# ART CRITICISM

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# Table of Contents

**Administrativism and Its Discontents**
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# Introduction

## Art in the Age of Cultural Tourism

*For too long, critics and artists have considered the shell without the context of the ocean.*

- Robert Smithson, *Art and Dialectics* (1971)[1]

*If I don't look after the interests of the under-privileged, maybe someone else will; someone without money or property.*

- Orson Wells as Charles Foster Kane, in *Citizen Kane* (1941)[2]

*Vampires playing humans playing vampires! How Avant-Garde!*

- Anne Rice, *Interview with the Vampire* (1994)[3]

For some, the term *avant-garde* continues to suffice as a description of a set of display-making activities that can still be alleged to challenge and disrupt the conventionally typical stylistics of a hidebound status quo. Others prefer the euphemism "cutting edge" as a way of valorizing such activities, allowing for a smooth avoidance of the fact that a once oppositional *avant-garde* has since become the complacent and manneristic *neo-avant-garde* prior to transforming itself into a spectacularly trivialized *pseudo-avant-garde* operating in research-and-development service to pan-capitalism's omni-global fashion industry. It is also still common to hear the label *conceptual art* applied to the most recent of these "advanced" activities, although of late the term has become more of an umbrella designation pertaining to a wide variety of artistic projects that now seem to grow ever more indifferent to a logically

rigorous linking of facts to purpose. But even at this late date, no one has yet dared to use the term *Art Administrator Art* as a label for the contemporary art that has been most visibly positioned under institutional spotlights during the past 20 years.

This lexicographical omission is no mere oversight; rather, it represents a programmatic denial of the obvious fact that *Art Administrator Art* is what we see when we enter the precincts of art administration, keyed as they are to their own self-serving hierarchies of "importance" buttressed by the momentum of markets that have been administered into being. Such art plays the role of convincing us that it needs administrators as much as it needs artists to come into social being while also convincing us that we need administrators to enlighten our otherwise bemused or indifferent relationship to it. While an extreme skepticism might claim that this is all that *Art Administrator Art* does, and that, as such, it embodies no other cultural value outside of the role that is given to it by this narrow circumstance, I do not go quite that far, because it is clear that *Art Administrator Art* is of other uses as well: in its various guises, it takes the form of equity chips that are bought and sold in the fluctuating ponzi-scheme called the art market prior to their being transformed into inflated tax deductions, and it also provides a notable service as mute subject matter awaiting proper ventriloquization by the pedagogical-bureaucratic institutions of academic credibility that would embrace art as a subject of study. And yet, fairness insists that we recognize that these latter-named systems of utilization are of a secondary and epiphenomenal significance, because the "history" that they reference is in tow to a market that is keynoted by mythological valuations that follow from topical sensationalisms that are "administered" into the forefront of public consciousness via the instrumentalities of influence-peddling (aka "networking"), capital-intensive production values and, of course, the amplified visibility that comes part-and-parcel with the convening authority of the presenting institution.

For the purposes of this introduction, it is sufficient to note here that the artistic activities formerly known as *avant-garde* continue to be manifested in many sub-generic types, and each is worthy of a general illustration. One of these might point to an artwork that may or may not have a video component; perhaps it is a multimedia installation built around a video projection that either slows or speeds-up its image in sync with a soundtrack that is either annoyingly noisy or soothingly calm. Or maybe *it* is a series of large or small photographs of the artist acting in the manner in which artists are supposed to act, in turns clownish, impassive, or mock-dangerous. Or *it* could be an arrangement of found objects calling special attention to some real or imagined form of taxonomic regime. *It* may even include text as a visible component, and that text may have some political implication pertaining to some perceived rupture amid the categorical imperatives of informational normalcy. Indeed, it

very often engages in an algebraic designation of meaning staged as a speculation about what meaning *might be*, all-the-while shying away from any presentation of the tangible embodiment of same. Almost never is it an optimally executed crystallization of experience, knowledge, and desire, nor does it actually provide the actual moments of dangerous ecstasy to which it might allude. Never does it crystallize experience and knowledge into a persuasive symbol of optimal subjectivity, because this would be tantamount to enacting an untoward aggression pointed in the direction of rhetorical efficacy.

Usually, *it* is something quite large, and sometimes it is exceedingly large, making it unsuitable for most domestic dwellings and most suitable for placement in or near a museum building of recent vintage. And almost always, *it* is something that needs to be set-up and activated within one of these museums in order to establish a relationship to the viewer, because *it* knows that the creation and orchestration of aesthetic "situations" has been deemed preferable to the seemingly benign manufacture of objects – "mere commodities" – this on the grounds that such situations are somehow more audacious, and also more representative of a speculative condition of "liberation." The same presumption tells us that the aforementioned commodities are by definition slaves to an oligarchic market that has been said to control *everything* to the grim purpose of reification. Most tellingly, *it* almost never propels us with any real force in the direction of Martin Buber's *Thou,* for that (and perhaps only that) is the last blasphemy, as far as art administrator art is concerned.

As a candidate for the appreciation implicit in being one of the aforementioned situations so pointedly claiming to represent a condition of liberated consciousness, *it* willingly subjects itself to the convening authority of the museum, which *it* takes to be *its* venue and *its* destiny. Granting the museum the power to make *it* over into a hierarchically-keyed object of said authority's moral universe suffuses it with the taint of bad faith. Given the viability of the above-stated sequence of facts (the past twenty years of art theory seem unanimous only on this one point), the final question that remains is the one that asks about the ethics of that moral universe, or put more precisely, the one that asks about the real ethics that are forwarded by the psychological politics encouraged by the ensemble operations of that moral universe. This is the major question that this book seeks to answer by attempting to organize the many whys-and-wherefores leading up to its asking.

The reason for asking is simple, even if the possible articulation of a satisfactory answer is hardly so: we want to know why most of the visual art that emerged during the 1990s fell so short of being durably interesting as anything other than a peculiar sociological epiphenomena. Or, stated a bit differently: why did it back away from embracing the genius moment of audacious symbolic initiation while also eschewing the time-honored challenge of achieving a masterly crystallization, synthesis and idealizing summation of

meaningful experience? Answers taking the form of quips point to the fact that the 1990s were a kind of interregnum existing between the exhausted will-to-present-tense originality called Modernism and a yet-to-emerge revival of a new aesthetics of mastery, but of course, one could easily point to the art of the past *fifty years* as adequately fulfilling that criteria of abeyant in-between-ness. Journalistic clichés held that it was a "nobrow"[4] decade "where surface became depth,"[5] but however accurate these ascriptions may have been, they say far too little while pretending to say it all, and for this reason they do not even rise to the level of being good *bon mots*. To get closer to the real truth of the situation, we need to recognize that what the 1990s did was turn the above-mentioned circumstance into a fetish curiously earmarked by an ongoing condition of crisis pertaining to a perceived lack of crisis taking place in the arts, even as a real crisis of unimaginable proportions was consolidating its seemingly unchallenged sponsorship of reality.

The term New Globalism has been floated as a label for that moment, earmarked by the attributes of "multiplicity, diversity and contradiction,"[6] which of course are only a set of quasi-euphemisms that invoke everything and nothing. But underneath this foggy refusal of differentiation, other motives are in play. As Pamela M. Lee has remarked,

> …the conventional understanding of the term "art world" betrays a set of prejudices under threat by the very global conditions the contemporary art world seeks to represent…something of a colonial logic underwrites the expansion of the art world's traditional borders, as if the art world itself were gleefully following globalization's imperial mandate…But whether the art world is a theoretical atmosphere or an institutional elite (complete with secret handshakes that grant membership into its society), the question remains: What happens to the art world when the world itself is progressively aestheticized under the regime of global spectacle?[7]

The motivational logic of that prejudicial entity is the thing that I call *administrativism*. Not merely a label for a benign set of organizational procedures, administrativism is instead advanced as the name for the real ethos that motivates, organizes, and prioritizes their enactment. That ethos can be viewed as the basis for subsequent negotiations that take place between art, capital, government, and audiences that stem from the waning magic of an ideological salesmanship that has displaced the magic of an art that had only recently seceded from the magic of religion. The key point is that administrativism continues to conduct these negotiations on behalf of itself while pretending to represent the interests of the above-mentioned quartet of interest groups, and in so doing, it transforms those groups into servomechanisms that are recruited to work on administrativism's behalf by serving administrativism's needs. Like

a loyal butler who has dutifully bided his time so as to eventually inherit the mansion, administrativism has served art long enough to learn how to be served by it, and this may well be the reason why so much of the art of our time looks like it was made by resentment-addled butlers working in ostentatious service to ideas of which they have only a dim, cliché-ridden understanding.

And so we bear witness to the many artistic *its* exemplifying art administration-for-the-sake-of-administration in the age of an artificially protracted ontological abeyance. When examined as an ensemble, they can be viewed as an odd collection of institutional hood ornaments participating in "the ballooning 30 billion 'experiential communication' industry, the phrase now used to encompass the staging of such branded pieces of corporate performance art and other 'happenings.'"[8] Any one of these *its* may know *its* history, and most likely could cite particulars about how *it* evolved out of a matrix of allegedly radical practices that once naively believed that they could change everything for the better because everything already seemed to be in the grips of the foreordained inevitability of such a change. But as the 20th century drew to a close, different circumstances came to the fore, and just as an ideological brave-new-world seemed to be vividly framed in the onrushing headlights of that heady moment between 1967 and 1972, ideology itself began to suddenly disappear into the engulfing mists of pragmatics and spectacle.

Certainly, these things were clearly ideological – in fact, they were supremely so – but at the same time they were strangely immune to any ideological challenge manifested in the form of a critique. The practical effect of this circumstance was that all of the aforementioned *its* that had evolved out of the aforementioned matrix of radical practices suddenly had to content themselves with a perpetual keeping-the-game-going-just-a-little-bit-longer, hoping against hope that the situation would somehow revert to the familiar Cold War moieties of conservative and progressive while giving little heed to how and why the rules of that game had dramatically and permanently changed. That change now casts the great cavalcade of the above-cited *its* as the symbolic representations of an authority system that has learned to deploy the historically derived forms of "liberated" artistic practice in disingenuous service to a noisy circus of pseudo-liberations that only confirm the impossibility of achieving any real change in human circumstances.

To be sure, all of this may simply seem a long-winded description of fashion, but the key point is that the mechanisms of fashion now operate as the primary regulatory apparatus of a mass-media society in thrall to new techno-bureaucratic concentrations of capital, and as such, is now every bit as authoritarian as the most repressive traditionalism. Administrativism uses fashion to instrumentalize its insistence that all will cynically or unwittingly serve administrativism's own purpose of manic self-proliferation arrayed against the

prerogatives of any autonomously self-defined subjectivity.

Those who would uphold those prerogatives in spite of administrativism would be the discontents named in this book's title in *homage* to the earlier discontents named by Freud in his famous examination of their relationship to Civilization. In Freud's formulation, civilization is made possible by the renunciation of sexual and aggressive impulses for the sake of a greater good. His discontents are those who are unhappy with the bargain, and the key to understanding his view of art lies in how he shows it to be a sublimated symbolization of those very things that have been sacrificed on the altar of social guilt. As Freud writes, "sublimation of instinct is an especially conspicuous feature of cultural development; it is what makes it possible for higher psychical activities, scientific, artistic or ideological to play such an important part in civilized life."[9] The difference between Freud's notion and the one advanced by this book is that his idea of civilization called for a sublimation of instinct for a greater good, 21st-century administrativism calls for its nullification in the name of a perversely eroticized hatred of the very idea of subjectivity going its own way, paranoiacally assuming that, if it were allowed to do so, some form of horrible aggression might ensue. Freud seemed to have seen this coming when he wrote "What a potent obstacle to civilization aggressiveness must be, if the defense against it can cause as much unhappiness as aggressiveness itself!"[10] This statement closes an otherwise large gap between Freud and my own views on the subject. Whereas Freud saw civilization as an expression of Eros that cast aggression in the role of an anti-social death instinct, I see administrativism as an expression of a different kind of death instinct devoted to keeping erotic conviviality at bay, hoping against hope that it refrain from any fashioning of its own political arrangements.

Following from this, we can see how my term *Art Administrator Art* is intended to refer to a kind of cultural production that is formulated to be of primary use to art administrators, who themselves seek to be of use to their corporate paymasters while pretending to be of use to institutions that pretend to be of use to the world. These are the very people who have mastered the fine art of translating algebras of euphemism into the actuality of leverage, thus allowing them to hire the assistants who hire the consultants who conduct the surveys upon which the recommendations for courses of action are based, so long as they never reflect any conception of greater good that is not beholden to the enhancement of administrative positionality. This logic defines the real utility of *Art Administrator Art*, casting it as a substantiating proof that art administrators are indeed necessary and vital participants in the task of marshalling articles of private artistic pleasure into the symbolic realm of public virtue, for without art administrators there would be no one else to place such articles into an "authoritative context," no one to explicate and reveal the secret meanings that inhere in their willful obscurity, no one to use (and be used

by) the institutional apparati set up to legislate a sequential narrative that will enforce an exclusionist simulation of "history" that becomes believable by way of the defaults bred by mass apathy. In other words, there would be no one to certify the authoritative fashionability of the allegedly new, and if such an advent were to come to pass, there would be no art that would be made to play to the supposed need for such certifications, meaning that it would be put into the untenable position of using its own devices to invite and sustain interest in a marketplace of persuasions rather than a rigged emporium of postures *de jure*.

In an age dominated by the kind of packaging strategies that usually go part-and-parcel with mass-marketing calculus, an embrace of this kind of rhetorical self-reliance would be tantamount to suicide, for now there can be no meaningful free speech that can live as social persuasion without access to some form of mass amplification, and since many are called and very few are granted access to such institutional amplifiers, policy-makers, regulators, and gate-keepers are necessarily called into play. And so, in this way and for these reasons, apparatchiks proceed to make the artistic weather and then proclaim the moments when artistic rain occurs.

And so, an obvious question: if *Art Administrator Art* is art made by artists to substantiate and facilitate the positionalities of art administrators, then who or what is it that art administrators serve? One traditional answer holds that it is the art administrator who serves art by way of protecting it from the vulgarities of market-driven abuses, enshrining it within the contemplative realm of a higher credibility that presumes to be in keeping with higher ideals, including those ideals that might pertain to social responsibility. This is not the answer that is embraced by this book, and the reason why everything written herein rejects such a claim lies in the recognition that said shrines can no longer be viewed as zones of market neutrality. Their growing admission prices and proliferating concession stands are adequate arguments in support of this particular point, but these advents just occlude the larger fact that such institutions are themselves the zones of a higher marketability, the marketability of pure self-marketability that passeth far beyond the realms of ideology and normative commerce, thereby instigating both a broader and a greater commerce that sells the authority of its own self-certification in a manner that is remarkably similar to the way that mass media markets its own marketing of popularity-for-the-sake-of-popularity, based on a tautological commodification of a type of "celebrity" that perpetually advertises its own self-advertisements.

The fact that this situation has now changed says a lot about the state of art and the state of the world. A new patron of the arts has emerged, and this patron is called the cultural tourist. We need to register how this patron differs from those of the past, even as we also have to understand how it has folded all previous forms of patronage into its complex operation. From the standpoint

of cultural tourism, contemporary art is understood as a form of bait that will attract disposable tourist dollars to whatever "museum experience" that surrounds it, not to mention the hotels, eateries, and tax collectors that are its collateral beneficiaries. It will also, by association, attract rose-colored attention to the corporations and government agencies that set themselves up as sponsoring "partners" for the formulation of these magnet sites, creating a host of synergistic benefits for all concerned, excluding perhaps the artists who are led to believe that their own activities are the points of primacy that make the whole machine move. Few things could be further from the truth, but now that art is marketed as a relic of its own positionality in the aforementioned tableaux, we must note that there is undeniable monetary worth to be assayed from such lineages, meaning that artists do gain something tangible in what would otherwise be a pure economy of unvarnished narcissistic reward. Certainly, the rules of this economy have little to do with embodying anything that might be taken as a higher ideal that is seriously aligned with anything that might prompt a viewer into a condition of greater courage, greater wisdom, or greater empathy. On the contrary, if there is a single reigning cliché of *Art Administrator Art*, it is that such things should be subjected to overblown parodies, suggesting that *Art Administrator Art* is generally and often explicitly at odds with such durable virtues owing to its need to be "alive" in its own ever-changing moment. But this need becomes problematic when the question of to whose moment should art administrator art be alive comes to the fore. Any credible answer to this question begs the issue of bureaucratic self-congratulation operating as the core ethos of the answer, again leading back to an inquiry into who in fact are the paymasters of art administration.

The world of corporate wealth is the answer, with all of its return-on-investment-driven values of abusive self-proliferation from which it stems and to which it will always be beholden. That world now infuses the institutional art world in the form of direct or indirect subvention, filling the vacuum left by a two decade-long retreat of public funding and the even more remote waning of old style "patrons of the arts" who purchased paintings and sponsored composers as dutiful acts of *noblesse oblige*. Now what we have is a marketplace of administrative styles vying for ever-higher prices of admission, although to call it a marketplace is to miss the point that there is almost no real market competition between said styles. What does exist are minor variations on a theme of the next new thing (read: pre-packaged experience) that will change everything for the next five minutes, executed in willful ignorance of any historically informed notion of connoisseurship and with only the most perversely insincere nods to anything resembling entrepreneurial showmanship. What remains is the upholding of a regulated hierarchy of relative importances, with just enough moments of unpredictability to sustain a vague fixation on what might happen next.

Now, it is routinely assumed that without art administrators, there could be no art, or if there was, it would be so bad or inconsequential that it would not live up to any myth of credibility. The quick rise and fall of the career of Thomas Kinkade seems to substantiate this point. The self-proclaimed "painter of light" achieved a stunning (albeit short-lived) mass popularity during the late 1990s simply by mass-producing sentimental landscapes laced with a hint of Pentecostal innocence. "This," we might have been told, "is the contemporary art that America would call its own if left to its own unsupervised devices of market capitalism in service to a democratic taste bereft of culture or education." But the real and unremarked-upon aspect of the Kinkade phenomenon lies in how similar it was to the real operations of contemporary *Art Administrator Art,* suggesting that it may have been cynically advanced as an exercise in mock-populist parody of the art market's (administratively) rigged game. In both instances, we note a celebration of the technological supplantation of the artistic hand so as to maximize the distribution of artworks into an artificially overheated market. In both cases, we witness an economy of tiered certification underwriting the value of the objects under consideration, the reliquary status of the objects keyed to those certified as "original" mass-produced objects, substantiating the trade of given certifications for given dollars. Most importantly, both feature gimmick-laden images of sentimental pseudo-transcendence were pawned off as the genuine article, Kinkade proffering a watered-down variant of the German Romantic *Landschrift,* while *Art Administrator Art* emphasizes an equally diluted variant of the ethos of *épater le bourgeois*, cynically capitalizing on the time-honored fact that there was and is nothing that makes the bourgeoisie feel more alive than the opportunity to take control of that which would give offence to it. But now, what remains of the old historical bourgeoisie has other interests, and other more global problems, and these account for its transformation into a new form called the corporate manageriat. All too well does this manageriat know how to sell rebellion back to itself, and make a tidy profit in so doing.

If the precincts of art administration are zones of market motivation and even market orchestration, it is not too over-simplistic to say that art administration serves the market by manufacturing the fictions and metafictions of legitimacy that stimulate interest in the supposed advantages of certain kinds of art, however momentary those advantages might be. In this scenario, it is the dog of administrative fiat that wags the tail of the market, even as a closer inspection will tell us that the tail will exercise whatever influence it can to wag the dog. And just when the issue of dog and tail became irretrievably hand-in-glove, the very idea of the meaning of the term "art market" starts to undergo a metamorphosis of incalculable magnitude, for now the real market for art is not so much one driven by a pyramid economics of buying low and donating for write-offs high, because that model is being swallowed up by the

very idea that art institutions *themselves* are the things that are being marketed to ticket buyers and bookstore/design shop customers. It is the contention of this book that the brave new world of institutional marketing has become the primary factor that informs and motivates institutional decision-making. In this new and emerging scenario, art becomes the thing that decorates the institution: physically as its provocative adornment and ideologically as its covering excuse via its participation as both magnet and distraction within an industry of corporately sponsored cultural tourism that in turn seeks to blur boundaries between the aesthetic and the anaesthetic as well as the static and the exstatic so as to cloud all judgment on the subject of consequential meaning, and even on the reality of the subject *as subject*.

When the proverbial clouds part, we see that it is the institution itself that is located in the position of being the predicate of last default, and as such, is the only path to consequential subjectivity that has not been washed away by the torrents of perspectival discreditation that once vaunted themselves as being the critical gestures of deconstructive demythologization. Even the recently popular exercises in institutional critique have always existed within a context circumscribed by some form of institutional sponsorship, indicating that an ethos of so-called "responsible critique" (nibbling rather than biting the nourishing corporate hand) was perpetually foregrounded at the expense of gestures that are courageously responsive to real circumstances.

This prompts a vexing question for the art historically curious reader, asking: at what point did an ostensibly liberationist avant-garde art become enfolded into the apparatus of distraction-cum-domination sketched and characterized in the above paragraphs? Potential answers are plentiful, but, like any search for an exact historical fulcrum point, it invites a disregard of the view of the proverbial forest in favor of a snipe hunt for specific trees. Seeing the contemporary character of that forest in an inductive, synchronic light is this book's point of rhetorical embarkation, focusing on the ethics and aesthetics of administrativism as they emerged and evolved between 1986 and 2003, that being the time period lodged between the Gdansk Shipyard strike and the "shock and awe" that signaled the onset of the second war in Iraq called *Operation Enduring Freedom*. Or, to index the same timeline against the recent history of art-made-visible, we can point to the interval between the Sonnabend Gallery's Fall 1986 *Neo-Geo* exhibition to the 2006 exhibition of Matthew Barney's *Drawing Restraint* series at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art.

My accounts of the isolated episodes between these polar moments could be taken as a synoptic survey of the art presented during this period, but my main purpose is to forward an inquiry into the psychological politics and socio-cultural predications that need to be established prior to the development of any real history of the art of that period that goes beyond mere chro-

nology. This is the reason why my inquiry is initiated in the border zone be-
tween art criticism, art history, and art theory while passing through other bor-
der zones as well; those between political economy, technology, and psycho-
analytic theory representing its most important orientational waypoints.

It has suited my purposes to divide this book into four chapters, any
of which could be read as a stand-alone essay. The first of these if focused on
the emergence of cultural tourism as the new patron of contemporary art to
which other forms of patronage are both keynoted and made subservient. The
fact that the past fifteen years have witnessed unprecedented proliferations of
international biennial exhibitions of contemporary art and a boom in stylish
museum buildings has been widely noted, and yet, it is impossible to suffi-
ciently underscore the importance and the implications of these facts, which
have simultaneously energized and trivialized artistic practice. One reason why
this paradox has become manifest is that the new patron does not see itself
reflected in any specific work of art that might in some way carry the ontologi-
cal burden of being "exemplary." Rather, that reflection now finds its form in
the ensemble construction of big mega-exhibitions, thereby conferring the sta-
tus of "aesthetic author" to the curators of such exhibitions. After all, they are
the ones who direct and deploy the artistic talents contained therein in much
the same way that film directors emboss their authorial status on the collabora-
tions of talent working under their supervision.

Of course, just as every film director answers to a producer, and as
every magazine editor must answer to a publisher, so too do today's mega-
curators answer to the representatives of a complex governing system. Nomi-
nally, these are the museum directors who answer to a board of trustees, who
answer to each other. In many instances, these trustees are art collectors and
even gallerists, so it goes without saying that influence peddling has been built
into the system for a long time. But there are other motives in play as well,
because museum directors and trustees are also keen to answer to corporate
public relations officers and governmental funding agencies who in turn must
answer to policies that are answerable to the elected representatives of a polity
enframed by the machinations of marketing and demographics, and this loosely
defined chain-of-command is consecrated to a conventional wisdom that is
simultaneously pseudo-populist and anti-democratic. While the curatorial
boilerplate routinely announced such things as an alleged "disappearance of
the oedipal family, the subconscious, the individual" or that "the problem of
the art market is that the artworks disappear, people buy it, invest in it and
remove it from the realm of social experience," the real story lies in how these
statements provide smoke-and-mirror rationales for the empowerment of a
self-appointed administrative elite enacted at the expense of artists and their
work, not to mention those who would seek a habilitating self-understanding
from the experience of these works.

It is those artists who have been enjoined to think of their efforts as the manufacture of a kind of idealized erotic property that would be contaminated by the same money that administrators make for telling them that this is so. Thus, it is administrativism that proves itself to be the beknighted entity that can be held responsible for a condition where "art was...beknighted by a total eclipse"[11] as Julian Spalding so eloquently characterized it, pointing to how its language, teaching, and taste-making apparatus keeps it from being art by keeping it from doing the things that art could and should do.

To ascertain the operations of administrativism, the first chapter looks closely at a few examples of such mega-exhibitions, and in so doing it surmises them to be "distraction machines" governed by the imperatives of mimicking and exaggerating the schizoidal imperatives of administrative procedure while also mirroring and exaggerating the schizoidal values of a schizoid society. Here, an attempt is made to describe the situation using political, economic, and sociological metaphors as a way of sketching the conditions of administrativist ontology as it is revealed by the "art phenomena" of the time-period under discussion. The second chapter covers much of the same ground as the first, but it devotes more attention to detailing a psychoanalytic description of the way that the defense mechanism of disassociation can codify itself into the schizoid character structure which I take to be both symptomatic and emblematic of administrativism's governing ethos. In that chapter, I seek to describe an elusive balance point between the sociological and the psychological by showing how schizoidal social values might establish themselves into the artistic and curatorial "author-subject" through a complex process of incorporation, internalization, and introjection, and my suggestion is that contemporary art can be instructively examined from the standpoint that sees it as a re-projection (extrojection?) of these values back into the social sphere. This object-relations emphasis attends to the full complexity of how worldly values are internalized into and projected from and beyond the subjective subject, and it seems to have sufficient subtlety and sophistication that significantly improves upon routine sociological assumptions that are determined to cast the subject as demography's annoying afterthought.

The focus of the third chapter is on what I regard to be the typical modes of art "criticism" practiced in the art world during this book's self-imposed time frame, highlighting the cynicism of a critical practice following from Arthur Danto's famous definition of itself as "a discourse of explanations." Such a practice is cynical (or rather, mock-cynical) because it takes for granted that the thing being explained is already an entity that bears value, implicitly shying away from the real rationale of the critical project, which is to publicly advocate, challenge and/or question the authority that asserts such value. The chapter separates cynical criticism into two subtypes that may or may not exist in dialectical relation to one another, the first of those being an

outmoded ideological scholasticism that all-too-easily subsumes works of art into the position of demonstrating an *a priori* ideological position viewed in a self-serving light, and the second being belletrist panegyric, which promiscuously rhapsodizes about works of art or the "literary" encounter with same. The latter orientation comes into high relief when we recognize that its practitioners often find it preferable to label their practice "art writing" because they cannot face the ethical and intellectual responsibilities of articulating a critique.

The fourth and final chapter casts about for the artistic signs of a possible "post-administrativism" appearing on the horizon, and I find them in seemingly divergent sets of practices that are keynoted by the embrace of a kind of narrative mimetics that foreground what I call "a therapeutics of art" in contrast to the reigning notion of art produced as potential or actual equity markers for the games that administrativism plays. These works can be seen as providing an insulating containment of complex poetic meaning, emphasizing modes of integrated internalization other than those represented by the synecdochal work of art's easy availability for incorporation into the administrativist tableau. These practices are of two types: the first is a type of mannerist surrealism represented by the work of artists such as Lisa Yuskavage, Kara Walker, and Charlie White, and the second are examples of what I call the new *gesamtkunstwerk,* represented by Matthew Barney's *Cremaster* cycle as it was presented in the spring of 2003 at the Guggenheim Museum and also by *Burning Man*, the annual populist art event held at summer's end in Nevada's Black Rock desert. The comic irony that I note here is that *Burning Man* did such a good job of satirizing the aesthetics of cultural tourism that it became a favored destination for a new audaciously conceived kind of cultural tourism, a cultural tourism literally and figuratively enacted *en abyme*.

Throughout the whole book, I make frequent recourse to psychoanalytic characterizations of artworks and the conditions of cultural appetite governing their creation and reception. Certainly, this orientation is an exceedingly useful one if we view works of art as being the communicative manifestations of an underlying consciousness that invite as much critical attention directed toward their "intentionality" as they do toward the force and clarity of their communication. And if we don't view them in that light, then what other reasons could there possibly be to bother paying attention to them at all?

This last question reveals something about my polemic orientation. Like almost everyone else in the game of writing criticism about the contemporary visual arts, I too claim to be influenced by Marx and Freud, but in my case it is the early "humanistic" Marx and the latter, post-1920 Freud that do most of the influencing. Stepping back from this rather qualified confession, I might go on to say that I see my four chapters as being wrapped around a very small segment of a much larger axis that is capped by Aristotle's *Poetics* at one

endpoint and the post-Freudian object-relations theorists at the other, with the writings of Søren Kierkegaard, George Santayana, Theodor Adorno, and Donald Kuspit occupying the most important waypoints in-between and beyond those polarities. Naturally, this puts what I have to say at an implied odds with the majority of published remarks about contemporary art, operating as they do upon what Richard Rorty has called the Plato-to-Kant axis, that being an axis I presume also includes semioticians of every stripe. If I seem to belabor this point, there is a reason: it is to pre-empt or at least forestall what I think will be a rather predictable hue-and-cry about an alleged "conservative" or "traditionalist" substrate to my analysis, which unabashedly favors narrative figuration and the forwarding of a social poetics of the self-in-society. No doubt, such an emphasis will be read as a reactionary clarion calling for a retreat to aesthetic certitudes in the face of a baffling profusion of "the new," but such a reading will miss my point, which will insist on the ethical necessity of a fiction of the self that can be sufficiently self-possessed to at least question the influence and wisdom of exo-subjective entities that must of necessity serve the arrangements of power that they pretend to challenge. In an age when the liberal institution follows the oppressive suits of family, organized religion, and state, the embrace of such a myth of intentional autonomy is in fact the only zone of a progressive politics left standing.

No doubt, I am not the first person to think that nugatory feebleness of the visual art's claim at offering an alternative to corporately-controlled media culture well-serves the social agendas of the latter. But I might be the first to come out and publicly suggest that this in fact is the case. Add to this the fact that administrators and religious fundamentalists are among the few who still believe that any viable ideological differences still exist between the progressive and the conservative (they only do this because their *raison d'être* is to paranoiacally protect themselves from the menace represented by the other), because the real contemporary political spectrum is so frighteningly narrow. One pole is occupied by neo-liberals whose continued addiction to the politics of coalition-building means that their only principle is to protect themselves from people with principles, while the other is occupied by neo-conservatives who continue to make a spectacle of the fact that they are deeply dedicated to the wrong principles that always remind us of the fact that fascism is historically embraced by those who fear losing power rather than those who might contemplate seizing it.

The sad fact is that in art and in life, the real realm of "progressive" politics has been more or less completely devoured by the corporately controlled practices of "rebellion marketing," and none of the advents in the art world of the 1990s can be seriously said to counter this claim. Yes, there are laudable exceptions to that which has bred this bitter cynicism. The most heartening of these has been the anti-corporate activism that emerged on a global

scale during the middle of the last decade, laudable in major part because it didn't waste valuable time critiquing a now un-critiqueable capitalism, but instead chose to challenge and confront the corporate culprits responsible for the real crimes of global rapacity and bad faith on their own cloistered door-steps in Seattle and Genoa. Inspired by their efforts at pointing fingers of real accountability before the terrorist attacks of 2001 made it impossible to do so, this book takes up more genteel arms against a much smaller sea of troubles, but the outrage over institutional duplicity is still there, as is the outrage over an excess of boredom and an absence of adventure in an arena of vital en-deavor that should be unbothered by either.

Here, a clarifying word about writing style. Although each chapter is wrapped around a specific set of themes and topics, each is also written in such a way so as to contain echoes and miniature variations on each other's major themes in the manner similar to that of a symphony made of four distinct movements redeploying common melodies recapitulated in different harmonic guises. The citational devices of multiple epigraphs, block quotes, and ex-planatory endnotes is deployed to amplify and direct this "mirroring musical-ity" effect while also using the words of others to state important concepts much better than I myself could state them. More than merely fulfilling the academic etiquette of substantiating arguments with authoritative corrobora-tions, I see these rhetorical strategies as having their own literary possibilities that can direct and amplify ideas in much the same manner as does Talmudic annotation, casting them as carefully chosen collage elements whose intima-tions and juxtapositions lend dimension, richness, and texture to a more con-ventional notion of writing conceived of as a singular line of descriptive thought. This seemed like an interesting way to advance a kind of richness of exposi-tion that Clifford Geertz might be generous enough to label "a thick descrip-tion," that being a way of assessing the complex intentionalities of apparently simple subjects, a "stressing not so much the empirical commonalties of (a given subject's) behavior, but rather the mechanisms by whose agency the breadth and indeterminateness of his inherent capacities are reduced to the narrowness and specificity of his actual accomplishments."[12] Again, and fi-nally, *administrativism* is the word that I use to indicate and characterize that agency, but I also recognize that my approaches to this unifying focal point have an odd and perhaps presumptuous polyphony to them. My hope is that the staging of occasional returns to the same terrain from different vectors might reveal more descriptive texture by way of adjusting the rake of its illu-mination, perhaps facilitating moments of unexpected re-cognition. Of course, the danger of doing this lies in its potential for a redundant recapitulation in-sufficiently embellished with enough refreshing variation to properly locate them in their differentiated streams of examination. If I have succumbed to that danger, let me apologize in advance by reminding the reader that the laby-

rinth of writing can and perhaps should be a place of daunting vexation owing as much to surprising moments of errancy as it does to the will-to-lucidity.

# Chapter 1

# Contemporary Art and the Administrative Sublime

*I want to make a distinction between curating within the canon and curating within culture...That is, to curate within culture is to see art as a totality that is not simply bounded by art history. It is there that we begin to make room for new forms of knowledge, new possibilities for articulating different types of intelligence that are unruly and cannot be disciplined by the academic world...There can no longer be any neat histories of dwelling: they are always discontinuous. It is the power and the force of the multitude that will unsettle this very issue.*

- Okwui Enwezor, *Interview Statement* (2002)[1]

*But we need not go immediately or entirely outside language. There is between "translation proper" and "transmutation" a vast terrain of "partial transformation." The signs in the original statement are modified by one of a multitude of means or combination of means. These include paraphrase, graphic illustration, pastiche, imitation, thematic variation, parody, citation in a supporting or undermining context, false attribution (accidental or deliberate), plagiarism, collage and many others. This zone of partial transformation, of derivation, of alternative restatement determines much of our sensibility and literacy. It is, quite simply, the matrix of culture.*

- George Steiner, *After Babel* (1975)[2]

*Perverse replication, à la Warhol et al., has become the modus vivendi of postmodern art. It is the gist of the Hollywoodization of art. It confirms its cynicism, and the postmodern rejection and destruction of high art. It is disillusionment with art by "artists." Perverse replication is a form of nihilism, in that it pulls the support of tradition out from under art in a way that avant-garde never did. Avant-garde artists felt compelled to take a stand to tradition, whether that meant to master it enough to modify it or to work it through to an ostensibly liberated, independent creativity. In contrast, postmodern artists are indifferent to tradition; they see no point in struggling with it to achieve autonomy, for both tradition and autonomy are irrelevant in the postmodern world, in which current appearance is all, at whatever cost to reality testing.*

- Donald Kuspit, *Avant-Garde, Hollywood, Depression: The Collapse of High Art* (2000)[3]

*The theory of the Virtual Class: cultural accommodation to technotopia is its goal, political consolidation (around the aims of the virtual class) its method, multi-media nervous system its relay, and (our) disappearance into pure virtualities its ecstatic destiny.*

- Arthur Kroker and Michael A. Weinstein, *Data Trash: The Theory of the Virtual Class* (1995)[4]

*I could count on your reactions. You were as predictable as automata. You murdered like professionals.*

- Friedrich Dürrenmatt, *The Physicists* (1962)[5]

# I

How long has it been since questions about an alleged "commodification-of-the work-of-art" were the burning issues in the visual arts? Hindsight suggests that they came into play soon after exhibitions such as the Royal Academy's 1981 *New Spirit in Painting* and the Walter Gropius Bau's *Zeitgeist* exhibition of 1982 valorized and codified the return to figurative and expressionistic modes of painting that had been on the rise throughout the late 1970s. By 1986, the new spirit was already old, as could then be wit-

nessed by the sudden enthusiasm for the work of those artists grouped under the banner of "Neo-Geo," namely, Haim Steinbach, Jeff Koons, Peter Halley, Meyer Vaisman, and Ashley Bickerton – the latter four having been featured in an influentially controversial group exhibition at the Sonnabend gallery in the fall of that year. In that exhibition, Halley exhibited some almost symmetrical geometric paintings that featured fluorescent shapes that were both schematic and emblematic. These were simply titled *Cells,* their titles referencing the double meaning of the word as that which gives power to a circuit and also as the unit of incarcerial accommodation that is typically found in correctional facilities. It was a double entendre that would signal the arrival of a major shift in attitudes about what could be expected from works of contemporary art.

This seemingly sudden shift in aesthetic priorities brought with it a new descriptive vocabulary comprised of terms mined from architecture, literary theory, and the social sciences, with *deconstruction, appropriation,* and *simulation* being the ones that gained the most currency. This new *patois* seemed to momentarily revive earlier conceptualist categories that had become arid, academic, and passé by the middle of the 1970s, only here, their special contribution lay in the way that they offered ironical blessings to artistic practices that seemed more like 1960s Pop Art in that they were predicated on the creation of expensive commodities from slightly less expensive commodities for the purpose of forwarding an alleged critique of the growing omnipresence of commodity culture – Koons's executive subcontracting of the production of his sculpture to anonymous craftsmen being the most widely recognized case-in-point.[6]

All of this took place near the end of the Reagan-Thatcher years, a time earmarked by celebrity art dealers and a handful of prominent artists selling their work for bankable six-figure sums. Soon thereafter, American politicians would start making invidious noises about the viability of government support of the arts and the values served by it. In part, these statements were provoked by the media's fascination with large sums of money changing amongst relatively few artistic hands, thus providing irresistible bait for pundits from both the right and the left ends of the political spectrum. Socially conscious leftists could follow the lead of the Guerrilla Girls by focusing on the elite politics of exclusion brought into vivid evidence by the new art of the hyper-commodity, while right-wing commentators could dish predictable outrage over the apparent attempt to engineer a new kind of public taste predicated on the theatricalized contempt for public taste. And all of this was going on while Solidarity Strikes in Poland were leading up to the fall of the Berlin Wall, with an imminent capitalist victory in the Cold War looming unavoidably large on the world historical horizon.

In retrospect, it now seems fair to say that those were bad times for institutional art administrators, who had suddenly found themselves besieged

from two sides; those being the world of glamour and commerce that cared nothing for social fairness, and the world of political policy-making, which has always rather poorly pretended to care about nothing but. While it would be a bit of exaggerated hyperbole to suggest that circumstances were momentarily conspiring to completely cut the world of professional arts administration out of the game of public taste-making (the art market would always need some form of "disinterested" institutional authority to certify and stabilize its investments), we can nonetheless take note of the fact that the 1980s were a time when artists who made things actually made some money by making things that occasionally symbolized what money was not supposed to be able to buy.

While all of this was taking place, so-called "alternative space" art predicated on the conceptualist practices of video, performance, and installation seemed headed for the art historical dustbin, their putative radicalism having been momentarily unmasked as a pseudo-avant-garde extortion plot advanced by intellectual hypocrites seeking either tenured workstations in the academy, or, with greater sanctimony, to make over the institutions of civil society as *academies manquées* subject to the embrace of "transgression" understood as a foreordained administrative protocol. The partisans of this older conceptualism were the very same intellectuals who were signaled out by Donald Kuspit in this 1983 statement: "perhaps these critics are not sufficiently self-critical to see their own approaches as conventional and traditional to the point of being obsolete...They refuse to see themselves as traditionalists...too impotent to imagine any future for art other than the same modernist missionary position of 'classical' negation."[7] As the 1980s drew to a close, it became increasingly clear that the artistic habits of negation and transgression were almost always directed at targets of straw, usually in the name of advancing differing versions of same while providing the assurance (of distraction) that any real transgression against any ruling regime would have a much more difficult time ever seeing the light of day.

The real story of the art world in the 1990s lies in how it subtly embraced and then reversed this trend toward hypercommodification by using the machinations of "marketing" to shift the focus of art patronage away from the artist and back toward the institution. Like the 1930s, the 1990s did not show its unique aesthetic hand in the emergence of any identifiable period style in the visual arts; rather, it did so with a building boom in stylish museum buildings and a concomitant proliferation of international biennial exhibitions. Underpinning both of these phenomena was the emergence of the celebrity art administrator who was and still is thought to be the one who truly "makes things happen" while garnering a six-figure salary for providing a place for artists to exhibit their work for little or no direct reward. The thing that was supposedly being made to happen was the transformation of obscure destinations into internationally reknowned magnets of cultural tourism, with every

impresario casting him/herself as a potential agent of the next "Bilbao Effect" that would seem to enrich all who are directly concerned. Thus, when we partake of Francis Haskell's near-dumbstruck amazement over the fact that,

> Miles above us jets speed through the skies carrying their freight of Titians and Poussins, Van Dycks and Goyas. Below, meanwhile, curatorial staff in museums and galleries scattered over much of Europe and the United States are supervising the transfer of pictures that usually hang on their walls to inaccessible and crowded storage rooms and are busy preparing large new explanatory labels,[8]

we might also hear the mantra of "welcome to the future" being whispered in our ears, just as we do when we follow the undulate crowds through the cubicle mazes at *Documenta*, *The Palais de Tokyo* or the *Taipei Biennial*. And, like the growing proliferation of blockbuster-style old master exhibitions, the 1990s profusion of pseudo-avant-garde art administrator art also represents a telling symptom of an emerging set of cultural priorities: it was not merely a new style or form of art that had come to the fore, but the golden reflection of a new model of patronage shaped to fulfill administration's purposes, epiphenomenally representing the shifting values of that murky interregnum disingenuously passing itself off as the era of a "New Globalism." No longer do the bickering moieties of the "capitalist market" and the subsidized non-commercialism of an allegedly advanced "avant-garde" suffice to define a meaningful moment after the collapse of Cold War ideological contest. Most certainly, they are not up to the task of giving a representational voice to the new Cold War that now exists between Islam and rock-and-roll. The real patronage of art now lies elsewhere, and it is one that is more in keeping with the values of the new pan-capitalist moment that has come to the fore.

Cultural tourism is the name of that new patron(age), and its most representative art should now be called art administrator art in recognition of how it functions as a synecdochal avatar of administrativism's need for self-confirming spectacles that can also re-confirm administrativism's right to theatricalize its own machinery of legitimization as a theater of authority. This machinery both reflects and is built from institutional powers of superordinative determination that stage-manage both the artist and the work of art as a kind of raw material awaiting a certain kind of manipulation, casting them as the toys with which the game of art administration can be played. Like the stone gargoyles perched atop the old cathedrals, art administrator art enacted under the flickering sign of cultural tourism has little real significance as a singular, stand-alone entity. Rather, it is most instructively viewed as a component of a larger hierarchically-keyed construct that gains whatever meaning and status it has in

relation to the value constellations that it consciously or unconsciously seeks to confirm and promote.

Thus, when we read curatorial boilerplate claiming that characteristic works of advanced art are "drained of their acquired or inherent cultural or emotional associations...[because] individualism and personal identity is a thing of the past; that the old individual or individualist subject is 'dead,'"[9] we read not so much any actual account of the real vicissitudes of contemporary subjectivity or any clear trend in artistic practice, which now more than ever contains within it examples of every conceivable aesthetic and stylistic orientation: rather, what we witness is one among a great many similar instances of "institutional wishing" that frames itself as an implied instruction to be embraced by artists and critics who would want to fulfill the prerequisites for gaining the kind of institutional identity that could lead to institutional patronage. When we see such examples of institutional wishing come into play, we are bearing witness to an ideological construct called *administrativism,* which can be defined as the unspoken ethos that motivates all administrative practices toward a position of self-serving self-empowerment.

Art administrator art can be distinguished by the fact that it has a special need for institutional administrators to both bring it into tangible being (the artist is relegated to the subaltern role of "content provider") and also to give it meaningful coherence by way of textual explication and significance-by-institutional-inclusion. Because it needs administrators, art administrator art serves administrators who are naturally concerned about the fluctuating status of their own leverage, this owing to their precarious political position located amid uncertain and quickly changeable political fortunes.

By examining a few key episodes in the recent history of art, we can begin to see how the values of administrativism enter into artistic practice. In May of 1989, a paleo-conservative Senator from North Carolina famously stood up and reviled the National Endowment for the Arts for its support of allegedly indecent art, a point that was made on the basis of illustrations in two exhibition catalogues that the Endowment partially funded. Defenders of the Endowment pointed to statistics comparing the relative budgets for Federal Arts Supports ($171 million in FY 1989-90) and Military Marching Bands ($202 million), but this exercise in cost-benefit analysis proved to be of no persuasive avail, as was also the case with another set of statistics detailing the huge 99.9 percentile majority of non-offensive recipients of federal arts funding.

The conservative critics of the Endowment were implacable, and no amount of rational policy analysis could blunt their animus directed at what they perceived to be an engine of official state-sanctioned culture. This pitched irrationalism signaled the onset of the so-called Culture Wars, supposedly staged between the defenders of free expression and those who would pretend to

uphold the freedom of elected representatives to decide what their constituent's tax dollars should and should not support. The latter group could be easily disparaged for obsessing on overblown trivia while ignoring the real political and environmental depredations that were funded at exponentially greater expense, but calls to this kind of sober realism failed to blunt the zeal of the endowment's detractors, in large part because they could not abide the way that the endowment's policy of "peer review" served to empower a self-appointed administriviat that seemed only to be interested in defending the kind of "free speech" that would allow it to continue making arbitrarily censorious decisions on a routine day-to-day basis.

Needless to say, all of this is political milk that was spilt long ago. But what happened after this initial moment of pitched political contest continues to be of under-discussed interest. Soon after these initiating rounds of the Culture Wars were played out, new priorities quietly came to the fore. The first of these was the call for proportional ethnic representation in museum collections and in the organization of major exhibitions. Diversity was the buzzword of this moment (running from about 1989 to 1995), and it seemed a long overdue corrective to historical practices that could hardly be called progressive. Using many of the demystifying strategies of analysis previously generated by the feminist movement during the 1970s, advocates of the new plurality persuasively made a case for the hidden racism of the art world, and rightfully demanded that something be done.[10]

And something was done, or so it seemed. Exhibitions were organized, and articles were written, in large part because there were funds available to support them in their attempts to provide correctives to long-standing historical injustices. The problem was that there were other motives operating behind this rush to a Potemkin village of representational inclusivity owing to the fact that the art world's administrative elite had just lost a war of symbolic manipulation that it should have won, and was casting about for new constituencies that might be valuable political allies in the inevitable next phase of the war. It was also conceived as having something of a generational marketing hook, for, as Naomi Klein wrote in 2000, "'Diversity' had become the defining idea for Gen-Xers, as opposed to 'Individuality' for boomers and 'Duty' for their parents."[11] This seems to ring especially true if we break the notion of "individuality" into the sub-components of a modernist obsession with "actuality" slowly displaced by a more pervasive attention to "celebrity" *pace* Pop Art, but in another sense all of the aforementioned models default to various kinds of celebrity valorization. On this score, Klein quotes a trenchant statement made in 1991 by Tim Brennan: "The real guilt of P.C. [i.e. "political correctness"] is not its supposed intolerance of rigidity, but that it is not political enough – that it is impersonating political struggle."[12]

Whether or not this strategy would have proven successful ended up

being a moot question for three reasons. The first is that the NEA lost its second political struggle in 1996, when its budget was again cut in a way that forced it to reconfigure its focus to the exclusive support of large institutions and so-called "folk art" while sacrificing funds for artists working in an art world context – all of this enacted by statutory mandate. The second of these reasons was that near the same time the fickle focus of activist politics changed from what was called "identity politics" to a new kind of anti-corporate activism directed against the economic and environmental depredations of a so-called New Globalism. This meant that, although the dialectic of identity and diversity might still have been a problem that institutional practices would continue to address as a matter of course, it was no longer an issue with the kind of emotional appeal that could drive macro-institutional marketing decisions. The third of the aforementioned reasons can be found in the sudden explosion of new technology and the money that the stock market was making from it, starting in about 1995 and reaching a zenith at the end of 2000. Suddenly, giddy dreams about the benefits of a "new economy" tied to post-Cold War "peace dividend" displaced concerns about the dubious advantages of a new corporately-controlled Globalism, and the celebration of difference that had five years previously come to the fore had quickly been leveled and displaced by a brave new world of supposedly colorblind online identities.

