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**UNDERMINING THE MUSEUM: THE RHETORICS OF
MICHAEL ASHER, MARCEL BROODTHAERS,
DANIEL BUREN, HANS HAACKE AND LOUISE LAWLER**

by
LOUIS CUMMINS

**A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Art History
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy,
The City University of New York**

2002

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Abstract

UNDERMINING THE MUSEUM: THE RETHORICS
OF MICHAEL ASHER, MARCEL BROODTHAERS,
DANIEL BUREN, HANS HAACKE AND LOUISE LAWLER

by

Louis Cummins

Adviser: Professor Romy Golan

This dissertation brings together the work of Modern and Postmodern artists who have addressed the issue of the museum, both as institution and as space, within their own practices in order to make it speak with a different voice. From Courbet to Louise Lawler—by way of Marcel Duchamp, Jean Dubuffet, Robert Smithson, Marcel Broodthaers, Daniel Buren, Michael Asher and Hans Haacke—these artists have brought to light the different contexts in which art is displayed and distributed within capitalist society. Unlike the interventions of most of their fellow artists, theirs bear upon the conditions governing the exhibition and dissemination of art, rather than on the making of new objects for the market. The museum and gallery nexus can be viewed as an enunciatory system in which art dealers, critics, curators and scholars display materials and presentation procedures, catalogues and symposia, educational training sessions and public education tours, museum architecture and exhibition design, acquisition policies and de-accessioning practices—all of which help to form and establish a specific vision of art. Similarly, the strategies of artists who intervene on this level are aimed at bringing

other possible discourses to the fore, and at transforming the conventional system of art distribution. I have examined, both diachronically and synchronically, how the most significant artists to have addressed the issue of the museum have also inscribed their work within a broader cultural context that includes the marketplace. From Courbet to Lawler, all of the artists who have drawn my interest show a concern with the economic dimension of art circulation. It has, therefore, become impossible to separate this system into one side that articulates aesthetic standards, and another that makes art profitable. In fact, the link connecting them is shown and analyzed throughout this dissertation, as it was explored, appropriated or otherwise used by the artists I am examining.

to Alain

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PART I

FEW HISTORICAL PREMICES IN ART INSTITUTION CRITIQUE

INTRODUCTION

During the second half of the nineteenth century, museums came to occupy a key position within the "public sphere of art."¹ With this preeminence of museums in the circulation of art works, *art objects* came to be received essentially on an aesthetic basis. In other words, museums set the conditions under which beholders were moved by a whole range of specific emotions and pleased by the vision of beautiful figures and forms that were supposed to correspond harmoniously with the subjects depicted. Whereas art had been traditionally integrated with life practices through various religious rituals or symbolic demonstrations of power, the institution of the museum separated it from these and the other public fields of human endeavour such as science, politics and economy.

Even the modes of presentation and representation of the history of art came to be submitted to various aesthetic paradigms. Despite their claim to present an objective historical overview of the arts for all times and all civilizations, universal survey museums like the Louvre in Paris or the Metropolitan Museum in New York have proposed specific constellations of "the beautiful" as exemplary models of achievement. To do this, as we all know well, they select and show only specific segments of their collections to their public; moreover, the hanging and arrangement

-
1. The notion of "public sphere" is used by Jürgen Habermas to designate the various more or less formal institutions and places where intellectuals, writers, philosophers and artists met to create spaces conducive to the exercise of free speech. In Paris during the late eighteenth century and the whole of the nineteenth, private and public Salons became forums for discussions about art and literature, which were thereby put forward for public appreciation. See *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, Thomas Burger and Frederick Lawrence trans. (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1991).

of the works follow a certain order intended to demonstrate the supremacy of a specific style, trend or period.

It is there in the homogeneous and idealised space of the museum that art works came mainly to be judged and admired.² And yet, as Yve-Alain Bois has argued, only the museum can simultaneously secure the two dimensions of the modern art work, namely, its essentialist and historicist components.³ The essentialist feature comes fully into its own in the museum because art there is taken only as art, and is submitted exclusively to aesthetic judgment. The museum presents not only the past embodied in art history, but also reveals its historicist dimension by setting out the conditions under which the evaluation of novelty can be made. Hence the creation of the universal survey museum and the modern art museum contributed to the autonomy of art by reducing it to its aesthetic dimension and by identifying its history with a process of succeeding stylistic transformations.

This emergence of a separate realm of art was not due exclusively to the creation of museums. In fact, their existence coincides with the emerging of the "public sphere," as defined by Jürgen Habermas. According to him, during the eighteenth century diverse groups of individuals met on an equal footing in private and public salons⁴ and cafés in order to exchange ideas so as to form societies more or less stable. These associations came to form a true counterpart to the authoritarian structure of society at the time, which traditionally considered knowledge and

-
2. The spaces of the museums can be said to be homogeneous and idealized in the sense that they are distinctively separate from other social spaces, and that they are produced by the art historical discourses. In a certain way, they can be perceived as discursive spaces in which narratives take place.
 3. See Yve-Alain Bois, "Exposition: Esthétique de la distraction, espace de démonstration," *Cahiers du Musée national d'art moderne* (Fall 1989) no. 29, p. 57-79. This issue is discussed more in details in the chapter on Courbet's *Pavillon du Réalisme*.
 4. By "Salon" Habermas does not mean the usual art historical designation of art exhibitions, but the private and public Salons where French intellectuals, writers, philosophers and artists alike met each other during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

good taste the natural right of rulers. In this new context, some subjects previously reserved for the authority of the Church and Court became subject to public discussion. Moreover, as a class of wealthy merchants and bankers grew, the marketplace of art, which already existed since the 17th century, considerably expanded in both antiques and contemporary artistic goods. Hence, discussions on taste served to elaborate criteria for aesthetic appreciation that could secure good purchases.

To the degree, however, to which philosophical and literary works and works of art in general were produced for the market and distributed through it, these culture products became similar to that type of information: as commodities they became in principle generally accessible. They no longer remained components of the Church's and court's publicity of representation; that is precisely what was meant by loss of their aura of extraordinariness and by the profaning of their sacramental character. The private people for whom the cultural product became available as a commodity profaned it inasmuch as they had to determine its meaning on their own (by way of rational communication with one another), verbalize it, and thus state explicitly what precisely in its implicitness for so long could assert its authority.⁵

For Habermas, then, it was precisely the concurrent formation of the public sphere and the expansion of the cultural commodities market that was responsible for art's entry into a separate realm. In other words, it was not only museums and philosophical discourse that created the specific realm in which art became autonomous; the existence of an expanding art market played a role as well. Although it represented an emancipation from traditional political and religious constraints, this assignment of art to a specific realm made art works vulnerable to their reification into commodities. Further, the thorough establishment of art works as separate entities detached from any apparent context whatsoever led to their self-referentiality.

5. Jürgen Habermas. *op. cit.*, p. 36-37.

Art as an Institution

Peter Bürger, who has published one of the most debated books on the avant-gardes, articulates a crucial contradiction concerning the function of art in the bourgeois society. During the seminars he gave in Bremen in 1973 and 1974, he first gave voice to and developed what would become his *Theory of the Avant-Garde*.⁶ In this volume, he presents a critique of Adorno's and Lukács' position on the function of art in bourgeois society. According to Bürger, Adorno believes that the autonomy of the arts and the increased hermeticism and fragmentation of the avant-gardes are necessary within the context of advanced capitalist society, where the culture industry has infiltrated ordinary life in the form of kitsch. At the opposite pole, Lukács blames the avant-gardes for their detachment from the proletariat's needs and affirms that they should rely instead on the realist novel, which can represent actual conditions of life as a totality. In contrast, Bürger observes that both theories presuppose that art is an institution, and assume this fact without any critique whatsoever. By making the radical critique of "art as institution" characteristic of the avant-gardes, he shifts the emergence of the latter from late nineteenth-century art to the aftermath of the First World War; for then, for the first time in the history of art, art practices postulated art's apartness from everyday life. Here is Bürger's definition:

The concept of "art as institution" as used here refers to the productive and distributive apparatus and also to the ideas about art that prevail at a given time and that determine the reception of works.⁷

6. It is worthwhile noting that Bürger's *Theory of the Avant-Garde* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984) was developed only one year after the Fifth Documenta held in Kassel, where Marcel Broodthaers called a halt to his most rigorous critique of the museum as an institution of art distribution.

7. Peter Bürger, *op. cit.*, p. 22.

Consequently, he states:

The avant-garde turns against both—the distribution apparatus on which the works depend, and the status of art in bourgeois society as defined by the concept of autonomy.⁸

At the core of his theory is the idea that art in bourgeois society is characterized by its attainment of autonomy, so that art becomes a relatively independent subsystem within the whole of the social fabric. On the other hand, this autonomy neutralizes art works' potential effects on other social fields. For Bürger, nineteenth-century aestheticism did not criticize the institution of art but contributed to its entrenchment, since aesthetic experience requires a special type of behaviour distinct from any other kind of experience.⁹ If aestheticism detached art from life and allowed it to gain autonomy, this process remained unconscious until it was revealed by the self-criticism of "art as institution" practised by the avant-gardes, which wanted to abolish the arts altogether by returning aesthetic forms and experiences to the praxis of life.

The art of the "historical" avant-gardes at the beginning of the twentieth century—Bürger includes in this definition the German Dada movement, Russian Constructivism and Productivism, and the French Surrealists—is characterized by the fact that they all attempted to transform practical life by injecting late-nineteenth-century aestheticism into the praxis of life. This involvement is viewed as disruptive of the "means-ends" rationality of bourgeois society, of the instrumentality of capitalist undertakings in all areas of life:

The intention of the avant-gardiste may be defined as the attempt to direct toward the practical the aesthetic experience (which rebels against the praxis of life) that Aestheticism developed. What most strongly conflicts with the

8. *Id.*

9. Aesthetics, in Bürger's view, is the "crystallization of a special sphere of experience." *Ibid.*, p. 24. This definition echoes Habermas' thesis concerning the role of art in bourgeois society, which is characterized by its autonomy, i.e. the independence of art works vis-à-vis demands for their use outside of art (See Bürger, p. 110, note 13).

means-ends rationality of bourgeois society is to become life's organizing principle.¹⁰

In Bürger's view, then, the historical avant-gardes, with their aesthetic vision inherited from late nineteenth-century art, introduced an anarchistic principle into the logic of industrial capitalist bourgeois culture. The avant-gardes' aestheticization of everyday life appears to be the proper response to the apartness of art, because aesthetic experience may have an impact on diverse forms of social life and may help to transform them into unalienated modes of living. Social and political consciousness could arise from the aesthetic experience of better living, and from the provocation created by shocking images and representations.

Bürger's analysis falls short in that he does not analyze the actual art institutions that were either created or transformed during the nineteenth century. These numerous institutions, indeed, determined and shaped the autonomous field of art, and not the development of "aestheticism," which is, after all, only an ideology corresponding to a specific stage of art within the context of bourgeois society. Yet, as we shall see, many other forms of artistic ideology are viable in this society. Although Bürger's theory rests upon the conditions of art reception in bourgeois society, he does not pay attention to the complex developments of art distribution channels, which underwent profound transformations during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries; nor does he pay attention to the specific responses of avant-garde artists to these conditions. In other words, Bürger's critique addresses only one aspect of the formation of a separate domain of art, namely, the ideology of aestheticism. At the same time, however, numerous institutions contributed to the formation of the specific realm of "art as institution."¹¹

10. *Ibid.*, p. 34.

11. From another perspective, Hal Foster criticizes Peter Bürger's *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, basing his theory on the psychoanalytic notion of *Nachträglichkeit*, or deferred action. In his book, *The Return of the Real* (Cambridge and London: The MIT Press, 1996) he foregrounds the art

Now the apparent functionlessness of art in bourgeois society, which is obviously connected to the notion of artistic autonomy, appears in a different light if we consider the specific functions that art works have actually occupied since then. We will name but a few very obvious ones: art works have served as important intermediaries in the constitution of the public sphere, since they have been the pretext for public discussions about values; demands for social symbols of distinction and for cultural goods have increased to such an extent that art works have been produced in much larger quantities than ever before; the expansion of the middle class and improvements in living conditions have created a huge demand for "popular" entertainment products and spectacles, which created the conditions for popular forms of culture competing with higher manifestations of culture; finally, art works have become vehicles of financial speculation. None of these functions exists apart from "everyday life" in capitalist society. Financial speculation, the exchange values of commodities, hidden ideologies born out of promises of happiness, class distinction combined with free access to the upper classes via prudent work and consumerism—none of these are separate from the functioning of culture in advanced capitalist societies. Yet, neither Bürger nor his detractors, have sufficiently focused on the fact that art works have become commodities that not only can be exchanged on the market place, but also on which one could speculate. The formation of art as an institution not only means autonomy, it also means that the distinction of the art objects from the other commodities constitutes the necessary basis on which economic speculation became more extended.

of engaged artists who actually attacked the institution of art like Michel Asher, Marcel Broodthaers, Daniel Buren, Hans Haacke, and Louise Lawler, as well as Pop artists like Rauschenberg, Warhol, Johns and Kaprow. In his opening chapter about the postmodern era, Foster criticizes Bürger's dismissal of the neo-avant-garde as a mere farcical mimicry. Although Foster does recognize the importance of Bürger's theory, he is critical of it because of its incapacity to acknowledge the role of the neo-avant-gardes in developing the seminal implications of the avant-gardes' critique of art as institution. While he does not deny that the art of the avant-garde was a critique of the institution of art, he argues that this became apparent only with the neo-avant-gardes of the late sixties.

Fetishism or Art in the Context of Exhibiting Value

For the moment, let us suppose that one of the various functions of art works as they developed in the last two centuries constitutes the "exhibition value" defined by Walter Benjamin in his famous article, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction."¹² Let us suppose also that exhibition value is tied to the exchange value not only of "art-as-commodity," but to that of all commodities, so that our relations with any artifact would involve an aesthetic link, which perpetuates a kind of "mystical" distance from the entire world of commodities. With exhibition value, all artifacts can be reduced exclusively to their visibility for a certain period of time and, in the process, they are irremediably separated from their fabrication, origin, usefulness and circulation. Their visual distance and their dazzling shine in a variety of display conditions—on bases and pedestals, in windows and showcases, under spotlights of all kinds—make them endlessly desirable insofar as they remain images of wealth, grandeur, power, taste, etc. In the end, however, they turn out to be images *tout court*. The exhibition of objects, therefore, foregrounds their visual dimension, obliterating their usefulness behind their apparition. Yet, in a less obvious manner, the exhibition of commodities is also a denial of their exchange value; for, although they are exhibited to be sold, their "mercantile vileness" is hidden behind their "resplendent grace."

Benjamin's notion of "exhibition value," as opposed to the concept of "aura," implies increased visibility in the display parameters for art works and does not represent something apart from the praxis of life in bourgeois society—quite the contrary. Indeed Benjamin's "Arcades Project,"¹³ is mainly concerned with the conditions

12. Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," *Illuminations*, Harry Zohn trans. (New York: Schocken Books, 1969), p. 217-251.

13. Walter Benjamin, "Paris: The Capital of the Nineteenth Century," in *Charles Baudelaire: A Lyric poet in the Era of High Capitalism*, Harry Zohn trans. (London: Verso, 1976.), p. 155-177.

of vision in bourgeois society, as are his texts on Charles Baudelaire.¹⁴ Describing the spectacle of Paris as an immense "phantasmagoria" (using the name of an optical illusion device popular in the nineteenth century), he transforms Marx's concept of "commodity fetishism" to speak about the commodity-on-display in the Parisian arcades, department stores and world expositions. Susan Buck-Morss identifies the transformation of this notion from Marx to Benjamin:

[T]he key to the new urban phantasmagoria was not so much the commodity-in-the-market as the commodity-on-display, where exchange value no less than use value lost practical meaning, and purely representational value came to the fore. Everything desirable, from sex to social status, could be transformed into commodities as fetishes-on-display that held the crowd enthralled even when personal possession was far beyond their reach.¹⁵

To be on display, of course, is to be held up to view, to become visible, to be exposed. In other words, Benjamin's analyses bear on the incommensurate explosion of visibility that occurred in industrial society, where everything became something to be looked at. Thus the materialist view he adduced to explain the transformation of art works is built upon the link between the development of industrial society and the various commodity display parameters elaborated during the Second Empire of Louis Napoléon Bonaparte.¹⁶

It is common sense to say that industrial production has its counterpart in consumerism, and that its means are intended to make goods both available and desirable. This is the relationship that gave rise to the compulsiveness of display in the nineteenth century.¹⁷ In the commodity exhibitions that were set up in the

14. *Ibid.*

15. Susan Buck-Morss, *The Dialectics of Seeing: Walter Benjamin and the Arcades Project* (Cambridge, Massachusetts & London: The MIT Press, 1989), p. 81-82.

16. Benjamin's interest in the Parisian nineteenth century led him to omit the Victorian precedent embodied in the Crystal Palace, where, for the first time, commodities were displayed as such an incommensurate amount.

17. As a postscript to his unfinished novel, *Bouvard et Pécuchet*, Flaubert added a "Dictionary of Received Ideas." In this we find: *EXPOSITION – Sujet de délire au XIX^e siècle*. Flaubert states that

arcades, department stores and universal expositions, the products of industry were displayed as works of art, while the latter began to appear as luxury goods that were more available than they had been under the *Ancien Régime*.

It was precisely in this context that an artist, Gustave Courbet, developed an acute awareness of display conditions and more or less invented the one-man retrospective exhibition. Examining Courbet's invention will allow us to see the issues that were at stake in the context of early industrial capitalism, when the promotion of industrial products began to determine their production. The fetishistic character of commodities came to compete with works of art; "exhibitionism" spread throughout the industrial countries, particularly in England, France and the United States. Art objects became commodities in response to greater demand. As we shall see, Courbet's Pavillon du Réalisme, which he set up within the context of the second World Exposition in 1855, constitutes an important artistic response to the commodity marketplace of modern art.

As the Museum and the Marketplace are Intertwined

My original project sought to examine the strategies adopted by a specific group of 1970s artists who attempted to critique and destabilize the institution of the museum. It had to be reframed however, to take account of the other major art field condition which is the marketplace. It expanded considerably during the second half of the nineteenth century and throughout the twentieth that to omit it would have compromised the understanding of their critique. I am referring, of

the display habits of that century were compulsive, a point that is not lost in Walter Benjamin. For a survey of the term "exhibition" in relation to architecture as it is found in the French literature of the nineteenth century, see Philippe Hamon, *Expositions: Literature and Architecture in Nineteenth-Century France*, Katia Sainson-Frank and Lisa Maguire trans. (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1992).

course, to the marketplace. Indeed, if the museum is the institution embodying "aesthetic ideology" and represents the apartness of art from the praxis of everyday life, the marketplace is where the real games are played, where benefits accrue and the ideologies of novelty and originality are most meaningful and fruitful. The artists studied in this dissertation pointed me in an unexpected direction; for their museum-like installations and interventions often bridged representations of the museum and the art market. Although my intention was to see what these artists had to say about the museum, their own strategies showed that they made use of museums, galleries, collections and public places to articulate the need to produce other forms of art that cannot be reduced to the museum perspective and that are resistant to appropriation by the market.

The museum, the marketplace and exhibition value together constitute the main parameters under which art exists in capitalist and late capitalist society. While one speaks about museums and galleries spaces, one also points out the space of exhibition itself, and its limits. Actually, the artists of my interest have addressed the other issues through the questions related to the spaces and places of art. Thus, the point of view developed here tries to keep these four factors continually in view, while looking at the actual strategies of the artists examined. These observations have precluded the study of the exhibition "practices" of many other artists or avant-garde movements who were more concerned with politics per se. Nor do I look at artists who developed interventions essentially based on the space of the exhibition. Also, the numerous exhibitions mounted by the Surrealists would have been extremely relevant had my concerns related only to the separation of art from the realm of knowledge; but, this was not the case.¹⁸ For comparable reasons.

18. See my article on this subject: "Multiplicités surréalistes," *RACAR* vol. XVIII, p. 1-2 (1991), 31-42. On the notion of space in relation to exhibition venues, see also the seminal article by Yve-Alain Bois, "Exposition: Esthétique de la distraction, espace de démonstration," *Cahiers du Musée national d'art moderne*, vol. XXIX (Fall, 1989), p. 57-79. As a matter of fact, Bois' article was the point of departure for my own reflections, and for the resolution of some of its terms. The chapter on Courbet will cover several aspects of Bois' argument at some length.

many other exhibition practices of the avant-garde are not taken into consideration in this dissertation.¹⁹

The one historical event that posed the greatest challenge to the role of art institutions was undoubtedly Marcel Duchamp's submission of a urinal to the Independents exhibition of 1917. In itself, this gesture was the most radical critique yet of "art as institution." A close analysis of the readymade in relation to Duchamp's exhibition strategies and his mastery of the various agencies in the art system sheds some light not only on the institutions of art but also on the economic dimension of his practice. And the legacy of this aspect is just as important as that of his readymades, although it has been less studied. If Duchamp's readymades and his installation for advised beholders at the Philadelphia Museum, *Given 1^o The Waterfall, 2^o the Lighting Gaz...* (1966) violated standard museum parameters, it should be noted, however, that his main target was the modernist institution of the Independents, which allowed for self-expression, the creation of new trends, the holding of separate exhibitions, the development of a free market and, finally, the abolition of conventions. But what does it imply to target the main institution of modern art? Is it not contradictory to implicitly promote the abolition of freedom by such a radical nihilistic gesture, which declares art no longer possible? Beyond all this, what is revealed except the lies behind the so-called "independence of art"?

Marcel Broodthaers was one of the neo-avant-garde artists who worked explicitly on this level, exposing all the strands woven into the modern art institu-

19. For a history of the exhibition and the avant-garde see Bruce Altshuler, *The Avant-Garde in Exhibition: New Art in the 20th Century* (New York: Harry N. Abrams Inc., 1994). As this dissertation examines the reactions of modernist artists towards the museums and the marketplace of art rather than issues about strategies of display (in relation to space and the participation of the beholder), the installations of abstract art conceived by El Lissitzky—his two *Prounrooms* (1923, 1927) and his designs for the Soviet pavilions at the International Press Exhibition Pressa in Cologne (1928), and for the International Salon of Hygiene in Dresden (1930)—are not examined here. For similar reason, Kurt Schwitters' *Merzbau* (1923) is not directly relevant to my subject either, even though this work represents a way to escape from both the art market and the museum, as it was a "site specific" piece mounted in Schwitters' own apartment in Hannover.

tion. To do so, he set up a fictitious museum, the *Musée d'art Moderne: Département des Aigles* (1968-1972), which was comprised of various "Sections" designed to reveal otherwise hidden operations within the functioning of the museum. These might include anything from ideological and political policies and classification systems to the circulation of money, advertising and exhibiting devices. Taking Duchamp's non-art object as his point of departure, Broodthaers used the figure of the eagle to show that everything in art is also closely related to political and economic power. Working through the nexus of art, art science, museums and power to dismantle widespread prejudices concerning the "objectivity" and "disinterestedness" of art museums, he attempted to blur the distinction between art museums and other kinds of learned collections, such as ethnographic and natural science museums.

Although it may seem obvious to say so, museums, in addition to being treasure houses for the precious art objects they contain, are also the places where these same objects are exhibited and presented to the public. Thus they occupy specific delimited parcels of space—where art objects are collected, classified, ordered and looked at. As we will see in the chapter on Dubuffet and Smithson, they can be perceived as utopian spaces, in the etymological meaning of the term, "u-topia;"²⁰ that is, as utopian spaces where disparate and ill-assorted things are assembled together, and where historical narratives are constructed wholly from highly uncertain notions such as style, period, *zeitgeist*, etc. Nonetheless, the museum is a complex institutional apparatus that differentiates art from non-art and, less flagrantly, helps to set a value for art commodities. Although Dubuffet and Smithson are two artists from completely different horizons, they both radically rejected the museum and advocated the idea that true artistic practices happen out-

20. For an extensive analysis of Thomas Moore's *Utopia* in terms of space and narration, see Louis Marin. *Utopiques: Jeux d'espaces* (Paris: Minuit, 1973).

side museum walls; whether coincidentally or not, they both opposed the rhetoric of the museum with a poetics of marks in sand and earth. Yet their respective utopias diverge: Dubuffet sought the primitive impulse to create, whereas Smithson represented the post-industrial moment when utopian fantasy was already accomplished through the proliferation of simulacra. In both cases the space of the museum is implicitly defined as an interior space that is not, however, necessarily delimited. It would be the task of several neo-avant-garde artists to show that the spaces of the museum and the gallery are cultural artifacts with their specific characteristics.

Daniel Buren and Michael Asher systematically explore the limits of art institutions and the cultural system in which they function. Like Dubuffet and Smithson, they too come from very different horizons, but dovetail in their investigations. Buren was a painter who, in the context of the 1968 critique of institutions, became conscious of the role played by museums in the separation of art from more convenient location. According to him, the artist's studio where the works of art are conceived in relation to an intellectual environment. Since the museums and galleries were the main places where works of art were received by the public, he transplanted, so to speak, the studio into common places of consumption: in other words he worked *in situ*. In a crucial article titled "*Limites Critiques*,"²¹ he analyzed the various levels of demarcation and framing that make art a cultural and social illusion. Throughout his career, Buren attempted to reveal the different lines of demarcation, i.e. the edges, of the many places in which he made his interventions.

21. First published as a pamphlet accompanying an exhibition of his "paintings" at the Galerie Yvon Lambert in Paris (December 1970-January 1971), it was subsequently republished in the first volume of Daniel Buren's *Les Écrits (1965-1990)* Jean-Marc Poinot ed. (Bordeaux: Musée d'art contemporain, 1990).

In his review of Peter Bürger's *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, Benjamin Buchloh ["Theorizing the Avant-Garde," *Art in America*, vol. 72, no. 10 (Nov. 1984), p. 19-20] refers to Buren's "*Limites Critiques*," arguing that this article was crucial in the critique of art as an institution.

His critique of both the readymade and land art²² asserts that they represent two ends of the same spectrum. For both claim to escape from the specific conditions of art in our cultural environment: the former by refusing the illusionism of painting in a return to the real, the latter by moving far away from the (urban) cultural system of galleries and museums. Buren argues that both are regressive not only in that they leave the institutions unchanged, but also because they pursue the ideology of art as a field where absolute liberty can exist.

Asher, by contrast, was a sculptor who became interested in the phenomenological experience of space in galleries, museums and other locations where art is exhibited. His experiences with various institutions and his determination to analyze the specific conditions of the places where he intervened led him to criticize the space of art as culturally defined. At the opposite pole from Buren, however, Asher's works about framing went so far as to uncover the historical backgrounds of specific collections, in the process revealing the political history of specific museums.

The critique of art institutions would have remained incomplete had the economic side of art distribution and circulation been ignored by artists who stepped back from the reification and commodification of art. This point becomes particularly important if one considers the transformation and expansion of the art market that took place in the 1970s and 1980s: during that period, the quantities of paintings sold at auctions and the prices they fetched reached new heights. In addition, corporate sponsorship came to be used more frequently as a mark of distinction and apparent disinterestedness on the part of large companies, which made it into a marketing strategy and a smokescreen to hide less salubrious practices. By making *in situ* or site-specific installations, Robert Smithson and other land artists, along

22. Buren associates readymades with minimalist sculptures and pop-art objects, while he places land art alongside happenings.

with Buren and Asher, reacted against the reification of art; they thereby believed to avoid its commodification. If this attitude made it possible to reveal the roles played by museums and galleries in the construction of cultural values, it did not unravel the economic valuation process of art works because the artists who espoused it did not frequent the places where such valuation occurs, i.e. private and corporate collections, gallery storerooms, auction house bidding chambers.

Louise Lawler pursued this investigation by taking pictures of works of art in the various contexts in which they are placed, and where they seem dropped down a rung, to become sheer objects, oddly placed, and often purely decorative. Her interest clearly lay in the commodity status of works of art, and she attempted to expose this to public view. Hans Haacke, for his part, used visual and linguistic means to reveal the political aims of corporate sponsorship and the unavowed historical backgrounds of places, monuments and architecture. In contrast with Buren, for instance, who showed museum architecture and monuments as cultural artifacts, Haacke identified the specific historical and political background of such places. He targeted not only international institutions as such, but more importantly, their links with economic interests and historical events that have been hidden behind facades of neutrality and fascination.

On Semiotics

In contrast with the observation of Courbet's strategic weaving of interrelations between the museum, the market place and exhibiting value, analyzing Duchamp's work and attempting to find some coherence in its multiple manifestations, inevitably leads one to recognize a semiotics implicit to his work. In the process of our investigation, the understanding of some features of Duchamp's semiotics is necessary in order to grasp correctly his institutional strategies, which dig

deeply into the notion of "value," as we will see. As it happened, in all the cases studied here (with the exception of Courbet), the artists in question had a particular vision of language. Perhaps this may be explained by the fact that these artists have voluntarily and consciously taken the position of enunciators who utter a specific discourse about the institutional context in which they intervene.

Consequently, the works analyzed here are viewed as "strategies of enunciation" directed towards art institutions. By strategies of enunciation I mean the artists' examination of museums and other similar cultural artifacts as sites of speech-production. This implies that the museum (through its curators, its architecture, its patterns of circulation, its catalogues, its exhibition display procedures and its acquisition policies) "speaks." And it speaks not only about art, but also about its history, its aesthetic criteria and its function within a larger social and economic fabric. The artists in question attempt in various ways to usurp the position of "speaker" in order to make the institution speak "otherwise."

The concept of "strategies of enunciation," to which I am referring here, is borrowed from the semiotic approach called "pragmatics" (in literary studies and other sociolinguistic fields). In literary studies, Mikhail Bakhtin could be considered its initiator.²³ His "model" is concerned neither with the permanent or invariable structures of language or narrative that exist through the different forms of expression, nor with the ideological contents of literary works, but with the specific processes of the act of speaking (or writing) as they are bound up with specific contexts. The main presupposition of this kind of analysis is observation-based: each and every speech act is communicational, i.e. it involves not only a speaker

23. Michael M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, edited by Michael Holquist; Carl Emerson and Michael Holquist trans., Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981. See in particular, "Discourse in the Novel," p. 259-422.
For a rigorous presentation of Bakhtin's theory of literature, also see Tzvetan Todorov, *Mikhail Bakhtin, The Dialogical Principle*, Wlad Godzich trans., (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984).

who expresses ideas, observations and needs in sentences, but also a listener (or a reader) who is addressed by that speaker. In other words, every act of communication is always already a social one. Therefore, both the speaker and listener share a common horizon of understanding which makes them interdependent subjects. Both are included in dialogical interactions framed by institutional rules. It is not only the specific artistic language they use that constitutes the basis of their linguistic encounter, but also the common social, cultural and historical background that makes this encounter possible.

This basis is, however, unstable, fragmented and multi-directional; in other words, the world of art and the society in which it exists do not form a coherent system. Because the contexts in which "artistic speech acts" occur are perpetually in transformation, one has to study each of them as singular, to put it into relation with its proper specific context, rather than in relation only with the "universal linguistic structures." In other words, speech acts should be analyzed as singular and viewed as constituting occurrences within a specific field—in opposition to merely reiterative phenomena of the linguistic structures. According to Bakhtin, the need to coordinate these abstract forms or structures with the social activity of speaking calls for a semiotic model different from those provided by the Russian formalists, by F. de Saussure's Structural analysis, or by Roman Jakobson's model of communication. This need led him to develop a theory of utterance in which discourse includes non-verbal factors that correspond to the context of enunciation. For "the situation enters into the utterance as a necessary constitutive element of its semantic structure;"²⁴ or "it is the expression of the concrete historical situation that engendered the utterance."²⁵ Or, as Bakhtin stated himself:

24. Quoted from V.N. Voloshinov, "Discourse in Life and Discourse in Poetry", in Todorov. *op. cit.*, p. 41. (Voloshinov was a colleague of Bakhtin and a member of his circle.)

25. V.N. Voloshinov, *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*. L. Matejka and I.R. Titunik trans. (New York: Seminal Press, 1973), p. 119-120. Quoted in Todorov. p. 45.

— Every utterance participates in the "unitary language" (in its centripetal forces and tendencies) and at the same time partakes of social and historical heteroglossia (the centrifugal, stratifying forces).

[...]

The authentic environment of an utterance, the environment in which it lives and takes shape, is dialogized heteroglossia, anonymous and social as language, but simultaneously concrete, filled with specific content and accented as an individual utterance.²⁶

Bakhtin's theory of utterance is important in that it makes it possible to take into account specific meaningful artistic events (or utterances) that may appear as singular within a specific context. In other words, this model sees artistic enunciations as responding to the specific historical situations in which they occur and are shaped. This approach differs from others by seeking the content in the context within which the work is inscribed; yet this context reveals itself through the form of the utterance. On the one hand, then, Bakhtin's theory of utterance is opposed to the usual social art-historical methods, which tend to read representations of social conditions in art works as background of the ideological content of the works. On the other hand, it disagrees with formalist interpretations that abstract works of art from their specific context of enunciation, neutralize their specificity by integrating them into general frameworks or structures, and thereby reinforce the aesthetic ideology. Bakhtin's theory of utterance sees social, historical or institutional contexts as taking shape in the enunciations of specific literary works, and not outside of them. Todorov summarizes Bakhtin's (second) formulation of the theory of utterance as follows:

Every utterance has two aspects: that which comes from the language and is reiterative, on one hand, and that which comes from the context of enunciation, which is unique, on the other.²⁷

26. M. Bakhtin, *op. cit.*, p. 272.

27. Todorov, *op. cit.*, p. 49.

One can view the social institutions of art (the academies, Salons, museums, the gallery system, etc.) as producers of normative rules that frame the conventions of art practice. Consequently, they embody those reiterative norms through which every artistic practice is produced.

The usual critiques of museums come from art historians, professors, critics, curators, philosophers and writers. Artists' critiques of art institutions are generally expressed through short statements and sporadic demonstrations. Although the body of literature criticizing museums and their norms has grown extensively in recent years, there is still a need for a better understanding of the critiques carried on by artists not necessarily in their discourses and statements but within their artistic practices as such. For it is not sufficient to say that the artists of the seventies and eighties have criticized the institutions of art. One still needs to know what precisely has been attacked and, moreover, what strategies they had to adopt in order to speak in their own voices despite the museums' immense capacity for co-opting them. The aim of this dissertation, then, is to shed some light on the specific utterances of significant artists with regard to the museum, the art market and exhibition value.

By investigating the enunciative strategies employed by the artists of my interest, I intent to focus upon their deconstructionist attitude not only in a Bakhtinian position that incorporates context and utterance into the very practices of language, but also because enunciation (not only utterance) induces such a displacement away from the traditional oppositions (like form and content, context and utterance, etc.) that are shown and unraveled at the same time. In other words, the artist who inserts his work as enunciation already takes another position within the context of art production and consumption. As shown by Ronald Schleifer.²⁸

28. Ronald Schleifer. *A.J. Greimas and the Nature of Meaning: Linguistics, Semiotics and Discourse Theory* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1987).

deconstructionist theories of discourse transform the usual terms of a given opposition in order to simultaneously invalidate both of them. By using "neither ...nor" terms to insinuate discourse, processes, enunciation in the semantic field, the external conditions of speech and discourse are introduced into the semiotic field not as external factors, but as intrinsic conditions a given discourse. *Mutatis mutandis*, the artists who have intervened within the system of art as speakers, not only as producers, have introduced modes of distribution more suitable for critical art practices than the prevailing institutional conditions. As we can observe from our vantage point, their practices indeed contributed to the transformation of the orders of things by rerouting or deconstructing the production/consumption system in which they had to intervene. As speech acts reflecting on art institutions, the enunciation was also performative, accruing now in the world, transforming it as much as a judgement, a question, a protest, a claim can do.

CHAPTER 1

GUSTAVE COURBET'S
ONE-MAN-SHOW

Next to the Exposition Universelle held in Paris in 1855, Courbet mounted a personal exhibition of his works that lasted until the end of the international fair. For the occasion, he gathered together and presented forty of his works within a temporary building that he had constructed near the Palais des Beaux-Arts, where the painting section of the Exposition was located. He put on sale a small catalogue including a manifesto, "*Du réalisme*," in which he roughly explained his view on art; and he hired a few guards to watch the visitors and a ticket-seller to collect entry fees. Before the exhibition opened, he also had some photographs made of his paintings—which were for sale during the show—and put up posters through-



Fig. 1.1 Courbet's *Pavilion of Realism*, 1855

out the city of Paris to advertise his exhibition. To obtain a strategic location, he literally harangued the police department until he achieved his goal of having his pavilion at the very door of the Beaux-Arts section of the Exposition.¹

Among the works he presented were his most significant paintings so far: *A Burial at Ornans* (1849-50), *The Painter's Studio* (1855) (fig. 1.2), *The Grainsifters* (1855), *The Stonebreakers* (1850-51), *The Meeting* (1854), *Portrait of Champfleury* (1855), and *Self-Portrait with Pipe* (1850).² As such, Courbet's installation of a set of works made by a single person as a one-man retrospective exhibition constitutes a landmark in the making of modernism in art.

We are now well aware that art institutions impose ways of seeing, that they organize sequences of works to make them "speak" in different ways, and that these "discourses" say something not only about aesthetic values but also about politics and economic values.³ Yet when it comes time to analyze the art works of the avant-garde, the focus is generally on single pieces or group of works, without taking into account that they were often originally intended to respond to dominant ways of seeing. Moreover, while the question of display parameters was still far from being resolved, and while the traditional institutions with all their rules—including their ideas about the functions of art and, consequently, the kind of visi-

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1. This information is presented in Patricia Mainardi, "Courbet's Exhibitionism," *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*, vol. CXVIII, no. 1475 (December 1991), p. 253-266, and in her *Art and Politics of the Second Empire: The Universal Expositions of 1855 and 1867* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1987), p. 57-61. See also her book on the fall of the Salons: *The End of the Salon: Art and the State in the Early Third Republic*, Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993. On the double exhibition system prevailing then, see p. 22-35.
 2. In spite of his insistent demands to the Director of the Musée de Lille, Courbet could not get *An After Dinner in Ornans* (1849) for his one-man exhibition. This painting had earned him the only gold medal he was ever to receive during his entire career. See Petra ten-Doesschate Chu, *Letters of Gustave Courbet* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1992): Letters 55-5, 55-6, and 55-8, p. 141, 143, 145).
 3. There is a considerable body of literature on the subject that has been published since the 1970s. Recently, Reesa Greenberg, Bruce W. Ferguson and Sandy Nairne edited an important anthology covering different aspects of this matter: *Thinking about Exhibitions* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996).

bility required for it—were collapsing but had not yet been taken over by fixed principles, modern artists simply could not be content with imitating conventional modes of display, would it be only because the increasing art market forced them to put in value their products; rather, they felt impelled to change the conditions of exhibitions, to produce new ones that would be closer to their interests. In this sense they shared the invention of exhibiting not only with the other art institutions that were taking shape at this time, such as art museums and independent galleries, but also with other entities that were not specifically artistic, such as the arcades with their displays of sumptuous commodities. Indeed, there is little understanding of how avant-garde artists reacted to the predominant displays they were faced with, and what ends they were pursuing by mounting self-arranged exhibitions of the kind that Courbet did in 1855.

From this perspective, Courbet's private show is extremely meaningful even though this was not the first time that an artist had presented a series of works in the form of a one-man show. Horace Vernet, for instance, who was supportive of the rebellion against Louis XVIII's Restoration, had exhibited forty-five paintings in his studio in 1822 to protest against the political implications of a Salon jury's rejection of two of his paintings.⁴ But Courbet's show marked the first time that a living artist, on his own initiative, had shown his works in the form of a retrospective, i.e. a survey of his career and development that elevates the sum of his pieces at the level of an oeuvre.⁵ Besides the tribute often paid to deceased artists shortly before

4. Patricia Mainardi mentions Vernet's exhibition, though without any further explanation, in her "Courbet's Exhibitionism," *op. cit.*, p. 264, note 12.

The story goes as follows: To oppose the refusal of two of his paintings by the Salon jury, Vernet exhibited forty-five paintings in his studio in 1822. Vernet's studio was identified as a nest of rebellion against Louis XVIII's Restoration. Hence, the Bourbon police recognized some members of the Duc d'Orléans' small court and a few discharged Napoleonic soldiers in his *The Painter's Studio*, one of the two paintings rejected by the jury. Vernet decided to exhibit his works as an act of protest against the State.

5. Robert Jensen discusses Courbet's self-arranged exhibition in his *Marketing Modernism in Fin-de-Siècle Europe* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), p. 113-116. He sees Courbet's exhibition of 1855 as exceptional because it was followed only by his own and Manet's indi-

the settlement of their estates,⁶ the development of one-man shows, as the most conventional way of selling works of contemporary art, happened relatively late in the century; and even then, they were rare. As everyone knows, the art market operating outside the Salons during the first half of the century was oriented mainly towards non-contemporary art. Except for the Salons, it was only in 1826 that a permanent collection of various contemporary artists' works was opened to the public for trade—along with stationary and curiosities—in Alphonse Giroux's shop. Giroux was soon followed by different art dealers like Asse, Binant and Durand-Ruel (senior), but mainly by Henri Gauguin who, in 1829, opened the "Musée Colbert," where the presentation of art works was carefully planned.⁷ And yet, none of them ever managed to mount retrospective exhibitions of a single artist. In this regard, Courbet's one-person retrospective must be correctly estimated in relation to its own context; in fact, the exhibition was conceived, planned, and materialized in the context of the rise of commodity culture.⁸

vidual exhibitions in 1867. It was really Whistler who was the first in 1874, says Jensen, to install a set of his works in carefully arranged spaces as a means of marketing, in order to sell them. (See, *Ibid.*, p. 42-44).

6. After the death of an artist, the works remaining in his studio were sometime shown as a tribute to him; soon after, they were sold at auction. This constitutes a sort of retrospective for commercial purposes, as well as a homage.
In the case of Benjamin West's estate, however, his sons were, so to speak, forced into an innovation in that tradition. They built a gallery next to the painter's house in Newman Street in London after the disappointing results of the auction. For a few years, beginning in May 1821, the Wests' "gallery" was opened to the public, with entrance fees. It was praised both for its content and its qualities as an exhibition space. During the first year, some 95,000 people visited the gallery! It closed in 1824. For more details, see Robert C. Alberts, *Benjamin West: A Biography* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1978), p. 386-389.
7. Gérard Monnier, *L'art et ses institutions en France: De la Révolution à nos jours* (Paris: Gallimard, 1995), p. 152-153.
Of course, H. Gauguin's museum was not a museum at all, but a sumptuous art gallery. See Linda Whiteley, "Art et commerce d'art en France avant l'impressionnisme," *Romantisme*, no. 40, 1983, p. 65-75. (Quoted in Monnier, p. 152) See Patricia Mainardi, *The End of the Salon*, *op. cit.*
8. Thomas Richards, *The Commodity Culture of Victorian England: Advertising and Spectacle, 1851-1914* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1990). The author associates commodity culture with Guy Debord's "society of the spectacle" through the development of advertising, i.e., when commodities were not only perceived for their virtual consumption but when they began to endorse a semiotics; when the products were seen as a vehicle to communi-

At issue in Courbet's exhibiting practice were the conditions of visibility of art works in a changing institutional and economic environment.⁹ Indeed, these conditions began to appear particularly important in a context where, emerging from the Salon exhibitions, both the museums¹⁰ and the art market were defining the new parameters for the status and functions of art objects in capitalist society. In relation to these, of course, the exhibiting conditions became much more important. The analysis of Courbet's invention is important, in that sense that it will bring to the fore the various parameters that existed at the origins of the modern conditions of art production and distribution. If the historical data brought here are extremely important to understand these conditions, their interpretation within the largest apectrum as one could would allow to elucidate the background of many similar practices.

cate. According to Richards, if the first moment of that transformation occurred with the first universal exposition held in London in 1851, the true implications became clear only with Victoria's Jubilee in 1887 when advertising presented the political power as a sort of commodity.

9. Ingres, Delacroix, Decamps and Vernet also had their own retrospectives within the Beaux-Arts section of the 1855 Universal Exposition. Theirs, however, were the result of uneasy and secret negotiations between Nieuwerkerke, the president of the admissions jury of the Universal Art Exposition, and the artists; hence these retrospectives, unlike Courbet's, were not personal initiatives and were the expression both of their recognition by the State and its will to neutralize the opposition between various schools. See P. Mainardi, *Arts and Politics of the Second Empire*, *op. cit.*, p. 49-59.
10. First organized by the *Académie Royale* in 1667, the Salons were held in the Salon Carré of the Louvre from which they took their name and also in the Grande Galerie from 1699 until 1848. The Salons, therefore, were the first to exhibit art to the public. The Louvre, as a museum, came in second by a 1792 decree of the Convention and was opened to the public in August 1793. Because of their shared and sometimes competing locations, as well as their mutual function of exhibiting, the museums and the Salons were interconnected institutions. The Salon, in fact, was a complex institution. From its academic and monarchic origins, it became a showcase for artists' works. But in the nineteenth century it was also a place for testing opposing ideas, as well as being *the* place where the artists met their patrons: the State which, at the time, bought more works than it commissioned, and the collectors who stood in the wings. As Gérard Monnier suggests:

Le Salon est enfin l'espace central de l'économie de marché de l'art. C'est au Salon, alors que le marché de l'art est encore peu développé, que l'artiste entre en contact avec ses partenaires économiques.

The Salon is the main space for the marketplace of art. While the market place is not very much developed yet, it is at the Salon that the artist meets his economic partners. [My translation] See Gérard Monnier, *op. cit.*, p. 129.

Courbet seems to have been very sensitive to the conditions of visibility of his works very early in his career.¹¹ In 1853, the year he confided to Bruyas his wish to mount a private exhibition at the Universal Exposition, Courbet already had some experience showing in the Salons so that he was well aware of the prevailing modes of display, as for example, the private exhibitions of his *Burial at Ornans* (1850) in Ornans, Besançon and Dijon, for which he charged entrance fees; the Gold Medal he earned at the 1849 Exposition; the purchase of *After Diner at Ornans* (1849) by the Musée de Lille; from all of these Courbet gained substantial self-confidence in his art and, above all, a belief that he was painting in his own manner. So he may have thought of a personal retrospective not only as a way of competing with and defeating his elder rivals,¹² but, above all, as a way of gaining more visibility than he had received so far. As well, he may have wanted to establish more adequate viewing conditions than any other artist present at the Exposition Universelle.¹³

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11. Although he was satisfied, for example, with the hanging of his first submission to the Salon of 1844, he already had a comment on the subject. At his third Salon in 1846, however, he formally requested that the painting, *Self-Portrait with Leather Belt* (1846), be hung at eye level, which was done midway through the exhibition. In an endeavor to bring Théophile Gautier's attention to his work, he complained to the critic:

I strongly doubt, in spite of the height, that it is a place of honor; I will try to appeal to the director of the new Tower of Babel. And if chance decrees that in the return-about it will be more visible to the naked eye, then I would pray you to do me the favor to be so kind as to tell me what you think of it.

It was not only the elevated location of his piece that disturbed Courbet, but the distraction resulting from the cluttered hanging of the Salons (in his expression, the "new Tower of Babel." See his letters in *op. cit.* Letters 44-2, 46-5, and 46-3, respectively p. 46, 62, and 60-61.

12. This is Mainardi's contention, *op. cit.*, p.57-61. In her account of Courbet's attempts to have his pavilion set up, she recalls that he was a very young artist in 1855 and, as a result, could not expect to be treated as his much more senior elders. She concludes: "Had Courbet's two major paintings been accepted, he would have had a private retrospective exhibition equal to that of the four major painters; this, of course, was exactly what he wanted." (p.59) Her argument is developed at greater length in her article: "Courbet's Exhibitionism," *op. cit.*, p. 253-266. In this piece, she shows how Courbet acted as a entrepreneur and a promoter of his art.
13. To a certain extent, this is Yve-Alain Bois' argument. See Yve-Alain Bois, "Exposition: Esthétique de la distraction, espace de démonstration," *Cahiers du Musée national d'art moderne* (Fall 1989) no. 29, p. 57-79.

In seeking the collaboration of key artists for the art section of the Exposition (to prevent any potential reactions on the artists' part to the State's supposed preferences for one school or another), Count Nieuwerkerke personally invited Courbet to do a painting for that occasion. Boosted by his recent success, Courbet reacted with extreme self-confidence and even overweening arrogance towards the most important officer of the Exposition and a deputy of the State, and declined the invitation.¹⁴ To mount his pavilion happened to be the best way to pull off the most important *coup de force* of his career. Indeed he was so successful in term of visibility that he repeated his gesture on a grander scale for the 1867 Universal Exposition, where he showed more than 100 paintings.¹⁵ Others viewed it as such a success that Manet also mounted a parallel show in 1867; and Monet and Rodin had a joint exhibition at George Petit's gallery for the Centennial Exposition of 1889.¹⁶ As decisive a stroke as it was, however, it does not say anything about the meaning of Courbet's strategy. We still need to know why he decided to exhibit his works apart from those of his rivals, at a separate site. Was it only to make his works more visible for the visitors from all over the world? Or, was it also to secure better display conditions? And yet, above all, did his secessionist gesture mean something in relation to the great commodity fair that the Exposition Universelle was?

The simplest—but not the most comprehensive—answer to these questions emerges from the facts themselves. For the Salon of 1855, Courbet sent fourteen

14. Throughout the letter he wrote to Bruyas in the fall of 1853 (Letter 53-5, p. 114-116), where he recounts his meeting with Nieuwerkerke and where he fantasizes about his private exhibition, Courbet seems to have been extremely arrogant towards his host. We have to remember that Courbet was sympathetic to the 1848 Revolution and opposed to Napoléon III's *coup d'état* of 1851. Nieuwerkerke was a representative of that government.

15. See P. ten-Doesschate Chu, *op. cit.*, p. 312, note 2. Courbet's catalogue mentions 115 paintings; he would add twenty more. See *Exposition des œuvres de M. G. Courbet*. Rond-Point de l'Alma, Champs-Élysées.

16. See Robert Jensen, *op. cit.*, p. 129-130. Rodin exhibited 36 sculptures and Monet 145 paintings representing works from 1864 to 1889.

paintings to the jury; three of these were rejected, supposedly due to a lack of wall space.¹⁷ Among these, however, were Courbet's most important works: *A Burial at Ornans* (1850) (which constituted, he said, "my debut and my statement of principles"¹⁸) and *The Painter's Studio: Real Allegory Determining a Phase of Seven Years of My Artistic and Moral Life* (1855), another manifesto painting, this time executed specially for the Salon of 1855. The rejection of his major submissions may ultimately have been the catalyst for his decision to erect his pavilion, but it does not constitute its basic motivation. For the project itself existed long before the opening of the Exposition. In the letter to Bruyas where Courbet reported his meeting with Nieuwerkerke and in which he fantasized about his pavilion, he expressed his strong belief that he would earn much more money than he ever could from State subsidies.¹⁹ Upset by the rejection of his three paintings, he was nonetheless encouraged to mount his exhibition by the acceptance of the eleven others, which he saw as a boost and as publicity for his own show.²⁰ To set up a retrospective

17. In her critical edition of Courbet's letters, Petra ten-Doesschate Chu comments on Courbet's statement to Bruyas in which he said that the jury rejected his works because they were disastrous to French art and that he had to be stopped (Letter 55-4, p. 139)

There is no record that such a statement was ever made, either in public or in private. Most likely the *Burial* and the *Atelier* were not accepted because of their large size. Lack of wall space was the major problem at the Universal Exposition and forced the jury to refuse three-quarters of the approximately 8,100 hundred works that were submitted. (Note 2, p. 140)

18. See *op. cit.*, Letter 53-6, p. 116.

19. This is the story he told Bruyas in the fall of 1853:

He asked me again if I would not send something to the Exposition. I answered that I never entered competitions because I did not acknowledge any judges; but that it might happen that I would send them, as an act of cynicism, my *Burial*, which constitutes my debut and my statement of principles; that they should deal with the painting as best they could; but that *I hoped to have the honor of organizing on my own (perhaps) an exhibition rivaling theirs*, which will earn me 40,000 francs, an amount that I would certainly not earn with them. (*Op. cit.*, Letter 53-6, p. 116)

20. Courbet wrote to Bruyas in April 1855:

I am at my wits' end! Terrible things are happening to me. They have refused my *Burial* [...]. Everyone is urging me to have a private show and I have given in. I will organize another exhibition of twenty-seven of my new and old paintings, saying that I am taking advantage of the boost the government has given me by receiving eleven paintings in its exhibition. (*Op. cit.*, Letter 55-4, p. 139.)

exhibition in such an international context gave extremely good visibility to the work of an artist as young as Courbet was at the time. And yet, this visibility was reached through the development and appropriation of a specific space: the enclosed space of the exhibition.

About Courbet' Modernism

With respect to the whole issue of exhibition space in relation to modernist art, Bois considers Courbet's pavilion²¹ to be the inaugural moment of modernism. This is argued in contrast to the general assumption that it is Manet who should be taken as modernism's starting point because, in his paintings, the referent is the history of painting. Hence, the argument runs, their proper place is the museum archive. *A propos* of the self-referentiality of Manet's paintings, Michel Foucault contends:

Déjeuner sur l'Herbe and *Olympia* were perhaps the first "museum" paintings, the first paintings in European art that were less a response to the achievement of Giorgione, Raphael and Velasquez than an acknowledgment (supported by this singular and obvious connection, using this legible reference to cloak its operation) of the new and substantial relationship of the painting itself, as a manifestation of the existence of the museums and the particular reality and interdependence that paintings acquired in museums. In that same period, *The Temptation* was the first literary work to comprehend the greenish institutions where books are accumulated and where the slow and incontrovertible vegetations of learning quietly proliferate. Flaubert is to the library what Manet is to the museum. They both produced works in a self-conscious relationship to earlier paintings or texts - or rather to the aspect in painting or writing that remains indefinitely open. They erect their art within the archive.²²

21. Yve-Alain Bois, *op. cit.*

22. Quoted by Douglas Crimp, "On the Museum's Ruins," *On the Museum's Ruins* (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England: The MIT Press, 1993), p. 50. (English translation by D.F. Bouchard and S. Simon originally published in *October*, no. 13 (Summer 1980), p. 41-57.) Michel Foucault, "La bibliothèque fantastique" (1967), reprinted in *Le travail de Flaubert* (Paris: Seuil, 1983), p. 107. Quoted by Yve-Alain Bois, *op. cit.*, p. 57:

Il se peut bien que le *Déjeuner sur l'herbe* et l'*Olympia*, aient été les premières peintures "de Musée": pour la première fois dans l'art européen, des toiles ont été peintes – non pas exactement pour répliquer à Giorgione, à Raphael et à Velasquez.

Eugenio Donato and Douglas Crimp have taken up this issue in America. For them it is not the library but the museum in its fundamental heterogeneity that is the issue both in Flaubert's ironic *Bouvard et Pécuchet*, where their encyclopedic project ends with the most heteroclitic collections gathered within a museum. Comparable to this heterogeneous museum, there are Robert Rauschenberg's silk-screen collages of the sixties. Where everyday life images are placed side by side with art reproductions. Thus, we have the exact opposite to what Foucault believes to be Manet's dream of painting by unifying different genres as they are put together in the "homogeneous" museum. For, according to Donato,²³ language and text support the encyclopedic discontinuities of the library by their own homogeneity, whereas museums cannot hide their essential heterogeneity despite their taxonomies of school, genres, chronology, etc.²⁴

mais pour témoigner, à l'abri de ce rapport singulier et visible, au-dessous de la déchiffrable référence, d'un rapport nouveau de la peinture à elle-même, pour manifester l'existence des musées, et le mode d'être et de parenté qu'y acquièrent les tableaux. À la même époque, *La tentation de saint Antoine* est la première oeuvre littéraire qui tienne compte de ces institutions verdâtres où les livres s'accumulent et où croît doucement la lente, la certaine végétation de leur savoir. Flaubert est à la bibliothèque ce que Manet est au musée. Ils écrivent, ils peignent dans un rapport fondamental à ce qui fut peint, à ce qui fut écrit – ou plutôt à ce qui de la peinture et de l'écriture demeure indéfiniment ouvert. Leur art s'édifie où se forme l'archive.

23. Eugenio Donato, "The Museum's Furnace: Notes Towards a Contextual Reading of *Bouvard et Pécuchet*," in *Textual Strategies: Perspectives in Post-Structuralist Criticism*, Josué V. Harau ed. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1979).

24. Apart from Foucault, whose observations have just been mentioned, other sources involved in that debate are: Michael Fried, "Manet's Sources," *Artforum*, vol. 7, no. 7 (March 1969), p. 28-82, and "Painting Memories: On the Containment of the Past in Baudelaire and Manet," *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 10, no. 3 (March 1994), p. 510-542; Eugenio Donato, "The Museum's Furnace: Notes towards a Contextual Reading of *Bouvard et Pécuchet*," *op. cit.*, p. 213-238, and Douglas Crimp, "On the Museum's Ruins," *op. cit.*

Donato, indeed, presupposes the homogeneity of the text in contrast to the heterogeneity of the museum, saying:

[The] clerk's library—if one can call it that—is on the one hand contrasted with their scientific instruments, that is, with an otherness which is inscribed in the texture of representation; but more important, it appears in a series of heterogeneous elements. The difficulty resides, precisely, in reading a series of heterogeneous elements, since through their heterogeneity they offer what is absolutely other to the homogeneous representation space of the *Encyclopedia-Library*. (Eugenio Donato, *op. cit.*, p. 219)

Bois suggests that to take Manet as the starting point for modernist art (through the encounter of the avant-garde with the museum) is to conceal the economic basis of the story, as well as its aesthetic consequences. Taking up the observations of the revisionist art historian, Francis Haskell,²⁵ Bois proposes that the first perceptions of the museum as the ideal location for works of art, hence, as the crucial institution for the practice of art, occurred with Géricault and Delacroix who wanted their paintings—respectively, *The Raft of the Medusa* (1819) and *The Massacres of Chios* (1823-1824)—to be hung in the Musée du Luxembourg, the first museum devoted to living artists.

During the very month of its opening (the museum opened its doors on April 24, 1818), Géricault bought an immense canvas on which he painted *The Raft of the Medusa*, with the expectation that this would be purchased by the government. Given its size and the depiction of a painful subject that could not be rescued by any religious, mythological or historical justification, where else, asks Haskell, could Géricault enter the painting if not in the Luxembourg? He adds that the same observations could be made about Delacroix's *The Massacres of Chios*.²⁶ The museum of living artists played, thereby, the role of a purgatory prior to the Louvre: "In fact, it seems to me that, although many artists looked upon the

Of course, the assumption about the homogeneity of the *Encyclopedia-Library* (and that of the text) is debatable. In contrast to the museum's virtually endless collections, however, where everything can interpenetrate and upset the whole system (as well as be infinitely reshuffled), the text integrates within its seeming transparency, delusive as that may be.

Because objects in museums, in contrast to books in libraries, are at an arbitrary distance from their own space-time origins and functions, and because they are arbitrarily integrated into series that induce irrelevant fabulations, they cannot recover their memory. The heterogeneity of the museum collection is thus inescapable. (See also, Donato, *Ibid.*, p. 224)

25. Francis Haskell, "The Artist and the Museum," *The New York Review of Books* (December 3, 1983), p. 38-42; also published in French (since, it was a lecture given at the opening of the Musée d'Orsay), as "Le peintre et le musée," *Le Débat*, no. 49 (March-April 1987), p. 47-56.

26. *Ibid.*, p. 39.

Luxembourg as a sort of antechamber to the Louvre, we can also think of it as fulfilling some of the functions of a sort of "*Musée des (pas trop) refusés*."²⁷

According to Bois and Haskell,²⁸ Courbet, following the example of Géricault and Delacroix, conceived the *Burial at Ornans* on such a grand scale that the painting would fit only in the Luxembourg.²⁹ Actually, the story goes back to *After Dinner at Ornans* (1849); the painting was awarded a gold medal by the jury, praised by contemporary artists such as Delacroix and even Ingres, and eventually purchased by the State. But, despite Courbet's wishes, it did not go to the Luxembourg but ended up in the Musée de Lille at the request of Edouard Reynard, the museum administrator.³⁰ As it happened, Courbet reacted with his tremendous canvas, *Burial at Ornans* (11' 1" x 23' 6").

27. *Idem*. There followed a series of love-hate relationships between the museum and the artists. Some dreamed of having a significant part of their oeuvre gathered under the same museum roof. Turner, for example, specified in his bequest that the paintings remaining in his studio be hung in two or three rooms of the National Gallery under his name. Others, like Thorvaldsen, wanted to have their own personal museums; and indeed, in 1844, Thorvaldsen was buried among his works in his Copenhagen mausoleum-museum. And still others transformed their studios into museums, like Gustave Moreau who even changed the format of some of his paintings to match the display parameters of the permanent collection of his own work. In any case, in the nineteenth century the museum became the institution one turned to in order to create some sort of meaning around the works of an artist, or to construct history.

28. It is admitted by Bois (*op. cit.*), and also by Hélène Toussaint, *Gustave Courbet: 1819-1877* (Paris: Éditions des musées nationaux, 1977), p. 96, that the first agreement between the State and Courbet was that the painting, *After Dinner in Ornans*, would be shown at the Luxembourg after its purchase by the government.

29. In fact, the painting remained in the artist's studio until his death. After arduous dealings and bureaucratic slowness to purchase some part of Courbet's estate, which included *The Burial*, his sister Juliette gave it to the Republic. Thus the painting sidestepped the Luxembourg and entered directly into the Louvre, but not without controversy. See Hélène Toussaint, "Le dossier de 'l'Atelier' de Courbet," in *op. cit.*, *Courbet*, p. 105.

