

6

WHAT'S INTANGIBLE, TRANSITORY, MEDIATING,

PARTICIPATORY, AND RENDERED IN THE PUBLIC SPHERE?

PART II

The following essay is a revised version of a text originally written in 1996 as the second part (indeed, the bulk) of the essay of the same name published in October in Spring 1997.

The Critique of Artistic Autonomy

This is the crux of the problem. . . . In this country, under American-style capitalism, a man who owns a work has complete legal and unalterable possession of it.

—Barnett Newman, Art Workers Coalition Open Hearing, 1969

1. A work of art by a living artist would still be the property of the artist. . . .
2. The artist would be consulted when his work is displayed. . . .
3. The museums, collectors, or publication would compensate the artist for use of his art. This is a rental, beyond the original purchase price . . . : the principle of a royalty would be used. . . .
4. An artist would have the right to retrieve his work from a collection if he compensated the purchaser. . . .
5. When a work is resold from one collector to another, the artist would be compensated with a percentage of the price.

—Sol LeWitt, Art Workers Coalition Open Hearing, 1969

Artists should attach binding conditions to the sale of their work. Such conditions should include the condition that the work may not be re-sold. . . . Another condition should be made universal and should be enforced systematically, rigorously, and with a constant eye to filling loop-holes out of which the force of the condition drains: that condition is, *no owner may in any way enrich himself through the possession of the work of art.*

—Carl Andre, Art Workers Coalition Open Hearing, 1969

That the critique of the autonomy of the art object had, by the late 1960s, become a rejection of more than Greenbergian formalism is evident in the speeches made at the Art Workers Coalition's Open Hearing in April 1969. At issue was the fact that the autonomy of art objects—as discrete and separable from both artist and viewer, from both the site of production and the site of presentation or consumption—determines their “materiality” not only in their physical “presence” but also as commodities.

Artistic autonomy can be considered in terms of four different though interrelated dimensions. Artistic autonomy has a specifically aesthetic dimension: the freedom of artworks from rationalization with respect to specific use or function, whether moral, economic, political, social, material, or emotional. Second, it has an economic dimension: the emergence of the relatively anonymous bourgeois market and, with it, the artistic commodity; the consequent separation of sites of production and consumption and, with it, the separation of production from the demands it meets or satisfies in the places and processes of consumption. Third, artistic autonomy has a social dimension: in Pierre Bourdieu's analysis, the autonomy of any field is relative to that field's capacity to impose “its own norms on both the production and the consumption of its products” and to exclude norms and criteria dominant in other fields—especially those of the economic and political fields.¹ Finally, this social dimension of artistic autonomy implies a fourth, political dimension: the freedom of speech and conscience and the right to dissident opinion.

Bourdieu describes two mechanisms through which the products and practices of the relatively autonomous field of art are brought into the service of external interests and functions. The first is heteronomization: the imposition within the field of art of interests and values dominant in other fields, particu-

larly economic and political interests. Such heteronomization can function directly, as instrumentalization, or indirectly, through the devaluation of specifically artistic criteria through the influence of economic and political (or social) criteria.

A second mode of “use” proceeds through what Bourdieu calls “the logic of homologues”: that is, through parallels between the dynamics, structure, and interests of the field of art and those of what he calls the field of power—of dominant classes understood as the locus of monopolies of political, social, and cultural as well as economic capital.

If the critique of the production and exchange of art objects as commodities—like the critique of the studio and the museum—emerged out of a critique of the autonomy of the artwork, it was not just as a challenge to aestheticism. Rather, it was rooted in a recognition of the partial and ideological character of that autonomy and an attempt to resist the heteronomy to which artists and artworks are subject by the apparatus that supports their legitimacy and through which that legitimacy is appropriated as symbolic and economic profit. The critique of the art object’s autonomy in this sense was less a rejection of artistic autonomy than a critique of the *uses* to which artworks are put: the economic and political interests they *serve*. The statements made at the Art Workers Coalition Open Hearing indicate that a central element of rejections of the commodity form in art of the late 1960s was an attempt to resist such use.

The late 1960s produced at least three different strategies of resistance. One strategy was represented by the AWC and other groups developing counterhegemonic practices of cultural and community-based activism: that of reforming the art institutions and commercial art apparatus that oversaw the circulation, presentation, and consumption of artworks. The second and third strategies of resistance were directed at art—artistic practice and artistic products—and not just at institutions and the market. They include conceptual art’s dematerialization of the art object in language and action and the temporalization of artworks in specific times and spaces in what came to be called post-studio practices. A fourth set of strategies, represented by institutional critique, emerged as a combination of these three.

Service Products: Conceptualism and Intangible Value

The labour of a manufacturer adds, generally, to the value of the materials which he works upon, that of his own maintenance, and of his master's profit. The labor of a menial servant, on the contrary, adds to the value of nothing. . . . [It] does not fix or realize itself in any particular subject or vendible commodity. His services generally perish in the very instant of their performance, and seldom leave any trace or value behind them.

—Adam Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, 1776

A primary focus of the AWC was developing policies to defend claims by artists to proprietary rights over their works even after they are sold. These policies were to safeguard both economic and artistic interests. The AWC came into existence in January 1969 when a group of artists and critics supported a protest by kinetic sculptor Takis over the way one of his works, owned by the Museum of Modern Art, was exhibited in the museum's "Machine" show. Takis's claim that as the producer of the work he had the right to determine when, where, and how it was exhibited, even if he no longer owned it, evolved into the AWC's broader critique of the circulation and exchange of artworks as commodities. It also led to agitation for museum reform that continued to be directed primarily, if largely for strategic reasons, at MoMA.


In most of the reforms sought by the AWC, the status and character of artwork and artistic competence were not in question. One of the AWC's founding principles was to eschew a particular artistic orientation. The goal of protecting artwork from misuse was to be accomplished through legal and organizational rather than artistic means. At the same time, however, many of the AWC's most active members, including Carl Andre, Hans Haacke, Lucy Lippard, and Gregory Battcock, were pursuing or supporting artistic practices that questioned the bases of the value of artworks within commercial and social markets. Haacke's work about physical systems from the 1960s challenged the durability of artworks. Lippard and Battcock were among the earliest critics to identify the "dematerialization of the art object." Andre's stack and scatter work had already been identified, in a 1967 review by Dan Graham, with the rejection not only of the autonomy of the art object, or even the commodity form, but of all forms of possession and use: "The component units possessed no intrinsic significance

Art Workers' Coalition is here to save artists the embarrassment of being identified with:

- 1) The political ambitions of Nelson A. Rockefeller.
- 2) The Trustees of the Museum of Modern Art, who assume
– to the detriment of the intellect, energies, and intentions of artists – that they establish cultural values.