As a result, the only difference that seemed to matter was the digital divide separating the computer literate and those many others who would be left behind. And the art world *was determined to not be left behind*, especially since an exploding stock market had brought new corporate funding sources to the fore at the very moment when the government was backing away. This corresponded with the fast proliferation of the Internet as a commerce-and-communications medium, with its new priority of easily accessed and easily exchanged information valorized at the expense of rare and particular experiences. To counter this new priority, new destinations were needed, and contemporary art was enlisted to provide the many *causes célèbres* that could create the idea, the illusion, and finally the reality of the eventfulness required by such would-be destinations. Thus, biennial exhibitions of contemporary art proliferated around the globe, and being able to claim a global perspective on contemporary culture meant having to visit these exhibitions so that one could truly understand what the many professional commentators were writing about them in relation to the emerging world they claimed to reflect, not to mention the complex economies of private/public partnership feeding them and feeding into that which they fed.

And *mutatis mutandis,* when these new sources made their presence known, administrativism followed suit by dropping its identity theme to better embrace the seductions of new technology, thus announcing a new fealty to what it hoped would be its new corporate paymasters while casting suspicion

on the sincerity of its previously-held social justice agenda.

Then, rather suddenly, the whole art world was indeed left behind, but not by the all-pervasive technological transformation of everyday life. When al-Qaeda terrorists commandeered and crashed commercial airplanes into the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001, the hyper-branded imbrication of art with corporate support was suddenly ruptured as the energies of venture philanthropy were curtailed and/or vectored in directions far away from arts institutions. This left the institutional art world in a compromised position of having traded public support for corporate support, only to be left in the lurch and jilted by the latter. Presumably, a catastrophe of the magnitude of the 9/11 terrorist attacks would have some kind of effect on the way that art could be viewed and understood; instead, we have thus far witnessed an odd moment of paralysis and denial as administrativism has suddenly discovered that it is nei- ther rock and roll, nor Islam, nor any relevant thing that splits their deep ideo- logical differences as anything other than a beside-the-point distraction from their building antagonism.

We can look back to the late 1970s for an instructive comparison that highlights this peculiar point. When, in 1978, Iranian militants seized control of the US Embassy in Tehran, and when Soviet troops marched into Afghani- stan less than a year later, the art world registered these events with the shrill upheavals of neo-expressionist painting and punk rock-inspired aggression directed at the ruling *doxa* that was frighteningly inclined to rattle nuclear sabers while subverting the American constitution as a matter of military and political convenience. But, in recent years, no such upheaval has been felt in the art world, and it is the lack of such an outraged upheaval in the realm of the visual arts that seems to be one of the most telling symptoms of our current moment.

The ideological divide between the old and the new administrativism can be highlighted by contrasting the proscriptions of two seemingly similar Marxist thinkers. Writing in bad health from a prison cell in southern Italy during the 1930s, Antonio Gramsci reflected on the nature of effective politi- cal revolution, and surmised that significant social change could not be achieved by directly engaging the ruling authorities in open conflict. Rather, he pro- posed that successful revolutionary transformation would of necessity be the eventual byproduct of "a long march through the institutions,"[13] meaning that intellectuals would be called upon to make organizational structures over in the image of the radical dream, *one institution at a time*. This proscription of incremental makeovers was at the core of what Gramsci called his *Philosophy of Praxis*, and this idea was his chief export to the radical ferment that ear- marked the moment when the 1960s counter-culture challenged the Great Society's prosecution of the Vietnam War. Thus, his ideas are echoed through *The Port Huron Statement*, which was the 1962 founding document for the

Students for a Democratic Society, and they undergird the fact that a major emphasis of the National Endowment for the Arts lay in the sponsorship of organizations – "alternative spaces" – that could recast the possibilities of artistic praxis without being tied to market support.

Gramsci's proscription buoyed the romance that was at the core of the explosion of post-studio practices that earmarked the late 1960s and 1970s. It was a moment where the speculative question "what could a work of art possibly be?" held significant sway over any investigation into what it actually was, and this motivated much in the way of artistic innovation, though very little in the way of any real revolution. It wasn't until 1969 that we would read the countervailing view bred of the historical hindsights of the Second World War and subsequent Cold War between the capitalist west and the communistic east. In *Ideology and State Apparatus* Louis Althusser effectively warned his readers of the fact that when the would-be revolutionary looks into the institutional abyss with an eye toward revolutionary makeover, that abyss will look back with an instrumentalist gaze that will insist on reproducing its own means of production, one that must of necessity operate in service to the political and economic macro-climates that surround it. So, to shorten a rather long ideological conversation, we can simply note that, as the Cold War moved into its endgame phase, it became clear that Althusser's view, rather than that of Gramsci, would most accurately define the real relationship between artworks, art institutions, and the world in which they operate.

And so, for this and other reasons, administrativism abides. Like dutiful priests in ancient Egypt, the contemporary art administrator ordains what the artist must provide out of his or her own political and economic necessity. The difference is that the contemporary version of this immemorial dialectic disingenuously pretends that a very different game is afoot, one where artistic "innovations" and "breakthroughs" are still dangerously "subverting" some repressively antiquated status quo in advance of an eternally incomplete historical fruition. This Hegelian fantasy of inevitable and eternally deferred redemption is always intimated as the "new thing" to be revealed to those who are addicted to the perpetual pseudo-excitement of "seeing what happens next" and this is the contemporary equivalent of the celebration of eternal life gained by the exalted death of the Pharaohs.

Naturally, the most important of the aforementioned administrativist values is the provision of a financially necessary magnet event that might cause large numbers of would-be spectators to line up in front of a ticket booth or part with some disposable income to purchase a commemorative exhibition catalogue at a museum bookshop. Given these commercial mandates, it is not at all surprising that the arts institutions of the 1990s chose to take a page out of the success manuals of themed amusement parks by recognizing that the most efficient way to accomplish said goal was via an orchestrated series of

attention-grabbing distractions that could, in their haptic displays of ersatz worlds-within-ersatz-worlds, operate in a manner akin to the arcades of 19th century Paris by loudly competing for the fleeting attention of bemused passers-by. But to say that distraction is the stock in trade of art administrator art is to not say quite enough, for it is of the utmost importance to recognize that a special kind of distraction is what such art is called to manifest – one that can also be strategically orchestrated to simultaneously annotate, mock, and envy the much larger distraction-machine of corporately constructed popular culture in such a way so as to occlude the fact that for all intents and purposes it *has become* a component part of that popular culture's much larger distracting machine, albeit one that is addressed to the more adventurous and better-educated segments of that culture. Or to those who would pretend to be.

So, in addition to trafficking in the aesthetics of a rarefied distraction, art enacted under the sign of professional art administration also appeals to the enframing prerogatives of the administrativist *mise en scène* by making itself available for acceptable participation in administration's theater of legitimization. Like its interlocking managerial directorates looking to each other for models of mutual substantiation that might appear as a momentary consensus, administrativism's theater of legitimization is also made up of a hierarchically-keyed ensemble of smaller manifestations of such theaters feeding into larger ones, simultaneously licensing, authorizing and stabilizing the thresholds of a manufactured consent on the subject of artistic credibility. This imperative shapes the fundamental tenor of art administrator art as being an aesthetic manifestation of managerial arrogance, which has become synonymous with its distanced and impersonal mode of presentation and in the majority of cases much more important than its putative "content."

Whether it be manifest in poorly composed photographs output to the size of large paintings, in wall-sized video projections with noisy mechanical soundtracks illuminating claustrophobically darkened cubicles, in sculpture that takes instruction from the stage-management strategies of theatrical prop construction, or in installation tableaux that mimic the display strategies of scientific dioramas, art administrator art makes plain its imperative-to-display-and-distract in a way that implicitly envies the display-making prerogatives of those who orchestrate the extravaganzi to which it aspires to be a contributory entity, who in their own turn can be seen envying the display-making prerogatives of corporate entertainment. The old notion of a high art sustaining a kind of innovative imagination and heroic autonomy in the face of the coercive imperatives of an omnipresent culture industry is not exactly missing from this equation, but the spirit of the idea is, for now the institutions of the art world are surprisingly large-scale components of that industry, ironically predicated on pretending that they are somehow offering an alternative to it even as their over-branded gift shops are now making their presence known

in airport termini across the globe.

There is more. When such envy is laced with self-deprecating irony, we often bear witness to an aesthetic of "specimenification," rendered during the aforementioned decade as the representative trope (fetish?) of the above-mentioned circumstance: witness the aggressive objectification of the subject forwarded in the work of artists such as Vanessa Beecroft, Katarina Fritch, Mark Dion, Damien Hirst, Jeff Wall, and even Tracy Emin, all of whom deploy and exaggerate stage-managerial strategies derived from taxonomy and taxidermy to deploy stand-ins for themselves as standing-in for the compliant found objects that administrativism has encouraged them to become. Hirst's sculptural tableaux of disturbing and seemingly threatening materials displayed in containers that look like overbuilt aquaria provide one well-known set of chilling examples, and another can be found in a solo exhibition by Dion held at London's Tate Gallery in the Spring of 2003, this devoted to creating an elaborate display taxonomy of everyday objects archeologically dredged from the banks of the Thames. The widespread embrace of the aesthetics of specimenification that emerged during the 1990s may well remind us that "it's all happening at the zoo," the *it* in question being devoted to the valorization and advancement of an aesthetic of radical dishabilitation that uses simplistic claims that "all is constructed by context" to advance recognition and gain reward for exponentializing their fealty to those self-appointed zookeepers who have garnered the institutional power to enact such constructions.

The penultimate example of this aesthetic of specimenification was a project that was executed in the form of a magazine advertisement. Exactly 18 years and ten months after *Artforum* published the controversial advertisement featuring a nude Lynda Benglis wielding large dildo, the same publication contained another ad filling three full pages, apparently purchased by the artist Piotr Uklanski. Two of these pages featured his photograph titled *Untitled (Gingeras)* (2003), featuring the bare buttocks of a young woman who is bending over in provocative fashion. A text on the third page reveals that the subject of this photograph is Alison M. Gingeras, then a curator at the *Centre Pompidou*. It also reveals Gingeras as the author of the text, from which I shall now quote at length:

> Just another white girl's ass? Purchasing three pages in order to publish this image along with a text that bluntly acknowledges my professional identity makes it impossible to write it off as such...This image courts the immediacy and accessibility of porn...*Untitled (Gingeras)* pushes this calculated crassness to another level...Money buys visibility. Visibility caters to ego...making it public in Artforum confronts the projection of taboos, concepts of professional climbing, vanity and artistic/per-

> sonal conviction that are part of the gesture...this is totally my ass, trying to be beautiful.[14]

It is hard to resist making humorous sport of this project, and even more diffi-cult to resist noting that the color, aspect-ratio, and organization of prominent graphic components in Uklanski's photograph seem calculated to advance a kind of homage to Barnett Newman's canonical *Vir Heroicus Sublimis* from 1950, thereby folding the earlier artist's ideas of a then-new sublime into the more recent effort of articulating an idea of beauty that is of our own age. But resist these temptations I shall, because another point begs to be made: it is the image of the ass that aggressively taunts us even while it begs to be kissed, and in so doing, reveals itself to be the epicenter of a tightly wound circle-jerk whose widening gyres describe and ensnare administrativism's entire domain.

A tide of interlocked presumptions about what we might and might not expect from art is engendered by this image and situation implicated within it, and those presumptions are exceedingly difficult to challenge in that they go a long way to define the reality of that situation. But they also invite a psychoanalytic reverie of sorts, for if we focus on the way that contemporary art downplays the poetic attributes of authenticity, mastery, integration, and containment so as to give emphasis to the alleged "ecstasy" of socio-aesthetic distraction that accentuates psychic displacement and the new technology that gives it unprecedented amplification (with its many nods to Jean Baudrillard's *Ecstasy of Communication*)[15] – a significant picture emerges. We would do well to remember that the term "ecstasy" derives from the Greek *ex-stasis* which literally means "out of being." Its salutary significance stems from the fact that one can only gain meaningful insight from such departures provided that one returns intact to the condensed realm of being with newly relevant wisdom. If one fails to make such a return, ecstatic displacement cannot form itself into any habilitating wisdom, and remains only as mere "stimulation," doomed to an unending chaos of undifferentiated repetition-compulsion. On the other hand, when libidinous displacements fail to be condensed into an integrated psychical structure, they might still be readable as fragmentary omens of the type that can put the lie to the bad repressive faith of an overarching condensation's will-to-procrustean synthesis. But it is much more likely that they will merely advertise themselves as being ripe for an external entity's cynical orchestration, manipulation, and subsequent exploitation.

Such displaced fragments might display a stylization of experience, and certainly they can be displayed as suggestive omens or even relics of such, but such algebras of displaced form and contextual extra-subjective condensa-tion should not be confused with the sustenance of the full revelatory gravitas of the symbol-making process enacted in the expanded space of persuasion where the imperatives of society and culture might still be fused. Instead of

such persuasion, we are instead and forever greeted with "new" assortments-of-assortments, (curatorally) revealed as exopsychical projections of part-objects coyly searching for an administering and administrating ego to call their own, hoping against hope to find a place in the 21st century's cavalcade of displays-of-display. Because of this, these objects cannot be said to be truly ex-static in their potential for a radical disruption of the given, because the given is already in an apparent state of permanent and ongoing disruption, albeit one that masks an omnipresent lock-down of happy potentialities. But are they not truly *aes-thetic* either, in light of the fact that the word literally refers to a quintessential self-embodiment of its own perfect self-idealism. Pretending to be both but in fact being neither, contemporary art is left only with its own "un-dead" dissemblance of vitalities that are neither ecstatic nor aesthetic.

Again, the bad faith of the overall operation needs to be underscored, because there is a vexing discrepancy operating between the fantasy of a liberating potential coming part-and-parcel with the recognition of the powers of contextual determination, and the sobering on-the-ground realism that points to how such recognitions are often used to explain away stunning lapses in ethical responsibility and professionalism: paranoid projection leading to the authorization of a tawdry opportunism as an allegedly "savvy" recognition of the "way things are." Sacrificed here is the will-to-what-might-be (which should also be understood as the latent-will-to-what-needs-to-be), and the depth and sophistication of experience that can define and actualize it in extraordinary terms. This is why it is so unlikely that art in the age of art administration serving the mandates of cultural tourism will be deemed worthy of much interest in a very short period of time. This is also why Baudrillard sees so much in his *ex-stasis* and fails to contrast it against its opposite number of *aes-thesis* – literally "quintessence of idea"– because the challenge of creating and appreciating such durable embodiments implies a different kind of accountability that may now be beyond the grasp of the contemporary imagination.

This preliminary synopsis provides much of the back-story for understanding art administrator art's imperative-to-distraction, which habitually seeks to nullify and/or displace a reflective aesthetics pointed toward existential habilitation. Much of it has been made to be looked at as freakish or gimmick-laden attention-grabber, but little of it is to be lived with as a relational entity that is rich in integrated nuance and complex far-reaching implication. And even less has the ability to stage the coherent drama of containing contemporary experience in service to advancing a model of optimum selfhood. Such an accomplishment could not be in the best interests of administrativism's ability to promulgate the kind of dependency that enhances its control of all that falls under its purview. It is both the specter and the larger implications of such control that the administrativist aesthetics of omniglobal distraction seeks

to preclude. The good news is that there are preliminary signs of changes to this arrangement coming into view, and these seem to owe something to a belated prestige given over to the reality principle in the wake of the September 11th terrorist attacks, not to mention a general disappointment in technology's much-vaunted ability to deliver a meaningful salvation. Of these impending advents, more will be written. A sorting out of the present circumstance in relation to its recent past is the task that is here at hand.

## II

The aesthetic of "displaying the display" was rendered in a high controversial relief at the 2002 Whitney Biennial of Contemporary American Art. Curated by a team headed by Lawrence Rinder (including Debra Singer, Chrissie Illes, Christiane Paul, and Tom Eccles), this exhibition deviated sharply from the premises of many of its predecessors, which have often been criticized for simply codifying or passively reprising the greatest hits of the previous two exhibition seasons. Here, a different agenda came to the fore, and it was clearly calculated to spark consternation and controversy, all-the-while doing a great job of revealing the game of art administrator art for what it was and still is – a strategic algebra of inclusions and exclusions that gains coherence by either confirming or contrasting other such playing of similar games. The 2002 Biennial accomplished this by embracing an extreme level of aesthetic eclecticism that is still rare in museums (although an undeniable fact of day-to-day social life), and it seemed to coyly want to make a spectacle of apparently relinquishing its own power of determination, all the while clinging to the actual thing.

As one of four *Artforum* critics weighing in on the exhibition, Bob Nickas wrote "I thought about something that I already knew: Big shows don't work."[16] Contrary to that view, we can take note of the fact that the 2002 Biennial actually forced us to recognize how big shows have become the only ones that still do, at least in any functionally rhetorical sense of the word. Part of the reason for this has to do with the fact that these are the only shows that can still get critics to challenge and defend them, and in so doing, challenge and defend each other in contentious ways that depart from the placid blandishments that are occasioned by less ambitious presentations. This important distinction is symptomatic of the fact that the recent history of art is now being defined and determined by the way that such mega-exhibitions position themselves and their contents as moves and counter-moves in a global game of (competitive?) curatorial one-upsmanship, that being the game that now passes for the sweep of history. Or, to put the same statement into different words, the aforementioned "big shows" make a point of loudly wearing their hierarchical premises on their sleeves, and it is the hierarchical premise (rather than the work representing it) that functions as the rhetorical mechanism that raises

issues, challenges assumptions and marks its fleeting moment. Or so we are led to believe.

On this rather cynical score, the 2002 Whitney Biennial succeeded admirably, so much so that it is destined to become memorable in much the same way that Paterson Simms's 1983 "East Village" and Elizabeth Sussman's 1993 "politically correct" Biennials were memorable – as timely and controversial deviations from the art world's standard operating procedure, serving to renew its audience's desire to embrace the comforts and certitudes of that procedure. It would have been exceedingly easy for Rinder & Co. to wander through Chelsea and scrape the cream off the top of a dozen upscale art emporia, and, in so doing, the Whitney would have most likely hosted "the running-on-empty-Biennial," as the aforementioned cream was in short supply at that time (as could have been witnessed in an early summer 2002 viewing of disappointing gallery exhibitions by Peter Halley, Brice Marden, Sue Williams, Karen Finley, and David Reed).

Instead, the Whitney attempted something far more audacious, that being an earnest (albeit far too tentative) exploration of the many instances of proliferating para-artistic "cultural practices," most of which in one way or another pretend to have turned their backs on the art world's over-coded fish-ladder of elite credibility. Instead, said practices have sought to echo and galvanize the values of insular affinity groups which ordinarily fly far below the etiquette-bound radar of art administration, oftentimes choosing to operate in isolated underground realms of the type that Hakim Bey referred to when he coined the term "Temporary Autonomous Zones" in 1991.[17] This emphasis made for a Biennial that "tended to treat spirituality as artifice, history as fiction, politics as spectacle and all of them, sometimes, as a rollicking joke"[18] to quote from Nancy Princenthal's *Art in America* review of same, itself a failed struggle to separate the wheat of parody (intentional or otherwise) from the chafe of abject mediocrity. Similarly, the 2002 Biennial has been dubbed "the diffusion Biennial" in a cranky review by New York Times critic Roberta Smith, and was said to be "populated by artists who just want to have fun, hang out, do good, or promote a mild mannered social agenda."[19] In other words, the 2002 Biennial could be characterized as being not so much a case of being over the top as it was "under the bottom," and it seemed to beg for a criticality that checked "the going level of mediocrity: the always teeming range of merit between the pretty good and the not so hot" as Peter Schjeldahl suggested in reference to the 2000 iteration of the same exhibition.[20] Maybe the term *niche market* Biennial gets even closer to the truth of the 2002 iteration and closer to the problem as well; this by virtue of its anxious if not entirely courageous recognition of the possibility that institutionally-ordained public taste may be becoming obsolete in an age of omni-proliferating media streams.

In its profuse variety, occasional playfulness and omnipresent noisi-

ness, a visit to the 2002 Whitney Biennial was very much akin to attending a large Dada carnival (minus the possibility of any real uninhibited fun), because much of what it contained could easily fall under the rubric of the kind of media-conscious Pop Surrealism that might now pass for social realism: a cavalcade of extroverted gimmicks and introverted mutterings. But this assessment should give the sophisticated viewer some pause, for it suggests a time-honored source for the exhibition's odd priorities. Here, I refer to the traditional distinction between the *kunstkammer* and *wunderkammer* that still remains the basis of the categorical separation of museums of art from museums of natural and technological history. The 2002 Biennial follows one of the paths blazed by the Surrealists by intentionally mixing and skewing this time-honored distinction for the sake of provoking and exaggerating an uncanny effect. As James Clifford has written: "This disenchanted viewpoint...taking as its problem – and opportunity – the fragmentation and juxtaposition of cultural values...to see culture and its norms – beauty, truth, reality – as artificial arrangements susceptible to detached analysis and comparison with other possible dispositions is crucial to an ethnographic attitude."[21] Without the adaptation of such an "ethnographic attitude" on the part of the viewer, most of the work contained in Biennial 2002 couldn't make much sense when subjected to the amplified scrutiny and value-laden assumptions which are inherent in an allegedly disinterested process of museumification, which is, of course, highly interested and invested in the authoritative outcomes of its own "disinterested" verdicts.

Perhaps the best that can be said is that some cultural practices survive best when they remain ensconced in their own quasi-communal microclimates where local interaction and participation can be cherished in a way that is implicitly suspicious and hostile to any potential of death-by-institutional-enthronement. But if we step back from the generosity of this particular benefit-of-the-doubt, we have no choice but to admit that the exhibition was overburdened with work that seemed half-baked and sophomoric (every Biennial has its share of pretentiousness), and it sounds far too many wrong notes. Notable among these were Collier Schorr's gender-bending photo-paste-ups that goof on Andrew Wyeth's "Helga" paintings, and Judith Schaechter's cartoon-infested stained glass amalgams. It was hard to make much sense of how the heroes of Detroit's underground music scene were being valorized in an unforgivably lame installation by the *Destroy All Monsters* collective.

On the other hand, the ample selection of Chris Ware's original drawings for his *Jimmy Corrigan* comics brilliantly came off as being the genuine sub-cultural article, sporting a crisp incisive drawing that gave good visual ballast to the narrated foibles of its morose protagonist. The do-it-yourself surreal pageantry of the 1990s rave scene was the focus of a noisy and obstreperous installation titled *The Third Annual Roggabogga* (2002) by the Rhode

Island-based collective called *Forcefield,* while the late San Francisco-based artist Margaret Kilgallen was given the largest amount of space accorded to any single artist in the exhibition so as to present a large installation of proliferating signage titled *Main Drag* (2000). Despite its playful orchestration of circus-placard typography, Kilgallen's installation succeeded in evoking a bittersweet moment of despair and loss via subtly indexing the moment when the idea of neighborhood retreats in the face of the arrival of anonymous industry. The prominent featuring of this work represented a moving tribute to a talented artist who died far too young (at the age of 34 in 2001).

The 2002 Biennial divided the Whitney's four floors into thematic zones that mirrored the traditional division of rave spaces into dance areas and chill rooms. Thus, the fourth floor was given over to "tribes" while the presiding spirit of the third floor was keynoted by the cooler, more meditative theme of "spaces." On the second floor, the leftovers were grouped under the retro-Heideggerian banner of "beings," but all of the exhibition spaces were far too cluttered and too noisy to allow the viewer to make any kind of sustained sense of what was being presented. Everything was keyed to play to the quick glance, seemingly designed to keep the viewer in a perpetual state of agitation and distraction-from-the-previous-distraction, lest he/she look at (and interpret) any one thing for too long. Even the stairwell and elevator showcased something (installations by Chris Johanson and Miranda July), and there is also a contingent of biennial-related public sculpture in Central Park, ongoing neo-Fluxist performances that live in the exhibition as video documentation and catalogue entries, and a particularly large and well-conceived film and video component (curated by Chrissie Illes). There is also the new category of "sound art" (curated by Debra Singer) that was presented in a darkened lounge-like room as well as on a CD that came as part of the exhibition's handsome catalogue. All in all, there are 113 artists or artist groups making some sort of presentation here, perhaps arguing for the collective moniker of "the profusion Biennial."

As has already been stated, a strong current of Pop Surrealism was felt throughout the show, perhaps best represented by Christian Marclay's finely crafted musical instruments that seem to be animated and/or melting. Ken Feingold's pair of talking animatronic heads, titled *If/Then* (2001), packed in a box like so many spare parts, also hit the mark, albeit in a rather obvious way. Vija Celmins contributed two achingly beautiful paintings of grayscale spider webs ("webs – get it?"), while Yun-Fei Ji presented paintings on paper that beautifully fused traditional Chinese painting technique to contemporary subjects, making for a kind of Henry Darger–meets–Sung Dynasty effect. Perhaps the one piece that best summarizes the whole exhibition is Robert Lazzarini's *Payphone* (2001), dismissed by some as a long way to go for an obvious visual joke, but in my view achieving something much more interesting and com-

plex. What Lazzarini did was develop an accurate 3-dimensional computer model of a typical telephone booth, which was then subjected to an abrupt shearing distortion. He then built an actual phone booth anamorphically based on the new proportions, creating an alarming defamiliarization effect that spoke of reality itself being sucked into the phone lines (read: information network, à la *The Matrix*), and more broadly, of tangible (autonomous?) reality suddenly being displaced by invisibly networked information.

Among those critics who tended to be less harsh in their verdicts on the 2002 Whitney Biennial, there was constant recourse to comparing its offerings to the strategies and productions of *Fluxus,* the famous neo-Dada art movement initiated by George Maciunas in 1961. This is particularly evident in assessments of the exhibition's performance-oriented works, included as video documentation and catalogue description. Read Arthur Danto on the subject of the ongoing performance by *Praxis* (Delia Bajo and Brainard Carey):

> On any given Saturday afternoon, Praxis opens the East Village storefront that is its studio and home to passers-by. The ongoing performance, which they title *The New Economy*, consists in offering visitors any of four meaningful but undemanding services from the artists: a hug, a footbath, a dollar or a Band-Aid, which comes with the kind of kiss a mommy gives to make it all better. Praxis draws on a fairly rich art history. Its services are good examples of what were considered actions by Fluxus...It is a matter for philosophers to determine when giving someone a hug is a piece of art – but an important consideration is that as art it has no particular connection to the art market, nor is it the sort of thing that is easily collected. And it requires no special training to know how to do it...There is something tender and affecting in Praxis's ministrations...The artists set themselves up as healers or comfort-givers, and the art aims at infusing an increment of human warmth into daily life. There was not a lot of that in Fluxus, but it has become very much a part of art today, especially among younger artists.[22]

Certainly, the similarities are obvious enough. Fluxist artists tended to create surreal reliquaries of quotidian particularity that functioned as witty reminders of the value of everyday fascination, and these were frequently buttressed by maddeningly elaborate ascriptions of Fluxist provenance in the form of highly detailed "histories" of their location in a obsessively elaborate and often tongue-in-cheek Fluxist anti-cosmology. Summarizing the group's central tenant, Robert Filliou one remarked that "the function of art is to remind people that life is more important than art,"[23] indicating among other things that their project was enacted in the spirit of defying institutional prerogatives to authoritatively

ordain the priorities of what was supposed to represent "public" culture. This can be witnessed by the Fluxist's early preference to collaboratively manufacture their work in multiple editions intended for distribution via their own international mail-order network. But something happened along the way, that being a wholly predictable over-estimation and over-zealous institutionalization of the anti-institutional ethos that was Fluxus. There were many reasons for this, but perhaps the most important was that its "anything can be a work of art" ethos proved to have a considerable utility as an administrativist rationale, allowing it to be co-opted into a farcical institutional sideshow that was never more than a faint reprise of Dada's more audacious and urgent program of symbolic anarchy. What remained of Fluxus after this administrativist sleight-of-hand took place was simply the deployment of certain types of pseudo-anthropological reliquary objects that were made for the purposes of playfully speculating on the meaning of making, rather than the making of (read: embodiment) of meaning.

   The 2002 Whitney Biennial belatedly signaled the obviousness and exhaustion of an aesthetics keyed to quasi-anthropological speculations about "how something might be construed as a work of art if regarded from a certain imaginary vantage." It is a lesson that other exhibitions of its ilk would have done well to embrace in more forthright terms, because the recent history of contemporary art running from Duchampian Dada to the first generation of Pop Art and through a period of so-called postmodernism into our current period of post-postmodernism seems to have reached an endgame insofar as the provocative potential of advancing an aesthetics of speculative designation is concerned. In other words, we may now do well to ask whether or not the social anthropological definition of art has at last run its course, and with it the postmodern stylistics of which social anthropology played the role of master discourse. On that question, George Baker was unequivocal in his own prescription, this by suggesting that the exhibition "announces a contemporary war between the false plenitude of the technological/curatorial Imaginary and the uneasy challenge of the artistic Real. The time has come to choose sides."[24] Of course, any return to the self-styled actuality of an older Modernism would also miss the point by erring on the side of a dull and nostalgic obviousness, missing whatever real opportunity for a transformative aesthetics might be available in our current moment of semiotic exhaustion, which is also a moment of unprecedented social, political, and technological transition.

## III

   If we return to the seemingly unavoidable conclusion that the 2002 Whitney Biennial was overburdened by the half-baked, we also have to honestly ask whether this was more or less preferable to yet another over-baked

affair, especially in the context of a post-9/11, post-irony art world. Of course, the easy answer is to find the median point between these two extremes of straw, this being an ideal that casts art as instrument of adjustment between the subject and his/her environment, or a form of vernacular expression redeemed by a knowing embrace of the historically-derived codes of high style.

But instead of embracing such an ideal, we have what Bob Nickas referred to as the exhibition's "schizophrenic mood: all high-tech, gimmickry, gadgetry one minute then homemade, crafty, and funky the next."[25] It would be more precise, instructive and useful to note the *schizoidal* mode of the exhibition, rather than point to an alleged schizophrenia that fails to understand the clinical implications of the latter term, itself given to a long history of many flights of romanticism in art world circles. Schizophrenia is in fact an imprecise umbrella term covering several distinct styles of psychosis having very different etiologies. The ascription *schizoid* is more specifically pointed at the common condition of internal objects in conflict with each other's representations of parental introjects while simultaneously being contained, nullified and dependent upon a governing (administrativist?) ego. William Fairbairn's groundbreaking system of endopsychic distinctions is useful here, especially if we make the leap of faith necessary to see the panoply of works in the 2002 Whitney Biennial as being externalized projections of his notion of internal objects and disassociated part-objects, and the curatorial orchestration and containment of those objects functioning as an unintentional attempt to mirror his theory of the psyche's dynamic internal structure. As Fairbairn summarized:

> The ego and therefore libido is fundamentally object-seeking...Internalization of the object is a defensive measure...a distinct psychological process...aspects of the internalized object, viz. its exciting and its frustrating aspects, are split off from the main core of the object and repressed by the ego...The resulting internal situation is one where the original ego is split into three egos – a central (conscious) ego attached to the ideal object (ego-ideal), a repressed libidinal ego to the exciting (or libidinal) object) and a repressed anti-libidinal ego attached to the rejecting (or antilibidinal) object. This internal situation represents a basic schizoid position.[26]

When Fairbairn's "basic schizoid position" progresses from the commonplace defense mechanism of compartmentalization to disassociation upheld as a central personality trait and pervasive character dysfunction, we can also see incremental collapse and/or malformations of condensing internal structures come into play. These internal structures normally allow for the "acting in and working through" of everyday frustration that allows it to be transformed into the

kind of ego strength that best describes what we think of when we use the word "wisdom." Therefore, with such collapses we also see concomitant increases in displacement-derived "actings-out" reflecting the dialectic of a lack of impulse control countervailed by an anti-libidinal program of impulse compartmentalization, nullification and denial. Psychic architecture is therefore split, meaning that the processes of internalization and working through are precluded by a lack of the kind of internal structure, fixating the subject in a condition of internal stalemate. Oftentimes, this stalemate operates as an adolescent fixation on a fetishized notion of being-qua-being staged as a self-perpetuating reaction-formation arrayed against anxieties stemming from a lack of real agency attached to real doing; real accomplishment called by longer names.

Thus, in place of the agency of doing, we see a valorizing emphasis on the pseudo-doing that Judith Butler and others have called "performativity," and performativity was what the 2002 Whitney Biennial had in exaggerated and discordant spades, although all of the major exhibitions of contemporary art held during the 1990s also embraced "performativity" to greater or lesser degrees, and with varying degrees of critical awareness of the term's implications within and beyond gender studies. As Butler has written: "Gender is always a doing, though not a doing by a subject who might be said to pre-exist the deed."[27] Similarly, art is also a doing, an objectified event even when it is manifested as a presumably eventful object. But it is questionable whether its status as such pre-exists the artist-subject that "does" it, which is another way of asking whether the artist is a creative agent or merely a para-institutional appendage that facilitates a pre-scripted orchestration of art-making according to the unspoken, albeit implicit, specifications of a superordinative cultural appetite, including the one that specifies highly contoured "subversions" that preach to an all-too-reified choir.

With the new valorization of performativity understood as a perpetual "becoming" requiring exonymic facilitation to pass through the threshold of doing, the vexing discrepancy of contemporary art comes into clear focus, for inscribed within it are all of the disingenuous appeals to an embrace of "radical" artistic practice that pretends that all feckless and nugatory things are revolutions waiting to happen, rather than mere pseudo-novelties seeking a mere moment of circulation in a context driven by administrativism's will-to-distraction. It is worth remembering that the term performativity harks back to J. L. Austin's classic analysis of philosophical grammar titled *How to Do Things with Words*,[28] and that, in Austin's schema, so-called *performatives* need to operate in concert with *constitutives* to complete the circuit of communication, thereby mirroring the fundamental psychoanalytic dialectic of *displacement* and *condensation*. The assumptions of recent performativity theories give no such credit to the constitutive dynamics of communicative agency, playing

into administrativism's hands by parading under the banner of "identity" and hijacking investigations into artistic value by subsuming them under sociological questions pointed at the politics that apportion artistic identity. Always, there are two obvious albeit contradictory answers: 1) Everybody and 2) Whoever is so designated by the interlocking directorates of art administration.

Recent theory has made much of the libertine potentials of understanding identity as an exclusively rhetorical and "performative" condition, the recognition of which is alleged to be synonymous with a bold new freedom that attains its status by sacrificing both vocation and volition for a state of being that narcissistically confuses momentary privilege with an ideal state. Presumably, the "freedom" indicated here lies in adapting a critical hypervigilance of the arranged and constructed character of social ordination, or by embracing camp eccentricities that spectacularize a playful – but still schizoidal –indifference to same.[28] This represents the most valuable aspect of the new performativity: it can occasion a backhanded discovery of simple everyday empathy that again might remind us that art can be the thing that reminds us that life is indeed more important than art.

Curators oftentimes compare their role to that of the conductor of a symphony, and Baker's review of the 2002 Whitney Biennial alluded to the exhibition's theme of "the curator as a kind of hip-hop sampler of artistic statements through the labyrinthine mega-narrative of the mega exhibition...it was no coincidence there were so many DJs in the current show."[29] One striking work that simultaneously deviated from and reflected upon that mega-narrative was Peter Sarkisian's *Hover* (1999), which was a set of five video projections directed to the top and sides of a cube of classically minimalist proportion. The projections featured images of a nude woman interacting with her young son in a way that evoked the Mother and Child subjects of Renaissance art, only here they gradually become blurred like ghosts after seeming to want to escape from within the confines of the cube. Rarely has any work of contemporary art taken as its subject the mother and child dyad, and almost never in the annals of contemporary art has such intelligent attention been lavished upon it in a way that subtly balanced an earthy idealism with the sinister implications of a technological prison revealed as the source of deep-rooted unhappiness. In fact, one could go so far as to say that *Hover* succinctly implicated technology as contributing to the unhappiness that it seeks to ameliorate, simultaneously creating emotional distance while freezing the memory of primal plenitude. As Donald Kuspit has pointed out, "modern art is a dialectic of mastery and anxiety" trapped in a vicious cycle: "Anxiety gets the modern subject coming and going...its efforts at mastery produces heroic technologies...designed to make life more bearable...(paradoxically) induc[ing] it [anxiety] because of the change it produces."[30] Thus, Sarkisian gives us a post-human evocation for the most timeless of human nostalgias, revealed in

fleeting moments of idealized memories that accusatorily haunt our schizoidal post-emotions, much the same way as the recorded reveries featured in Samuel Beckett's *Krapp's Last Tape* seem to address us as dead subjects remembering a life once lived.

## IV

The 49th Venice Biennale that took place during the summer of 2001 may or may not have been a house with many mansions, but it certainly was a house with many home entertainment centers. Video installations predominated curator Harold Szeemann's exhibition of the work of over 120 artists culled from around the world, all of whom were paraded under the ironic banner of *The Plateau of Humanity*. When rendered in French or Italian, this term carried multiple connotations – ranging from "pinnacle" to simply "display platform"– but the exhibition was decisively clear about its post-human view of the humanity it proposed to highlight. Here, the shadow world of exsanguinated mass-media phantoms were everywhere to be seen and heard, be they in the slow-motion still-life of impassive characters pictured in Bill Viola's *Quintet of the Unseen* (2000) or in the high speed MTV-inspired jump-cuts of Chris Cunningham's erotically charged video projections. They were also projected loud and clear in Com + Com's loudly over-elaborated spoof on the *X-Files* television program (titled *C-Files: the Tell Saga)* which presented itself as a theatrical trailer for a non-existent film featuring secret agents time-traveling into the world of William Tell. Along the way, it also functioned as a promotional tool for merchandise that was derived from it, driving home the tired point that, in big extravaganzas like the Venice Biennale, art has become just another form of corporate entertainment – the tawdry bait that puts the machinery of cultural tourism into lucrative play. In João Onofre's video projection titled *Casting* (2000), another, somewhat funnier, version of the post-human is invoked: that of vapid Gap models taking turns reciting poetic statements in deadpan fashion, their affectless self-consciousness obliterating any meaning that might inhere in what they had to say. Rinecke Dijkstra's large photographic portraits of young Israeli soldiers had a similar edge of empty glamour, oftentimes appearing to be frontally blunt examinations of needy children tragically dressed up in warrior's clothes. And Vanessa Beecroft exhibited photographs of women who kept their clothes on, although they were infused by the same aggressive look-but-don't-touch tenor of her more famous formations of nude and semi-nude models. Video projections by Chantal Akerman and Tracy Rose were, respectively, quietly meditative and loudly obstreperous in their (self-?) portrayal of a female protagonist quite literally going insane under the unbearable weight of contradictory self-identifications.

The post-human point was also made undeniably clear by an array of sculpture, which provided *Plateau's* best moments. Near the entrance of the

main exhibition in the old Arsenale, one encountered a collection of mock specimens in large laboratory bottles by Xiao Yu, all looking very much like a series of failed attempts to fuse human and animal anatomy for sinister purposes. Brilliantly driving home a kindred point was Ron Mueck's colossal trompe l'oeil sculpture of a crouching adolescent boy, not only the best single work of art exhibited at this biennial, but the best single work of sculpture done by any artist during the past decade. It is not only a masterpiece of realistic detail that far surpassed anything done by Duane Hanson or Charles Ray, but also one of unmatched psychological complexity. Crouching to fit under the vaulted ceiling of the Arsenale, Mueck's *Boy* looked like a reluctant Atlas trying to hold up the crumbling world of the whole exhibition, seeming at once to be terrified, and at the same time up to a kind of subtle mischief. Allegorical representation was also evident in Maurizio Cattelan's *La Nona Ora* (2000), which was a life-like wax replica of Pope John Paul portrayed as having fallen down amidst heavy machinery, struggling in vain to hold up his symbolic standard (that is, the crucifix on a long papal staff). Here we see something akin to the last gasp of old-style humanism rendered in both elegiac and satirical form, a veritable pietà of the old order going down for a final count before all autonomous volition is sucked-up into a plethora of mechanical servo-mechanisms running out of control.

The world left behind by this great electro-digital evacuation is wittily invoked in an installation by Ilya and Emilia Kabakov titled *Not Everyone Will Be Taken into The Future* (2001). Here, the viewer is positioned as if he or she had just arrived on a train platform, only to see that their train has just departed. Lingering on the platform were a few discarded paintings, themselves the representatives of a discarded individualism deemed unfit for the precise schedule of history's new locomotives. In a collaborative installation by Barry McGee, Stephan Powers, and Todd James titled *Street Market* (2000), human presence was noticeably absent from this fanciful reconstruction of an economically distressed street replete with fully stocked stores and over-turned cars. If there was a human presence, it was only represented by hundreds of McGee's trademark portraits of bowser-faced depressives emblazoned on empty liquor bottles, which comprised a kind of anti-brand brand name – a logo of logolessness. Here, graffiti tags merged into a cascade of other kinds of signage that seem to both mimic and mock the etiquette of corporate logotype in cascades of sheer agitation.

In contrast, paintings by Gerhard Richter and Helmut Federle seemed like routine exercises in modernist meditation, passively giving the viewer the choice of either slowing down to tune in to their stately stoicism aspiring to a forsaken autonomy, or to walk on by to be hypnotized by the next videographic bug zapper. A socially conscious alternative to all of these images of distraction and social evacuation was docked in the lagoon outside the Arsenale.

Collaboratively developed by Joep van Lieshout and Dr. Rebecca Gompertz, *A-Portable* (2001) was in fact a floating medical facility designed to provide abortions to women in countries where the procedure is against the law (presumably by being towed into international waters). A posted explanatory statement by Van Lieshout beat the viewer to the obvious punch: "Is this art? To ask reveals an outdated set of assumptions. To understand the work, one must move from ontology (what is art?) to pragmatics (what can art do?). Herein lies a possible revival of avant-garde politics."[31] Implicit here is the idea that the rest of the work in *Plateau* had forsaken such politics in favor of a cascade of empty postures, a notion that is very hard to dispute.

Like other exhibitions of its ilk, Szeemann's *Plateau of Humanity* turned out to be just another one of contemporary art's many roadside attractions, and despite the fact that it was larger than most, it stood for nothing save its own "positionality" vis-à-vis other shows of its type. There was far too much consideration given over to the strategic covering of "important" curatorial bases, and not nearly enough to the aesthetic, poetic, and ideological coherence undergirding the actual experience of seeing the show. But the experience of "seeing the show" is no longer the point of exhibitions like *Plateau*; rather, they now primarily serve as theaters of legitimization that represent and certify that the artists included therein are to be accorded a specific level of bankable career status.

This imperative was taken to sublime ridiculousness in the case of Cy Twombly's receipt of the coveted *Leone d'Oro* award for lifetime achievement, represented here by a suite of 12 recent paintings allegedly representing the 1571 Battle of Lepanto (where the Venetian fleet met and defeated the navy of the Ottoman Sultan). The fact the paintings themselves were atrocious, haphazardly pretending to heroic commemoration (and heroic spontaneity) is to not say enough, for it is also evident that they were all painted from the same pots of expedient paint, undermining what little specificity they might have had. The other winner of the lifetime achievement award was Richard Serra, represented by two of his trademark swirls of torqued steel, works that were impressive enough in their own right, but also hard to truly see, given that their inclusion seemed so much more a *de rigueur* bow to art world pecking orders than any real sense of deserved place within the exhibition's alleged mission of displaying the new and the noteworthy.

Because of this twin emphasis on art career certification and curatorial career positionality, the 49th Venice Biennale proved to be a predictable edifice consecrated to hedged bets writ internationally large. We should remember that it was curated by the same Harold Szeemann who gave us the 1969 *When Attitudes Become Form* and the 1972 *Documenta V* exhibitions, both pressing an urgently critical agenda (that being of the historical significance of post-minimal and conceptual art) with great intelligence and timely

energy. There can be no doubt that these exhibitions stemmed from a deep critical consciousness of the world of their time, and that they were unparalleled in their sophisticated representation of their moment. But at the turn of the third millennium, Szeemann (and in fact, the whole art world as we now know it) seemed to be resting on his hard-earned laurels, treading water on the Grand Canal, as he did in the same directorial role two years previous to *plateau*. The result is an exhibition that looks more like an art fair than anything else, which is to say that it comes off like a cacophonous hodge-podge of conflicting aims and agendas that tended to nullify one another. Even his loyal allies seemed to be turning on him. Witness Benjamin Buchloh's rather curious remark about the exhibition in the September 2001 *Artforum*: "Here, the called-for response is neither individual contemplation nor simultaneous collective reception. Exhibition value – the condition of the secularized modernist work as fully emancipated from cult value and myth – has been replaced by spectacle value, a condition in which media control in everyday life is mimetically internalized and aggressively extended to those visual practices that had either been defined as either exempt from or opposed to mass-cultural regimes, and that now relapse into the most intense solicitation of mythical experience."[34] This rather shrill statement begs us to ask, can we actually still believe that the articulation of the Benjamite exhibition object (and the long lineage of administrativist murders-of-the-author stemming from it) is anything other than the entity that is directly responsible for (and the direct beneficiary of) the ascendancy of spectacle objects in today's art world of pseudo-critical cultural tourism? Either you have artists who crystallize their experience, or you have administrators who use putative artworks as the raw material for a "signing" of agreed-upon simulations of experience. The latter has always provided greater opportunities for the real depredations of social manipulation, myth or no myth.

This recognition of the ascendancy of cultural tourism and its attendant stylings of art administrator art provided the most useful sensitizing context for the summer 2002 iteration *of Documenta* taking place for the eleventh time in Kassel, Germany (as well as in other satellite venues). In the context of a cultural tourism configured as the new patron of new art, *Documenta* is the top of the administrativist food chain, establishing many of the thematic keynotes that many other international biennials use to define their own agendas, just as it would now seem to select its artistic director from the ranks of those administrators who have previously organized said biennials. Summer 2002 gave us the eleventh iteration of the 100 days of Documenta with Nigerian-born artistic director Okwui Enwezor, who had previously distinguished himself via his organization of the 1997 Johannesburg Biennial titled *Tradewinds and Bordercrossings*. For the first time in its almost fifty-year history, *Documenta* was directed by a curator who is not from Europe (Enwezor emi-

grated to the United States in 1992), thereby portending a very different exhibition with a decidedly non-Eurocentric slant. In fact, it delivered on this promise, but only in a way that demonstrated that art administrator art is now a global phenomena, offering many local versions of the same worn-out strategies which look much too much like minor variations on well-known stylistic themes presented over and over.