30. See Hélène Toussaint, *Ibid.*, p. 96:

L'Après-dînée à Ornans est achetée par l'État. Sur la demande d'Edouard Reynart, Administrateur des Musées de Lille, elle lui est remise. Cette disposition surprend Courbet qui voit déjà son tableau au Luxembourg; pourtant il accepte de bon cœur et écrit à Reynart : "J'aurais eu à choisir un emplacement que certainement je lui aurais choisi moins beau et moins honorable."

[The *After Dinner at Ornans* is bought by the State. Upon the request of Edouard Reynart, the administrator at the Musée de Lille, the painting is given to Reynart. This decision surprises Courbet, who had already imagined his painting hanging in the Luxembourg; nonetheless, he accepts the transaction, and writes to Reynart,

In his analysis of the Courbet case, Haskell confines his discussion mainly to the large dimensions of the painting. Bois, however, goes further, developing its implications for the Pavillon du Réalisme:

As is well known, eleven works by Courbet had been accepted by the exhibition committee—and not minor ones—but he was dissatisfied with the way they were displayed: not exhibited together, but dispersed among an undifferentiated mass of hundreds of paintings exactly as in the next building, machines and machine-made products were exhibited, competing for the gold medal. "I am conquering freedom, I am saving the independence of art" are the words Courbet used to explain the motivation of his parasitic show of some forty works, which he managed to install only six weeks after the inauguration of the fair and to maintain until the fair closed five months later. With these words, Courbet characterized what is the first avant-garde act, an act of defiance against the ever-growing realm of the commodity.³¹

In Bois' view, Courbet's secessionist act in showing his oeuvre not only apart from his peers but, moreover, from the innumerable exhibits at the Exposition Universelle, is evidence of his feeling for the "exaltation of statistics."³² He created,

["I would have had to choose a place that it certainly would have been less beautiful and less honorable."] (My translation)

Of course, considering his reputation only emerging by then, Courbet had to accept the decision of the State and could do no better than to charm his supporter.

However, this story is reported differently by T.J. Clark in his *Image of the People: Gustave Courbet and the 1848 Revolution* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1973):

The deal with the Bureau des Beaux-Arts quickly went sour. Instead of the promised place in the Luxembourg, *After Dinner* went off to Lille in a job-lot with Huguenin's statue of Hebe. (p. 77)

In other words, Courbet's expectations would have been based on some promises by the Government, following Clark. In any case, whatever Courbet's feelings could have been about the final location of his painting, the fact is that he had one of his paintings hung in a Museum very early in his career. Also, it seems that this conclusion encouraged him in creating larger works that could only fit into a museum.

31. Yve-Alain Bois, "Painting: The Task of Mourning," in *Painting as Model* (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England: The MIT Press, 1990), p. 234. The mode of display as it was practiced in the Salons would have destroyed the unity of Courbet's work, as he said to Bruyas many times, and yet, his pieces of art would have been comparable to any other product of industry exhibited near the Palais des Beaux-Arts. (*Op. cit.*, p. 60)
32. These were Flaubert's words upon visiting the London Universal Exposition of 1851. Quoted in Donato's article (*op. cit.*, p. 225, note 15). Jean Seznec reported on the visit in *Flaubert à l'Exposition Universelle de 1851* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1951). Following Seznec, Donato observes that no particular objects attracted Flaubert; yet his fancy turned to the exhibits that aroused his imagination. Donato contends that "the function of the

thus, something like a temporary personal museum (or gallery), a remote and homogeneous space wherein his paintings would be protected from their transmutation into commodities.

Bois says that, in Walter Benjamin's commentary on Baudelaire's fascination with novelty, the capitalist process of exchange is seen as threatening for art because it "engenders the terrifying and eternal return of the same," and because "all the commodities [including works of art] are equally exchangeable."³³ For Baudelaire, novelty becomes the ultimate entrenchment of art because it resists equalization (with other commodities).³⁴

Bois reiterates Walter Benjamin's observation that the need for novelty in modern art coincides with the spreading of the commodities on the market place. Hence,

objects chosen by the novelist is to enable him to reconstruct a *fictional image* of a particular culture." Hence, his conclusion that:

The metonymic displacement of the archeological objects of the museum, which makes them unsuitable for an objective science, makes them, on the contrary, very suggestive to the literary imagination. The archeologist's loss is the novelist's gain; witness *Salammô*. (*Id.*)

33. Yve-Alain Bois, *op. cit.*, p. 61.

34. In "Esthétique de la distraction, espace de démonstration," (*op. cit.*) p. 61. Bois endorses Walter Benjamin (*The Arcades Project*, Cambridge Mass.: The Belnap Press of Harvard University Press, 1991):

This degradation to which things are subject because they can be taxed as commodities is counterbalanced in Baudelaire by the inestimable value of novelty. *La nouveauté* represents that absolute which is no longer accessible to any interpretation or comparison. It becomes the ultimate entrenchment of art.

One must, however, pursue the reading of Benjamin's text:

Newness is a quality independent of the use value of the commodity. It is the source of that illusion of which fashion is the tireless purveyor. The fact art's last line of resistance should coincide with the commodity's most advanced line of attack this had to remain hidden to Baudelaire. [...] The linchpin of his entire theory of art is "modern beauty" and for him the proof of modernity seems to be this: it is marked with the fatality of being one day antiquity, and it reveals this to whoever witnesses its birth. Here we meet the quintessence of the unforeseen, which for Baudelaire is an inalienable quality of the beautiful. The face of modernity itself blasts us with its immemorial gaze. Such as the gaze of Medusa for the Greeks. (Walter Benjamin, *Ibid.*, p. 22)

According to Benjamin, the aesthetics of the new in Baudelaire is a necessity that is opposed to the absolute similarities of all commodities. Yet, for Benjamin, it will bring nothing more than repetition and boredom. For in its shock appears also its obsolescence.

modernity had substituted the imitation of tradition by the urge for the new; yet, surprisingly, novelty reveals itself where archives are kept. For the museum incarnates the condition of preservation of the *nature* of art, of its essence, in addition to being the ground of its historicity. Indeed, as far as art objects are concerned, essentialism and historicism are embodied in the museum. It is there, and nowhere else, that the aesthetic nature of these objects is at least preserved—from, say, ornamentation or from ideological or ritual functions—and elevated to the disinterested appreciation of their qualities by their comparison *only* with similar works executed in the past.

According to Giorgio Agamben, to whom Bois also refers, the 1851 International Exposition was the original moment when the fetishisation of the object by its commodity form became apparent:

The transfiguration of the commodity into *enchanted object* is the sign that the exchange value is already beginning to eclipse the use-value of the commodity. In the galleries and the pavilions of its mystical Crystal Palace, in which from the outset a place was also reserved for works of art, the commodity is displayed to be enjoyed it through the glance at the enchanted scene.

Thus at the Universal Exhibition was celebrated, for the first time, the mystery that has now become familiar to anyone who has entered into a supermarket or been exposed to the manipulation of an advertisement: the epiphany of the unattainable.³⁵

In a footnote to this text, Agamben refers to diverse artists who reacted against the potential commodification of works of art in the context of the universal exhibitions: Ruskin, Courbet, Manet and Gauguin. All of them represent a leading position in the making of modernism and, implicitly, are seen to have anticipated the attitude of most modernist artists towards the growing threat of the transformation of art objects into commodities—a transformation that does not stem from the art object itself, of course, but from its encounter with the products of

35. Giorgio Agamben, *Stanzas: Word and Phantasm in Western Culture*. Ronald M. Martinez trans. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993) p. 38.

industry displayed in the exhibition like works of art. This was the original context in which Courbet installed his pavilion next to the Exposition Universelle; this was the first moment in history when the products of art were presented side by side with the products of industry, both illuminated with the aura of the fetish. Yet, by setting up his pavilion and installing his works as an ensemble apart from the rest of the exhibition, was Courbet really reacting against the virtual commodification of works of art?

In Bois' view, Courbet's response to the potential commodification of his works was their installation within a separate and homogeneous space, comparable to the museum space. In the rest of his article, Bois sees the reaction of many modernist artists against reification and commodification by conceiving their works to fit within specific places.³⁶

Courbet's Temporary Museum

If "throne and altar" determined the content and the subjects of works of art, they also established their destinations and their sites. Commissions for monuments, as well as for frescoes and painting programs, were given for specific sites. Soon after the Revolution, museums appeared to become the normal substitute for the church and the aristocratic gallery. In Courbet's time, the museums—which were born with the Revolution a half-century earlier—were already perceived as the appropriate destination for works of art.³⁷ As substitutes for the previous locations,

36. Even if the issue of our concern is as old as the museum itself (see next note), it was in 1970 that the linkage of the work of art with a specific place became an apparant solution to the increasing commodification of art objects. The artists at the time developed site specific strategies that became identified with post-modern art. Bois's art historical strategies often consist by showing that many modernist works developed comparable venues.

37. This was the argument of the French revolutionaries when Bonaparte brought paintings and monuments from Venice and Rome in 1798 to fill the Louvre with the art of Antiquity. They claimed that the appropriate place for ancient Greek art was French museums because only

however, have the museums also been perceived as *sites* by the artists? It is with respect to this context that we can properly understand the precise issues at stake in the case of Courbet's pavilion. Yet, as the Salons were also the dominant institution by then—even more significant and much more important than museums in the eyes of living artists, because they were not only the place where judgments on contemporary art took shape and competed, not only either because they were the place where artistic education of the lay persons happened, but also because they played a key economic role by taking over the way the previous commissions were done, where the marketplace plunged its roots³⁸—what exactly was Courbet's strategy in this context?

Through the considerations we have made about Courbet's positioning in relation to the marketplace and the museum, one can track a structural antagonism that took shape in Courbet's time and that would remain decisive for an understanding of the avant-garde interest in curating its own exhibitions: on one side, we have the expansion of the art market and, on the other, the growing influence of the new museums, even though the latter were well established by mid-century.³⁹ This opposition, I think, gave rise to the two most significant interpretations of Courbet's action. On the one hand, it has been said that Courbet acted as an aggressive busi-

there were the democratic values of the Ancients restored; consequently, only the French were capable and worthy of preserving these treasures. (See Édouard Pommier's introduction to Quatremère de Quincy, *Lettres à Miranda sur le Déplacement des Monuments de l'art de l'Italie* (1796) (Paris: Macula, 1989), p. 7-83.

According to Pommier, the patrimonial politics of the Convention under the Directory did not only consider it necessary to protect national monuments from popular vandalism but, also, to preserve the heritage of humanity from the gaze of slaves, namely, all those European nations that had not yet become free. The National Museum foundation (at the Louvre), the conquest of neighbouring "enslaved" countries and the despoilment of the masterpieces they kept, all represented the same mastery of time, space, history and geography by the Revolution and the liberty that French revolutionaries believed it embodied.

38. See Patricia Mainardi's, *The End of the Salons*, *op. cit.*

39. For a short historical and conceptual analysis of the relation between museums and the art market, see Krzysztof Pomian, "L'art entre le musée et le marché," *Le commerce de l'art de la Renaissance à nos jours* (Besançon: La Manufacture, 1992), p. 9-33.

nessman in seeking new supporters and collectors who might enable him to make a living from his painting and free him from reliance on State commissions.⁴⁰ From this perspective, of course, the products of his work were commodities exchangeable in the marketplace. As the owner and marketer of his products, Courbet sought to free himself from dependence on the State and to gain freedom for his entrepreneurial aims. On the other hand, it has been claimed that his reaction should be explained as an act of resistance to the possible commodification of art works within the context of the Universal Exposition, which exhibited industrial products alongside works of art. In the face of such conditions, which threatened the intellectual "nature" of art, museums appeared as shelters for aesthetic values. In that sense, Courbet's pavilion could be seen as a kind of "temporary private museum" in which his works formed a compact group of meaningful aesthetic statements.

Courbet' Entrepreneurship

In an article on Courbet's pavilion, Patricia Mainardi argues that the refusal to deal with art in a commercial way was typical of the conservatives and the academicians, but not of avant-garde artists.⁴¹ For the former, with their roots in the Ancien Régime, believed that the aim of art is educational, and that the proper vehicle of this aim is history painting. Thus painting should be neither decorative nor a commodity. The suitable place for exhibiting such art was the Louvre and the museums, while the appropriate venues for lower genres (genre pictures, landscape and still lifes), as well as for curios and art supplies, were bazaars and picture shops.⁴² Mainardi thus shows that Courbet initiated a new way of being an

40. Patricia Mainardi, "Courbet's Exhibitionism," *op. cit.*, (note 12).

41. Patricia Mainardi, "Courbet's Exhibitionism," *op. cit.*, p. 253-266.

42. *Ibid.*, p. 257.

artist, one that involved an entrepreneurial development of marketing techniques to sell one's works: staging his show as a commercial event with entrance fees, selling a manifesto-booklet and photographs of his paintings, and advertising his exhibition throughout Paris. But, if Courbet's entrepreneurial exhibition expressed his dissatisfaction with the display conditions of the Salon, which showed artists' work in such proximity and quantity that all individual pieces were eventually drowned out, the conservatives were also dissatisfied with the Salon system because it had become a market for mediocrity. And they were even more frightened at the prospect of "the commercialization and commodification of art, which, they feared, would happen under capitalism."⁴³ Courbet's commercial attitude towards his art is supported by other examples.⁴⁴

43. *Ibid.*, p. 260. Elsewhere [in "The Double Exhibition in Nineteenth-Century France," *Art Journal*, vol. 48, no. 1 (Spring 1989), p. 23-28], Mainardi discusses the conservatives' opposition to the Salon and their willingness to hold a separate and less frequent exhibition for the members of the Academy. For they associated the Salons with "picture shops and bazaars," hence with commerce and capitalism. History paintings, meanwhile, were not to be subject to trade, but were to be commissioned by the State in order to educate the people.

The classical purpose of art espoused by the Academy and implicit in history painting was to educate: its habitus was the church, the public monument, the museum, or aristocratic private gallery. Contrasted to this was the bourgeois penchant for art as decoration or as commodity: its habitus would be—according to conservatives—the bazaar, the market place, the boutique, the boudoir; in reality it was the bourgeois living room and, as capitalism developed, the commercial art gallery. (p. 24)

The opposition, thus, is between the market place on the one hand, and the museum on the other. Both appear to pursue different goals and to use different means favoring different genres.

44. I refer to the exhibition of the *Burial at Ornans* in Besançon and Dijon, where people had to pay to see the show. Courbet claimed that he wanted people to feel free to express their views and criticism. It is worthwhile quoting him at length, as he expresses his changing views on the subject:

Some two thousand peasants came to Ornans to see my paintings. They all asked me as they left how much they owed me. It was no use telling them that I owed them, that I was in my own part of the world. That did not please them and I lost a good deal of their respect. They tended to think of me as an imbecile, which proves clearly that generosity is foolish because you deprive yourself of your means of action without enriching others, either spiritually or financially. People want to pay in order to be free so that their judgment won't be influenced by gratitude. They are right. I am eager to learn and to that end I will be so outrageous that I'll give everyone the power to tell me the cruelest truths. You see that I am up to it. Don't think that this is a whim, I have thought about it for a long time. Moreover, it is a serious duty, not only to give an example of freedom and char-

To sum up, then, we are back at the beginning: on the one hand, there is the reaction of the avant-garde artist to the threat of commodities, which led Courbet to show his paintings in a venue remote from the exhibition of industrial products and to create his own gallery and personal museum; on the other hand, Courbet's understanding of his context awakened his desire to master ways of presenting his art that were in keeping with the very economic order in which it was produced—all in opposition to the elitist judgment of the Salon juries and the traditional State commissions. The issue, then, could be stated as follows: from what did Courbet save the independence of art? from the marketplace and the realm of commodities, as Yve-Alain Bois maintains?, or from elitist institutions such as museums, as Mainardi contends? Perhaps we should say that he resisted both the marketplace and the museum. The issue is important because, according to Bois, "With these words ["conquering freedom," "saving the independence of art"]. Courbet characterizes what is for me the first avant-garde act, an act of defiance against the ever-growing realm of the commodity."⁴⁵ But, perhaps one should suggest the opposite; i.e. that Courbet resisted to neither the marketplace, nor the museum, that he embraced them both at the same time.⁴⁶

acter in art, but also to publicize the art I undertake. (Petra ten-Doesshate Chu. *op. cit.*, Letter 50-4, p. 99)

Behind his eagerness to learn from people's comments, Courbet also speculates about how much he could have earned from his exhibition of the *Burial at Ornans*: (1950) considering that, a few weeks later, he asked fifty centimes of the Besançon visitors, he could have earned six thousand francs in Ornans! He could have sold a painting like *Young Ladies of the Village* (1852) for two or three thousands francs. The exhibition, hence, could have brought in substantial revenue.

45. Yve-Alain Bois, "Painting, The task of Mourning," *op. cit.*, p. 234.

46. In "Circuits of Production, Circuits of Consumption: The Case of Mid-Nineteenth-Century French Art Dealing." (*Art Journal*, vol. 48, no. 1, Spring 1989), Nicholas Green shows the complexity of the French art market at the time of Courbet mounted his exhibition. Paintings' were sold as luxury goods, and yet became matter of speculation during the sixties.

A Key Work: *The Painter's Studio*



Fig. 1.2 Gustave Courbet, *The Painter's Studio*, 1855

To understand the intention behind Courbet's pavilion more deeply, one must examine the catalogue of the works he exhibited and consider the most important one of all—which is, of course, the *Painter's Studio: Real Allegory Resolving Seven Years of my Artistic Life* (1855). This painting shares the concerns involved in the pavilion since both were intended at the same time and as part of the same process, to serve similar goals. Indeed both are part of the same project. The painting, however, is still an enigma, partly as a result of the oxymoronic title, "real allegory." As an allegory, it could be ostensibly deciphered by anyone who knows the "code" of the figures, even though its "modes of address" are indirect. By adding "real" to the term "allegory," however, Courbet obviously intended to confuse the "reader." Even Champfleury, Courbet's supporter and friend (and the presumed author of the manifesto, *Du réalisme*, published for the

opening of the pavilion), was puzzled by the title of the painting⁴⁷ even though he had received the so-called code in a letter Courbet sent to him.

In her article on Courbet's *Studio*, Linda Nochlin refuses to foreclose the possible readings of the painting by giving it an ultimate interpretation based upon the figures represented in it, like Klaus Herding, for instance, did.⁴⁸ Instead, she reads the work as a text, cognizant of its materiality and its signifiers, and convinced that allegories emerge from uncertainties that are highly specific to certain social contexts where the ideological unity of things falls apart, and where meanings are no longer available.⁴⁹ Her counter-interpretation of "allegory" is based upon Walter

47. See Champfleury's letter to George Sand in *L'enterrement à Ornans*, Jean-Luc Ferry ed. (Paris: Denoel/Gonthier, 1980) p. 62-77.

48. Starting with Hélène Toussaint of the Louvre, who identifies every single figure in Courbet's *Studio* (*op. cit.*), Klaus Herding proposes a social historical and iconographical interpretation of the painting. See "The Painter's Studio: Focus on World Events, Site of Reconciliation," in *Courbet: To Venture Independence* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1991), p. 45-61. Emphasizing the fact that Courbet's *Studio* was painted specifically for the Universal Exposition of 1855, Herding argues that the painting is an *adhortatio ad principem*, "an exhortation to the ruler," Napoleon III, who is represented in the extreme left of the painting. Its hidden message, according to Herding, is that the Emperor has the responsibility to defeat poverty and that, in order to achieve this aim, "instead of encouraging the dubious progress of industry [celebrated at the Exposition], he should recall the forces of renewal [that are] inherent in nature" (p. 60) and allegorized by the landscape painting the artist is working on in the center of *Studio*. Herding closes his interpretation by pointing out that another particular feature of the *Studio* is that everyone in it is placed on the same level: Courbet's friends and supporters are represented on the right side, while on the left are allegorical figures of the entire spectrum of nations, ideological trends and positions in the social hierarchy. But none could pretend to be superior to the others, not even the Emperor himself or the artist. Despite the fact that the latter is sitting in the center and working on a painting, he is made equal to all the others through the performance of duty. Following German critical theory and drawing on Prudhon, Herding interprets Courbet's painting as a representation of the avant-garde artist's social role of showing the path of reconciliation through art.

49. Nochlin in her article "Courbet's Real Allegory : Rereading *The Painter's Studio*" (in *Courbet Reconsidered*, New York: Brooklyn Museum, 1988) summarizes Frederic Jameson's penetrating analysis of Benjamin's *Trauerspiel*:

Given what Jameson terms, she says, historical impossibility in the modern world for genuine reconciliation to endure in time, allegory becomes the privileged mode of our own life in time, a clumsy deciphering as meaning from moment to moment, the painful attempt to restore a continuity to heterogeneous, disconnected instants. (*Op. cit.*, p. 23)

The text of Frederic Jameson from which Nochlin borrowed her interpretation of "allegory" is *Marxism and Form* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971) p. 72.

Benjamin's study of German *Trauerspiel* (sorrow play or pageant). Instead of imposing conclusive readings on works of art, the approach of this study opens them up to their disorganized and fragmented "nature," such as we find in the societies of Courbet's mid-nineteenth century France. Given the incomplete state of the painting, Nochlin suggests that it is not about social or ideological unity or assertive authority, but about their failure and negation. She reads the figure of the Irish women crouched behind the left edge of the landscape painting not only as a reproach to the Emperor Napoléon III, who did not respect his promise to defeat poverty, but also as a warning to the artist himself with his utopian hope of complete social harmony. Nochlin then goes on to associate the female figure with Baudelaire; both figure melancholia (melancholia is the most significant figure of allegory in Benjamin's *Trauerspiel*), and both warn us against Utopia, constituting a "paired vehicle connoting privatized absorption versus public demonstration".⁵⁰

Emphasizing the fragmentary character of the painting, Nochlin proceeds with her own gendered reading, which is based upon the contrast between the different anonymous women represented in the painting. She points to the "carnavalesque" upside-down quality of the painted allegory, a quality fostered by the fair-ground atmosphere of the Exposition. The Emperor is submitted to the reproaches of the painter, who is, in turn, subject to those of the poor Irish woman. Consequently, in Nochlin's view, the proper vehicle for the utopian principle of hope in avant-garde works is not the iconographic but all the formal and material elements that convey the "in-progress" nature of the works; for this quality short-circuits representation and dismantles tight links between signifier and signified, opening up active interpretations and commitments.

Two particular points have received little attention, even though they shed some light on Courbet's understanding of the shape of the art world of his time.

50. *Ibid.*, p. 28.

None of the authors who have discussed the *Painter's Studio* has noticed that, in his letter to Champfleury, Courbet initially uses the word "shareholders" (*actionnaires*) to designate the entire range of figures ("friends," "workers" and "art lovers") standing on the right side of the painting. In other words, "friends", "workers" and "art lovers" represent extensions of what he meant by "shareholder." These characters, then, not only support the art world but actively participate in it. At the opposite pole from the common people, who represent "misery, poverty, wealth, the exploited and the exploiter and those who thrive on death," there are the musician (Promayet), the philosopher (Proudhon), the writer and art critic (Champfleury and Baudelaire), the trader (Cuenot), the editor and political activist (Buchon), the drawing child (Courbet himself, earlier in his life?), the art collector (Bruyas), the Salon holder (Madame Apolonie Sabatier⁵¹) and the lovers.⁵² On the left side is the allegory of the social world, while on the right side is that of the art world, both apart from each other. Who are the ones who, on Courbet's side, seek the independence of art? Mainly they are those by means of whose hands art works circulate, in other words, those who talk about art and buy it. In this painting, thus, Courbet stages not only the political issues of his time, but also shows how art works circulate as both economic and aesthetic values the more so since, as Carol Armstrong has shown, it is a retrospective within a retrospective.⁵³

In this regard, the other aspect deserving of more attention is the fact that Courbet painted his *Painter's Studio* explicitly and exclusively for its exhibition

51. Hélène Toussaint (*op. cit.*, p. 259) identifies Caroline Ungher (married Sabatier), who was a singer, and Apolonie Sabatier, who held Salons in the mid-nineteenth century. The latter's supporter and lover, a certain Mosselman, is also represented in the painting. Why these three figures are in the painting remains obscure. Did Courbet wanted to pay advance tribute to be introduced in the "*Tout Paris*", asks Toussaint? One does not know.

52. Toussaint (*Ibid.*, p. 262) cannot identify the male figure but says that the woman is Courbet's sister Juliette. Consequently, she suggests that this is an allegory of masonic fellow feeling.

53. See Carol Armstrong, *Manet Manette*, Princeton: Yale University Press, 2001.

within the context of the Universal Exposition.⁵⁴ As Courbet himself said, the *Painter's Studio* represents the material and intellectual conditions of painting—in other words, the *conditions of production* of art constitute the allegory of the painting. Perhaps, can we now solve the apparent *aporia* surrounding Courbet's attitude towards the ends of art in capitalist society—in other words, could art escape the conditions of the art market and the transformation of art objects into commodities by entering into the realm of a space exclusively devoted to the exhibition and, hence, to aesthetic appreciation; or should it, on the other hand, enter wholeheartedly into the world of commodities and accept its inescapable condition as a commodity among commodities? Is the integration of art works into museum-like space favorable to its decommodification? To solve this enigma, we should go back to the question of the fetishistic nature of commodities.

If, as Mainardi recalls, Courbet has been accused of commercialism for transgressing the conditions governing the exhibition of high art in the schools, Salons (or, at least, in the studio, like David and Vernet), and if he adopted a form of popular entertainment in mounting his own retrospective within a separate building from the Palais des Beaux-Arts, he rejected neither high art venues like Thorvaldsen's museum-mausoleum nor the studio as a site of production. Although correctly opposing sites of distribution and sites of production, Mainardi fails to see Courbet's gesture as the transplantation of the studio into the exhibition space, an act that highlights the process of production as the cornerstone of the whole show. Elements of this process can be seen not only in the representation of the artist at work, but also in the multitude of components used in the making of paintings from canvases and stretchers, to subjects and collectors. And yet, the painting representing the artist's studio can also be seen as the site of presentation of a retro-

54. Herding and Nochlin both stress this aspect without, however, drawing out all its consequences.

spective, as Carol Armstrong has shown.⁵⁵ Pointing to the tradesperson on the "world side" of the *Painter's Studio*, Nochlin sees Courbet presenting himself as a producer of genuine value, whereas the tradesman allegorizes the Exposition by selling futile goods. As Nochlin says:

The real allegory then, in the context of the Exposition Universelle of 1855, may be read as Courbet's production of himself as "countercommodity"—a free and self-determined man producing objects of genuine value—for a new and relatively unfamiliar public.⁵⁶

In the context of the commodity fetishism so exalted by the Universal Exposition, the representation of the working process incarnates another way of resisting the commodification and reification of art, despite the fact that museological modes of display will continue to serve to sell art works.

The interesting thing about Courbet's inaugural gesture, as expressed in the context of the Universal Exposition, is not that it solved any of the contradictions that modernist artists would face but that it embodied the whole range of the issue in one single move. That single move covers these various interconnected elements: (1) the one-person show as a means of selling art works to an unidentified public and virtual purchasers, with the support of a catalogue giving ideological principles, photographs of the works, and comprehensive publicity; (2) mastery of the conditions of exhibiting art works as a statement of independence in the face of the art world establishment and the political apparatus; (3) this mode of presentation that defines works of art as distinct from other commodities and, thereby, creates a specific category of goods on which it would eventually become possible to speculate; (4) the affirmative restoration of the intellectual and material process of production as a virtual expression of mere commodification and reification, delusive as it may be. Courbet by representing Baudelaire, Champfleury, Prud'hon, as

55. Carol Armstrong, *op. cit.*

56. Nochlin, *op. cit.*, p. 39.

shareholders, for instance, seems to indicate that if artworks became commodities they were also part of the intellectual life of their time; (5) and finally, the appropriation of museum-like dimensions and the apartness of the exhibition space as conditions of cultural reception of art works.

CHAPTER 2

MARCEL DUCHAMP'S INSTITUTIONAL MANŒUVRINGS

Marcel Duchamp claimed that he ceased to be a painter in 1913, when he became a librarian at the Bibliothèque Sainte-Geneviève in Paris and began playing chess on a professional basis. This happened only one year after he saw his painting, *Nude Descending a Staircase, No. 2* (1912), rejected by his fellow artists from the Cercle de Puteaux with which his own brothers were closely associated. The unexpected in this was certainly that these artists declared themselves to constitute the avant-garde in art. Duchamp's self dissociation from the art world, it should be noticed, coincided with a major shift in his own production as he began to deal with chance procedures and precision drawing,¹ and as he became more concerned with notions such as "value," and "arbitrariness." Nonetheless, his artistic commitments were destined to be even more diversified and prodigious than any of his contemporaries.

Indeed, for the better part of his life, Duchamp was a versatile art professional. He organized numerous individual and group shows in galleries and museums,² including some surrealist and dada exhibitions.³ He also helped to found one

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1. By "precision drawing," Duchamp meant a form of drawing similar to technical drawing instead of a kind of drawing based on the skills of the artist's hand ("la patte", in French).
 2. Duchamp was responsible for designing Brancusi's exhibitions at the Arts Club of Chicago, opening in January 1927. See Jacqueline Gough-Cooper and Jacques Caumont, "Ephemerides on and about Marcel Duchamp and Rose Sélavy, 1887-1968," in Pontus Hulten ed., *Marcel Duchamp: Work and Life* (Cambridge, Mass. The MIT Press, 1993), 4.1.1927 [For references in this book, I use the date of the reported event, since the document edited by Pontus Hulten is an Ephemerides]. He also painstakingly organized and designed Brancusi's second exhibition at the Brummer Gallery in 1933. (*Idem.*, 17.11.1933). Duchamp worked in collaboration with art dealers to set up group shows, as in the Dada exhibition held at the Sidney Janis Gallery, in 1953.

of the most prominent organizations for artists in America at the time, the Society of Independent Artists. Also, along with Man Ray and Catherine Dreier, he was one of the founding members of the *Société Anonyme*⁴ (the first museum of modern art, as they expected the collection would become). He contributed to the dissemination of avant-garde ideas, designing covers for magazines and catalogues, poster announcements for various exhibitions,⁵ as well two avant-garde reviews, *The Blind Man* and *Rongwrong*, both published in 1917 on his initiative.⁶ And he designed shop window installations to bring avant-garde literature and art into the public domain.⁷ Duchamp's pursuits went as far as advising art collectors, dealers and museum curators in their purchases and trading art objects.⁸ But, certainly, the strategies he devel-

In 1926, he helped Catherine Dreier organize the *Société Anonyme's* premier international show of modern art, the first to be held in America since the Armory Show. The show was on view at the Brooklyn Museum from November 19, 1926 to January 9, 1927.

3. He designed the "Exposition internationale du Surrealisme" at the Galerie des Beaux-Arts in Paris, in 1938; "The First Papers of Surrealism" for the Coordinating Council of French Relief Societies, Inc. in New York, in 1942; and "Surrealism Intrusion in the Enchanters Domain" at the D'Arcy Gallery in New York, in 1960.
For more information on Duchamp's designs for Surrealist exhibitions, see Brian O'Doherty, *Inside the White Cube: The Ideology of the Gallery Space* (Santa Monica & San Francisco: California, 1986) p. 65.
4. Although Catherine Dreier generally acted as the *Société's* principal organizer, Duchamp played a very important role in the organization of the 1926 exhibition of modern art at the Brooklyn Museum. He also compiled the catalogue of the Museum's collection in the forties. According to its statutes, the *Société Anonyme* was founded to organize lectures, publish a quarterly journal, produce exhibitions in various venues and manage travelling exhibitions in order to educate people on modern art.
5. Those exhibitions include: *Cabiers d'art*, *Minotaure*, *First Papers of Surrealism*, VVV's Almanach of 1943 and Man Ray's Exhibition of 1945 at Julian Levy's Gallery, etc.
6. *The Blind Man* played a crucial role in publicizing and interpreting the readymades. Except for a short text signed by Marcel Douxami from New Brunswick (another one of Duchamp's aliases), *Rongwrong* contained very few articles; its main purpose was to criticize Norton's article in defence of the *Fountain*, and thus simulate public debate.
7. For instance, to promote André Breton's *Arcane 17* (New York: Brentano's, 1945), Duchamp set up a window display at Brentano's Bookshop in New York based on a surrealist aesthetic. He later set up the same display at Gotham Bookmart. See Gough-Cooper and Caumont, in Pontus Hulten ed., *op. cit.*, 19.4.1945.
8. He helped his friend Catherine Dreier in selecting works for the *Société Anonyme*, as he was President of the *Société* for a period. As an art consultant, also, he advised Peggy Guggenheim regarding the opening of her first gallery in London, the Guggenheim Jeune, in 1938, as she knew very little about modern art and was a neophyte in the art business. He continued to act

oped to show the links between money, the art objects, and the various institutions of art were the most subversive.⁹

Duchamp's Economics

Duchamp's attitude towards value¹⁰ and its conventional applications in various fields of culture may be construed as deconstructionist in the sense that he strove to appropriate the prevailing rules and subvert their application to expose their conventional nature. Since many of Duchamp's pieces address the functions of the marketplace of art, we can suppose that his view on the economics of art were similar to his views on aesthetics, language and representation.¹¹ Before it

as her consultant later in New York with her gallery, Art of This Century. He also advised his friends, Louise and Walter C. Arensberg, on their collection, helping them to amass what became the most comprehensive collection of Duchamp's and Brancusi's works in existence.

9. Among few art historians who have discussed these issues, David Joselit, *Infinite Regress. Marcel Duchamp 1910-1914* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, and London, England: The MIT Press, 1998), and Dalia Judovitz, *Unpacking Duchamp; Art in Transit* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1998) have done so in a very different way from the one explored here.
10. See Robert Lebel, *Sur Marcel Duchamp* (Paris: Éditions du Trianon, 1959), p. 35-36. Lebel's book was published almost simultaneously in France and in America in 1959: *Marcel Duchamp* (New York: Grove Press in conjunction with London & Paris: Trianon Press, 1959). This is the first monograph ever published on Marcel Duchamp. In his book, Lebel comes to the conclusion that the artist's chief concerns were centred on the notion of "value." He observed that, on the one hand, Duchamp's readymades elevate ordinary objects to the status of *art objects* in an altogether arbitrary fashion, thus increasing their value. On the other hand, the artist's ironic appropriation of Leonardo da Vinci's *Mona Lisa* (*L.H.O.O.Q.*, 1919) and his suggestion that other classic masterpieces might be turned into ordinary objects (for instance, using a Rembrandt as an ironing board) subverted artistic valuation. Duchamp called these desecrated masterpieces "reciprocal readymades." In both instances, he wished to expose the conventional and arbitrary aspects of artistic valuations when considered from an aesthetic point of view.
11. In all these cases, Duchamp worked at neutralizing prevailing cultural positions. The ready-made, of course, represents the most telling example of this: As he once said in a MoMA talk, the reciprocal readymades were designed to show the fundamental antinomy between the readymade and art. The readymade was therefore meant to be understood neither as art, nor as non-art. From this point, it followed that works of art (art products) could be compared to any given product and vice-versa. With language, he suggested a dictionary in which the abstract words would be replaced by figures drawn from the *Three Standard Stoppages*; in other words, abstract figures would substitute for abstract notions within an ensemble composed with words, thereby neutralizing the distinction between ideas, words, and images.

becomes a matter of aesthetics, ethics or semiotics, "value" is established through economic exchanges and appraisals, as Nietzsche once remarked: "...To establish prices, to estimate values, to exchange, all that, in a certain sense, it must have been the thought itself."¹² In other words, as Nietzsche suggested, thoughts were initially and fundamentally based upon trade activities because it is in the field of economics that "valuation" emerges. And certainly, for a correct appreciation of Duchamp's work, financial considerations matter greatly.

Duchamp's attitude towards the business of art, however, is difficult to discern and appears to be paradoxical. On the one hand, we have a man who was an artist who did not want to be submitted to the necessity of selling his works to earn his living.¹³ On the other hand, he commercialised many of his works like the *Rotoreliefs*, edited 300 copies of *Green Box* (which had paid for itself only one year after its release), promoted his work with *Box-in-a-Valise* (a profitable business that kept him busy for a long time), and above all bought and sold art works in order to live off of the proceeds.

Because of the public's supposed need for taste, Duchamp complained, artists have the obligation to produce a large number of works in order to fulfil expectations on the part of museums and collectors around the world. In a letter he wrote to Catherine Dreier, he expressed his disgust with the ways in which aesthetic quality and economic value are equated:

12. Quoted by Jean-Joseph Goux "Numismatiques," in *Symbolic Economies: After Marx and Freud* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1990).

13. Duchamp found a job as a librarian at the Bibliothèque Saint-Geneviève so that he was not forced to paint to earn a living. He also divorced only a few months after his wedding with Lydie Sarrazin-Levassor in 1927 to free himself from familial obligations. He did not want to submit to the art market to the extent that he would refuse an annual income of \$10,000 from Michel Knoedler, the most important gallery owner in the United States to produce only one painting a year, complaining all the while about the crass commercialism of the art world: see Cabanne, *Dialogues with Marcel Duchamp* (New York, Da Capo Press Inc., 1987). p. 106.

The more I live among artists, the more I am convinced that they are fakes from the minute they get to be successful in the smallest way. This means also that all the dogs around the artists are crooks. If you see the combination of fakes and crooks how have you been able to keep some kind of faith (and in what?) Don't name a few exceptions to justify a milder opinion about the whole "art game." In the end, a painting is declared good only if it is worth "so much." It may even be accepted by the "holy" museums. So much for posterity.¹⁴

Duchamp vehemently rejected the connection between taste and monetary value. But these considerations address only Duchamp's personal attitude towards art and money; they neither permit us to understand his financial strategies within the domain of art, nor allow us to see how subversive he could have been in this regard. Many of his pieces addressed issues surrounding the relationship between art and money, neutralizing again the prevailing cultural positions.

His *Monte Carlo Bond* (1924) (fig. 2.1) brought to the fore the close connections between art, money and personal commitments. In many ways, this piece may be viewed as a metaphor for Duchamp's devil-may-care existence. Indeed, the bond was a bizarre amalgamation of fiction and reality that Duchamp created and administered with his alter ego, Rose Sélavy. The Trust Company supposedly managing



Fig. 2.1 Marcel Duchamp, *Monte Carlo Bond*, 1924

14. Tomkins, *op. cit.*, p. 285.

these commercial securities was fictitious, of course. But Duchamp did sell bonds, and travelled to Monte Carlo to play roulette with the proceeds. He was then acting as a broker, selling bonds for a bogus company headed by a non-existent person, Rose Sélavy. While the overall look of the bond was comparable to valid commercial bonds, it could in no way be mistaken for the real thing, as the mock face of Duchamp with a shaving cream beard and horns crowns the piece. It leaves no doubt today that this piece is at the same time a mockery and a true piece of art within the context of Duchamp's *oeuvre*. However, while Duchamp had created the piece as a nonsensical object, it was his firm intention to make some money from it. He issued the bond having already devised a system (the *martingale*) with which one was supposed to win at roulette. Duchamp introduced the bond as though he was running a serious business. Of course, he neither succeeded in mastering chance at the roulette, nor at making much money; he did succeed, however, in the business of making easy money by making art. The *Monte Carlo Bond*, indeed, was a paradoxical piece in that it was a counterfeit financial product for which Duchamp had created an alternative commercial reality in the process of creating an *oeuvre*. The bond's outstanding artistic feature resided in the fact that it was a self-proclaimed fake. In selling his bonds and gambling with the proceeds, Duchamp acted very much like a counterfeiter who gambles with fake bills to make real money. If he broke even in his endeavour, his *Monte Carlo Bond* marked a shift from the prevailing tradition of craftsmanship towards a new economic position for the artist, since the latter becomes a conceptualist for whom art does not need to be embodied in objects; yet, in his strategies, artistic ideas and devices could nonetheless be traded as financial endeavours. The *Monte Carlo Bond* does not only represent a conceptual piece of art, it is also a forgery, and a fraudulent financial operation.

Two years before Duchamp found himself a job at the Bibliothèque Sainte-Geneviève in Paris in 1913,¹⁵ he was already distancing himself from art and crafts-

manship when he painted an old-fashioned coffee mill (*Coffee Mill*, 1911) as a decorative item for his brother's kitchen. Duchamp's work moved away from "the artist's hand" (*la patte*) towards technical drawing procedures and their characteristic features (cross-sectional and frontal views, arrows and repetition of line to illustrate movement). From this point on, Duchamp undertook a protracted revolution in art by using mechanical devices to replace conventional methods of painting. In the Munich paintings and *Nude Descending a Staircase No. 2*, Duchamp's illusionist movement is animated through the structure of paintings rather than figurative representations. Soon after he created these pieces, he turned his focus away from anthropomorphized figures to more mechanically objectified apparatuses, such as the entities he had identified as the "Chocolate Grinder" and the nine "Malic Molds," for instance, in *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even*.

It was during this early period that Duchamp invented his readymades *Bicycle Wheel* (1913), *Pharmacy* (1914) and *Bottle Dryer* (1914), as if they were the three-dimensional versions of the mechanical drawings he was making at the time. Clearly, Duchamp was progressively detaching himself from authorship in art making; and yet, more importantly, he was attempting to eliminate the—modernist—use-value of art, i.e. the aesthetic appreciation that his readymades and paintings offered by way of precision drawing.

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15. In his *Pictorial Nominalism*, (Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 1991), 227, 258. Thierry de Duve argues that the readymade represented the encounter of art with the prevailing conditions in industrial society not only because it was a mass-produced object, but also because one has to draw the consequences of the use of industrially made tubes of paint: that was the beginning of the abandonment of artists craftsmanship.

De Duve also extensively analyses Duchamp's financial moves in *Cousus de Fils d'or: Beuys, Warhol, Klein, Duchamp*, (Villeurbanne: Art Édition, 1990) p. 75-95 (See English translation in Thierry de Duve, *October*, no. 52, p. 63-75). In contrast to the proletarian Beuys, the Warhol machine and Klein, the money-maker, argues de Duve, Duchamp simply breathes. He does not work like Beuys, does not produce as much value as Warhol, he does not put any stock in ostentatious commercialism like Klein, but he plays at speculating with bonds and counterfeit checks, buys second-hand goods from flea markets to sell them to collectors.

De Duve's article provides useful insight into how Duchamp dealt with exchange value in the field of art. However, he stops short of considering the deeper ramifications of Duchamp's attitude towards copy making and falsification of documents in particular.

As soon as in *The Box of 1914* (fig. 2.2), Duchamp posits dislocation and non-differentiation, as if everything was comparable, relative and therefore, potentially equal. On the one hand, one can identify dislocations in *The Box of 1914* as strategies to escape universal rules and principles without

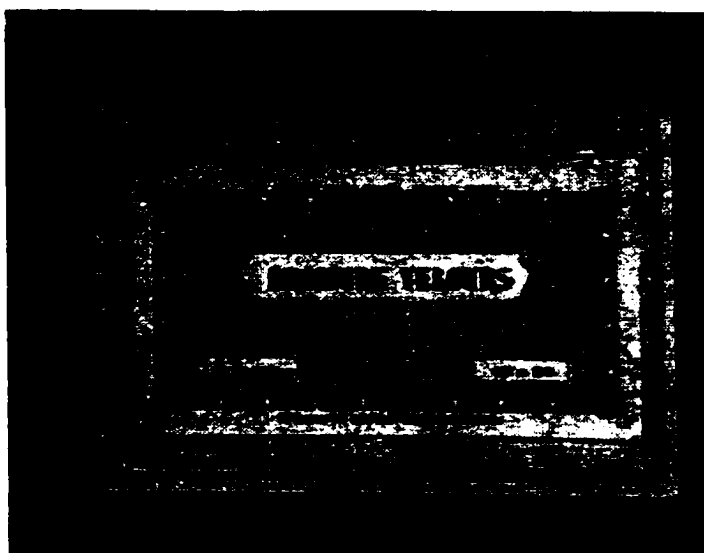


Fig. 2.2 Marcel Duchamp, *The Box of 1914*, 1914

replacing them by new ones. For instance, *The three standard stoppages* proposed in the notes of *The Box* are made of the standard meter but modified by chance procedures so that infinite standard of length could be produced from the same unit. A dislocation is thereby engendered, since the standard is indicated, and deconstructed at the same time.¹⁶ On the other hand, Duchamp's dislocations do not reconstitute a hierarchy between a model and its products; in that sense, all units are equal and non-differentiated from each other. His reflections and statements on the absence of

16. Other dislocations to be found in *The Box of 1914* include the following:

- 1- dislocation between vision and hearing (Duchamp said "one can see to see, but one cannot hear to hear"),
- 2- dislocation between figure and text, as in the delays and the respective distances between *Green Box* and *Large Glass*,
- 3- dislocation between the present and anticipation of the future, as illustrated in "the delay in glass." Duchamp called his piece "paintings on glass", as he knew that their reception would be delayed,
- 4- dislocation between syntactically well-constructed sentences and meaninglessness in *To Have the Apprentice in the Sun*,
- 5- dislocation between material forms and their reflections (the bridge of volumes created by its reflection in the water),
- 6- dislocation between choices and other possibilities (the game in which failed attempts are worth the same as successful attempts),
- 7- and finally, dislocation between art and money (which, as we will see, constitutes another form of delay).

definable attributes for comparison are particularly instructive. In Duchamp's speculation about value, the implicit question he was pondering could be formulated as follows: What happens when the basis for comparison, such as a standard meter, is supplanted by infinite, undetermined possibilities?¹⁷

Playing upon the homophony between the word "art" (in French) and "arrhe"¹⁸ (a variation on the French word "arrhes," which means "deposit") in his notes, Duchamp compared the words "art" and "shit" in an equation where money is explicitly implied. For Duchamp "arrhe" was to "art," as "merde" ("shit") was to "merdre" ("shitt"), except that the latter term sounds more vulgar and lower.¹⁹ Graphically the famous equation is written as the following:

17. My formulation, not Duchamp's. This approach echoes that of André Gide in *The Counterfeiters: with the Journal of the Counterfeiters*, translated by Dorothy Bussy and Justin O'Brien (New York, New York: Knopf, 1962), where he tackles the Biblical question: "Ye are the salt of the earth; but if the salt has lost its savour, wherewith shall it be salt?" (Matthew 5:13). (Gide enounced the sentence in the following terms: "Si le sel perd sa saveur, avec quoi la lui rendra-t-on?") This quote is taken from the journal of Edouard, who is Gide's fictive alter ego in the novel. Edouard is also a writer whose novel is also called *The Counterfeiters*. In this specific section of his journal, dated November 9 (Part I, Chap. XIII), Edouard addresses the theme his novel will explore. The Biblical question is thus transposed into literature, and addresses the essence of being, Edouard claims. Obviously, this question is also a question about value, since it addresses *tragic moral*.

Jean-Joseph Goux extensively explores the implication of Gide's economic views in "The coiners of Language", *The Counterfeiters* (Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 1984). For a brief synopsis of Goux's analysis of *The Counterfeiters* regarding the modernist double-bind paradox in literature, music and visual art, see Rosalind Krauss, "A Penny for Picasso" in *The Picasso Papers* (New York: Farrar, Strauss, Giroux, 1998), p. 1-21. Like Goux, Krauss suggests that beliefs and practices radically changed in various domains in the context of blocked currency. Eliminating the gold standard led to a comparison between currencies based upon differential systems. In the visual arts, as in many other fields, this lack of common denominator may have allowed for the construction of pure abstract languages which sprang up after 1910. Krauss asks: What if this universal abstract language turned out to be nothing at all, and led to counterfeiting in literature, in arts, in music?

18. "Arrhe" is a paronym, deliberately misspelled in Duchamp's text. In French, the term is always spelled with an "s" and means "deposit." Its misspelling is meaningful as otherwise this word might be interpreted as if Duchamp had wished to convey a concept instead of an actual operation. And, although painting is explicitly mentioned, the misspelled version of "deposit" can be applied to every form of art.

19. Phonetically "arrhes" and "art" sound the same in French.

$$\begin{array}{ccc} \text{Arrhe} & & \text{merdre} \\ \hline & = & \hline \text{art} & & \text{merde} \end{array}$$

Hence, as early as in his first collection of notes, Duchamp speculates about value from an economic viewpoint.

It would be misleading to limit Duchamp's analysis of the art-money complex to painting since he also included sculpture and games in his ponderings. For instance, he described "*jeu de tonneau*" (a game of skill in which the players try to throw metal disks into numbered holes in a box) in financial terms: "Do not prefer 'all the pieces in the moneybox' to 'all those that are outside of it,' or, above all, to a good average score."²⁰ He then added: "The barrel game is a very beautiful skill sculpture."²¹ Much later, in *Green Box*, Duchamp associated the moneybox with his readymade projects, since some of them were categorized under the subtitle "*TIRE-LIRE (OU CONSERVES)*" (*MONEYBOX (OR PRESERVERS)*). Among his projects, for instance, Duchamp mentions the modified readymade he gave to Walter Arensberg, *With a Hidden Noise* (1916) which might contain a diamond in his *dires*; in other words, this work might be worth the speculative value of an art object, or the value of the diamond it contains. Duchamp wanted to limit the number of readymades that can be made in a year, otherwise the infinite possibilities of creating works of art out of nothing would have destroyed the idea itself of the readymade, which suppose a distinction between the world and the domain of art where speculations occur. Consequently, painting, sculpture, and the readymades are clearly associated with cash for deposit (*arrhe*) in a personal bank, but profits are only made by

20. "*Ne pas préférer toutes les pièces dans la grenouille à toutes les pièces dehors*" ou (ni) surtout à une bonne moyenne." The "*grenouille*" is a piggy bank in popular French.

21. Translated from "Le jeu de tonneau est une très belle sculpture d'adresse."

chance (in something like the barrel game). Art can be viewed as money in the bank (*arrhe(s)*) as soon as an *art object* enters the marketplace as a means of speculation—i.e. investing in art with the expectation that its value will increase.

Duchamp was very sensitive to the new economical situation that was developing in the domain of art. In particular, he recalled an experience with the Barbizon School and Paul Durand-Ruel, an Impressionist dealer, who was the first to borrow enormous sums of money to purchase vast portions of artists' repertoires to turn a tidy profit at the Hotel Drouot auctions.²² Duchamp held that Durand-Ruel's rescue from bankruptcy by the American banker Havemeyer in 1886²³ fostered rank commercialism in which the esoteric dimension of art²⁴ was quashed. From that point onward, according to Duchamp, everyone could be an authority in artistic matters; in his view, commercial populism had placed taste above any other artistic value. But since art had very little to do with taste, as far as Duchamp was

22. In *Marketing Modernism in Fin-de Siècle Europe* (*op. cit.*), Robert Jensen claims that as soon as he replaced his father in this art business, Paul Durand-Ruel became one of the most aggressive dealers in the market place and developed some highly innovative financial strategies.

After his father's death in 1866, Durand-Ruel entered into a partnership with the dealer Hector-Henri Brame to invest enormous sums in the Barbizon painters. They risked even the use of outside backers for the capital necessary to maintain business operations while, in effect, sitting on their stock, waiting for prices to rise at Drouot's. This also meant that they had repeatedly to defend and, if possible, to elevate the prices of their artists at auction, a technique that relied on sales and resales made back and forth between a coterie of patron-speculators and the dealer. (p. 52)

Durand-Ruel's strategies for raising prices at auction and hoarding paintings in order to speculate presaged the tide of speculation in avant-garde art.

23. According to Charbonnier, the banker Jules Feder already backed the Impressionist dealer, Paul Durand-Ruel, from 1878 until his bank went into bankruptcy in 1882. Durand-Ruel was himself rescued from bankruptcy by the American banker Havemeyer in 1886. See Georges Charbonnier, *Entretiens avec Marcel Duchamp* (Marseille: André Dimanche, 1994)(transcripts from INA recordings, 1961). About Duchamp's incomplete knowledge of the events surrounding Durand-Ruel's and Feder's bankruptcies, see Charbonnier's book, p. 17 (in footnote). For more accurate information concerning Feder's rescue of Paul Durand-Ruel see Robert Jensen, *op. cit.*, p. 127.

24. Duchamp said to Charbonnier (*Ibid.*) that pre-eminence of taste in art must be considered a mistake, because it brings populism (exotericism) into a realm reserved for initiated persons only (esotericism). In Duchamp's view, when taste supplants knowledge in the appreciation of works of art, it becomes a matter of economic interest and sheer commercialism.

concerned, both should be condemned.²⁵ Hence, the readymades were created in this perspective as objects devoid of any aesthetic quality.

Even though Duchamp did not utter a word in his interviews regarding the *Peau de l'Ours* auction at the Hôtel Drouot in 1914, this event may well have contributed to his decision to challenge the economic value attributed to works of art. This sale represented such a fundamentally important shift in the dealings of the art market of the time that it is unlikely he would have overlooked some of its possible repercussions. This is all the more true since, as we have seen, he was then examining value in many areas of culture and economics. *La Peau de l'Ours* was a thirteen-investor consortium created in 1904 by André Level, a businessman who was well acquainted with avant-garde circles in France at the turn of the century. The agreement between the members was to pool their money over a period of ten years in order to invest in new works of art, then to sell the lot at auction at the end of this period. They openly declared their intention to speculate with their collection of avant-garde art, wagering that their investments would be minimal if made early in the career of an artist and that the most profitable of their acquisitions should be resold within a short period of time. Their supposition was based on observations they made during the considerable increase in value of Impressionist paintings and the works of Cézanne, Gauguin, and van Gogh. To these speculators what mattered was that new forms of expression were the best places to invest, albeit at considerable risk. The sale at Drouot's in 1914 proved them right.

Indeed, André Level as the leader of the consortium had done such a good job advertising the *Peau de l'Ours* auction that its preview show was packed with a wide-ranging variety of art personalities, including art dealers (Vollard, Fechtheim and Thannhauser), art critics (Salmon and Jacob), collectors (Coquiot, Gasquet,

25. Duchamp's views on esotericism, commercialism and taste can be found in his interview with Charbonnier, *op. cit.*, p. 11-17.

Prince Bibesco and Countess de la Rouchefoucauld), artists (Gleizes and Metzinger) and many representatives from the press. As FitzGerald points out, "The openly speculative purpose of *La Peau de l'Ours* focused attention on the relationship of commercial and aesthetic judgments"²⁶—and, one could add, on their marriage. It also clearly showed that novelty was a major selling point and that works of art could be seen as investments. From this sale, Duchamp might have concluded that the value of works of art in the market place was utterly arbitrary and highly speculative.

After that, Duchamp began to play with conflating his role as artist with that of curator, editor, art dealer, gambler, smuggler and, now, as art broker. In 1926, while he was back in France, he organized a successful auction of eighty of Picabia's drawings and paintings at the Hotel Drouot. It was art business as usual. The same year, working with Henri-Pierre Roché, Duchamp managed the Brummer Gallery sale of John Quinn's estate of Brancusi and other pieces from his studio in Paris so well that the dealer offered him a thousand dollars a month to run his new modern gallery. However, he declined the offer because he had just moved into his new studio in Paris. According to Calvin Tomkins, Duchamp earned his living during the two next decades by buying and selling works by other artists.²⁷

At the American Independents' Exhibition

When Duchamp presented *Fountain* at the Independents' Show in 1917, he was challenging not only the aesthetic value of art, but also its economic value. As mass-produced objects, the readymades indisputably laid bare the institutional conventions of art practices in industrial societies. At a deeper level, they also reflected

26. See Michael C. FitzGerald, *Making Modernism; Picasso and the Creation of the Market for the Twentieth Century*, (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 1995).

27. Tomkins, *op. cit.*, p. 270.

the network through which they had to circulate: the magazines, the newspapers and their critiques, the exhibitions and their organizing committees, the galleries and their dealers, the museums and their curators, etc. To assert that Duchamp was challenging the economic value of art through the Independents' show, one must know whether the Independents' show was really designed by Duchamp and his colleagues of the Board of Directors to create a market place in which new conditions of art circulation might be defined in America.

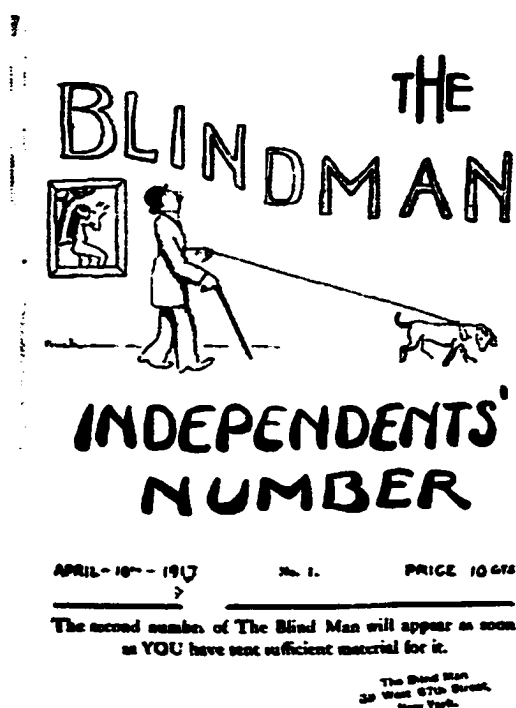


Fig. 2.3, 2.4 *The Blind Man* no. 1, no. 2, 1917

The Society of Independent Artists was a new organization with a heterogeneous membership that included artists, art dealers and collectors with a commonly held interest in modern art. The Society's 1917 show was designed to recapture the momentum built up four years previous by the Armory Show, but rather than promoting European art, American modern art was to be front and center this time. For Duchamp this event was a golden opportunity to test some of the conclusions

he might have drawn following his withdrawal from the French Independents in 1912, his *succès à scandale* and commercial success at the Armory Show in 1913, his achievements in exposing fetishised objects and his ponderings regarding value, including the *Peau de l'Ours* auction. Drawing from the conclusion that both art objects and products of the industry were clearly fetishes, he presented his ready-mades to show that everything, any object, lent itself to speculation. It was Duchamp's friend and collaborator Henri-Pierre Roché who explicitly developed this argument in the first issue of *The Blind Man*. Roché's article has provided noteworthy insight into Duchamp's view of the attribution of economic value to works of art that deserve more attention than they usually get.

Roché also defended the "no jury, no prize" principle, citing the impressive example of the French Independents' unjuried show in 1884, which ended up overshadowing four other French juried Salons. He quoted the American Independents' pamphlet that compared their show to the French *Salons des Indépendants*, which stated, "They have more members, sell more works, and are on firmer financial basis than any other of the four great Salons."²⁸ Roché supported all forms of art, from traditional to modern, but urged that new forms of expression should be explored, encouraging New Yorkers to revolutionize their art, just as the Russians needed to do in politics. He also wanted to convince American art collectors to invest their money in American art rather than in European art, because it would profit Americans more directly. After all, America had very good painters and purchasing avant-garde art was a good investment, he argued. Roché cited the example of Henri Rousseau (1844-1910), a French customs employee whose paintings had significantly increased in value within a few years:

28. Henri-Pierre Roché, "The Blind Man" in *The Blind Man*, no. 1 (April 1917).

As a boy I could not take my eyes away from his "ridiculous" pictures.

Today I know why; because they were beautiful, and lyrical, and something more than true.

No one laughs at them now, not even practical collectors, for those paintings, which were worth from 20 to 100 francs then, are now worth from 2,000 to 5,000 dollars.²⁹

Clearly, Roché was a proponent of speculation. It was better to purchase the works of painters whose tastes were not so fashionable, he suggested, and take a chance on original and sincere works. Roché went on to invite *The Blind Man's* readers to guess how many pictures would be sold during the show, what the highest price paid for a single picture would be, and how much money was invested in producing the works for sale. From Roché's point of view, the American Independents' show was clearly aimed at creating a new marketplace in which all the products of American art could be compared to each other in the interest of broadening the spectrum of investment opportunities. As Rousseau's case illustrated, buyers did not need to be experts in conventional or avant-garde art to make a sound investment; only novelty was necessary.

The *Peau de l'Ours* auction dissociated age from artistic value by showing that novelty pieces could provide quick returns on high investment in art. It showed that works of art did not require a consensus to be valuable—only the opinion of the viewers in sales rooms. Rarity was not a reason for raising prices, since very young artists might eventually be every bit as prolific as Picasso, whose work of 1905, *The Family of Saltimbanques*, was the highlight of the sale. This kind of speculation relied upon a significant expansion of the market, which was precisely what the American Independents (like the French Independents) were endeavouring to achieve, argued Roché. The Independents' show was designed to foster the growth of a huge art market in America, freed from the stultifying, con-

29. Henri-Pierre Roché, *Ibid.*, p. iv.

ventional influence of the National Academy of Design.³⁰ A revolution was taking place in which the free market would decide which products were worthy to be developed in American art.

Just as *La Peau de l'Ours* showed that avant-garde art could be a profitable investment, Duchamp's Armory Show experience in 1913 convinced him that scandalous works of art could attract buyers. This was most notably the case with the sale of his *Nude Descending a Staircase No. 2* to Frederic C. Torrey, an antique dealer from San Francisco. Despite the fact that Duchamp's *Nude* had been the most heavily criticized piece in the show, to its critics it was quintessentially modern. Since the avant-garde's works were often rejected by the mainstream, investing in a truly inartistic (aesthetically neutral) object seemed likely to be a good bet.³¹ Indeed, all four of Duchamp's paintings were sold with satisfactory prices. The source of profitable investments appeared to lie somewhere in those non-aesthetically oriented objects. Duchamp was testing their worth.

