS FROM NOWHERE: ACTIVIST ART AND AFTER

Gregory Sholette

1999. *www.gregorysholette.com*. http://gregorysholette.com/essays/docs/13_newsfrom.pdf

NEWS FROM NOWHERE

Activist Art and After, a Report from New York City

GREGORY SHOLETTE

Jeff Koons, Three Ball Total Equilibrium Tank (Two Dr J Silver Series, Spalding NBA Tip-Off) 1985 Collection Tate Modern

1. The wall is gone. Let a thousand souvenirs prevail.

What would have been celebrated as a hard won victory by many cultural activists of the sixties, seventies, and early eighties has today been met with an apathetic shrug. The line between high and low art has been discarded by a generation of artists who reveal the same indifference toward this once stalwart barrier that my generation in the eighties displayed toward the problem of "flatness" in painting. What changes have taken root in the wake of this insouciant revolution? What of Mao's thousand flowers of proletarian culture, Benjamin's worker turned producer, the decentralized people's art of the New Left? Not one of these ideas endure. Instead we bear witness to a merchandising pageant where contemporary art merges with designer labels that may soon include: Kline/Flavin, Armani/Beuys, Madonna/Sherman, and Hugo Boss/Barney. 2

This rupture between high and low coincides with an ethical and political vacuum in which trans-national capital holds a political and technological monopoly to which visual culture will soon be added. With mass movements from labor to feminism long since missing-in-action in the post-political 90s, the very idea of a dissident counter-culture, one that the Left, however confused and at times self- serving still managed to keep afloat into the early 80s, has vanished.

The impulse towards a collective and sustained art of political opposition, one cobbled together out of what Raymond Williams termed resistant and residual cultural forms, is not only missing but in the non-spectacle of its passing one discovers a trail of good intentions leading to the current landscape of cultural affirmation.

It should come as no surprise that the new art world order has forged a joint venture with the fashion and tourism industries, with Hollywood and the new information technologies. After weapons

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This essay was first published the journal Third Text #45, (Winter, 1999.) 45-56, and afterwards in the book Metropolenkultur: Kunst, Kultur und Politik in den Großstädten der 90er Jahre in den Zentren der Welt. ed. by Utta Held. Schriften Der Guernica-Gesellschaft, (Weimer, Germany 2000). 227-249.

manufacturing, the global image of the United States is most clearly defined by entertainment products and services. And yet with "political art" now more than a few seasons out of fashion and the Left unable to offer even a blurred vision of collective political resistance, the dissipation of the fine art tradition must be seen as a vacuous achievement, even a counter-productive one. Granted that from a certain perspective Degas neck-ties and Cézanne covered baseballs are fitting ends to the pretensions of bourgeois high culture. Still, one can not so easily dismiss the often expressed desire to link avant garde art practices with progressive movements, an objective that belongs as much to the history of modern art as it does to the Left.

Yet even the legacy of activist art, when not dismissed altogether, is being re-written, its historical contribution reduced to that of a genteel "institutional critique" of the art industry. This process of revision can be seen at work in a recent essay by architectural critic Miwon Kwon in the journal October. Kwon has virtually re-written the history of site-specific art so as to avoid the fundamental impact of activist politics on this important post-1960's practice. Kwon tells the story this way: beginning in the early 1970's certain conceptual artists (Daniel Buren, Hans Haacke) expanded upon one notion of site as a literal but idealized space (that of Donald Judd, Carl Andre) by re-defining site to include the context of the art institution itself.

Kwon describes a second, more recent wave of expansion that further pushed this concept of site to include such non-art discourses as history, sociology, cultural studies, and political theory (Renee Green, Fred Wilson, Group Material, Mark Dion, REPOhistory.) However Kwon takes aim at this expanded practice, arguing that the specific site in which the art is located is "now generated by the work (often as "content"), and then verified by its convergence with an existing discursive formation." (Kwon 94.) In other words the history of slavery in the United States, to take one example, does not play a determining role in shaping the physical and conceptual specificity of public space in a former slave state like Atlanta Georgia. Instead this content is "generated" by the introduction of a practicing artist. In one sentence Kwon has swept away the corporeal trace of history, politics, and other ideological texts, replacing these with her own idealized topography of intrinsic and extrinsic space in which discourse and matter are categorically opposite. Yet Kwon's revision does not stop with the squeezing-out of history and politics from site specific practice, but extends to the erasure of 60s political activism and its impact on artists like Haacke, Kelly, Buren, Rosler, Burgin, Kosuth, Kaprow and so forth, all artists who's work upended idealized constructions of site specific art in the first place. 1

One aim of this text will be to provide a modest counter-weight to this kind of revisionism 2 by presenting the work of two activist art collectives founded in 1979: Political Art Documentation and Distribution (PAD/D, 1980-1986,) and Group Material (1979-1997.) These

"repossessed" activist art histories will then be used to interpret several features of the current art landscape while arguing that such things as the merging of high and low culture and the divided legacy of site-specificity can only be understood in light of an early eighties art activism when the desire of artists and the agenda of the Left appeared to momentarily converge.

The importance of this historical fulcrum lies in the way a concern with non-art world politics all but carried away a generation of artists in a movement not seen since the 1930's. Indeed some were swept as far away as sectarian left politics, while others remained to be absorbed by an ever adaptive culture industry that had by 1987 transformed "political art" into something as innocuous as third generation abstract expressionism. Nevertheless a few practitioners continued to stumble along hoping things would change. Writing as a self- avowed stumbler, let me now make a provisional stab at defining the term activist art.

CAUTION ! ALTERNATIVE SPACE !

Group Material manifesto/flyer in which they proclaim they "cannot' possibly rely on winning validation from bright, white rooms and full-color repros in the art world glossies. To tap and promote the lived aesthetic of a largely "non-art" public- this is our goal, our contradiction, our energy." (circa 1982)

2. Activist art: idealism and contradiction

In a catalog essay for a 1984 exhibition entitled Art & Ideology, the critic and activist, Lucy R. Lippard, described activist art as a practice whereby: "...some element of the art takes place in the "outside world," including some teaching and media practice as well as community and labor organizing, public political work, and organizing within artist's community." 4 For Lippard, who was a co-founder of several important collectives including: the feminist art collective Heresies, Political Art Documentation and Distribution and Women's Action Coalition,

Activist art is the opposite of those aesthetic practices that, however well-intentioned or overtly political in content, remain dependent on the space of the museum for their meaning. Think of Picasso's Guernica which despite the artist's personal abhorrence toward fascism and war, is in its first and last instance an oil painting entirely dependent on an institutional frame . To produce activist art is therefore to put one's political commitment to the test, first through non-institutional forms of cultural distribution and interaction --art for demonstrations and picket lines, mail art, on city walls or on the sides of buses, art in the middle of shopping malls and crowded plazas --and second to use that form of dissemination to speak about social injustices with an audience who presumably has little patience for refined aestheticism but does care about war, inequality, political freedom and protecting the environment.

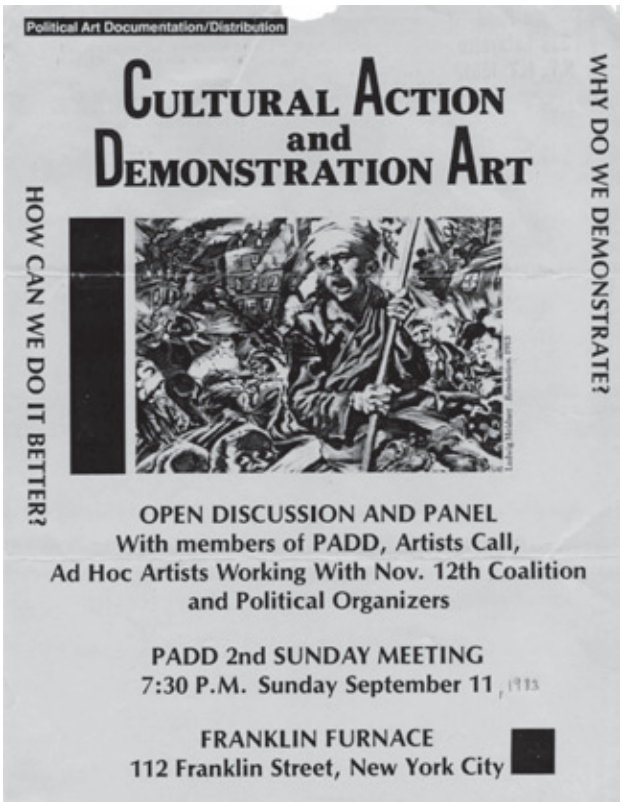
Yet, activist art harbors its own unexamined idealism. This is most evident when the committed artist presumes to speak to those who lie "outside the defiles of art world." In an essay written for the same

catalog in which Lippard has defined activist art, the art historian Benjamin Buchloh challenges those artists who propose to liberate the false-consciousness of the "people" by arguing that:

> ... mass audiences are not only locked-up firmly in the terminal grip of the media, but where the access that the artist has to the actual apparatus of ideological production [mass media] is at very best that of a parasite who mimics and excels in the strategies of the consciousness industry...5

What once seemed to be an overstatement now appears prosaic. As if to turn vice into virtue, postmodern theorists have rejected Buchloh's pessimism about the media. Instead, artists that operate within pop-culture are celebrated, their parasitism treated as subversive. The artist who "excels in the strategies of the consciousness industry" now invokes William Borroughs and Jacques Derrida, claiming to deconstruct the authority of the media, while still relishing its seductive richness. This trumping of Buchloh's acerbic criticism helped build the glittering runway that artists such as Matthew Barney now parade down, a point I return to in my conclusion. Regardless, rather than define 80s activist art by invoking its myths or myopia, consider the actual alliances sought out --often temporary and sometimes contentious-- between socially engaged artists on the one hand and organized Left political movements on the other.

A partial list of these collaborative arrangements operating in New York City between 1979 and 1982 includes: Artists for Nuclear Disarmament (AND), Artists Against Nuclear Madness, Artists for Survival, the Deep Dish and Paper Tiger Television collectives, The Women's Pentagon Action, "the Anti-WW III Show," Dangerous Works anti-nuclear network, the Children's Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, as well as Political Art Documentation/Distribution's (PAD/D) contribution to the 1981 mass March against the Pentagon.



PAD/D public event flyer (early 1980s NYC)

Activist art projects were also made for the pro-choice "street fair" entitled Bazaar Conceptions by the feminist art collective, Carnival Knowledge, and a visual spectacle was produced for the International Day of Action on Reproduction Rights by No More Nice Girls and members of PAD/D, while the Madame Binh Graphics Collective organized an art auction to help fund a women's center in Zimbabwe. 6

It is important to understand that prior to the late 1970s New York based artist collectives like the Art Workers Coalition (AWC, 1969- to 1971) and Artists

Meeting for Cultural Change (AMCC, 1975-1977) had focused their activism primarily toward changing the art world, demanding that museums become responsive to the needs of the contemporary art community as well as take a position against larger social issues such as the Vietnam War.

After the 1970s, politically engaged artists aimed to make their practice useful outside the parameters of their own discipline. However the separation between activist art and art merely sympathetic to political dissent is a tenuous one in which historical context defines a position rather than artistic intent. Such was the case with the German born artist Hans Haacke's project Shapolsky et al. Manhattan Real Estate Holdings, Real-Time Social System.

Initially intended for the "idealized" space of the Guggenheim Museum, Shapolsky et al. became a watershed for activists after the work brought about the closing of Haacke's one person exhibition in 1971. Shapolsky et al. consisted of maps, written descriptions and 142 photographs of New York City real estate holdings owned by landlords Harry Shapolsky and his family. Haacke's mock-scientific approach offered viewers the facts about something the artist described [at the time] as a "real-time social system," one that was invisible yet entirely accessible through public records. The artist's accumulated evidence presented a pattern of social neglect typical of New York's invidious real estate market. Shapolsky et al. also resembled, if not in fact parodied, the conceptual or information art being made in the early 1970s by artists such as Mel Bochner, Adrian Piper or Joseph Kosuth. After canceling Haacke's exhibition just prior to the opening Thomas Messer, the museum's director, summed up his opposition to Shapolsky et al. by stating, "To the degree to which an artist deliberately pursues aims that lie beyond art, his very concentration upon ulterior ends stands in conflict with the intrinsic nature of the work as an end in itself." 7 Defining what did lie beyond the art's "intrinsic nature" was to become the central question for a new generation of activist artists.

While Haacke's Shapolsky et al. project may not have been intended as a test of the museum's limits, it nevertheless pinpointed where the dissembling discourse of neutrality these institutions invoked was most vulnerable. Equally as important however was the way Shapolsky et al. presented artists with a model regarding the kind of social subject matter a rigorous practice like conceptual art might sanction. In other words Haacke's work demonstrated that the practice of site-specific institutional criticism had become inseparable from questions of social justice that previously seemed to have little to due with aesthetics or with the "institutional frame." (see Kwon 92.)

This negative-legitimizing of Haacke's work by a nervous and cen-

Artists Meeting for Cultural Change flyer calling for protests at The Whitney Museum of American Art and the Museum of Modern Art, NYC 1976

sorious art industry was not lost on a generation of artists who scrupulously read Artforum but who grew up listening to pop- culture antiheroes like Jimi Hendrix, James Brown, Frank Zappa and later the Clash. This was a wave of art students who would enter institutions like The Cooper Union (where Haacke taught) or the School of Visual Arts (where Kosuth and Acconci taught) in the decade ahead. Yet Haacke himself continued to produce work primarily for art world audiences raising the question of what circumstances produced the shift in the 1980s toward collective activism by younger artists? Perhaps a generation had to come into its own free of Clement Greenberg's formalist influence. Another likely factor was the limited access emerging artist's had to the prevailing art market. But the artistic response to Shapolsky et al did come, if some nine years after the incident itself in a sudden outburst of collective social activism... One riposte came from a New York City based collection of young, politically committed artists who called themselves Group Material (1979-1997). In their 1980 founding manifesto Group Material asserted:

> "we are desperately tired and critical of the drawn-out traditions of formalism, conservatism and pseudo avant-gardism that dominate the official art world.... Our project is clear, we invite everyone to question the entire culture we have taken for granted 8

Similar sentiments were expressed by Political Art Documentation and Distribution, better known as PAD/D (1980-1986). PAD/D's introductory statement appropriately titled "Waking up in NYC" argued that:

> "....PAD[/D] can not serve as a means of advancement within the art world structure of museums and galleries. Rather, we have to develop new forms of distribution economy as well as art...." 9

Simply put, by the start of the 1980s the only avenue perceived to be open to those who would pursue a politically engaged art was one that led directly out of the museum. Furthermore because the critical framework of early 70s Conceptual Art, Haacke's included, had laid claim to both the political and the aesthetic radicalism of the early European avant garde, some of these artists who chose to exit the established art world in the early 80s understood this exodus as a logical extension of Berlin Dada and Soviet Productivism. In this sense activist art appeared caught in a paradox between a desire to integrate art practice back into society without regard to the claims of art discourse or history, and a contradictory need to claim the inheritance of the most rigorous modernist art movements of the Twentieth Century.

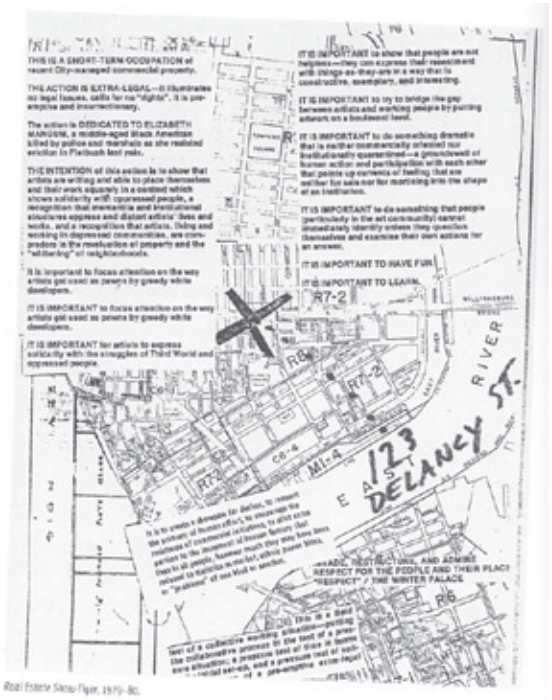
3. New York, New York 1979-1980: the red shift

It was not only artists with an explicit political commitment that un-

derstood the Guggenheim Museum's message about acceptable aesthetic boundaries. Beginning in the mid 1970s, a wave of young artists migrated from suburban zones surrounding the city to what was then an affordable neighborhood: Manhattan's Lower East Side.

Within this cluster of neighborhoods then among the most ethnically and culturally diverse in the city, the prospect of unifying art and activist politics would be raised once again.

The Lower East Side was at this time a unique mix of Puerto Rican, Dominican, African-American, Chinese, Ukrainian, Polish, Italian and Jewish Americans as well as aging hippies, left-over punks, recent skinheads, old left and new left radicals, housing activists, squatters, small businesses, winos, junkies, cops, and the Hells Angels Motorcycle Gang all gathered together in about two square miles of cracked sidewalks and dilapidated housing. Where as earlier art activism had focused on the responsibilities of the art world toward living artists, linking this to national political struggles such as the anti-war movement, the art activism of the 1980s emerged out of this specific place known as Loisaida to its Spanish speaking residents but called The East Village or Alphabet Town by real estate brokers. Geographically and aesthetically removed from either SoHo or the 57th street art markets, Louisiana was being re-engineered through real estate speculation, selective banking practices, and City Hall politics to become an urban "renaissance" zone. What that meant to local residents was the aggressive displacement of poor and working class residents in favor of highly taxable professionals. In this transformation that came to be known as gentrification, artists served as the advance garde of a brutal social and economic make- over. 10



Flyer/map for The Real Estate Show,, direct action, 1979.

As early as 1977 New York's "alternative" art scene including Artists Space and Grand Street had generated their own alternatives. One of these was Collaborative Projects inc. or COLAB. Strongly influenced by the Lower East Side's Punk music scene, COLAB's eclectic programming included experimental cinema and video, performance art and massive thematic group exhibitions with titles like The Manifesto Show, the Doctors and Dentists Show and the Dog Show.11

COLAB's exhibition procedure was ingenious. Group members first located a cheap industrial space after which members were [then] invited to produce art based on [an] the exhibition's theme[s]. Work Delivered to the space [work] was hung on a first come, first serve basis. Silk-screened street posters and word of mouth advertised. these thematic salons The exhibitions themselves resembled a patchwork quilt in which drawings and paintings, kitsch, and graffiti covered walls from floor to ceiling. Signaling an overt rejection of SoHo's orderly consignment of art products in neat white galleries, COLAB's

visual congestion also announced the tumultuous arrival of a legion of new art practitioners ready to test the ramparts of the New York art establishment. The style of work favored by COLAB -- figurative and self-consciously crude by SoHo standards-- was itself a rebuff aimed at the prevailing formalist aesthetic of the art industry.

While COLAB itself had no acknowledged political agenda, on the last day of 1979 a splinter group broke away from the parent organization and into an abandoned city-owned building on the Lower East Side. There the rebels hastily installed a COLAB-style exhibition that aggressively decried rent gouging landlords, arson for hire, neglectful city housing agencies, and even the "whitening" of this Latino neighborhood by the artists themselves. The title of this direct action "squat-gallery" was The Real Estate Show. On January 2 1980, the day after the opening, the city padlocked the entrance tossing much of the art into the street. By the 8th the artists had enlisted artist Joseph Beuys to help confront the city. After some bad press and a series of negotiations the city offered the artists a different building and The Real Estate Show re-opened down the street from the initial site. This first blast of a new activist art wave had sounded and had just as quickly been subdued. Nevertheless these events brought into focus several key features of the emerging activist art of the 1980s. In a statement distributed by the "Committee for the Real Estate Show" the group described their art-action as: "... a field test of a collective working situation...the action is illegal - it illuminates no legal issues, calls for no "rights." It is pre- emotive and insurrectionary."

It also called for the encouragement of "human fantasy that lives in all people." 12 The authors of the unsigned manifesto (it was in fact written by Alan Moore) dedicated The Real Estate Show to Elizabeth Mangum, a "middle aged Black American killed by police and city marshals as she resisted eviction in Flatbush [Brooklyn, NY] last year" and insisted that artists "express solidarity with Third World and oppressed people." The text also emphasized "it is important to have fun." while proclaiming a desire for independence not only from commercial interests such as those in SoHo, but also from state financed alternative art spaces. The Real Estate manifesto went on to call for artists to work "on a boulevard level," to reach working people and the non-art public, and to address the negative impact that artists were having on the Lower East Side. Despite the fantastic mix of Maoist and Situationist language, the text effectively hit on three of the principle desires and contradictions that would haunt this budding new East Village bohemian Left. Each of these objectives --from the aim of establishing a genuinely alternative exhibition network, to the romance of "the street" as distribution site, to the "identification with the 'other" --would be taken up by the new activist culture and each in turn would evade satisfactory resolution.

Although the Lower East Side was the medium in which this new political art activism was cultured, local issues did not entirely domi-

nate the scene. With the United States defeat in Southeast Asia and the Watergate affair as backdrop, international political and military humiliation for the United States was coming in waves. By the summer two US-backed regimes, one in Nicaragua and one in Iran, had been defeated by popular insurrections and a major insurgency was immanent in the US client state of El Salvador. 1979 was also the year of the near melt-down at the Three Mile Island nuclear power plant and the settling of a ten million dollar lawsuit against the Kerr-McGee Nuclear Power Corporation brought by the family of a suspiciously irradiated industry whistle blower named Karen Silkwood. In November the US embassy in Tehran was stormed by Islamic students, its staff taken hostage. One month later Robert Mugabe declared victory over the white Rhodesian government after a protracted military campaign. Before the year was out the Soviets had invaded Afghanistan and Chinese officials taken down the Democracy Wall in Beijing. Within a year an independent trade union was recognized in Poland, Ronald Reagan and his conservative republican coalition seized the white house and three US nuns were found raped and murdered in a ditch in El Salvador precipitating mass opposition to Reagan's involvement in Central America among activists and artists.

The Left, including the new, the old, and the Green, mobilized around these issues. One artist's group emerged which defined their mission as building a bridge between the organized Left and artists. Its objective was to produce a truly alternative and oppositional cultural sphere. The group, Political Art Documentation and Distribution or PAD/D was founded in early 1980. With more than 20 initial members the accumulated political experience of PAD/D reached as far back as the mid 1960s and ranged from recent art school graduates to those who had been active with organizations such as Heresies, Art Workers Coalition (AWC), The Anti-Imperialist Cultural Union, Artists Meeting for Social Change (AMCC), and even Fluxus. PAD/D's original agenda was so extensive that it resembled the platform of a bona fide political party which in many respects it was modeled upon. Indeed PAD/D's immediate ideological foundation was built in part upon a short-lived artists collective that published a journal entitled Red Herring. Red Herring['s] sought to develop a "proletarian culture" specific to North America. Its theory, influenced by China's Cultural Revolution, called on artists to "learn from the masses." and reject the artworld. 13 What remained of the New Left at the end of the 1970's interpreted the severely depressed international economy and the stumbling U.S. military regime in Latin America, Southeast Asia, and Iran as a sign that United States imperialism and perhaps capitalism itself was near to collapse. The job of the Left therefore was to provide leadership in the transition to socialism. The job of the cultural worker was to rally other artists to support this project. Though it never became an official party line, this analysis was operative within PAD/D most strongly in its first two years. However the

Members of Group Material perform at an event co-developed with PAD/D and several progressive labor unions in NYC entitled No More Witch Hunts and organized to protest Ronald Regan's anti-terrorist public surveillance legislation in 1981.

selflessness and discipline required to carry out such a program soon clashed with individual members artistic and career-based needs.

PAD/D's activities during the first year included gathering material for an archive of international socially concerned art, publishing a newsletter, establishing a network of like minded activist artists, and programming a monthly public forum on politics called 2nd Sunday, all tasks not typically associated with cultural production. Looking at the list of programs presented in these Sunday programs one can immediately grasp the value that PAD/D placed on connecting artists to non-art world activists. The list of topics in 1981 included: the History of Abortion Rights, Civil Liberties and Domestic Surveillance, War Tax Evasion, Unauthorized Art in Public Spaces, Hispanic Culture and Struggle and Art and Ecological Issues. In the immoderate language typical of the early eighties PAD/Ds stated goal was nothing less than "to build an international, grass roots network of artist/activists who will support with their talents and their political energies the liberation and self-determination of all disenfranchised peoples." 14

Above all else it was this attempt to forge a viable network of politically sympathetic exhibition outlets for activist art that set it apart from other collectives either before or since. Before political art went mainstream some five or six years later, art with social content was still being ghettoized as "Angry Art" or "Protest Art" and self help was the order of the day. The projected network of artists and outlets PAD/D anticipated was to involve the orchestration of community centers, university galleries, union halls, and even church ministries (recall that the early eighties coincided with North American Leftists discovery of "Liberation Theology") -- in sum a completely alternative system of distributing politically committed projects to an audience of progressive activists, many of whom were unaccustomed to this level of social engagement on the part of artists. At the end of its first year however PAD/D developed an internal fracture between the stated aim of serving other progressive artists on one hand and a growing desire by a majority of members to initiate group art projects on the other. By the end of 1982 the group had participated in two art exhibitions and four public art events including a mass march to Washington and the self-initiated multi- sited project called Death and Taxes which took the form of an open invitation to artists for public work protesting the use of federal taxes for the military. Simultaneously presented at different public locations on April 4th, Death and Taxes included a thirty by twenty foot anti-Pentagon slide projection on the wall of the 26th street armory in Manhattan and the appropriation of one thousand personal income tax forms that were then over-printed with anti- war graphics and re-circulated so that New Yorkers would discover them at random during tax season.

PAD/D remained in existence for almost eight years yet it's initial presence as a focal point for New York's activist art went into declined around 1985 when a prudent version of "political art" become institu-

tionally viable within the art world. 15 By 1988 all that remained of the groups initial agenda was its archives of political art today housed at the Museum of Modern Art. An important source of information about activist culture, the diversity of PAD/Ds archive once again reflects the catholicity of the groups concept of counter-culture that includes documentation of performance art, guerrilla actions, street posters, gallery based political art, and even plans for an international art strike in 1969. But the predominance of material dating from 1980 to 1990 evinces the dynamic expansion of activist art during these "red" years. 16

It is worth contrasting PAD/D's rise and decline with that of the longer lived Group Material. Better known within the art world, Group Material was founded at about the same time as PAD/D and initially expressed many of the same progressive concerns. But Group Material's collective practice was grounded in a uniquely modified form of curating that allowed it to be viewed as a sort of group "artist" by the voracious art market that took off in the late eighties. This perception no doubt helped insure the groups longevity and effectiveness within art discourse. With it's Russian Constructivist sounding name, Group Material officially commenced when a dozen young artists rented a storefront space in the East Village. Like the dozens of commercial galleries that would follow in the months ahead, Group Material wound up in this largely Latino neighborhood for economic reasons: inexpensive rent and proximity to the downtown art scene. Yet unlike the many art galleries that soon followed, the group's working ideology was emphatically non- commercial. Indeed Group Material's ambitious 1980 mission statement called for an audience of working people, non-art professionals, artists, students, organizations, and what the collective described as:

> "our immediate community - the people of Manhattans Lower East Side, the people on the block, the people who will pass by our storefront on their way to some everyday activity. 17

Growing out of this concept of an expanded art audience, the storefront became a combination group headquarters and activity center for neighbors and school kids. Stating that " an independent art depends on its not being a business " Group Material's hours were 5 P.M. to 10 P.M. and " oriented toward people who must work." In the first year group members screened films and offered children's art classes. They also managed to bang-out a series of eight exhibitions with titles like: "Alienation," "The Gender Show," "Consumption: Metaphor, Pastime, Necessity," and "Facere/Fascis" a prophetic critique of fashion culture. However, by group members own accounts the most important of these early exhibitions was "The People's Choice" (later changed to "Aroz con Mango"). Instead of work made by artists Group Material displayed "beautiful objects" from the homes of

Group Material on East 13th Street in 1980-81.

people in the immediate Latino community. Re- working the thematic formula developed by COLAB into a form of ethnographic self-representation, "The People's Choice" consisted of china dolls, family photographs, posters, and even a neighbor's Pez candy dispenser collection. all chosen by the neighborhood residents themselves 18

Group Material conceived of this work not only as a way of making their art space less off-putting to their primarily Puerto Rican neighbors, but they also aimed to send a message to the art establishment about its own exclusionary cultural practices. Yet the exhibit can also be seen in anther way; as a polemic against the predominant aesthetic ideology of the Left . Since the 1920s, activist political art stressed the deployment of high-art techniques into community settings (read: other peoples cultures) in order to illustrate political lessons and facilitate self-expression. This approach is exemplified by certain practitioners of the mural art movement. Setting aside for now the different sort of patronage presented by Group Material in which a group of University trained artists notarized other peoples belongings as "art," what now seems most significant about "The People's Choice" is the way it can be viewed as part of a shift in museum practice. . While certainly not the intent of Group Material, "The People's Choice" nonetheless points to a transformation within the ideology of the art world in which the idea of the museum as a privileged, discerning authority that masquerades as public education is inverted to one where political and economic interests of a global nature appear as dynamic cultural advocates, a point I will come back to later.

What did Group Material accomplish with "The People's Choice" and other similar exhibitions in their gallery? These projects offered viewers a visual, textual and tactile symbol of what an ideal cultural democracy might look like if one were to emerge. This enactment or performance of artistic democracy remains the enduring feature of Group Material's work through curated installations, public art projects and forums.

In 1985, after producing several innovative public art works including one in the New York City subway system, Group Material was invited to participate in the Whitney Biennial. The project they assembled entitled "Americana" combined contemporary art, mass produced products, images excerpted from mass media, and historical documentation. As always the collective stressed cultural inclusion. Nevertheless Group Material's previous circumvention of what they once termed the "bright, white rooms and full-color repros in the art world glossies." 19 had come to a close. While the focus on cultural diversity remained, future projects over the next eleven years would be carried out primarily within a framework provided to Group Material by the art world. Group Material completed its last major project in 1979 as a response to an invitation by The Three Rivers Arts Festival in Pittsburgh Pennsylvania. The collective (at this point consisting of two remaining members) publicly debated the growing phenomena

of municipally sponsored "community-based" public art. Choosing to use the very brochure that the city of Pittsburgh distributed to advertise its month long festival, Group Material inserted into this publication what the collective described as a "constructed dialogue" of "... unarticulated perspectives and voices..." in order to construct a picture of "community" and "the city" as indeterminate and contested." 20

By interjecting into the festival brochure a series of unsigned quotations culled from architects, designers, critics, and people interviewed at random on the streets of Pittsburgh Group Material was able to suggest that public space in Pittsburgh (like many other municipalities) is a conflicted terrain. "Pittsburgh is like a big fort...." someone remarks while another states "Downtown never was a social space." and to underscore Group Material's own agenda the anonymous statement: "Many officials are using the vocabulary of community. This kind of thing reminds me of Pat Buchanan quoting Martin Luther King." 21

Ultimately the argument made is that the economic interests behind the privatizing of public space are eager to use this new form of "Community-based art" as a symbol of inclusiveness and democracy, while avoiding the expense of supporting egalitarianism in actual practice.

The dissolution of PAD/D and Group Material brings to official close what had been obvious for many years; the legacy of political art activism that started in the Lower East Side of New York between 1979 and 1982 was no longer sustainable in practice. Caught between the desire to build a progressive alternative to mainstream U.S. culture and the attempt to re-kindle the exhibition strategies of a once radical avant-garde, the fading of New York's "new wave" of activist art was nothing less than ironic. On the one hand PAD/D had not survived the demise of an ever more factionalized Left with which, in hindsight, the group had too closely identified itself, and on the other hand Group Material's accommodation by the art world ultimately lead the collective in its last project to sardonically debate the very practices that it (along with PAD/D among others) had once fought to establish. These include the opening up of the art establishment to culturally diverse forms of artistic expression and the development of models for community based public art projects. While other forms of collective art activism did emerge in the later half of the eighties, most notably Gran Fury and the Guerrilla Girls, unlike PAD/D or Group Material these new collectives focused their political agenda on specific issues including opposition to racial and gender based discrimination by museums and galleries, and the culpability of the medical and political establishment in the spread of the HIV virus. The work of Gran Fury and the Guerrilla Girls re- worked many of the activist concepts first tried in the early eighties, substituting for low cost street flyers and stencils expensive commercial advertising. techniques. By directly appealing to the aesthetic of mainstream pop culture both groups aimed to "de- ghettoize" activist art. Yet this bold tactic also coincided

Members of the Guerilla Girls marching in costume circa 1992.

with the fading of critical tension between high and low art and the disappearance of a perceivable public arena of cultural dissent..

Within this new global topography of information, art and entertainment even the look and language of dissent becomes source material for graphic imaging, public spectacles and fashion. in which the semblance of opposition is folded into a mainstream spectacle It is no accident therefore that what is absent from activist culture today is the very idea of an oppositional public sphere. Gone is any desire to establish a non-artworld network of exhibition outlets bringing together progressive art, media activists, and Left intellectuals once an explicit goal of PAD/D. Today the question is not which "transgressive" artistic strategy might work against a system that actively mimics its opponents, but how to re-frame a critical art practice once again within a larger political and social agenda. Understanding the implications and legacy of political activism is one means of initiating this critical repossession.

4. Post-left activist art

One art world phenomenon that cannot be understood outside the history of art activism is the practice known as site-specific art. This concept, whereby the physical and/or social context of a particular location grounds the production and reception of the work[,] is claimed by two very different groups of contemporary artists. Both factions of site-specific art practitioners trace their thinking to the architecturally grounded site works of conceptual artists such as Michael Asher, Robert Smithson, or Daniel Buren in the late 1960s, but one group continues to pursue the art world as the privileged specific site of intervention, while the other presides over what remains of a public sphere.

It is difficult today to understand how the former use of site-specificity can still seem radical, yet a new generation of artists continues to treat the gallery and museum as if it were still open to interrogation, as if de-concealing the institutional frame might yield different results if carried out just one more time. 22

Like a stock plot out of an episode of the X-Files our artist investigators comb the museum's crime scene. Although already scoured by other cultural forensicologists they discover an overlooked clue! Unlike television however the art world evidence turns out to be planted in the classic style of dis-information. Still our investigators obligingly re-discover the obvious. Such repetition is predictable for the TV re-run generation as site-specificity is revised strictly as a matter of formal innovation.

The other site specific art being produced and discussed in the nine-

ties expands upon the reading of site as context: social, political, and only in the last instance formal. Despite the label "New Genre Public Art" 23 this work is effectively a rehabilitated form of civic art, only instead of disguising issues of racial intolerance or historical injustice through public monuments, this new site-specific practice attempts to bring the very idea difference itself into focus as public dialogue or spectacle.

One of these practitioners of contextual site-specific art is REPOhistory, a New York based collective of artists and writers founded in part by former members of PAD/D, myself among them.

Founded in 1989, REPOhistory echoes some of the ambitions of PAD/D and Group Material by facilitating alliances between artists and non-artists. In each of its public projects to date, artist-designed street signage is installed on city streets in order to : "retrieve and relocate absent or overlooked historical narratives at specific sites..." 25

Some of the histories the group has temporarily "repossessed" include: the location of the City's first slave market; the offices of Madame Restell, New York's most successful 19th Century abortionist; the shape of the island's pre-Columbian coast line; an historic visit by Nelson Mandela; an alleged 1741 slave rebellion in Dutch controlled New Amsterdam; the stock market crash of 1929; and the draft-dodging and gold speculation of J. P. Morgan during the Civil War. 24

Similar street-sign projects have commemorated legal activism, incidents of gay and lesbian history in New York's Greenwich Village and in downtown Atlanta Georgia signs were used to demarcate a now vanished African-American neighborhood. The specifically situated information generated by these projects is expanded upon via local and national news media, as well as through the distribution of free maps and public walking tours. Still REPOhistory's attempt to cross a number of disciplinary boundaries has proven less effortless.
The group has collaborated with historians, urban geographers, legal activists, unions, and architects nevertheless an extended dialogue between these various fields and the artists has not taken root.

While this may be due to the discursive and economic interests that define the jurisdiction of each discipline it is most likely the absence of a Left public intelligentsia and a civic forum in which critical, non- academic dialogue can be secured that has contrubuted to this impasse.

Not only is the vestige of 80s activist art visible within REPOhistory, but so is a certain idealized concept of the urban street, one that envisions these "boulevards" as an edge space where a suppressed, but potentially militant historical opposition lies withdrawn and secretly available to the activist artist. Take away this quixotic contingency and REPOhistory's public projects

Tom Otterness sculpture being dismantled on Manhattan's Upper West Side in 2005, once a member of COLAB along with Kiki Smith, Jenny Holzer, and John and Charlie Ahearn among many others the popular artist's work is now found throughout the city and around the US in playgrounds, hotels and public parks.

serve either as a model for collective practice at a time of intense art careerism, or as a curious hybrid of historical tourism, graphic design, and political didacticism aimed at message saturated pedestrians. However, it may be the unapologetic utopianism of this work (and the art-worlds lack of interest in it thus far) that signals an occasion for tempered optimism. With the radical potential of the information "highway" dimming fast, both cyber-activists and street-savvy public artists might consider developing a new theory of radical enthusiasm. 26

5. A geography of nowhere

It was not all that long ago that the marketing and display of high culture was organized around the maintenance of an implicit ruling- class ideology one that art historian Carol Duncan ironically described as "dedicated to the spiritual enhancement of all who visit there." 27

Today however, the culture industry and museums in particular have begun to withdraw this offer of communal access to spiritual enhancement. In its place comes visual and cultural vicissitude, the spectacle of democracy as global emporium. Museums and galleries remain public showcases but virtually no-thing is permitted to escape the privilege of being represented as art. That which has not yet appeared within them one of these cultural spaces is just months or weeks away from doing so as everything that can be described, displayed, fabricated, performed, or photographed including images of molecules, dissected pigs, acts of coitus, vats of industrial liquid, bad jokes, surgical prostheses and arrangements of mail-order merchandise finds a willing curator with an available exhibition space.

If 60's Pop Artists borrowed and then re-worked cultural detritus: comic books, plastic junk and soup cans, occasionally with a socially critical edge, the new pop or "low pop" artist simply displays such things in toto. An installation may consist of assorted kitsch, advertisements, film stills, computer images, and consumer products, yet the artist leaves it to the viewer to reflect on their status. This casual use of mass culture follows logically from the disappearance of any significant difference between images or objects in a museum and images or objects produced for mass consumption. For example a recent installation by artist Jason Rhoades consists of assorted lawn equipment, electrical generators, quartz lamps, unspecified furniture and a donut making machine piled onto a large shag rug. Although the title of the work is "My Brother/Brancusi," Rhoades's high art reference to the Romanian sculptor amounts to a column of stale donuts lanced upon an upright steel rod. Neither is Rhodes' accumulation of odd contraptions intended as a social commentary about cultural anomie (too 70s) nor is it a post-modernist burlesque critiquing its own commodity status (too 80s). In Rhodes work, as well as that of many of his contemporaries, the lumping together of commercially manufactured "stuff" that might have been ordered from a Sears catalog (by the artist

or by his brother for that matter,) begins and ends with political, vocational as well as aesthetic indifference. "Low-pop" and what might be called its complimentary "tech-pop" is boastfully meaningless.

This new expanse of undifferentiated high and low culture extends beyond the borders of the art world. Witness such recent mergers between the mainstream and the peripheral as garage band clothing, Hollywood movies made by post-modern artists, collaborations between "serious" architects and the Walt Disney corporation, or the candidly displayed heroin addiction of supermodels and pop stars.

Meanwhile a shaken commercial gallery system has benefited from a new breed of curator. Evolving out of the post-wall street crash environment of the late 1980s curators approach thematic exhibitions as a form of art practice. The technique, pilfered from the likes of COLAB and Group Material but stripped of any political agenda, often reduces the artist to an element of curatorial imagination. As galleries have loosened their financial commitment toward the traditional stable of artists, thematic exhibitions help compress production and consumption into a single locus: the commercial space itself. Similar trends are emerging within contemporary art museums. Even installation art, work that typically exists only for the duration of an exhibition, can be understood as an outgrowth of a downsized art industry. The artist for her part, politically self-impoverished and economically beaten down, is left to compete for access to the niche markets of an increasingly service oriented and ever more global art industry.28 Taken as a whole, this no-holds barred new art world order reverses the old ideology of institutional neutrality. If once artists such as Acconci, Kaprow, Haacke and Rosler forced an increasingly problematic range of acts, systems, and things, through the incision made by Duchamp in the museum's protective skin --things that the museum had worked very hard to prohibit-- the new culture industry is outright predatory. It now summons every conceivable object, act, subculture, high culture, friend or foe, like an InterNet search-engine, forcing all to appear, to be questioned, to reveal their hidden aesthetic identity. Impinging on all other spheres of production and not unlike the modern legal system, it advertises its own positivity while assuring all concerned -- from producers to dealers, from curators to consumers-- that anything can be made to bear witness to the goodness of diversity.

Perhaps the best response to this new and erratic terrain involves putting less faith in the intrinsic transformative or transgressive potential of art and instead treating visual culture as one component of other social undertakings including political activism, public education and the battle over access to public space itself. Nevertheless within the present landscape the art activist, reduced to practicing a residual cultural form, perhaps even a nostalgic one for the moment, bides her time while putting faith in the unpredictable contingency known as history.■

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NOTES

1. The New York Times has often reported on this conjunction of high art and fashion industries see especially "Artful Back-Scratching Hitches Couture Names to Needy Museums" January 4, 1997 (p13 & 17.) For a stinging critique of this same phenomenon see "Critical Reflections" by Benjamin H. D. Buchloh in the January 1997 issue of Artforum (pgs 68, 69, & 102.)

2. Consider Hans Haacke's use of the Guggenheim Museum as a specific-site for his "real-time" New York City real estate map Shapolsky et. al. of 1971. In Haacke's work, described in more detail below, the intervention was not "indexical" to the architectural space of the Museum but was nevertheless specifically situated with regard to the Museum's audience of educated, liberal art spectators; an "institutional frame" if there ever was one Nevertheless within Kwon's revised history of site specific art, Haacke's seminal project falls through her conceptual grid out of sight. See Miwon Kwon "One Place After Another: Notes on Site Specificity " October 80 (Spring 1997): 85-110.

3. This silence extends to the academic Left and the Left press as well. The former has largely retreated into a funhouse of "theory" while the letter, including widely distributed publications like The Nation, prefer writing about "high art." However, for an important overview of the present state of Marxist Art History that is also less pessimistic see Andrew Hemingway, "Marxism and Art History After the Fall of Communism." Art Journal (Vol. 55 No. 2 Summer, 1996): 20 -27.

4. Lucy R. Lippard " Give and Take: Ideology in the Art of Suzanne Lacy and Jerry Kearns" in the catalog for the exhibition: Art & Ideology (New York, The New Museum of Contemporary Art, 1984): 29.

5. Benjamin H. D. Buchloh "Since Realism there is..." in (Art & Ideology): 6.

6. Sighted in Political Art Documentation/Distribution newsletters: 1st Issue numbers 1& 3, and Upfront numbers 3 & 4. (PAD/D New York).

7. For a thoroughgoing presentation of Shapolsky et al. see Rosalyn Deutsche "Property Values: Hans Haacke, Real Estate, and the Museum in her book Evictions (Cambridge Mass. MIT Press, 1996): 159.

8. Group Material Calendar of Events, 1980-1981, gallery hand-out.

9. 1st issue. Political Art Documentation/Distribution. (New York: issue no.1, Feb. 1981).

10. Gregory Sholette "Unnatural Speculations: Nature as an Icon of Urban Resistance on New York City's Lower East Side, 1979-1984." Afterimage , The Journal of Media Arts and Cultural Criticism. (Sept./October, 1997)

11. COLAB's success was soon matched by other similar ventures. Perhaps the best known of these, Fashion Mode, was an artist and community center located in the Bronx.

12. Alan Moore and Marc Miller, "The ABC's of No Rio and its Times" ABC No Rio Dinero: The Story of a Lower East Side Art Gallery, ed. Moore and Miller (USA: Copyright 1985, ABC No Rio).

13. Red Herring. (two issues: New York: January 1977 & ?)

14. 1st Issue. Political Art Documentation/Distribution, (New York: issue no. 2, May-June 81.)

15. Art with political content was the industry fashion from about 1985 to roughly 1992 including two key exhibitions one at the Museum of Modern Art entitled Committed To Print and the Whitney Biennial of 1993. For a debate about the relationship of political art to the art industry see my essay "Waking Up To Smell The Coffee Reflections on Art Theory and Activism" in Re-imaging America, ed. Mark

O'Brien and Craig Little, (Philadelphia: New Society Publishers, 1990): 25-33.

16. The MoMA Library makes the PAD/D Archives accessible to artists and scholars by appointment.

17. Group Material Calendar of Events, 1980-1981. (offset flyer)

18. The objects selected for "The Peoples Choice" were solicited from residents of East 13th Street in a letter from Group Material that requested locals to bring to the gallery "... the things that you personally find beautiful, the objects that you keep for your own pleasure....something that you feel will communicate to others....." A letter from Group Material to local residents dated Dec. 22 1980 quoted in Jan Avgikos "Group Material Timeline: Activism as a Work of Art," But is it Art? Nina Felshin ed. (Seattle: Bay Press, 1995) 85-116.

19. Group Material. Caution Alternative Space! (offset flyer, not dated.)

20. Three Rivers Arts Festival. Program brochure. (Pittsburgh Pa. June 7-23, 1996).

21. Three Rivers Arts Festival.

22. The most recent group of artists to take up this tactic is Parasite. Soon after announcing its formation in 1997 the group was offered headquarters at several well known alternative spaces in New York City thus begging the question which of these two entities -- the institution or the collective-- is the site and which the supplemental appendage.

23. See Suzanne Lacy's remarks in Mapping the Terrain: New Genre Public Art, Suzanne Lacy ed. Seattle: Bay Press, 1995.

24. Gregory Sholette, letter and three-page proposal to Lisa Knauer, April 11, 1989.

25. REPOhistory, The Lower Manhattan Sign Project, catalog (New York: The Lower Manhattan Cultural Council, 1995).

26. What may be required to combat the affectless simulation of activist culture is a counter strategy that embraces the idea or myth of a resistant collective will proposed by Gramsci. After all, if right-wing public intellectuals can pilfer revolutionary desire why can't the Left re-appropriate these in turn?

27. Carol Duncan, "The MoMA's Hot Mamas," Aesthetics of Power: Essays in Critical Art History. (Cambridge: University Press, 1993) 189-207.

28. For an insightful look at this issue by several practicing artists see: "What's Intangible, Transitory, Mediating, Participatory, and Rendered in the Public Sphere by Andrea Fraser and "Services: Working -Group Discussions" that follows Fraser's piece in the October #80, Spring 1997.

05

THE FACTORY AS SOCIAL TRANSFORMER: RAPHAËLLE DE GROOT'S 8 X 5 X 363 + 1

Jean-Philippe Uzel

2006. *Parachute* 122. http://www.parachute.ca/public/+100/122.htm#Uzel_e

→ L'intervention *8 x 5 x 363 + 1* que l'artist
tréalaise Raphaëlle de Groot a réalisée s
période de deux ans (juillet 2002 – juille
dans l'usine textile Lanificio F.lli Cerruti,
nord de l'Italie, représente un des cas les plus aboutis de *Factory Art*. Cet ensemble de pratiques artistiques récentes fait de l'usine le microcosme de la société capitaliste et des contradictions qui la traversent. Mais il la transforme également en un lieu où il devient possible, à partir d'une redistribution des liens entre l'art et le travail, de repenser l'articulation des rapports sociaux sur une base plus égalitaire. Si le monde de l'art a régulièrement emprunté le modèle d'organisation et de fonctionnement des entreprises industrielles ou commerciales — de la *Factory* d'Andy Warhol aux entreprises fictionnelles des années 1990 (UR de Fabrice Hybert, Polyco de Massimo Guerrera...) —, ce n'est que dans les toutes dernières années que des artistes se sont penchés sur la vie usinière en développant des approches où se croisent réalité et fiction, mobilisation sociale et évocation nostalgique. Toutefois, *8 x 5 x 363 + 1* se singularise par l'importance des moyens mis en œuvre par De Groot pour faire de l'usine le centre d'une structure réticulaire où se répondent les institutions artistiques et économiques, politiques et universitaires.

Les modalités du *Factory Art*

Le nouvel intérêt des artistes pour le monde usinier est éminemment politique. Il s'explique par l'intensification des effets dévastateurs de la mondialisation sur le tissu industriel des pays développés : délocalisation, licenciements secs, augmentation de la précarité, remise en cause du droit du travail... Aussi n'est-il pas étonnant que ce soit principalement en France, l'un des pays les plus fortement touchés par les relocalisations sauvages (Lewis, Daewoo, Hewlett Packard...), que les

THE FACTORY AS SOCIAL TRANSFORMER
RAPHAËLLE DE GROOT'S *8 X 5 X 363 + 1*

↓

The intervention *8 x 5 x 363 + 1*, created by Montreal artist Raphaëlle de Groot over a period of two years (July 2002 – July 2004) in the Lanificio F.lli Cerruti textile factory in northern Italy, is one of the most successful examples of *Factory Art*. This recent type of artistic practice turns the factory into a microcosm of capitalist society and its contradictions. It also makes it a place where it is possible, through a reworking of the relations between art and labour, to reconsider social relations from a more egalitarian perspective. If the art world has often borrowed its models of organization and management from industrial or commercial businesses—from Andy Warhol's *Factory* to the fictional businesses of the 1990s (Fabrice Hybert's UR, Massimo Guerrera's Polyco)—it is only in the last few years that artists have examined factory life through approaches where reality and fiction, social mobilization and nostalgic evocation, meet. However, *8 x 5 x 363 + 1* is exemplary due to the methods used by De Groot to place the factory at the centre of a complex structure in which the institutions of art and economics, politics and the university, must account for one another.

The Methods of *Factory Art*

The new interest of artists in factory life is eminently political. It can be explained by the increase of the devastating effects of globalization on the industrial infrastructure of developed countries: relocations, layoffs, increased job insecurity, the undermining of employment law, etc. Is it not also surprising that it is principally in France, one of

RAPHAËLLE DE GROOT, *8 x 5 x 363 + 1*, 2002–2004; PHOTO REPRODUITE AVEC L'AIMABLE PERMISSION DE L'ARTISTE_COURTESY THE ARTIST.

artistes se sont montrés les plus solidaires avec les employés victimes de l'« horreur économique » (Viviane Forrester). Des *24 objets de grève présentés par Jean-Luc Moulène* (1999) — photographies d'objets détournés produits par des ouvriers en grève — aux portraits photographiques et aux entretiens qu'**Alexis Cordesse** et **Zoé Varier** ont faits en 2005 des employés mis à pied de l'usine de biscuits LU de Ris-Orangis, dans tous les cas, les artistes mettent leur pratique au service de la contestation sociale pour dénoncer les fermetures d'usines et la misère humaine qui en découle. Cette mobilisation artistique en faveur des mouvements sociaux nous montre que les choses ont considérablement évolué depuis la fin des « trente glorieuses » (période de prospérité économique de 1945-1973) et du premier choc pétrolier. En 1972, Louis Malle filmait dans *Humain, trop humain* les chaînes de montage de l'usine Citroën de Rennes pour dénoncer les conditions inhumaines du travail à la chaîne : rapidité des cadences, bruit assourdissant, manque de sécurité... Aujourd'hui, si les artistes se mobilisent, ce n'est plus pour critiquer l'aliénation du travail usinier, mais sa disparition pure et simple. En symbiose avec les mouvements de contestation sociale, ils dénoncent les politiques de délocalisations qui se soldent par la fermeture d'usine, et le licenciement de milliers d'ouvriers dont le savoir-faire et l'expertise accumulés au cours des années sont passés par pertes et profits.

À côté de l'activisme social, le *Factory Art* propose une approche qui, sans se départir d'une dimension critique, met l'accent sur le potentiel utopique que possédait l'usine au cours de l'âge d'or du développement industriel et du plein emploi. Le thème d'un passé industriel riche de promesses était le fil conducteur de l'exposition du Britannique **Liam Gillick** au Palais de Tokyo en 2005[1]. Trois immenses installations renvoyaient

the countries most affected by ruthless relocations (such as Lewis, Daewoo, and Hewlett Packard) that artists have shown the most solidarity with the victims (the employed) of an "economic horror" (Viviane Forrester)? From the *Twenty-four Strike Objects Presented by Jean-Luc Moulène* (1999)—a work comprised of photographs of objects subverted by labourers on strike—to the photographic portraits and interviews made by **Alexis Cordesse** and **Zoé Varier** in 2005 of laid off employees from the LU cookie factory in Ris-Orangis, in every case artists put their practice in the service of social protest in order to denounce the closing of factories and the human misery that ensues. This artistic mobilization in support of social movements shows that things have developed considerably since the end of France's so-called "trente glorieuses," a period of economic prosperity (1945–73), and the first oil crisis. In the 1972 film *Humain, trop humain*, Louis Malle showed the assembly lines of the Rennes Citroën factory in order to expose the inhuman working conditions: the manic work pace, the deafening noise, and the hazardous environment. Today, when artists mobilize themselves, it is no longer to criticize the factory worker's alienation, but rather to underscore his or her complete eradication. In symbiosis with the social protest movements, they denounce the politics of relocation that result in factory closings and the layoff of thousands of workers, whose knowledge and expertise, accumulated over the years, are written off as a total loss.

Alongside social activism, *Factory Art* involves an approach that, without abandoning its critical edge, emphasizes the Utopian potential which the factory possessed during the golden age of industrial development and full employment. The idea of an industrial past rich in promise was the main theme of British artist **Liam Gillick**'s exhibition at the Palais de Tokyo in 2005.[1] Three enormous in-

8 x 5 x 363 + 1 de Raphaëlle de Groot appartient à ce type d'action où l'artiste intervient directement dans l'usine et où la dimension consultative et participative est au cœur de la démarche artistique.

à un projet de livre intitulé *Construcción de Uno* qui relatait l'histoire d'un groupe d'employés au chômage retournant dans leur ancienne usine, désaffectée depuis plusieurs années, pour recréer sur une base plus égalitaire les conditions de travail qu'ils avaient connues avant la fermeture du site. C'est la même situation que l'on retrouvait dans l'installation cinématique *Factory* (2003) de **Chen Chieh-jen**, présentée dans l'exposition « L'expérience de l'art » à la Biennale de Venise 2005. À la différence près que l'artiste taïwanais avait mélangé fiction et réalité en demandant à deux ouvrières de revenir dans leur ancienne usine, fermée depuis sept ans, pour répéter sur les machines abandonnées les gestes qu'elles avaient accomplis pendant des décennies. La dimension nostalgique de ce film silencieux était encore accentuée par certaines séquences au cours desquelles les deux ouvrières, assises au milieu d'immenses ateliers laissés à l'abandon, regardaient un film réalisé à l'époque où l'usine était en pleine activité et où le « miracle économique » taïwanais était encore une réalité.

Une troisième voie du *Factory Art* est ouverte par les artistes qui s'immergent directement dans l'univers usinier et y travaillent pendant des périodes plus ou moins longues. Pionnier en la matière, le collectif britannique **Artist Placement Group** (1966-1989) s'était donné pour mission de placer des artistes dans l'industrie et l'administration dans l'espoir que ces « *Incidental Persons*[2] » parviendraient à transformer l'idéologie de ces institutions. Ici l'usine n'est plus vécue en creux, sur un mode contestataire ou nostalgique, mais devient un laboratoire social riche de possibilités de changement et d'émancipation. C'est le cas chez l'artiste allemande **Antje Schiffers**, qui s'est fait embaucher en 2003 comme « artiste d'entreprise » dans une usine de pneus d'Hanovre, où elle a réalisé différents types d'images (dessins muraux, peinstallations referred to a book project entitled *Construcción de Uno*, which tells the story of a group of unemployed and disillusioned workers returning to their former factory in order to recreate the prior working conditions on a more egalitarian base. The same idea can be found in **Chen Chieh-jen**'s cinematic installation *Factory* (2003), presented in the exhibition "L'experience de l'art" at the Venice Biennale in 2005. Here, however, the Taiwanese artist combined fiction and reality by asking two workers to return to their former factory, which was closed for the past seven years, to repeat the movements they had made for decades on the now defunct machines. The nostalgic dimension of this silent film was enhanced by some footage in which the two workers, sitting in the middle of the enormous shop floor, watched a film about the factory when it was in full operation at a time when the Taiwanese "economic miracle" was still a reality.

A third approach to *Factory Art* is made by artists who immerse themselves directly in the factory world and who work there for more or less long periods of time. A pioneer of this approach was the British collective **Artist Placement Group** (1966–89), which took on the mission of placing artists in industry and administration in the hopes that such "incidental persons"[2] would be able to transform the ideology of the institutions. Here the factory is no longer treated indirectly as a theme for protest or nostalgia, but becomes a social laboratory rich in possibilities for change and emancipation. Such is the case with the German artist **Antje Schiffers**, who was hired in 2003 as a "business artist" in a Hanover tire factory where she produced various kinds of images (murals, paintings, photographs) in the departments that requested her services. Each of these interventions took place over a period of one or two weeks, and each stage of the process (subject, placing of images, etc.) was worked out in consultation with

Today, when artists mobilize themselves, it is no longer to criticize the factory worker's alienation, but rather to underscore his or her complete eradication.

tures, photographies) dans les départements qui ont sollicité ses services. Chacune des ses interventions s'étendait sur une période d'une à deux semaines et chaque étape du processus de création (sujet, emplacement des images, etc.) faisait l'objet d'une concertation avec les employés du département concerné[3].

8 x 5 x 363 + 1 de Raphaëlle de Groot appartient à ce type d'action où l'artiste intervient directement dans l'usine et où la dimension consultative et participative est au cœur de la démarche artistique. Mais la durée de cette intervention (deux ans) a permis à l'artiste de mener un travail en profondeur sur les relations à l'intérieur de l'usine, mais également entre cette dernière et les institutions sociales qui l'environnent.

Plus que parfaites : entre ethnographie et militantisme

Avant son intervention chez Cerruti, Raphaëlle de Groot s'était déjà intéressée à l'économie et à l'histoire du travail. Elle a organisé l'exposition *Plus que parfaites. Chroniques du travail en maisons privées 1920-2000* présentée au Centre d'histoire de Montréal de septembre 2001 à avril 2002. Ce projet, consacré à l'histoire et aux conditions de travail des aides familiales (auxquelles on a donné différents noms au cours de l'histoire : domestiques, bonnes, servantes...), s'avérait d'emblée extrêmement ardu puisqu'il fallait reconstituer une histoire à partir d'une absence quasi complète d'archives et de documents. À la manière d'un détective, figure à laquelle elle se compare souvent, l'artiste est partie à la recherche des indices et des témoins de cette histoire invisible. Elle a lancé un « avis de recherche » dans les médias québécois afin de récolter les récits de vie d'aides familiales à partir desquels elle a conçu son projet d'exposition. Elle a ainsi fait passer le travail anonyme de ces femmes

the employees of the department concerned.[3] Raphaëlle de Groot's *8 x 5 x 363 + 1* involves the same kind of action in which the artist intervenes directly in the factory, thereby making consultation and participation central to the artistic process. But the two-year duration of the intervention gave the artist a chance to work in-depth on both relations within the factory and the external rapport between the factory and the social institutions that surround it.

Past Perfect: Between Ethnography and Militancy

Before her intervention at the Cerruti plant, Raphaëlle de Groot was already interested in economics and labour history. She curated the exhibition *Beyond the Call of Duty: Chronicles of Domestic Work in Private Homes, 1920–2000*, which was shown at the Centre d'histoire de Montréal from September 2001 to April 2002. This project, devoted to the history and working conditions of family aid workers (to whom different names have been given in the course of history: domestics,

Raphaëlle de Groot, *Plus que parfaites. Chroniques du travail en maisons privées 1920–2000*, 2000–2001; photo reproduite avec l'aimable permission de l'artiste_courtesy the artist.

Raphaëlle de Groot, *Dévoilements*, 1998–2001, encre sur papier_ink on paper; photo Dieter Kik, reproduite avec l'aimable permission de l'artiste_courtesy the artist. >

dans l'espace public, leur offrant par là même une visibilité et une dignité qu'elles n'avaient jamais eues auparavant. Ce passage de « l'invisible au visible » constitue d'ailleurs le fondement de la démarche de Raphaëlle de Groot : « Le point de départ de mon travail de création en tant qu'artiste, écrit-elle, est une volonté de révéler l'invisible[4]. » Ce *modus operandi* se retrouve aussi bien dans ses interventions à caractère social, comme *Dévoilements* (1998-2001)[5], que dans ses œuvres plus poétiques comme *Collecte de poussière* (2001)[6] ou plus ludiques comme *L'Histoire illustrée* (2003-2004)[7].

Le travail de préparation de *Plus que parfaites* et les ramifications auxquelles le projet a donné lieu ont préfiguré sous plusieurs aspects le projet *8 x 5 x 363 + 1*. En aval, l'implication de l'artiste est proche de celle d'un ethnographe qui s'immerge dans le milieu social et culturel qu'il étudie. De Groot a interrogé pendant plusieurs mois les aides familiales qui avaient répondu à son appel. Elle a également travaillé dans les archives de l'Institut Notre-Dame du Bon-Conseil de Montréal qui a formé des générations d'aides familiales et développé une collaboration très étroite avec l'Association des aides familiales du Québec (commanmaids, servants, etc.) proved extremely difficult because a record had to be reconstructed out of an almost complete absence of archives and documents. Like a detective, a figure to which she has often compared herself, the artist went off in search of clues and witnesses to this invisible history. She put out a "research notice" in the Quebec media in order to gather life stories of family aid workers who were the subject of her exhibition. In this way she succeeded in bringing the anonymous work of these women into public focus, thus offering them a visibility and dignity they had never previously afforded. This transition from "the invisible to the visible" is the foundation of Raphaëlle de Groot's approach: "The point of departure for my creative work as an artist," she wrote, "is a desire to reveal the invisible."[4] This modus operandi is found as much in her social interventions such as *Dévoilements* (1998–2001),[5] as in works of a more poetic character such as *Collecte de poussière* (2001),[6] or in playful works such as *L'Histoire illustrée* (2003–04).[7]

The preparatory work for *Plus que parfaites* and the work's ramifications prefigured in several ways the *8 x 5 x 363 + 1* project. On the one hand, the artist's involvement is close to that of an ethnog-

À GAUCHE_LEFT: RAPHAËLLE DE GROOT, *L'HISTOIRE ILLUSTRÉE* (EXTRAIT DE VIDÉO_VIDEO STILL), 2003–2004, CAMÉRA_CAMERA JEAN DAOUST; PHOTO REPRODUITE AVEC L'AIMABLE PERMISSION DE L'ARTISTE_COURTESY THE ARTIST. À DROITE_RIGHT: RAPHAELLE DE GROOT, *COLLECTE DE POUSSIÈRES*, SQUARE CABOT, MONTRÉAL, 2001; PHOTO PATRICK MAILLOUX, REPRODUITE AVEC L'AIMABLE PERMISSION DE L'ARTISTE_COURTESY THE ARTIST.
RAPHAËLLE DE GROOT, *COLLECTE DE POUSSIÈRES*, SQUARE CABOT, MONTRÉAL, 2001; PHOTO PAUL LITHERLAND, REPRODUITE AVEC L'AIMABLE PERMISSION DE L'ARTISTE_COURTESY THE ARTIST. >

Raphaëlle de Groot, *8 x 5 x 363 + 1*, 2002–2004; photo Julia Trolp, reproduite avec l'aimable permission de l'artiste_courtesy the artist.

Raphaëlle de

ditaire de l'exposition). En amont, l'exposition au Centre d'histoire de Montréal n'est qu'un des éléments de l'intervention puisque l'artiste a aussi coécrit un ouvrage dont le contenu scientifique dépasse largement ce qu'on attend d'ordinaire d'un catalogue d'exposition[8]. Enfin, elle a organisé une série d'ateliers, *Toujours serviables, jamais servantes*, centrée autour d'une action réalisée en 2001 dans les rues de Montréal avec un groupe d'aides familiales. Mais l'artiste ne se contente pas de décrire le milieu dans lequel elle intervient, elle s'engage également pour l'amélioration des conditions de vie des personnes avec qui elle travaille. C'est ainsi que le 4 décembre 2002 elle comparaît, avec l'Association des aides familiales du Québec, devant la Commission permanente de l'économie et du travail de l'Assemblée nationale du Québec pour y présenter un rapport sur l'amélioration de la protection sociale des aides familiales dans le cadre de la réforme de la Loi sur les normes du travail[9].

L'artiste se fait successivement commissaire d'exposition, ethnographe du travail et militante des droits des aides familiales. Étonnant mélange d'observation et d'engagement qui n'est réductible ni à l'*autofiction* (mise en scène du soi) ni à l'*infiltration* (irruption intempestive dans un milieu extérieur au monde de l'art), deux stratégies qui ont beaucoup été exploitées ces dernières années par les artistes de l'art relationnel. Dans les interventions de Raphaëlle de Groot à Montréal et en Italie, la question primordiale n'est plus liée à l'*identité* de l'artiste ou du monde de l'art, mais bien plutôt à l'*effectivité* de la pratique artistique, à la façon dont l'œuvre *prend effet* dans la réalité sociale. Il n'est pas rare que le *Factory Art* ait un impact à l'extérieur de la sphère artistique. Jean-Luc Moulène a, par exemple, collaboré en 2003 à un numéro spécial de la revue *Nouvelle Vie Ouvrière* de la CGT, le plus important syndicat ouvrier français, dans lequel il a reproduit la série

rapher who immerses himself or herself in the social and cultural milieu under study. For several months De Groot questioned the aid workers who had responded to her notice. She also worked in the archives of the Notre-Dame du Bon-Conseil de Montréal institute, which trained generations of aid workers, and she developed a close collaboration with the Association des aides familiales du Québec (the sponsors of the exhibition). On the other hand, the exhibition at the Centre d'histoire de Montréal is only one of the elements of the intervention, since the artist also co-authored a work whose scholarly contents go far beyond what might be ordinarily expected of an exhibition catalogue.[8] Finally, she organized a series of workshops, *Toujours serviables, jamais servantes*, which gave rise to an intervention in the streets of Montreal in 2001 with a group of family aid workers. But the artist is not content to merely describe the milieu in which she intervenes; she is also involved in the improvement of living conditions for the people with whom she works. On December 4, 2002, she appeared before the Commission permanente de l'économie et du travail de l'Assemblée nationale du Québec with the Association des aides familiales du Québec in order to present a report on the improvement of social protection for family aid workers in light of the reforms of Quebec's Act Respecting Labour Standards.[9]

Thus, the artist became, successively, an exhibition curator, an ethnographer of labour, and an activist for the rights of family aid workers. She thereby fosters an astonishing mix of observation and involvement that is reducible neither to a mode of *autofiction* (which is a mise-en-scène of the self) nor to a form of *infiltration* (which is an inopportune irruption into a milieu outside the art world), two strategies that have been much exploited in recent years by the artists of relational art. In Raphaëlle de Groot's interventions in Mon-

En aval, l'implication de l'artiste est proche de celle d'un ethnographe qui s'immerge dans le milieu social et culturel qu'il étudie.

Raphaëlle de Groot, *8 x 5 x 303 + 1*, 2002–2004; photo Julia Trolp, reproduite avec l'aimable permission de l'artiste_courtesy the artist.

« 40 Documents/objets de grève ». L'intérêt de *Plus que parfaites* et de *8 x 5 x 363 + 1* consiste toutefois à mettre en évidence le fait que les pratiques actuelles qui prennent pour sujet le travail instaurent à leur tour de nouvelles modalités du travail artistique, créant entre celui-ci et les autres activités humaines les conditions opératoires d'une possible transformation sociale.

Deux ans dans l'usine Cerruti

8 x 5 x 363 + 1. Dans le titre de son intervention, De Groot aborde très directement l'impératif de productivité (la multiplication) qui gère l'organisation du travail au sein de l'usine Cerruti et la place quelque peu insolite que l'artiste y occupe à titre de « valeur ajoutée » (l'addition) :

Huit est le nombre d'heures de travail d'une journée, cinq celui des jours dans une semaine, trois cent soixante-trois celui des travailleurs de l'usine Cerruti, un c'est moi, Raphaëlle de Groot, artiste[10].

Ce projet se situe dans la continuité de celui de Montréal, mais à une échelle beaucoup plus ambitieuse. Tout commence en 2002 par une résidence de quatre mois au sein de la Cittadellarte – Fondazione Pistoletto de Biella, pour mener une recherche sur les conditions de travail des femmes dans ce bastion de l'industrie textile, un des secteurs industriels les plus durement touchés par les effets de la mondialisation. Après une recherche de quelques semaines dans les archives de la Chambre du travail de Biella, l'artiste éprouve le besoin de s'immerger dans le milieu usinier et de se confronter à la réalité des conditions de travail des ouvriers du textile. Elle réalise alors un stage d'observation de trois semaines dans l'usine Cerruti durant lesquelles elle partage le mode de vie des ouvriers, prend avec eux ses repas à la cantine, observe le roulement des équipes. À la fin de sa résidence, Raphaëlle de Groot convainc Michelangelo

treal and Italy, the fundamental question is no longer related to the artist's *identity* or to that of the art world, but rather to the effectiveness of the artistic practice, in the sense of the work's *effect* on social reality. It is not unusual for *Factory Art* to have an impact outside of the artistic realm. Jean-Luc Moulène, for example, collaborated in 2003 on a special issue of the CGT's (the most important French labour union) journal *Nouvelle Vie Ouvrière*, in which he reproduced the series "40 Documents/Strike Objects." *Plus que parfaites* and *8 x 5 x 363 + 1* are interesting in this respect, for they show how current artistic practices that take labour as their subject matter establish in turn new methods of artistic work, thereby creating between these and other human activities the operating conditions for a possible social transformation.

Two Years in the Cerruti Factory

8 x 5 x 363 + 1. By means of the title of the intervention, De Groot directly confronts productivity's imperative (growth), which controls the organization of labour in the Cerruti factory, and the rather unusual place that the artist occupies as an "added value":

Eight are the working hours in a day, five the working days in a week, three hundred and sixty-three the workers in the Cerruti Mill, one is me, Raphaëlle de Groot, artist.[10]

This project continues the Montreal work, but at a much more ambitious level. It all began in 2002 with a four-month residence at the Cittadellarte - Fondazione Pistoletto de Biella, where she undertook research on the working conditions of women in this bastion of the textile industry—which is one of the industrial sectors most affected by globalization. After conducting research for several weeks in the archives of the Work Office in Biella, the artist felt compelled to immerse herself in the factory world and confront in person the

In Raphaëlle de Groot's interventions in Montreal and Italy, the fundamental question is no longer related to the artist's identity or to that of the art world, but rather to the effectiveness of the artistic practice, in the sense of the work's effect on social reality.

Pistoletto (directeur de la Cittadellarte) et Nino Cerruti (propriétaire de l'usine) que le projet mérite d'être poursuivi avec des moyens plus importants. C'est ainsi qu'une demande de subvention visant à promouvoir l'égalité des hommes et des femmes au sein de l'entreprise est déposée auprès du Fonds social européen, principal instrument financier de l'Union Européenne en matière de stratégies d'emploi. Ce nouveau projet, présenté par la commune de Biella, implique, en plus de la Fondation Pistoletto et de l'usine Cerruti, un grand nombre de partenaires locaux, nationaux et européens : le ministère italien du Travail, la Commission européenne, plusieurs associations, entreprises et universités du nord de l'Italie. Lorsque la demande est acceptée par l'Union européenne, De Groot se trouve du jour au lendemain à la tête d'un gigantesque projet aux multiples ramifications.

Elle revient dans l'entreprise en 2003, aidée par des collaborateurs chargés de l'assister dans la mise en place et l'archivage du projet. Entre novembre 2003 et avril 2004, elle va intervenir en trois étapes qui visent chaque fois à « rendre visible l'invisible » par l'intermédiaire des mots et des images. Il s'agit à chaque fois non pas tant de *faire* que de *faire faire*, puisque chaque moment du projet suppose la participation active de l'ensemble des travailleurs du site. La première étape consiste à demander aux employés de se prononcer à l'aide d'un bulletin de vote sur la couleur de la boîte aux lettres que l'artiste a placée préalablement dans leurs départements respectifs. Dans la seconde étape, les employés sont invités à décrire en cinq mots leur travail et à déposer leur réponse dans leur boîte aux lettres. Enfin, dernière étape, l'artiste propose à chaque travailleur de choisir une question, écrite par quelqu'un d'autre, et d'y répondre par une image prise, à l'intérieur ou à l'extérieur de l'usine, à l'aide d'un appareil photographique jetable — les images obtenues, ainsi que le reste

conditions of the textile workers. She undertook a three-week observation period in the Cerruti factory, during which time she shared the workers' way of life, ate with them in the canteen, and observed the rotation of crews. At the end of her residence, Raphaëlle de Groot convinced Michelangelo Pistoletto (director of Cittadellarte) and Nino Cerruti (the factory owner) that the project deserved to be better funded. In this way a request for a subsidy aimed at promoting the equality of men and women in the workplace was submitted to the European Social Fund, the main financial arm of the European Union on questions of employment strategies. This new project, presented by the Biella commune, involved not just the Fondazione Pistoletto and the Cerruti factory, but a large number of local, national, and European organizations: the Italian Labour Ministry, the European Commission, and a number of partnerships, businesses, and universities in Northern Italy. When the European Union approved the request, De Groot suddenly found herself at the head of an enormous project with numerous ramifications.

She returned to the business in 2003, aided by associates charged with the task of helping with documenting the project. Between November 2003 and April 2004, she intervened in three phases, aiming each time to "make the invisible visible" through the use of words and images. It was not so much a matter of *doing* as of *having things done*, since every moment of the project implied the active participation of the entire workforce on the site. In the first phase, the employees were asked to decide, with the help of a ballot, the colour of a letterbox that the artist had placed beforehand in their respective departments. In the second phase, the employees were asked to describe their work in five words and to deposit their responses in their letterbox. In the last phase, the artist invited each worker to choose a question, written by some-

La nature artistique de 8 x 5 x 363 + 1 a en effet été la condition déterminante pour susciter la participation et la liberté de parole des employés [...]

des archives de l'intervention (bulletins de vote, résultats des enquêtes...), ont fait l'objet d'une exposition au sein de l'usine à la toute fin du projet (mai – juillet 2004). Chacune des étapes s'est étalée sur plusieurs semaines, nécessitant des rencontres avec les employés, la conception graphique et l'impression des bulletins, leur dépouillement, etc. Mais en fin de compte, les différents moments de l'intervention participent d'un seul et même processus consistant à transformer l'usine en un espace public où chacun est invité à faire connaître son opinion et à réagir à celle des autres. Le choix, en apparence insignifiant, de la couleur d'une boîte aux lettres a donné lieu à des débats sur la règle de la majorité dans le vote démocratique, sur l'identité féminine ou masculine des différents départements, sur la pertinence de la présence d'un artiste dans une usine... finissant par créer un sens de la communauté chez des travailleurs qui d'ordinaire sont peu sollicités sur des questions qui ne concernent pas directement leur expertise. Cela a été possible parce que leur interlocuteur n'était pas un responsable des ressources humaines ni même un sociologue, mais bien une artiste qui n'avait pas d'objectif préconçu et qui faisait évoluer son projet au gré des réactions obtenues. La nature artistique de *8 x 5 x 363 + 1* a en effet été la condition déterminante pour susciter la participation et la liberté de parole des employés — comme l'ont d'ailleurs souligné les cinq sociologues et psychologues qui ont analysé l'impact du projet sur les conditions de travail des employés de Cerruti[11]. L'artiste elle-même admet de façon très lucide que son statut a contribué au succès du projet :

J'ai peu à peu compris qu'en tant qu'artiste et en tant que « personne étrangère », ma présence orientait les conversations dans un certain sens. Le fait que les employés me considéraient comme une personne « créative » a ouvert de nouveaux sujets de conversations [...] J'étais perçue comme un terrain neutre à partir duquel les travailleurs pouvaient

one else, and to respond to it with a photograph taken inside or outside the factory with a disposable camera. The images thus obtained, as well as the rest of the documented intervention (the ballots, the answers to the questions) became the subject of an exhibition in the factory at the very end of the project (May–July, 2004). Each of these phases was spread over several weeks, requiring meetings with the employees, the graphic design and printing of the ballots, their analysis, etc. But in the end, the various procedures of the intervention amounted to a single process, which was the transformation of the factory into a public space where each person was invited to make known his or her opinions and to react to those of others. The apparently insignificant choice of the colour of a letterbox gave place to debates on the majority rule in a democratic vote, on the masculine or feminine identity of the various departments, and on the relevance of an artist in the factory, thereby leading to the creation of a sense of community among the workers, who ordinarily were seldom questioned about things outside of their fields of expertise. This was possible because the person fielding the questions was neither from the personnel department nor even a sociologist, but an artist without a preconceived plan, who had developed her project in response to the received reactions. The artistic nature of *8 x 5 x 363 + 1* was, in the end, the determining factor for winning the employees' participation and freedom to speak, as was pointed out by the five sociologists and psychologists who analyzed the impact of the project on the working conditions of the Cerruti employees.[11] The artist herself perceptively acknowledges the contribution her status made to the success of the project:

Day after day, I realized that insofar as I was an artist and a "foreign body," my presence oriented conversations in a particular way. The fact that they saw me as a "creative" person opened up new topics of conversation. . . . I was

Through Raphaëlle de Groot's initiative, the Cerruti factory became, in a period of two years, a social transformer.

exprimer leur idéal et où ils trouvaient une place pour d'autres genres de relations et d'autres motivations pour communiquer[13].