Art Workers' Coalition therefore demands artists' representation on the board of trustees.

Art Workers' Coalition is here to reassert that the artist be given power to control his work. Art Workers' Coalition demands that the artist be given moral control and a share of the capital gains realized from the resale of his work. Art Workers' Coalition demands that the Museum pay rental to artists whose work it displays but does not own. Art Workers' Coalition demands that the artist be paid a residual on all reproductions of his work. Art Workers' Coalition demands that a share of all profits gained by the public or private resale of the work of dead artists be redistributed to contribute to the growth of living art.

DEMONSTRATION (9 : 30 pm)
May 26  **9 AT The Museum of Modern ART**
 11 West 53 Street, New York, N.Y. 10019 Tel. 245-3200 Cable: Moder

Rockefeller and the "Elite" invited to this evening's opening are more than capable of assuming the full financial support of the Museum of Modern Art. Art Workers' Coalition demands that admission fees be discontinued. We object to the fact that free access is given this evening to the very group most guilty of the subversion and rape of the content and meaning of the work of art. Art Workers' Coalition demands free access for all at all times.

Again, Art Workers' Coalition is here to rescue Art from identification with a social community that is guilty of promoting racism. Art Workers' Coalition demands that the museum set up a Martin Luther King Center devoted primarily to the work of black and Puerto Rican artists.

JOIN OUR DEMONSTRATION.

Art Workers' Coalition, P.O. Box 553, Old Chelsea Station, New York, N.Y. 10011

6.1 Art Workers Coalition flyer, 1971.

beyond their immediate contextual placement, being 're-placeable.' Works are unpossessible by the viewer in the monetary sense, [in] the sense of an artist being possessed of a vision or of satisfying personal inner needs of the viewer."² The economic and political dimensions of these artistic tendencies may have had their most explicit expression in the activities of the AWC.

One of the most consistent arguments to be found in the documents of the AWC is that artworks serve interests that are contrary to those of artists. Artworks, even the most aesthetically autonomous, are used. Artists must take such use into account, if not for reasons of conscience, artistic or political, then for reasons of self-interest—hopefully, a radical self-interest, a self-interest with an analysis.

Many of the statements at the Open Hearing describe such *use* as a *misuse*. Artworks are subject to price speculation and manipulation by profiteering galleries and "commercial middle-men" who reduce art to objects of conspicuous consumption and artists to producers of luxury commodities: "servants of the wealthy" and "toadies of the upper middle-class elite" whose livelihood depends on their capacity to provide for "THE ENTERTAINMENT OF ISOLATED RICH PERSONS"; "RICH PERSONS" who control museums—as well as "ALL [other] legitimate communicative agencies"—and who are "waging war in Viet Nam" and calling "the cops at Columbia" and "justifying their slaughter . . . by their precious, conscious support of ART."³

With the recognition that even the most aesthetically autonomous artworks are used and that their commodity form conditions this use, many of the policies advocated by the AWC were oriented toward controlling such use. Whereas the transfer of artworks as merchandise implies "complete legal and unalterable possession," artist after artist at the Open Hearing proposed legal mechanisms for retaining at least some proprietary rights over works after they are sold. These included not only the right to a percentage of appreciated value realized in resale but also royalties from reproductions and fees from exhibitions (even when the exhibitor owns the work). That these models are all drawn from the legal and economic conditions of intellectual property was noted. Artists, Alex Gross stated, "are only asking for the same return from their work as is received by writers, composers and film-makers in the form of copyrights and royalties."⁴ Ian Whitecross took up the same theme: "It can be objected that art is different since it is intrinsically valuable as a unique object whereas music and literature have value only in their idea and not in their physical form—yet, one can maintain that the sale of an art work conveys only the right to private and personal enjoyment

thereof and not the right to financial gain, personal publicity or public acclaim.”⁵ In 1969, these arguments began developing into the “Artists’ Reserved Rights Transfer and Sale Agreement.” The final version of the Agreement, written by attorney Robert Projansky and published in *Studio International* in April 1971, was designed, according to Seth Siegelau, “to remedy some generally acknowledged inequities in the art world, particularly artists’ lack of control over the use of their work.”⁶

Some of the participants at the Open Hearing also noted that protecting the proprietary rights of artists was not very radical, accepting as it did the principle of private ownership. However, what was radical about the AWC’s proposed protections was the duplicitous condition of art’s value that they uncovered: they implied a radical splitting of artwork into tangible and intangible value. And this in turn implied a redefinition of artwork from a commercial product or good to a service product—in this case, intellectual property.

Instead of complete and “unalterable” possession, the exchange of services—even service products—generally implies specific and limited use. Compensation for the production of durable goods can always function as an advance on value to be appropriated in sale and resale—that is, on profit. Compensation for services, on the other hand, such as fees and royalties, are only the cost (or a portion of the cost) of final consumption.

One of the earliest distinctions between goods production and service provision, made by Adam Smith, relates less to the tangible or intangible character of the product of labor than to the social character of labor itself: whether or not that labor produces profit. For Smith, a service is a product that contains only use value and no exchange value: it adds “to the value of nothing.”⁷ It may have been precisely this condition—which rendered services suspect for Smith—that the artists of the AWC aspired to in considering their work intellectual property: as Andre stated, “no owner may in any way enrich himself through the possession of the work of art.”⁸ From this perspective, one can understand how artists of the late 1960s saw in the condition of service products, relations, positions, and functions a means of protection from, and even resistance to, forms of exploitation (of themselves and others) consequent to the production and exchange of cultural commodities.