Circuits and Fakes

Around the time of the *Peau de l'Ours* auction, Duchamp experimented with important artistic ideas with his piece, *Pharmacy* (1914), a reproducible image bought at an art supply store to which two little dots of colour were added, straight from the paint tube. This reproducible image was absolutely devoid of any aesthetic value whatsoever. Thereby, Duchamp posited that if a mass-produced image

30. See Francis Naumann, "The Big Show: The First Exhibition of Independent Artists, Part I & II" in *Artforum*, vol. XVII nos. 6 & 8 (February and April 1979), p. 34-39 and p. 49-53, respectively.

31. Thierry de Duve observes that *Fountain* produced a significant paradigm shift in art, as viewers who based their judgments on quality of craftsmanship began questioning the very nature of art. There was a shift from asking, "Is this work of art beautiful?" to the question "Is this art?" It is worth noting, however, that while Duchamp did not single-handedly initiate this shift, he certainly dramatically influenced its direction.

could be transformed into an *art object*, any mass-produced object could be "transformed" in this way; any object could become an *object d'art*, on the condition, however, that it circulates within the circuits of art. When he was residing in New York in 1916, Duchamp had the opportunity to "exhibit" two readymades—identified as "sculptures" in the catalogue of the show—at the Bourgeois Gallery. Both objects went completely unnoticed, thus confirming their total absence of aesthetic value, as expected by Duchamp.³² To speculate on this kind of object as if it were a real avant-garde work required much more attention and strategy on the part of Duchamp. And, indeed, the Independents' Exhibition offered him the opportunity to mount yet another attack against economic conventions in art.

By 1917, Duchamp had publicly launched the readymade with *Fountain*, bringing together all the conditions necessary to producing a work of modern art: a signature that certified the piece under an authorized name (R. Mutt), a date that gave the creation its place in history, a large marketplace where every trend and every product could be compared (the Independent's Exhibition), publicity to disseminate information and rumours about the piece (including *The Blind Man*, Stieglitz's photograph and the newspapers' account of his resignation from the Independents' Board of Directors), a critique establishing the relevance of the piece (Louise Norton's article), supporters who shared the artist's point of view (the Editors of *The Blind Man*, Walter Arensberg who also withdrew from the Independents' Board of Directors), detractors (writing in *Rongurong*, where Norton's article, and the other members of the Board of Directors, Glakens and Bellows, were criticized), a collector (according to Catherine Dreier's narrative, Arensberg bought the piece), and last but not least, an unseemly object that was sure to attract attention if it did not stir up a controversy. Only one thing was miss-

32. This view is expressed by Calvin Tomkins, *op. cit.*, p. 169.

ing to make the modern artistic ritual complete: the show which happened at the Janis Gallery in 1951. The piece, however, was publicly shown many times in *Box-in-a-Valise* in galleries and shop windows in the 1940s.

Ironically, every element of Duchamp's marketing strategy was predicated on imitation, mockery or outright fraud. The list of creative fakery is long. To begin, the artist's name (R. Mutt) was fraudulent, invented by conflating the name of a plumbing company with that of Mutt, the comic strip anti-hero. In writing about the piece, Norton used these facts and then drew an off-the-wall analogy between the evolution of art and a Darwinian story about a monkey's tail to produce an absurd critique. As far as *Fountain's* purchase, Arensberg may have bought the piece, but the check he (purportedly) wrote was (reportedly) lost. Even the review publication, *The Blind Man*, was a fake, only lasting for two issues—just long enough to promote *Fountain* and celebrate its arrival on the art market. Moreover, *Fountain's* dramatic, attention-grabbing "rejection" went contrary to the "no jury, no prize principle" established by the Independents themselves. Last but not least, *Fountain* was created as a mockery of art: it was neither art nor an "original" piece, but a duplicate of an object that was not art to begin with.

Fountain was just one of many other works in which Duchamp used fictitious entities to his own ends. The *Tzanck Check* (1919) (fig. 2.5), for instance, could be classified as one of Duchamp's counterfeit pieces. Like many other artists, Duchamp bartered services for his artwork. Once, in exchange for some dental surgery he had received, he designed a check of an unusual size to pay \$115 to his dentist and modern art collector, Daniel Tzanck. The check, as one might expect, was drawn on a bogus financial institution, "The Teeth's Loan and Trust Company, Consolidated," supposedly located on Wall Street in New York. Across the check, Duchamp printed "ORIGINAL"—instead of "SPECIMEN" as one usually does— in

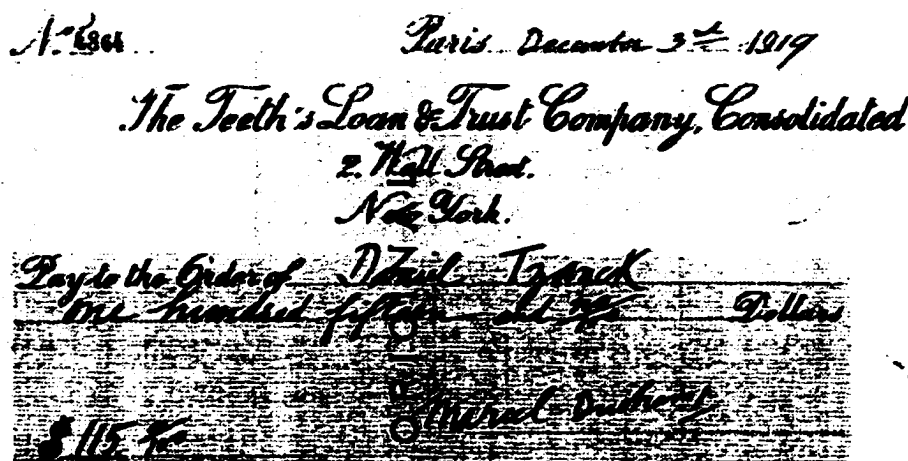


Fig. 2.5 Marcel Duchamp, *The Tzanck Check*, (1919)

typeface letters to indicate that the piece was unique.³⁴ Creating bogus companies constitutes fraud in the real world, but Duchamp was playing by another set of rules in the world of art. The explicit reference he makes to Wall Street, New York, is an allusion to the stock exchange, an indication that with the check, speculation on fake monetary units had officially entered into Duchamp's repertoire. In the end, Duchamp had to buy the check back himself for slightly more than its face value of \$115 in order to reproduce it for *Box-in-a-Valise*.³⁵ Before this transaction took place, Duchamp tried to negotiate with Arensberg, who declined to purchase the piece despite the cut-rate asking price of \$50. Overall, although Duchamp's attempts at speculation seem to have failed, they did show how art could be used as a form of currency.

Duchamp's creation of the *Tzanck Check* occurred the same year that England and France blocked their currencies so that they could no longer be exchanged for gold, the gold stocked in the Central Bank would not cover the money in circulation and the use of gold coins became illegal. As a consequence,

34. This was before its facsimile reproduction in *Box-in-a-Valise*, and its printed reproduction in Picabia's Dada magazine, *Cannibale*, in 1920, described in the caption as a "Dada drawing".

35. Calvin Tomkins, *op. cit.*, p. 221.

floating currency was more prone to fluctuations in prices when compared to other currencies.³⁶

Duchamp treated art with the same disdain he showed for conventions in currencies and commodities. In one his most famous pieces, for instance, he defaced a postcard reproduction of Da Vinci's *Mona Lisa*, adding a moustache and a goatee to the classic portrait. At the bottom, he wrote "L.H.O.O.Q.". By altering the most acclaimed museum piece in Western civilization and trivialising its aesthetic standard, Duchamp was attacking one of the most significant artistic models and references one can find in the museums.³⁷ If one accepts the metaphor of museums as the "reserve banks" of art, we could say that they played the role of securing fluctuating artistic values in the marketplace through its stock of classic (standard) pieces. It was Duchamp's intention to expose the museums' artificial means of control. Much later, in 1965, at a time when the entire new avant-garde acclaimed him, he signed a blank check drawn on "The Bank Mona Lisa," made out to his admirers Mr. and Mrs. Phillip Bruno (*The Bruno Check*). The amount he wrote on the check was unlimited since, for Duchamp, the value of any piece of art, including this counterfeited check, was essentially floating and speculative.

36. Jean-Joseph Goux, *Les iconoclastes* (Paris: Seuil, 1978). In this collection of articles, Goux examines various cultural phenomena in relation to the elimination of the gold standard. He explores multiple correlations between economics, Saussurian linguistics, psychoanalysis, formalist logic, Einstein's theory of relativity and the rise of abstract art. The correlations Goux establishes reflect the elimination of old referents and, consequently, the advent of comparative (relativist) values.

37. In one of the last chapters of Gide's novel *The Counterfeiters*, (*op. cit.*) Armand Vedel, the son of a protestant pastor (who carries out his duties but unconsciously lacks faith), takes over as the publisher of an avant-garde journal called *Iron*, clearly named after Man Ray's famous piece. The poem "*Le vase de nuit*" ("The Chamber Pot," alluding to Duchamp's *Fountain*) is on the first page and Duchamp's defaced *Mona Lisa* on the front cover of the first issue. In Gide's novel, art and language are compared to money and Armand Vedel's ideological analysis of the subject is one of the many literary ideologies to be discussed. For example, the agnosticism of the counterfeiter, Strouvillhou, led him to attempt to demonetize currency with fake coins. He also attempted to demoralize readers by mocking refined feelings in the literary magazine, *Les Nettoyeurs* (*The Cleaners*) in order to cleanse people's souls. Lastly, there are Dada writers, like Armand Vedel, who pursued of cultural conventions destruction through irony and believed that the only way to be sincere was to be insincere.

Duchamp was so convinced that the difference between originals and their duplicates was negligible that he became more involved in reproducing than he was in creating new pieces. We might even say that Duchamp's originality lay in demonstrating how a reproducible *art object* can conceivably precede its "original." Indeed, most of his readymades were known only through their copy substitutes. The originals have been lost, but the copies were never duplicates per se, as they were similar objects found at random, based on Duchamp's verbal descriptions³⁸ or photographic reproductions, as was the case with the eight editions of thirteen readymades assembled/created by Schwarz Gallery in 1964. As mentioned earlier, most of the earliest readymades were in Duchamp's possession for his private "use" in any case; they generally entered the public domain in the form of photographic or three-dimensional reproductions in *Box-in-a-Valise*. In the course of his



Fig. 2.6 Marcel Duchamp, *Morceaux Choisis d'après Courbet*, 1968

career, he duplicated his own works just as freely as he appropriated those by other artists, like Leonardo, or Rembrandt, or Ingres, or Rodin, or Courbet (fig. 2.6), since there was no real difference between substitute pieces and originals as far as he was concerned. Duchamp was more interested in turning this opposition on its head by emphasizing copies people would view.

In the posthumous edition of his notes, published by Paul Matisse, Duchamp invites the creation of new readymades, marrying forgery to authenticity in an unexpected way:

38. Such is the case for the *Air de Paris* piece that Arensberg broke as well as for *Fountain* (the Sidney Janis version).

buy or take known / unknown paintings / and sign them with the name of / a known or unknown painter – / **the difference** between the "style" and / the unexpected name for the / "experts", – **is the authentic work** / of Rose Sélavy, and defies / forgeries³⁹

Thus, fakes and authentic works became one and the same to Duchamp. Unlike counterfeiters and forgers, who practice their craft to convincingly imitate both the style and name of original creators, Duchamp was producing obvious, and provocative fakes. And yet, those fakes were the authentic work of the fictitious counterfeiter Rose Sélavy. But even before Sélavy came into existence, Duchamp created *Battle Scene*. In 1916, during a dinner with Walter and Louise Arensberg at the Café des artistes on 67th Street in New York, Marcel Duchamp, then a well-known artist in New York, signed one of the murals in the restaurant. It was a readymade, he explained to Dore Ashton later on.⁴⁰

Box-in-a-Valise: A Trojan Horse

Without a doubt, the most involved and time-consuming work of duplication Duchamp produced was *Box-in-a-Valise* (1935-1941) (fig. 2.7).⁴¹ A total of 69 miniaturized versions of Duchamp's most important works were reproduced in two versions of this portable catalogue: one standard edition at 300 copies and a deluxe edition, featuring one "original" piece, at 24 copies.⁴² Unlike the standard editions, deluxe boxes were presented in actual suitcases.

39. Marcel Duchamp, *Marcel Duchamp* (Boston: G.K. Hall & Company, 1983), note 169. I have preserved the editor's typography.

40. Quoted by Arturo Schwarz, *op. cit.*, item no. 239, p. 462.

41. These dates correspond to the making of the first series of *Box-in-a-Valise*. In fact, the production of this piece lasted until Duchamp's death in 1968. For an extensive reconstitution of the production work involved, see Ecke Bonk, *Marcel Duchamp. The Box-in-a-Valise de ou par Marcel Duchamp ou Rose Sélavy* (New York: Rizzoli, 1989).

42. The last 122 boxes, which were overseen by Arturo Schwarz from 1966 until 1968, contain 12 additional items.

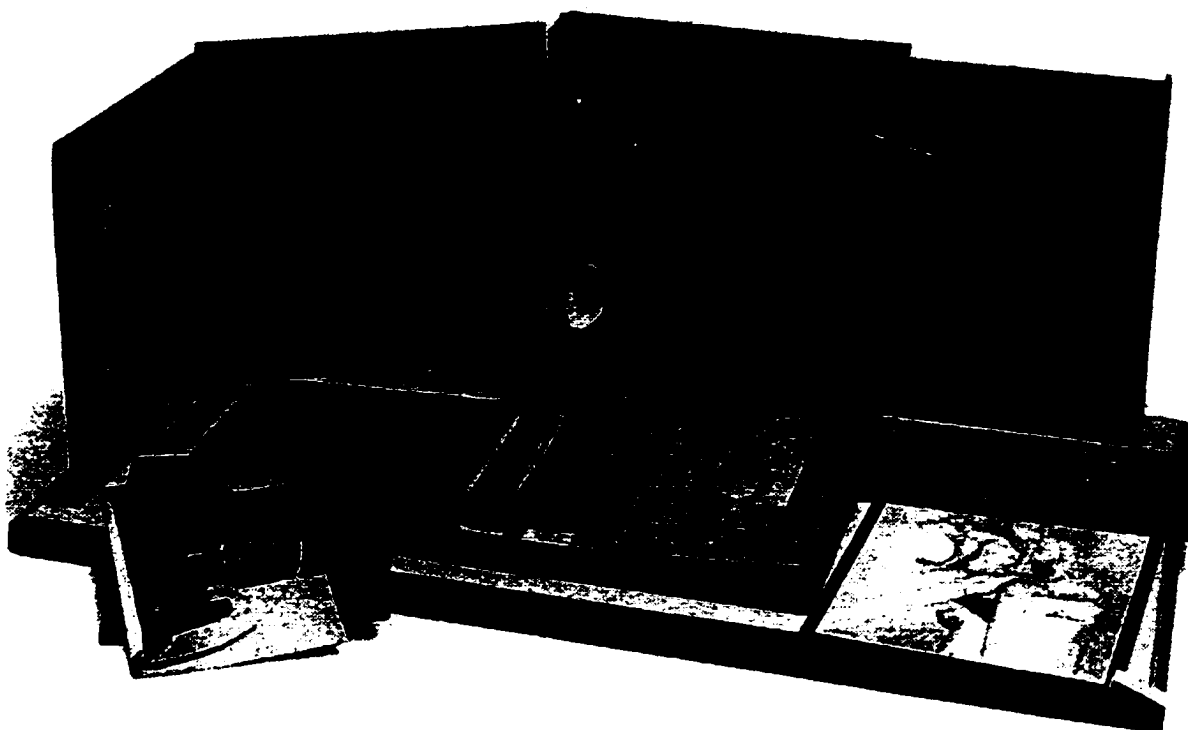


Fig. 2.7 Marcel Duchamp, *Box-in-a-Valise*. 1935-1941

The *Box-in-a-Valise* further blurs the distinction between the original and the copy since it incorporates elements that are works of art in their own right. The deluxe version was supposed to be limited to twenty units, numbered I/XX to XX/XX, but in fact, Duchamp produced four *hors-séries* Boxes, numbered "0/XX." All of the deluxe editions included a dedication to their owner and featured "originals"—mostly hand-coloured photographs that Duchamp used as models for the collotype printing process. Ecke Bonk makes this observation regarding Duchamp's approach to reproduction:

rather than use the speedy reproduction techniques that were already available, Duchamp opted for an elaborate and obsolescent method: collotype printing, with colouring applied by hand through stencils (*pochoirs*).⁴³

43. Ecke Bonk, *op. cit.*, p. 20.

Instead of using classic edition-making techniques, Duchamp was more *artisanal* in his approach. Making the reproductions involved fastidious hand crafting for over three hundred copies of the 69 items contained in the suitcases, but Duchamp did not take on the task of reproduction by himself. Besides collecting objects and having his works photographed (from 1935 on), he carried out the preparatory work for the collotype printing, but the actual hand crafting of the reproductions was carried out by three French firms: Beaufumé, Saudé, and Girandot.⁴⁴ Duchamp did assemble some of the deluxe boxes himself while others were done with Joseph Cornell, the now famous artist. The rest of the standard edition boxes were produced under Duchamp's directions first by John Cage's wife Xenia (1947 to 1952),⁴⁵ then by photographer Ilia Zdanevitch, known as ILiazd (1952 to 1958), and then by his step-daughter Jackie Monnier (1961 to 1971). Distribution was taken on by various art dealers, including Peggy Guggenheim, Matta-Kane and Rose Fried, as well as by Lefebvre-Foinet, an art supply store in Paris. Indeed, the making, assembling and distribution of the multiple copies of *Box-in-a-Valise* were a major production that involved numerous people and resembled a kind of family business.

The twenty-four standard *Box-in-a-Valise* editions may be viewed as a collectible and lucrative one-man retrospective exhibition. But if we look again, these boxes bear an uncanny resemblance to a maquette for a single museum collection of Duchamp's works. Duchamp's miniaturized retrospective exhibition appears to have been created in the same spirit as the latter bequest that he engineered for the Arensberg collection of his works to the Philadelphia Museum of Art. It seemed that with his suitcases, Duchamp was making an early attempt to ensure his place in the annals of modern art. Soon after the deluxe boxes were first produced, he presented

44. *Ibid.*, p. 162, note 14.

45. *Ibid.*, p. 193, note 16. According to Peggy Guggenheim, Matta-Kane oversaw the distribution of the boxes from 1947 until 1952, when Rose Fried took over. Xenia Cage, who was paid with a box by Matta-Kane, made the boxes between 1947 and 1952.

one of them to the Museum of Modern Art in New York. Thus, in 1943, the replicas he made and gathered in his portable museum entered the MoMA, the greatest modern art institution of the time. In one fell swoop, Duchamp had succeeded in securing the artistic status of the portable museum and the readymades it contained, along with *Large Glass*, which was also on loan to the Museum at the time. It was only then that the commercial distribution of Duchamp's suitcases got underway.

Dealing with multiples and duplicates was not new in Duchamp's oeuvre. Already with *Pharmacy* (1914) and *Fountain* (1917), *The Box of 1914* and *Green Box* (1934), the hand coloured photograph of his *Nude Descending a Staircase No. 3* that he made for Walter Arensberg, and the *Rotoreliefs* (1935), reproducibles were common practices in Duchamp's oeuvre. But the limited and the standard editions of the *Box-in-a-Valise* reified and condensed the commercial means used by modernist artists to sell their works in a single piece of art, simulating the obtaining of both "certification" from a pre-eminent art institution and legitimacy as a profitable activity in the market system.

On "Works-Collections" and Authorized Replicas

Duchamp insisted on saying that chance was responsible for artistic success.⁴⁶ This statement may be true in many respects, but deserves qualification in

46. Duchamp believed that two conditions had to be met to achieve fame in art: (1), a considerable amount of effort on the part of many people; and (2) chance.

In his interview with Cabanne, *op. cit.*, p. 70, Duchamp mentioned his belief that art is complemented by the viewer:

The artist exists only if he is known. Consequently, one can envisage the existence of a hundred thousand geniuses who commit suicide... who disappear, because they didn't know what to do to make themselves known, to push themselves, and to become famous. (p. 70)

And, in his interview with Charbonnier, *op. cit.*, p. 36, Duchamp states:

Generally, the great artist has a lot of luck. When he "comes out," he comes out because the social conditions helped him to "come out." You understand, it is chance nonetheless. [...] Beside those who were rehabilitated, there are those who have been destroyed, even by life, who could not produce. (p. 36)

Duchamp's case. As we have argued, the numerous calculations that he made when he first sent his urinal to the Independents are evidence that he did not count only on chance to make his works known. And yet, a later version of that procedure was the miniaturized duplicate of the controversial *Fountain*, fashionably poised in the belly of Duchamp's Trojan horse, by which means it entered the hallowed vaults of the MoMA along with other pieces of art and readymades.⁴⁷ The MoMA, however, did not display *Box-in-a-Valise* right away; the Yale Art Gallery instead first showed the MoMA's piece in an exhibition in 1945. Subsequently, around the time of the Arensberg bequest to the Philadelphia Museum, a replica of *Fountain* was exhibited at Sidney Janis. To summarize, the Readymade truly entered the world of art under the form of a copy in miniature, provoking the conditions of its full acceptance as a work of art.



Fig. 2.8 Marcel Duchamp. *Tu m'*, 1918

Duchamp used *Box-in-a-Valise* as a compendium of references since his major works would all typically allude to previous pieces. His painting, *Tu m'* (1918) (fig. 2.8) was also a kind of retrospective piece comprising references to *Three Standard Stoppages*, *Hatrack* and *Bicycle Wheel*, along with colours taken from those present in the readymades. *The Network of Standard-Stoppages* (1914)

47. When Duchamp brought back all of his reproductions and labels to be assembled in France for the new edition supervised by Iliazd in 1956, six packing cases containing the labels were seized by customs officials. They contended that Duchamp had made a false declaration regarding "mysterious merchandise." The cases were finally released as "samples" since they appeared to be "neither art, nor merchandise." Ecke Bonck, *op. cit.*, p. 178.

not only integrated *Three Standard Stoppages* (1913-1914) (fig. 2.9) but was also a palimpsest of a preceding painting turned on its side, and reduced in scale.

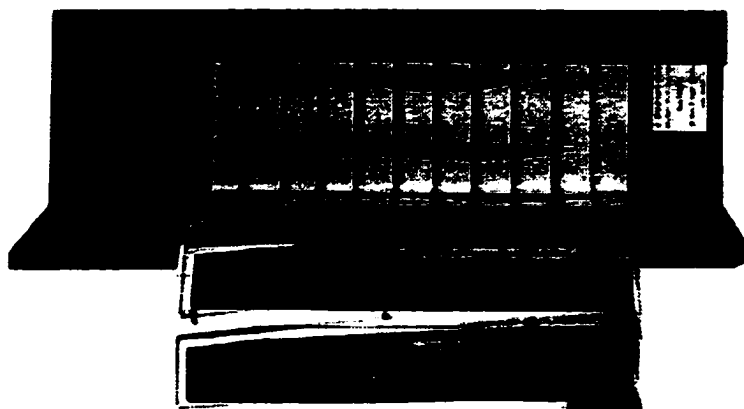


Fig. 2.9 Marcel Duchamp, *Three Standard Stoppages*, 1913-1914

Like *Box-in-a-Valise*, Duchamp's *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even* was another astonishingly extensive collection of his earlier works, incorporating *The Network of Stoppages* (1914); *Three Standard Stoppages* (1913-1914); *Bride* (1912), itself an allusion to the "Bride" in *The Passage from Virgin to Bride* (1912); *Chocolate Grinder No. 1 and No. 2* (1914); the *Glider Containing a Water Mill in Neighboring Metals* (1913-1915); *9 Malic Molds* (1914-1915); and the object involved in *To be Looked at [from the Other Side of the Glass] with One Eye, Close to, for Almost an Hour* (1918).⁴⁸

Duchamp's subversion and deconstruction of the opposition between original and copy, showing reproductions as originals, and creating originals out of reproductions (as in *Box-in-a-Valise*) is reflected in his indifferent treatment of the numerous copies of his pieces made by others. Duchamp accepted them as his

48. Although these works can be interpreted as studies for *Large Glass*, they stand alone as independent pieces as well. They are marked with their own signature and date, they are matted separately and have different catalogue entries in the *Box* since they are not completely identical to those in *Large Glass*. In this regard, one might even say that *Large Glass* is a record of Duchamp's transition from painting (*The Bride*) to the readymade.

own work, since all art could be used as a pattern or formula to play the game of art. When Ulf Linde of the Moderna Museet in Stockholm made full-scale replicas of *Large Glass*, *Bicycle Wheel*, and *Fresh Widow* in 1961, for the first Duchamp retrospective in Europe, Duchamp declared Linde's copy of *Large Glass* to be true to the original and signed the piece. He did the same with Richard Hamilton's replica of the same piece for his Tate Gallery retrospective exhibition in 1966, as well as for Walter Hopps' facsimiles of *9 Malic Molds* and *Three Standard Stoppages* at his Pasadena retrospective in 1963. Duchamp also authorized replicas of 13 readymades that were based on photographs (hence, copies) to be made by the Schwarz Gallery, as well as by Charles Ratton Gallery in Paris (1936). Also, a "replica" of *Fountain* found at the flea market in Paris was exhibited in *Challenge and Defy* and the Sidney Janis Gallery in New York (1951). From 1942 onwards, the original readymades were progressively lost. Thus, full-scale replicas appeared here and there in various exhibitions, such as *Bottle Rack* in the *Exposition Surréaliste d'Objets* (1936). Duchamp continued to exhibit *Box-in-a-Valise* throughout his career, but he also presented some of its miniaturized reproductions as if they were independent pieces, as in the Mexico City exhibition of *International Surrealism*, organized by Breton, Paalen and Moro in 1940, or *Abstract and Surrealist Art in the United States*, curated by the Cincinnati Museum travelling exhibition in 1944. Then, Duchamp took the next logical step and literally appropriated masterpieces by Ingres, Courbet, Cranach, and Rodin in a series of etchings (fig. 2.10) whose salacious interpreta-



Figure 2.10 Marcel Duchamp.
Morceaux Choisis d'après Ingres. 1968

tions of the masters recall the 1919 *L.H.O.O.Q.*, but in a much more graphic fashion.

Duchamp's activities in copying, duplicating, and counterfeiting are not adjunct to his work; they have the status of a quasi-theory since they closely relied on his speculation regarding what he called the "infra-thin" (*infra-mince*, in French). True to form, he refused to provide a definition for this "concept," rejecting the need to conceptualise and attribute a standard definition to an idea, since doing so would thereby fetishise it. But he did provide examples of the infra-thin. One of the most revealing examples, published in his posthumous notes,⁴⁹ is, "The odour of the mouth that remained in tobacco smoke when exhaled" (note 11). The idea of the infra-thin came from the artist's tireless work with index, prints, and casts. "The mass-produced (objects) are infra-thin, sameness and similarity," "the difference (dimensional) between 2 mass produced objects (from the same mould) is an infra-thin when the maximum [?] precision is obtained," (note 18) according to Duchamp. Seen in this light, readymades, shadows in *Tu m'*, photographic reproductions of Duchamp's notes in *The Green Box*, the collotype reproduction of his major pieces in *The Box-in-a-Valise* all explore this fundamental idea of the infra-thin in different way. At base, the infra-thin is a principle of differentiation between identical copies. More precisely, the infra-thin can be a slight difference between two things or events that may seem identical. And no two objects are identical. The laws of chance dictate that seriality and repetition of form inevitably create slight differences between things or events.

On the level of language games, seriality and repetition were explored more by Rrose Sélavy rather than by Duchamp himself. Sélavy was the one who signed

49. Marcel Duchamp, *Marcel Duchamp Notes*, arranged and translated by Paul Matisse (Boston: G. K. Hall, 1983). In Duchamp's notes "infra-thin" is not a substantive since the artist explicitly refused to conceptualise or "substantiate" the term. Hence, "the" infra-thin represents a variable quality.

the movie *Anemic/Cinema* (1925-1926) in which verbal puns alternate with optical discs, and the use of alliterations, homophonies, homonyms, anagrams, spoonerisms, and the like, generate semantic displacements that range from facile to low and carnal. Sentences like "*Esquivons les ecchymoses des esquimaux aux mots exquis*" are fairly neutral, as it would appear that they involve alliterations and anagrams. But other sentences are more salacious: "*Avez-vous déjà mis la moëlle de l'épée dans le poêle de l'aimée?*" (Have you ever—or already—put the marrow of the sword in the oven of [your] loved one?') Rose Sélavy, Marcel Duchamp's transvestite alter ego, is also the co-author of *Box-in-a-Valise* and the editor of *Green Box*. Indeed, her activities in reproducing and creating serial works kept her very busy. As mentioned above, Duchamp claimed that Rose Sélavy was the true artist behind works signed by other artists who sign their own names to works very similar to known (or unknown) artists, in other words, behind all existing copyists—including himself, one can suppose, since she was very prolific in this matter.

Rose Sélavy was as much a fake as Duchamp's other multiple aliases who, according to the modified readymade *Wanted/\$2,000 Reward* (1922) (fig. 2.11),⁵⁰ are alleged to have operated a bucket shop in New York. In his poster, Duchamp used the term "bucket shop" as an analogy to illustrate his opinion of art market operations: A "bucket shop" was a fraudulent brokerage that accepted orders to sell or to buy shares or commodities, but that delayed delivery on orders, gambling that prices would fall, to the detriment of their customers. As in art speculations, gambling relies upon delays and timing.⁵¹

50. The poster, *Wanted / \$2,000 Reward*, was made from an actual bounty poster in circulation in 1922. Duchamp replaced the original mug shots with his own and added Rose Sélavy to the list of the aliases. The work was reproduced in various copies and versions in 1938, 1941 and 1963 for his exhibitions.

51. "Delay in glass" denoted Marcel Duchamp's genre. This expression also described the readymades as they conveyed a delay, difference or gap (*écart*) between "already-found" objects and their purpose. In *Green Box*, "delay in glass" is said to mark the gap and the difference between the "already-made" and the "already-found."

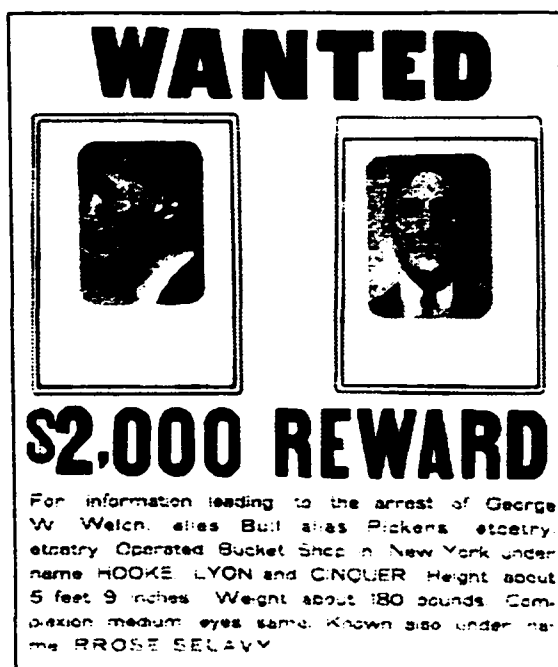


Fig. 2.11 Marcel Duchamp, *Wanted/\$2,000 Reward*, 1922

In 1935, Duchamp presented his *Rotoreliefs* at the Concours Lépine, an amateur inventor's exhibition. The piece incorporated sets of six discs with a drawing on each side. It resembled a popular toy, with its discs converging to create the illusion of three-dimensional reliefs when rotated at 30-33 RPMs. The play toy cards that he had industrially produced seemed to indicate a serious desire to profit on his part, as he published them in hundreds or thousands of copies at a time (both numbered and unnumbered), and on many occasions (in 1935, 1953, 1959, 1963 and 1965). He took out a patent for them and he even lent a set of his cards for evaluation at Macy's. Although his *Rotoreliefs* (1935) (fig. 2.12) were initially conceived as



Fig. 2.12 Marcel Duchamp *Rotoreliefs*, 1935

commercial goods, they were used as limited, numbered art reproductions in their subsequent edition, but in the end they succeeded much better as *art objects* than as toy commodities.

Duchamp's career was not a great success story in strictly commercial terms and we might even say that in the beginning he appeared to have failed. But, in the course of his wheeling and dealing with museums, galleries, auction houses, reproductions, fake bonds and checks, and even shop window designs,⁵² he succeeded in blurring distinctions not only between art and the mass-produced object, but also between originals and copies, or between true and counterfeited *art objects*, and between commercial activity and artistic creation. He, thus, became one of the most famous artist-forgers of the century, as well as its most "authentic" one. In all this, in Marcel's is dressing up as Rose, in those trivial language games with alliterations and spoonerisms, in this endless process of duplication where the copy comes first, forgery and counterfeiting cohere.

Duchamp ultimately wished to prove that art was only a form of gambling in which delays are valued by institutions. Indeed, everything Duchamp did challenged the established norms of value. He showed that, behind aesthetic disinterest and independence, lay speculative gambits, which he used at a given distance with a given amount of delay. Further evidence of Duchamp's efforts can be found in the name he, Man Ray and Catherine Dreier gave to the first museum of Modern Art, *La Société Anonyme* (a French term for Limited Stock Company). Thus, the

52. Duchamp was also involved in various promotional activities by designing shop window displays, such as the ones he put together for André Breton's book *Arcane 17* and later for *Le Surréalisme et la peinture*, at Brentano and Gotham Bookshop in 1945. However, Duchamp's window designs for his own work were even more impressive. At La Hune bookshop, he exhibited *Box-in-a-Valise* and a complete set of the *Rotoreliefs* in 1946. Later, he presented the Arensberg's version of *Nude Descending a Staircase* in a window installation with five naked mannequins with neither arms nor wigs. He also designed a window to promote Robert Lebel's book on him at Bamberger's store in Newark in 1960.

group was showed that their Museum was not much more than a business, promoting financial speculation with artistic goods.

In Duchamp's counterfeiting system, the reproducible came first. And yet, in an economic system that is spoiled by counterfeits, fake currency may circulate to such an extent that it renders normal currency worthless, as André Gide illustrated in his novel *The Counterfeiters* in which the French Dadaists are clearly pointed out with Armand Veded's magazine *Iron* (referring to Man Ray's photograph), its opening poem *Le vase de nuit* (suggesting Marcel Duchamp's *Fountain*) and its frontispiece page with a reproduction of a moustashed Mona Lisa. In this extreme scenario, neither the opacity of self-referential structure in the pure abstract sign nor the original referent of worth in currency can exist as it did before. Duchamp played with money and institutions where there are only infra-thin differences between multiple copies in circulation and no original to be found anywhere.

CHAPTER 3

AWAY FROM THE LOCI OF ART DUBUFFET'S AND SMITHSON'S UTOPIA

Dubuffet once said to me: "That idiot, Duchamp! He managed to get \$2,000 off of me for his Chess Association and in exchange he gave me this horrible etching of chess players. You want it? Take it!" The two of them knew each other rather well. Dubuffet interested me because in a certain way he was Duchamp's complete adversary. Duchamp, the consummate Hegelian, said that art no longer had any internal necessity; it was now pure convention [...] [Dubuffet collected *Art Brut*] because the works were driven by necessity. There was no audience. So it was the inverse situation from that of Duchamp. There was no public, there was no museum, no exhibition, only an urgent drive to draw, to paint.

Hubert Damisch¹

One lives here, one stamps one's feet and stamps again, among footprints molded in fine sand, like in plaster. [...] The entire extent of the oasis, stamped and stamped again, is full of marks and signs, is like a huge sketchbook, a notebook of improvisations, a large school blackboard filled with numbers, wherein one lives, immerses oneself, and dissolves oneself.

Jean Dubuffet²

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1. See Yve-Alain Bois, Denis Hollier, and Rosalind Krauss, "A Conversation with Hubert Damisch," *October*, no. 85 (Summer 1998), p. 3-17. Note that Damisch's designation of Duchamp as a "consummate Hegelian" is obscure, all the more so as he opposes the inner necessity of *Art Brut* to the conventionalist Duchamp. If Duchamp had been a Hegelian, he would certainly have been concerned with the immanent necessity of art, and these conventions would have been the *dialectical* negation of this necessity in order to produce sense out of the undetermined urge to create. As I argued in the preceding chapter, the diversity of Duchamp's body of work and the predicament it deploys suggest a sort of "rhythmic logic" rather than "arborescent dialectics."
 2. Quoted by Jean Piel from a letter Dubuffet wrote to Jacques Berne (5 February 1948), "Jean Dubuffet et l'amateur de peinture," *Critique*, vol. 48, no. 540 (May 1992), p. 420.

Dubuffet's Museums

According to Damisch, whereas Duchamp showed that art no longer had internal necessity since it was only a matter of conventions, or a name given by art institutions to certain types of objects, Dubuffet's interest in diverse manifestations of *Art Brut* (*raw art*) focused on that drive that makes people draw, paint, sculpt and erect buildings without expecting any audience, any reputation, any fame, any critique whatsoever. In fact, a number of *Art Brut* artists do not even think that they make art



Fig. 3.1 Jean Dubuffet, *L'homme à la rose*, 1949

and, when asked about this issue in relation to their drawing activities, they reject any responsibility in the matter. In short, they do not see any artistic intent in what they are doing. As a result, they do not want their production to be exhibited, judged by the critics, or entered into any art-historical classifications.³ Their works belong neither to the system of art, nor to its history.

As early as 1945, Jean Dubuffet was fascinated by outsider art. From then on, he collected a multitude of objects, drawings and paintings made by a wide range of "non-artists": psychiatric patients, prisoners, members of spiritualist circles

3. Michel Thévoz, "La Collection de l'Art Brut à Lauzanne," *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*, vol. CVI, no. 1398-1399 (July-August 1985), p. 42-46.

and other social misfits. In 1948, he created the *Compagnie de l'Art Brut* along with André Breton, Jean Paulhan, Charles Ratton, Henri Pierre Roché and Michel Tapié.⁴ The *Compagnie* organized exhibitions of *Art Brut* in the basement of René Drouin's Gallery and, later, in a space lent to them by Gallimard on the Rue de l'Université in Paris. Because Dubuffet was dissatisfied with the commitment of the other members, the association was dissolved in 1951.⁵ But the collection went to East Hampton, New York, where it was housed and could be visited for a while. In 1962, the *Compagnie* was reconstituted and, by 1975, had assembled more than 5,000 items to form an impressive collection housed in a Paris building where visitors could see it. In the meantime, in 1971, Dubuffet arranged for a catalogue to be written for the collection. And, in 1972, he gave the collection to the city of Lausanne where the Musée de l'Art Brut is now located, in the Château de Beaulieu.⁶

The expression *Art Brut*, in Dubuffet's view, refers to works made by people whose art is not influenced in any way by the surrounding culture; the subjects they address, the materials they use, the forms they shape, the procedures and techniques they apply, and even the ways in which they mark their surfaces—all of these lie outside the usual conventions prevailing in traditional artmaking. In contrast, everything they do seems motivated by their own inner impulses. According to Michel Thévoz, who is chief curator at the Musée de l'Art Brut in Lausanne, *Art Brut* is characterized by the following three features: its creators are

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4. Jean Paulhan was one of the most influential French intellectuals of his generation; he was the Director of the *Nouvelle Revue Française* from 1925 to 1940, and again in 1953; he created *Les Éditions de Minuit* in 1941. A writer, literary theorist and art critique, he had an interest in *L'art informel* (1962). Charles Ratton was an art dealer and gallery owner. Among his other important activities, the *Exposition Surréaliste d'objets* was held in his gallery in 1936. André Breton, the central figure of the Surrealist movement, needs no introduction. Henri Pierre Roché, a friend of Duchamp, was also a traveler, art dealer and writer. (He wrote *Jules et Jim*, a novel filmed by François Truffaut). Michel Tapié was an art critic who wrote on the Informel and Cobra groups.
 5. With regard to the dissolution of the *Compagnie de l'Art Brut*, see the address Jean Dubuffet made to the members and André Breton's response in Jean Dubuffet, *Prospectus et tous écrits suivants*, introduction and notes by Hubert Damisch (Paris: Gallimard, 1967), vol. 1, p. 491–494.
 6. This information is presented by Michel Thévoz. *L'Art Brut* (Geneva, Skira, 1975) p. 53.



Fig. 3.2 a Musée de l'Art Brut, Château de Beaulieu



Fig. 3.2 b Musée de l'Art Brut (exhibition room)

social or mental misfits or art world outsiders; their subjects, materials and procedures do not rely upon tradition or contemporary fashion; finally, their products do not belong to the system of art in any way whatsoever⁷.

Thus, the creation of such a museum of *Art Brut*, filled with pieces that were not intended to be displayed, or to be submitted to any aesthetic judgment whatsoever, is apparently paradoxical. For, as has been demonstrated so many times and in various ways, museums not only gather, preserve and display the heritage of humanity, but select those objects which they consider worthy to be preserved; and they organize this heritage through classifications that embody specific visions of history, beauty, wealth, grandeur, and so forth. Museums embody such a demonstration of power, and imply such a disciplinary education of taste and conduct,⁸ that an out-siders' museum could create anxiety and disturbance in that it would seem to glorify social and psychological dysfunctions. But the argument could be reversed: at the middle of the century, long after the Musée

7. *Ibid.*, p. 11-12. On the art of the insane, the reader may also refer to the fascinating history of the concept by John M. MacGregor, *The Discovery of the Art of the Insane* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1989).

8. Among many others see the following texts :Carol Duncan and Alan Wallach, "The Universal Survey Museum," *Art History*, vol. 3, no. 4 (December 1980), p. 448-467. Eileen Hooper-Greenhill, *Museums and the Shaping of Knowledge* (London and New York, Routledge, 1992). See chapter 7, "The Disciplinary Museum," p. 167-190. Tony Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum: History, Theory, Politics* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995).

the argument could be reversed: at the middle of the century, long after the Musée de l'homme was created and outsider art—the art of the primitive man, for instance—had been neutralized within our own categories, the harnessing of these wild activities by the Musée de l'Art Brut seemed more like appropriation than true consideration of what raw art involves.

In reply to the view that a *Musée de l'art brut* would always-already be recuperated, Thévoz argues that of within the museum's walls should nonetheless engender a crisis of the museum, because of its incongruity, strangeness and uniqueness.⁹ It must be said, however, that these works cannot be identified with those of primitive men, who made cultural objects in conformity with very specific cultural rules, however much the modern Western world has believed in an originally pure form of expression for the primitive arts. *Art Brut* works are not like those of "primitive" painters either, who, in spite of their lack of artistic education, want to make art in accordance with culturally accepted norms and, moreover, want to compete with their contemporaries.

But, according to Michel Thévoz in his defense of the Musée de l'Art Brut,¹⁰ there is no contradiction in collecting and exhibiting works of *Art Brut*. On the one hand, he argues, outsider art is always already deterritorialized. It is an art without a specific place because it stems from no culture whatsoever. Nor does it have any destination, since it is not intended to be shown to any audience. In this sense, this already deterritorialized art does not fit anywhere in particular. As a result, the museum is no less of a venue for it than any other place, particularly, we could claim, since the works usually displayed within museums have often been removed from their original places—chapels, temples, palaces, public spaces, etc.—for

9. Michel Thévoz, "Le paradoxe d'un musée de l'art brut," *Opus International*, no. 82 (Fall 1981), p. 37-38.

10. *Ibid.*

more fitting context for such truly deterritorialized works, than for these already deterritorialized works of *Art Bruë*. The latter, Thévoz maintains, are as much at home in the museum as any other piece of art. All the more so, we could again contend, since the museum space itself creates a "no-place" (*U-topia*) in the social fabric,¹¹ as the separation between that which is outside and that which is inside the museum's canon favors the creation of imaginary discourses produced with objects displayed in sequences to make visitors believe that a certain order exists in a historical narrative¹².

Thévoz also holds that the relation one entertains with museums depends on social and cultural divisions between those who produce works of art and those who consume them through visual contemplation; thus this relation does not rely only upon actual museum space *per se*, but upon a larger ideological context. Hence, wherever works of art (or anything identified as such) are displayed, our specific relation to any object that the museum might virtually contain is reenacted because of this social and cultural division. But should we not object that this division between consumption and production results partly from the aesthetic ideology that the birth and the expansion of museums greatly helped to enforce?¹³

11. Etymologically, "u-topia" means no-place. For an extensive analysis of the literary structures in Thomas More's narrative *Utopia*, where the term was coined for the first time, see Louis Marin, *op. cit.*, full quote p. 15. In the second part of his book, Marin provides various analyses of other cultural discourses and places, such as Disneyland, in terms of utopian places and practices.

12. For a presentation of the rhetorics of museological display and the constitution of utopian place by the institution of the exhibition, see Jean Davallon, "Gestes de mise en exposition," *Claquemurer, pour ainsi dire, tout l'univers* (Paris: Centre Georges Pompidou, 1986), p. 241-266. Davallon distinguishes between two distinct "worlds" in the exhibition: (1) the actual world made of a space apart from the outside, filled with objects, exhibits, exhibiting devices and museum visitors; (2) the imaginary and semiotic world created by the selection of exhibits and their ordering into sequences of meanings. It is this second "world" of the exhibition that he characterizes as a utopian space; another place where narrative occurs, it is a discourse organized with semiotic objects, presented in more or less specific sequences, in a fictitious space.

13. See Douglas Crimp on this matter in his essay on the birth of the Altes Museum in Berlin: "The Post-modern Museum," *On the Museum's Ruins* (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1993), p. 282-325.

If it is true, as Thévoz believes, that aesthetic appreciation dominates our relation to art wherever art is shown, the museum's boundaries nonetheless frame and form our common acceptance of what art is. And yet, in Dubuffet's view, this acceptance is completely misleading as it veils any authentic artistic activity. This assumption constitutes a sort of theorem in Dubuffet's philosophy of art. According to him, every work of art is emptied of its true artistic power as soon as it comes inside the museum's walls, or as soon as it is labeled with the name "art." Opposing *Art Brut* to the cultural arts, Dubuffet juggles with the dialectics of true art and the non-art of the museum:

True art is always found where one doesn't expect it to be, where no one thinks about it or speaks its name. Art hates to be recognized and to be hailed by its name. As soon this happens, it flees. Art is a character who passionately loves to be incognito. As soon as one detects him or points in his direction, he bolts, leaving in his place a crowned stand-in with the word ART written on a large sandwich board on his back. The laureate is then showered with champagne and experts parade him from town to town with a ring in his nose. This is the false Mister Art, the one known to the public since he is one with the laurels and sandwich board. Would the true Mr. Art let himself be sandwiched between boards? Not a chance! So nobody recognizes him. Although he goes everywhere, and everyone bumps into him twenty times a day at every street corner, no one would ever think that this is the true Mister Art himself, the one about whom so many good things are said. For he just doesn't look the part. You understand, it is the false Mister Art who looks like the real thing, while the real Mr. Art doesn't look the part!¹⁴

14. Jean Dubuffet, "L'Art Brut préféré aux Arts Culturels," (October 1949) in *Prospectus et tous écrits suivants*, vol. I, p. 198-202.

Le vrai art il est toujours là où on ne l'attend pas. Là où personne ne pense à lui ni ne prononce son nom. L'art il déteste être reconnu et salué par son nom. Il se sauve aussitôt. L'art est un personnage passionnément épris d'incognito. Sitôt qu'on le décèle, que quelqu'un le montre du doigt, alors il se sauve en laissant à sa place un figurant lauréat qui porte sur son dos une grande pancarte où c'est marqué ART, que tout le monde asperge de champagne et que les conférenciers promènent de ville en ville avec un anneau dans le nez. C'est le faux monsieur Art celui-là. C'est celui que le public connaît, vu que c'est lui qui a le laurier et la pancarte. Le vrai monsieur Art pas de danger qu'il aille se flanquer des pancartes! Alors personne ne le reconnaît. Il se promène partout, tout le monde l'a rencontré sur son chemin et le bouscule vingt fois par jour à tous les tournants de rue, mais pas un qui ait l'idée que ça pourrait être lui monsieur Art lui-même dont on dit tant de bien. Parce qu'il n'en a pas du tout l'air. Vous comprenez, c'est le faux monsieur Art qui a le plus l'air d'être le vrai et c'est le vrai qui n'en a pas l'air. (p. 201)

Throughout his entire artistic life, Dubuffet dissociated what goes by the name of "art" from the true artistic impulse. Although he acknowledged that official culture distributes laurels and labels with the name of art, he rejected that culture's ability to harness art's true dimension, which is something vital and necessarily freed from any restrictions.

About Prints in Sand and Other Curious Things

In opposition to conventional modes of expression, which seek to attain perfection through conscious mastery of the medium and subject matter, Dubuffet preferred to explore accidents occurring in the painting processes in order to discover new forms, subjects and languages. He favored chance procedures and exploited the specific qualities of materials; he would use anything he could to produce textural effects, things such as herbs and leaves, threads and rags, dust and sand, torn newspapers and scrap materials, or anything similar. The surfaces of his paintings and drawings have as many knife scratches as brush marks. Basically, his interests were turned towards *empreintes*, traces, and marks of all kinds that reveal unconscious energy manifested through compulsory activities.¹⁵

And yet, this art made with impressions was not intended to last or be preserved by museums. Rather, it could be erased with the passage of time; apparently, for him this did not matter. For the art of the present, of any present, dies with the people who make it and with those who enjoy it within their primal context. Art vanishes anyway, Dubuffet believes:

15. In the description of his working procedures, for instance in the text catalogue "Empreintes" (Damisch's edition, V. 2, p. 134-153), Dubuffet seems out of breath and dazzled in experiencing simple off-print techniques as if the different possibilities he discovers overpass his mastering, as if things go faster than he can follow their lines.

"This is not painting! This is a mark that you have made on the soil with your heel!" [says Dubuffet's imaginary art-specialist interlocutor]; "I need comparable works," he pursues, "so I can sort them out by order of merit within a well-defined category." "I opt for confusion," replies the Author. "Do not sequester art, or keep it apart from the world, in a Trappist monastery. I want painting to be full of interiors, splashes of paint, signs, posters and heel marks on the earth. Those are its native soil."¹⁶

Or again:

In short, everything that is human is mortal, and one should not try to go against this. It is better this way; this kind of death is gentle and graceful. Man writes on sand. This suits me just fine: the erasing doesn't disturb me; at low tide, I start over again.¹⁷

According to Jean-Claude Lebensztejn, Dubuffet's perception of the opposition between *Art Brut* and the cultural arts, the art of the misfits and that of the elites, changed over time. While he did not, at the beginning of his artistic career, care about the disappearance of art, he nevertheless started to collect, catalogue and exhibit *Art Brut*, first in galleries (at the Galerie René Drouin in 1947 and 1948, in a space lent by Gallimard from 1948-1951, and at the Cordier and Eckström Gallery before his return to Paris from America in 1962), and later in museums (at the Musée des Arts Décoratifs in 1967 and, in 1972, at the Musée de l'Art Brut in Lausanne, which provided a final home for this art). In 1971, Dubuffet published

16. Dubuffet, *op. cit.*, vol. I, p. 54-55.

"Ceci n'est pas de la peinture! C'est un tracé que vous avez dessiné sur le sol avec votre talon!" [...] "J'ai besoin d'ouvrages comparables entre eux, et que je puisse ensuite classer par ordre de mérite, à l'intérieur d'une catégorie bien définie." Je tiens pour la confusion. N'enfermez pas l'art, coupé du monde, dans une Trappe. Je veux la peinture pleine d'odeurs de tout cela – donc des décors, des badigeons, des enseignes et des pancartes, et des traits de talons sur la terre. Ce sont ses terroirs d'origine.

17. Dubuffet, *op. cit.*, vol. II, p. 232. Quoted by Jean-Claude Lebensztejn, "L'Espace de l'art," in *Zigzag* (Paris: Aubier-Flammarion, 1981), p. 23.

En somme tout ce qui est humain est mortel. Il ne faut pas essayer d'aller là contre. C'est mieux ainsi, c'est assez gentil cette mort, c'est gracieux. L'homme écrit sur le sable. Moi ça me convient bien ainsi; l'effacement ne me contrarie pas; à marée descendante je recommence.

the *Catalogue de la Collection de l'Art Brut*, which lists more than 4,000 works made by 133 artists.¹⁸

Dubuffet's involvement with outsider art was not confined to collecting, cataloguing, and exhibiting. As early as 1952,¹⁹ he set about compiling a catalogue of his own works. This happened only one year after the ten-year retrospective of his work held at the Arts Club of Chicago in 1951. And yet, from 1947 on, Dubuffet had already shown his paintings, drawings, and sculptures in some of the most prestigious galleries of the period. (He was represented in New York and Chicago by the Galeries Pierre Matisse and, later, was picked up by Sidney Janis and Leo Castelli.) Lebensztejn says that, with interest in his work on the rise, his definition of *Art Brut* changed.

In his earliest texts, then, Dubuffet advanced the idea that "art effects" may be tracked down in a considerable variety of marks left on surfaces, marks such as graffiti, make-up, tattoos, scars, footprints and the like. And this same "art effect" could also be found in various ways of handling objects and transforming the environment, as in, for example, architectural adornment, interior decoration, *bricolage*, mask-making, etc., that is, in more traditional forms of expression. Hence the "art-effect" does not result from the voluntary control of representational codes. In Dubuffet's view, then, everybody is an artist, and art can go underground in many cultural manifestations, including those of the cultural arts. According to Lebensztejn, this understanding of *Art Brut* was utterly social and subversive, since anything possessed of an "art-effect" is included in its expanded notion of "art"—which does not need to be justified by a definition of the so-called nature of art.

18. See Michel Thévoz, *op. cit.*, p. 54.

19. This represents only ten years of a truly artistic career, since Dubuffet, after three or so false starts, began devoting his life to art only in 1942. With regard to these false starts, see Andreas Franzke, *Jean Dubuffet*, Robert Eric Wolf, trans. (New York: Harry Abrams Inc. Publishers, 1981), p.273 (Biographical Outline).

But when Dubuffet began to introduce *Art Brut* into the circuit of museums and galleries, he reformulated his definition by saying that raw art is a manifestation of inner, individual and personal impulses emerging from the artist's deepest interiority. According to Lebensztejn, Dubuffet then began to see art as relying on natural human behaviour, instead of embodying various forms of social conduct determined by specific cultural and historical conditions. In Dubuffet's famous manifesto, *L'art Brut préféré aux Arts culturels*²⁰ (published in 1,000 copies for an exhibition of *Art Brut* held in the large rooms of the Galerie René Drouin in 1949), the tone is embarrassing indeed. After first attacking the art of the intellectuals for denaturalizing true artistic activity, because this kind of art relies, he says, on ideas and is sheer mimicry—countefait money, as he puts it—, Dubuffet emphasizes the fact that *Art Brut* artists create from their own inner intensity, from their own impulses and needs, as if they had never seen any images or representations other than their own.

Consequently, Dubuffet's most obvious contradiction lies in this fact: on the one hand, he heralded the end of the museum, suggesting that we cease our habit of preserving works of art because this creates, in the end, rarity and inflated values—in the aesthetic, ethical, and economic senses of the term; on the other hand, he collected a great number of *Art Brut* works, which he then exhibited and placed in museums. Moreover, he showed his own pieces in prestigious galleries and sold them for respectable prices; they attracted attention from the most famous collectors and were picked up by the world's most reputable museums, particularly in the United States, as early as 1947.²¹

20. *Op. cit.*, p. 198-202.

21. François Mathey lists the numerous museums, in both Europe and the United States, that possess Dubuffet's paintings, drawings and sculptures in their holdings. The dissemination of his works is quite impressive: the Museum of Modern Art in New York alone had 17 paintings, 70 gouaches and drawings and 2 sculptures in 1973. This is not to mention the Guggenheim, the Art Institute of Chicago and the museums in Baltimore, Dallas, Saint Louis and most of the European countries. See Mathey's article, "Les Musées de Dubuffet," *Cahiers de L'Herne* (Paris: L'Herne, 1973), p. 148-152.

Art museums, of course, establish a powerful system of exclusion whose history has come to determine our relationship to all forms of art; they thereby embody a procedure of classification. An *Art Brut* museum could, therefore, represent a specific type of museum, in the same way that other museums may be museums of ethnography, history, popular culture, etc. It can be concluded, then, that the *Art Brut* museum produces another form of exclusion in order to preserve the usual, this is aesthetic function of the cultural arts. And, it can be asked whether not another way of toning down the artistic impulse Dubuffet talked about and, by the same token, muting its subversive impact.

In addition to the opposition that capitalist societies generate between consumers and producers—one reproduced in the field of art mainly through museums—, Hubert Damisch points out another opposition that should be taken into consideration when looking at art production: that between the productive work of professional artists, which speculative creates value and the leisure-time activity of *Art Brut* artists (and the like).²² Those who are indeed forced to waste time because they are imprisoned or in psychiatric hospitals, do not work in the productive sense of the word; for that reason, their products are, economically speaking, devoid of value, in the context of a marketplace requiring complex economic strategies. Obviously, *Art Brut* artists are completely disqualified on that basis. Thus *Art Brut* is not only excluded from museums and confined to its own institutions, but is also kept outside economic circuits. But can this exclusion still be meaningful if one considers that the so-called leisure society is now completely integrated within the economic circuits of late capitalism, submerging the daily life of the working class in a multitude of occupations that have very little to do with artistic creativity? In

22. Hubert Damisch, "Note sur l'art brut," in *Ruptures, Cultures* (Paris: Minuit, 1976), p. 50-53 (Originally published in *Encyclopedie Universalis*, vol. II, p. 508-509, 1968).

short, can leisure time filled with artistic activities still be economically and socially subversive? One should contend instead that these practices are simply neutralized.

Ironically, one should also note that the makers of *Art Brut* are sometimes aware of the economic circuit of art and that some of them may therefore have been counterfeiters as well. In his psychoanalytic approach to *Art Brut*, Allen S. Weiss reports on a psychiatrically ill artist, Georgine Hu, whose works have been collected by the Musée L'Alancine. Her art consists of "false banknotes created on toilet paper, with which she often attempted to pay her psychiatrist!"²³ Although Weiss interprets these works in scatological terms and links them to Bataille's wasteful expenditure and formlessness, Georgine Hu's attempts to pay her doctor with works of art manifest some understanding of the functioning of art objects in the marketplace. Of course, Hu projected her own desires onto her psychiatrist's will to possess art goods; but this does not mean that she was ignorant of how the art market operates.

At the heart of all these contradictions, as expressed by Jean Dubuffet, the most determining issue at stake remains the dialectical opposition between the true nature of art and the place of its confinement. On the one hand, true art is art that exists everywhere that an "art-effect" can be inferred from surface traces, or from visual transformations of objects and surroundings motivated by nothing other than an artistic impulse; on the other hand, the so-called site of art, the museum, is a neutralized and antiseptic place where one finds only things labelled with the name of art, but never the real thing. This form of dialectics between museum space, understood as a no-place, and the outer world where art can spread its roots, was addressed on the other side of the Atlantic, where the museum-gallery nexus became an issue a decade later but on a much larger scale and with much greater impact.

23. Allen S. Weiss, *Shattered Forms: Art Brut, Phantasms, Modernism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992), p. 11.

Smithson's Loci and Monuments

The last monument was a sand box or a model of desert. Under the dead light of the Passaic afternoon the desert became a map of infinite disintegration and forgetfulness. [...] Every grain of sand was a dead metaphor that equaled timelessness, and to decipher such metaphors would take one through the false mirror of eternity.[...] Picture in your mind's eye the sand box divided in half with black sand on one side and white sand on the other. We take a child and we have him run hundreds of times clockwise until the sand gets mixed and begins to turn grey; after that we have him run anti-clockwise, but the result will not be a restoration of the original division but a greater degree of greyness and an increase of entropy.

Robert Smithson²⁴

Entropy, chaos, disintegration, de-differentiation and the interchange between the real and the fictional were at the center of Robert Smithson's projects. They motivated his thoughts and actions from the beginning of his career until his death in a plane crash while photographing one of his earthworks, *Amarillo Ramp* (1973). The notion of "entropy" refers to the second principle of thermodynamics, which states that any energy existing within a closed system tends to be less available to do work with the passage of time; as a consequence, any existing order also ineluctably inclines to disorder. This principle is illustrated by the closed system of the sandbox in Smithson's quotation where the separation of the black and white sand represents an order that is mixed irreversibly to form grey. Consequently, in Smithson's view, past and future collapse together in each instant, since the pres-

24. This quote is taken from Smithson's unpredictable text "A Tour of the Monuments of Passaic, New Jersey," first published in *Artforum* (December 1967), and reprinted in Robert Smithson, *The Writings of Robert Smithson*, Nancy Holt ed. (New York: New York University Press, 1979). This piece of anthology resembles a short narrative of a journey, as in Thomas More's *Utopia*, except that Smithson's uses the story as a platform for more scientific and semiotic considerations, in which art is seen as an allegory of the post-industrial culture.

ent is both "the past of the future" and "the future of the past"; every instant is an abyss of eternity, to use Nietzsche's words. And if time collapses, everything is transformed into space. This, however, can never be found in any actual place since, Smithson says (quoting Pascal), "the universe is a sphere where the center is everywhere and the periphery nowhere." These observations obviously lead him to assume a specific stance with respect to works of art and the places where they can be seen—i.e. galleries and art museums—in addition to compelling him to compare these places with the natural history museum, where pre-history meets post-history—the era of space exploration.²⁵

The narrative of *The Monuments of Passaic*, from which the above quotation is taken, is a turning point not only in Smithson's career, but also in the recent history of art. Published in 1967, while Smithson was developing his ideas about "aerial art," the article complements two projects he was then working on: the *Tar Pool and Gravel Pit* (1966), and the *Dallas-Fort Worth Regional Airport Project* (1966-1967) (fig. 3.3). Although these never got beyond being the proposal stage, they initiated earthworks projects that would greatly expand from that point on.²⁶ Needless to say, this type of work represents a dramatic shift in the approach to art, and does so at many levels: the procedures and techniques used in artmaking, the conditions of reception of the works, the new issues arising from the relation-

25. See, for instance, the text he wrote in collaboration with Mel Bochner, "The Domain of the Great Bear," originally published in *Art Voices* (Fall 1966), p. 24-31, in *The Writings of Robert Smithson*, *op. cit.*, p. 24.