L'artiste en travailleur du futur

8 x 5 x 363 + 1 a été le premier projet du « Bureau du travail » (*The Work Office*) de la Cittadellarte – Fondazione Pistoletto dont le mandat consiste à « initier des processus visant une transformation responsable de la société dans le milieu de travail[13]. » Sous l'impulsion de Raphaëlle de Groot, l'usine Cerruti est devenue, dans l'espace de deux ans, un transformateur social. Mais l'intervention *8 x 5 x 363 + 1* n'a pas seulement modifié les relations et la communication à l'intérieur de l'usine de Biella, elle a aussi contribué, en tissant des liens entre des institutions qui d'ordinaire s'ignorent, à faire de l'usine un laboratoire où il est possible d'expérimenter les modalités d'un nouveau « contrat social ».

Ce type de projet prend l'exact contre-pied de la pensée moderne qui a toujours opposé la production du travailleur à la création de l'artiste. Ce n'est pas par l'« œuvre », considérée comme un simple divertissement, mais par le « travail » que l'individu moderne a prétendu, au gré des révolutions industrielles, se définir et se rendre maître de son destin[14]. Dès la fin des années 1960, les artistes ont cherché à surmonter cette opposition entre l'utilité du travail et la gratuité de l'acte artistique. La fameuse proposition de Joseph Beuys, « chaque homme est un artiste », souvent critiquée pour son aspect démagogique, cache en fait une volonté de réconciliation de l'art et du travail, comme l'a d'ailleurs expliqué à maintes reprises l'artiste, lui qui voyait dans les éboueurs madrilènes « les représentants d'une humanité future[15]. » Aujourd'hui, Raphaëlle de Groot et les artistes du *Factory Art* participent très directement à cette redéfinition des liens entre l'art et le travail qui fait dire aux sociologues les plus lucides que « l'artiste voisine avec une incarnation possible du travailleur du futur[16]. »

perceived as a neutral ground where the workers could still express their ideals and where they found space for other kinds of relationships and other stimuli to communicate.[13]

The Artist as a Worker of the Future

8 x 5 x 363 + 1 was the first project of "The Work Office" of the Cittadellarte - Fondazione Pistoletto, whose mandate "is devoted specifically to responsible social transformation in the workplace."[13] Through Raphaëlle de Groot's initiative, the Cerruti factory became, in a period of two years, a social transformer. But the *8 x 5 x 363 + 1* intervention not only modified the relations and communication inside the Biella factory, it also contributed, by bringing institutions that ordinarily ignore each other closer together, to turning the factory into a laboratory where it is possible to test the methods of a new "social contract."

This type of project provides a precise counterpoint to modern thought, which has always contrasted workers' productivity and artists' creativity. It is not by means of the art work, considered as a mere form of entertainment, but by means of work itself that the modern individual aspired, in line with the industrial revolutions, to define himself or herself and become master of his or her own destiny.[14] Since the late 1960s, artists have sought to overcome this opposition between the usefulness of work and the gratuitous nature of the artistic act. Joseph Beuys's famous dictum that "every man is an artist," which is often criticized for its demagogical content, conceals in fact a desire for the reconciliation of art and work, as the artist himself explained many times. Beuys considered the Madrid garbage collectors as "the representatives of a future humanity."[15] Today, Raphaëlle de Groot and the artists of *Factory Art* participate directly in this redefinition of the connection between art and work, of which the most perceptive sociologists have said that "the artist is close to the possible incarnation of the worker of the future."[16]

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Translated by Mark Heffernan

NOTES

1. L'exposition de Liam Gillick « Texte court sur la possibilité de créer une véritable économie de l'équivalence » s'est déroulée du 2 février au 5 avril 2005 au Palais de Tokyo à Paris.
2. Expression de John Latham, l'un des fondateurs de l'Artist Placement Group ; voir John Latham, *Event Structure - Approach to a Basic Contradiction*, Calgary, Scartissue, 1981.
3. www.hauptsacheman hatarbeit.antjeschiffers.de
4. Raphaëlle de Groot et Elizabeth Ouellet (dir.), *Plus que parfaites. Les aides familiales à Montréal, 1850-2000*, Montréal, Les éditions du remue-ménage, p. 67.
5. Exposition de dessins, précédée d'une « résidence » de huit mois dans la congrégation des Religieuses Hospitalières de l'Hôtel-Dieu de Montréal, présentée à la galerie Occurrence de Montréal du 25 février au 24 mars 2001.
6. Performance dans l'espace urbain présentée dans le cadre de l'événement *Gestes d'artistes*, organisé par le centre Optica de Montréal, du 7 au 14 octobre 2001, commissaires Marie Fraser et Marie-Josée Lafortune.
7. Installation vidéo présentée dans le cadre de l'exposition collective « *Nous venons en paix...* », *Histoires des Amériques*, exposition tenue au Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal du 28 mai au 5 septembre 2004, commissaire Pierre Landry.
8. Raphaëlle de Groot et Elizabeth Ouellet (dir.), *op. cit.*
9. www.assnat.qc.ca/fra/publications/debats/journal/cet/021204.htm
10. Raphaëlle de Groot citée par Mirko Sabatini, « 8 x 5 x 363 +1 », *Progetto Arte* (journal annuel de la Cittadellarte - Fondazione Pistoletto), n° 9, 2004, p. 100. [Notre traduction.]
11. Une table ronde réunissant ces spécialistes du travail a été organisée le 30 avril 2004 à la Fondation Pistoletto.
12. Raphaëlle de Groot citée dans « Lanificio F.lli Cerruti. A creative approach to equal opportunities », *Progetto Arte*, n° 8, 2003, p. 52-53. [Notre traduction.]
13. Francesco Barnebai, « Work Office. Motivation », *Progetto Arte*, n° 8, 2003, p. 48.
14. Hannah Arendt, *Condition de l'homme moderne*, Paris, Calmann-Lévy, 1983.
15. Joseph Beuys *et al.*, *Bâtissons une cathédrale*, Paris, L'Arche, 1988, p. 154.
16. Pierre-Michel Menger, *Portrait de l'artiste en travailleur. Métamorphoses du capitalisme*, Paris, Seuil, La république des idées, 2002, quatrième de couverture.

1. Liam Gillick's exhibition, "A Short Text on the Possibility of Creating a True Economy of Equivalence," was held from February 2 to April 5, 2005 at the Palais de Tokyo in Paris.
2. This is a reference to John Latham's expression. He was one of the founding members of the Artist Placement Group. See John Latham, *Event Structure: Approach to a Basic Contradiction* (Calgary: Scartissue, 1981).
3. http://www.hauptsacheman hatarbeit.antjeschiffers.de.
4. Raphaëlle de Groot and Élizabeth Ouellet, *Plus que parfaites. Les aides familiales à Montréal 1850–2000* (Montreal: Les éditions du remue-ménage, 2001), 67.
5. *Dévoilements* is a series of drawings produced during an eight-month residence in the Order of the Religieuses Hospitalières de l'Hôtel-Dieu de Montréal. It was exhibited at Occurrence in Montreal (February 25 – March 24, 2001).
6. *Collecte de poussière* is an urban performance presented at of the Gestes d'artistes event, which was organized by Optica and curated by Marie Fraser and Marie-Josée Lafortune (October 7–14, 2001).
7. *L'Histoire illustrée* is a video installation shown in the group exhibition "*Nous venons en paix . . .* " *Histoires des Amériques*, which was held at the Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal and curated by Pierre Landry (May 28 – September 5, 2004).
8. De Groot and Ouellet, op. cit.
9. http://www.asnat.qc.ca/fra/publications/debats/journal/cet/021204.htm.
10. Raphaëlle de Groot, quoted by Mirko Sabatini, "8x5x363 + 1," *Progetto Arte* 9 (annual journal of the Cittadellarte - Fondazione Pistoletto) (2004): 100.
11. A seminar gathering labour specialists was organized on April 30, 2004 at the Fondazione Pistoletto.
12. Raphaëlle de Groot, quoted in "Lanificio F.lli Cerruti: A Creative Approach to Equal Opportunities," *Progetto Arte* 8 (2003): 52–53.
13. Francesco Barnebai, "Work Office. Motivation," *Progetto Arte* 8 (2003): 48.
14. Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition: A Study of the Central Dilemmas Facing Modern Man* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1958).
15. Joseph Beuys et al, *Batissons une cathédrale* (Paris: L'Arche, 1988), 154.
16. Pierre-Michel Menger, *Portrait de l'artiste en travailleur : Métamorphoses du capitalisme* (Paris: Seuil, 2002).

06

PROPERTY VALUES: HANS HAACKE, REAL ESTATE, AND THE MUSEUM

Rosalyn Deutsche

1996. *Evictions: Art and Spatial Politics.* https://mitpress.mit.edu/catalog/item/default.asp?ttype=2&tid=8129

Evictions

Art and Spatial Politics

Rosalyn Deutsche

Graham Foundation for Advanced Studies in the Fine Arts
Chicago, Illinois

The MIT Press
Cambridge, Massachusetts
London, England

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Property Values: Hans Haacke, Real Estate, and the Museum

"Hans Haacke: Unfinished Business," presented at the New Museum of Contemporary Art in 1985–86, was the artist's first one-person exhibition at a New York City museum.[1] But it was not the first attempt to hold such a show. In 1971 the Guggenheim Museum had planned an exhibition of Haacke's work that was called off shortly before it was due to open. At issue then was Haacke's proposal to include what he termed "real-time social systems"—his two real-estate pieces in particular—which the Guggenheim judged to be incompatible with the functions of a prestigious art institution. Fifteen years later Haacke placed the real-estate pieces at the beginning of his New Museum installation and so invited a reconsideration of the circumstances that prompted the cancellation.

Shortly after the Guggenheim incident, describing the interventionist principles governing his new projects, Haacke speculated about the scope and duration of the works' influence: "Works operating in real time must not be geographically defined nor can one say when the work is completed. Conceivably the situation into which a new element was injected has passed when the process unleashed at that moment has gained its greatest potential."[2] For the real-estate pieces, this process presumably began with the Guggenheim's censorship, intensified in the course of the ensuing controversy, and concluded with the subsequent exhibition of the rejected works in other venues. What, then, was to be gained by extending

that situation beyond the Guggenheim episode? In what sense were the real-estate pieces still "unfinished business" in 1985? What, on the other hand, were the dangers of such a retrospective investigation?

Paramount among the risks was the likelihood that, directed toward art history's traditional ends and undertaken according to the discipline's standard procedures, the inclusion of the real-estate pieces would further marginalize—this time through accommodation—works initially cast outside the official boundaries of art by authoritative decree. Conventionally, art-historical reexaminations try to vindicate repudiated works by assimilating them to art's ontological norm. If, in this spirit, Haacke's project had been submitted to the judgment seat of history by being referred back to normative criteria and stabilized aesthetic categories, it would consequently have been withdrawn from the historical conjuncture in which it arose as well as that in which it continued to survive.

Consigned, for instance, to a homogenized lineage of avant-garde art, the real-estate pieces could have been linked to a chain of nonconformist artistic ventures initiated by nineteenth-century salon scandals. But such an approach, which disavows the heterogeneity of avant-garde history and in which the very production of outrage becomes the normalizing standard for a work's eventual canonization, would have masked the impact of crucial historical changes in critical art practice. In equally invariant terms, Haacke's works could have been legitimated by absorbing them into a venerable tradition of realist artworks united by their objective presentations of unidealized, lower-class themes. Indeed, some of Haacke's advocates at the time of the Guggenheim cancellation based their defense of the real-estate pieces on the contention that they utilized the now fully respectable techniques of nineteenth-century realism. Whatever the tactical value during the struggle with the museum, this argument reduces realism to a mere commitment to subject matter and adheres to a long discredited belief in a transparent relationship between realistic representations and the empirical phenomena to which they refer. Today critical practices claiming the legacy of realism have extensively redefined that heritage. Among other pursuits, they explore the mediation of consciousness by representations and investigate the conditions of possibility of what is perceived to be "real" at a given historical moment.

Instead of subsuming the banned real-estate pieces under avant-garde or realist traditions, art historians could have authenticated them as art by utilizing the discursive form of the monograph and placing the works within the artist's career. This option, too, would have severed them from historical determination, for, as Griselda Pollock writes, monographic conventions primarily define works of art as the unique products of sovereign artistic subjects.[3] Although the specificity of Haacke's work militates against such neutralization, the biographical form can incorporate widely divergent practices. Within its narrative of individualistic creative development, the real-estate pieces could have been classified as "early political works," their flaws or rhetorical errors indicated. In these works, historians could have found the seeds of the artist's eventual stylistic mastery of techniques and materials. In his "mature phase," Haacke could then have emerged, predictably, as an "exemplary political artist," a new version of the "great artist" who is, in fact, the real object produced by monographic study.[4]

These approaches resurrect precisely those transhistorical artistic conditions and idealist aesthetic categories—author, style, oeuvre—that artists such as Haacke challenged beginning in the late 1960s. Against the prevailing dogma that works of art are self-contained entities possessing fixed, transcendent meanings, these artists explored the cultural process of meaning production. They also investigated the changing functions of art in relation to the contingencies of history that had previously been relegated in both formalist criticism and its purported adversary, mainstream social art history, to a more or less distant backdrop." From the beginning," Haacke says, "the concept of change has been the ideological basis of my work."[5] This concern is signaled in the titles of the real-estate pieces: *Shapolsky et al. Manhattan Real Estate Holdings, a Real-Time Social System, as of May 1, 1971* and *Sol Goldman and Alex DiLorenzo Manhattan Real Estate Holdings, a Real-Time Social System, as of May 1, 1971.* The words *as of,* followed in each title by a precise date, are significant for two reasons. First, they suggest something important about the works' subject matter: the documented real-estate operations function elusively, their activities and compositions continually altering. But the titles also allude to the materialist premises informing Haacke's mode of artistic production: the belief that a work's meaning is always incomplete, changing "as of" different temporal

situations, that the work includes the responses it evokes and mutates according to the uses to which it is put, and, finally, that this relativity of meaning depends on the position of viewing subjects themselves contingent within history.

Haacke assembled his real-estate pieces in 1971, several years after minimalist artists had initiated a critique of artistic autonomy by investigating the spatial and temporal conditions of aesthetic perception. The minimalists' temporary, site-specific installations incorporated the place of a work's perception into the work itself to demonstrate that perception depends on context.[6] But formalism reentered minimalist art in the assumption that the sites of aesthetic perception are politically and socially neutral. A more decisive shift in contemporary art occurred when artists broadened the concept of site to embrace not only the aesthetic context of a work's exhibition but the site's symbolic, social, and political meanings as well as the historical circumstances within which artwork, spectator, and place are situated.

These inquiries led in diverse directions. One group of artists pursued an investigation of the institutions that mediate between individual works of art and their public reception, developing strategies of intervention in institutional spaces and discourses. Occupying a key place in this critique of art institutions, Haacke's real-estate pieces—including the official reaction that they provoked—interrogated the museum as such a primary mediating agency, foregrounding how it determines and limits the reading of artistic texts. The works also confronted the broader social functions of the museum—its points of intersection with specific economic or political interests and its role in legitimating political realities in a society structured on relations of oppression and exploitation.

Attempts to reevaluate Haacke's real-estate pieces by removing them to a realm of sweeping continuities that repress evidence of rupture and multiplicity in contemporary art could only have seemed a betrayal of the shifts in aesthetic practice that the works themselves helped set in motion. Such interpretations distort the meaning of Haacke's rigorous investigation into the concrete historical factors that characterize his works' sites. There were, however, other imperatives that compelled a recollection of the real-estate pieces when they reappeared in 1985 at the artist's New Museum exhibition. Of overarching concern was the desire to

retrieve a crucial moment in the development of contextualist art practice as part of a struggle for historical memory necessitated in the 1980s by a climate of artistic reaction and widely disseminated neoconservative reconstructions of contemporary art history. That period was marked by a return in the established art world to conventional forms and mediums of artistic production. An embrace of the conditions of the art market coupled with a resurgence of ideologies of aestheticism and self-expression accompanied a resurrection of the authority of traditional art institutions. The critical art practices developed during the previous twenty years and the contemporary art committed to elaborating their principles were frequently ignored, falsified, or absorbed under the rubric of a "pluralism" that proclaimed art's freedom from history and evacuated its past. An understanding of the stakes in the Guggenheim Museum's confrontation with Haacke's real-estate pieces could help restore the ability to apprehend genuine differences and conflicts in contemporary art discourse, conflicts with far-reaching ramifications in the political field.

In still another, more specific, sense Haacke's real-estate pieces shed light on the 1980s and could, reciprocally, be illuminated from the vantage point of that decade. They raised questions about a particular interface between economic and artistic concerns: the connection between dominant aesthetic discourses and the interests of real-estate capital in New York. During the years that had elapsed between the Guggenheim episode and the New Museum show, the problems embedded in Haacke's subject matter—real-estate dealings, deteriorated housing, and the role played by the needs of profit in determining New York's landscape—had acquired a new urgency. In the late 1970s, as a "solution" to the city's fiscal crisis and, moreover, as part of post-Fordist capitalism's reorganization of the domestic and international divisions of labor, the city entered a period of accelerated restructuring as a center for international corporations and corporate-related services. The restructuring entailed an attendant impoverishment and dispersal of the blue-collar laborers whose jobs in manufacturing industries had been disappearing from the city's economic base since the 1950s. The physical conditions to support the new economic structure and facilitate corporate domination of the city had been created by city planning policies that promoted privatized construction of corporate

headquarters, office buildings, and luxury apartments that service white-collar industries and workers. Fostering gross speculation and enriching big real-estate developers, this phase of urban redevelopment also engineered the destruction of the material conditions of survival—housing and services—for residents no longer needed in the city's economy. Redevelopment was, then, one aspect of a more extensive and continuing crisis for this group, a crisis that included unemployment, attacks on unions, and cutbacks in social services.

New York's cultural apparatus played, sometimes unwittingly, a variety of instrumental roles in the redevelopment process. For example, commercial galleries moving into the Lower East Side facilitated gentrification by raising rents and upgrading the area's image for other members of the gentrifying class.[7] In addition, works of art, sometimes even entire museum branches, were routinely placed in "public" areas of new corporate buildings and luxury apartment complexes. Whether sponsored by the state or the private sector, they elevated property values and legitimated private speculation by presenting an image of new construction as beautification programs that furnish cultural benefits to New York's populace. As Walter Benjamin commented about another urban transformation—Haussmann's spatial reorganization of nineteenth-century Paris—such works were largely deployed to "ennoble technical necessities by artistic aims."[8] To a certain extent this collaboration was possible because a great deal of the public art produced for New York's redeveloped, corporate spaces was informed by academic notions of site-specificity that gave this art an aura of social responsibility but suppressed comprehension of the real character of its urban sites. City spaces were treated solely as aesthetic, physical, or functionalist environments; economic forces shaping them were obscured in an enforced distinction between spatial forms and social processes. Haacke's real-estate pieces, by contrast, spanned that artificially created gap, expanding the definition of site-specificity in relation to both urban and cultural sites. The works addressed two spaces—the city and the museum—and treated each spatial form not as a static physical or aesthetic entity but as the effect and context of specific social relations.

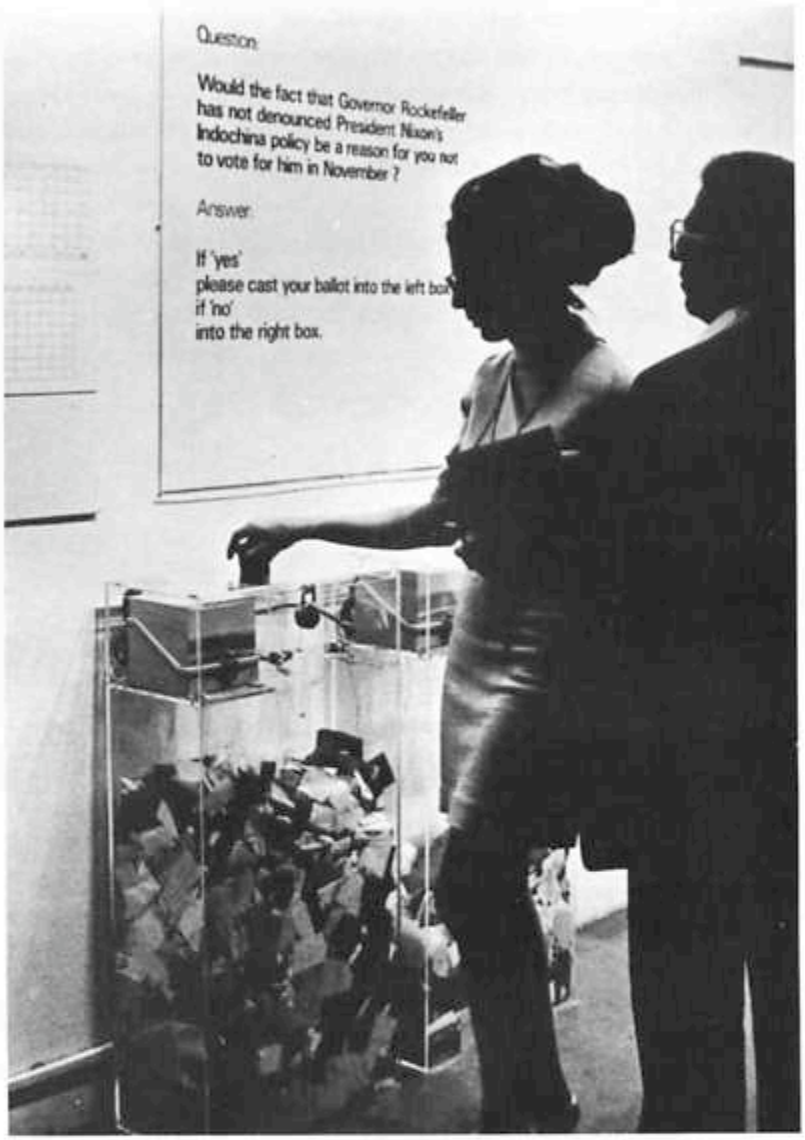
The issue of specificity lay at the heart of the Guggenheim's rejection of Haacke's work. Inadequately and contradictorily defined by the museum's spokesperson, the specificity of Haacke's art was nonetheless cited as the principal reason

for its unacceptability. "It is well understood in this connection," the Guggenheim's director Thomas Messer wrote to Haacke, "that art may have social and political *consequences* but these, we believe, are furthered by indirection and by the generalized, exemplary force that works of art may exert upon the environment, not, as you proposed, by using political means to achieve political ends, no matter how desirable these may appear to be in themselves."[9] Within the terms of this stock argument, Haacke's work is positioned, on account of its specificity, as "political" in contrast to the "indirect" art authorized by museological discourse and constituted, by virtue of the comparison, as "neutral." The practical implications of this doctrine were readily apparent in New York in the late 1980s, when public art that addressed its urban environment in aestheticized or narrowly utilitarian terms reverted to art's official purposes. In so doing, it complied with the demand that artists remain ignorant of the specific forces shaping their works' locations and oblivious to the works' functions. But the usefulness of this work to the forces of urban redevelopment undermined the credibility of Messer's assertion that art yields purely beneficial consequences. In 1971 the notion of art's "generalized exemplary force" was rallied to evict real estate from a New York City museum by claiming that Haacke's detailed analysis of real-estate operations was "alien" to artistic purposes. By the following decade the same aesthetic notion was used to validate the participation of artists, critics, and museums in advancing the interests of the real-estate industry in New York, which was evicting residents from the city. This change does not represent a reversal but, rather, a continuity in dominant aesthetic practice. In both instances, existing economic relations are actively shielded from public exposure by disavowing their direct ties to the conditions of artistic production. Art is severed from economics. When Haacke's work attempted to heal this ideological breach in aesthetic thought, the Guggenheim Museum unveiled its repressive powers.

The Guggenheim's director canceled the exhibition "Hans Haacke: Systems" a few weeks before its planned opening in April 1971. The decision followed a brief period of negotiation between Haacke and Messer about the problems that the

director anticipated with those works dealing with social, as distinguished from Haacke's previous physical or biological, themes. On April 5, following Haacke's publication of a statement about the cancellation, Messer responded: "I did explain that by trustee directive this museum was not to engage in extra-artistic activities or sponsor social or political causes but was to accept the limitations inherent in the nature of an art museum."[10]

Haacke's "extra-artistic" works included a visitors' poll that expanded a type of work that the artist had invented two years earlier—the audience survey. In 1970 Haacke conducted such a survey at the Museum of Modern Art's "Information" exhibition.[11] The MoMA poll directed attention to conditions of aesthetic reception by casting museumgoers in an active role. It queried spectators about their opinions on a timely political issue, asking, "Would the fact that Governor Rockefeller has not denounced President Nixon's Indochina policy be a reason for you not to vote for him in November?" Since Rockefeller, his relatives, and his business and political associates were integrally connected to MoMA either as officers or members of the board of trustees, the question, mounted on the museum wall, not only interrogated spectators about their own political leanings but encouraged them to interrogate modernist assumptions about the museum's status as a neutral arena cleansed of social and political concerns. The museum's white walls, signifier of the art institution's supposed purity and purportedly a mere background for equally pure art objects, became instead part of the material of the work. Haacke converted an element of art's physical frame into a vehicle for revealing, rather than masking, art's social context in a work that provoked public scrutiny of the social structure of the art institution and the economic interests of those who control it. In his Guggenheim survey of the following year, Haacke planned to query viewers about current social and political issues and tabulate responses to demographic questions that would, like his earlier *Gallery-Goers' Residence Profile* (1969), have yielded sociological information about the status and class composition of the art world. Part of a critique of audience and reception that challenged the existence of an art public untroubled by social divisions, the residence profiles suggested that art audiences are composed not of universal "citizens of art" but of specific subjects of class and race. These works also implied that art museums do



Hans Haacke, *MOMA-Poll*, installed as part of the exhibition "Information," Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1970 (photo courtesy Hans Haacke).

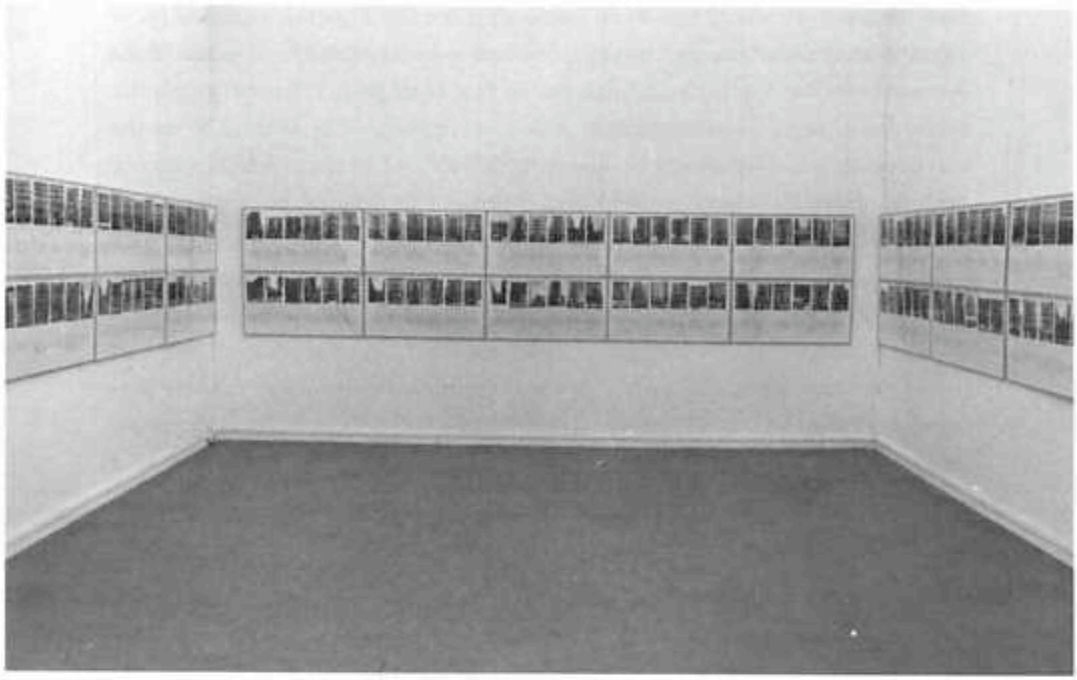
not preserve aesthetic truths transcending social conflicts but are, rather, social institutions that preserve privilege and are therefore immersed in conflict.

Although Messer expressed reservations about the poll, he named Haacke's other "social systems" works as the reason for the show's cancellation. Using material freely available in public records, these works documented the property holdings and investment activities of two separate real-estate groups. One piece provided information about various types of buildings owned by the association of Sol Goldman and Alex DiLorenzo. The other displayed the slum properties of the Shapolsky family organization. In a letter of March 19, preceding the final cancellation, Messer stated that the likelihood of legal consequences precluded the exhibition of these works:

> When we began our joint exhibition project, you outlined a threefold investigation and proposed to devote several exhibits to physical, biological, and social systems. From subsequent detailed outlines, it appeared that the social category would include a real-estate survey pointing through word and picture to alleged social malpractices. You would name, and thereby publicly expose, individuals and companies whom you consider to be at fault. After consultation with the Foundation's president and with advice from our legal counsel, I must inform you that we cannot go along with such an exhibition outline.[12]

Having also conferred with lawyers who denied that legal suits would arise from the work, Haacke commented a few months later that Messer's written statement had not referred to the poll as a reason for refusing to mount the show "because it was impossible to generate a legal smoke-screen for its rejection; in a meeting with the curator and my lawyer, Mr. Messer demanded the elimination of all directly political questions, a demand with which I, naturally, could not comply."[13] Debating the cancellation in art journals and the mass media, both the museum's director and Haacke's supporters consistently concentrated on the Shapolsky real-estate piece. The emphasis on the Shapolsky work is probably best explained by the compelling social contradictions that it addresses and the consequent force of its confrontation with the museum's universalizing pretensions.

Hans Haacke, *Sha*
view (photo cour



Hans Haacke, *Shapolsky et al. Manhattan Real Estate Holdings, a Real-Time Social System, as of May 1, 1971,* installation view (photo courtesy Hans Haacke).

This confrontation was ensured by the sheer magnitude of the purely factual data that comprised the work and by the display of this material in a format unalloyed by either expressionistic sentiments or traditional aesthetic arrangements. *Shapolsky et al. Manhattan Real Estate Holdings* gathers individual photographs of 142 buildings and vacant lots located primarily in New York slum neighborhoods as well as a number of typewritten sheets, charts, diagrams, and maps detailing real-estate transactions. The piece incorporates these documents into a complex presentation. Had it been installed in the Guggenheim, spectators willing to commit time to viewing the work might have perceived striking physical and sociological contrasts between the buildings in the photographs, on the one hand, and the museum building in which the work and its audience were located, on the other.

Such observations would have been encouraged because Haacke's organization of pictorial and textual material blocks traditional avenues of aesthetic escape from the social conditions portrayed. Similarly, the Shapolsky piece refuses to supply the means by which a museumgoer's attention is conventionally diverted from the conditions in which art is viewed. Engaging its public in an active reading process, the work decisively rejects the single-image form of the painted, photographic, or sculptural object accompanied by a discrete caption, a form historically invested with the task of promoting transcendent experiences of "presentness" and evoking contemplative responses from spectators purportedly abstracted from historical circumstances. Moreover, the deadpan, unrelieved factuality of the Shapolsky piece counteracts attempts to convert the concrete specificity of its subject matter into a tribute to the artist's expressiveness and compassion. The repetitive arrangement militates against the transformation of the social reality the work documents into an elegant aesthetic composition, a supposedly self-contained totality.

Shapolsky et al. deviates from the conventions of a genre in which a similar iconography of lower-class urban neighborhoods had previously entered the modern art museum—liberal social documentary, or what Allan Sekula calls the "find-a-bum school of concerned photography."[14] Haacke's photographs document the same kind of New York tenement buildings that had been the object of social reformers' attention for decades, but while the Guggenheim Museum repeatedly referred to Haacke's work as a deed of "social reform," the project differs fundamentally from the humanist photography associated with reformist traditions. "The subjective aspect of liberal esthetics," Sekula writes about concerned photography, "is compassion rather than collective struggle. Pity, mediated by an appreciation of 'great art,' supplants political understanding."[15] Because such work is informed by overwhelmingly subjectivist or aestheticist ideals, it has found shelter within the museum, where it can be united with other aesthetic objects defined as products of unique artistic subjects. Since the art institution pays homage to the sensibility that transposes wretched social conditions into the register of art, the social documentarian's—and, by extension, the viewer's—distinct position of privilege in relation to his or her subject matter is confirmed. But power and privilege are concealed even as they are reinforced since the aesthetic domain is proclaimed a universal public sphere unfissured by class, race, or gender.

The Shapolsky piece alters to the point of reversal the viewing dynamics of liberal aesthetics. "Political understanding" replaces "pity, mediated by an appreciation of 'great art.'" Exhibited in the Guggenheim, it would have precipitated inspection not only of Shapolsky's real-estate maneuvers but of the museum's physical space, social position, and ideological tenets. The Guggenheim, originating in a collection of early twentieth-century idealist abstractions and trading in equally abstracted concepts of spiritual liberation, individual expression, and purified aesthetic experience, would have confronted a work employing painstakingly researched, concrete information about the specific material reality of New York. A museum building renowned as an aesthetic monument of architectural history would have housed representations of buildings defined solely as economic entities. Other contrasts—between the pristine museum interior and the deteriorating tenement facades, between the social status of the viewers' space in a luxury enclave of Manhattan and that of the impoverished minority ghettos pictured—also threatened to erode the aura of isolation constructed around the museum and to dismantle its pretensions to represent universal interests. Instead, the museum might have emerged as a space occupying a position of material privilege in relation to other sites. Viewers might then have focused on the character and interrelationship of these spaces. The anticipated confrontation between the Shapolsky piece and the museum quickened into an open rupture when Haacke's show was canceled. Once the cancellation was publicized, however, it only intensified the work's effects.

While the Shapolsky work sets up tensions between the spaces it addresses—the city and the museum—it also suggests correspondences between the two sites. Explicitly, it documents the ownership and control of urban space, but the work implicitly raises questions about how proprietorial interests affect the cultural space as well. By expanding the work's context beyond the museum walls to encompass the city in which the museum is situated, Haacke did not merely extend the notion of site-specificity geographically. Neither did he simplistically attempt to surmount institutional boundaries by symbolically placing his artwork "outside" the museum and addressing "real" subject matter. Rather, he permitted the viewer to apprehend the institutional apparatus by questioning the twin fetishisms of two, equally real, sites. Both the city—constructed in mainstream architectural and urban discourses as a strictly physical, utilitarian, or aesthetic space—and the museum—

conceived in idealist art discourse as a pure aesthetic realm—appear as spatial forms marked by a political economy.

Wanting to expose the presence of power in sites that appear neutral or self-evident, Haacke investigated the urban site by concentrating on real estate as a force determining the shape of New York's environment. This investigation, which, it turned out, flagrantly violated the museum's rules of aesthetic propriety, explains why Haacke selected the Shapolsky group as his object of study. Searching public records in the office of New York's County Clerk, he identified those real-estate owners with the most extensive holdings in their particular categories of investment. Far from an arbitrary choice, this decision was crucial to the fulfillment of Haacke's objective—revealing the degree to which large-scale real-estate interests dominate New York's landscape. As Haacke explains in the notes accompanying his presentation, in 1971 the Shapolsky properties represented the largest concentration of real estate in Harlem and the Lower East Side under the control of a single group. After choosing Shapolsky, who appeared in the *Manhattan Real Estate Directory* as the principal of these substantial holdings, Haacke researched the publicly recorded deeds and mortgage agreements for each of Shapolsky's properties. A careful examination of the names and addresses of the parties to the real-estate transactions disclosed that Shapolsky was the key figure in a family group that possessed even more properties. Tracking additional connections among members of this group, Haacke uncovered 142 parcels of land owned by the group for which title was legally held by about seventy different corporations. Frequent sales and exchanges took place among the individuals and corporations comprising the system. Properties were sold and mortgages obtained, assigned, and cross-held.

Haacke photographed the individual properties and coupled each picture with a typewritten sheet providing data about the property: address; block and lot number; size; building type (its official code—predominantly old- and new-law tenements and apartment buildings); holder of mortgage; assessed land value and total assessed value. He then synthesized this data in a series of diagrams that chart the business transactions relating to the properties in the twenty-year period prior to 1971. Three charts list the corporations holding the real-estate parcels and trace connections among the corporations in the form of exchanges of mortgages or properties. A fourth reveals the large number of mortgages on Shapolsky proper-

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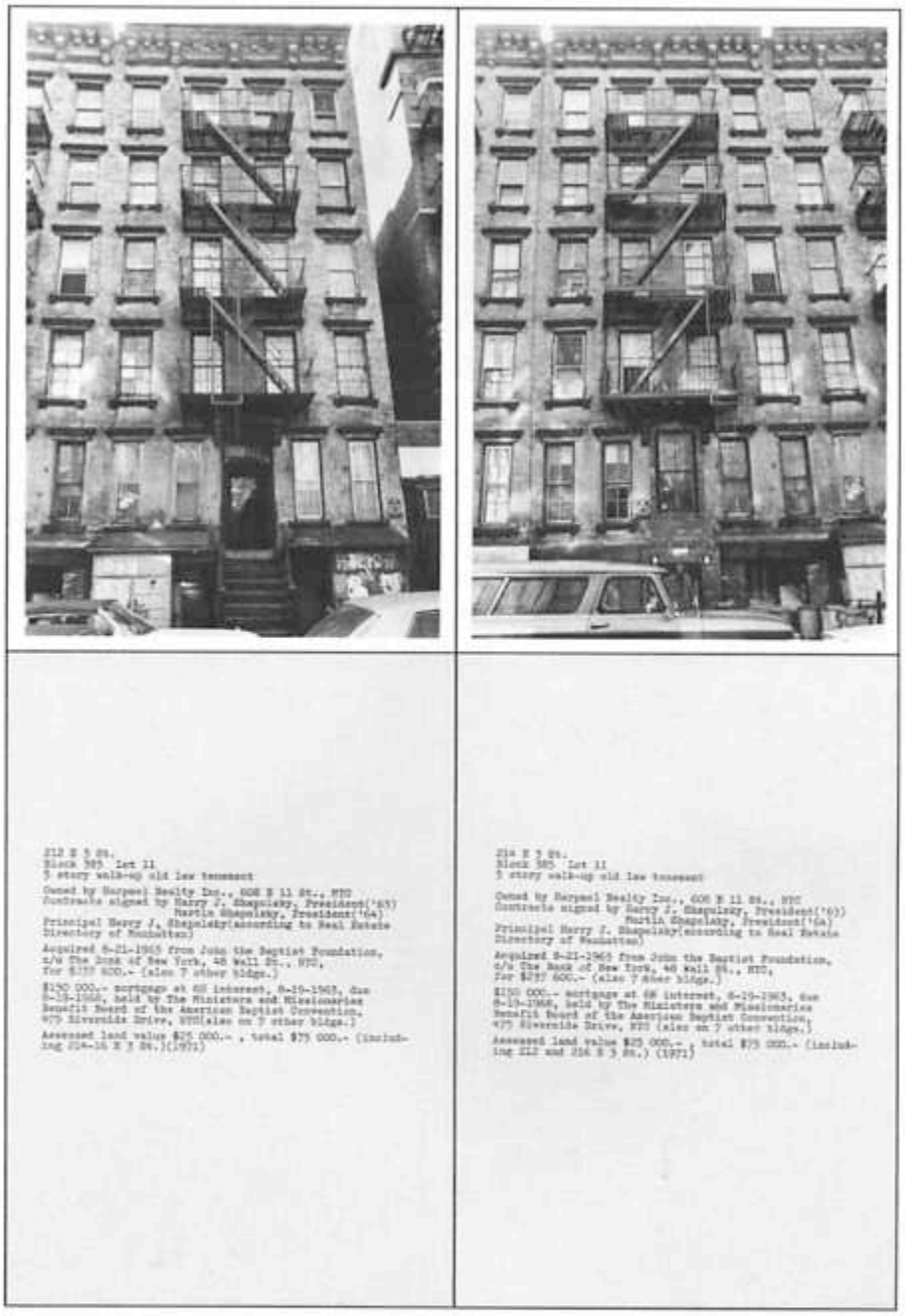


212 E 3 St.
Block 385 Lot 11
5 story walk-up old law tenement

Owned by Haryeal Realty Inc., 606 E 11 St., NYC
Contracts signed by Harry J. Shapolsky, President('65)
Hattie Shapolsky, President('64)
Principal Harry J. Shapolsky(according to Real Estate Directory of Manhattan)

Acquired 8-21-1965 from John the Baptist Foundation, c/o The Bank of New York, 48 Wall St., NYC, for $737 500.- (also 7 other bldgs.)

$150 000.- mortgage at 6% interest, 8-19-1965, due 8-19-1968, held by The Ministers and Missionaries Benefit Board of the American Baptist Convention, 475 Riverside Drive, NYC(also on 7 other bldgs.)

Assessed land value $25 000.- , total $75 000.- (including 214-16 E 3 St.)(1971)

214 E 3 St.
Block 385 Lot 11
5 story walk-up old law tenement

Owned by Haryeal Realty Inc., 606 E 11 St., NYC
Contracts signed by Harry J. Shapolsky, President('65)
Hattie Shapolsky, President('64)
Principal Harry J. Shapolsky(according to Real Estate Directory of Manhattan)

Acquired 8-21-1965 from John the Baptist Foundation, c/o The Bank of New York, 48 Wall St., NYC, for $737 500.- (also 7 other bldgs.)

$150 000.- mortgage at 6% interest, 8-19-1965, due 8-19-1968, held by The Ministers and Missionaries Benefit Board of the American Baptist Convention, 475 Riverside Drive, NYC (also on 7 other bldgs.)

Assessed land value $25 000.- total $75 000.- (including 212 and 216 E 3 St.) (1971)

Hans Haacke, photos of building facades and data sheets from *Shapolsky et al. Manhattan Real Estate Holdings, a Real-Time Social System, as of May 1, 1971* (photos courtesy Hans Haacke).

210 E 3 St.
Block 385 Lot 11
5 story walk-up old law tenement

Owned by Harpsel Realty Inc., 606 E 11 St., NYC
Contracts signed by Harry J. Shapolsky, President('65)
Martin Shapolsky, President('64)

Principal Harry J. Shapolsky(according to Real Estate Directory of Manhattan)

Acquired 8-21-1965 from John the Baptist Foundation, c/o The Bank of New York, 48 Wall St., NYC
for $237 000.-(also 7 other bldgs.)

$150 000.- mortgage @ 6% interest, 8-19-1965, due 8-19-1968, held by The Ministers and Missionaries Benefit Board of the American Baptist Convention, 475 Riverside Drive, NYC (also on 7 other bldgs.)

Assessed land value $25 000.-, total $75 000.- (including 212-14 E 3 St.) (1971)

208 E 3 St.
Block 385 lot 19
24 x 105' 5 story walk-up old law tenement

Owned by Harpsel Realty Inc. 606 E 11 St. NYC
Contracts signed by Harry J. Shapolsky, President('65)
Martin Shapolsky, President('64)

Acquired from John The Baptist Foundation
c/o
The Bank of New York, 48 Wall St, NYC
for $237 000.- (also 5 other properties) , 8-21-1965

$150 000.- mortgage (also on 5 other properties) at 6% interest as of 8-19-1965 due 8-19-1968

held by The Ministers and Missionaries Benefit Board of The American Baptist Convention, 475 Riverside Dr. NYC

Assessed land value $5 000.- total $28 000.-(1971)

292 E 3 St.
Block 370 Lot 19
22 x 105' 3 story walk-up semi-fireproof apt. bldg.

Owned by Brouwir Realty Corp., 608 E 11 St., NYC
Contracts signed by Hepzour Weinfeld, President
Alfred Fayer, Vicepresident

Principal Harry J. Shapolsky(according to Real Estate Directory of Manhattan)

Acquired 10-20-1965 from Appomang Properties Inc. 475 Riverside Drive, NYC, Frank L.Taylor, President

$55 000.- mortgage at 6% interest, 10-20-1965, held by The Ministers and Missionaries Benefit Board of The American Baptist Convention, 475 Riverside Drive, NYC (also on 510 E 5 St.)

Assessed land value $6 300.- , total $55 000.- (1971)

279 E 3 St.
Block 373 Lot 36
18 x 90' 3 story walk-up old law tenement

Owned by West No. 10 Realty Corp., 608 E 11 St., NYC
Contracts signed by Martin Shapolsky, Pres.('60)
Donald Sherman, Pres. ('68)

Principal Harry J. Shapolsky(according to Real Estate Directory of Manhattan)

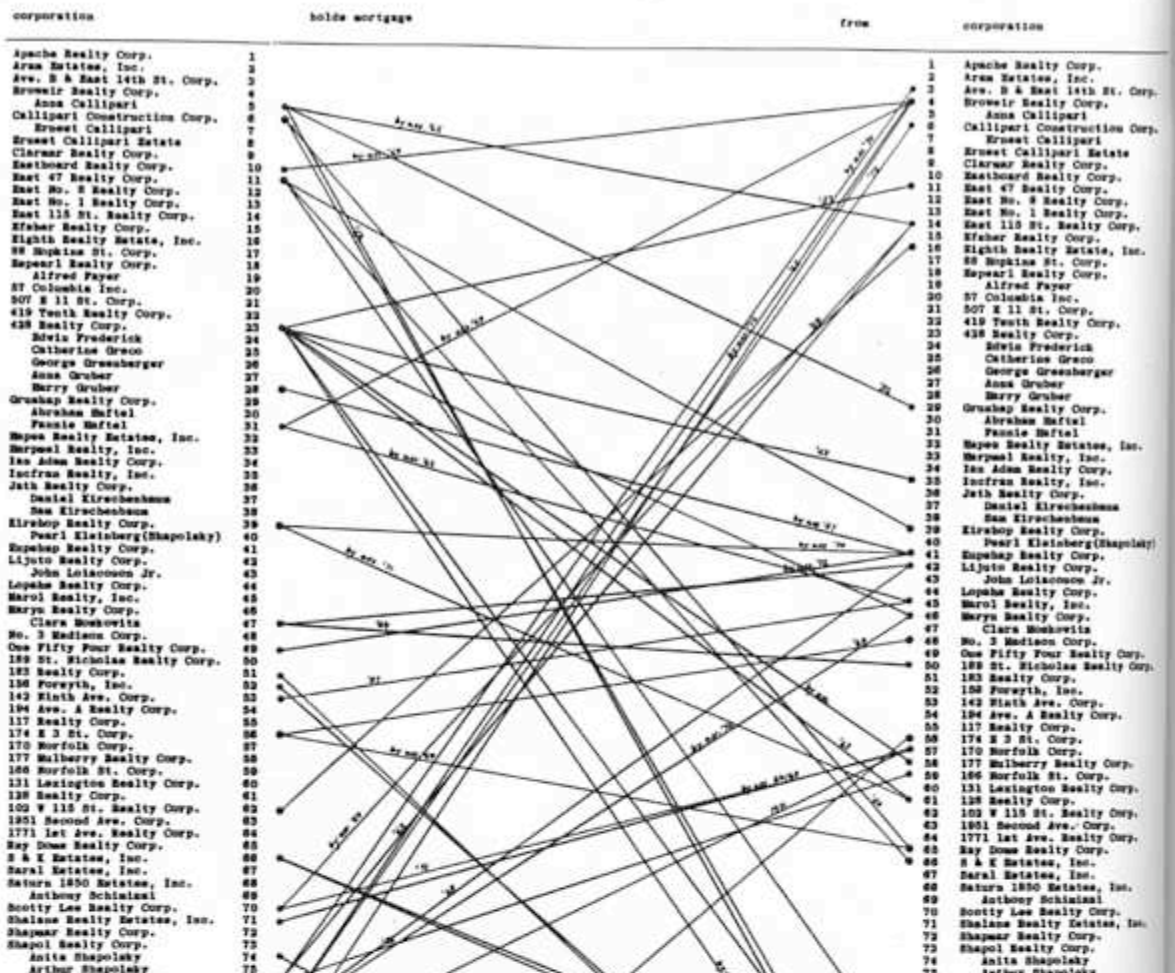
Acquired 9-11-1963 from 300 Realty Corp., 608 E 11 St., NYC,
contracts signed by Harry J. Shapolsky, Pres.('66/67)
Pearl Shapolsky, Pres.('64/65/67)
Donald Sherman, Vicepres.('71)

Principal Harry J. Shapolsky(according to Real Estate Directory of Manhattan)

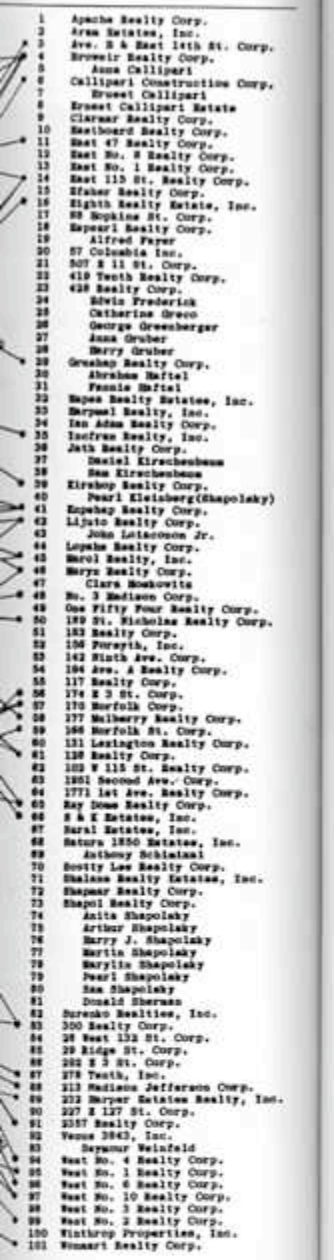
Due $8 975.27 of mortgage at 6% interest, held through assignment, 8-30-1967, by 428 Realty Corp., 608 E 11 St., NYC, Harry J. Shapolsky, Pres.('61/5/5/6), due 12-1-1967.

Due $8000.- of mortgage held through assignment, 7-30-1965, by 428 Realty Corp.

Assessed land value $5 200.- , total $18 000.- (1971)



Hans Haacke, chart showing exchange of mortgages within Shapolsky group, from *Shapolsky et al. Manhattan Real Estate Holding, a Real-Time Social System, as of May 1, 1971* (photo courtesy Hans Haacke).



Manhattan Real Estate Holdings,

ties held by two Baptist organizations. Finally, two charts inventory the corporation presidents and their addresses and juxtapose this material with the names of vice-presidents and secretaries as well as corporate addresses. These charts reveal that the Shapolsky real-estate system is a web of obscured family ties and dummy corporations that veil the identities of principal property owners. Completing Haacke's piece are enlarged maps of the Lower East Side and Harlem with the lots owned by the Shapolsky group circled.

The Shapolsky real-estate piece comprises, then, a dossier on an individual Manhattan slumlord, his family, and his associates. It identifies one kind of real-estate operation in the city and makes visible the complex mechanics of a profitable investment strategy. The photographs testify to the kinds of property in which the investments are made—housing in impoverished neighborhoods lucratively run at a low maintenance level. The data sheets and charts exhibit the myriad financial exchanges and the general investment organization that maximize the gains accruing from these manipulated properties. The Shapolsky system is open-ended. Following its various strands, the multiple relations among its individual and corporate components, one sees an even more labyrinthine and radiating network of real-estate power—a system that includes rental agents, city workers, city agencies, and religious groups, among others. The dispersal of functions within this "extended family" masks the system's interdependent operations. These operations appear random or discrete, rendering the system difficult to penetrate by tenants and the broader public, thereby enhancing its flexibility and control.

The full extent of the system's control emerged when, in addition to gathering and shaping the data, Haacke pursued research on the group in newspapers and other public sources of information. The results, some of which appear in the work's explanatory text, disclose that Shapolsky had been repeatedly investigated on a variety of criminal charges. These include concealing bank accounts and acting as a front for investments by members of the city's buildings department in properties he operated.[16] In 1959 Shapolsky was found guilty of rent gouging but was never imprisoned because the sentencing judge received numerous letters testifying to his good character from "very, very responsible people in the community."[17] Among Shapolsky's character witnesses was one of the Baptist organizations that Haacke's work reveals as the mortgage holder on many Shapolsky

properties. In 1966, after an investigation by radio station WMCA, a bill was introduced into the state legislature requiring the publication of the names of slum owners who operate behind "the obscurity of corporate names."[18] The station cited Harry Shapolsky as one of about twelve real-estate operators who "had controlled 500 tenement buildings housing 50,000 persons buying and selling—or foreclosing—among each other in deals that increased rents and profits."[19] The bill proposed that a list of all true owners of any property declared "a public nuisance" be published in two newspapers. A liability clause would have made these owners—including mortgage holders—personally liable for repairs to buildings.[20]

The information gleaned from these news reports illuminates two strategies—self-dealing and corporate ownership—that, as Haacke's work makes clear, are central to Shapolsky's real-estate system. The frequent self-dealing maximizes profits. Multiple corporate ownership limits personal liability. Both strategies obscure the identities of the principal investors in individual buildings and conceal the full extent of the owners' holdings. Consequently, they limit public knowledge and, therefore, the owners' accountability for nondelivery of services to tenants as well as for tax payments. Using techniques that structure complex deals worked out by lawyers and accountants, such private speculation is, in reality, publicly supported.

But a knowledge of these techniques generates perceptions that extend beyond recognition of the mechanics of the Shapolsky strategy or even the system's comprehensive nature. Such knowledge underscores a fundamental contradiction in a larger real-estate system framing the Shapolsky operation: that between market requirements and the social needs of city residents. This contradiction may emerge most dramatically in the quasi-legal or criminal activities of unscrupulous landlords, yet it springs from the basic organization of housing as a private investment in capitalist society. Indifference to human needs cannot finally be attributed to the callousness of individual landlords but is, rather, structurally determined. Alluding to this contradiction—and Haacke always encourages viewers to explore his works' full implications—Haacke's piece, too, exceeds the limits of its investigation of Shapolsky family relations and becomes a critique of social relations of property.

This aspect of Haacke's critique raises questions about the real-estate pieces' "specificity"—which, as we have seen, was the main reason for the Guggenheim's refusal to show the works. When Messer defined specificity, he distinguished between the act of naming specific individuals, on the one hand, and the representation of an anonymous system, on the other. He claimed that the designation of actual people, not a social system, was impermissible in the museum. Repeatedly, however, he also stated that social issues should be engaged artistically only through symbolism, generalization, and metaphor, thereby disqualifying specificity about the identity of a system as well as of individuals. Equivocation on this point pervades Messer's justification for the cancellation. "Where do we draw the line?" he asked. "*With the revealed identities of private individuals and the clear intention to call their actions into question,* and by a concomitant reduction of the work of art from its potential metaphoric level to a form of photo journalism concerned with topical statements rather than with symbolic expression."[21] Questioned by an astute interviewer who tried to untangle Messer's definition of "particularity," he replied: "I don't know that I fully understood you. But I would say that in the motivation again what is acceptable is the general illustration of a system. What is for the purposes of this discussion inacceptable [sic] is that it is aimed at a specific situation. In other words, it no longer has a self-contained creative objective, but is something with an ulterior motive."[22]

From Messer's obfuscating explanations of what constitutes unacceptable specificity—naming individuals *only* and, simultaneously, *any* nongeneralized reference to a social situation—it is only reasonable to conclude that the real-estate pieces in fact contained two kinds of specificity that the museum found objectionable: first, the detailed identification of the activities of a landlord whose right to operate out of public view had to be protected and second, the implicit designation of a broader framework for this system in a historically specific structure of property relations.

Several elements of Haacke's work permit viewers to question this second system. The condition of the photographed buildings is linked to—indeed is regulated by—the financial operations documented in the data sheets and charts. Clearly neither a natural nor a random process, these operations are themselves

directed by careful decisions dictated by the logic of an investment system. The juxtaposition of photographs of deteriorated housing with extensive calculations of large amounts of accumulating capital focuses the viewer's investigation. The investment activities do not serve the interests of poor tenants, nor does the provision of services to those tenants seem to provide a high rate of return on investment. Once the drive for profit through capital accumulation and appropriation of rents is seen as the principal factor governing the provision and condition of housing, serious doubts arise as to whether the needs of low-income residents can ever be met.[23]

In 1959, criticizing the suspension of Shapolsky's sentence for rent gouging Puerto Rican tenants, New York's assistant district attorney stated that Shapolsky had "ruthlessly exploited the shortage of housing."[24] Without minimizing the importance of this charge, it is crucial to recognize that when the housing problem is addressed exclusively in terms of the need to eliminate *abuses* of scarcity, this condition itself remains unexamined. Scarcity of housing is socially, not naturally, produced and is, moreover, a precondition of the market system. This fact has special ramifications for ghetto areas like those documented in Haacke's work. Given the institution of private ownership of real-estate parcels and the drive to increase profits by appropriating higher rents, coupled with the extremely limited choices of poor people in securing access to urban resources, it is difficult to escape the conclusion that, as David Harvey asserts, "the rich can command space whereas the poor are trapped in it."[25] Exploitative behavior by landlords only exacerbates the effects of normal entrepreneurial operations. Speculation in land and housing is an inevitable feature of capitalist urban development, resulting from forces at the core of our economic system.

Within this system, land and the structures on it assume the form of commodities. They do not, however, necessarily manifest this form with regularity. Real estate is likely to be in use for long periods of time and only rarely exchanged. The dialectical unity of use and exchange value embodied in the commodity appears with greatest frequency in the activities shown in the Shapolsky piece: the operation of rental housing and the frequent sale of properties. Haacke's mode of display emphasizes the commodity character of the buildings, neighborhoods, and

city. The data sheets, for example, initially label each vacant lot or building by the conventional units—block and lot numbers—that classify it as real property. Subdivisions of Manhattan's grid structure, the spatial organization imposed on the city by the Commissioner's Plan of 1811, these units facilitate profit maximization and provide the infrastructure for real-estate speculation. Haacke's photographs reinforce at the level of individual structures the impression that the city itself is an economic product. Shot from street level, looking up at the buildings, the photographs have borders that coincide with property lines, emphatically refusing compositional devices that might identify the buildings as historically or aesthetically interesting urban structures rather than as real estate. The municipal maps represent the city in a similar manner, objectified as an assemblage of blocks with Shapolsky's lots indicated. This objectification is particularly striking in relation to the sociology of the areas represented—Harlem and the Lower East Side, two working-class sectors of Manhattan. In the past, ethnic and racial minorities have been directed to these ghettos, which retain strong identities as communities containing vital networks of social institutions. In Haacke's maps, photographs, and data sheets, however, they appear not as communities but as spatial terrains defined purely by the real-estate market, a collection of houses, physical structures, and vacant lots.

Real estate is a commodity with some unusual features. One is physical immobility: it cannot be moved at will. But fixity does not characterize the social processes that organize land and buildings into particular formations. These processes have the opposite quality: as human practices they can be transformed. While the substantial power of real estate is amply demonstrated in Haacke's Shapolsky piece, the land and buildings do not appear to be immutable. Their permanence is shaken, and not only because they are continually manipulated and transferred in the marketplace. Rather, seen as private property and commodities, they embody relationships of exploitation and domination open to change.

Similarly, Haacke's work jolted the fictitious air of stability surrounding the building in which it was to be installed and undermined that building's claim to

represent eternal values. *Shapolsky et al.* created numerous comparisons between its subject matter and the Guggenheim—analogies between the ownership and control of properties and the ownership and control of culture, between houses collected by the Shapolsky family and art collected by the Guggenheim family, between the commodity form of both housing and art production, and, especially after the show's cancellation, between the concealment of power in the city and in the museum. Ultimately, the work highlighted the fact that the museum building, too, is no isolated architectural structure, container of static aesthetic objects, but a social institution existing within a wider system, a product and producer of mutable power relations.

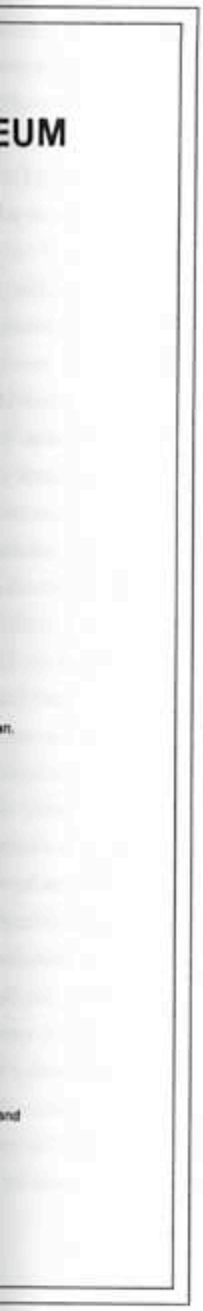
Following the cancellation, Haacke enlarged the project initiated in the real-estate piece—submitting private actions to public scrutiny—by publicizing the museum's censorship of his exhibition and discussing it openly in newspapers and art magazines as well as on television and radio. Throughout the discussion, the museum's director repeated his initial explanation for the cancellation but added that, even without the fear of legal reprisal, Haacke's work "posed a direct threat to the museum's functioning within its stated and accepted premises."[26]

> Should social malpractices be exposed if the evidence is dependable and reliable? Certainly, but not through the auspices of an art museum. It is freely admitted that this conclusion is self-protective, that is, protective of the museum's function as we currently understand it. Individuals and companies who would have suddenly found themselves the unsuspecting targets of a work of art could be expected to react against the artist as well as his museum sponsor. The possibility of a libel suit resulting from such a situation is therefore not farfetched. *But the museum's sponsorship would hardly seem defensible even if the legal effects proved to be containable* through the presumably unassailable nature of the assembled documentation—a rather large assumption on the part of the artist.
>
> A precedent would, in any case, have been set for innumerable analogous presentations with predictably damaging effects upon the

> museum's central function. What would, for instance, prevent another artist from launching, again via a work of art, a pictorial documentation of police corruption in a particular precinct? What would stand in the way of a museum-sponsored attack upon a particular cigarette brand which the documentation assembled for this purpose would show to be a national health risk?[27]

What indeed? In a historical period marked in the United States by mass protests against governmental policy, police actions, and corporate endangerment of public safety at home and abroad, these possibilities could hardly have seemed absurd or even undesirable. What, for that matter, would prevent an artist from exposing "via a work of art" the threat to public interests posed by the activities of those who control art institutions?

Haacke did just that.[28] In 1974, his *Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum Board of Trustees* extended some of the parallels suggested in the Shapolsky work. A key step in Haacke's development of a type of artwork that interrogates, rather than deflects attention from, the economic and political structure of art institutions, *Guggenheim Trustees*, in a manner strikingly reminiscent of *Shapolsky et al.*, traces the connections among members of the Guggenheim family, other trustees of the museum, and several corporations that frequently shared addresses and officers. For the multinational Kennecott Copper Corporation—which counted a Guggenheim family member and two museum trustees on its board of directors—Haacke presented information about the company's investments in Chile and included a statement by the country's deposed and murdered president, Salvador Allende, that such transnational corporations were "not accountable to or representing the collective interest" of Chilean citizens. Kennecott was later named in hearings on the destabilization of the Allende democracy by United States interests.[29] Using the typography and layout of official trustee lists, *The Solomon R. Guggenheim Board of Trustees* referred pointedly to the museum's interest in concealing its own relationship to the operations of privatized property against "the collective interest," a concealment that parallels the Shapolsky strategy for avoiding public accountability.



tesy Hans Haacke).

SOLOMON R. GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM

GUGGENHEIM FAMILY MEMBERS AMONG TRUSTEES

ELEANOR COUNTESS CASTLE STEWART

Born Eleanor Guggenheim. Daughter of Solomon R. and Irene (Rothschild) G.

MRS. HENRY OBRE

Born Barbara Guggenheim. Daughter of Solomon R. and Irene (Rothschild) G.

PETER O. LAWSON-JOHNSTON

Son of Barbara Guggenheim's first marriage to John R. Lawson-Johnston

MICHAEL F. WETTACH

Son of Barbara Guggenheim's second marriage to Fred Wettach Jr.

Hans Haacke, *Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum Board of Trustees*, 1974, panel 2 (photo courtesy Hans Haacke).

Self-protectively, the Guggenheim's director repeatedly described the museum as a private domain and characterized Haacke's real-estate works as an invasion of the privacy of both individual entrepreneurs and the artistic "sanctuary." Designed to foster private experience, the museum was an inappropriate place to question publicly real-estate investors committed to limiting public awareness of their activities. "These individuals," Messer asserted, "would have been held up to public scrutiny and condemnation without their knowledge and consent."[30] By attacking their right to seclusion, he contended, Haacke was taking unfair advantage of the museum as a refuge to protect *himself* from repercussions:

> Haacke's work implicates certain individuals from the safety of its museum sanctuary. Protected by the armor of art, the work reaches out into the sociopolitical environment where it affects not the large conscience of humanity, but the mundane interest of particular parties. Upon the predictable reaction of society the work, turned weapon, would recede into its immune "art-self" to seek shelter within the museum's temporary custody.[31]

Willing, nonetheless—by canceling the exhibition—to offer the museum's protection to large-scale private property and individual slumlords, Messer rehearsed prevalent illusions about the art institution as a natural retreat from the exigencies of society. In so doing, he tacitly invoked a view of the museum consistent with its role as surrogate for the bourgeois domestic interior.

Far from a naturally given entity, however, the interior emerged in the nineteenth century to perform functions tied to concrete economic conditions. Analyzing the bourgeois living environment as a prismatic cultural object that refracts and illuminates these conditions, Walter Benjamin succinctly reconstructed its origins in bourgeois society's historical demarcation of public and private spheres, the latter representing the privilege of seclusion. There, private individuals were guaranteed protection and freedom to pursue their own self-interest. To the considerable extent that such freedom ensured the liberty of acquiring and disposing of property at will, the private sphere testified to the definitive withdrawal of

resources from social control and served a crucial function in legitimating the bourgeois view of life.

Within the private sphere, the domestic interior was constituted as a separate domain where harmony was artificially achieved by expelling the conflicts that characterize economic society. Dependent for its comforts on gains in the economic realm, the illusions of the security of the interior were necessary precisely because the basis of capitalist society lies in a collision of interests. "The private person," wrote Benjamin, "who squares his accounts with reality in his office demands that the interior be maintained in his illusions. This need is all the more pressing since he has no intention of extending his commercial considerations into social ones. In shaping his private environment he represses both. From this spring the phantasmagorias of the interior."[32] "The interior is the retreat of art,"[33] Benjamin continued, describing the doomed attempts of the private owner of artworks to obliterate the commodity character of his collected objects.

The illusions of the interior as shelter and citadel, transferred to that other retreat of art—the museum—were severely shaken when Haacke proposed to bring texts and photographs of the exteriors of slum dwellings inside the Guggenheim's cloistered residence. The violent expulsion that this emblematic confrontation provoked suggests that economic and social conflicts are not, in reality, "alien" to the museum's harmonious space but—as Benjamin wrote about the interior—haunt it from the start.[34] At least that is what the museum itself intimated when, at an unusually telling moment, it articulated its ideology of autonomy and privacy through a literal defense of the rights of private property.

07

MEMOIRS OF A VIDEO ACTIVIST

Joanne Richardson

2006. *subsol*. http://subsol.c3.hu/subsol_2/contributors3/richardsontext3.html

MEMOIRS OF A VIDEO ACTIVIST

Joanne Richardson

Folklore, D Media 2004. Video by Diana Balog, Eniko Nagy, Joanne Richardson and Gabriela Torcatoru. Pioneers during Ceausescu epoch.

Representative image for Reality Science Fiction video group, part of D Media.

D Media filming at school for Roma children.

Different, but still a Team, 2005. Video by students of Nicolae Balcescu high-school in Cluj in collaboration with Liviu Pop and Marius Stoica from D Media.

I left Bucharest when I was 9. My parents were political refugees. We received political asylum in Austria and later moved to New York. I grew up poor but privileged, in the sense that I had an education at some of the best schools in America, social factories for the production of Marxist intellectuals. And then I dropped out of my PhD, left the US, and returned to Romania to become a video activist. For many years I was weaned on the same canon and rules of etiquette as most Western media activists. But they always seemed strange to me, as if I was seeing them outside their frame and hearing them in a foreign language that I only partly understood.

What does video activism mean today? From large demonstrations against the World Trade Organization to small protests against Sky TV in Rome, you can see almost as many people with video cameras as protestors. They go where television cameras don't, providing live news about events that are neglected or misrepresented, documenting police abuse, or challenging the neutrality of the mass-media. Recent video activism has its roots in the alternative media movements of the 1960s and 1970s. Although an oppositional press with an alternative content has existed since the nineteenth century, it privileged intellectuals as experts and maintained structural hierarchies of knowledge. What was different about many of the social movements of the 1960s and 1970s was the desire to provoke social change not through alternative ideas but through the process of production itself, by turning spectators into producers and eliminating the difference between experts who create culture and its passive consumers.

During the 1960s the documentary film first became reflexive and uncertain of itself, questioning its mediating gaze in its attempt to represent the real. American direct cinema sought to achieve a truer representation, a kind of pure transparency, by preserving the guiding hand of the filmmaker but subtracting his subjective perspective and style as much as possible. By contrast, French *cinema verite* inserted the camera and the filmmaker directly into the screen, drawing attention to the inevitability of mediation and the constructed nature of all representation. More radical experiments sought to abolish representation altogether by giving ordinary people the tools to produce their own images of themselves. The logical result of rejecting mediation was the disappearance of the documentary artist and of the artifice itself. Better capturing the real ultimately meant democratizing the production of images by putting them within everyone's reach – and the portability of the video medium made this easier. In 1968 Bonny Klein and Dorothy Henaut used the new Sony Porta-Pak for the National Film Board of Canada's "Challenge for Change." They collaborated with people from different regions of the country, including the slums of Montreal, to help them produce their own community video. Ever since then, the most ambitious goal of video activists has been to include non-experts in the process of production. Changes of form or style have been downplayed as less important and less radical. It is this idea that still guides video activism today - what's different is the proliferation of activist video made possible by cheap equipment and the internet.

Video activism has sometimes been criticized for being repetitive, stylistically conventional, and producing countless images of demonstrations that look the same and blur into one another. The quest for the instantaneous, unmediated "document" often means that questions about form, style, montage techniques, critical analysis and audiences are ignored. On the other extreme of the spectrum, which is more characteristic of the video artist turned activist, there has been a return to the heavy handed tradition of film *auteur* that straightjackets its subjects into pre-formulated theories. When Ursula Biemann presented some footage from a video in progress about the construction of an oil pipeline in the Caspian region, she confessed she found it "annoying" that the peasants living along the trajectory of the pipeline were happy to receive money for their land and had no thoughts of resistance. The reality didn't quite match the story she wanted to tell. This is not an isolated example - many activist artists allow their own voice (or rather ideas borrowed from fashionable theorists) to overwhelm the images. While the first form of video activism, which tries to let the brute "facts" speak for themselves, can be repetitive, stylistically weak and fall prey to the naiveté of pure transparency that characterized direct cinema, the second sometimes re-enacts the worst aspects of militancy that have been handed down through history.

Video Actions, D Media 2005. Video by Nita Mocanu. Image from first Gay Pride parade in Bucharest in 2005, filmed by Miruna.

Folklore, D Media 2004. Video by Diana Balog, Eniko Nagy, Joanne Richardson and Gabriela Torcatoru. Interview with Attila Tordai, curator of Protokoll Gallery and editor of Idea magazine, Cluj.

Paint Romanian , D Media 2004. Video by Diana Balog, Eniko Nagy, Joanne Richardson and Gabriela Torcatoru. Street in Cluj.

Paint Romanian , D Media 2004. Video by Diana Balog, Eniko Nagy, Joanne Richardson and Gabriela Torcatoru. Car in Cluj.

Paint Romanian , D Media 2004. Video by Diana Balog, Eniko Nagy, Joanne Richardson and Gabriela Torcatoru. Garage in Cluj.

The Situationists and the postsituationist group OJTR (*Organisation des Jeunes Travailleurs Revolutionnaires*) once criticized militants for subordinating their subjective desires and creative energies to the drudgery of work marked by routine and repetition – printing and distributing leaflets, putting up posters, preparing for demonstrations, attending meetings, engaging in interminable discussions about protocols of organization. But what remained unanalyzed in their account was the militaristic origin of militancy and its consequences. The first militants were the soldiers of God defending the Christian faith during the middle ages. Driven by an uncompromising vision of totality, they were willing to do whatever was necessary to win the war of righteousness. Revolutionary militants bear an uncanny resemblance to their older relatives: the same intransigence, the same desire to conquer and convert, as well as the spirit of submissiveness. But militants don't repress their desires because they are masochists, as OJTR claimed. They subordinate their immediate needs to an overwhelming passion (a supreme cause) for the sake of which all other things are renounced. They believe they are in the middle of a war, a state of exception that requires extraordinary behavior and momentary sacrifices. Militants don't militate on their own behalf; they put their lives in the service of whatever social categories they believe to be most oppressed (or, more accurately, in the service of their own ideas about the needs of the oppressed). This indirect vanguardism privileges intellectuals and the correct theory, especially when reality seems to contradict it. For all their insights into the bad conscience of militancy, the Situationists ended up recycling it: they claimed the proletariat of May '68 had really wanted revolution but "proved incapable of really speaking on their own behalf" because they lacked "a coherent and organized theory" – in other words, they needed the Situationist International to explain to them what they had really wanted but were unable to say.

There are many aspects of militancy that always made me feel uncomfortable – its vanguardism, its confrontational posture, its enactment of revolution as a theater of political machismo. When I returned to Romania, I viewed the general distrust of militant politics as an opportunity to leave behind this flawed tradition and start from zero. I once wrote enthusiastically about a new paradigm of group collaboration that emerged in the early 1990s in Eastern Europe - a conscious alternative to the manifesto issuing and intransigent proclamations that marked not only leftist militancy but also the history of the avant-garde. But it turned out that my optimism was exaggerated. After 17 years, skepticism about militancy has turned into a flat denunciation of leftist politics and an excuse for passive resignation. This is partly due to disinformation campaigns before 1989 that assured the "left" would be understood simply as the *de facto* power of the communist apparatus. But it has also been influenced by a new mystification about "postcommunism" by those who came to power. On the surface of things, postcommunism appeared to be a neutral, geographical description that referred to countries that used to be communist. But beneath the surface, postcommunism was heavily weighed down by unexamined prejudices and value judgments. The assumption was that communism was over and it had proven to be a dead end; the lesson learned from this tragedy of history was that all forms of state control are totalitarian and that the only way to achieve democracy is to liberate the market from all restraints. This fatalism became the necessary premise justifying neoliberal policies of price liberalization, state deregulation and privatization. Aside from its political and economic dimensions, postcommunism also harbored tacit assumptions about mental disease and health, most obvious in the condescending metaphor of "shock therapy" that intended to cure homo socialisticus of its disease. Internalizing this discourse of pathology, intellectuals denounced their miserable history and awaited the day when Romania would finally become "normal" like the rest of the world. What was hidden behind the language of postcommunism and normalization was the assumption that all the defects of the transition were purely effects of hangovers from the communist past and of the lack of a proper capitalist market, rather than its excesses.

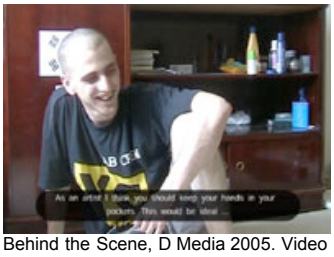
The mass-media has amplified this confusion by dismissing any critique of capitalism as nostalgia for communist dictatorship. A recent article by Cristian Campeanu appearing in "Romania Libera" denounced the antiglobalization, syndicalist and environmental movements as symptoms of a pathological desire to return to communism and as a "refusal" of the democratic principles of "open societies" (http://romania.indymedia.org/ro/2005/07/921.shtml). Dorina Nastase of CRGS, one of the main organizers of an event in Bucharest that called itself the "Romanian Social Forum," responded to criticisms by members of Indymedia Romania that her forum was a bureaucratic, elitist affair that lacked openness and transparency by denouncing her critics as "Stalinists" (http://romania.indymedia.org/ro/2005/05/829.shtml). The problem with postcommunism is not that it rejects the communist past but that it does so superficially and opportunistically, and that its ultimate aim is not to pass judgment on the history of communist regimes but to disparage any new ideas that invoke the common, the collective, the public, and even activism itself. This interdiction against using certain words, because of the disrepute of their communist past, is a refusal of thought. Activism is avoided because before 1989 it used to refer to the actions of party members who spread propaganda on the factory floor and in public spaces. But this is a deformed understanding. In its most radical sense (going back to the root of the word), activism is a recognition that the world can only change in the direction of your hopes and aspirations when you act to bring about its transformation, not by waiting for someone else to do it for you. When activism is outlawed, when it cannot even be thought, this is an implicit legitimation of its opposite. Passivity becomes its corresponding everyday reality.

Together with some friends, I started D Media (http://www.dmedia.ro) in Cluj in 2003. We sought to

Presentation of D Media videos at a fine arts high-school in Cluj.

Behind the Scene, D Media 2005. Video by Nita Mocanu and Eveline Bologa. Interview with Rodica Tache, Anca Gyemant and Maria Crista, curators of h.arta, an independent art space in Timisoara.

Behind the Scene, D Media 2005. Video by Nita Mocanu and Eveline Bologa. Interview with Csilla Konczei, director of Tranzit House, an independent art & cultural center, Cluj.


Behind the Scene, D Media 2005. Video by Nita Mocanu and Eveline Bologa.

Presentation of D Media videos at a high-school in Cluj.

Open, D Media 2004. Video by Diana Balog, Christi Moldovan, Mihai Pedestru and Alex Vranceanu. Alex at Transhackmeeting in Pula.

create a context for media activism that didn't exist and to make the practice of self-organization more contagious. At first we organized conferences and workshops to introduce unfamiliar ideas like do-it-yourself media, net radio, free/open source software and copyleft, and, since 2004, we devoted our attention almost entirely to video production. Being known as the video activist group in Romania is a lonely distinction. And video activism really did mean starting from zero. Unlike other communist countries, Romania had no alternative left, no counter culture and no tradition of experimental film or video. Festivals of experimental film like the ones in the 1960s in Yugoslavia, or a movement like the Czech new wave, or a state studio like the Hungarian Bela Balazs, which produced politically provocative, experimental films during the 1970s and 1980s, were unthinkable in the Romanian context. The only experimental, quasi-activist production was completely clandestine, like Ion Grigorescu's film about a fictitious conversation with Ceausescu, which he hid for fear of being discovered, or the films of the Kinema Ikon group, which weren't screened publicly until after 1989. And after 1989, there was no big flowering of experimental film or activist video. Due to prohibitive costs and the lack of a tradition, film and video production was confined to the school of theater and film or to a few art departments, with dreadful professors and archaic technologies. Things are not significantly different today: most people still have no access to video production, aside from a few artists. And among artists, video remains one of the least popular forms of expression.