The substitution of service products for material products, of ideas for things, already accomplished by conceptual art in the years before the Open Hearing, did not in fact do away with any of the basic property relations that more traditional

forms of artistic production had operated within. But eliminating such relations may not actually have been the aim of many of conceptual art's most prominent proponents and practitioners. In his acknowledgments for his first book of *Statements*, published in 1968 by Seth Siegelaub, Lawrence Wiener notes that "certain specific statements are reproduced with the kind permission of the people who own them."⁹ In a 1970 essay Jack Burnham quotes Siegelaub as saying: "My interest as a businessman isn't in circumventing the commercial system. I've just made pages of a book comparable to space. . . . Artists having their work go out as printed matter can be just as viable as selling Nolands."¹⁰ And while Lucy Lip-pard laments conceptual art's failure to resist "general commercialization" in her 1973 postscript to *Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object*, she describes her early hopes for such resistance as pinned, not on the efforts of the artists so much as the (initial) unattractiveness to collectors of ephemera like Xerox sheets which, she supposed, would "forcibly" free conceptual art from "the tyranny of a commodity status and market-orientation."¹¹

Conceptual art nevertheless questioned what the AWC did not: the ways in which the character of artworks and artistic practice itself presupposed the forms of symbolic and economic appropriation to which they are subject. The AWC's institutional critique was largely directed at the art apparatus as exterior to artistic practice, which was generally considered separable from the contexts in which it functioned (hence the solution was to impose restrictions on that apparatus, externally, by contract). For conceptual art, however, definition of the conditions and relations of exchange became an integral part of art itself.

If the AWC attempted to protect artworks contractually, conceptual artists reduced artworks themselves to contracts that often described not only objects or actions, but the conditions under which they would be produced or undertaken. In his 1969 *Duration Piece #15*, Douglas Huebler offers a reward for information leading to the arrest of a man wanted by the FBI which is to decrease from \$1,100 to \$0 over the course of a year. If the piece is purchased within that time period, the new owner assumes all responsibility for payment of any claims. Huebler specifies: "The price for this piece is \$1,100: from that sum I will reimburse its owner any money that he pays as a reward." In the proposal for *Location Piece #14*, also 1969, which describes the process of generating 24 photographs from 24 locations at longitudes divisible by 15, Huebler specifies: "The owner of this work will assume the responsibility for fulfilling every aspect of its physical execution."

In another example, Lawrence Weiner's often-cited "instructions" may be significant less because the "receiver" may include any reader than because the "receiver" also, explicitly, includes the buyer. "People, buying my stuff, can take it wherever they go and can rebuild it if they choose. If they keep it in their heads, that's fine too."¹²

As in the AWC's contract, the predominant orientation of conceptualism was not to refuse to sell an artwork, but to control it. Even in her optimistic preface to *Six Years*, Lippard predicts not the disappearance of collectors but rather their replacement by people "less interested in possession." These she characterizes as "patrons."¹³ It seems that conceptual art was to revolutionize the political economy of art by returning collectors to the more altruistic motives of patronage projected onto art's premarket past.

Service Relations: Site Specificity and Temporalization

Immaterial products [are] values consumed at the moment of production.

—Jean Baptiste Say, *A Treatise on Political Economy*, 1803

The idea of the return of the patron can also be found in Joseph Kosuth's "Art After Philosophy": "When someone 'buys' a Flavin he isn't buying a light show, for if he was he could just go to a hardware store and get the goods for considerably less. He isn't 'buying' anything. He is subsidizing Flavin's activity as an artist."¹⁴ With the substitution of "subsidizer" for collector, the compensation an artist receives is less payment for a product than payment for artistic activity itself. Kosuth implies that Flavin's rejection, as a minimalist and with the ready-made, of specifically artistic competencies and the production of unique aesthetic compositions is what turns art collectors into art subsidizers. What Kosuth doesn't mention, however, is that Flavin was one of the first artists of the 1960s to sell his work not just as an object but also as a certificate. The fluorescent tubes that constitute a Flavin are destined to die, making collectors the proud owners of specifications for the work's reproduction with new generations of materials.

In another reference to Flavin, Douglas Huebler wrote in a statement for *Prospect* '69: "Anyone could produce an Andre or a Flavin for instance. At the same time, I believe that the collector is someone who enters into a conspiracy

with the artist that is beyond the issue of accessibility, an agreement that the sensibility is an important one. This agreement may be really what the owner had that is original.”¹⁵ Huebler implicitly recognizes that a rejection of artistic competencies and the production of unique objects does not necessarily undermine the value of art. Rather, such value depends on the symbolic conditions of an artistic position: on the degree to which a work’s underlying principles are recognized as unique, legitimate, and historically relevant.

If Andre and Flavin did transform the conditions of artistic value, their doing so may have had little to do with their rejection of artistic competencies and products.¹⁶ The “return of the patron” their work implied had less to do with the disappearance of objects with specifically artistic value than with the emergence of a specific relation: the “conspiracy” that Huebler describes in his statement and inscribes in his contractual works. But while the works of Huebler and other conceptualists explicitly project and circumscribe specific relations to collectors, the works of Andre and Flavin do not. If Kosuth and Huebler nevertheless cite Andre and Flavin as precedents in redefining artistic exchange, it is because the specific relations implied by their practices are established within the form of their activity itself: the introduction, through practices restricted to the variable arrangement of ready-made materials, of a specific relation not only within a site but within a process of production. This was the challenge to the circulation and exchange of artworks developed in post-studio and site-specific practices in the 1960s and ’70s.

The implications of post-studio practice for the social conditions of artistic activity are hard to miss in one of the texts that introduced the paradigm of site specificity, Robert Smithson’s “Towards the Development of an Air Terminal Site,” which opens as follows:

Since July, 1966 I’ve been rendering consultation and advice as an “artist consultant” to Tippetts-Abbett-McCarthy-Stratton (Engineers and Architects). The project concerns the development of an air terminal between Fort Worth and Dallas. From time to time, after studying various maps, surveys, reports, specifications and construction models, I meet with Walther Prokosch, John Gardner and Ernest Schwiebert in order to discuss the overall plan. I have engaged in these discussions not as an architect or engineer, but simply as an artist.¹⁷

Remarkable in this description is not only that Smithson describes himself as an “artist consultant” but that he describes his client and the individuals he is working with so specifically. It reveals that a specific site, even when engaged only in its physical aspects, always also implies a specific set of relations, whether social, economic, or subjective. Those relations are not only relations within a site engaged or thematized by a site-specific work, but also the relations an artist constructs or enters into as a condition of working in that site.

The production of artworks on site instead of in a studio, even when not motivated by a critique of the commodity and even when not resulting in the elimination of transferable objects, has the effect of reducing the temporal and physical distance between the processes of production and consumption. As Daniel Buren recognized in “The Function of the Studio,” that distance requires the production of durable and movable objects that conform to the conditions of commodities and entails the abstraction of those objects from their sites of production in circulation and exchange.¹⁸ It also requires the abstraction of relations of exchange themselves. This abstraction is the difference between the artist-patron relationship defined by specific commissions and the artist-collector relationship that emerged with relatively anonymous bourgeois art markets and that introduced the economic dimension of artistic autonomy. What post-studio practice represented, therefore, was a radical shift in the conditions not only of the autonomy of the art object, but the autonomy of artistic practice itself.