26. With respect to the evolution of Robert Smithson's earthworks projects and realizations, see Robert Hobbs, *Robert Smithson: Sculpture* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1981). According to John Beardsley, [*Earthworks and Beyond: Contemporary Art in the Landscape* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1984)], when Robert Smithson met Michael Heizer in 1968, the latter had already made about ten works in the Western deserts. Heizer's motivations were different than those of Smithson, as they were done in rejection of the commodification of works of art in the marketplace. Smithson's "Aerial" works were motivated more by philosophical concerns, and dealt with science, history, space/time, art and architecture. What interests me in Smithson's views (which is only implicit in Heizer's) is the issue of museum or gallery space in relation to the site of art.

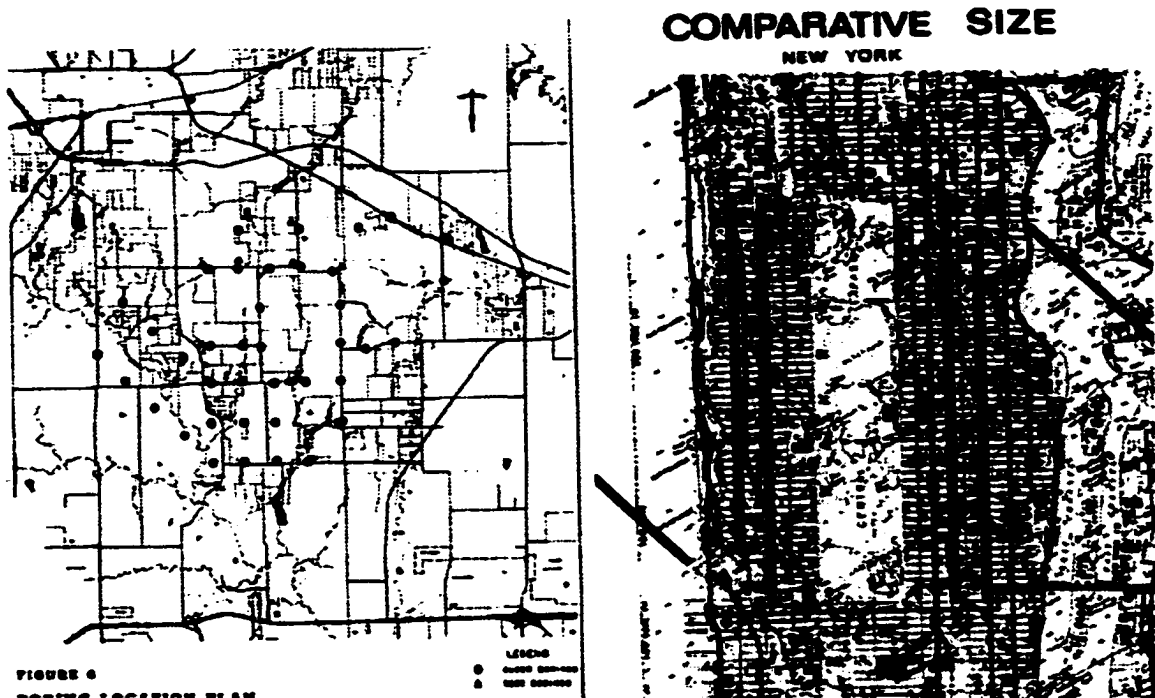


Fig. 3.3 Robert Smithson *Dallas For Worth Regional Airport Project* (1966-1967)

ships among dimension, scale, and place, the links sculpture now maintains with other artistic modes such as drawing, architecture, and landscape, the rationale behind this kind of business, as well as various sociological, economic, aesthetic and ecological concerns. Among these concerns are Smithson's views about the issue of museum or gallery space in relation to the appropriate site of art, from the cultural confinements. Perhaps even more than any other theoretical text, then, *The Monuments of Passaic* reveals the attitude of Smithson and several land artists had with regard to art in general; it is a post-modern allegory that speaks about art by narrating the surrounding world.

A Tour of the Monuments of Passaic relates a "journey" Smithson made one Saturday to the New York City suburbs of New Jersey, located on the banks of the Passaic River, where a highway was under construction. During his bus trip, he read the art pages of *The New York Times*, in which he "incidentally" fell upon the reproduction of Samuel F.B. Morse's Romantic painting, *Allegorical Landscape*.

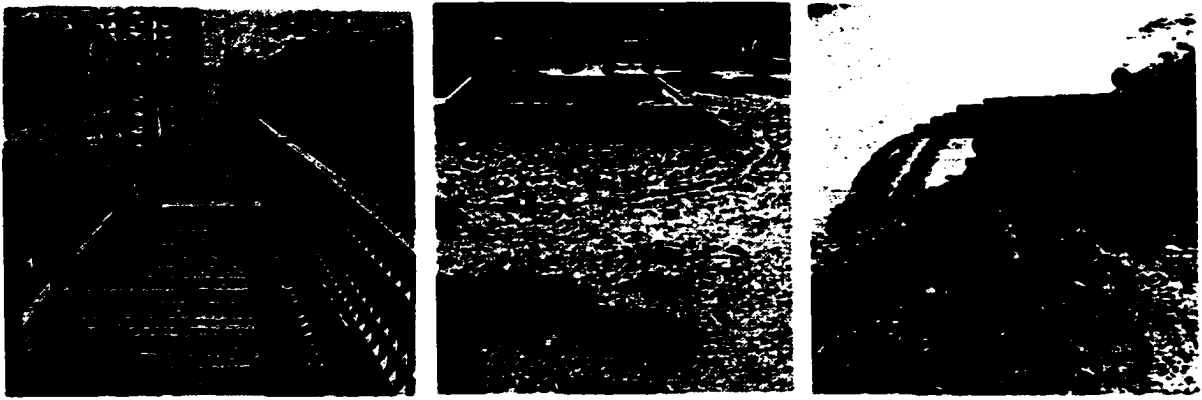


Fig. 3.4 a, b, c Robert Smithson, *The Monuments of Passaic*

Smithson carefully describes the painting in post-industrial terms, in order to set the atmosphere for his forthcoming narrative of his journey along the banks of the Passaic River. In his text, he punctuates the story of his journey with descriptions of different objects and places that he calls "monuments"; these are in fact instruments and machinery very characteristic of industrial society: a pivoting iron bridge, a pumping derrick, a long pipe running on pontoons alongside the river, six large pipes gushing water into an artificial pond, and many concrete abutments (fig. 3.4 a, b, c). And yet, one different monument, a sand square that he named "The Desert," reminded him of his long-term interest in entropy.

The descriptions of these industrial accessories obviously speak about sculpture and present a contrast with Duchamp's urinal: not only because they, too, are ready-made sculptures, but also because Smithson sexualizes some of them, interpreting the six-pipe fountain gushing into the pond, for example, as a kind of "sodomite intercourse." But he does not limit himself to the objects he sees; rather, the place itself is described in terms of a full-size photographic map that is sometimes overexposed under the noonday sun, while, at other times, it is compared to a film screen with a continuous white glow. Or the whole landscape seems to be mirrored in an automobile parking lot, so as to undifferentiate the actual place from its reflected duplicate, its simulacrum. The whole place is like an immense map that

completely dissolves into a chaos of words, objects and light. These monuments and their sites turn into decayed ruins. And yet they are anticipated ruins, or ruins in reverse, as Smithson calls them. In the instantaneous photographic imaging of the monuments and their place, time collapses and opens up an abyss of indeterminacy and undifferentiation. To conclude this whole fantasy about a place, its monuments, and their narrative, we should keep in mind that, in Smithson's view, the world itself has entered into the realm of the semiotic, as everything in his view came to belong to language with its syntax and markers. The de-differentiation he talks about results from the interconnection between matter and mind, once one thinks about physical matter in artistic terms. As well, reality and fiction, and science, and art, merge together in this stratified Babel of linguistic information.²⁷

Mapping the World

Smithson's vision of certain places on Earth as kinds of full-scale maps stems from his earlier sympathies with Minimal Art, whose works integrate, so to speak, the physical space of the gallery. For, aside from other features such as their de-anthropomorphization and denaturalization, the sheer emptiness of these objects produces the dialectical effect of their "expansion" outward; as a result, it relates to their surrounding space, including the beholder's own experience of both the object and the space. In this type of art, space itself becomes a kind of medium that can be explored as such.

This kind of observation is reported in 1966 by Tony Smith, whose narrative Smithson's *Monuments of Passaic* echoes and incorporates into his own entropic theory. The limitlessness of an artificial place can be experienced as an artistic fact.

27. About Smithson's concerns a with the interconnections between mind, language and matter . see for instance his text "A Sedimentation of the Mind : Earth Projects." *op. cit.*, p. 82-91.

although Smith had never known this experience in any artistic context. Yet this is just what occurred to him in his car ride on the unfinished New Jersey Turnpike. As we see from the *Monuments of Passaic*, Robert Smithson did not experience exactly the same thing as Tony Smith: while the latter discovered an aesthetic phenomenon, the sensation of limitlessness, the former acknowledges what happens when the world and its representation are conflated within the semiotic realm of our own reality. Although Smith's text is well known, it is worth quoting it at length, since the reader can pay attention to what may have sparked Smithson's imagination:

It was a dark night and there were no lights or shoulder markers, lines, railings, or anything at all except the dark pavement moving through the landscape of the flats, rimmed by hills in the distance, but punctuated by stacks, towers, fumes, and colored lights. This drive was a revealing experience. The road and much of the landscape was artificial, and yet it couldn't be called a work of art. On the other hand, it did something for me that art never did. At first I didn't know what it was, but its effect was to liberate me from many of the views I had had about art. It seemed that there had been a reality there which had not had any expression in art.

The experience on the road was something mapped out but not socially recognized. I thought to myself, it ought to be clear that's the end of art. Most painting looks pretty pictorial after that. There is no way you can frame it, you just have to experience it. Later I discovered some abandoned airstrips in Europe without any function, created worlds without tradition. Artificial landscape without cultural precedent began to dawn on me. There is a drill ground in Nuremberg, large enough to accomodate two million men. The entire field is three sixteen-inch steps, one above the other, stretching for a mile or so.²⁸

Clearly, Smith's narrative refers to an aesthetic experience that is not, however, confined to those that are historically pre-organized by the gallery-museum system, nor by the ambient culture. In Smith's view, this is the end of art because aesthetic experience is not limited to art, whereas museum ideology had us believe that aesthetics and art relate to the same kind of experience.

28. Samuel Wagstaff Jr., "Talking with Tony Smith," *Artforum*, vol. 1, no. 4 (December 1966), p. 18-19.

That the world resembles a kind of punctuated text—without words, it should be said—was not so much Tony Smith's perception as Robert Smithson's interpretation. This is explained in his article, "Towards the Development of An Air Terminal Site,"²⁹ published only a few months after Smith's interview. There, Smithson reads punctuation marks where Smith used only metaphors: the "towers" become exclamation marks (!), while the "stacks" are dashes (—), the "fume" question marks (?), and the "colored lights" colons (:). In Smithson's descriptions and projects, the world is not presented analogically as a language; but it is seen as a language as such.

Unlike the Minimalists, then, Smithson's definitive shift towards the investigation of "semiotic space" relies upon a completely different kind of understanding of the outer world, although it arises from a similar experience of limitlessness. This difference, I believe, is due partly to the fact that the gallery space itself was revealed to him to be another form of confinement, as much as frames demarcate paintings from the outer world, and pedestals mark a distance between actual space and the sculpture they support. But more importantly, unlike the Minimalists, who were more concerned about the phenomenological relation of the beholder to the presence of the objects in actual space, Smithson had a sophisticated understanding of language.

In this same text, where he reads Smith's experience in terms of semiotics and syntax,³⁰ Smithson refers to Alexander Graham Bell, who was not only the inventor of the telephone but also an eclectic engineer interested in many areas. The survey of sites and building structures occupied a sizeable place in Bell's research. Of course, Bell's tetragonal lattice kites remind Smithson of his own crys-

29. Robert Smithson, "Towards the Development of An Air Terminal Site," *Artforum*, vol. 1 no. 10. (June 1967), reproduced in Smithson's *Writings*, *op. cit.*, p. 41-47.

30. *Ibid.*

talloid structures. Yet his fascination with Bell was more fundamental than that: for it was the materiality of language, its physical properties, that allowed the engineer to develop communication systems.

Bell's awareness of the physical properties of language, by way of the telephone, Smithson says, kept him from misunderstanding language and object relationships. Language was transformed by Bell into *linguistic objects*. [...] A visual language of modules, he adds, seems to have emerged from Bell's investigation. Points, lines, areas, or volumes establish the syntax of sites."³¹

And, this is precisely what the *Dallas-Fort Worth Aerial Project* was supposed to be a syntactical site.

As we might expect, these physical features of language are reversed, however, in Smithson's understanding of the world; sites and places can be seen as informational texts punctuated with syntax and structures expanding out from them. In other words, the world itself comes to be seen as an infinite *simulacrum*. Earthworks thus represented ways of revealing this specific semiotic dimension of existing things and places, at least in Smithson's view.

It is important to mentally experience these projects as something distinctive and intelligible. By extracting from a site certain associations that have remained invisible within the whole framework of rational language, by dealing directly with the appearance of what Roland Barthes calls the "*simulacrum* of the object," the aim is to reconstruct a new type of "building" into a whole that engenders new meanings. From the linguistic point of view, one establishes rules of structure based on a change in the semantics of building.³²

Also in the narrative of his journey along the Passaic River, the town and its buildings are described as if they were a tridimensional map reflecting themselves, a simulacrum that engulfs past and future in a timeless present.

31. *Ibid.*, p. 44.

32. *Ibid.*, p. 46. So the airport buildings, seen from airplanes, would have assumed the dimensions of huge simulacra, since they would be located on a place designed in the form of an entropic spiral, the *Aerial Map—Proposal for Dallas-Fort Worth Regional Air Port* (1967).

That monumental parking lot divided the city in half, turning it into a mirror and a reflection—but the mirror kept changing places with the reflection. One never knew what side of the mirror one was on. [...] If the future is "out of date" and "old fashioned," then I had been in the future. I had been on a planet that had a map of Passaic drawn over it, and a rather imperfect map at that. A sideral map marked up with "lines" the size of the streets, and "squares" and "blocks" the size of the buildings. At any moment my feet were apt to fall through the cardboard ground. I am convinced that the future is lost somewhere in the dumps of the non-historical past.³³

To describe the city as if it were a mirrored map of itself, confusing reflection with what it reflects, embodies one of the most significant shifts in the system of representation. For as we all know, maps, along with portraits, have been seen as the model or paradigm of representation.³⁴ But when Smithson uses maps, he empties them out, cutting them into hexagons or serrated edges; he also builds up three-dimensional metallic structures filled with rocks, which he calls three-dimensional maps or "non-sites." Perhaps, these are maps; but they are certainly not representations in the sense that words and figures can be, as they are abstract geometrical figures, or raw materials. Conversely, actual places, which he describes as if they were sheer representations, photographs, movies or mirror images, become copies without models; the "real" is always already reflected, serialized, de-differentiated; it is revealed to be only one (undifferentiated) image among a series of identical mirror images, none of which could claim precedence over any other.³⁵

33. *Op. cit.*, p. 56.

34. For the importance of maps in the system of representation, see the many articles Louis Marin wrote on the matter: "Les voies de la carte," *Cartes et figures du monde* (Paris: Centre Georges Pompidou, 1980), p. 47-54; "Le cadre de la représentation et quelques-unes de ses figures," *Les Cahiers du Musée national d'art moderne*, no. 24 (Summer 1988), p. 63-81; "Le portrait de la ville dans ses utopiques," in *op. cit.*, 257-290.

35. With respect to Smithson's reversed utopia, see my article "La dialectique du site/non-site, une utopie cartographique," *Parachute*, no. 68 (Fall 1992), p. 42-46. In that article, I argued that postmodern deterritorialization literally transformed the perception of the city and exterior spaces, accomplishing a kind of "utopianization" of actual place. Smithson's dialectics is paradigmatic of this mutation.

Thus, one enters into a kind of Borgesian utopian world, which seems to be already accomplished.³⁶

Borges' description of a fictitious mapping out of an empire that coincides, point by point, with the actual physical space recalls Smithson's narrative of his *Monuments of Passaic* tour—with this difference, however: in Smithson's case it is the place itself, *at the present moment*, that is perceived and described as a map; it is not an event presumed to have occurred at some time in the past; also, in Smithson's case, the story is told by the narrator of the journey himself who is also the one who describes the place.

We should keep in mind that Smithson was very fond of Borges' writing and often referred to it in his own.³⁷ If I mention this point, it is only to show the extent to which Smithson's cartographic interests have involved a utopian take on reality.

36. Borges' original text, "About the Rigor of Science," reads as follows:

In this empire, the Art of Cartography has reached such a degree of perfection that the Map of one single Province occupied the whole territory of a City, and the Map of the Empire a whole Province. Through time, those Disproportionated Maps stopped being satisfying; so, the College of Cartographers drew a Map of the Empire that had the Size of the Empire and coincided with it point by point. Less passionate for the study of Cartography, the Following Generations thought that this expanded Map was useless; so, pityless, they left it to the inclemency of the Sun and the Winters. In the Western Deserts, some very rotten Ruins of the Map remain; Animals and Beggers live in it. In the whole Country, there are no remains of the Geographical Disciplines. (Quoted in Louis Marin, *op. cit.*, p. 291.)

Del Rigor en la ciencia

...En aquel Imperio, el arte de la Cartografía logró tal Perfección que el Mapa de una sola Provincia ocupada toda una Ciudad, y el Mapa del Imperio, toda una Provincia. Con el Tiempo, estos Mapas Desmesurados no satisficieron y los Colegios de Cartografos levantaron un Mapa del Imperio, que tenía el Tamano del Imperio y coincidía puntualmente con el. Menos Adiscitas al Estudio de la Cartografía, las Generaciones Siguietes entendieron que ese dilatado Mapa era Inútil y no sin Impiedad lo entregaron a las Inclemencias del Sol y de los Inviernos. En los Desiertos del Oeste perduran despedazadas Ruinas del Mapa, habitadas por Animales y por Mendigos; en todo el País no hay otra reliquia de las Disciplinas Geográficas. (Suarez Miranda: *Viajes de Varones Prudentes*, libro cuatro, cap. XIV. Lérida 1658)

See Jorge Luis Borges, *Historia universal de la infamia*, (Emercé editores, Buenos Aires, 1954).

37. The difference between the narrative of a past event and the description of an experience lived in the present, between Borges' story and Smithson's entropic utopia, is that one is presumed to be a fiction whereas the other makes the real into a fiction.

one that shares the beliefs of the increasingly utopian practices of the 1960s. The entire youth culture of that time staked its claim on an earthly paradise, a "Paradise Now" (to cite the title of one performance by the Living Theater). Smithson's utopian realizations, however, are even more meaningful since they embody these hallucinatory claims in the paradigmatic model of mapping, as if the "real" and its representation conflate into one and other, as if reality has become representation.

In Thomas More's *Utopia*, Utopia is an island. And on this island, which is actually located nowhere, the contradictions existing in the author's society are said to have been resolved so that everyone is perfectly happy with his or her living and working conditions. Of course, this ideal world exists in the narrative of a certain Raphael, More's fictive character, whose story the author is said to have heard. Etymologically, "U-topia" means "no-place." Utopia, then, is a figure drawn inside a text, laced within its narrative referring to nothing else than to this text and this figure. In this sense it is similar to Smithson's *Tour of the Monuments of Passaic*. But in Smithson's story the trip takes place in reality, and the map is right there under his feet, in the suburbs surrounding cities. Smithson's concern with Utopia is also evident in the fact that he made many drawings and three-dimensional maps of "Atlantis," the legendary island that is said to have sunk into the Atlantic Ocean. The legend of Atlantis, one might conclude, is a kind of entropic utopia.

With regard to the gallery/museum nexus, however, Smithson's site/non-site opposition can be better understood within the utopian paradigm. Smithson perceives museum and gallery space as places that are framed and contained. In his view, museums and galleries are containers for empty spaces, or entropic voids. So his non-site pieces—which were geometric sculptures filled with rocks, or heaps of aggregates topped with mirrors plates—are referred to as three-dimensional maps, containers within containers, fragments of sites, voids located in some place somewhere out there. To comprehend these extracted materials as equivalents for delim-

ited voids, and to presume that they operate just like maps—that they constitute an efficient system of references—means, conversely, that actual places (somewhere in nature) are not taken to be the opposite of language, but belong to its semiotic "nature." For the physical materials brought into the gallery space operate as synecdoches, becoming inclusive signs that stand for an open, unlimited site. This procedure, of course, does not happen in the "real," but belongs entirely to the semiotics of the infinite accumulation of simulacra. "The philosophism of 'reality,' Smithson says (he is speaking about the suburbs) 'ended some time after the bombs were dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Cinematic 'appearance' took over completely sometime in the late 50s. 'Nature' falls into an *infinite series* of movie 'stills.'"³⁸ The reference to cinema is hardly incidental, for it speaks of the language of the mass media in which everything is dislocated, desubstantialized, and virtualized. Indeed, the contemporary mediatized world is highly entropic.

Against Confinement of Art

The correspondance I wish to foreground between Dubuffet's and Smithson's conceptions of museum space relies on the fact that, for both of them, the museum represents a kind of entropic engulfment of art. Dubuffet believed that footprints in sand possess an art-effect at least as strong as that found on any other marked surface; footprints may be temporary, yet all marks will eventually vanish. His frenetic recordings of all kinds of traces or existing textures testify to his materialist stance. And his interest in *Art Brut* shows that, for him, (true) art can be found only where one does not expect to find it. Smithson, too, looked for the extremely remote in order to excavate art from its submission to museums and galleries. We should add, however, that his interest in the extremely remote was not

38. Robert Smithson, "A Museum of Language in the Vicinity of Art," in *op. cit.*, p. 74.

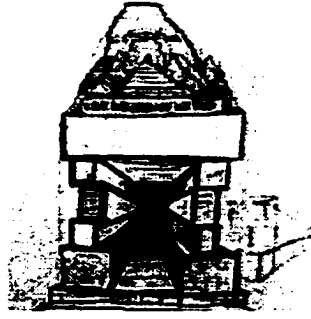
intended to portray a grandiose nature, as most photographs of the *Spiral Jetty* (1970) might suggest; rather, his intention was to explore denaturalized limit-places, such as the banks of the Passaic in which the work functions as an indicator of space, time, transformation and labour. Both Dubuffet and Smithson reacted against the incredible capacity of art institutions to absorb and obliterate prodigious numbers of art objects. For both of them, art from outside museums and galleries walls was a tool in the struggle against the restrictions and limitations which these institutions impose on art.

In Dubuffet's views of culture, there is a clear dialectical opposition between the arts and museums. When he says that art is deprived of its vitality in museums, whereas true art is everywhere (on street corners, in asylums, in the objects made by outsiders) except in the museum, the museum's inside/outside opposition is perceived and expressed in clear dialectical terms. In stating that art is never at the place where it is supposed to be and that it flourishes everywhere but in museums, Dubuffet completely reverses the commonly assumed cultural oppositions between art and non-art and disrupts the common understanding of the "nature" of art. Although he does not seem to be aware of it, it is the space of art that is at stake, not its nature. Different societies attribute different uses to "art" objects; in ours it is the aesthetic and exhibition functions that prevail. Dubuffet is thus bound up in his own contradictions because he sustains an essentialist ideology which causes him to believe that there is such a "nature" of art.

In Smithson's work and theory, a similar opposition is at stake, but in a more sophisticated manner. Again, the concern is with the space of art. And, once more, the world is seen as a place where artistic experiences may happen. It has an enormous art potential, not only because one may draw on its surface—as exemplified, for instance, by the *Spiral Jetty* (1970) (fig. 3.7)—paint, by pouring liquids on it—*Asphalt Rundown* (1969), or *Glue Pour* (1970)—make structures from it—*Spiral*



3.5



3.6



3.7

Fig. 3.5 Robert Smithson, *The Spiral Jetty*, 1970
 3.6 Robert Smithson, *The Museum of the Void*, 1968
 3.7 Robert Smithson, *Asphalt Rundown*, 1969

Hill, (1971)—delineate and frame surfaces on it—*Partially Buried Woodshed* (1970) (fig. 3.8)—and reflect it in mirrors—the various *Mirror Displacements* (1969), but also because nature has vanished into texts and photographs. "For me the world is a museum," he states. "Photography makes nature obsolete. My thinking in terms of the site and the non-site makes me feel there's no need to refer to nature anymore."³⁹ As a result of this de-differentiation between nature and culture, the outside world and the inner space of the museum, Smithson fantasized the entropic implosion of the Museum (fig. 3.6). Thus one encounters in Smithson's dialectics of the site/non-site a similar opposition to the one found in Dubuffet's "materiologies," "texturologies" and "raw art," where things happening in the world might eventually be experienced as artistic forms. As a result, the museum is everywhere and gallery and museums rooms are only supplemental frames and containers for maps and fragments extracted, not from nature, but from already mapped out artificial spaces. Of course, Dubuffet would certainly not think that all the places where one finds prints in the sand, marks on the road, etc. are somehow "natural;" but, some of these are. On the contrary, Smithson already viewed all places as always already

39. This statement is taken from a debate organized by the land artists. Michael Heizer, Dennis Oppenheim and Robert Smithson, in December 1968 and January 1969. *The Writings of Robert Smithson*, *op. cit.*, p. 174.

transforme by cultural activities. Hence, in a certain way, both of them remain opposite in spite of their similarities.

Indeed, if Dubuffet's and Smithson's dialectics in regard to institutional spaces can be compared to each other, they also differ considerably. As Smithson said to Paul Cummings in an interview, the anthropomorphism of Dubuffet and other American artists was exactly what he wanted to get rid of when he got involved with Minimalism in mapping out crystalloid forms and self-reflecting chambers.⁴⁰ Also, Smithson obviously does not think that art has an essence of any sort. For art could be anything, as one experiences sites as texts, maps, mirrored reflections, photographs, movies, or any other form. Nature, in Smithson's view, is something necessarily modified through culture, industry and communication systems.

Hubert Damisch has observed that Dubuffet's *oeuvre* is a continuous introduction (*entrée en matières*), an emerging into art, a starting over endlessly repeated.⁴¹ And, indeed, in spite of the diversity of his production, one perfectly senses that originary forms rise from matter. His works are very much like a primal "visual language" in formation, a sort of babble spoken before the articulated language begins to frame meanings, a sort of undifferentiated speech which, nonetheless, expresses fundamental needs.⁴² On the contrary, it must be said that Robert Smithson could be situated at the other end of the communication act, because he is not so much interested in primal speech as in the process of de-differentiation,

40. *Ibid.*, p. 146-147. Here, in addition to Dubuffet, Smithson names the American artists from whom he wanted to distance himself in this matter: de Kooning, Newman, Pollock, and Rauschenberg. As he was not interested in Bauhaus formalism, his breakthrough resulted from overcoming the "lurking pagan religious anthropomorphism" of the American School, as he called it.

41. Hubert Damisch, *Dubuffet; Entrée en matières*, *op. cit.*

42. For instance, Jean Dubuffet produced a series of literary texts, some of which were written in a form of "approximate gibberish," as Damisch calls it. See *Prospectus et tous écrits suivants*, p. 117-159. According to the scholar, in those texts, Dubuffet tried to find a living language, a language for holidays.

in the collapse of distinctions after culture has occupied the whole territory; for him, wreckage is as compelling as structure could be for others.

Unlike Buckminster Fuller, I'm interested in collaborating with entropy. Some day I would like to compile all the different entropies. All the classifications would lose their grids. Lévi-Strauss had a good insight, he suggested we change the study of anthropology into "entropology." It would be a study that devotes itself to the process of disintegration in highly developed structures. After all wreckage is often more interesting than structure. At least, not as depressing as Dymaxion domes. Utopian saviors we can do without.⁴³

Smithson spent so much energy in so many extremely engaging projects that he seems to have gone counter to this whole business of entropy by creating local orders in making sculptural environments. But, if one looks closer at these earth-works projects, one discovers entropy there too, since these works represent systems of reflections. For instance, *The Spiral Jetty* the water enclosed within the spiral ramp reflects both the sky and the surrounding place so that, in this reflection, the world itself becomes an image or, more precisely, a simulacrum, in which de-differentiation, once again, is at stake.

The transfer of utopian imagination and ideology into the utopian practices of everyday life, as happened in the 1960s—and as it is still perpetuated today via the "ravishment" produced by television and media culture—, indeed neutralizes the functions of the classical utopia; for, as the remote (unexisting) site is now reached within the always-already-present of the so-called virtual reality of the media, one feels one has entered into the (dis-)enchanted realm of the (anti)utopia forever. Yet today's anti-utopias, like those of Smithson, nevertheless belong to the realm of utopia, revealing it negatively, so to speak. Smithson's entropy hence appears to be a reversed utopia.

Finally, besides the anti-essentialism, and the anti-humanism that Smithson eventually opposes to Dubuffet's naive conviction that art can be freed from cul-

43. Robert Smithson, *op. cit.*, p. 181.

ture, his acute consciousness of the cultural limits of art (in gallery and museum spaces), radically distinguishes them from each other. Although Dubuffet is aware of the confinement of art within the circumscribed space of the museum, he never addressed this framing procedure as such. He acted as if the cultural system of the museum could be subverted simply by exhibiting and displaying other more primal forms of expression. This attitude, however, shows that he underestimated the museum's desire and capacity to incorporate any form of artistic manifestation. Also, the target of Dubuffet's attacks is the museum, not the gallery. Throughout the years, the *Compagnie de l'art brut* was very willing to mount exhibitions in many contemporary Parisian galleries. Dubuffet acted, therefore, as if the private gallery were an impartial business devoted only to the diffusion of art, whereas the museum, for its part, was supposedly interested in establishing cultural values, as if those two operations were separate and distinct.

Smithson's awareness of the physical limits of both the museum and the gallery (in fact, the consciousness of limitation as such), led him to other conclusions. In a symposium held in 1970 at the White Museum, Cornell University, where he, Dennis Oppenheim, Neil Jenney, Gunther Uecker, Hans Haacke, and Richard Long were invited to talk about earthworks, he argued that limits were now one of the most important of artists' concerns:

I do not think it matters where you are. You will always be faced with limits of some kind. I think that actually it's not so much expanding into infinity, it's that you are really expanding in terms of finite situation. I mean, there is no romantic urge towards the never-never land or something. I think that artists are now very conscious of strict limitations and they see them very clearly and can expand them in terms of other limitations. There is no way you can really break down limitations; it's a kind of fantasy of that you might have, that things are unlimited, but I think there's greater freedom if you realize that you have limits to work against and actually, it's more challenging that way.⁴⁴

44. Robert Smithson, *op. cit.*, p. 164.

It is this conviction that oriented his investigations of different locations, which were more or less remote places, such as the Salt Lake in Utah, or the fringes of the New Jersey suburbs. It is these limits, wherever they are, that need to be investigated. And yet, this is the same view that convinced him that gallery or museum spaces represent another limit of this kind. In Smithson's view, then, the opposition between inside and outside—of the gallery space—is not something that can be challenged and dismantled, but a matter of fact that must be acknowledged and played with, in contrast to Dubuffet who wished to escape this cultural condition in order to find authentic art.

While land artists like Robert Smithson have explored the physical limits of possible artistic experiences by pushing them as far as they did, it would still be misleading to think that their own new cultural limits completely overlapped the physical limits of art institutions. As physical and conceptual spaces conflate into each other in the communicational space of the simulacrum, as Smithson puts it, it is the whole contemporary culture that is addressed. But, nonetheless, how the various cultural apparatuses actually function remains obscure and abstract in their dialectics. To challenge the specific apparatuses of museum and gallery space and their limitations would be the business of other artists whose main concern was not so much the notion and fact of limitation, or the dialectics between the inside/outside of the museum and gallery, but the very limits of those particular devices which the museum and the gallery are.

From another perspective, one cannot accuse land artists of having blindly or self-indulgently fallen into the culture of commodity fetishism by making innumerable tradeable objects, as their projects cost enormous amounts of money. When Smithson created the *Broken Circle/Spiral Hill* at Emmen, Holland in 1971, this was the first industrial location he "reclaimed" in order to transform a place into

an art work.⁴⁵ Although the work was supposed to be a temporary installation, the neighbourhood people liked it so much that they requested that the abandoned sand quarry with its new Smithsonian design be transformed into a park. From then on, Smithson began to make "land reclamation proposals," which he addressed to various mining corporations with the purpose of recycling abandoned mines as works of art.⁴⁶

Both Dubuffet and Smithson have identified the museum and gallery spaces as places in which art vanishes and desintegrates. Wishing to rescue the works of art from this high cultural alienation, Dubuffet wanted to create the conditions that could permit him to disseminate those raw artistic products. By mounting the collection of *Art Brut* and negotiating its housing in a museum in Lausanne, however, he reenacted exactly what he criticized. More strategically, Smithson developed a practice in which the conditions of distribution were integrated into a larger context, which was his own work outside the gallery and the museum non-sites. Hence, works in the galleries were presented only as "negative" samples of entire fragments of the world seen as a immense network of a semiotic system. Insofar as the marking of the limits was not investigated per se, the conditions ruling the

45. See Robert Hobbs, *op. cit.*, p. 208-214.

46. To give a sense of the issues that this kind of project could produce, the first artist who actually created such site-works as "land reclamation," Robert Morris, is particularly enlightening with respect to the cultural and economic issues at stake. As traditional sponsorship began to decrease, and corporate funding began to envisage aesthetic intervention to mask the destructive impact of corporations on various landscapes, Morris formulated his opponents' objections in the following terms:

It might then seem that to practice art as land reclamation is to promote the continuing acceleration of the resource-energy-commodity-consumption cycle, since reclamation—defined aesthetically, economically, geographically—functions to make acceptable original acts of resource extraction."

Morris, however, argues that the real impact of this kind of practice is so ridiculously reduced in comparison with the enormous amount of destructive processes now occurring in a society based on high level of consumption of energy and primary resources that the attacks against these artistic practices are utterly beside the point. See Robert Morris, "Notes on art as/and Land Reclamation," *October*, no. 12 (Spring 1980), p. 88-102.

system of art would be maintained and reproduced. The museum's capacity to develop itself insofar as to integrate outer art practices, however, was not carefully perceived by Robert Smithson and other landartists. The contradictions emanating from the gallery-museum nexus, and particularly the issue of the inside/outside dichotomy, needed to be investigated in terms of cultural limits in order to unravel how precisely this opposition is actually experienced in the contemporary context of the "post-industrial" society; this is precisely what artists like Marcel Broodthaers, Daniel Buren, and Michael Asher, for instance, have deeply explored.

PART II

ENUNCIATION AND UTTERANCES IN THE ART OF THE SEVENTIES AND EIGHTIES

CHAPTER 4

ACTING ON ENUNCIATION: MARCEL BROODTHAERS' MUSEUM DIRECTION

Marcel Duchamp, I have argued, was a kind of "counterfeiter" who used the museum's authority to address the status of art within an economy in which growth seems to be based on speculation and stocks—in short, on chance and favorable circumstances. He was the first—if not the only artist for about fifty years—to acknowledge that art objects are tokens of exchange without any "referent" capable of fixing their values. As we saw above, although Marcel Duchamp truly believed that the value of art works resulted only from chance, he invested a lot of energy in efficient strategies in order to make his works very famous, hence highly valuable. Instead of rejecting the museum as the futurist and dada artists did, he used its system of endorsement to play his own disturbing game. Clearly in Duchamp's game, the museum was to be acknowledged as a given that one has to rely upon in order to beat the marketplace and the proliferation of art goods.

If the artists of the avant-garde rejected the institutionalization of art, particularly through the refusal of aesthetic conventions and museums that enclose art within a rarefied historical and formal framework, none of them went as far as Duchamp in targeting the market economy. A part of his production was even based on those links between museums and the art market. His *Bruno Check* (1965), for example, made it possible to draw an unlimited amount of money from the presumed *Mona Lisa Bank*. As many of his "counterfeit" pieces (his readymades, replicas, cheques and bonds) attest, the issue of the market economy was

not something he avoided. Indeed he exploited this phenomenon as a bizarrerie of contemporary artistic culture and the concomitant conditions of art practice.

Ever since their establishment, museums have been heavily criticized by artists, curators and writers alike. Countless reasons are given for these critiques. Quatremaire de Quincy, for instance, who was contemporary with the first museums, opposed them because they showed works outside their original settings, thereby emptying them out from their normal use and, hence, their meaning. A century later, Valéry complained that they were too noisy and crowded to favor aesthetic contemplation. And, closer to us, Adorno compared museums with mausoleums and protested that they entomb the living in the casts of a dead past. All of these critics, however, were in agreement in acknowledging the necessity of keeping art works apart from daily life. None of them claimed that museums should be attacked because their role consisted not only in setting up historical landmarks but, above all, in establishing quality standards for all other art objects currently circulating. If Futurists and Dadaists alike called for the destruction of the museums because they represented the culture of the past, they did not produce works that would analyse them so as to encourage their deconstruction. It came to Marcel Broodthaers to initiate the systematic investigation of various aspects of the museum within the context of late capitalist society. With Broodthaers, the "museum-as-an institution" becomes the art work; the museum, which is the container, the frame or the context, became both the content and the subject of Broodthaers' art. His strategies consisted in mimicking and parodying the museum envelope in order to show that art is produced first and foremost by a series of discriminating apparatuses and discourses of persuasion employed by institution officials.

The Museum Turned Inside Out

Marcel Broodthaers began his public life as a writer associated with the Belgian Surrealist movement. His orientation to visual art was signalled in 1964, when he exhibited a series of works that partook of the "aesthetic of the ready-made" at the Galerie Saint-Laurent in Brussels. The invitation card for this exhibition established the ambiguous status of art in contemporary culture, and the no less ambiguous position he wished to occupy in such circumstances. On one side of the card, Broodthaers stated that he, too, wanted to do something useful in life; on the other side, he claimed that he only wanted to make money by doing various insincere things which are dubbed art mainly by art dealers. The cards were printed over advertising images and left no mystery as to Broodthaers' declared intentions. In fact, such transparency about such venal intentions was as perplexing to viewers as the famous paradox of the liar who says quite openly, "I am lying." At the Galerie Saint-Laurent, Broodthaers exhibited many objects suggestive of various artistic disciplines such as painting, sculpture, architecture, music, poetry and even graphic and fashion design. Egg shells and empty mussel shells, for instance, were meant to evoke tempera painting and sculptures casts. Clearly, then, the subject of the exhibition was an allegorical representation of the arts.¹ More

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1. Benjamin Buchloh has borrowed Walter Benjamin's notion of "allegory" to designate those post-modern practices that enact this procedure by using appropriation, fragmentation, the depletion of meaning, the dialectical juxtaposition of fragments and the separation of signifier and signified (as happens, for instance, with montages). Marcel Broodthaers' work represented Buchloh's exemplary figure in this matter. See Benjamin Buchloh, "Allegorical Procedures: Appropriation and Montage in Contemporary Art," *Artforum*, vol. 21, no. 1 (September 1982), p. 43-56. Although Buchloh's suggestions concerning the relevance of the rhetorical figure of allegory for analysing the practices of the neo-avant-garde are fruitful in indicating how these practices differ from the historical avant-garde, it is obvious for me that their main attack against the modernist conventions rely on the fact that they operated on the edge of the institutions, and intervened on the enunciation rather than the content. Allegory, in my eyes, is only one specific form of utterance. As such, it can only utter something without modifying the conditions under which what is uttered is said.

symbolically, the exhibition included one cast of the remaining copies of *Pense-Bête* (fig. 4.1), a collection of Broodthaers' poems, which literally reified his own works as a writer. In addition, a segment of the top surface of an old bank counter was installed on wheels so as to stigmatize the whole system of exchange economy as it prevails in the art circuits.



Fig. 4.1 Marcel Broodthaers, *Pense-Bête*, 1964

Broodthaers soon came to understand that the main issue in the contemporary art field was not only the reification of art objects in the marketplace, but also the importance of the museums' contribution to this process. As a result, almost his entire production addresses the place and function of the museum within the context of modern politics and economy. From 1968 to 1975, his Museum became an

"artifact."² Initially, the *Musée d'Art Moderne: Département des Aigles* (1968-1972) designated a set of interventions called "sections," each of which revealed a different facet of the institution. In 1972, however, the term "museum" yielded to the general designation of "*Décors*" in Broodthaers' nomenclature as well as another type of intervention in which politics became more explicit. The *Musée d'Art Moderne: Département des Aigles* had a total of eleven "sections," each different from the next. One of these, the *Section du XIX^e Siècle*, was repeated once, thereby providing a supplementary exhibition. Exhibition periods varied from half a day—at Le Coq, where the plan of the museum was drawn in sand on the beach and erased by the tide (fig. 4.2)—to one year in Broodthaers' apartment on the Rue de la Pépinière in Brussels where the museum was inaugurated.

By exhibiting different facets of the museum, Broodthaers took over the position of the museum curator or director. In the process, the normative opposition of content/container was inversed, since the exhibition "container" is usually eclipsed by the art objects enshrined by various display devices and seductive speeches and



4.2 Marcel Broodthaers, *Musée d'Art Moderne: Département des Aigles*
Section Documentaire, 1969

2. The notion of "artifact" employed here refers to the idea that any object or thing exists only within a specific historical and cultural context. This object, as a part of a culture, carries significations and contributes to the general formation of the given society. Such a definition, however, risks avoiding the fact that any institution exercises a certain power over members of a society, or over other institutions, by imposing rules and norms of behavior and relationships of dominance. An institution in any given society occupies both a position of power, by defining rules and norms, and a position as a bearer of meaning. In the case of the museum, for example, this means that the institution could be regarded as the ultimate end of modern artistic production (setting specific conditions for artistic activity and recognition), as a player in financial speculations by art collectors, or as a marker of social distinction. These points have been demonstrated by various authors: H.S. Becker, *Art Worlds* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982); P. Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of Judgement* (London & New York: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1986); Raymonde Moulin, *The French Art Market: A Sociological View* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1987); Pierre Kuentz, "Le tête à tête: Exposé sur l'idéologie bourgeoise véhiculée par la lecture et le passage du 'tête à tête' au 'tête à texte' en littérature, *Esprit*, vol. 42, no. 12 (December 1974), p. 946-962. More recently, close to the work on my dissertation, there is the book of James Putnam, *Art and Artifact: The Museum as Medium* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 2001).

theories. For art objects, Broodthaers' museum substituted the material and human resources that enable museums to exist. These would include "speakers" invested with authority within the institution, "transportation material" like crates and trucks that enable art to move from place to place, print distribution systems like magazines, photographs and postcards that serve advertising purposes, and systems (labels, frames, security chains, and protective staff) that label works as "artistic."

By proceeding in this manner, Broodthaers established an equivalence between the content and the container. In this he followed Duchamp's transgressive readymades, which had already established that cultural institutions determine the conditions in which a given object is recognized as an art object. Broodthaers, however, subversively extended this strategy to incorporate the art institution itself. In his interventions, museums reflexively display their cultural and historical nature, exercising their authority and power by singling out works as "authentic," exhibiting and preserving the objects under their protection, and evaluating and certifying those that supposedly deserve our complete admiration. While it is obvious that Duchamp's readymades pointed out the institutional nature of the art object, Broodthaers addressed artifact constituted by the sanctifying institution, which can be transformed in its turn. Moreover, since Broodthaers' museum project consisted of successive events of varying duration, it gave us a history in which distinct moments had to be related one to another sequentially. We should, therefore, consider the project as a work in progress with a broad extension in time. In other words, Broodthaers' *Musée d'Art Moderne: Département des Aigles* mimicked the historicity of the museum even though it had a short life. This process clearly incorporated in Broodthaers' critical work may signify that the museum-artifact, this cultural institution, is also historical. Finally, Broodthaers resisted having his critique reified by ahistorical spectacles.

On September 19th, Broodthaers published a second letter in which he expressed his intention "to play on reality and its representation on the basis of an industrial technique."⁴ He was referring, of course, to the idea that art is now available through technical reproduction and, consequently, that he wanted to play upon this state of affairs by using simulacra. One should not forget that Broodthaers was fond of his fellow countryman, René Magritte, and aware of the implications of his work for theories of representation. Moreover, he identified himself as a "partner" of the American Pop artists⁵ and, later, with the French Nouveaux Réalistes.⁶

On September 27, in Broodthaers' own residence on the Rue de la Pépinière, the first installment of *Musée d'Art Moderne: Département des Aigles* opened under the name of "*Musée d'Art Moderne: Département des Aigles. Section XIX^e Siècle.*" The interior of the "museum" was full of crates used to transport art. On the walls, instead of art works, were postcards of 19th-century paintings. There was also a slide projection, as well as a stepladder and spotlights. Parked outside the apartment door was an empty truck rented from a company specializing in the transportation of art works. In the windows of the residence was an inscription with the word "Museum" clearly visible from outside. At the opening celebration, the self-appointed director Marcel Broodthaers himself, along with Johannes Cladders, then Director of the Städtisches Museum in Mönchengladbach, Germany, made speeches and led a discussion about the ways that institutions impose their views upon the alleged nature of art.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 44.

5. One of Broodthaers' first interventions in the visual arts consisted of various articles published in the *Journal des Beaux-Arts*. Some of these reviewed Pop Art exhibitions. Broodthaers' relationship with Magritte is well documented: not only did he openly adopt Magritte's troubling system of representation, or even reproduce some of that artist's devices, but he referred to him as an artist in many of his own works.
6. Broodthaers' relationship with the latter was more complex: although he wished to collaborate with them because he saw their movement as the European equivalent of American Pop-Art, and because many of his works could easily be compared to those of Daniel Spoerri. Pierre Restany and he disagreed on many issues. The "sociological" or "culturalist" attitude of Broodthaers was displeasing to the anarchistic Restany, who attacked culture as it exerts itself in the field of art.



4.4 Marcel Broodthaers, *Musée d'Art Moderne: Département des Aigles (Section XIX^e siècle)* (Opening). 1968

This section of the *Musée d'Art Moderne* focused on anything that is used to make the museums function, instead the art objects that such institutions exhibit. The content of this event—it had no works per se—included not only the museum's physical space and materials, but also its educational, promotional and political supports. By focusing on, and animating, the material and human resources necessary for exhibiting art, Broodthaers clearly revealed the cultural and social aspects of the museum. Museums, he showed, are very specific objects belonging to a particular culture and a moment in history. "Playing with reality and its representation" (as he put it) meant, therefore, that the cultural frame of representation, the museum, was made explicit.

Broodthaers' Semiotics

By occupying the position of museum director and curator, Broodthaers acted as a speaker within the system of art diffusion. Yet, as such a speaker, he

made a statement about the context in which the arts are confined within contemporary culture. In other words, his attitude as a speaker did not restrict him to statements only about art; rather, it enabled him to focus on the conditions under which art is practised—i.e. the conditions of its enunciation. In such conditions, it is not so much what is said that counts, but the potential for saying things otherwise. This was Broodthaers' uneasy position within the context of the contemporary art world, a place where everything seems to be utterable but where institutional authority alone prevails, and not necessarily by forbidding people from taking positions, but by aligning them with its own main orientations and mission.

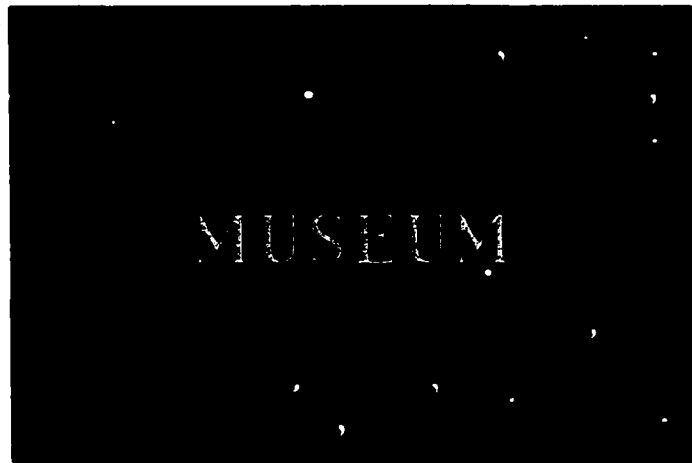


Fig. 4.5 Marcel Broodthaers, *Museum: Enfants Non Admis*, 1968

During the first year after the opening of his *Museum* (1968), Broodthaers made two plastic signboards bearing the inscription: "*Museum: Enfants non admis*." (Museum: Children not Admitted) (fig. 4.5)⁷. These were presented in positive and negative versions, and on both were these words, inscribed in relief. But

7. This translates as:

a form a surface a volume. servile. An open angle
Arch intersection angles a director a maid-servant a cashier
MUSEUM children not admitted.
all day to the ends of times

this was only the text. Scattered randomly across the signboard were also various punctuation marks. The words "MUSEUM enfants non admis," the punctuation marks and the rectangular edges of the sign were in a color that contrasted with the background. The remainder of the text was embossed, but not highlighted with a contrasting color. The colored elements shared one attribute, namely, that they were all linguistic symbols that function as framing devices: the rectangular edges of the signboard framed the image; the punctuation marks framed the organization of words into sentences; and the prohibition highlighted the restrictions and rules that determine and frame public conduct in relation to the museum. All represented the devices that govern the visibility of the content of paintings, sentences or exhibitions. In museums, objects lose something of their function in favor of a more rarefied visibility. On his "museum-signboards," Broodthaers inversed the relationship by erasing the content in such a way that only the framing devices remained. Hence his various devices point to the institutional conventions imposed on art practice and diffusion. And these conventions delimit "where," "how," and "when" art can exist, by "whom" it can be seen, in addition to implicitly or explicitly prohibiting inappropriate behaviours in relation to art, such as touching art objects.

The frame, a part of the context in which art is presented, is neither in the work itself nor in the space around it. Thus to work on the frame, as Broodthaers did, is to engage a critical procedure that concerns the enunciation rather than merely replicating the endless flow of utterances. It involves deconstructing the borders within which art works are forced to be produced and presented to the public. This attitude was not only Broodthaers' but that of a roster of intellectuals who became concerned with those apparatuses that create meaning and over-determine the reading of the works. One should remember that, as much as Louis Marin worked on the idea of neutral space (or u-topia) during the early seventies, other philosophers like Lyotard and Derrida investigated the issue of limits, frame,

and context in relation to art. According to Derrida, the frame is a device that belong neither to the content of a painting, nor to the external world; it is the artistic structure that makes a painting a painting, but does not belong to it; and yet, it is a fully artistic device, not simply a mundane object, that is essential to the existence of art works. According to Lyotard, *mutatis mutandis*, the museum can be seen as a framing device that does the same thing to works of art as such.⁸ As we will see even more deeply in the next chapter on Daniel Buren—who was present at the opening of Broodthaers' *Musée d'Art Moderne* on rue de la Pépinière—the issue of framing and limits became foremost and central to the transformation of cultural institutions; much more important, indeed, than the opposition, or interrelation between form and content that ran through the debates between the various avant-gardes, as well as in the ranks of the neo-avant-gardes.

For his part, Broodthaers oriented his activities towards enunciation not only by usurping the position of the speaker or excavating "framing devices" of the museum (fig. 4.6), but also by proffering a series of speech-acts that created a situation of communication between his museum and its public. In his wish to assert the authority of the *Musée d'Art Moderne: Département des Aigles*, he wrote and signed a series of letters on letterhead paper, and sent them to numerous people working in the art world. The tone of the letters did not correspond, however, to the usual official discourse of a museum, but resembled a more personal level of

8. On the issue of the institution as a "framing" apparatus see Jean-François Lyotard "La peinture comme dispositif libidinal," in *Des Dispositifs pulsionels* (U.G.E.: 1973), p. 237-280. In this article, Lyotard describes the world of art as a complex "framing" system in which the energy of the drive is captured. He identifies three levels of framing: the perspective projection, the frame as such, and the museum.

The either/or opposition that delimits the field of a painting and, by extension, of art, was developed by Jacques Derrida in "Le Parergon," which originally appeared in an abbreviated form in *Diagraphe* (nos. 2 and 4, 1974). It was subsequently published with other texts on painting and art in Jacques Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, Geoff Bennington and Ian McLeod trans. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press: 1987).

In bringing these texts to readers' attention, I want them to be aware of the fact that the issue of "frames" came to be debated in theory circles in France during this period, not without connections.



4.6 Marcel Broodthaers, *Musée d'Art Moderne: Département des Aigles* (rue de la Pépinière), 1968

exchange not truly relevant to the context of institutional communication. Furthermore, although the letters were clearly understandable syntactically and semantically, their inner coherence and contextual relevance were so diluted that they seemed totally devoid of content, leaving only the mark of their provenance—namely, the Museum letterhead—to speak for itself. While this was generally the rule, some passages served as comments on the cultural situation. For instance, in a letter dated October 11, 1968, in which Broodthaers claimed that he wants to be invited to official meetings in order to get more money for his museum, he also stated that the budget for the Ministry of Cultural Affairs should be increased by reducing that of the Ministry of Defence. At any rate, by the bizarre character of their content, Broodthaers' letters function chiefly at the level of utterance, for what they uttered within the context of the museum was different from the usual discourse.

The films that Marcel Broodthaers made while the *Musée d'Art Moderne: Département des Aigles* was in operation are instructive with respect to the semi-otic shift he sought to effect with his work. *La pipe, Quatre versions* (1968-1970); *Ceci ne serait pas une pipe (Un film du Musée d'Art Moderne)* (1968-1970); *La pluie* (1969)—all dealt with the process of erasing figures and texts, i.e. representations. In the first film, pipe smoke gradually filled the screen to such an extent that nothing could be seen but a cloud of smoke (fig.4.7). In *La Pluie*, Broodthaers is shown attempting to write a text in his garden just as it starts to rain; the rain dilutes the

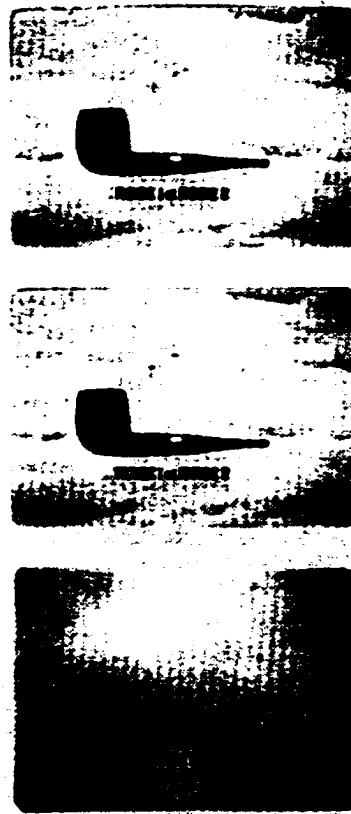


Fig. 4.7 Marcel Broodthaers, *La pipe*. 1969

ink and his letters become illegible on the paper. Only a year before he inaugurated the *Musée d'Art Moderne*, he worked on an installation in which a film,

Le Corbeau et le Renard (1967),⁹ was projected onto a screen covered with a stencilled poem. In front of the screen were a number of everyday objects, which were used in the making of the film. The text and images merged on a three-dimensional stand, so that all facets of the work shaded into their physical surroundings where the flickering projector beam eventually overexposed figures, objects, and texts.

In numerous works, installations and exhibitions, Broodthaers made notations ("Fig. O," "Fig. 1," "Fig. 2," etc.) under the drawings, texts and objects he exhibited. Sometimes he would even write these notations in such a way that they substituted themselves for the images or representations usually contained in the pictures. Such notations, of course, evoke the kinds of texts that accompany visual reproductions—as found, for example, in art history books. This stress on the system of notation used in art history and theory was meant to show how it serves as a framing device in this type of discourse. Using these notices as substitutes for images and representations had the effect of reducing the reference system to itself, to the system of representation in art.

During the summer of 1970, the *Section documentaire* of the *Musée d'Art Moderne: Département des Aigles* opened on the beach in Le Coq, Belgium (fig. 4.2). This was simply a museum blueprint or plan drawn in the sand and equipped with signs saying, "Toucher aux objets est absolument interdit" (Touching the objects is strictly prohibited.) Aside from stating this prohibition and reducing the museum to its plan (a mere frame), this work gave an allegorical treatment to one of the most crucial paradoxes of the museum in that it showed the ultimately ephemeral nature of the museum's construction, contradicting its supposedly timeless function as a preserver of objects. The prohibitions that follow from this mission to conserve cannot truly preserve objects from the destructive effects of human

9. The exhibition-installation took place at the Wide White Space Gallery in Antwerp from March 7 to 24, 1967.

contact. One of the characteristics of museums is that they regulate space and time. The museum is a locus where history is spatialized in conformity with certain rules and understandings, including the belief that exhibited objects have an inestimable value by reason of their documentary value. Of course, the fragility of documents and their evidentiary status vis-à-vis the past they illustrate and embody gives them an aura of historical authenticity.



4.8 Marcel Broodthaers, *Exposition littéraire autour de Mallarmé*, 1969

In 1969, Broodthaers treated a similar idea with Mallarmé's book, *Un coup de dé jamais n'abolira le hasard* (fig.4.9), as he did at his *Exposition littéraire autour de Mallarmé*, at the Wide White Space Gallery in Antwerp (fig. 4.8). Using the Gallimard edition of Mallarmé's poem, Broodthaers hid the sentences under colored strips of paper. In so doing, he transformed the text into a visual object, just as he had done with his own collection of poems, *Pense-Bête*, a few years

before. He also brought out a significant aspect of Mallarmé's work, namely, his arrangement of sentences on the page and his use of empty spaces as framing devices.¹⁰

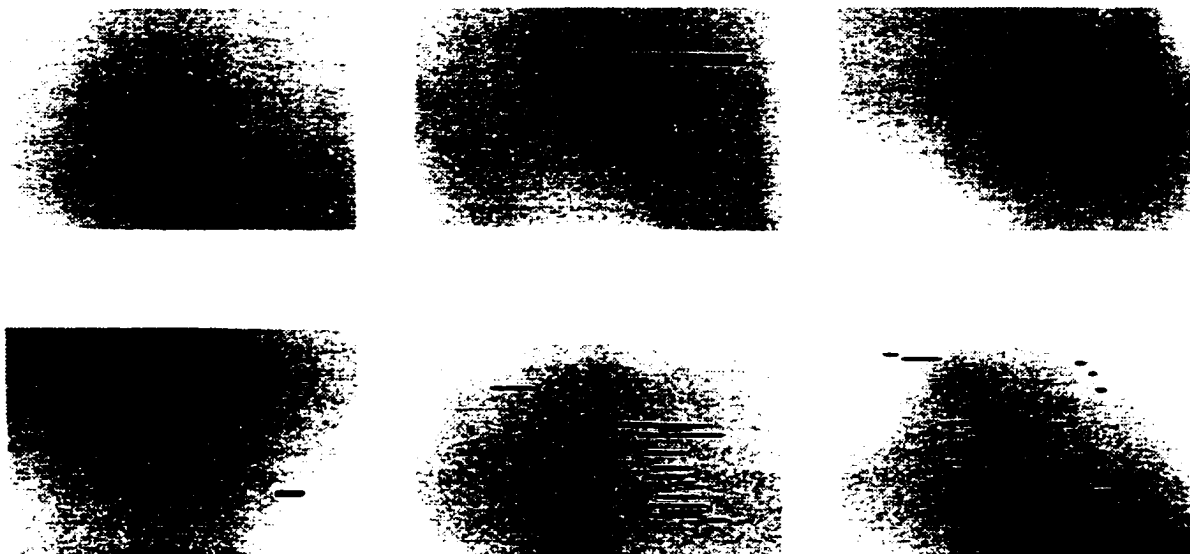


Fig. 4.9. Marcel Broodthaers, *Un coup de dé jamais n'abolira le hasard*, 1969

The process that Broodthaers brought to bear upon Mallarmé's work was, as I have said, similar to that employed in the artist's previous work. By focusing on erasure (with books, signs, pictures and the museum), Broodthaers showed that the significance of any construct is nothing but the frame itself. The frame is both an element external to representation (as part of the real world) and an internal element belonging to the construct of representation (as an active part of its fictional process, its internal constitutive condition, its system of regulation). In other words, with Broodthaers it is not so much what is said nor the way it is said that counts, but the context and the rules that govern utterances and the position from which statements are made.

10. Jacques Derrida has discussed this issue in "La double séance," *La dissémination* (Paris: Seuil, 1972), p. 199-318. The English translation is *Dissemination*, Barbara Johnson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983).

The opening of the *Musée d'Art Moderne: Département des Aigles* in Broodthaers' Brussels residence must be situated, therefore, within the entire body of his work, including that made before his interest in the museum became a central concern. Broodthaers also gave himself the authority to point out that art is a part of politics and war.¹¹ Yet he showed that this message, as much as the usual practice of power itself, comes from the periphery, the margins. For it is there, where the frame is located, that rules arise to govern what is said.