D Media's first video project was *Real Fictions* (2004-2005), a series of 4 experimental documentaries made in collaboration with local volunteers from Cluj between the ages of 15 and 20. The immediate background of *Real Fictions* was the general apathy of young people toward political participation and a lack of experience with self-organization, which often leads them to accept that they have no power to change things and to cast their eyes towards a powerful leader who promises to save them. PRM, the party of the extreme right, has fared well in this context, with members in parliament and a presidential candidate with very strong xenophobic sympathies who got more than 30 percent of the vote in the 2000 elections. A large number of his supporters were under the age of 25. The two videos I collaborated on, *Folklore* and *Paint Romanian*, engaged directly with the rise of nationalism and the extreme right in Romania, from political parties like PRM to small neofascist groups like Noua Dreapta that militate for a final solution to the gypsy problem and the re-criminalization of homosexuality. *Folklore*, the longer and more documentary of the works, begins from the everyday reality of Cluj, exposing the fears and frustrations that led the majority of the local population to elect Gheorghe Funar, an extreme nationalist and member of PRM, as mayor of the city for three consecutive terms. It also goes beyond present day Cluj, uncovering the history of nationalism from the Iron Guard to Ceausescu's regime, and its continued presence in today's mainstream culture. *Paint Romanian* is a rhythmic montage set to music, composed of hundreds of still photographs of tricolor objects and monuments reflecting Cluj's nationalist obsessions during Funar's terms in office. *Behind the Scene* presents the views of young artists about their struggle to make a living, the inadequacy of institutions promoting contemporary art in Romania, and the importance of artist-run spaces. The fourth video, *Open*, which was filmed during the Transhackmeeting in Croatia in 2004, introduces the political and economic implications of the Free/Open Source Software movement. (For downloads, http://www.dmedia.ro/04video-e.htm)

The *Real Fictions* project tried to eliminate the distinction between experts and consumers of media by involving local teenagers in the process of video making. But despite our intentions of working with the volunteers as equal partners, they continued to look to us as the experts responsible for making important decisions. Many of them wanted to travel and learn a few skills, without becoming intimately involved in the entire process, without attending too many meetings, and without spending a lot of time doing research or putting in long hours for the montage. So why wasn't the idea of self-organization more contagious? We tend to idealize self-organization as a sign of freedom, as the ability to exercise our rights and limitless possibilities. But in reality this freedom is not only the joy of discovering our latent creativity, it's also the burden of responsibility and hard work. We also tend to idealize open structures as a cure-all, as if all social and economic problems would simply vanish if everyone got a chance to participate and communicate without restraints – a perfect liberal democratic utopia. But openness need not mean a systemic change or even a culture in which everyone thinks for themselves; open forums and open publishing sites have become breeding grounds for racists to recycle all the prejudices and neuroses they've inherited from their cultures. The affirmation of openness can become synonymous with tyranny, unless it simultaneously addresses how ideology functions by imposing standardized ideas and preventing critical thought - and whose interests it serves. In a society that's predominantly patriarchical, homophobic and racist, openness and "free expression" can simply mean imposing the voice of the majority to the exclusion of the rights of minorities. And "rhizomatic" modes of communication are not necessarily progressive. The newest proliferation of self-organized, do-it-yourself media is by neofascist groups, which have their Indymedia spin-off (the Altermedia network), and their own zines, net.radios and blogs.

By focusing exclusively on the process of production, the *Real Fictions* project paid too little attention to the finished works and their dissemination. In retrospect it seems that the impact upon our volunteers' everyday lives was very small compared to the impact the videos could have had if we had planed them for large audiences. This conclusion is influenced by the specificity of the Romanian situation. Some activist friends from Italy once asked me about the social movements in Romania and I had to confess

Open, D Media 2004. Video by Diana Balog, Christi Moldovan, Mihai Pedestru and Alex Vranceanu. Interview with Marcell Mars, Multimedia Institute, Zagreb.

they really don't exist, at least not in the way they meant it. "Civil society" exists, and there are thousands of non-governmental organizations that are getting foreign funding to do so-called humanitarian work or to promote European integration. But as for grassroots, self-organized groups that operate without a legal framework or institutional structure, and especially those that are critical both of Romania's nationalism and its "transition" to global capitalism, you can really count them on a few hands. In Italy movements like Telestreet or Indymedia Italy have a large supporting network of social centers and hundreds of thousands of people participating. Trying to promote a do-it-yourself ethos in Romania with a handful of volunteers at a time lacks this already existing context. And the real problem seems to be elsewhere: in a hegemonic discourse, suppressed issues never reach public consciousness at all. Rather than making videos for a small art crowd or a couple of underground clubs, it seems more meaningful to provoke mainstream audiences to question the way they see their world.

Open, D Media 2004. Video by Diana Balog, Christi Moldovan, Mihai Pedestru and Alex Vranceanu. Interview with Patrice Riemens.

Our second video project, *Made in Italy* (2005-2006), was a collaboration with Candida TV (http://candida.thing.net), an activist collective from Rome. The videos focus on the delocalization of Italian companies to Romania and the migration of Romanian labor to Italy. There are now 16,000 Italian companies in Romania and some cities like Arad and Timisoara have literally been transformed into little Italies. The reality of foreign investment was very different from the initial promise: labor rules were not respected, working conditions were poor, the unions were absent, and many companies delocalized further east when wages began to increase, leaving the workers without a job from one day to the next. Many people left to work abroad rather than compete for jobs paying 70 euro per month at Italian firms in Romania. Italy has become the leading destination for Romanian migrants, with an estimated 2 million workers, mostly clandestine. We thought it important to highlight this connection because public discourse in Romania has uncritically celebrated foreign investment as a panacea that would save the nation. This is even more true now, in the midst of a wave of EU euphoria and following the ascent of a neoliberal government in 2005. The new power has done everything possible to promote the delocalization of foreign companies to Romania by introducing a flat tax of 16 percent, which has turned the country into a fiscal paradise for corporations, and by proposing a labor code reform that would abolish collective work contracts, make temporary contracts the norm, prolong the work week and make it easier to fire workers.

Candida & D Media filming an interview (anonymous) about precarious work in call centers, Cluj.

The videos in the *Made in Italy* compilation introduce a counter-story to the dominant one, but it's not a story told in a unified voice. Documentaries usually aspire to create a sense of authenticity and totality that lead the viewer to identify with their message. The montage style is one of the main elements that can create a sense of totality (and lead to identification) or disrupt it. A montage of association is additive - it adds concordant images and voices to create a homogenous picture. Dialectical montage, as Eisenstein defined it, goes beyond simple addition by presenting a clash of contradictions. But dialectical montage also has its limits, which are the limits of the dialectic itself: it moves between idealized pairs of opposites (like the bourgeoisie and proletariat in *Strike*), and the final outcome is predictable. The arrangement of sound and images can also be disjunctive without being dialectical – by presenting a multiplicity rather than a world made up of black and white contradictions. The videos in *Made in Italy* present the discordant perspectives of the owners of Italian companies, representatives of Italian cultural institutions, workers, taxi drivers, artists, students, trade union leaders and Romanian migrants in Italy. And the various "authors" from D Media and Candida TV who pieced the narratives together also have different perspectives, styles of filming, and ideas about montage - all of which made a single point of view impossible. As a consequence, the story unfolds through disjunctions and becomes more complicated as it moves along. Rather than a unified universe, multiple worlds collide. The audience has to piece together the fragments and draw their own conclusions.

Made in Italy, Candida & D Media, 2006. Video by Francesca Bria, Tora Krogh, Cristina Petrucci and Joanne Richardson. Shop in Rome.

Compared to the previous project, *Made in Italy* really did feel like a collaboration between equal partners. This also meant, realistically, that the process was often difficult since there were many disagreements about ideas and styles and we had to reach a consensus. But ultimately the most interesting part of any real process of collaboration is that those who participate in it are transformed, we all give up a little of our dogmatisms as we come to see things from the perspective of the others, we learn something about own limitations and prejudices, we see our ideas becoming more refined through the process of dialogue, and we are able to make a better work than each of us could have made as a single individual.

Made in Italy, Candida & D Media, 2006. Video by Francesca Bria, Tora Krogh, Cristina Petrucci and Joanne Richardson. Shoe factory in Bucharest.

Taking the highest principle of video activism to mean including habitual spectators in video-making tends to focus entirely on the process of production rather than the work. The importance of presenting perspectives and voices that are not usually heard should not be downplayed. But what often gets lost in activist video is the aesthetic dimension. In activist circles no one talks about the work of art or aesthetics, since these kinds of discussions are disparaged as elitist. The word "art" has become an embarrassment in all but its Situationist sense - as the liberation of creative energies that everyone possesses, but which have been suppressed by the routine and boredom of everyday life. Art is this, but it is also something else. It is an act of communication, and unlike other forms of communication (the political manifesto, the philosophical essay, or the news broadcast), what it communicates are qualities and affects that exceed conceptual schemes. Art has the power to provoke not by argument, unambiguous information, or agitation propaganda but by something that we still don't really know how to define. It incites people to think and feel differently, to pose questions rather than accept ready-made

Made in Italy, Candida & D Media, 2006. Video by Francesca Bria, Tora Krogh, Cristina Petrucci and Joanne Richardson. Shop in Rome.

Eden, D Media 2006. Video by Nita Mocanu. Part of Made in Italy compilation. Street in Arad.

Eden, D Media 2006. Video by Nita Mocanu. Part of Made in Italy compilation. Interview (anonymous) with accountant for Italian companies in Arad.

Eden, D Media 2006. Video by Nita Mocanu. Part of Made in Italy compilation. Intimissimi textile factory, Arad suburbs.

answers.

While he was a member of the Dziga Vertov group, Godard made some extremely arrogant films of Maoist propaganda. *Pravda*, a film about the 1968 uprising in Prague, is haunted by the trope of ideological correctness: we are told that the students who flew the black flag "are not thinking correctly" and that the filmmaker Vera Chytilova does not "speak correctly." The idea behind the Dziga Vertov films is that images are always false and need to be negated and critiqued by the "correct sound." The last project of the Dziga Vertov group was the unfinished film *Until Victory*, shot in 1970 as the Palestinian Liberation Organization was preparing for a revolution. After the breakup of the Dziga-Vertov group, Godard collaborated with Anne-Marie Mieville, using the footage shot for *Until Victory* to make a new work, *Here and Elsewhere*. As the voiceover says, the problem with *Until Victory* was that the sound was turned up too loud, "so loud that it almost drowned the voice it wanted to draw out of the image." The film interrogates not only *Until Victory*, but militant filmmaking in general.

Here & Elsewhere is a film composed of questions. We went to Palestine a few years ago, Godard says. To make a film about the coming revolution. But who is this we, here? Why did we go there, elsewhere? And why don't here and elsewhere ever really meet? The voiceover confesses, "Back in France you don't know what to make of the film ... the contradictions explode, including you." *Here and Elsewhere* is a reflection on how revolutionary militancy is staged as a political theater: its propagandistic gestures and speeches, its covering up of disjunctions in order to re-present a single voice of those unified in struggle. It also interrogates the complicity of activist filmmakers who organize the sound and images in a particular way to present the "correct" political line and to inhibit critical thinking. In an era dominated by a politics of the message (statements, communiqués, declarations of war), *Here & Elsewhere* searches for a politics of the question.

Godard once drew a distinction between making a political film (a film about politics) and making film politically. Making film politically means investigating how images find their meaning and disrupting the rules of the game, whether that game is Hollywood mystification or militant propaganda. It means provoking the viewers to become political animals, to reflect on their own position *vis a vis* power, to entertain doubts and to ask questions. By contrast, a lot of contemporary video activism is really propaganda in reverse. While the content differs from the mainstream press, its form and function is often preserved. Propaganda puts forward its position as natural and inevitable, without reflecting on its construction. Many activist videos show off their militancy through emotional slogans rather than argument, and are blind to their own internal contradictions. The Indymedia video *Rebel Colors*, which documents the demonstrations in 2000 in Prague against the IMF and the World Bank, presents the one-sided perspectives of activists who came from America, the UK, Netherlands, France, Spain and Italy, including members of actually existing communist parties. What you really don't get is a reflection on the Czech context – many locals denounced what they saw as an attempt to playact a revolution by foreigners who invoked slogans from an ideology the Czechs themselves considered obsolete. Because the clash of these different perspectives is absent, the video comes across as dogmatic as the mass-media, even though the content is reversed.

Video activism was born from the recognition that mass-media is controlled by powerful elites and that although it claims to serve the democratic interest of the public to be informed, its real interests, sources of financial support, hierarchical leadership and decision making processes are all hidden behind closed doors. It's important to oppose these practices by including the perspectives and quotidian desires of ordinary people and marginalized groups, and by making the process of production as democratic, non-hierarchical and transparent as possible. But it is not enough to eliminate the distinctions between production and consumption and between experts and spectators. It's also necessary to question how images and sound are organized to produce meaning. Ultimately, video activism means making video politically - refusing to supply platitudes, ready-made answers, or the "correct" political line. It means making videos in the form of a question.

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about Joanne Richardson >>

08

DEMOCRACY IS A GOOD IDEA: ON POLITICS, ART AND ACTIVISM, IDEALISM AND PRAGMATISM

Morten Goll & Jesper Goll

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Democracy is a good idea
On politics, art and activism, idealism and pragmatism

By Morten Goll & Jesper Goll

Pragma'tik –ken [pray-] (From Greek Pragmati'kos skilled, experienced, active, political, from 'pragma - that which has been done, active, of state affairs) expertise; in semiology a discipline that studies communicative media, the sign systems and their relation to man, and which regards the linguistic act in its concrete context in the widest definition (The concrete situation, the particular circumstances of the speakers, their intentions, their social origin, their mutual relations etc.); in political relations: factually grounded, practical and realistic politics. [Source: Gyldendals Fremmedordbog, [The Danish Gyldendal's Dictionary of Foreign Terms] 11th edition, 3rd printing, Nordisk Forlag, Copenhagen, 1993. Tr. by Morten Goll]

How do we know what contemporary art looks like? We don't. We know that it can be defined as cultural critique, that it seeks to eliminate its own inherent confinement as well as the limits produced by the current explanatory model**.** Which is to say the philosophical discourse and the identity models we deploy to describe the world and ourselves, both globally and on the local political plane as well as at the individual level.

For want of something better, we rely on our experience when we have to determine whether something is art, critique or skilled craftwork. In other words, we judge the artwork with reference to historical models that relate to how art used to look. But what qualified as art fifty years ago is not necessarily art today since its form and content no longer propose a critical alternative to the prevailing explanatory model. Stripped of its critical dimension, art reduces to skilled craftwork.

How do we know what critique looks like? We don't. Logic allows us to deduce that the form and burden of a critique should be a function of the object of critique. At best, the critique takes a form that constitutes a constructive demonstration of an alternative to the object of criticism. But more often than not, the form amounts to a recycling of approaches that have proved successful in the past, but may not be successful in the present.

Political activists and progressive artists inhabit parallel universes. When the activist decides to protest against an undemocratic, compliant and anti-social government, she does precisely what the artist does in seeking to create an artwork: she takes a retrospective look at the protests of earlier times and repeats the pattern. But how do we know what resistance looks like today? How do we know how a demonstrator behaves?

What we are looking for in the past is an identity model. A model that defines a pattern of agency, which is a function of the world-view we share. Modernism was one such world-view. The modernist utopia was a fantastic vision of an ideal world.

The modern ideal: that man, aided by science, is able to establish an objective viewpoint from which the world can be over-looked at safe distance. In this modern gaze, the beholder is removed from the object of the gaze, and thus exerts no influence on what is seen. This dualist partitioning of the world is all pervasive in the West. It freezes personal identity into an I and a you and group identity into a them and an us.

Dualism likewise informs the Western idealist faith in progress, which –orchestrated

through technological and political revolutions – will bring us ever closer to the modern utopia. Western scientists, along with the revolutionary avant-garde, lead the way. Both are, by virtue of their positions – in the laboratory or as part of the political elite – immune to pressures from "the natives" they control. The myth of the artist-genius is also part of the legacy of the modernist identity model. The male artist-ego sequestered in his studio, extracting from the uniqueness of his inner being the truth about the world.

The modern idealist's worst nightmare is political pragmatists.

The pragmatist's worldview is based on a quest for consensus. Rather than cultivating the cleavage between "them" and "us", utopia and reality, pragmatists seek to bridge differences, with the aim of reaching practical political solutions. Pragmatic power politics have produced some of the most absurd states of affairs seen in recent world history. An example is USA's ever-changing relations to Osama Bin Laden.

Yet, modernism's political idealism – anarchism, socialism and communism, once seen as alternatives to capitalism – have suffered one abysmal defeat after the other over the past 20 years. As a philosophical discourse/an explanatory model for artists, modernism has proved similarly inadequate.

Artists have talked a lot about "postmodernism" as a new explanatory model but few have managed to set up identity models that do not hark back to the history of modernism. At this point, one can conclude that the only novelty ushered in by postmodernism was the loss of the modernist utopia. Thus bereft of ideal and purpose we carry on in the manner of headless chickens plunging forward in the same direction as before. In a similar manner, demonstrators dress up to look like demonstrators, lining up in front of the police in conformity with the designated extra-parliamentary role accorded them by the powers that be.

However: If art is still a form of cultural criticism, and if political activism aspires to the same goal, it becomes a crucial point to answer the question of where the potential for criticism can be found today. One way of seeking an answer to this question is to try to define more closely and concretely how modernism has outplayed itself. For in the anatomy of the breakdown of modernism lies firstly an understanding of what has broken down, and why, secondly the point of departure from which it might be possible to move on.

Modernist thinking is critical thinking and cultural criticism par excellence, but as critical thinking it has a characteristic trait that seems closely related to its present downfall: The modernist critique is often founded in an abstract negativity, and with the progress of the 20th century this trait seems to become ever more dominant. The focus of the critical activity changes over time from an interest in the specific subject of concrete critique – an interest in what is being criticized, and what this concrete critique has to say about its subject – to an interest in the fact that critique is being exercised. The point of interest becomes the process of negation as such instead of its cognitive potential.

The purpose that modernism seeks to achieve with this negative move is to criticize any form of fundamentalism. Like Derrida, modernism seeks to disown all "privileged concepts" – except the critical position as such – and the means it employs in this general crusade against privileges is a critique of all attempts to establish something that can be construed as a fixed position. But since every positive statement is by its nature (i.e., by the nature of language) similar to a fixed position, modernism in the end looses its ability to say anything at all except "no".

After the breakdown of this critical project, two alternatives seem to remain open. The first alternative is to turn the edge of abstract-negative criticism against modernism itself. Which leads to either the nihilism of postmodernism – where finally the critical position itself is negated and all positions become equally valid or invalid – or to a "yes" that is as abstract as the "no" of modernism, that is to a relapse into a fundamentalism that until recently seemed to belong in the past. These two positions, fundamentalism and postmodernism, are in fact each other's reflections.

The second alternative consists in making the critique concrete (a classical move borrowed from Hegel's toolbox) by seeing the history of modernism as a point of departure, as experience gained that needs to be worked through, assimilated and used – rather than as a platform for renewed exercises in abstract negationism. The experience embodied in modernism is hastening towards self-destruction – culturally into nihilism, politically into fundamentalism – and the necessary countermove is an anticritique that criticizes the failing ability of critique to comprehend pluralistic values and contexts, its forever escalating levels of abstraction and its generally hostile relation to the subject of critique.

Where modernist critique works by constantly "undermining" something – a strategy that in the end reduces the very concept of critique to a ritual – anticritique remains critical in the original sense of the word by entering a territory and opening it, by asking new questions and investigating unseen connections. In its origins modernist critique was (also) like that, but a century of ritualization has rendered its form unusable at present.

Anticritique turns this state of affairs around by maintaining the initial right of any viewpoint to be heard, thus laying claim to consensus, compromise, and dialogue. This is a necessary consequence of its concrete starting point: If the task at hand is to understand, elaborate and develop that which is criticized, it is necessary to run the risk of learning something from it. One's own position must be brought in a danger that is equal to the danger brought to the opponent's position. Thus, anticritique represents an abrupt fall from the thin, refined air of modernism down to the messier but also, one may hope, more fertile morass of opposed interests and viewpoints.

By virtue of the extreme situation in which modernism has left us, such "kindness" is in itself a critical move that will reopen a number of worn concepts – democracy, dialogue, compromise – to thinking. To Heidegger, for one, this is the very purpose of art: To preserve the instruments of thinking in language by renewing and deepening their meanings. He saw poetry as a paradigm for this type of move: The German name for poetry is Dichtung, which to Heidegger also signified Verdichtung, "condensation". However, the very relationship between critique and anticritique also cannot be contained in an unambiguous preference of one over the other. On the contrary, both of these concepts of criticism will loose their content (as in modernism) if they are not thought together. A critique of culture and society that deserves to be called radical must oppose any ritualization of thought. This includes the abstract negativity of modernism, but also the ritualization that attempts to elevate compromise and consensus as the new established ritual. A critique that is radical in this sense must avoid manifestos and policy statements like the plague, and at the same time it must continue to produce them. It is pragmatic, paradoxical, unruly, of a Buddhist nature.

Modernism's ritualistic insistence on critique as pure abstract negativity has completed a long, tough haul in the cultural history of the West. Because this haul is now complete, it is time for new poetry, for a new condensation – and because all the old idols have been toppled (also for this reason!) we now necessarily find ourselves on the ground of pragmatism. Our task is to formulate a trap; an ambush that can open the mind to the possibility of pragmatism – for the only alternative available today seems to be a relapse either into a post-modern form of nihilism, or into a medieval fundamentalism akin to the simplified, semi-religious world views that are presently being promoted by powerful militant leaders both in the East and in the West.

It is time to develop a new identity model that can invest both art and activism with new meaning and better resonance. Modernism's dualism, which makes possible the entrenched ego, is closer to fascism than to democracy in social contexts. It supports colonialist domination: to talk, to refuse to listen, to dominate.

The task for this new identity model is nothing less than a defense of one of the late modernism's most impossible ideals, namely democracy. It is the responsibility of art and political activism to create an identity model that both in terms of method and message

articulates a democratic alternative.

Democracy is a fragile vision that has been in hibernation for 2500 years. The democratic ideal is constantly threatened by economic, political and military powers. Democracy is impossible in a capitalist economy that places economic freedom above personal freedom. Democracy is impossible where pragmatic power politics sacrifices human rights in favor of cheap oil. Democracy is impossible without democratic mass media. Democracy has never existed. Yet, it is a good idea.

Democracy's method is social interaction, communication, debate, respect for those who think differently, consensus, pragmatics. The struggle for democracy should be conducted by the same means. This does not mean that we should adopt current definitions of the concept of "pragmatism". Rather, we should explore and develop the potential of pragmatics as an ethically accountable artistic and political method. We need to explore the dynamic intersection where critique and anti-critique meet.

A pragmatic model of identity must be based on concepts such as collaboration, conversation, mutable identities, and above all focus on encounters in social space where the democratic processes are conducted. All communication requires a sender, a receiver and a medium to convey information. Meaningful communication requires that the participators exchange not simply information but also identities – to be a listener as well as a speaker. A pragmatic cultural critique must focus on the art of disseminating information, on the role of the mass media, on the reclaiming and upgrading of the name of democracy. We need to find ways to demonstrate that democracy is a good idea, and methods that reveal how its name is being abused.

Being a fellow-citizen is not a profession. It is a responsibility that falls to amateurs.

Morten Goll
Jesper Goll
April 2003

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09

MYSTERIES OF THE CREATIVE CLASS, OR I HAVE SEEN THE ENEMY AND THEY IS US

Gregory Sholette

2005. *www.gregorysholette.com*. http://gregorysholette.com/essays/docs/03_mysteries.pdf

MYSTERIES OF THE CREATIVE CLASS

or, I Have Seen The Enemy and They Is Us

GREGORY SHOLETTE

Artists and other 'creative' professionals are increasingly willing pawns in the State-backed gentrification games of developers and corporations. But can those that wish to challenge the underlying brutalities of 'culture-led regeneration' turn their creative powers against it? Gregory Sholette on New York artists' collective REPOhistory and their fight to re-write the story of urban renewal in Manhattan

A painting of a smartly clad, long necked and sophisticated trio of young white people conversing over a glass of wine fills a full page of the Sunday New York Times. Done in a 1930s Art Deco style, the advertisement is captioned 'An Oasis In Times Square.' This, the copy explains, is a place where the traveller, weary from business, can discover tranquility amidst energy and 'A new level of self-indulgence.' It was the year 1999 when, with retrograde panache, the Hong Leong Group launched ist flagship hotel in New York, the Millennium Premier. Even then I sensed the arrival of something new, a shift in tactics in the decade-old 'upclassing' of the city. I also knew something troubling about the hotel's recent past that made my hunch even more compelling.

A veteran of anti-gentrification activism on the city's Lower East Side some 20 years earlier, I still recall the clumsy call for 'pioneers' to brave the city's harsh urban frontiers. But by the late 1990s this type of gambit had largely played itself out, at least in Manhattan. Already most of the island was well on its way to full blown gentrification and what was left of the poor and working class largely scattered by force or rising rents in the wake of reverse white flight that began in the 1980s. However, this late '90s wave of gentry wanted nothing to do with leaking pipes or chasing away crack-heads from street corners, and under no circumstances would they wear overalls. Yet the hotel's curiously retro illustration also avoided references to the fevered,

New York Times advertisement for the Millennium Premier Hotel, circa 1999 (artist unknown)

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DEMOLITION IN HELL'S KITCHEN
by William Menking for REPOhistory
circa 1999

technogiddiness of those blissful, pre-crash '90s. Instead, the unknown artist lovingly invoked the modernist conceit of the machine age some 60 years prior. Nor was it camp, for the irony was too far adrift from any rhetorical moorings to signal 'spoof'. Instead, like an arcane plot out of a Philip K Dick novel, the very visage of the city I knew was beingtransmuted from lead to gold. The more I looked, the more I saw. Quaint Cafés replaced actual coffee shops. Futuristic bars and art galleries took over food processing and light industrial shops. An ersatz cosmopolitanism was everywhere and the Millennium was a part of this larger whole that involved wiping clean not merely the physical traces of the past, but its memories. What filled up the ensuing breach were artful surrogates and clever replicas of a city that no one had ever lived in but that nevertheless looked strangely familiar. Certainly it is easier to see this in retrospect, but the Millennium campaign signaled the start of an entirely new era in the administration of free market urban renewal. More abstract, more inspired, more creative. The question I wanted to answer most, then and now, is whose minds the hotel chain's marketers hoped to, well, gentrify, and what ghosts they sought to keep at bay?

It was the artists' collective known as REPOhistory that provided the key to unlocking this mystery, but its startling solution, like Poe's purloined letter, turns out to have been right in front of me all along.

Located on West 44th Street, the Millennium Premier Hotel stands in a once largely Irish and working class neighborhood formerly known as Hell's Kitchen but re-christened with the sanitarysounding moniker 'Clinton' by real estate speculators in the 1980s. The Times Square from whose implied stresses it claims to offer an 'oasis' is no longer the porn playground of the fiscal crisis '70s. It has been rehabilitated: safe for families, safe for business, efficiently emptied of homeless people and sundry other uninvited. In May of 1998, however, a metal street sign appears outside the Millennium. The sign is flagged off of a lamppost, meters away from the hotel's tastefully subdued, black marble façade. Mounted low enough for passersby to read, its text begins portentously:

What is now the Millennium Broadway Hotel used to be the site of 4 buildings including an SRO hotel that provided badly needed housing for poor New Yorkers...

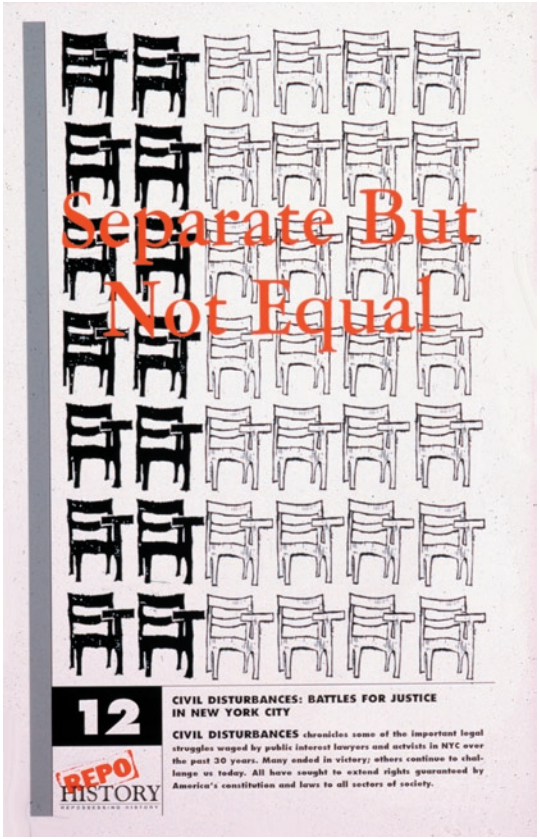
Artist and architect William Menking designed the plaque to look like a busy montage of newspaper clippings. The story of the Hotel's less than tranquil past continues in bold type:

In 1984, New York City passed a moratorium on the alteration of hotels for the poor. Hours before the moratorium was to go into effect, developer Harry Macklowe had the 4 buildings demolished without obtaining demolition permits, and without turning off water and gas lines into the buildings. NYC officials declared, 'It is only a matter of sheer luck that there was no gas explosion.' Attempts to bring criminal charges against Macklowe for these actions were not successful.

Macklowe built a luxury hotel on the site, then lost it to the current owners. The demolition of hotels for the poor during the 1970's and 1980's added to the city's growing homeless population. While streets of the 'new' Times Square seem paved with gold - for many they have literally become a home.

Like the materialisation of an army of Dickensian apparitions, the Millennium/Macklowe sign was one of 20 temporary historical markers specifically sited around New York that made up the public art project 'Civil Disturbances: Battles for Justice in New York City'. Sponsored by New York Lawyers for the Public Interest (NYLPI) and produced by the art and activist group REPOhistory, ist aim was to publicly landmark legal cases in which civil rights were extended to disenfranchised peoples. The content of the signs ranged from the famous Brown Vs the Board of Education desegregation case to the first woman firefighter sworn into service in NYC. Others however, pointed to occasions when the law had failed to protect as promised and Menking's sign was in this category. Initially, for a time the city tried to stop REPOhistory from installing 'Civil Disturbances'. After weeks of legal manoeuvres however, the signs went up from spring of 1998 to late winter of 1999. Nevertheless, right from the start several signs vanished after installation. Menking's was among them.

Responding to an inquiry the Millennium freely admitted having its staff confiscate the legally permitted artwork. They even returned it to the group. However, along with the returned sign came a letter threatening legal action if any attempt was made to reinstall it. The grounds? REPOhistory was amaging hotel business. It seems the return of an inopportune past can prove a powerful trigger revealing hidden ideological tendencies in what appears otherwise to be a purely market driven process of privatisation and gentrification. After considerable debate that internally split REPOhistory roughly along lines of activists versus artists, Menking's sign was reinstalled, but now at a greater distance from the hotel. And despite further threats the sign stayed in place, the project's permit ran its course, and neither side took legal action. It is five years on. Aside from this text and other scattered citations, Macklow's 'midnight demolition' is forgotten along with those he cruelly displaced. At the tranquil oasis in old Hell's Kitchen stylish guests still sip wine, discuss art, and continue to manufacture content for the information economy.



REPOhistory,'Civil Disturbances', Laurie Ourlicht's street sign detailing the historic Brown Vs the Board of Education desegregation law suit brought by the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People

WINNERS AND LOSERS

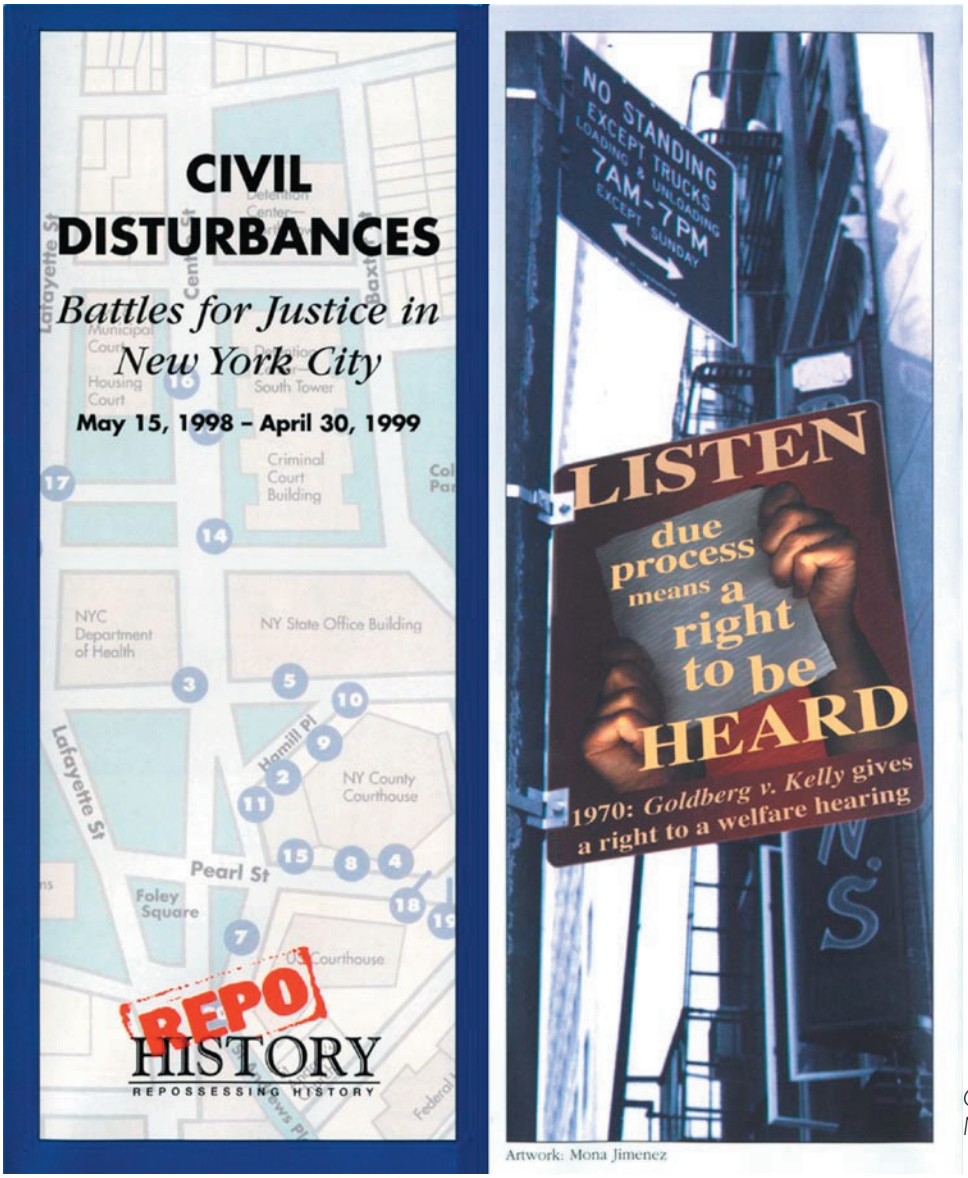
All of this is familiar now. The 1990s affection for the 1920s and pre-crash 1930s, its weird merger of avant-garde aesthetics, high fashion, and post-Fordist management theory all dolled-up in a neo-modernist longing for limitless progress. So what if the occasional act of terror was, and remains indispensable

to make it all seem real? Why dwell on conflict? If the creative class has supplanted the traditional labouring class in many places it has done so by greeting capital as potential equal, not as adversary. Winners are admired. Losers on the other hand are truly abject, lacking the aptitude to become exploiters themselves. Asserting a collective disarray, an enduring a-historicity, and a belief they have transcended labour/management antagonisms, creative workers think they can even avoid being exploited in the long run because their big, table-turning breakthrough is always just around the corner, always about to make that longedfor reservation at the swanky Millennium tower a reality.

Anyway, it's 2004, and billionaires abound. According to Forbes' recent survey they number a record 587. Still, it's difficult not to notice a connection between this fact and the new economy with ist deregulated markets, rampant privatisation, decaying worker protection and widening gap between rich and poor. Nor are the super-rich all petroleum refiners and armament producers. Many belong to the socalled creative class. Among those joining the ten figure income bracket include the rags to riches writer of Harry Potter stories, JK Rowling; Google creators Sergey Brin and Larry Page; and Gap clothing designer Michael Ying. So why am I still surprised when I walk down formerly forbidding streets to see such upscale consumption? Designer outlets, smart eateries, bars radiant with youthful crowds, and taxis shuttling celebrants to and fro. Block after block the scene resembles a single, unending cocktail party strung like carnival lights up and down the avenue. Between these cheerful stations other men and women, mostly in their forties and fifties, haunt the shadows gathering glass and metal recyclables from public waste bins. Certainly losers can't harm you. But what about ghosts?

I enter bar 'X'. Its ambiance probably not much different from bars in the Millennium New York, or Millennium Shanghai, or Millennium London. I shout for a dry, gin Martini over the mechanised music. (A cartoon thought-bubble appears, 'Am I the only person in here with a

Artist Olivia Beens reading map while on jury duty, 1999 (photo: author)



Civil Disturbances: Battles for Justice in New York City (map and brochure)

beard?' 'The only one over 40?') My mind returns to REPOhistory and its altruistic necromancy some six years earlier. 'If the enemy wins, not even the dead will be safe,' Walter Benjamin once declared. Not safe from whom? Perhaps it was the noise and the alcohol, but a surprising correlation asserts itself. REPOhistory was part of the creative class. While its objectives were different, REPOhistory, like RTmark, the Yes Men, and similar artistic agitators made use of available technologies and rhetorical forms to reach the same erudite consumer-citizens this swanky bar hoped to attract. The Millennium had been correct all along: we were the competition. With a little toning down of its righteous antagonism REPOhistory could have even taken its place amongst the web designers, dressmakers, MTV producers and other content providers of the new, immaterial economy. And come to think of it, right before the group folded it was increasingly being asked to travel outside to this or that city or town and install public markers about the quaint olden times; the local barber shop, the saloon, the red-light district and parade grounds. I had indeed found the enemy: it

was me.

Like forgotten letters in some dimly lit archive, those not immediately part of the radical shift in the means of production remain out of sight, out of mind, fleeing from demolitions, downsizings and sometimes rummaging for cans. Not that this zone of dark matter was not always present and surrounding the upwardly mobile types such as the Millennium crowd. What is new, however, is the way this far larger realm of unrealised potential can gain access to most of the means of expression deployed by the burgeoning consciousness industry - that ubiquitous spectacle essential to the maintenance of global capitalism. By the same token, the so called 'insiders' might, if circumstances permit, decide to cast their collective lot in with the losers and the ghosts. REPOhistory et al proves it can happen. Because even the new creative class with its 80-hour work week and multiple jobs has a fantasy, one half-remembered perhaps and a bit mad, yet still evident in times of stress and economic uncertainty. It goes like this: the bar tenders and the brass polishers and cooks, the laundresses and bell hops throw down their aprons and spatulas to join in mutinous celebration with artists, web designers and musicians. Raiding the wine cellar, they open up all 33 executive style conference rooms, set up a free health clinic in the lobby, transform the hotel into an autonomous broadcasting tower and party in a universe of creative dark matter.

I finish my drink and return home to wrap-up the essay I promised the fine, creative folks at Mute. ■

Gregory Sholette is a NYC based artist, writer and a co-founder of the artist collectives REPOhistory and PAD/D. He is co-editor with Nato Thompson of The Interventionists: A Users Manual for the Creative Disruption of Everyday Life (MIT: 2004 & 2005); and Collectivism After Modernism co-edited with Blake Stimson (University of Minnesota Press, 2006)

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For an introduction to Sholette's concept of creative dark matter see:

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Civil Disturbances: Battles for Justice in New York City (map and brochure)

10

FOR HAMBURG: PUBLIC ART AND URBAN IDENTITIES

Miwon Kwon

2001. *art-omma* #6. http://www.art-omma.org/NEW/past_issues/theory/06_For%20Hamburg%20Public%20Art%20and%20Urban%20Identities%20by%20Miwon%20Kwon.htm

For Hamburg: Public Art and Urban Identities

by Miwon Kwon

Public art practices within the united states have experienced significant shits over the past thirty years. Three paradigms can be schematically distinguished:
1)art in public places, typically a modernist abstract sculpture placed out-doors to "decorate' or 'enrich" urban spaces, especially plaza areas fronting federal buildings or corporate office towers;
2) art as public spaces, less object-oriented and more site-conscious art that sought greater integration between art, architecture, and the landscape through artists' collaboration with members of the urban managerial class(such as architects, landscape architects, city planners, urban designers, and city administrators), in the designing of permanent urban (re) development projects such as parks, plazas, buildings, promenades, neighborhoods, etc.; and more recently,
3) art in the public interest (or "new genre public art"), often temporary city-based programs focusing on social issues rather than the built environment that involve collaborations with marginalised social groups(rather than design professionals), such as the homeless, battered women, urban youths, AIDS patients, prisoners, and which strives towards the development of politically-conscious community events or programs.[1]

These three paradigms of public art reflect broader shifts in advanced art practices over the past thirty years: the slide of emphasis from aesthetic concerns to social issues, from the conception of an art work primarily as an object to ephemeral processes or events , from prevalence of permanent installations to temporary interventions, from the primacy of production as source of meaning to reception as site of interpretation, and from autonomy of authorship to its multiplicitous expansion in participatory collaborations. While these shifts represent a greater inclusivity and democratization of art for many artists , arts administrators, art institutions, and some of their audience members, there is also the danger of a premature and uncritical embrace of "progressive" art as an equivalent of "progressive politics".(Although neglected by the mainstream art world, artistic practices based in community organizing and political activism has a been around for a long time. Why is it now that it has become a favored model in public arts programming and arts funding?) .The shifts in artistic practice, while

challenging the ideological establishment of art, may at the same time capitulate to the changing modes of capitalist expansion. What appears to be progressive , even transgressive and radical, may in fact serve conservative if not reactionary agendas of the dominant minority.

As a follow-up, I want to address more specifically here the relationship between art practices and the production of urban identities. Throughout its recent history , public art has been defined in part against a (discursive) back-drop of "spectre of placelessness" and the "death of cities". Initially described in architectural terms in the 1960s and 70s, the ostensive demise of urban centers and the degradation of "quality of life "therein are described more and more now in terms of social problems such as violence, homelessness, poverty, crime, drugs, pollution, etc. But whether concerned with the character of the built environment or with the uneven souci-economic relations foundational to current urban conditions , "place making' remains a central , if unarticulated , imperative in public arts programming today. Public art participates in the production of a site's distinction, often a city's uniqueness, which in turn is intimately engaged in the process of economic reorganization of recourses and power as they are played out through the rehierarchization of space in the social structure of the cities.
I present two seemingly antithetical case studies here to address the art-city relationship. First is Alexander Calder's 1969 sculpture "La Grande vitesse" in Grand rapids, Michigan, the first public art work sponsored by the Art-in-Public -Spaces Program of the National Endowment for the Arts' Visual Arts program, which was established in 1965. Conceived as a capping for an urban development program, grand rapids, like so many other American cities in the late 1960s and 70s, wanted to build a thriving new downtown business and cultural center. The cultural leaders of the city wanted to "get on the map" both nationally and internationally, which is to say , they conceived the city to be siteless. The city solicited Calder, an artist of international renown, indeed one of the fathers of modernist abstraction, for a work that could be hailed as a "grand Rapids' Calder", like "Chicago's Picasso", which had been commissioned with private funds for the Chicago Civic Center and installed two years earlier in 1967.

Despite the initial controversy regarding" La grand Vitesse" over issues of regionalism versus nationalism, the usefulness of an abstract sculpture versus a properly large fountain, and questions about Alexander Calder's allegiance to America(he had lived in France for most of his adult life), "La Grande Vitesse" in subsequent years has apparently been embraced by the city.Outdoing the Picasso sculpture in its emblematic function, the sculpture has been incorporated into the city's official stationery and its image is even stenciled onto the city's garbage trucks. To the extent that a work of art has become a symbol of the city, "La Grande Vitesse", as the first public sculpture to be installed under the auspices of the NEA, is still considered to be one of the most successful public art project in the United States.
Considering the site as a physical entity, Calder's large red sculpture was to become a centralizing focal point, a powerful presence that would visually and spatially organize the space of the plaza, which was modeled somewhat superficially on European piazzas. In addition to providing a 'humane" reprieve from the surrounding modern glass-steel office architecture, deemed brutal and inhumane, the sculpture was to function as a marker of identity for the city at large. On the one hand, the city thought itself to be lacking in distinctive identity, without unique features, a city whose site was unspecific. With an itinerant inferiority complex economically and culturally, grand rapids wanted to find a place for itself "on the map". On the other hand, Calder had established himself as a pedigree artist of strong identity and signature style. The function of "La Grande Vitesse" was to infuse the sense of placelessness of the plaza with the artist's creative originality, to literally mark the plaza site as a singular, "specific" location. By extension, the sculpture was to mark the uniqueness of the city as a whole.
It is important to note that Caller never saw, nor did he feel it necessary to visit, the plaza before the sculpture's installation. Like a good modernist, he operated under the assumptions of

an art work's autonomy. The site, in the case of this project , then, was conceived as a kind of abstract blankness awaiting some marker(i.e., art, sculpture) to give it what could be claimed an authentic identity, even if that identity was created through the logic of a logo. The insertion of an art work functioned like an inscription, giving the site a voice. Calder's "voice" as an artist was joined together with Grand rapids' perceived lack of one, as "La Grande Vitesse" gathered up what surrounds it (the plaza and the city), to become an emblem for the city, rendering the city into a sign. In a strange sense, even though the sculpture was not conceived as site specific, it nevertheless became site specific-site specificity was produced here as an effect and not engaged as a method of artistic production.

Unlike the Calder example, the second case begins with the general cultural valorization of places as the locus of authentic experience and coherent sense of historical and personal identity .relying on a certain gymnastics of logic in relation to the site, qualities like originality, authenticity, and singularity are reworked in recent site-oriented practices -evacuated from the artwork and attributed to the site. "Places with a Past" , the 1991 site-specific -based arts programs organized by independent curator Mary Jane Jacob, although not conceived as a public art project per se, serves as an instructive example in this context. The exhibition , composed of nineteen site-specific installations by internationally well-known artists, took the city of Charleston, South Carolina, as not only the backdrop but a "bridge between the works of art and the audience"2. In addition to breaking the rules of the art establishment(taking art to the "street" and to the "people"), "places with a past" wanted to further a dialogue between art and socio-historical dimension of places. According to Jacob
" Charleston proved to be fertile ground" for the investigation of issues concerning "gender, race, cultural identity, considerations of difference(…) subjects much in the vanguard of criticism and art-making (…). The actuality of the situation, the fabric of the time and place of Charleston, offered an incredibly rich and meaningful context for the making and siting of publicly visible and physically prominent installations that rang true in [the artists'] approach to these ideas".3
While Site -specific art continues to be described as a refutation of originality and authenticity as intrinsic qualities of the art project or the artist, this resistance facilitates the translation and relocation of these qualities form the art work to the place of its presentation. But then, these qualities return to the art work now that it has become integral to the site. Admittedly, according to Jacob, "locations(…) contribute a specific identity to the shows staged by injecting into the experience the uniqueness of the place" 4 . Conversely, if the social, historical, and geographical specificity of Charleston offered artists a unique opportunity to create unrepeatable works (and by extension an unrepeatable exhibition) these exhibitions like "Places with a Past" ultimately utilize art to promote the city of Charleston as a unique place also. What is prized most of al in site-specific(public) art is still the singularity and authenticity that the presence of the artist seems to guarantee , not only in terms of the presumed unrepeatability of the work but in the ways in which the presence of the artist also endows places with a "unique" distinction.
As I have written elsewhere 5 , site-specific art can lead to the unearthing of repressed histories, provide support for greater visibility of marginalised groups and issues, and initiate the re (dis)covery of "minor" places so far ignored by the dominant culture. But inasmuch as the consumption of difference (for difference's sake), the sitting of art in "real" places can also be a means to extract the social and historical dimensions out of places to variously serve the thematic drive of an artist, satisfy institutional demographic profiles , or fulfill the fiscal needs of a city.
Significantly, the appropriation of site-specific public art for the valorization of urban identities comes at a time of a fundamental cultural shift in which architecture and urban planning, formerly the primary media for expressing a vision of the city, are displaced by other media more intimate with marketing and advertising. In the words of urban theorist Kevin Robins, [a]s cities have become ever more equivalent and urban identities increasingly 'thin', (…) it has

become necessary to employ advertising and marketing agencies to manufacture such distinctions. It is a question of distinction in a world beyond difference". 6.

Site specificity and public art in this context find new importance because they can supply distinction of place and uniqueness of locational identity, highly seductive qualities in the promotion of towns and cities within the competitive restructuring of the global economic hierarchy. Thus, site-specific art remains inexorably tied to a process that renders particularity and identity of various cities a matter of product differentiation. Indeed, the exhibition catalogue for "places with a past" was a tasteful tourist promotion, pitching the city of Charleston as a unique, "artistic", and meaningful place (to visit) 7. Under the pretext of their articulation or resuscitation, site-specific public art can be mobilized to expedite the erasure of differences via the commodification and serialization of places.

It is within this framework, in which art is put to the service of generating a sense of authenticity and uniqueness of place for quasi-promotional agendas, that I understand the goals of city-based art programs in Europe as well, such as "Sculpture. Projects in Munster 1997". (It should be noted that the 1987 Sculpture project in Munster served as one of the models for "Places with a Past"). According to co-curator Klaus Bubmann's press release, "[t]he fundamental idea behind the exhibitions was to create a dialogue between artists , the town and the public , in other words, to encourage the artists to create projects that dealt with conditions in the town , its architecture, urban planning, its history and the social structure of society in the town.(…) Invitations to artists from all over the world to come to Munster for the sculpture project , to enter into a debate with the town, have established a tradition which will not only be continued in the year 1997 but beyond this will become something specific to Munster: a town not only as an "open-air museum from modern art" but also as a place for a natural confrontation between history and contemporary art. (…) the aim of the exhibition "Sculpture. Projects in Munster 1997" is to make the town of Munster comprehensible as a complex, historically formed structure exactly in those places that make it stand out from other towns and cities".8

Which is to say, the ambitions of programs like "Places with a Past" and "Sculpture. Projects in Munster 1997". Ultimately do not seem to veer very far from those of the city officials and cultural leaders of Grand Rapids, Michigan, thirty years ago. For despite the tremendous differences in the art of choice among these three events , their investment in generating a sense of uniqueness and authenticity for their respective places of presentation remains quite consistent. As such endeavors to engage art in the nurturing of specificities of locational difference gather momentum, there is a greater and greater urgency in distinguishing between the cultivation of art and places and their appropriation for the promotion of cities as cultural commodities.

NOTES

1 See my article "Im Interesse der Offerntlichkeit…", in : Springer, December 1996-February 1997, 30-35.

2 See Places with a Past: new Site-specific Art at Charleston's Spoleto Festival, ex.cat., New York: Rizolli, 1991,19. The exhibition took place may 24-August 4, 1991, with nineteen "site-specific" works by artists including |Ann hamilton, Christian Boltanski, Cindy Sherman, David Hammons, Lorna Simpson and Alva Rogers, Kate Ericson and Mel Ziegler, and Ronald Jones, among others. The promotional materials, especially the exhibition catalogue, emphasized the innovative challenge of the exhibition format over the individual projects, and foregrounded the authorial role of Mary Jane Jacob over the artists.

3 Ibid.,17.

4 Ibid.,15.

5 My comments here are from a longer assay on this topic. See my "one place after another: Notes on Site Specificity," October 80, Spring 1997.

6 Kevin Robins, "Prisoners of the city: Whatever Can a Postmodern City Be?," in : Erica Carter, James Donald, and Judith Squires(eds.), Space and place: Theories of identity and location, London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1993, 306.

7 Cultural critic Sharon Zukin has noted, "it seemed to be official policy [by the 1990s) that making a place for art in the city went along with establishing a marketable identity for the city as a whole". See Sharon Zukin, The Culture of Cities, Cambridge, MA: Black-well Publishers,1995, 23.

8 Klaus Bubmann, undated press release for "Sculpture. Projects in Munster 1997". n.p

The present text was included to the publication of Christian Philipp Muller "Kunst auf Schritt und Tritt " (Hamburg:Kellner,1997), referring to Hamburg's "Kunstmeile", a planned association of several museums located near the central railway station.

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TEMPORARY AUTONOMOUS ZONE

Hakim Bey

1990. http://www.hermetic.com/bey/taz3.html

THE TEMPORARY AUTONOMOUS ZONE

> "...this time however I come as the victorious Dionysus, who will turn the world into a holiday...Not that I have much time..."

--Nietzsche (from his last "insane" letter to Cosima Wagner)

Pirate Utopias

THE SEA-ROVERS AND CORSAIRS of the 18th century created an "information network" that spanned the globe: primitive and devoted primarily to grim business, the net nevertheless functioned admirably. Scattered throughout the net were islands, remote hideouts where ships could be watered and provisioned, booty traded for luxuries and necessities. Some of these islands supported "intentional communities," whole mini-societies living consciously outside the law and determined to keep it up, even if only for a short but merry life.

Some years ago I looked through a lot of secondary material on piracy hoping to find a study of these enclaves--but it appeared as if no historian has yet found them worthy of analysis. (William Burroughs has mentioned the subject, as did the late British anarchist Larry Law--but no systematic research has been carried out.) I retreated to primary sources and constructed my own theory, some aspects of which will be discussed in this essay. I called the settlements "Pirate Utopias."

Recently Bruce Sterling, one of the leading exponents of Cyberpunk science fiction, published a near-future romance based on the assumption that the decay of political systems will lead to a decentralized proliferation of experiments in living: giant worker-owned corporations, independent enclaves devoted to "data piracy," Green-Social-Democrat enclaves, Zerowork enclaves, anarchist liberated zones, etc. The information economy which supports this diversity is called the Net; the enclaves (and the book's title) are *Islands in the Net*.

The medieval Assassins founded a "State" which consisted of a network of remote mountain valleys and castles, separated by thousands of miles, strategically invulnerable to invasion, connected by the information flow of secret agents, at war with all governments, and devoted only to knowledge. Modern technology, culminating in the spy satellite, makes this kind of *autonomy* a romantic dream. No more pirate islands! In the future the same technology--freed from all political control--could make possible an entire world of *autonomous zones*. But for now the concept remains precisely science fiction--pure speculation.

Are we who live in the present doomed never to experience autonomy, never to stand for one moment on a bit of land ruled only by freedom? Are we reduced either to nostalgia for the past or nostalgia for the future? Must we wait until the entire world is freed of political control before even one of us can claim to know freedom? Logic and emotion unite to condemn such a supposition. Reason demands that one cannot struggle for what one does not know; and the heart revolts at a universe so cruel as to visit such injustices on *our* generation alone of humankind.

To say that "I will not be free till all humans (or all sentient creatures) are free" is simply to cave in to a kind of nirvana-stupor, to abdicate our humanity, to define ourselves as losers.

I believe that by extrapolating from past and future stories about "islands in the net" we may collect evidence to suggest that a certain kind of "free enclave" is not only possible in our time

but also existent. All my research and speculation has crystallized around the concept of the TEMPORARY AUTONOMOUS ZONE (hereafter abbreviated TAZ). Despite its synthesizing force for my own thinking, however, I don't intend the TAZ to be taken as more than an *essay* ("attempt"), a suggestion, almost a poetic fancy. Despite the occasional Ranterish enthusiasm of my language I am not trying to construct political dogma. In fact I have deliberately refrained from defining the TAZ--I circle around the subject, firing off exploratory beams. In the end the TAZ is almost self-explanatory. If the phrase became current it would be understood without difficulty...understood in action.

Waiting for the Revolution

HOW IS IT THAT "the world turned upside-down" always manages to *Right* itself? Why does reaction always follow revolution, like seasons in Hell?

Uprising, or the Latin form *insurrection*, are words used by historians to label *failed* revolutions--movements which do not match the expected curve, the consensus-approved trajectory: revolution, reaction, betrayal, the founding of a stronger and even more oppressive State--the turning of the wheel, the return of history again and again to its highest form: jackboot on the face of humanity forever.

By failing to follow this curve, the *up-rising* suggests the possibility of a movement outside and beyond the Hegelian spiral of that "progress" which is secretly nothing more than a vicious circle. *Surgo*--rise up, surge. *Insurgo*--rise up, raise oneself up. A bootstrap operation. A goodbye to that wretched parody of the karmic round, historical revolutionary futility. The slogan "Revolution!" has mutated from tocsin to toxin, a malign pseudo-Gnostic fate-trap, a nightmare where no matter how we struggle we never escape that evil Aeon, that incubus the State, one State after another, every "heaven" ruled by yet one more evil angel.

If History IS "Time," as it claims to be, then the uprising is a moment that springs up and out of Time, violates the "law" of History. If the State IS History, as it claims to be, then the insurrection is the forbidden moment, an unforgivable denial of the dialectic--shimmying up the pole and out of the smokehole, a shaman's maneuver carried out at an "impossible angle" to the universe. History says the Revolution attains "permanence," or at least duration, while the uprising is "temporary." In this sense an uprising is like a "peak experience" as opposed to the standard of "ordinary" consciousness and experience. Like festivals, uprisings cannot happen every day--otherwise they would not be "nonordinary." But such moments of intensity give shape and meaning to the entirety of a life. The shaman returns--you can't stay up on the roof forever-- but things have changed, shifts and integrations have occurred--a *difference* is made.

You will argue that this is a counsel of despair. What of the anarchist dream, the Stateless state, the Commune, the autonomous zone with *duration*, a free society, a free *culture*? Are we to abandon that hope in return for some existentialist *acte gratuit*? The point is not to change consciousness but to change the world.

I accept this as a fair criticism. I'd make two rejoinders nevertheless; first, *revolution* has never yet resulted in achieving this dream. The vision comes to life in the moment of uprising--but as soon as "the Revolution" triumphs and the State returns, the dream and the ideal are *already* betrayed. I have not given up hope or even expectation of change--but I distrust the word *Revolution*. Second, even if we replace the revolutionary approach with a concept of *insurrection blossoming spontaneously into anarchist culture*, our own particular historical situation is not propitious for such a vast undertaking. Absolutely nothing but a futile martyrdom could possibly result now from a head- on collision with the terminal State, the megacorporate information State, the empire of Spectacle and Simulation. Its guns are all

pointed at us, while our meager weaponry finds nothing to aim at but a hysteresis, a rigid vacuity, a Spook capable of smothering every spark in an ectoplasm of information, a society of capitulation ruled by the image of the Cop and the absorbant eye of the TV screen.

In short, we're not touting the TAZ as an exclusive end in itself, replacing all other forms of organization, tactics, and goals. We recommend it because it can provide the quality of enhancement associated with the uprising without necessarily leading to violence and martyrdom. The TAZ is like an uprising which does not engage directly with the State, a guerilla operation which liberates an area (of land, of time, of imagination) and then dissolves itself to re-form elsewhere/elsewhen, *before* the State can crush it. Because the State is concerned primarily with Simulation rather than substance, the TAZ can "occupy" these areas clandestinely and carry on its festal purposes for quite a while in relative peace. Perhaps certain small TAZs have lasted whole lifetimes because they went unnoticed, like hillbilly enclaves--because they never intersected with the Spectacle, never appeared outside that real life which is invisible to the agents of Simulation.

Babylon takes its abstractions for realities; precisely *within* this margin of error the TAZ can come into existence. Getting the TAZ started may involve tactics of violence and defense, but its greatest strength lies in its invisibility--the State cannot recognize it because History has no definition of it. As soon as the TAZ is named (represented, mediated), it must vanish, it *will* vanish, leaving behind it an empty husk, only to spring up again somewhere else, once again invisible because undefinable in terms of the Spectacle. The TAZ is thus a perfect tactic for an era in which the State is omnipresent and all-powerful and yet simultaneously riddled with cracks and vacancies. And because the TAZ is a microcosm of that "anarchist dream" of a free culture, I can think of no better tactic by which to work toward that goal while at the same time experiencing some of its benefits here and now.

In sum, realism demands not only that we give up *waiting* for "the Revolution" but also that we give up *wanting* it. "Uprising," yes--as often as possible and even at the risk of violence. The *spasming* of the Simulated State will be "spectacular," but in most cases the best and most radical tactic will be to refuse to engage in spectacular violence, to *withdraw* from the area of simulation, to disappear.

The TAZ is an encampment of guerilla ontologists: strike and run away. Keep moving the entire tribe, even if it's only data in the Web. The TAZ must be capable of defense; but both the "strike" and the "defense" should, if possible, evade the violence of the State, which is no longer a *meaningful* violence. The strike is made at structures of control, essentially at ideas; the defense is "invisibility," a *martial art*, and "invulnerability"--an "occult" art within the martial arts. The "nomadic war machine" conquers without being noticed and moves on before the map can be adjusted. As to the future--Only the autonomous can *plan* autonomy, organize for it, create it. It's a bootstrap operation. The first step is somewhat akin to *satori*--the realization that the TAZ begins with a simple act of realization.

(Note: See Appendix C, quote by Renzo Novatore)

The Psychotopology of Everyday Life

THE CONCEPT OF THE TAZ arises first out of a critique of Revolution, and an appreciation of the Insurrection. The former labels the latter a failure; but for us *uprising* represents a far more interesting possibility, from the standard of a psychology of liberation, than all the "successful" revolutions of bourgeoisie, communists, fascists, etc.

The second generating force behind the TAZ springs from the historical development I call "the closure of the map." The last bit of Earth unclaimed by any nation-state was eaten up in

1899. Ours is the first century without *terra incognita*, without a frontier. Nationality is the highest principle of world governance--not one speck of rock in the South Seas can be left *open*, not one remote valley, not even the Moon and planets. This is the apotheosis of "territorial gangsterism." Not one square inch of Earth goes unpoliced or untaxed...in theory.

The "map" is a political abstract grid, a gigantic *con* enforced by the carrot/stick conditioning of the "Expert" State, until for most of us the map *becomes* the territory- -no longer "Turtle Island," but "the USA." And yet because the map is an abstraction it cannot cover Earth with 1:1 accuracy. Within the fractal complexities of actual geography the map can see only dimensional grids. Hidden enfolded immensities escape the measuring rod. The map is not accurate; the map *cannot* be accurate.

So--Revolution is closed, but insurgency is open. For the time being we concentrate our force on temporary "power surges," avoiding all entanglements with "permanent solutions."

And--the map is closed, but the autonomous zone is open. Metaphorically it unfolds within the fractal dimensions invisible to the cartography of Control. And here we should introduce the concept of psychotopology (and -topography) as an alternative "science" to that of the State's surveying and mapmaking and "psychic imperialism." Only psychotopography can draw 1:1 maps of reality because only the human mind provides sufficient complexity to model the real. But a 1:1 map cannot "control" its territory because it is virtually identical with its territory. It can only be used to *suggest*, in a sense *gesture towards*, certain features. We are looking for "spaces" (geographic, social, cultural, imaginal) with potential to flower as autonomous zones--and we are looking for times in which these spaces are relatively open, either through neglect on the part of the State or because they have somehow escaped notice by the mapmakers, or for whatever reason. Psychotopology is the art of *dowsing* for potential TAZs.

The closures of Revolution and of the map, however, are only the negative sources of the TAZ; much remains to be said of its positive inspirations. Reaction alone cannot provide the energy needed to "manifest" a TAZ. An uprising must be *for* something as well.

1. First, we can speak of a natural anthropology of the TAZ. The nuclear family is the base unit of consensus society, but not of the TAZ. ("Families!--how I hate them! the misers of love!"--Gide) The nuclear family, with its attendant "oedipal miseries," appears to have been a Neolithic invention, a response to the "agricultural revolution" with its imposed scarcity and its imposed hierarchy. The Paleolithic model is at once more primal and more radical: the *band*. The typical hunter/gatherer nomadic or semi- nomadic band consists of about 50 people. Within larger tribal societies the band-structure is fulfilled by clans within the tribe, or by sodalities such as initiatic or secret societies, hunt or war societies, gender societies, "children's republics," and so on. If the nuclear family is produced by scarcity (and results in miserliness), the band is produced by abundance--and results in prodigality. The family is *closed*, by genetics, by the male's *possession* of women and children, by the hierarchic totality of agricultural/industrial society. The band is *open*--not to everyone, of course, but to the affinity group, the initiates sworn to a bond of love. The band is not part of a larger hierarchy, but rather part of a horizontal pattern of custom, extended kinship, contract and alliance, spiritual affinities, etc. (American Indian society preserves certain aspects of this structure even now.)

In our own post-Spectacular Society of Simulation many forces are working--largely invisibly--to phase out the nuclear family and bring back the band. Breakdowns in the structure of Work resonate in the shattered "stability" of the unit-home and unit-family. One's "band" nowadays includes friends, ex-spouses and lovers, people met at different jobs and pow-wows, affinity groups, special interest networks, mail networks, etc. The nuclear family becomes more and more obviously a *trap*, a cultural sinkhole, a neurotic secret implosion of split atoms--and the

obvious counter-strategy emerges spontaneously in the almost unconscious rediscovery of the more archaic and yet more post-industrial possibility of the band.

2. The TAZ as *festival*. Stephen Pearl Andrews once offered, as an image of anarchist society, the *dinner party*, in which all structure of authority dissolves in conviviality and celebration (see Appendix C). Here we might also invoke Fourier and his concept of the senses as the basis of social becoming--"touch-rut" and "gastrosophy," and his paean to the neglected implications of smell and taste. The ancient concepts of jubilee and saturnalia originate in an intuition that certain events lie outside the scope of "profane time," the measuring-rod of the State and of History. These holidays literally occupied gaps in the calendar--*intercalary intervals*. By the Middle Ages, nearly a third of the year was given over to holidays. Perhaps the riots against calendar reform had less to do with the "eleven lost days" than with a sense that imperial science was conspiring to close up these gaps in the calendar where the people's freedoms had accumulated--a coup d'etat, a mapping of the year, a seizure of time itself, turning the organic cosmos into a clockwork universe. The death of the festival.

Participants in insurrection invariably note its festive aspects, even in the midst of armed struggle, danger, and risk. The uprising is like a saturnalia which has slipped loose (or been forced to vanish) from its intercalary interval and is now at liberty to pop up anywhere or when. Freed of time and place, it nevertheless possesses a nose for the ripeness of events, and an affinity for the *genius loci*; the science of psychotopology indicates "flows of forces" and "spots of power" (to borrow occultist metaphors) which localize the TAZ spatio-temporally, or at least help to define its relation to moment and locale.

The media invite us to "come celebrate the moments of your life" with the spurious unification of commodity and spectacle, the famous *non-event* of pure representation. In response to this obscenity we have, on the one hand, the spectrum of *refusal* (chronicled by the Situationists, John Zerzan, Bob Black *et al*.)--and on the other hand, the emergence of a *festal culture* removed and even hidden from the would-be managers of our leisure. "Fight for the right to party" is in fact not a parody of the radical struggle but a new manifestation of it, appropriate to an age which offers TVs and telephones as ways to "reach out and touch" other human beings, ways to "Be There!"

Pearl Andrews was right: the dinner party is already "the seed of the new society taking shape within the shell of the old" (IWW Preamble). The sixties-style "tribal gathering," the forest conclave of eco-saboteurs, the idyllic Beltane of the neo-pagans, anarchist conferences, gay faery circles...Harlem rent parties of the twenties, nightclubs, banquets, old-time libertarian picnics--we should realize that all these are already "liberated zones" of a sort, or at least potential TAZs. Whether open only to a few friends, like a dinner party, or to thousands of celebrants, like a Be-In, the party is always "open" because it is not "ordered"; it may be planned, but unless it "*happens*" it's a failure. The element of spontaneity is crucial.

The essence of the party: face-to-face, a group of humans synergize their efforts to realize mutual desires, whether for good food and cheer, dance, conversation, the arts of life; perhaps even for erotic pleasure, or to create a communal artwork, or to attain the very transport of bliss-- in short, a "union of egoists" (as Stirner put it) in its simplest form--or else, in Kropotkin's terms, a basic biological drive to "mutual aid." (Here we should also mention Bataille's "economy of excess" and his theory of potlatch culture.)

3. Vital in shaping TAZ reality is the concept of *psychic nomadism* (or as we jokingly call it, "rootless cosmopolitanism"). Aspects of this phenomenon have been discussed by Deleuze and Guattari in *Nomadology and the War Machine*, by Lyotard in *Driftworks* and by various authors in the "Oasis" issue of *Semiotext(e)*. We use the term "psychic nomadism" here rather than "urban nomadism," "nomadology," "driftwork," etc., simply in order to garner all these

concepts into a single loose complex, to be studied in light of the coming- into-being of the TAZ. "The death of God," in some ways a de-centering of the entire "European" project, opened a multi-perspectived post- ideological worldview able to move "rootlessly" from philosophy to tribal myth, from natural science to Taoism-- able to see for the first time through eyes like some golden insect's, each facet giving a view of an entirely other world.

But this vision was attained at the expense of inhabiting an epoch where speed and "commodity fetishism" have created a tyrannical false unity which tends to blur all cultural diversity and individuality, so that "one place is as good as another." This paradox creates "gypsies," psychic travellers driven by desire or curiosity, wanderers with shallow loyalties (in fact disloyal to the "European Project" which has lost all its charm and vitality), not tied down to any particular time and place, in search of diversity and adventure...This description covers not only the X-class artists and intellectuals but also migrant laborers, refugees, the "homeless," tourists, the RV and mobile-home culture--also people who "travel" via the Net, but may never leave their own rooms (or those like Thoreau who "have travelled much--in Concord"); and finally it includes "everybody," all of us, living through our automobiles, our vacations, our TVs, books, movies, telephones, changing jobs, changing "lifestyles," religions, diets, etc., etc.

Psychic nomadism as a *tactic*, what Deleuze & Guattari metaphorically call "the war machine," shifts the paradox from a passive to an active and perhaps even "violent" mode. "God"'s last throes and deathbed rattles have been going on for such a long time--in the form of Capitalism, Fascism, and Communism, for example--that there's still a lot of "creative destruction" to be carried out by post-Bakuninist post-Nietzschean commandos or *apaches* (literally "enemies") of the old Consensus. These nomads practice the *razzia*, they are corsairs, they are viruses; they have both need and desire for TAZs, camps of black tents under the desert stars, interzones, hidden fortified oases along secret caravan routes, "liberated" bits of jungle and bad-land, no-go areas, black markets, and underground bazaars.

These nomads chart their courses by strange stars, which might be luminous clusters of data in cyberspace, or perhaps hallucinations. Lay down a map of the land; over that, set a map of political change; over that, a map of the Net, especially the counter-Net with its emphasis on clandestine information-flow and logistics--and finally, over all, the 1:1 map of the creative imagination, aesthetics, values. The resultant grid comes to life, animated by unexpected eddies and surges of energy, coagulations of light, secret tunnels, surprises.

The Net and the Web

THE NEXT FACTOR CONTRIBUTING to the TAZ is so vast and ambiguous that it needs a section unto itself.

We've spoken of the *Net*, which can be defined as the totality of all information and communication transfer. Some of these transfers are privileged and limited to various elites, which gives the Net a hierarchic aspect. Other transactions are open to all--so the Net has a horizontal or non-hierarchic aspect as well. Military and Intelligence data are restricted, as are banking and currency information and the like. But for the most part the telephone, the postal system, public data banks, etc. are accessible to everyone and anyone. Thus *within the Net* there has begun to emerge a shadowy sort of *counter-Net*, which we will call the *Web* (as if the Net were a fishing-net and the Web were spider-webs woven through the interstices and broken sections of the Net). Generally we'll use the term *Web* to refer to the alternate horizontal open structure of info- exchange, the non-hierarchic network, and reserve the term *counter-Net* to indicate clandestine illegal and rebellious use of the Web, including actual data-piracy and other forms of leeching off the Net itself. Net, Web, and counter-Net are all

12

SEPARATION PERFECTED

Guy Debord

1967. *The Society of the Spectacle.* http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/debord/society.htm

Guy Debord 1967

Society of the Spectacle

Written: 1967;
Translation: Black & Red, 1977;
Transcription/HTML Markup: Greg Adargo.

Chapter 1 "Separation Perfected"

> But certainly for the present age, which prefers the sign to the thing signified, the copy to the original, representation to reality, the appearance to the essence... illusion only is sacred, truth profane. Nay, sacredness is held to be enhanced in proportion as truth decreases and illusion increases, so that the highest degree of illusion comes to be the highest degree of sacredness.
> Feuerbach, Preface to the second edition of The Essence of Christianity

1.

In societies where modern conditions of production prevail, all of life presents itself as an immense accumulation of spectacles. Everything that was directly lived has moved away into a representation.

2.

The images detached from every aspect of life fuse in a common stream in which the unity of this life can no longer be reestablished. Reality considered partially unfolds, in its own general unity, as a pseudo-world apart, an object of mere contemplation. The specialization of images of the world is completed in the world of the autonomous image, where the liar has lied to himself. The spectacle in general, as the concrete inversion of life, is the autonomous movement of the non-living.

3.

The spectacle presents itself simultaneously as all of society, as part of society, and as instrument of unification. As a part of society it is specifically the sector which concentrates all gazing and all consciousness. Due to the very fact that this sector is separate, it is the common ground of the deceived gaze and of false consciousness, and the unification it achieves is nothing but an official language of generalized separation.

4.

The spectacle is not a collection of images, but a social relation among people, mediated by images.

5.

The spectacle cannot be understood as an abuse of the world of vision, as a product of the techniques of mass dissemination of images. It is, rather, a Weltanschauung which has become actual, materially translated. It is a world vision which has become objectified.

6.

The spectacle grasped in its totality is both the result and the project of the existing mode of production. It is not a supplement to the real world, an additional decoration. It is the heart of the unrealism of the real society. In all its specific forms, as information or propaganda, as advertisement or direct entertainment consumption, the spectacle is the present model of socially dominant life. It is the omnipresent affirmation of the choice already made in production and its corollary consumption. The spectacle's form and content are identically the total justification of the existing system's conditions and goals. The spectacle is also the permanent presence of this justification, since it occupies the main part of the time lived outside of modern production.

7.

Separation is itself part of the unity of the world, of the global social praxis split up into reality and image. The social practice which the autonomous spectacle confronts is also the real totality which contains the spectacle. But the split within this totality mutilates it to the point of making the spectacle appear as its goal. The language of the spectacle consists of signs of the ruling production, which at the same time are the ultimate goal of this production.

8.

One cannot abstractly contrast the spectacle to actual social activity: such a division is itself divided. The spectacle which inverts the real is in fact produced. Lived reality is materially invaded by the contemplation of the spectacle while simultaneously absorbing the spectacular order, giving it positive cohesiveness. Objective reality is present on both sides. Every notion fixed this way has no other basis than its passage into the opposite: reality rises up within the spectacle, and the spectacle is real. This reciprocal alienation is the essence and the support of the existing society.

9.

In a world which really is topsy-turvy, the true is a moment of the false.

10.

The oncept of spectacle unifies and explains a great diversity of apparent phenomena. The diversity and the contrasts are appearances of a socially organized appearance, the general truth of which must itself be recognized. Considered in its own terms, the spectacle is affirmation of appearance and affirmation of all human life, namely social life, as mere appearance. But the critique which reaches the truth of the spectacle exposes it as the visible negation of life, as a negation of life which has become visible.

11.

To describe the spectacle, its formation, its functions and the forces which tend to dissolve it, one must artificially distinguish certain inseparable elements. When analyzing the spectacle one speaks, to some extent, the language of the spectacular itself in the sense that one moves through the methodological terrain of the very society which expresses itself in the spectacle. But the spectacle is nothing other than the sense of the total practice of a social-economic formation, its use of time. It is the historical movement in which we are caught.

12.

The spectacle presents itself as something enormously positive, indisputable and inaccessible. It says nothing more than "that which appears is good, that which is good appears. The attitude which it demands in principle is passive acceptance which in fact it already obtained by its manner of appearing without reply, by its monopoly of appearance.

13.

The basically tautological character of the spectacle flows from the simple fact that its means are simultaneously its ends. It is the sun which never sets over the empire of modern passivity. It covers the entire surface of the world and bathes endlessly in its own glory.

14.

The society which rests on modern industry is not accidentally or superficially spectacular, it is fundamentally spectaclist. In the spectacle, which is the image of the ruling economy, the goal is nothing, development everything. The spectacle aims at nothing other than itself.

15.

As the indispensable decoration of the objects produced today, as the general expose of the rationality of the system, as the advanced economic sector which directly shapes a growing multitude of image-objects, the spectacle is the main production of present-day society.

16.

The spectacle subjugates living men to itself to the extent that the economy has totally subjugated them. It is no more than the economy developing for itself. It is the true reflection of the production of things, and the false objectification of the producers.

17.

The first phase of the domination of the economy over social life brought into the definition of all human realization the obvious degradation of being into having. The present phase of total occupation of social life by the accumulated results of the economy leads to a generalized sliding of having into appearing, from which all actual

"having" must draw its immediate prestige and its ultimate function. At the same time all individual reality has become social reality directly dependent on social power and shaped by it. It is allowed to appear only to the extent that it is not.

18.