One aspect of Buren’s critique of the studio and museum was that the distance between sites of production and consumption, explicitly closed by post-studio activity, are only, in fact, apparent: the museum “makes its ‘mark,’ imposes its ‘frame’ (physical and moral) on everything that is exhibited in it . . . all the more easily since *everything that the Museum shows is only considered and produced in view of being set in it.*”¹⁹ Buren recognized that the instrumentalization of art for economic and symbolic profit is conditioned by the autonomy of the artwork itself. This autonomy allows the art object to become “what even its creator had not anticipated, serving instead, as is usually the case, the greater profit of financial interests and the dominant ideology.”²⁰ Buren also appeared to recognize that this ideological use depends not only on the autonomy of artworks, but on the autonomy of the aesthetic itself. While the former allows for the appropriation of artworks for economic profit, the latter, by foreclosing determined functions, consigns artworks to ideological use. While the autonomy of artworks as commodities may allow them to produce economic profit, the



6.2 Daniel Buren, *Photo-Souvenir: Peinture-Sculpture (Painting-Sculpture)*, acrylic on fabric, work in situ at the Guggenheim International Exhibition, 1971, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York. Photo: Robert E. Mates and Paul Katz.

autonomy of art as aesthetic construct is what allows it to produce the symbolic profit of social and cultural legitimacy.

It may have been precisely this profit in legitimacy that Huebler was describing when he wrote about the “conspiracy” (of taste) that underlay exchanges between collectors and conceptualists or minimalists. In a text published at the same time as Huebler’s statement, Buren was writing—“in conscience of the danger that, in art, a form/thing . . . can become, even if it is physically, aesthetically, objectively insignificant, an object of reference and of value”—of the need to develop “a method of work.” This method should be allied, not to “any particular inspiration” (or sensibility), but to “a specific system” that he characterizes as “*indicative or critical*. Among other things . . . of its own process.”²¹

The rejection of commodity production in the dematerialization of the art object or its temporalization in specific sites did not necessarily imply a rejection of economic relations. But did it imply the return of relations of patronage, as texts by Lippard and Kosuth seem to suggest, or the emergence of a new set of relations? Both conceptual art, by projecting its consumption in contractual works, and post-studio practice, by eliminating the distance between sites of production and consumption, substituted specific for generalized relations of exchange. But what would turn those specific relations into patronage? The answer may be found in the absence of a direct exchange of quantities of value: the absence not only of the deferred exchange value of an object of investment but also, within aesthetic paradigms of gratuitous production and disinterested consumption, of function and use. The determinedly critical function of Buren’s “method” is what distinguishes the relations established in his post-studio approach from those of patronage that much conceptual and site-specific work seemed to evoke, from the extravagant subsidies of the Dia Art Foundation to the support provided by Virginia Dwan, a wealthy gallerist who made many of the most ambitious earthworks of the period possible.

Buren’s engagement with specific sites implicitly addressed the social and economic relations underlying “the false discretion of . . . depersonalized architectures.”²² However, it was left to Michael Asher to develop a system that both revealed the relations constitutive of a site and redefined the place of his own practice within them.

Asher’s 1973 and 1974 exhibitions at commercial art galleries are notable not just as interventions on the “commercial adaptation” of aesthetic production within the gallery space, but because they formalize Asher’s situational practice itself as a form of resistance to that adaptation. Writing about his 1973 exhibition

at the Heiner Friedrich Gallery in Cologne in which he painted the ceiling throughout the entire gallery (including offices, hallways, storage, etc.) a tone slightly darker than the floor, Asher notes: “In this work, the viewer could see the relationship between the gallery’s office space activities and the gallery’s exhibition space activities, which visibly appeared as opposed functions in that the fixed nature of the work (the whole gallery) came into opposition with the commercial functions of the gallery.” However, besides making those opposed functions visible, the work also performed its own opposition by stipulating that the ceiling be painted over after the one-month duration of the exhibition. (The gallery did not meet this condition.)

Service Occupations: Institutional Critique and Cultural Mediation

The apparently homogeneous notion of the expansion of the services sector, that is typical of late capitalism, must therefore be reduced to its contradictory constitutive elements. This expansion involves:

1. The tendency towards a general extension of intermediate functions . . .

—Ernest Mandel, *Late Capitalism*, 1972

The first time Asher received a fee for his work was for the “Spaces” exhibition organized by Jennifer Licht at the Museum of Modern Art in late 1969. “Spaces” was also the first time MoMA compensated artists for participating in an exhibition that did not result in the museum’s ownership of an artwork. The fees that artists received for “Spaces” were only and explicitly in compensation for generating temporary installations specifically for the exhibition.

It wasn’t Asher who requested a fee for his participation, but probably the collaborative group Pulsa. Pulsa, whose members were trained as architects and engineers, may simply have transferred practices standard in these fields to their relations with the museum. For the museum, the request could not have come as a complete surprise—MoMA had been fending off AWC demands to provide fees for showing existing works for almost a year. The museum may have found the logic of providing fees for temporary site-specific installations easier to follow.

While “Spaces” does not appear to have been considered a particularly important exhibition at the time, it was noted as an example of the new curatorial

practices emerging around conceptual and other “dematerialized” art. “Spaces” conformed to noted aspects of those practices: artists were selected, rather than specific works, and artists participated with works that were produced specifically for the exhibition and ceased to exist after it closed.

These practices were perhaps most evident in Lippard’s and Siegelau’s curatorial activity. Lippard’s exhibition concepts entailed a new level of curatorial determination in formulating not only the themes but also the procedures, sites, and situations that artists would work within. Writing about Lippard’s 1969 Seattle exhibition, “557,087,” Peter Plagens noted: “There is a total style to the show, a style so pervasive as to suggest that Lucy Lippard is in fact the artist and that her medium is other artists.”²³ In “On Exhibitions and the World at Large,” Siegelau describes the new tendency as the organizing of “exhibitions in which the general conditions are proposed to the artists and the decisions about specifics are left entirely to them.”²⁴ Lippard describes her 1970 exhibition “Groups” as an “experiment in dealing with an imposed experience.”²⁵

By early 1970, Jack Burnham could write that the fact that gallery and museum exhibitions were “increasingly planned, not through the selection of existent work, but on the basis of submitting proposals” was a *reason* for the emergence of conceptual art rather than a response to it.²⁶ In any case, it’s clear that the shift conceptual and post-studio practices accomplished from abstract and generalized conditions of production and circulation to specifically determined relations of exchange was also being implemented by new curatorial practices. While conceptual and post-studio practices implied a new relationship between artists and curators, those relationships were also emerging through developments taking place within museums and museum professions themselves.