On Consumerism and Finance

Exactly a year after the opening of the museum in Brussels, Broodthaers closed it and opened the *Section XVII^e Siècle* in Antwerp. To mark the occasion, he organized a bus trip with his friends and art world associates from Brussels to Antwerp. During this new museum's tenure, which ran from September 27 to October 4, 1969, Broodthaers showed only postcards of 17th-century paintings, as if he had wanted to focus on a specific feature shared by his *Section XIX^e Siècle*. The key issue in this new section was the relationship between art works and their technical reproduction. By reducing the first version of the *Musée d'Art Moderne: Département des Aigles* to the exhibition of postcards of art works (instead of their actual physical presence), Broodthaers highlighted not only the whole question of originality and reproduction, but the touristic function of museums in contemporary culture, underlined by the bus trip from Brussels to Antwerp, and by the duration of the exhibition, which approximated the length of a typical vacation. That museums had become a form of consumerism was thus part of Broodthaers' demonstration.

11. After the closing of the *Musée d'Art Moderne*, Broodthaers devoted himself entirely to unravelling the relationships of museums with nations' bellicose displays of power. See, for example, his *Décors* (from 1971 on), his *Atlas*, or *L'Angelus de Daumier*, in which exotic plants and animals explicitly evoke the colonial past.



Fig. 4.10 Marcel Broodthaers, *Musée d'Art Moderne: Département des Aigles, Section Financière*, 1971

Between October 5 and 10, 1971, Broodthaers put his *Musée d'Art Moderne* up for sale at the Köln Kunstmarkt (fig. 4.10). The stated reason was bankruptcy. On this occasion, Broodthaers had 19 book jackets printed and used them to cover catalogues of the Cologne Art Fair. These jackets bore the inscription, "Musée d'art moderne à vendre pour cause de faillite" (Museum of Modern Art for sale, due to bankruptcy); the words "Musée," "à vendre" and "faillite," were printed in larger letters to highlight the paradox of this artificial situation. Art works may certainly be sold; this is obviously the chief business of the Cologne Art Fair. But the notion that a museum—a preserving force apparently impervious to the machinations of the art market—could itself be sold was more startling and harder to comprehend. The announcement of the sale of the *Musée d'Art Moderne: Département des Aigles* confirms the interpretation given here, namely, that Broodthaers converted the content of the museum into its container and established an equivalence between the two. This strategy revealed that the institution per se is just as much an artifact as the

objects it contains; consequently, it is subject to the historical circumstances of its growth. By declaring his museum bankrupt and putting it up for sale, Broodthaers unexpectedly emphasized the economic dimension of museums everywhere. Yet he also questioned how public institutions like museums can declare bankruptcy if they always already represent sheer expenditure on the part of the those in power—an expenditure of symbolic goods that serve to exhibit their social position as the legitimate possessors of social and cultural power.

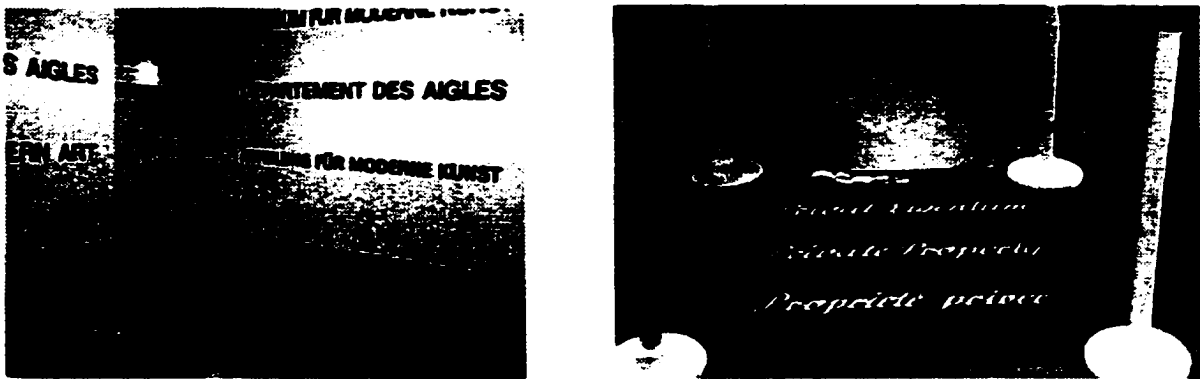


Fig. 4.11 Marcel Broodthaers. *Musée d'Art Moderne: Département des Aigles, (Section d'Art Moderne)*, 1972

The last section of *the Musée d'Art Moderne: Département des Aigles: Section Publicité* (Advertising Section) was held in the main exhibition hall at the Kassel Documenta in 1972. Like the *Section Publicité*, the *Section d'Art Moderne* (fig. 4.11), which was installed in the Neue Galerie on the same occasion, the latter took museum facilities and infrastructures as its point of departure. In the centre of the room, the words "private property" were written in French, English and German on a section of the floor that had been painted black and enclosed by security chains. In the course of the exhibition, the words on the floor were replaced by various French terms directly related to art [Peindre, Écrire, Copier (To paint, To write, To copy)] and by others that, although art-related, marked a departure from the usual art vocabulary [Échanger, Informer, Pouvoir (To exchange, To inform, To be able). Thus, in an apparent oxymoron, the opening of *the Musée d'Art Ancien*:

Département des Aigles, Galerie du XX^e Siècle terminated the *Musée d'Art Moderne: Département des Aigles, Section d'Art Moderne*. It must be added that the two installations at the Kassel Documenta were held in the wake of the *Section des Figures*, partly overlapping Broodthaers' most developed exhibition, which was held in Düsseldorf at the same time. The *Section Publicité* addressed the issue of art and the economy in some of its dimensions, since the reproduction of various aspects of the eagle effigy contributed to the commodification of the image. The two installations at the Documenta show revealed that with his *Section des Figures* Broodthaers had come to the point that it was now necessary to call this business to a halt, even though the critique inherent in his museum had been effective before. In the catalogue of the *Section Publicité* and in the handout available at the exhibition, Broodthaers stated his reasons for closing his museum. It was, he said, becoming too similar to other museums and institutions like Documenta, parodying art with politics and politics with art.

On Politics and Knowledge

The most impressive moment of Broodthaers' *Musée d'Art Moderne: Département des Aigles (Der Adler vom Oligozän bis Heute)* was the *Section des Figures* (fig. 4.12), held in the Städtische Kunsthall in Düsseldorf from May 16 to July 9, 1972. For this section, he assembled more than three hundred specimens representing the eagle in paintings, sculptures, prints and other sources. These representations were drawn from high art as well as from advertising, popular culture and traditional utilitarian contexts. The Kunsthalle exhibition was supplemented by a catalogue whose front cover featured three representations of an eagle egg, and detailed the provenance of the artifacts displayed. By bringing together such disparate and heterogeneous objects, Broodthaers' fictitious museum evoked the pop-

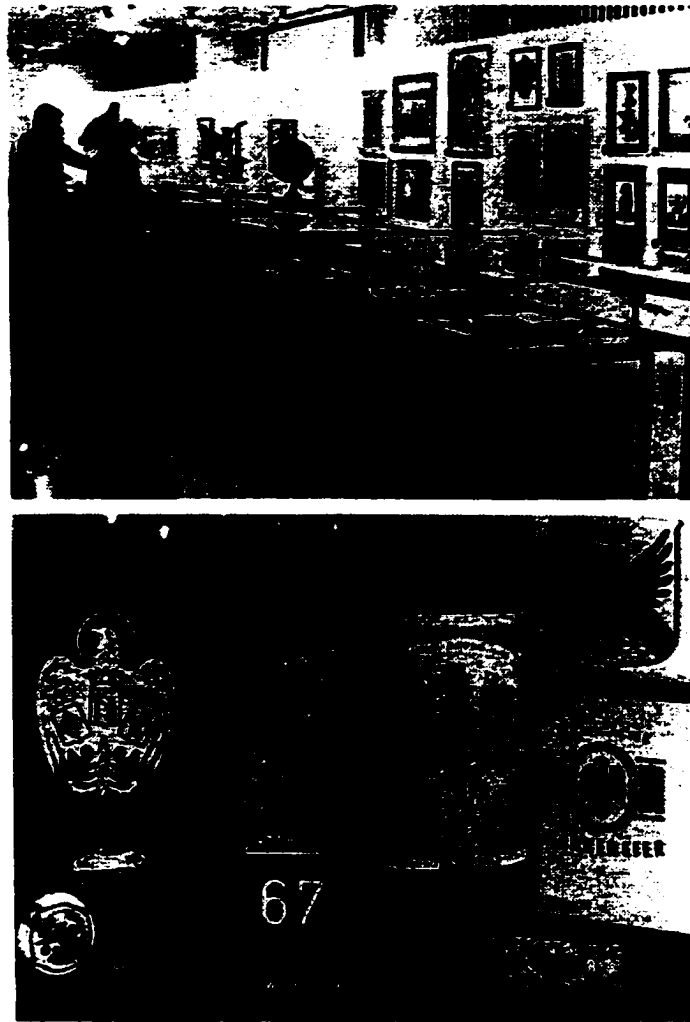


Fig. 4.12 Marcel Broodthaers, *Musée d'Art Moderne: Département des Aigles, (Section des Figures)*, 1972

ular bric-a-brac museum and, indeed, all situations in which art is not radically distinct from other cultural artifacts. In it we recognize the (simulated) conditions so much feared by modern artists, who thought that art ought to be protected from the venal trade applied to other commodities, such as those found in department stores and the marketplace. Indeed Broodthaers went even further in diluting the distinctiveness of art commodities by putting up a sign that read "This is not a work of art" (in French, English and German) beside each object on display. As in ethnographic museums, the objects were numbered; the naming, however, was

arbitrary. This operation, of course, must be linked to Duchamp's readymades and Magritte's *The Treachery of Images* (1926).

The link between the *Section des Figures* and the readymade is justified for several reasons. First, the statement uttered by Duchamp's readymade must be understood as a question: is this a work of art or not? Broodthaers' *Ceci n'est pas une oeuvre d'art* proclaims a clear "no." Second, the readymade revealed the commodity status of all art works as objects that can be traded on the market. Third, it challenged assumptions about art. By presenting a urinal at the first Independents show in 1917, Duchamp forced the artistic community to consider the object's status and its potential for recognition as art. Although the first recipients of Duchamp's urinal refused to pronounce on the matter, subsequent art institutions agreed to put it up for discussion by implicitly acknowledging the issue's legitimacy and, in the process, resolving the predicament. The *Section des Figures* inversed the conceptual process instituted by the readymade, not by asserting that objects like bottle racks are sculptures, but instead by denying the privileged status of the art objects on display, presented along with many other artifacts showing the image of an eagle.

Broodthaers combined such disparate objects as Richter's *Adler* (1972), which was clearly recognizable as a work of art, with totemic stone carvings that might have seemed more at home in a museum of anthropology. By defining all of his exhibition entries as "not a work of art" (although some appeared to be art objects while others seemed to be simple artifacts), Broodthaers constructed a self-negating contradiction. Like Duchamp's readymade, Broodthaers' statement that "this is not an art object" erased the distinction between artifacts and art works. In Broodthaers' work, however, this erasure was enacted by the negation of the field of art as an autonomous entity. This leads us again to the key point that the context serves as one essential condition for art's acceptance as art, whether or not this is officially recognized.

While the sentence, "This is not a work of art," is clearly linked to Duchamp's readymades, it is just as obviously related to Magritte's *The Treachery of Images*. For the sentence written on the surface of that painting, *Ceci n'est pas une pipe*, denies the figural representation of the pipe depicted above. The negative statement below the image produces a very complex interrelation between the sentence—the image is denied at the linguistic level yet asserted at the visual level—and that thing in the world to which both refer. The contradictory information in Magritte's work relies on the linguistic shifter "ceci" (this), since this empty syntagm belongs to the realm of language and representation instead of reality¹² Thus the question arises: what does the shifter "ceci" in Magritte's painting refer to? Does it refer to the image above the sentence? Or to the thing substituted by its representation. This interplay of signifier, signified and referent, this juxtaposition of something read and something seen and their interrelationship within a picture, all manifest both the process of representation and its deconstruction. In a certain way, this same interplay also shows the process of falsification or illusionism in both images and language.¹³ To say that representation is shown as a "process of falsification" does not mean, however, that the representation itself is false; rather, it simply means that it is a process of cultural construction. In other words, beyond the representation and the relationship between the signifier and signified in language and pictures, there is another process that allows a representation to be a representation. This constitutes a cultural environment which promotes the belief that

12. For an analysis of shifters and the «index» within the context of artistic works, see Rosalind Krauss, "Notes on the Index, Part 1 and Part 2," in *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1986), p. 196-219.

13. For a rigorous analysis of this painting as a deconstruction of a theory of representation, see Michel Foucault, *This is Not a Pipe* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1982). It is worth mentioning that Marcel Broodthaers was familiar with Michel Foucault's interpretation of illusionism and the play on representation in Magritte's painting, *The Treachery of Images*, and in his work as a whole. In the catalogue of the *Section des Figures*, he explicitly mentioned Foucault inviting people to read his text on Magritte.

the thing doing the representing (the signifier) is indeed the thing represented. By denying that the representing agency is the thing itself, Magritte created a distance between the signifier and the signified and showed that it is this distance which gives the illusion that the picture or name of a thing is the thing itself.

Transposing this process to works of art in a more general sense, Broodthaers furthered the deconstructive analysis begun by Duchamp and Magritte by combining the proposition implied in Duchamp's readymade ("this is a work of art") with its denegation; this combination leads to the assertion that works of art are not works of art. By denying that art works are what they claim to be in the museum, the institution itself is shown to be a process of falsification.

The *Section des Figures* of the *Musée d'Art Moderne: Département des Aigles* was the first instance in which Broodthaers had content composed of real art works; even if they shared their status with other artifacts that were immediately recognizable as not art objects. As the title *Section des Figures* indicated, this content was composed of figures, more specifically the figure of the eagle in all of its many guises. It may appear strange that the collection was organized in this way, instead of in relation to a genre, discipline, period of art history or theme. But, it could be said that by organizing an exhibition exclusively around the unifying theme of the "eagle," Broodthaers was treating the curatorial activity of thematic exhibition ironically.¹⁴ Even if one aspect of Broodthaers' *Section des Figures* concerned the classification systems that necessarily exist in every museum institution.

14. This point was suggested by Crompton, who claimed that Broodthaers' critique concerned the work of the museum sociologist and/or curator on classification. In his view, Broodthaers' attack was directed less at the museum as an institution and more at the deeds performed within its walls by curators who usurp the true creator's realizations. See Michael Crompton, *Marcel Broodthaers* (London: Tate Gallery, 1980). Also see Douglas Crimp, "This is not a Museum," in *Marcel Broodthaers* (Minneapolis: Walker Art Center; New York: Rizzoli, 1981), p. 71-91; and Benjamin Buchloh, "Open Letters, Industrial Poems," in *Broodthaers: Writings, Interviews, Photographs* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1988), p. 67-100. Crompton's position on this is different from that of Crimp and Buchloh, who believed that the institution of the museum itself was the target of Broodthaers' criticism.

this was not the only dimension of the museum treated in this singular component in the *Musée d'Art Moderne*.

Broodthaers acknowledged the fact that works of art lose their use-value within the context of their technical reproduction, that they become mere commodities (as Walter Benjamin demonstrated) even when taken into collections.¹⁵ As Crimp paraphrased Broodthaers' statement about the aims of his museum:

The public is confronted here with the following art objects: eagles of all kinds are brought with weighty symbolic and historical ideas. The character of this confrontation is determined by the negative inscription: "this is not... this is not a work of art." This means nothing other than : Public, how blind you are! Thus, either-or: either information on so-called modern art has played an effective role, in which case the eagle would inevitably become part of a method; or the inscription appears as mere nonsense—that is, it does not correspond to the level of discussion concerning, for example, the validity of the ideas of Duchamp and Magritte—and the exhibition simply follows the classical principles: the eagle in art, in history, in ethnography...¹⁶

Broodthaers's supposed principle of classification, the figure of the eagle, is made nonsensical by the arbitrariness of its selection. By placing this figure at the centre of the "mythology" of representation, Broodthaers joined Magritte in deconstructing representation. In his critique, however, Broodthaers extended the principle of representation to include art institutions as a whole. In other words, for him they were representations that needed to be constructed (and deconstructed), not only in texts and art but through institutions as well.

Broodthaers' selection of the ubiquitous eagle ironically parodied the so-called "enlightened" selection of the museum exhibition. To this he opposed his

15. In a subsequent exhibition called "*Décor*" (the Museum of Modern Art, Oxford), Broodthaers made the following statement, which was quoted by Crompton: "I do not believe it is legitimate to define Art other than in the light of one constant factor, namely, the transformation of art into merchandise..." (p. 66). Michael Crompton, "In Praise of the Subject," in *Marcel Broodthaers* (Minneapolis exhibition, *op. cit.*), p. 14-69.

16. See Crimp's article, *op. cit.*, p. 85 (quoted from "Alder, Ideologie, Publicum, in Der Alder vom Oligozän bis Heute," vol. 1, p. 16).

"Public, you are blind!" For museums are places not of enlightenment but of blindness because they offer a seemingly lucid, specific reading of history through the opacity of arbitrary classifications. They are, furthermore, places of blindness because, at the same time that the process of representation is manifested in the objects on display in any given museum, the concomitant process of reification enacted upon these objects transforms all of them into purely visible, material objects drained of any use-value. And the seemingly pure visibility of objects placed before us through this process of reification is ultimately nothing more than a construct.

Broodthaers' principle of classification, the emblematic figure of the eagle, was not totally absurd, of course. Its function was to foreground and emphasize the image of power it embodies. The figure of the eagle itself has been recognized and used as a very powerful image in many different contexts including mythology, religion and politics. As a symbol, it has served, for example, as an image of pervasive imperial might. The extent of this figure's use in countless cultures and civilizations is nothing short of amazing, and the reduction of all these images and artifacts to cultural products is a most effective way of revealing their ties with power. The secular separation of the arts from other dimensions of reality such as politics, religion and knowledge is negated in Broodthaers' *Section des Figures*, which voids the usual formal comparisons between figures. By repeating the same symbol to the point of saturation, it brings aspects other than the aesthetic to light, so that both ethnographic knowledge and political analysis can emerge from the countless documents. Benjamin Buchloh, who has taken great pains to keep Broodthaers' legacy alive, in editing an anthology on M. Broodthaers' work, or in reconstructing the *Section Publicité* of his Musée d'Art Moderne at the Marian Goodman Gallery in New York, contrasts his method with avant-garde collage and photomontage¹⁷; for

17. See Benjamin Buchloh, *Marcel Broodthaers*, in *October*, vol. 42 (Fall 1987), and, *Marcel Broodthaers; Section Publicité, Musée d'Art Moderne* (New York: Marian Goodman Gallery, 1995).

Broodthaers stages or enacts the archive by respecting its ordered and serial presentation, its accumulation of supplemental materials (magazines, invitation cards, catalogues, etc.) and its seemingly indiscriminate resources. Buchloh has suggested that Broodthaers, unlike the historical avant-gardes, was not at all optimistic about the so-called redemptive function of art; he was, says Buchloh, more apt to believe in its mnemonic feature and task.

Broodthaers' mounted his *Section Publicité* installation by recycling his previous work. His task with this piece consisted in preserving the memory of the procedures he had used in his previous works, including the ongoing *Musée d'Art Moderne: Département des Aigles*. Indeed some of the photographs and documents in the *Section Publicité* were taken from the *Section des Figures*. The method was also "illustrated" by showing Duchamp's *Fountain* and Magritte's *The Treachery of Images*, as well as numbered labels and repeated images of egg shells. This material was presented in several showcases, in addition to being framed and hung on the outside wall of the pavilion in a mode that suggested a documentary mode of presentation. Inside the room, next to the showcases, were objects brought in from Broodthaers' previous shows. This, along with several empty frames and showcases with documents in them, clearly established the theme of the installation, namely, the diffusion and distribution of art. Here, then, art works, art advertising and the museum, along with frames and other exhibition devices, were subsumed within the more general context of advertizing. In connection with the latter, Broodthaers wrote: "VIEW according to which an artistic theory will function as publicity for the artistic product in the same manner that the artistic product functions as publicity for a regime under which it was conceived..."¹⁸ Unlike the con-

18. Quoted in Buchloh's catalogue, from the magazine *Interfunktionen* vol. II, Cologne, 1974, p. 89. The French original read as follows:

AVIS selon lequel une théorie artistique fonctionnerait comme publicité pour le produit artistique, le produit artistique fonctionnerait comme publicité pour le régime dans lequel il est né.

...

ventional presentations of museums and galleries, however, the installation in the *Section publicité* was arranged like Aby Warburg arranged his documents in his studio in order to set up a visual apparatus more practical for an understanding of transhistorical and anthropological phenomena.¹⁹

Against Reification: Knowledge of Art and History

As we see from Marcel Broodthaers' museum project, to question the institution of art in a contemporary context is to question the status of the art object itself, particularly its status as an object that seems to have lost its use value though, in reality, it was merely hidden behind aesthetic appreciation. Although the economic system which drives the circulation of art works as merchandise is obvious in the auction house and gallery system, this is it not the case in the museum world, or in the realm of juried public exhibitions. It was precisely this more obscure aspect that Broodthaers sought to show explicitly.

It is perhaps understood in modern society that works of art have been transformed into commodities. Ostensibly neutral in content and simply ornamental in character, modernist art seems fully autonomous. The museum has also played a role in this process of reification and commodification. Museum collections, for example, reflect institutional acquisition policies founded on judgments of quality and connoisseurship. Contemporary art museums, in particular, serve to

19. I must point out here that "transhistorical" does not mean "ahistorical." The former alludes to the idea that certain images, motifs and figures may, through various means, reappear with similar fields of meaning at various points in history. Warburg believed that this could be demonstrated. (Cf. Georges Didi-Huberman, *Devant le temps* (Paris, Minuit, 2000), and Philippe-Alain Michaud, *Aby Warburg et l'image en mouvement* (Paris: Macula, 1998) See also Benjamin Buchloh, "Warburg's Paragon? The End of Collage and Photomontage in Postwar Europe," *Deep Storage*, ed. by Ingrid Schaffner and Matthias Winzen, Munich and New York, Prestel, 1998, p. 50-60.

consecrate new tendencies in art and procure them official recognition. The condensed judgement they provide produces an effect of reification, to say the least.

For a critical artist in late capitalist society, an awareness of this reification and of the role that museums play in it could lead to cynicism. Because the art object has lost its capacity or power to clear a space for thinking and appeared instead as merely decorative or factual, it becomes absolutely necessary to apprehend art at another level, namely, that of a document inseparable from its cultural and social context.

How is it possible, therefore, to restore cognitive reflection to art without longing for a utopian moment grounded in the subjectivity of artistic creation, or in social promises of liberty and freedom? Different possible responses to this problem do exist; indeed Broodthaers' work represents one of these cogent possibilities, as do the installations of Buren and Asher and the photographs of Haacke and Lawler. What these artists share is their refusal to aestheticize life with pleasant or expressive objects and environments. In other words, Buren, Asher, Haacke, Broodthaers and Lawler offer an escape from the reification of the art object by opting for an awareness of the conditions in which art is practised today.

The rejection of both "representation" and "reification" exemplified by all of the artists we have looked at could, I suppose, lead to mere silence, or to the refusal of any kind of production whatsoever. (This attitude—apparently the most radical—is in fact a retreat, not a critique.) The refusal of reification in the work of Broodthaers and these other artists is not, as we will see, a refusal to make objects (as many conceptual artists have claimed to do) but an affirmation of a critical confrontation with the forces that are operative in art institutions. In the field of the visual arts, deconstruction is a very delicate procedure, one that demands both an awareness and an active production of objects capable of escaping reification by negating themselves as such.

CHAPTER 5

INSTITUTIONAL LIMITS ON THE EDGE, DANIEL BUREN'S CULTURAL INTERVENTIONS

The great obsession of the nineteenth century was, as we know, history; with its themes of development and of suspension, of crisis and cycle, themes of the ever-accumulating past, with its great preponderance of dead men and the menacing glaciation of the world. The nineteenth century found its essential mythological resource in the second principle of thermodynamics. The present epoch will perhaps be above all the epoch of space. We are in the epoch of simultaneity; we are in the epoch of juxtaposition, the epoch of the side-by-side, of the dispersed. We are at the moment, I believe, when our experience of the world is less that of a long life developing through time than that of a network that connects points and intersects with its own skein.

Michel Foucault¹

The original museum had an historical point of view. All the museums internationally, since the nineteenth century, were built in a series of rooms which you had to walk through chronologically because they started with a certain point in art history and ended with another. If you build a museum for modern art, for contemporary art especially, there is no chronology; it is happening altogether at the same time.

Johannes Cladders²

1. Michel Foucault, "Of Other Spaces," *Diacritics*, vol. 16, no. 1, (Spring 1986), p. 22-27.

2. Johannes Cladders interviewed by Juddy Annear, "Möchengladbach: In the Hands of the Museum Director and the Architect," *Parachute*, no. 46 (March-April-May 1987), p. 45-49.

The range of analyses that try to explain the rebellions of the sixties is amazingly extensive. The spectrum runs from paranoid theories of plots by political officials to more compelling models which interpret the events in question as manifestations of a social crisis resulting from contradictions between maladjusted institutional structures and the considerable development of technical means of production in the aftermath of the Second World War. Neoliberal sociologists, for their part, saw youth's claims to immediate satisfaction—so characteristic of media and consumer society—as the expression of new forms of subjectivity. Less satisfactory as a general theory, yet more satisfying in analyzing particular events, is positivist sociology's view of the uprisings as a consequence of an uncontrolled accumulation of incidental events that attained their climax in the students' and workers' revolts. Third-worldists, on the other hand, explain the conflicts in advanced economies as internal adjustments to conditions produced by the political and economic liberation of former colonies like Algeria and Vietnam.

If contemporary neoliberals like Daniel Bell, Christopher Lasch and Gilles Lipovetsky seem to be right in suggesting that late capitalist consumerism leads to narcissism and conflates social demands with untrammelled individual desires, we must nonetheless consider that the pursuit of immediate pleasure was not the main target of sixties' rebels. Granting that labor, for instance, was no longer accepted at face value—the way it was during the nineteenth century and at the dawn of the twentieth—, this does not mean that it became only a means to individual gratification through the possession of material goods. Workers actually demanded a say in the organization of labor as well as control over their unions. Although individualism and narcissism clearly reached many social strata in first-world countries, various parameters of group identification—like gender, sexual orientation and ethnic or linguistic community—were not completely displaced by personal achievements, nor did they become completely outdated. If, in the sixties, demands for

immediate freedom and happiness were disseminated largely through slogans like "It is forbidden to forbid!," or "Under the cobblestones, the beach!," it would be utterly misleading to ignore the fact that the various cultural institutions represented the main focus of concern for a whole generation of rebels.

Within this cultural context, it is not surprising to find that a number of artists echoed these concerns and expressed criticism through their art. As I intimated in a previous chapter, institutional critique mainly took the form of the appropriation of language and the reclamation of space. Against the hegemonic power of capital over public institutions, the appropriation of both language and space came into focus, and both factors were considered intrinsic conditions of emancipation. For instance, Jean Dubuffet's anticultural position was framed in relation to the institutional space of the museum, and his formula for artistic liberation called for a return to primitive modes of expression both in language and in the visual arts. And Robert Smithson's site/non-site dialectics dealt directly with the question of the space of art, instead of ignoring it in the name of individualistic freedom of expression. Yet, as I have argued, his investigation of space was bound up strictly with a theory of visual simulacra and communication, both of which were connected with his postulate of an entropic de-differentiation of the oppositions between things and words on the one hand, and nature and culture on the other. Indeed Smithson went so far as to predict that museums would vanish into an entropic void as much as the world itself became filled with museum relics and ruins. The contrast between Dubuffet and Smithson is flagrant: while the former sought an "Ur-Sprache" (originary language) and envisioned a more authentic and "primitive" form of art, a mere decade later Smithson acknowledged that there had been a complete conceptual transformation of the distinction between things and words, so that every existing thing became semiotic and hence cultural.

In the sixties, space and language came together in the protests of cultural activists.³ This was true not only for the students who occupied the universities and made their voices heard through banners, leaflets, manifestos, graffiti and the like: it also held for the workers who began taking over their labor unions on behalf of greater democracy and the right to have a voice within their own organizations. Workers even demanded a role in the management of their employers' companies, as well as more leisure time. This was also the case with African-Americans, who demanded equal access to social space and institutions hitherto reserved for whites, and who began to take possession of their own community services and cultural platforms. We could extend this list by mentioning the women who marched on behalf of equal access to social space and created, as venues for their own needs, bars, theatres, birth control clinics, magazines and publishing houses. The quintessential expression of this concern with space was the rebirth of ecological activism stemming from the counterculture's opposition to industrial productivism. In short, the issue was to bring institutional power more in line with people's real needs: instead of demanding progress in the technical means of production, sixties' activists acted on the premise that the development of society as a whole depended on the right to freedom of expression and equal access to specific institutional space.

All of these movements were critical responses to the "generalized universal industrialization" that was beginning to occupy every territory of production, consumption and communication in the aftermath of the Second World War.⁴

3. In their enlightening introduction to a collective publication [*The 60s without Apology*, Sohnya Sayres, Anders Stephanson, Stanley Aronowitz and Frederic Jameson Eds. (Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press and Social Text, 1984)], the editors convincingly demonstrate how important the issue of "space-reclamation" was in the sixties.

4. Frederic Jameson, "Periodizing the Sixties," (*The 60s without Apology, op. cit.*), p. 207. In this text, Jameson refers to Ernest Mandel who observed that mechanization, standardization and industrialization came to cover the entire sphere of the existence.

This includes the mechanization and standardization of the fields of leisure and culture, as Frederic Jameson has shown:

Late capitalism in general (and the 60s in particular) constitutes a process in which the last surviving internal and external zones of precapitalism—the last vestiges of non-commodified or traditional space within and outside the advanced world—are now ultimately penetrated and colonized in their turn. Late capitalism can therefore be described as the moment in which the last vestiges of Nature which survived on into classical capitalism are at length eliminated: namely the third world and the unconscious.⁵

Consequently, during the sixties and seventies it became clearer to a whole range of intellectuals that, in contrast to traditional leftist orthodoxies, power in late capitalist society is not concentrated in government; rather, it is diffused throughout all social and cultural institutions, from the family, school, police, army and psychiatric hospitals to the prisons, law courts, streets and architecture. In short, power is ubiquitous.⁶ It was viewed as not residing in government or in the hands of a cohesive group; instead, it was said to be spread throughout the social fabric, in its institutions, structures, laws and normative behavior. Even within the art world,

5. *Ibid.*

6. Louis Althusser's seminal text, "Idéologie et appareils idéologiques d'État" (first published in *La Pensée*, no. 151, June 1970), constituted a breakthrough in Marxist orthodoxy. It stated that power was at work in various State apparatuses, some of which are ideological, like the educational system or the arts, while others are repressive, like the police and the judiciary system. In this perspective, it is not the Government or the Public Administration only that embody the power, which is seen to infiltrate the entire society through its norms and institutions. Moreover, it follows that economy determines the social organization only in the last instance; in other words, cultural and social systems benefit from a certain autonomy. See English translation "Ideology and Ideological Apparatus," in *Essays on Ideology* (London: Verso, 1984) p. 1-60. In the sixties, three books by Michel Foucault [*Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason* (New York: Vintage books ed., 1973, c 1965); *Birth of the Clinic: An Archeology of Medical Perception* (New York: Vintage books ed., 1994, c1973); and, above all, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York: Vintage books ed. 1979, c 1975)] best demonstrated the distribution of power throughout various social and cultural structures, including how power is translated into space organization. Gilles Deleuze's *Foucault* (London: Athone, 1988) pays tribute to Foucault's major discovery that power is not located in a specific place but needs to be mapped out with all its complexities and thoroughly invested with transgressive practices.

"space-reclamation" became a way to counter the increasing penetration of late capitalism into all spheres of culture.

It is significant that Dubuffet simply rejected the museum without attempting to appropriate its space—at least until the seventies.⁷ If the museum represents a place where true artistic impulse is obliterated, this is because it embodies Western cultural rules and norms that are inimical to true art, which is untamed and closer to real life. In other words, Dubuffet's rejection of the museum was not predicated on its nature as overly confining. Smithson's works, on the other hand, were concerned with space and place, including those of the gallery and museum.⁸ Transforming places into works of art, he achieved a sort of deterritorialization of art that Dubuffet could not have imagined a decade earlier. In Smithson's view, however, the idea or concept of limitations was sufficient acknowledgement that any place can be incorporated into an artistic project. And it was this awareness of limitations that opened the way to his theory of a dialectics of inside and out. Those limits were not, however, experienced for their own sake. It came to other artists of the period to suspect that these limits were not conceptual and theoretical, but institutional and cultural. They began, therefore, to scrutinize the multifaceted dimensions of museum and gallery space. They saw these spaces and, in particular, their limits and boundaries, as architectural, social, political and economic apparatuses in need of deconstruction. This was the case of Daniel Buren, whose work I want to examine in this chapter.

7. As I stated in the previous chapter, Dubuffet donated his collection of Art Brut to the city of Lausanne precisely in the seventies. It would certainly be an overinterpretation to say that space reclamation in the sixties effectively opened the way for the creation of such a museum. For the moment, I would suggest that this was no more than a coincidence. I will argue later, however, that this coincidence was contemporary with another significant shift in designing exhibitions and collections, as exemplified by Harald Szeemann's exhibitions: *When Attitudes Become Form* (1969) and the fifth Documenta (1972).

8. I refer to Robert Smithson as an exemplary figure representing the other land artists, even though all of these were not as sophisticated in their use of inside/outside dialectics.

On Cultural Revolution and Zero-Degree Painting



Fig. 5.1, 5.2 Manifestation no. 1 and 2 at the Salon de la jeune peinture, Paris, 1967

This story begins in France on January 3, 1967, the day set for the opening of Paris's annual *Salon de la jeune peinture*. A group of four young painters—Daniel Buren, Olivier Mosset, Michel Parmentier and Niele Toroni—made a series of identical paintings as salon visitors looked on (fig. 5.1). Each artist selected a different motif and, working at his own pace, repeated it on a series of canvases of equal size. The artists called this performance, which lasted throughout the day, a demonstration (in French, *manifestation*). They concluded by handing out leaflets explaining that their paintings were made in direct opposition to the very nature of painting. Their pieces, they wrote, could not be described as "composition," or "harmonization of colors," or "valorization of gesture," or "expression of the self," or "representation of the external world," or anything in any of these veins.

At the end of the same day, at precisely six o'clock, they performed a second demonstration by taking their paintings down from the walls and placing, over the space where they had hung them, a banner reading "BUREN, MOSSET, PARMENTIER, TORONI N'EXPOSENT PAS" (fig. 5.2). They then distributed a second set of leaflets in which they claimed to reject all varieties of the painting salon because the latter, they said, only exhibits commodities—in the manner of the automobile

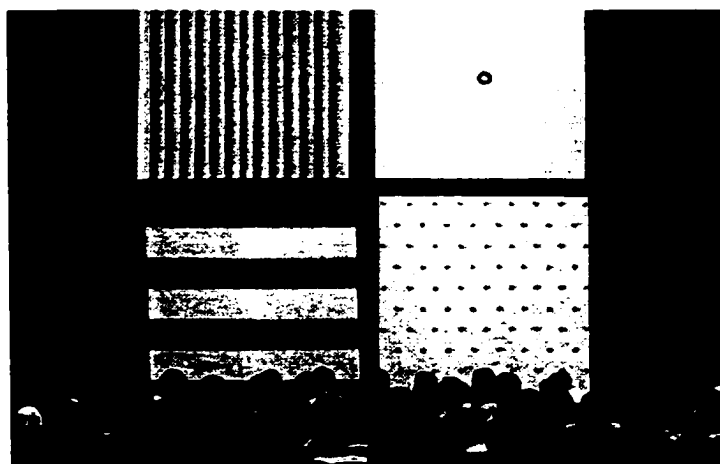


Fig. 5.3 Manifestation no. 3 at the Musée des arts décoratifs, Paris, 1967

and domestic products salons. Moreover, they claimed that the art of painting is reactionary by nature.

Six months later, paintings similar to the four made at the *Salon de la jeune peinture* appeared in a kind of "happening" at the theatre in the Musée des Arts Décoratifs (fig. 5.3). This time, however, the paintings were larger. The four of them, each with its own initial motif, were hung above the stage. And, once again, leaflets were distributed to visitors, who waited around for forty-five minutes while nothing happened. The leaflets explained that the spectacle itself was the happening or event, that its actors were the public attending the "show," and that the only thing on view were the paintings made by Buren, Mosset, Parmentier and Toroni.⁹

In September of the same year, at the fifth *Paris Biennale*, the four artists made their last joint demonstration. Their four paintings, with the same motifs, reappeared. Now, however, they were supplemented with a slide projection of stock photographs showing things like a beach at Saint-Tropez, a strip-tease dancer,

9. This recalls Bataille's idea about the museum as a container not so much of works of art as of a public, which forms the true content of the cultural institution. See the entry on museums in the special issue of *October* devoted to Georges Bataille [*October*, no. 36 (Spring, 1986), p. 25]. "We must realize," Bataille says, "that the halls and art objects are but the container, whose content is formed by the visitors." In the museum, then, the spectacle offered to the gaze is the crowd that winds its way throughout the various galleries with the keen expectation that something wonderful will be revealed. "The museum," Bataille continues, "is the colossal mirror in which man, finally contemplating himself from all sides, and finding himself literally an object of wonder, abandons himself to the ecstasy expressed in art journalism." (*Ibid.*)

the Pope, etc. Accompanying the images was a soundtrack of continuously repeated remarks about several of the illusionistic functions of painting: painting as freedom; as the sacred or marvelous; as estrangement, and so on. The zero-degree of painting, as embodied in these four motifs, was meant to put an end to illusionism within the context of commodity culture.

Daniel Buren's painted motif is typical of this approach. He uses industrial-weight striped tent canvas—pasted paper is occasionally used in its place. The stripes, which are precisely 8.7 cm wide, alternate between white and one other color, depending on what is available on the market. And the stripes at both ends of the canvas are covered with white paint, thus reversing the most basic artistic distinction between ground and figure.

Although Buren, Mosset, Parmentier and Toroni claimed in one of their leaflets that they were giving painting a new start, this, when looked at exclusively from a painterly point of view, led nowhere because the extreme reduction to such limited patterns did not allow for much variation with respect to expression, composition or representation. Yet, because they limited themselves to such minimal forms and refused to create a new pictorial language, the context itself became dazzlingly highlighted. In fact, the possibilities opened up by their expansion beyond the pictorial frame were tremendously productive for art making. This was so because the interplay between the painting-objects and their contexts made innumerable variations possible.

With their zero-degree paintings, BMPT¹⁰ wished to put an end to the idea that painting must pursue its evolution; for them, this ideology is one of the most

10. In his *L'Art en France: Une nouvelle génération* (Paris: Chêne, 1972), Jean Clair lumps together Buren, Mosset, Parmentier, and Toroni under the "BMPT" label, as if they formed a consolidated group of artists. Clair's book was published in conjunction with the controversial exhibition, "12 ans d'art contemporain en France, 1972," which was organized as a response of the State to the uprisings of May 1968. The exhibition was held at the Musée d'art moderne in Paris. Although Buren was invited to participate in the exhibition, he refused to take part in what he considered to be the nationalistic gambits of the Ministère de la Culture.

insidious forms of artistic illusionism. In an interview published in 1968 in *Galerie des Arts*, Buren told André Parinaud: "total revolution may be the only option left after seeing canvases like ours."¹¹ Why? Because the kind of paintings they made cannot compensate for any type of social alienation whatsoever. Consequently, if their paintings were at odds with society, this was not because they defined a realm in which total freedom could be expressed, as Theodor Adorno might have put it, but because the domain of art, as they conceived of it, cannot provide a separate realm in which one could entertain the idea of a utopian project.¹²

Moreover, Buren does not believe that revolution or social change can be achieved through art. In his view, to believe this would be to entertain further illusions since the artist, he argues, would accept prevailing conventions as a matter of fact.¹³ Even the supposedly most radical critiques of artistic conventions—Buren points to the readymade and the appropriations of the Nouveaux Réalistes—function within the institutional context without really criticizing it. Even if the real, in the guise of mundane objects, appears to blatantly intrude upon the realm of art and to disrupt its conventions, which rely on compositional features, illusionistic

Without a doubt, Clair appropriated Buren's text, *Limites Critiques*, reformulating it in his own words. In a photocopied letter distributed in Los Angeles where the exhibition traveled, Buren attacked Clair's book for its inconsistencies and its misleading information with regard to the existence of a group such as "BMPT." In the letter, Buren rejected the contention that the individuals associated with BMPT constituted such a group; on the contrary, he said, their joint demonstrations were merely incidental which they were. See Daniel Buren, *Les Écrits, 1965-1990*, (Bordeaux: Musée d'art contemporain de Bordeaux, 1991), vol. 1, p. 297-301.

11. See Daniel Buren, *op. cit.*, vol. 1, p. 38. The interview with André Parinaud was originally published under the title, "La figuration aujourd'hui," in *Galerie des Arts*, no. 50 (February, 1968), p. 4-5. Buren stated: "*La seule chose qu'on peut peut-être faire après avoir vu une toile comme les nôtres, c'est la révolution totale.*" The entire body of Buren's writings was edited by Jean-Marc Poinot in a three-volume edition totaling more than 1,400 pages. This publication, along with a book of photographs [*Daniel Buren: Photos-souvenirs 1965-1988* (Villeurbanne: Art Édition, 1988)], provides comprehensive documentation on Buren's works and strategies.
12. I refer to Theodor Adorno's *Aesthetic Theory* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1984). In this work, Adorno argues that absolute freedom in art comes in contradiction with the alienated realm of late capitalist society.
13. Daniel Buren, *op. cit.*, vol. 1, p. 43.

representation, unique hand-made pieces, certificates of authenticity, etc.; these objects, he argues, are completely sanctified by their new context, the space of the museum. In the end, these strategies of appropriation not only sublimate the surrounding culture as a given datum without really criticizing it, but also consolidate the discretionary power of the museum.

Also, with respect to art as a means of social transformation. Buren maintains that art works, whether they are installed in the workplace or placed outside in the streets, and whether their content is revolutionary or not, distract from truly revolutionary goals and offer just another illusion of emancipation.¹⁴ In contrast with many other "activist-artists" who used traditional forms of expression to urge people to revolt, Buren rejected the idea that so-called revolutionary representations could help to produce ideological freedom—although he too was an activist in the May 1968 uprisings in Paris. In his view, any revolutionary representation is dubious because it reproduces the illusionism inherent in conventional image making. Instead, he wished to stress the sheer reality of the art object, to foreground its literalness and focus on the prevailing conditions governing the making and distribution of art in late capitalist society. The question for Buren then became: by what possible means could artistic interventions effectively disrupt the actual cultural order?

As one might expect, the first condition consisted in refusing to communicate any information either about the author or the outside world. Otherwise, art objects would appear to bear inner meanings independent of their context of presentation—a situation that would be false, misleading and deceptive. This explains why Buren used (and still uses forty years later) a repetitive industrial pattern that is conspicuously blank, although it explicitly relies upon painting and art in general.

14. See the statement he published under the title "Faut-il enseigner les arts?" in *Galerie des Arts*. See Daniel Buren, *op. cit.*, vol. 1, p. 53-57.

The use of such material obviously undercuts the whole issue of artistic genius since no specific craftsmanship is needed for work of this kind. Nor does the pattern of lines, colors and forms even come into question. Only the context of installation is foregrounded. Thus, like the readymade and for the same reasons, Buren's opaque design points towards the "painting's" context of presentation.

The second condition consisted in the installation of works in any number of public places. Although he favored those where art is usually exhibited, he did not confine himself to such places since the task he set himself was to disclose and question various cultural apparatuses.¹⁵ In his view, art should remain public even when presented outside its traditional venues. Unlike Smithson, he did not want to eliminate the distinction between art and its surroundings, nor was he seeking to neutralize the world into an aestheticized realm of simulacra. His purpose, rather, was to maintain and reproduce an "art-effect" wherever the public happened to be, and this in turn was intended to reveal the conditions and circumstances under which art can exist in contemporary society.

This led to a third condition, namely, the need to investigate all the limits that keep the art system functioning. On a practical level, Buren had already embarked on this kind of experimentation as early as 1968, when he installed a wide strip of striped paper behind the front door of the Galerie Apollinaire in Milan. As a result, the gallery was kept closed for the duration of the (non-)exhibition. Buren's investigations of institutional and cultural limits assumed an explicit (and sophisticated) theoretical form with the publication of his crucial text, *Limites Critiques*. This accompanied the work he showed in 1970 at the Galerie

15. See Daniel Buren, "Warning, no. 3" (1970), *op. cit.*, vol. 1, p. 117. On the occasion of several group shows, Buren published theoretical statements that bore the heading, "mise en garde" ("warning"). Besides expounding his own views, he criticized contemporary movements that claimed to defy dominant aesthetic givens, revealing their limitations and arguing about problems that could be raised about contemporary art. For instance, he accused Land Art of, among other things, merely repeating modes of easel painting, but on a much grander scale. Hence Land Art reiterated the romantic view of the artist genius.

Yvon Lambert in Paris (fig. 5.4),¹⁶ where he installed two "paintings." One partially covered one wall of the gallery, while the other was hung outside above the street. In his text, Buren warns us that *Limites Critiques* is intended to be neither a theory of his work nor an explanation of it; nonetheless, it set the parameters of his forthcoming artistic activities.¹⁷



Fig. 5.4 Daniel Buren, *Limites Critiques*, Gallery Yvon Lambert, 1970

16. Daniel Buren, *op. cit.*, vol. 1, p. 175-190.

17. It may be that Buren's refusal to propose such a theory was prompted by the idea that a theory would have represented an ultimate meaning hidden behind the proceedings he intended to generate. His warning, therefore, connects with his strategies in the sense that these interventions are meant to fit into the specific contexts he wants to bring to light. Rather than take a supposedly transcendental view of all the possible situations that might be presented, Buren shapes his strategies through the variable situations he actually encounters. Theories usually attempt to explain sets of problems and to point out the rules that might make it possible to find a solution for every situation. Buren's strategy, by contrast, slightly transforms an environment, a place, accordingly to the situation he wants to address. As his experimentations develop and the general conditions in the art world change, new possibilities in critical analysis emerge and come into sharper focus.

In keeping with the conditions he had defined for a truly critical art, the constraints under which Buren would develop his practice are as follows. (1) In order to escape illusionism of any kind, works must be devoid of any content whatsoever. (2) However, since the contemporary cultural context of art needs to be addressed specifically, works must still rely upon form and design and must address issues such as the figure/ground opposition, vision and visibility, and the time of perception and presentation. (3) In order to produce an "art-effect," pieces must mimic *conventional* modern forms of art yet reduce them to a zero degree of complexity so as to avoid any aesthetic distraction. (4) Since art is essentially a matter of culture and collective ethos, works must be shown anywhere the public is likely to see them. (5) Given that limits and frames define the "nature" and functions of art within modern society, these cultural and institutional boundaries must in themselves be investigated.

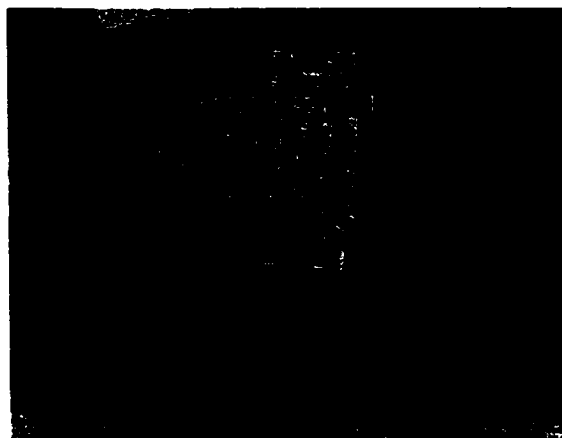
Public Spaces

In 1968, students and workers vented their anger against the old cultural structures of industrial society, aware that power was diffused throughout the entire range of institutional apparatuses. Buren participated in these protests with an unexpected intervention to which he gave the name "affichage sauvage" (wildcat posting) (fig. 5.6).¹⁸ This piece, which was neither prompted nor supported by any gallery or museum, involved illegally putting up about 200 striped posters over commercial and political advertising on billboards throughout the city of Paris.

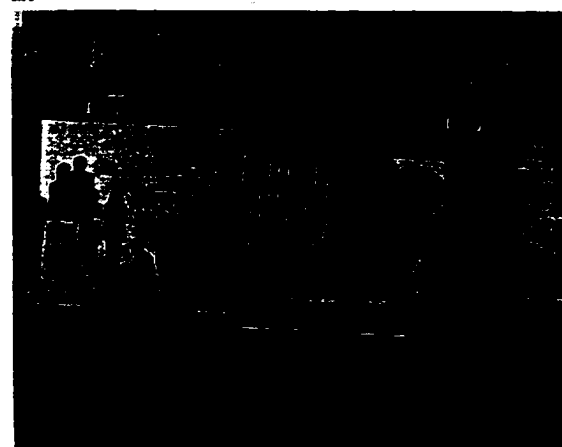
18. Throughout his artistic life, Buren employed similar public "affichages" in many various ways: advertisement panels carried by sandwich-persons, posters, flags, sign arrows, boat-sails, and the like. These designs were meant to combine a specifically artistic device with other forms of advertisement: political, commercial, and entertainment. This play with various forms of advertisement addresses the public's unconcern with art. By contrast, Buren's "paintings" brings art into all possible public situations.

In conjunction with this, Buren mailed out similar posters in envelopes without any return address. People already familiar with his work—and there were many of them in Parisian art circles—received art pieces for free. The posting and mailing coincided with a group exhibition held at the Musée national d'art moderne de la ville de Paris, in which Buren had a huge (18 m x 5 m) "painting." While this exhibition acknowledged his striped design as art in its own right, the other (public and private) installations and pieces outside challenged sanctification by the museum. By bringing a pattern clearly identified with modernist painting directly into the public sphere, and by associating "high art" with "lower" commercial and political advertisements, Buren raised questions about the right places for art and its true nature.¹⁹

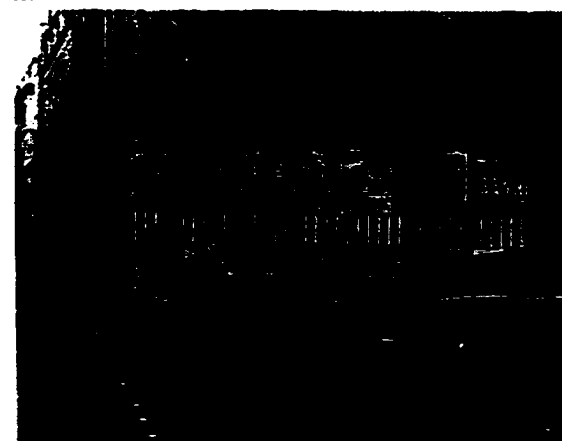
By combining three strategies—museum display, public posters and personal mailing—Buren expanded the borders of art space to encompass an audience



15.



16.



5.5 Daniel Buren, *Affichage sauvage*, Paris, 1968

19. Of course, the intervention made into the public space became relevant to the art system insofar as it echoed the recognition of Buren's work by the museum of modern art. In other words, the unidentified pieces out there were designated to belong to the realm of art because of the legitimacy they received from the institution.

much larger than the one normally found in museums and galleries. At the same time, he showed the cultural confinement of art in institutions and conventions that make it recognizable only to those with some knowledge of trends and issues in contemporary art. Obviously, his tripartite strategy was meant to reveal the cultural borders that keep art separate from *public* life and to unravel the conventional art world's signposts and limits.

Using a variety of means both legal and illegal, Buren subsequently made regular use of these same "advertising" strategies to inscribe "lower" (actually, the most simple) design forms within the context of prestigious art venues. These included survey exhibitions and international events like the Kassel Documenta, the Venice Biennale and the Münster Skulpture Projekt. He placed posters, flags, arrows, wallpaper, awnings and painted stripes on billboards and Morris columns, in streets and subways, on the bases of public sculptures and on street stair risers.

Buren's strategies are indeed multifaceted since they blur many of the boundaries between the usual cultural distinctions applied to art. I am speaking, for example, of the lines drawn between avant-garde painting and wallpaper decoration; high art and commercial design; museum paintings and public posters; institutional exhibition modes and distribution procedures of questionable legality; and between the museum-going public of peers and specialists and the larger undifferentiated mass of lay men and women. Buren's zero-degree "paintings" shift our focus from the object towards the context of presentation, while his distribution techniques and procedures reveal the complexity of the cultural art system. If his interventions into the public realm allow him to reach a wider audience for art works, they paradoxically demand a much higher awareness of contemporary art issues to be able to ponder for them what is at stake.

About a Turning Point in the Art of Exhibiting

Very soon after the multiple protests of 1968, the establishment, in the domains of art and politics, quite surprisingly reacted by "co-opting" (or absorbing) dissenting practices into more acceptable cultural frameworks. This was the case of the 1969 exhibition, *When Attitudes Become Form*,²⁰ which was curated by Harald Szeemann, and held in Bern Switzerland. Soon after, in 1972, the fifth Documenta in Kassel, also curated by Szeemann, produced what was, in effect, the most extensive co-opting of radical art in the recent history of modern art. Past integrations of avant-garde art into museological holdings and displays paled by comparison. That these two exhibitions represented a true assimilation of dissenters can be convincingly made by looking at the features of Szeemann's two exhibitions, and at Buren's own intervention within that context.

Many leading contemporary art historians and critics now recognize Szeemann's *When Attitudes Become Form* as the turning point in the "art of exhibiting." As the exhibition's subtitle (*Works. Concepts. Processes. Situations. Information*) suggests, this exhibition was intended not only to shed light on large segments of contemporary art that had not previously been shown in modern art museums and international exhibitions, but also to include new forms of expression that were detached from object-making but still involved artistic features. I refer here to forms like performance, conceptual art, site- and context-specific works, process art, etc. Szeemann's exhibition was based on his observation that the distinction between art and life would fade. The means to this end included, among other things, the virtually unlimited range of material and formal possibilities open to contemporary artists, the recent appropriation of various communication systems and new technologies, and the increase in the number of sites where

20. The exhibition also traveled to Amsterdam and London.

art could be displayed. All paved the way for artistic forms of expression that would be closer than ever to life.

The broad range of contemporary works and trends—Minimalism, Conceptual and Land Art, Pop Art, Nouveau Réalisme, Arte Povera, Anti-Form, Process Art and Body Art—brought together by Szeemann served to demonstrate how much contemporary artists are concerned with process and communication—as opposed to product- and object-making.²¹ This expansion of the field of art was, however, not only a response to the demands of the artists involved in the protests of the 1960s, but also an assertion of freedom from constraints. In this respect, it was akin to the freedom formerly claimed by the beat generation, the hippy movement and rock music.²²

Buren's contribution to *When Attitudes Become Form* was another unsolicited *affichage sauvage*, this time throughout the city of Berne (Switzerland) where the exhibition was held. In *Photo-Souvenirs*, Buren's *catalogue raisonné*, the entry on this intervention mentions that this posting was meant to test the social and cultural limits of the artists' alleged freedom.²³ Indeed, it did overstep that limit, since the police arrested Buren in spite of Szeemann's protests to the municipal authorities. Yet, Buren's arrest blatantly contradicts Szeemann's claim that absolute freedom in art is viable despite the constraints imposed by art institutions. But more

21. The following are only a few of the sixty-nine artists and the various movements under which they could be classified: Minimal Art (Carl André, Sol LeWitt, Richard Serra, Robert Ryman), Pop Art and Nouveau Réalisme (Claes Oldenburg, Edward Keinholz, Yves Klein, William T. Willey), Conceptual Art (Robert Barry, Mel Bochner, Joseph Kosuth, Lawrence Weiner, Jan Dibbets), Arte Povera (Giovanni Anselmo, Jannis Kounellis, Michelangelo Pistoletto, Mario Merz), Anti-Form (Robert Morris), Body Art (Bruce Nauman, D. Oppenheim), Land Art (Michael Heizer, Richard Long, Walter De Maria, Robert Smithson). And let us not forget Joseph Beuys.

22. In his short catalogue essay, "Zur Ausstellung," Szeemann states explicitly that these movements have had an impact on the developments of new trends in art.

23. Daniel Buren, *op. cit.*, vol. 1, p. 286, entry no. 46. The *Photo-souvenir* caption reads: "Exposition personnelle sur les limites de la liberté de l'artiste vis-à-vis de la société."

importantly, Buren's posting explicitly indicated that his artistic "utterances" are basically actions or, to be more accurate, performatives. In Austin's and Searle's speech acts theory²⁴, "to question" and "to command" are not descriptive utterances but performative enunciations; they are like all other non-descriptive forms of linguistic utterance in that they do not state anything about the world but *do* something through their enunciation. And if ever they do say something about the world, they say it in reference to their enunciation; in other words, the performative enunciation qualifies itself as occurring now, in the world, as a command, question, judgment, protest, claim, etc.

What Szeemann's exhibition revealed, however, was not so much the limitless possibilities in contemporary modes of artistic expression nor the vanishing of the distinction between art and life—although this might have been the spectacular effect of the show—but a shift in the viewer's attention away from exhibits towards the spectacle of the exhibitions themselves. Later on, Buren noticed this tremendous shift in the "art of exhibiting" and pointed it out in his text for the catalogue of the fifth Documenta, "*Exposition d'une exposition*."²⁵

This change could also be observed in the role of the curator, who came to play a predominant role in the mounting of exhibitions, which, as a result, became more and more dazzling and spectacular as curators strove to outdo each other. As Buren observed with respect to the Berne show, curators now considered the exhi-

24. See J.L. Austin, *How to do Things with Words* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1962) and John R. Searle, *Speech Acts*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969). In a more general sense than the one associated with speech acts theory, pragmatics refers to "the study of the relations between language and context that are basic to an account of language understanding"; it involves, thus, forms such as implication, presupposition and other aspects of discourse. See Stephen Levinson, *Pragmatics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

25. Daniel Buren, "Exposition d'une exposition", *op. cit.*, vol. 1, p. 261-262. This text was originally published as a statement in the catalogue for Documenta, Section 17, p. 29. In it, Buren compares the art of exhibiting to the art of painting; the curator (namely, Harald Szeemann) acts as if he were using art works like colors and hues, distributing them as if on a support. Buren laments that museums, which are supposed to show works of art, now devour them in order to exhibit themselves and the curator's skills in producing renewed forms of spectacle.

bition as a whole as an art piece, above and beyond any of its individual works. The Berne show was nonetheless considered to be the most advanced statement on the state of the arts at the time, and for this reason was praised by a large number of curators, critics and art historians. But, as I have suggested, it was also the most efficient response one could imagine on the part of the establishment to artists protesting against the political and cultural stagnation of art institutions.

In 1968, European art institutions were systematically attacked by artists.²⁶ From the spring sit-in at the Palais Royal des Beaux-Arts in Brussels and the Triennale in Milan, to the thirty-fourth Venice Biennale and the fourth Kassel Documenta, European institutions were denounced for their insensitivity in their conception of the artist's role and the absolute arbitrariness of their decisions. Of course, the protests and the events that sparked them varied from place to place. For instance, many artists at the 1968 Venice Biennale (twenty-three in total) ended up withdrawing their works from the exhibition to protest the excessive police presence everywhere in the city. The city council had opted for high security because it feared a repetition of the one-week occupation that occurred at the Milan Triennale, as well as the spread of the type of revolt seen in Paris. The results were dramatic: student protesters marched in the streets and seventeen out of the

26. The situation was different in the United States. Instead of attacking art institutions for what they represented, American artists focused more on politics in the conventional sense, as opposed to on the politics of public art institutions themselves. This may be explained by the United States' involvement in the Vietnam War. In New York, Chicago and on the West Coast, artists' demonstrations mainly targeted this involvement. The attack on the art market was extremely secondary in comparison.

Aside from the widespread anti-war sentiment, 1968 saw only a small protest against art institutions. This was organized at the Museum of Modern Art in New York on the occasion of William Rubin's exhibition, *Dada and Surrealism*, which protesters saw as co-opting revolutionary anarchistic avant-garde art.

For a concise presentation of the issues on the American art scene in 1968, see Therese Schwartz, "The Politization of the Avant-Garde, Part I and Part II," *Art in America*, vol. 59, no. 6 (November-December 1971), p. 96-105, and vol. 60, no. 2 (March-April 1972), p. 70-79. See also Thomas Crow, *The Rise of the Sixties* (New York: Harry N. Abrams Publishers, 1996). In particular, see the introduction and Chapter 6, "1969," p. 176 sq.

twenty-four Italian artists walked out of the national pavilion. Anger grew rapidly; even the jury resigned. The Biennale's Board of Directors suspended the event, closing the show only a few days after its opening.²⁷

The same year, at the fourth Kassel Documenta, artists targeted the international marketplace and accused Americans of enjoying a hegemonic presence within it. Their protests were caused partly by the organizers' decision to emphasize Op Art and Minimal Art, with the result that almost a third of the artists represented in the exhibition (fifty-seven out of one hundred and fifty) were Americans. Even Dubuffet, who was there as one of the major contemporary art figures, felt eclipsed by the flagrant American overrepresentation and protested against US imperialist domination of the marketplace.