Where the real world changes into simple images, the simple images become real beings and effective motivations of hypnotic behavior. The spectacle, as a tendency to make one see the world by means of various specialized mediations (it can no longer be grasped directly), naturally finds vision to be the privileged human sense which the sense of touch was for other epochs; the most abstract, the most mystifiable sense corresponds to the generalized abstraction of present-day society. But the spectacle is not identifiable with mere gazing, even combined with hearing. It is that which escapes the activity of men, that which escapes reconsideration and correction by their work. It is the opposite of dialogue. Wherever there is independent representation, the spectacle reconstitutes itself.

19.

The spectacle inherits all the weaknesses of the Western philosophical project which undertook to comprehend activity in terms of the categories of seeing; furthermore, it is based on the incessant spread of the precise technical rationality which grew out of this thought. The spectacle does not realize philosophy, it philosophizes reality. The concrete life of everyone has been degraded into a speculative universe.

20.

Philosophy, the power of separate thought and the thought of separate power, could never by itself supersede theology. The spectacle is the material reconstruction of the religious illusion. Spectacular technology has not dispelled the religious clouds where men had placed their own powers detached from themselves; it has only tied them to an earthly base. The most earthly life thus becomes opaque and unbreathable. It no longer projects into the sky but shelters within itself its absolute denial, its fallacious paradise. The spectacle is the technical realization of the exile of human powers into a beyond; it is separation perfected within the interior of man.

21.

To the extent that necessity is socially dreamed, the dream becomes necessary. The spectacle is the nightmare of imprisoned modern society which ultimately expresses nothing more than its desire to sleep. The spectacle is the guardian of sleep.

22.

The fact that the practical power of modern society detached itself and built an independent empire in the spectacle can be explained only by the fact that this practical power continued to lack cohesion and remained in contradiction with itself.

23.

The oldest social specialization, the specialization of power, is at the root of the spectacle. The spectacle is thus a specialized activity which speaks for all the others. It is the diplomatic representation of hierarchic society to itself, where all other expression is banned. Here the most modern is also the most archaic.

24.

The spectacle is the existing order's uninterrupted discourse about itself, its laudatory monologue. It is the self-portrait of power in the epoch of its totalitarian management of the conditions of existence. The fetishistic, purely objective appearance of spectacular relations conceals the fact that they are relations among men and classes: a second nature with its fatal laws seems to dominate our environment. But the spectacle is not the necessary product of technical development seen as a natural development. The society of the spectacle is on the contrary the form which chooses its own technical content. If the spectacle, taken in the limited sense of "mass media" which are its most glaring superficial manifestation, seems to invade society as mere equipment, this equipment is in no way neutral but is the very means suited to its total self-movement. If the social needs of the epoch in which such techniques are developed can only be satisfied through their mediation, if the administration of this society and all contact among men can no longer take place except through the intermediary of this power of instantaneous communication, it is because this "communication" is essentially unilateral. The concentration of "communication" is thus an accumulation, in the hands of the existing system s administration, of the means which allow it to carry on this particular administration. The generalized cleavage of the spectacle is inseparable from the modern State, namely from the general form of cleavage within society, the product of the division of social labor and the organ of class domination.

25.

Separation is the alpha and omega of the spectacle. The institutionalization of the social division of labor, the formation of classes, had given rise to a first sacred contemplation, the mythical order with which every power shrouds itself from the beginning. The sacred has justified the cosmic and ontological order which corresponded to the interests of the masters; it has explained and embellished that which society could not do. Thus all separate power has been spectacular, but the adherence of all to an immobile image only signified the common acceptance of an imaginary prolongation of the poverty of real social activity, still largely felt as a unitary condition. The modern spectacle, on the contrary, expresses what society can do, but in this expression the permitted is absolutely opposed to the possible. The spectacle is the preservation of unconsciousness within the practical change of the conditions of existence. It is its own product, and it has made its own rules: it is a pseudo-sacred entity. It shows what it is: separate power developing in itself, in the growth of productivity by means of the incessant refinement of the division of labor into a parcellization of gestures which are then dominated by the independent movement of machines; and working for an ever-expanding market. All community and all critical sense are dissolved during this movement in which the forces that could grow by separating are not yet reunited.

26.

With the generalized separation of the worker and his products, every unitary view of accomplished activity and all

direct personal communication among producers are lost. Accompanying the progress of accumulation of separate products and the concentration of the productive process, unity and communication become the exclusive attribute of the system's management. The success of the economic system of separation is the proletarianization of the world.

27.

Due to the success of separate production as production of the separate, the fundamental experience which in primitive societies is attached to a central task is in the process of being displaced, at the crest of the system's development. by non-work, by inactivity. But this inactivity is in no way liberated from productive activity: it depends on productive activity and is an uneasy and admiring submission to the necessities and results of production; it is itself a product of its rationality. There can be no freedom outside of activity, and in the context of the spectacle all activity is negated. just as real activity has been captured in its entirety for the global construction of this result. Thus the present "liberation from labor," the increase of leisure, is in no way a liberation within labor, nor a liberation from the world shaped by this labor. None of the activity lost in labor can be regained in the submission to its result.

28.

The economic system founded on isolation is a circular production of isolation. The technology is based on isolation, and the technical process isolates in turn. From the automobile to television, all the goods selected by the spectacular system are also its weapons for a constant reinforcement of the conditions of isolation of "lonely crowds." The spectacle constantly rediscovers its own assumptions more concretely.

29.

The spectacle originates in the loss of the unity of the world, and the gigantic expansion of the modern spectacle expresses the totality of this loss: the abstraction of all specific labor and the general abstraction of the entirety of production are perfectly rendered in the spectacle, whose mode of being concrete is precisely abstraction. In the spectacle, one part of the world represents itself to the world and is superior to it. The spectacle is nothing more than the common language of this separation. What binds the spectators together is no more than an irreversible relation at the very center which maintains their isolation. The spectacle reunites the separate, but reunites it as separate.

30.

The alienation of the spectator to the profit of the contemplated object (which is the result of his own unconscious activity) is expressed in the following way: the more he contemplates the less he lives; the more he accepts recognizing himself in the dominant images of need, the less he understands his own existence and his own desires. The externality of the spectacle in relation to the active man appears in the fact that his own gestures are no longer his but those of another who represents them to him. This is why the spectator feels at home nowhere, because the spectacle is everywhere.

31.

The worker does not produce himself; he produces an independent power. The success of this production, its abundance, returns to the producer as an abundance of dispossession. All the time and space of his world become foreign to him with the accumulation of his alienated products. The spectacle is the map of this new world, a map which exactly covers its territory. The very powers which escaped us show themselves to us in all their force.

32.

The spectacle within society corresponds to a concrete manufacture of alienation. Economic expansion is mainly the expansion of this specific industrial production. What grows with the economy in motion for itself can only be the very alienation which was at its origin.

33.

Separated from his product, man himself produces all the details of his world with ever increasing power, and thus finds himself ever more separated from his world. The more his life is now his product, the more lie is separated from his life.

34.

The spectacle is capital to such a degree of accumulation that it becomes an image.

Chapter 2 "Commodity as Spectacle"

> The commodity can only be understood in its undistorted essence when it becomes the universal category of society as a whole. Only in this context does the reification produced by commodity relations assume decisive importance both for the objective evolution of society and for the stance adopted by men towards it. Only then does the commodity become crucial for the subjugation of men's consciousness to the forms in which this reification finds expression.... As labor is progressively rationalized and mechanized man's lack of will is reinforced by the way in which his activity becomes less and less active and more and more contemplative.
> Lukacs, *History and Class Consciousness*

35.

In the essential movement of the spectacle, which consists of taking up all that existed in human activity in a fluid state so as to possess it in a congealed state as things which have become the exclusive value by their formulation in negative of lived value, we recognize our old enemy, the commodity, who knows so well how to seem at first glance something trivial and obvious, while on the contrary it is so complex and so full of metaphysical subtleties.

36.

This is the principle of commodity fetishism, the domination of society by "intangible as well as tangible things," which reaches its absolute fulfillment in the spectacle, where the tangible world is replaced by a selection of images which exist above it, and which simultaneously impose themselves as the tangible par excellence.

13

PARAGRAPHS ON CONCEPTUAL ART

Sol LeWitt

1967. *Artforum* 5, no. 10. http://www.sinc.sunysb.edu/Stu/kswenson/lewitt.htm

Sol LeWitt, "Paragraphs on Conceptual Art"
Artforum (June, 1967)

The editor has written me that he is in favor of avoiding "the notion that the artist is a kind of ape that has to be explained by the civilized critic". This should be good news to both artists and apes. With this assurance I hope to justify his confidence. To use a baseball metaphor (one artist wanted to hit the ball out of the park, another to stay loose at the plate and hit the ball where it was pitched), I am grateful for the opportunity to strike out for myself.

I will refer to the kind of art in which I am involved as conceptual art. In conceptual art the idea or concept is the most important aspect of the work. When an artist uses a conceptual form of art, it means that all of the planning and decisions are made beforehand and the execution is a perfunctory affair. The idea becomes a machine that makes the art. This kind of art is not theoretical or illustrative of theories; it is intuitive, it is involved with all types of mental processes and it is purposeless. It is usually free from the dependence on the skill of the artist as a craftsman. It is the objective of the artist who is concerned with conceptual art to make his work mentally interesting to the spectator, and therefore usually he would want it to become emotionally dry. There is no reason to suppose, however, that the conceptual artist is out to bore the viewer. It is only the expectation of an emotional kick, to which one conditioned to expressionist art is accustomed, that would deter the viewer from perceiving this art.

Conceptual art is not necessarily logical. The logic of a piece or series of pieces is a device that is used at times, only to be ruined. Logic may be used to camouflage the real intent of the artist, to lull the viewer into the belief that he understands the work, or to infer a paradoxical situation (such as logic vs. illogic). Some ideas are logical in conception and illogical perceptually. The ideas need not be complex. Most ideas that are successful are ludicrously simple. Successful ideas generally have the appearance of simplicity because they seem inevitable. In terms of ideas the artist is free even to surprise himself. Ideas are discovered by intuition. What the work of art looks like isn't too important. It has to look like something if it has physical form. No matter what form it may finally have it must begin with an idea. It is the process of conception and realization with which the artist is concerned. Once given physical reality by the artist the work is open to the perception of al, including the artist. (I use the word perception to mean the apprehension of the sense data, the objective understanding of the idea, and simultaneously a subjective interpretation of both). The work of art can be perceived only after it is completed.

Art that is meant for the sensation of the eye primarily would be called perceptual rather than conceptual. This would include most optical, kinetic, light, and color art.

Since the function of conception and perception are contradictory (one pre-, the other postfact) the artist would mitigate his idea by applying subjective judgment to it. If the artist wishes to explore his idea thoroughly, then arbitrary or chance decisions would be kept to a minimum, while caprice, taste and others whimsies would be eliminated from the making of the art. The work does not necessarily have to be rejected if it does not look well. Sometimes what is initially thought to be awkward will eventually be visually pleasing.

To work with a plan that is preset is one way of avoiding subjectivity. It also obviates the necessity of designing each work in turn. The plan would design the work. Some plans would require millions of variations, and some a limited number, but both are finite. Other plans imply infinity. In each case, however, the artist would select the basic form and rules that would govern the solution of the problem. After that the fewer decisions made in the course of completing the work, the better. This eliminates the arbitrary, the capricious, and the subjective as much as possible. This is the reason for using this method.

When an artist uses a multiple modular method he usually chooses a simple and readily available form. The form itself is of very limited importance; it becomes the grammar for the total work. In fact, it is best that the basic unit be deliberately uninteresting so that it may more easily become an intrinsic part of the

entire work. Using complex basic forms only disrupts the unity of the whole. Using a simple form repeatedly narrows the field of the work and concentrates the intensity to the arrangement of the form. This arrangement becomes the end while the form becomes the means.

Conceptual art doesn't really have much to do with mathematics, philosophy, or nay other mental discipline. The mathematics used by most artists is simple arithmetic or simple number systems. The philosophy of the work is implicit in the work and it is not an illustration of any system of philosophy.

It doesn't really matter if the viewer understands the concepts of the artist by seeing the art. Once it is out of his hand the artist has no control over the way a viewer will perceive the work. Different people will understand the same thing in a different way.

Recently there has been much written about minimal art, but I have not discovered anyone who admits to doing this kind of thing. There are other art forms around called primary structures, reductive, rejective, cool, and mini-art. No artist I know will own up to any of these either. Therefore I conclude that it is part of a secret language that art critics use when communicating with each other through the medium of art magazines. Mini-art is best because it reminds one of miniskirts and long-legged girls. It must refer to very small works of art. This is a very good idea. Perhaps "mini-art" shows could be sent around the country in matchboxes. Or maybe the mini-artist is a very small person, say under five feet tall. If so, much good work will be found in the primary schools (primary school primary structures).

If the artist carries through his idea and makes it into visible form, then all the steps in the process are of importance. The idea itself, even if not made visual, is as much a work of art as any finished product. All intervening steps –scribbles, sketches, drawings, failed works, models, studies, thoughts, conversations– are of interest. Those that show the thought process of the artist are sometimes more interesting than the final product.

Determining what size a piece should be is difficult. If an idea requires three dimensions then it would seem any size would do. The question would be what size is best. If the thing were made gigantic then the size alone would be impressive and the idea may be lost entirely. Again, if it is too small, it may become inconsequential. The height of the viewer may have some bearing on the work and also the size of the space into which it will be placed. The artist may wish to place objects higher than the eye level of the viewer, or lower. I think the piece must be large enough to give the viewer whatever information he needs to understand the work and placed in such a way that will facilitate this understanding. (Unless the idea is of impediment and requires difficulty of vision or access).

Space can be thought of as the cubic area occupied by a three-dimensional volume. Any volume would occupy space. It is air and cannot be seen. It is the interval between things that can be measured. The intervals and measurements can be important to a work of art. If certain distances are important they will be made obvious in the piece. If space is relatively unimportant it can be regularized and made equal (things placed equal distances apart) to mitigate any interest in interval. Regular space might also become a metric time element, a kind of regular beat or pulse. When the interval is kept regular whatever is ireregular gains more importance.

Architecture and three-dimensional art are of completely opposite natures. The former is concerned with making an area with a specific function. Architecture, whether it is a work of art or not, must be utilitarian or else fail completely. Art is not utilitarian. When three-dimensional art starts to take on some of the characteristics, such as forming utilitarian areas, it weakens its function as art. When the viewer is dwarfed by the larger size of a piece this domination emphasizes the physical and emotive power of the form at the expense of losing the idea of the piece.

New materials are one of the great afflictions of contemporary art. Some artists confuse new materials with new ideas. There is nothing worse than seeing art that wallows in gaudy baubles. By and large most artists

who are attracted to these materials are the ones who lack the stringency of mind that would enable them to use the materials well. It takes a good artist to use new materials and make them into a work of art. The danger is, I think, in making the physicality of the materials so important that it becomes the idea of the work (another kind of expressionism).

Three-dimensional art of any kind is a physical fact. The physicality is its most obvious and expressive content. Conceptual art is made to engage the mind of the viewer rather than his eye or emotions. The physicality of a three-dimensional object then becomes a contradiction to its non-emotive intent. Color, surface, texture, and shape only emphasize the physical aspects of the work. Anything that calls attention to and interests the viewer in this physicality is a deterrent to our understanding of the idea and is used as an expressive device. The conceptual artist would want o ameliorate this emphasis on materiality as much as possible or to use it in a paradoxical way (to convert it into an idea). This kind of art, then, should be stated with the greatest economy of means. Any idea that is better stated in two dimensions should not be in three dimensions. Ideas may also be stated with numbers, photographs, or words or any way the artist chooses, the form being unimportant.

These paragraphs are not intended as categorical imperatives, but the ideas stated are as close as possible to my thinking at this time. These ideas are the result of my work as an artist and are subject to change as my experience changes. I have tried to state them with as much clarity as possible. If the statements I make are unclear it may mean the thinking is unclear. Even while writing these ideas there seemed to be obvious inconsistencies (which I have tried to correct, but others will probably slip by). I do not advocate a conceptual form of art for all artists. I have found that it has worked well for me while other ways have not. It is one way of making art; other ways suit other artists. Nor do I think all conceptual art merits the viewer’s attention. Conceptual art is good only when the idea is good.

14

WALKING AFTER MIDNIGHT: WOMEN, SEX AND PUBLIC SPACE

Rebecca Solnit

2000. *Wanderlust, a History of Walking*. http://www.powells.com/cgi-bin/biblio?isbn=0140286012

WANDERLUST

A History of Walking

Rebecca Solnit

viking

Chapter 14

Walking After Midnight: Women, Sex, and Public Space

Caroline Wyburgh, age nineteen, went "walking out" with a sailor in Chatham, England, in 1870. Walking had long been an established part of courtship. It was free. It gave the lovers a semiprivate space in which to court, whether in a park, a plaza, a boulevard, or a byway (and such rustic landscape features as lovers' lanes gave them private space in which to do more). Perhaps, in the same way that marching together affirms and generates solidarity between a group, this delicate act of marching the rhythms of their strides aligns two people emotionally and bodily; perhaps they first feel themselves a pair by moving together through the evening, the street, the world. As a way of doing that something closest to doing nothing, strolling together allows them to bask in each other's presence, obliged neither to converse continually nor to do something so engaging as to prevent them from conversing. And in Britain the term "walking out together" sometimes meant something explicitly sexual, but more often expressed that an ongoing connection had been established, akin to the modern American phrase "going steady." In James Joyce's novella *The Dead*, the husband who has just discovered that his wife had a suitor in her youth asks if she loved that now-dead boy, and she replies, devastatingly, "I used to go out walking with him."

Caroline Wyburgh, age nineteen, was seen walking with her soldier, and because of it she was dragged from her bed late one night by a police inspector. The Contagious Diseases Acts in effect at that time gave police in barracks towns the

A female ophthalmologist, who is herself veiled, discounted the problem. "There is no proof it affects the vision at

power to arrest anyone they suspected of being a prostitute. Merely walking about in the wrong time or place could put a woman under suspicion, and the law allowed any woman so accused or suspected to be arrested. If the arrested woman refused to undergo a medical examination, she could be sentenced to months in jail; but the painful and humiliating medical examination constituted punishment too; and if she was found to be infected, she was confined to a medical prison. Guilty till proven innocent, she could not escape unscathed. Wyburgh supported herself and her mother by washing doorsteps and basements, and her mother, fearing the loss of their income for so long, tried to persuade her to submit to the examination rather than to serve the three-month prison sentence. She refused, and so the officers of the law strapped her to a bed for four days. On the fifth day she agreed to be examined, but her willingness failed her after she was taken to the surgery, straitjacketed, thrust onto an examining couch with her feet strapped apart, and held down by an assistant who planted an elbow on her chest. She struggled, rolled off the couch with her ankles still strapped in, and severely injured herself. But the surgeon laughed, for his instruments of inspection had deflowered her, and blood poured between her legs. "You have been telling the truth," he said. "You are not a bad girl."

The soldier was never named, arrested, inspected, or otherwise drawn into the legal system, and men have usually had an easier time walking down the street than have women. Women have routinely been punished and intimidated for attempting that most simple of freedoms, talking a walk, because their walking and indeed their very beings have been construed as inevitably, continually sexual in those societies concerned with controlling women's sexuality. Throughout the history of walking I have been tracing, the principal figures—whether of peripatetic philosophers, flâneurs, or mountaineers—have been men, and it is time to look at why women were not out walking too.

"Being born a woman is my awful tragedy," wrote Sylvia Plath in her journal when she too was nineteen. "Yes, my consuming desire to mingle with road crews, sailors and soldiers, barroom regulars—to be part of a scene, anonymous, listening, recording—all is spoiled by the fact that I am a girl, a female always in danger of assault and battery. My consuming interest in men and their lives is often misconstructed as a desire to seduce them, or as an invitation to intimacy. Yes, God, I want to talk to everybody I can as deeply as I can. I want to be able to sleep in an open field, to travel west, to walk freely at night." Plath seems to have

all," she said. "And if women see less well at night, well, no good Muslim woman should be out at night

been interested in men for the very reason she was unable to investigate them—because their greater freedom made their lives more interesting to a young woman just setting out on her own. There are three prerequisites to taking a walk—that is, to going out into the world to walk for pleasure. One must have free time, a place to go, and a body unhindered by illness or social restraints. Free time has many variables, but most public places at most times have not been as welcoming and as safe for women. Legal measures, social mores subscribed to by both men and women, the threat implicit in sexual harassment, and rape itself have all limited women's ability to walk where and when they wished. (Women's clothes and bodily confinements—high heels, tight or fragile shoes, corsets and girdles, very full or narrow skirts, easily damaged fabrics, veils that obscure vision—are part of the social mores that have handicapped women as effectively as laws and fears.)

Women's presence in public becomes with startling frequency an invasion of their private parts, sometimes literally, sometimes verbally. Even the English language is rife with words and phrases that sexualize women's walking. Among the terms for prostitutes are streetwalkers, women of the streets, women on the town, and public women (and of course phrases such as a public man, man about town, or man of the streets mean very different things than do their equivalents attached to women). A woman who has violated sexual convention can be said to be strolling, roaming, wandering, straying—all terms that imply that women's travel is inevitably sexual or that their sexuality is transgressive when it travels. Had a group of women called themselves the Sunday Tramps, as did a group of Leslie Stephen's male friends, the monicker would have implied not that they went walking but that they engaged in something salacious on Sundays. Of course women's walking is often construed as performance rather than transport, with the implication that women walk not to see but to be seen, not for their own experience but for that of a male audience, which means that they are asking for whatever attention they receive. Much has been written about how women walk, as erotic assessment—from the seventeenth-century miss whose "feet beneath her petticoat / like little mice, stole in and out" to Marilyn Monroe's wiggle—and as instruction on the right way to walk. Less has been written about where we walk.

Other categories of people have had their freedom of movement limited, but limitations based on race, class, religion, ethnicity, and sexual orientation are local and variable compared to those placed on women, which have profoundly

unaccompanied."—JAN GOODWIN, *PRICE OF HONOR: MUSLIM WOMEN LIFT THE VEIL OF SILENCE ON THE ISLAMIC*

shaped the identities of both genders over the millennia in most parts of the world. There are biological and psychological explanations for these states of affairs, but the social and political circumstances seem most relevant. How far back can one go? In Middle Assyria (circa the seventeenth to eleventh centuries B.C.), women were divided into two categories. Wives and widows "who go out onto the street" may not have their heads uncovered, said the law; prostitutes and slave girls, contrarily, must not have their heads covered. Those who illicitly wore a veil could be given fifty lashes or have pitch poured over their heads. The historian Gerda Lerner comments, "Domestic women, sexually serving one man and under his protection, are here designated as 'respectable' by being veiled; women not under one man's protection and sexual control are designated as 'public women,' hence unveiled. . . . This pattern of enforced visible discrimination recurs throughout historical time in the myriad regulations which place 'disreputable women' in certain districts or certain houses marked with clearly identifiable signs or which force them to register with the authorities and carry identification cards." Of course "respectable" women have been equally regulated, but more by social constraints than legal ones. Many things are remarkable about the appearance of this law, whose ordering of the world seems to have prevailed ever since. It makes women's sexuality a public rather than a private matter. It equates visibility with sexual accessibility, and it requires a material barrier rather than a woman's morality or will to make her inaccessible to passersby. It separates women into two publicly recognized castes based on sexual conduct but allows men, whose sexuality remains private, access to both castes. Membership in the respectable caste comes at the cost of consignment to private life; membership in the caste with spatial and sexual freedom comes at the cost of social respect. Either way, the law makes it virtually impossible to be a respected public female figure, and ever since, women's sexuality has been public business.

Homer's Odysseus travels the world and sleeps around. Odysseus's wife Penelope stays dutifully at home, rebuffing the suitors she lacks the authority to reject outright. Travel, whether local or global, has remained a largely masculine prerogative ever since, with women often the destination, the prize, or keepers of the hearth. By the fifth century B.C. in Greece, these radically different roles were defined as those of the interior and exterior, the private and the public spheres. Athenian women, writes Richard Sennett, "were confined to houses because of their supposed physiological defects." He quotes Pericles concluding his funeral

WORLD I could not walk out alone, without giving suspicion to the whole family, should I be watched, and seen

oration with advice to the women of Athens—"The greatest glory of a woman is to be least talked about by men, whether they are praising you or criticizing you"—and Xenophon telling wives, "Your business will be to stay indoors." Women in ancient Greece lived far from the celebrated public spaces and public life of the cities. Throughout much of the Western world into the present, women have remained relatively housebound, not only by law in some countries even now, but by custom and fear in others. The usual theory for this control of women is that in cultures where patrilineal descent is important for inheritance and identity, controlling women's sexuality has been the means of ensuring paternity. (Anyone who thinks such matters are archaic or irrelevant need merely remember the anatomist-evolutionist Owen Lovejoy, discussed in chapter 3, attempting to naturalize this social order by theorizing that female monogamy and immobility were important for our species long before we became human.) But there are many other factors pertaining to the creation of a dominant gender whose privileges include controlling and defining the female sexuality often viewed as chaotic, threatening, and subversive—a sort of wild nature to be subdued by masculine culture.

Architectural historian Mark Wiggins writes, "In Greek thought women lack the internal self-control credited to men as the very mark of their masculinity. This self-control is no more than the maintenance of secure boundaries. These internal boundaries . . . cannot be maintained by a woman because her fluid sexuality endlessly overflows and disrupts them. And more than this she endlessly disrupts the boundaries of others, that is, men. . . . In these terms the role of architecture is explicitly the control of sexuality, or more precisely, women's sexuality, the chastity of the girl, the fidelity of the wife. . . . While the house protects the children from the elements, its primary role is to protect the father's genealogical claims by isolating women from other men." Thus, women's sexuality is controlled via the regulation of public and private space. In order to keep women "private," or sexually accessible to one man and inaccessible to all others, her whole life would be consigned to the private space of the home that served as a sort of masonry veil.

Prostitutes have been more regulated than any other women, as though the social constraints they had escaped pursued them as laws. (Prostitutes' customers,

to meet a man—judge of the consequence!—MARY WORTLEY MONTAGU, 1712 *How beautiful are thy feet in*

of course, have almost never been regulated in any way, either by law or by social condemnation: think of Walter Benjamin and André Breton a few chapters ago, who managed to write about their relations with prostitutes without fear of losing their status as public intellectuals or marriageable men.) Throughout the nineteenth century, many European governments attempted to regulate prostitution by limiting the circumstances in which it could be carried out, and this often became a limitation of the circumstances in which any woman could walk. Nineteenth-century women were often portrayed as too frail and pure for the mire of urban life and compromised for being out at all if they didn't have a specific purpose. Thus women legitimized their presence by shopping—proving they were not for purchase by purchasing—and stores have long provided safe semipublic havens in which to roam. One of the arguments about why women could not be flâneurs was that they were, as either commodities or consumers, incapable of being sufficiently detached from the commerce of city life. Once the stores closed, so did much of their opportunity to wander (which was hardest on working women, for whom the evening was their only free time). In Germany the vice squad persecuted women who were out alone in the evening, and a Berlin doctor commented, "The young men strolling on the streets think only that a woman of good reputation does not allow herself to be seen in the evening." Public visibility and independence were still equated, as they had been three thousand years earlier, with sexual disreputability; women's sexuality could still be defined by geographical as well as temporal locale. Think of Dorothy Wordsworth and her fictional sister Elizabeth Bennet upbraided for going out walking in the country, or Edith Wharton's New York heroine in *The House of Mirth* risking her social status at the beginning of the novel to walk into a man's house unchaperoned for a cup of tea and ruining that status for good by being seen to leave another man's house in the evening (while the law controls "disreputable women," "respectable women" often patrol each other).

By the 1870s in France, Belgium, Germany, and Italy, prostitutes were only allowed to solicit at certain times. France was particularly cynical in its regulation of prostitution; the practice was licensed, and both the licensing and the banning of unlicensed sexual commerce allowed the police to control women. Any woman could be arrested for soliciting merely because she appeared in the times and places associated with the sex industry, while known prostitutes could be arrested for appearing in any other time or place—women had been divided into

shoes, O prince's daughter! the joints of thy thighs are like jewels.—SONG OF SOLOMON 7:1 *"You're wearing*

diurnal and nocturnal species. One prostitute was arrested for "shopping in Les Halles at nine o'clock in the morning and was charged with speaking to a man (the stall holder), and with being off the beat stipulated on her registration license." By that time, the Police des Moeurs, or Morals Police, could arrest working-class women for anything or nothing, and they would sometimes round up groups of female passersby on the boulevards to meet their quotas. At first watching the women get arrested was a masculine pastime, but by 1876 the abuses became so extreme that boulevardiers sometimes tried to interfere and got arrested themselves. The mostly young, mostly poor, unmarried women and girl children arrested were seldom found innocent; many were incarcerated behind the high walls of Saint Lazare prison, where they lived in dire circumstances, cold, malnourished, unwashed, overworked, and forbidden to speak. They were released when they agreed to register as prostitutes, while women who ran away from licensed brothels were given the choice of either returning to the brothel or being sent to Saint Lazare—thus women were forced into rather than out of prostitution. Many committed suicide rather than face arrest. The great champion of human rights for prostitutes Josephine Butler visited Saint Lazare in the 1870s: "I asked what the crime was for which the greater number were in prison and was told it was for walking in streets which are forbidden, and at hours which are forbidden!"

Butler, a well-educated, upper-class woman who grew up amid progressives, was the most effective opponent of Britain's Contagious Diseases Acts passed in the 1860s. A devout Christian, she opposed the laws both because they put the state in the business of regulating prostitution and thus, implicitly, of condoning it and because they enforced a double standard. Women could be punished by incarceration or by the inspections dubbed "surgical rape" for the slightest suspicion of being a prostitute, and a woman found to carry a venereal disease was confined and treated, while men were left free to continue spreading it (similar measures have been considered and sometimes carried out in regards to prostitutes and AIDS in recent years). The law had been passed to protect the health of the army, whose soldiers had a much higher incidence of such diseases than the general public; it seems to have been based on a cynical recognition that the health, freedom, and civil rights of men were of greater value to the state than those of women. Many more extreme abuses than that of Caroline Wyburgh were carried out, and at least one woman—a widowed mother of three—was

flat 'eels. Are you a Lesbian?"—LONDON PASSERBY TO A STREETWALKER *Her body is perfectly balanced, she*

hounded into suicide. Going out walking had become evidence of sexual activity, and sexual activity on the part of women had been criminalized. Though the laws in the United States were never quite so bad, similar circumstances sometimes prevailed. In 1895 a young working-class New Yorker named Lizzie Schauer was arrested as a prostitute because she was out alone after dark and had stopped to ask directions of two men. Though she was in fact on her way to her aunt's house on the Lower East Side, the act and the time were interpreted as signs that she was soliciting. Only after a medical examination proved she was a "good girl" was she released. Had she not been a virgin, she might well have been found guilty of a crime compounded of the twin acts of having been sexual and of walking alone in the evening.

Though protecting respectable women from vice had long been one rationale for state regulation and prosecution of prostitution, the eminently respectable Butler took on the formidable task of protecting women from the state, for which she was vilified and chased by mobs (often hired by brothel owners). On one occasion the mob caught her and she was badly beaten and smeared with dirt and excrement, her hair and clothes torn; on another, a prostitute she came across as she fled a mob led her through a labyrinth of back streets and empty warehouses to safety. Of course she herself had transgressed by moving into the public sphere of political discourse and challenging the sexual conduct of men, and she was decried by one member of Parliament as "worse than prostitutes." As she lay dying in 1906, far more women were moving into that sphere and meeting with similar treatment. The women's suffrage movement in the United States and Britain, after decades of quiet and ineffectual effort to gain the vote for women, became militant in the first decade of the twentieth century, with an extraordinary campaign of marches, demonstrations, and public meetings—the now-usual forms of outdoor politicking available to those denied entrée to the system. These demonstrations were met with an unusual degree of violence—by the police in Britain, and by crowds of soldiers and other men in the United States. Union activists, religious nonconformists, and others had been met by violence before, but some of the things that happened to the suffragettes were unique. In Britain archaic laws were invoked to criminalize the women's public gatherings, and current laws that gave all citizens the right to petition the government were violated. In both the United States and Britain these women arrested for exercising their right to be and to speak in public went on hunger strike, demanding

holds herself straight, and yet nothing suggests a ramrod. She takes steps of medium length, and like all people who

they be recognized as political prisoners. Both governments responded by force-feeding the prisoners, and the agonizing procedure—which involved restraining the woman, forcing a tube down her nostrils to her stomach, and pumping in food—became a new form of institutional rape. Once again women who had attempted to participate in public life by walking down the street were locked up and found the privacy of their bodily interiors violated by the state.

But women won the vote, and in recent decades most of this strange duet between public space and private parts has been not between women and the government but between women and men. Feminism has largely addressed and achieved reforms of interactions indoors—in the home, the workplace, the schools, and the political system. Yet access to public space, urban and rural, for social, political, practical, and cultural purposes is an important part of everyday life, one limited for women by their fear of violence and harassment. The routine harassment women experience ensures, in the words of one scholar of the subject, "that women will not feel at ease, that we will remember our role as sexual beings, available to, accessible to men. It is a reminder that we are not to consider ourselves equals, participating in public life with our own right to go where we like when we like, to pursue our own projects with a sense of security." Both men and women may be assaulted for economic reasons, and both have been incited by crime stories in the news to fear cities, strangers, the young, the poor, and uncontrolled spaces. But women are the primary targets of sexualized violence, which they encounter in suburban and rural as well as urban spaces, from men of all ages and income levels, and the possibility of such violence is implicit in the more insulting and aggressive propositions, comments, leers, and intimidations that are part of ordinary life for women in public places. Fear of rape puts many women in their place—indoors, intimidated, dependent yet again on material barriers and protectors rather than their own will to safeguard their sexuality. Two-thirds of American women are afraid to walk alone in their own neighborhoods at night, according to one poll, and another reported that half of British women were afraid to go out after dark alone and 40 percent were "very worried" about being raped.

Like Caroline Wyburgh and Sylvia Plath, I was nineteen when I first felt the full force of this lack of freedom. I had grown up on the suburban edge of the country in the days before children were closely supervised and I went to town or to the hills at will, and at seventeen I ran away to Paris, where the men who

move and dance well, walks from the hip, not the knee. On no account does she swing her arms, nor does she rest a

often propositioned and occasionally grabbed me in the streets seemed more annoying than terrifying. At nineteen, I moved to a poor San Francisco neighborhood with less street life than the gay neighborhood I had moved from and discovered that at night the day's constant threats were more likely to be carried out. Of course it wasn't only poor neighborhoods and nighttime in which I was threatened. I was, for example, followed near Fisherman's Wharf one afternoon by a well-dressed man who murmured a long stream of vile sexual proposals to me; when I turned around and told him off, he recoiled in genuine shock at my profanity, told me I had no right to speak to him like that, and threatened to kill me. Only the earnestness of his death threat made the incident stand out from hundreds of others more or less like it. It was the most devastating discovery of my life that I had no real right to life, liberty, and pursuit of happiness out-of-doors, that the world was full of strangers who seemed to hate me and wish to harm me for no reason other than my gender, that sex so readily became violence, and that hardly anyone else considered it a public issue rather than a private problem. I was advised to stay indoors at night, to wear baggy clothes, to cover or cut my hair, to try to look like a man, to move to someplace more expensive, to take taxis, to buy a car, to move in groups, to get a man to escort me—all modern versions of Greek walls and Assyrian veils, all asserting it was my responsibility to control my own and men's behavior rather than society's to ensure my freedom. I realized that many women had been so successfully socialized to know their place that they had chosen more conservative, gregarious lives without realizing why. The very desire to walk alone had been extinguished in them—but it had not in me.

The constant threats and the few incidents of real terror transformed me. Still, I stayed where I was, became more adept at navigating the dangers of the street, and became less of a target as I grew older. Almost all my interactions nowadays with passersby are civil, and some are delightful. Young women receive the brunt of such harassment, I think, not because they are more beautiful but because they are less sure of their rights and boundaries (though such unsureness manifested as naïveté and timidity are often part of what is considered beauty). The years of harassment received in youth constitute an education in the limits of one's life, even long after the daily lessons stop. Sociologist June Larkin got a group of Canadian teenagers to keep track of their sexual harassment in public and found they were leaving the less dramatic incidents out because, as one said, "If I wrote

hand on her hip! Nor, when walking, does she wave her hands about in gesticulation.—EMILY POST,

down every little thing that happened on the street, it would take up too much time." Having met so many predators, I learned to think like prey, as have most women, though fear is far more minor an element of my everyday awareness than it was when I was in my twenties.

The movements for women's rights often came out of the movements for racial justice. The first great women's convention at Seneca Falls, New York, was organized by abolitionists Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Lucretia Mott out of anger over the discrimination they faced even while trying to fight against slavery—they had attended the World's Anti-Slavery Convention in London, only to find that the male-dominated organization would not seat any female delegates. "Stanton and Mott," writes one historian, "began to see similarities between their own circumscribed status and that of slaves." Josephine Butler and the English suffrage leader Emmeline Pankhurst also came from abolitionist families, and in recent years some of the most original and important feminists have been black women—bell hooks, Michelle Wallace, June Jordan—who address both race and gender.

When I wrote of the gay poets of New York, I left out the Harlem-born James Baldwin, because for him Manhattan was not a deliciously liberatory place where he could lose himself, as it was for Whitman and Ginsberg. It threatened instead never to let him forget himself, whether it was the policemen near the Public Library telling him to stay uptown, the pimps on uptown Fifth Avenue trying to recruit him, when he was a boy, to become one of the dangers, or the people in his own neighborhood keeping track of him as do people in small towns. He wrote about walking the city as a black man rather than a gay one, though he was both; his race limited his roaming until he moved to Paris. Black men nowadays are seen as working-class women were a century ago: as a criminal category when in public, so that the law often actively interferes with their freedom of movement. In 1983 an African-American man, Edward Lawson, won a Supreme Court case challenging a California statute that "required persons who loiter or wander on the streets to provide a credible and reliable identification and to account for their presence when requested by a peace officer." Lawson, who, the *New York Times* reported, "liked to walk and was often stopped late at night in residential areas," had been arrested fifteen times for refusing to identify himself under this

ETIQUETTE *"I call them limousine shoes," she says of the pointy toes that will make the rounds this fall. "One woman wrote to me, 'My boyfriend wants me to wear high heels, but they hurt my feet.' I said, 'Tell him you'll wear*

statute criminalizing walking. An athletic man with tidy dreadlocks, he used to dance at the same nightclub I did then.

But in public space, racism has often been easier to recognize than sexism and far more likely to become an issue. Late in the 1980s two young black men died for being in "the wrong place at the wrong time." Michael Griffith was chased by a gang of hostile white men in Howard Beach, ran out into traffic to escape their persecution, and was killed by a car. Yusef Hawkins was bludgeoned to death for being a black man in another white Queens neighborhood, Bensonhurst. An enormous outcry arose over these two cases; people rightly understood that these young men's civil rights had been stripped from them when they were attacked for walking down the street. Not long after Griffith and Hawkins died in Queens, a large group of teenage boys from uptown Manhattan went into Central Park at night and found a white female jogger. She was gang-raped, cut with knives, beaten with rocks and pipes, her skull was crushed, and she lost most of her blood. Expected to die, she survived with brain damage and physical disabilities.

"The Central Park Jogger Case" was discussed in startlingly different terms. Considerable public outrage had been expressed that the two murdered men had been denied the basic liberty to roam the city, and the crimes were universally recognized as racially motivated. But in a careful study of the Central Park case, Helen Benedict wrote, "Throughout the case, even up to the start of the trial, the white and black press kept running articles trying to analyze why the youths had committed this heinous crime. . . . They looked for answers in race, drugs, class, and in the ghetto's 'culture of violence.'" The reasons proferred, she concludes, "were woefully inadequate as an explanation . . . because the press never looked at the most glaring reason of all for rape: society's attitude toward women." Portraying it as a case about race—the assailants were Latino and black—rather than gender failed to make an issue at all of violence against women. And almost no one at all discussed the Central Park case as a civil rights issue—as part of a pattern of infringements on women's right to roam the city (women of color rarely show up in crime reportage at all, apparently since they lack men's status as citizens and white women's titillating appeal as victims). A decade after Bensonhurst and Central Park, the gruesome lynching of a black man in Texas has been greeted with outrage as a hate crime and an infringement on the civil rights of people of color, as has the brutal death of a young gay man in

Wyoming—for gays and lesbians are also frequent targets of violence that "teaches them their place" or punishes them for their nonconformity. But similar murders motivated by gender, though they fill the newspapers and take the lives of thousands of women every year, are not contextualized as anything but isolated incidents that don't require social reform or national soul-searching.

The geography of race and gender are different, for a racial group may monopolize a whole region, while gender compartmentalizes in local ways. Many people of color find the whiter parts of rural America unwelcoming, to say the least, even in the places where a white woman might feel safe (white supremacists seem to arise from or flock to some of the most scenic parts of the country). Evelyn C. White writes that when she first tried to explore rural Oregon, memories of southern lynchings "could leave me speechless and paralyzed with the heart-stopping fear that swept over me as when I crossed paths with loggers near the McKenzie River or whenever I visited the outdoors." In Britain the photographer Ingrid Pollard made a series of wry portraits of herself in the Lake District, where she apparently went to try to feel like Wordsworth and felt nervous instead. Nature romanticism, she seemed to be saying, is not available to people of her color. But many white women too feel nervous in any isolated situation, and some have personal experience to draw upon. When she was young, the great climber and mountaineer Gwen Moffat went to the beautiful Isle of Skye off Scotland's west coast to climb by herself. After a drunken neighbor broke into her bedroom in the middle of the night, she cabled for a man to join her and recounts, "Had I been older and more mature, I could have coped with life on my own, but living as I did I laid myself open to all kinds of advances and speculations. Ordinary, conventional men thought this way of life an open invitation and I couldn't face the resentment which I knew they felt when they were rebuffed."

Women have been enthusiastic participants in pilgrimages, walking clubs, parades, processions, and revolutions, in part because in an already defined activity their presence is less likely to be read as sexual invitation, in part because companions have been women's best guarantee of public safety. In revolutions the importance of public issues seems to set aside private matters temporarily, and women have found great freedom during them (and some revolutionaries, such as

the shoes if he provides curb-to-curb service.'"—HARPER'S BAZAAR, 1997 *After the [Korean] city gates were*

Emma Goldman, have made sexuality one of the fronts on which they sought freedom). But walking alone also has enormous spiritual, cultural, and political resonance. It has been a major part of meditation, prayer, and religious exploration. It has been a mode of contemplation and composition, from Aristotle's peripatetics to the roaming poets of New York and Paris. It has supplied writers, artists, political theorists, and others with the encounters and experiences that inspired their work, as well as the space in which to imagine it, and it is impossible to know what would have become of many of the great male minds had they been unable to move at will through the world. Picture Aristotle confined to the house, Muir in full skirts. Even in times when women could walk by day, the night—the melancholic, poetic, intoxicating carnival of city nights—was likely to be off limits to them, unless they had become "women of the night." If walking is a primary cultural act and a crucial way of being in the world, those who have been unable to walk out as far as their feet would take them have been denied not merely exercise or recreation but a vast portion of their humanity.

Women from Jane Austen to Sylvia Plath have found other, narrower subjects for their art. Some have broken out into the larger world—Peace Pilgrim (in middle age), George Sand (in men's clothes), Emma Goldman, Josephine Butler, Gwen Moffat, come to mind—but many more must have been silenced altogether. Virginia Woolf's famous *Room of One's Own* is often recalled as though it were literally a plea for women to have home offices, but it in fact deals with economics, education, and access to public space as equally necessary to making art. To prove her point, she invents the blighted life of Shakespeare's equally talented sister, and asks of this Judith Shakespeare, "Could she even get her dinner in a tavern or roam the streets at midnight?"

Sarah Schulman wrote a novel that is, like Woolf's essay, a commentary on the circumscription of women's freedom. Titled *Girls, Visions and Everything* after a phrase from Jack Kerouac's *On the Road*, it is among other things an investigation into how useful Kerouac's credo is for a young lesbian writer, Lila Futuransky. "The trick," thinks Futuransky, "was to identify with Jack Kerouac instead of with the women he fucks along the way," for like Odysseus, Kerouac was a traveling man in a landscape of immobile women. She explores the charms of Lower East Side Manhattan in the mid-1980s as he did America in the 1950s, and among "the things she loved best" was to "walk the streets for hours with nowhere to go but where she ended up." But as the novel progresses, her world becomes more

closed . . . the city was turned over to women, who were then free to walk abroad. They strolled and chatted in

intimate rather than more open: she falls in love and the possibility of a free life in public space recedes.

Near the end of the novel, she and her lover go out for an evening walk in Washington Square Park and come back to eat ice cream together in front of her apartment building when they overhear a man in a group of men: "That's gay liberation. They think they can do whatever they want whenever they want it." They have been, like lovers since time immemorial, walking out together. Like Lizzie Schauer, arrested in the Lower East Side ninety years earlier for walking alone, their venture into public space threatens to become an invasion of their private lives and their bodies:

"Lila didn't want to go upstairs, because she didn't want them to see where she lived. They started walking slowly away, but the men followed.

"'Come on you cunt. I bet you've got a nice pussy, you suck each other's pussy, right? I'll show you a cock that you'll never forget. . . .'

"For Lila, this was a completely normal though unnecessary part of daily life. As a result she had learned docility, to keep quiet and do a shuffle, to avoid having her ass kicked in. . . . Lila walked in the streets like someone who had always walked in the streets and for whom it was natural and rich. She walked with the illusion that she was safe and that the illusion would somehow keep her that way. Yet, that particular night as she went out for cigarettes, Lila walked uneasily, her mind wandering until it stopped of its own accord on the simple fact that she was not safe. She could be physically hurt at any time and felt, for a fleeting moment that she would be. She sat on the trunk of a '74 Chevy and accepted that this world was not hers. Even on her own block."

groups with their friends carrying paper lanterns. —ELIZABETH WILSON, *THE SPHINX IN THE CITY*

Part IV

PAST THE END OF THE ROAD

15

PUBLIC ART AS PUBLICITY

Miwon Kwon

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The title of the symposium, for which this text was written, "In the Place of the Public Sphere," signals a double reading. In particular, the use of the word "place," or rather the place of the word "place," in the title asserts two different conceptions of the public sphere. In one reading the public sphere is a place, a kind of arena or location defined by spatial boundaries with an *inside* that can be occupied. Public sphere is a somewhere. A second reading of the title invokes a possible alternative to, or a replacement for, the public sphere. "In the place of" suggests that rather than an *inside*, we might imagine an *instead* to the public sphere.

The model of the public sphere that this last formulation implicitly critiques - a model against which to imagine an instead - is that of Jürgen Habermas's by-now classic work on the subject. Schematically put, in *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (1962) [1] Habermas locates the emergence of the public sphere in the clubs, coffeehouses, debating societies, museums, newspapers, and other institutions of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Europe, where members of the rising bourgeois middle class gathered to discuss various matters of "public" interest. Concurrent with the rise of mass urban societies and the decline of monarchic absolutist rule, Habermas's bourgeois public sphere is conceived as a social and political form wherein the participating subjects, having bracketed out his personal interests and thus able to engage in objective, disinterested debate, can collectively function as a kind of a watchdog overseeing the rule of the government or the authoritarian state. In this public sphere, a model of modern democratic processes, all subjects are presumed to be equal and equally able to participate in rational-critical debate without being prejudiced by self-interest.

In the past decade and more, Habermas's thesis on the bourgeois public sphere has received much criticism for its authorization of a patriarchal masculine subject as the normative subject of the public sphere; for its tendency to foreground idealized abstractions rather than existing political cultures; and for its lack of acknowledgement of the contributions of subcultural or counter publics (especially women) in the construction of the bourgeois public sphere. Contrary to the Habermasian model, more recent theories of the public sphere cast it as a site of varying types of competition and contestation, itself fraught with social fragmentation, of *unequal* and exclusive access, of what Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge describe as "competing communicative practices."

The impact and implication of such shifts in public sphere discourse for contemporary art are rather profound. To counteract the spatialization of the notion of the public sphere, art historian Frazer Ward, informed by the writings of Negt and Kluge that emphasize modes of communication (publicity) over the resulting site of communication (public sphere), has encouraged a shift in thinking about the function of art as a form of publicity.[2] Heeding such encouragement, this essay will review some paradigmatic public art works over the last thirty-five years in the United States to reconsider them as different forms of publicity, that is, as different models of communicative practices or forms of public address (rather than genres of art). This reconsideration will be guided by the wisdom of Raymond Williams, who outlined in his 1961 essay "Communications and Community" four modes of communicative practices that follow a quasi-evolutionary development - from authoritarian, to paternalistic, to commercial, to the democratic.[3]

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[1] Jurgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (1962), trans. Thomas Burger with Frederick Lawrence (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1989).

[2] See Frazer Ward, "The Haunted Museum: Institutional Critique and Publicity," in *October* 73 (Summer 1995): 71-89.

[3] Raymond Williams, "Communications and Community" (1961), in Robin Gable, ed., *Resources of Hope* (London: Verso, 1989), 19-31.

According to Williams, in an *authoritarian* system of communication a ruling group controls the society of the ruled, and all institutions of communication are in its control. It represses and excludes those ideas that threaten its authority. No individual or group is allowed to create its own communication system. It is a system in which there is only one way of seeing the world, with one set of rigid values, and these are imposed by a few over many. Williams characterizes this mode of communication as fundamentally "evil." The *paternalistic* mode of communication is "authoritarian with a conscience." Claiming to have a benevolent attitude of giving guidance, education, and improvement to the ruled, the ruling group regards its majority of subjects as if they are children who do not know what is best for them. The minority that is in power is driven by a sense of responsibility and duty to do good, to provide "public service," to the majority that is seen in some sense as backward and lacking. Interestingly, the underlying presumption is that the ruling group's superiority will eventually disappear when others "grow up" to be like the "adults." Williams notes that this mode is more exposed and vulnerable than the authoritarian system of communication but problematic nonetheless in terms of localization of power and control. The *commercial* mode of communication, initially proposed to oppose the first two modes, fundamentally challenges the rule of the few over the many. Fighting against state control (considered monopolistic whether authoritarian or paternalistic), the commercial mode relies on the free market as a basis for providing the necessary freedom for all to publish and read what they choose. But while resisting state control, Williams writes, the commercial mode of communication instates *new* controls based on the criteria of profitability. As a result, power over information is still consolidated and shared among a small number of individuals or groups who control the majority of the newspapers, magazines, television, broadcasting (and we should add today the Internet). Finally, the decentralized *democratic* mode of communication, which is an ideal not yet fully realized for Williams, opposes both commercialism and state control. It is a system that maximizes individual participation and allows independent groups licensed to use publicly owned means of communication - theaters, broadcast stations, film studios, newspapers, etc. - to determine what is produced. That is, the modes of expression and communication and the means of their distribution or dissemination are owned by the people who use them. And what is produced is decided by those who produce it.

These four categories of systems of communication or modes of publicity help to understand the ways in which public art practices in the United States have developed (or not developed) in the past four decades.[4] Moving chronologically, we can first consider Alexander Calder's *La Grande Vitesse* in Grand Rapids, Michigan, the premiere public sculpture sponsored by the National Endowment for the Arts and its Art in Public Places Program in 1967. Viewed by many to be one of the most successful public art projects in the twentieth century, at least in North America, *La Grande Vitesse* is a biomorphic, modernist abstraction made out of steel and painted red. Located centrally within a large urban plaza surrounded by International-Style office buildings, the sculpture asserts its autonomy visually and physically, and it functions as a testimony to the singular "genius" of the artist. This kind of "plop art," which appeared on many similar plazas throughout the major cities of the United States during the 1970s, was meant to be a "gift" of the government - local, state, or federal - to the public. With its panels and committees of select experts deciding the fate of public art commissions, with the purpose of bringing the "best" accomplishments in art to a general public, programs like the National Endowment for the Arts were established upon what Williams described as the paternalistic model of communication. The underlying presumption here is that the lives of the general public, thus far deprived of exposure to high culture, would benefit from the presence of great art in the spaces of everyday life, and that the government, with the aid of art experts, can function to provide such educational and elevating experiences to its people.

Similar presumptions continue to guide the NEA and other public art agencies throughout the seventies and eighties. The Wiesner Building on the MIT campus brought together Scott Burton, Kenneth Noland, and Richard Fleischer to collaborate with the architect I.M. Pei in providing art in the form of a public space. Foregrounding functionalism over aesthetics, such artist-architect team efforts integrated art into

[4] The analysis that follows draws on arguments posed in my book *One Place after Another: Site-Specific Art and Locational Identity* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2002).

environmental design, with artists providing designs for seating, shading, lighting, etc., as part of a larger architectural or urban design project. While essentially remaining paternalistic in its mode of operation - that artists and architects, as well as the sponsoring government agency, know best what is good for the public - such efforts accommodated corporate interests keen on real estate development, too. Artists were recruited, in other words, to provide amenities that would increase the property value of certain buildings and zones of gentrification. As such, in this case, the paternalistic basis of public art is conflated with a commercial mode of public address.

Richard Serra's *Tilted Arc* (1981-89) at Federal Plaza in downtown New York was meant to counter the art-as-public-spaces approach to public art that accommodated architecture or submitted to it. As an example of "critical" or "political" site specificity, the controversial sculpture showed up the hypocrisy of the "public" plaza as a cohesive and unified social space by negating the utilitarian or functionalist mandate for public art with an obtrusive and "useless" object.[5] But even as *Tilted Arc* challenged Federal Plaza's architectural condition as itself an authoritarian mode of communication (in Williams's terms), it nevertheless maintained a paternalistic attitude. During the hearings that ultimately led to the removal of the sculpture, the "art experts" defending the artistic merit and political value of artistic freedom, including the artist, voiced positions that clearly established their "superior" and refined knowledge over the uninformed and untrained impressions of the general public. Which is to say, the paternalistic mode of address of *Tilted Arc* is not too far removed from Calder's *La Grande Vitesse*, both as examples of a "high" achievement in art that is understood as such by a minority of few and presented to a majority social body presumed to lack in education and cultural refinement (but will transform through exposure).

In the 1990s, efforts to institute a more democratic mode of public art practice gained greater momentum (the publication of Suzanne Lacy's anthology *Mapping the Terrain: New Genre Public Art* being one evidence of this trend[6]). Among numerous art works that can be pointed to along these lines is John Ahearn's Percent for Art project from 1992-93 that entailed the installation of three life-size cast statues of young residents of the South Bronx neighborhood where they were to be placed.[7] These figurative sculptures, considered more accessible to the public than the language of modernist abstraction (Calder) or post-minimalist art (Serra), were, according to the artist, "heroic" representations of his neighbors. Since Ahearn himself lived in the South Bronx, and since the art was created in direct interaction, even collaboration, with the subjects, the "content" of these public sculptures were imagined to be identical to the "audience" for them. Instead of an art that is brought to the public as a gift from a paternalistic ruling group, Ahearn's effort was meant to function as art that is *of* the people, and to some extent *by* the people, that it represents. While the controversy arising from the presumptions of who can represent whom led to a quick removal of the sculptures (the artist chose to remove them), the debates concerning what constitutes a "democratic" mode of artistic address remain a potent lesson of Ahearn's South Bronx Sculpture Park project.

"New genre public art," as defined by Suzanne Lacy, seeks a "democratic" model of communication based on participation and collaboration of audience members in the production of a work of art. It simultaneously seeks social change, maintaining a certain instrumental attitude toward art as a means to facilitate policy changes or to correct social injustices. While such efforts challenge conventional power dynamics and hierarchies that sustain the contemporary art world, more often than not the democratic mode of communication that new genre public art envisions is for a unified public sphere. At the same time, it often maintains a certain paternalistic attitude toward the "collaborating" audience members.[8]

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[5] Among a big range of writings on the *Tilted Arc* controversy, see Clara Weyergraf-Serra and Martha Buskirk, eds., *The Destruction of Tilted Arc: Documents* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1991), Rosalyn Deutsche, "*Tilted Arc* and the Uses of Public Space," *Design Book Review* 23 (Winter 1992): 22-27, and Douglas Crimp, "Redefining Site Specificity," in *On the Museum's Ruins*, (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1993), 150-198.

[6] Suzanne Lacy, ed., *Mapping the Terrain: New Genre Public Art* (Seattle: Bay Press, 1995).

[7] For more information on this project, see Jane Kramer, *Whose Art Is It?* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1994), and my book, *One Place after Another*.

[8] See my critique of new genre public art in *One Place after Another*.

A better example of an effort to figure or model a democratic mode of communication in art is Group Material's *DaZiBao* poster project from 1983.[9] As an unsanctioned "guerilla act," it entailed the installation of a series of posters in Union Square, New York, that represented a range of different voices and opinions on a diverse set of political and social issues of the day - from U.S. intervention in South America, to abortion rights, to the welfare system, etc. Using the ephemeral space of the city street and the ephemeral form of the street poster, Group Material presented to an unquantifiable audience - passersby - a picture of themselves as an un-unified public, comprised of disjunctive conversations and incommensurate points of view. Here, the "democratic" public sphere emerges as a competitive, formless, and inconclusive process.

* * *

How satisfied are we with *this* model? As many have said before, the public sphere is always necessarily an ideal, an idealized construction (fantasy), insofar as it imagines a possibility and potential of overcoming social differences to debate issues of common concern.[10] In the past, this notion of the "common" was heard as a universalizing tendency asserted by the dominant ideological regime that obscures not only minority or marginalized constituencies but maintains and naturalizes the power structure of this regime. But, as Frazer Ward has written, "Given on the one hand the contemporary dominance of mass media, and on the other, the balkanization of identity politics and its tendency to degenerate into a field of clashing particularized claims...a necessarily modified Habermasian scheme demands attention." Which is to say, in the face of balkanized identity politics (greater and greater individualization and division based on a sense of absolute, incommensurate, and non-relational difference, self-authorization based on psychological, political, and/or social offense or trauma) and the homogenizing affects (erasure of difference, or "depth," a la Fredric Jameson) wrought by the intensities of late capitalism's mass mediated spectacle culture - both leading to either non-communicative impasses (leading to violence) or numbing of the senses to utter incapacity - it might be useful not to throw out Habermas's vision of the bourgeois public sphere so readily. The fantasy of a public sphere, where one might bracket, temporarily, one's private, personal interests to imagine a collective identification, a different sort of intimacy - not for affirmation, consensus, or unification (not a self-same identification) - seems more important than ever. Such an effort to imagine a democratic public sphere anew is necessarily an exercise in abstraction, and the (art) work to be done seems to be located in the space of coming together of this different sort of intimacy and publicity.

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[9] For more information on this project and Group Material, see Nina Felshin, ed., *But Is It Art?: The Spirit of Art as Activism* (Seattle: Bay Press, 1995).

[10] See, for instance, Bruce Robbins, ed., *The Phantom Public Sphere* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993).

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THE END OF UTOPIA

Herbert Marcuse

1967. http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/marcuse/works/1967/end-utopia.htm

Herbert Marcuse 1967

The End of Utopia

Source: Herbert Marcuse Home page, created by H. Marcuse on 27 May 2005;
Translated: by Jeremy Shapiro and Shierry M. Weber.

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Today any form of the concrete world, of human life, any transformation of the technical and natural environment is a possibility, and the locus of this possibility is historical. Today we have the capacity to turn the world into hell, and we are well on the way to doing so. We also have the capacity to turn it into the opposite of hell. This would mean the end of utopia, that is, the refutation of those ideas and theories that use the concept of utopia to denounce certain socio-historical possibilities. It can also be understood as the "end of history" in the very precise sense that the new possibilities for a human society and its environment can no longer be thought of as continuations of the old, nor even as existing in the same historical continuum with them. Rather, they presuppose a break with the historical continuum; they presuppose the qualitative difference between a free society and societies that are still unfree, which, according to Marx, makes all previous history only the prehistory of mankind.

But I believe that even Marx was still too tied to the notion of a continuum of progress, that even his idea of socialism may not yet represent, or no longer represent, the determinate negation of capitalism it was supposed to. That is, today the notion of the end of utopia implies the necessity of at least discussing a new definition of socialism. The discussion would be based on the question whether decisive elements of the Marxian concept of socialism do not belong to a now obsolete stage in the development of the forces of production. This obsolescence is expressed most clearly, in my opinion, in the distinction between the realm of freedom and the realm of necessity according to which the realm of freedom can be conceived of and can exist only beyond the realm of necessity. This division implies that the realm of necessity remains so in the sense of a realm of alienated labor, which means, as Marx says, that the [p. 63] only thing that can happen within it is for labor to be organized as rationally as possible and reduced as much as possible. But it remains labor in and of the realm of necessity and thereby unfree. I believe that one of the new possibilities, which gives an indication of the qualitative difference between the free and the unfree society, is that of letting the realm of freedom appear within the realm of necessity – in labor and not only beyond labor. To put this speculative idea in a provocative form, I would say that we must face the possibility that the path to socialism may proceed from science to utopia and not from utopia to science.

Utopia is a historical concept. It refers to projects for social change that are considered impossible. Impossible for what reasons? In the usual discussion of utopia the impossibility of realizing the project of a new society exists when the subjective and objective factors of a given social situation stand in the way of the transformation – the so-called immaturity of the social situation. Communistic projects during the French Revolution and, perhaps, socialism in the most highly developed capitalist countries are both examples of a real or alleged absence of the subjective and objective factors that seem to make realization impossible.

The project of a social transformation, however, can also be considered unfeasible because it contradicts certain scientifically established laws, biological laws, physical laws; for example, such projects as the age-old idea of eternal youth or the idea of a return to an alleged golden age. I believe that we can now speak of utopia only in this

latter sense, namely when a project for social change contradicts real laws of nature. Only such a project is utopian in the strict sense, that is, beyond history – but even this "ahistoricity" has a historical limit.

The other group of projects, where the impossibility is due to the absence of subjective and objective factors, can at best be designated only as "provisionally" unfeasible. Karl Mannheim's criteria for the unfeasibility of such projects, for instance, are inadequate for the very simple reason, to begin with, that unfeasibility shows itself only after the fact. And it is not surprising that a project for social transformation is designated unfeasible because it has shown itself unrealized in history. Secondly, however, the criterion of unfeasibility in this sense is inadequate because it may very well be the case that the realization of a revolutionary project is hindered by counterforces and countertendencies that can be and are overcome precisely in the process of revolution. For this reason it is questionable to set up the absence of specific subjective and objective factors as an objection to the feasibility of radical transformation. Especially – and this is the question with which we are concerned here – the fact that no revolutionary class can be defined in the capitalist countries that are technically most highly developed does not mean that Marxism is utopian. The social agents of revolution – and this is orthodox Marx – are formed only in the process of the transformation itself, and one cannot count on a situation in which the revolutionary forces are there ready-made, so to speak, when the revolutionary movement begins. But in my opinion there is one valid criterion for possible realization, namely, when the material and intellectual forces for the transformation are technically at hand although their rational application is prevented by the existing organization of the forces of production. And in this sense, I believe, we can today actually speak of an end of utopia.

All the material and intellectual forces which could be put to work for the realization of a free society are at hand. That they are not used for that purpose is to be attributed to the total mobilization of existing society against its own potential for liberation. But this situation in no way makes the idea of radical transformation itself a utopia.

The abolition of poverty and misery is possible in the sense I have described, as are the abolition of alienation and the abolition of what I have called "surplus repression." Even in bourgeois economics there is scarcely a serious scientist or investigator who would deny that the abolition of hunger and of misery is possible with the productive forces that already exist technically and that what is happening today must be attributed to the global politics of a repressive society. But although we are in agreement on this we are still not sufficiently clear about the implication of this technical possibility for the abolition of poverty, of misery, and of labor. The implication is that these historical possibilities must be conceived in forms that signify a break rather than a continuity with previous history, its negation rather than its positive continuation, difference rather than progress. They signify the liberation of a dimension of human existence this side of the material basis, the transformation of needs.

What is at stake is the idea of a new theory of man, not only as theory but also as a way of existence: the genesis and development of a vital need for freedom and of the vital needs of freedom – of a freedom no longer based on and limited by scarcity and the necessity of alienated labor. The development of qualitatively new human needs appears as a biological necessity; they are needs in a very biological sense. For among a great part of the manipulated population in the developed capitalist countries the need for freedom does not or no longer exists as a vital, necessary need. Along with these vital needs the new theory of man also implies the genesis of a new morality as the heir and the negation of the Judeo-Christian morality which up to now has characterized the history of Western civilization. It is precisely the continuity of the needs developed and satisfied in a repressive society that reproduces this repressive society over and over again within the individuals themselves. Individuals reproduce repressive society in their needs, which persist even through revolution, and it is precisely this continuity which up to now has stood in the way of the leap from quantity into the quality of a free society. This idea implies that human needs have a historical character. All human needs, including sexuality, lie beyond the animal world. They are historically determined and historically

mutable. And the break with the continuity of those needs that already carry repression within them, the leap into qualitative difference, is not a mere invention but inheres in the development of the productive forces themselves. That development has reached a level where it actually demands new vital needs in order to do justice to its own potentialities.

What are the tendencies of the productive forces that make this leap from quantity into quality possible? Above all, the technification of domination undermines the foundation of domination. The progressive reduction of physical labor power in the production process (the process of material production) and its replacement to an increasing degree by mental labor concentrate socially necessary labor in the class of technicians, scientists, engineers, etc. This suggests possible liberation from alienated labor. It is of course a question only of tendencies, but of tendencies that are grounded in the development and the continuing existence of capitalist society. If capitalism does not succeed in exploiting these new possibilities of the productive forces and their organization, the productivity of labor will fall beneath the level required by the rate of profit. And if capitalism heeds this requirement and continues automation regardless, it will come up against its own inner limit: the sources of surplus value for the maintenance of exchange society will dwindle away.

In the *Grundrisse* Marx showed that complete automation of socially necessary labor is incompatible with the preservation of capitalism. Automation is only a catchword for this tendency, through which necessary physical labor, alienated labor, is withdrawn to an ever greater extent from the material process of production. This tendency, if freed from the fetters of capitalist production, would lead to a creative experimentation with the productive forces. With the abolition of poverty this tendency would mean that play with the potentialities of human and nonhuman nature would become the content of social labor. The productive imagination would become the concretely structured productive force that freely sketches out the possibilities for a free human existence on the basis of the corresponding development of material productive forces. In order for these technical possibilities not to become possibilities for repression, however, in order for them to be able to fulfill their liberating function, they must be sustained and directed by liberating and gratifying needs.

When no vital need to abolish (alienated) labor exists, when on the contrary there exists a need to continue and extend labor, even when it is no longer socially necessary; when the vital need for joy, for happiness with a good conscience, does not exist, but rather the need to have to earn everything in a life that is as miserable as can be; when these vital needs do not exist or are suffocated by repressive ones, it is only to be expected that new technical possibilities actually become new possibilities for repression by domination.

We already know what cybernetics and computers can contribute to the total control of human existence. The new needs, which are really the determinate negation of existing needs, first make their appearance as the negation of the needs that sustain the present system of domination and the negation of the values on which they are based: for example, the negation of the need for the struggle for existence (the latter is supposedly necessary and all the ideas or fantasies that speak of the possible abolition of the struggle for existence thereby contradict the supposedly natural and social conditions of human existence); the negation of the need to earn one's living; the negation of the performance principle, of competition; the negation of the need for wasteful, ruinous productivity, which is inseparably bound up with destruction; and the negation of the vital need for deceitful repression of the instincts. These needs would be negated in the vital biological need for peace, which today is not a vital need of the majority, the need for calm, the need to be alone, with oneself or with others whom one has chosen oneself, the need for the beautiful, the need for "undeserved" happiness – all this not simply in the form of individual needs but as a social productive force, as social needs that can be activated through the direction and disposition of productive forces.

In the form of a social productive force, these new vital needs would make possible a total technical reorganization of the concrete world of human life, and I believe that new human relations, new relations between men, would be possible only in such a reorganized world. When I say technical reorganization I again speak with reference to the capitalist countries that are most highly developed, where such a restructuring would mean the abolition of the terrors of capitalist industrialization and commercialization, the total reconstruction of the cities and the restoration of nature after the horrors of capitalist industrialization have been done away with. I hope that when I speak of doing away with the horrors of capitalist industrialization it is clear I am not advocating a romantic regression behind technology. On the contrary, I believe that the potential liberating blessings of technology and industrialization will not even begin to be real and visible until capitalist industrialization and capitalist technology have been done away with.

The qualities of freedom that I have mentioned here are qualities which until now have not received adequate attention in recent thinking about socialism. Even on the left the notion of socialism has been taken too much within the framework of the development of productive forces, of increasing the productivity of labor, something which was not only justified but necessary at the level of productivity at which the idea of scientific socialism was developed but which today is at least subject to discussion. Today we must try to discuss and define – without any inhibitions, even when it may seem ridiculous – the qualitative difference between socialist society as a free society and the existing society. And it is precisely here that, if we are looking for a concept that can perhaps indicate the qualitative difference in socialist society, the aesthetic-erotic dimension comes to mind almost spontaneously, at least to me. Here the notion "aesthetic" is taken in its original sense, namely as the form of sensitivity of the senses and as the form of the concrete world of human life. Taken in this way, the notion projects the convergence of technology and art and the convergence of work and play. It is no accident that the work of Fourier is becoming topical again among the avant-garde left-wing intelligentsia. As Marx and Engels themselves acknowledged, Fourier was the only one to have made clear this qualitative difference between free and unfree society. And he did not shrink back in fear, as Marx still did, from speaking of a possible society in which work becomes play, a society in which even socially necessary labor can be organized in harmony with the liberated, genuine needs of men.

Let me make one further observation in conclusion. I have already indicated that if critical theory, which remains indebted to Marx, does not wish to stop at merely improving the existing state of affairs, it must accommodate within itself the extreme possibilities for freedom that have been only crudely indicated here, the scandal of the qualitative difference. Marxism must risk defining freedom in such a way that people become conscious of and recognize it as something that is nowhere already in existence. And precisely because the so-called utopian possibilities are not at all utopian but rather the determinate socio-historical negation of what exists, a very real and very pragmatic opposition is required of us if we are to make ourselves and others conscious of these possibilities and the forces that hinder and deny them. An opposition is required that is free of all illusion but also of all defeatism, for through its mere existence defeatism betrays the possibility of freedom to the status quo.

Question. To what extent do you see in the English pop movement a positive point of departure for an aesthetic-erotic way of life?

Marcuse. As you may know, of the many things I am reproached with, there are two that are particularly remarkable. I have supposedly asserted that today the movement of student opposition in itself can make the revolution. Second, I am supposed to have asserted that what we in America call hippies and you call *Gammler*, beatniks, are the new revolutionary class. Far be it from me to assert such a thing. What I was trying to show was that in fact today there are tendencies in society – anarchically unorganized, spontaneous tendencies – that herald a total break with the dominant needs of repressive society. The groups you have mentioned are characteristic of a state of disintegration within the system, which as a mere phenomenon has no revolutionary force whatsoever but which perhaps at some

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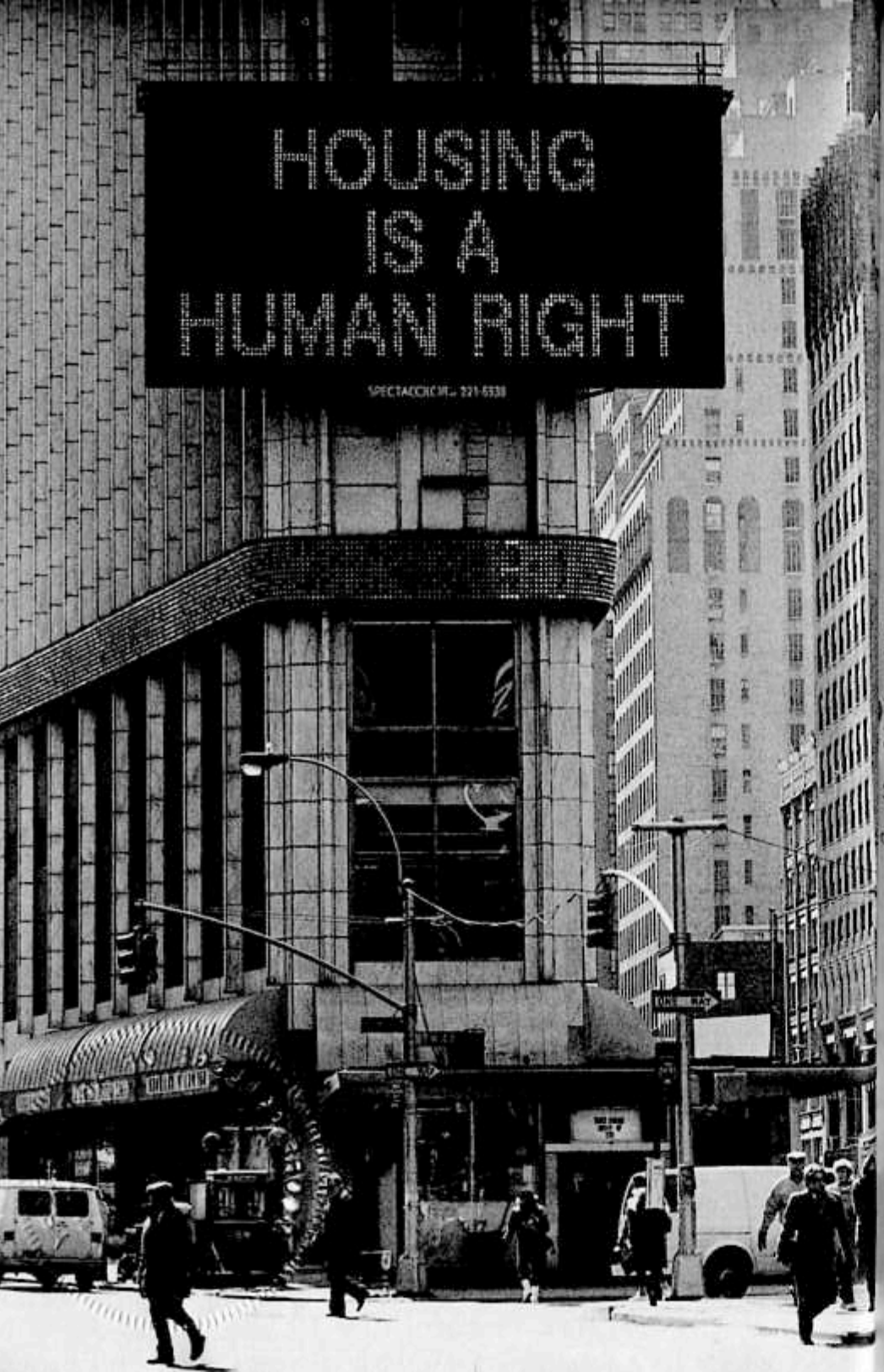
AN UNFASHIONABLE AUDIENCE

Mary Jane Jacob

1995. *Mapping the Terrain.*



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MAPPING THE TERRAIN

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AN UNFASHIONABLE AUDIENCE

Mary Jane Jacob

The mainstream contemporary art world focuses on the production (artists and works of art) and the distribution (museums, galleries, and publications) of contemporary art. Mediation between the work of art and the audience is usually the purview of professionals designated as educators, and the reception of the art is measured once it appears in its respective venues. Fault—the inability to comprehend and appreciate the work of art—is often attributed to a notion of deficiency: lack of art knowledge on the part of the viewer, lack of labels on the part of the museum, and, less often, lack of clarity or quality on the part of the artist. This gap between art and its audience is dramatically pointed out by the example of public art, since it is on the street that, it is felt, the work of art meets an uninformed and unwilling general public.

But what if the audience for art (who they are and what their relationship with the work might be) were considered as the goal at the center of art production, at the point of conception, as opposed to the modernist Western aim of self-expression? And what if the location of art in the world was determined by trying to reach and engage that audience most effectively?

WHO DEFINES IMPORTANT CONTEMPORARY ART?

Twentieth-century Western art has always been positioned according to its avant-garde edge—that is, the degree to which it departs from tradition and demonstrates innovation. At times, the avant-garde is defined by its political roots as the revolutionary advance; at other times, it is understood as a function of stylistic innovation. Contemporary art museums, in bringing exposure to the new, have acquired by association the connotation of being avant-garde institutions. Yet, at the same time, like all museums, they operate according to principles of connoisseurship derived from their eighteenth-century origins.

In spite of the rebelliousness of art in this century, museums and the mainstream art establishment remain the arbiters of style and the validators of art, as "museum standards" for defining and distinguishing important art continue to prevail. The assessment of the work of art is accomplished through the museum practice of identifying the makers of the art object; categorizing it according to genre; evaluating it according to a hierarchy of media; assessing its quality; placing it within a continuum of art history; and displaying, interpreting, and publishing the work as part of a monographic or thematic program.

Within museums, the audience is often conceived as self-reflexive. The audience for art is that which comes to the museums, and the issues related to audience revolve primarily around the question of museum attendance. Even though demands are being placed on museums today to be audience responsive, increase accessibility, provide didactic materials and educational programming, and expand beyond the roles of keeper and presenter of culture into the community, the identification of the audience remains bounded by the institutions' own conventions. In the seventies and eighties, new approaches to audience development centered on membership perks or building amenities such as museum stores and cafes; that is, museums attempted to attract the viewer as patron and consumer. By the end of the last decade, in an era of increased multicultural awareness, the focus shifted to in-house education and outreach programs, though the aim still was more to colonize persons and communities and turn them into museum-goers than to establish new relationships and continuing, permanent vehicles of exchange and mutual respect.

But art existed for centuries before museums. For institutions within the art world to define what is art—or, at least, *important* art—is a relatively recent phenomenon in our culture. With this power is also made a distinction between high art and low art—to indicate that which is significant in the history of contemporary art as opposed to the popular arts. Hence, forms of cultural expression outside the museum's sanctioned space are demeaned or devalued. This system of division and classification permeates the institution's class-oriented structure of patrons, trustees, membership, special events, and so on. Thus, when foundations or

community spokespersons call for a revamping of the system to open up art to new audiences, they are met with resistance or the inability to reshape the museum's collections, facilities, exhibitions, programs, staff, and boards; instead, a token representation or temporary trend occurs. In other words, reformers discover that at the very core such art institutions are at odds with new social agendas.