Siegelau wrote that conceptual art would reduce the art world to “two types of people: artists and everyone else.”²⁷ What seems to have been building was, rather, a new level of identification among artists, critics, and museum professionals: a “collaboration of people and flexible adjustment of roles and areas of responsibility,” as Licht wrote in her *Spaces* acknowledgments.²⁸ However, the meaning and character of that collaboration was soon called into question. Battcock’s 1970 review of MoMA’s “Information” show echoes Buren’s “The Function of the Museum.” Artworks, Battcock writes, “are perceived within a frame of reference.” In the case of “Information,” “the museum is our frame of reference for the art works and interacts with them in providing the meaning.” However, Battcock continues, one “result from the new frame of reference

concept is that art works have to be made specifically *for* the Museum of Modern Art, and that's what's wrong. They should have been made *against* it."²⁹

Half a year before the formation of the AWC, another group of artists and activists occupied the Palais des Beaux-Arts in Brussels and attempted to supplant its administration. Marcel Broodthaers's participation in that occupation is widely evoked as a precedent to his establishment, in September 1968, of the *Musée d'Art Moderne, Département des Aigles, Section XIXème Siècle* in his Brussels studio and his appointment of himself as director.³⁰

In its first incarnation, which lasted a year, the interface of Broodthaers's museum with officially chartered institutions was limited to the inaugural address given by Johannes Cladders, director of the museum of Mönchengladbach. Broodthaers's own appropriations of the functions of a museum director were limited to scheduling discussions and issuing open letters under his museum's letterhead. In two of its later incarnations—the 1970 *Section XIXème Siècle (Bis)* and the 1972 *Section des Figures (Der Adler vom Oligozän bis Heute)*, both at the Städtische Kunsthalle Düsseldorf—his interaction with museums and their representatives and his appropriation of their functions were greatly extended. The art postcards and empty shipping crates arranged in his Brussels studio were supplanted by objects borrowed from first one museum and then over a dozen museums. Broodthaers's reversal of his initial reversal—from the site of reception to the site of production back to the site of reception—established a set of relations that went well beyond those implied by creating an installation specifically for (or against) a museum. His appropriation of a museological position was no longer purely discursive but became unavoidably intertwined with the mediating functions, practices, and protocols of chartered museums themselves. These included not only Broodthaers's catalogues and captions and the selection and arrangement of objects on loan, which were oriented toward scrambling the classificatory systems and shattering the linguistic transparency those formats and functions presuppose and impose. In fact, all the procedures of securing loans, ensuring their care, registering their circulation, etc., were now also superimposed on Broodthaers's "museum fiction," not only as its object, but also as the very real condition of its possibility.

It was left to Louise Lawler to identify the entire range of functions, sites, and procedures of art presentation as the object and material of artistic engagement: not only the installation of art objects and the mechanisms of publicity

and exchange, but also the economic relations that underlie and orient those functions. Her *Untitled: Black/White* artist book of 1978 and her 1983 *Gift Certificate* for Leo Castelli Gallery not only thematize the economic value of artworks but work on the construction of value directly, making the act of valuation in purchase constitutive of the works themselves. Direct engagement with economic relations also underlay Lawler's 1982 arrangement of works by gallery artists at Metro Pictures. If the entire arrangement was sold, Lawler would receive a 10 percent commission on the total value of the work. Lawler's collection installations can thus be distinguished from those of Broodthaers in that she engaged not only the procedures and functions of art mediation, but also the economic conditions and social relations according to which those functions are defined. Yet, unlike the value of the artist books and gift certificate, Lawler's commission was not explicitly constituted as a part of the work.

The ambivalence that marks Lawler's approaches to the economic aspects of her work has everything to do with problems of artistic autonomy. With an art consultant's commission for a gallery show or a curator's fee for a museum installation comes a question of the difference between taking up institutional functions as an artistic intervention and executing the functions of an institutionally defined position.

Service Functions: Community-Based Art and Participatory Public Culture

A service is nothing more than the useful effect of a use-value, be it of a commodity, or be it of labor.

—Karl Marx, *Capital*, 1867

I can only speculate on why MoMA decided to compensate artists for participating in "Spaces." If the demands of the AWC for exhibition fees and royalties played some part, it may have been through the direct involvement of curator Jennifer Licht herself in some of the AWC's initiatives.

As the AWC's struggles with MoMA unfolded, the museum as an institution became increasingly differentiated in the group's discourse. Although the AWC initially attacked the curators for misrepresenting Takis's sculpture, the group gradually began to identify the board of trustees as the locus of power within the institution and to address the professional staff as potential allies. This change eventually led to the direct collaboration of MoMA's professional staff (against the