Here, a word about scale. *Documenta XI* was huge, consisting of 115 more-or-less complete solo-exhibitions clustered in or around three large venues that were just barely within comfortable walking distance of each other. This time around, Enwezor added to this by establishing four additional "platforms, "which were symposia that had previously taken place in Vienna, Berlin, New Delhi, St. Lucia, and Lagos, with each of these proceedings memorialized by its own publication which was circulated in addition to the two exhibition catologues of the fifth platform, that being the actual exhibition in Kassel. From all of this brouhaha, one can surmise that *Documenta* is now casting itself as a kind of global megaconference on the state of culture, and it is undeniably true that the most significant thing about the exhibition was how it indexed the anxious emergence of cities such a Bogotá, Havana, and Dakar into the conflicted realms of global (post)modernity. In general, it is fair to say that the work in Enwezor's exhibition did not shy away from its own conflicted state: this was no "United Colors of Benetton" exercise in enforced multicultural harmony so much as it is a series of quasi-critical disquisitions taking place in the amorphous spaces where "neo-colonialism" and "post-colonialism" negotiate their invisible boundaries. Sometimes, these investigations lapsed into easy and reactive clichés of criticality, displaying effects that presume to represent vexing dilemmas without really digging too deep into their whys and wherefores. A rather typical example of this was to be found in Tania Bruguera's installation, where gallery visitors were herded into a darkened room, only to be hit by blinding lights while two shadow-shrouded actors stationed on an overhead platform respectively stomped about and fidgeted with the bolt of an automatic rifle. No doubt, this work was intended to give the viewer a disquieting taste of what it might be like to be subjected to the rawest form of "state control," but it came off as reveling in a comic book cliché of oppression's machinations, studiously avoiding any examination of the underlying ethos of oppression. Working on another pole of the same thematic continuum was a video installation by The Atlas Group, which provided information and interview footage pertaining to the suspicious sinking of a refugee-laden ship off the coast of Italy a few years back. One video feed showed a remote camera view of the bottom of the sea, while another featured a parade of commentators exonerating themselves from any responsibility for this human tragedy. The message that "bureaucrats lie" is an old and honorable one, but one wonders where and how the installation is placing blame – it

certainly doesn't refute the claim that the tragedy was caused by a freakish series of unavoidable accidents, unless the unavoidability in question was based on the right of any country to use immigration policies to control its borders.

The permeability of boundaries was a consistent theme running through much of the work presented in *Documenta XI*. The best work of this ilk was found in a series of photographs by Allan Sekula, most of which took the Los Angeles harbor as their subjects. This seemed prosaic enough, but in Sekula's hands, the images became masterful articles of two types of archeology – one documentary and one poetical –allowing the harbor to be viewed as a complex sociocultural slate upon which a multitude of semi-disappearing histories were written over and around each other. This message of passages and interpenetrating histories was revealed by picturing a kind of time where distant events seem to have happened all at once. Sounding a more visceral note was Yinka Shonibare's installation titled *Gallantry and Criminal Conversion* (2002), which was breathtakingly hilarious. It consisted of a large room with about a dozen headless mannequins, all elegantly dressed in lavish 18th-century costumes, accompanied by a cab of an old horse-drawn carriage. They were all posed as if they were enacting various sexual positions, some hanging from the high ceiling like erotic trapeze artists. The most unabashedly delightful work in the exhibition was the two miniature fantasy cities made by Bodys Isek Kingelez. These were imaginative and fanciful version of what big cities are in fact becoming: fantasy sites of fugitive transit saturated with many types of ornate spectacle. Mona Hatoum's installation (titled *Homebound*, 2002) consisted of an everyday room filled with 1950s-era furniture, all of which was connected by copper wire and periodically subjected to jolts of high voltage electricity. On a more somber front, there was the terse and disquieting installation by Mark Manders, an artist who completely out-Gobered Robert Gober's typical poetry of uncannily juxtaposed everyday objects as revealed in the latter artist's disappointing installation in the American pavilion of the 2001 Venice extravaganza.

In general, it is fair to say that *Documenta* featured an abundance of work that emphasized some type of documentary realism, making much of the exhibition seem like a highbrow National Geographic emporium – the whole world distilled in a fiercely anti-allegorical and anti-historical snapshot, so staged as an implied riposte to the over-the-top (pseudo-) historicism of Catherine David's *Documenta X* from 1997. Thus, there was always the aesthetic friction that existed between the bizarre unreality of the *Documenta* venues and the attempts of various artworks to reveal some kind of unvarnished reality from a faraway place. Further heightening this unreality was the undulate throngs of people coming from near and far to see the exhibition, creating a carnival atmosphere that annoyed some art world snobs, who would do well to chant: "the art world subsumed and masticated under the banner of

cultural tourism smiles at us all, and all any of us can do is smile back."

In general, most of the mega-exhibitions that have taken place since Christos Joachimides and Norman Rosenthal organized Metropolis at the Walter Gropius Bau in 1991 have placed considerations pertaining to what might constitute an effective work on the back burner so that questions about "who does and does not get to be an artist" can live in the rhetorical limelight, this emphasis being the root cause of why the art world has devolved from an area of endeavor to a mere arena of more-or-less arbitrary inclusion. We would do well to take note of the fact that the Basel Art Fair opened at roughly the same time as the 51st Biennale de Venezia in 2005, meaning that one could surmise the need for some aggressive institutional branding that could stretch across the Dolomites, let alone the rest of the art world. And the Biennale did just that, self-consciously branding itself as a "cultural event" rather than a trade fair precisely at the time when inquiring minds are asking about the difference between commodified commerce and meaningful culture in our brave new world of omni-global cultural tourism – this owing to the fact that there are now more international biennial exhibitions of contemporary art than anyone can count. Fortunately, this glut seems to have at last sparked a kind of competitive impulse, and so this third Venice Biennale of the 21st century has done something that no other similar show had thus far attempted, that being a staging of two separate exhibitions that were designed to both compliment and contest one another's premises in the manner of an aesthetic boxing match.

As has been the case for well over a decade, the national pavilions (now numbering over seventy) were relegated to sideshow status in relation to the two large curated exhibitions that were ensconced under the big-tops of the Arsenale and the spacious Italian pavilion that now no longer shows the work of Italian artists. This *uno-due* punch proved to be the innovative master-stroke of presentation that brought the whole biennial enterprise into a provocative focus: no proliferation of *tutti-mista* "diversity" here, just two examples of solid curation who didn't overreach themselves while doing an exceedingly good job of playing off the other's seemingly opposed premises.

The spacious Italian pavilion contained an exhibition curated by Spanish curator Maria de Coral, and was titled *The Experience of Art*. This was a stately and stylish grouping of the work of well-known artists who could be thought of as institutional favorites. At the heart of this sprawling group exhibition was a set of large photographs by Thomas Ruff, all landscape images that had been pixilated, and then pixilated again to once again drive home the point that big photographs have become the new painting. Apparently, no one has informed Ruff that we have come to a pass where big drawings on paper have become the new big photographs claiming to be the new painting. Paintings by Antonio Tapies, Francis Bacon, and Philip Guston were also on view, the latter two installed in such a way to suggest that a contest was being staged

between them, mirroring the contest between the two curated exhibitions, and indeed, between the Biennale and the Basel Art Fair.

The Arsenale played host to an exhibition curated by Rosa Martinez (also from Spain) titled *Always a Little Further*, which cast itself as a post-avant-gardist walk on the wild sides of mock perversity and social criticism. Here, a clutch of new, brightly colored posters by the Guerrilla Girls reminded everybody that racial and gender fairness has again eluded the organization of the Biennale, while fat-boy performance artist Leigh Bowery was videotaped wearing the garb of Mexican wrestlers. At the other end of the seemingly end-less building, Rem Koolhaus gave us more posters, these being smart interro-gations of what the idea of a museum could be taken to represent in the not-too-distant-Future(ism?).

It is interesting to note that the Venice Biennale was founded in 1896, the same year that brought us the modern Olympics, and the same year that gave us the invention of cinema, the coining of the term psychoanalysis, and the publication of Bram Stoker's *Dracula*. Coincidence? Most certainly, but the point here is that both the Olympics and the Biennale came into being when the ideas of nationalism and community of nations carried with them a good deal of idealistic currency – meaning that the former was understood to be the athletic version of the artistic latter, and vice versa. In 1896, there were about a dozen national pavilions ensconced in the Venetian *Giardini*, those representing European countries that were still decades away from even think-ing about the word "post-colonialism." Now, a bit more than a century later, there were 70 national pavilions, some from places that still might be consid-ered exotic, although not so exotic so as to not have a government-sponsored ministry of culture. These were quite interesting, although I have to report here that Ed Ruscha's exhibition in the US pavilion was not quite the *coup de grace* that some hoped it would be when the news of his participation was circulated that past spring. What Ruscha did was take five works that he executed in 1992, and do a second series updating their subjects and compositions to cre-ate a kind of before and after presentation that pictured the post-NAFTA trans-formation of manufacturing into a kind of globalized mercantilism. Certainly, this was an American story, one that was almost overshadowed because, for a while, it seemed that the American pavilion might have to go begging because of limited government funds from the State Department's Bureau of Educa-tional and Cultural Affairs. Suffice to say here that "generous support" from a variety of interested parties came to the rescue.

It is interesting to note that for a number of years, *Documenta* and the Venice Biennale have engendered a kind of alternative exhibition called *Manifesta*, which has been an exhibition of the work of artists from Europe staged in a different European city every two years. In 2002, it took place in Frankfurt, which was home to the airport used by most of those who flew in to

see *Documenta*. This European Biennial (curated by Iara Boubnova, Nuria Enguita Mayo, and Stephanie Moisdon Trembley) featured the work of some artists working in a documentary-realist vein, and in general works of that type seemed more rewarding than the majority of projects that recirculated tired Fluxist and Situationist clichés in the name of a supposedly radical life/art praxis. Without such documentary efforts, both *Documenta XI* and *Manifesta 4* would have come off as just another nostalgic nod to the oxymoronic moieties of the institutional avant-garde at a time when its credibility was falling into a steep and serious decline. This point was particularly driven home by Marc Bijl's installation titled *Resist* (2002). Here, the artist simply spray-painted the characters of the title word onto the six mock-Corinthian columns standing in front of the Portikus Kunsthalle. A noble sentiment in our troubled times? No doubt, but it is one that sticks in our throat when we see it in its dwarfed architectural relation to the nearby Frankfurt Banking Towers, themselves looking like 300 foot tall stacks of gambling chips. In this dramatic comparison, we witnessed a harrowing reminder of who really controls the game of a putative "resistance," and at *Manifesta 4*, Bijl's *Resist* looked almost as sentimental as one of Thomas Kinkade's babbling brooks.

# Chapter 2

## Schizoid Administrativism

*The information economy was a Ponzi scheme spiraling out of control. The investment bankers got rich slaving away, so they called their tax accountants, who got so rich filing government forms that they called their investment bankers back for advice about where to invest their surging wealth. The investment bankers were also miserable, so they called their therapists, who billed them by the hour to listen like a good friend and assure them that they weren't crazy. They worked so hard that they neglected their families, so many of which ended up in divorce. They called their divorce lawyers. The lawyers worked even harder than the investment bankers and suffered physical maladies that the doctors charged them ridiculous fees to attempt to cure. The doctors, worried about being sued by the lawyers, called their insurance brokers for malpractice coverage. The engineers built computer systems that helped all of them speed up this cycle so that they could call and bill at a faster pace. The engineers that didn't build computers worked in the military industry at the request of the politicians, who were worried that Iranians might invade Florida. The politicians kept changing the laws so the lawyers could be kept busy, and they kept changing the tax code so that the accountants could be kept busy, and they kept borrowing money to keep the investment bankers busy. This was the Third Law of Information Economics at work, and it was the way of the future.*

*- Po Bronson, Bombardiers* (1995)[1]

*Thus, there is not only the reality of the model, there is also no reality other than that of the model. Consequently, developers pro-*

*duce cities that are models for cities, architects produce buildings*
*that are models for buildings, and artists produce works of art*
*that are models of the idea of art.*

- Peter Halley, *Essence and Model* (1986)[2]

## I

To stand upon the west balcony of Mario Botta's Museum of Modern Art in San Francisco is to see the future. Below stretches Third Street, running north to south like an urban Nile. On the opposite bank of this liminal river, one sees a stark causeway running westward between the Visual and Performing Arts buildings of the Yerba Buena Center for the Arts, the latter bearing a stunning similarity to the Middle Kingdom temple at Luxor. At the far end of the causeway, past an urban park which is an anemic study in surveilable, over-manicured artificiality, we see the newest building in the area, the Sony Metreon entertainment complex, a grandly scaled arcade of hyper-administered spectacle which is the most recent addition to San Francisco's new downtown cultural nexus, which just happens to be geographically convenient to the subterranean cavern of the Moscone Convention Center located one short block away. This complex-of-complexes has been aptly dubbed "the necropolis" by street-smart hipsters, perhaps as a way of referring to its futuristic resemblance to a Pharaonic burial site, and also because it ushers in a new historical moment in which there are no more streets to be smart in. Cars and trucks may continue to career about on roadways, but these bear no resemblance to the streets of yore – those being the Montmartres and Bunker Hills that were once inhabited by undulating crowds of modern boulevardiers reflecting upon the dialogical meanings that once seemed to inhere in unsupervised social encounter. At the necropolis, the modern crowd has been displaced by the postmodern congregation desperately pretending to be a public, with the paradoxical index of this pretense being its willingness to sell the very idea of public interest for the Barmacide illusions of momentary congregational benefit. When Theodor Adorno took note of the fact that "people cling to what mocks them in confirming their own essence," making "common cause with the world against themselves" via "their own conversion into appendages of machinery,"[3] he was not merely touching on the grim anti-democratic and anti-subjectivist seductions of Hollywood's corporate dream machine. He was also elucidating the earliest manifestations of an all-pervasive marketing model which would soon come to permeate all facets of public culture, most especially that of the museum, where the idea of "display" was already becoming as much of a cost-benefit calculation of "show business" as any over-hyped

action-adventure saga.

More than anything else, the ascendance of marketing – that is, the incremental making over of reality in the image of the marketer by way of convincing people that they should want things which they never knew that they wanted – is now the most telling index of the way we live. Since the 1950s, we have seen the slow but steady ascendance of an interdisciplinary field called "motivational research," defined as "a type of research that seeks to learn what motivates people in making choices. It employs techniques designed to reach the unconscious or subconscious mind because preferences generally are determined by factors of which the individual is not conscious."[4] The contemporary import of this ascendancy lies in how its increasing sophistication and availability has saturated everyday life in a social arrangement where corporate culture continues to consolidate, replicate, extend and amplify its invisible hegemony by synthesizing the worst of capitalism (omen-present commodification stemming from ever-more arduous standards of "accountability" to mythical bottom-lines) with the worst of socialism (endless, Kafkaesque bureaucracy and the gatekeeper's culture of extortion and protracted deferral spawned by it), it becomes clear that the end of the Cold War called for a new descriptive term for its nightmare moment of feverish consolidation, which now extends not only to all points of the known globe, but into cyberspace as well – the "final frontier" for the marketer's estimable alchemy of inventing persuasive illusions of value from the thin air of precisely managed fantasy. We can only shudder when we contemplate the implications of a leading advertising executive's claim that "the stuff with which we work is the fabric of men's minds."[5]

Rather than joining Fredric Jameson in wistfully pretending that we are in the throes of something called "late capitalism," I would like to advance the term "techno-bureaucratic capitalism" as a more accurate tag for marking the current moment of capitalism's final assimilation of any actionable connection between personal volition and the legitimate hope for the creation of a better world.[6] No doubt such hopes were in their own way naïve in that they assumed that the imperatives of universal justice and practical liberation could somehow be synthesized into a grand cultural vision, but at least it was a vision in the ego-ideal sense of the word. As was the case of the Vasarian synthesis of Platonic idealism and Aristotelian mimesis which came to dramatic fruition during the Renaissance, it brought the best out of many artists and writers. Now, in the space of that older vision are the new fetishes of "positionality" within the network and the institution, fetishes whose fundamental cynicism corrodes idealism and finally abolishes the old dichotomy between progressive and reactionary. In its place, we have a resurgent acquiescence to the age-old cynicism that sees the world first and foremost as a drama of insiders and outsiders. Thus, where heroes of mastery and/or innovation once bestrode the

earth as colossi, opportunists have since supervened to the disastrous detriment of any aspiration to the building of a better world, let alone any hope to gain a stable moment of intra-subjective coherence.

Amid this subtly nightmarish moment of historical transformation, we can also take note of the change in the presiding ethos which frames and inhabits that complex system of symbolic exchange which we call "art." Much has been written about the continued inoperability of the old humanistic ethos after the global tragedy of the Second World War, the "governing fiction" of humanism having been decried as being "not humanistic enough" by some, and vigorously dismissed as irrelevant, hypocritical, and ridiculously nostalgic by others. Some, following Theodor Adorno's famous proscription, linked its collapse to a necessary and permanent moratorium on the writing of poetry, while others saw in it an opportunity to sketch, circulate, and enforce new meta-narratives which were redolent of their own previously *outre* idealism that privileged spontaneity at the expense of an overburdened will-to-mastery. One function of this unleashing of a "return" of a "repressed" transcendental idealism was that, for a brief historical moment, art in its modernist and avant-gardist guises became a form of religion rather than a mere prompting to it, offering spontaneously concretized moments of metaphysical revelation stemming from paradoxical symbols of the instantaneous transcendence of symbolism. Such productions were viewed as offering salutary moments of a psychical "starting anew" even as they could also be viewed as gestures which erased or blanked out the old, confirming the notion of art history as being the dramatic chronicle of an Oedipal dream where relevant hope always reigns superior to irrelevant remembrance. This was the stuff of necessary invigoration and wish-fulfillment, even as it tended toward a kind of narrow historical blindness which would eventually prove to be its undoing.

Since the middle 1960s, however, the symbolic perpetuation of phenomenological and existential notions of "essence" have been linked to the aforementioned collapsed humanism, although fairness dictates that we remind ourselves that these notions also came into historical being as an attempt to negate, challenge, and/or escape from humanism's self-confirming "hallucination of history." In the place of these sometimes competing and sometimes cooperating modernist notions of essences immutable and transcendent, we can now fairly point to another model of meaning having come to the fore, the model of radical perspectivalism and its urging forth of a world of designated meaning surrounding and reigning triumphant over all manifestations of autonymic volition and the condition of embodied self-invention stemming from it. Where identity was once cast as a knot-of-consciousness that was rich in meanings running as a fugue from inside to out, it is now most often understood to be an epiphenomenal and exonymic function of naming, packaging, and positionality. Peter Halley elaborated on this idea when he wrote: "Exist-

ence is defined only in terms of position. If position is lost, existence vanishes."[7] This is a statement that gains additional importance via its clarifying of the confusion to which Robert Hughes confessed when he cited this postmodern "incantation" written by Tricia Collins and Richard Milazzo:

> If placing a frame around culture, if "framing" the media properly describes the mechanism of appropriation, then the mere consciousness of the frame bracketing or framing the frame or the framer, and the hybridization of this regression and instrumentalization, both captures the legacy of appropriation and projects its demise in the hyperframe.[8]

Both of these statements bespeak the recognition that the heroic artist model of visual culture has been gradually displaced by a newer vision of the artist as a cultural worker, or – more to the point – a *cultural functionary* who is in turn managed by others who are in their own turn managed by policy. This is an idea that is deeply indebted to Pharaonic priorities that privilege the superordinating position of the priestly administrator (as opposed to the divinely inspired artificer of Greco-Roman extraction, that being the artist who could create the illusion of animating dead matter) as being (post) history's primary world-historical actor.

Given this trajectory, it is not surprising to note that one of the chief earmarks of this important shift in priorities is to be found in the widespread ascendancy of what Caroline Jones has aptly dubbed "the executive artist," who is "an image manager, or the director of bulldozers and discourses." Such artists produced works that "resonated with a broad visual culture of the corporate logotype, the commodity ad or the industrial mine."[9] In other words, their productions can be viewed as concretized instances of "administrator envy" in their exploitive orchestration of and taking credit for the labor of others, even as their visibility and success can be taken as the results of currying favor with real administrators via a galvanization of their values into forms which gain their coherence by codifying and implicitly valorizing administrative attitudes. To state the same thing in simpler terms, postmodern/post avant-garde art is almost by definition an institutional art *par excellence,* and is perhaps all the more so in its moments of shrill denigration of what it alleges to be bourgeois values, said shrillness being a diversionary tactic configured to camouflage the bourgeois affiliations (and agendas) of the denigrator. As such, it is circumstantially disengaged from and perhaps even contemptuous of both the sensible world and the values gained through an integration of lived experience conducted in self-conscious dialogue with that world's terms. It is first and foremost an art of code that worshipfully fetishizes same as a talisman that would ward-off an increasingly indifferent and hostile future. It knows not

what it is nor what it wants to be, only what it fears, which is its likely potential for eventual insignificance, the-death-of-a-thousand-dismissals called by another name. And yet, as perversity would have it, the art of code behaves in a way that taunts and invites such dismissals via its dogged insistence on the authority of stereotypes, hoping against hope that it can perpetually have its institutionally captive audience while it insults its need for exopsychic fulfillment.

If our moment is symptomatically defined by its valorization of the art of code-arrangement, it follows that the artist would be cast as a strategic arranger of pre-existing approximations of experience, engaging in a practice that has in essence been reduced to a scholastic's algebra of tropes and genres which can only come into symbolic light when they fit into an institutional regime which is, of course, driven by the primary institutional appetite of privileging loyalty at the expense of ability. This leads to the compunctive fealty of the many instances of contemporary art which assume design (i.e. constitutive arrangement) to be psycho-aesthetically superior to artistic performance – here cast as the rhapsode's craft of rhetorical seduction that was so vigorously despised in Plato's *Ion*.[10] The reason for this is that such art cannot come to any social fruition without explicit institutional sponsorship and collaboration, casting institutional administrators and their polemic lackeys as the vested (read: silently controlling) partners in a Jesuitical game of turning designated objects into the valuable relics of a "history" that is in major part a self-serving institutional fiction.

I call the mindset that proliferates this fiction *administrativism,* that being a condition of omni-present *gauche caviars* constituting the real post-historical truth undergirding our age of a supposed pluralism. Contrary to Arthur Danto's elegiac claim that the truth of (post) historical art is that "you can be an abstractionist in the morning, a photorealist in the afternoon, a minimalist in the evening" because "it does not matter what you do,"[11] I would say that it still matters greatly, but not to the over-idealized Hegelian fairy-tale of a history whose alleged disappearance through self-fruition has been such a cause for philosophical alarm and/or celebration. It matters greatly because the thing which renders art into a nugatory manqué of itself and "allows no room for breakthrough" is not an illusory "anything goes" pluralism, but is instead fashion, which ordains what does and does not go via an administered hall of semiotic mirrors that has co-opted the moral authorities which were once accorded to the seemingly contradictory imperatives of "History" and the cult of elective affinities, and in invidious addition has proven itself to be a more effective technology for the manipulation of large populations than any class-bound embrace of tradition could have ever dreamt of being. It matters greatly because of the de-administering potential of art to do something that is idiosyncratically contrary to administration-for-the-sake-of administration (visibly

revealed as administration-as-fashion) which is always latent, and can erupt at any time, which is one reason why art will always remain dangerous.

This recognition of the power of administrativism-through-fashion accounts for a widespread shift of emphasis and orientation in both art historical and art critical writing. During the 1990s, the chief subject matter of such writing has been the various institutional sites of the production and circulation of art,[12] most certainly making a salutary contribution to the project of expanding our awareness of art's place in the world, but also putting paid to the truism which states that the fundamental difference between the neo/pseudo avant-garde and its historical avant-garde predecessors boils down to the difference in mores and psychological politics which are characteristic of the formalized culture of the conference room versus those older ones which stemmed from the improvised informality of the artist's studio and traditional café culture, itself the incubator *par excellence* of unofficial opinion that lives or dies on its at-hand power of topical persuasion. The latter is best understood as a social site of controlled leveling (of outmoded hierarchies and their attendant "dead" rituals of symbolic self-description) in that it is a liminal space that privileges the insurrective insertions of succinct wit as a way of suspending any superordinating stream of official opinion. Conversely, the conference room is a site *par excellence* for a highly filigreed fealty to hierarchically mandated official opinion, limiting oppositionality to doomed strategies of protracted filibuster while giving pride of place to passive-aggressive influence-peddling pretending to be the building of consensus. The conference room recasts wit and imagination as an attribute one deploys to maximize one's position in that room's highly differentiated pecking order, in effect placing it in the service of that order. If the obstinately exhibitionistic bully is the emblematic buffoon of the world recast as a café, then surely we can with equal fairness cast the compunctively strategic sycophant as being the emblematic protagonist of a conference-room world where authority is exercised in the form of a diffuse and omni-present "power mist," to borrow Douglas Coupland's clever term for a mythical fog which represents "the tendency of hierarchies in office environments to be diffuse and preclude crisp articulation."[13] Where café culture can be said to celebrate the demythologized moment that is brought to light by incisive wit, the conference room places its highest premium on the artful deployment of that deathly soporific called euphemism.

This chapter is dedicated to the admittedly daunting task of penetrating the diffusions and deflections of techno-bureaucratic power mist for the sake of accurately describing and analyzing its presiding – indeed, *motivating* ethos – presented here with an eye toward describing how that ethos has consolidated and self-symbolized itself in contemporary visual art production and exhibition. Whereas the past decade has been accompanied by a profusion of

analyses detailing the changing nature of various institutional sites for the production and circulation of symbolic activities, my admittedly more elusive goal reaches further. It is nothing other than an attempt to illuminate the psychological politics and charactological intentionality which continues to give rise to those transformations of practice and emphasis, casting them as the socio-economic epiphenomena of a deeper and deepening pattern of psycho-moral crisis. And let us make no mistake: it is very much a crisis – in fact it is *the* crisis that underwrites the crisis of credibility which art now faces as it contemplates one of two unacceptable fates, those being an unrealistically short-sighted entrenchment into a scholastically hyper-specialized world of self-imposed irrelevance, or the immanently realistic likelihood of being completely swallowed by the all-too-spectacular world of corporate entertainment. Clearly, any attempt at articulating a third alternative to either of these unacceptable destinies will require a head-on engagement with the psycho-moral problems bred by the prevailing ethos, even as that ethos is also viewable as stemming from a pervasive – one could almost say, "naturalized" – condition of markedly proliferating and profoundly inhumane dysfunction.

"Schizoid Administrativism" is my term for that ethos, and it can also be used to describe the system of symbolic priorities and characteristic economy of attention that stems from it. We see manifestations of that system in many major institutional exhibitions of contemporary art, just as we read similar manifestations of it in art magazines and academic journals of critical theory. Its chief hallmark is a fetishistic embrace and valorization of the aesthetics of disassociation and amphigory fantasized and advanced as a talisman of self-evident superiority held against the depredations of an indifferent world, giving tacit impetus to a gatekeeper's culture of ever-more rarefied access (and denial) to a mythical condition of irrationally privileged positionality. The psychomechanics of schizoid administrativism are also routinely manifested in the governing structure that allows and encourages the art which fulfills its peculiar appetite for perverse self-idealization to emboss itself into the public eye as an agent of a quasi-official *fait accomplit*. Almost always, this is accomplished in spite of the larger polity that seldom finds its own sense of psycho-dynamic necessity mirrored in the subtly exploitive priorities of that structure.

It is this circumstance of seemingly omni-present disassociation lying behind my initiating reverie about the future-present revealed as spectacle-shrouded necropolis. It offers a picture of the way that we are supposed to live, according to certain institutionally identified lights who view their task as one of delimiting the history of the future before it ever comes to pass, prompting this chapter's suggestion that the world of art "doth administer itself too much," to play upon Shakespeare's famously suspicious remark. As such, it goes to the newly relevant post-Cold War question pertaining to the real social and political values which the arts act on behalf of – even as the Archimedean

ground upon which questions stand is almost everywhere revealed to be sharply tilted in an administrativist direction. This subtle albeit pervasive tilt always reconfirms that status quo administrativist pseudo-consensus as the default solution to all otherwise irresolvable conflicts over everyday prerogative and the subjective interiority that can be alleged to exercise it, all-the-while failing to acknowledge the degree to which administrativism actually acts to perpetuate such conflicts – mostly through the advancement and circulation of a noisy parade of pseudo-issues – so as to create a confirming condition for the necessity of administrativism's superordinating will-to-power.

And so, even though these remarks are directed at what appears to be a conventional system of institutionally privileging certain types of art, I would go so far as to contend that we also see the ascendant symptomology of Schizoid Administrativism manifesting itself in all aspects of our brave new social world of omnipresent dot.commodification, and this prompts us to once again rethink the age-old question of whether it be better for art to reflect reality (even the schizoid administrativist reality of pervasive and all-encompassing un-reality) or instead ask it to articulate and idealize an ecstatic dream world which could in some compensatory way render the traumas meted out by quotidian circumstance more bearable. No matter how critical one might allege one's motives to be, the fact is that to confront reality in any way whatsoever is to in some way invest in its *a priori* authority – confrontations with authority are always part of the Oedipal path to becoming authority – while the act of compensating for it tacitly admits that, in the end, it is always reality that finally determines our everyday fate, however much we might seek a convivial respite from it.

## II

It was during a visit to Catherine David's *Documenta X* in 1997 that "Schizoid Administrativism" entered my consciousness as a useful descriptive term. While examining Michelangelo Pistoletto's installation in perpetual progress titled *Office of the Black Man* (original version, 1970), I noted that the work claimed to be about the artist's "administration of his own past," which explicitly embraced an alleged "end of productivism," even as the work itself was quite a production number. A bemused multi-lingual crowd gathered around the work's amalgamation of disparate and cryptic relics, and they were all pondering the question of what would come to replace the productivism that Pistoletto's work seemed to want to memorialize. Never to shy away from stating the obvious, I blurted out the word "administrativism" to jovial nods of approval.

Indeed, almost all of *Documenta X* seemed consecrated to the idea of art administrating its own recent past via a kind of algebraic "typosophia," to

use Ecke Bonk's clever designation of his own project.[14] From Rem Koolhaas's systematic reduction of the postmodern cityscape to a generic circuitry of information exchange reflecting "a free-fall in the space of the typographic imagination"[15] to the belated re-exhibition of Gerhard Richter's index of index-card sized photographs that were candidates for subsequent painting subjects (*Atlas: 1962-1996*), the notion of the obsessively privileged reduction of artistically crystallized experience to easily managed information and relics was abundant, and this abundance far outpaced any claims that the exhibition might have made with regard to any notion of "politics." This foreground of information was also underscored by the exhibition's weighty companion book (not really an accompanying catalogue, but a collection of essays commissioned on the occasion of the exhibition, intended as a literary and theoretical equal to the actual exhibition) as well as its auspicious lecture series. It was also underscored by the exhibition's ubiquitous logo featuring a red sans-serif "X" superimposed over a lower-case "d," which created the pictographic representation of the violent nullification of an underdeveloped phallus. Whether it was in Richard Hamilton's presentation of *Seven Rooms* (1997), or the multitude of artist-made websites that were featured in the exhibition's "internet lounge" pavilion, didactic disconnections of text, photography, and architecture was in proliferate abundance, and this linkage could be said to form the psycho-aesthetic cartel working behind the monster "X" that so repeatedly snipped at the little black "d" on the chilly gray signage that adorned the many posters, wall texts, and official publications that were such an omnipresent part of the exhibition and its surrounds.

Nostalgic memorializations of the "revolutionary events of 1968," were an explicit part of values and decision-making processes behind *Documenta X,* which recapitulated many of the rhetorical and stylistic attributes of Harold Szeemann's *When Attitudes Become Form* exhibition of 1969,[16] itself a Phillip Morris-sponsored extravaganza which advanced the cause of "radical" post-studio artistic practices under the tellingly injunctive subtitle "Live in Your Head," which in effect enjoined the reader to make schizoid disassociation his or her everyday defense mechanism. Almost three decades after that injunctive moment, *Documenta X* brought the academy of both the old and the new conceptualism to codified fruition, valorizing it as the dominant art historical tendency of late 20th-century art. As the long-standing hybrid of the "cool" styles of Pop and Minimalism which took inspiration from Marcel Duchamp's campaign of calculated impostership arrayed against the sanctity of art, *Documenta X*'s anthology of both old and new conceptualist orientations were united by one common theme: the programmatic advance of an aesthetic of "administrator envy" as the *sine qua non* of advanced aesthetic thinking that begged to be read as an ex-sanguinated contrast to the feel-good Globalism of Jean Hubert Martin's hyper-pluralistic 1989 *Magiciens de la*

*Terre* at the Centre Pompidou in Paris. But here, the core value of *Documenta X* was an emphasis and celebration of the authority of what Hal Foster has called "specific genealogies of art and theory that exist over time,"[17] and their belated and self-serving *miscognizance* of "the fundamental stake in art and academy: the preservation in affirmative, administered culture of spaces for critical debate and alternative vision."[18]

But something else was lurking under the suspended animation of the show's cryogenic display of "critical debate and alternative vision" reconfigured as a neo-conceptualist valorization of information-for-the-sake-of-information. Perhaps this was the show's cold and bitter tone, which came across as one grand sigh about the ending of an over-idealized historical party that came to an apparent grief of pan-capitalist triumph, recognizing that "the history and the political project of *Documenta* belong to a now vanished era of post-war Europe."[19] But beneath that icy tone, one could also detect a kind of manic enthusiasm for the aforementioned "triumph" of the newly configured system of exchange values that the exhibition secretly idealized however much it pretended otherwise. For what had in fact triumphed was not any tradition of transgression and oppositionality, but only its coded remembrance, itself masking an entirely different reality, which was of course the triumph of the art of code as the central semiotic trope of the institution's right to exercise techno-bureaucratic authority via a manufacturing of the consent of those who are subjected to it. On this score we could make no mistake: the show placed Catherine David herself in the central spotlight as the *prima administorie* who was exercising that authority with an alarming aristocratic abandon upon a supporting cast of vassel artists, lecturers, and exhibition visitors. This rather odd torchlight parade was very much in keeping with a general trend in the art world of the 1990s to celebrate the ascendance of high profile administrative careers with a world-wide construction boom in stunning museum architecture. Given this celebration, as well as the conveniently un-remarked-upon paucity of significant art produced during that decade, one can say with surety that it was no mere coincidence that the *Documenta X* logo held such a striking resemblance to that other common character of the postmodern signscape, the prohibition symbol of red circle-and-slash fame. Taking note of the "deep design" of that symbol, Libby Lumpkin wrote:

> The Prohibition Symbol takes full advantage of the venerable history of the diagonal's iconography. Its domestic domain, however, is benign and banal in comparison to the grandly tragic or blindly utopian sites visited by the diagonal in the past. It perfunctorily polices politesse and political agenda – "do not enter, park, litter, do drugs, get an abortion, be anti-gay." It represents the rule of law, not the word of God or the order of nature, it's a command,

not a commandment. As such, it accommodates the obsolescence
of a social morality grounded in absolute value, as delineated in
the hierarchies of Christian religion and the rhetoric of Modern-
ism, and perfectly emblemizes the currency of a cultural ethic based
on relational values, as articulated in philosophies grounded in
linguistics and difference. The no sign functions as a word, not a
pictograph; the circle with slash is not a simplified picture but a
linguistically coded abstraction.[20]

To which I would add, "a linguistically coded abstraction that serves as
administrativism's instrument of implied coercion." Its serviceability lies in
its efficient branding of a disciplinary agenda into the consciousness of the
viewer who presumably has no choice but to be subjected to it, opening up the
pressing art historical question which asks: to what degree do all forms of
coded abstraction aspire to function in this coercionary way? Given the wide-
spread influence accorded to Clement Greenberg's doctrinaire imperative to
pictorial flatness, which reasonable hindsight allows us to recast as the rhetori-
cal act of erasure (of bourgeois mimesis) so as to clean the art historical slate
for postmodernism's impending proliferation of an institution-driven semio-
sis, one might want to go so far as to implicate the larger share of the entire
institutional art world of the past 40 years for taking subconscious part in
opportunistically facilitating what has been revealed to be a patrician fantasy
of social management parading under the banner of radical aesthetic revolu-
tion. I leave it to the reader to ponder the question of how the totalization of
corporate power in the first decade after the Cold War might lead us to cease
ascribing radical motivation to this institutionalized "revolution," or if its sup-
posedly radical motivations can sincerely claim to have helped people live
better in any significant way.

Even though the conceptualist and post-conceptualist art presented
in *Documenta X* loomed large as a summary statement of late 20th-century art,
I need to acknowledge that my Schizoid Administrativist thesis needs the sub-
stantiation of other examples to flesh out my assertion of its pervasiveness.
Also, it is perhaps important to note here that there have been some
countervailing tendencies that have emerged in other major exhibitions. For
example, in Jan Hout's *Documenta IX* of 1992, and again in the 1997 *Münster
Sculpture Project* curated by Kaspar König and Klaus Bassman, a more play-
ful and interactive spirit prevailed in works that engaged social space in mul-
tivalent, non-didactic terms that privileged the illusion that social space does
not necessarily imply an institutional space. *Documenta IX* and Münster both
registered the chilly ethos of the New Globalism in that they both tried to
engage the idea of how a legitimately high style could be forwarded from it. In
the case of David's *Documenta X,* it was scholastic sanctimony advanced as a

nostalgic manqué of necessary criticality, while at Münster and to a lesser extent *Documenta IX,* it was aesthetic playfulness elevated to a high style that wore an indifference to high style on its sleeve. In other words, at *Documenta X,* having fun constituted a kind of "giving in the enemy," while at *Münster* and *Documenta IX* it was all that was left after everything else had been taken. This latter attribute was also apparent in some other important exhibitions which tried to anthologize the artistic spirit of the 1990s (i.e. the Los Angeles Museum of Contemporary Art's *Helter Skelter* exhibition of 1991, the Royal Academy of London's *Sensation* exhibition of 1997, the Aldrich Museum's *Pop Surrealism* exhibition of 1998), but the supposed fun that was to be gained from the art presented in these shows was by and large the kind that was liberally doused with a pathos which resentfully recognized that real prerogative and real agency lay elsewhere, far beyond the rhetorical reach of images and objects that often collapsed under the metaphorical weight of their own unsublimated infantilism.

Another article of fairness prompts this remark in the direction of a caveat, that being the recognition (contrary to the pop-surrealist tendency toward playful pathos) that the aesthetics of schizoid administrativism can in fact engender works of art to which the term "high style" can be fairly applied, invoking the pathos of what can be called "the schizoid sublime" all-the-while begging the question of the larger morality underwriting such ascriptions. One example of this is the work of Bill Viola, which was featured in a large retrospective at the Whitney Museum in the spring of 1998. Since the mid-1970s, Viola has been well known for creating video-projection installations that use devices such as extreme slow motion, staccato editing, abrupt shifts in scale and focus and layered screens to create surrealistic dream spaces inside darkened architectonic chambers. For example, in *He Weeps for You* (1976), the fish-eye lens of a video camera scrutinizes the end of a length of copper pipe, where a drop of water slowly forms itself before falling onto the surface of an amplified drum positioned on the floor below. The camera feeds to an overhead projector that enlarges the slowly swelling drop to mammoth proportions on a far wall, showing it to subtly reflect every significant object in the room, including the curious viewer who gains an out-of-body glimpse from the tableau. A drama of anticipation ensues as the drop grows, until it falls upon the drum below, creating a protracted thump that resonates throughout the room. Here, the sound of resonance is the sound of memory-as-experience, and as such it speaks to a condition of psychic disassociation where experience is exaggerated as highly nuanced sound and image, that is, *vivid information,* while its palpable tactility is simultaneously suppressed, thereby insisting on the disembodied character of the perpetually floating memory-moment whose poetic timbre is so persuasively simulated. If contemporary experience does indeed force us to schizoidally "live in our head," then it is best to cast that

head as a memory palace full of uncanny and unpredictable surprises, some being excruciatingly intimate while others are rich in allusive grandeur. Taken as a single totality, Viola's exhibition was just such a memory palace, and in many ways it represented the best aspects of the art of the 1990s.

Of course, Viola's memory palace needed an institutional office to come into being, and this returns us to that vexing "issue of the 1990s": institutional motivation and its relationship to the desire for self-optimization that uses art to help it live better. In the case of Viola's work, this was accomplished through saturating institutional spaces with a maximal suggestion of both an uncanny time-past and an ever-anxious time-future, both flowing like mythic dreamwork into the emotionally inaccessible vacuum space of a hyper-simulated time-present. Yet, if Viola's work can be said to epitomize the best aspects of the aesthetics of the schizoid sublime, then the need for balance points us toward a few of the many exhibitions that were earmarked by the most ridiculously hypocritical manifestations of administrativism. One of these was an installation by Julia Scher titled *Predictive Engineering* which was exhibited twice at SFMoMA; the first as part of a 1993 group exhibition curated by Robert Riley titled *Thresholds and Enclosures,* and the second in 1999 as a standalone solo exhibition. Scher's installation used real-time video feeds taken from the museum's security system with added taped sequences shot in the same locales, so that viewers could partake of the illusion that they were moving in an environment that was "invaded" by naked interlopers (no doubt intended to represent the irrepressibility of "nature") all the while listening to "system-status updates" enunciated by a velvet-smooth female voice amplified by loudspeakers. *Predictive Engineering* did a good job of revealing the design and operational protocols of the otherwise hidden panopticon of everyday surveillance, but it seemed to have mixed motives for doing so: on one hand, there was an obvious deconstructive imperative at work, but at another level the installation also seemed to revel in a kind of envy of the power of surveillance, prudently identifying with the power to watch over the process of watching. It is particularly interesting to again note that this exhibition was presented twice in the same decade, albeit in slightly different guises (even though it was not included in any of the major anthology exhibitions of technological art that earmarked the turn of the 21st century). This suggested that administrativism found a special value in restaging the drama of the surveilled and the surveillor, no doubt so that it could contain and surveil that drama with the kind of relish that comes part-and-parcel with viewing an art work that so eloquently speaks to its own values.

Another example of institutional reflexivity turned into artistic subject matter was a large group exhibition curated by Kynaston McShine for the Museum of Modern Art in the spring of 1999 titled *The Museum as Muse.* The title of this exhibition represents a fair synopsis of its self-confirming premise:

an anthology of works that position themselves in a museum space to announce the historical construction of that space as their inspirational subject and/or topic of alleged critique. Of course, any imperative to critique presented in this particular context fell short of real seriousness owing to the fact that it could never really question what it meant to submit to the terms of an institutional sponsorship of institutional critique, and this glaring lapse also applies to other exhibitions that anticipated *Museum as Muse,* such as Joseph Kosuth's 1990 *Play of the Unmentionable* at the Brooklyn Museum, or Fred Wilson's many interventions into the display etiquettes of museum collections of African Art, interventions which are calculated to reveal their latent racist assumptions. As it turns out, only Hans Haacke's *Shapolsky et. al.* (1971) can be said to have taken such a critique far enough to bait its original sponsoring institution (The Guggenheim Museum) into an act of self-protective censorship that cast its hidden hypocrisy in sharp historical relief. Ironically, *Shapolsky* has been re-exhibited many times over since that time (in fact, it was given pride of place at *Documenta X*), and has set a standard of using information-as-politics to catalyze the politics of information that many subsequent works have failed to meet.

In at least one significant way, *The Museum as Muse* went further than its predecessors, that being in its desire to use the specter of something resembling anti-censorship to revalorize the aura-giving power of the sponsoring institution, itself the longstanding subject of accusations pertaining to the falsification of history in the name of flattering wealth and power. This was accomplished in two distinct ways. First, there was the wholly disingenuous attempt to show the museum off as a site for the free exchange of ideas – after all, what could be more separated from worldly coercion than an exhibition explicitly critiquing the politics of exhibition? The obvious answer to this question would point out that such an allegation of freedom masks a calculated opportunity cost with regard to other topics that unfettered expression might address itself to, casting new suspicion on the idea of the museum as a site of democratic debate. *The Museum as Muse* also sought to revalorize the museum in another way. By insisting on itself as the subject matter of its own show, the museum placed its own infantilizing paternalism at center stage, *at the expense of the works that it presented*. This is important when we remind ourselves of the original ambitions of some of the work included in this presentation, for example, the work of Marcel Broodthaer's or the artists associated with Fluxus, which pointedly mocked the authority of the museum, subtly insisting that works of art are things that should do something for us rather than things that we do something with. In *Museum as Muse,* they were clearly re-cast in the latter camp as the fecklessly backhanded pseudo-exceptions which in fact proved the rule of ascendant administrativism, casting the work of art as an inarticulate tantrum whose "pain" the museum could make a big show of

"feeling" even as it also willfully misunderstands that pain as well as its own subtly self-serving investment in causing, shaping, and sustaining it.

It is interesting to note how often and to what degree exhibition organizers and presenting institutions have moved into the forefront of art world news throughout the 1990s, suggesting that they are more and more likely to view themselves as the primary art historical actors in a drama that relegates artists and works of art to the status of a supporting cast which provides set-pieces for the negotiation of administrative narratives. Nothing could highlight this trend better than the fanfare which accompanied the re-opening of the P.S.1 Contemporary Art Center in Long Island City in October of 1997, and the concomitant sighs of resigned disappointment that were heard when it was announced in the Spring of 1998 that the Center was preparing to merge with the Museum of Modern Art.

It turned out to be a move of profound administrativist realism in that the MoMA could claim that its sponsorship of the Center would again place it into the forefront of the world of living art which its detractors have claimed it to have abandoned, while P.S.1 could gain access to the audience and marketing savvy that it needed to continue operating in a new and somewhat alien funding environment. Judging from the first exhibition presented at the post-merger P.S.1, titled *Greater New York,* it was a marriage made in techno-bureaucratic hell, begetting over 120 artistic offspring in an incoherent installation of works by mostly "new faces" to the New York art scene. And now, *Greater New York* is an institution in its own right, having been repeated in the spring/summer of 2005, spawning the expectation that new iterations of it will be a regular feature of P.S.1's long-term exhibition plans.

Needless to say, there is a significant behind-the-scenes story to the organization of the first *Greater New York.* One aspect is the timing of the show to ostensibly pre-empt or otherwise compete with the so-called "Millennial Biennial" which would open at the Whitney Museum less than two months later. Here, the guiding assumption is that the Whitney show will again be guilty of being too predictable and conservative in its biennial survey of American Art, and *Greater New York* seems keyed to taking advantage of this presumed weakness by organizing a presentation that could truly be called "fresh" or "cutting edge." As it turns out, however, several of the best artists in *Greater New York* (Lisa Yuskavage, Chakaia Booker, Shirin Neshat, and E.V. Day) were also represented in the 2000 Whitney exhibition, which was otherwise haunted by the icy aesthetic tenor earmarked *Documenta X.*

One is tempted to wonder whether the pre-MoMA P.S.1 would ever care to engage the Whitney in this way, although I suspect that, if it did, no one would cry foul. But we are no longer dealing with the Pre-MoMA P.S.1, so such musings are useless. Of greater use is an assessment of *Greater New York* that looks behind its apparent plethora of diverse art to engage an underlying

thematic. Although the exhibition has its moments of neo-conceptual iciness as well as other moments of Pop Surrealist silliness, it is mostly earmarked by sheer abundance-for-the-sake-of-abundance, coupled with a craven emphasis on the youth of its participants. It also provided an abundance of art that obsessed over its own highly theatricalized triviality, hoping-against-hope that a hyper-synecdochal aesthetic (synecdoche *en abyme?*) will capture the imagination of the moment, and in any case rightly assuming that the arsenal of theory is vast enough to legitimize *even this,* or *even that*, or anything else as being worthy of serious consideration. Yet it is fair to point out that this faith in the generosity of the theoretician's polemic arsenal might be misguided in its assumption regarding the willingness to play along, for when we see the celebration of synecdoche we must also look toward the larger *epoché* that the former can be said to condense and reflect. And here, we discover that said *epoché* is not any drama of history, desire, or other form of worldly necessity, but only the brackets provided by administration's self-congratulatory assertion of its right to designate meaningfulness where almost none exists. Thus, we see works of art presented as the curious relics of and backdrops for the practice of administrative negotiation, and the narratives of these negotiations taking on their own authorial agendas.