So the art museum may not be the most appropriate starting point for larger, new audiences for contemporary art. Instead, by departing from the institution, new meaningful ways to engage a wider audience for contemporary art can be greatly multiplied. Moreover, these non-art-world venues may be equally or more appropriate than museums as the setting for some of the most important artistic statements emerging from current mainstream thought.

WHY WORK "IN PUBLIC"?

An artist choosing to step outside the domain of the museum, intentionally or by virtue of his or her interest, gains a bittersweet freedom from the hierarchies and definitions imposed by traditional art institutions. The extended edges that define art as avant-garde, explored as early as the beginning of the century, were pushed wide open by artists in the early seventies. Their work includes art that is produced collaboratively or anonymously; process-based art that exists within a limited time frame; art that uses nontraditional media; art that might be identified with other fields (for example, science) or everyday life itself; art that requires assessment according to quality of experience, or requires non-Western or newly formed evaluation systems to chart its success; art that is open to interpretation by the audience as well as by professionals; and art that uses routes such as public media to generate discourse, rather than art magazines and exhibition catalogs.

The roots of these changes can be found in artists' practices of the last twenty-five years and come from several sources. Some artists intended their work to resemble, even be mistaken for, life; being in the reality of the world increased the work's readability as part of the environment rather than artifice. For those artists with a more pronounced social

and political agenda, the role of art as a forum for dialogue or social activism gained in power and effectiveness by being situated in the real world. It was necessary to remain outside the institution to maintain an independent artistic or politically revolutionary stance. Forced initially to work outside art institutions because of discriminatory selection processes, politicized artists—especially those who must defend their place in the art world because of their ethnicity, race, gender, or sexual preference—have used the public venue as a potent means of speaking about personal issues of a public dimension.

While the art museum, too, moved to the use of alternative, outside locations by the eighties because of the additional gallery space and visibility they afforded, many special exhibitions were offered in such locations because of their potential as a meaningful context for art. Commissioning new works for site-specific shows is, therefore, aligned with contemporary public art practice rather than conventional curatorial practice, which is founded on connoisseurship. These exhibitions, however, do not necessarily constitute public art. They are essentially museum exhibitions outside museums; they might exist in public view, but they are rarely directed toward engaging that audience unfamiliar with the artists on view; they appealed instead to a new breed of art tourist that emerged during this period of active international art-world travel in the eighties.

The "new public art" that has come into the spotlight in the nineties is not actually new; rather, the application of the genre of public art has made digestible some art known under more specific political labels (such as feminist performance or Chicano installations). Yet the recent increase of activity around public art that addresses social issues is dramatic. It is an art whose time, if not wholly its acceptance by the art establishment, has come. The work of this rapidly growing group of artists ranges from the expression of identity (which itself can be a political act), to the creation of art as social critique, to the production of art as an instrument for change. The latter category may be thought of as encompassing three types of work. One is emblematic: objects or actions that embody the social problem or make a political statement and by their presence in a public setting hope to inspire change. A second is supportive: works conceived and

created by the artist that, upon presentation, are designed to be linked to others, ultimately feeding back into an actual social system (for example, public service messages benefiting a particular group, or schemes to generate revenue for the cause evoked by the work). A third type is participatory, whereby the concept of the work and perhaps its actual production come out of a collaborative process. It aims to make a lasting impact on the lives of the individuals involved, be of productive service to the social network, or contribute to remedying the social problem.

For the meaning of this art to be conveyed, its presence in public is essential. It is not art for public spaces but art addressing public issues. This art is dependent upon a real and substantive interaction with members of the public, usually representing a particular constituency, but not one that comes to art because of an identification or connection with the art world. Such work must reach those for whom the art's subject is a critical life issue. This work deals with audience first: the artist brings individuals into the process from the start, thus redefining the relationship between artist and audience, audience and the work of art. This work departs from the position of authority over and remove from the audience that has become a hallmark of twentieth-century Western art. It reconnects culture and society, and recognizes that art is made for audiences, not for institutions of art.

THE RECEPTION FOR THE "NEW PUBLIC ART"

Much of the internal dynamic within the art world results from the conflict between the devaluing of certain nonmainstream art by the critical and cultural establishment and the desire for recognition and reevaluation on the part of the work's practitioners and supporters. In recent decades, we have seen this battle played out in regard to work in so-called crafts media, primarily clay, glass, and fiber; work in the so-called new genre, such as video, performance, and installation; work by so-called regional artists, that is, those living outside New York; work by so-called minorities, such as women, African Americans, Latinos, or Native Americans; and work by foreigners, beginning around 1980 with German and Italian artists, then French, Spanish, and British, then Dutch, Japanese, Brazilian—the list goes

on around the world as other countries try to prove, for reasons of cultural and economic power, that their work is part of a vital, current scene.

The latest "art outside the mainstream" that is claiming recognition, being praised as "the new" and damned as "not art," is the new, community-based public art. Its status fluctuates between disregard and promotion as it is offered as the latest thing—the new avant-garde—or deemed socially concerned but aesthetically insignificant.

Inevitably, art outside the mainstream is initially met with criticism and suspicion; then some stars are identified and propelled to demonstrate the incorporation of yet another area, such as a new style, into the art scene. But it is unclear whether the power relationships that for so long favored white male American and European painters can be said to have truly changed in response to the above-named movements and the entry into the canon of contemporary art history of a Robert Arneson, Dale Chihuly, Magdalena Abakanowicz (sculptors in clay, glass, and fiber, respectively); a Nam June Paik, Laurie Anderson, Ann Hamilton (who work in video, performance, and installation); a Siah Armajani or James Surls (from Minneapolis and Texas, far from New York); a Susan Rothenberg, David Hammons, Guillermo Gómez-Peña, Jimmie Durham (who escape the limitations of gender, race, or ethnicity); or a Yasuo Morimura, Cildo Miereles, and many from European countries (who broke the U.S. domination of the post–World War II art scene). Perhaps we have just allowed a few "others" into the academy? Perhaps within, nothing has changed? Will the new public art be absorbed likewise, with some artists rising to the top and others fading as the movement wanes from view? Or is there something fundamentally different about this work—its community base, social subject matter, political strategy—that will prevent it from following the same pattern? Will that difference keep it forever outside the mainstream?

There is already a groundswell of opinion in the art community that this work is getting too much attention. Art should "speak for itself," so why should an artist be out there explaining? Art should be primarily visual, and since this work uses and mixes any media, takes forms associated with traditional popular arts, or involves community organizing, where's the art? Isn't this social work after all? The artist's role is being

co-opted or compromised; it's not the work of the artist but of the community, thus, it's not art. (Interestingly, questions of authorship raised by art using appropriation have not affected the status or prices of Sherrie Levine's or Jeff Koons's work.)

Like the move to pressure museums to expand their audiences, this work has caused consternation and outrage in the field: to appeal to and attract the uninitiated audience, quality must be lowered. For instance, it is believed that such an audience, with no art history training, could not possibly understand public projects emanating from a conceptual art base. Therefore, if locally appreciated (on the street level, if you will), such public art works must not be of interest to those situated geographically and socially outside, and the art must lack universality, must not be of aesthetic significance.

Ironically, new public art's avant-garde status—both stylistically innovative *and* politically advanced—does not easily win for it a place of distinction in art world media and institutions. Rather, its premises are dismissed because of characteristics that run against the grain of an art-establishment ideology based on the collectible nature and private appreciation of the object. Its offenses are its connectedness to the actual (not just artifice); its practical function (not just aesthetic experience); its transitory or temporary nature (rather than permanence and collectibility); its public aims and issues as well as public location; its inclusiveness (reaching beyond the predefined museum-going audience); and its involvement of others as active viewers, participants, coauthors, or owners. Moreover, because so many artists have felt the urgency to work this way in the face of the critical needs of our cities and communities, this community-responsive, audience-directed work is put down for being trendy, "do-gooder," and opportunistic, taking advantage of funds created out of new governmental or foundation agendas.

CHANGING ARTISTIC PRACTICES

When the artist designs the contextualizing program as well as the work of art, or when the artistic strategies become one with the points of audience engagement, what emerges is a new way of thinking about the purpose of

education and the artwork as a totality. To understand this work is to recognize that process and all associated activities are central to, even part of, the art; this is not just a case of a final product or object to which all else is preliminary. To carry out such labor-intensive, time-consuming, multidisciplinary work, conventional definitions of the artist, the curator, the critic, and the institutions of art and society must be challenged. But this poses a threat to the continued operations of those institutions and the professional identity of most in the art world.

A number of artists today, perceiving the possibility of deconstructing society and possessing a vision to reinvent or aid in remedying it, have begun to rearrange cultural institutions as well. Making exhibitions is a way for artists to demonstrate some of their ideas about art as social critique. Blurring traditional roles within the field, artist-made exhibitions range from Group Material's assembling of other artists' works according to a political theme, to the Incest Awareness Project's exhibitions of artists alongside social scientists and activists, to Fred Wilson's reinstallations of existing museum collections, to Betti-Sue Hertz's curating of indigenous artworks that parallel current themes in the art discourse. Furthermore, to produce works that bring together social groups and issues in experimental forms outside any social or cultural system, artists have become adept at fund-raising, community organizing, managing extensive logistics, and a host of other, heretofore nonart, skills.

In areas that were previously off limits as the artists' domain, curators are playing a part in the making of art, in its conception and realization. When art moves outside studio production and becomes a process of community or institutional negotiation, when it must be responsive to a social dynamic and address the needs of others, when it is collaborative by nature, or when it draws upon the expertise of other fields, it becomes a more open-ended and fluid process. The new public art demands and invites communication and the engagement of others. In this, the role of the curator can be key, as this individual becomes at various times client or commissioner; information resource or researcher; sounding board and friend; administrative and artistic collaborator; exhibitor and presenter; educator, tour guide, and interpreter. The creative process is opened to the

curator by nurturing and supporting a broadly experimental and innovative art-making approach as well as by directly having the curator participate in the creative process. The resulting alliance between artist and curator is beneficial, even essential to making socially complex works that can exist on many levels, and to weathering logistical and political obstacles endemic to art but compounded here. Meanwhile, some social institutions are welcoming artists whose energies they see as gifts to their campaign, while those in the art establishment seem baffled, mildly curious, or antagonistic.

Most important, however, is the change that is occurring in the audience for contemporary art. What happens when the primary audience is not that which is educated in art or financially and socially aligned as supporters of the art world? What happens when the most in-depth and privileged experience of the art is not reserved for the person who distinguished him- or herself by wealth or reputation, but is available to any who cared about the issues and wished to become involved?

In the seventies we worked to extend the definition of the artist along the lines of nationality or ethnicity, gender and sexual orientation, and in the eighties the place of exhibitions was expanded to include any imaginable alternative venue. Now, in the nineties, we are grappling with broadening the definition of the audience for contemporary art.

With the new public art, the traditional audience for art is changed in several significant ways: by being placed at the center of the art making, with their concerns and issues adopted as artistic subject matter; by reacting to the work, their critical viewpoint ultimately determining its artistic success, i.e., its *quality*; and by taking on a diversified and more active role. In fact, the audience-participation factor in the genesis of this public art gives the work relevancy within the community, not in the usual public art sense of promoting art appreciation, but by offering the potential for this art to affect the lives of those in and outside of the community.

Public art works that are audience generated and audience responsive appear to the established art world to be necessarily unsophisticated. It seems the mainstream equates the audience's involvement in and comprehension of the work of art (particularly of those on the margins of society) with a limitation of the artwork's status as avant-garde or contemporary, and assumes a lessening of its applicability and appropriateness to other audiences beyond the specific and the local, especially the art-world audience. Perhaps its very nature of being nonexclusionary makes the new public art a challenge to the art system. Perhaps the art world clings to the arts for its refinement and remove from the everyday and everyone. The concentration of projects around the subjects of marginalized groups (women, youth, the lower classes) may be seen as exclusionary—an act of reverse discrimination—or as exploiting or romanticizing a community's problems. But others would argue that the issues evoked—those we see in the news every day—are not only relevant beyond the community in which they are sited but affect us all and are echoed around the world.

As artists have given greater, primary, consideration to the audience in developing their projects and in bringing those usually outside art institutions into their work—through the subject matter, neighborhood or other public venue, or nonart participants who personally invested themselves in the process—many of the art world audience have fled. The audience has not expanded but has been substituted. Indeed, it is this change in the composition of the audience, and their position at the creative center, that makes this public art so new.

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TOUCH SANITATION: MIERLE LADERMAN UKELES

Robert C. Morgan

1982. *The Citizen Artist: 20 Years of Art in the Public Arena.*

The Citizen Artist:
20 Years of Art in the Public Arena

An Anthology from
High Performance magazine 1978-1998

Edited by
Linda Frye Burnham and Steven Durland

Volume I

"We're ready now to move to another space." We did the Chief Seattle Run; we said, "We can all join together, we can run together and make our peaceful steps heard. We can put out our visions for peace. We have gone through our own ordeal, and then we can turn it into the song and send these peaceful messages out through the image of the bird."

The dance was itself an unfolding of a mythological peace statement, so it wasn't about peace, was it? We went through what it takes to go through to find peace within ourselves, and then unite to send that peace out. And we did it in a peaceful way. So the whole thing is around peace, not for peace, or about peace, but experiencing peace.

JS: *What comes next? Do you already have plans for a new project, or are you still totally involved in the peace dance?*

AH: I'm right here now with the peace dance: understanding it more consciously—being open to it growing and developing in richer ways, and being available to go wherever we're called to take it. Hopefully I see the circle growing, growing, growing—that's what I'd like to see—how can we nurture this process. Let's just be open and available to see where it will take us.

Spring 1986

Touch Sanitation: Mierle Laderman Ukeles

By Robert C. Morgan

When New York-based art critic Robert C. Morgan wrote this article, Mierle Laderman Ukeles had already been exercising the feminist art/life principal for more than a dozen years. Her own pregnancy sparked her long-term examination of woman's traditional caretaker role, extrapolating to larger questions about art, work and survival. Here Morgan gets to the bottom of the work's form, content and context. —Eds.

Take out the papers and the trash
Or you don't get no spending cash
If you don't scrub the kitchen floor
You ain't gonna rock and roll no more

from "Yakety Yak," words and music
by Jerry Leiber and Mike Stoller
© 1958 by Tiger Music, Inc.

In 1969, Mierle Laderman Ukeles wrote a manifesto entitled "Maintenance Art—Proposal for an Exhibition," which challenged the delegation of housework to women. In this seminal document of feminist art, Ukeles was attempting to demystify the image of the "housewife" as someone locked into an irretrievable system of dependency. Being pregnant at the time with her first child, she was feeling biological and psychological changes within her body, as well as confronting social and political changes within the society, which were in turn affecting her attitudes about art. In deciding to become a "maintenance artist"—and by announcing her intentions through the manifesto—Ukeles wanted to reinterpret the conventional housewife stereotypes, not in imagistic terms, but through a systemic style of creative action.

The chores that accompanied the raising of children became meaningful as she refused to define her domestic role as being any-

thing more than a neutral work-system. Thus, by rejecting the standard "housewife" ideal, Ukeles hoped to revive the idea of housework as a functional endeavor—a ritualistic series of activities that maintain the hygiene of the family unit. Thus, she intended to confront the apprehension and anxiety of falling into a role and of being handed a social image she abhorred. Rather than disavowing her existential dilemma, Ukeles chose to "perform" housework as a maintenance system—a literal art of work existing in real time.

Having read the Freudian historian Norman O. Brown some years earlier, the artist was able to identify her struggle between housewife and artist as resembling the familiar life-against-death conflict used in psychoanalysis. By accepting the reality of her situation as a necessary role in maintaining the household, she discovered the reality of maintenance as a means to the survival of personal freedom, art and all other social institutions. In other words, maintenance art was a necessary part of the human condition. Through this approach to the problem, Ukeles began to extend the references in her work outside of a purely feminist content in order to reveal the conditions of work, and the stereotypes handed to maintenance workers on all levels, whether in public, private, or corporate enterprises. Her mode of "doing" art became a series of actions that acknowledged the basic human operations that supported various institutions and perpetuated the idea of culture. In the course of redefining her own domestic role, she caught the meaning of art as action, art as gesture, art as circumstance within an appointed system or any designated structure.

Initially, Ukeles acknowledged the tasks of maintenance as a liberating idea, a context for her art that she identified as a feminist position. As this position extended from the household system to that of public sanitation, the artist performed in museums and office buildings and eventually in the streets of New York City. In *I Make Maintenance Art One Hour Every Day* (1976), Ukeles shifted her emphasis from the personal or individual scale to that of a large-scale system. For two months, she worked as part of a sanitation bureaucracy, cleaning floors and elevators in a lower-Manhattan office building along with 300 janitors and "cleaning women" during regular shifts. Her recent

large-scale performance, *Touch Sanitation*, completed June 1980, involved more than 8,500 workers in the New York City Department of Sanitation. The performance itself lasted for a duration of eleven months. Her intention was "to face and shake hands" with each one of the 8,500 sanitation works while saying the words: "Thank you for keeping New York City alive."

While not oblivious to the biases that various news media held against the Department, Ukeles believed that most of these negative feelings were the result of irrational fears people had about garbage. As a performance artist, she wanted to emphasize the basically human side of the operation, that the activity of picking up trash was essentially no different than the disposing of it; the process was, in fact, one cycle. By shaking hands with a sanitation worker, or "san-man," she was demystifying another stereotype. There is a necessary task to be done and a necessary separation to be made between the task and those who perform it. Maintenance is a shared concern; there is both a private and public aspect to the work cycle. Waste products are not created by "garbage men," but by individuals who designate leftovers as trash. "Are we to assume," Ukeles has stated, "that those who dispose of trash—being all of us—are the 'garbage people'?"

In the course of redefining her own domestic role, she caught the meaning of art as action, art as gesture, art as circumstance within an appointed system or any designated structure.

In *Touch Sanitation*, the artist has shifted the focus of her actions outside the gallery space as an implicit ideology, a container for her work. This is a more radical shift from her previous 1976 performance in which the exhibition space of the downtown branch of the Whitney Museum was used in conjunction with the performance in the building. The museum, in this case, was simply part of the larger system, the social network of maintaining the premises, regardless of where the art happened to be shown. In *Touch Sanitation*, however,

the gesture of the handshake evolved as an action independent of any immediate spectatorship among art-world clientele. Not only was such an action independent of the gallery or museum space, it was also independent of the theater. Its lack of domination by any traditional aesthetic category puts it on the fringes of a support system with which it could easily identify itself as art.

In keeping with the ecological concerns pronounced in the earlier "Maintenance Art" manifesto, *Touch Sanitation* raises several important questions: What occurs at the other end of the production line? What happens after the utility of the material has been exhausted? What happens to the scrap? The refuse? The dangerous gases and toxicants? The chronically harmful effects of radioactive wastes? More specifically, who takes care of the 22,000 tons of waste produced each day by the factories, businesses and residents of New York City? And what is the current social attitude that surrounds the sanitation worker who is hired to clean the sidewalks and maintain the mobility of the streets?

The fact that Ukeles has operated within a bureaucracy from the standpoint of "real time" places her work within the scope of conceptualism; yet, it might also be acknowledged as a kind of sociological street-theater. Although the artist is questioning the rational aesthetics of modernism, as well as the groundless decorativeness of postmodernism, the art-historical concerns are rather diminutive in contrast to the larger cultural issues being addressed in *Touch Sanitation*. Given the perspective of a simple action, Ukeles has performed a subtle transformation upon the psychology of doing an otherwise humdrum routine. Although such an action might not be interpreted as dramatic in a theatrical sense, the handshake carries a powerful feeling of mutual interest and support among workers. It comes to signify a sense of trust, an instillment of a feeling about the social nature of work. In joining forces with the san-men, Ukeles was able to unite her feminist concerns with the general nature of the work which they perform. Furthermore, san-men tend to believe—and rightly so—that a certain disparity exists between the reality of their work and the public image that is presented negatively through the news media. The gesture, presented by Ukeles, offered an alternative to some of the bad publicity.

Consequently, the repeated series of handshakes literally became a chain reaction, a human support structure.

The definition of "nontheatrical performance"—stated earlier by Allan Kaprow (*Artforum*, April, 1976)—characterized certain types of work as "performing" a task well. Such performances given by garage mechanics, telephone operators or surgeons do not require an audience or a persona in the sense of constantly reinforcing what these performers do. They exist in their own right without audience support. Often such performances are related to maintenance and therefore seem appropriate to the underlying intentions in *Touch Sanitation*. In performing a collection maneuver, for example, a sanitation worker may have a personal style of choreography in the way he operates off the truck. In *Touch Sanitation*, this operation is further emphasized as having artistic merit while, at the same time, it is reinforced by a handshake—"pressing flesh," as the jargon goes. During this exchange, the worker is invited to step outside the normal routine for a moment, to lose his anonymity as a worker on the streets, and to become a person. This may account for a minor transformation of demeanor and attitude in the worker's mind. Yet the action cannot be forced; the sense of ritual is understood for the moment. No further motive is necessary. Although union ideology is an ever-present issue, to impose a specific ideological connotation upon Ukeles' action would give it an unnecessarily romantic edge. It is not an expectation of the job; yet by choosing to participate in the exchange, the san-man reaffirms something of the individual that he is. The decision to be one's own authority, given the anesthetization of the routine, persists while upholding one's end of the truck team, and while taking orders from the foreman. The sanitation worker is a basic support unit that keeps the system going, and the authority to do so is ultimately his own. The handshake further acknowledges that human hands do the work, and without them the work would not get done.

To comprehend the scale of maintaining a city as complex as New York is difficult. For Ukeles, it was necessary to have some insight into the reality of the system before she inaugurated her performance on June 24, 1979. The proposition of shaking hands with 8,500 workers throughout each of the five boroughs was one thing as an idea.

and something else as an actual experience. The challenge, in addition to "walking out" the various sanitation districts and shaking hands with san-men, was to maintain oneself. Her performance also consisted of beating fatigue and depression, fighting off illness, nausea, discomfort, toxic odors and body aches. At one point, bronchitis landed her in bed for two weeks.

It is within this social/work context, outside of the conventional art/gallery syndrome, that the handshake and the spoken phrase assume another important connotation. When photographed by the news media, the image of a handshake serves to remind the public sector that sanitation is a team effort, that each worker and each citizen is valuable to the entire system. The affirmative message given by such an image is generalized as a public model. Pragmatically, however, not everything about the job or within the job deserves recognition or even positive reinforcement. It is inevitable, for example, that some workers will take advantage of certain situations and ignore parts of their job. The power of the commercial news media to blow such incidents out of proportion was one of the serious contentions that Ukeles sought to address. In performing a gesture of support, she hoped to reveal the more favorable, though often ignored, attributes of the majority of workers employed by the Department.

Ukeles' performance of *Touch Sanitation* was primarily an attempt to exorcise the stereotypes affiliated with employees in the New York City Department of Sanitation. The notion that one who handles garbage works at the lower echelon of society was the stereotype Ukeles saw revealed time and again. Such a notion is possibly in evidence when a culture has not yet vanquished its puritanical work-ethic as a criterion for godliness. Garbage could be considered a metaphor as much as illness is. Thus, in advocating "the human part of the system," Mierle Laderman Ukeles has further extended the notion that feminism and maintenance are intertwined; to overcome the stereotype remains a challenge. She has further advocated that maintenance is the "underbelly system" of urban life and culture—a work-a-day system that keeps people alive and things functioning, whether on a public or domestic level.

Fall 1982

Two Lines of Sight and An Unexpected Connection: The Art of Helen Mayer Harrison and Newton Harrison

by Arlene Raven

The work of Helen Mayer Harrison and Newton Harrison consists of deceptively simple solutions to complex ecological problems. Their process is embedded in layers of discourse, poetry, science, politics and passionate concern for human life. Here art historian Arlene Raven, a long-time contributing editor to High Performance, *delves into the collective mind of the Harrisons, one layer at a time.* —*Eds.*

What is art in the environment supposed to be or do? Can such art just sit there, surrounded by nature? Or hang in galleries in the art environment and simply refer to ecological issues? Does environmental art have to be ecological? If so, what—in practical terms—does that mean? By what standards should it be said to have accomplished or not accomplished its purpose? And by whom? Art critics, environmentalists, scientists, or the public?

Helen Mayer Harrison and Newton Harrison make no claims to answer these questions, to fit into any established categories of art and environment, or to fulfill any standards but their own. They insist that their work, at its core, shifts fundamental designs in human perception and calls an observer to participate in recreating a dynamic, healing balance between nature and people. The Harrisons are artists who rediscover and recreate physical, social, philosophical and mythic environments—with artistry, originality, and with exemplary integrity

I.

Helen Mayer Harrison and Newton Harrison began a conversation in 1970. After 18 years, their discourse continues uninterrupted. Mutual thinking, the basis for all of their collaborations, contextualizes works to such an extent that they titled a recent interview about new

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ANTI-TECHNOLOGIES OF RESISTANCE

Alexander Brener & Barbara Schurz

2000. *subsol.* http://subsol.c3.hu/subsol_2/contributors/brenertext.html

ANTI-TECHNOLOGIES OF RESISTANCE

Alexander Brener & Barbara Schurz

In the beginning of 1999 we published a little book called What to do? 54 Technologies of Resistance Against Power Relations in Late-Capitalism (in Vienna, and before that in Moscow.) This book is a collection of a number of semi-anecdotes and semi-reflections about the possibilities of political and cultural resistance under the condition of a globalized market and multiculturalism. The centre of our examination were so-called technologies of resistance: familiar and traditional methods of political struggle and cultural resistance, as well as individual 'transgressive' techniques. On the one hand we tried to analyze critically technologies such as demonstrations, sit-ins, hunger strikes; on the other hand we discussed the effectiveness of showing your ass in front of your enemy, throwing eggs and spitting on your opponent's dress. Resistance must take into consideration concrete circumstances of place and time and must act from very precise strategies and tactics of local struggle, if it wants to be effective. Borrowing from Foucault, who spoke about the 'specific intellectual' we suggested the term 'local and specific resistor.' Such a resistor doesn't act from universal concepts or out of the doctrines of parties or groups, but struggles against these very doctrines and keeps moving endlessly, not knowing what he or she will do tomorrow. In combating the current art-system, local scandals, interventions, leaflets, graffiti etc. may be effective at a certain moment but useless in another context. Soft subversion, a heritage inherited from the 1980s, is no longer adequate, and the hidden undermining of the political context of the enemy is obsolete and has finally degenerated either into cynicism or into conformism and strategies of success and survival within the system. 'War is necessary!' was our answer to the question 'What to do?'

However, the term 'technologies of resistance,' which we have used untill now, no longer satisfies us. From now on we want to talk not about technologies but about anti-technologies of resistance. After the works by Artaud, Bataille and Foucault, Lacoue-Labarthe, it becomes clear that the Greek term 'techne,' which denotes a mimetic ideal in the sphere of art and is directly connected with the art of politics, still subordinates itself to political and aesthetic activities in modern society. Techne implies a model of society that is based on the hegemony of certain technologies of power and on the subjection of the will of individuals in a direction favorable to the elite. Technologies are the skills and abilities which guarantee the functioning of knowledge and power in very different fields - from a shoemaker's business to the construction of intercontinental ballistic missiles, from artistic collages to espionage satellites. Power relations produce technologies and distribute them partly through dictatorship, partly through seduction, but always in the interest of the ruling order. Even if one or another technology is employed in the service of resistance, at a certain moment it inevitably turns out to be the hostage of power and, deriving from power relations, it permanently return us to them. Technologies serve the oldest and most productive game of power, where its myths get the 'final' and 'competent' confirmation from experts. Nowadays techno-myths serve the neo-liberal elites, repressive tolerance, and the new Right. We no longer want to speak about 'technologies of resistance' because we associate the term 'technologies' with 'power' rather than 'resistance.' Anti-technologies of resistance are necessary!

In 1959 Gustav Metzger presented his concept of 'auto-destructive art.' ("Destructive of what? Destructive of the peace of mind, the pleasure in the arts, the moral integrity of people directly or indirectly supporting the violence of the state, structural social discriminations, different forms of oppression…") Metzger's concept was directed against an understanding of art as a stable and completed technology that has a fixed aesthetic and market value. At that time, Metzger's political views were close to anarchism, and he thought that 'auto-destructive art' would enact the destruction of capitalist economy and imperialistic politics. Metzger discovered and articulated the connection between aesthetic technologies of the production of art and political technologies of the reproduction of the hegemonic concept of cultural memory, tradition, and the 'history of the winner' Unless an artwork destroys itself, it is at the service of capital. Metzger was the first to question how technologies (of art and power) can turn into their opposite, destroy themselves and become something else.

Anti-technologies of resistance entail the destruction of the cultural and scientific technologies which are at the service of power, and, secondly, the creation of 'unpleasant,' 'dissatisfying,' dubious, and crazy practices that cannot be included in the toolbox of the technologies of power. We would like to stress the importance of the terms 'dissatisfying' and 'unpleasant.' Dissatisfaction is the only real product of anti-technologies of resistance. Deep, restless, and exciting dissatisfaction should be felt not just by the power structures, against which resistance is realized, but also by the resistors themselves and by the 'uninvolved' observing audience. To cultivate anti-technologies of resistance means to create an atmosphere of unpleasantness, defeat, disappointment and indignation in today's world of successful 'humanitarian interventions' (for example, in Iraq and Yugoslavia) and festive representations of triumphing cultural imperialism. Anti-technologies of resistance are like a fart at a cocktail party with guests dressed in evening attire. This fart must be really unbearable and instill consternation and dissatisfaction into the souls of those present. It should not have anything in common with Christof Schlingensief's theater or Roman Singer's performances. This fart must be really anti-artistic, but not like punk or J.J. Allin, because these are also technologies. Anti-technologies are not art, but at the same time they are art because nobody knows what art is although everybody can do it. Anti-technologies are the striving for the impossible, and in no case just another aesthetic phenomenon which decorates the pages of art magazines. Art magazines are shit!

Anti-technologies of resistance are atmospheric appearances, because they are principally indescribable and non-reproducible. It is impossible to repeat an anti-technology (otherwise it becomes a technology.) Anti-technologies are anti-systematic. At the same time some more or less constant characteristics of anti-technologies can be named.

1. Connection with specific and local context. Only these specific connections can determine the effectiveness of resistance. However (we can say parenthetically) no one has ever practiced such a deepening of context-from court organs to artists. Without this deepening, there is no understanding.

2. The body as the opposite of a machine. Bodies do not organize or create anti-technologies, but appear as anti-technologies-it is through bodies that anti-technologies become visible and perceptible. Bodies are not machines: neither machines of desire, nor war machines, nor machines of power. Bodies destroy their function, come out of their frames, get into contradiction with themselves. Bodies show their discrete anti-machinery. Bodies carry the truth of anti-technologies, which can be defined through the interrupted pulsing of 4 elements: body-thinking-happiness-suffering. Happiness is not a technology; neither is suffering. Suffering and happiness live at a high-speed detached from technologies, like death is a high-speed detached from life. (If you don't understand this, try drowning in a bathtub.) Thinking is not a technology because it can exist only in desperate disagreement (with the primate of technologies.)

3. 'Wild' and 'antisocial' activities. These do not have anything in common with all sorts of expressionism, or, moreover, with a frustrated iconoclasm. (Expressionism is just another mercantile technology.) Wild activity means introducing chance elements into the order of technology, thereby demolishing this very order. Chance elements are bodies, chairs, water, night, dirt, hunger, flowers-in a word, everything available right at the moment.

4. Striving for decomposition and unproductivity. Decomposition is an attempt to hinder the repressive order, which in hegemonic culture is perceived as the main source of productivity. The normative product in today's understanding is repressive consensus in a certain packaging. Exactly this consensus must be subjected to the procedure of decomposition. Decomposition and

disintegration are the weapons of a minority, calling into question the consensus of a moral majority.

5. Striving for discontinuity. Discontinuity is a risky leap out of the body of cultural history, which Benjamin called a 'history of winners.' (The ‚history of winners' is the history of the fat giggling of patriarchal owners who stage celebrations on the bodies of poverty.) Leap into what? Into dissatisfaction, risk, pain. Into the void… But more than anything, a leap into thinking, into producing resistance.

6. Refusal of any aesthetic and ethic satisfaction. No satisfaction, not for yourself, not for others. No consumption and pleasure of success. We confess that this idea is not clear in the end even to ourselves: What does no satisfaction mean? No laughing, no enthusiasm? Rather not that: laughing and enthusiasm, but with the disgusting feeling of shit coming out of your neck. (And immediately a shout and attack.) This feeling was described by Bataille in Literature and Evil. The political equivalent of this feeling: Contra-Attack against your own post-bourgeois fatness. Anti-technologies are convulsive contra-attacks against the fascism of your own machine-body.

7. Refusal of normative documentation. A typical means to collect fat around your hips is to document your own 'works.' Anti-technologies entail refusing the principle of documentation. Documentation is the main way to archive hegemonic cultural memory. Documentation is the liberal form of social consensus, ironically making fun of the conservative term 'masterpiece.' Documentation is today's whiny form of recognition, begging for critical revisionism. Don't document and exchange information but think! And every thought must find it's own specific and mortal (political) form.

8. Non-originality. Originality is the crumpled, rotting intellectual fruit of old shit-preservers like Jürgen Harten and Kasper König. Puffed up 'experts' talk about originality, while they are disgusting non-original functionaries. Originality is the commercial success and mass-medial triumph of some obedient bodies over others-nothing more. In a political field, efforts are the only reality of resistance-culture! Non-originality means adopting radical-democratic principles in a cultural, social and political realm.

Our short theses about anti-technologies of resistance are connected with the actual political situation in the modern age of globalized capitalism. The noticeable repoliticization of social groups (youth, immigrant, trade-unions, different social movements) in many parts of the raises the specter of local and specific struggle against various enemies: neo-liberalism, conservatism, the new rights, racism, cultural populism, subtle sexism, various 'progressive' institutions, serving the interest of political and social elites. 'Micro' resistance is necessary to combat the expansion of capitalist instincts and orders in every direction, every place, all bodies, all discourses, all objects. Struggle at the level of elementary particles of thoughts and activities. Start with yourself, with your own context, your professional field. Re-view theoretical approaches; give up using current discourses, contemporary formulas, fashionable technologies. Speed, imposed by modern culture, is just the speed of capital. It is necessary to brake sharply, to stop and slow down. It is necessary to carry out what Foucault called a return to: "If we return, it is because of a basic and constructive omission, an omission that is not the result of accident or incomprehension.... This non-accidental omission must be regulated by precise operations that can be situated, analyzed, and reduced in a return to the act of initiation. Both the cause of the barrier and the means for its removal, this omission - also responsible for the obstacles that prevent returning to the act of initiation - can only be resolved by return... It follows naturally that this return... is not a historical supplement that would come to fix itself upon the primary discursivity and redouble it in the form of an ornament... Rather, it is an effective and necessary means of transforming discursive practice." (What is an Author?)

A 'basic and constructive' institutional omission of resistance-culture (the culture of Mary Richardson, Arthur Cravan, Antonin Artaud, Martha Rosler, Adrian Piper, Gustav Metzger, Jack Smith...) has already taken place. About a return, so far, we don't have to speak.

Austria/Russia, 2000

about Alexander Brener & Barbara Schurz >>

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THRIVING ON ADVERSITY: THE ART OF PRECARIOUS-NESS

Anna Dezeuze

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Thriving On Adversity: The Art of Precariousness

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By **Anna Dezeuze**

Whilst in the expanding global slum survival at subsistance level is increasingly the only option, in the West the celebration of the creativity and ingenuity of the slum dweller is becoming fashionable. In a conflation of relational aesthetics with the 'creative' survival strategies of the globalised slum, many artists have become associated with what could be called 'slum chic'. Anna Dezeuze surveys a number of artists who draw upon the experience of everyday life in the slums to make their work, and tries to separate out the aestheticisation of poverty from the poverty of aesthetics

Walking around the immaculate spaces of the New York Guggenheim, I once came across a roughly built brick shelter, with two pillars and a roof, and a small shack with a large satellite dish. In an adjoining metal structure stood a single functioning toilet. In the reassuring bubble of an archetypical museum, the images of shanty town architecture and emergency refuges conjured by the basic components of this pared-down construction seemed very remote. The structure in front of me, I was informed by a wall-text, corresponded to an existing type of core unit being built at the time in a far-away location: Kagiso, a suburb of Johannesburg. The artist, the Slovenian Marjetica Potrc, had just been awarded the 2000 Hugo Boss Prize.

Two years later, the Belgian, Mexico-based artist Francis Alÿs was short-listed for the Hugo Boss prize. His *Ambulantes (Pushing and Pulling)*, a slide series executed 1992-2002, documents the astonishing range of street vendors, refuse collectors, delivery men, and salespeople walking around the streets of Mexico City, pushing and pulling loaded carts or wheeled stalls, and occasionally carrying loads on their heads.

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Image: Francis Alÿs, from the *Paradox of Praxis* 1997

Works such as Potrc's and Alÿs' point to a widespread interest, among artists and curators, in the precarious existence of shanty town dwellers and of the millions of people across Third World cities whose mode of livelihood Mike Davis has described as 'informal survivalism.'[1] In order to address the apparent contradictions suggested by these works and by their appeal to official sponsors and institutions, I would like to sketch out some characteristic features of this trend and some of the problems it raises. Rather than providing a systematic overview, I will look in particular at the ways in which artists and curators have theorised this growing interest, and explore a few of the perils and promises that precariousness holds for contemporary art today.

Image: Francis Alÿs, from the series *Ambulantes,* 1992-2002

On Adversity We Thrive!

Potrc was one of the artists included in the exhibition The Structure of Survival at the 50th Venice Biennale in 2003. The curator, the Argentinean Carlos Basualdo, chose to focus on the *favela* or shanty town as the guiding theme of the exhibition, which featured over 25 international artists. Basualdo's definition of the shanty towns as spaces of resistance, 'places in which original forms of socialisation, alternative economies, and various forms of aesthetic agency are produced' has been echoed in other fields.[2] The philosopher Slavoj Zizek, for example, believes that '[t]he new forms of social awareness that emerge from slum collectives will be the germs of the future and the best hope for a properly "free world."'[3] Basualdo's ideas on this question developed more specifically from his engagement with the work of Brazilian artist Hélio Oiticica, who coined the motto 'on adversity we thrive' ('da adversidade vivemos') in 1967.[4] Adversity, for Oiticica, was a condition of Third World countries, and should be the starting point for any Brazilian artist. Oiticica himself found inspiration for his work in the Brazilian popular culture of samba dancing and the shanty town architecture of the Rio favela of Mangueira.[5] In 2001, Basualdo appropriated Oiticica's motto as the title for an exhibition at the Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris. Featured artists, among whom were included Francis Alÿs, as well as artists who would subsequently figure in the Venice Biennale show, were discussed in terms of their experience of a Latin American reality characterised by 'constant precariousness' and 'adversity in tragically unstable socio-economic contexts.'[6]

Image: Hélio Oiticica, Parangolé (as worn by Caeteno Veloso on the book cover of *Marginália* by Marisa Alvarez Lima)

If the critic Guy Brett described precariousness as a characteristic of Latin American art as early as 1989,[7] Basualdo's shows have contributed to the growing celebration of contemporary practices relating to issues of adversity and crisis. In our current globalised world, as Basualdo has pointed out, crises operate beyond national boundaries, and beyond distinctions between developing and developed countries.[8] Yet rather than analyse the ways in which the First World societies may be in a state of crisis, Basualdo, like many artists, has focused on the ongoing inventiveness of those who experience adversity at first hand. The attraction of the precariousness of the Developing World for artists and curators seems to lie not in the situation of crisis itself as much as in the *responses* that it encourages. Potrc often speaks of the 'beauty' of slum architecture,[9] while Francis Alÿs marvels at the ways in which people in Mexico 'keep inventing themselves', like a man in his neighbourhood who spends his day cleaning the gaps between the pavement flagstones with a bent wire.[10] The Turkish artist collective Oda Projesi, who were included in The Structure of Survival, seem to summarise a widespread, if often implicit, belief, when they explain that inhabitants of the prefabricated houses erected after the 1999 Adapazari earthquake 'construct these annexes by choosing the materials in accordance with their own conditions and needs, just like an artist or an architect.'[11] Similarly, both Alÿs and Potrc have celebrated the ways people occupy space in an unplanned fashion and erect shelters spontaneously. In 2003, Potrc exhibited a 'growing house' from a Caracas shanty town at the Palais de Tokyo in Paris. The 'iron wires sprouting from its rooftop,' according to her, 'proclaim the vitality of the place.'[12] In 1994, Alÿs pieced together electoral posters declaring 'housing for all' ('viviendas por todos') in order to create a shelter-like structure fastened over a subway air duct in Mexico City. 'It was a direct comment on the state of local politics and at the same time an attempt to recreate these cells of squatters that I encountered everywhere in the city', he has explained.[13] Perhaps

unsurprisingly, both Alÿs and Potrc come from an architectural background. Urban planning is their frame of reference, and their concerns with precariousness mirror the emerging attraction among architects to the hitherto unmapped slums of Third World cities.

Image: Marjetica Potrc, Caracas: Growing House, 2003

The abandonment and neglect experienced by, to use Mike Davis' term, the 'informal proletariat' seems to be conceived by artists such as Alÿs and Potrc as a kind of freedom. In a 1990 essay, Guy Brett explained that in Latin America 'many grass-roots movements have appeared because of a complete loss of faith in the willingness or ability of governments to do anything about major problems.'[14] Many activists and non-governmental organisations in the West would recognise themselves in this description, and Latin American grass-roots movements have been models for similar groupings elsewhere. For Potrc, there is a direct parallel between NGOs and shanty towns: both have been '[g]rowing without any control or planning', and both, according to the artist, embody our aspirations, dreams and ideals.[15]

In the catalogue for The Structure of Survival, Basualdo invited a group of Argentinean activists, Colectivo Situaciones, to write about responses to the devastating economic crisis in their country. Like many such groups, Colectivo Situaciones explain that their type of revolution differs from traditional 'modern emancipatory politics' in that they do not seek to gain state power. Instead, they are concerned with finding concrete means of self-sufficiently managing resources and of affirming common values of solidarity and sociability.[16] Similarly, Potrc believes that '[t]he world we live in today is all about self-reliance, individual initiative, and small-scale projects.'[17] This corresponds to a widespread belief that the utopias of the past, the grand narratives of 'emancipatory politics', remain forever unattainable. Potrc focuses on 'small gestures, not big ones',[18] while Alÿs, according to a critic, 'moves as an artist who has come to understand that the only thing left to do is to take small steps'.[19] Potrc does not wish to change anything, she claims she is interested in analysing, without judging, the 'facts of contemporary urban life'.[20] Alÿs, for his part, explains that Mexican society 'is a society that is governed by compromise' and that he has adopted compromise as the very modus operandi of his work.[21]

Image: Francis Alÿs, *Turista*, 1996

Neither Potrc nor Alÿs, however, perceive this resignation and compromise pessimistically. Like Colectivo Situaciones, they reject 'the idea that the omnipotence of market flows (with the wars that accompany them) leave no space for any struggles for liberation' and believe that it is 'possible that power and its opposition can coexist long term without eliminating one another.'[22] In this sense, their outlook brings to mind Michel de Certeau's analysis of everyday life as containing in itself the potential means through which to subvert the dominant order from within. 'Making do' – 'faire avec' is, in fact, the title of a chapter in de Certeau's 1980 book entitled *The Practice of Everyday Life*. Alÿs' Ambulantes seem to embody Certeau's idea that practitioners of everyday life constantly tinker 'within the dominant cultural economy in order to adapt it to their own interests and their own rules.'[23] On the one hand, Alÿs' photographs literally demonstrate practical tricks – such as how one can fit fourteen cardboard boxes onto one small hand-pulled cart. On the other hand, they point to the range of petty jobs that inhabitants of Third World countries have to keep inventing to survive and to find a useful function in a chaotic economy. As job precariousness has also become a concern for activist groups in First World countries – since 'jobs for life' are becoming a thing of the past – Alÿs' slide show immediately chimes with global struggles in the age of micropolitics.

Making Do

One of the problems with the discourse of precarity is the conflation of a wide variety of situations, ranging from the illegal immigrant working as a cleaner, or the employee in a call centre, to the freelance web designer or the projectionist at the Cannes film festival.[24] It is precisely this kind of confusion that can occur when precariousness is used as a privileged theme in contemporary art. Within this conflation, the emphasis on precariousness runs the risk of erasing crucial differences at the same time as it tries to bring together a disparate group in order to promote a specific argument. Basualdo's Da Adversidade Vivemos and The Structure of Survival certainly included a wide range of practices under the umbrella of crisis and adversity. Fernanda Gomes' installations, which were included in both exhibitions, display a vocabulary of simple, sometimes fragile, everyday objects, casually placed on the floor, hung or propped within an empty space. While these discrete and ephemeral arrangements evoke precariousness and instability, they seem far removed from the realities of everyday life in Latin American slums. Condemning Gomes' works for not having the same urgency as the works of some of her compatriots would be falling into the trap of asking them to conform to some

kind of Latin American stereotype. Claiming that these works are about survival, or that they propose a model for a new type of ethical art would suggest, however, that precariousness in *itself* is subversive.

Image: Fernanda Gomes, No title, 2003, installed at The Structure of Survival

This problematic slippage can be better understood when reading statements by artists such as Potrc or Alÿs who speak of their work in terms of the 'human condition'. Potrc justifies her placement of shanty town architecture as 'case-studies' in galleries by explaining that galleries are 'places where we think the human condition',[25] whereas Alÿs claims he is 'trying to suggest this absolute acceptance of the "human condition"' by the people he sees struggling every day in his neighbourhood.[26] While the implications of Potrc's and Alÿs' works can indeed be extended from their locally specific origin to encompass wider reflections on human finitude and inventiveness in the face of death, the logic that inflects Basualdo's readings of Gomes's work operates in reverse: installations that suggest a general sense of instability, transience or fragility, he seems to suggest, must *de facto* be related to the particularly precarious social and economic conditions of living in Latin America. I believe that this logic is erroneous, and that these distinctions remain crucial. There are substantial variations among artists working in different countries, and even within the same country distinctions should be highlighted among social and ethnic groups as well as successive generations of Latin American artists. Unlike Basualdo, I would like to emphasise the gap that separates Oiticica's 1960s oeuvre from some of the younger Brazilian artists, whose work betray the influence of the growing internationalisation of the art market. An instance of this shift can be seen in Alexandre da Cunha's work, which was included in The Structure of Survival. By displaying cheap objects (such as sleeping bags, raincoats and plastic brooms) to create shelter-like arrangements, da Cunha seems to me to be using conventional, trivial signifiers of precariousness in a way that aestheticises, rather than embodies or analyses the nature of this condition. The creation of a 'slum chic' style will no doubt find echoes in contemporary fashion and design trends. It is hard to find here even the slightest echoes of the existential precariousness hinted at by Gomes' ontological evocation of human finitude.

Where da Cunha seems to aestheticise the signifiers of precariousness, the Angolan artist Antonio Ole, also included in The Structure of Survival, seems to be aestheticising precariousness itself. By arranging found fragments of an impoverished architecture along the walls of the gallery in his *Township Wall*, Ole makes poverty look cheerful and picturesque. This points to a second major pitfall in the exploration of practices of 'making do' and thriving on adversity. This is a problem that Alÿs himself encountered when he was planning a film which sought to illustrate the virtue of 'valemadrismo', the Mexicans' 'capacity to accommodate oneself to *mala fortuna*, to bad luck, and even more, to actually turn one's misfortune into an advantage.'[27] This film was to tell the story of a dog called

Negrito who lost a leg but went on to develop a very successful juggling trick using the bone of its broken leg. Although Alÿs has not given the reasons why he abandoned this film, he admits that it was a 'somewhat romanticised account', and my guess is that he became wary of this. For celebrating valemadrismo can lead to an occlusion of the suffering itself, and perhaps even to a lapse back into a primitivising stereotype of the carefree, cheerful pauper who accepts his condition without protest. Calls such as David Aradeon's, reproduced in the catalogue for The Structure of Survival, to remember that inhabitants of Brazilian shanty towns are 'poor but vibrant, sensitive and creative', can easily slip into a confirmation of such romanticising stereotypes.[28]

Image: Hélio Oticica, *Parangolé* P15 Cape 11, 'I embody revolt', 1967

Such problems, I would like to argue, take us back to the crux of precariousness, and its existence at the junction of crises and reactions, of adversity and coping strategies. At the heart of this articulation lie two much broader issues. The first concerns the politics of the slums themselves. I mentioned earlier how Zizek has suggested that slum-dwellers constitute the new proletariat, the agents of the next revolutionary challenge to capital. However, not everyone shares his optimism. Davis, for example, argues that up until now the dominant political force in the slums has been organised religion; survival rather than protest has remained – perhaps unsurprisingly – the main agenda of this 'informal proletariat'.[29] Thus the activity of 'making do' in itself could turn out to be more conservative than revolutionary, as millions of people struggle to make it through another day, with little possibility of making organised and effective demands. In this sense, Alÿs' interest in the Mexican's 'absolute acceptance' of their condition could be read as a call for passivity, rather than action. In order to contradict this narrative, and glimpse some potential change, it would be useful to further explore the grass-roots model of micropolitics, and the potential for change once the traditional revolutionary seizure of state power has been set aside in favour of 'self-reliance, individual initiative, and small-scale projects', to use Potrc's terms. Colectivo Situaciones, after all, still believe in a 'struggle for liberation'. The question remains whether, and how, the model of effective reaction, which they have substituted for the Marxist call for action, can ultimately lead to such liberation.

The second issue raised by the politics of 'making do' is the question of agency. George Yúdice has criticised Michel de Certeau's notion of subversive tactics because they 'are wielded not only by workers but by the very same managers (and other elites) who reinforce the established order.'[30] In order to reveal the subversive potential of everyday life, it is necessary to '*distinguish* among the practitioners of such tactics in terms of how the tactics enable them to survive and [to] challenge their oppressibility.'[31]

Towards a 'Coalition'?

In order to navigate these distinctions, I would like to finally turn to Zizek's definition of the slum-dwellers of the world as the 'counter-class to the other newly emerging class, the so-called "symbolic class" (managers, journalists and PR people,

academics, artists etc.) which is also uprooted and perceives itself as universal.'[32] This definition, which effectively updates Marx's social analysis, seems to me to avoid the conflation of different kinds of precarious work in discourses about job security, while acknowledging a relationship that can be fruitful. Crucially, Zizek asks: 'Is this the new axis of class struggle, or is the "symbolic class" inherently split, so that one can make a wager on the coalition between the slum-dwellers and the "progressive" part of the symbolic class?'[33] My contention here is that some artists can indeed occupy the 'progressive' place of a symbolic class trying to forge a coalition in the arena of art and discourse. If the celebration of 'making do' tactics can be recuperated by a conservative discourse of passivity and conformism, it can also nevertheless contain the seeds of a globalised discourse of protest, as long as the agents of this coalition, and their respective needs for empowerment, are clearly distinguished. Once the utopias of the Left have been set aside, the objective for many artists today is to find ways of bringing this coalition to light by eschewing the risks of voyeurism or romanticism. Potrc's rejection of 1980s social activism as reinforcing the marginalisation of the homeless and the poor is premised on a belief that artists need to move away from traditional models of critique in order to explore a model of the coalition based on empathy.[34] Alÿs' adoption of compromise as a guiding force for the redefinition of artistic practice offers a similarly empathetic model through which to relate to the subjects with whom he co-exists in Mexico City. Other modes of coalition are being explored by contemporary artists, whether in traditional forms of documentary or activist reportage, or for example in the provocative alienation set up by Santiago Sierra's performances, which provocatively dramatise the radical differences between the informal proletariat and bourgeois art viewers.

Image: Santiago Sierra, *250 cm Line Tattoed on 6 Paid People*, 1999

Ultimately, the deep ambivalence that I experienced when I encountered Potrc's shelters in the white cube of the gallery points to the final, inevitable question for artists investigating precariousness: can the rarified conditions of display and reception in the contemporary art world really provide a platform for the exploration of political alternatives? Can art be a credible space in which to foreground this potentially revolutionary 'coalition between slum-dwellers and the "progressive" part of the symbolic class'? How artists manage to articulate this coalition within the framework of the current artworld, and to what effect, constitutes one of the most interesting questions of contemporary art. It also happens to be one of the more

urgent questions for society at large – especially if we agree with Potrc that when '[y]ou lose sight of your dreams, you die.'[35]

[1] Mike Davis, 'Planet of Slums: Urban Involution and the Informal Proletariat', *New Left Review*, 26, March-April 2004, p. 24.

[2] Carlos Basualdo, 'On the Expression of the Crisis', in Francesco Bonami (ed.), *Dreams and Conflicts: The Dictatorship of the Viewer*, exh. cat., Venice: Biennale, 2003, p. 243.

[3] Slavoj Žižek, 'Knee-Deep', *London Review of Books*, vol. 26, no. 17, 2 September 2004, http://wwwlrb.co.uk/v26/n17/print/zize01_.html, accessed 17/05/2006, p. 5.

[4] Oiticica used this motto in one of his works, a *Parangolé* cape, and included it in a manifesto-like text written on the occasion of the exhibition *Nova Objetividade Brasileira*, at the Museum of Modern Art in Rio de Janeiro.

[5] I have written about Oiticica's relation to Brazilian popular culture in 'Tactile Dematerialisation, Sensory Politics: Hélio Oiticica's *Parangolés', Art Journal*, vol. 63, no. 2, Summer 2004, pp. 58-71.

[6] Carlos Basualdo, 'A propos de l'adversité', in *Da Adversidade Vivemos*, exh. cat., Paris: Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, 2001, p. 13.

[7] Guy Brett, 'A Radical Leap', in *Art in Latin America, The Modern Era, 1820-1980*, exh. cat., London: Hayward Gallery, 1989, p. 255.

[8] 'On the Expression of the Crisis', pp. 243-244.

[9] Marjetica Potrč, 'Urban, 2001', in *Marjetica Potrč: Next Stop*, Kiosk, Moderna Galerija Llubjana Museum of Art, 2003, p. 31.

[10] 'La Cour des Miracles: Francis Alÿs in conversation with Corinne Diserens', in *Francis Alÿs: Walking Distance from the Studio*, exh.cat., Wolfsburg: Kunstmuseum Wolfsburg, 2004, pp. 100-101.

[11] Oda Projesi, 'Annex', on www.odaprojesi.com, accessed 20/03/2006.

[12] Marjetica Potrč, 'In and out of Caracas', in *Marjetica Potrč*, p. 83.

[13] 'La Cour des Miracles', op. cit., p. 109.

[14] Guy Brett, 'Border Crossings', in *Transcontinental: Nine Latin American Artists*, exh. cat., Birmingham: Ikon, 1990, p. 16.

[15] Potrč, 'Urban, 2001', op. cit., p. 31.

[16] Colectivo Situaciones, 'Through the Crisis and Beyond: Argentina', in Bonami (ed.), *Dreams and Conflicts*, p. 245.

[17] Potrč, 'Back to Basics: Objects and Buildings', in *Marjetica Potrč*, p. 54.

[18] Marjetica Potrč, 'Take me to Shantytown', *Flash Art*, March-April 2001, p. 98.

[19] Annelie Lütgens, 'Francis Alÿs and the Art of Walking', in *Francis Alÿs: Walking Distance from the Studio*, p. 56.

[20] 'Tracking the Urban Animal', *Circa*, 97, Autumn 2001, p. 29.

[21] 'La Cour des Miracles', op. cit., p. 112.

[22] Colectivo Situaciones, 'Through the Crisis and Beyond: Argentina', p. 245.

[23] Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, transl. Steven F. Rendall, Berkeley and London: University of California Press, 1984, p. xiv.

[24] For an overview of debates regarding job precarity, see 'Precarious Reader' *Mute* Vol II #0, London: 2005.

[25] 'Take me to Shantytown', p. 98.

[26] 'La Cour des Miracles', op. cit., p. 83.

[27] Ibid., p. 85.

[28] David Aradeon, 'Are We Reading Our Shanty Towns Correctly?' in Bonami (ed.), *Dreams and Conflicts*, p.264.

[29] 'Planet of Slums', pp. 28-34.

[30] George Yúdice, 'Marginality and the Ethics of Survival', *Social Text*, no. 21, 1989, p. 216.

[31] Ibid., p. 217.

[32] Žižek, op. cit., p. 5.

[33] Ibid.

[34] See 'Tracking the Urban Animal', op. cit., 29.

[35] Potrč, 'Urban, 2001', op.cit., p.31.

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NEO-AVANTGARDE AND SERVICE INDUSTRY: NOTES ON THE BRAVE NEW WORLD OF RELATIONAL AESTHETICS

Walead Beshty

2005. *Texte zur Kunst*. http://www.textezurkunst.de/NR59/NEO-AVANT-GARDE-AND-SERVICE-INDUSTRY_2.html

WALEAD BESHTY

NEO-AVANTGARDE AND SERVICE INDUSTRY

Notes on the Brave New World of Relational Aesthetics

Rirkrit Tiravanija, aus der Serie "Stages / Stationen", Bangkok (Wahlen), 1992

The conglomeration of strategies, and artists, that fit under the heading Relational Aesthetics indicate, if only for recent history's lack of "movements," a pronounced shift in the topography of contemporary art, and the need for a realignment of critical terminology. Despite its amorphous set of conditions and tenets, as they are expressed by Nicolas Bourriaud in his 1997 book of the same title, it separates itself distinctly from early interventionist tactics (i.e. Institutional Critique, Identity Politics, Performance and Installation).

This shift appears induced by an intellectual paralysis concerning the patterns and strategies available for contestation. From a theoretical perspective, classical models of critical opposition provide an untenable set of compromises, between institution and practitioner, between the opening up or revealing of dominant structures, and the counter adoption of didactic prescription, or more precisely, one conducive to the reification of inherently problematic subject positions constructed from positions of dominance (i.e. one must assume the voice of authority in order to contest it), which re-subordinates the viewer. In stern condemnation, Michel De Certeau wrote that the discourse around repression and ideology is a self-inflicted chastening, which have the cumulative effect of "family stories," of "devils and boogey men," while "ideological criticism does not change its function in anyway; the criticism merely creates the appearance of a distance for scientists who are members of the institution." This is, for all intents and purposes, the crux of the argument levied against the traditions of Institutional/Ideological Critique, rehearsed by Bourriaud. It seems Relational Aesthetics is born from a distinctly European retreatism, separate from the American return to the hand wrought escapist drawings, emphasis on craft, and melancholic lamentation of the passing of 68. Relational Aesthetics is enabled by the continued centrality of the European institution, robust in its state support, and thus able to unproblematically continue as an invisible container for the interaction of ideas, and most of all its presumption of being non-ideological in its reception of multiple points of view (including those that claim opposition). The proposal for a Relational Aesthetics that is about, "learning to inhabit the world in a better way," seems to avoid both the element of authority inscribed within the figure of the revealer, deconstructor, liberator, and thus presumes to create "open ended" contexts for self determination that are seemingly freed from the restrictions of the state, and capitalist structures. They do not treat the institution as a privileged location, but as yet another locale in the postmodern geography, as any other point where social relations are activated, and never as an emblem of an ideological position. In short, they avoid the predicament of being forced to take a stance on the institution's role, while working almost exclusively within them.

Despite the relative successes of a number of artists within Bourriaud's groupings (most notably, Pierre Huyghe, Maurizio Cattelan, and Rirkrit Tiravanija) in the U.S., the American response to the movement itself has been minimal, and when it has taken notice, tepid. In the Summer issue of Artforum, Joe Scanlan opined, "Why is relational aesthetics so boring?," going on to say, "time and again I have found myself in a room full of people... yet the group always ends up exchanging pleasantries, and planning dinner..." The only extended critical response published in an American journal came from Claire Bishop (who hails from the UK) in the pages of October. Bishop's article matched Scanlan's derisive tone, albeit in markedly different terms, faulting Bourriaud's sometimes mantras of community, and exchange, as "rest(ing) too comfortably with an ideal of subjectivity as a whole and community as immanent togetherness." Both writers insinuate larger problems contingent upon questions of verifiable 'quality,' as Bishop writes, "...how are we to measure or compare these relationships? The quality of the relationships in 'relational aesthetics' are never examined or called into question... all relations that permit 'dialogue' are automatically assumed to be democratic or good." But if the criterion by which the efficacy of relational programs is missing (or partial) a more sinister implication alluded to by Scanlan, who, chidingly, writes, "Indeed, firsthand experience has convinced me that relational aesthetics has more to do with peer pressure than collective egalitarianism, which would suggest that one of the best ways to control human behavior is to practice relational aesthetics." And continues, "Peer pressure is effective because it uses one of our most

basic fears—public humiliation—as a built in mechanism for controlling behavior." The metamorphoses of Bourriaud's stressing of "conviviality" and "the horizon of an art based on interactivity and the creation of relationships with the other," into systems of "control" or an unreflexive "imbrication" within a dominant model, requires some explanation. Bourriaud frequently oversimplifies the work of the artists he discusses, in service of their theory, often excluding characteristics that do not fit comfortably within the relational program. In writing on Rirkrit Tiravanija, he describes his work as a sort of kindergarten experiment, a place ".where people once again learn what conviviality and sharing mean, " and by Bishop who claims Tiravanija is simply creating new networking points for "art dealers and like minded art-lovers...because it evokes the atmosphere of a late night bar" citing a 1996 account by art critc Jerry Saltz which details his social escapades with art world insiders and random flirtations in Tiravanija's first New York solo show Untitled (Free) from 1996 (where he chats with David Zwirner, Paula Cooper, and Lisa Spellman, and meets some young artists), as evidence. While this criticism is partially true, Tiravanija exhibitions do reinforce preexisting social networks, and have a saccharine surface of togetherness, this dismissal obscures a more comprehensive understanding of the complex of subject formulations operating in Tiravanija's work. Continueing to use Saltz as a tezt case, in the passage immediately following Bishop's citation, he goes on to say:
A sense of uneasiness was always close by. Once when I went to the gallery I ate alone, and I felt that old fear of doing something wrong. I remember pausing outside the door and thinking, "Maybe I shouldn't do this--they'll think I'm a moocher." I felt sheepish, guilty, like I was a freeloader. I don't usually feel this way when I go back to a show more than once.

Certainly this doesn't satisfy the question of accessibility, or the passive relationship Tiravanija has to the mode of social interaction he creates, but it does attest to an important societal contradiction, and a specifically capitalist anxiety typified in the free market mantra: "there ain't no such thing as a free lunch." But the investigation of the nascent anxiety presented by Tiravanija, and the potential implications that follow are, for Bourriaud, patently off limits. After summarizing critiques deriding relational programs for their artworld insularity, Bourriaud asserts: But do we deny Pop Art because it reproduces codes of visual alienation? ... What these critics overlook is that the content of these artistic proposals has to be judged in a formal way... bearing in mind the political value of forms... They are aimed at the formal space-time constructs that do not represent alienation, which do not extend the division of labor into forms... the purpose is not conviviality, but the product of conviviality...
It seems that while Bourriaud rejects these dimensions of Tiravanija's work, chastising us for daring to ask these questions, and displacing the emphasis on some later, unexaminable "result," Tiravanija invites the query. "Alienation," and "the division of labor," seem to be exactly what Tiravanija is proposing we ask about, both the ubiquity of low paid service labor in the artworld and its invisibility, but doing so subtly without resorting to spectacularized circuses of victimization. First hand accounts often allude to "the product of conviviality" as constructed by Tiravanija, as one reviewer has said, "[w]e are now the wallflowers at the party, and our old-fashioned spectatorship is just sad," in the contradiction that Saltz describes as a "subversive, unsettling hospitality." The specific character of this form of "unsettling" needs to be examined. The anxiousness described by Saltz, in his repeated interactions with Tiravanija's work (both in 1996, and on the occasion of his last show at Gavin Brown's in 1999, Saltz again describes almost adolescent angst, "...being there can be difficult. I experienced unwanted waves of shyness, affection, and irritation there.") and the social restrictions (i.e. peer pressure) of the environments appear continuous with a society of surveillance, and their self-policing rigid codes of conduct which occupy all transactions without being firmly locatable. In fact, relational programs not only amplify consumerist anxiety within the museum context, but facilitate the corporatization of the museum itself.

For the events following the recent Guggenheim acquisition of Tiravanija's Untitled 2002 (he promised) in 2004, with help from American Express, Tiravanija turned over the event programming to the museum, who then worked in tandem with American Express' PR department, and created a sequence of programming which was more spectacle than microtopia: To celebrate the new IN:NYC Card, Amex will present a free interactive art exhibition at the Guggenheim Museum created by internationally acclaimed artist Rirkrit Tiravanija, which will engage visitors with a variety of programming elements that respond to the culture of the city in which it is displayed. In addition, award-winning music artist Wyclef Jean will perform live for invited guests.
Or as it was later described by the fashion wire service:
Fashion Wire Daily October 8,2004- NEW YORK - In the New York universe, installation art by 2004 Hugo Boss prize-nominated artist Rirkrit Tiravanija is in the same room as celebrity guest DJ's Nicky Hilton and Nicole Richie; Wyclef Jean performs and sings about his political leanings to a well-heeled crowd of girls in Chanel jackets drinking lychee martinis from Latin fusion restaurant Calle Ocho. Canadian Press - Fri Oct 8,11:16 AM ET LONDON (AP)

Similarly, at his recent exhibition at the Sepertine Gallery in London, the communing of artworld insiders, morphed into an event that sounded more like a Hollywood Oscar party (with a few art stars mixed in) than a microtopia. Stuart Comer's Artforum.com diary entry describes processions of celebrities, Kid Rock, Rod Stuart, Farrah Fawcett, Mariah Carey, David Gilmore and Roger Waters (Pink Floyd), Alex James (from Blur), which crescendoed in "A flurry of pale yellow chiffon, [as] Paris Hilton made her entrance into the kitchen." Here the insiders privileged in Saltz's account, are themselves shut out, for a new level of insider, that of the celebrity. Instead of creating a new zone of interactivity, the social divisions are renenacted in heightened spectacle: the subjects sit back and watch the glamorous.

Tiravanija, and others who invoke these "free" zones of conviviality, not only run the risk of transforming the communal into the estranged, but more importantly, they naturalize social repressions, locating them as the ur-text of experience.

Bourriaud repeatedly confuses the liberation of the artist from traditional divisions of labor with the assumed liberation of the viewer, compacting Michel DeCertaus's depiction of resistance in daily life (mini revolts of use, and practice that contradict the everywhere present monolith of ideological power), with the artists adoption of ruses, operating as curator, interior designer, caterer, public relations manager, and event organizer (quite different than the parodic adoption of these roles in institutional critique, with Broodthaers as museum director, Andrea Frazer as Docent, or Michael Asher as exhibition designer, the Relational Aesthetics programs simply adopt these roles, they do not reflexively dismantle them). Bourriaud defends this adoption, and refers to it as democratic, but democratic for whom? While these open new territories for artists, it would be deeply problematic to assume these mean more ethical, or valuable contexts for viewers to interact. The viewer is not presented any further occasion for play other than that which is already present in another repressive structure, in fact it is the institution, with the artist facilitating, that engages in these ruses, manipulating the categorical divisions, and masquerading as some other environment (either a bar, kitchen, dance club, etc.). Tiravanija's progression in practice demonstrates this in particular, as the instrumentalization of his work (which is diffused by the inherent complacency, i.e. anti-didacticism of his relationship to authorship) never violates the model that is given priority, i.e. that of the artist as a moving target.

In this sequence of deceptions, reappropriations, and play, the viewer continues to be merely the object in the environment acted upon, enticed to engage in a series of banal activities; in seeming acknowledgment Tiravanija lists "lots of people" as one of his materials. This is why Bourriaud concerns himself more with describing how the artists act, their intentions, and the distinctions between their approach and previous practices, and avoids, almost completely, as Bishop discerns, the "quality" of those interactions. He simply refers to the impacts, and the type of relationships as being positive because they have been enacted, not what contexts for behavior they are activated within, or their relationship to external mechanisms. Often the occupation of various roles, like Jorge Pardo's foray into store design at the Dia, indicates a seamless almost cynical conflation of disciplines, but also the metamorphosis of the institution into commercial space (Pardo's Dia merges the design of the expanded book store into the first floor gallery). The promise of relational programs, and their issuing of a "better way of life," is interchangeable with the contemporary shopping mall when enacted in grand scale (perhaps this is the most devious Warholian trick enacted since Warhol himself painted celebrity portraits, that later found their way to the museum, or starred on "Love Boat"). The current trend in malls is self-described as a location of "communal meeting points," "settings for festive interaction," "space to roam, to sit down, and to talk," and have with increasing regularity created public events, employed large open "park-like" spaces, and free attractions to entice consumers, fully displacing its less seductive relative, public space. Moreover, facilitating the evolution of the museum into another aspect of the entertainment industry. If at one time museums were autonomous and naturalized power centers, in the U.S. the climate of curtailed governmental support radically changes the situation, as "...both the museum and the entertainment complex are, today, sustained by the transactions of shopping." Between 1992 and 2002, the amount of shopping space in the typical U.S. museum has increased by almost ten times the amount of gallery space. Far from utopic, relational aesthetics often leaves us in a decontextualized social world, where only the repressions, not their material conditions are apparent. In the rejection of strategies of Institutional Critique, which always reasserted the material conditions of space, the Relational Aesthetics conception of social interaction mirrors the recent shift in urban planning's understanding of the city. As Sze Tsung Leong argues, the spatial term "map" is jettisoned opting instead for "scenario analysis systems," a "science of spatial modeling", a "decision support system" or a tool for "forecasting space time dynamics,." They are echoed in relational aesthetics appropriation of terminology like "laboratory," "station," "matrices," "sets of information strata," and "mixed use," (among others), intermittently signaling data structures, industrial forms, and economic categorizations. Similarly, the relationships that occur in relational aesthetics are invisible to the material understanding of the institution, or physical locus of power, by their very imbeddedness. This revision of the city map foregrounds the relations between pockets of the city, privileging usage over topography, networks over space, all in service of "the primary engine of urbanization: the market." Bourriaud's "interstices" in "the social corpus" are just such invisible points of communion where the market transcriptions of personal relations are the boundaries between people, no longer the physical walls, and the complete irrelevance of private vs. public space is realized. The proposed libratory conflation of domestic space and gallery space, and the real world progression of the art institution into entertainment complex, creates both a disturbing endpoint where domestic space become indistinguishable from commercial space, (for Bourriaud only considers the transition going one way, not the other) and masks the understanding that this is already happening. The new digital behaviorist topography of the city completely dissolves the symbolic divisions between personal and public. The city itself becomes an expression of interrelations, consciousness of material conditions evaporate, creating systems of control invisible to those who are placed inside it. With the onset of the satellite, the panopticon has become as ubiquitous as the sky itself.

Nan Ellis argues that this dematerialization is the foundation of a distinctly postmodern anxiety of the city, "[w]here modernist fear and the positivistic climate in which it occurred led to efforts to detect causes and effects...postmodern fear amid the refining anti-technocratic climate has incited a series of closely related and overlapping responses including retribalization, nostalgia, escapism, and spiritual return." Or in Bourriaud's words, "...we are hoping for a return to traditional aura..." The understanding, or reflection, of these evolutions of subjectivity and space are important to consider in reexamining the subjectivity of the viewer, and how control can be disrupted, but relational aesthetics seems to go only so far as recreate these systems, literalize their movements, without providing any moments of resistance. Instead it is staged t as an inevitable outcome, by reinscribing these existing structures of control as "a realm of possibilities," of a "possible future," as "microtopias." This is exactly the system of domination that Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari describe in "Mille Plateaux", writing, "Attention has recently been focused on the fact that modern power is not reducible to the classical alternative "repression or ideology" but implies a process of normalization, modulation, modeling, and information that bear on language, perception, desire, movement etc,, and which proceed by way of micro assemblages."

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ANTAGONISM AND RELATIONAL AESTHETICS

Claire Bishop

2004. *October* 110. http://roundtable.kein.org/files/roundtable/claire%20bishop-antagonism&relational%20aesthetics.pdf

Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics

CLAIRE BISHOP

The Palais de Tokyo

On the occasion of its opening in 2002, the Palais de Tokyo immediately struck the visitor as different from other contemporary art venues that had recently opened in Europe. Although a budget of 4.75 million euros was spent on converting the former Japanese pavilion for the 1937 World's Fair into a "site for contemporary creation," most of this money had been used to reinforce (rather than renovate) the existing structure.[1] Instead of clean white walls, discreetly installed lighting, and wooden floors, the interior was left bare and unfinished. This decision was important, as it reflected a key aspect of the venue's curatorial ethos under its codirectorship by Jerôme Sans, an art critic and curator, and Nicolas Bourriaud, former curator at CAPC Bordeaux and editor of the journal *Documents sur l'art*. The Palais de Tokyo's improvised relationship to its surroundings has subsequently become paradigmatic of a visible tendency among European art venues to reconceptualize the "white cube" model of displaying contemporary art as a studio or experimental "laboratory."[2] It is therefore in the tradition of what

1. Palais de Tokyo promotional and Website, "site de création contemporaine," <http://www.palais-detokyo.com>

2. For example, Nicolas Bourriaud on the Palais de Tokyo: "We want to be a sort of interdisciplinary *kunstverein*—more laboratory than museum" (quoted in "Public Relations: Bennett Simpson Talks with Nicolas Bourriaud," *Artforum* [April 2001], p. 48); Hans Ulrich Obrist: "The truly contemporary exhibition should express connective possibilities and make propositions. And, perhaps surprisingly, such an exhibition should reconnect with the laboratory years of twentieth-century exhibition practice. . . . The truly contemporary exhibition with its striking quality of unfinishedness and incompleteness would trigger *pars pro toto* participation" (Obrist, "Battery, Kraftwerk and Laboratory," in *Words of Wisdom: A Curator's Vade Mecum on Contemporary Art*, ed. Carin Kuoni [New York: Independent Curators International, 2001], p. 129); in a telesymposium discussing Barbara van der Linden and Hans Ulrich Obrist's *Laboratorium* project (Antwerp, 2000), the curators describe their preference for the word "laboratory" because it is "neutral" and "still untouched, untouched by science" ("Laboratorium is the answer, what is the question?," *TRANS* 8 [2000], p. 114). Laboratory metaphors also arise in artists' conceptions of their own exhibitions. For example, Liam Gillick, speaking about his one-man show at the Arnolfini, Bristol, remarks that it "is a laboratory or workshop situation where there is the opportunity to test out some ideas in combination, to exercise relational and comparative critical processes" (Gillick quoted in *Liam Gillick: Renovation Filter: Recent Past and Near Future* [Bristol: Arnolfini, 2000], p. 16). Rirkrit Tiravanija's

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Lewis Kachur has described as the "ideological exhibitions" of the historical avant-garde: in these exhibitions (such as the 1920 International Dada Fair and the 1938 International Surrealist Exhibition), the hang sought to reinforce or epitomize the ideas contained within the work.[3]

The curators promoting this "laboratory" paradigm—including Maria Lind, Hans Ulrich Obrist, Barbara van der Linden, Hou Hanru, and Nicolas Bourriaud—have to a large extent been encouraged to adopt this curatorial modus operandi as a direct reaction to the type of art produced in the 1990s: work that is open-ended, interactive, and resistant to closure, often appearing to be "work-in-progress" rather than a completed object. Such work seems to derive from a creative misreading of poststructuralist theory: rather than the *interpretations* of a work of art being open to continual reassessment, the work of art *itself* is argued to be in perpetual flux. There are many problems with this idea, not least of which is the difficulty of discerning a work whose identity is willfully unstable. Another problem is the ease with which the "laboratory" becomes marketable as a space of leisure and entertainment. Venues such as the Baltic in Gateshead, the Kunstverein Munich, and the Palais de Tokyo have used metaphors like "laboratory," "construction site", and "art factory" to differentiate themselves from bureaucracy-encumbered collection-based museums; their dedicated project spaces create a buzz of creativity and the aura of being at the vanguard of contemporary production.[4] One could argue that in this context, project-based works-in-progress and artists-in-residence begin to dovetail with an "experience economy," the marketing strategy that seeks to replace goods and services with scripted and staged personal experiences.[5] Yet what the viewer is supposed to garner from such an "experience" of creativity, which is essentially institutionalized studio activity, is often unclear.

Related to the project-based "laboratory" tendency is the trend toward inviting contemporary artists to design or troubleshoot amenities within the museum,

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work is frequently described in similar terms: it is "like a laboratory for human contact" (Jerry Saltz, "Resident Alien," *The Village Voice*, July 7–14, 1999, n.p.), or "psycho-social experiments where situations are made for meetings, exchange, etc." (Maria Lind, "Letter and Event," *Paletten* 223 [April 1995], p. 41). It should be noted that "laboratory" in this context does not denote psychological or behavioral experiments on the viewer, but refers instead to creative experimentation with exhibition conventions.

3. Lewis Kachur, *Displaying the Marvelous: Marcel Duchamp, Salvador Dali and the Surrealist Exhibition* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2001).

4. Under Sune Nordgren, the Baltic in Gateshead had three "AIR" (Artist-in-Residence) spaces for artists' studios, but these were only open to the public when the resident artist chose; often the audience had to take the Baltic's claim to be an "art factory" on trust. The Palais de Tokyo, by contrast, has up to ten artists in residence at any one time. The Munich Kunstverein, under Maria Lind, sought a different type of visible productivity: Apolonia Sustersic's conversion of the gallery entrance featured a "work console," where members of the curatorial staff (including Lind) could take turns manning the gallery's front desk, continuing their work in public.

5. B. Joseph Pine II and James H. Gilmore, *The Experience Economy: Work Is Theatre and Every Business a Stage* (Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 1999). The Baltic presents itself as "a site for the production, presentation, and experience of contemporary art" through "a heavy emphasis on commissions, invitations to artists, and the work of artists-in-residence" (www.balticmill.com).

such as the bar (Jorge Pardo at K21, Düsseldorf; Michael Lin at the Palais de Tokyo; Liam Gillick at the Whitechapel Art Gallery) or reading lounge (Apolonia Sustersic at Kunstverein Munich, or the changing "Le Salon" program at the Palais de Tokyo), and in turn present these as works of art.[6] An effect of this insistent promotion of these ideas of artist-as-designer, function over contemplation, and open-endedness over aesthetic resolution is often ultimately to enhance the status of the curator, who gains credit for stage-managing the overall laboratory experience. As Hal Foster warned in the mid-1990s, "the institution may overshadow the work that it otherwise highlights: it becomes the spectacle, it collects the cultural capital, and the director-curator becomes the star."[7] It is with this situation in mind that I focus on the Palais de Tokyo as my starting point for a closer inspection of some of the claims made for "open-ended," semifunctional art works, since one of the Palais' codirectors, Nicolas Bourriaud, is also their leading theorist.