Despite the diversity of these particular demonstrations and protests, the main complaint remained, nonetheless, that artists did not want to limit themselves to being producers of commodities. Rather, they wanted to have a say in the functioning of the art circulation and distribution system, which they found to be undemocratic and unfair. The major international art institutions were, then, severely criticized for usurping selection procedures and for their total control of art distribution. They were seen as repressing the numerous emerging art trends on behalf of the interests of the international marketplace. But as we can see more clearly today, the old modernist framework of art was collapsing.

It was in this context of generalized discontent and virulent protests against art institutions that Harald Szeemann mounted his 1969 exhibition, which presented a broad range of artistic trends in order to show that extended freedom could be part of the agenda of any art institution. The presentation of such a wide variety of materials, techniques, supports, places, ideas, means and medias served to

27. The American artists in the show were perceived as reactionaries because none of them withdrew their works or walked out of the pavilion. See Therese Schwartz, *op. cit.*, p. 104.

dumbfound both the members of the establishment and their opponents. This impressive demonstration was sponsored by a tobacco company, Philip Morris Europe, whose representative, John A. Murphy, wrote the introduction to the catalogue. In it, he claimed that art was not a side activity for the company but an integral constituent of its outlook. Moreover, he argued that innovation and experimentation, the two sources of art, favor progress and freedom in commercial activities as much as they do in art.

Clearly, the great display potential of such spectacular events with all their ideas, attitudes, material and visual experiments, new technologies and communication systems—in short, everything that shapes and occupies contemporary everyday life—could be made to serve consumerism in the name of freedom. The tobacco industry, which thoroughly understood and accepted this form of consumerism, tried to occupy a very visible position in it by promoting and sponsoring all exponents of the so-called "society of the spectacle": international sports competitions, festivals of all kinds, and blockbuster exhibitions. In the 1950s and 60s, bourgeois productivist ideology and consumer acquisitiveness entered a phase in which the spectacle as commodity came to permeate the totality of the social fabric. In a world modeled on and fashioned by the "spectacle," consumer goods become images, while representations in turn become commodities. The distinction between means and ends also vanishes, since the use-value of goods serves as a means to "communicate" a social status. Guy Debord, one of the leaders of the International Situationists and the 1968 uprisings, clearly perceived this transformation and used the term "spectacle" to describe it:

The basically tautological character of the spectacle flows from the simple fact that its means are simultaneously its ends. [...] It covers the entire surface of the world and bathes endlessly in its own glory.

The Society which [is built 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.²⁸

Szeemann's "spectacular" exhibition, *When Attitudes Become Form*, claimed to focus on gestures and processes rather than on objects and products; it favored concepts, means of information, and communication systems over the usual art objects. While it appeared to escape from the realm of objectified art merchandises, it nevertheless entered the realm of a commodified global culture in which even gestures, actions and processes are simultaneously representations and commodities. And the Bern exhibition was only a precursor to the fifth Documenta (1972), also curated by Szeemann, which I will examine below.

It is worth mentioning that, while Pop artists were aestheticizing everyday life by appropriating elements of mass culture and commercialism, and while "happenings" were momentarily integrating the spectacle into daily life, everyday life itself was already being represented and aestheticized through advertising, entertainment and the mass media. And yet, if there was any fading of the distinction between culture and life, this occurred only in a context in which everything and every event became subject to representation—or more precisely, *was* a representation. Thus, as could be expected, the location, identification and disclosure of the limits that compose the cultural ethos came to the fore. The need was not so much to blur the boundaries still more, since these were already vanishing into the generalized spectacle of life, but to take stock of their features and to scrutinize how they actually function. Artists like Buren were concerned that these limits still existed despite appearances, and juggled with them.

28. Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, aphorisms 13 & 14. Debord's book was first published in 1967 by Éditions Buchet-Chastel, Paris. The English publisher was Black & Red, Detroit (1983). Although Debord saw that the consumerism of society is itself characteristic of the capitalist mode of production, this became truly apparent only with the massive diffusion of mass media during the fifties, when television became more widely available.

***In-Situ* Works and Enunciation**

Daniel Buren's various ways of presenting his works challenged the usual cultural framework in which art has been displayed in galleries and museums alike for almost two centuries. This is so obvious with respect to some of his works that not much comment is needed: urban posters, mailings, sandwich and advertising boards, flags, banners, awnings, window blinds, arrow signs, magazine inserts, exhibition catalogues, wallpaper in private residences and exhibition halls—all defy traditional practices. In opposition to the museums' impulse to preserve artistic patrimony and the resulting decontextualization of art works, Buren has practiced a form of installation that he has labeled "*travail in situ*"—which should be translated as "context-specific," rather than as "site-specific work"²⁹. In fact, beginning with the first demonstration at the *Salon de la jeune peinture* in 1968, most of his works are identified by him as "*travail in situ*." This includes his postings and his mailings and interventions in galleries and museums and on public monuments. By designating his works in this way, Buren sought to address both the specific cultural conditions under which his pieces were presented and the general institutional apparatuses that set those conditions. With a few exceptions, all his works have been ephemeral and relied on the location where they were slated to be mounted or shown.³⁰

29. The English term, "site specificity," as it was used in the United States by artists such as Michael Heizer, Robert Smithson, Richard Serra and Walter De Maria, is not a precise translation of Buren's *in situ*. The former indicates the site or the place where works are installed, whereas "*in situ*" refers to a more general context, be it cultural, architectural, situational, topological, social, etc. Jean-Marc Poinot has analyzed this distinction in his article, "*L'In Situ* et les circonstances de la mise à vue," *Cahiers du Musée national d'Art moderne*, no. 27 (Spring 1989), p. 67-75. According to Poinot, site-specific works "index" and point toward the places where they are installed, while *in situ* pieces show the *circumstances* which the (opaque) pieces are meant to reveal.

30. It should be noticed, however, that some of Buren's pieces can transform in accordance with their site; in this sense they are neither ephemeral nor context-specific since they can fit into any museum and gallery context at any time, or they can even last for a long period of time. This is the case with one of Buren's works that is now among the holdings of the Museum of Modern Art in New York. This piece, *One Painting in Four Elements for One Wall*, 1969-1977"

Generally, Buren's *in situ* installations are meant to intervene on the sidelines (or at the boundaries) of the specific cultural situations in which he decides to participate; but this does not mean that they preclude his participation in the event. At the same time, however, to achieve this critical goal, he cannot be satisfied with the usual practice of displaying works in a museum or gallery. Rather, art must question these limits by highlighting, and revealing them. This kind of strategy is constantly on the edge of new developments and must adapt its means to the inevitable changes that occur in the art world, sometimes as a result of Buren's own intervention.

Buren's investigation of boundaries became systematic with his exhibition at Yvon Lambert's gallery in 1970. There for the first time, in a provocative and rigorous text called *Limites Critiques* (fig. 5.4), he gave a thorough exposition and theoretical analysis of his notion of "limits," presenting it as a kind of conceptual *mode d'emploi*. In doing so, he set the parameters that he would adhere to in his later works.

Furthermore, Buren's analysis of the cultural limits of art enabled him to be aware and wary of problems resulting from the two most important trends then emerging in contemporary art: Conceptual Art and Land Art. In his view, the former simply reifies ideas, substituting ideal objects for conventional art objects.³¹

(*Photo-Souvenirs*, no. 286), was made by cutting a square piece of striped canvas into four parts of three equilateral triangles and one irregular section. Those four pieces can fit on any museum wall, and are meant to be installed in the four corners

My second example addresses the ephemeral feature of *travail in situ*. In 1985, Buren was commissioned by the President of the Republic, François Mitterand, to make a work in the Honor Court at the Palais-Royal in Paris. *Les deux plateaux* is an immense fountain made of two parts: one runs beneath the courtyard, while the other consists of black and white marble columns positioned at regular intervals throughout it. The height of the columns varies with the slope of the fountain underneath. This piece is not ephemeral, of course although it can be still named *in situ*.

31. See Daniel Buren, *op. cit.*, vol. 1, p. 85-96.

Meanwhile the latter, he argued, is only another way of making paintings since only the dimensions and the supports have changed, not the artist's gesture.³²

For *Konzeption/Conception*, an exhibition held at the Städtischen Museum in Leverkusen (1969), Seth Siegelaub, then the foremost Conceptual Art dealer, designed a show that was essentially a catalogue covering the work of eleven artists working at various locations throughout Europe and the United States over a three-month period.³³ Buren's contribution to the "catalogue-exhibition" was a work in two parts. One part consisted of an *affichage sauvage* of 200 striped posters he put up throughout the city of Paris. The postings were regularly announced in *Lettres Françaises* for the duration of the exhibition, and a phone number was provided so that people could inquire as to their location. The other part of the work was the publication of Buren's text, "Warning." In this, he denounced Conceptual Art as the most insidious form of idealism in that its claim to replace marketable objects with ideas was utterly illusory. In contrast to Conceptual Art, his own strategy clearly reaffirms the actual object and its visibility since both of these constitute the means by which "artistic enunciations" are made possible, and the context visible.

In the years following the publication of *Limites Critiques*, Buren focused his activity on the various apparatuses that frame, enclose and confine the products of art. His "critical practice," then, became explicitly and specifically concerned with

32. In 1970, Buren published an article reiterating his initial "warning," along with supplementary comments on Land Art and artists such as Smithson, Heizer and Oppenheim. See *VH101*, no. 1 (Spring 1970), p. 97-101, and *op. cit.*, vol. 1, p. 113-123.

33. In addition to Buren, the other artists invited by Siegelaub were: Carl André, Jan Dibbets, Robert Smithson, Sol LeWitt, Richard Long, Douglas Huebler, Robert Barry, Joseph Kosuth, Lawrence Weiner, and N. E. Thing Co. Ltd. (Ian Baxter). Five artists (Long, Dibbets, Smithson, Huebler and André) used maps and plans to indicate where their pieces were supposed to be on view. Some of those were supplemented with photographs in the catalogue. LeWitt's work consisted of a wall drawing at the house of the German art dealer, Konrad Fischer. Barry sent a sentence mentioning the ideas that might occur to him during the "exhibition." Weiner's piece consisted of film stills of the artist throwing rubber balls into Niagara Falls from both sides of the USA-Canada border. N. E. Thing's pieces were shadows of various objects intended to create the impression of a sundial. Carl André's contribution was copies of the floor plan of galleries at the Gemeente Museum in The Hague, where he had an exhibition.

the cultural conditions of exhibiting and the limits that define the "art of exhibiting." Although museum architecture is the most visible framing device, Buren's concern was directed toward culture in general, be it in art fairs, museums, galleries, streets, subways, highways, public monuments, private and public buildings, and so forth. We would do well to look more closely at what Buren meant by the notion of "limits," since all his strategies were directed toward their deconstruction.

Analysis of Framing Devices

For each installation he made within an exhibition context, Buren systematically specified five different frames and limits through which his pieces were articulated. The first three concern the piece of art itself as they bear on the distinctions between painting and object, between the front and back of the paintings, and on the layers of paint. The two others are about the articulation of the work with its environment, the institutional framework, and the cultural context in which his installations were made.

1- The Painting/Object Opposition

The introduction of readymades into the field of art created ambivalence about the nature of such found objects, which were not sculptures or paintings but something else that was also art. In contrast, Buren's striped canvases clearly reasserted painting, particularly since he systematically painted (white) the two outside bands on either side of his striped canvases. Moreover, the alternating pattern of colored and white stripes reiterated the modernist merging of foreground and background on its own terms and, by the same token, reaffirmed Modernism's crucial formal concerns. The material and formal devices used, as well as the color and the brushed-on white paint, all reinserted Buren's readymades/striped canvases

into the realm of painting. This procedure was aimed at *denying* the specificity of the readymade. As the striped canvases were available on the industrial market, they resembled the readymade; but this status was denied them by the very act of painting the two bands along each edge of the canvas.

Although Land Art and Conceptual Art may appear to be freed from art institutions, they too are objectified since such trends could also be—indeed were—taken over by the museum-gallery system through various documents that were produced, and then exhibited, displayed, preserved, and traded by the art institutions. Yet, they constitute a specific condition that needs to be addressed. In this regard, Buren sought to reorient Land Art and Conceptual Art in ways that would include the museological context. This involved (1) always presenting texts with his works, (2) participating in Conceptual Art exhibitions (such as Seth Siegelaub's *Summer Show* and *Konzeption/Conception*, both held in 1969), (3) working on public monuments (as he did for Lyons' Nouveau Musée when he covered the bases of all the city's public monuments), (4) integrating museum architecture in numerous ways, and (5) sometimes intervening within landscapes (always in the context of art fairs). In all these interventions Buren continued to use his striped pattern, a device that belongs, among other things, to painting in order to associate these various contemporary practices with the latter, which represents "art in general" for modern culture.

2- The Front/Back Opposition: A Matter of Support

The mere fact of fixing a canvas on a stretcher hides one side of the fabric so that it becomes possible to create an illusionist image. The use of only one side already produces an illusion by itself, since the reality of the object as a whole is denied. Illusionism in painting begins right here, by this negation of the materiality of the canvas on which other forms of illusion can be created. Buren, on the other

hand, often installs his paintings so as to make both sides visible. With this simple strategy he brings the beholder face to face with the sheer materiality of paintings, as well as making him/her aware that painting is, at least, a matter of the support. For instance, for his exhibition at Yvon Lambert in 1970 already discussed, Buren hung a large striped canvas across the street in front of the gallery, so it could be seen from either side. Inside the gallery space, however, instead of hanging paintings on the walls, he pasted striped wallpaper directly on one wall, in the process merging painting and wall and drawing attention to the conventional support. Again, the strategy was intended to reveal the support, this time the gallery wall.

3- Layers of Paint

As Buren's canvases already display patterning and color, the covering of the bands at the two edges with a layer of white paint reveals another conventional camouflage, namely, the concealment of the canvas itself under layers of paint. In Buren's paintings, however, the lateral layers literally frame the canvas and reveal one of the strategies used by traditional painting to create illusions. Moreover, as these painted bands are in white, which corresponds to the usual color of the canvas, they seem to bring the conventional hidden background (canvas) to the foreground. Conversely, the alternating white-and-colored pattern of stripes returns, so to speak, to the background. With this procedure, Buren neutralizes the usual figure/ground opposition and literally frames the support.

4- The Institutional Framework

In the context of modern culture, the category of art has expanded to such an extent that it now includes a broad range of objects such as readymades, earth-works, environmental installations, technological and communication art pieces, traces of body art and performance, graffiti, photographs, videotapes, film and, in

some cases, the drawings, paintings, sculptures and architectural constructions of children and the mentally ill. One generally tends to assume that these objects and gestures have been assimilated into the domain of art, which is believed to have blurred and surpassed traditional means of expression like painting, sculpture and architecture. By way of contrast, Buren suggests that the gallery represents the basic cultural framing device, putting its mark on everything that goes into it and giving things their artistic character and value. In Buren's view, then, it is the museum and gallery complex that establishes the category of art within the context of modern society—not the other way around. Moreover, museums not only confer aesthetic value upon the objects they contain, but enrich them with a plus-value merely by selecting, gathering and preserving them. From this perspective, the museum is not only an unavoidable cultural fact that must be taken into account, but a participant in the economic circulation and valuation of art goods.³⁴

5- Cultural Frames

In *Limites Critiques*, Buren suggests that, in the understanding of the relationship between art and society shared by both common sense and the more knowledgeable social history of art, social and cultural conditions are generally seen to configure the content of art works. This social content represents only one aspect of the ways in which culture invests in art making. Other aspects, such as materials, technical procedures, the visual organization of images and aesthetic values, appear to have an independent existence from these social or cultural condi-

34. Although written in 1970, Buren's text ("Function of the Museum") was first published in the catalogue of the exhibition, *Sanction of the Museum*, which took place at the Oxford Museum of Modern Art in 1973. This text identifies three different functions of the Museum: (1) an aesthetic function, in a topographical sense—i.e. the museum is the place, frame and true support for works inscription as art; (2) an economic function, since works of art gain value by being selected by a museum; (3) a mystical function, since everything that is displayed in the museum is hallowed and accepted as "Art." By identifying the museum's procedures of preservation, gathering and housing, Buren analyses these three intertwined and invisible functions that mark all art objects from the nineteenth century to the present. See *Daniel Buren, op. cit.*, p. 169-173.

tions. In fact, Buren argues, both the museum-gallery complex and the cultural framework—knowledge, mass media, art journals, art history discourses and even the ethos of the period—jointly determine the specific viewpoint from which any artistic product can be seen. In this respect, the gallery is the prime destination of art. Indeed, it is the place where every artistic product is meant to end up, and in which it is actually exhibited and understood.

A Strategic Intervention at the Fifth Documenta

One of the interventions that best exemplifies Buren's strategy was his participation in the fifth Documenta (1972) upon the invitation of the chief curator, Harald Szeemann. Pursuing his drive for huge and comprehensive shows, Szeemann was so ambitious in planning the Documenta that the initial project could not be achieved in its totality. This is explained, in part, by political objections from the Russian and Chinese Governments, which withdrew their contributions.³⁵ In other cases, doubts as to the honesty of the whole enterprise led some land artists to opt out.³⁶ Finally, lack of financial support made some aspects of the

35. According to the organizers, the withdrawal from the show by the Russians and the Chinese was, in the end, welcome because their participation would have brought the Cold War's political issues to the fore and would have accentuated the differences between Socialist Realism and Capitalist Realism. Such comparisons and oppositions would have considerably overshadowed the issues that the organizers wanted to investigate.

36. Instead of participating in the fifth Documenta, Robert Smithson published an essay in the exhibition catalogue. In his text, "Cultural Confinement" (*op. cit.*, p. 132-133), he denounced the travesties of art works perpetrated by curators and critics who used them only to realize their own agendas and, what was worse, to empty them of their truly political content by accentuating their apartness from the rest of society. Quite cleverly, Smithson perceived Szeemann's framework of ideas when he wrote: "Art's development should be dialectical and not metaphysical." And, then, spelling out what he meant, he argued:

I am speaking of a dialectics that seeks a world outside of cultural confinement. Also, I am not interested in art works that suggest "process" within the metaphysical limits of the neutral room. There is no freedom in that kind of behavioral game playing. The artist acting like a B.F. Skinner rat doing his "tough" little tricks is something to be avoided. Confined process is no process at all. It would be better to disclose the confinement rather make illusions of freedom.

Robert Smithson, *op. cit.*, p. 133.

exhibition unfeasible.³⁷ Nonetheless, what was accomplished remained widely inclusive.

Under the broadest theme imaginable—"*Questioning Reality: Images, Words Today*"—Szeemann planned three different sections for the two museums in Kassel, the Fredericianum and the Neue Galerie.³⁸ Within these sections, he claimed to investigate three questions concerning the relations between images and so-called reality: These concerned the "reality of the picture," the "reality of the depicted object" and the "identity/non-identity relationship between the picture and the object it pictures." Under these abstract questions—one might also say metaphysical investigations—Szeemann could have included almost everything that could be conceived as a representation and an artifact in the exhibition.

Indeed he did achieve this goal, particularly at the Neue Galerie where, under the headings, "*Reality of the Picture*" and "*Reality of the Object Depicted*," he gathered together a full range of what the organizers labeled "parallel pictorial conceptions." These were as follows: "Advertising," "Utopian architectural drafts of imaginary cities," "Science fiction drawings," "Children's pictures" and what the Documenta officials called "Social iconography," i.e., bank notes, magazines covers and Nazi political propaganda. All of these miscellaneous pictures were heterogeneously displayed with hyperrealist paintings and sculptures, Nouveau Réalisme pictures and objects, anonymous action art (such as that of political movements like

37. The original plan also included a "school for visitors" (*Besucherschule*) in which slide projections and computer graphics would have further extended the questioning of reality. If this didactic part of the exhibition had been set up, images from, say, natural history would have been shown alongside pictures from art history. In short, with this slide show, the entire world would have entered the exhibition, just as in the pre-Classical *Wunderkammer*.

Szeemann seems to have regretted this lack more than any other lacunae of the exhibition.

See his interview with John Anthony Thwaites in *Art and Artists*, vol. 7, no. 4 (July 1972), p. 21-23.

38. For a comprehensive presentation of the fifth Documenta, see Jürgen Harten. "Documenta 5 at Kassel," *Studio International*, vol. 184, no. 946 (July-August 1992), p. 2-4.

Black Power, the Red Guards and the Guerilla Art Group), religious folk art, pornography, design, Pop Art, psychedelic painting, individual mythologies (originally called "Shamanism and Mysticism"), formalist language in art and science, caricature and portraiture.

The "*Identity/non-identity*" investigation, for its part, included representations as disparate as pictures made by the mentally ill and by hyperrealist painters, as well as process art, performance art, information art, minimal art, etc. This section was aimed at comparing images of the self and the absence of figuration in information and conceptual art trends. In addition, the section labeled "*Individual Mythologies*" was presented in the two museums. It included works as different as those of the Neo-Expressionists (Immendorff and Bazelitz) and Fluxus (Brecht, Brouwn, Ono) on the one hand, and of Marcel Broodthaers and Hermann Nitsch on the other. Even if this listing of works and images is limited in comparison to the whole range of images in the exhibition, one is dazzled by its obviously intentional heterogeneity.³⁹ The extreme variety of images and objects and, in addition to the more conventional arts, the diversity of their origins—popular culture, commercial images, leftist political groups and extreme-right organizations, solipsistic forms of expression, popular religious traditions and individual mysticism, artistic and scientific drawings, formal languages, etc.⁴⁰—corroborate my contention that the aim of the Documenta organizers was to revise the opposition between art and the rest of the images produced in a society ruled by the proliferation and dissemination of simulacra.

39. Anyone could object that it is in the nature of this kind of international exhibition to combine freely and to produce such an effect of strange confusion. Indeed this objection was raised. But, clearly, the theme "Investigation into Reality" referred to a survey of the relations between representations and the world as it extended into the contemporary culture.

40. This nomenclature is mine, but the description of the Documenta on which it is based comes from Jürgen Harten, "Documenta 5," *op. cit.* This is the most comprehensive description of the exhibition and the most transparent as to the organizers' intentions, even though the author completely supports its design.

Behind this *bric-à-brac*, the simulacrum was at stake because the exhibition's investigation focused on the relationship between images and reality in the context of information networks—advertising, television, computers, performance, and so on. In the introduction to the Documenta catalogue, Szeemann even went so far as to say that a visitor would be able to interpret what was going on in the exhibition only if "he understands that Documenta 5 is an example, and [that] the works therein displayed represent all the images of the world!"⁴¹ In short, contemporary culture is viewed and shown to be a culture in which signs, symbols, fictitious images, miscellaneous religious beliefs and utopian figures proliferate in all directions without any boundaries and with infinite means.

And yet, in the same breath, Szeemann considered that the antagonistic relationship of artists and the museum was over, that putting art in the street was not relevant any more, and that the time had come for a return to the museums' walls.⁴² And this only a few years after the events of 1968. Jürgen Harten, who reviewed the show in *Studio International*, articulated one of the theoretical effects produced by the exhibition:

What was, in my opinion, decisive and (in the best sense of the word) provocative was the taking over of the question of relationship the between

41. Harald Szeemann, "Abteilung," Documenta 5, Kassel, 1972.

42. It is worth mentioning that exactly twenty-five years later, in 1999, Kynaston McShine, curator at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, said exactly the same thing in his introduction to the catalogue for the exhibition, *Museum as Muse: Artists Reflect* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1999). McShine wrote:

Overall, the relationship between museum and artist is far less adversarial than it was a few decades ago: occasional disruption aside, the status quo prevails. Museums are allowed to maintain their lofty functions, and artists are allowed to behave in the expected way, their transgressions against the museum being usually consistent with the romantic definition of the artist. Even so, this fascinating cohabitation and coexistence will probably always contain an element of wariness. Like two superpowers that mutually depend on each other vigilantly—as if practicing for the field on which they are engaged together, the miraculous field of visual art. (p. 23)

This says a lot not only about the institutions' will to coopt dissenting practices, but also about how criticisms of the institutions are dismissed. See other comments on the MOMA exhibition in the last chapter.

art and society by an avant-garde institution which, having done it four times before, was once again expected to celebrate the spiritual "definition of standpoint" as in inherently artistic event. As if one could turn the clock back beyond the discussions that have gone on since 1968! As it is one could skirt round "cultural-revolutionary thought" which [...] must in no way be hostile to art!⁴³

And after having legitimized his own standpoint with reference to one of the authors of the catalogue, who was said to be a Marxist, Harten argued:

[...] In practical terms this Documenta will make history as an exhibition of realism (in its narrower sense), the art of ideas, the aptly named "individual mythologies" and the associated themes of social iconography (in its broad sense).⁴⁴

In short, art must rightfully be reinstalled within so-called revolutionary thought in order to give credit to an art institution said to be part of the avant-garde.

One might well ask, however, how artists could be brought back into museums. The response was very simple both to formulate and to achieve: "Dilute their critiques within the media culture!" And, indeed, this is exactly what Szeemann did: he invited artists such as Buren and Marcel Broodthaers, who had already developed art practices that vigorously criticized museums, to participate in the exhibition. Their radical critiques would be attenuated by engulfing them within other "museums-in-miniature" that would more faithfully reflect the whole project of the Documenta, and by neutralizing them under categories that negated their political and cultural impact. This was the case with the two sections of Marcel Broodthaers' "fictitious museum," *Musée d'Art Moderne. Département des Aigles* (1968-1972) the *Section Publicité* of which was surrounded by many similar devices such as

43. Jürgen Harten. *op. cit.*, p. 2.

For a more critical review of the 1972 Documenta, see Denis Denizot "Exposition of an Exhibition: A Backward Look at Documenta 5," *Studio International*, vol. 185, no. 953 and no. 954 (March and April 1973). Denizot corroborates Buren's view that Documenta was indeed an exhibition about art exhibiting, an exhibition that exhibited itself and submitted all the works in it to its own goals.

44. *Id.*, p. 4.

Duchamp's *Box-in-a-Suitcase*, Oldenburg's *Mouse Museum*, Ben's *Armoire*, Distell's *Fluxus Museum für die Museen*—all of which brought reproductions, facsimiles, collections of meaningless objects and signatures on valueless paraphernalia into the Neue Galerie. Broodthaers' *Section Publicité*, in which traditional procedures and techniques of museological scholarship were compared with the techniques of persuasion in advertising, lost a bit of its efficiency, since advertisements pervaded the exhibition. His other contribution to the Documenta, the *Musée d'Art Moderne, Département des Aigles, Section d'Art Moderne* (which was transformed in the course of the exhibition into the *Musée d'Art Ancien, Département des Aigles, Galerie du XX^e Siècle*) was listed under the category "*Individual Mythologies*," even though Broodthaers' works were openly critical of modern art institutions and was overtly opposed to the myth of the artist.⁴⁵

Instead of presenting an object, or a collection of objects, Buren's own intervention at the Documenta linked the different sections of the exhibition, including the catalogue in which he presented a manifesto-text and a *catalogue raisonné* of his work from 1965 on.⁴⁶ His contribution consisted in posting strips of white paper on seven walls in the six sections of the exhibition (fig. 5.7). The day of the opening, Buren installed the first part of the installation on one wall of the rooms listed under the title "*Idea+Idea/Light*" in the Fredericianum; the other part, which made use of the same wallpaper, was installed in the other sections yet prior to the installation of the other pieces (art works, or items of popular culture), so that these were eventually put up over Buren's own installation. In the Fredericianum, Buren's one-wall all-over installation shared its space with very sober and ascetic works by artists like Agnes Martin, Robert Ryman, Sol LeWitt, Richard Long and Hanna

45. See above my chapter on Broodthaers.

46. On the eve of the sixth Documenta Buren published a fine analysis of his intervention at the fifth Documenta in a book titled *Rebondissements* (Brussels: Daled and Gavaert, 1977). See Daniel Buren, *op. cit.*, vol. 2, p. 61-110.

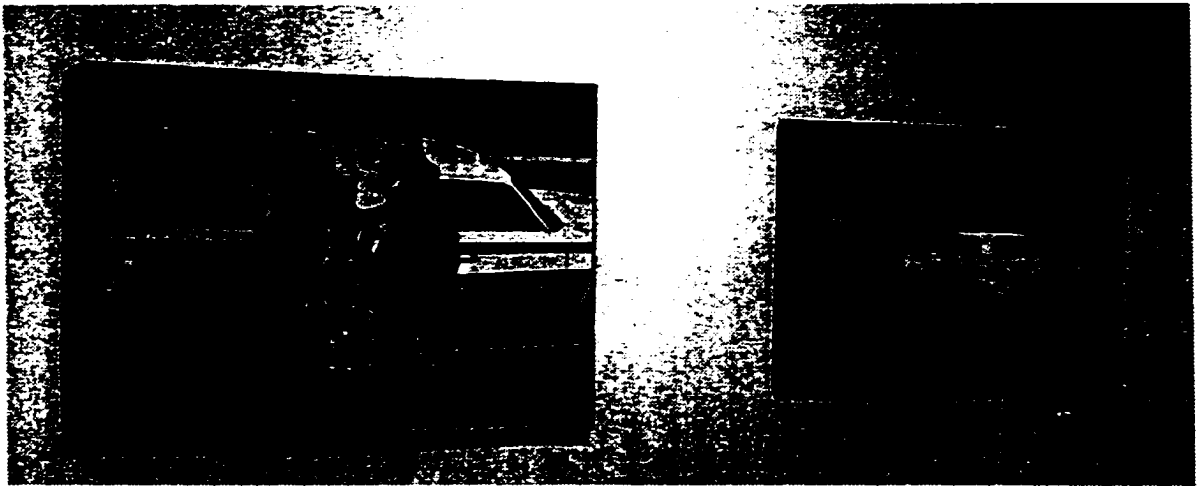


Fig. 5.6 Daniel Buren, Documenta 5, Kassel 1972

Darboven. Separate from his installations in the other sections, Buren's wall seemed to share not only space but also the same aesthetic as the other painters represented in the same section. In other words, his own work appeared to be a work of art in its own right. However, since it followed the exact configuration of the wall on which it was installed, it led to questions about supports in modern painting. On the other hand, as his work was made only with wallpaper, it could be retrospectively confused with plain wall decoration, particularly since the other six walls that Buren covered had paintings and other images displayed on them. In one instance, then, a work was seen to engage contemporary avant-garde issues without the slightest confusion, while in the other it could be perceived as plain decoration both by the artists and the public.

Just to indicate the complexity of Buren's analysis, let us mention that his design had at least four different functions in the context of the Documenta exhibition. First, it revealed the decorative art's sizeable representation in the exhibition by reiterating and underlining it. Second, it showed that the "real" decorative and communication arts were displayed as fine art, since Buren's own wallpaper was used as a decorative background for these less appreciated images. Third, the political posters of many kinds displayed in the Neue Galerie appeared to be closer to

art than Buren's own postings; conversely, his own work became more political than the political posters themselves, since it addressed specific contemporary cultural issues. And last but not least, the adhesive paper on the walls pointed to the walls themselves—by this Buren meant the museum's architecture and structure, i.e., Brian O'Doherty's "white cube"—to the space between and behind the works hung on them.

As I mentioned above, Szeemann wanted his exhibition to include the whole world; the original design of his exhibition was intended, therefore, to function as an allegory for contemporary culture. Hence Buren's own intervention, perhaps more efficiently than others, brought enunciation and context into play in order to disturb the normal functioning of art institutions and the conditions of exhibiting found in contemporary culture. By emphasizing the enunciation and the context, he clearly distanced himself from both the metaphorical and allegorical figures of art objects and images.⁴⁷

This enunciative procedure was made possible because Buren played with the limits of institutions, not only literally but also strategically and intellectually. Literally, by keeping to the surface of the walls, his work sought to expose the physical limits that both define and confine art; its goal was to indicate the space between the pictures, to reveal how this space is generally concealed, negated and neutralized under normal exhibition conditions. But his intervention involved a strategic dimension that also played at the limits—of what was then acceptable. Drawing the consequences of his expulsion from the Guggenheim Museum in New York in 1971, when several of his fellow artists persuaded museum officials to remove his work from an exhibition, he not only managed to get the organizers of

47. Allegory, it must be said, is both metaphorical and synecdochic. It is a figuration that represents an idea or a concept; as such, the allegorical figure is metaphorical. But as this figure is fragmentary in relation to a totality, it is also a synecdoche. See also, my remarks ahead p. 125, note 1.

events to collaborate with him, but he would also make strategic decisions to render his interventions acceptable to curators and other artists. At Kassel, for instance, to secure the approval and support of Szeemann—and indifference on the part of the other exhibitors—he opted for wallpaper that was as neutral as possible. Yet it had the slightest difference in finish, thus enabling him to develop his strategy of mixing high art and decoration at will; had he chosen a stronger color, none of the other participants would have agreed to hang his works over the wallpaper, and Szeemann would simply have rejected his project. In other words, Buren operated at the edges of collective agreement in order to follow his own agenda. And he played the edge intellectually as well, since the specific work he did at the Documenta could not be clearly situated: the most that could be said was that it stood somewhere between modern painting, decorative pattern, graphic design and political propaganda, thereby prompting numerous questions about vision, supports, sites, the uses of art, exhibition values and the relationships between painting and text, politics and art. And all this came to the fore because Buren's work investigated the most "structuring" condition of art in our culture: the limits of the museum-gallery space. As mentioned above, Buren's investigation into the systems of limits that create art corresponds to a larger trend in the French context of art critique. For instance, in a crucial text, "La peinture comme dispositif libidinal," which he first delivered to the *Groupe de recherche sur la théorie du signe et du texte* at Strasbourg in 1972, Jean-François Lyotard said that the sites of art, namely, the museum and gallery, play the key role in capturing libidinal inscriptions and transferring them into something bound by representation.⁴⁸ In other words, in spite

48. See Jean-François Lyotard, *Des dispositifs pulsionnels* (Paris: 10/18 U.G.E., 1973).

I mention Lyotard's article because, in it, he applied to contemporary art the conclusions of his investigations into psychoanalysis in relation to art. These were developed in *Discours, Figure* (Paris: Klincksieck, 1971). In the article, "La peinture comme dispositif libidinal," he refers three times to Buren's text, *Limites Critiques*, which shows the historical impact that Buren's investigations had (and as early as 1972) on one of the leading thinkers of his time.

of its emancipation from representation, art nevertheless remains representational because of these limits. Lyotard concluded by stating that the main issue at stake now is the sites and the places of art.

Speech Acts

To affirm that Buren's works are concerned with the cultural and institutional context is to claim that he implicitly endorsed a specific conception of (artistic) language that would be neither representational nor "metalinguistic"; his "paintings" do not represent anything, nor do they "speak" about the languages of painting (albeit through the means of painting). By being emptied of content but asserting themselves as works that are positioned in relation to modern painting, they can be compared to "utterances" that say nothing but are "enunciated" under precise conditions. In short, their blank utterance features the context of their enunciation.⁴⁹ But, as Buren's works obviously belong to the realm of painting and, more precisely, to modern painting, they direct the beholder's attention towards the visual. Thus, they focus on both the visual and "enunciative" contexts of (their) presentation.

As the forms of the works are neutralized (via their zero-degree of composition), repeated over and over and divested of any internal variations, they pro-

49. Speaking about works that are different from Buren's (yet similar in how they function in the specific context of their installation), Rosalind Krauss analyzes their indexical feature in her seminal texts "Notes on the Index (Parts 1 and 2)," first published in 1977. There she attempted to identify and circumscribe a shift in art making that was initiated by Marcel Duchamp but was fully determining for the art of the seventies. In "Notes on the Index: Part 1," she characterized this shift by using both the Peircian semiotic notion of "index" (as illustrated by marks, traces and imprints) and the Jakobsonian linguistic notion of "shifters" ("I" and "you," "here" and "there," "now" and "then," etc.), those empty signs that await fulfillment in utterance, i.e. through reference to a specific content. Shifters are indexes in the sense that they are signs that show and point to (rather than represent) the context in which they are uttered. See "Notes on the Index: Part 1 & 2," *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths* (Cambridge Mass. and London England, The MIT Press, 1986), p. 196-219.

vide no meaningful distinctions within the pieces themselves. Their total opacity makes subjects of place, time and the institution. They are both reflexive and transitive at the same time: reflexive in the sense that they articulate their enunciation, and transitive in that these conditions are referred to, indicated, pointed out. Buren's works reflect the context of their utterance, not the "language of painting" which they could use and represent. Yet the works refer to this context not because the device states something about things that happen in the world, but because the enunciation itself, which is reflected in the intervention, belongs to the world of art in particular and hence to the world in general; it occurs there as an *act* of enunciation, and a fact, that produces something, like showing a structure, questioning a convention, exposing an institution.

As Jean-François Lyotard has argued, the originality of Buren's works lies in the fact that they develop a pragmatics of visuality with visual means.⁵⁰ If Buren's works do not represent anything, if they are not analytical or self-reflexive, they nonetheless engage the beholder in a process of questioning the conditions of art presentation, display and exhibition. And since "questioning" implies, as Lyotard points out, that someone, somehow, is capable of providing an answer; it is, then, a command to do just that.

The reader may already have observed that, in the case of Szeemann's exhibition, *When Attitudes Become Form*, Buren tested and challenged some of the cultural limits within which art can exist. Then, with his "*affichages sauvages*," he empirically demonstrated that the organizer's claim that "total freedom in art exists today" was only wishful thinking, since Buren himself was arrested by the police while carrying out an artistic activity—or, if you will, a political activity came out as an art demonstration. Thus it was shown that, if artistic freedom does exist, it

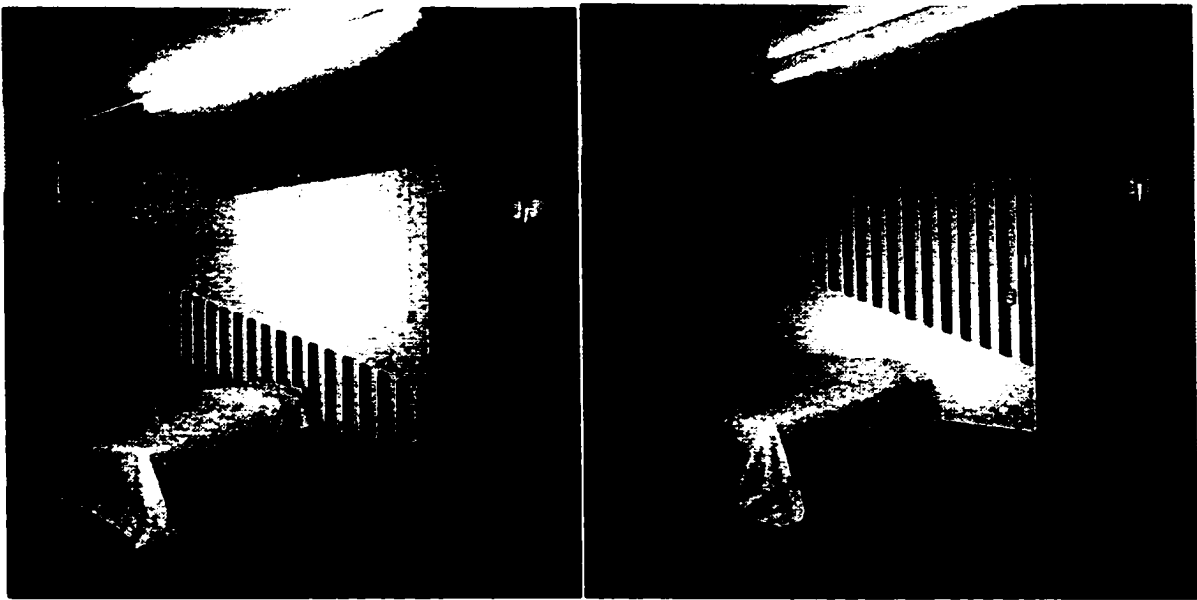
50. See Jean-François Lyotard, "Preliminary Notes on Pragmatic of Works: Daniel Buren," *October*, no. 10 (Fall 1979), p. 59-67.

could only occur under certain specific conditions and in certain restricted areas like museums and other similar institutions. In other words, the assumption of freedom requires the successful exercise of institutional conditions.⁵¹

The posters that Buren put up on the advertising billboards of the city of Bern can be compared to "utterances" with no content other than an "art-effect." Following this line of comparison, the posting itself would be the enunciation of this utterance. The enunciation consisted, therefore, in showing that the cultural context, like any other social context, is a complex system involving rules, authorities, rights, constraints, places, conditions, etc. Buren's unauthorized enunciation questioned both the city's political authority in the matter of art and Szeemann's political counter-position that freedom could exist anywhere; it did so through a practical exercise of freedom that failed since the city officials decided that Buren's posters were illegal advertising and not art.

On many other occasions, Buren defied the rules imposed on him by (museum or freelance) curators who invited him, along with other artists, to do site-specific works. His acts of defiance were aimed at pointing out the implicit rules that govern the conditions of practicing art at any given moment. He adopted this approach particularly when exhibitions were slated for sites beyond museum walls. It goes without saying that the strategies he employed in these cases were intended to restore art to its cultural site (namely, the museum) so as to contravene the illusion that art can freely and really happen everywhere. In 1986, for instance, Jan Hoet, Director of the Museum Van Hedendaagse Kunst at Ghent in Belgium, designed an exhibition titled *Chambre d'amis*, in which artists were invited to make works in the private residences of several Ghent citizens. The only rule was that

51. J.L. Austin (*Ibid.*) already noticed that performative utterances couldn't be true or false, since they do not assert anything about the world. The command, "Close the door!," obviously can neither be true nor false; it can only be successful or not, according to a set of contextual conditions.



5.7 Daniel Buren, *Chambre d'amis*, Ghent, 1986

work could not be installed in the town's museum. Buren, for his part, following his usual mode of installation, put up white and fuchsia adhesive paper half the way up along a diagonal in one of the bedrooms in the Herberts' house, thereby conforming to Jan Hoet's rules for the exhibition (fig. 5.8). Contravening the rules, however, he managed to construct a duplicate of the Herbert's room within the museum, and then put up striped paper above the diagonal in this simulated bedroom, thereby linking the inside and outside of the museum together instead of accepting the trend of art exile from the museums. So when it became fashionable to organize exhibitions anywhere but in the museum (in the streets, subways, bus stops and the like), Buren insisted on returning to recognized art venues. By doing so, however, he fully acknowledged that the museum, more than any other art institutions, constituted the vanishing point of his entire practice. All the more so since the preservative function of the museum always-already included monuments existing out there in the public space.

Obviously the investigation and examination of the sites and the modes of exhibitions are crucial in the understanding of the process of making art in the con-

text of modernity. Moreover, the deconstruction of these conditions requires that one could transform them by playing at the limits of the apparatuses that fetishise the art objects. Yet, showing these apparatuses would not suffice to demonstrate how the museum and the gallery nexus works in their transformation of the objects that one calls art. Indeed, history must also be a part of this deconstructionist exposure. Michael Asher who comes from a completely different horizon from Daniel Buren and Marcel Broodthaers, started by experiencing the physical space of the gallery, but soon proceeded to excavate out the political and historical background of the museums and galleries in which he made his interventions.

CHAPTER 6

MATERIAL SPACES, HISTORICAL PLACES, AND COMMUNICATION, MICHAEL ASHER'S TRANSFORMATIONS



Fig. 6.1 Robert Morris, Exhibition at the Green Gallery, New York, 1964

The objects that the Minimalists placed in galleries made the viewer more aware of the literal space in which these sculptures were installed.¹ For instance, all seven pieces that Robert Morris exhibited at the Green Gallery in 1964 were on a human scale and related to the gallery's architecture (fig. 6.1). "Bridging, or wedged into corners, or bracketing the floor and its adjacent walls, these objects were dispersed throughout the gallery space to allow a dialogue with both the architectural site and the viewer."² As a result, the beholder's perception turned

1. See Rosalind Krauss, *Passages in Modern Sculpture*, *op. cit.*, p. 266-272

2. Rosalind Krauss and Kimberley Paice, *Robert Morris: The Mind/Body Problem* (New York: The Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation, 1994), p. 170.

towards the various conditions in which these objects were displayed—conditions of space, time and movement, as well as ongoing interactions between the viewer and the object. Yet the experience of the gallery space depended on the objects themselves, their placement in this or that position, their dimensions, and their scale in relation to a specific site.

In contrast with these Minimalist objects, Michael Asher's early works aimed at making space itself tangible without the physical presence of any object that might hold the beholder's attention. His strategy consisted in finding means to raise awareness of the physical and literal presence of space itself: the lighting, sound amplification (or its absorption), jets of air, and the use of paint. Occasionally, his installations opened up the gallery to the world outside, letting in its light, atmosphere and sound. At other times, he would further enclose the gallery space by interposing additional walls, or by setting up sound insulation material to draw attention to the exclusion of the space outside. Not unlike Buren's strategies, which operated on the margins of the art system (particularly its architecture), Asher's early works were integrated within the architectural sites of art institutions, without putting physical objects on display.

One of the most eloquent examples of this kind of intervention occurred in 1970, when Asher did an installation at the Gladys K. Montgomery Art Center Gallery at Pomona College (Claremont, California)³ (fig. 6.2). The work consisted of two rooms that formed two uneven triangular areas oriented in opposite directions. Both areas were connected at their acute angles, leaving a narrow passage-

3. Most of my information on the early works of Michael Asher is drawn from his writings, which were written in collaboration with his editor, Benjamin Buchloh. See Michael Asher, *Writings 1973-1983 on Works 1969-1979* (Halifax and Los Angeles: The Press of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design/Museum of Contemporary Art (Los Angeles: [c 1983?]), p. 229. Since Buchloh wrote the texts together with Asher, the latter's writings have benefited from a great deal of art historical and conceptual analysis. It is, however, more difficult to identify precisely which ideas belong to each.

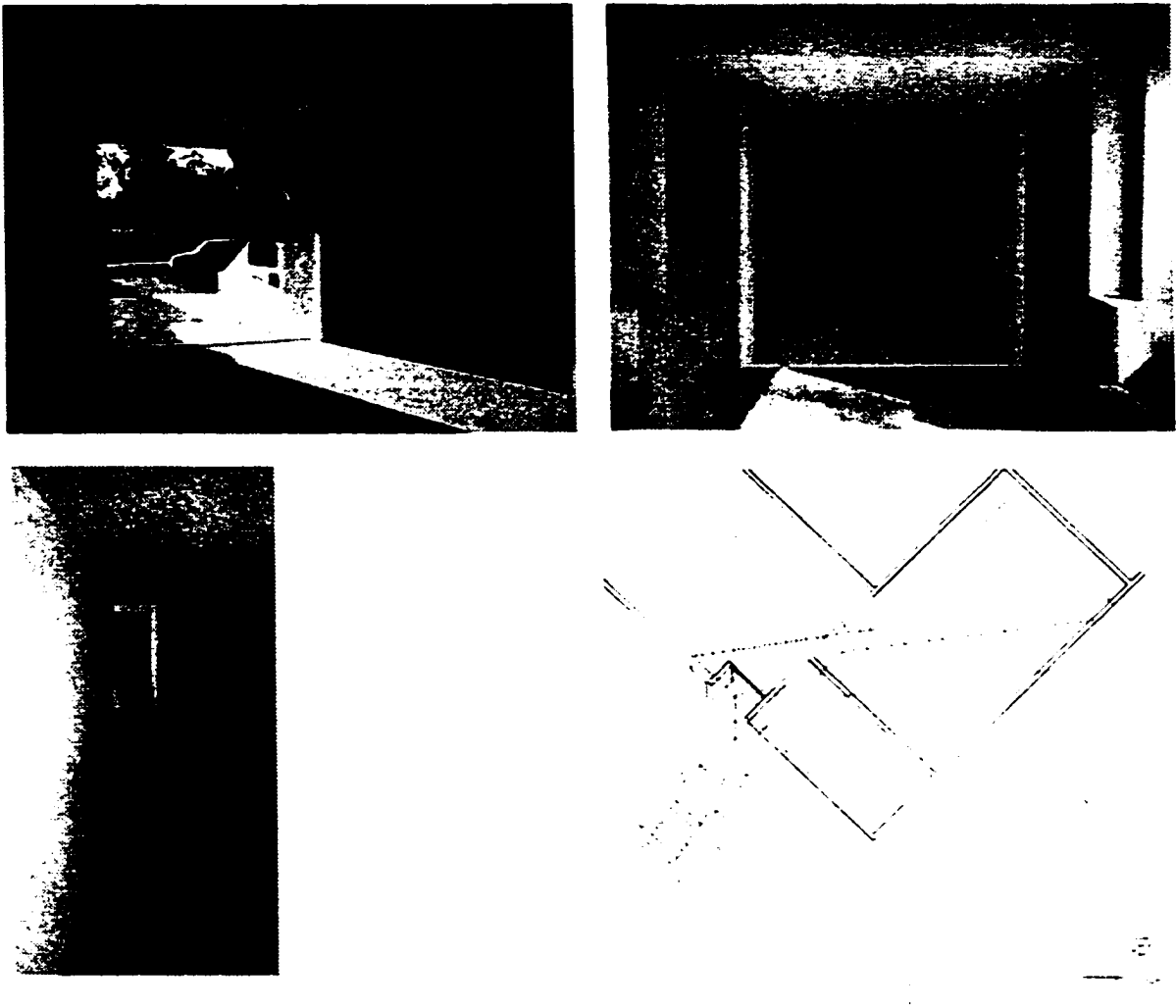


Fig. 6.2 Michael Asher. Gladys K. Montgomery Art Center Gallery at Pomona College. Claremont Ca. 1970

way through which visitors (as well as light, sound, and air) could pass. Asher built the installation by simply adding three walls and a double ceiling to the gallery rooms. The doors of the gallery were removed to make the installation accessible twenty-four hours a day for the duration of the exhibition. The entire installation was meant to produce an experience of a site completely modified and controlled for the viewer. Since the gallery was open to the outside day and night, visitors were prompted to question the so-called neutrality of the conventional exhibition space, which might appear as abstract as the one they were now experiencing. Since the gallery space was opened up to the "real life" beyond its walls, visitors

could not miss the opposition between the fictive space of the gallery and the space outside, a space from which they felt detached while walking through the installation.

Thus the opposition of inside and outside—which generates the abstraction of the "white cube"—has taken on a materialist overtone in Asher's work. The gallery space becomes physically palpable, and is sensed as such. Moreover, no objects are allowed into the space to give off their "aura." In contrast to conventional modernist objects, which are autonomous, self-contained and nomadic, Asher's early works fit within the specific architectural framework in which they were installed. And like other *in situ* works, Asher's installations disintegrate completely when dismantled, leaving nothing for the art market. Although the works that Asher made prior to 1973 gave material form to physical and literal spatial features, they remained, for the most part, formal. They were basically environments made to be experienced both materially and phenomenologically. In this way, Asher's work was very similar to his contemporaries—like James Turrell, Robert Irwin, and Dan Flavin—who made works of art that physically transform the environment in which they are inscribed in order to provide sensorial experiences. In 1973, however, when Asher began to modify spaces by subtracting discrete architectural elements, instead of building up new structures, his investigation turned towards more social and cultural concerns related to art. Indeed, it represented an important shift in his way of working as well as the problems he decided to address.

In response to an invitation from Nicholas Logsdail, then Director of the Lisson Gallery in London, Asher cut off a thin strip (about 1/4" wide by 1 1/2" deep) from the bottom of the four walls in a basement room of the gallery (fig. 6.3). This extremely minimalist procedure, which he called "*material subtraction*," enabled him to draw attention to the conventional display apparatus (the modernist white

cube) and to set a strategy of denial against the compulsory need for new means of art production and new modes of composition, both of which proceed by addition.⁴

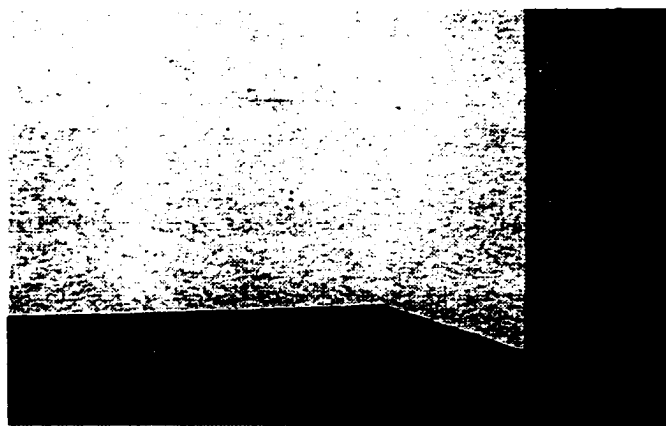


Fig. 6.3 Michael Asher, Lisson Gallery, London, 1973

It should be pointed out, however, that this procedure of "material subtraction" is a logical outcome of Asher's experiments with "space transformation," since it was the contained space—hence a void—that was, so to speak, "materialized" in these works. The materialization of contained emptiness and the stripping away of the container itself, they both come from the same concern with ways of enabling spaces to be perceived and questioned as factual data. This shift in working procedures cannot, however, be adequately explained by reducing everything to technique, or to a "metaphysical" questioning of space and void.⁵ Asher could have pursued such experiences further, and in various directions. I would suggest, rather, that the last piece he made in this fashion (the one he made at the fifth Documenta in 1972) might reveal Asher's greater awareness of the problems implied by formal and phenomenological interactions with space. I mean by this that he might have understood that installations are not *per se* the only way to "deconstruct" conventions in art.

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4. Even the extremely minimal gesture of selecting an object for submission to an exhibition—one thinks of Marcel Duchamp's selection for the Independents in 1917—adds to the stock of available art merchandise.
 5. If I refer to this kind of metaphysical questioning, it is because this eventuality existed well before Asher's experiments with space. In the recent history of art, Yves Klein's 1958 exhibition at the Galerie Iris Clert tuned such a metaphysical endeavor, as we can see from the full title of the exhibition: *The isolation of sensibility in a state of primary matter stabilized by pictorial sensibility*.

From Fictional to Functional Spaces

In 1972, upon Harald Szeemann's invitation to participate in the Documenta show, Asher designed a work that would fit into the allotted space (fig. 6.4). The piece was a hallway (3.66 m high, 4.5 m wide and 10.97 m long) situated on the second floor of the Museum Fridericianum. Like Richard Serra's *Circuit* and Bruce Nauman's *Elliptical Space* (which were also at the Documenta), Asher's work was a self-sufficient installation that provided its own "sensorial experience" and, in the process, psychically escaped from Documenta's phantasmagorical display of heterogeneous objects. The installations of Asher, Serra and Nauman involved a bodily experience of space in relation to the spectators' perception.

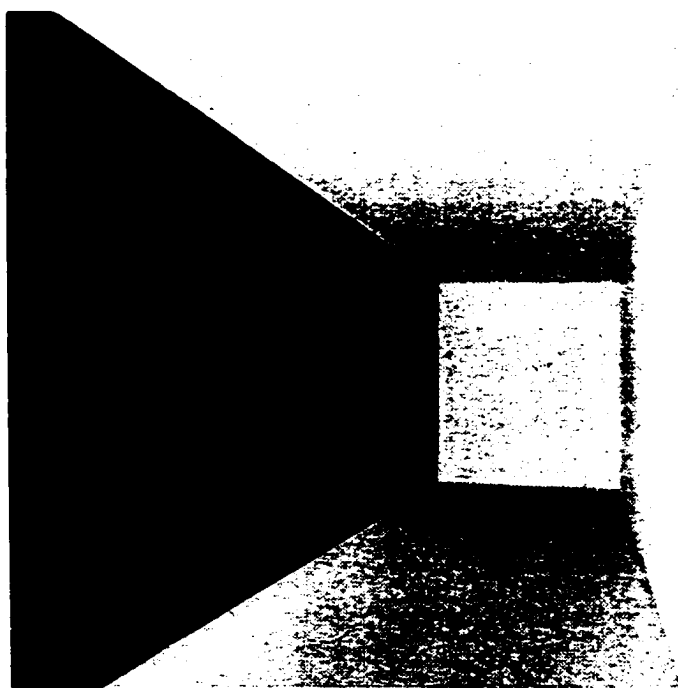


Fig. 6.4 Michael Asher, Room installation at the Documenta 5, Kassel, 1972

As planned and executed, Asher's work was a closed corridor with access provided by a door at one end. The space was divided longitudinally into two areas, the halves separated only by black and white paint. One side was completely

painted in dark, and the other in light. The only light in the room came from two narrow wells located at both ends of the white section where the ceiling and walls intersected. Viewers entered the room through a door at one end of its black side. Since the light in the room was extremely dim, they experienced the space progressively, as their eyes adapted. Seen from the black portion of the room, the white side appeared shrunken and confined, while the black section seemed to be an immense void. To viewers positioned within it, the white side of the room looked like an extension of equal dimension on the other side; yet it seemed as if the space were separated by smoked glass. Essentially, then, this work was designed to produce a bodily experience of visual perception dealing with spatial continuity and discontinuity.

While previous Asher's works made in art centers and museums were truly site-specific, his aspirations could not be completely realized in exhibitions like the Documenta, which have their own agenda and exhibiting conditions. Asher's "perception room," indeed, was constructed away from the venue; moreover, it could have been removed from there and set up in any other suitable place, even if it was originally designed for a specific site. In that sense, Asher's work at the Documenta was the contrary of Buren's site-specific work made for that same occasion since this latter's piece was disseminated throughout the whole show so as to incorporate the ensemble of the exhibition into itself. Asher's work, instead, was as movable as any other "art-commodity," and involved an aesthetic experience as any other art object.

Since then, however, every work that Michael Asher has made has involved and addressed institutional and cultural concerns, in addition to his "material subtraction procedure." The installations he made upon his return to California dealt with exhibiting conditions: the light reflection potential of various white paints and electrical fixtures (Gallery A 402, California Institute of the Arts, Valencia, California,

1973⁶); framing devices (Gallery 167, The University of California at Irvine, 1973⁷); architectural settings, including passageways to gallery spaces (Gallery A 402, and the Lisson Gallery, London, 1973⁸). Even viewers themselves were looked at from this angle (as was the case when Asher projected a uniform medium-gray film in a dormitory room in Boston,⁹ or when nothing but the gallery space was on display.¹⁰) All of these strategies were clearly aimed at disclosing the various display devices developed in the course of a century of modern art exhibition practices. Yet the mercantilist endeavor of one-person exhibitions remained to be exposed in its entirety, and not even the "minimalist" cut edge at the Lisson Gallery could achieve this demonstration.

On Commercialism

Asher first incorporated the issue of art business into his installation work in the fall of 1973, with his interventions at the Heiner Fisher Gallery in Cologne and the Galleria Toselli in Milan. These two works, together with his intervention at the Lisson Gallery, coincided with his first exhibitions in commercial art galleries.

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6. See Asher/Buchloh, *op. cit.*, p. 64-69. On this occasion, Asher used two different shades of white paint (one of these was the gallery's usual color). The point was to show the reflective intensity of the two whites, as well as to expose the lighting and electrical devices of gallery exhibitions. Asher also removed the gallery's main doors, facilitating unimpeded movement for the duration of the exhibition.
 7. *Ibid.*, p. 70-71. When the students and staff of the school where he was teaching were invited to hold a group exhibition, Asher decided to measure the protective glass surfaces of the drawings to be exhibited. He then calculated their average size and mounted a sheet of glass with these same dimensions. His contribution was clearly intended to underline both the display devices used in such exhibitions and the proportion of wall surface on which exhibitors typically show their works.
 8. *Ibid.*, p. 76-80.
 9. *Ibid.*, p. 72-75.
 10. *Ibid.*, p. 101-103. On the occasion of this exhibition at the Anna Leonowens Gallery at the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, Asher simply removed the screen blinds from the gallery's exhibition room since these were not part of its original design. The exhibition was announced by a card. As a result, those attending had nothing to see but the place itself, and could only call themselves into question as gallery-goers.



Fig. 6.5 Michael Asher, *Heiner Fisher Gallery*, Cologne, 1973

At the Heiner Fisher Gallery (fig. 6.5), Asher simply painted the gallery ceiling in a color similar to the brownish black of the floor¹¹ and arranged the base of the uneven walls to make them flush with the floor. On this occasion, it may seem that, he played a merely formal game with the gallery space by creating a sort of visual illusion comparable to what he did in previous works; but since the color on both ceiling and floor ran evenly throughout the gallery space (inclusive of the exhibition room and administrative offices), a unified field was produced. Thereby, the space of the exhibition and the place where transactions are made were shown to be contiguous and interrelated to each other. Also, since no art objects were displayed, in this peculiar situation, the furniture in the gallery, and the people at work seemed to be what was on display. The transformation of the Fisher gallery did not address the space by providing a visual sensation or a physical experience of place. Instead, the focus was on the place as a commercial apparatus where transactions were made.

11. The slightly darker color of the ceiling was meant to compensate for the reflection of light on the ceiling.



Fig. 6.6 Michael Asher, Installation at the Galleria Toselli, Milan, 1973

During the same fall, Asher made an even more radical intervention at the Galleria Toselli in Milan (fig. 6.6). This time, he sandblasted the gallery's exhibition spaces to remove all the layers of white paint that had been applied to the walls and ceilings between exhibitions. The initial architectural setting, with its brown plaster, its concrete floor and the various fixtures, was laid bare, exposed so to speak to the sight of the visitors. Also exposed were the various adjustments made to the space to render it more convenient for exhibiting art. In this intervention, the work and the denuded space melded so perfectly that no residues of any conventional modernist art practices remained. Gone were the figure/ground opposition and the nomadic object; nor were there traces of commodities, of the "white cube," or of spatial autonomy, or business transactions. All that was left was the result of a stripping bare of modernist illusions. Strictly speaking, in this piece Asher literally operated at the margins of traditional art places in an attempt to reveal the conditions governing the production and distribution of contemporary art.