## III

Thus far I have given the lion's share of emphasis to the whys and wherefores of administrativism while offering only a scant remark on the special significance of modifying it with the psychoanalytic term "schizoid." In the most general sense of the term, this significance lies in how it represents the post-Cold War era's uniquely perverse stylization of the master-slave morality that Hegel famously described in his *Phenomenology of Spirit*. This can be initially substantiated by examining the relationship of administrator and administratee through the optic of the psychoanalytic explication of the symbiotic relationship between sadism and masochism, the "on top of it all" coldness of the administrative sadist making a good situational fit to the obediently self-punishing "bottom" of the perennially under-rewarded artist-laborer, who would seem to gain perverse pleasure from repeated rituals of humiliation even as he or she learns (or projects) that the path to overthrowing the sadistic oppressor lies in gradually becoming – that is, secretly identifying with and eventually recovering the abusive prerogative from the sadist. There is in fact much to be gained by explaining the reconfigured power relations of the 1990s "New Globalism" in this way. As Gilles Deleuze has written: "Masochism is above all formal and dramatic; that means that its peculiar pleasure-pain complex is determined by a particular kind of formalism, and its experience of guilt is by a particular story...when guilt is experienced "masochistically," it is

already distorted, artificial, and ostentatious."[21] The last three adjectives are, of course, long-standing ascriptions which have been frequently applied to modern and contemporary art by detractors and advocates alike, suggesting that some form of masochism might determine much of the will to create in the "alchemical" manner of the modern artist who is often cast as the emblematic victim (or patient) of a socially normative lack of caring. This drama is most vividly present in the commonplace picture of creativity viewed as vengeful turning of the base material of quotidian humiliation – symbolized by the dead matter of inert and lifeless art materials – into the specious gold of an omnipotent creative gesture (with its attendant career as a revered culture-hero) which is a screen-construct for the masochistically earned state of redemption. But there is even more to this analogy, for earlier in the same essay, Deleuze writes:

> From the idea that the law should not be based on the principle of the Good but on its form alone, the sadist fashions a new method for ascending from the law to a superior principle; this principle, however, is the informal element of a primary nature which aims at the subversion of all laws. In the other modern discovery that the law increases the guilt of the person who submits to it, the masochist in his turn finds new ways of descending from the law to its consequences: he stands guilt on its head by making punishment into a condition that makes possible the forbidden pleasure. In so doing, he overthrows the law as radically as the sadist, though in a different way...The Oedipal content, which always remains concealed, undergoes a dual transformation – as though the mother-father complementarity had been shattered twice and asymmetrically. In the case of sadism, the father is placed above the laws; he becomes a higher principle with the mother as his essential victim. In the case of masochism, the totality of the law is invested upon the mother, who expels the father from the symbolic realm.[22]

This takes us a step further into the complex evolution of the aforementioned alchemy, in that the transformation of which Deleuze writes also functions as a strategy of displacement leading to a justifiably "earned" role-reversal (however temporary) of the sado-masochistic power protocol. It is this kind of ritualized (albeit unconscious) reversal and re-reversal of role that gives characteristic form to the two distinctive "political types" that Harold Lasswell wrote about in 1930, those being the political agitator and the political administrator. The former can be linked to Deleuze's vision of the masochist in "the high value which he places on the emotional response of the public"[23] while sadistic aspects of the latter is earmarked by "an over scrupulous performance of duty" representing an "elaborate effort to demonstrate potency" in the face of "persistent feelings of inadequacy...[which] are self-imposed penalties for his hos-

tilities against the environment."[24] Summarizing his typology, Lasswell wrote that "as a class, the administrators differ from the agitators by the displacement of their affects on less remote and abstract objects,"[25] here meaning "real" (or at least clearly differentiated) people rather than the agitator's subconscious appeal to an "undifferentiated world parent." Perhaps the most important point of similarity between Lasswell's types and Deleuze's sado-masochistic actors lies in the vivid presence of frozen hostility and persecutory thinking in relation to their respective objects, and the symbiotic pseudo-antagonism that they ceremonially playact for each other's pathological benefit.

Here, I would like to contend two things: first, and obviously enough, artistic gestures can be profitably read as stylized extensions of the kinds of psychological politics that Lasswell examined with such prescient acuity, because – as the marketing peoples' motivational researchers know all too well – art's goal of crystallizing and catalyzing an ideal alignment of experience, memory, and received information are more of a piece with the rhetorician's task of persuasion than they are the scientist's imperative to prove or disprove. My second contention is that the terms for identifying those stylizations and their implications are now in need of update, elaboration, and relevant clarification. While not wanting to dismiss any assertions and analyses of the myriad sado-masochistic subtexts for the relationship between artistic production and socio-cultural administration (which is the new techno-bureaucratic term for what was once called patronage), I do think that they reveal only part of a larger and more complicated picture, albeit a usefully important one that is somewhat taboo and certainly under-discussed. A more complete picture must also include the integration of another complimentary elaboration that is even more under-discussed, although I view it as being much more to the point of contemporary circumstance and practice: the view of art's reflection of and interaction with the social world as being keynoted by a "narcisso-schizoid" relation which in turn engenders what I would contend to be the period style, presiding ethos, and characteristic cultural appetite of techno-bureaucratic capitalism's apparent enthusiasm for its myriad projects of artistic and architectural self-idealization: schizoid administrativism.

It seems quite natural that Lasswell would not resort to a use of the term "schizoid" in his early analysis of the psychopathology of political types. In 1930, the word had yet to be properly coined,[25] and the charactological state that its clinical usage now describes continues to be the amorphous subject of competing views. Like the condition that is termed "borderline" (to which a "schizoid" position is structurally and etiologically related), it seems very much to be a modifier in search of a noun. We might best start by reiterating the common understanding of the term "schizoid" as referring to an incipient or ambulatory form of schizophrenia in much the same way that "borderline" refers to the incipient threshold to the state of full psychotic break, as in "bor-

derline psychotic." But this initial description is of only limited use when we realize that schizophrenia is something of an umbrella term that corrals together several distinctive conditions, ranging from catatonia to paranoid-schizophrenia, so we can reasonably suppose that the incipient forms signaled by the term "schizoid" are likewise diverse. But this diversity seems to exist and fluctuate between two poles, which I shall term "disintegration" and "affective withdrawal" as a way of respectively describing, respectively, the schizoid's characteristic self-experience and the most characteristic defense mechanism which the schizoid employs to contain and compensate for the absence or functional malformation of disintegrated internal structure which cripples and incapacitates his or her relational abilities. In the case of disintegration (or fragmentation), it is helpful to be reminded of the schizoid's reliance on the relatively primitive defense mechanisms of "splitting" and "compartmentalization," signaling both their incapacity to master the exacting requirements of "normal" neurotic repression as well as their alternative positionality in relation to the seemingly thankless and unending task of equilibrating instinctual need with worldly demand. As Freud noted in his early exploration of the subject: "a splitting of the ego (intrasystemic) rather than a splitting between agencies (between ego and id) is to bring out a process that is new in comparison with the model of repression and of the return of the repressed. In fact, one of the specific traits of this process is that it does not result in the formation of a compromise between the two attitudes present but that it maintains them simultaneously instead, with no dialectical relationship being established."[27]

This reliance on splitting and compartmentalization is the aspect of a schizoid state which is shared with the borderline, but the schizoid differs with the borderline in a very significant way which allows the schizoid to function very successfully in a world over-determined by techno-bureaucratic abstractions, whereas the borderline is cast as the quintessentially self-destructive victim of that world, always aspiring to be its unredeemed martyr. The difference lies in how each manages, internalizes and projects their moments of affect, for the borderline can be said to have very fluid boundaries between "thin-skinned" internal compartments, and thus seems at first glance to be emotionally spontaneous in their response to the here-and-now. The schizoid compensates for the lack of internal structure by withdrawing and redirecting the energy that affect depends upon, compulsively flattening and schematizing the experience of the here-and-now into pre-formed stereotypes so as to gain the illusion of efficient manipulability and concomitant strategic advantage at the very real (quasi-sociopathic?) expense of a relational failure. If the borderline can be fairly said to suffer from the kind of impulse-control problems that bespeak a pitched and hyper-animated condition of internal riot (often misunderstood and/or idealized to be "passion"), then we might fairly say that the schizoid freezes his or her internal riot into a seemingly controllable condition

of suspended animation. As Harry Guntrip put it in 1969:

> The schizoid condition consists in the first place in an attempt to cancel external object relations, and live in a detached and withdrawn way...The attitude to the outer world is the same: non-involvement and observation at a distance without any feeling...When a schizoid state supervenes, the conscious ego appears to be in a state of suspended animation in between two worlds, internal and external, and having no real relationship with either of them. It has decreed an emotional and impulsive standstill, on the basis of keeping out of affective range and being unmoved.[28]

Almost three decades earlier, William Fairbairn advanced a similar assessment when he wrote:

> It becomes possible to recognize as essentially schizoid not only such phenomena as full-fledged depersonalization and derealization, but also relatively minor or transient disturbances of the reality-sense, e.g. feelings of "artificiality" (whether refereed to the self or the environment), experience such as "the plate-glass feeling," feelings of unfamiliarity with familiar persons or environmental settings, and feelings of familiarity with the unfamiliar...Among the various characteristics common to the apparently conglomerate group of individuals who fall under the schizoid category...These are (1) an attitude of omnipotence, (2) an attitude of isolation and detachment, and (3) a preoccupation with inner reality.[29]

Here, it should be noted that the schizoid's condition of internal riot is no more resolved into a healthy pattern of coherent integration than that of the borderline. It is only maintained in a position of protracted abeyance so as to minimize both internal and external threats to functionality and survival that invite such worldly misery upon the latter, at least until uncontrollable circumstances trigger the condition of intra-psychic fracturing and collapse which is conventionally understood to be a breakdown.

At this juncture, I want to go a bit deeper into the specifics of the psychoanalytic theorization of these charactological conditions, but before I do, I would like to shed some light on what I think is another useful generalization, that being the dialectical and symbiotic construction of both the borderline and the schizoid to another typical charactological figure, the pathological narcissist who is their close structural relative. I do not think that I oversimplify things too much when I state that what distinguishes the schizoid from the narcissist are their core obsessional terrors (respectively, with malefic and/or imprisoning engulfment in the case of the schizoid and abandon-

ment in the case of the narcissist), which is to say that the reason that narcissists (in the manner of Lasswell's "political agitator") can be said to overdress themselves and their cultural productions into self-objectifying reaction-formations (subconsciously modeled on the idealized screen memory of the phallus) configured to preempt or "ward-in" the terrible abandonment which they subconsciously feel themselves to deserve. This persistent feeling owes much to a traumatization of infantile self-esteem as well as the projection of guilt that they feel over the fact that they have decathected their own libido from the objects of the world – in effect, abandoning those objects – thus making their own fear of abandonment all the more desperate. This compensatory over-dressing is at the core of the narcissist's eroticized self-objectification, that being his or her treatment "of his own body in the same way in which the body of a sexual object is treated."[30] As others have no doubt noted, Freud returned to the thorny subject of self-objectification as a defiance of the specter of castration when he outlined his theory of fetishism as the "objects chosen as substitutes for the absent female phallus,"[31] drawing the narcissist and the fetishist together in terms of their similar forms of magical thinking – one warding-in (potential abandonment) and one warding-off (the specter of castration). One can also follow a lead suggested by Bela Grunberger by substituting the more diagnostically precise ascription of "self possession" to the narcissist as a way of highlighting another aspect of the narcissistic self-system, that being the manner in which the pathologically false narcissistic personality can be said to hold-in, contain and hide the "piece of feces" that he or she secretly feels the true self to be. As Grunberger has written, "In effect, the narcissistic factor is highly dialectic, for...it cannot exist in a pure state, but must be associated with other factors...in a constellation of agencies within the total personality...narcissistic desire goes back to a quasi-absolute early narcissistic state...but one already traumatized, for it has been frustrated and is therefore attended by guilt."[32] In contrast, the schizoid doesn't fear abandonment nearly so much as he or she fears being psychically contained, trapped, and engulfed by some inescapable and omni-present manifestation of generalized malice, which he or she subconsciously hopes to freeze out; first by deploying the defense mechanism of playing emotional possum and secondly by erecting an intricately self-protective web of semioticized pseudo-reality which might contain, pre-empt or deflect said malice. In essence, these are the two distinct phases of a common defense mechanism called intellectualization, and they both earmark the schizoid's peculiar manner of dealing with the world. The emotionally shut-down condition of frozen affect is the key for differentiating the schizoid from the masochist, for the threatening sadist is not fascinated by actual cruelty so much as he or she is fascinated by the masochist's "dramatic response" to the sadist's theatricalized presentiment of threat, thus the sadist can be counted on to quickly lose interest in any interaction with the unrespon-

sive and undramatic schizoid. The web of pseudo-reality is in essence a homeopathic deployment of sadistic projection designed to protect schizoidal positionality.

Of course, the important relational problem is that it is everyone, not just the malicious, who is ensnared in the schizoid's highly differentiated web of ex-sanguinating semiosis, and it is this same everyone who experiences that ensnaring web for what it is, a subtly sadistic apparatus for meting out small increments of absurd humiliation so that all who survive it will be properly humbled (or distracted) out of any potentially overwhelming posture of direct confrontational threat. Of course, no one survives such a web for any length of time without frustration and eventual damage, and this brings us back to the borderline, whose state of pronounced internal conflict can be said to simultaneously suffer the narcissist's fear of abandonment and the schizoid's fear of engulfment at the same absurdly contradictory moment. This contradiction and the condition of misery that is coupled with it prompts one to describe the borderline in terms of Kierkegaard's parable about the unhappiest of all men: the man who is weighted down by sorrow over the (inevitably abandoning) past even as he is also full of anxious dread of the (uncontrollable and potentially engulfing) future.[33]

Following other writers, I dwell here on the relational dynamic between the narcissist, the schizoid, and the borderline because it seems to display the formalism of pleasure and pain that is at the core of Deleuze's exposition of sado-masochistic symbiosis in a fresh, raking light. In fact, I am quite convinced (as are many other observers) that one needs to understand the paradoxical subtleties of all three of these internal-object configurations before one can hope to fully understand any one of them, as they almost seem to breed and exaggerate each other in an ongoing symbiosis. Important similarities are certainly evident, for example, both the narcissist and the schizoid are diagnostically branded by their "withdrawal of libido" from the objects of the world, and their marked inclination to megalomania has been noted at the very beginning of their appearance as subjects of psychoanalytic study. But important differences reside amid and even within these similarities. For example, the tendency to affective withdrawal in the narcissist and the schizoid takes on a distinctly different cast; in the former, it is redirected onto and into either the objectified and eroticized body or into the world-aggressive ego, both of which take on an excess of object-attributes in the disassociated world of narcissistic consciousness. This consciousness exists paradoxically as a skewed attempt to convince that world that the narcissist does not need it when, in fact, the narcissist lives or dies on the visible displays of confirmation and adulation that only the world can provide – or withhold.

On the other hand, the schizoid's withdrawal of libido re-cathects it not onto the self imagined as either a body-object or an ego-actor, but onto the

self fancied as the occupier of a strategically advantageous – that is, *protected* position vis-à-vis the frightening unpredictability of presumably hostile other-selves whose potential for malicious upsurge needs to be neutralized and "managed-away" at the earliest opportunity – hence the schizoid's exaggerated enthusiasm for things such as "advance" or "inside information," "accountability," "specific criteria" or (self-protective and self-aggrandizing) "salvation through policy" all of which are reliant of the efficacies of code. The schizoid accomplishes this by first flattening the figures in his or her experience into abstractions so that they can more efficiently be redeployed as disembodied "information pictures" in a confining grid of conceptual relations which is always centered around the schizoid's imaginary control position, which is often imagined to be an invisible "gray eminence" to others who are assumed to be spellbound by the narcissist's flamboyant exhibitionism. To borrow Alexander Lowen's succinct description: "The schizoid character functions in reality as a matter of survival but without the inner conviction that its values are real. He lacks the control over his reactions that the neurotic has, neurotic though that control may be. He is more at the mercy of external forces than the neurotic. He responds to affection immediately and directly but just as immediately will he freeze in a situation which he feels is negative."[34]

The megalomania that Freud associated with narcissism and schizoidal "paraphrenia,"[35] also becomes clear when we contrast their differing nuances. Narcissistic megalomania is motivated by narcissistic rage in either a latent or dramatically manifest form, that being the rage and sadness associated with abandonment's potential reenactment of the overwhelming tragedy of abject helplessness amid an indifferent relational environment. When the magic of narcissistic self-objectification fails to "ward-in" such horrifying potential, the self-possessed core of "secret" or "shameful" identification with hidden feces can explode into a condition of anal-sadistic rage which often animates acts of self-destruction or brutal authoritarianism when they are not pathetically forwarded as last-ditch efforts to regain attention. In contrast, the schizoid exercises megalomaniacal control in the manner of a game of chess, carefully jockeying for strategic position in obsessive-compulsive increments until the situational gameboard exists in a state of apparent control. The narcissist lives by subconscious choice as a vassal on this disassociated gameboard, sometimes as a pawn and sometimes as its featured knight, but seldom is the narcissist aware of who makes the moves and why they are made, or who is behind that decision and who or what might be behind that. What the narcissist knows and is deeply invested in is the "flamboyance effect" of the particular move, not its role in an overarching strategy, the existence of which he or she in fact eschews and denies as a conspiracy to undermine the state of eminent narcissistic being with a requirement that the narcissist engage in masochistic "doing." This is the narcisso-schizoid relation, where the schizoid uses momentary at-

tention (or the implied threat to withdraw attention) as a technology of remote manipulation allowing him or her to plant the schizoid world picture into narcissistic hands, and have the narcissist fashion its particulars as if it were his or her own creation, occasionally redolent of polite irony but always subject to schizoidal orchestration and in some way responsive to schizoidal applause.

Of course, life is not a game of chess, and real relationships cannot be systematically flattened into assets and impediments, so the control that the schizoid exerts from his or her position of psychic retreat is in many cases a partial or complete illusion, depending on how connected or unconnected the schizoid is to reality. But here I must hasten to add what should appear to be an obvious comment about the "life" and "reality" described herein: it isn't real, and is in fact an insane pseudo-reality schizoidally constructed on the exsanguinated models of a Kafka novel or a Gothic romance. It finds verisimilitude only when compared to organized unrealities, such as that of incarceration, or the dehabilitating condition of "hospitalism"[36] that René Spitz detailed over half a century ago.

In a forthright and candid discussion about the interrelationship of psychoanalysis and space, Michael Eigen articulates an image of socio-psychological interactivity that brilliantly captures and aligns the schizoid personality as it lives (or fears to live) both within the self as well as the "real" world beyond it:

> I've experienced many patients overly obsessed with space, who have no playful space whatsoever. What they have is not so much a playground as a coliseum, where there's a battle for survival going on: a territorial battle over who is going to survive in space. These patients inhabit a corrupted space, a violent TV-like space, where the emphasis is on who's blowing away whom: where the violence makes for one explosion after another. So the session itself becomes a kind of explosive or violent space. It becomes an annihilating space, a space that eats up, where the obsession with space again blows away the possibility for time to develop.

> It's a void space, in a way, or a big-bang space, or a black hole space that seems to foreclose the possibility of letting something unfold. Just as something's unfolding, a violent enactment blows it away, so that the experience doesn't get a chance, in and of itself, to come to a conclusion. You never get a chance to find out what the experience could be because the sort of space it occupies nullifies it...Clinically, the problem is one where negative space eats away at the possibility of letting an experience be. It's a very violent, Pac-Man, black-hole kind of space that explodes the possibility of giving people a time to complete any particular trajectory of experience...But the problem is even more pervasive, be-

cause it precludes the possibility of completing a perception...It's a matter of stopping actual innate capacities from having a chance to operate.[37]

What is remarkable about this passage is how it references a kind of perverse space that is simultaneously "in the psyche" and "in the world," but is not necessarily of either, prompting us to remember Mark Edmunds' more general observation of the spatial implications of the psychoanalytic project: "For Freud...the psyche is centrally the haunted house of terror Gothic. Freud's remarkable achievement is to have taken the props and passions of terror Gothic – hero-villain, heroine, terrible place, haunting – and to have located them inside the self."[38] Here we are led to the paradox of finding our way out of a dilemma by finding our way into it so that – through the power of analysis – we can take regulatory ownership of an irrationality that has taken regulatory ownership of us.

Eigen's recitation of the perpetually "blown away" subjective space of his schizoidal analysands provides an instructive mirror to the picture of the necropolitan cityscape that initiates this chapter. They are, of course, related like the opposite sides of a coin, one as the seething cauldron of hyper-animated paranoid projection and one as the site of social evacuation (read: psychological withdrawal), each baiting the other's sense of psychic necessity. The question is, how can any artistic gesture hope to mediate and mend this socio-architectonic split, allowing for the kind of psychic inhabitation that can sustain some kind of long-term growth. Eigen underscores this point by stating: "In a way, the whole Freudian enterprise implicitly has to do with getting the mind into the body. Freud's whole oral, anal, phallic thing is about the ways the mind is incarnating...it's about phases of incarnation, or a development of incarnation."[39] In my view, the narcisso-schizoidal art world is an Ontranto's house that is in dramatic need for an occasion of symbolic re-invention that would be similar in terms of process to Eigen's gradually self-incarnating analysand, and, needless to say, it is poorly positioned to receive and facilitate such an occasion. This is because of a long-standing institutional overinvestment in the pathological dialectic of schizoidal control and narcissistic pseudo-revolution (always in the name of that lord-and-master called fashion), which has become the cliché-ridden scene of a seemingly endless and irrelevant repetition-compulsion that reduces revolutionary pretense to an act of dead ritual. The real question is, does this poor position preclude the taking of necessary action on behalf of recovery and long-term survival (however painful that action might seem to be), or, will the next moment play itself out in the manner of a Gothic romance and wait in a seemingly eternal state of denial for catastrophe to save it from confronting and re-inhabiting its all-pervasive morbidity?

# Chapter 3

# Critique of Cynical Criticism

*Who but a madman would suppose he cares to hear it said on Sundays, that the volunteer who plays the organ in the church, and practices on summer evenings in the dark, is Mr. Pecksniff's young man? Who but a madman would suppose it is the game of such a man as he, to have his name in everybody's mouth, connected with the thousand useless odds and ends you do?...if that be possible, as well one might suppose...that Pecksniff traded in your nature, and that your nature was to be timid and distrustful of yourself, and trustful of all other men, but most of all, of him who least deserves it?*

- Charles Dickens, *Martin Chuzzlewit* (1844)[1]

*Today, the latent will to catastrophe on all sides has taken cover under the official respectability of the politics of peace. The mechanisms whose relatively brutal openness characterized the fascist style have sunk into the subliminal and the atmospheric under the masks of accommodation, good will and sincere sentiments. Naïve stimuli have disappeared from the surface of consciousness. The increasing socialization of reactions represses open gestures; what is called democracy means, psychologically, an increase in self-control, which is probably necessary in dense populations. However, we should not be deceived by the calmed surface.*

- Peter Sloterdijk, *Critique of Cynical Reason* (1983)[2]

*What's more, if you'll pardon my bluntness, it was you rhetori-*
*cians who more than anyone else strangled true eloquence. By*
*reducing everything to sound, you concocted this bloated puffpaste*
*of petty drivel whose only real purpose is the pleasure of punning*
*and the thrill of ambiguity. Result? Language lost its sinew, its*
*nerve. Eloquence died.*

- Petronius, *Satyricon* (c. 64 CE)[3]


# I

Thus far, the New Year's resolution that I originally made in 1999 continues to be successful, so I am hesitant to stretch the limits of my good fortune with any additional oath to the gods of self-improvement. Instead, I again content myself with yet another renewal of an easily accomplished vow that is presented here as an injunction in service to the greater goal of good mental hygiene: *Don't confuse the banter that one hears at art dinners with the communications which take place in real relationships.* You know, *art dinners*: those strained, artificially festive occasions which take place after gallery openings, each an awkward ceremonial feast where the featured artist(s) breaks bread with friends, allies, and investors for the sake of pretending that they have just conquered the known world. In my role as designated scribe, I am often invited to art dinners, no doubt because such events are supposed to be worthy of some immortalizing literary note. I occasionally accept such invitations, mostly for the sake of taking mental note, but not the kind that any of the assembled guests would ever want to see spilled onto the public page.

Take my fellow critic sitting across the table during the first week of December. At some point after the second glass of wine was poured, and well within earshot of both the featured artist and the gallery owner who was our generous if reluctant host, he announced that he saw "no career mobility (presumably for himself) in writing about northern California art," meaning, in that particular instance, that the exhibition which we were celebrating would not be the recipient of any of his hallowed ink. In point of fact, it would not be receiving any of mine either, but that was because the featured artist was a personal friend whose previously exhibited work had already gained my favorable comment, and, unlike many of my brethren, I am not the kind of critic who writes repeatedly about the work of my personal friends – which may explain why I have so few of them. But the critic sitting to my right didn't know any of this, and seemed to assume that my enthusiastic review had already been written, and that I was consequently in dire need of some paternalistic (albeit poorly-timed) career advice.

In fact, it was he who was in dire need of career advice, and that advice is this: If your words were even half as concerned with their insight, relevance, and real necessity as they were with the pecking-order status of who you were writing about, you wouldn't need to worry about your damned career mobility, because at that point your words would be actually worth reading, thereby making others worry about their lack of career mobility in the bargain. But, as is almost always the case with blunt utterances (however timely and prescient they may be), there needs to be some follow-through which connects their immediate topicality to some set of larger issues, lest pompous sanctimony become the order of the day. So, as I proceed to link my art dinner anecdote to the heretofore unacknowledged transformations that have shaped and defined the practice of art and art criticism during the 1990s, I can be certain that the larger and evermore vexing issue which presently underwrites those practices is the now common art world cynicism that refuses any differentiation between serious critical analysis and a pervasive influence peddling whose embarrassing sycophancy and pathetic hypocrisy pretends so very poorly to proffer such an analysis.

Any insistence on maintaining such a differentiation is now said to be a form of "nostalgia" which is no longer relevant to the current situation of a New Globalist art world of total marketing deployed as a meta-institutional instrument of total administration – all parading under an octopussian banner trumpeting the many attractions of an international industry called "cultural tourism." During the past decade, we have been regularly regaled by newspaper accounts of yet another opening of a satellite franchise of the Guggenheim, or of mega-mergers between art institutions, which are, more than anything else, reminiscent of the mania for leveraged buyouts which panicked Wall Street during the mid-1980s. At the end of the 20th century, the biggest news in the art world remained the ongoing metastasis of international biennial exhibitions of contemporary art, which now number over forty as they continue to multiply across the globe. Mirroring this new proliferation is a concomitant growth in the number of arts institutions and their administrators, and this growth seems to have bred an amnesia-of-convenience regarding the newly beleaguered circumstances of the individual artist.

No matter, because the most notable art world celebrities are now the directors and curators of museums, as well as those who have been chosen as the artistic directors of the big international biennials, presumably because they have already distinguished themselves in the recent growth industry of the little international biennial. Artists themselves have been relegated to making what amounts to the turnstile tokens and set pieces for this bureaucratic scramble up the fish-ladder of art administrative importance – which is to say that their new role is that of producing the symbolic currency and valorizing ideological backdrop which does little more than decorate said scramble, mak-

ing it appear momentous and eventful. And, by the strictest standard of success, it all seems to be working exceedingly well, for we are told that audiences are attending museum exhibitions in record numbers, and there now is a great deal of private, corporate, and third-sector money changing hands along the way. In short, the art world of the late 1990s has once again become something of an overheated juggernaut, as was the case in the 1960s and again in the 1980s, albeit now at the behest of very different causes.

The crucial difference lies in how we must re-ascertain the idea of market-driven orthodoxy which now lies behind the new juggernaut, orthodoxy always being the *bête noir* of criticism's attempts at focusing attention on the most worthy accomplishments appealing to the most noble of psychomoral values. During the 1960s and again in the 1980s, that market was primarily found in the overheated private commerce in salable objects that took place between art collectors and art dealers, in large part subsidized by museums trading inflated tax benefits to those collectors in exchange for the eventual donation of said objects to their collections. But after the 1995-96 reconfiguration of the National Endowment for the Arts, this model changed rather dramatically; it was at this point that large institutions become the nexus of public arts funding (small institutions and individual artists were expressly written out of the equation), even as they also became the beneficiaries of an upsurge of corporate subsidy and subvention, which was supposed to take the place of declining public funds. The result of this shift in funding was that museums and other major arts-presenting institutions had no choice but to energetically engage in a practice called "marketing." These practices led them to take on the contours of what some architecture theorists have called "Urban Entertainment Destinations,"[4] offering a country club atmosphere for attracting the corporate manageriat as a patron class while simultaneously providing a shopping destination for cultural tourists arriving from near and far. Following from these transformations, museums themselves began to believe in their own marketing boilerplate, taking it so seriously that they began to regard themselves as the primary focal points of symbolic meaning, relegating the works presented and contained within them to the synecdochal status of reliquary "nodes of meditation." Located amidst this new marketplace mentality, these "relics" would reflect back on the cathedral-like totality of the museum experience, and of course, the superordinating authority of the administrators whose task is to orchestrate that experience. It is this authority and the powers that lie behind that authority (rather than any history of art, artist, or artwork) that now keynotes the myths of credibility to which works of art must appeal so as to gain an identity in today's art world of corporately sponsored cultural tourism. And this leads us to the first important point: the unavoidable recognition that it is utility to the administrative cause (always understandable as being administration-for-the-sake-of-administration) rather

than in any persuasive artistic performance or demonstration of critical consciousness that now establishes the all-too-momentary "importance" of contemporary art.[5]

On the superficial face of things, this situation bears a good deal of inflated resemblance to the "alternative space" movement of the 1970s, which, like the present moment, also boasted its celebrity curators[6] who loomed much larger than any dealer or critic – although, it must also be said that they worked very hard to keep the artist in the position of center stage *for the moment.* Instead of merely receiving works that were pre-certified by collector support, critical comment, and/or government grant, curators who cut their professional teeth during the alternative space movement of the 1970s proactively certified artists through the exercise of their own curatorial prerogative, which almost always made a rather meretricious spectacle of eschewing "the market" as being the site of an oligarchical elitism. To oppose that very real elitism, a countervailing force was necessary, which quite naturally engendered another kind of elitism. It came in the form of the development of theocratic rationales for so-called "advanced practices," and in the need for an alleged "democracy" of images and practices to which noncommercial alternative space art could supposedly address itself. The need for a polemical rapprochement between these seemingly exclusive imperatives gave birth to a scholastic criticism that could simultaneously argue for "greater access for disenfranchised communities" and well as for the continued relevance and validity of an oxymoronic god called "the avant-garde tradition," which (as historical irony would have it) was already energetically engaged in making an anti-democratic spectacle of the aesthetics of dehumanization (e.g. Chris Burden, Vito Acconci), indifference (Joseph Kosuth, John Baldessari), entropy (Robert Morris, Robert Smithson) and death (Bruce Nauman). In other words, it was a discourse addressing the pseudo-radical illusion of a democracy of images shrouded in so-called "difficult art," marshaled into position to provide third-sector funding rationales for artists who short-sightedly and perhaps even cynically sought to substitute bureaucratic gamesmanship for the depredations of an art market that had suddenly appeared to be a club with a very finite number of members.

A mastery of the patois of bureaucratic rationalization was necessary so that funding criteria could be met, and this led to the art world's first concerted sweeping of independent critical consciousness under the marketer's rug. Initially, that sweeping came in the form of a kind of conceptual art which, as Ursula Meyer put it, "eliminated the division" between artistic production and critical evaluation. As Meyer stated: "Conceptual artists take over the role of the critic in terms of framing their own propositions, ideas and concepts."[7] Thus, at that early juncture, we already see an exegetical manqué of criticality being cynically substituted for criticism's more honorable role of providing a

public inquiry into the value of a given subject. This emphasis was further advanced by the kind of criticism that was primarily published in *Artforum* during the years that John Coplans was the editor (1971-1977), later finding some degree of voice in *October, Avalanche,* and *High Performance,* among many other publications. As Coplans has stated: "It [i.e., the advent of a post-studio notion of 'conceptual' artistic practice] was in the air, so to speak. And if you had your antenna out, you couldn't help but be affected by it, and I was affected by it. After all, the magazine was supposed to be about the art scene and what was going on. There were *issues,* important issues to be discussed, which weren't being discussed. I felt that it was necessary to deal with the infrastructure, as much as you were dealing with the art."[8]

Needless to say, twenty years later we can now see that many of the administrators of 1970s alternative spaces have since matriculated to the status of museum director and chief curator, and in large part they have done so by a finessing of the intractable dialectic of avant-garde piety and mock-democratic imperative. Their new corporate paymasters seem to both love and envy this fact, for it represents the fruition of a marketing calculus that they themselves have successfully emulated, repackaging it as the new gospel of "resentment marketing." This new form of marketing is directed not only to the disposable incomes of impressionable youth, but also to an intellectually passive mass media who knows full well that it can garner easy attention with yet another callow exercise of *épater le bourgeois,* so long as there is no real *épater* of the corporate manageriat involved.[9] It almost goes without saying that said manageriat has also done particularly well via its embrace of resentment marketing, given that profitability is ever more connected to quick turnover and the fickle truculence of commodity-addicted consumers seeking ersatz-satisfactions from a whirlwind of fetishized objects which are always destined to disappoint even as they always whet the appetite for more – much more – of the same. This is perhaps especially true of that class of "eventful" objects (or objectified events) called "cultural productions" or more quaintly, "works of art." Whenever these consumers might find their mind's ear replaying Peggy Lee's anthem to inevitable disappointment titled "Is That All There Is?" the marketers again shout the magical incantation of "New and Improved" from the rooftops, and, *mutatis mutandis,* consumers are frog-marched back into the ever-changing world of virtual pseudo-satisfaction. But here I digress from the crucial point, which is this: The past 20 years have born witness to a profound transformation of the contemporary art institution. No longer is it a mere refuge from the market; rather, it is now the engine that drives it, and that engine is in turn driven by an ensconced administriviat that has found it all-too-easy to sacrifice the political claims which it made for itself twenty-five years ago for the sake of shilling for their new friends – the corporations.

All of this explains why the most significant issue of the art world of

the 1990s has been the changing status and circumstances of the institution. To a certain extent, this is by default, because it comes into the foreground by way of the post-Cold War era's chilling absence of other issues and contests, under-scoring the fact that the realm of the institutional is (for the moment) the only game in town. Symptomatic of this new advent is the museum's inflated sense of self-importance, and this drives their changing sense of priorities. No longer do they see themselves as the devoted servants of art; rather, it is art that must of necessity serve them in the same manner that it served the pharaonic priest-hood, the Byzantine clergy or the French and British aristocracies of the 18th century. And because of this advent, it no longer suffices to point to the machi-nations of the market as being the invidious epicenter of the current fever – in fact, the time for that is long gone. Instead, the art market as such is now best understood to be but the speculative epiphenomena of an internally regulated institutional certification mechanism, jealously protecting its own long-term interests as the entrenched arbitrator of the financial and cultural value of the relics of its own decision-making processes. For the purposes of this essay, let us refer to the aggregate practices of this self-protected system of certifica-tion-cum-arbitration as "administrativism," and let us call its guiding ethos "adminidoxy"[10] as a way of signaling its formal, concerted and strategic char-acter. Adminidoxy is simply a marketing department's simulation of an anti-orthodox orthodoxy (predicated on the routine idealization of rote gestures of shallow anti-idealism), cynically substituting superordinated changes in fash-ion for orthodoxy's blind veneration of received opinion. The condition of adminidoxy stems from the very modern fact that fashion has proven itself far more effective in the manipulation of large urban populations than the old orthodoxies of institutionalized religion could ever have dreamt of being.

We see adminidoxy at work when we are forced to regard certain artworks as "art administrator art" – a work of art that only an art administrator could love (always for administrative purposes), and we also see adminidoxy at work when we read the cynical criticism that recognizes the unvarnished psychomoral truth of the situation, and takes the provision of discursive justi-fication for the adminodox imperatives that are encoded into the aforemen-tioned works of "art administrator art" as its mission, usually articulated with-out the slightest sense of intellectual shame. And here, let me be clear: I am not using the term "cynical" in the sublime and technical sense intended by Diogenes when he disavowed worldly vanity to search for an honest man. Rather, it is my intent to invoke the common and popular sense of the word implying an over-eager willingness to adjust one's moral compass to the momentary exi-gencies of worldly power. In short, the cynic is cast as an opportunist, flatterer, and a sycophant: in Peter Sloterdijk's words, a practitioner of "enlightened false consciousness...afflicted with the compulsion to put up with preestab-lished relations that it finds dubious, to accommodate itself to them, and fi-

nally even to carry out their business."[11] Lacking a metaphysics of art or life, the cynic has no choice but to adopt the motto "to be dumb and have a job, that's happiness!"[12]

One of the telling legacies of the 1990s is that it has provided an astounding abundance of cynical art criticism, which has come in a staggering variety of subtypes ranging from the scholarly to the promotional, which is to say, from the pretentious to the abjectly sycophantic. And if the current art world of corporately sponsored disinfotainment seems to stink a moribund peace, then let us call that all-too-deceptive peace the *pax administrivia,* which can also be said to be a *pax exsanguinia* of art administrative gamesmanship sustained for its own self-perpetuating sake. Its most identifying characteristic is a programmatic over-reliance on protracted rear-guard actions which now double as the new forms of aesthetic fascism – one which rules not via the truncheons of authoritarian edict, but via the calculated deployment of euphemism, circular logic and a compulsive deferral of all necessary judgments based on persuasive rationale. By way of routine implication and occasional explication, cynical criticism can be condemned for eagerly serving and servicing this new form of aesthetic fascism-of-fashion, and that service now includes the occasional proclamation of itself as adminodoxy's loyal opposition. But these proclamations are almost always made of unpersuasive straw, offering weak and easily dismissed challenges to the all-encompassing status quo.

To lurch closer to the topic at hand, we can note that this renewed frenzy of art world activity has bred its own unique brand of town crier to herald the unique momentousness of its rather sudden but wholly predictable consolidation of art world and corporate power. This new breed of panegyrist practices the rawest form of cynical criticism that this essay proposes to critique, for, in explaining its subjects via passive exegesis rather than interrogating them from the vantage of a sophisticated "metaphysics of art,"[13] it only functions as a servile amplifier for the aforementioned pre-construction of "adminodox" opinion. For such flatterers, there is little difference between the genres of the catalogue essay and the celebrity profile, in that both are seen as occasions for worshipful paean rather than the raising of serious and sometimes troubling questions. In fact, one could even say that the very existence of such orations represents a kind of strategic distraction designed to keep troubling questions away from the realm of public debate by drowning them out with cheerleader's rhapsodies that double as rationales and marching orders for low-level arts administrators seeking guidance on what programming decisions might eventually elevate them to the position of middle-level arts administrators.

But it should also be noted that adminodoxy owes its more elaborated construction not nearly so much to the eager simpletons who pen journalistic flattery as it does to more "respectable" writers who make something

of a show of their supposed antagonism toward each other's "positions," although the cynical fact that must be reiterated here is that the antagonisms in question are almost always enacted between differing flavors of the most loyal of oppositions. Of these, much more will be said, but here we should remember that this circumstance is in no way new: as has always been the case with artists, critics too have been held accountable to the need for an idealized legitimization of a given moment's view of its own righteous self-dominance, in historical turns laundering the guilt of emperors, priests, and the captains of bourgeois industry with phrases well-tuned to the exigencies of their times. What is new is that the institutional art world now sees itself as having displaced those other entities (not to mention society in general) as being the central agency that determines the hierarchy of values to which art and its legitimizing narratives are now called to account. This is a new arrangement of power breeding a wholly new form of decadence, and I suspect that it will be around for a very long time, even as very few people will seriously care whether it lives or dies.

## II

In the wake of the corporate juggernaut of professional arts administration that now calls itself the art world, almost all forms of public commentary – written or otherwise – is of necessity shepherded into one of several well-illuminated slaughter pens of noisy promotionalism. Or, failing that particular and dubious utility, it is then banished to the Arden forest of microcommunal obscurity, with makeshift clearings set aside for the subcategories of "the academic," "the regional," "the subcultural," and "the down(and-out)-trodden." The fact that many of these clearings are starting to form quasi-autonomous and unadministered relations with one another via the internet thus far seems to be a factor of only limited importance to the art world's conduct of its own hyper-mediated affairs – but this fact is now casting a gloomy shadow upon the fish ladder of career credibility which now comprises that world's day-to-day operation, now rife with an anxious fealty to undeniably dead rituals of aesthetic valuing. To state the same point in different terms, the contemporary art world (still conveniently misunderstood as either an arena for the maintenance and protection of elite aesthetic categories, or, in a more comic register, as a socially potent forum for "radical" oppositional practices) is on the verge of being rendered morbidly moot by the triumphal sweep of pan-capitalist history and the technology-driven arrival of a hyper-mediated post-urban society.

To its perverse credit, the art world has made a fetish of very selectively misconstruing this new advent, hoping against hope that it could repeatedly turn "art about the death of art" into the guiding theme of a house style

(i.e. "staging the conflict between subject and object," which is to actually say "stage-managing the administrative objectification of that conflict, thus insuring that it can never become an actual conflict"), all the while giving itself an inoculating dose of the very thing that threatens it. In effect, the art world made itself over as that very thing in subtle historical increments, naively hoping to save itself from a seemingly inevitable catastrophe of self-inflicted irrelevance by "containing" (read: "contextualizing") the specter of that irrelevance, lest the art world be contained by it, which in fact will most likely be the unavoidable case. But, regardless of which imperative ends up containing the other, a state of impasse is perpetuated, and that state now calls loudly for the sacrifice of sacred cows – those being the (over in-) vested interests which the art world still holds dear at a long-term cost still too great to be calculated. And here lies the core problem: no one is now empowered with a sufficiently autonomous perspective or is allowed adequate amplification of what little autonomy they might have to call for that sacrifice. The only way to do so requires that one first apply to and then establish a bought-and-paid-for consensus (which will of necessity protect vested interests at any price), and the health of the proverbial herd suffers accordingly. This set of circumstances is particularly devastating to younger artists' attempts to earn a serious reputation on their own terms, in that it is only the groupthink of fashion that has the power to give them their fifteen minutes of worldly identity, and that is not nearly enough time to nourish serious artistic growth.

Perhaps we can see why so much of the critical writing of the 1990s has played its part so well with regard to advancing and sustaining adminodoxy's all-encompassing authoritarianism-of-fashion, allowing for different critical actors to come to the fore as the stock characters of its anesthetizing melodrama. In general, these come in two paradigmatic types, which I shall dub "the scholastic" and "the panegyrist." Theirs are the cardinal cynicisms of contemporary art criticism: not merely the representatives of any differentiation of style or consciousness of values; but practices that serve to buttress adminodoxy from two seemingly opposed flanks. "Scholastic" cynical criticism accomplishes this not only by providing valorizing exegesis, but also by keeping the archive in a proper, institutionally agreed-upon order, insisting that everything be understood as a function of an (institutionally pre-certified) set of historical predicates stemming from an idea of "the one true avant-garde practice." That practice is always said to be "oppositional" in character and compulsorily representative of progressive values, as if this antique dialectic could still be said to have any real meaning – let alone relevance – in the post-Cold War world. But it does create the illusion of a kind of purposeful coherence to which "serious" artistic practice could aspire, and for some that illusion seems to have been able to turn the trick of masking the pronounced clone fatigue that is so apparent in self-consciously neo-avant-garde artistic prac-

tices, such as those of Lawrence Wiener, Daniel Buren, or Marcel Broodthaers, to cite a few frequently scholasticized examples. This scholastic masking insures a certain kind of stability of institutional values (which, by definition, are the nexus of the only things that can now be called "reactionary" values, despite the shrill character of their mock-progressivism) as well as a certain kind of imagined protection from those who might vote with their feet when questions of real symbolic value are concerned. Its goal is to sustain a canon of artists who pretend to be critical of the formulation of an artistic canon.

The most prominent example of scholastically cynical art criticism can be found in the odd blend of neo-Marxism and Lacanian psychoanalysis that continues to inhabit the pages of *October* magazine, bringing excessive diligence to the scholastic proof that all significant contemporary art must of necessity issue in some way from the work of Marcel Duchamp (whose "critique of pure modernism" has been recast as an exercise of modernism *in extremis*).[14] Whether it be in Hal Foster's fanciful claim that "Minimalism...contradicts its idealist model of consciousness,"[15] or in Rosalind Krauss's claim that "The history of modern sculpture coincides with the development of two bodies of thought, phenomenology, and structural linguistics, in which meaning is understood to depend on the way that any form of being contains the latent experience of its opposite: simultaneity always containing the implicit experience of sequence,"[16] the limousine liberal's anti-elite elitism is everywhere in evidence in *October*'s pages. Of course, once one gets past *October*'s typical rhetorical strategy of dogmatic cant giving way to solemn over-explanation, one finds that the rhetoric is mostly bluster-masking anxiety, the anxiety in question no doubt being about the finite length of time that the dialectic between the textual holiness of selectively celebrated anti-relics and the psycho-symbolic needs of a democratic polity can continue to be finessed. For all of their display of labyrinthine complexity and sophisticated theoretical framework, *October*-style critical arguments seem to default to a single method, here well summarized by Irving Sandler's description of founding editor Krauss's "critical strategy":

> Krauss...learned from Greenberg how to acquire taste-making power: assume an identifiable position with a few identifiable premises, repeat them again and again until they seem 'natural,' and apply them to relatively few privileged artists, whose work...illustrates the art critical premise...October made the art theorist an interpretative genius, at the same time denying the existence of genius.[17]

Victory to the administrators! Krauss & Co. have gradually transformed Greenberg's deductive/reductive formalist premises (themselves the rhetori-

cal forms of a scholasticized empiricism) into an updated *linguistic formalism* (seeking to echo the theorizations of linguistic determination formulated by the Moscow and Prague linguistic circles of the 1920s). *October*'s critical approach was initially based on Roland Barthes's notion of intertextuality and then was later updated by Jacques Lacan's notion of the operations of language as the exercise of The-Name-of-the-Father which inevitably represses and negates the child's desire for union with the mother, and by introjected extension, any possible sense of self-totality. Only now, in the name of liberating the subject from said negation, we in fact see a worshipful fetishization of the powers of naming, "critically" displaced from the mythic father of some demonized bourgeois extraction and implicitly projected onto the supposedly androgynous institution (itself a dangerously idealized stand-in for the Jungian idea of a world parent by way of techno-bureaucratic society's supposedly experimental construction of "new men and women.") Thus, in *October*, we see a new semiotic gloss applied to the old story of the authoritarian personality which has always been evident in the history of modern art. Characterizing that personality in 1974, Max Kozloff wrote "the habits of condescension and contempt have worked deep within him, and have been ingrained in his outlook...Always suspicious and on-guard, this attitude is hopelessly at odds with its environment...With his [i.e. Mondrian's] culture of determined relations, he aestheticizes what would turn out in the world to be a most antidemocratic form of government indeed."[18]

This authoritarianism can be traced all the way back to Charles Baudelaire's call for "a new kind of aristocracy...established on the most precious and most indestructible of faculties, on the divine gifts that neither work nor money can give."[19] It is worthwhile to note here that for Baudelaire (as was the case with Oscar Wilde, T.S. Eliot, and Ezra Pound – the other literary expositors of "Modernism"), the bourgeoisie was the despised embodiment of the collapse of an aristocratic notion of "culture" taking place under the weight of the mercantile equation of the idea of "market" with that of "society." This prompted him to wishfully postulate an "aristocracy of the spirit" (i.e., a aristocracy of poets and artists) as heroically awaiting the historically inevitable redemption of a lost birthright. Needless to say, all of this is a rather exaggerated exercise in narcissistic over-compensation, so when we see Baudelaire taking up arms at the barricades of 1848, let us remember that it was not for the sake of removing the shackles of oppression from the limbs of the proletariat. Rather, it was because he thought the revolt would provide a good pretext for an attempted assassination of General Aupick, who was his hated stepfather – the uncouth and autocratic symbol of all that was bourgeois. This is important, because clear to the present day, the Marxist and Baudelairian notions of *épater le bourgeois* have been conveniently conflated with the now completely shopworn mythography of the institutional avant-garde artist – never mind that

Marx and Baudelaire despised the bourgeois for diverse and perhaps even opposed reasons. Of course, the real issue here is not whether a given polemic is or is not representative of legitimately democratic values (everybody *says* theirs is so, nobody's *is*), but rather, it is to point to how semiological formalists have passive-aggressively updated this tradition of Baudelairian aristocracy into a kind of postmodern authoritarianism. Only here, we see the revolutionary's barricades displaced by a highly manipulated sociology of information that insinuates postmodern scholasticism into the ground floor of the administrativist temple of art. The purpose of this substitution alleges the will to revolutionary transformation, but in practice it serves to only facilitate a climbing up to its controlling penthouse for the purpose of inaugurating yet another anti-democratic culture of determined relations of its own perverse devise.