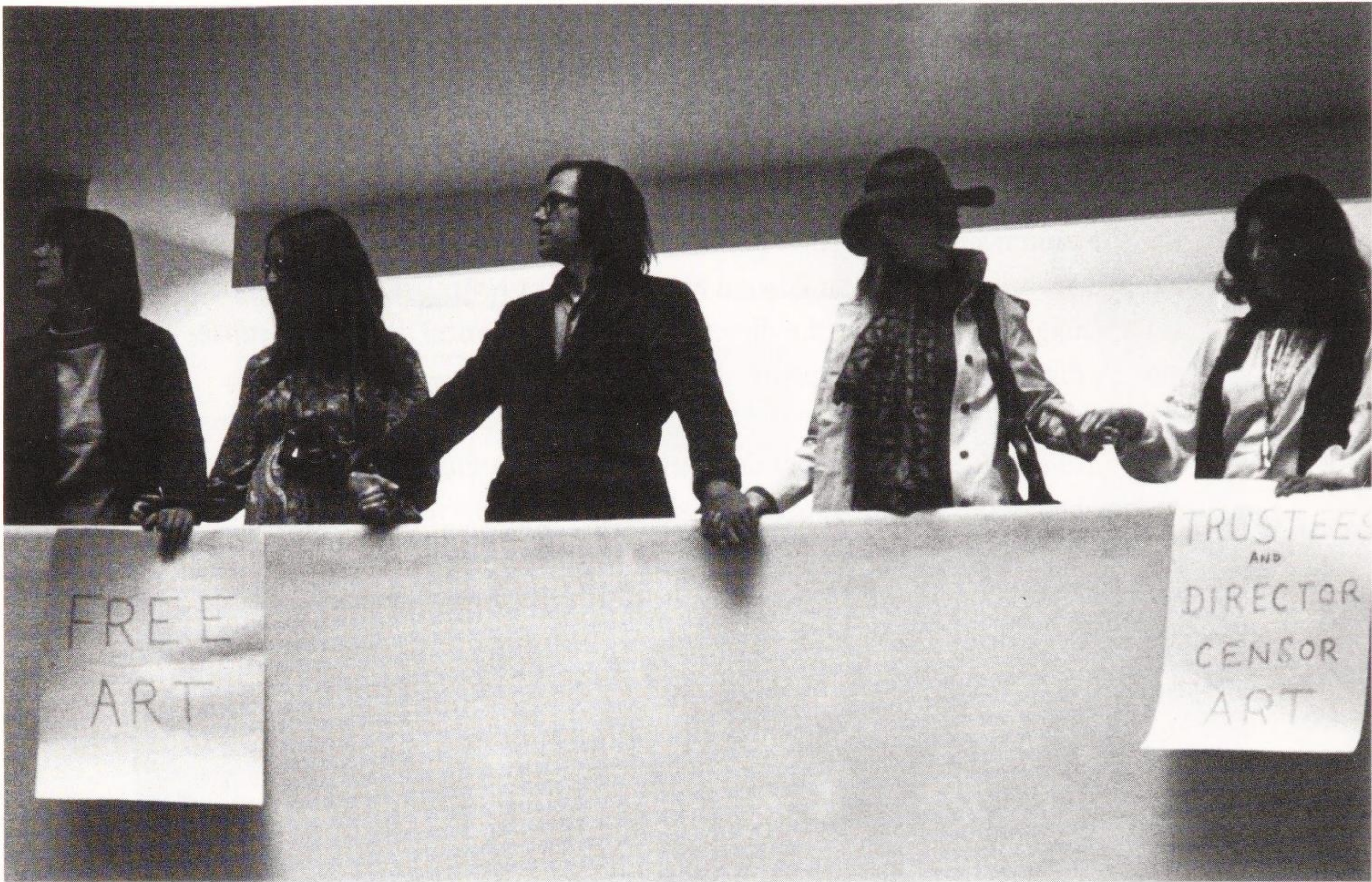
6.3 Louise Lawler, installation view of an arrangement of works by gallery artists at Metro Pictures, New York, 1982. Photo: Louise Lawler.

wishes of management) in such AWC initiatives as the My Lai protest poster. Such collaboration represented not only a growing understanding of museums by the AWC, but also a growing assertion of autonomy by museum professionals from the interests and demands of the museum's management and board. Such assertion of autonomy can be seen as culminating in two events of 1971. The first was the unionization of MoMA's professional staff, a first in the United States. The second event was curator Edward Fry's support of Hans Haacke's exhibition at the Guggenheim against the director's decision to cancel it; Fry was subsequently dismissed for that support.

The unionization drive at MoMA was widely supported by artists, writers, and filmmakers, who signed petitions and joined picket lines. The primary issues in the unionization drive at MoMA were not wages and benefits but staff participation in determining museum policy. A specific policy at issue was MoMA's decision to respond to a budget crunch by cutting back on public services. The strikers' focus on public services may have been strategic, but what it implies is fundamental: MoMA's staff would define their obligation as being to serve not the museum trustees who ostensibly employ them, but the public that supports the museum through tax deductions and for whose benefit the museum exists as a charitable institution. The fact that the contract won by the staff required the museum to seek government funding indicates that the organizers considered it in their interest to make this public support even more direct.

One can see the unionization of MoMA as a conclusive step in the transformation of curators from the personal art advisors of collectors and museum founders (or even the "gentlemen" curators themselves) to independent professionals. Among the contractual guarantees of "professional self-respect" that MoMA's staff won through collective bargaining were paid sabbaticals, research leaves, and tuition funds. Unlike the directly public museums of Europe, long defined as scientific institutions, in the private, nonprofit museum of the United States this assertion of professional autonomy required recourse to the public sector and a substitution of an ethos of public service for one of personal service to museum patrons.

If the shift in the status of museum professionals due to unionization also had an impact on the relations between artists and museums, it may have been because that shift was consistent with the demands of artists themselves. At the AWC's Open Hearing, many participants were already calling on museums to recognize their public responsibilities. A statement prepared jointly by Hollis



6.4 Demonstration at the Guggenheim Museum, New York, organized in protest against the cancellation of Hans Haacke's retrospective, May 1, 1971. Courtesy Hans Haacke. Photographer unknown.

Frampton, Mark Jacobs, and Michael Snow and a letter to MoMA director Bates Lowry by Tom Lloyd and Faith Ringgold challenged the museum's denial of public obligation by analyzing its tax base as a nonprofit institution. Asserting that the responsibility of museums "comprehends public service," Lloyd and Ringgold called on MoMA to set up a "program embodying cultural identification for blacks and Puerto Ricans," and they questioned its past commitment to the stated aim of providing programs "adapted to the needs of smaller communities."³¹

Most of the demands by Open Hearing participants that museums recognize public service obligations and meet the needs of more diverse communities implied that the gaps between artists and publics were by-products of the elitist character of museums: their plaques to patrons, their entrance fees, their locations, their work-day hours, their exclusion of art by African-American and Hispanic artists. However, there were already intimations of a demand addressed to artists as well: a critique of the art world, the art market, and artworks produced for that apparatus. In the few years following the Open Hearing, the impulse that led to calls for museums to serve diverse communities found an outlet in the development of cooperatives and alternative spaces and in initiatives for community cultural centers spearheaded by artists themselves. The cultural activism represented by the AWC itself and the closely related Guerrilla Art Action Group (and in Europe by such actions as the occupation of the Palais des Beaux-Arts in Brussels and demonstrations at the 1968 Venice Biennale) emerged as a distinct form of artistic activity, along with what is now referred to as community-based art.