On several other occasions in the years that followed, Asher adopted similar procedures to reveal the interconnections between exhibition spaces and art distribution. For example, at the Claire Copley Gallery in Los Angeles, he dismantled

the wall between the office area and the exhibition space in order to bring the gallery's business transactions and storage mechanisms into public view. At the Otis Art Institute Gallery, he simply closed down the gallery proper and used the display window in the building's lobby; to the information board he attached the invitation to his show sent out by the gallery. On it he had typed: "In the present work I am the art."

Despite his extremely minimal modification of these spaces, Asher led visitors to explore the various agents or factors involved in the production and distribution of art. These would include the actual producers and middlemen (the gallery owners, directors and staffs), the galleries and museums architecture, the various display devices and announcements; in short the containers and their accessories, as much as the visitors themselves as spectators.

Resisting Aesthetics

Asher's strategies, then, led him to an acute awareness of the cultural conditions in which art works exist and circulate. Amid these conditions, however, there was an emerging trend that consisted in appropriating all forms of institutional critique within a formalist framework, on the part of many critiques and curators with the result that the cutting edges of institutional critique seemed to be severely blunted. Asher's intervention at the 1976 Venice Biennale, which invited him to participate in a thematic group show curated by Germano Celant under the title *Ambiente/Arte* (*Environmental Art*), specifically challenged this "formalist" undertaking.

During the 1970s, many critics firmly believed that installation work¹² was intrinsically "revolutionary" since it was said to resist "commodification" by being

12. Installation works are also identified as *in situ* work, or the "site-specific," or "environmental art." Of course, each designation refers to something slightly different. In this present context, it does not really matter what these differences are.

essentially immutable. Germano Celant, who was responsible for the Biennale's *Ambiente/Arte* section, was one such critic. Celant maintained his position with a two-pronged exhibition: one side was a comprehensive historical survey of modern art practices that integrated ambient space, while the other presented a roster of contemporary artists (including Michael Asher) who had made "site-specific works" for the occasion.¹³

As we saw earlier, the Venice Biennale was one of the main targets of the 1968 protests since it was then the single largest international venue for contemporary art. And it was also the site of the battle between Americans and Europeans for control of the art market at the times when that was still an issue.¹⁴ When, in the first days of the Biennale, artists from many countries walked out of their pavilions (some pavilions were forced to close), students and artists found themselves in scuffles with the police. The Biennale's survey exhibitions had to be closed down by the officials (they did reopen, however, later in the summer). On an immediate basis, the 1968 revolts had a limited effect on the Biennale's organizational structure and its goals. Although the following two exhibitions were more open to new trends and showed more experimental art (*Arte Povera*, video, Conceptual Art, etc.), they remained nonetheless a compromise between the institution's traditional routines and artists' demands for radical renewal; in short, the Biennale's *modus operandi* remained largely unchanged.¹⁵ But participants contin-

13. The other contemporary artists who were invited to make work for that occasion were Palermo, Buren, Dan Graham, Beuys, LeWitt, Merz, Nauman, Acconci, Kounellis, Irwin, Nordman, Wheeler. The exhibition also included reconstruction of many avant-garde works that addressed the space of exhibition: G. Balla, F. Depero, I. Pannaggi, V. Tatlin, I. Puni, E. Lissitsky, T. van Doesburg, S. Delannay, O. Schlemmer, P. Mondrian, K. Schwitters, M. Duchamp, Y. Klein, A. Kaprow, C. Oldenburg, G. Segal, and many others.

14. See Paolo Rizzi and Enzo DiMartino, *Storia della Biennale (1895-1982)* (Milano: Electra, 1982), p. 59.

15. Rizzi and DiMartino (*Ibid.*, p. 62) referring to the scandal provoked by an Italian "behavioral" artist who exhibited a mongoloid as an allegory of the Universe's immobility, summarize the event even to in the following way: *la Biennale del 1972 segna, rispetto a quella del '70, un momento di moderazione, di conciliazione, di plurismo.* (At the exception of events like this one, comparatively the Biennale of 1970, that of 1972 represents a moment of moderation, conciliation, and pluralism.)

ued to press for real change, claiming that the Biennale's structures were too elitist and conservative.

This pressure did eventually produce results, and 1973 marked the beginning of a new era. In that year, Carlo Ripa di Manea was selected to head the organizing committee for the 1974 Biennale. The planning, however, stretched over three years and 1974 came and went without a Biennale. Nevertheless, this pause happened to be quite fruitful. First, a crucial exhibition, *Bachelor Machines*, curated by Harald Szeemann and initially presented at Bern, took place in the fall of 1975 under the auspices of the Biennale organization as a replacement for the usual show. More significantly, however, the organization of the Biennale was completely restructured to more adequately serve all art-related fields and to make it more democratic in its aims.

Debates were held on the greater "decentralization" of art institutions, including the Biennale. In this context, "decentralization" meant seeking ways to make the Biennale more accessible to "third world" artists, so that it could live up to its international responsibilities. Also, as a way of countering elitist art, Ripa di Manea and his peers advocated the creation of links with both popular culture and the mass media. With this in mind, even trade union organizations were invited to present their views on an eventual role for themselves in the Biennale, as a way of increasing widespread public participation in cultural events and institutions. In the wake of the events of 1968, trade union representatives expressed their own concerns over cultural issues—a stance that contrasted considerably with their usual limited practice of asking for better wages and working conditions.¹⁶ Also, in order to facilitate the exchange of ideas and greater transparency in the organization of Biennale events, the officials decided to publish reports of their activities, *Eventi*, and to create a contemporary art documentation center.

16. For information on this shift, see the reports on the Venice Biennale: *Eventi 1975* (Venice: Archivio storico delle arti contemporanee, c1976), p. 168-246.

Ripa di Manea, in preparing for the 1976 Biennale, was aware of the crucial contradiction that existed between individual artists pursuing their careers in isolation and the collective consciousness they might share. In his speech for the opening session of the working group constituted to set up the Biennale, he assessed the situation as follows:

At the individual level all that may or may not be interesting, but this phenomenon [the "cultural revolution" that is happening everywhere in the world] already underway is shaking the structures and institutions of culture. The time has come to deal with the problems and contradictions which these initiatives imply, without resolving them. At the center of this diatribe, artists, despite the numerous cases of collective consciousness, continue to work in isolation, all the while living the collective and voluntaristic moment as a prelude to the long solitary tunnel at the end of which the market and its commercial laws await them. Art and the products of consumption cannot be two contradictory forces within a single work. [...] It is impossible to oppose art and the commercial production because these two concepts belong to two entirely different and incompatible worlds.¹⁷

In response to this unsolvable split, Ripa di Manea did not ask for what, in his view, might be impossible forms of hybridization. Rather, as a way of circumventing these difficulties, he called collective collaboration among artists, intellectuals, the working class and representatives of "third world" community groups in order to counter the already well-established art market. From this perspective, thematic exhibitions around social concerns deserved a place on the agenda of the Biennale. Di Manea believed that aesthetic reflection, political engagement, and thematic exhibitions would put an end to crass commercialism. For example, to prolong demonstrations against Pinochet's *coup d'état* of 1974, the Biennale organized an event to commemorate the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939) and support the anti-Franco movements in Spain, as well as all those fighting for freedom in the world. Moreover, the theme chosen for the new Biennale of 1976 was *Environment, Participation, and Cultural Structures*. Participant countries were even asked to

17. *Ibid.*, p. 246.

adopt this theme in their own pavilions. This is an indication of the extent to which the revolts of 1968 shook the old structures.

Germano Celant's *Ambiente/Arte* was designed to fall within the framework of the general theme of *Environment, Participation, And Cultural Structures*. His anti-capitalist stance found its expression in "Environmental Art." Although he was wrong in forgetting the Bourgeois origins of such environments, which certainly go back to Richard Wagner's *Gesamtkunstwerk*, he believed that the bourgeoisie more recently eliminated "total works of art" because they implied social interactions of spectators and their surroundings, instead of the isolating actions and feelings of ephemeral experience produced by other forms of art. He clearly expressed this view in the following statement:

Bourgeois thinking was bound to eliminate any attitude which stood in the way of exchange and free movement of goods and therefore excluded any possibility of binding a work of art to a specific environment. The characteristics of an art which is integrated with space are immutable; they cannot be manipulated. Environmental art is an indivisible whole.¹⁸

Given the changes then underway in the Biennale's reorganization of its structures and reorientation of its goals, Celant's stance seemed to fit perfectly into its democratic political agenda and its calls for an escape from the market's takeover of art production. There is no room for doubt: reactions against the art market's ever expanding occupation of the terrain of art took the form of a renewal of aesthetic experience, one that favored "total works of art" instead of the isolated and autonomous *art object*. But we could also ask whether such investment in designs for "spatial experience" could effectively favor social relationships among viewers on the one hand, and between producers and consumers on the other. Moreover, while the immutable character of "total works of art integrated within

18. See Germano Celant, "Artspaces," *Studio International*, vol. 190, no. 977 (September-October 1975), p. 115-136. An extended version was published for the Venice Biennale: *Ambiente/Arte dal Futurismo alla Body Art* (Venice: Edizioni La Biennale di Venezia, c1977).

specific spaces" allows an escape from the "commodification" of the art object and its transformation into sheer exchange value, it is much less certain that the kind of experiences installation provides are not themselves a form of art in which culture becomes a show and is hence commodified. For even if both viewers and art "objects" constitute a single experience in installation works, and even if they are both unified within a sensory and intellectual interrelationship, viewers nevertheless remain separated from each other since visual and intellectual sensations cannot be shared without any verbal or written mediation. As we shall see in a moment, within the context of the *Ambiente/Arte* exhibition at the Venice Biennale, Asher's response explicitly addressed this issue.

Germano Celant's exhibition stressed that, in contrast to the modernist transformation of whole spaces,¹⁹ contemporary art enacts a full range of various experiences with space itself. To spell out his point, Celant suggested a typology of Environmental Art composed of six categories. (1) In contrast to the Abstract Expressionists' projection of the self onto the field of painting, the category of *Object-Space*, Celant argued, reactivated the encounter of artists' private fantasies with the mundane circumstances of their lives, circumstances that they share with a larger community—as represented in the sensuous and "trashy" objects of Neodada and Nouveau Réalisme. (2) The category of *Optical/Kinetic/Space* referred to numerous experiments conducted jointly by artists, psychologists, technicians and scientists in order to improve our knowledge of optical perception, movement and space—in the 1960s, for instance, there was the Italian Nuova Tendeza and the American "Experiment in Art and Technology". (3) Among environmental art, the category of *Figural Space* designated those works in which everyday advertising

19. Such as we find in the Futurist and Dadaist "cabarets" and Constructivist showrooms, in private interiors (Piet Mondrian's *Salon of Madame B.*), in artists' studios (Kurt Schwitters' *Merzbau* and Marcel Duchamp's *11 rue Larrey*), or in the painting surface as a field of action for artists who were isolated (Pollock and Fontana).

and other stereotypical images are used together to build up fragmented spaces (the awkward representational spaces of Segal, Oldenburg and Warhol). (4) The *Factual Spaces* category, meanwhile, grouped together those works that analyze conventional display conditions (Buren, LeWitt, Palermo, Flavin, and Serra), taking a rational approach toward the understanding of artistic social behaviors instead of being occupied with compositional and figural concerns. (5) The *Life Space* category referred, in a much more comprehensive fashion, to a vision of space that implied a complete and total living experience, one in which artists project their own lives onto the surrounding space—examples would include performances and installations involving both animals and human beings (Acconci, Gilbert & George, Kounellis). (6) In contrast to the *Life Space* category, which abolished the distinction between the self and its environment, *Experience Space* referred to artists' urge to construct an environment in which they could experience boundaries between themselves and the environment (Californian artists Irwin, Turrell, Wheeler, Nordman, Munger, Nauman, Orr and Asher). Thus, to go by Celant's categories, Environmental Art is essentially constituted by the various relationships that exist between the object, the self and space. In some sense, one can say that Celant expanded Minimal Art's awareness of the phenomenological relationships between space, object, and subject to encompass a larger range of artistic practices. However, this inscription of these practices into topologies and categories is finally misleading with respect to the institutional critique implied in some of the works that Celant had included in his comprehensive list.

If one considers how Celant describes Daniel Buren's and Michael Asher's works in particular, there is no doubt that these are assimilated in such a fashion that their critical edge is conspicuously blunted. Within the category of *Factual space*, Buren's *in situ* works are said to analyze various spatial situations, yet without mentioning the institutions that they are supposed to analyze and deconstruct; Celant maintains:

The spatial characteristics of an environment are not in fact concerned with problems of content or composition of an individual and historical nature. It has to be looked at in the light of its "behavior," which can be understood through the standard units (ceiling, floor, walls and dimensions) of which it is formed. [...] These [two/three dimensional characteristics] govern the aesthetic arrangement, as can be seen in the work of Buren and LeWitt from 1968 onwards. They carry out their studies *in situ*. Under the "pressure" of the particular situation, Buren defines one aspect of it, in order to make it intelligible. This aspect might be, within the given field, the regular pattern made by certain elements (windows, doors), the way in which surfaces are divided up (in squares, rectangles or circles), or else the volumetric compactness and the internal/external dialectic.²⁰

While this overview may be appropriate to define certain of Buren's works that used his characteristic device of stripes to analyze and reveal architectural structures *in situ*, it omits to mention that these structures are those of exhibition places, of museums and galleries. Nor does it connect them with many other public display and advertising devices, which Buren investigated at the same time: billboards, sandwich boards, Morris columns, invitation cards, etc. If Buren's work does indeed shift compositional and content concerns in the direction of behaviors, it is also necessary to point out that the behaviors in question are those which result from the art conventions and institutions that frame them. Moreover, at that time Buren was obviously interested in all sorts of display devices. Yet, if museum and gallery architecture plays such a fundamental role in Buren's interventions, it is because architecture constitutes the main cultural framework that delimits the place of art and defines the functions of the art object in our society.

The installation Buren did for the exhibition, *Ambiente/Arte*, is quite revealing about how radical he can be with respect to his concerns. On this occasion, he began by removing the glass roof of the room set aside for his installation, thereby leaving it open to the weather. But instead of confining his work to this place, he covered the pavilion's other glass roofs with strips of translucent striped paper.

20. Celant, *Ibid.*, p. 122.

By playing with the roofs protecting the exhibition halls, Buren was, of course, underscoring a specific architectural component; and in the process, he may have produced a peculiar atmosphere for his installation. But the glass roof is not just one architectural device among others; it is one of the major historical inventions that gave the institution of the museum its specific characteristics on which its exhibiting function depends. Moreover, by covering the glass roofs of all the exhibition halls with the exception of his own, Buren appropriated the whole event and drew attention to the place and event of the Biennale exhibition via its physical limits. In the process, he spelled out the exhibition as an event and exhibited the art of exhibiting. To pass over this fact is to transform Buren's institutional critique into a phenomenological approach to spatial analysis. One could argue, perhaps, that Buren's work is, after all, nothing more than a behavioral analysis of both the architectural structures of art institutions and their conventions. But it is hard to concede that his deconstructionist approach is limited to the rational experience of spaces; for everything he did points to the cultural framework within which art institutions and conventions are bound.

A similar observation could be made about Celant's interpretation of Michael Asher's work. In his article he mentions that, after 1968, California artists were interested in building spaces aimed at "discovering one's own experience." "The purpose of building these spaces," he adds, "is to 'test' one's own dimension and energy on a human scale."²¹ Bringing the Californians into a single coherent group, Celant states:

Everything is reduced to the perception of a phenomenon which fluctuated between interior and exterior; and there is no pausing to dwell on a crystallized or quantified object or product, for example in the light rooms of Irwin, Wheeler and Turrell.²²

21. Germano Celant, *Ibid.*, p. 123.

22. *Ibid.*

Speaking more specifically about Asher's works, and even supplementing his text with a photograph of Asher's intervention at the Claire Copley Gallery (where he dismantled the wall between the exhibition and office spaces), Celant pursues his analysis in the following terms:

By reducing as far as possible the references to quantified images and by polarizing the senses on simple happenings, which might be a window (Nordman) or a door (Asher), these artists are trying to make the periphery of the body reduce the attention it gives to external objects and turn to experience-processes.²³

While this observation might hold true for Asher's works up to the 1972 Documenta, from that point on he shifted his practice toward institutional critique. At the Copley Gallery, the issue at stake had nothing to do with a phenomenological experience in which spatial coordinates are so reduced that the spectator explores his/her own displacement into space. As I have argued, the gallery wall was removed in order to make visitors aware of the commercial activities that regularly take place in the gallery. If, in this situation, there was any self-consciousness on the part of gallery visitors, it was as gallery-goers who had nothing to see but the gallery's regular proceedings, and nothing to experience but themselves as gallery-goers who would usually expect to see something that might be for sale.

In 1976, then, when Asher was invited by Germano Celant to design a work for the *Ambiente/Arte* exhibition, he did not respond in accordance with the phenomenological approach promoted by the curator. Since he was already involved in investigating and revealing social relationships as they are conveyed by cultural institutions, his proposal aimed at creating an ambivalent space that would function as a structural and conceptual pivot between the exhibition hall of the Central Pavilion and the external site of the Biennale, the Giardini. For this purpose, Asher

23. *Ibid.*

24. Asher, *op. cit.*, p. 138.

requested a space near an entry/exit point of the exhibition area, one that he could transform into a lounge—in his view, a place where "people communicate on a social level"²⁴ (fig. 6.7). In the end, he was assigned an indoor room with one door opening onto a patio next to a café-bar. Inside the room, in addition to the door opening onto the patio, there were two other passageways that provided access to neighboring artists' installations (Nauman and Wheeler) and, via these, to the whole exhibition area. Before Asher's arrival in Venice, however, the curator had had the passageway between Nauman's room and his closed off with a partition. As a result, Asher's space was set apart from the rest of the exhibition. He requested that the partition be dismantled so as to satisfy the conditions for his visitors' "lounge." It took a petition signed by fellow artists to have his demand met.²⁵



Fig. 6.7 Michael Asher, Installation at the Venice Biennale, 1976

25. Out of the twenty artists present in the exhibition, seven signed the petition: Vito Acconci, Daniel Buren, Dan Graham, Janis Kounellis, Mario Merz, Maria Nordman, and Palermo. See Asher-Buchloh, *op. cit.*, p. 140.

Asher had the walls of the room stuccoed and whitened, and the parquet floor sandblasted. This room, like those in the other rooms of the pavilion, had a glass roof. In contrast to his previous works, however, he added several folding stools designed by an Italian firm. By transforming his part of the exhibition hall into a lounge, Asher's installation worked in a direction opposite to that of the readymade. The industrial objects that he had purchased in Italy, the intermediate space that he chose next to the café bar, the virtual lounge allowing visitors to meet, discuss and rest—all these, taken together, were aimed at creating a situation in which the exhibition would be transformed into a social event, and in which the conventional use of objects would not be abstracted through the context of the exhibition. Thus, while artists and curators were altogether attracted to installations dealing with the phenomenological experience of exhibition spaces, Asher responded to this trend by creating a situation in which social communication could take place within the public domain of art and substitute for the exhibition-value currently at stake.²⁶ Asher's use of objects as practical things was meant to restore their use-value at a time when the trend was toward exhibition-value alone. Yet this use-value was to favor social communication over sensory experience.

Many other examples of Asher's work can be adduced to convince us of his strategy of resistance to the then current "aesthetization" of "site-specific" works in art exhibitions.²⁷ In 1981, for instance, he was invited by the Los Angeles County Museum of Art to make a work for an exhibition, *Museum as Site*, that was sup-

26. On the matter of exhibition-value and Asher's strategy, see Claude Gintz, "Les 'réponses' de Michael Asher," *Art Press*, no. 160 (July-August 1991), p. 38-41; and Asher/Buchloh, *op. cit.*, p. 138-145.

27. Conforming to the etymology of the word, I mean by "aesthetization" the perception and interpretation of an artistic work—or any other object, like a "primitive" artifact, an industrial product, a cultural or natural setting for objects and figures, etc.—as a stimulus for sensations, and whose effectiveness derives from its forms and may or may not involve an appreciation of its beauty. This etymological definition relies mainly upon the relationship between forms and the sensations these forms may induce.

posedly designed to present contemporary site-specific works in relation to the museums' spaces and features.²⁸ On this occasion, Asher's work consisted of three distinct yet interrelated parts. In the main courtyard entrance of the museum, he set up a billboard showing two reproductions of the same still photograph taken from the movie *The Kentuckian* (1954) showing its star, Burt Lancaster, walking out from a forest with a dog on leash; these photographs were accompanied by a plan of the museum's building and park, and by a caption referring to the other two parts of the work. In the park surrounding the museum, Asher replaced a vandalized sign that formerly bore a city ordinance forbidding unleashed dogs in the park. Inside the museum, Thomas Hart Benton's painting *The Kentuckian* was hung in its usual place to be on view to the visitors. Benton's painting, it should be said, was originally commissioned as a film poster by the producer of *The Kentuckian*, and had remained in Burt Lancaster's collection until he gave it to the museum. The iconographic features of Asher's appropriation and fragmented montage—the opposition of leashed and unleashed, the movie star, the heroic hunter, the city ordinance—allow us to bridge a series of cognitive associations that might otherwise not be perceived in the separate elements.

Yet this iconographical program also served other ends: it pointed to the ideological transformation of an alienated reality into social fiction, as carried out by the entertainment industry and high art culture; both of them are represented in the work, where they are brought together to expose the same underlying agenda. Through the image of the regionalist painter Benton, reference is also made to the

28. The full title of the exhibition was *Art in Los Angeles – Museum as Site: Sixteen Projects*. The other fifteen artists who participated in the exhibition were: John Baldessari, Jonathan Borowsky, Michael Brewster, Chris Burden, Robert Graham, Lloyd Hamrol, Robert Irwin, Richard Jackson, Jay McCafferty, Michael McMillen, Eric Orr, Roland Reiss, Terry Schoonhoven, Alexis Smith, and Jim Turrell. In total, even the endeavors of what "site specificity" was supposed to be, seem voided by the works on show. See Peter Plagens' critique in "Site Wars," *Art in America*, vol. 70, no. 1 (January 1982), p. 91-98.

anti-modernist and reactionary trend in post-war American art, when the McCarthyist right persecuted intellectuals suspected of being sympathetic to communism. Thus both high art and the mass culture industry are shown to pursue jointly the same ends, yet on two different levels.

Given that the other works in the exhibition played with exorbitant avant-gardist features, although without adopting a critical approach towards the political and symbolical functions of the museum, Asher's fragmented and dispersed work may have been intriguing for visitors. By appropriating the museum's advertising billboard to point to his own contribution to the exhibition, Asher took possession of the entire *Museum as Site* exhibition, along with the other works produced for that occasion. Hence, his historical "commentary" on the relationship between a product of mass culture like *The Kentuckian*, and trends in the field of high art was also a comment on the current exhibition and its transformation of "site-specificity" into an artistic fashion.

Thus, in this piece, Asher made an explicit reference to the museum *per se* as the depository of a collective memory that operates within specific political and cultural frameworks. Indeed, the most striking feature of the piece was the incorporation of the context into a work that both reflected it (through that part of the museum's collection that was incorporated into the work) and reflected on it (through the historical reconstruction provided by Asher's installation). In other words, in contrast to the current fashion in site-specific works, which content themselves with a few phenomenological data, Asher's installation enunciated its own cultural conditions within and through the work itself. And it did so without resorting to a finished and closed system whose meaning would have to wait to be spelled out through either its iconographic representations or its formal features. On the contrary, this fragmented piece, although simple in design, had many layers interconnected in such a complex fashion that it was capable of producing

countless readings. To do so, it would use artistic components as well as extra-artistic devices, a contemporary situation along with historical data, mass culture products alongside high art objects, and ideological analysis in conjunction with formal characteristics, all of them echoing each other.

On Communication and Social Relationships

If Asher incorporated the context and situation in which his works were presented into his installations, and if his focus turned towards social relationships and communication—as was the case, for instance, at the Venice Biennale—, it should come as no surprise that both the enunciator (the artist himself) and the addressees of his works (the art audience) were also part of his projects and were included in them in one way or another. Indeed some of his works involved groups of people related to art in various ways: museum staff and visitors; art school students and faculty members; and gallery owners and staff.

For example, for one group exhibition (that also included David Askevold and Richard Long) at the Los Angeles Institute of Contemporary Art (LAICA), Asher hired participants from a variety of fields, mostly art-related. He paid them to stay six hours a day in a specified area of the museum where, insofar as it was possible, they would carry out some of their normal activities (fig. 6.8). The piece, then, simply consisted of the communicative exchanges among the participants, and between them and the museum's visitors and staff. Although the work itself remained entirely Asher's responsibility, it did imply collaboration between the participants. As the situation at the LAICA evolved, they became immersed in discussions and debates on contemporary art, its means of diffusion, its modes of exchange, its conditions of production. Such conditions included, for example, the relationships between producers and consumers, remuneration for participating in



Fig. 6.8 Michael Asher, *Intervention at the Los Angeles Institute of Contemporary Art*, Los Angeles Ca, 1979

art projects, the meaning of collaborative action in the realm of art, social interaction.²⁹

Again in his role as a producer of social communication, Asher designed a work that was performed by the staffs of the three museums in Fort Worth, Texas. These were the Fort Worth Art Museum, which exhibits mainly 20th-century and contemporary art, the Amon Carter Museum, which houses a collection of 19th- and early-20th-century American art, and the Kimbell Art Museum, which has a major collection of pre-20th-century painting and sculpture. Invited by the Fort Worth Art Museum to do a group-show installation on the southern Californian art of the seventies, Asher convinced the staffs of the three museums to park their personal vehicles and their work automobiles in a common parking lot situated midway between the three institutions. This one-week project led the staff members of each museum to meet and talk with the employees of the other institutions who were doing

29. See Asher-Buchloh, *op. cit.*, p. 149-150.

similar jobs. As all three museums staffs had a similar work schedule, they became aware of their common condition as "working people in a cultural institution." Hence, in place of the employees' "natural" and "spontaneous" identification with their own institutions, Asher's work sought to produce a collective consciousness in the staffs as museum workers sharing the same social status instead of their institutional identification.

Working once more as an agent of communication, Asher also created a work at the Nouveau Musée in Villeurbanne, France. With this piece he surpassed all previous expressions of his social concerns. The invitation to do it came in 1991, when the city museum was slated to close for renovations. Asher focused his intervention directly on the social fabric, making a work that would alert the museum to its social responsibilities and inform the people about their right to fair housing conditions. Located in a working class neighborhood, the Nouveau Musée was built on the site of a former elementary school. Housing conditions were clearly deteriorating, real estate speculators were waiting for the least signs of renovation, and it was obvious that the museum renovations would encourage gentrification of the neighborhood. Indeed, similar developments had already happened in many other cities. As his own contribution to the protection of public rights, Asher had the old cast-iron furnaces of the museum melted and recast into about 700 blocks. On these were inscribed the names and phone numbers of two tenants' rights associations. These blocks, given away free of charge to the low-income population of Villeurbanne, provided a use-value for "art objects," since they could be used as paperweights, door stops, advertising for the housing associations, or even promotion of urban rights. In a departure from his previous works, Asher created objects that belonged to the domain of art, since they originated in an art institution. Yet where the usual process of commodification implied in art making assumes that the art object epitomizes the total absence of "use-value," in the case

of the Villeurbanne pieces, the objects in question were not divested of use-value; on the contrary, they were made to be used in some way, and to transmit information. They were made in multiples, so that they could not be said to be unique or rare.³⁰

Asher not only foregrounded those to whom his work was addressed, but also managed to find ways to include them within the works themselves, where they functioned as representatives of the whole system of art and its communicative structures. On many occasions, then, living performers who occupied various positions in the realm of art and culture constituted the content of his works. At the Claire Copley Gallery in 1974, the gallery's director and staff were the content of the exhibition as they functioned as economic intermediaries and cultural promoters. Meanwhile, in 1976, at the Portland Center for the Visual Arts, one saw the distributors of culture, the technicians of the mass media, hard at work.³¹ Then there were the receivers, those members of the art audience who collaborated in the final process of art making, both locally (at the Los Angeles Institute of Contemporary Art in 1977) and internationally (at the Venice Biennale of 1976). Finally, the Fort Worth Art Museum provided art distribution organizers and speakers along with museum staff (1977) while, at the Stedelijk Van Abbemuseum in Eindhoven (1977),³² maintenance workers served as intermediaries in the transmission of artistic messages.

30. See the exhibition catalogue, *Michael Asher* (with an essay by Frederik Leen) (Villeurbanne: Le Nouveau Musée, 1991).

31. On the occasion of *Via Los Angeles*, a group exhibition held at the Portland Center for the Visual Arts. Asher broadcasted the master-control area of a television station (the commercial television station KGW, an affiliate of NBC in Portland) for a period of thirty minutes, intermittently with commercial advertising, while the technicians pursued their normal activities.

32. As was the case with most of the other works, people were not the only feature of this work at the Van Abbemuseum. Nonetheless, the workers who reinstalled the light diffusers on the ceiling of the museum's exhibition rooms were visible and audible to the public during their daily four hours of work on Asher's installation.

One condition that contributes to produce the fetishistic character of the commodity relies upon the abstraction (or suspension) of the use-value of the product in the process of exchange, as well as on the concealment of the social processes of production and consumption. By involving the various agents of the art world in the creation of his works, Asher completely reversed the alienating process of commodification insofar as art was concerned—particularly since, instead of adding new products to be exchanged on the market place, he proceeded by "material subtraction" and by displacing conventional display components. These would include the space of the gallery and museum, along with their architectural structures (walls, ceilings, floors, openings, glass roofs), exhibiting devices (light diffusers, heaters, spotlights, protective glass and frames, placards, signs, decorative equipment), and the time of exhibition and creation. Nor would history be ignored, since this is also an important part of the specific conditions in which art objects are displayed.

History as an Exhibition Device

In 1979, within the context of the *73rd American Exhibition*, Michael Asher removed a monument dedicated to George Washington from outside the Art Institute of Chicago. The sculpture, which had been in this location for several years, was placed in the middle of a room devoted to 18th-century art³³ (fig. 6.9). This simple displacement of Houdon's sculptural replica raised several different questions about the role of museums.

33. See, Asher/Buchloh, *op. cit.*, p. 220-227; Also see Anne Rorimer, "73rd American Exhibition, Gallery 219. The Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago, June 9-August 5, 1979", in *Museums by Artists*, A.A. Bronson and Peggy Gale eds. (Toronto: Art Metropole, 1983), p. 21-24, and "Michael Asher: Recent Works," *Artforum*, vol. 18, no. 8 (April 1980) p. 46-50.



Fig. 6.9 Michael Asher, Intervention for the 73rd American Exhibition at Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago Ill., 1979

First, by making such an intervention, Asher connected the historical past of the collection with its own participation in a contemporary art event, namely, the *73rd American Exhibition*. This displacement, and the new connection it produced, made the relationship between contemporary art and the history of art explicit, in addition to foregrounding the contemporaneity of the museum. The museum thus appeared not only as an institution devoted to the past, but also as one that played a role in the present of the art world. It could be said that, in this instance, two bridges were built between the past and the present. First, the "present" of the sculpture in its own cultural context demonstrated that Houdon's sculpture belonged both to a specific past and to the present of the museum. Second, Asher's "present" intervention in a contemporary show was related to a historical comment, to a "discourse" centered on the past and its monuments.

This initial observation calls forth a second. The commemorative monument, when placed in front of the building, had the universal "aura" of a timeless meaning. When relocated to the 18th-century room, however, it pointed to its historical context in a very explicit manner. In other words, the historicity of both the sculpture and the other objects and paintings in Room 219 of The Art Institute of Chicago was demonstrated fashion, by the relocation of the sculpture. Asher's displacement of the monument produced a denial of its "normal" or historical function—as indeed museums always do with the objects that they exhibit. The context of its reinstallation framed a certain discourse on 18th century art, namely, the absence of a genuine discourse on the commemorative function of sculpture.

Another aspect exhibited and expounded by Asher's relocation of the Washington statue into the 18th century room was certain interplay between fiction and reality. The monument's surprising presence³⁴ among a collection of other artifacts eclipsed its symbolic value in favor of its reality as a sculpture or artifact—hence as an object. Then it was not only the sculpture itself that appeared as an artifact, but all the other pieces that surrounded it. They were revealed to be objects as well. In the case of the paintings, this constituted a break with their function as representational images; and, in the case of the artifacts, with their function as utilitarian objects. The strangeness produced by Asher's original relocation or displacement of the statue established the loss of use value of the objects in the museum collection, while also disclosing them as precisely part of that historical collection.

34. It is indeed surprising to encounter a *monument* within a regular exhibit room of a museum because the normal function of monuments is to give a symbolic meaning to a specific site, to mark it as a site. Even if museums may contain many monuments in their collections, in such a context the symbolic function of these sculptures is lost in favor of their aesthetic character.

CHAPTER 7

PUBLICIZING FACTS ABOUT THE CAPITAL: HANS HAACKE AND THE MEDIA CULTURE

At the beginning of the 20th century, the French art market evolved as contemporary art came to represent the most profitable form of short-term investment. Though works were sold at auction houses, at that time, art dealers maintained total control over the market.¹ This system lasted more than fifty years. But by the 1970s, the traditional art market, which was led mainly by the art galleries until then, had changed radically with auction houses playing a much more important role in the circulation of works of art. The unprecedented economic development of the industrially advanced societies that followed the Second World War brought very wealthy collectors into the art market in the 1950s. As a result, the number of works of art sold at auction houses increased, as did the prices.² This was particularly true for modern art works by well-established artists, whose prices peaked in the eighties. Various reasons explain this phenomenon: the works' greater availability on the market, their already proven speculative rewards, their "neutral" content, and their "decorative" features.

Although the museums continued to play an important role in aesthetic appreciation and art history scholarship, they could not afford the prices required to fill the gaps in their collections, in particular for modern art. At the same time,

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1. See Raymonde Moulin, *The French Art Market: A Sociological View*, translated by Arthur Goodwater (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press: 1987), p. 45-65.
 2. The number of paintings sold at auction houses between 1800 and 1970 remained relatively stable, with an average of 5,000 to 6,000 per year. In the 1980s, this figure reached 50,000 paintings annually. See William Goetzmann, *Accounting for Taste: An Analysis of Art Returns over Three Centuries*, mimeo (New York: Columbia University, 1990).

cultural institutions received more government grants, especially in Europe, in order to construct new buildings for housing art and holding exhibitions. Never before in the history of the museum were new constructions, restorations, or transformations of buildings into exhibition-halls as numerous as they were in the seventies and eighties.³

In the same vein, national and regional Councils were created to support artists, critics, journals, and various special exhibitions.⁴ These circumstances generated a tremendous expansion of contemporary art in terms of both production and distribution. And the kind of works that were produced was also considerably modified: the conventional art object yielded to less commercial forms of art: Conceptual Art, Body Art, Information Art, Mail Art, performances, earthworks, etc. As a result, new forms of distribution and remuneration corresponding to these types of art were born, making institutions and museum officials devoted to contemporary art the new patrons of art production. Consequently, the role of the players on the art scene was transformed. Curators, inside and outside of institutions, acted more directly and more rapidly in the aesthetic evaluation of new trends. By ordering works from artists for specific exhibitions and paying their expenses, and then by purchasing the works occasionally, aware and up-to-date curators came to have a more direct impact on the market. At the same time, an entire range of objects came to be negotiable on the market: by-products derived from installation works and performances, such as photographs, sketches, and various artefacts, were traded as much as conventional works of art.⁵

3. See, Moulin, *op. cit.*, p. 63. The number of museums opening around the world, she writes, increased by 5% every year. From 1950 to 1980, 123 museums were built or enlarged in the United States. In the Netherlands, Germany and Switzerland, countless new museums and Kunsthallen opened during these years. In Paris, the Musée d'Orsay and the renovation of the Louvre in addition to the Centre Georges Pompidou, which opened in 1977, gave rise to huge building sites that transformed their neighborhoods into a network of galleries. Elsewhere in France, many regional art institutions opened: Le Magasin in Grenoble, the CAPC in Bordeaux, the museum at Villeurbanne, etc.

See also Dominique Poulot, "L'avenir du passé: les musées en mouvement," *Le Débat*, no. 12 (May 1981), p. 105-115.

4. In the United States, for instance, the National Endowment for the Arts was created in 1965: though its budgets were very low compared to those of similar institutions in other countries, it nevertheless reflected this new trend.

5. See Moulin, *Ibid.*, p. 63-70, on the interaction between the new museums and the art market. She observes:

En organisant des expositions collectives ou individuelles, souvent itinérantes, accompagnées d'un superbe et savant catalogue, les responsables des musées contribuent, au-delà la découverte, à la confirmation d'artistes. Ils agissent ainsi en

During this period of re-orientation of the art market and cultural institutions, corporate sponsorship of art exhibitions greatly increased. Szeemann's *When Attitudes become Form* (1969), for instance, showed that independent exhibitions on such a scale required support from both government and private sponsors. Brian Wallis, the curator who mounted Hans Haacke's first one-person exhibition at the New Museum of Contemporary Art in New York, pointed out in his catalogue essay that corporate sponsorship grew considerably in the seventies and eighties⁶:

In 1967 American corporations spent only about \$22 million on the arts: today [in 1986] that figure tops \$600 million and by the end of 1987 the figure will be close to \$1 billion annually. To the extent that this increase in corporate support coincided with the expansion of multinational or global corporations, it should be noted that a large proportion of this sponsorship has come from just a handful of multinationals: IBM, Exxon, Philip Morris, Mobil and a few others.⁷

The issue of corporate sponsorship of the arts became Haacke's characteristic contribution to institutional critique. His work is an attempt to answer the questions: Are the so-called philanthropic gestures made by international corporations really disinterested? If not, what is the purpose of their action? Why would this relatively small group of corporate sponsors spend so much money for the sake of art?

complémentarité avec la (les) galerie(s) qui soutient (soutiennent) ces derniers. L'effort publicitaire de marchand et l'activité de présentation des conservateurs et de commissaires d'exposition se conjuguent pour produire des signaux qui font monter les prix. [...] D'une part, ils [les responsables de musées] contribuent à la définition des valeurs esthétiques et à l'élaboration d'un palmarès de créateurs. D'autre part, ils représentent une partie, variable selon les pays, de la demande et concourent, selon les types d'œuvres, à ratifier la cote du marché ou à en créer artificiellement une. (p. 64-65)

In other words, institutional and freelance curators played a much more important role in the art market economy than they had not so long ago.

6. *Hans Haacke: Unfinished Business* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, and New York: The MIT Press and The New Museum of Contemporary Art, 1986). In fact, this exhibition was Haacke's first one-man show in an art institution. It came fifteen years after the controversial cancellation of his exhibition at the Guggenheim in 1971. This was supposed to be held right after the 6th Guggenheim International Exhibition.
7. Brian Wallis, "Institutions Trust Institutions," in *Hans Haacke: Unfinished Business*, op. cit., p. 51.

Connecting Art, Politics, and Economy

Haacke began to use art to investigate social systems in 1969-70, using various devices that permitted him to introduce questions about contemporary social order into the production of art. For instance, he installed teletype machines transmitting information from international wire services in exhibition rooms, organized museum and gallery polls to investigate the social profiles of visitors, and displayed a series of captioned photographs to present an investigation he had undertaken on certain Manhattan real estate holdings.⁸

From 1970 onward, starting with his work for Kynaston McShine's *Information* exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art, the *MOMA Poll* (fig. 7.1) collected museum visitors' opinions on American domestic policy and the connection between the museum and the Rockefeller family, a connection which dated back to the museum's foundation in 1929. This "social system work" addressed the issue of art institutions' connections to big business. At the time, Nelson Rockefeller, the Republican Governor of New York State, was in the process of being reelected. It

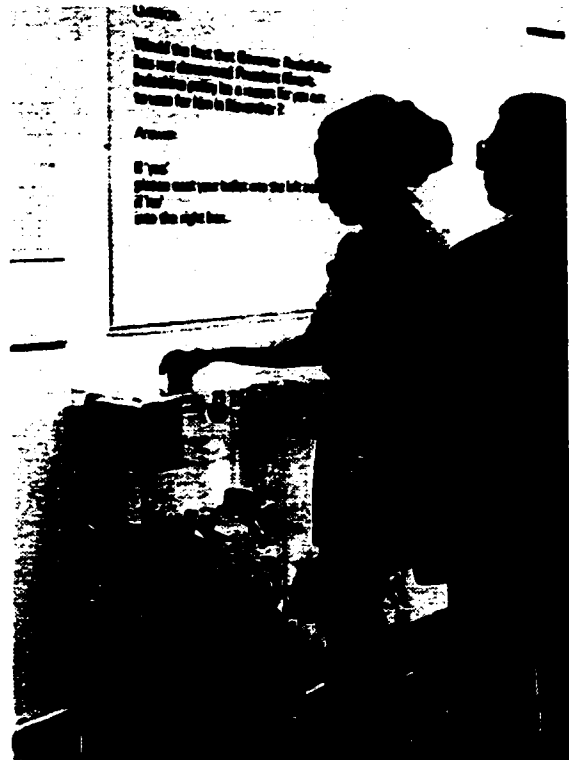


Fig. 7.1 Hans Haacke, *The MOMA Poll*, The Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1971

should be remembered that Nelson Rockefeller was also a member of the MOMA's

8. It is worth noting that in her book on the contemporary system of art, Raymonde Moulin, (*op. cit.*, p. 216) observed that Haacke's "gallery-goers' profiles" are unique in the genre and provide accurate information not otherwise available, concerning the social status of the visitors as well as their purchasing ethos.

board of trustees. As Governor he did not object to the bombing of Cambodia by the US military, even though Cambodia was not supposed to be involved in the Vietnam War. Cambodia was bombed just two months before the opening of Haacke's exhibition. The *MOMA Poll* included in the exhibition *Information* at the MOMA asked museum visitors if, given that Rockefeller did not denounce President Nixon's policies in Indochina, they would vote for him as Governor. Since the two ballot boxes—one for the yes and one for the no—were made of transparent acrylic, the results of the voting could be estimated at a glance during the time of the exhibition. With this piece, Haacke not only asked the museum visitor to participate in the making of a work of art that included them, so to speak, but also drew connections between big money, dubious politics and supposedly apolitical art.⁹ He challenged the public to understand that artistic disinterestedness could serve as a smokescreen for much less honorable political practices. More importantly, public presentation of the links existing between culture, knowledge, and politics come into opposition with the conventional modern separation between the various domains of human activities.

The differentiation of art from the other fields was precisely the principle used by officials of the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in 1971, when they decided to cancel Haacke's one-man exhibition. Thomas Messer, then Director of the museum, claimed that, although art might have an indirect political effect by influencing the social ethos, that effect should not be achieved through specific political acts, nor by presenting information unrelated to art. Articulating the museum's policies on politics and art, he said:

9. Frederic Jameson has argued that Haacke's work consists in unraveling the illusory distinctions made by Kant, which separated what relies on knowledge from whatever necessitates ethical decisions and actions, and whatever pertains to disinterested judgment. In fact, Haacke reconnects these three supposedly distinct fields. See Jameson's "Hans Haacke and the Cultural Logic of Postmodernism," *Hans Haacke: Unfinished Business*, *op. cit.*, p. 38-51.

Considered from the vantage point of the Museum's purpose and functions, a muckraking venture under the auspices of The Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation also raises questions. We have held consistently that under our Charter we are pursuing esthetic and educational objectives that are self-sufficient and without ulterior motive. On those grounds, the trustees have established policies that exclude active engagement toward social and political ends. It is well understood, in this connection, that art may have 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 propose, by using political means to achieve political ends.¹⁰

Haacke's exhibition at the Guggenheim was originally conceived to present three distinct systems: the physical, the biological system, and the social system. The works that were rejected by the museum were called *Real-Time Social Systems* and one *Poll*. The type of works that Haacke called *Polls* investigated the social status and political stands of museum and gallery visitors. This time, Haacke did not try to link the museum's trustees with corporate interests, as he had done at the MOMA vis-à-vis Nelson Rockefeller. Nonetheless, these works touched upon the social fabric of New York so directly that they prompted the museum to reject them. *Real-Time Social Systems* explored two New York real estate holdings: the Sol Goldman and Alex DiLorenzo partnership, and the Harry Shapolsky group (fig. 7.2). Presenting factual data (photographs of buildings and documentation on their locations and value), Haacke showed that slum neighborhoods were under the control of a few powerful landlords who possessed extensive holdings. (It is

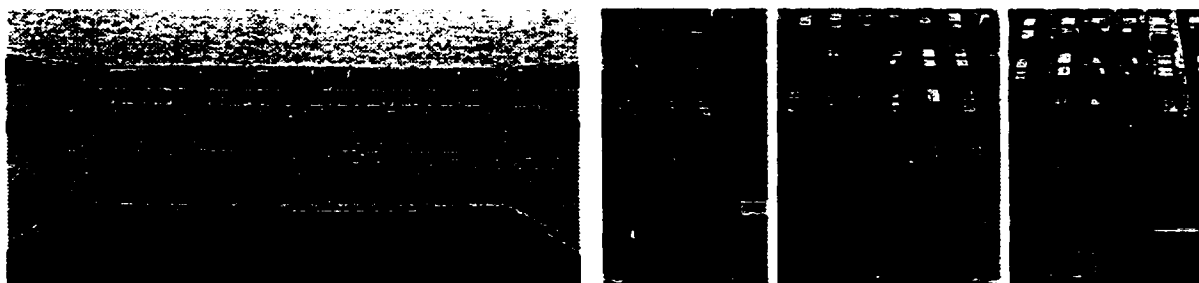


Fig. 7.2 Hans Haacke, *Real-Time Social Systems*, the Salomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, 1971

10. Thomas Messer, statement in *Studio International*, vol. 914, no. 181, p. 250.

interesting to notice by the way, that Haacke's information was so accurate that it was later requested by law enforcement agencies in the hope that it could assist them in their investigation of Goldman and DiLorenzo's relations with the Mafia.)¹¹

Three years after the rejection of his one-man exhibition, Haacke responded to the Guggenheim Museum's so-called artistic disinterestedness with a work in a group show held at the Stefanotty Gallery in New York. This piece revealed the multiple corporate affiliations of the Guggenheim's board of trustees. It disclosed that Peter O. Lawson-Johnston, Chairman of the board of trustees and grandson of Solomon R. Guggenheim, was also a member of the board of directors of the Kennecott Copper Corp, a multinational mining company which, in 1971, had branches in many countries, particularly in the Third World, namely in Chile. It showed similar links for other members and former members of the board of trustees of the museum. Haacke's work, *Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum Board of Trustees*, exemplifies the kind of investigative journalism he uses to shed light on hidden links between the supposedly apolitical world of art and the worlds of business and politics. Moreover, Haacke's reply to the Guggenheim represents not only a shift in his own production, but also a completely different mode of making art, conflating promotional activity with artistic endeavours.

Diffusing Information

Haacke's works occasionally provoke reactions from those who are under his scrutiny, as well as from the art community and the general public. For example, a demonstration was held inside the Guggenheim following the cancellation of his exhibition. More than a hundred artists pledged to boycott exhibiting at the Guggenheim "until the policy of art censorship and advocates ... changed," as the

11. See Hans Haacke, *op. cit.*, p. 88.

tract distributed then proclaimed. The cancellation of the exhibition received wide press coverage and gave rise to countless articles in both art magazines and newspapers.

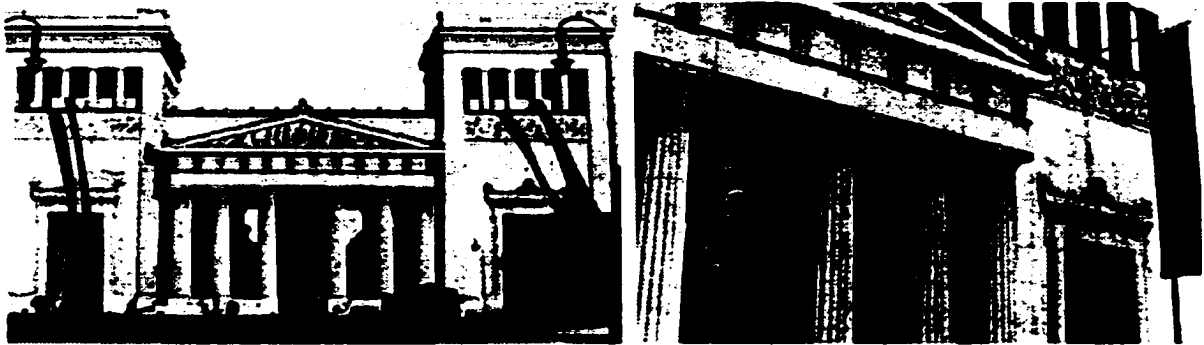


Fig. 7.3 Hans Haacke, *ArgusAuge (Eyes of Argus)*, the Propylaea, Munich, 1991

Haacke's art is a melding of the two poles of the media system: advertising (in his installations) and investigative journalism (in his catalogue entries). Advertising techniques allow him to juxtapose visual and textual information and thus provoke reactions on the part of the beholder, while investigative journalism techniques permit him to stimulate debates and promote awareness by providing accurate data on the context and background of his works.

Since art critics' writings on Haacke's works tend to disseminate the information contained in his catalogues, art criticism is diverted from its usual path. Not only is conventional art history writing subsumed within a kind of socio-historical journalistic discourse but art criticism, in contrast to its usual ethos, is forced to turn its attention to the reality. The social world in which art institutions actually exist is thus restored rather than obliterated (which is what usually happens). Since Haacke's works address specific social concerns and expose lesser known practices of sponsoring corporations, they show that the apolitical stance of art institutions is merely an ideological smokescreen willingly maintained by museum officials.

Although the corporations that Haacke attacked generally preferred not to stir up controversy, they did occasionally respond publicly to his works, sometimes

through legal action. For instance, for the group exhibition, *ArgusAuge* (*Eyes of Argus*), held in Munich in 1991 shortly after the Persian Gulf War, Haacke mounted two flags (1,100 x 250 cm each) and one banner (550 x 350 cm) on the sides and front of the neoclassical Propylaea, a ceremonial gate that leads to the square next to the Glyptotek (fig. 7.3).¹² Written in Gothic typeface on the side flags were the names of some twenty German companies (some with headquarters in Munich) that sold nuclear, biological and chemical material to help Iraq build up its arsenal. On the central banner, Haacke printed the first words, "*Zum Appel*," from the famous Nazi hymn, the *Horst-Wessel*, along with a typical SS skull and the incisive caption: *Deutsche Industrie im Irak*. The Königsplatz, where the museum is situated, is one of the most symbolically charged sites in Munich: built under the King of Bavaria, Ludwig I, it was often used by the Nazis for their rallies. After the Nazis took power in 1933, one of the two museums on the Königsplatz served as Hitler's office in Munich, while the other housed the Nazi party headquarters. The two other buildings that frame the Königsplatz are monuments: one was built by Ludwig I, the other by the Nazis to commemorate the "martyrs" of the failed Munich putsch that made Hitler known throughout Germany.

Irritated by Haacke's linking of Saddam Hussein with Adolf Hitler, the Ruhrsgas AG, one of the companies listed on the flags as having provided Iraq with military material, arranged with the exhibition organizers to include an insert in the catalogue stating that it was not Ruhrsgas but a subsidiary that sold the material to Iraq.¹³ Ruhrsgas also sued Haacke with the intention of having his installation dismantled, but this was a fruitless endeavour since the exhibition ended before the hearings concluded. Alerted by Haacke, journalists covered the proceedings in the

12. The information concerning the work and the events comes from the interview between Hans Haacke and Pierre Bourdieu, *Libre-Échange* (Paris: Seuil, 1994), p. 30-35.

13. In fact, the branch was 100% owned by Ruhrsgas!

newspapers. As a result, rather than eclipsing its dealings with Iraq, Ruhrsgas attracted even more attention to them. The accuracy of Haacke's information, the appropriation of highly symbolic places and signs, the insertion of the work into a specific context, and the press networking—all helped to provoke reactions which the usual run of art works and conventional journalism do not usually incite.

Haacke's intervention in the *ArgusAuge* exhibition is instructive with regard to the strategies he often uses to create controversy. (1) The specific context in which the work is presented constitutes its base material;¹⁴ (2) the information Haacke brings to light is remarkably accurate in contrast to the general and predictable stands so characteristic of agitprop art; (3) the use of powerful symbols in relation to the situations in which he intervenes (the *Horst-Wessel*, gothic typeface); (4) the unearthing of history to relate it to the present (the support of German companies for the Iraqi dictatorship in comparison with the support of big industry for the Nazis); (5) the collaboration with other actors on the scene¹⁵; (6) the limitation of his interventions in the context of artistic events, to avoid the accusation that he carries out merely political acts; (7) the seeking of provocative rather than aesthetically appealing and pacifying reactions; (8) the appropriation of devices not generally used in art production, such as advertising and political propaganda means like banners, flags, logos, striking symbols, well identified typefaces, vivid colours, etc.

Apart from his public relations style of functioning, Haacke combines accurate information based on investigative journalism, professional advertising language, contextual or historical background settings, and references to artistic trends

14. In the case of the work, under discussion here, these would all be brought together: the Gulf War, the Königsplatz as a symbol of dictatorship and of Western relations with Eastern countries, the controversial participation of German companies in the building up of Iraq's military arsenal while the German government was helping to defeat Iraq in Kuwait.

15. In the present case, Haacke developed links with the journalist who wrote the article on German companies' arms dealings with Iraq; in other works, he collaborated with activists who could provide him with information on the corporations in question.

and means of creation. These characteristics make his works effective on many levels. Investigative journalism enables him to reveal little-known facts, lends a certain credibility to the reported data and protects him from slander suits. Professional design presentation allows his work to be compared to professional advertising with its symbolic language. Relating the work to a particular context generates unexpected meanings in both the work and its context, creates links between the past and present, and integrates the work of art into the "reality." References to artistic means and trends serve to legitimate Haacke's works within art history, and to give him platforms from which his works can be distributed, and his ideas disseminated through art galleries, museums, Kunshallen, international fairs and events, and art journals.

On Appropriation

Haacke acknowledges appropriating not only the language of advertising but also its techniques and "look." Interviewed about the professional quality of his works, he explained:

You have quite accurately sensed my ambition to mimic the slickness with which corporations present their message. And indeed it often costs me a lot of money to achieve that same level of "perfection." It cannot be done with a typewriter on cheap paper—it has to have the "corporate look." It is not only the verbal message, it is also very much the appearance, the look of authority, power, and expertise with which corporations impress views on the public.¹⁶

Haacke's advertising devices may vary in style according to the situation in which he intervenes, or to the targeted corporation's own use of symbols, colours, forms and look; but most often he mimics the typical layouts of glossy magazines

16. Tony Brown. "Artist as Corporate Critic, an Interview with Hans Haacke," *Parachute*. no. 23 (Summer 1981), p. 12-17, (quote, p. 16).

or corporations' annual reports with their slick colour photographs, effective type-faces, well-designed logos and boastful captions. Enlarged, framed and displayed on walls, Haacke's own magazine-like advertisements tell another story, however, one in which truth is restored.¹⁷



Fig. 7.4 Hans Haacke, *A Breed Apart*, Museum of Modern Art, Oxford, 1978

A Breed Apart (1978) (fig. 7.4) is a good illustration of Haacke's appropriation of professional advertising techniques and "restoration of truth" strategy. This context-specific work was made for his solo exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art in Oxford, England. In Cowley, a town located on the outskirts of Oxford, the British Leyland company had a major automobile manufacturing plant that employed about half of the population of Oxford. This company was owned by the British government and had many subsidiaries in Third World countries, including South Africa. At the time of Haacke's exhibition, it was reported in business and economics journals that Leyland South Africa was merging with Sigma Motor Corporation. As a result of this merger, Leyland South Africa would produce a large range of commercial vehicles, including the Land Rover; Sigma, meanwhile, would

17. See Yve-Alain Bois, "Antidote," *October*, no. 39 (Winter 1986), p. 129-145.

produce passenger cars and British Leyland would continue to manufacture the luxurious Jaguar. In his work, Haacke reproduced Leyland's logo and its advertising slogan, "Leyland Vehicles, Nothing can stop us now," at the bottom of seven photographic panels. Three panels showed different views of the luxurious Jaguar with a caption at the top taken from company advertising: "Jaguar—A Breed Apart." The four remaining panels showed Land Rovers "in action": the photographs depicting the famous "all-purpose" armoured vehicle used by the police during the Soweto uprisings. Taken from sources as diverse as a United Nations Security Council resolution, a UK parliamentary committee declaration, and a corporate spokesperson's statement, Haacke quoted them in captions, and thereby illustrated the contradiction between the UN's ban on military collaboration with South Africa, and the UK's pursuit of financial interests in such a place, where workers were blackmailed by companies for having to choose between lower wages and living in urban areas, or being ghettoized in townships; in this advertising-like work, Haacke made a parallel between the living conditions of the British workers and the South African inhabitants of the townships. At the same time, Haacke's captions revealed the financially motivated cynicism of both the British Parliament and the Leyland corporation with regard to the South African apartheid regime.

Juxtaposed Images And Texts

On the basis of our experiences with corporate publicity and commercial advertising in magazines and newspapers, we generally presume that images and texts should complement one another. Because photographs are like evidence, a quality due in part to their indexical character, they lend *immediate* credibility to accompanying statements. Text, on the other hand, furnishes both the presumed context of the image and the specific strata of meanings to be associated with it.

This merging of image and text is illusive, however, since any number of statements may be made to contextualize an image. In Haacke's works, texts and images clash instead of merging, so that meanings take another turn. Slogans like "Nothing can stop us now" and "Jaguar—A Breed Apart" acquire a very different sense when connected with the blatant defiance of the United Nations resolution, or with the British state corporation's manufacturing of military equipment used in the maintenance of apartheid. "Nothing can stop us now" is understood to mean: "not even the United Nations Security Council can do that." And the Jaguars and Land Rovers are indeed bred apart, one in England and the other in South Africa. Furthermore, not only do the texts and images clash, but the pictures themselves present dissimilar, conflicting features. The slick, smooth colour advertising images of the Jaguar are opposed to the rough, high-contrast, black-and-white photojournalistic style of images of mass arrest; and the luxury of the Jaguar, the portrayal of upper class England and the image of the calm, tradition-bound English countryside contrast with the armour of the Land Rover and the military aggression and urban violence in South Africa. The restoration of truth consists, then, in spelling out the hidden meanings of certain statements by comparing and contrasting them with diverse utterances and images.

Haacke's art work appropriates pictures, photographs, corporate logos, texts from diverse sources and readymades, as well as producing collages of visual and textual data and media. In this sense, his methods stem directly from the historical avant-garde's innovations.¹⁸ In contrast to the historical avant-garde, however, the elements of reality that he brings into his art are, paradoxically, both more context-

18. Benjamin Buchloh has analyzed the historical avant-garde's shift in art making in relation to their political implications in his seminal text "From Faktura to Factography," *October*, no. 30 (Fall 1984), p. 83-119. For the links between the "factographic" and Haacke's work, see his catalogue essay "Hans Haacke: The Entwinement of Myth and Enlightenment," *Obra Social. Hans Haacke* (Barcelona: Fundacio Tapies, 1995), p. 45-60.

specific and more general. They are more context-specific in that his works rely heavily on the cultural, social and historical contexts in which they are presented. They are more general in the sense that they embrace larger issues than those of his predecessors, since he aims not only to denounce specific political situations and stances but also to reveal the connections between the economic system and the consciousness industry.

Although initially the readymade called the conventions of art into question, it is now devoid of any significative efficiency since it has been fully integrated into the art system. Haacke observed that in the 1980s, when investment in art products peaked and speculation seemed to have no limits, readymades sprouted like mushrooms: "This takeover by a Wall Street mentality," he said, "accompanied the boom in readymades."¹⁹ Haacke's method of appropriation is thus radically opposed to the methods of Simulationists like Jeff Koons and Haim Steinbach, whose works were sheer renderings of consumerist society's devices. When Haacke addresses



Fig. 7.5 Hans Haacke. *Baudrichard's Extasy*, 1988

his works to avant-garde gallery-goers, he relies upon their knowledge of artistic scholarship in order to challenge their comfortable willingness to bow before "simulation-works." In 1989, for instance, when the Simulationists were still fashionable in New York and Europe, he exhibited two works at the Centre Georges Pompidou

19. Mark Thomson, "Hans Haacke," *Artefactum*, vol. 7, no. 36 (Nov. 1990-January, 1991), p. 2-5.

in Paris and, later, at the John Weber Gallery. These works, *Broken R.M.* (1986) and *Baudrichard's Extasy*²⁰ (1988) (fig. 7.5), both require some knowledge of Duchamp's works and writings, as well as of Duchampian scholarship. The first piece alludes to the R. Mutt signature on *Fountain* and imitates two of Duchamp's famous readymades: *In Advance on a Broken Arm* (1915), and *Eau et Gaz à tous les étages* (1958). In Haacke's representation, however, they are slightly modified: the snow shovel is gilded and truly broken, the inscription on the enamel plaque now reads "Art et Argent à tous les étages," and the title implies that R. Mutt's game must come to an end. *Beaudrichard's Extasy* offers a similar reading to the reciprocal readymade of Duchamp's ironing board, its reference to the title of Baudrillard's first book translated into English, and its restoration of sexual allusion implicit in the *Fountain*. All this material is recycled so that it is shown to go nowhere, just like the water circulating from the fire bucket to the gilded urinal, except that it works like a machine for making money. As we can see, though the readymade is used in Haacke's work as a collage of visual and intellectual aggregates, he is nonetheless fundamentally critical of both the readymade and collage when used only as formal techniques.