One of the central tenets of this new culture of administrativism is its rather obsessive focus on the question of "who gets to be an artist," repeated over and over to the almost complete exclusion of any meaningful inquiry into the topic of what might constitute a successful work of art. Signaled here is the administrativist obsession with "identity," and its vulnerable relationship to any advent of metaphysical authority (inscribed into a consistent and allegorizable hierarchy of values), which is cast as the ideology of a disciplinary regime from which administrativism seeks to protect the aforementioned identity at all costs. Yet, the most vexing question remains: How can identity be protected from the administrativism that presumes to protect it from the world? Needless to say, such questions of potential exploitation and mutual accountability are never raised in *October*-style polemics, which tend to wave them off as the irrelevant mutterings of reviled populists whose own identities are hopelessly mired in reactionary systems of identity formation. Such a routine and high-handed dismissal of the view from the proverbial cheap seats always tells the tale of who is and who is not committed to real progressive values of egalitarianism and justice; it is interesting to note how widespread this programmatic displacement of questions of value (as accomplishment) with questions of identity (determined and privileged by carefully selected administrativist pseudo-consensus) truly is. This progressive displacement is certainly not limited to toilers in the art world's vineyards, but in fact operates in other realms of intellectual endeavor where political gamesmanship and serious inquiry collide. For example, in describing the contemporary study of the Classics, Victor Davis Hanson and John Heath have written:

> Classicists, in the manner of the demise of the Maya, the Aztecs and the Mycenaeans, have now reached that penultimate tottering. The signs of the impending cataclysm of systemic collapse are all there:

1. An elite sect of copyists which transcribes official documents in obscure runes that are mere inventories and records read by no one outside of their minuscule circle.

2. Over-specialization, where clerk cannot fathom clerk.

3. The aggregate mass of capital and labor devoted to clarification, rationalization and self-promotion rather than construction and promotion.

4. Denial, where court toady and tenured scribe whisper in the ear of Pharaoh and Lord Master that everything is just fine, rumors of dissension mere talk among the whiney and unappreciative.[20]

It would be hard to imagine a better synopsis of the machinations of institutional decadence (loyalty given all primacy over ability), and its analogous applicability to the relationship between *October's* pettifogging polemics; their stylizations of art world adminodoxy should be obvious. But, given those polemics' encouragement of an environment where "scholastic clerk cannot fathom scholastic clerk," it seems doubly odd that the critical function so often reverts to speaking on behalf of the name of the True Avant-Garde Father – Duchamp – who has been characterized by *Octoberist* art historian T.J. Clark as being "at the center of modernism, a figure of negation and nihilism, of endless centrifugal questioning of Art as a category and institution."[21] This establishes the core contradiction of *October*-style polemics: a servile and arguably uncritical embrace of an "anti-father father-figure" who, like Lacan's Name-of-The-Father, authoritatively intervenes in and negates the experience of the "mother culture" for the sake of establishing an allegedly post-traditional system of determined relations that must nonetheless disallow any persuasive symbolization of self-totality. Once this is established, the critical task boils down to putting all other pretenders to the hallowed anti-throne in their proper place and then reciting their conflicted inter-relations as a kind of palace intrigue pretending hard not to be yet another enactment of a bourgeois family romance.

This peculiar set of operations is odd in and of itself, but its obsessive engagement with the question of who should sit on the art world's throne also masks the fact that Krauss & Co. have elided a far more pressing question – the one which asks who now holds the deed to the whole palace, a subject upon which *Octoberist* writers remain remarkably mute, lest their dusty dialectic of progressive and reactionary positions implode into a morass of self-contradiction. Apart from this exceedingly vexing question, one could perhaps say that Krauss & Co. are only engaged in a harmlessly scholastic act of juggling tropes, genres, and precedents. But to bring that question into the fore-

ground necessitates seeing the more invidious implications of the *October* project. As Donald Kuspit has written: "The looming question is whether a new Robespierrean revolutionary art-critical dictatorship will be set up to replace the old art historical one, similar if less obviously rigid and repressive in spirit.[22]

Given the prominence that art institutions have accorded to *October*'s scholastic postmodernism (implicitly valorized in Krauss's claim that the most serious intellectual study should be "turned toward the literary products of postmodernism, among the most powerful examples of which are the paraliterary works of Barthes and Derrida,"[23] the clear answer to Kuspit's question is now a resounding "yes," but a "yes" with a decidedly iconophobic difference. This is because the motives behind the linguistic formalism which animates *October*-style polemics should in the very least be suspect of being not only irrationally and fascistically anti-mimetic, but in fact anti-art as well. Art always traffics in some sort of idealized consciousness, even when it is idealizing a stylized anti-idealism. And idealism always poses a danger to administrativism, because any move toward the building of a better world undermines the purchase of those who benefit from the world-as-it-is. Even more to the cynical point is the ritual antipathy of such polemics toward any sense of art being understood as the crystallization of individual experience and symbolic enactment of volition. It is much more "manageable" to view art as the (administrativist) "signing" of pre-digested codes for experiences that may or may not even exist until the mechanisms of institutional positionality accede to this fact, or invents it out of thin air. But any such emphasis to such a crystallization – indeed, any *allusion* to it will inevitably draw the ritual disparagements of "idealism" or even worse, "traditional humanism," the latter said to be a dead horse that is still feverishly whipped by *Octoberists* for perpetually undisclosed reasons. An instructive example of this can be found in Benjamin Buchloh's re-appraisal of the work of Joseph Beuys, which "obviously risked appearing as an instance of formal obsolescence and epistemic quaintness, suffering already, by its attempts for *narrative* and *representation,* from a seemingly inevitable historical or structural deficiency within the continuously advancing discursive formations and institutions of contemporary art itself."[24]

Of course, the crucial truth about *October*-style scholasticism is this: for all of their labyrinthine complexity, the arguments on its pages boil rather quickly down to articles of a peculiarly insistent faith in discredited predicates stemming from an obsolete metaphysics of art. I would go so far as to describe that obsolescence as a naïve faith in the necessary power of the institution misunderstood as *a code-driven sanctuary from the bourgeois values* equating identity with the prerogatives gained from market leverage. Two delusions are in play here: the first is the naiveté that sees life in the aforementioned

sanctuary as being something other than abjectly bourgeois, and the second is the obstinate *idée fixe* that breeds the facile equation of post-Cold War America's corporate manageriat with the bourgeois shopkeepers of *la belle époque*. While the latter can be fairly said to have practiced an ethos of extreme individualism, the former are far more complex, having mastered the moieties of an exclusionist and highly self-selected collective behavior, which, among other things, has effectively displaced any Marxist-derived idea of "class" (of producer) with the more precise categorical formulations called "demographics" (of consumer attitudes). In its highly self-selective (and highly differentiated) collectivism, corporate culture now embosses its priorities on the many forms of the art world's circus of legitimization that echo the values of those 21st-century entrepreneurs and middle managers who accrue stock options and art collections in direct proportion to their ability to formulate, enforce, and then take maximum advantage of those invisible fluidities called "policy." For these new swashbuckling entrepreneurs, "hair ravaged by wind, chest heaving, one boot up on the gunwale as they survey their vast sea of appointments on their palm pilots,"[25] life's guiding truths are completely inscribed in the dark alchemies of demographics and spin-control, and their post-bourgeois ascendance to the socioeconomic spotlight is testament to the fact that their new alchemy has completely and irrevocably displaced the old taxonomy of class, which is now inoperative and obsolete.

But these changing economic circumstances do not exonerate neo-Marxists from the need to articulate a new taxonomy of class, and the fact that they have failed to even try to do so should in itself be taken as a telling index of their real cynicism vis-à-vis the obscured psychological politics of an all-pervasive administrativism. Instead, the locus of neo-Marxist examination and argument has shifted almost entirely away from *all* considerations of class, making the more bureaucratically quantifiable questions of ethnicity and gender their focal point. This is not to say that there is not much of value to be learned from the intellectual engagement with various forms of Otherness, only that pretenses to such engagements are very susceptible to the easy reification of co-optation and institutional nullification via a token inclusionism that creates the illusion that real inclusion is taking place somewhere else. Such a program of cosmetic inclusion suggests that any structural injustice in society can be papered over by simply bringing highly visible tokens of ideologically acceptable "diversity" into its elite preserve – thereby indulging in a charade of identity fetishism to further confound the always vexing inequities inherent in the economic analysis of commodity fetishism. Cynicism supervenes when identity fetishism becomes the *lingua franca* of an opposition that only wants in, seeking to use a selective construing of the sociology of information as a substitute for the absence of any persuasive metaphysics of value.

The fact that neo-Marxism has had no choice but to turn its back on

Art Criticism

the proletariat is of supreme consequence, but to some extent this is true because the proletariat could never find its way to face and embrace Marxist truth – that is, it could never hope to see itself as a class with a shared interest in minimizing the manipulative circumstances that defined it. That is because what Marxists and neo-Marxists have chosen to call "circumstances" is experienced as "life" by those who live it, and, until a demonstrably better life is made tangibly available as more than a pie-in-the-sky promise, few are willing to give up the proverbial bird-in-the-hand, even if it is known to have been hatched from the egg of injustice. Neo-Marxism's most resounding failure is precisely around this score, for, even as it did a great job of displaying the grim realities underwriting the economies of sign and spectacle, it could not persuade anyone that it could improve those economies in any meaningful way. As Herbert Marcuse wrote in 1976:

> In a situation where the miserable reality can be changed only through radical political praxis, the concern with aesthetics demands justification. It would be senseless to deny the element of despair inherent in this concern: the retreat into fiction where existing conditions are changed and overcome only in the imagination.[26]

Here we once again hear the all-too-familiar avant-gardist call for a revolution "by other means," tacitly admitting to and perhaps even investing in the failure of revolution by revolutionary means. Ostensibly, Marcuse's answer to the call for justification is simple: art should be the symbolic arena where the call to praxis could achieve its precise and most coherent formulation, the place where thought-experiments could be conducted and then evaluated in service to the clarification of necessary purpose. In short, art represents the imaginative space as the place where the better world can be envisioned to the point of having its merits debated, and also where a symbolic enticement could be made sufficiently vivid to activate the latent praxis which could get us there, *for its own good rather than for the good of art*. In short, art could not only indict the systemic injustice of the status quo, but it could also reveal a picture of a more reasonable world free of systemic injustice.

But, neo-Marxists have nothing but high-toned scorn for this "vulgar" notion of art as persuasive enticement/incitement, and when the world responds to this scorn by failing to embrace their symbolic austerity programs (as if totally abstract art, free of all symbolic baggage, would make the need for revolution self-evident), neo-Marxists are suspiciously quick to carry their polemic marbles back to the safe shoals of the academy, even if that means quickly scurrying past the boarded-up doors of the labor temple. It never occurs to neo-Marxists that the proletariat objects to their collective call to end

artistic idealization precisely on the grounds that it in fact *does* want liberation – real liberation – which is to say that it doesn't want to be hectored into yet another fool's paradise of even more administration-for-the-sake-of-administration. Marcuse again:

> The radical qualities of art, that is to say, its indictment of established reality and its invocation of the beautiful image of liberation are grounded on precisely the dimension where art transcends its social determination and emancipates itself from the given universe of discourse and behavior while preserving its overwhelming presence. Thereby art creates the realm in which the subversion of experience proper to art becomes possible: the world formed by art is recognized as a reality which is suppressed and distorted in the given reality.[27]

Here, the terms that tell the tale are "indictment," "liberation," "transcends," "emancipates," and "subversion"; they are all labels of convenient disengagement and schizoid retreat from the exigencies of the all-too-social lifeworld, deployed in service to an undisclosed higher sanctimony which tacitly admits that the real history of the real struggle for justice was always elsewhere, if it ever existed at all.

The reason for this self-sabotaging discourse is simple: when Marxism became an intellectual fetish (the advent of which was the defining moment when "vulgar" Marxism was dismissed in favor of neo-Marxism), it became synonymous with the free-floating value of some allegedly transcendent virtue, displacing its earlier identity as a particular kind of analysis in loyal service to the explicit values of egalitarianism and enhanced social justice. Thus, neo-Marxist scholasticism was born, *as an established reality* with the institutional privileges of self-appointment to defend, come hell or high water, hypocrisies be damned. And because of this state of unearned (and thus, tenuous) privilege, it was and is just as vulnerable to the confusion of values and vested interests as is the inevitable case with any other ensconced constituency, because self-preservation within the status quo and real revolution against the status quo are exclusive propositions. It is in the construction of analyses that obfuscate this fact of exclusive proposition – manifested in the intellectual elitism and the fetishized semiotics of neo-Marxism that we see their conveniently self-negating cynicism. This form of scholasticism not only cares more for the status of the bureaucratic word at the expense of the dramatic summations of the image, it also prioritizes institutional positionality over the fate of real people. On this score, one cannot help but take note of Nikita Khruschev's famous pronouncement, "Comrades! We must abolish the cult of the individual decisively, once and for all!"[28]

The motives for all of this seem clear: they reside in the need to orchestrate and contain human interaction in such a way that it can be "re-educated" to its new role as a constituent member of a manageable demographic, conveniently losing post-Cold War sight of the anti-capitalist rationales which were once at the polemic core of neo avant-garde art.[29] Now, it is the pancapitalist institution itself that has the most to gain from any demise of the subject, and on this point we must be clear: the postmodern techno-bureaucratic institution is a pan-capitalist rather than anti-capitalist entity. In other words it is either a corporation or is politically and economically beholden to corporate agendas, and has been so for much longer than has been commonly recognized. As such, it can be expected to exercise only minimal lip service to and have no real sympathy for the goals of social justice and economic democracy, however highly it might pretend to esteem those goals in its mission statements and promotional paperwork. And, I must hasten to reiterate, re-educational social orchestration is almost exclusively exercised in passive-aggressive terms that rely on euphemism and subterfuge to gain positions of leverage via the strategic manufacture of persuasive illusions of consent. In this important aspect, the *pax exsanguinia* of 21st-century administrativism differs sharply from the explicit authoritarianism of 20th-century fascism. Here, I leave it to the reader to ponder the extent to which this is the only difference.

## III

The excessive and misguided faith in the legitimate and redeeming power of the institution is not just the comfortable refuge of neo-Marxists pining away from a revolution that they know (and secretly hope) can never come. It is also shared by Arthur Danto, a well-known art critic and philosopher who was among the very first to campaign on behalf of the idea of art's needing an institutional hothouse to survive in any meaningful way. As a philosopher, he is a proponent of the Institutional Theory of Art, which he qualifies as being a non-cognitive theory, in that it confers and prioritizes identity on the basis of categorical rather than tangible attributes. As Danto has written:

> The art world is a discourse of reasons institutionalized, and to be
> a member of the art world is, accordingly, to have learned what it
> means to participate in the discourse of reasons for one's culture.
> In a sense, the discourse of reasons for a given culture is a sort of
> language game, governed by rules of play, and for reasons parallel
> to those that hold that only where there are games are there wins
> and losses and players, so only where there is an art world is there
> art.[30]

Following from this, we have his vision of criticism practically applied:

> Works of art are symbolic expressions, in that they embody their meanings. The task of criticism is to identify the meanings and explain their embodiment. So construed, criticism is the discourse of reasons, participation in which defines the art world of The Institutional Theory of Art: to see something as art is to be ready to interpret it in terms of what and how it means. Sometimes the meanings will have been lost and intricate exercises in archeology of the sort at which masters like Aby Warburg or Erwin Panofsky excelled are required to bring them to light, and to reconstitute what would have been transparent to the original art world for these pieces. There is, simply in the nature of their being symbols, a system of communication and an implied audience for the work, and we can identify that audience as the work's art world, in that members of it are conversant in the discourse of reasons that constitute that work as a work, and then as the work is.[31]

On the face of things, this explanation seems to put Danto on a similar theoretical footing to the Constance University *Rezeptionaesthetik* theorists Wolfgang Iser and Hans Robert Jauss: insofar as every work of art is a kind of self-narration addressing itself to an implied narratee, and insofar as both narration and narratee are fused by their location amid a shared horizon of expectations built on a common heritage infrastructure, then the critical task consists of deciding whether or not one is able to be the narratee that a given artistic narration calls for. But there is an important difference between Danto's position and that of the Rezeption theorists. In the case of the latter, the "horizon of expectations" to which works of art address themselves are formed by fluid and non-professional "communities of desire," which are self-selecting through shared affinities. In Danto's formulation, said horizon is necessarily professionalized and exclusive, which is to say that it discards the idea of affinity-driven communities of desire in favor of a self-consciously professionalized discourse of reasons available to a limited coterie.

Although Danto tends to write more frequently about historical rather than contemporary art, he frequently displays a keen instinct for the dialectical interplay that exists between specific works and the larger horizons of expectation to which they address themselves, which is to say that Danto has proven himself capable of being many different kinds of critical narratee. He himself has written: "Monists, Duelists, and Pluralists each have arguments and counter arguments, but none of them is decisive: The only defensible position is of tolerating them all, and living with the disjunction."[32] Following from this, we must reasonably ask if Danto the art critic practices the pluralism that Danto the philosopher seems to be preaching. The answer is both yes and no.

It is "yes" when we observe the variety of media and artistic orientation that Danto attends to in his regular column in *The Nation*. Here, he consistently reveals a keen instinct for the archeological recovery of the conditions of experience which are encoded in various artworks, seeing those conditions as being grounded in the artist's experience of the world and asking for explanation. But the answer is "no" when we take note of the critical blind spot in Danto's oeuvre; the blind spot that centers around the work of various neoexpressionist painters that Danto has disparaged, apparently losing his grip on the pluralism as well as the archeological imperative that he so comfortably articulates when looking at other types of work. In a retrospective remark written in 1986, Danto states:

> There was Neo Expressionism, which burst into the consciousness of the art world after over a decade of what retrospectively seemed stagnation, when there was no particular direction to be discerned, but simply the ceaseless modification of existing forms and styles, minimal perturbations of the already accepted and already understood, where the only available or justifiable ideology seemed to be a benign pluralism...now abruptly, here is Neo Expressionism, deliriously hailed as a breakthrough after all...it was my conviction that this picture of history was false. I thought: art does not have this kind of future.[33]

But what future did Danto accord to art? His well-known view was that art had already fulfilled its historical mission in the manner prophesied by Hegel: "Is it possible that the wild effervescence of the art world in the past seven or eight decades has been a terminal fermentation of the historical chemistry of which remains to be understood?"[34]

Danto answers his own question when he states the following: "Hegel's thought was that for a period of time the energies of history coincided with the energies of art, but now history and art must go in different directions, and although art may continue to exist in what I have termed a post-historical fashion, its existence carries no historical significance whatever."[35] If this is indeed true, why then do we read such shrill critical alarm about Anselm Kiefer's 1988 retrospective at the Museum of Modern Art?

> Aside from the overall perniciousness of Kiefer's crackpot message, he is in this respect no worse than Salle or Schnabel, both of whom early recognized the benefits of incoherence...The Aristophanic charge is to produce work that is dense, dark, prophetic, heroic, mythic, runic, dangerous, reassuring, accusatory, reinforcing, grandiloquent, too compelling for mere reason to deal with, fraught, fearful, bearing signs that the artist is in touch with

powers that will make us whole, and is spiritual, oceanic, urgent, romantic, and vast.[36]

What real reason could Danto have for getting so worked up about Kiefer's work, or about Neo-Expressionism in general? Could it be that it threatened to put the Aristophanic lie to Hegelian claims of a cosmic historical narrative by anthathematically calling for an understanding of a lower-case notion of history, one that is understood as collective autobiography respirating forward and backward, always ongoing? And could it be that adminodoxy needed and still needs the Hegelian fairy tale of History and its (administrativist) End to suppress this highly unstable notion of collective autobiography, in part because it implies collective participation rather than passive consumption of institutionally superordinated meanings? And finally, could it be that the paintings created by these artists held within their own formal structures the exoteric key to their self-explanation, thereby challenging the idea that the work "needs an explanation" and so challenging the viability of such explainers? Danto himself gives a clue to how these questions might be answered when he muses:

> It is far from plain that we can separate art from philosophy, inasmuch as its substance is in part constituted by what it is philosophically believed to be. And its insubstantiation by its oppressor may be one of the great victories of political metaphysics.[37]

This fit of disdain about Neo-Expressionism seems odd for a critic who prides himself with such apparent catholicity of taste. Certainly, the archeological task of coming to terms with the intent of such works is not particularly daunting: this was the art of panic in the age of Reagan, panic about what the looming end of the Cold War would mean for conventional assumptions about exemplary artistic subjectivity, and panic about no longer being able to pretend that the avant-garde model of artistic accomplishment was still intact. One would be right to expect that Danto should have found support for his famous thesis about "art at the end of art" in these works, and he should have been able to explain them accordingly, in the manner that he lauded the work of Norman Rockwell some years later, significantly *after* the 9/11 terrorist attacks: "Rockwell not only shows us situations with which everyone is familiar, he showed them as having the feelings to go with those situations...the reader (read: "the viewer") is touched by the feelings they display. And probably one is moved by the fact that one is moved, momentarily flooded by a feeling of warmth."[38] What could account for this lapse of skepticism in the face of sentimental illustrations giving voice to a cliché-ridden pseudo-history? An urge to easy popularity in troubled times? Certainly, when Danto claims that

Rockwell states that Rockwell's work represents "The default state of the American persona,"[39] we can be tempted into thinking such a thing, but by the same standard, we could claim that Neo-Expressionism represented the default state of the European persona, rendered with a knowing and urbane irony. But on another score, it is also fair to say that Neo-Expressionism violated another thesis that Danto holds almost as dear, that being one that insists on an artwork's a priori need for philosophical explication to bring them into the world of collective consciousness. This can be read as a serious symptom of cynical psychological politics, which is revealed in another statement illustrating an astounding lapse in logic for any thinker who would ascribe to himself the label of analytic philosopher:

> A senator who appeared that day on the program (i.e. The McLaughlin Group) made the point that artists must be held accountable if supported, as anyone else must be, and my question then was how we distinguish censorship from accountability. The question could not arise save against an acknowledgment of artistic content...if we acknowledge content, and suppose formalist considerations subservient to it, then accountability really is censorship. The senator truly posed a paradox: we are, in the case of art, giving subsidy to something that we cannot, without forfeiting a deep freedom, call to account. We can then stop subsidy, but there is something willful in a government pledged to defend a freedom that it is unprepared to tolerate in art.[40]

The lapse in logic is in the equation of subsidy with toleration, suggesting that an unsubsidized art cannot exist apart from its subsidization, a claim contradicted by history many times over. This lapse belies Danto's institutionalist and adminidox loyalties, which, as has been suggested by both George Dickie[41] and Richard Wollheim[42] are far more about a discourse of entrenched prerogatives than they are a true discourse of logically argued reasons reflecting a real plurality of views.

## IV

It seems fair to characterize Danto's critical and philosophical projects as being primarily driven by the attempt to finesse and equilibrate the evolutionary imperatives of Hegelian historical metaphysics with analytic philosophy's emphasis on making defensible statements. In other words, he seems to be laboring to make the advocacy of Hegelian metaphysics defensible in the sense of being a verifiably true (as opposed to demonstrably false) proposition. This is nothing less than an attempt to naturalize what is essentially a theological project, one that must of necessity fail at being both: as

theology, it gives no coherent basis for the exercise of decisions based on right reason, and as logic it can only presume a truth content which can never be demonstrated empirically. Pluralism holds the default position that survives this logical impasse, but Danto's institutionally simulated pluralism does a poor job of being truly and vividly pluralistic, fixated as it tends to be on praising a relatively narrow group of artists who came of artistic age in the 1970s. As is the case with the controversial Institutional Theory of Art, this too reminds of the wag's remark that "philosophy was the art of proving to the powerful that they are right," that being the damning nutshell which has ever since encased the prosecution of scholastic reason. As time would pass, this little piece of common sense also became the basis for yet another common cynicism in art criticism.

As the art world of the 1990s began to develop its own characteristic identity, it became clear that one of its guiding priorities was to advance a style of art criticism that could actively exonerate itself from the charge of scholasticism, which had almost no utility as a marketing tool. By mid-decade, an art-critical sea change was well underway, giving new emphasis to quasi-populist accounts that were supposed to be less intimidating to general readers who presumably were frustrated by the intellectual tenor of more theoretical approaches. Reasons for this sea change are only now coming into a clarified light: the end of the Cold War and the concomitant restructuring of the National Endowment for the Arts created a situation in which it was apparent that the art world's belated attempt at "outreach" and the building of new constituencies (read: multi-culturalism and identity politics) would not be able to turn the political tide in its favor. Furthermore, little help was coming in the form of various scholastic approaches, which had all but abandoned the world of art in favor of a field called "visual studies" which focused on various manifestations of popular culture. The call went out for a more vivid and accessible writing that could rebuild the public's flagging interest in art, writing which could mask rather than reveal the ideological imperatives of its subjects. With this demand, the notion of critic as a spokesperson/panegyrist was reborn out of the 1970s idea that one could be an "art writer" without indulging in the untoward judgment-mongering of "criticism." This approach has two seemingly opposite faces, which I shall dub the "passive" and the "aggrandizing." First the passive face, initially full of the kind of anxiety expressed by Eleanor Heartney in 1986:

> Why do critics feel so dispirited? Twenty-five years ago, Clement Greenberg wielded the power to shape an entire art movement. Ten years ago, Lucy Lippard confessed that although she abhorred the system, she continued to write because it was a way of bringing forward the work of women artists. Today, critics seem fasci-

nated with their own impotence. Are they simply being disingenu-
ous, or are larger social , economic, and political forces conspiring
to render their calling irrelevant? How do the circumstances under
which criticism is done today affect the results? Is the cynicism of
certain critics the logical consequence of such eighties phenom-
ena as instant masterpieces, disco art, and celebrity collectors?[43]

An answer to this anxiety comes in the form of Jeremy Gilbert-Rolfe's bleak
statement of pan-Capitalist reconciliation:

The extreme timidity of today's criticism? The galleries are suffer-
ing skyrocketing rents which forces them to make increasingly
safer choices in the art which they present. Artists are under ever-
increasing pressure to provide that art and the magazines are un-
der pressure to promote it. Writers want to get published, so they
have little choice but to also fall into line.[44]

And into line they do fall. Witness the impudent natterings of Mathew Collings,
who brazenly plays the role of mouthpiece-in-residence for the newly made-
over London art scene so energetically marketed by advertising mogul Charles
Saatchi. Or look through the pages of *Artforum* and *Art in America* and try to
find instances where any writer goes out on even the smallest limb. Taking
these paeans at face value would lead one to believe the art world was produc-
ing an endless cornucopia of significant work. But this servile approach has
another face as well, for when these so-called art writers matriculate to the
position of newspaper critic, they often metamorphose into monsters of self-
righteous self-importance motivated by a desire to overcompensate for the
humiliations of their previous conditions of art magazine servitude. This is the
aggrandizing face, which foregrounds the narcissism of the writer's self-ac-
count as the preferred alternative to passively fanning the artistic subject's
narcissism.
        It is interesting to consider the cynical relationship between art-writ-
ing-as-neutral-description and art-writing-as-pompous-pronouncement. It is
really quite simple: writers start by working for magazines doing descriptive
articles, and some graduate to newspaper jobs, at which point the frustration
of a long apprenticeship of descriptive cow-towing comes to a head, and they
explode into monsters of comic self-importance, knowing that they are backed
up by "the power of the media." Of course, the media only has the power to
dictate the-next-big-thing-that-will-change-everything-for-the-next-five-min-
utes, so some degree of bet hedging is required – hence a constant obsession
with career mobility, because those who live by the power of the media are
particularly prone to die by the power of the media. The career of Jed Perl

offers a good example of this self-aggrandizing style of quasi-autobiographi-cal art writing. Perl initially learned the art critic's craft at the knee of his mentor, Hilton Kramer, while writing for Kramer's Olin-foundation-sponsored *New Criterion*. During the 1990s, he served as the regular art critic for the neo-Conservative *New Republic*, where he has consistently bemoaned the art world for its denigration of "the stand-alone values" of works of art (not ex-actly code for the antique doctrine of Greenbergian autonomy, but close enough) because we have been seduced into celebrating context-determined trivia by a satanic army of opportunistic packagers. So far, so good. But why then do we care that the installation of Bill Jensen's paintings at Mary Boone is "too spare,"[45] or that the Metropolitan Museum's installation of the work of Camille Corot "comes dangerously close to turning him into a broken-down nineteenth-century period piece"?[46] And, for that matter, how can one even attempt to describe anything whose essential value is said to lie in how it "stands alone"?

On the other hand, Perl's *New Republic* work does offer many mo-mentary flashes of clear and worthwhile perception: "Warholism and Reaganomics fell into bed together. Then their lovechild, Robert Mapplethorpe, was transformed from a clever aesthete into a martyr at the altar of political correctness."[47] Here we can see that Perl's ability to turn a clever phrase is enviable. The problem is that he doesn't know how to run very far with those moments of insight, and thus fails to weave the warp-and-weft of circumstance and observation into a sufficiently elaborate narrative of consciousness, or to transmute it into a generative perspective. Instead, he opts to dump his trite *ad verecundiam* misgivings into his reader's lap, as if their "free-standing" self-importance were of some automatic consequence. And this is the rub: a critic working during a time of downward spiraling artistic decadence must do more than huff-and-puff and pump the fortunes of artists who are acknowledged as his personal associates – he or she must also detail the trajectory and velocity of the fall, and take careful Petronian note of the complex scenery which passes while perdition looms ever-larger. Who, apart from a trained psychoanalyst, would guess that the man who most loudly reviles the philistines is himself a philistine? Certainly not the editors of *New Republic*.

Of course, the distance between the overly demonized philistine and the laudably democratic populist is an exceedingly short one, and very few critics have made any serious effort to address their remarks to the slippery space that exists between the two positions. The most noteworthy example of such an effort resides in the work of Dave Hickey, which has come to an un-likely prominence during the second half of the 1990s. Hickey, coincidentally, has also mourned the passing of the mythical condition of "standing alone."[46] Hickey came into art world prominence with the 1993 publication of his book *The Invisible Dragon: Four Essays on Beauty*. Certainly, this was a startling title and topic for a book of art criticism written during the first half of the so-

called "politically correct" 1990s, and one suspects that this was so for calculated effect, because the real substance of the four essays had much less to do with any attempt to articulate the character and contours of a postmodern theory of beauty[49] than it had to do with an attempt to advance demurring questions about the real motives of arts institutions during the post-Cold War era. Much of the first and second sections of this Chapter owes a significant debt to the questions that Hickey's book advanced with such literary flair, although fairness also reminds us that those questions were already well in play before *Invisible Dragon* was published.[50] Nonetheless, Hickey deserves much credit for challenging administrative self-congratulation in a vivid and persuasive way; in so doing, he also has done much to revive the general reader's interest in contemporary art criticism.

Clearly, art institutions deserve all of the scorn that Hickey has heaped upon them (as well as some that he hasn't), but once Hickey's laudable anti-institutionalist agenda becomes transparent, another kind of easy cynicism begins to reveal itself, exposing the absence of a well-developed metaphysics of art. Hickey has stated that "saying the market is corrupt is like saying that the cancer patient has a hangnail,"[51] drawing a parallel between the bureaucratic institution's "monitoring of desire" with the market's "monitoring of appearances."[52] This is supposed to be true because the market allegedly allows for greater opportunities for symbolic subversion because it only cares for "how things look," rather than about "what it means,"[53] but this is really true only if we allow Hickey his facile dichotomy of a virtuous market run by risk-taking art dealers (Hickey himself was one) vs. an infantilizing bureaucracy run by control-obsessed civil service workers. In other words, we are asked to assume that plutocratic oligarchy and bureaucratic theocracy are the only positions that can rightfully draw critical allegiance, and that oligarchy is clearly the preferable alternative. It is important to note here that no distinction is made between democracy and oligarchy, implying that Hickey thinks that a citizen's vote and his pocketbook are of the same egalitarian stripe, which is, of course, nonsense. As Minou Roufail has written, "Viewed in terms of the larger American rage for markets, though, Hickey seems less like an innovative thinker, and more like the Fred Barnes of art criticism: In his universe, all things bad come from elite liberal institutions like government and museums; all things good emanate from ordinary people working through their trusted democratic medium, the free market."[54]

But the real fact is that these two seemingly opposed engines of "art support" have in fact operated hand-in-glove for at least four decades. Assuming that one can save the art world from the other is wishful to say the least, particularly now that the so-called market is so deeply in the thrall of a corporate cash cow run by a new kind of patron called "the art consultant," one who evaluates visual experience solely in terms of how it serves the anesthetizing

functions of boardroom ambiance and casino decor. When Hickey is delivering approbation about contemporary art (and it is remarkable how infrequently he writes about the work of living artists – excepting in promotional catalogue essays – preferring various pop cultural phenomena such as jazz, rock & roll, and Las Vegas spectacles), we are left to wonder how these vivid declarations of personal preference are to be taken as being anything more significant than that. Perhaps they need not and should not be in the over-idealized democratic universe that Hickey inhabits, for, as he has stated:

> As for myself, I am a Southerner and no kind of Modernist, since the inheritance of European modernism is deeply imbricated with the German idea of cult, or culture, as opposed to the Anglo-French idea of civilization. All of my criticism, in fact, aspires to mitigate the power of culture by bringing its out-of-awareness permissions and prescriptions into a condition of social awareness. I am rigorously opposed to the idea of tribal believing and communitarian culture. I hate that mysterioso stuff. Any organic, extralegal idea of culture deprioritizes the body of the democratic citizen: it is the enemy of secular consciousness, the enemy of the intellectual anxiety of secular urban life in general.[55]

Never mind that the "intellectual anxiety of urban life" *is* the dialectical friction that occurs between "oedipean" culture and the "sibling aggregation" called society, and never mind that the best art represents a dialectical finessing of the allegorical imperatives of the former with the documentary imperatives of the latter. This is precisely the fulcrum where a pragmatics of art fails to be a metaphysics of art, and for this reason we see Hickey pulling punches that need to be landed, for it is not the place of serious criticism to serve the blindly sensible intuitions of the market any more than it should serve the empty prerogatives of bureaucratic entitlement. Rather, criticism should see itself as being served by these agencies, and treat them with whatever scorn it deems necessary when they fail that role. In other words, we can acknowledge the fact that it is an unavoidable given that works of art must of necessity be either commodities or tokens of bureaucratic gamesmanship, for those are the portals through which art enters the modern and/or postmodern world. The real importance of criticism lies in the way that it can insist upon and reveal how art can and should be something more than those things – meaning that, even though criticism can never be disinterested or disengaged, it should strive for its own independence of voice, one that encompasses, subsumes, and transforms the experience of art into a durable symbol of exalted meaning. This is not an anti-democratic requirement: in fact, it is the opposite, for we should remember the adage stating that "art is news that stays news," recognizing that there is no way to build an actionable democratic consensus around anything

other than a resonant idea that lives eloquently in its own time and beyond that time as well. A pragmatics of art that eschews the metaphysics of art backs away from this fact, substituting the easy prerogatives of simple narcissism (Andy Warhol: "Art is about liking things") for the somewhat thornier advancement of a symbolically persuasive plan for collective action and interaction. Without appeal and recourse to this "cultural" fact of art, the stated preferences of any critic are about as worthwhile as the public announcement of his or her favorite flavors of ice cream.

Circumstances came to the fore to throw the limitations of such "pragmatic hedonism" in high, tragic relief. It was Hickey's fate to curate the fourth iteration of *SITE: Santa Fe,* which opened in the summer of 2001. Titled *Beau Monde: Toward a Redeemed Cosmopolitanism,* the exhibition styled itself as a pleasure zone of impeccable haute design, a kind of late 90s recapitulation of 1970s pattern-and-decoration insouciance writ technologically large and lavishly delightful as a neo-rococo retort to scholastic pretension. Featured in the exhibition was notable work done by accomplished late modernists working at the conclusions of brilliant careers (such as Frederick Hammersly, Ellsworth Kelly, Kenneth Price, and Bridget Riley) mixed in with artists who use outlandish materials in hyper-outlandish ways – one thinks of the architectural adornments of Jim Isserman and a spray painted mural by the K2S (Kill to succeed) graffiti crew. By all accounts, it was a fun show that did push the boundaries of an aesthetics of pleasure. But just as it seemed to be making its case for an operatically unqualified embrace of the pleasure principle, the (repressed?) reality principle reared its head in the form of the 9/11 terrorist attacks, themselves a gesture of macabre geopolitics that reminded all of how the world was not so *beau,* making the show seem nostalgic for a bygone time even before it concluded its own run the following January.

Hickey's theory of beauty seems to want to be a metaphysics of art, but by virtue of saying everything, it says almost nothing. It elides an engagement with the categorical overlap of beauty and the sublime, while ignoring the thorny issue of the relation of terror to the sublime (excepting for several politicized references to how it operates amid Gilles Deleuze's dialectic of sadism and masochism), just as it remains hazy regarding the sublime's relation to beauty as opposed to mere prettiness. In the end, Hickey's valuation of beauty lies only in its ability to subvert an undifferentiated idea of order with an equally undifferentiated notion of desire: "If our worlds change at all, they do so on those singular occasions when desire shatters the hegemony of taste. If we ever know ourselves at all, I suspect, it is only in those moments when we discover exactly what we want – when we encounter that one thing that we never could have imagined, that does everything, and nothing like it will do."[56] Here, we see a good example of Hickey's widely revered prosody operating in high grandiloquent mode; never mind that it conveys a rather obvious insight,

and that it quickly drops its own line of reason without further elaboration. Here we would assume that Hickey's reliance on the authority of the ostensive voice would place him in harmony with the Clement Greenberg, but apparently, this is not the case:

> Take the example of Clement Greenberg. You have probably heard of him. He was an art critic from the postwar era whose practices and preferences were totally discredited and defunct by the time that I entered the art world in 1967. Academic critics, however, by laying siege to Greenberg's gutted and abandoned citadel for the past thirty years, have invested his misty bullshit with such a disproportionate level of social value that the waning authority of academic criticism (due to bad investment) has occasioned a grass roots recrudescence of Greenberg's favorite stuff: color field painting, which, even as we speak, is being translated into money.[57]

It sounds almost as momentous as Marc Antony pronouncing eulogy over the corpse of Julius Caesar, but the facts that he takes for granted are easily debated. For example, it is true that the influence of Greenberg's formalism was waning in 1967, but it would be *at least* another full decade before it could seriously be said to have been discredited, and even then, it remained a somewhat arguable position: witness its revival in Frank Stella's *Working Space* (1986) and Michael Fried's *Absorption and Theatricality in the Age of Diderot* (1990). And any resurgence of color field painting that may have come and gone during the late 1990s (the work of Monique Prieto, for example) owes a much larger debt to the connotation-and-irony-laced work of Peter Halley than it does to any resurgent cult of chromatic purity. Yet, it also opens up to another statement that is fraught with possibility, that Hickey would prefer "honest fakery to fake honesty,"[58] another false dichotomy that excludes the possibility of an honest non-fakery, but one not quite as glib as it sounds when given this elaboration:

> Finally, we realize that Antonioni has transformed the visual language of Italian painting – of Guido Reni and Veronese – into a kind of music. And this is troubling to us because "serious movies" in our culture traditionally speak in the language of Rembrandt; they aspire to give us the invisible subtext, the inference of troubled interiority, the psychological truth made visible on the character's anguished face. Antonioni's characters, however, more closely resemble the figures on those antique paintings. Like the heroes and heroines in Tiepolo, Antonioni's characters are handsome and self-contained; they live completely in their bodies and inhabit compositions of similar elegance...this psychological opacity is routinely taken as a signifier of the characters' 'shallowness.'[58]

And here, we catch a glimpse of Hickey's other, less remarked-upon *bête noir,* which is subjectivism, forming the confusing shadow side of his flamboyant consternation for academies and institutions. This leads us to ponder what Hickey could mean when he states that "the great subject of late-twentieth-century cultural speculation...[is] the historical relationship of art to secular power in the social realm."[60] Who or what is that power to be exercised over, if it is not the introspective subject striving for the autonomy of his or her own interiority? To seriously answer that question is to admit that *the* real great issue in post-Cold War art and art criticism is the articulation, dramatization, and defense of the prerogatives of the creative autonymic subject (whose self-experience forms the very definition of interiority), empowering it to with-stand the administrativist forces of exonymic trivialization and objectifica-tion-as-specimen. It does not matter if those forces come from the chain-letter economy of the administered art market, or from the palace intrigues of crypto-monarchical institutions, for on this score it is critical folly to simply be con-tent to pick one's poison without striving for a persuasive third alternative.

## V

Somewhere between an ideological discourse of explanations and the promotional practice of belletrist panegyric, a space needs to be carved out for what Raphael Rubenstein recently called "new genealogies for contempo-rary painting,"[61] a call that presumably also applies to all contemporary art as well as the ways that their critical reflection might be stylized. Indeed, it is not adequate to merely call for new genealogies, for to do so is to simply address the problem of "festivalist pluralism" with even more of the same, and this does not truly engage the limitations of criticism conceived from within the "explanatory/educational paradigm." Every genealogy stems from some kind of a starting point, and that point need be articulated in terms of a metaphysics of art that can initiate and guide such a genealogy, and also re-cast the practice of criticism as a more crucial discourse of engenderments that might be more vital than its current orientation of penning exegetical taxonomies of "well-schooled, craftsmanly busywork."[62] Abiding by such metaphysics is not new to art criticism; on the contrary, the refusal to openly do so seems to be the dubious innovation of the current moment.[63] But an unanswered question re-mains: how to go about carving that space, and with what tools? Certainly, the formalist's allegedly disinterested attention to the actuality of artistic fact has run its course, and the speculative aesthetics that takes social anthropology as its master discourse also seems to be mired in endgame strategies intended to occlude the fact that they should rightfully encourage a questioning of the institutional prerogatives that they pretend not to serve.

This leaves but one unexplored territory, and that is *transformative*

*subjectivism* articulated here without any embarrassment over the quasi-religious ramifications invoked by it. It was Aristotle who initially placed the idea of catharsis at the heart of his theory of dramatic tragedy, with his famous unities functioning as the architectonic scaffolding that could organize and amplify the moment of "blessed enlightenment" conveyed and realized by the enactment of the tragic moment. Mimesis was the important connective tissue that wrapped the former into the latter, insulating it from the world of which it was a crystallized idealization. Because this idea was essentially a prescription for a poeticized externalization of psychical conflicts that could be "played out" and resolved in the symbolic realm, it required psychoanalytic theory to protect and sustain it through the enlightenment's campaign of confusing rationalism with rationalization. The fact that post-modernist theory both exaggerated and revealed the inseparability of the two is both useful and limiting; useful because it reminded of the linkage between measurement and the measurer, and limiting because it knew not what else it could do after revealing this linkage. All that seemed left was the practice of a criticism predicated on a kind of "pragmatic hedonism" that now seems just a tawdry mystification for the act of shopping for titillations in hopes of stumbling across the big aesthetic score that never quite seems to be revealed.

What remained after the hollow triumph of post-modernist self-reflexivity was a kind of criticism that functioned as a kind of "ethnography of the self" – that being a kind of speculative navel-gazing festooned with footnotes corroborating the fact that others have done the same thing. Certainly, this was a valuable corrective to the older and even more nugatory self-reflexivity that insisted on the object *qua object,* but both had only marginal success in the most important of criticism's many unrewarded tasks, that being the forwarding of a "discourse of engenderments" emanating from a consciousness that might prescriptively articulate the persuasive conditions of aesthetic necessity without resorting to the circus of hedged bets. Such an audacious forwarding can only be accomplished by gaining knowledge of a meaningful touchstone of value, and it is more than clear that the risks for doing so far outweigh the likelihood of successfully accomplishing such a thing. But it also is important to recognize that there are risks for not doing so, and I would submit into evidence that most of the art, and indeed, almost the entire set of ensemble relations that we still call the *art world* that has emerged during the past twenty years can be seen as proof of that.

Here, the most important point is not that we need to return to Aristotle for guidance on what such a touchstone of value might be; rather, I would say that we should return to an idea of what Aristotle's motivations might have been for making his claims. Simply put, these were to publicly recognize that certain symbolic deployments could have a therapeutic effect on social groups, and here, the term therapeutic is not intended to even slightly suggest any

educational implication of the word. On the contrary, "education" comes very close to being an adequate name for what the aforementioned therapy can cure us from by returning those who partake of it to the core dialectic of real experience and real mortality, which is the beginning point for the only wisdom that matters. This is so because only it can rightfully assess aesthetic value in terms that can hope to have any durable consequence beyond the provision of distraction in the service of administrative opportunism. Thus, criticism does indeed need a metaphysics of art to be and do the thing that it is, and the best metaphysics of art is the one that best knows the most crucial reasons why art matters, even if the embrace of same must of necessity and by definition challenge the aforementioned opportunism as being just that.