What the activist and community-based activities of the early 1970s shared with at least some minimalist, post-studio, and conceptual art was a critique of the commodity status of art objects and their appropriation for economic and symbolic profit. Post-studio and conceptual artists sought to resist such appropriation by pursuing a critique of the partial and ideological character of artistic autonomy while at the same time adopting literally heteronomous forms, procedures, and relations. Implicit in activist and community-based practice, on the other hand, was an acknowledgment and acceptance of the function of art as common culture in representing the interests and serving the needs of particular communities. The obvious homologies between the fields of producers and consumers of art belied art's universality as well as its autonomy. If apparent freedom from the interests of taste and the needs of representation, from economic and other forms of rationalization, itself predisposed autonomous art to

represent the freedoms afforded by privilege, then so-called “high” or “elite” culture was nothing other than the culture of elites.

Rather than continuing to serve the interests of the “community” constituted by art insiders (makers, lookers, and buyers), the artists engaged in activist and community-based practices proposed instead to serve their own and other communities of artists, women, African-Americans, Hispanics, neighborhood residents. If post-studio and conceptual artists sought to resist commodification by producing intangible or untransferable works, artists engaged in activist and community-based practices followed a similar course but with a difference: their immaterial and site-specific interventions functioned primarily or exclusively within the public sector as well as within the public sphere.

The Critique of Artistic Autonomy Revisited

Benjamin Buchloh concluded his 1989 essay on conceptual art by linking “the achievement of Conceptual Art”—including its “transformation of audience and distribution” and “abolition of object status and commodity form”—to what he saw as “a profound and irreversible loss,” one that represented yet another, perhaps the “last of the erosions . . . to which the traditionally separate sphere of artistic production had been subjected in its perpetual efforts to emulate the regnant episteme within the paradigmatic frame proper to art itself.”³²

In many ways, a genealogy of conceptual art and contemporaneous practices within the framework of services seems to confirm Buchloh’s thesis because it brings into clearer focus the myriad points of artistic emulation and appropriation of the “regnant episteme” of a terciarized late capitalist society. These would now include not only the administrative procedures identified by Buchloh, but a whole range of practices and competencies, products, positions, and relations that continue to emerge within the ever expanding field of intermediary and mediating functions that Ernest Mandel identified as one of the dominant features of late capitalism. At the same time, such a genealogy may also make it possible to identify some of the fundamental contradictions that have defined so much critical practice since the 1960s: that a critique of the social and economic uses to which art is put would result in the pursuit of a form of pure use value; that the rejection of the role of “servants of the wealthy” would result in the adoption of the economic conditions and social relations of service provision; that the discovery of the partial and ideological conditions of artistic autonomy would lead to an embrace of heteronomous positions, functions, and relations.

The critique of the autonomy of the art object resulted, first for minimalism and then site-specific art, in the production of works that were physically and conceptually dependent on their particular placement. The critique of the autonomy of the artist as represented by the free play of expression and experimentation resulted in the adoption by minimalists and conceptualists of the systematic procedures that Buchloh called administrative and Rosalind Krauss called obsessional. The critique of the commodity status of the art object did lead some conceptual artists to eschew the art market, but it led many more to reduce the artwork itself to a contract that projected and circumscribed—and, one could argue, further reified—its conditions of exchange. The critique of the autonomy of artistic production in the preserve of the studio resulted in the post-studio practices of Buren, Asher, and others, in which the artwork as well as the motive for its production itself became determined by the conditions under which the artist works. And finally, the critique of the instrumentalization of art and art institutions by political and economic interests resulted in (self-) instrumentalized political documentary practices, like that of Hans Haacke, on the one hand, and the appropriation of instrumental institutional functions, such as exhibition organizing, in the work of Marcel Broodthaers and Louise Lawler, on the other.

But what in fact is the “paradigmatic frame proper to art itself”? What these artists revealed, above all, was that this frame, in its very paradigmatic propriety and artistic discretion, in its traditions of separateness, was “itself” the most mythified of all the “mythical forms of perception and hierarchical modes of specialized experience” that constituted the aesthetic field.³³ What they tore away was the veil on which this myth was projected, which maintained an illusory separation between the paradigmatic and epistemic forms that constitute art’s symbolic systems and the practical and economic relations that constitute its material conditions.

At issue is not just the emulation of administrative practices and service relations as a strategy of critical engagement or secondary mythification, much less an aesthetic construct. These artists demanded of artistic practice something much more profound. What they constituted as the fundamental practice of art was nothing less than work on the conditions and relations of production of artistic practice itself: not only the symbolic transformation of artistic positions, and not only what Bourdieu calls “position-takings,” but their material transformation as well; the transformation not only of the positions artists represent within the paradigmatic frame of an aesthetic system, but the very positions they occupy and the economic conditions and social relations that

produce those positions and which they in turn reproduce. It is not possible to evaluate the work of Hans Haacke, or Lawrence Weiner, or Daniel Buren, or Michael Asher, or Marcel Broodthaers, or Louise Lawler, or of any of the artists whose work proceeds from theirs, without taking into account not only the visible, visual manifestations of their practices, but also their policies; not only the artistic positions they manifest, but also the positions they construct for themselves within the network of relations that constitutes the fields of their activities.

The material arrangements that artists of the past thirty years have endeavored to put into place, both to secure the means to continue their activities and as an integral part of their works, are not only conceptual systems. They are also practical systems that fulfill, or fail to fulfill, the principles of artistic positions on the level of their social and institutional conditions. Far from functioning only as ideology critique, they have aimed to construct a less ideological form of autonomy, conditioned not by the abstraction of relations of consumption in the commodity form, but by the conscious and critical determination, in each particular and immediate instance, of the uses to which artistic activity is put and the interests it serves. And it is in this sense that the substitution of literally heteronomous service relations for ideologically autonomous relations of commodity production and consumption can be seen, not as the final erosion of the traditionally separate sphere of art but as the first step in an effort to move beyond the perpetual replay of the dialectic of negation and institutionalization to which the critique of ideological use is consigned so long as the artistic positions that artists take are considered in isolation from the social and material conditions of the art they make.

Notes

1. Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984), 3.
2. Dan Graham, "Carl Andre," *Arts Magazine* (December/January 1967–68), 34.
3. The comments in quotation marks are cited from the statements made by Bruce Brown, Frederick Castle, and Gregory Battcock at the Art Workers Coalition Open Hearing, as represented in a collection of manuscripts distributed by the AWC after the event, 4, 7, 47.
4. AWC Open Hearing, 112–113.
5. *Ibid.*, 76.