Relational Aesthetics

Esthétique Rélationnel is the title of Bourriaud's 1997 collection of essays in which he attempts to characterize artistic practice of the 1990s. Since there have been very few attempts to provide an overview of 1990s art, particularly in Britain where discussion has myopically revolved around the Young British Artists (YBA) phenomenon, Bourriaud's book is an important first step in identifying recent tendencies in contemporary art. It also comes at a time when many academics in Britain and the U.S. seem reluctant to move on from the politicized agendas and intellectual battles of 1980s art (indeed, for many, of 1960s art), and condemn everything from installation art to ironic painting as a depoliticized celebration of surface, complicitous with consumer spectacle. Bourriaud's book—written with the hands-on insight of a curator—promises to redefine the agenda of contemporary art criticism, since his starting point is that we can no longer approach these works from behind the "shelter" of sixties art history and its values. Bourriaud seeks to offer new criteria by which to approach these often rather opaque works of art, while also claiming that they are no less politicized than their sixties precursors.[8]

For instance, Bourriaud argues that art of the 1990s takes as its theoretical horizon "the realm of human interactions and its social context, rather than the

6. "Every six months, an artist is invited by the Palais de Tokyo to design and decorate a small space located under the main staircase but placed at the heart of the exhibition spaces: Le Salon. Both a space of relaxation and a work of art, Le Salon offers comfortable armchairs, games, reading material, a piano, a video, or a TV program to those who visit it" (Palais de Tokyo Website [http://www.palaisdetokyo.com], my translation). The current premises of Portikus Gallery in Frankfurt feature an office, reading room, and gallery space designed by the artist Tobias Rehberger.

7. Hal Foster, "The Artist as Ethnographer," in Foster, *The Return of the Real* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1996), p. 198.

8. "Contemporary art is definitely developing a political project when it endeavors to move into the relational realm by turning it into an issue" (Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics* [Dijon: Les Presses du Réel, 2002], p. 17). Hereafter cited in the text as *RA*.

assertion of an independent and *private* symbolic space" (*RA*, p. 14). In other words, relational art works seek to establish intersubjective encounters (be these literal or potential) in which meaning is elaborated *collectively* (*RA*, p. 18) rather than in the privatized space of individual consumption. The implication is that this work inverses the goals of Greenbergian modernism.[9] Rather than a discrete, portable, autonomous work of art that transcends its context, relational art is entirely beholden to the contingencies of its environment and audience. Moreover, this audience is envisaged as a community: rather than a one-to-one relationship between work of art and viewer, relational art sets up situations in which viewers are not just addressed as a collective, social entity, but are actually given the wherewithal to create a community, however temporary or utopian this may be.

It is important to emphasize, however, that Bourriaud does not regard relational aesthetics to be simply a theory of interactive art. He considers it to be a means of locating contemporary practice within the culture at large: relational art is seen as a direct response to the shift from a goods to a service-based economy.[10] It is also seen as a response to the virtual relationships of the Internet and globalization, which on the one hand have prompted a desire for more physical and face-to-face interaction between people, while on the other have inspired artists to adopt a do-it-yourself (DIY) approach and model their own "possible universes" (*RA*, p. 13). This emphasis on immediacy is familiar to us from the 1960s, recalling the premium placed by performance art on the authenticity of our first-hand encounter with the artist's body. But Bourriaud is at pains to distance contemporary work from that of previous generations. The main difference, as he sees it, is the shift in attitude toward social change: instead of a "utopian" agenda, today's artists seek only to find provisional solutions in the here and now; instead of trying to change their environment, artists today are simply "learning to inhabit the world in a better way"; instead of looking forward to a future utopia, this art sets up functioning "microtopias" in the present (*RA*, p. 13). Bourriaud summarizes this new attitude vividly in one sentence: "It seems more pressing to invent possible relations with our neighbors in the present than to bet on happier tomorrows" (*RA*, p. 45). This DIY, microtopian ethos is what Bourriaud perceives to be the core political significance of relational aesthetics.

Bourriaud names many artists in his book, most of whom are European, and many of whom were featured in his seminal exhibition *Traffic* at CAPC Bordeaux

9. This change in mode of address from "private" to "public" has for some time been associated with a decisive break with modernism; see Rosalind Krauss, "Sense and Sensibility," *Artforum* (November 1973), pp. 43–53, and "Double Negative: A New Syntax for Sculpture," in *Passages in Modern Sculpture* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1977).

10. This is reflected in the number of artists whose practice takes the form of offering a "service," such as the Berlin-based U.S. artist Christine Hill, who offered back and shoulder massages to exhibition visitors, and who later went on to set up a fully functioning secondhand clothes shop, the Volksboutique, in Berlin and at *Documenta X* (1997).

in 1993. Certain artists are mentioned with metronomic regularity: Liam Gillick, Rirkrit Tiravanija, Phillippe Parreno, Pierre Huyghe, Carsten Höller, Christine Hill, Vanessa Beecroft, Maurizio Cattelan, and Jorge Pardo, all of whom will be familiar to anyone who has attended the international biennials, triennials, and *Manifestas* that have proliferated over the last decade. The work of these artists differs from that of their better known YBA contemporaries in several respects. Unlike the self-contained (and formally conservative) work of the British, with its accessible references to mass culture, European work is rather low-impact in appearance, including photography, video, wall texts, books, objects to be used, and leftovers from the aftermath of an opening event. It is basically installation art in format, but this is a term that many of its practitioners would resist; rather than forming a coherent and distinctive transformation of space (in the manner of Ilya Kabakov's "total installation," a theatrical mise-en-scène), relational art works insist upon *use* rather than contemplation.[11] And unlike the distinctively branded personalities of young British art, it is often hard to identify who has made a particular piece of "relational" art, since it tends to make use of existing cultural forms—including other works of art—and remixes them in the manner of a DJ or programmer.[12] Moreover, many of the artists Bourriaud discusses have collaborated with one another, further blurring the imprint of individual authorial status. Several have also curated each others' work in exhibitions—such as Gillick's "filtering" of Maria Lind's curatorship in *What If: Art on the Verge of Architecture and Design* (Moderna Museet, Stockholm, 2000) and Tiravanija's *Utopia Station* for the 2003 Venice Biennale (co-curated with Hans Ulrich Obrist and Molly Nesbit).[13] I now wish to focus on the work of two artists in particular, Tiravanija and Gillick, since Bourriaud deems them both to be paradigmatic of "relational aesthetics."

Rirkrit Tiravanija is a New York-based artist, born in Buenos Aires in 1961 to Thai parents and raised in Thailand, Ethiopia, and Canada. He is best known for

11. For example, Jorge Pardo's *Pier* for *Skulptur. Projekte Münster* (1997). *Pier* comprised a 50-meter-long jetty of California redwood with a small pavilion at the end. The work was a functional pier, providing mooring for boats, while a cigarette machine attached to the wall of the pavilion encouraged people to stop and look at the view.

12. This strategy is referred to by Bourriaud as "postproduction," and is elaborated in his follow-up book to *Relational Aesthetics*: "Since the early nineties, an ever-increasing number of art works have been created on the basis of preexisting works; more and more artists interpret, reproduce, reexhibit, or use works made by others or available cultural products. . . . These artists who insert their own work into that of others contribute to the eradication of the traditional distinction between production and consumption, creation and copy, readymade and original work. The material they manipulate is no longer primary." Bourriaud argues that postproduction differs from the ready-made, which questions authorship and the institution of art, because its emphasis is on recombining existing cultural artifacts in order to imbue them with new meaning. See Bourriaud, *Postproduction* (New York: Lukas and Sternberg, 2002).

13. The best example of this current obsession with collaboration as a model is found in *No Ghost Just a Shell*, an ongoing project by Pierre Huyghe and Philippe Parreno, who have invited Liam Gillick, Dominique Gonzales-Foerster, M/M, Francois Curlet, Rirkrit Tiravanija, Pierre Joseph, Joe Scanlan, and others to collaborate with them in creating work around the defunct Japanese *manga* character AnnLee.

hybrid installation performances, in which he cooks vegetable curry or pad thai for people attending the museum or gallery where he has been invited to work. In *Untitled (Still)* (1992) at 303 Gallery, New York, Tiravanija moved everything he found in the gallery office and storeroom into the main exhibition space, including the director, who was obliged to work in public, among cooking smells and diners. In the storeroom he set up what was described by one critic as a "makeshift refugee kitchen," with paper plates, plastic knives and forks, gas burners, kitchen utensils, two folding tables, and some folding stools.[14] In the gallery he cooked curries for visitors, and the detritus, utensils, and food packets became the art

Rirkrit Tiravanija. Untitled (Free). *303 Gallery, New York, 1992. Courtesy Gavin Brown's Enterprise, New York.*

exhibit whenever the artist wasn't there. Several critics, and Tiravanija himself, have observed that this involvement of the audience is the main focus of his work: the food is but a means to allow a convivial relationship between audience and artist to develop.[15]

Underlying much of Tiravanija's practice is a desire not just to erode the distinction between instititutional and social space, but between artist and viewer; the phrase "lots of people" regularly appears on his lists of materials. In the late 1990s, Tiravanija focused increasingly on creating situations where the audience could produce its own work. A more elaborate version of the 303 Gallery installa-

14. Jerry Saltz, "A Short History of Rirkrit Tiravanija," *Art in America* (February 1996), p. 106.

15. If one wanted to identify historical precursors for this type of art, there are ample names to cite: Michael Asher's untitled installation at the Clare Copley Gallery, Los Angeles, in 1974, in which he removed the partition between exhibition space and gallery office, or Gordon Matta-Clark's restaurant Food, opened with his artist colleagues in the early 1970s. Food was a collective project that enabled artists to earn a small living and fund their art practice without succumbing to the ideologically compromising demands of the art market. Other artists who presented the consumption of food and drink as art in the 1960s and early '70s include Allan Ruppersberg, Tom Marioni, Daniel Spoerri, and the Fluxus group.

tion/performance was undertaken in *Untitled (Tomorrow Is Another Day)* (1996) at the Kölnischer Kunstverein. Here, Tiravanija built a wooden reconstruction of his New York apartment, which was made open to the public twenty-four hours a day. People could use the kitchen to make food, wash themselves in his bathroom, sleep in the bedroom, or hang out and chat in the living room. The catalog accompanying the Kunstverein project quotes a selection of newspaper articles and reviews, all of which reiterate the curator's assertion that "this unique combination of art and life offered an impressive experience of togetherness to everybody."[16] Although the materials of Tiravanija's work have become more diverse,

Tiravanija. Untitled 1996 (Tomorrow Is Another Day). *Kolnischer Kunstverein, Cologne, Germany, 1996. Courtesy Gavin Brown's Enterprise, New York.*

the emphasis remains on use over contemplation. For *Pad Thai*, a project at De Appel, Amsterdam, in 1996, he made available a room of amplified electric guitars and a drumset, allowing visitors to take up the instruments and generate their own music. *Pad Thai* initially incorporated a projection of Andy Warhol's *Sleep* (1963) and subsequent incarnations included a film by Marcel Broodthaers at Speaker's Corner, Hyde Park, London (in which the artist writes on a blackboard "you are all artists"). In a project in Glasgow, *Cinema Liberté* (1999), Tiravanija asked the local audience to nominate their favorite films, which were then screened outdoors at the intersection of two streets in Glasgow. As Janet Kraynak has written, although Tiravanija's

16. Udo Kittelmann, "Preface," in *Rirkrit Tiravanija:* Untitled, 1996 (Tomorrow Is Another Day) (Cologne: Salon Verlag and Kölnischer Kunstverein, 1996), n.p. As Janet Kraynak has noted, Tiravanija's work has occasioned some of the most idealized and euphoric art criticism of recent times: his work is heralded not just as an emancipatory site, free of constraints, but also as a critique of commodification and as a celebration of cultural identity—to the point where these imperatives ultimately collapse, in the institutional embrace of Tiravanija's persona as commodity. See Janet Kraynak, "Tiravanija's Liability," *Documents* 13 (Fall 1998), pp. 26–40. It is worth quoting Kraynak in full: "While Tiravanija's art compels or provokes a host of concerns relevant to the larger domain of contemporary art

dematerialized projects revive strategies of critique from the 1960s and '70s, it is arguable that in the context of today's dominant economic model of globalization, Tiravanija's itinerant ubiquity does not self-reflexively question this logic, but merely reproduces it.[17] He is one of the most established, influential, and omnipresent figures on the international art circuit, and his work has been crucial to both the emergence of relational aesthetics as a theory, and to the curatorial desire for "open-ended," "laboratory" exhibitions.

My second example is the British artist Liam Gillick, born in 1964. Gillick's output is interdisciplinary: his heavily theorized interests are disseminated in sculpture, installation, graphic design, curating, art criticism, and novellas. A prevailing theme throughout his work in all media is the production of relationships (particularly social relationships) through our environment. His early work investigated the space between sculpture and functional design. Examples include his *Pinboard Project* (1992), a bulletin board containing instructions for use, potential items for inclusion on the board, and a recommendation to subscribe to a limited number of specialist

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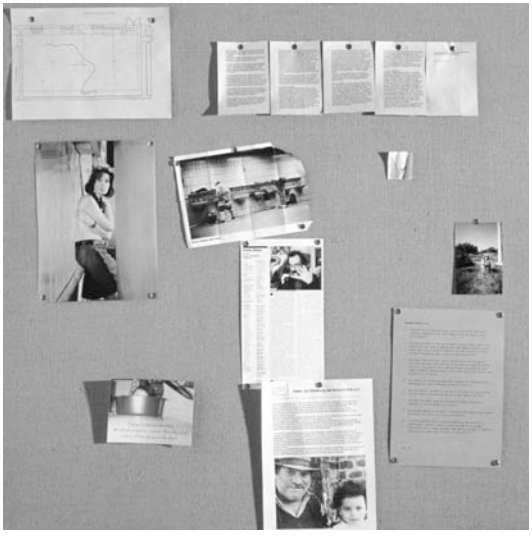
practices, its unique status in the public imagination derives in part from a certain naturalizing of the critical readings that have accompanied and, to an extent, constructed it. Unlike previous pairings of avant-garde utopianism, in which art merges happily with life, and anti-institutional criticality, in which art objects are constituted in, and as, social spaces, what putatively guarantees the production of uncontaminated social praxis in Tiravanija's work is the unique imprint of the artist, whose generosity both animates the installations and unifies them stylistically. A host of articles have focused on the familial atmosphere of the gallery where he is represented, and other biographical details of his life, rendering a covert equivalence between Tiravanija's work and self. This idealized projection seems to derive from the work itself, as the artist has thematized details of his ethnic background in his installations through references to Thai culture. . . . The artist, repositioned as both the source and arbiter of meaning, is embraced as the pure embodiment of his/her sexual, cultural, or ethnic identity, guaranteeing both the authenticity and political efficacy of his/her work" (pp. 28–29).

17. Ibid., pp. 39–40.



Liam Gillick. Pinboard Project (Grey). *1992. Courtesy the artist and Corvi-Mora, London.*

journals; and *Prototype Erasmus Table #2* (1994), a table "designed to nearly fill a room" and conceived as "a working place where it might be possible to finish working on the book *Erasmus Is Late*" (Gillick's publication of 1995), but which is also available for use by other people "for the storage and exhibition of work on, under or around it."[18]

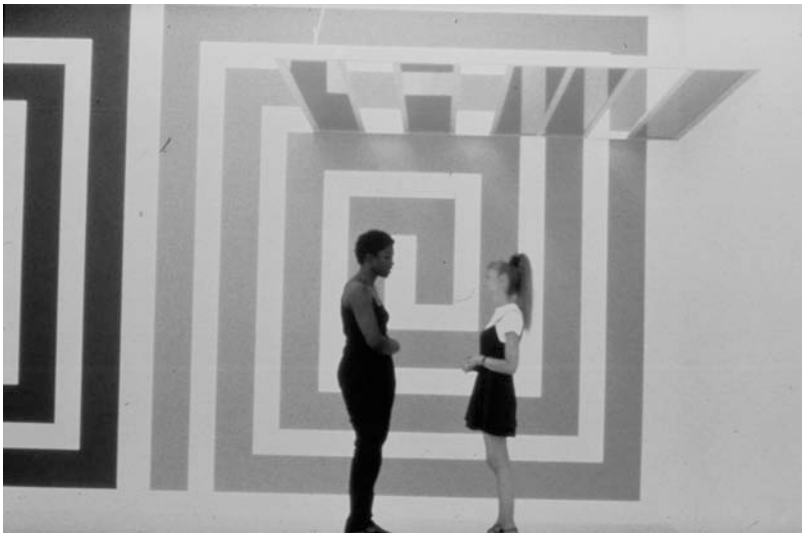
Since the mid-1990s, Gillick has become best known for his three-dimensional design work: screens and suspended platforms made of aluminum and colored Plexiglas, which are often displayed alongside texts and geometrical designs painted directly onto a wall. Gillick's descriptions of these works emphasize their potential use value, but in a way that carefully denies them any specific agency: each object's meaning is so overdetermined that it seems to parody both claims made for modernist design and the language of management consulting. His 120 x 120 cm open-topped Plexiglas cube *Discussion Island: Projected Think Tank* (1997) is described as "a work that may be used as an object that might signify an enclosed zone for the consideration of exchange, information transfer and strategy," while the *Big Conference Centre Legislation Screen* (1998), a 3 x 2 meter colored Plexiglas screen, "helps to define a location where individual actions are limited by rules imposed by the community as a whole."[19]

Gillick's design structures have been described as constructions having "a spatial resemblance to office spaces, bus shelters, meeting rooms and canteens," but they also take up the legacy of Minimalist sculpture and post-Minimalist installation art (Donald Judd and Dan Graham immediately come to mind).[20] Yet

18. Gillick, quoted in *Liam Gillick*, ed. Susanne Gaensheimer and Nicolaus Schafhausen (Cologne: Oktagon, 2000), p. 36.
19. Ibid., pp. 56, 81.
20. Mike Dawson, "Liam Gillick," *Flux* (August–September 2002), p. 63.

Gillick. Revision/22nd Floor Wall Design. *1998. Courtesy the artist and Corvi-Mora, London.*

Gillick's work differs from that of his art historical predecessors: whereas Judd's modular boxes made the viewer aware of his/her physical movement around the work, while also drawing attention to the space in which these were exhibited, Gillick is happy for viewers to "just stand with their backs to the work and talk to each other."[21] Rather than having the viewer "complete" the work, in the manner of Bruce Nauman's corridors or Graham's video installations of the 1970s, Gillick seeks a perpetual open-endedness in which his art is a backdrop to activity. "It doesn't necessarily function best as an object for consideration alone," he says. "It is sometimes a



Gillick. Big Conference Centre Limitation Screen. *1998. Courtesy the artist and Corvi-Mora, London.*

backdrop or decor rather than a pure content provider."[22] Gillick's titles reflect this movement away from the directness of 1970s critique in their use of ironically bland management jargon: *Discussion Island*, *Arrival Rig*, *Dialogue Platform*, *Regulation Screen*, *Delay Screen*, and *Twinned Renegotiation Platform*.[23] These corporate allusions clearly distance the work from that of Graham, who exposed how apparently neutral architectural materials (such as glass, mirror, and steel) are used by the state and commerce to exercise political control. For Gillick, the task is not to rail against such institutions, but to negotiate ways of improving them.[24] A word that he frequently

21. Gillick, *Renovation Filter,* p. 16.
22. Gillick, *The Wood Way* (London: Whitechapel, 2002), p. 84.
23. All of these works were shown in *The Wood Way,* an exhibition at Whitechapel Art Gallery in 2002.
24. However, it is arguable from Gillick's examples that "improvement" connotes change on just a formal level. In 1997 he was invited to produce work for a Munich bank and described the project as follows: "I identified a problematic dead zone in the building—an oversight by the architects—which I proposed to solve with these screens. These would subtly change the way the space worked. Interestingly, however, my proposal made the architects rethink that part of the building . . . the architects came to a better conclusion about how to resolve their designs, without the need for any art" (Gillick,

uses is "scenario," and to an extent his entire output is governed by an idea of "scenario thinking" as a way to envisage change in the world—not as a targeted critique of the present order, but "to examine the extent to which critical access is possible at all."[25] It is worth noting that although Gillick's writing is frustratingly intangible—full of deferral and possibility, rather than the present and actual—he has been invited to troubleshoot practical projects, such as a traffic system for Porsche in Stuttgart, and to design intercom systems for a housing project in Brussels. Gillick is typical of his generation in finding no conflict between this type of work and conventional "white cube" exhibitions; both are seen as ways to continue his investigation into hypothetical future "scenarios." Rather than determining a specific outcome, Gillick is keen to trigger open-ended alternatives to which others may contribute. The middle ground, the compromise, is what interests him most.

I have chosen to discuss the examples of Gillick and Tiravanija because they seem to me the clearest expression of Bourriaud's argument that relational art privileges intersubjective relations over detached opticality. Tiravanija insists that the viewer be physically present in a particular situation at a particular time—eating the food that he cooks, alongside other visitors in a communal situation. Gillick alludes to more hypothetical relations, which in many cases don't even need to exist, but he still insists that the presence of an audience is an essential component of his art: "My work is like the light in the fridge," he says, "it only works when there are people there to open the fridge door. Without people, it's not art—it's something else—stuff in a room."[26] This interest in the contingencies of a "relationship between"—rather than the object itself—is a hallmark of Gillick's work and of his interest in collaborative practice as a whole.

This idea of considering the work of art as a potential trigger for participation is hardly new—think of Happenings, Fluxus instructions, 1970s performance art, and Joseph Beuys's declaration that "everyone is an artist." Each was accompanied by a rhetoric of democracy and emancipation that is very similar to Bourriaud's

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Renovation Filter, p. 21). One critic has dismissed this mode of working as "corporate feng shui" (Max Andrews, "Liam Gillick," *Contemporary* 32, p. 73), drawing attention to the ways in which the proposed changes were primarily cosmetic rather than structural. Gillick would reply that the appearance of our environment conditions our behavior, and so the two are indivisible.

25. Liam Gillick, "A Guide to Video Conferencing Systems and the Role of the Building Worker in Relation to the Contemporary Art Exhibition (Backstage)," in Gillick, *Five or Six* (New York: Lukas and Sternberg, 2000), p. 9. As Gillick notes, scenario thinking is a tool to propose change, even while it is "inherently linked to capitalism and the strategizing that goes with it." This is because it comprises "one of the key components required in order to maintain the level of mobility and reinvention required to provide the dynamic aura of so-called free-market economies" (Gillick, "Prevision: Should the Future Help the Past?," *Five or Six*, p. 27).

26. Gillick in *Renovation Filter*, p. 16. As Alex Farquharson has noted, "The operative phrase here is 'might be possible.' Whereas Rirkrit can reasonably expect his visitors to eat his Thai noodles, it is unlikely that Liam's audience will do his reassessing. Instead of real activity, the viewer is offered a fictional role, an approach shared by Gonzalez-Foerster and Parreno" (Alex Farquharson, "Curator and Artist," *Art Monthly* 270 [October 2003], p. 14).

defense of relational aesthetics.[27] The theoretical underpinnings of this desire to activate the viewer are easy to reel off: Walter Benjamin's "Author as Producer" (1934), Roland Barthes's "Death of the Author" and "birth of the reader" (1968) and—most important for this context—Umberto Eco's *The Open Work* (1962). Writing on what he perceived to be the open and aleatory character of modernist literature, music, and art, Eco summarizes his discussion of James Joyce, Luciano Berio, and Alexander Calder in terms that cannot help but evoke Bourriaud's optimism:

> The poetics of the "work in movement" (and partly that of the "open" work) sets in motion a new cycle of relations between the artist and his audience, a new mechanics of aesthetic perception, a different status for the artistic product in contemporary society. It opens a new page in sociology and in pedagogy, as well as a new chapter in the history of art. It poses new practical problems by organizing new communicative situations. In short, it installs a new relationship between the *contemplation* and the *utilization* of a work of art.[28]

Analogies with Tiravanija and Gillick are evident in Eco's privileging of use value and the development of "communicative situations." However, it is Eco's contention that *every* work of art is potentially "open," since it may produce an unlimited range of possible readings; it is simply the achievement of contemporary art, music, and literature to have foregrounded this fact.[29] Bourriaud misinterprets these arguments by applying them to a specific type of work (those that require literal interaction) and thereby redirects the argument back to artistic intentionality rather than issues of reception.[30] His position also differs from Eco in one other important respect: Eco regarded the work of art as a *reflection* of the conditions of our existence in a fragmented modern culture, while Bourriaud sees the work of art *producing* these conditions. The interactivity of relational art is therefore superior to optical contemplation of an object, which is assumed to be passive and disengaged, because the work of art is a "social form" capable of producing positive human relationships. As a consequence, the work is automatically political in implication and emancipatory in effect.

27. Beuys is mentioned infrequently in *Relational Aesthetics*, and on one occasion is specifically invoked to sever any connection between "social sculpture" and relational aesthetics (p. 30).

28. Umberto Eco, "The Poetics of the Open Work" (1962), in Eco, *The Open Work* (Boston: Harvard University Press, 1989), pp. 22–23.

29. Eco cites Merleau-Ponty in *The Phenomenology of Perception*: "How can anything ever *present itself* truly to us since its synthesis is never completed? How could I gain the experience of the world, as I would of an individual actuating his own existence, since none of the views or perceptions I have of it can exhaust it and the horizons remain forever *open*?. . . This ambiguousness does not represent an imperfection in the nature of existence or in that of consciousness; it is its very definition" (Eco, "The Poetics of the Open Work," p. 17).

30. It could be argued that this approach actually forecloses "open-ended" readings, since the meaning of the work becomes so synonymous with the fact that its meaning is open.

Aesthetic Judgment

To anyone acquainted with Althusser's 1969 essay "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses," this description of social forms *producing* human relationships will sound familiar. Bourriaud's defense of relational aesthetics is indebted to Althusser's idea that culture—as an "ideological state apparatus"—does not *reflect* society, but *produces* it. As taken up by feminist artists and film critics in the 1970s, Althusser's essay permitted a more nuanced expression of the political in art. As Lucy Lippard has noted, it was in form (rather than content) that much art of the late 1960s aspired to a democratic outreach; the insight of Althusser's essay heralded recognition that a critique of institutions by circumventing them had to be refined.[31] It was not enough to show that art work's meaning is subordinate to its framing (be this in a museum or magazine); the viewer's own *identification* with the image was deemed to be equally important. Rosalyn Deutsche usefully summarizes this shift in her book *Evictions: Art and Spatial Politics* (1996) when she compares Hans Haacke to the subsequent generation of artists that included Cindy Sherman, Barbara Kruger, and Sherrie Levine. Haacke's work, she writes, "invited viewers to decipher relations and find content already inscribed in images but did not ask them to examine their *own role and investments* in producing images."[32] By contrast, the subsequent generation of artists "*treated the image itself as a social relationship* and the viewer as a subject constructed by the very object from which it formerly claimed detachment."[33]

I will return later to the question of identification that Deutsche raises. In the meantime it is necessary to observe that it is only a short step from regarding the *image* as a social relationship to Bourriaud's argument that the *structure* of an art work produces a social relationship. However, identifying what the structure of a relational art work *is* is no easy task, precisely because the work claims to be open-ended. This problem is exacerbated by the fact that relational art works are an outgrowth of installation art, a form that has from its inception solicited the literal presence of the viewer. Unlike the "Public Vision" generation of artists, whose achievements—largely in photography—have been unproblematically assimilated into art-historical orthodoxy, installation art has been frequently denigrated as just one more form of postmodern spectacle. For some critics, notably Rosalind Krauss, installation art's use of diverse media divorces it from a medium-specific tradition; it therefore has no inherent conventions against which it may self-reflexively operate, nor criteria against which we may evaluate its success. Without a sense of what the *medium* of installation art *is*, the work cannot attain

31. I am thinking here of much Conceptual art, video, performance, installation, and site-specific work that expressed its politics by refusing to gratify or collude with the art market, but which remained self-referential on the level of content. See Lucy Lippard, *Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object 1966–1972* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), pp. vii–xxii.

32. Rosalyn Deutsche, *Evictions: Art and Spatial Politics* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1996), pp. 295–96. Italics mine.

33. Ibid., p. 296.

the holy grail of self-reflexive criticality.[34] I have suggested elsewhere that the viewer's presence might be one way to envisage the medium of installation art, but Bourriaud complicates this assertion.[35] He argues that the criteria we should use to evaluate open-ended, participatory art works are not just aesthetic, but political and even ethical: we must judge the "relations" that are produced by relational art works.

When confronted by a relational art work, Bourriaud suggests that we ask the following questions: "does this work permit me to enter into dialogue? Could I exist, and how, in the space it defines?" (*RA*, p. 109). He refers to these questions, which we should ask in front of any aesthetic product, as "criteria of co-existence" (*RA*, p. 109). Theoretically, in front of any work of art, we can ask what kind of social model the piece produces; could I live, for instance, in a world structured by the organizing principles of a Mondrian painting? Or, what "social form" is produced by a Surrealist object? The problem that arises with Bourriaud's notion of "structure" is that it has an erratic relationship to the work's ostensible subject matter, or content. For example, do we value the fact that Surrealist objects recycle outmoded commodities—or the fact that their imagery and disconcerting juxtapositions explore the unconscious desires and anxieties of their makers? With the hybrid installation/performances of relational aesthetics, which rely so heavily on context and the viewer's literal engagement, these questions are even more difficult to answer. For example, *what* Tiravanija cooks, *how* and *for whom*, are less important to Bourriaud than the fact that he gives away the results of his cooking for free. Gillick's bulletin boards can be similarly questioned: Bourriaud does not discuss the texts or images referred to on the individual clippings pinned to the boards, nor the formal arrangement and juxtaposition of these clippings, but only Gillick's democratization of material and flexible format. (The owner is at liberty to modify these various elements at any given time according to personal tastes and current events.) For Bourriaud, the structure is the subject matter—and in this he is far more formalist than he acknowledges.[36] Unhinged both from artistic intentionality and consideration of the broader context in which they operate, relational art works become, like Gillick's pinboards, just "a constantly changing

34. Rosalind Krauss, *A Voyage on the North Sea* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1999), p. 56. Elsewhere, Krauss suggests that after the late 1960s, it was to a "conceptual-cum-architectural site that art practice would become 'specific,' rather than to any aesthetic medium"—as best exemplified in the work of Marcel Broodthaers (Krauss, "Performing Art," *London Review of Books*, November 12, 1998, p. 18). While I agree to an extent with Krauss on the point of self-reflexive criticality, I am troubled by her reluctance to countenance other ways in which contemporary installation art might successfully operate.

35. See the conclusion to my forthcoming book, *Installation Art and the Viewer* (London: Tate Publishing, 2005).

36. This is reflected in Bourriaud's discussion of Felix Gonzales-Torres, an artist whose work he considers to be a crucial forerunner of relational aesthetics. Before his death from AIDS in 1996, Gonzales-Torres gained recognition for his emotive reworkings of Minimalist sculpture using piles of sweets and stacks of paper, to which visitors are encouraged to help themselves. Through this work, Gonzales-Torres made subtle allusions to politically charged issues such as the AIDS crisis (a pile of sweets matched the weight of his partner Ross, who died in 1991), urban violence (handgun laws in *Untitled [NRA]* [1991]), and homosexuality (*Perfect Lovers* [1991]). Bourriaud, however, demotes this aspect of Gonzales-Torres's practice in favor of its "structure"—its literal generosity toward the viewer.

portrait of the heterogeneity of everyday life," and do not examine their relationship to it.[37] In other words, although the works claim to defer to their context, they do not question their imbrication within it. Gillick's pinboards are embraced as democratic in structure—but only those who own them may interact with their arrangement. We need to ask, as Group Material did in the 1980s, "Who is the public? How is a culture made, and who is it for?"

I am not suggesting that relational art works need to develop a greater social conscience—by making pinboard works about international terrorism, for example, or giving free curries to refugees. I am simply wondering how we decide what the "structure" of a relational art work comprises, and whether this is so detachable from the work's ostensible subject matter or permeable with its context. Bourriaud wants to equate aesthetic judgment with an ethicopolitical judgment of the relationships produced by a work of art. But how do we measure or compare these relationships? The *quality* of the relationships in "relational aesthetics" are never examined or called into question. When Bourriaud argues that "encounters are more important than the individuals who compose them," I sense that this question is (for him) unnecessary; all relations that permit "dialogue" are automatically assumed to be democratic and therefore good. But what does "democracy" really mean in this context? If relational art produces human relations, then the next logical question to ask is what *types* of relations are being produced, for whom, and why?

Antagonism

Rosalyn Deutsche has argued that the public sphere remains democratic only insofar as its naturalized exclusions are taken into account and made open to contestation: "Conflict, division, and instability, then, do not ruin the democratic public sphere; they are conditions of its existence." Deutsche takes her lead from Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe's *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics*. Published in 1985, Laclau and Mouffe's *Hegemony* is one of the first books to reconsider Leftist political theory through the lens of poststructuralism, following what the authors perceived to be an impasse of Marxist theorization in the 1970s. Their text is a rereading of Marx through Gramsci's theory of hegemony and Lacan's understanding of subjectivity as split and decentered. Several of the ideas that Laclau and Mouffe put forward allow us to reconsider Bourriaud's claims for the politics of relational aesthetics in a more critical light.

The first of these ideas is the concept of antagonism. Laclau and Mouffe argue that a fully functioning democratic society is not one in which all antagonisms have disappeared, but one in which new political frontiers are constantly

37. Eric Troncy, "London Calling," *Flash Art* (Summer 1992), p. 89.

being drawn and brought into debate—in other words, a democratic society is one in which relations of conflict are *sustained*, not erased. Without antagonism there is only the imposed consensus of authoritarian order—a total suppression of debate and discussion, which is inimical to democracy. It is important to stress right away that the idea of antagonism is not understood by Laclau and Mouffe to be a pessimistic acceptance of political deadlock; antagonism does not signal "the expulsion of utopia from the field of the political." On the contrary, they maintain that without the concept of utopia there is no possibility of a radical imaginary. The task is to balance the tension between imaginary ideal and pragmatic management of a social positivity without lapsing into the totalitarian.

This understanding of antagonism is grounded in Laclau and Mouffe's theory of subjectivity. Following Lacan, they argue that subjectivity is not a self-transparent, rational, and pure presence, but is irremediably decentered and incomplete.[38] However, surely there is a conflict between a concept of the subject as decentered and the idea of political agency? "Decentering" implies the lack of a unified subject, while "agency" implies a fully present, autonomous subject of political will and self-determination. Laclau argues that this conflict is false, because the subject is neither entirely decentered (which would imply psychosis) nor entirely unified (i.e., the absolute subject). Following Lacan, he argues that we have a *failed* structural identity, and are therefore dependent on *identification* in order to proceed.[39] Because subjectivity *is* this process of identification, we are necessarily incomplete entities. Antagonism, therefore, is the relationship that emerges between such incomplete entities. Laclau contrasts this to the relationships that emerge between complete entities, such as contradiction (A-not A) or "real difference" (A-B). We all hold mutually contradictory beliefs (for example, there are materialists who read horoscopes and psychoanalysts who send Christmas cards) but this does not result in antagonism. Nor is "real difference" (A-B) equal to antagonism; because it concerns full identities, it results in collision—like a car crash or "the war against terrorism." In the case of antagonism, argue Laclau and Mouffe, "we are confronted with a different situation: the presence of the 'Other' prevents me from being totally myself. The relation arises not from full totalities, but from the impossibility of their constitution."[40] In other words, the presence of what is not me renders my identity precarious and vulnerable, and the threat that the other represents transforms my *own* sense of self into something questionable. When played out on a social level, antagonism can be

38. For Lacan, the subject is not equivalent to a conscious sense of agency: "Lacan's 'subject' is the subject of the unconscious . . . inescapably divided, castrated, split" as a result of his/her entry into language (Dylan Evans, *An Introductory Dictionary of Lacanian Psychoanalysis* [London: Routledge, 1996], pp. 195–96).

39. " . . . the subject is partially self-determined. However, as this self-determination is not the expression of what the subject *already* is but the result of its lack of being instead, self-determination can only proceed through processes of *identification*" (Ernesto Laclau, *New Reflections on the Revolution of Our Time* (1990), quoted in *Deconstruction and Pragmatism*, ed. Chantal Mouffe [London: Routledge, 1996], p. 55).

40. Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* (London: Verso, 1985), p. 125.

viewed as the limits of society's ability to fully constitute itself. Whatever is at the boundary of the social (and of identity), seeking to *define* it also *destroys* its ambition to constitute a full presence: "As conditions of possibility for the existence of a pluralist democracy, conflicts and antagonisms constitute at the same time the condition of impossibility of its final achievement."[41]

I dwell on this theory in order to suggest that the relations set up by relational aesthetics are not intrinsically democratic, as Bourriaud suggests, since they rest too comfortably within an ideal of subjectivity as whole and of community as immanent togetherness. There is debate and dialogue in a Tiravanija cooking piece, to be sure, but there is no inherent friction since the situation is what Bourriaud calls "microtopian": it produces a community whose members identify with each other, because they have something in common. The only substantial account that I can find of Tiravanija's first solo exhibition at 303 Gallery is by Jerry Saltz in *Art in America*, and it runs as follows:

> At 303 Gallery I regularly sat with or was joined by a stranger, and it was nice. The gallery became a place for sharing, jocularity and frank talk. I had an amazing run of meals with art dealers. Once I ate with Paula Cooper who recounted a long, complicated bit of professional gossip. Another day, Lisa Spellman related in hilarious detail a story of intrigue about a fellow dealer trying, unsuccessfully, to woo one of her artists. About a week later I ate with David Zwirner. I bumped into him on the street, and he said, "nothing's going right today, let's go to Rirkrit's." We did, and he talked about a lack of excitement in the New York art world. Another time I ate with Gavin Brown, the artist and dealer . . . who talked about the collapse of SoHo—only he welcomed it, felt it was about time, that the galleries had been showing too much mediocre art. Later in the show's run, I was joined by an unidentified woman and a curious flirtation filled the air. Another time I chatted with a young artist who lived in Brooklyn who had real insights about the shows he'd just seen.[42]

The informal chattiness of this account clearly indicates what kind of problems face those who wish to know more about such work: the review only tells us that Tiravanija's intervention is considered good because it permits networking among a group of art dealers and like-minded art lovers, and because it evokes the atmosphere of a late-night bar. Everyone has a common interest in art, and the result is art-world gossip, exhibition reviews, and flirtation. Such communication is fine to an extent, but it is not in and of itself emblematic of "democracy." To be fair, I think that Bourriaud recognizes this problem—but he does not raise it in relation to the artists he promotes: "Connecting people, creating interactive,

41. Mouffe, "Introduction," in *Deconstruction and Pragmatism*, p. 11.
42. Saltz, "A Short History of Rirkrit Tiravanija," p. 107.

communicative experience," he says, "What for? If you forget the 'what for?' I'm afraid you're left with simple Nokia art—producing interpersonal relations for their own sake and never addressing their political aspects."[43] I would argue that Tiravanija's art, at least as presented by Bourriaud, falls short of addressing the political aspect of communication—even while certain of his projects do at first glance appear to address it in a dissonant fashion. Let us return to accounts of Tiravanija's Cologne project, *Untitled (Tomorrow Is Another Day)*. I have already quoted curator Udo Kittelman's comment that the installation offered "an impressive experience of togetherness to everybody." He continues: "Groups of people prepared meals and talked, took a bath or occupied the bed. Our fear that the art-living-space might be vandalized did not come true. . . . The art space lost its institutional function and finally turned into a free social space."[44] The *Kölnischer Stadt-Anzeiger* concurred that the work offered "a kind of 'asylum' for everyone."[45] But who is the "everyone" here? This may be a microtopia, but—like utopia—it is still predicated on the exclusion of those who hinder or prevent its realization. (It is tempting to consider what might have happened if Tiravanija's space had been invaded by those seeking genuine "asylum.")[46] His installations reflect Bourriaud's understanding of the relations produced by relational art works as fundamentally harmonious, because they are addressed to a community of viewing subjects with *something in common*.[47] This is why Tiravanija's works are political only in the loosest sense of advocating dialogue over monologue (the one-way communication equated with spectacle by the Situationists). The content of this dialogue is not in itself democratic, since all questions return to the hackneyed nonissue of "is it art?"[48] Despite Tiravanija's rhetoric of open-endedness and viewer emancipation,

43. Bourriaud quoted in "Public Relations: Bennett Simpson Talks with Nicolas Bourriaud," p. 48.
44. Udo Kittelmann, "Preface," in *Rirkrit Tiravanija*, n.p.
45. *Kölnischer Stadt-Anzeiger* quoted in *Rirkrit Tiravanija*, n.p.
46. Saltz muses on this question in a wonderfully blinkered fashion: " . . . theoretically anyone can come in [to an art gallery]. How come they don't? Somehow the art world seems to secrete an invisible enzyme that repels outsiders. What would happen if the next time Tiravanija set up a kitchen in an art gallery, a bunch of homeless people turned up daily for lunch? What would the Walker Art Center do if a certain homeless man scraped up the price of admission to the museum, and chose to sleep on Tiravanija's cot all day, every day? . . . In his own quiet way, Tiravanija forces these questions to the forefront, and jimmies the lock (so efficiently left bolted by much so-called political art) on the door that separates the art world from everything else." The "invisible enzyme" that Saltz refers to should alert him precisely to the limitations of Tiravanija's work and its nonantagonistic approach to issues of public space (Saltz, "A Short History of Rirkrit Tiravanija," p. 106).
47. Jean-Luc Nancy's critique of the Marxist idea of community as communion in *The Inoperative Community* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991) has been crucial to my consideration of a counter-model to relational aesthetics. Since the mid-1990s, Nancy's text has become an increasingly important reference point for writers on contemporary art, as seen in Rosalyn Deutsche, *Evictions*; chapter 4 of Pamela M. Lee's *Object to Be Destroyed: The Work of Gordon Matta-Clark* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2000); George Baker, "Relations and Counter-Relations: An Open Letter to Nicolas Bourriaud," in *Zusammenhänge herstellen/Contextualise*, ed. Yilmaz Dziewior (Cologne: Dumont, 2002); and Jessica Morgan, *Common Wealth* (London: Tate Publishing, 2003).
48. As the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* reported, "No subject is given, yet the artistic context automatically leads all discussions back to the question about the function of art." Christophe Blase,

the structure of his work circumscribes the outcome in advance, and relies on its presence within a gallery to differentiate it from entertainment. Tiravanija's microtopia gives up on the idea of transformation in public culture and reduces its scope to the pleasures of a private group who identify with one another as gallery-goers.[49]

Gillick's position on the question of dialogue and democracy is more ambiguous. At first glance he appears to support Laclau and Mouffe's antagonism thesis:

> While I admire artists who construct "better" visions of how things might be, the middle-ground, negotiated territories I am interested in always carry the possibility of moments where idealism is unclear. There are as many demonstrations of compromise, strategy, and collapse in my work as there are clear recipes for how our environment can be better.[50]

However, when one looks for "clear recipes" in Gillick's work, few if any are to be found. "I'm working in a nebulous cloud of ideas," he says, "which are somewhat partial or parallel rather than didactic."[51] Unwilling to state what ideals are to be compromised, Gillick trades on the credibility of referencing architecture (its engagement with concrete social situations) while remaining abstract on the issue of articulating a specific position. The *Discussion Platforms*, for example, do not point to any particular change, just change in general—a "scenario" in which potential "narratives" may or may not emerge. Gillick's position is slippery, and ultimately he seems to argue for compromise and negotiation *as* recipes for improvement. Logically, this pragmatism is tantamount to an abandonment or failure of ideals; his work is the demonstration of a compromise, rather than an articulation of a problem.[52]

By contrast, Laclau and Mouffe's theory of democracy as antagonism can be seen in the work of two artists conspicuously ignored by Bourriaud in *Relational Aesthetics* and *Postproduction*: the Swiss artist Thomas Hirschhorn and the Spanish

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Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, December 19, 1996, quoted in *Rirkrit Tiravanija*, n.p. He continues: "Whether this discourse is read on a naïve or a context-educated level—the intermediate level would be the obligatory reference to Duchamp—is a matter of chance and depends on the respective participants. Anyway, the fact that communication in general and a discussion on art in particular takes place, gains a positive value as smallest denominator."

49. Essentially, there is no difference between utopia (societal perfection) and the microtopia, which is just personal perfection to the power of ten (or twenty, or however many participants are present). Both are predicated on exclusion of that which hinders or threatens the harmonious order. This is seen throughout Thomas More's description of Utopia. Describing a troublesome Christian zealot who condemned other religions, the traveler Raphael recounts: "When he'd been going on like this for some time, he was arrested and charged, not with blasphemy, but with disturbance of the peace. He was duly convicted and sentenced to exile—for one of the most ancient principles of their constitution is religious toleration" (Thomas More, *Utopia* [London: Penguin Books, 1965], p. 119).

50. Gillick, *The Wood Way*, pp. 81–82.

51. Gillick, *Renovation Filter*, p. 20.

52. We could even say that in Gillick's microtopia, devotion to compromise *is* the ideal: an intriguing but untenable hypothesis, and ultimately less a democratic microtopia than a form of "third way" politics.

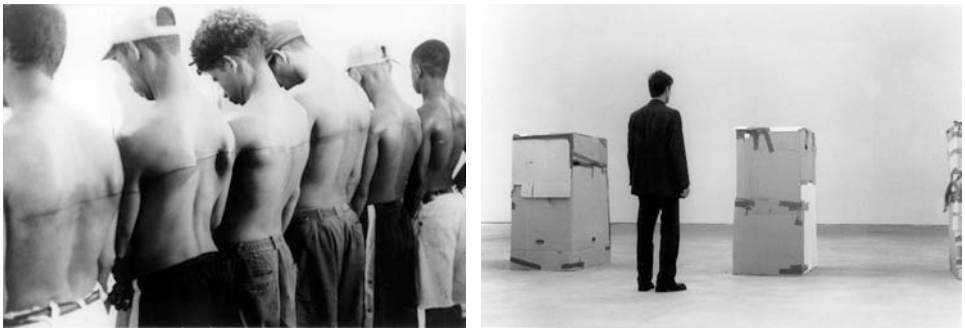
artist Santiago Sierra.[53] These artists set up "relationships" that emphasize the role of dialogue and negotiation in their art, but do so without collapsing these relationships into the work's content. The relations produced by their performances and installations are marked by sensations of unease and discomfort rather than belonging, because the work acknowledges the impossibility of a "microtopia" and instead *sustains* a tension among viewers, participants, and context. An integral part of this tension is the introduction of collaborators from diverse economic backgrounds, which in turn serves to challenge contemporary art's self-perception as a domain that embraces other social and political structures.

Nonidentification and Autonomy

The work of Santiago Sierra (born in 1966), like that of Tiravanija, involves the literal setting-up of relations among people: the artist, the participants in his work, and the audience. But since the late 1990s Sierra's "actions" have been organized around relations that are more complicated—and more controversial—than those produced by the artists associated with relational aesthetics. Sierra has attracted tabloid attention and belligerent criticism for some of his more extreme actions, such as *160 cm Line Tattooed on Four People* (2000), *A Person Paid for 360 Continuous Working Hours* (2000), and *Ten People Paid to Masturbate* (2000). These ephemeral actions are documented in casual black-and-white photographs, a short text, and occasionally video. This mode of documentation appears to be a legacy of 1970s Conceptual and body art—Chris Burden and Marina Abramovic spring to mind—but Sierra's work significantly develops this tradition in its use of other people as performers and in the emphasis on their remuneration. While Tiravanija celebrates the gift, Sierra knows that there's no such thing as a free meal: everything and everyone has a price. His work can be seen as a grim meditation on the social and political conditions that permit disparities in people's "prices" to emerge. Now regularly commissioned to make work in galleries throughout Europe and the Americas, Sierra creates a kind of ethnographic realism, in which the outcome or unfolding of his action forms an indexical trace of the economic and social reality of the place in which he works.[54]

53. However, Hirschhorn was included in the exhibition *GNS* and Sierra in *Hardcore*, both held at the Palais de Tokyo in 2003. See also Bourriaud's discussion of Sierra in "Est-il bon? Est-il méchant?," *Beaux Arts* 228 (May 2003), p. 41.

54. Since Sierra moved to Mexico in 1996, the majority of his actions have taken place in Latin America, and the "realism" of their outcome is usually a savage indictment of globalization—but this is not always the case. In *Elevation of Six Benches* (2001) at the Kunsthalle in Munich, Sierra paid workers to hold up all the leather benches in the museum galleries for set periods of time. The project was a compromise, since the Kunsthalle would not let Sierra tear out a wall of their new Herzog & de Meuron gallery for workers to hold up, but Sierra still considered the outcome to be successful "since it reflected the reality of labor relations in Munich. Munich is a clean and prosperous city, and consequently the only people we could find to perform the task at hand were unemployed actors and bodybuilders who wanted to show off their physical prowess" (Sierra, "A Thousand Words," *Artforum* [October 2002], p. 131).



Santiago Sierra. Left: 250 cm Line Tatooed on Six Paid People. *Espacio Aglutinador, Havana, December 1999. Right:* Workers Who Cannot Be Paid, Remunerated to Remain Inside Cardboard Boxes. *Kunst-Werke Berlin, September 2000. Courtesy Lisson Gallery and the artist.*

Interpreting Sierra's practice in this way runs counter to dominant readings of his work, which present it as a nihilistic reflection on Marx's theory of the exchange value of labor. (Marx argued that the worker's labor time is worth less to the capitalist than its subsequent exchange value in the form of a commodity produced by this labor.) The tasks that Sierra requires of his collaborators—which are invariably useless, physically demanding, and on occasion leave permanent scars—are seen as amplifications of the status quo in order to expose its ready abuse of those who will do even the most humiliating or pointless job in return for money. Because Sierra receives payment for his actions—as an artist—and is the first to admit the contradictions of his situation, his detractors argue that he is stating the pessimistic obvious: capitalism exploits. Moreover, this is a system from which nobody is exempt. Sierra pays others to do work for which he gets paid, and in turn he is exploited by galleries, dealers, and collectors. Sierra himself does little to contradict this view when he opines,

> I can't change anything. There is no possibility that we can change anything with our artistic work. We do our work because we are making art, and because we believe art should be something, something that follows reality. But I don't believe in the possibility of change.[55]

Sierra's apparent complicity with the status quo does raise the question of how his work differs from that of Tiravanija. It is worth bearing in mind that, since the 1970s, older avant-garde rhetorics of opposition and transformation have been frequently replaced by strategies of complicity; what matters is not the complicity, but how we receive it. If Tiravanija's work is experienced in a major key, then Sierra's is most definitely minor. What follows is an attempt to read the latter's

55. Sierra, quoted in *Santiago Sierra: Works 2002–1990* (Birmingham, England: Ikon Gallery, 2002), p. 15.

work through the dual lenses of *Relational Aesthetics* and *Hegemony* in order to tease out these differences further.

It has already been noted that Sierra documents his actions and thereby ensures that we know what he considers their "structure" to be. Take, for example, *The Wall of a Gallery Pulled Out, Inclined Sixty Degrees from the Ground and Sustained by Five People*, Mexico City (2000). Unlike Tiravanija and Gillick, who embrace an idea of open-endedness, Sierra delimits from the outset his choice of invited participants and the context in which the event takes place. "Context" is a key word for Gillick and Tiravanija, yet their work does little to address the problem of what a context actually comprises. (One has the impression that it exists as undifferentiated infinity, like cyberspace.) Laclau and Mouffe argue that for a context to be constituted and identified as such, it must demarcate certain limits; it is from the exclusions engendered by this demarcation that antagonism occurs. It is precisely this act of exclusion that is disavowed in relational art's preference for "open-endedness."[56] Sierra's actions, by contrast, embed themselves into other "institutions" (e.g., immigration, the minimum wage, traffic congestion, illegal street commerce, homelessness) in order to highlight the divisions enforced by these contexts. Crucially, however, Sierra neither presents these divisions as reconciled (in the way Tiravanija elides the museum with the café or apartment), nor as entirely separate spheres: the fact that his works are realized moves them into the terrain of antagonism (rather than the "car crash" model of collision between full identities) and hints that their boundaries are both unstable and open to change.

56. As Laclau argues, it is this "radical undecidability," and the decision that has to be taken within this, that is constitutive of a political society. See Laclau, *Emancipation(s)* (London: Verso, 1996), pp. 52–53.

Sierra. Persons Paid to Have Their Hair Dyed Blond. *Arsenale, Venice Biennale, 2001. Courtesy Lisson Gallery and the artist.*

In a work for the 2001 Venice Biennale, *Persons Paid to Have Their Hair Dyed Blond*, Sierra invited illegal street vendors, most of whom came from southern Italy or were immigrants from Senegal, China, and Bangladesh, to have their hair dyed blond in return for 120,000 lire ($60). The only condition to their participation was that their hair be naturally dark. Sierra's description of the work does not document the impact of his action on the days that followed the mass bleaching, but this aftermath was an integral aspect of the work.[57] During the Venice Biennale, the street vendors—who hover on street corners selling fake designer handbags—are usually the social group most obviously excluded from the glitzy opening; in 2001, however, their newly bleached hair literally highlighted their presence in the city. This was coupled by a gesture inside the Biennale proper, where Sierra gave over his allocated exhibition space in the Arsenale to a handful of the vendors, who used it to sell their fake Fendi handbags on a groundsheet, just as they did on the street. Sierra's gesture prompted a wry analogy between art and commerce, in the style of 1970s institutional critique, but moved substantially beyond this, since vendors and exhibition were mutually estranged by the confrontation. Instead of aggressively hailing passersby with their trade, as they did on the street, the vendors were subdued. This made my own encounter with them disarming in a way that only subsequently revealed to me my own anxieties about feeling "included" in the Biennale. Surely these guys were actors? Had they crept in here for a joke? Foregrounding a moment of mutual nonidentification, Sierra's action disrupted the art audience's sense of identity, which is founded precisely on unspoken racial and class exclusions, as well as veiling blatant commerce. It is important that Sierra's work did not achieve a harmonious reconciliation between the two systems, but sustained the tension between them.

Sierra's return to the Venice Biennale in 2003 comprised a major performance/installation for the Spanish pavilion. *Wall Enclosing a Space* involved sealing off the pavilion's interior with concrete blocks from floor to ceiling. On entering the building, viewers were confronted by a hastily constructed yet impregnable wall that rendered the galleries inaccessible. Visitors carrying a Spanish passport were invited to enter the space via the back of the building, where two immigration officers were inspecting passports. All non-Spanish nationals, however, were denied entry to the pavilion, whose interior contained nothing but gray paint peeling from the walls, left over from the previous year's exhibition. The work was "relational" in Bourriaud's sense, but it problematized any idea of these relations

57. "The procedure was done in a collective manner inside the closed doors of a warehouse situated in the Arsenale, during the inauguration of that year's Venice Biennale. Although the number of people programmed to take part in this operation was originally 200, it was finally down to 133 due to the increasing arrival of immigrants, making it difficult to calculate with precision how many had already entered the hall. It was then decided to shut down the entrance and calculate the number by a rough count. This caused numerous problems at the door, due to the never-ending flow of people that left or entered" (Sierra, quoted in *Santiago Sierra*, p. 46).

Sierra. Wall Enclosing a Space. *Spanish Pavilion, Venice Biennale, 2003. Left photo: Pablo Leon de la Barra. Right photo: Charles LaBelle.*

being fluid and unconstrained by exposing how all our interactions are, like public space, riven with social and legal exclusions.[58]

The work of Thomas Hirschhorn (born in 1957) often addresses similar issues. His practice is conventionally read in terms of its contribution to sculptural tradition—his work is said to reinvent the monument, the pavilion, and the altar by immersing the viewer among found images, videos, and photocopies, bound together in cheap, perishable materials such as cardboard, brown tape, and tinfoil. Beyond occasional references to the tendency of his work to get vandalized or looted when situated outside the gallery, the role of the viewer is rarely addressed in writing on his art.[59] Hirschhorn is well-known for his assertion that he does not make political art, but makes art politically. Significantly, this political commitment does not take the form of literally activating the viewer in a space:

> I do not want to invite or oblige viewers to become interactive with what I do; I do not want to activate the public. I want to give of myself, to engage myself to such a degree that viewers confronted with the work can take part and become involved, but not as actors.[60]

Hirschhorn's work represents an important shift in the way that contemporary art conceives of its viewer, one that is matched by his assertion of art's autonomy. One

58. As Laclau and Mouffe conclude, politics should not found itself on postulating an "essence of the social" but, on the contrary, on affirmation of the contingency and ambiguity of every "essence" and on the constitutive character of social division and antagonism. See Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony*, p. 193.

59. The most substantial example of this approach is Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, "Cargo and Cult: The Displays of Thomas Hirschhorn," *Artforum* (November 2001). The peripheral location of Hirschhorn's sculptures has on occasion meant that their contents have been stolen, most notably in Glasgow, 2000, before the exhibition had even opened.

60. Hirschhorn, interview with Okwui Enwezor, in *Thomas Hirschhorn: Jumbo Spoons and Big Cake* (Chicago: Art Institute of Chicago, 2000), p. 27.

of the presumptions underlying *Relational Aesthetics* is the idea—introduced by the historical avant-garde and reiterated ever since—that art should not be a privileged and independent sphere but instead fused with "life." Today, when art has become all too subsumed into everyday life—as leisure, entertainment, and business—artists such as Hirschhorn are reasserting the autonomy of artistic activity. As a consequence, Hirschhorn does not regard his work to be "open-ended" or to require completion by the viewer, since the politics of his practice derive instead from *how* the work is made:

> To make art politically means to choose materials that do not intimidate, a format that doesn't dominate, a device that does not seduce. To make art politically is not to submit to an ideology or to denounce the system, in opposition to so-called "political art." It is to work with the fullest energy against the principle of "quality."[61]

A rhetoric of democracy pervades Hirschhorn's work, but it is not manifested in the viewer's literal activation; rather, it appears in decisions regarding format, materials, and location, such as his "altars," which emulate ad hoc memorials of flowers and toys at accident sites, and which are located in peripheral locations around a city. In these works—as in the installations *Pole-Self* and *Laundrette*, both 2001—found images, texts, advertisements, and photocopies are juxtaposed to contextualize consumer banality with political and military atrocities.

Many of Hirschhorn's concerns came together in the *Bataille Monument* (2002), made for *Documenta XI*. Located in Nordstadt, a suburb of Kassel several miles away from the main *Documenta* venues, the *Monument* comprised three installations in large makeshift shacks, a bar run by a local family, and a sculpture of a tree, all erected on a lawn surrounded by two housing projects. The shacks were constructed from Hirschhorn's signature materials: cheap timber, foil, plastic sheeting, and brown tape. The first housed a library of books and videos grouped around five Bataillean themes: word, image, art, sex, and sport. Several worn sofas, a television, and video were also provided, and the whole installation was designed to facilitate familiarization with the philosopher, of whom Hirschhorn claims to be a "fan." The two other shacks housed a television studio and an installation of information about Bataille's life and work. To reach the *Bataille Monument*, visitors had to participate in a further aspect of the work: securing a lift from a Turkish cab company which was contracted to ferry *Documenta* visitors to and from the site. Viewers were then stranded at the *Monument* until a return cab became available, during which time they would inevitably make use of the bar.

In locating the *Monument* in the middle of a community whose ethnic and economic status did not mark it as a target audience for *Documenta*, Hirschhorn

61. Ibid., p. 29. Hirschhorn is here referring to the idea of quality espoused by Clement Greenberg, Michael Fried, and other critics as a criterion of aesthetic judgment. I should like to distance my use of "quality" (as in "the *quality* of the relationships in relational aesthetics") from that alluded to by Hirschhorn.

Thomas Hirschhorn. Right and facing page: Bataille Monument, Documenta XI, *2002. Courtesy Barbara Gladstone Gallery, New York.*

contrived a curious rapprochement between the influx of art tourists and the area's residents. Rather than make the local populace subject to what he calls the "zoo effect," Hirschhorn's project made visitors feel like hapless intruders. Even more disruptively, in light of the international art world's intellectual pretensions, Hirschhorn's *Monument* took the local inhabitants seriously as potential Bataille readers. This gesture induced a range of emotive responses among visitors, including accusations that Hirschhorn's gesture was inappropriate and patronizing. This unease revealed the fragile conditioning of the art world's self-constructed identity. The complicated play of identificatory and dis-identificatory mechanisms at work in the content, construction, and location of the *Bataille Monument* were radically and disruptively thought-provoking: the "zoo effect" worked two ways. Rather than offering, as the *Documenta* handbook claims, a reflection on "communal commitment," the *Bataille Monument* served to destabilize (and therefore potentially liberate) any notion of community identity or what it might mean to be a "fan" of art and philosophy.

A work like the *Bataille Monument* depends on its context for impact, but it could theoretically be restaged elsewhere, in comparable circumstances. Significantly, the viewer is no longer required to participate literally (i.e., to eat noodles, or to activate a sculpture), but is asked only to be a thoughtful and reflective visitor:

> I do not want to do an interactive work. I want to do an active work. To me, the most important activity that an art work can provoke is the activity of thinking. Andy Warhol's *Big Electric Chair* (1967) makes me think, but it is a painting on a museum wall. An active work requires that I first give of myself.[62]

62. Thomas Hirschhorn, in *Common Wealth*, ed. Morgan, p. 63.

The independent stance that Hirschhorn asserts in his work—though produced collaboratively, his art is the product of a single artist's vision—implies the readmittance of a degree of autonomy to art. Likewise, the viewer is no longer coerced into fulfilling the artist's interactive requirements, but is presupposed as a subject of independent thought, which is the essential prerequisite for political action: "having reflections and critical thoughts is to get active, posing questions is to come to life."[63] The *Bataille Monument* shows that installation and performance art now find themselves at a significant distance from the historic avant-garde calls to collapse art and life.

Relational Antagonism

My interest in the work of Thomas Hirschhorn and Santiago Sierra derives not only from their tougher, more disruptive approach to "relations" than that proposed by Bourriaud, but also from their remoteness from the socially engaged public art projects that have sprung up since the 1980s under the aegis of "new genre public art." But does the fact that the work of Sierra and Hirschhorn demonstrates better democracy make it better art? For many critics, the answer would be obvious: of course it does! But the fact that this question arises is itself symptomatic of wider trends in contemporary art criticism: today, political, moral, and ethical judgments have come to fill the vacuum of aesthetic judgment in a way that was unthinkable forty years ago. This is partly because postmodernism has attacked the very notion of aesthetic judgment, and partly because contemporary art solicits the viewer's literal interaction in ever more elaborate ways. Yet the "birth of the viewer"

63. Ibid., p. 62.

(and the ecstatic promises of emancipation that accompany it) has not halted appeals to higher criteria, which have simply returned in other guises.

This is not an issue that can be adequately dealt with here. I wish to point out only that if the work Bourriaud considers exemplary of "relational aesthetics" wishes to be considered politically, then we must address this proposition seriously. There is now a long tradition of viewer participation and activated spectatorship in works of art across many media—from experimental German theater of the 1920s to new-wave film and the *nouveau roman* of the 1960s, from Minimalist sculpture to post-Minimalist installation art in the 1970s, from Beuys's social sculpture to 1980s socially engaged performance art. It is no longer enough to say that activating the viewer *tout court* is a democratic act, for every art work—even the most "open-ended"—determines in advance the depth of participation that the viewer may have with it.[64] Hirschhorn would argue that such pretenses to emancipation are no longer necessary: all art—whether immersive or not—can be a critical force that appropriates and reassigns value, distancing our thoughts from the predominant and preexisting consensus. The tasks facing us today are to analyze *how* contemporary art addresses the viewer and to assess the *quality* of the audience relations it produces: the subject position that any work presupposes and the democratic notions it upholds, and how these are manifested in our experience of the work.

It can be argued that the works of Hirschhorn and Sierra, as I have presented them, are no longer tied to the direct activation of the viewer, or to their literal participation in the work. This is not to say that this work signifies a return to the kind of high-modernist autonomy advocated by Clement Greenberg, but rather to a more complicated imbrication of the social and the aesthetic. In this model, the kernel of impossible resolution on which antagonism depends is mirrored in the tension between art and society conceived of as mutually exclusive spheres—a self-reflexive tension that the work of Sierra and Hirschhorn fully acknowledges.[65]

In this light, the motif of obstruction or blockade so frequently found in Sierra's works is less a return to modernist refusal as advocated by Theodor Adorno than an expression of the boundaries of both the social and the aesthetic after a century of attempts to fuse them.[66] In his exhibition at Kunst-Werke in Berlin, viewers were confronted with a series of makeshift cardboard boxes, each of which

64. I am reminded of Walter Benjamin's praise of newspapers because they solicit opinions from their reader (via the letters page) and thereby elevate him/her to the status of a collaborator: "The reader is at all times ready to become a writer," he says, "that is, a describer, but also a prescriber . . . he gains access to authorship" (Benjamin, "The Author as Producer," in Benjamin, *Reflections* [New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., 1978], p. 225). Even so, the newspaper retains an editor, and the letters page is but one among many other authored pages beneath the remit of this editor.

65. "As the social is penetrated by negativity—that is, by antagonism—it does not attain the status of transparency, of full presence, and the objectivity of its identities is permanently subverted. From here onward, the impossible relation between objectivity and negativity has become constitutive of the social" (Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony*, p. 129).

66. The blockade or impasse is a recurrent motif in Sierra's work, such as *68 People Paid to Block the Entrance to Pusan's Museum of Contemporary Art, Korea* (2000) or *465 People Paid to Stand in a Room at the Museo Rufino Tamaya, Mexico City* (1999).

concealed a Chechnyan refugee seeking asylum in Germany.[67] The boxes were an Arte Povera take on Tony Smith's celebrated 6 x 6 foot sculpture *Die* (1962), the work that Michael Fried famously described as exerting the same effect on the viewer as "the silent presence of another person."[68] In Sierra's piece, this silent presence was literal: since it is against the law in Germany for illegal immigrants to be paid for work, the refugees' status could not be announced by the gallery. Their silence was exaggerated and exacerbated by their literal invisibility beneath the cardboard boxes. In such works, Sierra seems to argue that the phenomenological body of Minimalism is politicized precisely through the *quality* of its relationship—or lack of relationship—to other people. Our response to witnessing the participants in Sierra's actions—be they facing the wall, sitting under boxes, or tattooed with a line—is quite different from the "togetherness" of relational aesthetics. The work does not offer an experience of transcendent human empathy that smooths over the awkward situation before us, but a pointed racial and economic nonidentification: "this is not me." The persistence of this friction, its awkwardness and discomfort, alerts us to the relational antagonism of Sierra's work.

The works of Hirschhorn and Sierra stand against Bourriaud's claims for relational aesthetics, the microtopian communities of Tiravanija, and the scenario formalism of Gillick. The feel-good positions adopted by Tiravanija and Gillick are reflected in their ubiquitous presence on the international art scene, and their status as perennial favorites of a few curators who have become known for promoting their preferred selection of artists (and thereby becoming touring stars in their own right). In such a cozy situation, art does not feel the need to defend itself, and it collapses into compensatory (and self-congratulatory) entertainment. The work of Hirschhorn and Sierra is better art not simply for being better politics (although both of these artists now have equally high visibility on the blockbuster art circuit). Their work acknowledges the limitations of what is possible as art ("I am not an animator, teacher or social-worker," says Hirschhorn) and subjects to scrutiny all easy claims for a transitive relationship between art and society. The model of subjectivity that underpins their practice is not the fictitious whole subject of harmonious community, but a divided subject of partial identifications open to constant flux. If relational aesthetics requires a unified subject as a prerequisite for community-as-togetherness, then Hirschhorn and Sierra provide a mode of artistic experience more adequate to the divided and incomplete subject of today. This relational antagonism would be predicated not on social harmony, but on exposing that which is repressed in sustaining the semblance of this harmony. It would thereby provide a more concrete and polemical grounds for rethinking our relationship to the world and to one other.

67. *Workers Who Cannot Be Paid, Remunerated to Remain Inside Cardboard Boxes*, Kunst-Werke, Berlin, (September 2000). Six workers remained inside the boxes for four hours a day for six weeks.
68. Fried, "Art and Objecthood," *Artforum* (Summer 1967), reprinted in *Minimal Art*, ed. Gregory Battcock (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), p. 128.

Pierre Huyghe. Streamside Day Follies. *Dia Art Foundation, New York, 2003. Photo: Pierre Huyghe. All images courtesy Marian Goodman Gallery, Paris and New York, unless otherwise indicated.*

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PERIODISING COLLECTIVISM

Blake Stimson and Gregory Sholette

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Periodising Collectivism

Blake Stimson and Gregory Sholette

Since human nature is the true community of men,
those who produce thereby affirm their nature,
human community, and social being which, rather
than an abstract, general power in opposition to
the isolated individual, is the being of each individual,
his own activity, his own life, his own joy, his own richness.
To say that a man is alienated from himself is to say that
the society of this man is the caricature of his real community.

Karl Marx

There is a spectre haunting capitalism's globalisation, the spectre of a new collectivism. We now experience this spectre daily in two complementary forms, each with greater or lesser force than the other depending on where we are in the world. Both of these forms have deep roots and complex genealogical structures and each returns to us now mostly as a ghost but as a ghost with a hardened, cutting edge running the length of its misshapen and ethereal outline, a ghost whose concrete effects and ungraspable vitality seem evermore to determine our present. This edge is fully within the crisis and the dream that is late capitalism and, for better or worse, it offers the only prospect for moving on. If the conditions prove right, the work of artists among others just might venture from its hiding place in this spectre's ghostly vapour, find its once-heralded but now long-lost position at the cutting edge, and bring new definition to a rapidly changing world.

The first of these new, airy forms of collectivism, the one in the forefront as we write, is the collectivism of public opinion rising and falling on the Arab street or ricocheting across Al Jazeera's or Al-Qaeda's networks or whispering in this or that secret, self-isolated cell gathered together in a cave on the Pakistani or Afghani countryside, or in an apartment in metropolitan Toronto. In this form collectivism imagines itself and conducts itself as a full-blown anti-capitalist force, as an organic community loosely but dynamically organised around beliefs and resentments, around faith and ideology and strategy, around a sense of belonging that realises itself in the name of an

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ideal and against, with vitriol and spleen, the anti-idealism and immorality of the marketplace. In this sense the American televangelist (who is by nature no stranger to capitalism), or the Republican anti-gay-marriage activist share (and, indeed, thrive on) a not-so-secret bond with the Mujahidin leader: each responds to and cultivates a yearning for an absolute and idealised form of collectivity, each makes the need for communality more pressing by reconstructing the glory of an imaginary social form, a holy-of-holies with its own intoxicating, often orgiastic, groupthink and groupfeel. We may well try to stand apart from this with some genteel, nineteenth-century notion of detached critical propriety but none of us can deny its primordial appeal: to experience oneself as the glorious, all-encompassing body of Christ or God or Allah or King or Leviathan or Nation or State or Public is to experience collectivism as redemption, to experience the imagined community as an end to alienation and as a promise of eternal life. Indeed, collective social form is always first and foremost a fetish – a part that substitutes for the whole, a clerical or lordly or bureaucratic or symbolic epiphenomenon that stands in for the phenomenal reality of lived experience – and that is the way it should be: witness, for example, even such a latter-day scion of that old critical propriety as Louis Althusser, who was certainly right when he proclaimed with uncommon longing and without any of the technocrat's customary qualification or 'contempt that a communist is never alone.'

Second, if a bit recessed at the moment, there is the other face of the new collectivism, that of the once-vaunted New Economy: the collectivism of eBay, say, or Amazon, or the old Napster and its more recent offspring, or of chatrooms and flashmobs and blogospheres and listservs. This is collectivism in its minimally regulated, hyper-capitalist, DIY form, collectivism that struggles to replace the old glorious communitarian ideals of Christianity, Islam, Nationalism, and Communism with extra-idealist 'new media' and new technologies, collectivism that struggles to substitute the programmer for the ideologist. It is the collectivism of the computer geek rather than that of the holy warrior and its allegiances range from public to private, from techno-anarchist hacktivism to hippie-capitalist, pseudo-countercultural imperialism. Either way, as a private or public interest, as the this or that transnational conglomerate or as this or that netopia, this other new collectivism speaks its bond in a distinct social form: rather than addressing its constituency in modernist terms as 'anonymous citizens' (so notes one commentator), or even as a sectarian faithful, it finds its bond instead as a community of 'co-conspirators who are in on the joke'.[1] It is this language of collectivity, this imagined community integrated by the Internet that animates the entrepreneurial, neoliberal spirit and fuels the demand for capitalism's labour and managerial classes alike to – in that most mystical and most meaningful of all capitalist slogans – 'think outside the box' in order to increase their productivity and leverage their status in the name of an emergent 'creative class'. Equally, it propels virus writers squirreled away behind computer terminals around the globe to develop new worms, Trojans, and the like in order to undermine or take cover from that same accelerated productivity, to negate the instrumental drive in the economy, to give pause to the shepherding of myriad oppositional forces into

1. Geoffrey Nunberg, 'Blogging in the Global Lunchroom', commentary broadcast on 'Fresh Air', 20 April 2004 and published online at: http://www-csli.stanford.edu/~nunberg/lunchroom.html

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that creative class (a virus, feigns one such e-terrorist truthfully enough, is 'a humble little creature with only the intention to avoid extinction and survive').[2] In this sense, the new e-economy that we are concerned with here is not all that different from the old industrial one, our workers and managers no different from those brought forth by Frederick Winslow Taylor or Henry Ford a century ago, and our virus writers not so different from the famed Luddites still another century before them. The newness of the new e-collectivism, like the newness of the new Arab street, is only a rebirth of intensity, the welling up of spirits from the past, a recall to the opportunities and battlelines of old.

That this all seems the same as it ever was does not mean it has not changed, however. Indeed, it is our working premise that the desire to speak as a collective voice that has long fuelled the social imagination of modernism – in the desire to speak as a nation, for example, or as a transnational class, or as the voice of some unfulfilled universal human potential – underwent a distinct and significant transformation after the Second World War. Our argument is that collectivism can be and should be periodised, that we can gain from giving collectivism itself greater definition as a history, and that we occupy a distinct position and face a distinct opportunity now as a new period in that history emerges. Of primary interest is the collectivism particular to the Cold War – hence the phrase 'Collectivism After Modernism' given below and as the title of our forthcoming volume (for which this is a précis) – but only in so far as it exists as a prehistory, as a pivot point, for this moment now, that is, for a collectivism following 'collectivism after modernism'.[3] There is another turning point already indicated as well – that is, the one forced by the events of 9/11 – and we will need to give it its due in the history we are trying to sketch. Likewise our brief and broad overview will need to pay appropriate respect not only to the big players, the Al-Qaedas and the eBays, but also to what Michael Denning calls the 'intellectual shanty towns' of globalisation – the autonomous zones temporarily created in Seattle, Genoa, and Quebec, for example, or the provisional and often fleeting communal forms and community work developed by artists' groups such as Wochenklausur in Austria, Le Groupe Amos in the Congo, or Temporary Services in Chicago – in order to recognise that, whether by deliberation or by unconscious reflex, any historically emergent force is always a hybrid, always a happenstance reorganisation and reworking of available social forms and forces, always a fortuitous unleashing of sociality from its instrumentalisation as a commodity form.[4] By reimagining existing technologies and developing new ones that might breathe new life into the darkened archives of failed rebellions and feeble art organisations, new forms of collectivisation might emerge out of those incomplete ruptures and alternative histories, even if only as one more displacement or pause or negation as partial and scrawny as the first, as little returns of the vast repressed past, as humble little creatures with the sole intention of avoiding extinction and to survive within the horizon established by the dominant historical forces and tendencies of our day. It is here, in this space of thought outside the box, where the action is or where it ought to be and it is here where the truth and beauty and consequence of our collectivist fetish is to be found.

2. Quoted in Clive Thompson, 'The Virus Underground', *New York Times Magazine*, 8 February 2004, p 33.

3. *Collectivism After Modernism*, to be published by University of Minnesota Press with contributions by Irina Aristarkhova, Jesse Drew, Okwui Enwezor, Ruben Gallo, Chris Gilbert, Brian Holmes, Alan Moore, Jelena Stojanovic, Reiko Tomii, and Rachel Weiss.

4. For one superb if all too predictable illustration of such instrumentalisation see Will Leitch, 'Group Thinker', *New York Magazine*, 21 June 2004.

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MODERNIST COLLECTIVISM

Modernist collectivism, as we will have it here, was the first real effort to develop a sustained alternative to commodified social life by cultural means and it was full of the spirited and sometimes foolish ambition of youth. Modernist artists understood the collectivisation of their professional roles, functions and identities to be an expression of and, at best, a realisation of the promise and/or pitfalls of social, political, and technological progress. In this capacity they acted as either agents or symptoms of supra-individual forces – sometimes on behalf of political parties, for example, or the working classes, but more generally in the name of more wide-ranging forces of social, political, and technological modernisation. Their task as artists was either to envision a radically new society, often in terms that resembled a monumental social design problem, or to represent the psychical consequence of the loss of a premodern collective human bond caused by the emergence of mass culture and new technologies. The mandate for such artistic collectivism, in sum, was to give expression to modernity. The modernist adoption of the form of collective voice had different local ambitions and self-conceptions, of course – to speak in the name of a nation, or a class, or humanity was driven by very different intentions and had very different consequences – but, in one way or another, it maintained a consistent aim to give form to some variety of group being. Malevich's insistence that collectivism was the path to 'world-man' and that the self had to be annihilated was consistent with Mondrian's aim to struggle 'against everything individual in man'. This was in turn consistent with Magritte's *L'invention collective* that was likewise consistent with the Italian Modigliani introducing himself in Paris with the bold greeting 'I am Modigliani, Jew'. ('His ethnically diverse subjects lose their individual personalities in a collective portrait of the socially marginal', writes one art historian about his work, for example, 'Modigliani's faces represent the hybridisation of the European tribe.')[5]

Renée Magritte, *L'invention collective*, 1934, © 2004 C Herscovici/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York

5. Emily Braun, 'The Faces of Modigliani: Identity Politics Under Fascism', in *Modigliani: Beyond the Myth*, ed Mason Klein, The Jewish Museum, New York, 2004, p 39.