Remaking Art History and Art Criticism

Though the works that Haacke displays in galleries and museums are sufficient to raise consciousness, the accompanying exhibition catalogues add to the shock provoked by his works, factual information gathered in accordance with the standards of investigative journalism. Haacke presents cultural and economic facts within a historical context so that the necessary base for a critical understanding of

20. The spelling "Baudrichard" telescopes the name of the French sociologist, Jean Baudrillard, and Marcel Duchamp's signature of his *Fountain* (1917), R. Mutt considering the general acceptance of "R." that stands for "Richard," which means rich in French.

the situation is provided. Furthermore, every time his works are exhibited, he updates his catalogues to include any new developments related to them, as well as the most recent information on the corporations under scrutiny. Hence, the catalogue entries make three points: (1) they show that, beyond the glitzy world of corporate advertising and the allegedly apolitical world of art, real events happen in the real world; (2) since historical data as well as up-to-date information is provided, history does not appear to be frozen, nor to have vanished into the magma of simulacra, as some sociologists like Baudrillard have claimed; (3) emotional and ethical reactions to the shocking situations presented in Haacke's exhibitions are reinforced with easily remembered, accurate information.

Thus, just as Haacke subverts advertising by juxtaposing texts and images, slogans and facts, he also transgresses certain rules of the institutional art world. Instead of using canonical art historical descriptive terminology, he adopts an "investigative journalism" mode of writing in order to disseminate disturbing information about the relationships between the art world, its corporate sponsors and reactionary political regimes. Of course, the disciplinary ethos of the art world may not have changed since Haacke's "renewal" of the mode of writing art history, but his stand is in itself subversive since, in lieu of the art historian, he is now the one who as an artist knows, provides, and disseminates information. Since it is he who investigates the facts that he decides to recount facts, which he therefore controls, he puts himself in the position of the enunciator and maker of art history. By occupying this position, he refuses to be subjected to others' narratives and becomes the narrator of what he considers to be the most important issues and topics for discussion. In doing so, he distinguishes himself from the artist who indulges in making commodities. Since he is responsible for the information he chooses to circulate, he becomes an interlocutor and equal partner within the dialogic system of communication in the field of art.

In contrast to his fellow contemporary artists, Buren and Broodthaers, who also came to occupy the position of the curator, Haacke "adopts the art historian's disguises" so as to highlight factual data through sociological-style writings. In a certain sense, when compared to Pop Art's mass-media-like pictures and three-dimensional simulacra of commodities—procedures that were fully integrated into art making by the time Haacke developed his own "advertising techniques"—, Haacke's works are closer to more conventional ways of making art than those of Buren and Broodthaers. Pop Art works were, of course, already a breakthrough in the production of art—their reproducible and simulacrum-like features were quite a departure from conventional painting and sculpture. Nonetheless, their formats, media, supports and representations kept them within the realm of commodified art. This was not the case with Buren's installations, although his striped coloured device evoked Modernist painting; nor was it the case with Broodthaers, whose *"already-made" art objects* were displayed in simulated exhibitions. In both cases, the work of art was the exhibition itself, not what it may have "contained." By comparison, Haacke's works seem more conventional. His appropriation of recent or traditional artistic methods is, however, fully self-conscious and critical. In some works, for



Fig. 7.6 Hans Haacke, *Taking Stock (Unfinished)*, 1983–1984

instance, he goes so far as to mimic all the features of the most conventional oil portraits, as he did with *Taking Stock (unfinished)*, 1983-1984 (fig. 7.6), a life-size portrait of Margaret Thatcher presented in a typical Victorian gilded frame. His catalogue entries are also conventional in form: they appropriate aspects of (social) art history discourse in order to apply it to contemporary issues.

About Addressees

If Haacke puts himself in the position of speaker, not only as an artist but also as an art historian, one might wonder to whom he is speaking. The obvious answer is gallery and museum visitors who are interested in contemporary art. Hence, Haacke knows the social profile of this public perfectly, as he conducted various polls in galleries and museums. According to the *John Weber Visitors Profile 1 & 2* (1972, 1973), gallery visitors are mostly "young upper-middle-class, politically interested and left-liberal in their politics, artists, art students or others similar to them who are professionally involved in the arts."²¹ This art-related audience is similar in profile to the larger public of well-educated and liberal-oriented young people who also go to museums and galleries. But, it must also be observed that these people are likely to be the same ones who would demand more government control over industry in order to protect the ecosystem, who are sensitive to issues of human rights, who do not agree with the rationale that all means are permitted for the sake of profit, and who believe in democratic values. They also correspond precisely to the audience targeted by corporate sponsorship. Haacke explains:

21. This profile was compiled by Howard S. Becker and John Walton from Haacke's *Poles*. See Howard S. Becker and John Walton, "Social Science and the Work of Hans Haacke," *Framing and Being Framed, 7 Works 1970-1975* (Halifax and New York: The Press of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design and New York University Press, 1975), p. 149. See also, Howard S. Becker, *Art Worlds* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1982), p. 53, 106.

Some corporate executives who are familiar with the liberal milieu, such as Herbert Schwertz of Mobil, clearly see that in order to retain influence in government and to beat back assaults from citizen groups advocating stricter regulation of the industry, it is of the utmost importance to woo specifically the liberal segment of the population. At present, the Left in the United States poses no significant challenge to what business likes to describe as the "free-enterprise system." It is the erosion of trust and occasional flare-ups among liberals that could, some time in the future, seriously undermine that system. This democratic segment is, of course, also the most disposed to culture.²²

Although the artists and art students who visit galleries do not completely match the profile of museum visitors or liberal-minded members of society, they do share similar values. As art professionals, this public contributes to the shaping of artistic knowledge and, thus, of cultural and social consciousness. This is, in any case, what Haacke believes and what justifies his interventions. Haacke's main interlocutors are, therefore, culturally attuned art-related professionals and members of the liberal milieu.

Haacke is particularly aware that politically engaged art exhibitions in galleries are important because of the audience they reach:

In spite of little coverage in the trade journals, works of socio-political engagement do occasionally reach an audience in New York through commercial galleries. The mistrust and hostility some may feel toward these marketing outlets should not make one overlook their potential for distribution, particularly since their public clearly constitutes a segment of the target group that the corporations are trying to keep under their spell.²³

Although the high art system in which Haacke works is a very small part of the consciousness industry, his works may nonetheless affect the ways in which

22. See Hans Haacke, "Working Conditions," first published in *Artforum* (Summer 1981), p. 56-61, and republished in *Hans Haacke* (London & Eindhoven: The Tate Gallery and Van Abbemuseum, 1984), vol. 2, p. 90. Herbert Schwertz, Haacke reminds us, was a consultant for the Kennedy brothers, and was hired by Mobil precisely because he was well acquainted with the Democratic side of the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives.

23. *Ibid.*, p. 93.

more general social concerns are debated, since the educated public that makes up Haacke's audience does have some influence over various educational and cultural institutions, (liberal) political lobbies and government committees.

Public Art and Political Past

Though Haacke's main audience is composed of people who go to museums, galleries and art fairs, he sometimes has access to a larger public as well. In 1988, for instance, he was invited by Werner Fenz to exhibit a work in a public place within the visual section of the *Steirischer Herbst* (Styrian Autumn) festival in Graz, Austria. Adopting the "Guilt and Innocence of Art" as its theme, that year's festival was meant to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of Austria's annexation to Germany in 1938, known as the *Anschluss*. From the various Graz locations that were of historical significance to the annexation, Haacke chose the *Mariensäule*, a column devoted to the Virgin Mary, as the site of his intervention (fig. 7.7). He provocatively covered the column under an obelisk, just as the Nazis had done for the ceremony celebrating Hitler's honorary nomination of Graz as



Fig. 7.7 Hans Haacke, "And You Were Victorious After All", Graz, 1988

Stadt der Volkserhebung ("City of the People's Insurrection"). The title of Haacke's work, "*Und ihr habt doch gesiegt*" ("And You Were Victorious After All"), written on two faces of the simulated column, replicated the Nazis' slogan celebrating the people of Graz. Haacke, however, also enumerated the various groups of people who were vanquished by the Third Reich regime: Gypsies, Jews, political opponents.

Before the festival ended, a neo-Nazi supporter vandalized the work. The event created great debates in the media, particularly since the then recent election of Kurt Waldheim, formerly a Wehrmacht officer and the General Secretary of the United Nations, as President of Austria, had raised questions about the Austrians' zealous collaboration with the Reich. Well before the *Anschluss*, thousands of citizens of Graz had adhered to the Nazi party—the city hall was decorated with the swastika and numerous Jewish shops were "Arianized." Haacke's work thus called attention to a past that the citizens of Graz did not necessarily want to hear about. This, in turn, gave rise to a public debate, not only about the consequences of past totalitarian regimes but also about the present, since many former Austrian Nazis were still living, while others were neo-Nazi sympathizers. By addressing very specific issues related to the context of his interventions, Haacke provokes public reactions that inevitably reach the media and favor discussions about political and social concerns. The controversial character of Haacke's works often produces what one could call a "mass-media effect" that reaches a much larger strata of the public than can usually be reached by works of contemporary art.

Information Procedures Versus Public Relations Strategies

Advertising and journalism are the "propaganda means" of consumer societies. Although advertising's main objective is to publicize and generate a demand for products, it relies on a wide range of social and cultural values selected on the

basis of the target audience. Such values include: "freedom," "pleasure," "youth," "adventure," "innovativeness"; or "classicism," "nostalgia," "conservatism," "strength," "power," "responsibility," etc. As Roland Barthes has shown, all of these values are tightly woven into the social fabric.²⁴ In the name of marketing goals, advertising endorses a whole system of shared values in which "happiness" is preeminently equated with "consuming."

By contrast, journalism in democratic societies may appear to be an objective news vehicle, since information conveyed by the media can be double-checked and different interpretations of social and political events can be debated publicly. Nonetheless, it is common knowledge that corporations and political institutions rely on professional public relations services to control the information that is transmitted about them. Furthermore, since media survival is dependent on wide circulation, investigative journalism is completely overshadowed by coverage of natural disasters, sensationalist events and the countless "news items" that pollute the media networks. When political and social issues are raised, they are reported without any clear context, so that they appear to be devoid of meaning. As a result, any situation that could have social implications is interpreted within a narrow ideological framework of good and evil. Moreover, journalistic sympathy toward the establishment seems somehow natural, since journalists depend upon the good will of the ruling establishment to do their work. Worse still, since the majority of press distribution is controlled by huge corporate media empires, journalists must exert self-censorship if they want their articles to be published. The information that reaches the public is thus often, if not always, largely manipulated by public relations services, distorted by countless secondary considerations, and consciously or unconsciously censored. In this context of sensationalist coverage and media cen-

24. Roland Barthes. *Mythologies*, (St-Albans England: Paladin, 1957); see in particular. "Myth. Today," p. 109-158; *Elements of Semiology*, (London: Cape, 1967). *Writing Degree Zero* (London: Cape, 1967).

sorship, investigative journalism becomes extremely marginal, although it is necessary to maintain the illusion of a well-functioning democracy.

Haacke's well-known *MetroMobiltan*, exhibited first at the John Weber Gallery in 1985 (fig. 7.8), attacked the relationship between the Metropolitan Museum of Art (New York) and the private corporations that sponsor it, such as Mobil Oil.²⁵ The political issue of private corporations' support of art institutions was shown to be a part of the politics of the Museum itself. Drawing attention to Mobil's activities in South Africa, which included selling oil to the South African police and military, Haacke's piece dealt with the sponsorship policy of the Metropolitan Museum, its purposes and needs, the reasons for corporate interest in art sponsorship, and the ultimate effect which this confluence of forces had on the political situation in South Africa with its oppression, discrimination and civil war.



Fig. 7.8 Hans Haacke, *MetroMobiltan*. John Weber Gallery, New York. 1985

25. See the entry on *MetroMobiltan* in the exhibition catalogue *Hans Haacke: Unfinished Business* (New York: The New Museum of Contemporary Art, December 12, 1986–February 15, 1987), p. 274–277.

Quoting from a leaflet published by the Metropolitan Museum ("The Business Behind Art Knows the Art of Good Business—Your Company and the Metropolitan Museum of Art"), the inscription on Haacke's reconstituted frieze of the Museum was particularly eloquent in pointing out the political implications of such sponsorship:

Many public relations opportunities are available through sponsorship of programs, special exhibitions and services. These can often provide a creative and cost effective answer to a specific marketing objective, particularly where international, governmental or consumer relations may be a fundamental concern.²⁶

With its photograph of a funeral procession for black victims shot by the police and the military near Cape Town, accompanied by quotations from Mobil, which attempted to legitimate its supplying of oil to the South African police and military in the name of "responsible citizenship" (sic), Haacke's work showed that the sponsorship of the Metropolitan provided a cultural shield against potential political attacks against Mobil for supporting a racist regime. The combination of these elements showed that the relationship between the worlds of business, politics and art was not incidental but consciously chosen by all of the players, including museum officials.

Haacke uses highly charged symbols to create shocking events within broad contexts. Then, through his contacts with the press and other artists, he has the media disseminate his initial information and provoke public debates that, in turn, transmit it even farther afield. Since Haacke controls the information needed for a deeper understanding of the work and the resulting events, journalists and art critics are forced not only to repeat the information he wants to disseminate, but also to interview him so that his views on the art system in the age of sponsorship are publicized. Aside from the shock value of his works, the more in-depth historical, political and journalistic information provided by the catalogue entries and the

26. *Ibid.*

debates engendered by their diffusion in the media make it possible to articulate a more comprehensive appreciation of the art system, and to lay the foundation for a general theory of its functioning today.

CONCLUSION:

**ON COLLECTIONS, ART CIRCULATION,
AND LOUISE LAWLER'S
UNCANNY DISCLOSURES**

Thus the first glimmerings appear a little before *Homo sapiens*, and their character becomes more clearly defined with the discovery of some objects that Neanderthals brought into their caves at Arcy-sur-Cure, a very advanced Mousterian habitat. These objects are two lumps of iron pyrites formed of rough agglomerated spheres, a cast of a large fossil gasteropod shell, and a spherical polyparium from the Mesozoic era. No descriptive significance can be perceived in these vestigial finds consisting of a few spheroids and a spiral, but they represent the first attested evidence of shape recognition. They are also the first sign, and a most important one, of human fascination with the fantastical in nature. [...] Our own "museum," heir of the cabinet of curiosities of earlier times, remains to this day a storehouse for strange objects, monstrous and exceptional natural forms, and bodies that fail to meet the criteria of "normalcy."¹

André Leroi-Gourhan

In spite of their differences, the artists we have discussed share similar concerns regarding the institutional pressures that capitalist economies and the consumption society, the industry of the spectacle and the proliferation of simulacra, brought to bear on the arts. It is also clear that their intimate knowledge of the distribution system of art commodities allowed them to develop strategies that proved to be remarkably effective in bringing about transformations from within art insti-

1. André Leroi-Gourhan, *Gesture and Speech* (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1993), p. 367-370.

tutions. Of course, their targets changed according to the transformation of the institutional context; and yet, their strategies were adapted to their own agendas, as well as to the situations in which they intervened. As we can observe from this overview survey we have done, what was a radical critique of the institutions at a certain moment opened the field of art to larger integration into the market economy.

Courbet's case is extremely revealing of the impact that early acts of onself assertion of an artist as a speaker. By staking out a separate and privileged place for works of art, he was effectively demonstrating that these works were, indeed, very distinctive commodities. Of course, he could not have anticipated exactly what sort of commodities they would become. It was only with a half-century of one-person exhibitions in galleries and temporary locations, several independent exhibitions, increased numbers of wealthy collectors (generally barons of industry and the bank system)² and intense competition (leading to higher prices at auctions) that a vigorous art market came to be well established and works of art could become securities for financial speculation.³

The first manifestation of this transformation was found in Duchamp's dealings with the art distribution system. On one hand, refusing to produce conven-

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2. See, for instance, Susan M. Pearce, *On Collecting* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995), and Russel W. Belk, *Collecting in a Consumer Society* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995). Both authors propose a historical and structural analysis of collecting in Western countries. Belk emphasizes the historical motivation for collecting in relation to the emancipation of a bourgeoisie attempting to imitate the former ruling class and produce its own ideological representation. Pearce holds that collecting is specific to the Western mentality that creates a material world in which epistemological categories create culture through selection processes. While Pearce is more concerned with the shaping of Western mentalities in opposition to that which is foreign, Belk investigates the economic aspects of collecting. Belk argues that the advent of a consumer society with an abundance of available goods has created the possibility for everyone to collect something and demand for collectibles has therefore increased enormously. (Belk, *op. cit.*, p. 41) It was much later, however, that speculating in works of art came to be compared with speculation on the stock market.
 3. Raymonde Moulin has observed that it was in the 1980s only, when works of art fetched the highest prices on the market place, that economists began to compare investments in art to investments on the stock market. See "Le marché et l'histoire," *L'artiste, l'institution et le marché* (Paris: Flammarion, 1992), p. 25-30.

tional works of commodifiable art, he created pseudo-counterfeit legal tender such as the *Monte Carlo Bond* and the *Tzanck Check*, authorized the making of many duplicates of his "original" works, or even copied works by others to make them his own. On the other hand, by demonstrating with the ready-made that anything could be a work of art, he showed that the status of these objects essentially relies upon tacit agreements, because they are proved to be empty out of content in themselves, and therefore they can be securities for speculation. Indeed, like currency, the ready-made is an empty sign in which that which is signified relies upon the good faith and endorsement of a community that determines its value. Duchamp speculated on "things" and "ideas" that nevertheless came to be considered *objets d'art* within their circumscribed system and demonstrated that context could create a work of art and determine its value.

Marcel Duchamp's strategy regarding museums was complex, as evidenced in the delivery of *Box-in-a-Valise*. Although it was essentially consisted of replicas made for commercial distribution, it was given to the most important modern art institution like a Trojan horse to make his two main subversive ideas accepted: the dedifferentiation caused by the readymade, and the primacy and the precedence of the copy over the original. Similarly, in bequeathing *Given 1 the Waterfall. 2 the Lighting Gaz ...* to the Philadelphia Museum of Fine Arts where most of his entire work is housed thanks to his crafty maneuverings, he created some of the most interesting "site-and context-specific" art ever. This installation was specifically designed for the Museum; and its explicit voyeuristic device, which was destined and designed to be located within the museum, epitomizes both the cultural and institutional system of art, and the psyche of museum goers and art lovers.

While Duchamp arranged his ultimate subversive act, it became obvious for many actors in the art world that power not only resided in the state apparatuses of the government but was disseminated throughout the entire society. At the time.

artists like Buren, Haacke and Asher believed that their critique of art institutions had to infiltrate the inner channels of art distribution in order to effectively shift the status quo and reach all the parties involved within the art community. They held that institutions had to be investigated and criticized for what they were, at the place where they stood, if they were to be transformed. So it was in that perspective that works were produced on various sites around the physical and material locations of these lofty establishments in order to expose their misdeeds, past and present, and their hidden agendas. More importantly, these artists sought to give another voice to art institutions and show that they could offer an alternative discourse to the public. This would not be achieved, however, without taking into consideration the main function of the museum—which is to gather, collect, preserve, sort-out, and display precious semiotic-objects—and the crucial constituent of the art objects—which is to be assembled with other similar ones. In other words, there is no work of art without a collection; or, to say it otherwise: In the beginning was the collection.

And yet, as we all know, collection is at the core of art commodification. Courbet and Duchamp, as we can conclude without difficulties, were both aware that the legitimization of their most innovative pieces not only required exhibitions and the involvement of art institutions, but also had to be incorporated into larger collections. Courbet's two Pavilions were displayed in the context of the Universal Expositions in 1855 and 1867. At this time, his devotion to the collector Bruyas, his concern for the museum's interest in his works and his manifesto painting, *The Painter's Studio*, representing a series of his own works,⁴ were evidence that he perfectly understood the importance of collections in the recognition of art and in its valuation.

4. Carol Armstrong has shown that Courbet's *Painter's Studio* (1855) itself is a retrospective in a retrospective. See "Two Retrospectives: Courbet in 1855 and Manet in 1867," *Manet/Manette*. Princeton: Yale University Press, 2001.

When Marcel Duchamp designed *Box-in-a-Valise* to display replicas of his key works, including a few ready-mades, copies were given to various art institutions, such as the Museum of Modern Art and the Société Anonyme. Also, he managed to have most of his work collected by the Arensbergs, and saw to it that their collection ended up in the Philadelphia Museum of Art.

In order to demonstrate and support his theory about the authenticity of Art Brut, Jean Dubuffet did nothing more than collect works of art that were said to be created on impulse by their producers. This case was a prime illustration of how the legitimacy of art may be established outside of art institutions when pieces are stored in coherent collections. From the time that pieces are set apart and appraised within a larger body of work, their genre, essential characteristics and aesthetic value are appreciated in a different light. But, again, it is their belonging to an ensemble that makes these objects form an aesthetic or artistic entity.

Marcel Broodthaers' critique of the museum consisted in re-enacting and parodying some of its rituals. But the most striking moment in the history of *Musée d'art moderne, Département des Aigles* was when, in 1972, it opened in two parallel versions, the *Section des Figures* at the Kunsthalle in Düsseldorf, and the *Section Publicité* at the Documenta in Kassel. In both cases, Broodthaers gathered and displayed impressive, significant collections of images and artefacts representing the political symbol of the eagle during various historical periods and in various settings. The artefacts and images were gathered from both public and private collections for the temporary "collection" (or parody thereof) displayed in Düsseldorf. In the Kassel *Section Publicité*, Broodthaers presented a large collection of reproductions in shop windows as framed photo-montages and slide projections.⁵

5. Benjamin Buchloh recreated the *Musée d'art moderne, Département des Aigles, Section Publicité* at the Marian Goodman Gallery in New York in 1995. On that occasion, a catalogue was published in which Buchloh develops the paratactic practices of Broodthaers (i.e. a collage imitation of scholarly techniques of archiving) in order to debase historical constructions. See *Section Publicité du Musée d'art moderne Département des Aigles*, Maria Gilissen and Benjamin Buchloh eds., (New York: Marian Goodman Gallery, 1995).

Contrary to Courbet, Duchamp, and Dubuffet, who collected in order to lend a modicum of legitimacy to the novelty of their own works, Broodthaers was essentially concerned about the activities of art museums, criticizing them for their rampant participation in the spheres of politics, advertising and consumerism. In his discussion of the "capitalist" and "imperialist" nature of museums in letters published in regard to his *Musée d'art Moderne, Département des Aigles*, he focused more on revealing the contradiction between the financial interests and alleged neutrality of museums. His work analysed the mechanisms of the system of art at the political, ideological, and economic levels, striving to demonstrate the principles underlying the global dynamics of art.

Louise Lawler's approach towards the collection differs from most of the other artists I have studied in that hers is more specialized, and more cryptic. She examines the core elements of institutional art: the collections as they are formed and as the pieces contained in them circulate under particular conditions. Her epistemological strength lies in demonstrations of how art objects accrue value when they are bought, sold and held back from the market. In a sense, most of their practice is built on the works of other artists by incorporating these in her own photographs and installations, even going so far as doing but nothing curating a show of the artists of her own gallery as she did at Metro Pictures in 1982, "Arranged by Louise Lawler."

Marketable Collectibles

Already in 1978, Louise Lawler's contribution to a group show held at Artists Space in New York was to become the hallmark for the direction she was to take from then on. The first part of her multi-faceted approach consisted in displaying a painting of a race horse, borrowed from the New York Racing Association, hung

high on the gallery wall. Instead of being lit by the usual gallery spotlights, theatrical fixtures shone on the viewers so that, at night, their shadows were projected on the wall of the Citybank across the street. The second part of her approach consisted in designing the logo of the gallery, which was to be printed on the exhibition catalogue cover and on ads posted on billboards throughout Manhattan. Thus, Lawler found a way to do and say something relevant about art without producing an object that would be reified. At the same time, she singled out many players in the art world through discreet means, odd approaches to appropriation, and by redirecting the component parts of art commodification, including the *art object* itself, exhibition props and equipment, collections, the public, the market place and some forms of art advertising.

Lawler examined the circulation of art commodities to expose the basic economics of art. Her work elucidates the transformation of fetishistic features in *objets d'art* within a culture essentially shaped by spectacle and simulacrum, and an economy based on consumerism. For instance, in a collaborative exhibition with



Fig. 8.1 Louise Lawler and Allan McCollum, *For Presentation and Display: Ideal Settings*, 1984

Allan McCollum in 1984, at the Diane Brown Gallery in New York, she exhibited commercial display materials like those used by jewel dealers. The installation, *For Presentation and Display: Ideal Settings* (1984) (fig. 8.1), included 100 hydrocal cases, which were set up in rows on the usual exhibition display pedestals, all that bathed in blue halos of light; on the wall behind the installation of display devices, the price "\$200" was projected in white light. Together, the low lighting of the room, the aesthetically pleasing display, the distancing bases, and the ironic insistence on pricing, was made to conflate the display of precious objects with the fetishistic character that emanates from that.⁶

Using the typical look and feel of an advertising page in the American art magazine, *Artforum*,⁷ Lawler published a photograph of a brass bowl, taken in front of a detail from a Frank Stella chevron painting (fig. 8.2). She added "Bought in Paris, New York, Switzerland or Tokyo" as the printed caption. This inscription

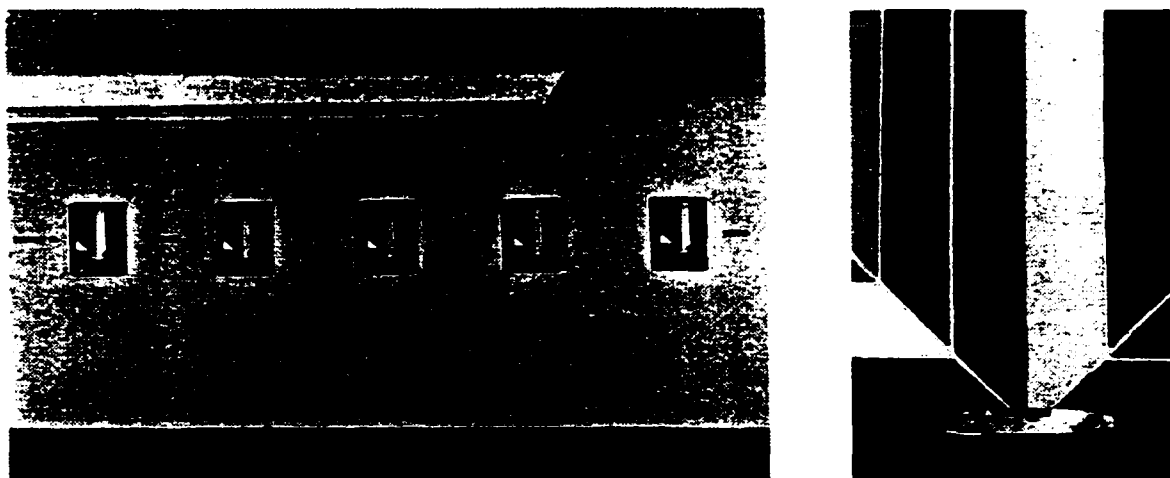


Fig. 8.2 Louise Lawler, *Bought in Paris, New York, Switzerland, or Tokyo*, 1986

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6. Neil Harris has studied the impact that department store displays have had on more spacious floor design in museums. It is interesting to see artists like Lawler and McCollum, whose concerns in art evaluation bring the history of commodity and art objects displaying to the fore, whether consciously or not. See Neil Harris, *Cultural Excursions, Marketing Appetites and Cultural Tastes in Modern America* (Chicago: The University of the Chicago Press, 1990) Chapters 3.7.
 7. Louise Lawler, "A Project by Louise Lawler," *Artforum*, vol. 25, no. 3 (November, 1986), p. 101.

links art objects to both the international market and private collections since an apparently precious object (the brass bowl) is shown juxtaposed to a Modernist painting within the public context of an art magazine. It should also be noted that the appearance of her art-ad in *Artforum* coincided with the publication of "Rites of Exchange," an article by Kate Linker in which Lawler's works are analysed in relation to the links she makes between economic value and "investments in meaning," as it happens in contemporary culture.⁸ Lawler's piece was also presented as an installation; the same image as *Bought in Paris, New York, Switzerland, or Tokyo* was presented in five identical images, with only the captions differed in the installation, now saying: "Stella/Brass", "(detail) Les Indes Galantes IV,"⁹ "purchased from a banker," "Now Located on the Blvd. Victor Hugo," and "1966/1986," linking art of the past and that of the present, as well as money, politics and high culture. But, most important is still the fact that a given object, or its representation, is clearly shown as totally dependent on its semiotic context. In other words, she is thereby demonstrated that it is the enunciation that counts in the end, and that makes value. And the enunciative context that gives meaning and value to the art object is first and the foremost the collection.

In 1987, Lawler was invited to participate in an exhibition at the Quatrièmes Ateliers Internationaux des Pays de la Loire in Fontevraud. She exhibited four identical cybochrome photographs of *Woman with Picasso 1912* (1986) (fig. 8.3).

8. Kate Linker, "Rites of Exchange," *Artforum*, vol. 25, no. 3 (November 1986), p. 99-100. Linker aptly observes that currently, art commodities can be exchanged, transferred, and valued mainly because there is no fixed referent, thus leading "to the uncontrollable iteration of [their] meaning." Although this claim may provide a satisfactory explanation for art market phenomena today, we have shown that the naive "belief" in the return of the referent would be regressive and that the issue must be articulated within the context of art presentation and its enunciation.

9. *Les Indes Gallantes* was a ballet-opera from a musical by the composer Jean-Philippe Rameau, and the librettist Fuzelier, presented in 1735. The fourth act was entitled *Les Sauvages* and the story is set in the West Indies.



Fig. 8.3 Louise Lawler, *Woman with Picasso* 1912, 1986

installed in a room where John Knight had covered the opposite wall with mirrors, reflecting her installation in his own. Lawler's work challenged the notion of uniqueness and originality.¹⁰ Lawler's strategy, which consists in presenting several identical pieces in the same exhibition, produces a destabilising effect on one's expectation that the work of art be unique. As a result of her presentation is that one is drawn to question the context in which the photographs are presented.¹¹

Each of Lawler's four photographs looks odd in itself: the woman's head is cropped, her raised arms indicate that she is talking, and since she has the privi-

10. John Knight's installation is interesting when juxtaposed with Lawler's duplicated photographs. Knight seems to want to express the opposite of what Lawler did. For him, although there are copies, there is always the original. And assembling four photographs is original, whereas their reflection in the mirror was nothing, not even a tangible copy. Nonetheless, in both cases there are reflections of the original, the copy, and the illusion. In the Introduction of the catalogue, both artists requested that Curator Yves Aupetitallot emphasize their differences.

11. This presentation strategy is often used by Lawler in order to debase her own works, much as she destabilizes frames to shift the focus from the usual subject represented. Lawler is operating on the margins of art production and her multiplication of identical images shows the viewer how art becomes "interesting" through repeated viewings. At the MoMA, for instance, she replaced a Miro painting with three identical photographs of the seat placed in front of the painting in the museum. Within the same place in the museum, the museum itself becomes a specific context because it is represented in a *mise-en-abîme*.

lege of holding a Picasso in her hands, the viewer assumes she is an authority in the upper echelons of the art world. But her identity remains unknown: she may be a dealer, a collector, a curator, or an art historian, for all we know. Four institutional positions conflate into one as they become indistinguishable from one another. And yet the picture appears to contain an utterance about an object of great historical and aesthetic worth. But, as the four positions remain indistinguishable from one other, the interpenetrating relationship between the market economy and the role of scholarship is brought to the fore.¹²

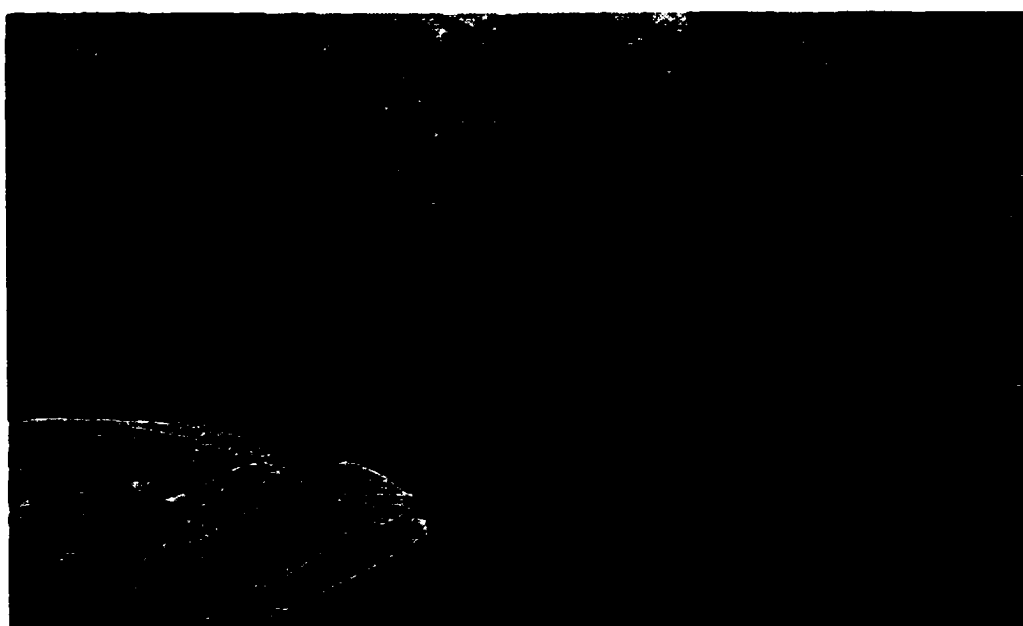


Fig. 8.4 Louise Lawler, *Combien pour ce chapeau?* 1987

Also at the Quatrièmes Ateliers Internationaux des Pays de la Loire, Lawler played a similar art game with the installation *Combien pour ce chapeau?* (1987) (fig. 8.4), three identical photographs of a typical 19th century top hat with a pair

12. I have not included an exhaustive reading of this work. For obvious reasons, the issue of identity in terms of genre, among other things, should be raised in relation to *Woman with Picasso*, 1912. On this subject, see Claude Gintz, "Le Même et l'Autre à l'œuvre dans le travail de Louise Lawler," *Louise Lawler/John Knight*, exposition monographique 12.11.86-16-1.87. (Saint-Étienne: Maison de la culture et de la communication de Saint-Étienne, 1987). This text was reproduced in Claude Gintz, *Ailleurs et Autrement* (Paris: Éditions Jacqueline Chambon, 1993), p. 135-151.

of glasses and an illustrated magazine *Le Fléau algérien* ("The Scourge of Algeria"). On the matte board of each photograph, there was a sentence in French: one asked "*Combien pour ce chapeau?*" ("How much for this hat?"), the second stated that it was Jules Verne's hat, and the third stated that it was an old hat. Again, links between the market of cultural values and the museum—we learn in the catalogue that the photograph was taken at the Musée Jules Verne, Nantes—are explicitly indicated. And once again, a representation of a cultural artifact is presented within three different linguistic contexts, each suggesting a different value for the same object.

In her definition of value as an act determined by both authority and arbitrary servile agreement, Lawler reproduces the famous short story by Hans Christian Andersen, *The Emperor's New Clothes*, in the catalogue of the exhibition; and in the exhibition, t-shirts bearing the last sentence of the story: *Le Roi est Nu* ("The King is naked") were hung on a wall.¹³ In a context where illusionism reigns supreme the story takes on complex shades of meaning. For in matters of art appreciation and valuation, truth and illusion are indirectly determined by institutional authorities—their consensus—and the "market laws." Thus, in some (or perhaps all) cases, *objects d'art* are like the Emperor's investment in clothing: they become what they are said to be, and they are worth the price that the market has determined they will be.

Exposing Collections

External Simulation View at Night (1994) (fig. 8.5) is an installation that addresses the issue of the status of art in a society of spectacle, as Rosalind Krauss

13. Catalogue des *Quatrièmes Ateliers Internationaux des Pays de la Loire*, 1987, held in various locations: Abbaye Royale de Fontevraud, Manufacture des tabacs in Nantes, Musée d'art et d'archéologie de la Roche-sur-Yon, Palais des Congrès de la ville de Saint-Jean-de-Monts, and Chapelle Saint-Julien de l'Hôpital de Château-Gontier.

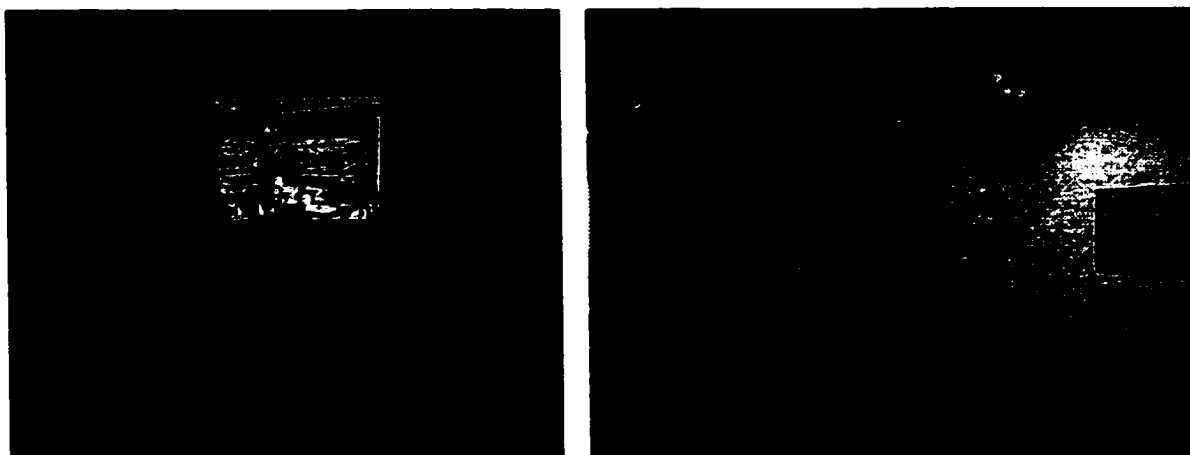


Fig. 8.5 Louise Lawler, *External Simulation*, 1994

remarked in her article "Louise Lawler: Souvenir Memories."¹⁴ The work is presented in two formats: at night, a projection of slides is visible through the storefront window of Metro Pictures gallery, and during the day, a series of the same photographs in small formats are placed under crystal half-globe paperweights, suggesting camera lenses or magnifiers. While the night view incorporates storefront windows, the interior presentation of the pictures is an allusion to the chest-high display cases in jewellery stores.¹⁵ In both cases, the subjects of all pictures remain the same: portions of private and public collections. Taking Lawler's installation as a model to investigate issues about contemporary photography and culture, Rosalind Krauss has discussed the implications of the society of spectacle in light of Walter Benjamin's analysis. In opposition to Benjamin's discussion concerning the vanishing auras of works of art through photographic reproducibility, Krauss argues that *External Stimulation* opens up ways to restore the uniqueness

14. Rosalind Krauss, "Louise Lawler: Souvenir Memories," in *Bachelors* (Cambridge, Mass. & London, England: The MIT Press, 1999), p. 191-205.

This view is corroborated by the facts. As Raymonde Moulin notes, indeed, the average annual transaction levels in paintings at the world's three foremost auction houses was estimated at between 5,000 to 6,000 per year from the latter half of the 19th century to the 1970s and 1980s while levels rose to 50,000. See Moulin, *op. cit.*, p. 18-19.

15. In her article, Krauss proposes that the hunched over position of the spectator while trying to look through the semi-spherical glasses was reminiscent of spectators at peep shows or customers in a jewellery store.

of works of art as a form of resistance against commodification by using photographic "demonstration" and "deconstruction." According to Krauss, modernist binary values opposing transparency and opacity have already been superseded and outmoded within the society of spectacle. In the same article, Krauss suggests that consumerism has produced an oppositional relationship between the collector and the consumer. In short, the collector is opposed to the consumer as he/she does not purchase an object for its function but for the pleasure it gives by not being consumed. The society of spectacle destroys this opposition by making anything a matter of consumption. Reversedly, any collectible, and to a certain point anything becomes a token for exchange. In Louise Lawler's photographs of art objects and collections, exhibited as spectacular images, art objects and consumer goods become interchangeable, which is what history of modern art came to teach us since Duchamp. This suggestion is very important in our understanding of contemporary society and increases in the number and value of transactions taking place in art commodities beginning in the 1980s.¹⁶

Lawler's commodified show is, in effect, a collection of collections. But the transformations she effects on these collections—or on the information she provides about them—by selecting specific locations in their original housing, by framing with her camera the installation of these works in their "normal" settings, by displaying reproductions under crystal glasses with captions that expose the whereabouts of the works, and by projecting them on the walls of a gallery, constitute a critique of the economics behind art objects within contemporary capitalist society. Lawler's pictures of these collections depict them as truly kitsch, even though they may be used as sumptuous decorations. For instance, one picture features an Edward

16. This view is corroborated by the facts. As Raymonde Moulin notes, indeed, the average annual transaction levels in painting at the world's three foremost auction houses was estimated at between 5,000 to 6,000 per year from the latter half of the 19th century to the 1970s while levels rose to 50,000. See Moulin, *op. cit.*, p. 18-19.

Ruscha painting, *Dreams no. 1* (1987), and Roy Lichtenstein's, *Ball of Twine* (1963) as they were installed in the apartment of Leo Castelli (fig. 8.6). Ruscha's painting reproduces the dull lettering of an opticians' reading test sheet in an enlarged format, but instead of the usual arbitrary selection of letters, one reads the word "dreams" in progressively smaller letters. Placed in Castelli's bedroom, as we learn it from the caption, Ruscha's work manifests a too-facile sense of humour certainly not expected from a gallery dealer of the stature of Leo Castelli. Nonetheless, it is surprisingly disturbing to see modern works of art in the contexts for which they were supposed to have been created, the private house of a collector.¹⁷

In both cases, her projections—seen from outside of the gallery—and magnifications of post-card size reproductions created for *External simulation*. Lawler is consciously avoiding the traditional presentation of art. Similarly, her *in situ* photographs provide additional, non-traditional information about the *art objects* she displays. For instance, for the same Castelli piece mentioned above, she traced the various venues and times that Ruscha's and Lichtenstein's works were exhibited, and when they were purchased by Castelli. In this case, it was the circulation of works of art that interested Lawler, as well as their installation and location in private

17. William Rubin explained that the organization of the rooms at the MoMA he eventually designed was motivated by the similarities he wished to assert with the private collectors' residence which are the true locations for modern works of art (see Catherine Millet, "Paris change de musée," *Artpress* no. 97 (November, 1985), p. 3).

Already in 1974, in an interview with Lawrence Alloway and John Coplans, Rubin stated that there is a tight link existing between modern art, easel painting, democracy, museums, and private collections.

Perhaps the dividing line [between modern art and the post-modern] will be seen as between those works which essentially continue an easel painting concept that grew up associated with bourgeois, democratic life and was involved with the development of private collections as well as the museum concept. (p. 52)

And Rubin pursues further:

To the extent that it remains within the tradition of modern easel painting, it still finds the museum a hospitable environment, although the *ideal* place—even for a big Pollock—is a private home. (p. 53)

Lawrence Alloway, John Coplans, "Talking with William Rubin: 'The Museum Concept is not infinitely expandable,'" *Artforum*, vol. 13, no. 2 (October, 1974), p. 51-57, and "Like folding out a hand of cards," vol. 13, no. 3 (November, 1974), p. 46-53.



Fig. 8.6 Louise Lawler, *Lichtenstein's Ball of Twine, and Ruscha's Dreams no. 1*
in Leo Castelli's collection

places.¹⁸ In her list of Lichtenstein's various contexts of exhibition, it is astonishing to see how fluidly works from private collections drift in and out of public exhibitions. As the connections between public and private spheres of art are shown, Lawler herself strives to bring selections of both private and corporate collections into the public sphere.

In her focus on the economics of art, Lawler presents photographs of collections in contexts outside of galleries and museums, where the works of art are usually seen by the public. She shows those other locations where art works are stored and placed, including gallery storage rooms, museum reserves, collections of casts, auction house rooms, and corporate offices (fig. 8.7). Of course, Lawler does not photograph art for the sake of art appreciation. In fact, one rarely has a

18. It should be noted that Castelli photograph was reproduced with the same information in Douglas Crimp's book *On the Museum's Ruins*, *op. cit.*, and in the MoMA catalogue *Museum as Muse*, *op. cit.* These provided new formats for the same photographs.

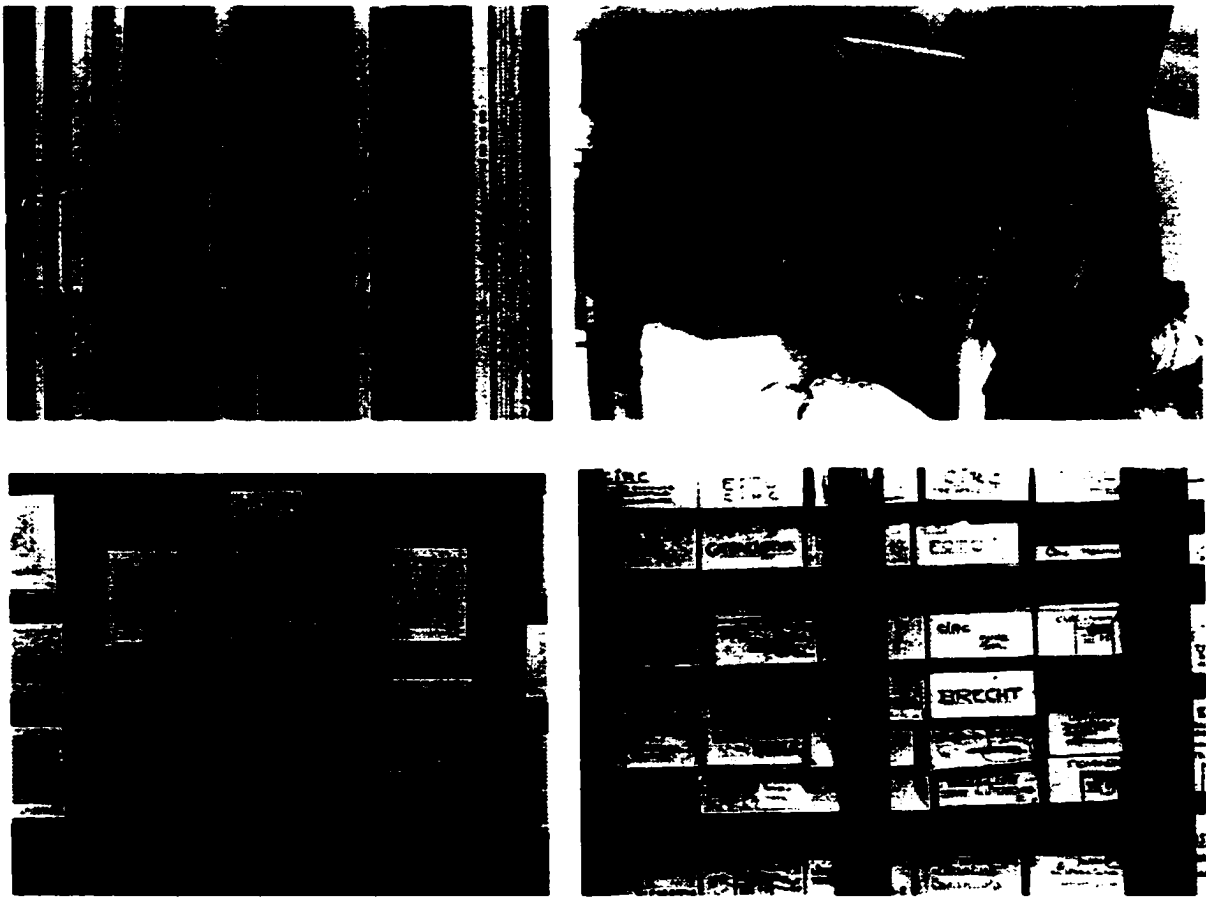


Fig. 8.7 Louise Lawler, Photographs from Douglas Crimp's *On the Museum's Ruins*, 1993

complete and unobstructed view of the works she presents, but we do get a very good look at the contexts in which they are situated. Her picture of a group of plaster casts of classical sculptures is not a study of their aesthetic qualities but rather raises questions about the number of casts and copies that exist, showing that while they are numerous, they are nevertheless painstakingly preserved somewhere. In a similar vein, Lawler took a series of photographs in auction houses to show where works of art are sold and how they are presented at sale. Although these venues are open to the general public, they are generally only frequented by art aficionados. Lawler's photos take the shine off of the glamour of art. For as expensive as some of these items may be, the venues they inhabit have uncomfortable overtones. Lawler documents art in public places and hidden spaces so that her viewers can unmask the "true nature" of art which is to circulate in order to gain value.

In 1981, Louise Lawler produced a series of photographs called *Arrangements*. As we view them, it becomes apparent that she took an interest in works of art displayed in odd positions. A Manet is partially hidden by the cover of a piano, a Sonia Delaunay is placed right behind a kitsch television from the sixties and Leger's *Three Women* (fig. 8.8) is hung above three old-fashioned chairs. These are the locations where art works live out their "lives" without much reverence, it may seem. In Lawler's photographs, indeed, fetishes and gods fall down from their pedestals; therein masterpieces are shown to be very ordinary and decorative artifacts in transit, waiting to change hands. Lawler's photographs seem to make comments about the true function of art while in the hands of collectors: rather than being used for aesthetic appreciation, they are mainly accumulated in their houses, offices and stockrooms. It is not aesthetic appreciation that counts in this context but the assets that these *objets d'art* represent. The numerous arrangements she exhibits show that the context in which art is gathered and preserved is, in fact, diametrically opposed to the idealist "white cube" setting.



Fig. 8.8 Louise Lawler, *Three Women, Three Chairs, Arranged by Mr. and Mrs. Burton Tremaine sr.* NYC, 1984

In order to bring other layers of meaning to the fore in depicting these disorderly accumulations of *objets d'art*, Lawler arranged pieces of art herself, or worked with some of her fellow artists. Her purpose was no more aesthetic than the collectors' arrangements, were; since again it is the merchandizing of art goods that is at stake. She installed works by her fellow artists at Metro Pictures, in *Arranged for sale* (1990), obviously presented in a group show as if for a promotional exhibition of contemporary art. In a collaboration work with Sol LeWitt, various objects were brought together from an existing collection, *From the Collection of the Wadsworth Atheneum, Sol LeWitt and Louise Lawler*, arranged by Louise Lawler, 1984 (fig. 8.9).¹⁸ In both cases, the installations were eclectic assemblages of objects, preserved together as precious. This simple exhibit showed that *objets d'art* were gathered for purposes other than love of art, pure and simple. The idea of value (aesthetic and/or economic) emerges as the only common denominator in all the arrangements as in the collections from which they come. The heterogeneity of the objects put together in private collections does not refer, of course, to the 17th century *Wunderkammer*, but to the 20th century striving for accumulation, consumerism, and highly speculative profits.



Fig. 8.9 Louise Lawler, *From the Collection of the Wadsworth Atheneum, Sol LeWitt and Louise Lawler*, arranged by Louise Lawler, 1984

Lawler's installation of *From the Collection of the Wadsworth Atheneum, Sol LeWitt and Louise Lawler* at the Museum of Hartford in Connecticut was a significant departure from standard curatorial displays in museums or galleries, since objects seemed to be placed in an utterly arbitrary manner, in rows, side by side, or at eye level without any conceptual connections between the objects: a 19th century grandfather clock beside an abstract painting by Franz Kline, placed above a photograph showing works of art in a corporate conference room, a genre painting from the Netherlands, a conceptual piece by Lawrence Weiner, two 19th century portraits, and so on. These objects seemed to have nothing in common but the fact that they were all selected by an art institution. Stranger yet, the criteria for the selection seemed to be entirely different from one object to the next. In sum, it seemed there was no rationale in their selection. The overall effect of such an installation is that of a preview exhibition at an auction house where the objects of art are presented in no order other than the sequence of the lots put up for sale. This auction-house presentation, however, was set up in a prestigious, well-reputed museum. But it was not prestige or reputation that were promoted in this case, but the museum's link to the commercialization of art.

Lawler's contribution to the critique of institutionalized art is pivotal. For if none of the artists of the neo-avant-garde had systematically investigated collections, the critique of art systems would have remained very fragmented and incomplete, indeed. Lawler helps us to see that collections are more than just holding tanks that transform objects into *art objects*. In reality, collections are the keystones that hold the system of art together. There would be no museums without collections to conserve, care for, study and exhibit. There would be no dealers without collectors to purchase and resell their precious art commodities. There would be no producers of artistic works without the accumulation of art by consumers. And there would be no auctions without competing collectors speculating on the worth

of works in the name of public prestige, private pleasure or financial gain. No object can be considered "art" if it is not integrated into a series of similar objects kept apart from other objects, protected and admired for qualities other than their use value.

Lawler's work has brought institutional critique to new heights. It is true that some of her actions were marginal (e.g. distributing matchbooks at other artistic events, designing a gallery logo, producing a gift certificate and designing magazine advertising pages) and many of her photographs have transgressed conventional norms in art, as in her use of frames, bases, labels, presentation easels, picture rails and crowd security cords. But her great contribution was to penetrate the inner sanctum of art and enter the world of collections, where works perch precariously on their picture rails or stand like soldiers solidly packed into storage rooms. For it is in these spaces that we clearly see thousands of *objets d'art*, invested with all of the passion, knowledge and wisdom of the day, in their state of eternal transit between the latest market valuations and the whims of the highest bidder.

The Museum Doing Business as Usual

If the art institutions could have incorporated the Duchampian revolution by historicizing the avant-garde, they could also simulate their own meta-institutional critique. The museum, as William Rubin once said, is perhaps not an infinitely expandable concept, but its capability of adapting itself to critical discourses and practices might be. In this sense, ever vigilant of their own interests, most museums of contemporary art and Kunsthalle and many museums of Modern art took the initiative of organizing several exhibitions in which organizers and curators requested context-specific works from participating artists.²⁰

20. In debates against contemporary art in France, for instance, some writers have attacked artists who produced site-specific works and installations on the basis that these works are paid for by the museums or the State. Philippe Domecq. *Artistes sans art?* (Paris: Éditions Esprit, 1994)

More recent examples of this kind of reappropriation and rerouting of movements include the New York Museum of Modern Art's *Museum as Muse* exhibition in 1998 in which Kinaston McShine, the curator, showed works by several Modern and contemporary artists who expressed misgivings about the museum in its role as the main cultural feature of modernity. The exhibition displayed not only art practices related to the critique of the museum institutions; it gathered a large range of works that feature the museum as a support and a source of inspiration. Paradoxically, the title of the exhibition itself appears to indicate that the institution was unflappably serene about the matter and fully prepared to reappropriate, level and spin any criticism or avant-garde discourse that came its way. In fact, the spectrum of works on display at the MoMA was so vast, and the range of their subjects so diversified, that even the most significant critical approaches seemed to emanate from a larger conceptual framework—which was formulated by the museum itself. And yet, even the most radical of the critical artists appeared to be deemed down so drastically that one might begin to believe that the MoMA exhibition itself was more radical than any of the artists represented in the show.

Indeed, the legitimacy of the institution in that context was never in doubt since it remained the ideal context for displaying and appreciating art. So while art institutions were the target of these critiques, the critiques themselves were a source of sustenance to institution officials and a source of inspiration for many artists. Indulgently, McShine states:

Overall, the relationship between museum and artist is far less adversarial than it was a few decades ago; occasional disruption aside, the status quo

attacks Buren, claiming that no other artist in France is as privileged as he is because his art is neutral and decorative, conveniently designed for *in situ* installation. According to Domecq, Buren's so-called revolutionary practices against institutions are not radical at all, since they are made for the establishment.

In contemporary art, Raymonde Moulin comments that high-risk investments in the domain of art (avant-garde products) are mainly the purview of the State and museums. Raymonde Moulin, *op. cit.*, p. 68.

prevails. Museums are allowed to maintain their lofty functions, and artists are allowed to behave in the expected way, their transgressions against the museum being usually consistent with the romantic definition of the artist. Even so, this fascinating cohabitation and coexistence will probably always contain an element of wariness. Like two superpowers that mutually respect each other, even mutually depend on each other vigilantly—as if practicing for the field on which they are engaged together, the miraculous field of visual art.²¹

By mitigating the denunciations of artists, the MoMA's curator (for one) effectively muted and neutralized oppositional views and deviant practices, reabsorbing the voices of artist-speakers into the institutional paradigm. Moreover, by removing works and performance art from the context that gave them their critical relevancy, *Museum as Muse* effectively drained the meaning from the works it exhibited. From that point on, works could be framed in a historical past, suggesting that things had changed and that the relationship between the artists and the museum was no longer adversarial.

All the works displayed in the exhibition at the MoMA were reduced to the level of *objets d'art*; they were literally objectified and presented as items of a more general category, which could be typified as art practices inspired by the museum. Normally these works would be interventions oriented towards the context of their execution; they would seem to include the context of their presentation rather than simply being included in it. The works at the MoMA exhibition were rather displayed because of what they represented, the museum, rather than appropriating the context of the exhibition. Instead of being enunciations, they became utterances within a larger context from which they were now spoken. To give one example: one of Andrea Fraser's *Gallery Talks* was presented as a video (*Welcome to the Wadsworth: A Museum Tour*, 1991); it became extremely odd in the context of such an exhibition, since the critique of the institution that it was meant to be is

21. Kynaston McShine, "Introduction," in *The Museum as Muse* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1998), p. 11-23.

utterly neutralized into a comic presentation where the artist says unexpected things about the museum and the works of art in it; the action of simulating a tour in a museum, the usurpation of a art-system character, the play on truth and fiction, etc., all this disappears when presented outside the appropriate context in which it is supposed to happen. In fact, Andrea Fraser's work, vanishes as context-work behind the temporary collection of museums taken as subject. The same observation could be made about most of the critical works displayed in the exhibition. The positioning of the artist as a speaker, and of his work as a speech act about the specific cultural conditions of practicing art are obviously shadowed by their hoarding into a heteroclite collection of museum-related-works. For many of these works, excavated from their past, it was catastrophic, look outdated when reified, and their critical edge is completely blunt.

Faced with insatiable institutions prepared to indiscriminately assimilate all manner of new material, critical artists invented alternative modes of discourse to disrupt business-as-usual. On the occasion of the MoMA exhibition, refusing to allow his practice being objectified, Michael Asher maintained his usual analytical approach. Instead of allowing himself be co-opted by the museum, he found its rawest nerve and struck it. At a minimum, Asher hoped to disrupt the museum's officious drone when he displayed a list of all the works of art that had been "deaccessioned" by the MoMA during its existence, beginning in 1929. Asher's goal was to make the list of works public so that anyone committed to the domain of art could bear witness to the museum's practices.²² Although such a revelation might

22. Michael Asher published the list of works deaccessioned by the MoMA (in conjunction with the Museum of Modern Art) for display and distribution at the exhibition. The publication was available at the bookstore and few copies could be consulted on site at the exhibition. The MoMA Director of the Department of Painting and Sculpture, Kirk Varnedoe, requested that he be allowed to respond to Asher's publication (in the pamphlet itself) so that he could neutralize any fallout resulting from Asher's compromising publication, which ended up including Varnedoe's and Asher's text as an introduction to this catalogue of deaccessioned *œuvres*.

appear innocuous, its implications are considerable since the very honesty of the museum was being called into question. Indeed, by deaccessioning works in a public collection, the role of the museum as a neutral preserver of modern culture became highly questionable. The implication was that questionable transactions had taken place and these pieces had been sold. The public might therefore be compelled to ask whether the historical position of a curator at one moment in history may justifiably be used to re-examine the judgements made by his/her predecessors as if these decisions were not part themselves of the making of art history. And just what are the repercussions of selling off works of art that were donated to museums by collectors (as is often the case)? Even more interesting, I think, Asher's intervention showed that museums face economic issues not only in relation to the administration of their activities, including the management of their collections, but in purchasing and selling major works of art. This whole process is generally hidden, of course, because it is highly problematic. The museum, by selecting the works that deserve to be preserved, by exhibiting and studying them, establishes the highest standards; and, to reverse Renoir's sentence, aesthetic valuation, which is a matter of consensus, determines economic value.

Michael Asher's initiative at the *Museum as Muse* exhibition taught us that, as speakers, critical artists could not express anything different and create new original works without using or proposing different conditions of "enunciation." It should be noted that the production of these works not only inspired new content but, more importantly, incorporated specific contexts as their content. As previously observed, these contexts were economic, political, cultural, institutional and semiotic in nature. Rather than introducing alternative "discourses" with new content, building unprecedented structures or proposing unusual congruences between form and content, artists strove to expose the colossal reach of existing problems. As a group, they strove to expose art production and distribution. They also exam-

ined the museum-gallery nexus from every angle: the architecture of art institutions, exhibiting material, types and functions of exhibitions, distribution and circulation of works of art, spectatorship, private and corporate sponsorship of the arts, etc. Of course, the efficiency of institution critique as practiced by artists may be limited since not only the museum and the market place strive for new art goods, but the society of spectacle has been able to transform anything, including cultural products, into a commodity. But, it is precisely because of this situation that artists must be interested in choosing enunciatory practice in which they can make more visible the less desired conditions of art distribution that submit art goods to the status of political propaganda, commodity fetishes, and as tokens for financial speculation.

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