6. Seth Siegelaub, "Artists' Reserved Rights Transfer and Sale Agreement," *Studio International* (April 1971), 142. The Agreement itself is reproduced on pages 186–188. It was also reproduced in the catalogue of Documenta v.
7. Adam Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* (New York: Modern Library, 1985), 136.
8. "A Reasonable and Practical Proposal for Artists Who Wish to Remain Free Men in These Terrible Times," awc Open Hearing, 32.
9. Lawrence Weiner, *Statements* (New York: Louis Kellner Foundation and Seth Siegelaub, 1968), n.p.
10. Seth Siegelaub, quoted in Jack Burnham, "Alice's Head: Reflections on Conceptual Art," *Artforum* (February 1970), 48.
11. Lucy Lippard, postscript to *Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object* (New York: Praeger, 1973), 263.
12. Lawrence Weiner, quoted in Ursula Meyer, *Conceptual Art* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1972), 217. Weiner first presented his "instructions" in Seth Siegelaub's exhibition "January 5–31, 1969" (of that date):

With relation to the various manners of use:

1. The artist may construct the piece
2. The piece may be fabricated
3. The piece need not to be built

Each being equal and consistent with the intent of the artist the decision as to condition rests with the receiver upon the occasion of receivership.

13. Lippard, preface to *Six Years*, 8.
14. Joseph Kosuth, "Art after Philosophy," *Studio International* (October 1969), 137.
15. Douglas Huebler, *Prospect '69* (Düsseldorf: Kunsthalle Düsseldorf, 1969), 26.
16. Andre made his opinions clear, at least with regard to the latter point, in 1976: "The most farcical claim of the conceptualizing inkpissers is that their works are somehow antibourgeois because they do away with objects. In fact, doing away with objects and replacing them with such reifications of abstract relations to production as stockshares, contracts, liens, options, and paper money itself (which is nothing but the fetishization of the idea of exchange value severed from even the dream of production) is exactly the final triumphant form of the bourgeois revolution." Carl Andre and Jeremy Gilbert-Rolfe, "Commodity and Contradiction or Contradiction as Commodity," *October* 2 (Summer 1976), 103.
17. Robert Smithson, "Towards the Development of an Air Terminal Site," *Artforum* (June 1967). Quoted here from *The Writings of Robert Smithson*, ed. Nancy Holt (New York: New York University Press, 1979), 41.

18. Buren writes that work produced in a studio “makes its passage, in order to exist, from one refuge to another. It should therefore be portable, manipulable if possible, by whoever (except the artist himself) assumes the responsibility of removing it from its place of origin to its place of promotion.” Daniel Buren, “The Function of the Studio” (1970), in AA Bronson and Peggy Gale, eds., *Museums by Artists* (Toronto: Art Metropol, 1983), 63.
19. Daniel Buren, “The Function of the Museum” (1971), in Bronson and Gale, *Museums by Artists*, 58.
20. Buren, “The Function of the Studio,” 63.
21. Daniel Buren, “Beware!” first published as “Mise en Garde!” in the catalogue *Konzeption/Conception* (Leverkusen: Städtisches Museum, 1969). Quoted here from *Studio International* (March 1970), 101, 102.
22. Daniel Buren, “The Function of Architecture” (1975), in Bronson and Gale, eds., *Museums by Artists*, 73.
23. Peter Plagens, “557,087,” *Artforum* (November 1969). Quoted here from Lippard, *Six Years*, III.
24. Seth Siegelaub, “On Exhibitions and the World at Large,” interview with Charles Harrison, *Studio International* (December 1969), 20.
25. Quoted from Lucy Lippard’s description of the project in “Groups,” *Studio International* (March 1970), 93. The entire project was presented at the School of Visual Art, New York, November 3–20, 1969.
26. Burnham, “Alice’s Head,” 41.
27. Siegelaub, “On Exhibitions and the World at Large,” 20.
28. Jennifer Licht, acknowledgments in *Spaces* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1969), n.p.
29. Gregory Battcock, “Informative Exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art,” *Arts Magazine* (Summer 1970), 26.
30. See for example, Benjamin Buchloh, “The Museum Fictions of Marcel Broodthaers,” in Bronson and Gale, eds., *Museums by Artists*; and Douglas Crimp, “This Is Not a Museum of Art,” in *Marcel Broodthaers* (Minneapolis: Walker Art Center, 1989).
31. Tom Lloyd and Faith Ringgold, AWC Open Hearing, 64, 61.
32. Benjamin Buchloh, “Conceptual Art 1962–1969: From the Aesthetic of Administration to the Critique of Institutions,” *October* 55 (Winter 1990), 143.
33. *Ibid.*, 143.

MUSEUM

Andrea Fraser

Edited by Alexander Alberro

WRITING **ART** SERIES

HIGHLIGHTS

The Writings of Andrea Fraser

© 2005 Massachusetts Institute of Technology

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced in any form by any electronic or mechanical means (including photocopying, recording, or information storage and retrieval) without permission in writing from the publisher.

MIT Press books may be purchased at special quantity discounts for business or sales promotional use. For information, please email special_sales@mitpress.mit.edu or write to Special Sales Department, The MIT Press, 55 Hayward Street, Cambridge, MA 02142.

This book was set in FF Scala and FF ScalaSans by Graphic Composition Inc. and was printed and bound in Spain.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Fraser, Andrea

Museum highlights : the writings of Andrea Fraser / Andrea Fraser ; edited by Alexander Alberro.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 0-262-06244-5 (alk. paper)

1. Fraser, Andrea—Written works. 2. Fraser, Andrea—Aesthetics. 3. Performance art—United States. 4. Art—Social aspects—United States. I. Alberro, Alexander. II. Title.

NX512.F73A35 2005

700—dc22

2004058756

CONTENTS

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS	xii
FOREWORD: REVOLUTION AND REVELATION Pierre Bourdieu	xiv
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	xvi
INTRODUCTION: MIMICRY, EXCESS, CRITIQUE Alexander Alberro	xxii

CRITICAL PRACTICES

1	An Artist's Statement (1992)	3
2	In and Out of Place (1985)	17
3	"Creativity = Capital" (1986)	29
4	It's Art When I Say It's Art, or . . . (1995)	37
5	What's Intangible, Transitory, Mediating, Participatory, and Rendered in the Public Sphere? (1996)	47
6	What's Intangible, Transitory, Mediating, Participatory, and Rendered in the Public Sphere? Part II (1996)	55
7	"To Quote," Say the Kabyles, "Is to Bring Back to Life" (2002)	81

PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS, PRIVATE OBJECTS

8	Notes on the Museum's Publicity (1990)	91
9	Museum Highlights: A Gallery Talk (1989)	95