　　　　Certainly, these are vexing issues, and my intent in raising them here is not merely the venting and fanning of a baseless *ressentiment* at recent art criticism's lapses in courage, sincerity, and best effort. Rather, my purpose is to hold critical feet to a critical fire in hopes that they will grow less cold in their quest for an Archimedean ground to stand upon. Just as Clement Greenberg found it necessary to cast aspersions on his colleague's efforts when he made the twin claims that Harold Rosenberg's work was "dogged by a fatality of nonsense...a fatality more properly called a comedy [of]...amphigoric art interpretation"[64] while also castigating Lawrence Alloway's efforts for their uncritical embrace of "exaggerated newness,"[65] my own ax grinds toward the cynicism that begs to be saved from itself by new or persuasively-revived ideals. Just as Carter Ratcliff was able to identify a species of art writers whom he dubbed "Cassandra critics"[66] all of whom were said to "pronounce on the scene with outrage, sorrow, and superior detachment,"[67] I see another species flourishing at the end of another decade of a very different kind of flash and glamour, a cynical species that might best be called "Ganymede critics" as a way of indicating how they function as the rhetorical cup-bearers to the pan-capitalist gods of market and institution, themselves the twin snakes on a single caduceus of aesthetic morbidity. Certainly, they can defend their positions by saying that they only seek to understand and reveal, casting judgment as an impediment to same. I counter that claim by saying that if we refuse to judge with our opinions grounded in explicit and cogent argument, we can rest assured that determinations not to our liking will be made for us by forces more diffuse, omnipresent, and much larger than ourselves, and the real problem is that such forces may have already grown large enough to be immune to accountability. At the very least, by calling attention to what I believe to be the cynicism of today's Ganymede critics, I hope to engender a space for the kind of thinking which will lead to a necessary uncircling of the art world's wagons, in hopes of pointing them toward a horizon which is marked by a recognition of (and renewed respect for) art's psycho-moral necessity. That necessity is in fact exaggerated by the emerging circumstances of post-urban life, rife as it is

with the ever-growing conflict between the diverging imperatives of too-much information and too few opportunities for self-invention and real experience. It also grows ever more bereft of the symbolic occasions where information pictures and experiential realities can be fused into some kind of durable waypoint allowing for the pertinent redirection of collective consciousness. More than ever before, we need persuasive symbols that can connect and fuse these two polarities, and art criticism non-cynically understood remains the only possible force that can publicly engender and insist upon the fulfillment of that need. So, if in the process of uncircling the art world's wagons a few sacred cows are left behind to feed buzzard and dust bin alike, this chapter will gladly chalk the loss up to the unavoidable exigencies of our confusing moment: a relatively small sacrifice gladly exchanged for the potential of a great and necessary gain.

# Chapter 4

# Mutation Mutandas: Miming for Meaning

*Regardless of the compelling metaphors of the spatial distinctions of inner and outer, they remain linguistic terms that facilitate and articulate a set of fantasies, feared and desired. "Inner" and "outer" make sense only with reference to a mediating boundary that strives for stability. And this stability, this coherence, is determined in large part by cultural orders that sanction the subject and compel its differentiation from the abject...In what language is "inner space" figured? What kind of figuration is it, and through what figure of the body is it signified? How does a body figure on its surface the very invisibility of its hidden depth?*

- Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble* (1990)[1]

*With the word "picture" we think first of a copy of something. Accordingly, a world picture would be a painting, so to speak, of what is as a whole. But "world picture" means more than this. We mean by it the world itself, the world as such, what is, in its entirety, just as it is normative and binding for us. "Picture" here does not mean some imitation, but rather what sounds forth in the colloquial expression "we get the picture" concerning something.*

- Martin Heidegger, *The Age of the World Picture* (1938)[2]

*Man does not desire an object. Man desires an object's desire.*

- Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1807)[3]

# I

It was right in front of everybody's face, and yet no one saw it as a collective self-portrait. I refer to Jonathan Borofsky's *Ballerina Clown* (1989), which was auspiciously and, in fact, ominously installed in the spacious foyer of the Martin Gropius Bau in the early spring of 1991, a building still redolent of a dark Nazi past. Part of an exhibition curated by Norman Rosenthal and Christos Joachimides titled *Metropolis*, it cast a shadow much longer than could be accounted for by its thirty-foot vertical dimension. This work was and still is a most telling piece of hyper-kitsch: its head sports a clown's face of the unshaven hobo ilk, struggling to hold back an imminent flood of tears. Its body is that of a svelte ballerina standing atop a singular toe balanced upon a raised proscenium. At once a down-and-out habitué of the open road and the object of desire at the very center of the circus, this pronoun-defiant *everyhuman manqué* seemed to simultaneously invite empathy and scurrophobic scorn,[6] as if the burden of distracting the audience from the other operations of the circus was making said clown into a latter-day St. Sebastian, suffering the slings and arrows that stem from a kind of manic self-trivialization. "What have I be-come?" This is the clown's unspoken question to viewers who might approach it as a latter-day sphinx. The answer is embodied in its very being: a fall guy; a stooge, a pawn in the theater of bathos who seems to cry out "I am the con-temporary artist. Hear me roar!" as a prompt to disdainful laughter on the part of the audience, who can see everything except agency in the embodiment. Soon, artists such as Jeff Koons, Paul McCarthy, Mike Kelly, Jake and Dinos

Chapman, and Thomas Hirschhorn would enter into the contemporary clown-making fray, each seeking to outdo the other in the project of constructing the most perversely freakish avatar of the widely feared but inevitable freakishness of an impending new millennium. Working on the science-fiction-bred assumption that computer-assisted biotechnology would add to and exacerbate the long list of mortifications of the subject that have marked modern history since the time of Copernicus,[7] artists sought out an icon that would register the tragic-comic idea of a homuncular subject that is the last to know that it has lost its subjectivity to invisible albeit omnipresently sadistic forces of humiliation. With its phonetic association to the word "clone," the image of a clown was the perfect answer to this quest.

Borofsky's *Ballerina Clown* was one of several such works that were exhibited at the outset of the 1990s. For his own part, Bruce Nauman also registered a similarly conceived surrogate self-portrait when he exhibited a video installation titled *Clown Torture* (1989) in his retrospective organized by the Museum of Modern Art. Of course, clowns were longstanding subjects for William T. Wiley and Robert Arneson, two artists who were Nauman's former teachers at the University of California at Davis. From this lineage, we can infer that these circus characters may well have been the favored subject of a latent sub-culture in the California art scene, and we are reminded that Borofsky also hailed from the southern part of the golden state. But Borofsky's clown was the most anthemic of its co-religionalists, owing in large part to how it functioned as the emblematic sentinel figure of the exhibition that in many ways was the aesthetic and polemic prototype for all of the mega-shows that would soon come to characterize the art world of the 1990s. More than a giant festival of inclusions and exclusion that masterfully equilibrated the panoply of influences properly peddled, *Metropolis* also gave us the full flavor of the 90s look, in turns cool, craftsmanly, ironical, and perverse, and in greater turns mock-populist all the while winking heavy theory to those in the know.

One of those winks came in the form of an essay included in the exhibition's catalogue. Written by Paul Virilio and titled *Perspectives on Real Time,* the essay addressed itself to something that he called *Dromospheric Pollution*, elaborating on a term derived from the Greek word *dromos* that indicates the idea of velocity. Indeed, ever since the publication of Filippo Marinetti's "Futurist Manifesto" in 1908, artists have been self-consciously trying to grapple with the idea of velocity in its many manifestations, and every time they executed this project with a confident zeal, they have always found themselves in service to some form of crypto-fascism, irregardless of whether or not such service was explicitly intentional. As Virilio wrote: "It seems that we are still incapable of grasping seriously the question of trajectory, except in mechanical, ballistic or astronomical terms. Objectivity and subjectivity, certainly; but never *trajectivity*."[8] A plain-text reading of this state-

ment will no doubt detect much in the way of error, simply because such trajectivity has been grasped many times by many artists and many commentators during the past century. But, in another sense, it rings true for a full half-century of art that found it easy to substitute effect for affect, all the while confusing said effects with their psychomoral consequences, or lack thereof.

Stepping rather far out of character, Harold Rosenberg would seem to be amongst the first to take note of a change in the developmental vectors of art in relation to changes in and expansions of the institutional climate of art. Over four decades ago, he wrote:

> The entire social basis of art is being transformed – to all appearances for the better. Instead of being, as it used to be, an activity of rebellion, despair, or self-indulgence on the fringe of society, art is being normalized as a professional activity within society. For the first time, the art formerly called vanguard has been accepted en masse and its ideals of innovation, experiment, and dissent have been institutionalized and made official. Its functions are being clarified in relation to accepted practice in decoration, entertainment, and education, and the rewards to be won in art by talent and diligence are becoming increasingly predictable.[9]

The ensuing forty years of hindsight support and amplify Rosenberg's observation. It is easy enough to point to work of the indifferently famous Andy Warhol as indexing this shift, which was prophesized by the famously indifferent Marcel Duchamp. These were the two artists who most completely administered themselves in response to a still nascent administrativism's ascendant regime of omnipresent nullification-of-the-subject. But perhaps we should regress even further. Was it not Piet Mondrian who founded administrativism's schizoid sublime, he being the geometric avatar of the dynamic equilibrium that implied a social culture of (administratively) determined relations? Or do we see its initial emergence even earlier, in Seurat's divisionism that so presciently prophesied a frozen world of regimented pixels? Perhaps it was already made plain in Edouard Manet's aesthetics of abbreviated indication challenging those of embodied description in advance of a combat of signs between those who were once institutionally included and those others who were refused? One could easily take this question all the way back to the early Renaissance. Armed with Adrian Stokes's distinction between sculptors that he termed carvers and modelers, we can clearly see the fundamental schism that has haunted art for five centuries. For Stokes, sculptors of a "carving proclivity" were said to be closer to their gothic and scholastic roots as "revealers of form," while those inclined to modeling were said to "imbue spatial objects with the animus and calculation of inner life."[10] On one side of this chasm, which applies for painting, is an idea of art as the revelation of the schizoid

sublime's will-to-preordained truth. This stands in sharp contrast to the notion of art as idealized invention that imaginatively seeks to create a better world. The former submits to a preexisting metaphysical authority, while the latter takes the responsibility for the worldly invention of same.

Of course, this cavalcade of worthy precedents could be profitably extended in a number of directions running all the way back to the invention of the Phoenician alphabet, but this list of examples would sooner or later ask for a definition of that which it supposedly illustrates. Barnett Newman's famous essay from 1948 titled "The Sublime is Now" provides one such definition, and despite its many shortcomings and sins of omission, it continues to exert an influence over the discourse pertaining to contemporary art. In this essay, Newman seems over-eager to stage and exacerbate a manufactured distinction between a valorized notion of the sublime and a despised notion of beauty, a distinction that is so lacking in elaboration or qualification that it is almost impossible to analyze. Yet, it has managed to fuse itself into many of the theoretical assumptions that continue to be upheld about late 20th-century art, particularly those that cling to the assumption that simple inscriptive gestures can carry the weight of revelation, *if we just believe it to be so.*

This assumption seems very close to the core of the privileging of actuality and the diegetic voice that is so characteristic of Modernist art and art criticism, but its sly contribution lies in how it marshals the exegetical voice forward to substantiate its claims, invoking the power of rhapsodic annotation as a paradoxical instrument of making fact *qua* fact more than it is while also letting said facts off the hook in terms of explicating themselves in terms of purpose. In other words, we can ascertain in Newman's short polemic a kind of nascent operating manual for simultaneously upholding works of art as autonomous facts while also ascribing to them the kind of idealization of facticity that conferred upon themselves the status of works of art, a simultaneous having and eating of the cake of presumed cultural primacy. On this particular point, it is interesting to note that, despite their anti-art rhetoric, Minimalist artists never really deviated from this strategy. In fact, their special contribution to art and art theory was to bring them to the state of perfection that made it possible to pretend that certain kinds of architectural ornaments could be construed as offering an institutional critique, if Minimalism's alleged intention was so stated.

Newman's guiding overstatement was that "The impulse of modern art was to destroy beauty" so that "the image we produce is the self-evident one of revelation, real and concrete, that can be understood by anyone who will look at it without the nostalgic glasses of history."[11] This point is then buttressed by the essay's existential crescendo:

> We are reasserting man's natural desire for the exalted, for a con-

cern with our relationship with the exalted emotions...we are cre-
ating images whose reality is self-evident and which are devoid of
props and crutches that evoke associations with an outmoded and
antiquated legend...Instead of making *cathedrals* out of Christ,
man, or "life," we are making it of ourselves, out of our own feel-
ings.[12]

Or not. What Newman's exercise in hyperbole overlooked is that the afore-
mentioned cathedrals were in fact being made out of material that was sup-
posed to reveal itself *pace* Clement Greenberg *as material*, and also out of an
early example of "the eruption of language into the field of the visual arts"[13] to
use Craig Owens's description of speculative designations following from Pop
Art and the many exercises in the area of art and language that followed this
semiotic suit. From this chain of eruptions, it was just a small step to the cathe-
dral of technology *as technology*, and on to the cathedral of administration-
for-the-sake-of-administration. This headlong rush to a robotic metaphysics
represents what I would call the neo-Futurist progression of art, and I advance
this idea in ironical recognition that the original Italian Futurism remains one
of the very few modernist movements yet to be given the prefix *Neo,* simply
because all that it has been given are in fact sub-variants of an all-encompass-
ing and universally omnipresent Futurist aesthetics that have inflected much
of the art of the 20th century, and almost all of its second half. Indeed, a sober
look at the tragic history of the 20th century will inevitably reveal the anthemic
character of those adrenalin-fired articles of delirium crafted by that group of
Milan-based painters and poets. For example, half a decade before the Great
War and almost two decades before the publication of the "First Surrealist
Manifesto," we can read Filippo Marinetti casting himself as the intoxicated
prophet of gargantuan cruelty: "We will glorify war – the world's only hygiene
– militarism, patriotism, the destructive gestures of freedom-bringers, beauti-
ful ideas worth dying for, and scorn for women."[14] Here, we can see how he
articulated an early instance of the dromological sublime that was a techno-
logical mimic of Edmund Burke's description of a "delightful horror,
a...tranquility tinged with terror,"[15] while also revealing everything that we
need to know about the ethical implications of any atavism of velocity.

All of this forms the deep background substantiating why so much
contemporary art has shown itself to be in service to what Jeremy Gilbert-
Rolfe has called "the technological sublime," as his way of indicating the
mobius-spiraling character of cybernetic servomechanisms playing themselves
out more or less independently from human volition. We can only imagine
Marinetti smiling as he reads Gilbert-Rolfe's blunt explanation:

Capitalism is now propelled by a robotic logic in which the par-

ticipation of actual people is restricted to serving machines, consuming what they produce, and gambling on the stock exchange...shares in electronic communications [are] symbolic expressions of the sublime of pure ratio and futurity, which guarantees its persistence. The post-human is then a condition where human knowledge is necessary but human beings (i.e., being as human) are redundant...Present but un-verifiable, it [the post-human world] maintains a relationship to the human in which it is both an alternative to consciousness as it knows itself and that which has already entered and changed consciousness...[it] proposes a future which is now part of the subject's present as futurity...These are the terms in which technology, capitalism, and the sublime are related.[16]

This vision of a brave new world was indexed by several exhibitions that were organized at the turn of the new millennium. One of those was the 2000 Seoul Biennial titled *Media City*, while another titled *Bitstreams* was held at the Whitney Museum in the early Spring of 2001. Yet another was titled *010101: Art in Technological Times*, opening later that same year at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art. All three exhibitions emphasized artistic manifestations of what was purported to be an emerging digital reality poised to subsume consciousness itself. *Bitstreams* curator Lawrence Rinder was particularly clear on that point, when he was quoted as saying,

One of the most intriguing things about digital media is the way that it homogenizes...media such as sculpture, photography, and even sound by reducing all information to some binary expression...It's precisely because of the homogenization of information that even the simplest digitally produced art challenges conventional views of art...this is what Christiane [Paul] means when she talks about the paradigm shift from artistic 'truth' to 'conditions of possibility.'[17]

It should go without saying that the very stock-in-trade of so-called advanced art has been an attempt to reframe the real in terms of highly speculative conditions of possibility for a much longer time than can be marked by the invention of the microchip, but even with that caveat, we would do well to ask: "Are we ready, *really ready,* to embrace such hyper-homogenized conditions?" Some hindsight now suggests that before we answer that question, we consider the economic cleansing that was well underway at the time that these exhibitions were organized. The flight of capital to the cheap labor havens of so-called "emerging markets," and the automation of production, administrative organization, and social surveillance were all part of that cleansing's equa-

tion, but these factors were secondary to a widening schism between a ruling social class predicated on equity manipulation, and a multi-tiered service class attending to their worldly needs. Little of the middle class operating between this polarity of equities and plebeians has been left standing, and, as was the case with the late Roman Empire, the situation has recently become ripe for a new and fanatical slave religion to make its presence known. At the beginning of the 21st century, Jihadist Islam became the contemporary equivalent of Nero's militant Christians, raising both the stakes and the costs of empire insofar as it can be measured by the up-spiking costs, fruitless military adventures, and barrels of sweet light crude.

*Bitstreams* and *010101* were organized just prior to the 9/11 terrorist attacks, and even in that post-bubble moment, no one could still be expected to believe that the questions pertaining to the impact of new technology could be taken to be representing *the* cutting-edge issue of art. Something else was afoot, and it is easy to suspect that it had to do with the fact that, as speculative money was moving out of a then-crashing stock market, institutional market-ers working on behalf of large museums calculated a ripening moment for making a play that could attract some of that restless capital. This entailed making arts institutions over as places in which the new techno-elite members of the Virtual Class might feel at home, that is, as places where stock market profits could be recast as venture philanthropy perpetuating the social my-thologies that were the source of those profits.

To this rather transparent motive, add a growing anxiety about a wan-ing of the convening authority of art museums in an age of rapid information exchange, prompting the following recognition: if museums didn't do some-thing to address and contain the proliferating omnipresence of the 21st-cen-tury netocratic media-stream, they might eventually be contained, defined and replaced by *it*. Indeed, by 2001, André Malraux's *Museum Without Walls* was already just a mouse-click away, but that only meant that the intellectual prop-erty represented in that or any other museum needed to be guarded with an ever-greater jealousy. Also, as museum operating budgets became evermore linked to admission receipts, there was the perceived need for amusement park-styled spectacles that would move large crowds in and out of their doors. As Howard Litwak was reported to have said:

> Museums have to be attuned to technology. They can't afford to
> be musty. With competition like theme parks and video games,
> museums have to deliver whiz-bang attention grabbers to cut
> through the clutter.[16]

This need prompted a widespread resurgence in technologically-oriented in-stallation art practices, mirroring the rise of similar practices that were promi-

nent during the videophilliac mid-1970s. But this comparison needs to be conducted with some judicious caution, given that the institutional circumstances surrounding them were so very different. Simply put, that difference was that, in the 1970s, arts institutions sought the lion's share of their support from government agencies who wanted to show that they had a purpose, while thirty years latter, that support came from lines of ticket-buying cultural tourists whose collective desires had already been educated in amusement parks and video arcades. This difference is what accounts for the fact that 1970s video art was predominantly an art of private television pretending to undermine the imperatives of corporate broadcasting, while more often than not, late 1990s technological art was an art that celebrated the technologically amplified confusion of a new technological hall of mirrors.

If we are to seriously examine the importance and value of digital art, then surely we need to see that importance in light of how it reveals and illuminates the emerging contours of the changes that digital servomechanisms have wrought in the social texture surrounding it. Any view of digital art that seeks to particularize it in terms of media specificity or as part of an insular history of technical development will not only miss the point, but will also have to defer the forwarding of any claim of cultural import to the more far-reaching technical innovations that mark the technical and financial history of the so-called computer revolution. Thus, when we read the following statement by Olia Lialina, we have to wonder not only what kind of world is being described, but also what kind of world is being wished into being. The statement pertains to that sub-category of digital art called net.art, but it has obvious implications for any artistic project that employs any new technology:

> Developing a theory of its own could enhance the value of Net.art. At the moment, it is understood in the context of media art, of computer art, of video art, of contemporary art, but not in the context of the Internet: its aesthetic, its structure, its culture. Works of Net.artists are not analyzed in comparison with one another. We are always viewed from an external perspective, a perspective which tries to place native on-line art works in a chain of arts with a long off-line history and theory.[19]

The use of the word "native" tips Lialina's essentialist hand, and it invites three criticisms. The first of these points to its neo-modernist nostalgia for an untenable authority derived from media-specificity – and here, I confess to no small amount of shock over the apparent fact that Lialina does not know that this is an idea that has been discarded in relation to painting and sculpture for over 30 years. The second is that Lialina's call seems to miss the very essence of the net.art to which she is trying to give specific definition, which lies in its

fluid potential for an impressive resistance to any categorical specification, which allows it to responsively shape-shift its way toward emergent topicalities with unprecedented timeliness. The third criticism wonders why the categories of net.art or digital art or computer art should be more exempt from the longer history of artistic accomplishment than film or photography. Of course, by invoking this idea of a longer history of artistic accomplishment, I am begging the question of "accomplishment of what?" and I suspect that Lialina's most honest answer would point to a path of making net.art in some way museum-worthy, buttressed with its very own hierarchical criteria of collectability that could stabilize it within the undead realm of institutionalized fetishes festooned with auction-house certifications of value. In other words, Lialina wants *in*, and because of this, she misses what may be the real opportunity of net.art in particular, or digital art in general. That real opportunity is its potential for making the interiors of museums irrelevant in relation to the endless proliferation of virtual affinity zones where the like-minded can dialogically establish the ideolectic rules for their own communities of desire operating beyond the pale of administrative supervision. But the dystopian specter of the digital artist as ubersystem operator, invisible and omnipresent, is never far from the Elysian Fields of liberated performativity, a dichotomy seemingly worthy of a sustained analysis.

Despite digital technology's bringing of the world closer together, it has done little to alleviate the real poverty and suffering of the majority of the world's inhabitants – in fact, given that its chief consequences have thus far been an exacerbation of the technologies of automation, surveillance, administrative accountability, and the manufacture of overblown media spectacles, we can reasonably observe that it has done as much to corrode the mandates of democracy as it has done to amplify them. So, in order to properly characterize art's position amidst the social texture of the digital age, we need to sustain a two-track arc of description, one being optimistic and the other being pessimistic. By staging the dialectical tension between the two, we might be able to arrive at something that resembles an insight of synthesis.

Erik Davis is the theorist who most eloquently defends the optimistic view, and his 1998 book titled *Technosis: Myth, Magic and Mysticism in the Age of Information* still has a well deserved place on the shelf of critical polemics about things digital. His thesis is particularly interesting for its unabashed metaphysical orientation, and his book elaborates fascinating congruities between the emerging hivemind of the mega-nodal network and those otherworldly states of mind made available through spiritual disciplines such as meditation and the ingestion of hallucinogenic drugs. This seems to be a rather idiosyncratic amendment to Jean Baudrillard's famous notion of an inevitable procession of simulations running from a given signifier's reflection of a basic reality to a masking and perversion of a basic reality (and then on to a masking of the

absence of a basic reality) before it finally arrives at a condition of "pure simulacra" that bears no relation to any basic reality whatsoever. Only in Davis's hands, the procession's endgame is played on a field of non-attached enlightenment rather than that of the earlier French philosopher's despairing nihilism. Here is his characterization of the links between these waypoints, contrasted against the "dominant images of technology [that] have been industrial" reflecting "the authority of technical and scientific elites, and the intrinsic value of efficiency, control, unrestrained technological development and economic expansion":

> Today, a new, less mechanized myth has sprung from the bow of the industrial megamachine: the myth of information, of electronic minds and boundless databases, computer forecasts and hypertext libraries, immersive media dreams and a planetary blip culture woven together with global telecommunications nets. Of all technologies, it is the technologies of information and communication that most mold and shape the source of all mystical glimmerings: the human self.[20]

Davis uses the term "metaverse"[21] as a shorthand code for the composite reality-pictures generated by the aforementioned hivemind, conjuring a Platonic image of virtual lights beyond counting broadcasting their divine truth toward the dark end of a quotidian tunnel of epiphenomenal actuality. In this scenario, seekers are invited to make forays into the world of infinite possibilities existing between an omnipresent virtual everything and a disappearing soon-to-be nothing of everyday existence.

It bears mentioning that peppered throughout Davis's book are passages that cast quizzical doubt about the achievability of its author's ambitious project of linking and aligning spiritual and technological modes of selfhood, if only to set up rhetorical opinions of straw that can be easily dismantled for the sake of emphasizing a given point. An amusing example of this is "common sense tells us that mysticism has no more in common with technology than the twilight cry of wild swans has with the clatter of Rock-'em-Sock-'em Robots...[but]...mystical impulses sometimes body-snatched the very technologies that supposedly helped yank them from the stage in the first place."[22] In other words, the short précis for Davis's book is that it equates the emerging global hyper-network with an archetypal and collective divinity that gives all a kind of spiritual access to all else, a transcendental idea that paints the realm of disembodied information with a mystical brush that sees a Buddhist *satori* lurking behind every pixel.

The Canadian media-theorist Arthur Kroker seems to have been the most prescient about the relationship of the networked world to changes in

society, and his 1995 book titled *Data Trash: The Theory of the Virtual Class* (co-written with Michael Weinstein) remains the single most persuasive exemplar of the pessimistic view on the effects of contemporary technology. This book is no mere call for latter-day luddites to cast off their 21st-century chains of co-axial cable – in fact, it shows us how it would be impossible for them to do so, how absurd it would be to think that they could do it and how that absurd impossibility has been with us for a much longer time than anyone would care to admit to be the case. Instead, it gives us the bleakest imaginable picture of nothing less than the demise of human volition, taking post-modern theory one step further to show how such things as the human subject, the nation state, and the family are headed toward the position of being subaltern nodes, phantasms and sub-functions of the net itself, postulating the bleak inevitability of a post-human universe. Just as one existentialist definition of insanity is proclaimed to be a willingness to accommodate oneself to an insane world, so too does Kroker proclaim the tension between volition and instrumentality to be an irresolvable one, for there is no possibility of an innocent glance into the technological abyss.

The artistic implications of this tension were prophesized during the heyday of conceptual art over three decades ago. Read Allan Kaprow on the evolutionary imperatives leading from art to a kind of technology-driven post-art:

> Nowadays the modern arts have become commentaries and may forecast the postartistic age. They comment on their respective pasts, in which, for instance, the medium of television comments on the film, a live sound played alongside its taped version comments on which is "real"; one artist comments on another's latest moves; some artists comment on the state of their health or the world; others comment on not commenting (while critics comment on all commentaries as I'm commenting here). This may be sufficient.[23]

Maybe and maybe not, depending on the definition of the task at hand. And maybe this retrospection should caution us to take greater care in choosing what destiny we would wish to be the case. Post-human is one way to describe that destiny, and schizoidally insane is another. In 1946 Melanie Klein looked at early manifestations of the will-to-post-humanization and found it wanting:

> Another characteristic of schizoid object-relations is a marked artificiality and lack of spontaneity. Side by side with this goes a severe disturbance of the feeling of the self, or, as I would put it, of the relation to the self. This relation, too, appears to be artificial. In other words, psychic reality and the relation to external reality

are equally disturbed.[24]

But, disturbed or not, the reigning psychical arrangement also becomes the model for the reigning political arrangement, that being the administrativism that uses a toolbox called administration to make its environment over in its own image of placid predictability. As foretold by Kroker and Weinstein:

> 'Public policy' is what goes on to get the flesh to adjust to the Net. The greater project is beyond policy, transcendent to it – that is the project of wiring bodies to the Net. That everyone will be wired to the information-highway machine is an historical inevitability that puts politics in its place as a local clean-up activity around the Net. This is technotopianism in its purest and most cynical form.[25]

Of course, the real issue is to what extent can any of this still be considered as being "disturbed" or – by dint of new socio-cultural circumstances – "normal." Even if this unanswerable question could be addressed, it would still leave moot the important question of how the adaptation of such psychic postures could be said to contribute to helping anyone live better. On one hand, their reflection and engenderment of a state of alienation seems to speak for itself (being not so much post-human as merely pseudo-human), but, on the other, they too have the power to embrace technology as representing a new species of transitional object, an exponentially expanding collection of electronic teddy bears, if you will. Like the old sublime reflecting the vastness of nature, they provide an economy of psychic scale that makes the differences between groups and individuals seem small, but whose effect levels other things as well, and when they are leveled, administrativism supervenes.

From Donna Haraway's forward-thinking mid-1980s feminist perspective, it was all to the good, for if we could become cyborgs, then we would not be plagued by the vexations of organ inferiority, the prerogative envy that stems from it and any oppressive world view stemming from either or both (no organs, no problem!). As Haraway puts it,

> The structural arrangements related to the social relations of science and technology evoke strong ambivalence. But it is not necessary to be ultimately depressed by the implications of late-twentieth century woman's relation to all aspects of work, culture, production of knowledge, sexuality and reproduction. For excellent reasons, most Marxisms see domination best and have trouble understanding what can only look like false consciousness and people's complicity in their own domination in late capitalism. It is crucial to remember that what is lost, perhaps especially from women's points of view, is often virulent forms of

oppression...Ambivalence toward the disrupted unities mediated by high-tech culture requires not sorting consciousness into categories of 'clear sighted critique grounding a solid political epistemology' versus 'manipulated false consciousness,' but subtle understanding of emerging pleasures, experiences, and powers with serious potential for changing the rules of the game.[26]

This point needs underscoring, as it stands astride the crucial fracture of art theory at the dawn of the new century. With one hand, the technological prosthesis liberates the potentials for performance and the imaginations from which it stems, and on the other it corrodes and trivializes interiority and the possibility that said interiority could be symbolized in any meaningful way. We come back to the fundamental truth of advanced technology; that its major utility lies in automation, data management (i.e. administration), and surveillance. Given its smoke-and-mirrors erasure of such things as scrutiny, prolonged consideration, and reflective thought, it portends an administrator's paradise.

## II

It is against the backdrop of this three-decade long embrace of schizoidal semiosis as an earmark of a supposedly high aesthetic purpose that the work of Gerhard Richter takes on its full significance for the 1990s. Even though Richter had been exhibiting in prominent venues since the early 1970s (the German pavilion of the 1972 Venice Biennale was given over to his work at the same moment when Joseph Beuys was lionized in Harold Szeemann's *Documenta V*), his 2002 retrospective at the Museum of Modern Art organized by Robert Storr titled *Gerhard Richter: 40 Years of Painting* seemed a timely memorial to art's dissolution into spectacle. This was because his work does such a good job of "picturing" and to some extent containing the mad rush to the fool's paradise of an omnipresent semiosis that earmarked the end of the 20th century. But the means by which Richter's work accomplished this feat need some untangling, beginning here with an anecdote. While I was waiting to retrieve my cold weather gear from the MoMA coat-check during the chilly spring of 2002, I struck up a short conversation with another museum visitor about Richter's then-current retrospective. He seemed unimpressed, but did manage to come up with a *bon mot* that proved to be a memorable one-line summary of the exhibition, which was said to "look like a mass grave where all of the corpses had really nice haircuts." The remark was certainly worthy of a guilty laugh, and it has henceforth proven to be worth some extended thought, especially when it was grafted on to the polarized "debate" about Richter's work undertaken by Storr and Benjamin Buchloh. Buchloh is perhaps the most oblique and intractable of that group of writers associated with the *October* journal, thus quite naturally writing on behalf of a neo-Marx-

ist animus against the "aura" of painting, explaining why he prefers to cast Richter as a wry Duchampian who uses paint to create a kind of conceptualist quasi-painting that mocks the auratic even as it also embodies same.

This latter view of Richter's work gained a great deal of currency when the artist's extended photographic sketchbook (titled *Atlas*) was given pride of place in the almost paint-free *Documenta X* of 1997, so one might do well to guess that Storr's initial impetus to organize *40 Years of Painting* came as a belated response to that *Octoberist*-derived typecasting of Richter. Mounted as a large-scale art historical rescue mission (for both Richter and the greater glory of painting in general), it countered the Duchampian view of Richter's work by emphasizing how his paintings demonstrate the power to digest and contain the forces that would propose to define and critique it, turning the tables on a conceptualism that would propose to demonstrate the preeminent power of designation (i.e., language) to contain everything including itself.

In fact, there is some truth to both views, but not nearly so much as either of their authors would claim. Richter has clearly proven himself to be an artist to be seriously reckoned with, and the reason for this is that the "great subject" of his work is nothing less than a charting of the ineffable gulf between the (un)reality of contemporary experience and the waning historical possibility of their ever again being a great subject. It is often said that Richter's multi-stylistic works investigate the "problematic of representation" and, as such, his work seeks to be a kind of history painting without a history, but this is little more than press release *patois* and docent's boilerplate. The real issue at hand is the fact that Richter has found a way to give characteristic and dramatic form to a condition of being that marks and defines its own time, for just as Manet initially registered the emergence of the Modern and Warhol the Postmodern, Richter registers the newly emergent condition of living-death-by-a-thousand-administered-distractions, a circumstance unique to our moment where what passes for consciousness is systematically divorced from conscience. He is at his best when he seizes upon the iconographic instant of frozen panic enacted just before the finalization of that divorce, or when he goes to the other extreme by way of painting as if there never was or never could be any connection between the two.

To accomplish this feat, Richter has subdivided his artistic personality into three overlapping entities, a strategy that mirrors the routine compartmentalization of identity demanded by our everyday lives. "Richter I" emerges in 1963 as a member of a group of former east Germans (including Sigmar Polke, Blinky Palermo, and Konrad Lueg, who later changed his name to Konrad Fischer), who made their way west in 1961, working under the banner of *Capitalist Realism,* which for all intents and purposes was a belated European term for Pop Art.[27] At this time we see Richter painting greyscale renditions of iconic photographs of warplanes or family photos of his father and "Uncle Rudi," (a

Nazi enthusiast who was killed in an early battle). Of course, by the time that Richter and company were working up their Capitalist Realism, Pop Art had already become well-established in the states and the UK, so early opinion cast Richter and associates in a derivative light. Looking back, it now seems it would be equally fair to cast Richter as an early photorealist, partly owing to how his paintings emphasize the continuous mid-tones of his photographic subject matter. But even that ascription would miss the point, for although Richter I has always used photographs as subject matter for paintings, he always made a point of working *from* the photograph rather than toward it, essentially meaning that the paintings were usually less about "issues of representation" and more about moments of crucial memory dissolving in a peculiar kind of psychological oblivion, one that seems trapped between the forces of remembering and forgetting.

Richter I's work took its next major step in 1972, when he was selected for a solo exhibition in the German pavilion of the Venice Biennale. There he installed his *48 Portraits,* a collection of frozen black-and-white 28" x 22" face shots of well-known writers, composers, and scientists (curiously, none of these culture heroes are visual artists). Again, we see Richter editorializing on his subjects in subtle painterly ways that give the works an eerie beauty, but here we also see him yearning for father-figure role models, even though his earliest years were marked by living under Nazism and then under East German Communism, supposedly engendering in Richter a visceral antipathy toward all authoritarian hero worship from any part of the political spectrum. This ambivalence reached an apex in his 1988 suite of 15 paintings titled *October 18, 1977,* reflecting on the controversial moment when the captured members of the *Baader-Meinhof Gang* were found hanging in their cells at Stammheim prison (many leftists claimed that they were murdered by the prison authorities). These works are widely regarded as Richter's greatest achievements, invoking a wide range of art historical precedents running from Masaccio's *Dead Christ* to Courbet's *Burial at Ornans.* Most certainly, they are eulogies, but they eulogize far more than the short lives of six political radicals. They eulogize the death of an innocent hope for a better world, or at the very least, the even more innocent hope that the state and its far-flung apparatus could be toppled by any popular revolution. And in so doing, they also reveal something disquieting about what is left behind when that hope is forsaken.

What is not often-enough remarked upon is the fact that Richter painted these works a full decade after the event which they portray, creating a distance in the passage of time that mirrors the ghostly disinterest of the actual paintings. From the vantage of a 1988 earmarked by Solidarity strikes in Poland and the imminent fall of the Berlin Wall, 1977 must have looked like the final pathetic hurrah (endgame?) of socialism and the hopes of the 1960s

counter-culture as well. The paintings seem to memorialize that moment of geopolitical transformation, even as they also reveal a guilty hauntedness that can still be felt about that counter-culture's idealism in relation to our own weak-willed cynicism.

Richter I's uncanny photographic mannerism is buttressed by the countervailing flamboyance of Richter II's abstract paintings. A seminal example of this body of work is a painting titled *Grey Streaks* from 1968. Painted in Richter's signature soft-edged greyscale, this painting holds an important key for the interpretation of subsequent works. It makes explicit use of a well-known work by Frank Stella (*Grey Tomb* from 1959, a work that has been said to have influenced Jasper Johns) and proceeds to fantasize upon it. In so doing he foregrounds painterly mutability at the expense of Stella's vaunted compositional deductivism. By the late 1970s, Richter II was making increasingly larger abstractions that would compete with Stella's work in terms of baroque flamboyance, even as they would also make clear (as was the case with Stella's post-1970 work) that Richter was designing his vainglorious abstractions in the most calculated sense of the word. They may initially seem like exercises in abstract expressionist conviction, but in the end they are only the rote articles of tasteful corporate decor, sporting much in the way of a confectionery skin while concealing their flagging vigor. In other words, they are the perfect accoutrements for the rococo consolidation of global corporate power that has earmarked the 1990s. These are works that one would be less inclined to linger over than loiter in front of, which in part explains the giddy esteem in which they are held by the botox-addled kleptocrats who comprise today's "patron class." But there are some important exceptions to this rule. I direct the reader's attention to a trio of large works painted in 1989 (completed just after the Baader-Meinhof works) respectively titled *January, November,* and *February*, which substitute cascades of elegant black ripples for the science fiction chromaticism of Richter II's other abstractions. These are among the largest works in the exhibition, their soaring grandeur fully inhabiting their heroic scale. They are every bit as persuasive as anything painted by Clyfford Still, not to mention many of Jackson Pollock's paintings from the late 1940s.

This brings us to Richter III, the ironic sentimentalist. In about 1984, Richter started experimenting with chiaroscuro and sfumato effects in paintings of very ordinary scenes – a pair of candles, some landscapes that look like Corot knock-offs, and later, small images of his wife and newborn son. Actually, there are some earlier works from the Richter I oeuvre that presage this ironic sentimentalism, such as his *Ema: Nude on a Staircase* (1966). These are the hardest to take of all of Richter's works. On one level, they confirm Richter's mastery of traditional painting technique, even as they are callow in the way that they approximate and over-generalize the *qualia* of painterly particularity, almost as if Richter were engaged in a practice of making handmade simu-

lations of digital reproductions of other paintings. Certainly, their polished surfaces conceal painterly touch much more than they reveal it, and their subjects and compositions seem alarmingly generic. But they also convey a longing for intimacy that almost passes for intimacy itself. This is even true in the small paintings of Richter's wife and young child, which are as cloyingly sentimental as any painting could possibly be. We can be spared the rhapsodies about how these works represent Richter's "artistic courage"; there is nothing courageous or wrong about painting sweet shots of one's own family, and in fact, there might be something much more right about it than those administrators (who are so programmatically allergic to sentimentality) could hope to admit. What was wrong was the meretricious scraping of their surfaces to create a callow "distancing effect" so as to make the works something that would be mistaken as a serious artistic statement, and thus, worthy of inclusion in a major museum show. Some things are best left at home *for the home,* while other things (such as Richter's *Atlas*) should have been brought along so that we would have the program from which to tell the players. But with or without *Atlas,* we can see that this exhibition typecasted Richter as the preeminent painter of *post-ideological life,* which of course is a reflection of the most omnipresent and encompassing ideology of all, the one that seems so natural that it doesn't even have a name.

### III

If Gerhard Richter can be cast as the preeminent painter of a supposed post-ideological life, then which other artists have done work that adds meaningful ballast to the same circumstance? One painter that seems to contend for Richter's mantle is the South African Marlene Dumas, while another is the Belgian Luc Tuymans, whose work has been discussed in terms of its advancement of what has been called "The Tuymans Effect," the earmarks of which being "a chalky palette," "crude renderings" that use "photographic and filmic sources" to foreground "painterly facture and speedy execution" that "do not rely on dated or ideologically laden ideas of craft and skill."[28] Despite this gloss, it is not at all clear how the "Tuymans Effect" is specifically and consequentially different than the "Richter effect," the "New Image Painting effect," or, for that matter, the Andy Warhol, Richard Hamilton, and/or Robert Rauschenberg effects that were established in the early 1960s. Indeed, this particular lack of clarity may bespeak the contours of a hidden academicism that would seek to give classical excuse to the routinization of the disassociated image, but the very fact that such an easily categorized set of practices can so easily move in the direction of a safe and predictable fashion-consciousness is indicative of a doubling down on bets made safe by an unexamined faith in the authority of a given look.

More audacious than Tuymans's paintings is the work of Kara Walker, an American artist who has gained a significant reputation for her wall-sized installations that are operatic carnivalizations of antebellum caricatures of a deeply racist provenance. Walker constructs her large image-silhouettes out of precisely cut black paper (tar paper?), giving them a morphological relationship to Rorschach inkblots which in her hands carry an additional connotation of a racial otherness upon which the viewer is invited to project fears and desires. Walker's installations incorporate many forms taken from slave narratives, skewing them in a variety of ways that are at once comic and tragic, oftentimes making them seem as if they are melting into a kind of undifferentiated chaos. These seem to be torqued and skewed, so as to exaggerate their evocation of a delirium that turns out to be a hallucination of history. This sets up their final irony as temporary occupants of the bright white walls of contemporary museum spaces, recasting them as full-sized movie screens upon which a shadow play seems to be projected, working in full ironic knowledge of the racial signification of the word *shadow*. Through this strategy, her works implicate their institutional hosts and the audiences that they draw, revealing the lingering shadow of racism as an operatic operation of the institutional imaginary.

As the 1990s drew to a close, there were some highly visible signs that the artistic game of fictive mimicry was gaining significant art-world attention. Exhibitions such as the Royal Academy's *Sensation* show of 1997, the Aldrich Museum's *Pop Surrealism* exhibition of 1998, the Saatchi Gallery's *Neurotic Realism* of 1998 (the latter being a faux-catalogue rather than a real exhibition) and *The Contemporary Grotesque* curated by Robert Storr (as the 2003 installment of *Site: Santa Fe*) featured works that were model examples of a resurgent (albeit carnivalized) mimeticism in their foregrounding of self-contained psychological dramas that to some extent resisted their potential for being art-world ciphers. The rising tide of enthusiasm for the work of these artists suggests a possible threshold of interest for an imagery constructed in celebration of self-contained subjectivity.

In Nicky Hoberman's paintings, the dramas in question reside in the peculiarly charged atmospheres surrounding her dramatis personae of big-eyed pre-teen girls, their oversized heads perched atop orthopedically distressed bodies clad in cutesy school uniforms, scowling at (and pleading with) the viewer. Even though they most frequently inhabit the outer peripheries of Hoberman's picture spaces, these faces are undeniably haunting, at once overbearing and delicate, cunning and innocent in a way that is reminiscent of the best portraits painted in an earlier era by Stanley Spencer or Lucian Freud. One could even be tempted to think that Hoberman is self-consciously advancing a 21st-century editorial on the stereotypical "Britishness" of those two well-known artists, recasting their clichés of stolid, self-confronting dig-

nity in re-gendered, generational terms that fold back into Postmodern ruminations about the larger psycho-social construction and distribution of identity.

Hoberman's palsied pre-teens are uncannily stationed between impending adulthood and oblivious youth: like the churlish tots portrayed in the 1960 science fiction classic *Village of the Damned*, they vengefully reproach their elders (i.e. the viewer) for the crimes of hypocrisy, prurience, and neglect that we might erroneously assume to go unnoticed by youthful witnesses. Hoberman's preteens seem to beg for our attention even as they anxiously bide their time in the contemplation of some unspeakable revenge.

Whereas Hoberman's girls all have knowing eyes intently peering out from oversized heads, Lisa Yuskavage paints doll-like women who have ridiculously oversized hindquarters and misshapen breasts sporting geometrically cylindrical nipples cantilevered out in odd directions. These attributes make these women seem like bizarre hybrids of Barbie dolls and the *Venus of Willendorf*, and when we can see their faces (which is not all that often), they usually have grotesquely puffed lips and the blankest of pharmacologically addled gazes. Providing a stark contrast to the intent gazes of Hoberman's school girls, Yuskavage's over-the-top *femme fatales* are portrayed as Frankensteinian sex dolls, and we find ourselves wondering at what exact moment they will wake from their hyper-objectified somnambulism and viciously turn on the viewers/voyeurs who are cast as their putative masters.

Yuskavage paints her figures in a ghoulishly manneristic dream-space illuminated by bright penumbral lights suffused with sugary chromaticism. Always, there is a stunningly perfect balance of clearly articulated shapes evocatively set against subtly gradated blurs, and this balance creates a dramatic tenebrism that we might associate with smoky rooms illuminated by the raking neon lights of some nearby casino. This commitment to a seamless technical naturalism laced with phantasmagoric and grotesque subject matter aligns imaginative and symbolic imperatives against administrativist notions of "the real," inviting a cavalier disrespect for the latter. This disrespect is furthered by Yuskavage's insistence on the masterful use of richly modeled form, reminding us of Adrian Stokes' notion of painterly modeling as providing "the miraculous sensation of fullness" that "recharges...shape, with patent flourish ...[making] them the figures of the inner life, the unconscious, that are shown as a fixture."[29] This pointed emphasis on the psychological power inherent in modeled form partially explains some of the critical overreaction to her work. For example, one early reviewer claimed it to be "knowingly dreadful" while another claimed that Yuskavage was "trying hard to make a travesty of the medium" by way of her "rupture...within rather than with the modern tradition" earmarked by "a narrative of sorts...one that takes place outside rather than within the painting."[30] The anxiety behind these opinions was given a

different emphasis by Dave Hickey when he wrote:

> In my view the linguistic properties implicit in the 'negativity' of
> illusionistic space – its metaphorical 'absence' – and the rhetorical
> properties latent in our largely unarticulated concept of 'beauty'
> should more than outweigh whatever academic reservations might
> still accrue to them...It was...the invention of illusionistic space
> that bestowed on the visual language of European culture those
> dimensions of "Negativity" and "remote tense" that are generally
> taken to distinguish human languages from the languages of ani-
> mals – since these properties make it possible for us to lie and
> imagine convincingly on our speech, to assert what we are deny-
> ing and to construct narrative memory by contextualizing our as-
> sertions with regard to a past or a future, to a conditional or sub-
> jective reality. For four centuries a visual culture in the west pos-
> sessed these options – and exploited them. Today...we remain con-
> tent to slither through this flatland of Baudelairian modernity,
> trapped...in the eternal positive presentness of a terrain so visually
> impoverished that we cannot even lie to any effect...nor imagine
> with any authority – nor even remember.[31]

This eloquent rebuke of the limitations that inhere in Modernist and
Postmodernist theories about art was elaborated upon by Ruth Weisberg, when
she wrote that,

> In each Period epistemes tend to be self-defining, self-regulating,
> and self-embedding systems both conceptually and institutionally.
> A more wide-ranging view of the dynamics of ideology, rhetoric,
> and aesthetics indicates many other possibilities and opens up al-
> ternative ways to interact with current and past cultural expres-
> sion. It seems to me that a contemporary reconsideration of the
> Roman concept of *aemulatio* is neither imitation or convention
> but rather an honoring of the power of images to convey meaning
> over long periods of time.[32]

In both of these statements, the useful implication is that of a contradiction
between a notion of a "modernist tradition" and the work's "mimetic imagina-
tion," the former having been made over in an administrativist guise that fails
to account for the fact that it too acted in imaginative service to an idea of a
better world that contested a hidebound status quo. That much being said, we
still do need to recognize an unavoidable fact of artistic practice at the turn of
the 21st century, that being that the idealizing portrayal of illusionistic space is
no longer contained in the exclusive realms of painting or even photography.
For example, in Charlie White's multi-generational digital prints, lurid com-

puter-generated panoramas double as highly complicated *mises en scéne*. These works are inhabited not so much by photographically articulated people (although they are always there) as they are with a canny orchestration of semiotic and socio-architectural metaphors that confront us with our growing inability to distinguish reality from fantasy at the level of broad social spectacle. To use plainer words, White's images offer brilliant rhetorical dramatizations of the old truism: it takes a computer to really screw things up. Quite naturally, he makes brilliant use of complex imaging software to bring these dramatizations very close to home, or at least a simulation of it.