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The formula modernism-equals-collectivism was simple, really, even though it varied from this style or technique to that, from this piece of art-historical turf to another. The aim was to blur the boundaries between subjects and subjectivities, to diminish the sense of who did what and who was what, in order to call forth, as the honoured subject of history, some synergy greater than the sum of its constituent parts. It was this synergy that was the agent of modernisation generally. As Marx puts it: 'When the worker cooperates in a planned way with others, he strips off the fetters of his individuality and develops the capabilities of his species.'[6] 'A futurist picture lives *a collectivist life*', is how one modernist interpreted the Marxian thesis, shifting the locus of self-realisation from the worker to a painting, adding: 'This is the exact same principle on which all creativity of the proletariat is constructed. Try to distinguish an individual face in a proletarian procession.'[7] Indeed, we might even state our argument in stronger terms than we have heretofore: modernism in the sense we are using it here, that is in the sense of Malevich, Mondrian, Magritte, Modigliani, and all the others, was never anything other than this or that form of trickle-down communism; its aim was always to generate the glorious – ecstatic, even – indistinguishability of the proletarian procession. It was to generate that sense given by Althusser when he had his guard down, that 'a communist is never alone'. This does not mean, of course, that the rarefied practice of petty bourgeois artists was the same as that done in factories or Soviets, in collectivised farms, or even in proletarian processions. Rather, it is that they shared an aim, even if it was rarely or never achieved, to 'affirm their nature, human community, and social being', as Marx called it, 'which, rather than an abstract, general power in opposition to the isolated individual, is the being of each individual, his own activity, his own life, his own joy, his own richness'. This was modernism's fetish, that collectivism would bring benefits to not only 'strikes, sabotage, social creativity, food consumption, apartments', but also to 'the intimate life of the proletariat, right down to its aesthetic, mental and sexual needs', that is, that it would liberate and give form to an innate human potential for life, joy, and richness.[8] That it was mostly only able to affirm that nature by picturing it, by imagining its structure and form, by assuming that the task at hand was nothing more than to somehow figure it out, was simply the limit of its own historical moment: its intentions were noble even if its means were limited.

Those good intentions have lingered in one form or another through the postwar period to the present, just as they have been recast darkly by cold war ideologues and used by neoconservatives and neoliberals alike to bolster a different fetish: that of individual sovereignty through which all manner of social privilege is venerated and collective aspiration is redeployed as a dehumanised abstraction, as a machine of exploitation and oppression. The ultimate expression of this recasting of the collective form is the bestowing of legal rights previously reserved for individual citizens to powerful, multinational corporations. Maintenance of this redistribution comes at a price: continuous, small acts of repression as well as the occasional spectacle of barbarity are required and typically carried out under the banner of personal freedom. As Augusto Pinochet once asserted, sometimes democracy must be bathed in blood, thus

6. Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, vol 1, trans Ben Fowkes, Penguin, New York, 1992, p 447.

7. Natan Altman, '"Futurism" and Proletarian Art', trans, in *Bolshevik Visions: First Phase of the Cultural Revolution in Soviet Russia*, ed William G Rosenberg, Ardis, Ann Arbor, 1984, pp 400–1.

8. Quoted by Mark R Beissinger, in *Scientific Management, Socialist Discipline and Soviet Power*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA, 1988, pp 33–8.

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putting into words the peculiar logic of cold-war cultural politics and its relentless march towards global hegemony.

COLLECTIVISM AFTER MODERNISM, OR, THE CULTURAL TURN

The collectivist dream darkened immediately following the Second World War. In the US media and its Western European counterparts collectivism was portrayed as a colourless pastiche of state-run unions, collective farms, rows of indistinguishable housing projects, and legions of look-alike Young Pioneers all busily working to build socialism in the USSR and its client states. Underlying these grey on grey, beehive-like representations was the barely hidden claim that collectivism represented a loss of individual will: the very thing Madison Avenue was quickly learning to regulate, homogenise, and commodify. At the same time, under pressure from the conservative, anti-Communist, and pro-business Truman administration, the once-powerful organised union movement began its downward plunge. Despite an impressive strike wave in 1945–46, American unions were put on notice to purge left-wing radicals from their ranks and most did. Collective and militant modes of working-class dissent, including walkouts and mass strikes, were not the only targets of anti-union legislation. Communists, Trotskyites, anarchists, and fellow travellers were routinely denounced while the few progressive cultural organisations held over from during or before the war such as The Artists League of America and Artists Equity also fell victim either directly or through innuendo to the anti-communist campaigns.

Ironically, it was the direct repression of working-class resistance as well as attacks against international collectivist politics that gave birth to an ingenious and reified mode of capitalist collectivism. Home

Zero Dimension in performance of 'Ritual' at *Anti-Expo Black Festival*, Ikebukuro Art Theater, Tokyo, 1969, photo: Kitade ('Tonbo') Yukio, courtesy: Kuroda Raiji, Reiko Tomii

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ownership, stock options, retirement plans, and other company benefits helped stave off lingering worker unrest even as the various disciplines of worker production were being radically deconstructed and hierarchically reorganised. In effect, traditional divisions of labour were intensified to such a degree that a qualitatively new form of worker control emerged. As Harry Braverman once put it, it was a process in which worker sovereignty is increasingly compartmentalised, thereby delimiting the potential of the collective form:

> The novelty of this development in this past century lies not in the separate existence of hand and brain, conception and execution, but the rigour with which they are divided from one another, and then increasingly subdivided, so that conception is concentrated, in so far as possible, in ever more limited groups within management.[9]

This in turn provided the groundwork for a new and supple type of worker supervision by a rising managerial class as well as the internalisation of systems of control by the workers themselves. In Sartre's terms a new, 'serialised' collectivity emerges exemplified by random groupings, urban queues, and perhaps most vividly by the legions of 'company men'. Decked out in striped suit and tie, stripped of any overt class-consciousness and organised into the patriarchal benevolence of the corporate body they appear to gladly exchange individual control over skilled production for a modest share of the capitalist's wealth and a volume on the latest motivational management theory tossed in for the bargain.

If, especially in the US, collectivism – as a recognisable and self-conscious identity – was forcibly banished from the world of actual production and organised political activity, then not surprisingly it returned in mutated and often contradictory form within the cultural realm. This re-emergence was especially striking in postwar popular cinema where collectivism typically took on a devious, even monstrous visage with all the repulsive pleasure that only suppressed and forbidden activities can summon. From Hitchcock's secret societies whose murderous conspiracies percolated just beneath the surface of normal life to the cold, vegetable consciousness of the alien invaders in various cold war science-fiction classics, collectivism was depicted as aberrant contagion with a mixture of fascination and dread. Despite an average income five times that of other nations and the largest standing military in history, middle America, white America, expressed a relentless fear about alleged communist infiltrators all the while harbouring deeper anxieties about the socioeconomic encroachment of other races and peoples. Such post-war trepidations also reflected what was an already shifting collective identity as the stirring nationalism that peaked during the war, and which helped give birth to the Popular Front, was rapidly being replaced by a new dynamic collectivism, that of mass consumer culture. In this regard, both the promises and fears that collectivism provoked in the early part of the twentieth century were crystallised into distinctly cultural forms during the massive reorganisation of political, geographic, and economic boundaries that followed the Yalta Conference. Right on up until the collapse of the Soviet Union and its client states in the late 1980s it was the politics of culture – from bigger

9. Harry Braverman, *Labor and Monopoly Capital: The Degradation of Work in the Twentieth Century*, Monthly Review Press, New York and London, 1974, p 125.

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cars, better gadgets and appliances to freer intellectuals and experimental music – that remained at the forefront of social transformation during the Cold War. Collectivism after modernism, as Michael Denning argues for the period of the cultural turn more broadly, was marked by a shared experience:

> … suddenly … everyone discovered that culture had been mass produced like Ford's cars: the masses had a culture and culture had a mass. Culture was everywhere, no longer the property of the cultured or cultivated.[10]

Between 1945 and 1989, culture took on a definite political heft in the undeclared war between capitalism and socialism. And reciprocally, politics took on a cultural cast of its own. From the struggle for civil rights graphically captured in *Life* magazine, to the surrealist-inspired slogans of May 1968, to the emergence of the New Left itself, entwined as it was with an emerging, youthful counter-culture, the range of transformations and contradictions making up the presence of the cultural turn was reshaping the everyday lives and struggles of the subaltern classes: 'As a result, the cultural turn raised the specter of a cultural politics, a cultural radicalism, a cultural revolution.' It was a spectre, Denning adds, that haunts the period of the Cold War.[11] Still, something new was already beginning to stir near the end of this period even as the bitter, structurally unemployed offspring of a fast failing Keynesianism screamed 'anarchy' in the UK and a musical pulse from Jamaica inspired the youth of the southern hemisphere.

And what exactly is the power of a spectre, a phantom? How does it interact, if it can do so at all, with the broader social and economic landscape including the struggle for social justice and the changing nature of capitalist accumulation? As we have contended, it is the seldom-studied desire to speak in a collective voice, a desire that has long fuelled the social imagination of artists, that not only offers a unique breach into the postwar cultural turn, but continues to pry open the social narratives of today.

Like modernist collectivism, collectivism after modernism was well intentioned and thoroughly of its own historical moment. It marked a shift within the practices of visual artists from a focus on art as a given institutional and linguistic structure, to an active intervention in the world of mass culture. At the same time it recognised that the modernist's collective vision had failed to materialise. Therefore if the earlier ambition was, as Mondrian once put it, to struggle 'against everything individual in man', then the aspiration of collectivism after World War Two rarely claimed to find its unity as the singularly correct avant-garde representative of social progress but instead structured itself around decentred and fluctuating identities. Rather than fighting against the inevitably heterogeneous character of all group formations, collectivism after modernism embraced it.

Yet if collective social form during the Cold War became political this was still a form of cultural politics or cultural radicalism. That is, its medium and its concerns were cultural; its fetish was the experience of collective political autonomy in and through culture, art, communication. It assumed that the ideal of collectivism was to realise itself not in the collective model or plan but in the to and fro of cultural

10. Michael Denning, *Culture in the Age of Three Worlds*, Verso, London and New York, 2004, p 1.

11. Ibid, pp 5–6.

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exchange. From the Situationists to Group Material to the Yes Men, postwar cultural politics was most clearly realised within informally networked communities of artists, technologically savvy art geeks, and independent political activists who embraced the plasticity of postwar political identities while turning directly towards the spectacle of mass commodification, tentatively at first and then with increasing enthusiasm, in order to make use of its well-established network of signification, amplification, and distribution. But most of all it is precisely because collectivism concentrates – inevitably, uniquely – the broader social and economic conditions of production, which are themselves always collective despite appearance, that it is capable of returning again and again to haunt both past and present.

COLLECTIVISM NOW

Evidence that recent and profound mutation in the neoliberal agenda has occurred in the period since 9/11 is everywhere abundant. Likewise, collectivism is undergoing a radical transformation of its own. As we write this, Steven Kurtz, a founding member of the Critical Art Ensemble (CAE), is facing dubious criminal charges connected to the group's public critique of the biotechnology industry that were levelled by a federal grand jury empanelled to reveal the artist's involvement in bioterrorism.[12] Underlying the state's investigation, however, is the CAE's anarchist-inspired writings on tactical media and the creation of radical, collective cells for carrying out, 'molecular interventions and semiotic shocks that contribute to the negation of the rising intensity of authoritarian culture'.[13]

All at once it seems that an era has transpired since the risk-taking, experimental approach embodied by contemporary art was being held up as the sexy doppelganger of the new economy. Ounce for ounce, art's cultural capital also paid dividends of another type. According to John Murphy, a former vice-president of Philip Morris Inc, art harbours an essential ingredient that 'has its counterpart in the business world. That element is innovation – without which it would be impossible for progress to be made in any segment in society.'[14]

But what appears to have set Kurtz and the CAE apart – at least for the moment – from other, similar artistic endeavours is most apparent by a question FBI officers posed to one of Kurtz's academic colleagues: why is the CAE 'listed as a collective rather than by its individual members?'.[15] No longer mere symptom but now fully suspect, the innovative groupthink common to both unbridled corporate entrepreneurialism and a certain electronic vanguard sensibility will henceforth be required to take a loyalty test or face the consequences. There is only room for one collective enterprise now and that is state-sanctioned marketplace fetishism as imagined community. And with it comes the ethereal image of commingled youthful blood, always purposely kept off-screen yet always fully present. It is as ghostly a form of collectivism as that of Vicksburg, Normandy, Iwo Jima, and countless other mnemonic points of reference cynically mobilised by a new cult of communal sacrifice and blindly administered by a swarm of embedded media, grey-haired talking heads, and evangelical party leaders.

12. See *The New Standard*, 9 July 2004: http://newstandardnews.net/content/?action=show_item&itemid=646

13. http://www.critical-art.net/

14. Chin-tao Wu, *Privatising Culture: Corporate Art Intervention Since the 1980s*, Verso, London and New York, 2002, p 125.

15. Reported in *The Washington Post*, 1 June 2004.

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An audience member at a Critical Art Ensemble performance, a promotional event for the fictitious company GenTerra, helps spread transgenic E coli on petri dish, 2003

In other words, what was only very recently a primarily *cultural* battlefield waged over modes of representation, manifestations of identity, and even choices of lifestyle has abruptly shifted into increasingly direct confrontation that, as Brian Holmes argues, is constituted by 'decentralised collective action that propagates itself via every means: word-of-mouth and rumour, communication between political groups, meetings of social movements, and broadcasts over specialised and mass media – above all the internet'.[16] Cultural politics may have ended, but in a world all but totally subjugated by the commodity form and the spectacle it generates the only remaining theatre of action is direct engagement with the forces of production. This re-politicisation of the economy brings with it the ghosts of collectivism past. In this respect, we cannot help but recall the words of El Lissitzky: 'The private property aspect of creativity must be destroyed all are creators and there is no reason of any sort for this division into artists and nonartists.'[17]

Nevertheless, in so far as collectivism after modernism remains rooted in difference rather than its attempted neutralisation, it is constituted within what Antonio Negri has described as a 'multitude' consisting of creative workers, community and environmental activists, radical labour, and NGO administrators but also urban garden builders, house workers, and mothers. From puppet makers busted by the Philadelphia police to radical hip hop artists on Chicago's South Side, from rural peasants facing down agri-business giants like Monsanto or the PRI in Chiapas, to techno-geeks who dream of turning the very tools of global capital into the means of its destruction, the new collectivism at once resembles the tentative unity of the United Front in the 1930s while simultaneously counterpoising the universal consumer to the romance of world man. When the Carnival Against Capital occupies urban space, when the group Yomango seizes merchandise simply 'because you can't buy happiness' or when the Critical Art Ensemble creates home testing

16. Email correspondence with the authors, 10 August 2002.

17. El Lissitzky, 'Suprematism in World Reconstruction' (1920), in El Lissitzky, *Life, Letters, Texts*, Thames & Hudson, London, 1967, p 333.

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kits for identifying transgenic foods purchased at the local grocery store they move within and are literally constituted by the same, nearly global force of capital they aim to disrupt.

This, then, is our fetish now: that the dream of collectivism realise itself as neither the strategic vision of some future ideal, of a revised modernism, nor as the mobile, culture-jamming, more-mediated-than-thou counter-hegemony of collectivism after modernism, but instead as Marx's self-realisation of human nature constituted by taking charge of social being here and now. This means neither picturing social form, nor doing battle in the realm of representation but instead engaging with social life as production, engaging with social life itself as the medium of expression. This new collectivism carries with it the spectral power of collectivisms past just as it is realised fully within the hegemonic power of global capitalism. Its creativity stands in relationship to the modernist image and the postmodernist counter-image much in the same way that the multitude of Sunday painters and other amateurs does to the handful of art stars: as a type of dark matter encircling the reified surfaces of the spectacle of everyday life. Vastly more extensive and difficult to pinpoint, this new collectivist fetish inhabits the everywhere and nowhere of social life. In so doing it gives its own interpretation to the old avant-garde banner – 'art into life!' – that it proudly carries forward from its predecessors: that the ancient dream of the glorious, all-encompassing body of the collective – of Christ or God or Allah or King or Leviathan or Nation or State or Public – the dream of redemption, of experiencing the imagined community as an end to alienation and as a promise of eternal life, realise itself not as an image or as flight from images but instead as a form of social building that brings itself into being wherever and whenever it can.

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THE TRANSVERSAL AND THE INVISIBLE: HOW DO YOU REALLY MAKE A WORK OF ART THAT IS NOT A WORK OF ART?

Susan Kelly

2005. *republicart*. http://www.republicart.net/disc/mundial/kelly01_en.htm

Susan Kelly

The Transversal and the Invisible:
How do you really make a work of art that is not a work of art?

[01_2005]

The title of this paper points to some discussions that seem to have pre-occupied the beginnings at least of the republicart project – the notion of transversality and how the relationships between political and artistic activities have been re-organised in Europe over the last 5-10 years. I also invoke in the title however, Marcel Duchamp's question, a question often repeated by Sarat Maharaj: that is: 'how do you make a work of art, that's not a work of art?' In putting these issues together I am attempting to flag an anxiety that stays with me despite the work carried out not only in the context of republicart, but also several years now of very visible politically and socially engaged art practices. That is, an anxiety about how despite the purported de-territorialising actions of transversal practices, what we have ended up with, or is now 'visible' is more often than not, an ever-expanded category of (relational, socially engaged) art. In fact, one could say, that it has become nigh impossible to make a work of art that is not a work of art.

So the question I am trying to raise in a sense is, how does this issue of visibility relate to the production of new so-called transversal or constituent practices that cross the field and institutions of art? To what degree do regimes of legibility and the forms into which practices are constituted in order to render themselves recognisable as this or that, limit or foreclose what is possible for such new practices? And finally, what are the strategies and dynamics involved in working across situations, institutions and discourses without becoming identified with them, or subsumed to them? (And immediately here, I am generalising the term visibility to also mean recognisability and legibility.)

To continue then with a by now much quoted thesis on contemporary art by Alain Badiou: Badiou writes: 'It is better to do nothing than to contribute to the invention of formal ways of rendering visible that which Empire already recognises as existent.'[1] Here Badiou negatively connotes a condition or state of visibility, within a regime of Empire. The invention of already known or recognisable forms is deemed pointless. In the context of this paper I would like to connect this statement to Maharaj after Duchamp's question (how do you make a work of art that's not a work of art?) by supposing 'the work of art' to be the recognisable, visible form laid bare to management and containment by Empire. In other words I am suggesting that the grand inclusion or identification of all kinds of transversal practices, practices of self-organisation, practices in which it is never clear where the art ends and the politics begins, into expanded categories of art ('relational', socially engaged etc) needs to be met with suspicion The suggestion is therefore - that for transversal practices to retain a critical relation to 'Empire', it is important that they remain what Sarat Maharaj has called 'doggedly eye-proof'.[2] I would argue that designations of certain practices as artworks, or restrictions of particular activities and forms to the 'art field' can limit and even foreclose their potential.

Now what are these practices and what is meant by transversality in this context? One might summarise much of what has been at work in art aswell as political practices over the last 10 years (at least) is a simultaneous questioning of the representational structures of the political party operating within the corporate ethos of the nation state, and the genres of traditional community-based and public art which

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[1] Alain Badiou, '*Fifteen Theses on Contemporary Art*', unpublished but available online at several sources including: http://www.16beavergroup.org/journalisms/archives/000633.php [accessed September 2004]

[2] Sarat Maharaj, 'Xeno-epistemics: Makeshift Kit for Sounding Visual Art as Knowledge Production and the Retinal Regimes" in *Documenta XI: The Catalogue*, Okwui Enwezor et al (eds.), London: Hatje Cantz, 2002 p.83
This quest is related to Sarat Maharaj's repeated question, after Duchamp, of how to make a work of art that is not a work of art?

correspond with these structures of political representation. This questioning of the structures underpinning the political is borne out in the significance to contemporary social movements of Zapatismo and 'new anarchist' experimentation with direct democracy through different forms of organisation. The often-collaborative artistic and political practices to which I refer also refuse to speak for minor constituencies, instead developing modalities that support other kinds of collective praxis. Gerald Raunig has argued that the renewed interest in public, participatory, community and interventionist art in the 1990s in Europe has taken on a newly politicised character this very connection 'with heterogeneous activities against economic globalisation'. This work, often collaborative and concerned with issues of public and social space, the freedom of movement and of knowledge, takes on multiple forms and often works across many different sites. Common to new cultural and activist practices is a focus on experimentation rather than representation, a focus on means: on activity that brings into proximity the why and the *how* of coming together. Practices such as those initiated by *Routes*, Belfast, *No One is Illegal* and Florian Schneider, *16Beaver*, *Ultra-Red*, involve producing situations, sets of tools and procedures that can be moved in and out of by various constituencies. Such practices might be said to use artistic modalities, as opposed to representations or even expressions, creatively producing new organisational forms, constellations and situations as they move through physical and social spaces.

Now, such practices might also be characterised as transversal, or rather to produce transversals? (the grammar always gets very difficult when dealing with the transversal). The term transversal is often associated with Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari *A Thousand Plateaus*. However, it was first developed by Guattari at La Borde clinic in France as a tool for the re-organisation of institutional practices of psychiatry, that were conventionally based on processes of transference between the analyst and the analysand. Guattari sought to displace the transferential processes that produce what he called institutional objects and introduce open collective practices that worked *across* the confines of the institution itself. Broadly speaking, Guattari used the term transversality as a conceptual tool to open hitherto closed logics and hierarchies and to experiment with relations of interdependency in order to produce new assemblages and alliances. In his activist work, Guattari used transversality as a critique and a rupture with inherited forms of political organisation such as 'the party'. In his later work and in his collaborations with A/Traverso and Radio Alice however, Guattari focused less on the psychoanalytic 'scaffolding' of the term and more on how modes of transversality might produce different forms of (collective) subjectivity that break down oppositions between the individual and the group.[3]

A movement or mode of transversality explicitly sets out to de-territorialise the disciplines, fields and institutions it works across. Recently, Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, as well as critics such as Gerald Raunig have used the term to describe new terrains of open co-operation between different activist, artistic, social and political practices. For Raunig in particular, these modes of co-operation are not forms of 'solidarity' between actors or areas of 'inter-disciplinarity' between fields, but rather signal a non-representational and additive form of alliance. The co-ordinating conjunction 'and' is not an inclusion mechanism, a random stringing together, or a series of contextual filiations. It is rather a modality of the between that produces temporary alliances between practices and 'fields': forms of alliance that are appropriate to their collective actions. Crucially, they cannot leave intact the fields that they have worked across. The transversal is an organisational form that does not separate the how and the why of collective activities. Guattari intended the work of transversality to rupture inherited forms of political organisation that create institutional objects or what he called 'deathly organisational reproduction'. And so, transversality cannot be seen as 'there' as a given. It is not a form into which one steps, but is rather continuously constituted through events, acts of alliance and temporary organisation. Since the transversal is in a permanent condition of taking place and cannot be defined as a positive thing or entity, but rather a production that retains organisational structures in a state of becoming, it is also

[3] See in particular Félix Guattari 'Transversality' in *Molecular Revolution: Psychiatry and Politics*, (trans. Rosemary Sheed), Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1984, Félix Guattari *Chaosmosis*, (trans. Paul Baines and Julian Pefanis), Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995. For a good overview of the term transversality in Guattari's work, see Gary Genosko, *Félix Guattari: An Aberrant Introduction*, London: Continuum, 2004.

crucially linked to production – the production of subjectivity and what Guattari calls self-engendering practices that seek to create their own signifiers and systems of value.

As such, transversal practices are often not recognisable as traditional activist campaigns or 'art practices' and are disinterested in debates that impose what Sarat Maharaj has called 'nominal closure' on their activities. They are also often involved in intervening not only in the structures of artistic representation but also the institutional structures that produce and reproduce objects and encounters.

Now, much of what goes on within the practices named above involves bringing different people together, creating sometimes temporary, sometimes not, social spaces for interaction. For example, the Los Angeles-based group Ultra-Red (which consists of a fluid group of those who would otherwise be identified as residents, community organisers, activists, artists and musicians) based in the Pico Aliso district of Los Angeles explicitly describe their multiple activities through a practice of organising. Their activities began and to a certain extent continue to centre on demands for housing and labour rights in this area of Los Angeles. By employing different strategies of collaboratively produced audio works, campaigning, organising social events as well as actions in collaboration with other residents and workers in the neighbourhood, Ultra-Red, in the words of one member, work on a collectively produced space.[4] Such a mode of practice and organisation is not based on a mutual identification or a single set of aims, yet the desire and the pragmatic need to work and practice together is shared. The 'group's' structures guard against overt hierarchies, and the ways in which it locates its various practices for the most part ensures that it traverses different fields, institutions and recognisable forms of practice, throwing each into relief as it they do so.

Such a practice and many of the terms used above however, might also sound familiar to another discourse: that of relational aesthetics. For critic Nicholas Bourriaud, such social spaces of interaction came to constitute actual artworks in the 1990s. Bourriaud began his study of by comparing the specific sociability produced in the places of art (the ability to comment on and discuss work 'live' in its presence) to what he deems to be the individual, private spaces of consumption produced by theatre, cinema and literature. Art for Bourriaud moves from a form that produces this special sociability to a form explicitly and exclusively focussed on producing such forms of conviviality. Bourriaud describes relational art as 'art that takes as its theoretical horizon the realm of human interactions and its social context rather than the assertion of an independent and private symbolic space'. This concept seemingly extends and modifies critiques of the autonomous work of art present in the discourses of art history since the 1960s. However, in presenting relational art's specific concern for social bonds and human relationships through its use of interactive, user-friendly concepts, Bourriaud tends to present these artworks as cures for social alienation or as an artistic stitching that will re-connect what he calls the communicational divide. He opposes imposed 'communication zones' (and various dystopian images of automatic public toilets, cash machines, and the automated telephone wake up call) to the free areas and contrasting rhythms of the art exhibition. This allows him to subsequently claim that 'contemporary art is definitely developing a political project when it endeavours to move into the relational realm by turning it into an issue'.5

Bourriaud however relies on concepts of alienation and reification based on modernist notions of production and rational communication and counter-poses to them an older autonomous and romantic concept of art. In addition, as many critics have pointed out Bourriaud's delineation of recent and contemporary relational art's sphere of utility bears a striking resemblance to contemporary managerial discourses. Bourriaud never explains *how* exactly, art develops a political project through turning the relational realm into an issue? His account of relational art is based on the premise of the alienated subject who is incapable of 'real' communication under capitalist conditions. Under post-fordism Paulo

[4] Ultra Red have been relatively successful in preventing the demolition of several housing projects in the neighbourhood and in securing additional funding from the city of Los Angeles for local education programmes etc. Proceeds from sales of their CDs (the most recent of which is titled 'Structural Adjustments'), released mostly on Independent label *Milles Plateaux*, also partly fund their activities.

[5] Nicolas Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, Dijon: les presses du réel 2002, 14-17

Virno and others have argued however, communication and co-operation have become the very fabric of capitalist production. Yet for Bourriaud the conviviality and sociability of relational artworks can magically rescue communication from its alienated conditions. No answer is provided as to why art should have this capacity. It would therefore seem that the mere definition of these activities as art is what enables this capacity for de-alienation and distinguishes them from any other form of relational activity.

A curious reversal can then take place and we can see this in many more obvious examples in recent 'socially-engaged' or relational art practices of how the mere calling on the category of art and the artist automatically deems an activity radical. For example recent manifestations of 'Artist's Marching Band' and an 'An Artist's Football Team', or a series of other activities such as artists serving coffee, is supposed to make the activity somehow political and/or radical. And so, where does this leave us? By effectively resorting to a modernist notion of art as a separate autonomous sphere, with an inherently transformative capacity, a discourse of relational art elides the relationship between art and the political.

This elision is a good example of how a recent and influential critical paradigm that ostensibly seeks to value and open out new realms of practice, and articulate the relationship between art, community and the political differently, is limited by its containment of a whole series of practices within an already recognisable category of art. Within a discourse of relational aesthetics, not only do a whole range of activities get mysteriously named art, but their political 'effects' are reduced to a list of romantic assumptions of art's transformative capacities. It is through a whole series of curatorial procedures, often with the willing participation of practitioners, starting from the seemingly minor gesture of referring to a series of activities or their detritus as 'a piece', that a rendering of such practices as art takes place. And so, in rendering relational practices and practices of organisation as art Bourriaud makes these practices legible to contemporary systems of value, cultural and symbolic capital (which Alain Badiou defines as Empire in the quotation above).

There seems to me to be a world of difference between this kind of 'artification' of entire practices, and the locating of one of Ultra Red's events in a gallery, or a temporary 'No One is Illegal' HQ at Documenta, or one of Platforma 981's temporary gallery installations for example. The latter projects proliferate public platforms, questioning and throwing each into relief as they pass through, while the former tend to submit to the rules, procedures and behaviours of art. Transversal practices often work across and through different fields, starting out not from given spaces for negotiation and approved ways of doing things, but through the simultaneous invention of actions and procedures. By retaining active and mobile relationships to known fields and systems of value, transversal practices can remain vigilant toward regimes of knowledge, disciplinary and institutional power that might limit their activities through a naming and containment within given definitions or new expanded 'forms' of art. In doing so, they run the risk of falling out of visibility, being illegible as art or anything other form, but also gain the capacity to push against and even re-organise the institutional and political structures of artistic recognition and production -- rather than play within them, making small barters for cultural capital instead. This is dynamic that Brian Holmes has described so well.

Put another way, and to refer back to Badiou, when such activities are made visible *as art*, as the conjunction 'as' suggests, we put them 'in the form of' what we already know and can account for. I would argue that for practices operating transversally, it is important *not* to solidify into such recognisable forms, but to attempt instead to render themselves in a particular consistency. The term consistency connotes both the regularity of an activity, and the level of thickness of a substance (think of cookery lessons). Deleuze and Guattari have used the term consistency to describe a plane of immanence that can never 'pre-exist the becomings that compose it' and that resists re-constitution into forms or subjects of depth. [6] Consistency refers to a movement and a material substance that holds heterogeneities together without resorting to a structure that would impose a form upon matter. Agamben has also used the term suggestively to describe a state in which the condition of potentiality

[6] Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, (trans. Brian Massumi), London: Athlone Press, 1988, p.270

must suspend itself in order to remain between the virtual and the actual.[7] A practice might be said to retain a certain potentiality through this consistency. And so in these terms, the attempt to retain practices in a certain consistency crucially works to open out different, as yet unknown futures for the ideas, concepts and activities described.

So, to conclude: 'transversal practices' must often negotiate a double and sometimes paradoxical move. A logic of refusal – of resisting visibility, or taking on recognisable forms. This refusal while running serious risks of invisibility, marginalisation, or inoperability, however also becomes a condition for an opening out of another logic, or system of *valorisation*. This is what I take to be the proposition of the work of art, that's *really* not a work of art. And so, as Maurizio Lazzarato has argued, in such a situation one should recognise and work with the paradox that in order to defend something you might also need to displace it, and its categorisation at the same time.

[7] Georgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998, p.45

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CONTRIBUTIONS TO A RESISTANT VISUAL CULTURE GLOSSARY

Nato Thompson

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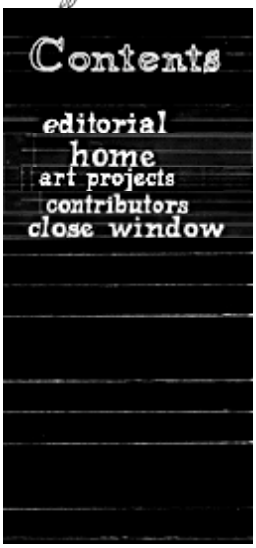
The Journal of Aesthetics & Protest



Contributions to a Resistant Visual Culture Glossary

by Nato Thompson

It is apparent that the current art historical language is collapsing rather quickly. In the wake of this collapse, I am hoping that *The Journal of Aesthetics and Protest* can be a vehicle for developing a more resistant, useful set of terms. Not simply because creating something new is always fun, but to be frank, given the current political climate, it is important that we get our shit together.

At the suggestion of the wonderful editors, I would like to say a few things about why on earth a glossary of resistant visual culture should matter. Initially I figured such a thing was obvious, but come to think of it, it isn't obvious at all. Resistant visual culture is not about art or traditional activism. It is a method for building a real, living culture. As opposed to a vocation or sentimental pursuit, I think of this field as a way to productively communicate amongst those who are dedicated to social change. It is not about further investigating art history nor about tactics for getting into galleries. If this sounds naively vague that is on purpose. I don't think we need to be specific and I believe that even a simple analysis of capital and control should be enough to bind a lot of disparate people together. These terms are methods for finding more effective ways to do this.

What follows are a series of terms that I have found many "rads" using. I introduce them in the hopes they lead to more productive discussions.
A. Visual Culture
B. Criticality (Ambiguity)
C. Resistance/Tactics/Strategies
D. Infrastructures of Resonance
E. Material Consequences
F. Legitimation

Visual Culture/vízhooel•kúlcher
Visual Culture is the study of the hypervisuality of contemporary everyday life and its genealogies. Given the 'weaponizing' of the visual during the recent Iraq War and the ongoing—and televised—iconoclasm of certain terrorist groups, I don't think there's any danger of it becoming a complacent field in the near future!
-Nicholas Mirzoeff

Increasingly I hear the term visual culture used to describe the visual landscape. As opposed to the term "art" (which has connotations of a static field of study), the term visual culture implicitly suggests that vision is a socially constructed
phenomenon. This small shift is an important semiotic maneuver because it allows us to consider the broad and increasing spectrum of visuality including television, film, advertising, fashion, urbanity, various cultural affinities, etc. as source material for visual strategies. In this regard, aesthetics must be positioned within a field of gender, race, class, and sexuality. Instead of discussing whether aesthetics are "good" or "bad", we can critique projects based on their position and reception. What type of transformative effect do these projects have? The question is not "is it art", but more importantly, "what does it do?"

Criticality/krítikelitee
What does it mean to ask, "What does a project do?" That is to say, what effects are we interested in producing? There are plenty of answers to this, but I suspect from the position of protest or politics, we would ask that it reposition the viewer's relationship to power. It should produce "criticality". To use the language of Bertolt Brecht, "We need a type of theatre which not only releases the feelings, insights and impulses possible within the particular historical field of human relations in which the action takes place, but employs and encourages those thoughts and feelings which help transform the field itself." Of course, the methods to achieve this vary greatly and their effectiveness are not at all agreed on. I do not want to give the misleading impression that the question of what a project does is an easy one to answer. In fact, it is the total lack of classically defined utility that tends to be the signpost for most things arty. We must be careful about the methods we use to answer this question. Ambiguity can still retain utility, but it must enlist the support of imagination, pedagogy, and desire. However, asking what a project does is a good place to begin a discussion of aesthetics and a debate on these grounds can be illuminating.

What inevitably accompanies this shift in emphasis toward the transformation of the viewer is the shift toward radical education. That is to say, once we begin to discuss the role of aesthetics as it

applies to a relationship of pedagogy, then it makes sense to look into the theoretical foundations of schools of thought that have been researching this for a long time. Radical education has antecedents in the writings of Brazilian educator Paolo Freire and the more recent writings of Henry Giroux. I do not actually know that much about this material, but I suspect that in considering whether a project produces criticality, this line of flight could prove instructive.

Strategies/tactics/strátijeez•táktiks
strategies/strátijeez/ n. pl. 1. the calculation (or manipulation) of power relationships that become possible as soon as a subject with will and power (a business, an army, a city, a scientific institution) can be isolated.

tactics/táktiks/ n. pl. 1. operates in isolated actions, blow by blow. It takes advantage of"opportunities and depends on them, being without any base where it could stockpile its winnings build up its own position, and plan raids.""In short, the tactic is the art of the weak."

The borrowed terms above are from the writings of Michelle De Certeau and they tend to come up quite frequently. With a whole genre now calling itself"tactical media"and many radicals using this language, it is instructive to look at them a little more carefully. Tactics, as the definition states above, are a sort of trespassing, and in the theory of De Certeau they are ways for people to develop meaning in the face of an overwhelmingly pre-determined situation. Strategies are the work of those in power. For radicals it should be of no surprise that they are constantly considering their work in the light of tactics. They are forever trespassing, and using the dominant landscape as a necessary dancing partner. However, for those like De Certeau and many Gilles Deleuze-inspired anarchists, tactics seem to suffice. The problem with accepting this sensibility is that it can lead to fairly privileged forms of resistance, like slacking at work or taking a meandering walk home. I am a fan of these more benign tactics, but not convinced they lead to anything but personal therapy.

Strategies are of course, rarely discussed and if they are, you can guarantee that someone will accuse the person of both hubris and attempting to produce dangerous ideologies. The idea of a revolutionary agenda or an attempt to gain a chunk of the dominant landscape never appears viable or promising. And so, tactics remain the de facto game in town. However, to use an example of someone operating in the field of strategies, the filmmaker Michael Moore has most assuredly broken out of the tactics category. His films win academy awards; his books are on the New York Times best seller's list. The same goes for Noam Chomsky. I mention them because I think their desire and ability to operate in the field of strategies has been effective and instructive.

Of course, not everyone can operate in the realm of strategies. The point of this section on tactics and strategies is to demonstrate that the dependence on these two terms seems to create a barren but much needed middle ground. Instead of a polarizing dichotomy, maybe it would be more useful to consider these terms as the two poles of resistant aesthetics. That is to say that a project vacillates in its relationship to power from tactics to strategies. While owning the dominant system may feel impossible, it feels more than a little slackerish to depend on defeat.

Infrastructures of Resonance/infrestrukcherz•ov•rézenens
infrastructure/infrestrukcher/ n. 1. the basic, underlying framework or features of a system of organization. 2. the fundamental facilities serving a country, city or area, as transportation and communication systems, power plants, and roads. 3. the military installations of a country.

In framing questions of aesthetics and politics, it is important that we consider the networked web in which they are operating. That is to say, we cannot detach the position within power that a particular project possesses. No project, in and of itself, will possess all the attributes necessary to make an all-encompassing political statement and/or action. Effectiveness requires a sort of content triage which, when viewed alone, can be complicit with some sort of ineptitude.

Take for example Mathew Barney, whose work I actually enjoy. It's bizarre, sensual, imaginative, and surreal. However, the fact that the Guggenheim places Barney's*Cremaster*series on a pedestal as their magnum opus and that reviewers at the*New York Times*praise Barney as the greatest artist of his generation, strikes me as all too convenient. It is at this point that I smell a rat. For, of course, content-less slippery open-ended material can too easily be consumed by those in power. The work's inability to resist and its complicity with the conservative tendencies that support the work, make it unpalatable.

While the convenience that comes to artists who want to avoid direct content must be considered, this should not mean dismissal. For we then fall into that old political trap of demanding purely utilitarian forms of visual representation. We should have the right to a qualified beauty without

necessarily falling prey to the vultures in power that make money, and prestige off it.

This conundrum rears its head continually. It is particularly acute for a generation growing up during the rise of the culture industry where seductive images abound and we do not possess adequate tools for weeding through them. This crisis in seduction is acute in other media as well: film, television, and music. As a paranoiac generation we are continually asking: who is benefiting from my pleasure?

For the readers of*the JAP*, this conspiracy theory of pleasure will find its most painful and damaging problems in the questions of Radial Chic. We are all too aware that there is a potential war of convenience, jealousy, ego, and efficacy raging for those who utilize the aesthetics of radicality to gain for themselves. As an example, I would like to bring up the work of artist Gregory Green. Green produces bombs, and pirate radio stations. A self-avowed anarchist, he rose to fame throughout the 90s as a radical gadget maker. Of course, no one believes his politics goes any further than his production of objects for his gallery and museum exhibitions. To quote a friend, Josh MacPhee, at length:

I am getting really sick and tired of seeing"radical"artists repackage old-school tactical materials, gut them of any utility, then hold them up as god's gift to activists. A good example of this is the continual reformulation of the pirate radio as a radical art object. Gag me. I'm sick and tired of seeing valuable transmitting equipment sit in a nice shiny new box or backpack in a gallery, when folks like the Campesino Radio Project in Chicago have spent the last 3 or 4 years smuggling transmitters into a good half dozen contested areas in Latin America (Chiapas, Peru, indiginous communities in Ecuador, etc) and setting up radio stations that people actually use in struggles to carve out autonomy and justice in their daily lives.

These suspicions of intent can find their ultimate source of antagonism with those closest to us when we see their social capital increase with their use of our most treasured, radical, forms of resistance. Such antagonisms have destroyed many collectives (like Group Material) and have severed ties within networks. This, in fact, is worthy of a separate essay of its own, but for the purposes of this essay, I would like to bring it full circle and suggest that we consider these problems in light of an infrastructure of resonance.

Infrastructures of resonance are about audience. It is, if one could attempt to measure such a thing, the network of resonance and affiliations a project has. It is something we naturally do, although many times we are more paranoid than analytical. We naturally include a project's relationship to power when we look at it. For example, when we see a project at the Guggenheim Museum, many of us are immediately suspicious of the projects allegiances and affiliations. Or when we see a television show, we are quite suspicious of the corporate powers and advertising dollars that rake in the cash off our momentary pleasure. We sense an infrastructure in place that further legitimates and perpetuates power. However, if we were to see a project at a community anarchist space, we position that project within a very different infrastructure of resonance. We may excuse its content-less-ness because, of course, we are assured that there is a commitment to radical change elsewhere in that infrastructure. Meaning becomes compensated through its connection to an infrastructure. The infrastructure provides a chorus of intentions that facilitate a more robust interpretative model. To take cue from the sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, we must understand the various discursive regimes that set up a particular project.

Perceiving an infrastructure of resonance depends on what position one holds. To go back to the example of Gregory Green and his radical chic bombs, to the average art viewer, this radicalness reads on the same infrastructure of resonance that a project by Indymedia does. The average art viewer at a museum does not differentiate the outside radical commitments of a project's producers because, of course, how are they supposed to know this type of insider gossip. When radical artists complain to me that so-and-so artist isn't really down and is only making money off of their radical chic (like Gregory Green), I wonder what the tactics of this complaint are. On a pedagogical level, the effectiveness of Green's projects are about as effective as most other radical art projects in a museum. On another level, there are those that lambaste any project that comes into a museum because, of course, they suspect it is in cahoots with power. I suspect this is why people prefer"content"in art, because then these networks are disclosed in the work itself. But of course, in the age of Sheppard Fairy and his"Obey"campaign, we are even suspicious of this.

It appears that the problem is more with display models that do not reveal these infrastructures. It is a model of trying to close off projects from their relationships to meaning networks. And it is an important one to consider. I put the notion of infrastructures of resonance out there as a lens to think about display strategies and critical readings. How to interpret work should include its relationship to power.

As a last note on this topic, I would like to propose that the art rads out there (if you are reading this, then this probably means you) develop a more cohesive radical infrastructure. *The JAP*is a good addition to this emerging network. What a real infrastructure could do is provide a cohesive, real world system to assist radical projects. It could allow some autonomy from the ever so common problem of interpreting work in the mixed field of power. This could be as simple as venues circulating exhibitions, writers providing critical analysis of contemporary radical aesthetics and communities participating in radical politics for social justice. It is something that is desperately needed and would have real material consequences.

Material Consequences/mete´ereeel•kónsikwens
It is a word I use in a specific context. I use this term when I am thinking in more overtly agit-prop projects. The question is,"How do I situate this project in a productive situation, a political situation, and a discursive situation. Or, more tactically, how can I position this project as closely to a site of instability in power as possible such that the project has real effects.
-Trevor Paglen

We are trying to find our footing after reeling from the tools of post-modernism. While deconstructing most monster narratives has been critical, long-term strategies are showing themselves as necessary (to rehash the discussion in tactics and strategies). In trying to ascertain the difference between post-modern relativism and intransigent modernism, we are developing language to call people's bluffs. One of these bluff-calling terms is"material consequences."What are the material consequences of a project? How does it translate into radical action? How does it assist in the broadening of social justice?

These are difficult questions and ones that will never find easy answers. For example, any radical visual project will still have a difficult time winding its way back to material consequences. If we don't understand how power works, then how are we to gauge whether a project has material consequences?

I don't know. But that doesn't mean that we shouldn't consider a project's relationship to its material consequences as best we can. It is a sort of foil that allows us to weed out certain, frivolous cultural studies practices that somehow legitimate projects like deconstructing sitcoms as somehow resistant.

Legitimation/lijítimáyshen
I work at a museum called MASS MoCA. It's a complicated position for me as I struggle with many political needs and pragmatic constraints. However, I do see the role museums play in the infrastructure of visual culture. They act as a legitimating entity. If we think of knowledge as an infrastructure, with different material agents affecting the way in which knowledge is produced and interpreted, then we can begin to understand the de-facto roles that institutions play within that. In an infrastructure of resonance, a legitimizing agent adds significant weight to the information being interpreted. In a world bombarded with information, we give significant weight to certain filters that we believe have somehow properly sifted through this material and given us the stuff we want. Of course, what is legitimating for one group of people may not be for another. This is obviously the case with the previous example of the Guggenheim and MASS MoCA itself for that matter.

Legitimation is not simply reserved for museums of course. It can come from famous individuals:"Noam Chomsky says,"check out this book!"It can come from friends,"Hey, check out this band."It can come from magazines,"*The JAP*gave a favorable review of this conference."It can come from CNN. And on and on. You get the point. As you might have guessed, some institutions have a larger radius of resonance for their legitimating function than others. And some, outside of those networks, still depend on that dominant system for their own legitimation."

It would be all too easy to dismiss legitimation as some sort of name-dropping conspiracy, but it has material consequences. I hope it is clear that I am not advocating legitimation from the outside so much as simply saying,"This is how things tend to work. What are we going to do with it?"We can create our own sources of legitimation, we can utilize the ones that exist, or we can attack from both ends of the spectrum. In the end, legitimation can act as a hall pass to larger arrays of social power. The more legitimate, among whatever constituency, the more one increases their radius of resonance. Once again, I like to think of Michael Moore and Noam Chomsky as effectively manipulating their legitimation. (You may not agree with my choice of fabulous legitimators and that is fine. I am simply attempting to find contemporary examples to demonstrate a point.)

Centers for legitimation already exist within the disparate radical infrastructure. Academics like Gayatri Spivak, the recently deceased Edward Said, Saskia Sassen, Angela Davis, Judith Butler are

all living vectors of legitimation. In the field of aesthetics and protest, of course, the legitimation begins to shrink quickly. Leftist magazines like*The Nation*continue to hold up entirely conservative art as a testament to the cultural status of their readership. On the arty side, one can either choose from the spotty coverage of magazines like Art Papers or be buried in masturbatory academia like*Critical Inquiry*or*October*. Of course, there are more scrappy spaces and journals that are in cahoots with these projects and going through them is an essay in itself. While micro-cinemas and punk bands appear to have more concrete infrastructures, radical visual culture appears to depend too often on either the dominant system or is isolated in separated pockets across the globe. Tightening these networks and providing our own self-legitimating sectors is critical in providing a radical culture.

Conclusion

I hope these terms might prove to be constructive. I notice that many of the words are developed in order to manage the tensions between an overtly dominant modernism and an all too relativist post-modernism. They also are attempts to position visual resistance within a framework conducive to the rise of the information economy. Using a more specific vocabulary allows us to avoid the boring pitfalls of"is it art?"or"is it political?". By avoiding these traps to some degree, hopefully we can move towards developing a radical culture that can actually bust apart the dominance of capital and control.

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TEMPORARY MONUMENTS

Lize Mogel

2002. *Journal of Aesthetics and Protest* 1. http://www.journalofaesthetic-sandprotest.org/1/monuments/index.html

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Temporary Monuments

Lize Mogel

The fall of the World Trade Center in September was immediately followed by a media-driven discussion about a memorial, or a material gesture of remembrance. Certain of the media looked to artists, architects and other "experts" in the production of meaning to interpret the massive loss and conflicting emotions experienced during the aftermath of the event. The New York Times, bellwether for the opinions of a portion of NY society, ran articles asking certain cultural producers what they thought should replace the physical and psychological hole left in lower Manhattan. Several artists proposed parks; Richard Serra, in keeping with his monumental body of work, called for new buildings, even larger than the previous ones.

Within the art world itself, artists like many other citizens met in groups informally and also within the confines of institutions (museums, galleries, art schools). Galleries and museums mounted exhibitions of work responding to the events of 9/11; the New Museum hosted an exhibition of artists from the Lower Manhattan Cultural Council Residency Program which had been housed on the upper floors of Tower 1. One piece out of all the tributary work effectively spoke of the demise of modernism and economic stability symbolized by the WTC; Mahmoud Hamadani's recreation of a 1970's Sol Lewitt modular cube structure, now crumbled and fallen.

Many artists' responses did not always enter a broader public discourse. Instead, a new public art formed on the street, with the vast accumulation of posters, objects, and displays created and placed by a portion of the city's population; including residents, workers, tourists, and passers-by. The public itself. This archive is, in its totality, an inclusive, participatory artwork, which dwarfs any deliberate gesture made by artists or institutions to interpret the events and aftermath of 9/11.

Immediately after the WTC fell, missing posters went up all over lower Manhattan. These were functionally futile but had great value as a larger phenomenon; a temporal memorial to the dead, an archive of souls. The posters were eventually taken down (although an occasional new one appeared on downtown lampposts) and replaced by handmade signs, photographs, t-shirts, candles, stuffed animals, flowers (real and fake), flags, banners. These collections or shrines were at first distributed within any significant gathering place below 14th Street. They are now contained in fewer areas; a church fence near Ground Zero; the subway station at Union Square; Grand Central Station. All critical points of convergence and divergence, and of maximum pedestrian traffic.

Most of the offerings near Ground Zero seem to be from elsewhere- after all, it is a tourist site. There is a visible effort to *belong* through mark-making, regardless of the origins of the mark-

maker. In the graffiti covering the Paris cemetery where Jim Morrison is buried, the iconic word "Jim" is carved into trees and sarcophagi, transcending a need for translation. The repetition adds to Morrison's mythos, whether inscribed in true mourning, idolatry, or trendy grave-scribbling. These gestures are doubly for the absent subject and for the author herself.

The singularity of the cemetery graffiti suggests an overarching presence, despite subtleties of penmanship. The collection of objects commemorating the WTC represents a more complex authorship, stylistically and functionally diverse. Can personal marks be writ large and monumentalized- or does the monumentalization and reproduction of this type of gesture remain purely sentimental, cliche, or kitschy? This stands in opposition to traditional notions of monumentality; size, mass, centrality, and permanence.

The New York Times championed the idea of Luxor-style, twin searchlights shining upwards, filling the absence left by the World Trade Towers with a brilliant ghost. The intangibility of light is appropriate here, but the purity of this abstract gesture is reductive. It speaks more of the loss of architectural space than of bodies. The physicality of the WTC is absent (wallboard, hallways, cubicles, sweat and smell of human habitation), perhaps better symbolized by the unruly shrines left as offerings rather than the grand narratives of hope, goodness and redemption symbolized by the columns of light. These collections, or temporary monuments, to the WTC present a new paradigm that cannot be easily contained within an institutional frame.

There is an absence within this public artwork: that of dissent. The mutable arrangement of objects exists within social space that is legislated as such, by unspoken rules of conduct that

rooted and temporary communities perform daily. During the first week after the attacks, an abundance of hand-lettered signs appeared, expressing political viewpoints and annotated by anonymous others. A month later, with free speech rights vastly curtailed, all evidence of true public discourse was removed in favor of sympathetic and patriotic statements. Is this unity or a civic editorial process? It remains to be seen if any future memorializing gesture can reflect the true range of viewpoints. The enormous absence of the WTC towers suggests an enormous presence, which can be replaced by another monolith or by a deliberate massing of the polysemic and the personal.

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PEDESTRIAN ERRORS

Cheryl Weaver

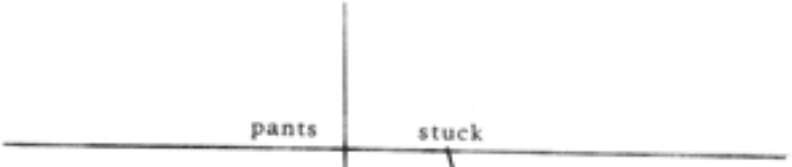
2002. *Institute of Failure*. http://www.institute-of-failure.com/downloads/CW_PedestrianErrors.pdf

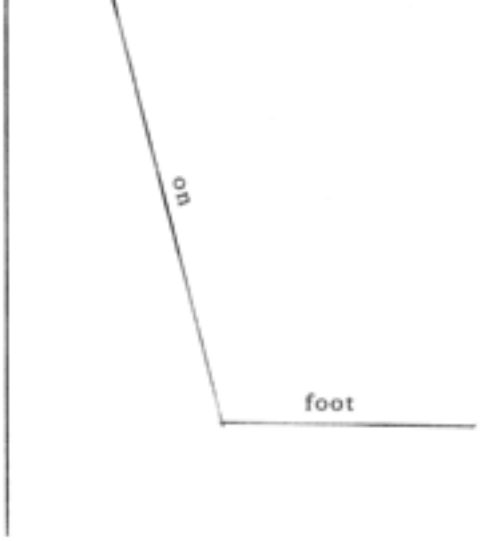
Cheryl Weaver's

pedestrian errors

a. pants stuck
b. stubbing toe
c. into door
d. shirt caught
e. foot tripping/foot
f. food caught
g. step on shoestring
h. arm stuck
i. foot tripping/curb
j. slipping
k. eye tearing
l. bumped into
m. cramp
n. backpack caught
o. irritant in throat
p. tickle
q. twitch
r. nose running
s. stepping on foot
t. tripping
u. shoe stuck
w. stomach growling
v. hiccup
x. hair in mouth
y. sweater stuck

begin

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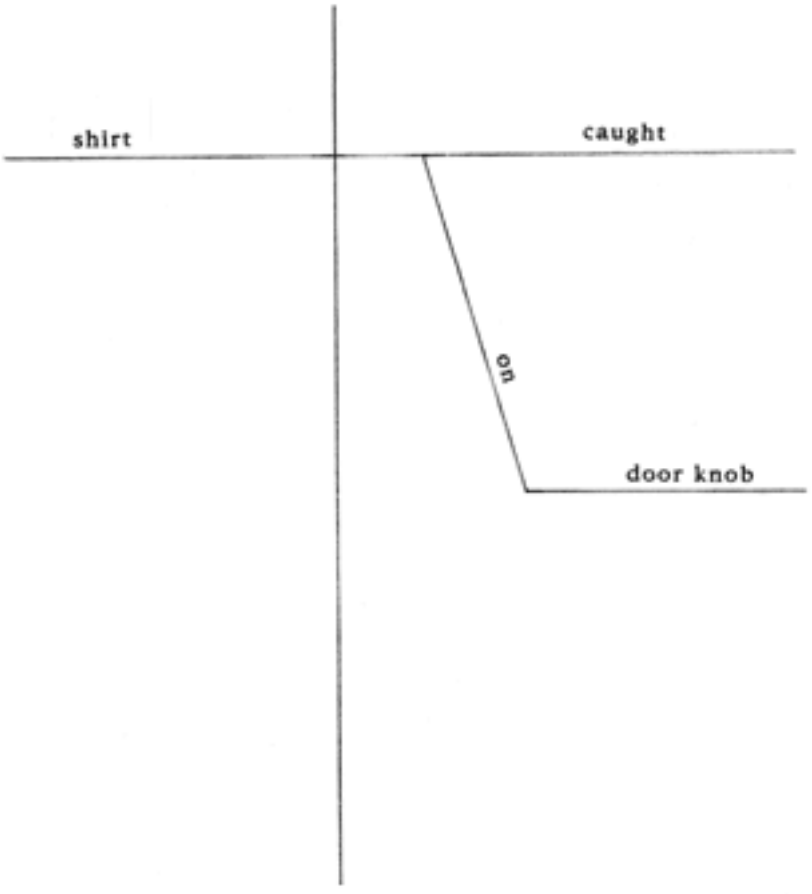
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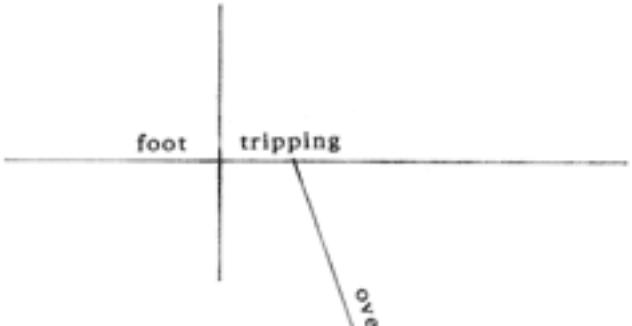
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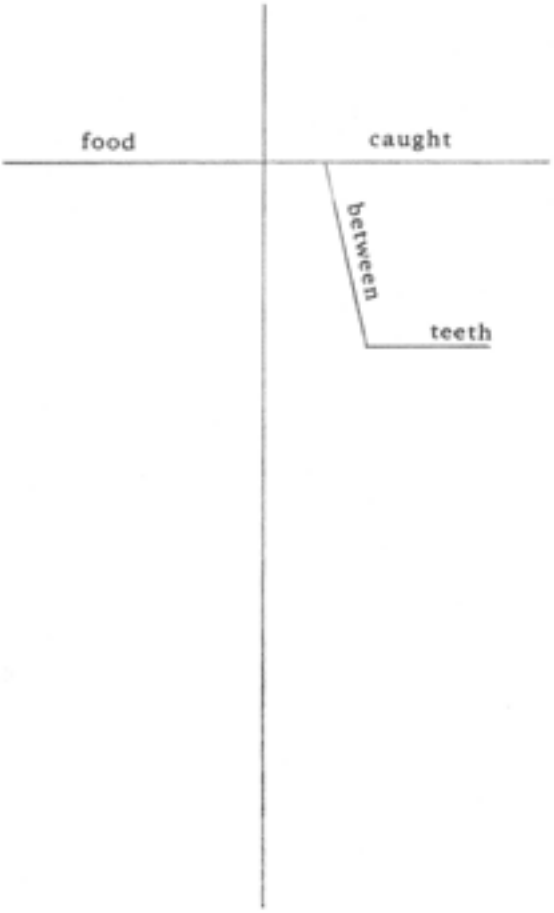
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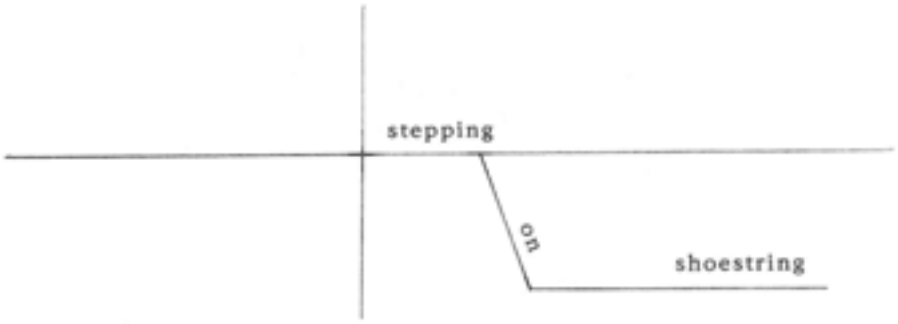
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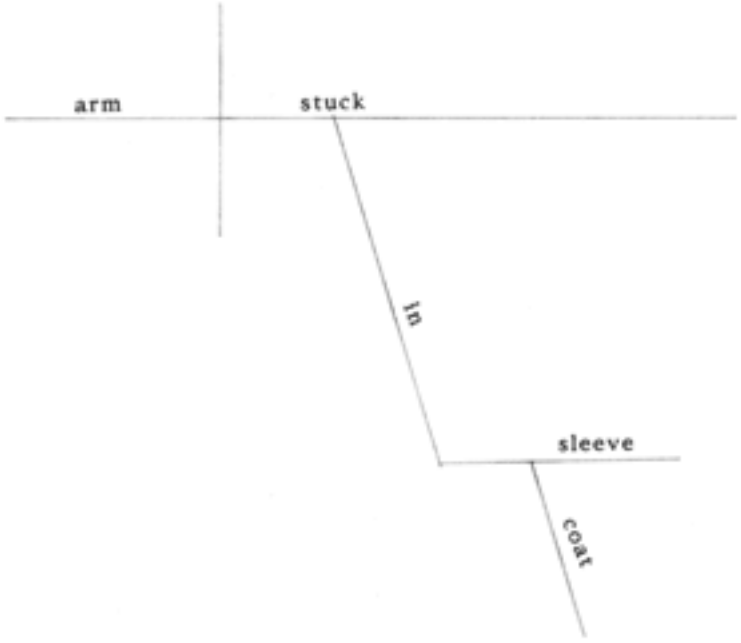
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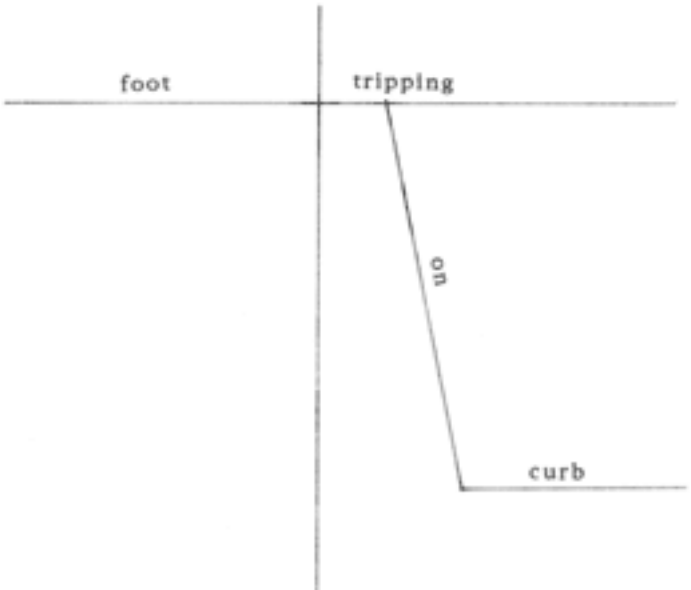
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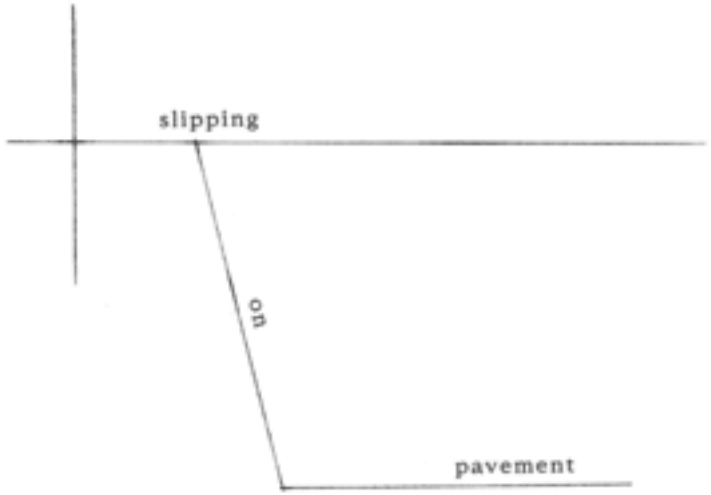
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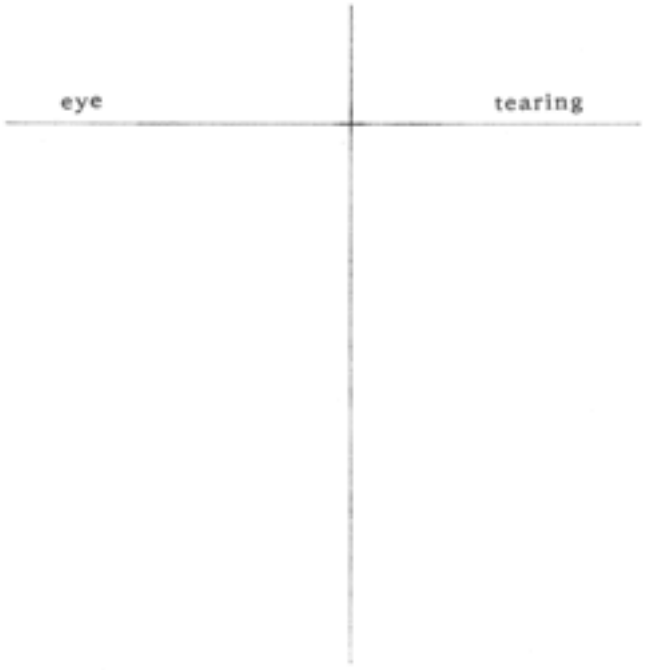
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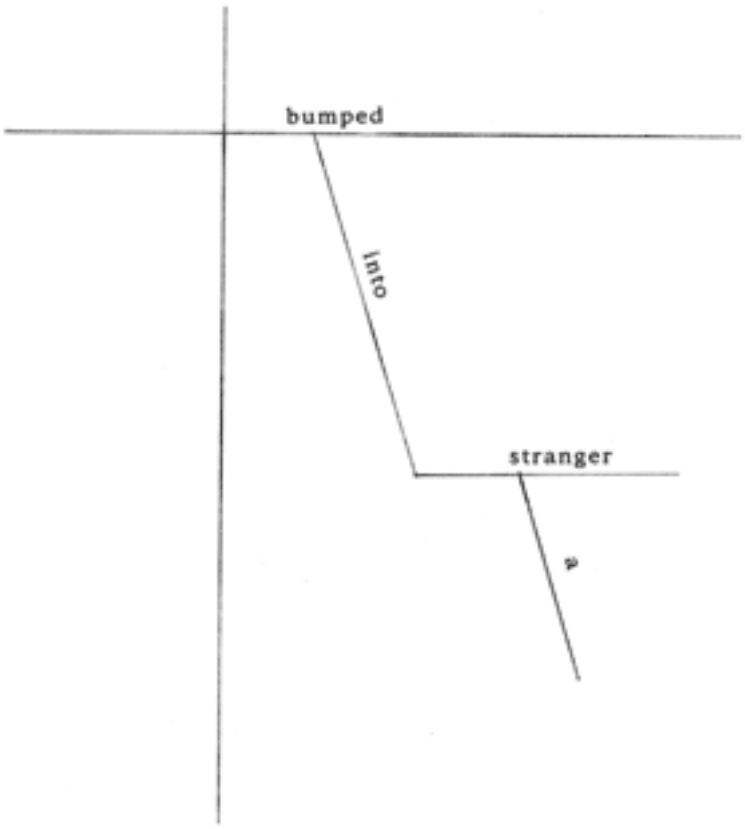
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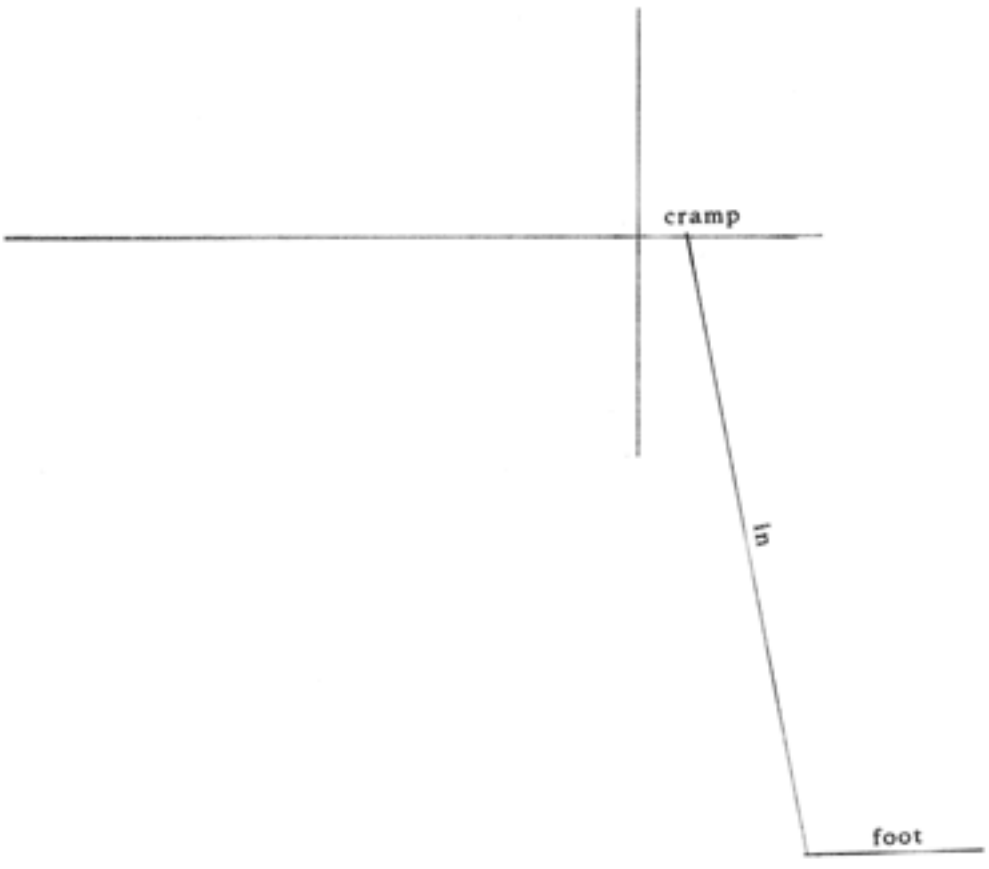
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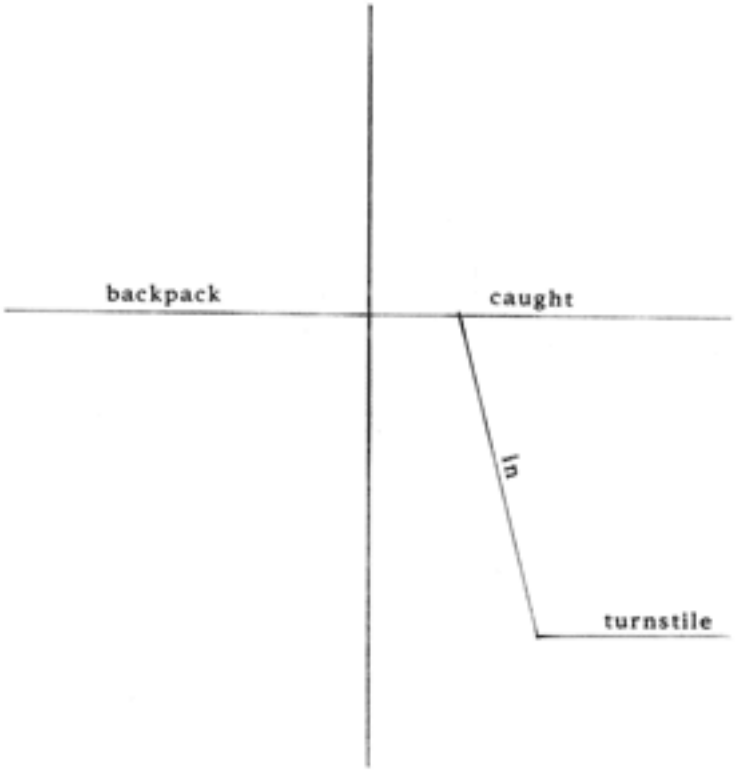
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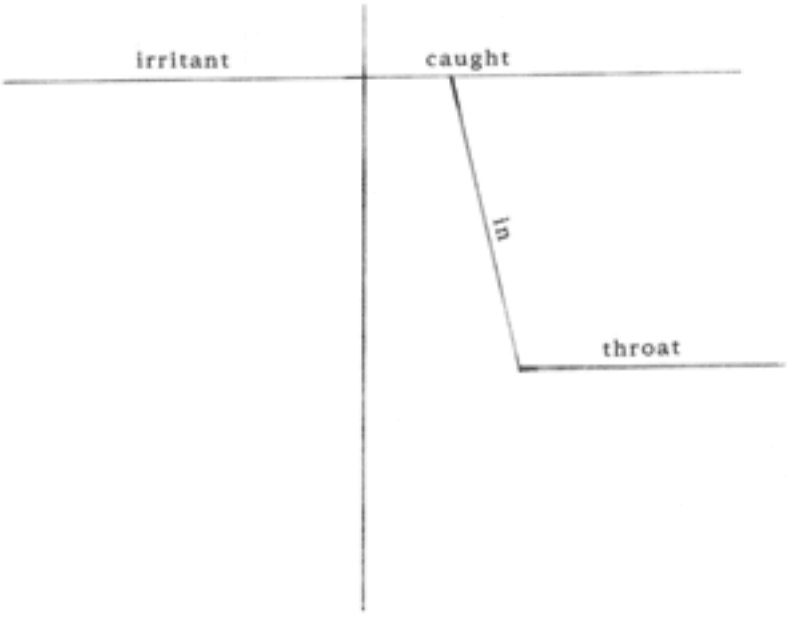
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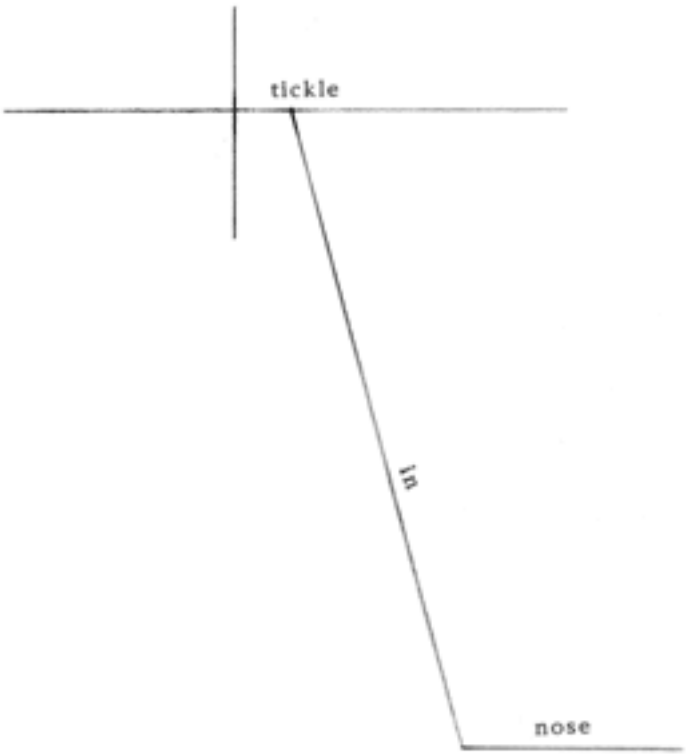
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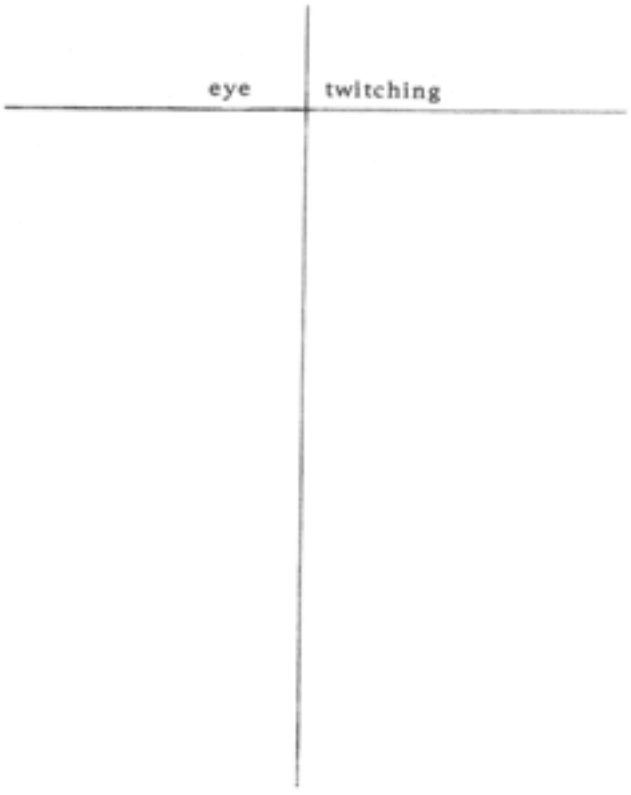
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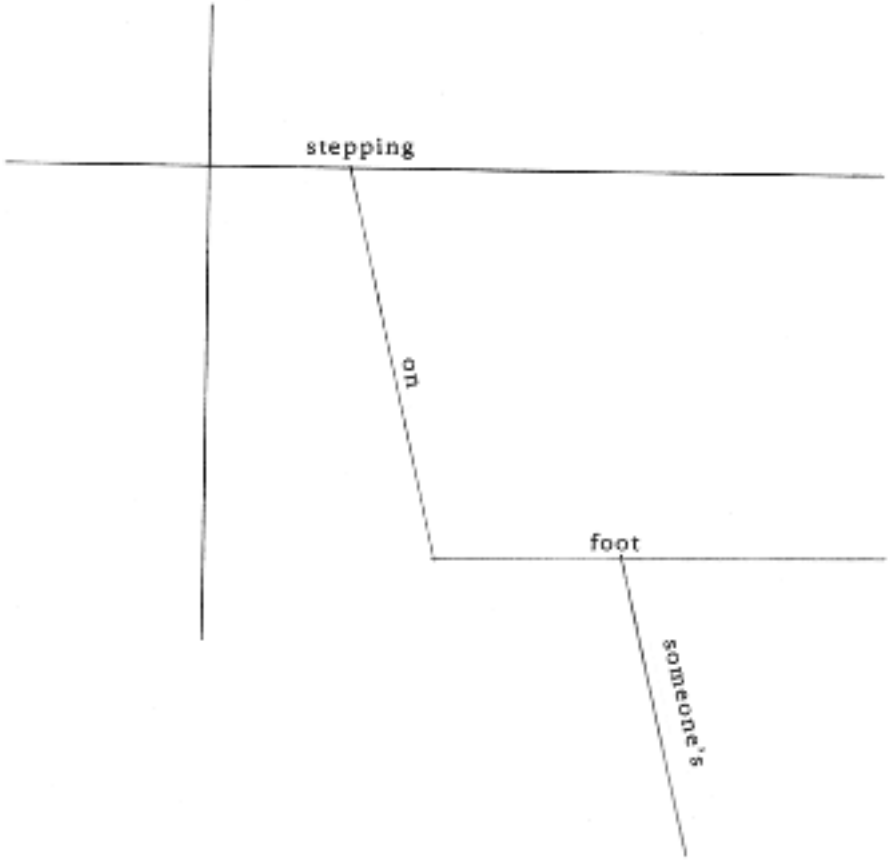
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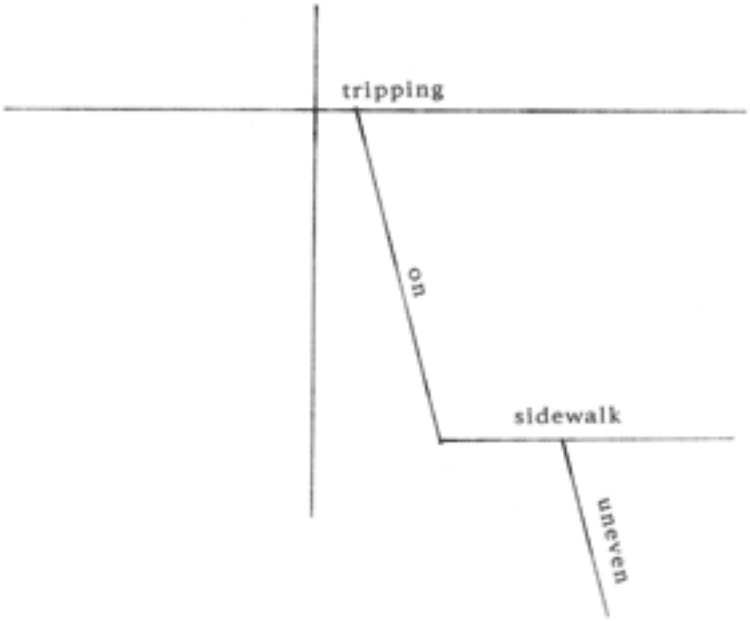
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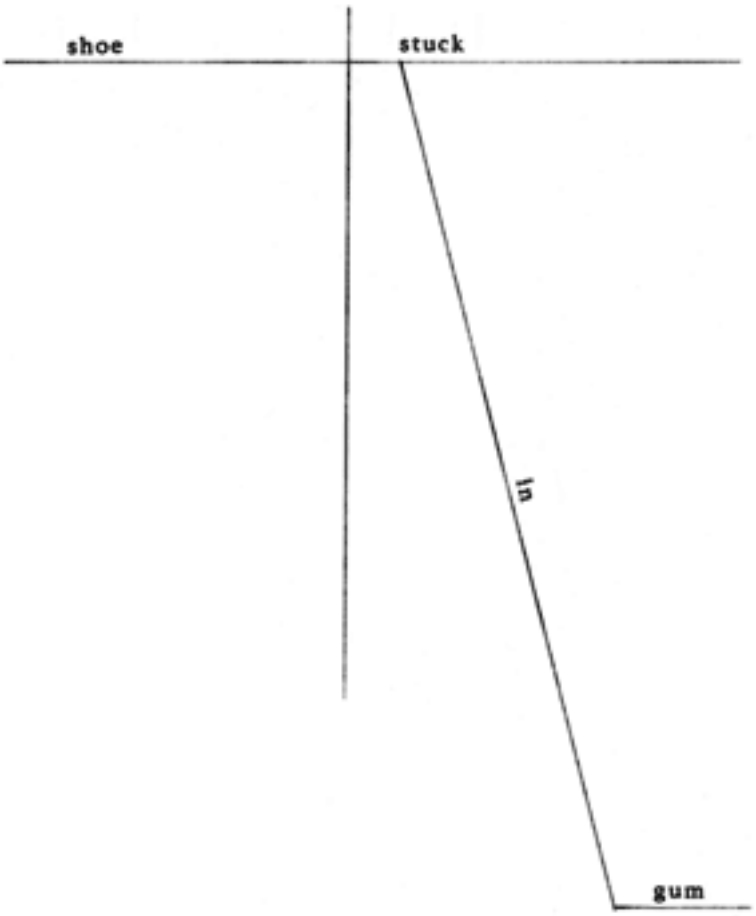
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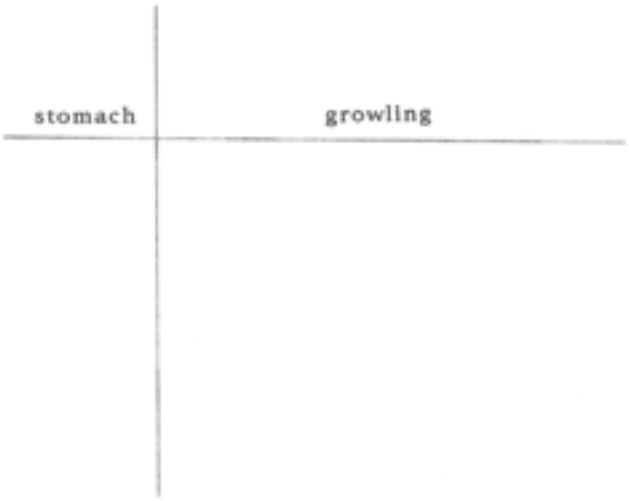
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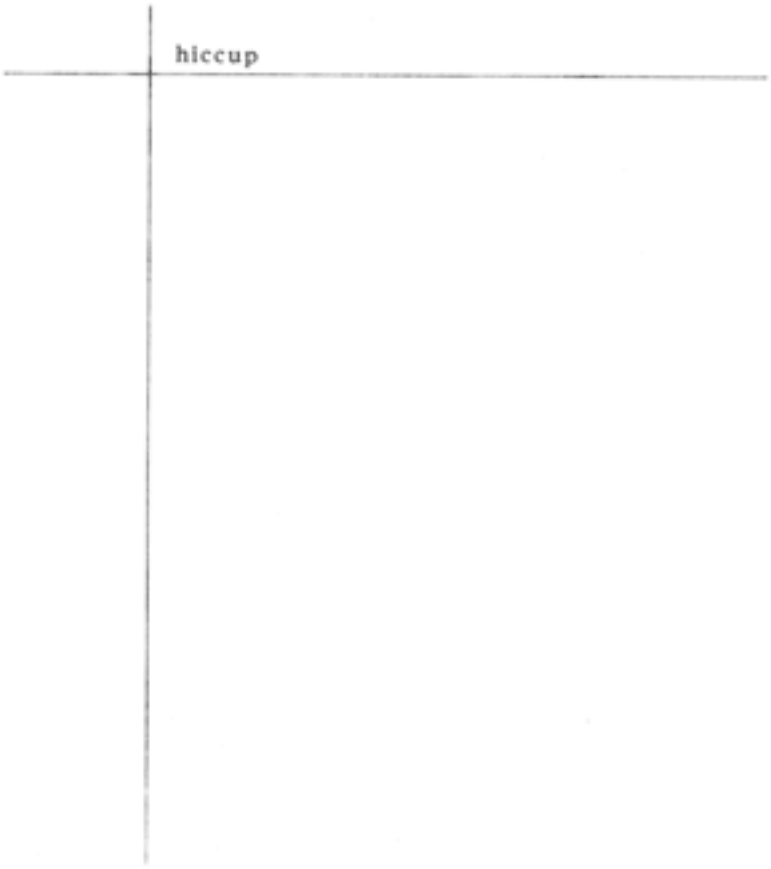
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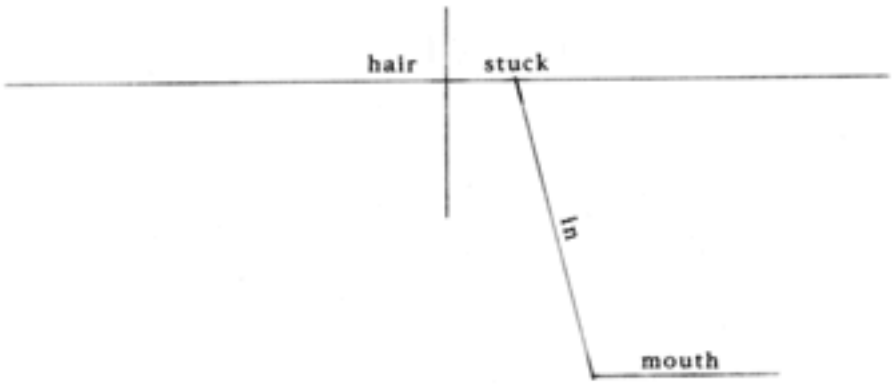
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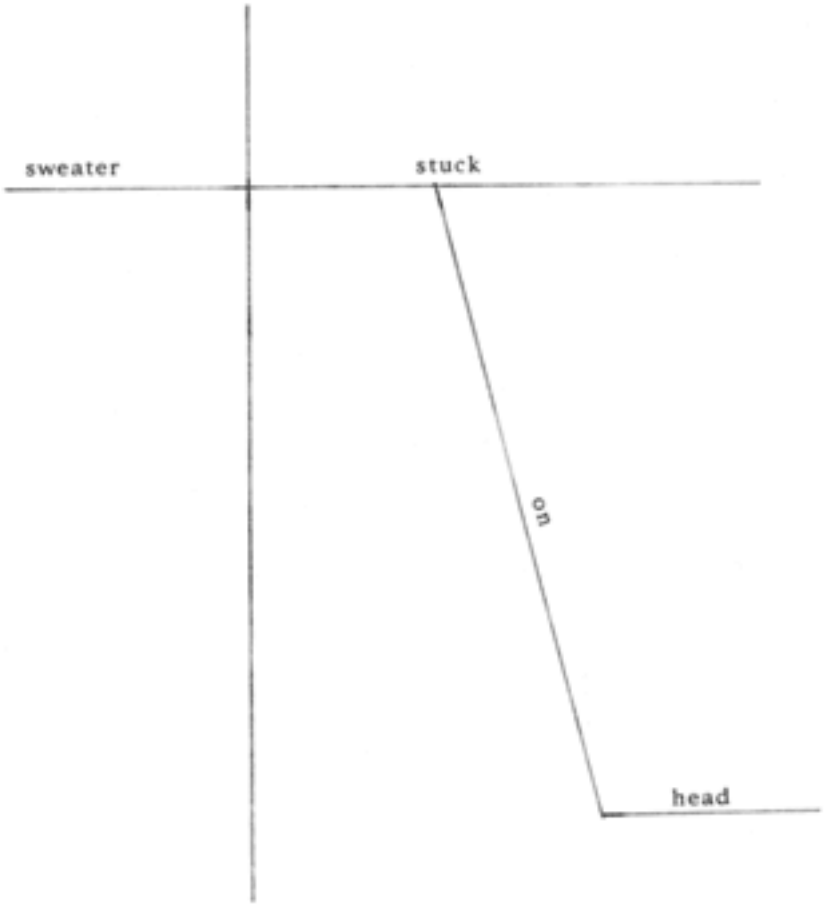
sweater
stuck
on
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End

End Notes

1. The study of formal properties of language reveals something of the nature of humans in a negative way; it underscores with great clarity, the limits of our understanding of those qualities of mind that enter into cultural achievement in an intimate, if still quite obscure, manner.