Even though a cursory double-take might confirm the apparent naturalism of these worlds, something about the inconsistency of their cast shadows, the brittleness of their color, the improbable alignment of their constituent parts, or the slightly under-textured flatness of their surfaces seems alarmingly over-general. Perhaps the point of these works is that reality itself has become overly general via its endless proliferation of pre-fabricated architectural regimes – i.e. cookie-cutter office buildings, mini-malls and franchised fast-food eateries that seem identical. This over-familiarity sets the stage for the most obvious aspect of White's work: the eruption of three-dimensional clip-art monsters of B-horror-movie provenance, oftentimes looking more like an over-rehearsed still from one of Robert Ripley's "Believe it or Not" documentaries rather than anything truly menacing.

The large-scale photographs of Andrea Gursky are more well known than White's computer-generated prints, but there are some important points of agreement between the two bodies of work. Near the beginning of the 1990s, Gursky began exhibiting large panoramic color prints of two kinds of scenes, the first being large interior spaces filled with a repeated plethora of similar objects, and the second being crowd scenes pictured outdoors, or in cavernous indoor spaces, always partaking in some form of pre-packaged mass experience. These panoramic scenes always emphasize a lot of pictorial detail, but very close inspection reveals that their overall construction sports the tell-tale clues of digital cutting-and-pasting, creating the effect that the entire realm of the visual has been completely filled with an avalanche of objects and people that are the endlessly duplicated *doppelgangers* of the already known, opening up on an idea of the homuncular sublime where the individual counts for nothing other than being one of demography's monads. In that duel guise, Gursky's photographs conflate the distinction between the visionary and the merely fanciful (as does White's work, even though it is more conventionally ominous) suggesting that we may have come to a pass where an embrace of the former may no longer be a historical option. Donald Kuspit eloquently reminded us that the distinction was worth remembering when he wrote:

Fanciful imagery is based on the association of familiar sources;

visionary imagery is based on the conflict of sources that are not conventionally communicable – that seem to necessitate the reinvention of language. The fanciful image resolves an aggregate into finite form; the limited synthesis invariably has a certain "accent." The imaginative image incompletely resolves profound tension, which is why its form seems "infinite" and "distressing," strangely open and not together – verging on formlessness. Fanciful images are in the last analysis attractive but not urgently interesting – not binding on us – whereas imaginative images are difficult to create, hardly seductive when created, but with profound power over us.[33]

To various and oscillating extents, the fanciful attributes of the work of artists such as Walker, Hoberman, Gursky, White, and Yuskavage all move into the foreground of whatever visionary significance that we may find there, but the common theme that unites their efforts is the willingness to actively specify and implicate the viewer as being vicariously engaged in some form of dubious participation of the kind that he or she would reluctantly admit. Such theaters of implication do require some degree of seduction, but they also invoke profound tensions that cannot be easily resolved. Thus, their fanciful attributes come off as being convivial without being ingratiating, and this is an aesthetic aspect that should be prized at a time when suspicions about administrativist agendas make any distinction between the visionary and the nugatory a very difficult one to uphold.

## IV

In an art world where curatorial projects cannot get a green light until corporate subvention is secured, and where model aesthetic accomplishments are increasingly being registered by the receipt of corporate approbations in the form of prizes sponsored by the likes of Hugo Boss clothiers or Absolute Vodka, it seems curious that the art of the past decade tends to look pretty much the same as it did 25 years ago, as the aridity of neo- and/or pseudo-avant-garde conceptualist trends have again traded predictable punches with a new generation of patterns-and-decorations writ technologically large. Can a note of *no news is good news* denial be detected from this long déjà vu? An affirmative answer seems unavoidable, but rather than advance this particular point any further, I would rather point to two audacious examples of something completely different, both falling far beyond any comfortable reprise of the 1970s even as they also catalogue, summarize, and parody much of what we would associate with the art of that decade. The first of these examples is Matthew Barney's *Cremaster Cycle* as it was installed at the Solomon Guggenheim Museum in the Spring of 2003. The second is the annual event known as Burning Man, which since 1990 has taken place every Labor Day

weekend in northwestern Nevada's Black Rock desert. Both of these examples are saturated with performative implications far too numerous to catalogue here or anywhere else, and in very different ways both have aggressively challenged the conventional prerogatives of institutional enframement at the time when they seem to have lost their patina of authoritative sanctity.

The similarities and divergences between these two examples are worth noting. In almost opposing ways, each has evoked the possibility of a post-institutional context for art, doing much to suggest new destinies for creative practices that for too long have labored under the assumption that the administrativist art world is the only game in town. We can start by noting that both examples have something to do with the rugged great basin section of the North American continent, and as such, they can be said to have some spiritual affinities to the earthworks of Michael Heizer, Walter DeMaria, and Robert Smithson; certainly, they both evoke the sublime character of that region's vast and unforgiving landscape. Although Barney's magnum opus was ensconced at the Guggenheim and also at the Ludwig Museum in Cologne during the previous summer, it turned both of these auspicious venues into toney cineplexes housing his five-film saga, and this housing was lavishly complimented with sprawling presentations of sculptural and photographic tie-ins, even though it was once claimed that the films were intended as being explanatory vehicles for the objects. That much said, we have little choice but to recognize that, following up on Robert Smithson's distinction between sites and non-sites, Barney's *Cremaster Cycle* was a saga that took place in an idealized elsewhere in relation to the somewheres represented by the two aforementioned museums. The first of these was the Boise, Idaho of Barney's own youth, in particular, the artificially blue-turfed Bronco Stadium at Boise State University (where incidentally, Barney once dreamed of playing quarterback).

Here, at this most westerly and ascended location, *Cremaster 1* starts with a flirtatious epigamatic drama enacted both upon and above the stadium in the manner of a 1930s musical review. The story? – A quintet of stylishly uniformed career girls are pictured as ladies-in-waiting within the surrealistically appointed passenger cabin of a blimp, all anxiously awaiting their arrival at an undisclosed destination. Meanwhile, under the table of consciousness, their erotic alter ego (played by Marti Domination) enacts her own playful drama of gestation by creating fallopian orderings of purloined fruit, and these configurations are mirrored by a Buzzby Berkeley style musical review taking place on the football field located below the high flying dirigible. This counterpoint of scenes sets in motion a variety of tropes that all hark back to the 1930s. Among these are art deco streamlining, spectacular musical reviews and surrealist cinema of the type practiced by Tod Browning, Luis Buñuel and Maya Deren, with some additional nods in the direction of Salvador Dalí's famous dream sequence in Alfred Hitchcock's *Spellbound* (1945) and the evoca-

tive freakishness of Federico Fellini's *Satyricon* of 1969.

Released in 1995, *Cremaster 1* came out a year after *Cremaster 4*, and is the only one of the five films that does not feature Barney as a performer. But if we cling to Barney's numerical sequence rather than his out-of-sequence release dates, the *Cremaster Cycle*'s status as a postmodern *Gesamtkunstwerk* comes into a much sharper focus. Subsequent contributions to the Cremaster saga lose altitude as they move east. For example, *Cremaster 2* takes us to a fanciful imagining of Gary Gilmore's execution ceremony at the Bonneville Salt Flats; *Cremaster 3* moves to New York City's Chrysler Building for a series of Masonic initiation rituals; *Cremaster 4* circumnavigates the Isle of Man in a goatish fit of male epigamatic display, and *Cremaster 5* plunges into the Danube from the same Budapest bridge that Harry Houdini once used as a performance platform – in Barney's case representing the self-sacrificial death of male reproductive destiny that takes place before the cycle returns to the moment of rebirth portrayed in *Cremaster 1*.

From the standpoint of the title of the cycle, it is the loss in altitude that is most significant, in that it allegorizes the Cremaster muscle's function of controlling the drop and thermo-regulation of the male testicles prior to the establishment of gender differentiation, and from that, an allegation of biology-as-destiny both mutable and immutable that Barney proceeds to neither challenge nor accept so much as play with, and finally celebrate. It is not at all odd that the viewer visiting the Guggenheim should have to ascend that building's famous spiraling stairs to view the many video projections, drawings, photographs, and reliquary sculpture included in the exhibition. How doubly odd that the center piece of both the exhibition and the quintet of films was a segment from *Cremaster 3* called *The Order*, a 31-minute segment that has been said to be a condensed representation of the entire Cremaster project – a kind of Cremaster *en abyme* if you will. It featured Barney in one of his two quasi-Masonic guises climbing upward in the Guggenheim's atrium, negotiating several temptations and obstacles only to reach the top level, whereupon he attempts and fails to commit a patricide against a Vaseline-slinging Richard Serra, who in this scene is cast as *The Last Great Modernist Sculptor*, but elsewhere plays the Phoenician architect Hiram Abiff from the Old Testament.

Serra's double identity is crucial, for just as Hiram Abiff figures in both Biblical and Masonic lore as the architect of the original temple of Solomon in Jerusalem, so too does this segment talk about another temple of Solomon, that being Frank Lloyd Wright's 1961 version of the temple of abstract art that was originally founded by Solomon Guggenheim in 1935. Serra may have continued to reign supreme in Barney's Osiris drama, but the museum itself did not fare so well, having been completely taken over and transformed from a shrine devoted to the sequestration of crypto-metaphysical objects to a circus-cum-gladiatorial area where an implicitly male protagonist enacts a drama-

of-becoming-and-unbecoming for the passive delectation of an implicitly fe-
male and omni-maternal judge (who was rendered explicit only in *Cremaster
5*, where Ursula Andress played the part of the *Queen of Chain*, impassively
presiding over Barney's final ascent and subsequent descent). This subliminal
theme permeated the final four films of the cycle, and was also signaled by the
way that Barney commandeered the vast vestibule of the museum's architec-
ture to witness and vaginally enfold his surrealistic celebration of Sisyphean
levitation. This is particularly important because it simultaneously inverted,
parodied and editorialized on the fact that, during the 1990s it was the institu-
tion that typically commandeered and nullified artistic productions to suit the
agendas that their marketing departments had convinced them were their own.

Barney was not the first artist to commandeer the Guggenheim as a
found object to be deployed as artistic material. In April 1998, Vanessa Beecroft
staged an event called *Show* on the rotunda floor of the same museum. It con-
sisted of 20 scantily clad female models, many nude and all young and white,
simply milling about and occasionally whispering to each other. Although the
models were eventually photographed as individuals and in various groups,
the point of the event that the museum itself was there cast as a stage for
rarified prurience was clear, so clear that Barney could include a witty homage
to the older work with a sequence in *Cremaster 3* featuring tightly choreo-
graphed dance performances by the Rockettes. By filling the museum's ro-
tunda with emblematic banners pertaining to different aspects of the *Cremas-
ter Cycle*, he also gave a nod to Daniel Buren's *Peinture-Sculpture* (1971), a
colossal piece of striped fabric that was the earliest hijacking of the museum's
atrium for a singular art installation.

During the summer of 2005, two other artists followed Barney's suit
by presenting grand multi-media spectacles in historically inflected buildings.
At the 2005 Venice Biennale, Pipilotti Rist presented a multi-channel projec-
tion titled *Homo Sapiens Sapiens* in the Baroque Church of St. Stae. Here,
viewers were invited to recline on small mattresses and look up into the Church's
vaulted ceiling where four tightly coordinated projections illuminated a kalei-
doscopic fantasy built from footage of the playful cavortings of two nude women
who seem to be temptress characters extracted from world mythological tradi-
tions. Called by one feminist critic "a Sistine Ceiling for our time,"[34] this work
clearly cast itself as a feminine if not entirely feminist retort to Barney's drama
of mythopoetic masculinity, so much so that one could almost imagine Barney
ascending a rope to participate in the erotic nirvana pictured on the ceiling.

Paul McCarthy's *Pirate Project* was that summer's other instance of
an artist taking over a historically charged building for the sake of staging an
ambitious project. The building in question was *Haus der Kunst* in Munich,
the same building that hosted the Nazi's *Entartete Kunst* exhibition in the sum-
mer of 1937. In its sprawling maze of galleries, McCarthy installed a series of

larger-than-life tableaux populated by animatronic pirates who out-did one another in terms of buffoonish grotesquery. Associations between the exhibition and Jerry Bruckheimer and Gore Verbinski's 2003 feature film *Pirates of the Caribbean* were unavoidable, and the exhibition's cast of animatronic characters also seemed familiar to anyone who had experienced the *Pirates of the Caribbean* amusement park attraction at Disneyland. But these associations soon gave way to others, owing to the crude level of morphological and behavioral abjection to which McCarthy's figures stooped. An art historically aware viewer might remember the tendentious signage that was such a prominent part of the original *Entartete Kunst* exhibition, corralling its objects into hate-laced sub-themes such as "Revelation of the Jewish Soul," "Insult to German Womanhood," or "The Ideal! – Cretin and Whore."[35] This recognition added disquieting albeit uncanny spice to a reading of *The Pirate Project*, suggesting that McCarthy was using the exaggerated figures of pirates to show how the art of the 21st century had come to embrace all of the values that were so abhorred by would-be Nazi tastemakers.

There are some common themes that saturate these rather grandiose multi-media spectacles. All of them emphasize the human figure cast as a protagonist operating within a myth cycle emphasizing a concern with the erotics of ideal embodiment moving ahead of the aspiration toward metaphysical transcendence or demythologizing designation. In this and other attributes, we can detect an uncanny return of the priorities that animated Greco-Roman art, which always sought to give anthropomorphic embodiment to ideals of characterological virtue. This is even true of Barney's fetishistic sculptures, which invite a reading of themselves as exo-subjective relics of, or stand-ins for, mythic bodies that have been ecstatically displaced from the field of the work's tangible visibility. Of course, they also reveal the self-consciousness of the way that Barney sees himself operating in a state of annotative competition with artists from a previous generation such as Joseph Beuys, Robert Morris, and Eva Hesse.

This competition was more clearly seen in Barney's next major exhibition titled *Drawing Restraint* held during the summer of 2006 at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art. The exhibition itself was a presentation of an ongoing series of works dating back to Barney's student days in the late 1980s, the most recent of which being the ambitious *Drawing Restraint 9*, which was completed in 2006. One of its components is a long feature-length film laced with the opulent production values that were apparent in the three most recent *Cremaster* films, this being a mediation on the perfect economy of the Japanese tea ceremony, the artist's mystic marriage to the Icelandic singer Björk (who provided much of the film's haunting soundtrack), and the tragic industrial alchemy of modern whaling as it is represented by Barney's use of the Robert Smithson "monument" of the *Nisshin Maru,* the world's last opera-

tional whaling ship. Although the story that the film tells is obscure, its slow stream of improbable visual incidents (beautifully photographed by Peter Strietmann) is a hypnotically stunning evocation of different levels of alchemical transformation, and, as such, can be read as an allegory of civilization itself undergoing an important transformation of both practical and psychological alchemy.

Once we have witnessed the film, the enigmatic sculptural objects, drawings, and photographs that pertain to the *Drawing Restraint 9* project come into much sharper focus. Here, the tone is chill-somber and the favored material is a kind of self-lubricating plastic that is a distant chemical cousin to Teflon (appearing here as a brittle bright-white stand-in for whale blubber, mother's milk, and ejaculatory fluid) with which the artist fashions frames for his drawings and photographs (many of which are stationed like specimens in surreal plastic vitrines). Also fashioned from this material are giant replicas of some fetish-objects in the film, including the giant mold in which simulated whale blubber was ceremonially cast into a colossal version of Barney's emblematic "Field Emblems," itself said to be a representation of the undifferentiated body subjected to a specific discipline. One allusion among many is the marking of a tragicomic pilgrim's progress of masculinity alchemically devolving from an idealized priapic potency to Teflon-coated cyrogenesis as it tries to adopt itself to ever more unnatural regimes of circumstantial conditioning, struggling to find Winnicottian "transitional objects" in forms and materials that are freakishly alien. This is not to say that, in Barney's work, assertive masculinity is cast as having become an irrelevant manqué of itself, only that it lives in a state of technologically assisted hibernation, awaiting the biotechnological intervention that will allow it to fulfill a previously unimaginable Frankensteinian destiny.

There is an old art school truism that points to the difference between American and European sculpture by saying that European artists view materials as being intrinsically saturated with myth and history while Americans tend to see materials as being neutrally inert, awaiting instrumental deployment. In other words, a European sculptor would see a forest as a place saturated with magical possibility, while Americans will tend to see it as so much lumber-on-the-hoof. Of course, this is a truism and little more, but it is interesting to apply it to Barney's work, especially in light of the high degree of self-consciousness about other artist's work that it reveals. I have already noted his loving if somewhat perverse homage to the work and person of Richard Serra in *Cremaster 3,* and it is interesting to think of how controversial the older sculptor's work was at the time that Barney was a student, with the *Tilted Arc* controversy still fairly fresh in the minds of the New York art world. Another relevant controversy was the still lingering debate about the 1980 Guggenheim retrospective of the work of Joseph Beuys. That controversy re-

volved around Benjamin Buchloh's shrill accusation that Beuys was promoting a regressive cult of "mythic" artistic personality, which was something that was thought to be very bad at the exact moment when every well-known artist in New York and Europe was doing the exact same thing.[36]

The influences of both Serra and Beuys are felt throughout the entire *Drawing Restraint* exhibition, ranging from the way that Barney deploys his self-lubricating plastic in a manner that both echoes and plays upon Beuys's older uses of felt, fat, and lead, or in the way that the larger sculptural objects from *Drawing Restraint 9* (such as *Cetecaia* from 2006) impose on the viewer's physical space in ways that are both similar and different from Serra's famously oppressive walls of torqued steel. A large part of understanding Barney's project lies in seeing how he plays echoes of each of these artists off of one another in ways that give libidinously perverse annotation, synthesis, celebration and negation to both, in effect creating a postmodern elaboration of the conflict between a pragmatist's embrace of immediate presence and an idealist's faith in the tragic possibilities of desire and redemption as they are discovered through arcane initiation.

There is a complex subtlety in the studied deployment of all of Barney's materials, prompting the suspicion that Barney is in fact a very thorough student of post-war sculpture who enjoys making wicked self-satirizing recombinations of the formal and material tropes extracted from that history – in effect turning it into a palette of raw materials awaiting alchemical reassembly into bizarrely metaphorical totems that memorialize private histories that imply disquieting potentials for public significance. For example, we can easily note the unprecedented degree to which his work embraces the theatricality that Michael Fried so famously abhorred in his *Art and Objecthood* essay from 1967. As 1967 was the year of Barney's birth, we might imagine him looking at that year's special issue of Artforum devoted to sculpture, noting that, in addition to containing Fried's famous essay, it also contained an article titled "'Making it' with Funk" by James Monte, examining the sculpture of California *Funk*[37] artists such as Robert Hudson and William T. Wiley, artists who went to elaborate extremes to invert and maximalize the tenants of Minimalism, and who often used various plastics as a material signifying "freakish" quasi-scatological embodiment. Besides the rather obvious (albeit witty) allusions to the work of Serra, Smithson, and Beuys, one also detects the refurbished ghosts of Eva Hesse and Robert Morris, particularly Morris's famous idea that sculpture should "emphasize its reasons for parts, inflections, or other variables."[38] That much said, I also see a distinct 21st-century self-consciousness in Barney's re-deployment of these allusions, especially in the way that it subulates the aforementioned antagonism between European and American sculpture (which was an antagonism of material-as-allusive alchemy versus material-as-self-referential fact) into another techno-bureaucratic contest be-

tween biochemistry and prosthetic artifice that seeks to forget earthly geography.

Compared to the ambitious grandeur of *Drawing Restraint 9*, some of the other iterations of *Drawing Restraint* seem quite humble, particularly those that Barney executed during his student years of 1987-1990. For example, in *Drawing Restraint 6* (1989), a looping video reveals a youthful Barney jumping on a small trampoline, reaching high to draw a portrait on a room's high ceiling. By itself, this work would seem to be the kind of student shenanigan that would be aptly satirized in Terry Zwigoff's 2006 film *Art School Confidential*, but it also shows Barney's long-standing interest in Osiris dramas of redemptive masculine levitation enacted in its rawest and most germinal form, allowing for a much better view of the many things soon to come. Like the videos with sculptural components produced by Bruce Nauman during his graduate student years (1965-66), we see here a questioning of the basic problem of what can and should studio time be used for, suggesting that the older artist's work (especially his early works of "body art") be taken into consideration as another precedent that is folded into Barney's grand summation of post-1967 sculpture. Indeed, it is not too far-fetched to say that Barney gives us the operatic form of Nauman's sculptural chamber music.

Included in the exhibition are a trio of sketchbook pages from 1990 that contain Barney's musings on the phenomenology of athletic performance and the alchemy of muscular hypotrophy. Here, we see an early indication of Barney's longstanding interest in the "body intelligence" of Harry Houdini, as well as his trinity of "situation/condition/production" again echoing Morris's *Notes on Sculpture* essays. Perhaps the most well-known work in the exhibition was *Drawing Restraint 7* (1993), a three-channel video installation featuring Barney done up as a satanic goat/man wrestling a kindred spirit in the back seat of a limousine and chasing his tail like a crazed kitten. In *Drawing Restraint 13* (2006), we witness Barney donning the exaggerated regalia of General Douglas MacArthur to rather comically reenact the acceptance of the Japanese surrender of 1945, perhaps editorializing on America's attempt at bringing and maintaining democracy in Iraq. The same persona was featured in *Drawing Restraint 14,* which was a performance that Barney executed at the SFMoMA on June 9, 2006, again featuring himself dressed as MacArthur swinging about the museum's interior with rappelling gear, executing a prosthetically assisted drawing on one of its walls.

All in all, the 2006 exhibition featured 12 distinct groupings of works from the *Drawing Restraint* corpus, more than enough material to invite comparisons between them and the works associated with the *Cremaster Cycle*. Of these many can be made, but I think the key difference lies in how the *Drawing Restraint* works tend to function in the manner of being instances of self-contained chamber music operating in economical contrast to the symphonic and

operatic character of the *Cremaster* works. Here, the word "drawing" carries multiple connotations, including its synonym "summoning" as well as that of a preparatory description of a more ambitious effort. However, it seems that their chief function for Barney's working process is as a series of relatively manageable interludes to be executed between more taxing and ambitious projects. Granted, it seems rather difficult to view *Drawing Restraint 9* in this particular light, but it is still an important point that counters whatever disappointment might be felt by those viewers expecting to see how Barney might have tried to improve upon his *Cremaster* project. The *Drawing Restraint* works are of a very different and more provisional breed, and their chief virtue lies in the way that they redesign sculpture's traditional bridges between intimacy and alienation, although it is not at all clear for whose betterment those makeovers are enacted.

## V

The ascending practice of making over museums as venues for high production value multi-media installations carries collaborative connotations. As the 21st century starts taking shape, it seems that we are frequently seeing artists casting themselves as the leaders and/or front-persons of specialized production teams that echo the old-style Hollywood studios of the 1920s. In the catalogue for the *Cremaster Cycle*, Barney credits his production associates Matthew Ryle, Chelsea Romosa, Peter Strietman, and Jonathan Bepler, sealing the allusion to the old-style Hollywood myth machines, we note that gallerist Barbara Gladstone was co-credited with Barney as being the project's producer. This brings a final fruition to the idea of the executive artist that we might associate with Andy Warhol's "directorship" of the Factory, but that idea has a much older provenance that predates the earliest experiments in motion picture production. Here, I mean to suggest that artists such as Barney, Rist, McCarthy, and even Marina Abramovic[39] are now engaged in the making of a new kind of *Gesamtkunstwerk* that echoes what the German composer Richard Wagner had in mind when he sought to describe the making of opera as "a total work of art." In his 1849 essay titled "The Art-Work of the Future," Wagner was specific about what he meant by the term – he saw it as a coordinated fusion of the plastic arts, architecture, dance, and pretty much everything else. As Wagner wrote: "The true endeavor of Art is all-embracing: each unit who is inspired with a true art-instinct contributes to it…The true Drama is only conceivable as proceeding from a common urgence of every art towards the most direct appeal to a common public."[40]

Naturally, Wagner's appeal to a fantasy of common culture will rankle those who are not only professionally invested in the arts in service to a civil society, but this view is perhaps over-invested in the perceived necessity of its

own professionalism. Try as we might to read him as a crypto-Nazi pre-incarnation of Cecil B. DeMille, we still must gradually come around to admitting that in Wagner's view, art is something that does something for its audience in a communal-therapeutic sense of the word, and this stands in sharp contrast to the prevailing notion of art as being something that administrators do something with, in either or all of the political, financial, or theoretical senses implied therein. Needless to say, most of the art of the past 40 years can be said to err rather egregiously on the side of the latter-named purpose, but can we say with any certainty that Barney's *Cremaster Cycle* portends a reversal of this trend? Certainly the long lines of museum visitors queuing to visit the exhibition might in itself suggest the affirmative, but a nagging question remains: although Barney's *Cremaster* can be seen as inverting the institutional idea that art is that we do something within terms of art-administrative game playing, does it in fact only do something to us, rather than for us? To ask the same thing with slightly different words, does Barney's temporary appropriation of the Guggenheim only re-substitute the artist and his hidden collaborators for the institution cast as the instrument of an authoritarian education of desire that mimics and all-too-conventionally restages the continuum that exists between oedipal self-regulation and recklessly perverse abandon?

Of course, any answer points to the fact that Barney has done what many artists have dreamt of doing, that is, thumb his nose at institutional orthodoxy as a prelude to being wildly celebrated by some very large institutions – nice work, if you can get it, as the old saying goes. But if you cannot get such work, there is always Burning Man, of which a great many things can be said. My remaining effort here will be to try and align *The Cremaster Cycle* and Burning Man on an axis that casts them both as *Gesamtkunstwerke* of a distinctively post-postmodernist stripe. Like the *Cremaster Cycle*, Burning Man also features the re-enactment of an Osiris story, more directly told in the form of the ceremonial raising and subsequent incineration of the eponymous figure from which the event takes its name. It is interesting to note that this also takes place in a space that is psycho-geographically surrounded by an enfolding architectural entity – here, I refer not to Frank Lloyd Wright's monumental 5-tiered vestibule, but to Black Rock City, a temporary metropolis collaboratively constructed by upwards of 35,000 campers. Usually, the event's city plan (designed by Bay Area architect Rod Garret) features seven or eight curvilinear roads bisected by 36 cross-streets to surround a mile-wide circle on three sides, with the easterly quadrant opening up onto what might well be the largest flat surface on the North American continent. The outer diameter of this circle is a bit over two miles; it is but a small part of the million-acre Black Rock recreation area, itself an enfolding entity of truly vast proportions.

The circular interior of the city contains more than the Burning Man effigy standing at its center like the needle of a huge sundial. It is also littered

with hundreds of other works of art running the full gamut from the sublime to the ridiculous. Many of these are also designed for burning in a ceremonial setting. Still others are conceived to speak only to the in-group mythologies that inhere at this 21st-century Eleusis, mocking the insularity of an over-professionalized art world with an equally arcane insularity of their anonymous creators' devise. But all are recast as something other than what they are by the *dérive* and *détournement* that come part-and-parcel with Black Rock City's high desert psycho-geography of sybaritic abandon enacted in harsh circumstance. It may even be that focusing on such distinctions may miss the more important point, for, as Daniel Pinchbeck has recently noted in Artforum, "the stylistic sampling of Burning Man may represent a stance beyond aesthetic judgment."[41]

On the other hand, this may not be so much the case, given the fact that Burning Man organizers have gone to great pains to sustain the event's own internally organized system of ideolectic judgments that still manage to collectively parody those undertaken in virtually all other sectors of contemporary visual culture. Many of the productions undertaken at Burning Man are best understood as attempts to enact an idea of play on a grand scale of collective participation, casting the desert itself as a kind of endlessly vast sandbox within which an array of sculptural toys are deployed as if they were awaiting the enthusiastic arrival of a 200'-tall toddler. As much as anything, this ensemble might remind us of Melanie Klein's early work in using sandboxes to translate the play of children into analyzable gestures of symbol formation, and her early remark on how such gestures could be interpreted seems particularly relevant:

> In their play, children represent symbolically phantasies, wishes and experiences. Here they are employing the same language, the same archaic, phylogenetically acquired mode of expression as we are familiar with from dreams…Symbolism is only part of it; if we want rightly to comprehend children's play in connection to their whole behavior…we must take into account not only the symbolism which often appears so clearly…but also all of the means of representation and the mechanisms employed in dream-work, and we must bear in mind the necessity of examining the whole nexus of phenomena.[42]

Again, it needs to be emphasized that the artistry enacted at Burning Man uses the flat expanse of the desert as a slate upon which a collective dream-work is enacted in almost ritual fashion, but it is one that takes into account a "nexus of phenomena" that permeates contemporary visual culture at a great many intersecting intervals.

Echoing this sentiment are the words of Hakim Bey, a writer whose notion of Temporary Autonomos Zones held an early and anthemic interest for Burning Man participants.[43] As Bey wrote:

> I believe that by extrapolating from past and future stories about 'islands in the net' we may collect evidence that a certain kind of 'free enclave' is not only possible in our time but also existent. All my research and speculation has crystallized around the concept of the 'TEMPORARY AUTONOMOUS ZONE'...the [idea of the] up-rising suggests the possibility of a movement outside and beyond the Hegelian spiral of 'progress' which is secretly nothing more than a vicious circle...Realism demands not only that we give up *waiting* for 'the Revolution' but we also give up wanting it. 'Up-rising,' yes – as often as possible and even at the risk of violence. The *spasming* of the Simulated State will be 'spectacular,' but in most cases the best and most radical tactic will be to refuse to engage in spectacular violence, to *withdraw* from the arena of simulation, to disappear...Like festivals, uprisings cannot happen every day – otherwise, they would not be 'non-ordinary.' But such moments of intensity give shape and meaning to the entirety of life...a difference is made.[44]

Here, the evacuation and post-event clean-up needs to be emphasized as being an important part of the art of Burning Man – indeed, to visit the desert a month after the Burning of the Man would yield absolutely no evidence that anything resembling a mass event had ever occurred.

Burning Man founder Larry Harvey has recently observed that, as far as he could see, "there isn't any need for public taste any more."[44] But there does seem to be a special need for omni-participatory play that indeed does do something for those who subject themselves to the premises of the event, the most important of which is the lesson stemming from the edict that there can be no spectators, meaning that everybody should be allowed and in fact encouraged to make a creative contribution. Again, Wagner's words ring with an almost uncanny anticipation:

> Thus will the *Drama of the Future* rise up of itself; when not Comedy, nor Opera, nor Pantomime, can any longer live; when the conditions which allowed their origin and sustained their unnatural life, shall have been entirely upheaved. These conditions can only be upheaved by the advent of those fresh conditions which breed from out themselves the Art-work of the Future. The latter, however, cannot arise alone, but only in the fullest harmony with the conditions of our whole Life. Only when the ruling religion of Egoism, which has split the entire domain of Art into crippled, self-seeking art-tendencies and art-varieties, shall have been mer-

cilessly dislodged and torn up root and branch from every moment of the life of man, can the new religion step forth of itself to life; the religion which includes within itself the conditions of the Art-work of the Future.[45]

If we can now say that Burning Man has achieved success and prominence on its own terms – and in the process has galvanized its own distinct community of aesthetic and ethical desire – we can certainly go on to note that it has now done such a good job of satirizing the values of cultural tourism that it has become the favored destination of a new type of cultural tourism that actively seeks to break the institutional boundaries separating institutional and popular culture even as it also can be said to invent its own genre for doing so. Indeed, insofar as the erasure of divisions of cultural labor has ever been a sincere dream of avant-garde theoreticians, then Burning Man can surely be said to more completely fulfill this dream than any other artistic project executed during the past five decades.

Or maybe not. It is worth suggesting that Allan Kaprow might have seen it all coming. In his 1967 essay titled *Pinpointing Happenings*, he revealed his familiarity with the above-cited Wagner text by claiming that the extravaganza could be considered as a bona-fide type of happening.

An extension of this (pocket drama) type of happening is the Extravaganza. Presented on stages and in arenas to large audiences, it takes the form of a fairly large compendium of the modern arts – with dancers, actors, poets, painters, musicians and so forth all contributing talents. In basic concept (probably unconsciously) the Extravaganza is an updated Wagnerian opera, a Gesamtkunstwerk. Its character and methods, however, are more lighthearted, resembling three-ring circuses and vaudeville reviews in the way that these were developed by Dada and Surrealist antecedents. This Happening is the only kind with which the public has any familiarity and, incidentally, with which it feels some degree of comfort. Watered down, it has emerged as the stock-in-trade of the discothèque and the psychedelic scene.[46]

Insofar as Burning Man is concerned, Kaprow's prophetic statement seems to leave only one question open, and that is – what happens when the same phenomena are subjected to willful dehydration? Insofar as Burning Man is concerned, we can say that it is not yet dried-up, nor has it yet become watered down. So far, so good.

Still, the event's far-reaching implications are in need of elaboration. Much of what makes the event meaningful for its participants is the unique social experience that it facilitates. This social experience has been described

as being based on a "gift economy" where the use of money is all but prohibited. This engenders a mass potlatch that intrudes into the contemporary moment as an alternative model for meaningful social and psychological co-existence precisely at the time when the institutional art world grows ever more committed to a winner-take-all aesthetics enacted on a global scale.[47]

It has been widely noted that a large plurality of Burning Man's participants hail from the world of advanced computer technology, that being a social prescient of wealth and perspicacious intellectual innovation. It is also a world where the signifiers of "the social" are felt differently than in other places, owing to the fact that technology itself, in its omnipresent neo-futurist guise, can be viewed as having had an anti-social impact in spite of its facilitation of instantaneous global communication. As an antidote to that trajectory, Burning Man becomes the favored cultural expression of that cohort, who tend to be disinclined to embrace museum culture as the preferred site for their cultural betterment.

The reasons for this disinclination are many, but the one that seems to loom largest is the lack of real opportunity for the making of the putative "history" of which the museum is a shrine. In short, the ethos that is in play at Burning Man runs something like, "if you don't like the pseudo-history that the world gives you, make up some pseudo-history of your own," embraced in full recognition of the *follie en masse* character of such an enterprise. And it is this very folly that creates the imaginary *Cathèdrale Vivante* that is Black Rock City, itself the almost invisible architectural form that informs the visible works of art as its collected gargoyles. Echoing this sentiment, Anthony Haden-Guest wrote, "There is great art at Burning Man. It's the whole extraordinary machine of Burning Man itself."[48] He went on to explain:

> The professional art world, though, has always dissed Burning Man, seeing it as a playpen for wannabes who can't hack the 'real' art economy. Burners, as regulars call themselves, tend to be scornful of such critiques, and in their own terms, they are right. Burning Man is about involvement, often about collaboration, and it tends to be about process not product, so it exists by choice within a therapeutic culture of creativity, not the Darwinist take-no-prisoners of the art world.[49]

From this "therapeutic culture of creativity" a kind of utopia is proposed, and it differs sharply from the utopias of administration (such as Russian Constructivism) that are valorized by many historians of 20th-century art. If it has any recognized art historical source, it would be in the expressive social realism that earmarked much of the 1930s, prior to the time that Abstract Expressionism became the *sine qua non* of the "Triumph of American Painting."[50] As was the case with the Social Realism of the 1930s (and also with the

Happenings of the early 1960s before they were displaced by the reifying advent of the individual performance artist, at Burning Man, there is a concerted effort to locate artistic production as an operation of a larger condition of social production attempting to reflect larger and more inclusive communal values. Burning Man establishes these in a kind of real-time circumstance that forces total strangers to band together for the sake of executing group projects that make their interrelationships a central part of said project's purpose – in effect, stage managing a social realism that uses real relationships as an art material – not in the predatory and self-destructive mode that was undertaken in Andy Warhol's Factory, but in a way that encourages them to flourish in unique forms owing to the fact that the event refuses the mediating influences of advertising and monetary exchange. Thus, many Burning Man participants are able to discover new talents and aptitudes in an environment where they cannot rely on normative behavioral patterns that are keyed to the socio-economic hierarchies imposed upon their everyday lives. This emersion results in many things, but from an artistic point of view, the most pronounced effect is found in a forwarding of an aesthetics of mass empathy enacted as an aggressive challenge to a conventional aesthetics of financial and political equity. If quotidian society casts us in the role of being schizoids most of our lives, then Burning Man goes the furthest in reminding us that catharsis is grace.

Because of Burning Man's emphasis on a generosity of spirit undertaken on a mass scale, it is much more in keeping with that real utopia that emerged a thousand years ago in southern Spain. Here, I refer to that period in Spanish history called the *Convivencia,* which lasted from the end of the eighth century through the eleventh century's second decade. It was a stunning two centuries of fruitful cooperation and mutual respect between Jews, Christians, and Muslims, the latter group being politically and militarily dominant, but benevolently so. The geographical heart of the *Convivencia*, the Andalusian city of Córdoba, was the seat of the Umayyad caliphate and the birthplace and home of Maimonides, the Jewish scholastic whose "negative theology" exerted a profound influence on Thomas Aquinas, Duns Scotus, and even Peter Abelard.

The two and a half centuries of the *Convivencia*[49] represented a protracted moment of stunning productivity that celebrated and synthesized the diverse influences felt from many cultural sources. Without its effort of cultural synthesis and recovery of classical knowledge, the Renaissance would have quite literally been unthinkable. We would do well to remember that while the Jewish and Muslim scribes of Córdoba were translating the lost texts of the classical world into the forms from which they would eventually be salvaged, almost all of northern Europe was in a state of siege as pillaging Norseman came down from Scandinavia to wreak havoc just prior to the turn of the first millennium.

Ten centuries later, we now find that administrativist pillagers are now the ones terra-forming the landscape of contemporary visual culture in a manner that is not to our liking, and it seems that their influence is everywhere to be felt, with the countervailing influence of serious purpose nowhere to be seen. But the widespread discontent that is felt for the image of their own efficacy is a specter that is gaining in clarity and coherence, not to mention purpose, and these may be more far-reaching than any gain of simple career positionality. Certainly, the political, economic, and artistic news that is on the immediate horizon of the moment of this writing is not of the kind that would prompt hopeful reverie, but the fact that we recognize our moment to be one of grim darkness is perhaps enough to give some hope for a brightness to come, if we remind ourselves that whatever salvation we might find will be of our own hand's devise.

# Coda

## The 2006 Whitney Biennial

*For a group all of whose members are afflicted by one and the same disorder no such background could exist; it would have to be found elsewhere. And as regards to the therapeutic application of our knowledge, what would be the use of the most correct analysis of social neuroses, since no one possesses authority to impose such a therapy upon the group? But in spite of all of these difficulties, we may expect that one day someone will venture to embark upon a pathology of cultural communities.*

- Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents* (1930)[1]

*No, it's about you...Your kind. Your ilk. It's about your failure to create anything of lasting value and the ugliness and impurity of your motives. It's about my despair over your inability to move me, or thrill me, or to engage even the simplest human emotion. It's really quite a nasty book, I'm afraid.*

- Sophie Hoffenkamp, in Daniel Clowes's
*Art School Confidential* (2006)[2]

At the very least, we can say that we have a crisis of authenticity on our hands. It stems from a programmatic insistence that the art that we would call nugatory be understood as being infected with a lesser aesthetic evil than any that is tarred with the brushes of kitsch or nostalgia. Such priorities make perfect sense only in an administrativist world where an aesthetics-for-the-sake-of-equity is foregrounded by a pseudo-history constructed from a specu-

lative pseudo-theory that operates in loyal service to a presumption of political necessity saturated with a myriad of unspoken contradictions. Represented here is the omnipresent condition of hypocrisy de jure that recruits all to its own grim purposes of self-perpetuation, but the important point lies in the unavoidable recognition that casts the administrativist rush to all things nugatory as being the programmatic enactment that is undertaken at the expense of any aesthetics-for-the-sake-of-empathy that would normally and rightfully be prized if social and psychic habilitation were the core values motivating the marshalling of artistic and political will. Of course, evidence of such a marshalling is scarce, because such a marshalling would be anathema to administrativism's interest in perpetuating administrativism – this by virtue of a holding it to account to values outside of itself, thereby undermining the fantasy of a holding of monarchical authority that forms the narcissistic rationale that sees desirability in the administrative task.

The thing that confirms this is the perpetuation of an absence of something that necessity should insist be present in proliferate form. That absence is a word and the categorical idea that it would represent – a word that would be the noun for which the modifiers *nugatory* and *meretricious* would serve as illustrative synonyms. Just as Clement Greenberg imported the German word *kitsch* to flavor his famous 1939 attack on all of the then still-lingering practices deriving from Social Realism, so too do we now need a term that could galvanize a new, albeit equally necessary, critique that would create critical distance from a global nightmare of a contemporary art that is cynically manufactured under the banner of being worth much while meaning very little. *Word*: I summon thee! And thus, *Schlimmbesskunst* is invoked. Derived from the German word *Schlimmbesserung* signifying any so-called improvement that makes things worse, *Schlimmbesskunst* seems the perfect neologism that bespeaks the entire trajectory of post-modernity in all of its aspects, facets, and guises. For this reason, it should be made available as the retort of choice for those moments when there might be a call for clarification of what the term *art administrator art* might mean. The Yiddish term *farpotshket* might also do, as might the German-derived term *Rhadferkunst* (i.e., art that flatters superiors and browbeats inferiors). Maybe we should also consider the Dutch-derived term *pluderkunst,* which indicates an art emanating from a conspiracy to exploit the public. But, as worthy as this gathering of alternative terms might be, *Schlimmbesskunst* seems to come closest to the necessary mark, although it lacks the desirable monosyllabic bluntness that came part-and-parcel with Greenberg's *kitsch.* Perhaps an onomatopoetic condensation into the single syllable *schlimm* will be sufficient for future critics setting straight the story of art, thereby aiding and abetting the continuation of that story beyond the current chapter of dim prospect.

But there is one exception to administrativism's rush to all things

meretricious, calculated, and nugatory, and that is the popular *idée fixe* that casts creativity itself as a synonym for the impulse-control problems that would indicate a supposedly heroic inability to participate in everyday social performance. Again, we are regaled by the tired cliché holding that real invention evolves out of the inevitable failures of mastery that mark the experience of the perpetually distracted, and this in turn explains why, once again, we are duty-bound to take graffiti seriously owing to its alleged "authenticity" operating in doomed contrast to a world of rigged games. But this liberating exception only goes so far, because even the best graffiti has a difficult time making any real sense when it is extracted from the sub-cultural micro-climate surrounding its making. But following from this article of condescension pretending to be valorization, we also see how such misplaced attention also means that we are duty bound to see how the most trivial examples of artistic production can be said to be wonderful in their own idiosyncratic way, even though this means that they are not wonderful in any way that portends any meaningful habilitation of the viewer's experience of self and world. We would do well to remember that, just because a given voice in the semiological wilderness cries out for salvation, there is no obligation on anybody's part to answer the call. And yet, the Whitney Museum's 2006 Biennial seemed deeply predicated on the idea that there was just such a built-in obligation coming part-and-parcel with the status of its own institution.

Subtitled *Day for Night*, the 2006 iteration of the Whitney Biennial curated by Chrissie Illes and Philippe Vergne seemed overburdened with a plethora of such unsympathetic half-cries. Some of them were quite loud, such as Francesco Vezzoli's advert film teasing us about an allegedly eminent release of a comic quasi-pornographic fall of the Roman Empire movie, while others spoke in the almost silent register of an abandoned mortuary, such as the one that earmarked Sturtevant's dour redeployments of Duchampian found objects, coyly passing themselves off as being clever about "the signifying system of art history" while also looking like so many canopic jars preciously ensconced in the burial chamber of a minor attendant attached to the court of some lesser pharaoh. Some kind of point was made by Urs Fischer's giant holes in the gypsum walls of the museum's fourth floor gallery, while Angela Stassheim presented a group of chromogenic prints featuring the slightly less up-scale cousins of Tina Barney's anxious families of emotionally frozen equity mavens. There was a dedicated room full of unremarkable work of some socially conscious black artists, creating an exercise in ghettoization that should have had the Guerrilla Girls ringing loud alarm bells. Only in Ed Paschke's beautifully painted trio of pulsating icons, and in Mark Bradford's large and energetically agitated abstract collages did we see anything that rewarded honest curiosity. Everything else in the 2006 Biennial can be condemned as being the would-be set piece for a movie that the curators seemed to hope viewers would

want to make in their heads, no doubt assuming that the exhibition's large catalogue and over-elaborated wall-text would function as the script illuminating the story that turned out to be just another variation of the tired game of running from being to doing to (merely) appearing in far too-rote a manner that conflated indolence with obduracy. That *Day for Night* might generate other more interesting stories was a most unlikely prospect, because there were too many missing elements: in the absence of characters, it only offered gestures incompletely aspiring to caricature; in the absence of story, it offered lifeless rehearsals of disconnected quasi-episodes. Most tragically, it offered no evocation of any world in which story and character might be deemed sensible and necessary. What remained was simply a dreg fest of sorts, the dregs in question being those that embrace only the most cliché-ridden ideas of what it means to escape cliché. And for this reason, the museum itself was recast as a kind of leviathanic rectum awaiting the long-overdue colonic of serious criticality applied with righteous indignation and a titan's perspicacity.