   Noam Chomsky, Interpreting the World

2. "You can't use a bulldozer to study orchids." he said.

   The Death of Ferdinand de Saussure,
   The Magnetic Fields

3. I really do not know that anything has ever been more exciting then diagramming sentences.

   Gertrude Stein

28

ALL POWER TO THE COPENHAGEN FREE UNIVERSITY

Henriette Heise & Jakob Jakobsen

2001. *Copenhagen Free University*. http://copenhagenfreeuniversity.dk/all-pow.html

All Power to the Copenhagen Free University

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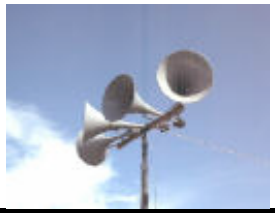

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Of all the affairs we participate in, with interest or without interest, the groping search for new ways of life is the only aspect still impassioning. The aesthetic disciplines have proved blatantly inadequate in this regard and display the greatest detachment when it comes to the basic questions. But the way forward is not to disband the aesthetic disciplines - the way forward is to demand more from them. In our search for new ways of life the chemistry of unhappy consciousness and surplus energy is still making us establish experimental institutions and still making us reformulate a discourse within which we apply the word 'aesthetics'. Copenhagen Free University is one such institution/discourse.

Living in a society ruled by the stomach of the ever-expanding middle classes - obsessed with security and order and consensus - the 'unhappy consciousness' tends to implode in the suicidal feeling of there being no exit. With a tradition of truce and consensus politics in Danish society the aesthetic disciplines have been predominately playing along the lines of the state in the reproduction of cultural values. The state explicitly states that cultural politics have nothing to do with social politics, and is convinced of the 'single' common good that can come from the integration of the aesthetic disciplines in the nation's general production of value. Both in terms of cultural and monetarian capital, that is. Synchronously the state is encouraging all, including the cultural producers, to be critical, to behave with social responsibility and, in general, expects people to express themselves and promote individualised subjectivity. This strategic double bind is the technology of power - a technology for creating and controlling the voices present in society. Conflicts are explained as misunderstandings and mediated through the panacea of 'dialogue'. Using words such as Communism, Class Struggle and Revolution in a Danish context will qualify you for a free consultation with a psychiatrist.

Copenhagen Free University is one voice in a mumble of voices. We are not two or three individuals, we are an institution drifting through various social relations, in the process of being produced and producing. We are the people in the house. This position establishes an ever-changing formation

characterised by many contexts, platforms, voices, actions, but also by inactivity, refusal, evacuation, withdrawal, exodus. According to the Situationist Asger Jorn, subjectivity is a point of view inside matter, "a sphere of interest", and not necessarily that which is equateable with the individualised ego. Our subjectivity (what is said and what is done) rises from the material conditions of our everyday lives and subtracts from the mediated rationale of the public sphere. In the public sphere any arguments are caught up in and filtered through the rationale of the individualised citizen. What if you do not feel like a sensible citizen? Copenhagen Free University is 'a sphere of interest' arising from the material life we experience and will always already be politicised before any citizenship. Our scope is both local and global, looking for fellow travellers around the corner and around the world.

Our point of departure is now and here: The circulation in and the consequences of the present day political knowledge economy and the desires distributed, accumulated, redirected or blocked in the flows and networks of that landscape. The fact that higher education is no longer the exclusive domain of the bourgeoisie and its children and that the workforce of today is generally highly skilled has brought us 'mass intellectuality'. The mass intellectuality and today's immaterial mode of production that demands a workforce that is able to work in an environment producing abstract products characterised by knowledge and subjectivity, has, in particular, caught our interest. Not that we would like a job, but we recognise that this development is influencing our emotional lives.

Based on assembly lines and machinery, the Fordist mode of production demanded a manual effort from the worker and did not invade the nervous system in any way other than through boredom. In the western world this mode of production has been left behind. Work is knowledge and the centre of productivity has moved inside the body of the worker, colonising not only the muscles, but the nervous system as well. Production increasingly involves, at various levels, an ability to make decisions among different alternatives giving a degree of responsibility through this decision making. To be productive in the knowledge economy, the worker is expected to become an active subject: one has to express oneself, one has to speak, communicate, cooperate etc. The mode of production is becoming immaterial and is related to processes of communication which require that the worker is critical and expresses subjectivity. It comes as no surprise that the ethos of the state regarding citizens has become almost identical with the ethos of the capitalist production regarding the worker. The present day political knowledge economy is taking shape.

When we turn our attention to the mode of aesthetic production we have to recognise that the artist is becoming the role model worker of the knowledge economy. The artist is traditionally investing 'soul' in the work, which is exactly the qualifications modern management is looking for when looking for a new employee. The entrepeneurship, self-employed independence and the sacred individuality of artists are the dream qualifications of the knowledge worker of tomorrow: An unorganised, highly skilled individual with no solidarity selling

his/her living labour as a day-labourer. The heroic avant-garde artist of yesterday will become the scab of tomorrow. We see it around us and are doing it ourselves, with interest or without interest.

Another aspect is the fact that much aesthetic production today is instrumental in the reproduction of the ideology of the knowledge economy. This is happening often when artists are engaging in new technology, when artists are engaging in social regeneration, when artists are making art in public space, in general when artists are engaged in good and edifying causes. Artists are, with intent or without intent, affirming the current hegemony: spearheading new market standards or sweeping up where the State and capital are missing out. Copenhagen Free University is setting out to develop other strategies; strategies of withdrawal and contestation. 'Withdrawal' to indicate an activity not based on direct opposition, but on a refusal of power, a refusal of obedience. 'Constestation' to indicate an activity engaged in exposing the antagonisms, which, under the surface, characterise society and allow them to crystallise.

Copenhagen Free University was established to explore and intensify the forms of knowledge and subjectivity that we see withdrawing from or being excluded from the increasingly narrow-minded circulation of the knowledge economy. Our primary aim was not to throw sand in the machinery, but to valorise the stammer, the poetry, the disgust, the schizophrenia etc. For that purpose we needed a university. Even without any permanent internal structure the Copenhagen Free University is the body, which guarantees our valorisations.

It seems that the knowledge economy is working with an understanding of the aesthetic disciplines solely as a product within a superstructure. When a city has been planned, a building built, a product developed, it is then that artists are called for. This understanding is the currency among the State, art institutions, and many of the artists. Art is a social practice, but is it solely a social construction to the good of public health? We intend to reconnect discussions of aesthetics to the base. Mass intellectuality and globalisation offer a potential to reintroduce avant-garde strategy not based on the universality of the heroic avant-garde, but unfolding as collective and polymorphous creative forces in the production of social relations. Aesthetics beyond disciplines. Aesthetics as a fact of life.

The Committee of 15th July, 2001/Henriette Heise & Jakob Jakobsen

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THE FUTURE OF THE RECIPROCAL READY-MADE: AN ESSAY ON USE-VALUE AND ART-RELATED PRACTICE

Stephen Wright

2005. *16 Beaver Group.* http://www.16beavergroup.org/events/archives/001481print.html

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May 02, 2005

Stephen Wright @16Beaver

(more info to follow in our monday night email)

Monday Night 05.02.05 -- Stephen Wright -- Talk / Discussion

1. About Stephen Wright
2. The Future of the Reciprocal Readymade:
An Essay on Use-Value and Art-Related Practice

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1. About Stephen Wright

Stephen Wright is an art critic, programme director at the Collège international de philosophie (Paris), and professor of philosophy at the École Supérieure des Beaux Arts de Toulon. In April 2004, he curated "The Future of the Reciprocal Readymade" (Apexart, New York) and is currently working on "In Absentia" (Passerelle, Brest), as part of a series of exhibitions examining art practices with low coefficients of artistic visibility, which raise the prospect of art without artworks, authorship or spectatorship. He lives in Paris, and is PARACHUTE's correspondent in France.

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2. The Future of the Reciprocal Readymade:
An Essay on Use-Value and Art-Related Practice

Stephen Wright

In a late text, Marcel Duchamp set out to distinguish several different types of readymades. Of particular interest here is the genre which he punningly described as "reciprocal readymades." Anxious, he claimed, "to emphasize the fundamental antinomy between art and the readymade," Duchamp defined this radically new, yet subsequently neglected genre through an example: "Use a Rembrandt as an ironing-board."1 More than a mere quip to be taken at face value, or a facetious mockery of use-value, Duchamp's example points to the symbolic potential of recycling art – and more broadly, artistic tools and competence – into the general symbolic economy of everyday life. For in that respect, the reciprocal readymade is the obverse of the standard readymade, which recycles the real – in the form of manufactured objects – into the symbolic economy of art. Historically speaking, the readymade is inseparably bound up with objecthood: it refers to a readymade, manufactured object Yet, it would be reductive to confine the readymade to its objective dimension alone, if only because it provides such a strong general image of the reciprocal logic between art and the real.

In the same way that framing an object in an art context neutralizes it as an object (distinguishing it, as it were, from the mere real thing), can the de-framing of an artwork neutralize it, in reciprocal fashion, as art? This is an important question, and one to which Duchamp was expressly alluding, because it would enable art to produce a use-value. Since Immanuel Kant's influential championing of "purposeless purpose" and "disinterested satisfaction" as defining features of our engagement with art, it has been broadly held that art cannot produce use-values. Kant argued in effect that art, unlike design, could not be evaluated and appreciated on the basis of its objective purpose – be it external, regarding the utility of the object, or internal, regarding the perfection of the object. In so doing, Kant sought to preserve art from the realm of the "merely useful"; and in the contemporary world where utilitarian rationality and the sort of cost-benefit analysis to which it leads reign supreme, where art is regularly co-opted by such profit-driven, subjectivity-production industries as advertising, to even mention use-value tends to smack of the philistine. Of course one might say that in such a context there is something circular about defending art on the basis of its uselessness alone (or even its "radical uselessness," as Adorno put it), for it would seem to suggest there is something worthwhile and thus useful about something ostensibly lacking use-value…

In any event, I have found that many contemporary artistic practices in the public sphere cannot be adequately understood unless their primary ambition to produce a use-value is taken into account. In trying to grasp what is at stake and at play in many of the art-informed practices which are, today, self-consciously concerned with generating use-value by injecting artistic skills into the real, it is useful to anchor their approach in art-historical terms; I want to argue that one way of understanding these works is as attempts to reactivate the unacknowledged genre of artistic activity conceived by Duchamp. For though he never got beyond the speculative phase – never actually putting his thoughts on the reciprocal readymade into practice – Duchamp clearly saw it as a way of "de-signing" art, of removing the signature by using an artwork to produce a use-value. For it is quite difficult to imagine how an artist-signed artwork (a "Rembrandt"), put to use as an ironing board, could then be re-signed as an "artistic" ironing board. Indeed, Duchamp's point was that it would revert to non-art status – the price to be paid for acquiring use-value, though it would assuredly be a most uncommon ironing board.

That's just art!

By that reckoning then, Kant was quite right: use-value and art, at least as it is now conventionally understood, are mutually exclusive terms. But is it perhaps possible to envisage dealing with use-value in substantively different terms? In terms literally reversing the dominant mode of twentieth-century artistic production? By thinking of art in terms of its specific means (its tools) rather than its specific ends (artworks)? In contexts often far removed from art-specific spaces and time, the past few years have witnessed the emergence of a broad range of such practices, which, in spite of certain affinities and indeed, in some cases, of undeniable family ties, can only be described as art-related rather than art-specific activities – often laying no particular claim to art status. The particular form of these activities suggests that they may be motivated by the desire to escape what is surely one of the most enfeebling accusations with which art is often, implicitly or explicitly, targeted: that it's not for real; or to put it bluntly, that it's just art For much of modernity, this could be dismissed as quite an unfair charge, and in any case situating art tautologically as what it is would not have been seen as disqualifying its role or impact in the public sphere. Much twentieth-century aesthetic philosophy was devoted to placing art in invisible parentheses, in an effort to separate art objects from the "mere real things," as analytical aesthetics cleverly puts it. Comparing a readymade to the "mere real thing" is certainly an elegant way of underscoring art's ontological privileges; but there is something insolent and obviously fraudulent about describing non-art as "merely" real, particularly as art has often shown itself all too ready to fall back on its status as the "mere" partner of the real. Invariably, when some artwork or other is threatened with censorship, the artworld's reaction is to assert the work's art status, upholding the privileged status it enjoys in the symbolic order. Ironically however, in so doing, it is implicitly acknowledged that it is merely art, not the dangerous, and thus potentially censorship-deserving, real thing. In other words, cordoning art off from the real has, in many cases, afforded art a place in the public eye, but it has done so at the considerable cost of stripping art of its capacity to find a way to have any real use-value and undermining its claim to do much damage to the dominant order of signs.

Art without artists, without artworks, and without an artworld
What happens when art crops up in the everyday, not to aestheticize it, but to inform it? When art appears not in terms of its specific ends (artwork) but in terms of its specific means (competence)? Well, for one thing, it has an exceedingly low coefficient of artistic visibility: something is seen, but not as art – for without the validating framework of the artworld, art cannot be recognized as such, which is one reason why it is from time to time useful to reterritorialize it in an art-specific space through documentation. The four collectives whose work I shall consider in a moment – The Yes Men, bureau d'études, AAA Corp, and the Grupo de Arte Callejero – all confront a common operative paradox: though informed by art-related skills, their work suffers from – or, one could say, enjoys – impaired visibility as art. Yet this impaired visibility may well be inversely proportional to the work's political efficiency: since it is not partitioned off as "art" – that is, as "just art" – it remains free to deploy all its symbolic force in lending enhanced visibility and legibility to social processes of all kinds. It is a form of stealth art, infiltrating spheres of world-making beyond the scope of work operating unambiguously under the banner of art. The art-related practitioners I mention here, and many others like them, have all sought to circumvent the reputation-based economy of the artworld, founded on individual names, and have chosen to engage in collaborative action; they use their skills to generate perception and produce reality-estranging configurations outside the artworld. As the wide range of tools developed by these collectives show, this has nothing to do with shunning or banning image production; art has no reason to renounce representation, a tool it has done much to forge and to hone over its long history. The question is the use to which such tools are put, in what context, and by whom: tools whose use-value is revealed as they are taken up and put to work. Specifically, then, how can art-related skills and perceptions be channelled in such a way that they empower rather than impress people? In other words, what do reciprocal-readymade practices, which see art as a latent activity rather than as an object or a process, physically look like?

The Yes Men: donning the fictional garb

The device which The Yes Men have most effectively gleaned from the toolbox of art history is verisimilitude, which they deploy in a framework of what might be described as deferred-disclosure tactics. The group is perhaps best known for designing fake-functional websites that parody, imperceptibly and incisively, those of socially pernicious political and business organizations, including the G.W. Bush campaigns in 2000 and 2004, and perhaps most notoriously, the World Trade Organization (WTO). So un-artlike – that is, so unidentifiable as art – was The Yes Men's parallel WTO website design that it actually led to the group being invited, on several occasions, to represent the WTO at prestigious gatherings of various sectors of the business community, invitations which The Yes Men were only too pleased to accept. Asked to represent the WTO at a textile-manufacturers congress in

Finland, one of The Yes Men took the podium and proceeded to deliver a keynote address on the virtues of free-trade and the evils of protectionism, which appeared to most audience members so WTO-like that they barely cringed when the speaker went on to argue that the abolition of slavery was an unreasonable interference in a market-driven economy. This impeccably designed performance was only revealed for what it was – a radical and thought-provoking spoof on the absurdity of laissez-faire discourse – when the impostor stripped off his three-piece, pin-striped suit and, clad only in a skin-tight bodysuit, proceeded to deploy a four-foot long phallus-like object attached to his midriff. Deadpan as ever, he described this Priapic excrescence – to the dismay of the security guards and the guffaws of the audience suddenly shaken from its ideological torpor – as a managerial tool for keeping close tabs on labour activity on the factory floors of the world. Such antics are made possible only by the deployment of art-related, fiction-design skills to infiltrate spheres well outside the world of art.
Perhaps a still more caustic fiction-based instance of "subversion of corporate subversion," as The Yes Men put it, was the genuinely fake press release they designed and sent out by email to thousands of people, ostensibly from Dow Chemical Corporation, on the eighteenth anniversary of the accident in Bhopal, India, which begins as follows:

December 3, 2002
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
Contact: mailto:press@dow-chemical.com
DOW ADDRESSES BHOPAL OUTRAGE, EXPLAINS POSITION
Company responds to activist concerns with concrete action points
In response to growing public outrage over its handling of the Bhopal disaster's legacy, Dow Chemical (http://www.dow-chemical.com) has issued a statement explaining why it is unable to more actively address the problem.
"We are being portrayed as a heartless giant which doesn't care about the 20,000 lives lost due to Bhopal over the years," said Dow President and CEO Michael D. Parker. "But this just isn't true. Many individuals within Dow feel tremendous sorrow about the Bhopal disaster, and many individuals within Dow would like the corporation to admit its responsibility, so that the public can then decide on the best course of action, as is appropriate in any democracy.
"Unfortunately, we have responsibilities to our shareholders and our industry colleagues that make action on Bhopal impossible. And being clear about this has been a very big step."

In many cases unaware that what they were reading was art, public reaction was one of outrage. Dow's reaction was to use its corporate influence to immediately shut down the ThingNet – the New York-based Internet provider The Yes Men had been using (along with tens of thousands of other subscribers) – which offers stinging testimony as to how the corporation assessed the action's veritable use-value, and gives some insight into the limits of corporate respect for the Internet as a public domain. In light of this action (further information on which can be found at www.theyesmen.org/dow/), I emailed The Yes Men the following question:

If threatened legally for having defamed, slandered or libellously depicted the WTO, the GATT, the Republican presidential candidate, DOW Chemical or whomever, would you argue that, ontologically speaking, your work is in the realm of fiction, rather than in the realm of the real, and therefore no more subject to prosecution than a character in a novel can be judged in a court outside of that novel's fictional framework? In other words, do you consider yourselves to be intervening in the real or in fictional representation?
To which I received the following, unambiguous reply:

In the real. Using fiction very truthfully, is how we see it. Providing transparency through truth masquerading as fiction. Actually not even masquerading, for that implies dressing-up, and there's no dressing-up – it's by donning the fictional garb that the nakedness is achieved.2

All too often, art's engagement with the real is construed in terms exemplified by the fruitless efforts of Don Quixote to set the world aright: the cockeyed knight's self-detrimental though sublime misapprehension of reality has led many to the melancholic conclusion that art is well advised to remain in its own sphere, rather than combating an order of reality entirely foreign to it. The Yes Men, however, seem to take fiction by the horns, reversing the logic of Quixotic antics, thereby suggesting that today the conventional relationship between fiction and reality has itself been reversed. Rather than fighting a reality anachronistically misconstrued in terms of fiction, The Yes Men "don the fictional garb" to smuggle a public reality check right to the foreground of the stage-managed theatrics devised to conceal big business interests, exposing the naked truth beneath the mantle of legitimacy which media consultants – the real fictioneers of today – spend their days carefully spinning.

bureau d'études: autonomizing cartography

The truth-value of fiction, particularly when wielded with humour, can be powerful indeed. But in the end, the point is to incite people to look at the real – and to do something about it. Mapping information, power and influence networks, producing flowcharts that link the often invisible, overlapping interests of technological, bureaucratic and economic power – in short, the component parts of biocracy in the era of the post-national state – has been the project of the art collective, bureau d'études over the past eight or so years. The Paris-based group has produced a dozen or so cognitive maps in an attempt to foster autonomous knowledge – autonomous, that is, from the monopoly held by the information-production regime of contemporary capitalist society. While many of the maps are denunciatory, revealing the collusion between pharmaceutical, biotech, telecommunications, media and resource-

extraction interests, others contribute to solidarity by drawing attention to networks of alternative knowledge and power (social centres, alternative media coops, squats, etc.). Typically, the group produces hand-out maps (60 x 84 cm), which are distributed in contexts where such autonomizing cartographic information may be empowering – in demonstrations or social forums, for instance. What is significant is that nothing whatsoever indicates that the maps have anything to do with art: of course, if one thinks about the extraordinary intricacy – and no less remarkable legibility – of the maps' design, one might well conclude that they are informed by art-related, graphic-design skills. Yet, situated outside the legitimating frame of the artworld, from which they have freed themselves financially and ideologically, they lay no claim to artistic status, and as such are diametrically opposed to Kant's "purposeless purpose" of aesthetic delectation: their objective purpose is clearly the production of autonomous knowledge. For it would be a mistake to reduce bureau d'études' work to graphic design alone: the maps are not an end in themselves, but an art-informed contribution to a far broader resistance to the transnational production line. Unfolding the map, one is confronted with an almost dizzying accumulation of information; bewilderment however quickly yields to fascination and – thanks to the index of proper names on the back of the map – to the desire to investigate these unnoticed ties of power more carefully. The maps designed by bureau d'études have often been compared to the wonderfully detailed maps, hand-drawn by the late New York-based artist Mark Lombardi. The information presented is indeed comparable – but after all, the information is all publicly available and verifiable, and appears seditious only because the links are seldom explicitly drawn. The difference lies in the very different artistic status of the two projects, and the entirely different gaze to which that status leads: whereas Lombardi produced unique artworks whose coefficient of artistic visibility was consequently maximal, bureau d'études batch-print and distribute their maps by the thousands, inviting an entirely different perception.

AAA Corp: the use-value of the artworld

What bureau d'études does in figurative terms – pulling apart the intricate semiotic machinery of post-Fordist capitalism and reassembling it in unconventional ways – the group AAA Corp, also based in France, does in entirely literal, hands-on fashion. With technical means and an esprit de bricolage comparable to what one might find in an automotive repair shop in the outskirts of Africa, the group's members recuperated the carcass of a Mercedes 508 diesel truck, which they entirely redesigned and re-outfitted into a mobile and (more or less) roadworthy silkscreen studio, which they drive from event to event, making the silkscreen equipment available to those who wish to use it to print stickers, etc. Behind this low-tech, autonomous media truck, known as AAA Corp Serigraphik (2001), they tow a mobile pirate FM radio station (AAA Corp Transmission, 1999), comprised of a sound and broadcasting studio which is also open to all those desirous to disseminate alternative information. A second trailer has been revamped as a fully functional refinery for extracting oil from such oleaginous plants as rape seed. The oil produced serves a double purpose: as an edible oil for salad dressing and French fries, and as a fuel oil used for running the group's expanding fleet of vehicles. In this instance, AAA Corp's slightly blurred, yet nonetheless undeniable, visibility on the radar screens of the artworld is a crucial tactical component in the group's work: just as the legitimacy of using a pirate radio broadcasting unit is dependent on the group's quasi-art status ("It's just art!"), so too their provocative use of self-pressed (and thus of course road tax-free) fuel oil to run their trucks escapes prosecution because of the exceptional status of art-related activities as opposed to their merely real counterparts. In this respect, AAA Corp is playing a double game; however, the contradiction is a productive one, for it enables them to engage in a reciprocal questioning both of the use-value of art and of the artworld (which in this light appears to be founded less upon a commitment to freedom than on the extension of privilege). The group's point is not to suggest that the world should abandon fossil fuels, nor even to merely condemn the wars waged to ensure their extraction, in favour of rape seed fuels – which would necessitate growing vast tracts of pesticide-concentrated monoculture. The point is to offer a tangible and infectious example of do-it-yourself autonomy.

Grupo de Arte Callejero: Making absence felt

Its name notwithstanding, the Grupo de Arte Callejero (GAC, "Street Art Group") is, of the four groups mentioned, undoubtedly the one with the lowest coefficient of artistic visibility, though its contribution to enhancing the visibility of popular movements in Argentina has been highly significant. Founded in 1997 in Buenos Aires, it is currently made up of eight members, some of whom have formal artistic training, while others are bio-chemists or graphic designers. The group works in situations of public participation, rather than art-referenced contexts, using its graphic-design and art-related competencies to challenge the public consumption and foster the public production of signs. Over the past few years, the GAC has worked with the steering committee of the H.I.J.O.S. movement ("Hijos" is the Spanish word for sons and daughters, and was founded by the children of some of the 30,000 people those who were "disappeared" by the military dictatorship), in organizing public actions with the objective of drawing attention to the ongoing presence in Buenos Aires' residential neighbourhoods of those who, in one capacity or another, took part in the criminal activities of the military government. These actions, highly specific to the Argentine context, and developed by H.I.J.O.S. in 1995, are known as escraches. An escrache is a sort of collective performance, where the production of memory and knowledge is inseparable from the production of form. The point is not so much to demand that the perpetrators of the genocide and political repression – which were of course not carried out by a handful of officers and their henchmen but required an extensive network of profiteers from all walks of life – be brought to trial, nor certainly to lynch them in a further miscarriage of justice, but to shed light on the role they played and their ongoing impunity, in order to constitute a sort of social memory and a popular understanding at the neighbourhood level of how the dictatorship actually functioned, so as to prevent its re-emergence. To this end, the GAC has developed a full array of tools – street signs indicating the location of clandestine detention centres, city maps showing the addresses of the perpetrators of repression – that the group deploys itself and makes available to others.

To a greater extent than the other examples I have mentioned, the GAC has chosen to inject art-specific competence into social processes as a tangible form of energy, while at the same time maintaining art as such in a state of objective absence. What they do is not art, yet without art it would not be possible to do it. This paradox underscores an ethical imperative: how could art adequately reconcile form and content to represent the absence of the 30,000 people assassinated by Argentina's military regime some two decades ago, for it is not their presence which is absent, but their absence which is so devastatingly present. In such circumstances, and others too, art must have the grace to respect that absence with its own.

Notes

An earlier version of the above text was first published in the leaflet accompanying the exhibition "The Future of the Reciprocal Readymade," shown at Apexart, New York, March 17 – April 17, 2004.

1. Marcel Duchamp, "Apropos of 'Readymades'", was initially given as a lecture at the Museum of Modern Art, New York, October 19, 1961; first published in Art and Artists, 1, 4 (July 1966), it is included in Michel Sanouillet and Elmer Peterson (eds.), The Writings of Marcel Duchamp (New York: Da Capo, 1989), p. 32. The text is easily accessible online, at iaaa.nl/cursusAA&AI/duchamp.html. In a spirited television interview with Guy Viau on Radio Canada, first aired on July 17, 1960, Duchamp gave an even more explicit description of his notion of reciprocal readymades. A transcription of this little known conversation is now available in French on the website of the online journal Tout-fait (vol. 2, isue 4, january 2002) : www.toutfait.com/issues/volume2/ issue_4/interviews/md_guy/md_guy_f.html.

2. The Yes Men, email correspondence with the author, April 27, 2003.

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PUBLIC ART

Julie Ault

1996. http://www.undo.net/cgi-bin/openframe.pl?x=/Facts/Eng/fault.htm

LA GENERAZIONE DELLE IMMAGINI

Public Art

Julie Ault

Go back

Today I'm going to give you some background on Group Material and show slides of Group Material projects in public places as well as other relevant artists' and groups' work. That will be followed by account and evidence of some recent developments in the Times Square area of New York and public art projects which precipitated these developments.

Group Material is an artists' collaborative founded as a constructive response to what we found to be the unsatisfactory ways that art was being taught, exhibited, and distributed in American culture at that time. When we started in 1979 there were thirteen of us but within a year and a half there were only three (Mundy McLaughlin, Tim Rollins and myself). Group Material has had a changing membership over the years but for the majority of its history there was a group of four working within a non-hierarchical organizational base. There were various conditions and shared purposes that led to the formation of the group. A lot of us had just come from art school, where we were trained to develop a 'unique' artistic voice. We were also trained to believe that after school you then can go exercise this voice in the so-called real world. This seemed to be pretty much of a false promise considering the limitations and biases which accompanied market principles and the commercial art system, and, many of us were not interested in making objects, but in collaborative processes. We were collectively intent on combining our social and political motivations with artistic practices, which is more common now than it was at that time. Then, the lines between art and politics were more clearly drawn and that delineation was commonly supported, often with the stated interest of preventing the contamination of art with politics.

Our inaugural poster stated some concerns:
"We want to maintain control over our work, directing our energies to the demands of social conditions, as opposed to than those of the art market. While most art institutions separate art from the world, neutralizing any abrasive forms and content, Group Material accentuates the cutting-edge of art. Our project is clear: we invite everyone to question the entire culture we have taken for granted." Group Material's primary medium has been the temporary exhibition. For our first year we presented exhibitions in a storefront which we rented and operated. After that we started producing exhibitions in interior spaces, at various kinds of art institutions, and we've also situated exhibition(s) in unexpected places, or public space. By public space for the most part I mean advertising space, which of course is private but in public.

So Group Material has rented space in billboards and newspapers, in subways and train stations, etc., in order to bring the idea of an exhibition, and to bring other agendas than commercial into the public sphere. Those are the projects I'm going to focus on today, the ones where we've dealt with public address, and social agendas within the environment of commerce and advertising.

Rather than isolate our practice artificially I'm going to situate Group Material's work within the larger context of certain social conditions in New York from the early 80s on, and in proximity to a couple examples of other artists' work in order to provide the sense that we operated with at the time, of working within a network of critical and oppositional practices, within various communities. At the beginning of the 80s, and in the late 70s, the context for working as artists in New York was polarized. There was a resurgence in neo-expressionist painting going on, with a notion of an heroic artist figure

in the foreground. And on the other hand, there was an environment of feminism, anti-colonialist critique, civil rights, punk and do-it-yourself music culture, etc. There was a strong feeling of entitlement in young people and amongst artists and cultural workers_entitlement, to question authority, and desire and responsibility to have a voice in culture that was challenging, contestational, and collaborative among other things.

I'm going to start showing the slides, and pose a couple of questions in relation to this lecture series about urban space: What is possible, encouraged and allowed in public? What are the mechanisms by which public space is controlled? How do various agencies function and how are they utilized in order to get a certain agenda or message across in public? How are artists controlled, censored, encouraged, and instrumentalized within various urban cultural contexts? What roles do artists take on "in public"? And, a reminder that the public sphere in conjunction with the political climate has changed dramatically since the early 80s to the 90s in New York, as we'll see in the example of Times Square.

A preface for the slides: from Sharon Zukin, author of an invaluable analytical book called The Culture of Cities : "Building a city depends on how people combine the traditional economic factors of land, labour and capital, but it also depends on how they manipulate symbolic languages of exclusion and entitlement. The look and feel of cities reflect decisions about what and who should be visible and what should not, on concepts of order and disorder, and uses of aesthetic power. In this primal sense, the city has always had a symbolic economy." I read this because these slides demonstrate dealing with a kind of surface or projection site within an urban context. This symbolic and real economy is a battleground between various ideologies, not methods.

At the beginning of 1980, concurrent with the beginnings of Group Material, a group of artists organized an event called The Real Estate Show. This was an important landmark and example of artists banding together to make a critical statement about an economic, political, and representational crisis. The organizing artists illegally seized a storefront space on Delancey Street in the Lower East Side in order to stage both a thematic art show around the subject of real estate and more importantly to stage an action and media event against the City (sometimes referred to as New York's worst landlord) as the party responsible for warehousing or keeping vacant buildings that could be otherwise used by people for living or working space. The city-owned site they chose to occupy, 123 Delancy Street, was slated for potential shopping plaza development. The flyer distributed announcing the event stated: "This is a short term occupation of vacant city-managed commercial property...The intention of this action is the show that artists are willing and able to place themselves and their works squarely in a context which shows solidarity with oppressed people and a recognition that mercantile and institutional structures oppress and distort artists' lives and works, and a recognition that artists, living and working in depressed communities, are compradors in the whitening or gentrification of neighbourhoods. It is important to focus attention on the way artists get used as pawns by greedy white developers."

The show opened on January 1st and on January 3rd the City of New York closed it down, locked the gate. Joseph Beuys happened to be in town at that time and visited the space, thereby providing a photo opportunity to the daily newspapers, resulting in increased media attention. This helped transform the event and circumstances of the show's shut-down by the city into a platform for spokespeople of the project to articulate their purpose and critique. The organizers had meetings with city officials from the housing department in order to negotiate a solution. The city offered another nearby space that would be permanent space or semi-permanent depending on the viability of what the group did. Reluctantly they accepted the alternate space at 156 Rivington Street that would become ABC No Rio, an ongoing alternative space which is still open though threatened with eviction. This example is significant as cultural activism by artists, but also in terms of the impact of the compromise made. By accepting the alternate space, media attention and public discourse around this event ended, and the visible model of squatting or taking over space leading to negotiation was closed down and erased.

Around the same time as The Real Estate Show Group Material rented a storefront space on East 13th Street. Keep in mind that this was still the Lower East Side, but the Lower East Side within a few years would also be known as the East Village, location for multiple bohemian fantasies and alternative art commerce district to Soho and 57th Street. When Group Material opened its space on East 13th Street the intention was for a room of our own, and to make a laboratory within which to organize and stage exhibitions and events with social themes. We also wanted to develop a relationship with the people living in the neighborhood, an immediate audience, in addition to relationships with the 'art world'. We were balancing multiple audiences and constituencies. This exhibition pictured, called The People's Choice is an example of redressing the notion of public through an exhibition. Hanging on the walls are articles and objects we gathered from residents on the block after distributing a letter door-to-door which read in part: "Dear friends and neighbours of 13th Street. Group Material is having an exhibition and you're invited. Group Material is the gallery that opened this October at 244 East 13th. We are a group of young people who have been organizing different kinds of events in our storefront. We've had parties, art shows, movies and art classes for the kids who are always rushing in and out. The Peoples' Choice is the title of our next exhibition. We would like to show things that might not usually find their way into an art gallery. The things that you personally find beautiful, the objects that you keep for your own pleasure, the objects that have meaning for you your family and your friends. What could these be? They can be photographs, or your favorite posters. If you collect things, these objects would be good for this exhibition."

What was important to us at the time and significant in retrospect about this exhibition is that it posed a different view of what is culturally valuable than posited by museums and other institutions considered to be official culture, and the 'collection' The People's Choice was an answer to what is culturally valuable determined by people not thought of as cultural experts. The People's Choice was not an ethnographic exhibition.

At the end of this first year that we had the gallery space there were various factions and arguments that had developed in the group and we decreased from a group of thirteen to a group of three. Although we started with a lot of energy and enthusiasm, as we more clearly identified and refined our ideas and interests, in terms of what we wanted to do individually and as a group, the original configuration basically fell apart. One reason we then identified was we had fallen into the trap in setting up an alternative space. We were feeding into the commercial system and accepting the role of being overdetermined by our alternative status. We were waiting for people to come and see what we were doing rather than taking ideas and production to the streets and other places, rather than taking our own question to heart, "who is culture for and where should it be seen". With the demise of the initial group incarnation and on the occasion of giving up our storefront space, we issued a flyer titled Caution: Alternative Space:

"For the second season Group Material is a very different organization with new associates and new tactics. We've learned that the notion of alternative space is not only politically phony and aesthetically naive, it can also be diabolical. It is impossible to create a radical and innovative art if this work is anchored in one special gallery location. Art can have the most political content and right-on form but the stuff just hangs there silent unless its means of distribution makes political sense as well. If a more inclusive and democratic vision of art is our project then we cannot possibly rely on winning validation from bright white rooms and full-color repros in the art world glossies. To tap and promote the lived aesthetic of a largely non-art public, this is our goal, our contradiction, our energy." So it was quite liberating at that point to not have the obligation of a space ,and to define ourselves as an independent group that could function in different ways and spaces throughout the city. This opened the possibility to work site-specifically and in contexts of various institutions and bureaucratic agencies.

One of the first projects that we did in a public space or outdoor space was called Da zi baos, or The Democracy Wall. "Dazi bao" is Chinese for "large-scale character posters". Our cursory understanding of the democracy wall movement in China is that it is a traditional form of social written dialogue occurring in public squares. The chain of events is that someone or some group would mount a commentary poster about public policy or a certain issue on an outdoor wall. And then another person would come and put another poster next to that and so on and so on. What ensued was a kind of opinion landscape, which in fact sometimes influenced public policy. In 1976 after Mao's death, Deng was reinstated in the party and by 1980 he consolidated his power and deleted four freedoms from the 1978 Constitution; speaking out freely; airing views fully; holding debates; and writing big character posters_the traditional form of political protest. We tailored the concept and form of Da Zi Baos and made a kind of constructed version.

We were thinking at that time, in 1982, about ways in which public opinion is instrumentalized and wielded by the media in the United States and how opinions and views are reduced to a yes or no, with no complexity or gray area in between, replicating cycles of reductive thinking. The process of gathering the statements that you see on the wall involved interviewing people on the street at the actual Union Square location where the posters were later installed about a number of social issues that were relevant to the site of Union Square and current events. We juxtaposed those statement from individuals (black on yellow) with organizational statements from various groups (black on red) who were working with the same issues. So in a sense the democracy wall is not so dissimilar from some of our interior shows in terms of the overall framework being a forum or a model of a democratic form.
The first statement in the wall was from Group Material:
"Even though it's easy and fun, we're sick of being the audience. We want to do something, we want to create our culture instead of just buying it."
Juxtaposed with that was a statement by a housewife: "Government funding of the arts should depend on the actual purpose, what they are giving it for. If it was being based on as far as to help other people or something like that I could see it."
Two other statements were about unions. An office worker said:
"Unions benefit society, but not in my office."
And the Home Health Care Workers Union wrote:
"These are rough times to stand alone. Even though people are now paid for working, the attitude of masters towards servants remains the same." I want to point our that this was a very inexpensive project to do ($200) as we did them by hand. We put the posters up illegally at night, and they stayed up for approximately five weeks before they were covered up and/or dilapidated. Up until then Group Material had been self-generating financially, meaning the members of the group pooled our moneys to make events and pay for projects. Around this time we began to get National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) support.

These next slides are of a project by artist John Fekner who was working concurrently. The series of site-specific stencils in public spaces was called Queensites. Talking about the purpose of this practice

he said the works were intended to:
"Indicate the areas in communities that have a need for construction, deconstruction, or reconstruction. Point out problems of the physical landscape pertaining to any of the structures or atmospheres in that area by labeling them as damaged or dangerous commodities. Get sanitation crews to take faster action at clearing away debris."

And in an interview with Peter Fend in 1980:
"My signs point directly to the environment in one's life and the call for a greater recognition of ones actual experience. Advertising billboards call for a recognition of what's at the store or at the end of an airplane ride. I oppose the idea in advertising of selling a product or a place without regard to the immediate physical circumstances affecting one's body, such as pollutants or poverty." This image is where Fekner had stenciled the word "Decay" on the side of a building in the South Bronx. Ronald Reagan was out there campaigning for the Presidency in 1980. The site was used as a backdrop by Reagan for a news conference_he appropriated the work for political purposes which in the end backfired because he made a lot of declarations and promises to the people of the South Bronx that he would clean up the area etc., and he was booed out. But this is an interesting example I think of some overlaps within visual/media culture. An example of a sign, an art work in public being appropriated by those it critiques. This one: "The Remains of Industry" is an example of how he would go out at night and stencil on something that should have been destroyed but wasn't, and then it would be attended to quicker because it had been marked in that way.

This is another project by Group Material called Subculture done in 1983. We rented advertising space on the subway trains. In this case Group Material acted as a contractor because we made a contract with the subway authorities for the space and then we invited 103 artists to make thirty pieces each to put up in those spaces. The transit authorities had told us we couldn't do anything with political content or religious overtones and that foreclosed about ninety percent of what we wanted to do because we knew that most of the artists wanted to do something with a political or social message. But given that this was the early 80s and it was before the culture wars, artists were not yet seen as symbolically dangerous, so there was really no oversight on what was installed ultimately because even though they warned us, we took the posters to the people who were putting them up. They liked the work so there were really no problems. The conditions for artists working in a public sphere where they have to negotiate with bureaucratic agencies is much tougher in terms of content being scrutinized. There is much more restrictive control over what the content can be, and some artists have even gone to the Supreme Court to battle their right to free speech in this manner. This is one of the most successful pieces in Subculture. It was made by a woman named Vanalynne Green who was working as a performance artist and also as a secretary on Wall Street at the time. She took a photograph of coffee cups and overlaid a story in one of the centers of the cups about how each morning her boss asked her to bring him a cup of coffee and she would smile as she handed it to him, remembering and relishing that she'd poured it in a dirty cup. For the month of September that year that was one work on every subway car on the IRT train.

This project is an interior exhibition by Group Material included here because we were thinking critically for this about what is American culture, what is this monolithic notion of the American public that is commonly promoted? It was called Americana, done in the Whitney Museum in the biennial exhibition in 1985, and it was the first time that Group Material had been invited by a so-called dominant institution or museum to do an exhibition. Traditionally the Whitney Museum Biennial is a survey of what the curators deem important or significant in American art in the last two years. I'm going to frame it cynically, but our view of the Biennial was that it was a very narrow vision that informed selection processes, making a kind of greatest hits of what had been going on the galleries and what had been selling the best, and didn't necessarily have much connection with what was happening on a larger scale in society. So given that the parameters or the frame for the exhibition was the Biennial, we thought we would make a model of our own biennial or what we though was important but left out of the Whitney Museum, and that included not only some artists but also elements of mass culture or so-called low culture. We were also trying to make a link between aesthetic choices people make shopping for instance in choosing a washing machine or which kind of cereal to buy, and the choices, in some ways based on taste, the Whitney curators make when shopping on a grander scale, for the museum collection. Americana also addressed the idea of the Whitney as a national museum, it's actually called the Whitney Museum of American Art, and thereby is defining their idea of American art is, and we wanted to take issue with the exclusivity and white-washed picture of American art is and open it up so it was more inclusive of women artists and artists of colour as well as excluded political agendas. The idea was to make a less elitist version of American culture and temporarily symbolically remove some borders of high and low culture, ultimately to question what is valued.

This project from 1988 was called Inserts. Again we were acting as a kind of contractor by renting this space and then turning to artists to supply the content. In this case the advertising space was in a newspaper_the insert went into 90,000 copies of the Sunday New York Times which in theory reaches about 150,000 readers. We invited 10 artists to make one page each, this first one on the left is by Mike Glier and the one on the right Jenny Holzer. Here Barbara Kruger and Carrie Mae Weems. Felix Gonzalez-Torres who had just prior become part of Group Material, and Nancy Spero on the right. Nancy Linn and Hans Haacke. Richard Prince and Louise Lawler. We had originally planned Inserts for the Daily News which is a more local less intellectual paper than the New York Times. We had been

negotiating with the Daily News for about a year but never actually signed a contract. And then when we finally went to them with the mock-ups of artwork we wanted to produce they rejected it on the basis that "it wasn't art it was editorial". So then we took the project to the New York Times and worked with the "advertising acceptability director" there, who was concerned that the piece by Carrie Mae Weems' work would be misunderstood by members of the audience as racist and wouldn't know it was made by an African-American artist, but eventually they accepted the project.

When Group Material has done projects like Americana at the Whitney or even with Inserts there is often a zone of compromise. From our point of view it's been worthwhile to negotiate at times. We certainly aren't interested in diffusing the content or meaning of our work, but we are interested in working at least temporarily with and within these institutions and not marginalizing ourselves. So for instance with the Whitney, in a sense they are using us in order to fulfill a certain function, to take care of certain social issues, and in turn we use it as a platform to pose a different set of social agendas.

This is a project Group Material organized with several organizations. We worked with Randolph Street Gallery which is an alternative space in Chicago and then with six community organizations spread throughout the city. So there are different levels of collaboration going on in this project. Group Material is itself collaborative, which is non-hierarchical and we don't use the corporate model which is along lines of expertise but we work together and take responsibility as a group for every aspect of the work. And then there's a collaboration or dialogue with the those artists and non-artists we work with, in terms of participation in the various projects.

And in the case of this project which is called Your Message Here we were collaborating from the beginning on the project with seven other institutions or organizations in terms of conceptualizing, putting the call out to artists and non-artists to place Your Message Here, selecting the material, and then actually realizing the billboards. Especially in low income neighborhoods in Chicago there is a predominance of cigarette and tobacco advertising on billboards. The idea was to replace some of that advertising with other messages, other images and agendas for a three month period. We had forty billboards donated by Gannett Outdoor Advertising on which we could display whatever we wanted to.

We put out a call through the six community organizations for people to propose what they wanted to see on billboards in their neighborhoods. It wasn't exactly a competition but we made a selection from about 140 proposals that we received to about forty that became actual billboards. We ended up with a very wide range of artistic approaches to the topical, vital social problems that people were thinking about in the neighborhoods of Chicago. Another level of collaboration that took place in this project was that there were a number of people who were not artists so they would be positioned with graphic artists or artists to realize their projects. This one was sited across from a high school, and it was done by Act-Up Chicago. They wanted to put it next to a high school and have the issues that are not talked about by students or in the general school policy such as sexuality etc. This piece says "no human is illegal". You can see there is a lot of variety in terms of the medium that people used to make these billboards as well. This was done by a homeless organization, the Chicago/Gary Union of the Homeless:(We may not have homes, but we do have names, and we live here too). So with a project like this we were really starting out with the idea that to incorporate new images into visual representations of the city can effectively and symbolically pose cultural democracy. (The war on drugs is a war on people. The real enemy is hopelessness in a dead-end system, by Vito Greco). This is a piece by Martina Lopez. She was asked what she would like to see on a billboard and she said she would like to see pictures of the people who lived there, friends and family, so she went and collected those and then worked with a graphic designer to make the final image.

There you see her billboard in situ or in context with the other ones for liquor. I love this piece and it also reminds me of The People's Choice project in a sense. At this point Group Material was composed of Doug Ashford (who joined in 1982), Felix Gonzalez-Torres (joined in 1987), Karen Ramspacher (since 1989), and myself.

In 1982 The Public Art Fund began a program called Messages to the Public on the specta-color light board in Times Square. I'm going to show a video of the various projects which happened there as well as read some excerpts about the ten year history of this program. The press release from the Public Art Fund describes the program: "On January 5, 1982, the Public Art Fund announced the inception of its program Messages to the Public. Beginning of the 15th of January the giant computer animated spectacolor billboard on the old Allied Chemical building at 1 Times Square will broadcast a thirty second art message to the 1.5 million potential viewers in the Times Square area every day. Recent projects in the Times Square area, notably murals by Richard Haus and Alex Katz in collaborative projects Times Square show made clear how effective art is in enhancing and revitalizing troubled urban centers. Messages to the Public is a classic example of one of the Public Art Fund's principle goals to marry an artist's individual expression to the public's expectations."

The picture on the right here is by Nancy Spero and that is actually a piece that was done for the spectacolor that was censored. Ellen Lubell described the politics of censorship in her article Spectacolor Short Circuits in the Village Voice 10 February 1987: "Late last summer Nancy Spero's feminist messages were quashed after they'd already going into production, and at the end of November video artist Dara Birnbaum's piece was rejected before it could be shown in its agreed up on

Christmas-New Year's slot. In both cases normal procedures had been followed and in bother cases spectacolor owner George Stonebelly stopped them cold."

The way that the economics of this situation work is that George Stonebelly owns the spectacolor board and gives a donation to the Public Art Fund in exchange for a tax break from the city for what he donates in terms of time and light-bulb use. Continuing with the Village Voice article:

"These are not the first incidence of rejection or demands for revision in the messages program. A piece about Ronald Reagan's politics by Hans Haacke never saw the lights on Broadway due to a reported that politically-oriented Haacke could produce something later on that would pass through. Haacke says he 'lost interest, because I knew that whatever I came up with, whatever that was of interest to me, was not likely to be acceptable."

The spectacolor board existed for artists use through Messages to the Public from 1982 to 1990. Similarly to Group Material projects and other projects I've shown you there is a very strong context for this kind of work in terms of Reagan being elected in 1980, the conditions of the Reagan and Bush administration years. A lot of us had a very clear sense of who the enemy was, which generated a lot of critique and protest oriented cultural activism. I'm going to leave the video going, it's about a thirty minute video but we can just let it run. In 1990 the year in which Stonebelly sold the board to another private company, you see in the photo the removal of the board.

The following is documentation of a related project in that it occurred in the Times Square area and was organized by Creative Time, an arts agency with similar goals and functions as the Public Art Fund. Creative Time is an agency that commissions art projects in unexpected places throughout the city. In 1993 Creative Time administered an art project in the storefront spaces on 42nd Street between 7th and 8th Avenues. This block, perhaps one of the most famous and infamous blocks in New York City, was formerly inhabited by a network of commercial enterprises such as movie theaters, adult entertainment and sex industry establishments (pornography shops) and fast food places such as Kentucky Fried Chicken and Tad's Steakhouse. This "traditional" fare was emptied in 1993 by the state's right of eminent domain and for the summer of that year the storefronts were reanimated with projects by forty-five artists. A New York Newsday article by Amei Wallach stated:

"The artists have been invited in by the 42nd Street New York Urban Development Project because all else has failed, because artists have been known to rescue dead neighborhoods. From SoHo to the East Village they have been unintentional stalking horse for real estate interests before, and this time they are willing accomplices in a new effort to save Times Square as a retail entertainment center."

This is a piece by the design firm M & Co., whose chief designer Tibor Kalman collaborated on the draft proposal for the New Times Square. For this piece he graphically displayed the word "Everybody", employing it as a kind of emblem of democracy. And I say this cynically because the whole notion of a new Times Square, changing it's seedy sex industry status in order to make it more attractive and comfortable for tourists and legitimate consumers is framed by the city, developers and architects as democratization when of course it's more complex than that_contrary to what many Americans confusedly believe, democracy and capitalism are not synonymous. There were a number or communities that were being served by a number of industries, but those people and communities are not legitimized in the eyes of the city. The redevelopment ushers in the "vulgar heterogeneity" desired by Robert A.M. Stern, the architect who drafted the redevelopment proposal in collaboration with Tibor Kalman, Mr. Everybody.

So in the case of this project on 42nd Street there were a lot of artists such as John Ahearn, Jenny Holzer, Lyle Harris, Glenn Ligon, etc._people whose agendas who are not conservative by any means_kind of feeding into a conservative agenda and aiding the "cleaning up" of Times Square. Reading from Culture of Cities again, Sharon Zukin wrote about this project:

"The on-site art installation drew so much favorable attention it was repeated the following year. The representation of Times Square as both a populist and avantguard cultural attraction helped by continued public subsidies for hotel construction and office relocation attracted corporate culture industries. The Disney corporation decided to open a theater for live stage shows on 42nd street and MTV, whose corporate offices are already in the area decided to open a new production studio."

So there's a direct relation here...in a sense artists were used in this situation to usher in the next step of cultural capital into that area. I suppose for Creative Time and a lot of the artists who participated it seemed to be an opportunity to show their work in a different space to a different, wider audience. Another aspect of the context for this unlikely partnership that developed, is that because of the culture wars many arts agencies, institutions, and artists in general have been so under fire for the last five, six, seven years there's been a pressure to reach a larger public and for artists to kind of advocate for their legitimacy and viability in the culture. So it's almost like a way of saying "look, artists do have a social function and we can be a positive force in this situation." Creative Time was probably responding to a lot of the culture war attacks on art by taking on a project like this. And in their flyer for this whole project they even said: "42nd can be a symbol of the decadence of our culture, but in its fierceness and danger can we also find hope? We can change the order of things, we can redevelop, and artists with

great wisdom and passion can help us to do it."

So even though I think for individual artists like this piece like Lyle Ashton Harris or the previous one by Lady Pink, they were making a social critique within their work and seeing their participation as oppositional, but the framework from the beginning was tainted. That was 1993. In 1994 the whole project of Creative Time organizing artworks in the empty stores was repeated. You're probably aware to some extent through the media of what's happening there which is a concerted effort by the city, the Republican administration and the businesses in the area to clean up Times Square, so its going to be the new, safe, family-oriented, Disneyfied version of Times Square. Obviously this is economically driven. This is the street sign, it has actually been changed from "W 42nd Street" to "New 42nd Street". This is the visitors' center where there is an exhibition showing what's going to happen in Times Square. When you go inside the center, itself a storefront on 42nd Street, on the left wall there is a kind of black and white (read: over) photo montage of the past glory of Times Square, that conveniently leaves out most of the sex industry. The focus is more on Broadway theaters and the legitimated commerce of Times Square. On the right hand side, all the images are in color (read: coming). There is the Virgin megastore that opened recently, a new McDonalds, Madame Tussaud's Wax Museum, New City Theater, Times Square Store, John's Pizza, the Firebread restaurant... that gives you some idea of the concerns. This is what in actuality 42nd Street looks like now, the old movie theatres have been closed down they are in various states of being repaired and changed. This is the transition moment, some reality in between the adjacent walls of the New Times Square Visitor Center. The Disney store opened about a month ago further east on 42nd. There are pockets of what's left of the sex industry economy which is being converted to a different kind of economy, corporate/consumer economy of office buildings, hotels, and thematic restaurants intended to cater to tourists and families. I realize this ends things with an air of pessimism but I think I was too ambitious, I have another tray of slides. It's 7:25 so perhaps its better to have some discussion and questions.

QUESTIONS
If the criticism of the 42nd Street project is founded on an analysis of what was there before, there is obviously some constructive critique of the changes in this zone, of its "Disneyfication". But is there not some nostalgia for what was there, the sex industry? Why was this more real in respect to the family-oriented culture being promoted now?

It's less nostalgia and more anger at the way that private initiative with the proper power base is able to totally demolish a community in the name of so-called public good and using the vocabulary of public morality for a private commercial agenda. Times Square has been changed without any thought or solutions for the people that operated commercially and inhabited it formerly, who have now been displaced. The city of New York, the same one that doesn't have the funds to build adequate housing for low-income people or adequately house it's homeless population_found $35 million to acquire the last private buildings on 42nd Street ($180 million had been spent between 1990-93 to buy others). It's not a matter of whether I liked it how it was before and don't now, I can get touristic and voyeuristic pleasure from either, but it's the political process that's informed by economics and the selective privatization process I want to emphasize and not the result of getting rid of the sex industry in Times Square.

At this moment does Group Material have a work in process, or what have you done in the past two or three years?

Group Material isn't working on any specific project at present. I would say we've been in decreasing activity mode for a while. It's a mixture of cultural changes and changes internal to the group that inform the decrease of activity and recent period of stasis. Some of the slides I didn't show yet are from the piece called Program for the Three Rivers Project in Pittsburgh, for which we made a contribution to the brochure guide . That's the most recent project from last summer.

I want to understand a bit better the motives for a certain change within Group Material. Before you realized projects with others, "the people", directly, such as the storefront project, then you gradually became more distant from people... Was it only to enlarge the audience or was it a critical change?

The participant community on 13th Street is not more real than other constituencies just because it is composed of low-income people of color. It's important not to romanticize "the people" and "community" along lines of disenfranchisement and oppressed status. For every project there is a community that is location-bound. Later in our work, when we did not maintain a stable space, communities were not so easy to categorize or locate. After that first year we engaged communities of concern, revolving around a particular issue, such as around the AIDS crisis or Education. Also, Group Material has always agreed on this_the art world with all its implications is also an important community for us too. That is where we choose to work and obviously it's not one-dimensional or monolithic. Even as we target other groups as audiences...

How do you gauge responses? The idea of dialogue is great but if you get no responses then they are just slogans...

I think in each project or situation it is very difficult to evaluate and gage effectivity or success. When we

did Inserts in the New York Times we went out on that Sunday and it was pretty exhilarating to actually see the papers with our insert, and imagine how they might be received and interpreted. As exciting as it was to see them on Sunday, then on Monday we saw a lot of them in the trash, and realized of course, it's very unclear how and if they are used. The best hope was that they were kept for a longer shelf life than the one day they appeared in print. In most of the projects that took place in and advertising space there is no real way to gauge it, particularly as the audience is somewhat random. In exhibitions it is different, you can get information from the guards etc., and we try to go hang out in the room a lot to hear what's going on.

AIDS Timeline of 1989 at Berkeley University was an attempt to chronologically account the development of the AIDS crisis, using variegated material gathered from fields of government and medical information, media representation of the crisis and community responses. And there were cultural artifacts that drew viewers further into history, sometimes by an emotional route. We were committed to making an environment people would spend a long time in the exhibition, because it was a history being revealed, and it took about three hours to thoroughly go around the exhibition. We talked to the guards and the curators, who said it was effective because people spent time and came back. For exhibitions, if the guards, the people who are sitting there for most of they time day after day have good reports from visitors, and like it themselves, its a good sign.

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ART AND REALITY

Could one imagine art which had nothing to do with persons?

Could one imagine art which had nothing to do with other persons?

Could one imagine art which had nothing to do with concrete situations?

Could one imagine the existence of concrete situations without the existence of things?

Could one imagine concrete situations with persons in which the behaviour of persons had no significance?

There is no meaning in talking about art without imagining persons, their behaviour, things and concrete situations. When one wants to talk about art, one must therefore talk about: persons and their behaviour with other persons and things in concrete situations. As a precondition that these persons are actually practising this behaviour at all, one has to imagine that they are experiencing it as meaningful. From this follows that one has to talk about: persons and their meaningful behaviour with other persons and things in concrete situations. There is reason to presume that this always stands when one talks about art. Otherwise one would be able to imagine:

art which has nothing to do with persons

art which no one finds meaningful and which therefore has no significance

art which has nothing to do with the behaviour of persons

art which has nothing to do with other persons

art which has nothing to do with things

art which has nothing to do with concrete situations

art which has nothing to do with persons and their behaviour, meaningfulness, other persons, things and concrete situations.

Therefore we now know that:
when one talks about art one must always talk about:

Persons and their meaningful behaviour with other persons and things in concrete situations

or about corresponding factors with the same significance and the same necessary relations.

This knowledge enables us to talk about art in a way that makes sense, and without allowing habitual conceptions, social conventions and concentrations of power to be of decisive importance to our experiences.

Notes:

Persons

A person can be described in an infinite number of ways. None of these descriptions can be completely adequate. We therefore can not describe precisely what a person is. Whichever way we describe a person, we do however have the possibility to point out necessary relations between persons and other factors. We have to respect these relations and factors in order not to contradict ourselves and in order to be able to talk about persons in a meaningful way.
One necessary relation is the logical relation between persons and bodies. It makes no sense to refer to a person without referring to a body. If we for example say: here we have a person, but he or she does not have a body, it does not make sense. Furthermore, there are necessary relations between persons and the rights of persons. Persons should be treated as persons and therefore as having rights. If we deny this assertion it goes wrong: here is a person, but this person should not be treated as a person, or: here is a person, who should be treated as a person, but not as having rights. Therefore we can only talk about persons in a way that makes sense if we know that persons have rights.

When one does not respect the rights of persons, then one can not respect art, as we know that art is inextricably bound up with persons.

Concrete situations

Concrete situations are the precondition of any use of language, because we know that an assertion can only be understood as something that is made by a person in a concrete situation. If for example we say: here we have an assertion, but this assertion was not made by a person in a concrete situation, it does not make sense. We can, in other words, not refer to anything without referring to concrete situations.
Concrete situations are what we talk about all the time, what we take for granted. We for example say: they sat there and they were fine. Nothing is as easy as identifying concrete situations via persons, mental states and the things of daily life in space and time. At the same time it is absolutely impossible to describe a concrete situation in an exhaustive way. This thing that a situation can be described in a vast number of ways is not an accidental property of situations, but on the contrary it is what characterizes situations. A situation that can be described in only one way is not a situation. When we try to define a situation based on one single description we prevent ourselves from experiencing it.

There is no reason to believe that a request to art that it should continue to find new forms is relevant. The historical consideration that such a request will have to be founded on, requires an impossible comparison of situations. History is concerned with descriptions from specific points of view and is not reality. In the attempt to compare situations, one reduces situations to something that can be fully understood. This is not in compliance with our knowledge of situations. If one attempts to define what art is, one only sees one's own description of it, and this description can never be exhaustive.

Things

Things have significance for concrete situations: when we say: here we have a concrete situation, but no things are of significance to this situation, this is not in compliance with our experiences.

Significance

Though concrete situations can only be identified in space and time, they can not be reduced to only existing in space and time. In any concrete situation significance plays a decisive role. If we say: they sat there and they were fine, but nothing was of significance, it does not make sense. Significance is decisive for concrete situations, but significance does not exist in time and space. What is the durability of significance and where does it exist? We do not know what significance is, but we know that significance is something which is decisive to our experience of the world. If we do not assign persons, their behaviour, things and concrete situations any significance, then there is no reason to concern oneself with persons, their behaviour, things and concrete situations.

If one does not assign persons, their behaviour, things and concrete situations significance, there is no reason to be concerned with art. Art has significance for our daily existence, because persons, their behaviour, things and concrete situations have significance for our daily existence.

Logic

Most of our thinking and our discussions are conducted on a level where we repeat and repeat our habitual conceptions to each other. We assume that there are no other conditions to decide whether something is right or wrong, except that one does not contradict oneself nor is inconsistent with facts. Beyond this there exists only more or less thoroughly grounded subjective opinions. However, there is a level so basic that it normally does not appear in our conscious mind, where everything does not revolve around subjective opinions. At this level things are simply right or wrong.
Logical relations are the most basic and most overlooked phenomenon we know. Nothing of which we can talk rationally can exist, can be identified or referred to, except through its logical relations to other things. Logic is necessary relations between different factors, and factors are what exist by the force of those relations. The decisive thing about logical relations is that they can not be reasoned. Nevertheless, they do constitute conditions necessary for any description, because they can not be denied without rejecting the factors of the relations. Persons are, for example, totally different from their bodies. Persons can go for a walk and they can make decisions. Bodies can not do that. Nevertheless, we can not refer to persons without referring to their bodies. If we say: here we have a person, but he or she unfortunately is lacking a body, it does not make sense. Persons are totally different from the concrete situations they are in. Nevertheless, we can not refer to persons without referring to the situations they are in. If we say: here we have a person, but this person has never been in a concrete situation, it does not make sense. Language is totally different from reality. Nevertheless, we have to perceive language as something that can be used to talk about reality. If we say: here we have a language, but this language can not be used to talk about reality, it does not make sense. Logical relations have decisive significance. The absence of logical relations would mean that nothing could be of decisive significance: as long as one does not contradict oneself nor is inconsistent with facts, any point of view may be as good as the next, one can say and mean anything. Logical relations are conditions for talking rationally together. The part of the world we can talk rationally about, can thus be defined as the part we can talk about using logical relations. But we do not have any reason to assume that the world is identical with what we can talk rationally about. Logic is something more basic than language. Logical relations are what makes language a language and what assigns meaning to words. Therefore, it is impossible to learn a language, without learning to respect logical relations. But as we grow up and learn to master language, logical relations are not present on a conscious level. If we are conscious of logical relations, it is possible for us to decide whether something is right or wrong and not to allow ourselves to be ruled by for example habitual conceptions and subjective opinions.

When one wants to talk about art in a way that makes sense and without allowing oneself to be ruled by for example habitual conceptions and subjective opinions, one has to respect the logical relations and the factors which have to do with art. Therefore one has to talk about persons' meaningful behaviour with other persons and things in concrete situations, when one talks about art. There is no reason to believe that what we can talk rationally about when we are talking about art, is exhaustive to what we talk about when we are talking about art.

Norms

Norms are the expression of objective knowledge. Objective knowledge is that which can not be denied. Norms are in contradiction to the view that everything depends on subjective opinions, and that one therefore can do or say anything, as long as one observes social conventions. Norms are the things we can not disagree about. Norms will always be valid. The fundamental ethical norm is that persons have rights. We are unable to talk about ethics in a way that makes sense without respecting this norm. The fundamental ethical norm does not tell us exactly what we should choose in concrete situations. Strictly speaking, this norm only tells us that persons should be treated as having rights. But if we do not observe this norm we do away with persons and the rights of persons.

It is a norm for art that when one talks about art one has to talk about persons and their meaningful behaviour with other persons and things in concrete situations. By respecting this norm one can create space for art, without consideration to social conventions. This is important because social conventions do not always respect norms. Subjective opinions about art can have significance, but one should not use them as the foundation of social conventions.

Concentrations of power

Concentrations of power do not always respect the rights of persons. If one denies this fact one gets: concentrations of power always respect the rights of persons. This does not correspond with our experiences. Concentrations of power characterize our society. Concentrations of power force persons to concentrate on participating in competition and power games, in order to create a social position for themselves. Concurrently with the concentrations of power dominating our conscious mind and being decisive to our situations, the significance of our fellow humans diminishes. And our own significance becomes the significance we have for concentrations of power, the growth of concentrations of power, and the conflicts of concentrations of power.

It is clear that persons should be consciously aware of the rights of persons and therefore must seek to organize the smallest concentrations of power possible.
Examples of concentrations of power which have interests in art include: Mass media (represented by journalists, critics, etc.), capital (represented by collectors, gallery owners, etc.), governments (represented by politicians, civil servants, etc.), and science (represented by historians, theorists, etc.). One can not permit these concentrations of power to have decisive influence and at the same time respect persons, the rights of persons or art.

Politics

The fundamental purpose of politics is to protect the rights of persons. If we deny this assertion we get: the fundamental purpose of politics is not to protect the rights of persons. This suggests that one of the basic tasks of politicians could be, for example, to renounce the rights of themselves and of others. This has no meaning. Or that there is a more important purpose to politics which does not have anything to do with persons and therefore also has nothing to do with the rights of persons. That is plain nonsense. Therefore, we now know that the basic purpose of politics is to protect the rights of persons. In other words we can not talk about politics in a way that makes sense without the assumption that the fundamental purpose of politics is to protect the rights of persons. Concentrations of power do not always respect the rights of persons. If one denies this fact one gets: concentrations of power always respect the rights of persons. This does not correspond with our experiences. It is obvious that if we want to protect the rights of persons we have to organize in as small concentrations of power as possible. Since the fundamental purpose of politics is to protect the rights of persons it is of decisive importance to politics that we seek to organize in as small concentrations of power as possible. It is clear that we can not leave it to others to protect the rights of persons. The notion that it is possible to elect a small number of people to protect the rights of a vast number of people is absurd, because here we are by definition talking about concentration of power, and thus about a concentration of power. And we know that concentrations of power do not always respect the rights of persons. It is clear that if one is conscious of persons and the rights of persons one must be concerned with politics. It is clear that if one is a person and thus concerned with politics and conscious of the rights of persons, it becomes of decisive importance to organize in as small concentrations of power as possible. It becomes of decisive importance to find ways to live and behave which correspond to our knowledge of persons, the rights of persons, etc. It is clear that this is our most important task as our whole existence is threatened.

It is obvious that artists too must be conscious of persons, the rights of persons and the influence of concentrations of power and thus must be concerned with politics. It is obvious that nothing can be more important than to concern oneself with this exactly. That also artists must first and foremost be concerned with creating consciousness about this, and with trying to organize in as small concentrations of power as possible. In this way we have a case where the fundamental ethical norm, and thus ethics, become decisive for aesthetics and politics become decisive to the performance of art. Aesthetics must first and foremost be an examination of, and a science about, possibilities to exist with as small concentrations of power as possible and organize ourselves in a way so that we respect each other's rights. In a way that makes room for persons and that which has significance to them in their daily life.

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