Everyone loves a lapdog, as the saying goes, and the nugatory *Schlimmbesskunst* of the early 21st century is everywhere to be seen operating as administrativism's anthemic lapdog of choice, in large part because it confirms the need for administrators to further perpetuate administrativism. Such art goes further than being doomed as the lightning rod for the misunderstanding of the unfeeling bourgeoisie; in our age of global spectacle, it creates a rococo theater of bathos around its studied lack of generosity, one that threatens no one because it makes no effort to persuade anyone. In so failing, it puts paid to its own contribution to administrativism's orchestration of an economy of positionality and pure narcissistic reward enacted in grandiose spite with a cold hostility toward real accomplishment – one that creates and circulates the phantasms of valueless equity that are both disposable and perpetually replaceable. But there is another path, one that is dangerous in its own way, but one that might be the last place that art can still mine the ore of meaningful particularity in the world overrun by administrativist *Gesamtschlimmbesskunstwerk*. It is the path that invites artists, critics, and yes, even curators to forsake and eschew the winner-take-all aesthetics of administration-envy shrouding its own motives pertaining to equity-envy, asking all concerned to instead embrace a set of aesthetic priorities keynoted by a high regard for the necessity of giving affective representation to a necessary empathy. This may well be the final frontier for the postmodern century, but it is a frontier that seems to provoke reticence, if not outright paralysis. This call is given ballast by Ellen Dissanayake, who has written:

> Somewhat surprisingly, postmodern thought, while emancipated from adherence to old-fashioned ideas of the noble, the grand, and the high ideals of art, is if anything even more likely to consider

the physical or emotional concomitants of art experience as irrel-
evant and somehow bad form...while a raised eyebrow, a chuckle,
or a hiss of rage might be allowed, a fully-fledged acknowledgement
of being deeply moved or drastically affected by a postmodern
work or by any other form of art is seen as evidence of one's
unexamined cultural prejudices made public.[3]

Such a devaluing of affect leaves only room for the low-wire act of various
gestures of abjection pretending toward cleverness, but even these have the
covert agenda of insisting that everything be conceptualized as "culture" that
is, as a biased figment of social operation that awaits administrative manipula-
tion. This means that the very nature from which Baudelaire claimed to draw
his criterion was an illusion, one among many other "culturally mandated"
modes of being that was suffused with the bad faith of bogus universalism.
Dissanayake proposed that these claims be countered by a "psychobiological"
account of empathy that is informed by "current neuroscientific findings about
the ways that we perceive, think, and feel."[4] Such an account would move by
definition toward a new set of universalizing metaphors pertaining to the way
that the human sensorium operates in the world, and she points to James J.
Gibson's "ecological" approach to perception as a "chain of affordances" as
being the basis of a viable "empathy theory" for the arts. On this subject, Gibson
was quoted at some length:

An affordance...points two ways, to the environment and to the
observer. So does the information to specify an affordance. But
this does not in the least imply separate realms of consciousness
and matter, a psychophysical dualism. It says only that the infor-
mation to specify the utilities of the environment by information
to specify the observer himself, his body, legs, hands, and mouth.
This is only to reemphasize that exteroception (recognition of
stimuli produced outside of an organism) is accompanied by prop-
rioception (recognition of stimuli produced within an organism) –
that to perceive the world is to coperceive oneself. This is wholly
inconsistent with dualism in any form...the awareness of the world
and one's complementary relations to the world are not separable.[5]

It is interesting to note that this statement confirms and vindicates Fairbairn's
early and controversial assertion of and theorization about the existence of
"endopsychic structures"[6] governing behavior according to the ego's orches-
tration of a rapprochement between their own demands on its agency. The
more important point lies in how it establishes a succinct fulcrum of defensible
presumption that harks all of the way back to Wilhelm Worringer's 1908 as-
sertion of a dichotomy between abstraction and empathy – the latter signifying

a "happy pantheistic relationship of confidence between man and the phenomena of the external world."[7] In unhappy times, such a relation should be cherished and celebrated. But then, administrativism supervenes, proposing itself as both cause and solution to all problems. And from this advent, unhappy consciousness remains the order of the day.

# Notes

**Introduction: Art in the Age of Cultural Tourism**

1. Robert Smithson, "Art and Dialectics" (1971), quoted in Suzaan Boettger, *Earthworks* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 60.

2. Orson Wells, *Citizen Kane* (RKO Pictures, 1941).

3. Anne Rice, *Interview with the Vampire* (1994). The quote is from Rice's screenplay for the 1994 film directed by Neil Jordan (Warner Brothers/ Geffen Pictures). It does not appear in her 1976 novel of the same title.

4. See John Seabrook, *NoBrow: The Culture of Marketing/ The Marketing of Culture* (New York: Knopf, 2000).

5. See Michael Bracewell, *When Surface Became Depth* (New York: Vintage Books, 2002).

6. These terms were attributed to Francesco Bonami in relation to his organization of the 2003 Venice Biennial. Quoted in Pamela M. Lee, "Boundary Issues: The Art World Under the Sign of Globalism," *Artforum* (November 2003): 165.

7. Ibid.

8. Naomi Klein, *No Logo* (New York: Picador, 2000), 12. Klein cites an unsigned editorial in the *London Daily Mail* (November 17, 1997) as being the basis of her remark.

9. Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and its Discontents* (1930), trans. James Strachy (New York: Norton, 1962). This book presents his fullest treatment of the idea of a death instinct originally advanced in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920).

10. Ibid., 90.

11. Julian Spalding, *The Eclipse of Art* (Munich and London: Prestel Verlag, 2003), 15.

12. Clifford Geertz, "The Impact of the Concept of Culture on the Concept of Man," in *The Interpretation of Culture* (New York: Harper Collins, 1973), 45.

**Chapter 1: Contemporary Art and the Administrative Sublime**

1. Okwui Enwezor, quoted in Carol Becker, "A Conversation with Okwui Enwezor," *Art Journal* (February 2002): 26.

2. George Steiner, *After Babel: Aspects of Language and Translation* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1975), 220.

3. Donald Kuspit, "Avant-Garde, Hollywood, Depression: The Collapse of High Art" in *The Rebirth of Painting in the Late Twentieth Century* (London: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 149.

4. Arthur Kroker and Michael Weinstein, *Data Trash: The Theory of the Virtual Class,* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995), 7.

5. Friedrich Dürrenmatt, *The Physicists* (1962), trans. James Kirkup (New York: Grove Press, 1964), 91.

6. Statements made in recent interviews by Neo-Geo Artists Ashley Bickerton and Peter Halley provide insight into the shifting values of the mid-late 1980s: "The 80s were really three different periods: 1980 to 1983 was dominated by the recession and the emergence of new European painting and neo-expressionism. Then you had the mid-80s, in which the robust economic recovery spurred the emergence of neo-Conceptualism – which included artists who were showing for the first time, Koons, myself, et cetera, but also marked the first widespread acceptance of artists like Richard Prince and Sherrie Levine, who were first shown around 1980...After about 1988, the economy was less good, the AIDS crisis emerged, and a more direct form of Conceptualism emerged, which defined itself in terms of a critical opposition...it's interesting to speculate on which version of the decade is going to win. Of course, I'm rooting for the more optimistic, glamorous version, namely the mid-80s" (Peter Halley in "Peter Halley talks to Dan Cameron," *Artforum* (March 2003): 212). Ashley Bickerton: "It was really the collector's moment. The machine had been put into place by the neo-exers and was grinding along at full tilt by the time we got there in the late 80s. But I had a problem with authority figures and never had the ease with critics that some artists did. Conversely, I never had a problem with dealers or collectors. I saw them as co-conspirators" (Ashley Bickerton in "Ashley Bickerton talks to Steve Lafreniere," *Artforum* (March 2003): 240). Neither Halley nor Bickerton address the authority of the market, or the values undergirding it at a time when the "robust" economy was being driven by exponential increases in defense spending and the rampant speculation in equities so aptly satirized in the "greed works" soliloquy from Oliver Stone's 1988 film *Wall Street*. Jeff Koons's matriculation as an artist from previous careers as a marketing executive and commodities trader is worth noting here, as is the astonishing lack of differentiation undergirding Halley's upper-case evocation of a servile "Conceptualism."

7. Donald Kuspit, "Flack from the 'Radicals': The Case Against Current German Painting" (1983) in *Art After Modernism: Rethinking Representation,* ed. Brian Wallis (Boston: David R. Godine, 1985), 138.

8. Francis Haskell, *The Ephemeral Museum* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2000), 1.

9. Margit Rowell, *Objects of Desire: the Modern Still Life* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1997), 194-195.

10. For a series of detailed investigative reports about the evolution and policy consequences of the NEA debates, see my series of articles and interviews that were published in *Artweek* magazine from May 1995 to June 1996: "An Interview with Jane Alexander," July 1995, pp. 3, 27; "On Point," July 1995, p. 5; "NEA Update," August 1995, pp. 3, 27; "NEA Update," August 1995, pp. 3, 27; "NEA Update," September 1995, pp. 4-5, "NEA Update," October 1995, pp. 3-4; "Brainstorming at the NAAO Conference, a Conversation with Jennifer Dowley, Director of the NEA Visual Arts Program, " December, 1995, pp. 14-15. See also Gary O. Larson, *American Canvas, An Arts Legacy for Our Communities* (Washington, D.C.: US Government Printing Office/ National Endowment for the Arts, 1997). Based on a series of public forums held in six American cities in 1995-1996, this report examined arts funding patterns from a cost-benefit point of view, measuring their accomplishments against the following standards: "What Role Do the Arts Play in Community Understanding and Civic Participation?"; "What Role Do the Arts Play in Cultural Heritage and Citizen Pride?"; "How Do the Arts Build a Positive Legacy for Children?"; "What Roll Do the Arts Play in Linking Communities and Building Solid Social Framework?"; "How Do the Arts Help to Ensure Livable Communities for Tomorrow?"; "How do The Arts Ensure Student Success and Good Schools?"; "In What Ways do the Arts Strengthen Family?"; "What is the Bottom Line? The Arts as a Community Resource"; "What Advantages Do the Arts Bring to Community Planning Design and Development?" Despite the fact that art administrators comprised the respective forums addressing these questions (very few of the listed participants were artists), affirmative answers that extended themselves beyond the clichés of enriching communities, educational outreach, and private-public partnerships were not forthcoming. But the questions themselves seem to betray many administrative prejudices and delusions about their own efficacy in the realms of social policy and social impact.

11. Naomi Klein, *No Logo* (New York: Picador/St. Martin's Press, 2000), 111.

12. Quoted in Klein, 122.

13. Quoted in Quentin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell-Smith, "General Introduction," *Selections of the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci* (New York: International Publishers, 1971), xcii. See also Louis Althusser, "Ideology and State

Apparatus" (1969), in *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2001), 85-126. The complete text of the Port Huron Statement can be accessed at http://www3.iath.virginia.edu/sixties/HTML_docs/Resources/Primary/Manifestos/SDS_Port_Huron.html

14. See Alison M. Gingeras, "Totally My Ass," *Artforum* (September 2003): 102-104. It is interesting to note the difference in reaction between the *Untitled Gingeras* ad and the earlier Lynda Benglis ad. The earlier gesture prompted half of *Artforum*'s associate editors to resign from the magazine on the grounds that the ad betrayed the publication's compromised complicity in the evils of the art market. Rosalind Krauss and Annette Michelson were two of these associate editors, and a year later they launched *October* magazine as a vehicle for writing that could exist apart from the mandates of gallery advertising. To date, there has been no public comment (other than my own) about the Gingeras advertisement, suggesting that it was received as an unremarkable piece of art world business-as-usual.

15. See Jean Baudrillard's "The Ecstasy of Communication," in *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays in Postmodern Culture,* ed. Hal Foster (Port Townsend, WA: Bay Press, 1983), 126-133. Baudrillard writes: "But today the Scene and the Mirror no longer exist. In place of the reflective transcendence of mirror and scene, there is a non-reflecting surface, an immanent surface where operations unfold – the smooth operational surface of communication...our own body and the whole surrounding universe became a control screen...the psychological dimension has in a sense vanished...it is not really there that things are being played out" (Baudrillard 126-127). If not there, then where? The obvious answer is "the social field," but perhaps with more subtlety we can say that Baudrillard's point is that the psychological has been displaced *out into* the social – that is, administrativist field, where the countervailing phase of condensation would be completed at the institutional rather than at the existential level. Oddly, this process is often described in terms of being a form of liberation (from the ego?), although contained within it is an explicit prescription for the sacrifice of individual volition and prerogative. It is interesting to note the fact that psychoanalysis initially came into being as a way of accounting for and mastering behavioral tendencies toward self-destructive self-deception. Baudrillard's evocation of a post-psychoanalytic moment needs to be examined in light of how it proposes to minimize the self so as to maximize its self-destructive susceptibility to omni-present world deception. For a discussion of the dialectic of displacement and condensation see Sigmund Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1899), ed. and trans. James Strachy (New York: Avon Books, 1965). Summarizing his theory of dreams, Freud writes: "The dream-work is not simply more careless, more irrational, more forgetful and more incomplete than waking thought; it is completely different from it qualitatively and for that reason not immediately comparable with it....That product, the dream, has above all to evade censorship, and with that end in view the dream-work makes use of a *displacement of psychical intensities* to the point of a

transvaluation of all psychical values. The thoughts have to be produced exclusively or predominantly in the material of visual and acoustic memory-traces, and this consideration imposes on the dream-work *considerations of representability* which it meets by carrying out fresh displacements. Greater intensities probably have to be produced than are available in the dream thoughts at night, and this purpose is served by the extensive *condensation* which is carried out with the constituents of the dream-thoughts. Little attention is paid to the logical relations between the thoughts; those relations are ultimately given a disguised representation in certain *formal* characteristics of dreams. Any affect attached to the dream-thoughts undergoes less modification than their ideational content. Such affects are as a rule suppressed; when they are retained, they are detached from the ideas that properly belong to them, affects of a similar character being brought together" (Freud 545-546). On the subject of the skewed dialectic of displacement and condensation that haunts contemporary art made in the administrativist mode, Donald Kuspit has written: "Indeed, ironic appropriation is unconsciously a form of melancholy submission to the visual and psycho-social control. The pseudo-avant-garde artist reifies already reified – by reason of their social success (secular sanctification) – avant-garde and kitsch art into ironic aesthetic phenomena. But irony is always resignation that nothing basic can be changed...Duchamp and Disney have equal credibility in this pantheon because they are equally successful" Donald Kuspit, *The Cult of the Avant-Garde Artist* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 103. Here, the important point is that art must return to the condition of subjective condensation if it is to persuasively idealize and transform the experience that is its subject matter – and in so doing, become a mode of social dreaming. Otherwise, it becomes a social instrument passively mimicking the pre-constructed codes of social dreaming without engaging the actual process.

16. Bob Nickas, "Multiple Voice," *Artforum* (May 2002): 164.

17. For an account of the idea of the "Temporary Autonomous Zone," see Hakim Bey, *T.A.Z: The Temporary Autonomous Zone, Ontological Anarchy, Poetic Terrorism* (New York: Autonomedia Press, 1991), 97-134. Bey's notion of social interaction at the micro-communal level is of particular note as it applies to much of the work contained in the 2002 Whitney Biennial. On page 106 we read: "The essence of the party: face-to-face, a group of humans synergize their efforts to realize mutual desires, whether for good food and cheer, dance, conversation, the arts of life; perhaps even for erotic pleasure...a basic biological drive to 'mutual aid.'" Of course, when the productions resulting from these drives are presented as epiphenomenal specimens rather than totems of local engagement (as was the case at the Whitney), the important component of momentary and inclusive interactivity breeding its own inter-subjectivity will fall by the wayside, leaving only an odd amphigorical detritus awaiting administrativist recuperation.

18. Nancy Princenthal, "Whither the Whitney Biennial?" *Art in America* (June

2002): 53.

19. Roberta Smith, "Bad News For Art, However You Define It," *Sunday New York Times,* March 31, 2002. Here, I quote at length: "In fact, this show often defines art so broadly, and so laxly, that the art all but disappears. It's the diffusion biennial, populated by artists who just want to have fun, hang out, do good or promote a mild-mannered social agenda. And so, painting houses in Puerto Rico is art instead of community activism. Pretending to be a Guru is art rather than fraud. Holding séances to contact the ghost of Joseph Cornell is art instead of theater. Of course, it's possible to define these activities as art, but it sets the bar conspicuously low...Cultural life today and the role of museums within it, however, are another matter. Whether noble or bleak, the Biennial is fascinating to mull over in this context" (Smith 33).

20. Peter Schjeldahl, "Pragmatic Hedonism," *The New Yorker,* April 3, 2000, 94.

21. James Clifford, "On Ethnographic Surrealism," in *The Predicament of Culture* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988), 117-118. The distinction between the *wunderkammer* (or "cabinet of curiosities"), and the *kunstkammer* (or "art chamber") is an old one that forms the basis for the traditional differentiation between museums of science, technology, ethnography, and natural history on the one hand, and museums of art on the other. For a detailed explanation of evolution and historical differences of the *kunstkammer* and *wunderkammer,* see Barbara Maria Stafford, "Revealing Technologies/Magical Domains," and Frances Terpak "Wunderkammer and Wunderkabinette," in *Devices of Wonder* (Los Angeles: The Getty Center, 2001; exhibition catalogue), 1-142 and 148-157. It should be noted that an important part of the original Surrealists' aspirations was to celebrate the "marvelousness" of the *wunderkammer* as a challenge to the conventional sanctification of the *kunstkammer*. This is born out by the two issues of the Surrealist publication *Documents,* which were edited by George Bataille in 1928 and 1929. A similarly "ethnographic" approach to staging exhibits of contemporary art was practiced in London by The Independent Group during the middle 1950s. Using titles like *Parallel of Art and Life* (1952) and *This is Tomorrow* (1955), they updated the ethno-graphic thrust of the older Surrealist projects to include and address the artifacts of popular culture as they were manifested in the then-nascent age of mass media. For an account of the Independent Group that emphasizes how their collaborative projects can be read as early forerunners of postmodernism, see *The Independent Group: Post War Britain and the Aesthetics of Plenty*, ed. David Robbins (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1990).

22. Arthur Danto, "The Show They Love to Hate," *The Nation*, April 29, 2002, 32-34.

23. Quoted in Benjamin Weil, "Ambient Art and the Changing Relationship to the Art Idea," in *010101: Art in Technological Times*, ed. David Ross (San

Francisco, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, 2001; exhibition catalogue), 61.

24. George Baker, "Film Rebuff," in *Artforum* (May 2002): 168.

25. Nickas, "Multiple Voice," *Artforum* (May 2002): 164. A widely cited example of such wishful romanticism can be found in Gilles Deleuze's and Félix Guattari's statement that "a schizophrenic out for a walk is a better model than a neurotic lying on an analyst's couch." (Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (1972), trans. Robert Hurley, Mark Seem, and Helen R. Lane (New York: Viking Press, 1977), 2. The practical implications of this statement invite a consideration of the fact that a schizophrenic out for a walk will be run over by a bus, or will perish from dehydration unless he or she is under the care of some form of "administrative" supervision. A neurotic on a couch has the opportunity to reflect on his or her experience so as to will modifications upon and take responsibility for what would otherwise be rote and possibly self-destructive behavior.

26. W.R.D. Fairbairn, "Synopsis of an Object-Relations Theory of the Personality" (1963) in *Fairbairn and the Origins of Object Relations,* eds. Grotstein and Rinsley (London: Free Association Books, 1994), 34-35. Several psychoanalytic writers have amended or elaborated Fairbairn's theory in some useful and instructive ways. As Otto Kernberg writes: "Fairbairn was able to transform into a theoretical statement what analysts had long sensed before – and after – him, namely, that in all clinical situations we never find pure drives, but always an activation of affects reflecting such drives in the context of internalized object relations reenacted in the transference" (Otto Kernberg, "Fairbairn's Theory and Challenge," ibid., 59-60). To this assessment, James Grotstein adds, "'Object' is a logical-positivistic and pseudo-scientific term, which fails to capture the phenomenology of the internal world. It is my belief that that 'internal objects,' whether Kleinian or Fairbairnian, are *third forms* – neither the external person from whom they were partially modeled, nor merely split-off parts of the self. They are in fact phantasmally altered, transformed montages that have been referred to across all the ages of mankind as "monsters," "demons," "witches," "angels," and so on. However, in Fairbairn's scheme, internalized objects, these split-off aspects of the self, form the template for the schizoid, narcissistic, borderline and multiple personality disorders – and the general condition of 'being schizoid'" (James Grotstein, "Notes on Fairbairn's Metapsychology," in *Fairbairn and the Origins of Object Relations,* eds. Grotstein and Rinsley (London: Free Association Books, 1994), 118). When internal objects are projected outward rather than split-off and compartmentalized within the subject, the path to a fully developed schizophrenia becomes clear. Of particular interest here, see Victor Tausk's early (1916) observation about schizophrenic fantasies pertaining to "Influencing Machines" that have the power to determine the subject's behavior via some form of remote control. See Victor Tausk, "On The Origin of the 'Influencing Machine' in Schizophrenia" (1916) in *Sexuality,*

*War, and Schizophrenia: The Collected Psychoanalytic Papers,* ed. Paul Roazen (London: Transaction Publishers, 1988). This notion of an influencing machine seems a worth precedent to the idea of the "Desiring Machine" advanced by Deleuze and Guattari (*Anti-Oedipus,* op. cit., 36-37).

It is important to stress here that the general proposition of "Object Relations" allows for a more subtle and sophisticated account of subject-formation than sociologically inspired notions of the subject's passive receipt of pre-ordained "life scripts." This is true because it posits an "endopsychic" world of internalizations dialectically formed as reactive models both stemming from and subsequently enframing the *experiential* seekings- and fleeings-from exopsychic objects. As such, it anticipated the claims of Sociobiology pertaining to the formation of "fixed-action patterns" and the "ritualizations" that can exacerbate or redirect psychic manifestations. For an account of the Sociobio-logical view of "deep semiotics," see. Edward O. Wilson, *Sociobiology: A New Synthesis* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1975). The two most influential psychoanalytic statements on the etiology of "Schizoid" mechanisms are W.R D. Fairbairn, "Schizoid Factors in the Personality" (1940), in *Psycho-analytic Studies of the Personality* (London: Tavistock Publications, 1952), 3-27, and Melanie Klein, "Notes on Some Schizoid Mechanisms" (1946), in *The Selected Melanie Klein*, ed. Juliet Mitchell (New York: Macmillan Free Press, 1986), 176-200.

27. Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 25. Throughout the 1990s, Butler's notion of gender as a social construct became synonymous with an alleged "new sophistication" about the way that identities are formed within a socio-cultural matrix of conventionalized encouragement and threatened retribution. Certainly, the ethical purposes of Butler's radically anti-essentialist formulations should be applauded for their offering of humane correctives to (obsolete) legalistic and theocentric constraints on individual prerogatives; however, this applause should arrive with a caveat that questions whether a "radical contextualism" is or is not any more irrational, reductive and over-simplistic than even the most hidebound of essentialisms. This is particularly important when we make the jump from recognizing the effect of the influential powers of context (especially in relation to its "constructed" character) to assuming and even envying its "determining power" by using administrative instruments to pursue a program of social engineering predicated on a kind of expert-thinking that can be too complacently sure that it has all of the right answers – not to mention the power to define, prioritize and/or dismiss the questions to which such answers can or should be appended. A more measured understanding of the self-constructing dialectic of identity and social context comes from Emile Durkheim who, as the founder of modern sociology, was among the very first to analyze the arbitrary nature of normative institutional constructs: "We do not mean to assert that...social practices or beliefs enter into the individual without undergoing variations – to say this would deny the facts. When we turn our thoughts to collective institutions – or rather, when we assimilate them – we individualize them, just as when we think of the sensible

world, each of us colors it...so that we see a great many subjects, differently expressed and adapting themselves to the same milieu. This is why every one of us, up to a certain point, forms his own religious faith, his own cult, his own morality, and his own technology...But sooner or later, we encounter...a limit that we cannot transcend. Hence the characteristic feature of social facts lies in their ascendancy which they exert over the minds of individuals" (Emile Durkheim, "Sociology," in *Emile Durkheim: Essays in Sociology and Philosophy,* ed. Kurt H. Wolff (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1964), 367-368).

Butler's thesis of performativity seems to stand or fall on the credibility of its embrace of a sociological notion of "identification" that is claimed to supersede the more dialectically complex psychoanalytic descriptions of *incorporation, introjection,* and *internalization.* In several extended footnotes, she contends that this progression is to be understood as a *fait d'accompli,* but at one juncture she suggests that psychoanalytic discourse may have more potential for generating subversive understandings of the performative subject: "What distinguishes psychoanalysis from sociological accounts...is that, whereas for the latter, the internalization of norms is assumed roughly to work, the basic premise, and indeed, the starting point for psychoanalysis is that it does not. The unconscious constantly reveals 'the failure of identity'" (Butler 156).

Of related interest is the famous hoax perpetrated upon the editors of *Social Text* by Alan Sokal. Sokal prepared a nonsensical article titled "Transgressing the Boundaries: Toward a Transformative Hermeneutics of Quantum Gravity" which appeared in the April 1996 issue of that journal. He later revealed his intentions in a subsequent issue of *Lingua Franca,* creating a *succès de scandale* that indicated that political convenience was synonymous with intellectual standards in at least one influential cultural studies journal. As Paul A. Boghossian writes, "It's impossible to do justice to the egregiousness of Sokal's essay without quoting it more or less in its entirety...'In such a situation, how can a self-perpetuating secular priesthood of credentialed "scientists" purport a monopoly on the production of scientific knowledge'...Throughout his text, Sokal quoted liberally and approvingly from the writings of leading postmodern theorists, including several editors of *Social Text,* passages that were breathtaking in their combination of self-confidence and absurdity." (Paul A. Boghossian, "What the Sokal Hoax Ought to Teach Us," in *A House Built on Sand: Exposing Postmodernist Myths about Science,* ed. Noretta Koertge (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 23-24. The real implication of the Sokal hoax is its inverse demonstration of the existence of a reality principle that could be held as operating beyond politicized arguments about the social construction of perspectival predicates that seek to supersede the authority of fact. This suggests that the schizoidally wishful thinking called "performativity" can be tested against a discourse that can exceed the topically performative (i.e., "the constructed"), while also giving the performative something to transgress against, or, more importantly, a resistance that potentiates the risk of a failure of and for said transgression. For an examination of the New Performativity in Contemporary Art, see Mark Van Proyen, "The New

Dionysianism," in *The Sticky Sublime,* ed. Bill Beckley (New York: SVA/ Allworth Press, 2001), 165-175.

For a prescient forshadowing of Butler's performativity thesis, see Susan Sontag, "Notes on Camp," (1964) in *Against Interpretation, and Other Essays* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1965), 284-292. At various junctures of Sontag's essay, the schizoidal underpinnings of "Camp" aesthetics are invoked, usually valorized as a kind of irony. Naomi Klein offered a trenchant riposte to the proliferation of Camp aesthetics in 2001, when she wrote, "Much of the early camp culture that Sontag describes involved using an act of imagination to make the marginal – even the despised – glamorous and fabulous. Drag queens, for instance, took their forced exile and turned it into a ball, with all of the trappings of the Hollywood balls to which they would never be invited. The same can even be said of Andy Warhol. The man who took the world on a camping trip was a refugee from bigoted small-town America; the factory became his sovereign state. Sontag proposed camp as a defense mechanism against the banality, ugliness and over-earnestness of mass culture.... Camp is modern dandyism. Camp is the answer to the problem: how to be a dandy in the age of mass culture. Only now, some thirty-five years latter, we are faced with the vastly more difficult question: How to be critical in an age of mass camp?...Yes, the cool hunters reduce vibrant cultural ideas to the status of archeological artifacts, and drain away whatever meaning they once held...Bauhaus modernism, for example had its roots in the imaginings of a socialist utopia free of garish adornment, but it was almost immediately appropriated as the relatively inexpensive architecture of choice for the glass-and-steel skyscrapers of corporate America....The spring 1998 Prada collection...borrowed heavily from the struggle of the labor movement." (Klein, *No Logo,* op. cit., 84). An even earlier foreshadowing of the administrativist implications of both Butler's performativity thesis and Deleuze's and Guattari's valorization of ambulatory schizophrenia can be found in Victor Tausk's early (1916) observation about schizophrenic fantasies pertaining to "Influencing Machines" that have the power to determine the subject's behavior via some invisible form of remote control. See Victor Tausk, "On The Origin of the 'Influencing Machine' in Schizophrenia" (1916) in *Sexuality, War and Schizophrenia: The Collected Psychoanalytic Papers*, ed. Paul Roazen (London: Transaction Publishers, 1988).

28. For an exposition of the dialectic between "performatives" and "constitutives," see J.L. Austin, *How to Do Things With Words* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1955).

29. George Baker, "Film Rebuff," in *Artforum* (May 2002): 167.

30. Donald Kuspit, *Psychostrategies of Avant-Garde Art* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 4-5.

31. Joep van Lieshout, quoted in Harold Szeemann, et. al., *The Plateau of Human-*

*ity: the 49th Venice Biennale, Vol. 1* (exhibition catalogue), 158.

32. Benjamin Buchloh, "Control, by Design," *Artforum* (September 2001): 163.

## Chapter 2: Schizoid Administrativism

1. Po Bronson, *Bombardiers* (New York: Penguin Books, 1995), 66.

2. Peter Halley, "Essence and Model" (1986) in *Peter Halley: Collected Essays 1981-1987* (Zurich: Gallery Bruno Bischofberger, 1988), 162.

3. Theodor Adorno, "The Palace of Janus" (1945) in *Minima Moralia,* trans. E.F.N. Jephcott (London: Verso, 1984), 146-147.

4. Louis Cheskin, quoted in Vance Packard, *The Hidden Persuaders* (New York: Pocket Books, 1957), 5.

5. Ibid., 3.

6. My use of the term "techno-bureaucratic capitalism" is to be taken as a synonym for Arthur Kroker and Michael A. Weinstein's use of the word "pan-capitalism," in their book *Data Trash: The Theory of the Virtual Class* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994), and it is intended to signal a condensation of the astute political analysis offered therein. As Kroker and Weinstein have noted: "The fascism proper that was never supposed to happen again returns with a vengeance, creating the bi-modern situation of hyper-technology and primitivism...Within the context of the double-mediation, fascism is determined as the reaction-formation against the logic of virtuality – the life of waiting to be replaced under the sign of the wish to be replaced" (Kroker and Weinstein 66). This is the ethos of schizoid administrativism in a grim but prescient nutshell, which becomes even clearer when we remember with Kroker and Weinstein that: "Virtual satisfactions are cheaper. This is how the hatred of existence works...Under the sign of possessive individualism possessed individuals work the economic destruction of the future in the name of just desserts, security, and self-fulfillment" (Ibid., 67).

7. Peter Halley, "A Response to Barnet Newman's 'The Sublime is Now'" (1986) in *Peter Halley: Collected Essays,* op. cit., 165.

8. Quoted in Robert Hughes, *American Visions: The Epic Story of Art in America* (New York: Knopf, 1997), 603.

9. Caroline Jones, *The Machine in the Studio* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 2.

10. See Plato, "Ion" (trans. Lane Cooper) in *Plato: Collected Dialogues*, ed. Edith

Hamilton and Huntington Cairns (New York: Pantheon Books, 1961), 215-228. Although it is routine to assume that the third book of Plato's *Republic* contains the best distillation of his theory of art, I would recommend *Ion* as a timely rival owing to its particular relevance to the political discrepancies that are inherent in our culture's adulation of celebrities. In it, Socrates toys with Ion of Epidaurus, a rhapsode (i.e. one who offers dramatic recitations of well-known poetry) who has come to perform in what might seem to be an ancient Athenian version of *Star Search*. After polite formalities, Socrates concludes by saying "you are like Proteus; you twist and turn, this way and that assuming every shape until you finally elude my grasp and reveal yourself as a general. And all in order not to show how skilled you are in the lore concerning Homer! So if you are an artist, and, as I said just now, if you only promised me a display on Homer in order to deceive me, then you are at fault" (Ibid., 227).

11. Arthur Danto, *The Philosophical Disenfranchisement of Art* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 114-115.

12. Donald Preziosi's *Rethinking Art History* (Yale University Press, 1989), Caroline Jones's *Machine in the Studio,* (op. cit.) and Howard Singerman's *Art Subjects* (University of California Press, 1999) are three of the very best examples of a genre of highly sophisticated analyses examining the determining contours of various sites of artistic production and distribution, respectively focusing on "the institutions of art history and the museum," "the late 20th century transformation of the artist's studio" or "the changing nature of how artists are educated." Common to all of these books is an acknowledged debt to Michel Foucault's "archeological method," as well as a picture of inexorable increase in institutional formalism as a historical given – implying that the march of history is of necessity a march away from the morpho-symbolic pragmatics of art. The recent migration of critical discourse toward the form of the exhibition catalogue as a vehicle for critical discussion is relevant to this point, emphasizing as it does the direct institutional sponsorship of discourse in service to said institution's presentational agendas.

13 Douglas Coupland, *Generation X: Tales for an Accelerated Culture* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1991), 25.

14. For an explanation of Ecke Bonk's seemingly obsessive notion of "typosophia" – a "conjugation of typography and philosophy" or "the typographical and taxonomic recasting of knowledge," (or, via a telling euphonic slippage, "the love of typography and taxonomy") see Catherine David, et. al., *Documenta X: The Short Guide* (Kassel: Museum Fredericianum, 1997), 90.

15. Ibid., 126.

16. For a succinct articulation of the underlying "attitudes" of the allegedly revolutionary forms presented in Szeemann's seminal 1969 exhibition, see Scott

Burton's untitled essay in Harold Szeemann, *When Attitudes Become Form: Works/Concepts/Processes/Situations* (Bern, Switzerland: Kunsthalle, 1969), 6-7. Burton initiates his elucidation of the work of the 24 artists included in this seminal exhibition with an epigraph taken from Samuel Beckett's *Molloy* which states that "saying is inventing," and then goes on to point out "though non-rigid art may at times refer to the weight and degrees of energy of the human body, it is not "humanist" because the viewer so often feels excluded, deprived of some states or parts of the work" (Burton 5). On the same page, he also writes "one of the few general characteristics of the artists in this show is how they relate their work to location. Generally, the choice is between a totally fixed position or a totally free relation of work to site." I offer these statements and the hubris with which they were uttered as evidence for and symptom of my "narcisso-schizoid" thesis, particularly my notion that the schizoid character is indicated by a counter-cathectic investment in the "magical" power of code (designation) as well as the superordinating power of "position" to deprive the body of "its weight and degrees of energy."

17. Hal Foster, *The Return of the Real* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1997), x.

18. Ibid., xvii.

19. Catherine David, et. al., *Documenta,* op. cit., 7.

20. Libby Lumpkin, "The Prohibition Symbol," in *Deep Design: Nine Little Art Histories* (Los Angeles: Art Issues Press, 1999), 37.

21. Gilles Deleuze, *Coldness and Cruelty* (New York: Zone Books, 1989), 109.

22. Ibid., 89-90.

23. See Harold D. Lasswell, *Psychopathology and Politics* (1930) (Chicago: University Press/Midway Reprints). Lasswell's book is often cited in the world of political science, but seems to be obscure in contemporary art critical and psychoanalytic circles. His early effort to reveal how "Political Man (displaces) private motives...on to public objects (subjecting the former to) rationalization in terms of public interest" (quoted in Fred I. Greenstein, "Introduction to Harold D. Lasswell, Psychopathology and Politics," viii) remains a noble one in its rigorous attempt to use the powers of psychoanalytic description upon symbolic figures in the public realm. Lasswell was always mindful of the fact that "political science without biography is a form of taxidermy" which would presumably make him enthusiastically sensitive to the idea of schizoid administrativism understood as both a political and psycho-aesthetic pathology (Greenstein viii).

24. Lasswell, 78.

25. Ibid., 150.

26. The source of the term "schizoid" is difficult to pin down in psychoanalytic literature, as the phenomena that it describes seems to slowly differentiate from that which is designated by older terms such as "paraphrenic," or "hebephrenoid personalities" which slowly fell out of clinical usage in the early 1930s. Early on, Helene Deutsch touched on many of the particulars of what she called the "as-if" personality in her 1937 paper titled "The Absence of Grief," in *Essential Papers on Object Loss,* ed. Rita V. Frankiel (New York: New York University Press, 1994), 223-231. On page 224, she describes a "mechanism, whose nature we are unable to define more clearly, may be a derivative of the early infantile anxiety situation which we know as the small child's reaction to separation from the protecting and loving person...If grief should threaten the integrity of the ego, or in other words, if the ego is too weak to undertake the elaborate function of mourning, two courses are possible: first, that of infantile regression expressed as anxiety, and second, the mobilization of defense forces intended to protect ego from anxiety and other psychic dangers. The most extreme expression of this defense mechanism is the omission of affect." (Deutch actually uses the term "schizoid" on page 229.) For practical purposes, the earliest theoretically complete articulation of the structure and dynamics of a "schizoid personality" or "schizoid position" is to be found in Fairbairn, "Schizoid Factors in the Personality" (1940) in *An Object Relations Theory of the Personality,* op. cit., 23-47, and Melanie Klein, "Some Notes on Schizoid Mechanisms" (1946) in *The Selected Melanie Klein,* ed. Juliet Mitchell (New York: McMillan Press, 1986), 176-200. My description of various schizoid aspects and attributes is gleaned, distilled, and idiosyncratically elaborated upon from these sources, as well as from Michael Eigen, *Psychic Deadness* (Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronsen, 1996). See also Harry Guntrip, *Schizoid Phenomena, Object Relations, and the Self* (Madison: CT, International Universities Press, 1969).

27. Sigmund Freud, "Splitting of the Ego in the Process of Defense" (1938) quoted and summarized in J. Laplanche and J.B. Pontalis, *The Language of Psychoanalysis* (New York: Norton, 1973), 429.

28. Guntrip, op. cit., 18-19.

29. Fairbairn, op. cit., 5-6.

30. Sigmund Freud: "On Narcissism: An Introduction" (1914) in *Essential Papers on Narcissism,* ed. Andrew P. Morrison (New York: New York University Press, 1986), 17-43. In an early recognition of the dialectical interplay between narcissism and schizoidal paraphrenia, Freud writes: "Certain special difficulties seem to me to lie in the way of the direct study of narcissism. Our chief means of access to it will probably remain the analysis of the paraphrenias" (Freud 25).

Art Criticism

31. Sigmund Freud, "On Fetishism" (1921) in *Essential Papers on Object Loss,* ed. Rita V. Frankel, op. cit., 65.

32. Bela Grunberger, "Introduction" to *Narcissism: Psychoanalytic Essays,* trans. Joyce S. Diamanti (Madison: CT: International Universities Press, 1969), 33.

33. See Søren Kierkegaard, *Either/Or. Part I* (1843), ed. and trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1987), 219-230.

34. Alexander Lowen, *The Physical Dynamics of Character Structure* (1958), reprinted as *The Language of the Body* (New York: Collier Books, 1971), 371.

35. Freud, "On Narcissism," op. cit., 51.

36. See René Spitz, "Hospitalism: An Inquiry into the Genesis of Psychiatric Conditions in Early Childhood" in *Psychoanalytic Study of the Child, Vol. 1* (1945), 53-74. After defining Hospitalism as "a vitiated condition of the body due to long confinement in a hospital," Spitz goes on to point to the foundling home as the site where "the evil effects of institutional care" are manifested, breeding a variety of mental and physical maladies despite the fact that the institutions in his study all upheld high standards of hygiene and nutrition. His findings suggest that routine over-regulation of daily activities and non-parental caregivers can be clinically signaled out as agents of psychic dishabilitation, in that they corrode opportunities for volition and relationality. In extreme cases, such corrosions can be said to breed the same kinds of emotional enfeeblement and psychic numbing that comes part-and-parcel with long-term confinements in prisons or concentration camps, or other unimaginable catastrophes. As Robert J. Lifton has written, "Psychic closing-off can serve a highly adaptive function. It does so partly through a process of denial ('If I feel nothing, then death is not taking place')…Further, it protects the survivor from a sense of complete helplessness, from feeling himself totally inactivated by the force invading his environment. By closing himself off, he resists being 'acted upon' or altered…We may thus say that the survivor initially undergoes a radical but temporary diminution of his sense of actuality in order to avoid losing this sense completely and permanently; he undergoes a reversible form of symbolic death in order to avoid a permanent physical or psychic death." Robert Jay Lifton, *Death in Life: The Survivors of Hiroshima* (London and New York: Horizon Books, 1968), 500.

37. Quoted in Anthony Molino, "An Interview with Michael Eigen," (1994) in *Freely Associated: Encounters in Psychoanalysis* (London: Free Association Books, 1997), 115-116.

38. Quoted in Richard Davenport-Hines, *Gothic: Four Hundred Years of Excess, Horror, Evil, and Ruin* (New York: North Point Press 1998), 325.

39. Molino, 116.

**Chapter 3: Critique of Cynical Criticism**

1. Charles Dickens, *Martin Chuzzelwit* (1844), ed. P.N. Furbank (New York: Penguin Books, 1968), 75.

2. Peter Sloterdijk, *Critique of Cynical Reason* (1983), trans. Michael Eldred (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 122.

3. Petronius, "Among the Rhetoricians" from *The Satyricon* (c. 64 C.E.) trans. William Arrowsmith (New York: Mentor books, 1959), 21-22.

4. The term "Urban Entertainment Destinations" (or "Urban Entertainment Centers") is taken from Louis M. Brill, "Entertainment in the Public Realm," *Funworld* (June 1998), 43-47.

5. One imagines the inexorable growth of dutiful legions of art professionals all marching in thrall to the National Endowment of the Art's founding oxymoron: "To Support and Encourage the Diversity and Excellence of American Art" (1965). This boilerplate language lurks more or less verbatim in the mission statements of membership-driven professional organizations such as *The National Assembly of Local Arts Agencies, The National Association of Artist's Organizations,* and *The National Council of Art Administrators,* all eliding the fact that the categorical ideas of diversity and excellence are irreconcilable and mutually exclusive antagonists, even as they both resist precise definition apart from playing the other's opposite in a dialectic of decadent blame. This contradiction provides a great service to administrativism: if a given presentation can be said to be deficient in "excellence," then "the need for diversity" is marshaled as a legitimizing excuse, and if its constituents were not as diverse as they could be, then their shortcomings could be explained away by an appeal to a perpetually undefined notion of "excellence" or "quality." And, even presupposing that this discrepancy could somehow be finessed or overcome, there would still be no answer to the other question about the contradiction that has vexed the art of the past forty years: how can one seriously defend the presumption of an *institutional avant-garde?*

6. Barbara Rose's blunt reminiscence of Harold Szeemann's *Documenta V* (1972) is worth noting here: "Ugh! The end of art. I think that *Documenta 5* is very important because art became an idea rather than an object. So it was the triumph of total theatricality. And, also, it showed the incredible growing power of the curator – in this case, Szeemann. It was amazing: the whole art world now followed *Documenta.* Critics no longer had any power to influence taste." Quoted in Amy Newman, *Challenging Art: ARTFORUM 1962-1974* (New York: Soho Press, 2000), 354.

7. Ursula Meyer, *Conceptual Art,* (New York: Dutton Books, 1970), vii. I am unaware of any detailed study suggesting conceptual art's displacement of production with interpretation. Such a study would inevitably point to the fact that conceptual art did not so much do away with what Joseph Kosuth called "the middleman," (i.e., the critic) as it created the opportunity for those theretofore underpaid middlemen to do away with the need for the overpaid (?) production of art. (Kosuth's remark is quoted on page viii.)

8. Quoted in Amy Newman, op. cit., 365-366. Among the "issues" that Coplans referred to were the translation of critical analysis as the lingua franca of artistic success in a post-studio art world and the questions pertaining to the extent to which advanced art had been co-opted into implied ideological service to the Vietnam War, and by extension, the Cold War as well. Max Kozloff, Associate Editor of *Artforum* during the early 1970s, stated: "John [Coplans], to be sure, shared certain attitudes with Phil [Lieder], most notably antipathy toward the material interests of the art world. But rather than [be] inclined to flee from them, or ignore them, he wanted to use them, and yet, eventually, to hold them to account" (Newman 365). To a large extent, the intractability of such a holding-to-account was initially signaled in an essay by *Artforum* founding editor Phil Lieder titled "How I Spent My Summer Vacation (or Art and Politics in Nevada, Berkeley, San Francisco and Utah – Read About it in Artforum!)," which recognized the omnipresence of the Vietnam-era war machine seen in the context of the Earthworks movement. *Artforum,* September 1970; reprinted in *Looking Critically: 21 years of Artforum Magazine* (Ann Arbor, MI: UMI Research Press, 1984), 98-101. A few years after the publication of this essay, the magazine published Eva Cockroft's controversial essay "Abstract Expressionism: Weapon of the Cold War," detailing the political rationales of the United States information agency's support of certain European exhibitions of Abstract Expressionism, see *Artforum* (June 1974): 39-41.

9. The earliest version of this essay was written in the immediate aftermath of the momentous multimillion dollar lawsuit against Philip Morris, and this has led me to remember how that multinational corporation was such an early and aggressive pioneer in the area of corporate funding for the arts in general and of the contemporary art world in particular going at least as far back as 1969, when its European subsidiary single-handedly sponsored Harold Szeemann's landmark exhibition titled *When Attitudes Become Form,* at the Basel Kunstmuseum. This exhibition, along with Szeemann's 1972 *Documenta,* Kyneston McShine's *Information* exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art in 1970 and Lucy Lippard's *557,087* held in 1969 under the auspices of the Seattle Art Museum in 1969, remain the single most important public presentation of so-called conceptual art, and remains a model of curatorial practice that still infuses current Biennial-type exhibitions, especially the 1999 and 2001 Venice Biennials, both of which employed the venerable Szeemann as their artistic director. It is interesting to note that, although Hans Haacke did pieces that at various junctures revealed the trustees of the Guggenheim museum as slumlords

(*Shapolsy, et. al.*, 1971), as well as the invidious corporate motives of Mobil Oil's support of an exhibition of African Art at the Metropolitan Museum (*MetroMobiltan*, 1985), only once did he bite the nicotine-stained hand that has so consistently fed the contemporary art world (in a 1990 piece titled *Helmsboro*) and here the point of criticism was that the tobacco industry was also a major supporter of North Carolina senator Jesse Helms's campaign against the National Endowment for the Arts, rather than a dispensary of dangerous and toxic consumer goods.

10. For an elaboration of my idea of adminodoxy in its relation to contemporary art criticism, see Mark Van Proyen, "Art Criticism: Where's The Beef?" *New Art Examiner* (July/August 2001), 60-61, 103.

11. Sloterdijk, op. cit., 5-6.

12. Ibid., 7.

13. Donald Kuspit has written: "For Baudelaire, 'there is never a moment when criticism is not in contact with metaphysics,' with a sense of 'the absolute.' This 'good' (of criticism) is that it knows and measures art by the profoundest standards of understanding and value. That criticism is the realm which protects and maintains absolute standards, applying them uncompromisingly, not only leads to the question, 'Does a given art measure up, and if not, why not?' but also to the more threatening, more urgent and hidden question, "What is the good of art?"" ("Artist and Critic: Never the Twain Shall Meet," in *The Structurist,* no. 25-26 (1985-86): 31. Jeremy Gilbert-Rolfe recently echoed this sentiment when he discussed "the implicit and explicit purposes of criticism." The implicit dimension was said to be "an evocation of a state of affairs that is yet to be" operating under the explicit guise of offering "explanation and analyses of specific works of art" (Quoted in Van Proyen, "Where's The Beef," op. cit., 103). In other words, critics should use the particularized occasion of journalistic reportage to subtly argue on behalf of a more general and far-reaching metaphysics of art. Kuspit again: "But there are critics who pick philosophical fights with art, as Baudelaire did. They always skeptically test the theoretical significance of the art that they admire – burdening it with weighty ideas, challenging it to lift them. Such critics test art by making explicit what is implicit in it, and feeding it back to the art" ("Artist and Critic," 33). It should be noted here that to require a metaphysics of art for a non-cynical art criticism does not necessarily mean that such critics would be bound to be "partisan critics who challenge the authority of this art because they prefer that art" (Ibid., 34). Indeed, it is preferable to apply one's metaphysics of art in a dialectical rather than dogmatic fashion; that is, to write as a way of staging the metaphysical conflict between the work of art understood as "a construction in ethics," and criticism's ontologically-driven sense of itself in the world. For an account of the procedural workings of dialectical criticism, see Donald Kuspit, "The Necessary Dialectical Critic" (1979) in *The Critic as Artist: The Intentionality*

*of Art* (Ann Arbor, MI: UMI Research Press, 1984), 109-125.

14. As Joseph Kosuth has famously written: "In fact, it is Marcel Duchamp whom we can credit with giving art its own identity." Quoted in Thierry de Duve, "Echoes of the Readymade: Critique of Pure Modernism," in *The Duchamp Effect,* eds. Martha Buskirk and Mignon Nixon (Cambridge, MA: M.I.T./ October Books), 95.

15. Hal Foster, "The Crux of Minimalism," in *The Return of the Real* (Cambridge, MA: M.I.T./October Books, 1997), 42.

16. Quoted in Foster, 43.

17. Irving Sandler, *Art of the Post-Modern Era: From the Late 1960s to the early 1990s* (New York: Harper-Collins, 2002), 341.

18. Max Kozloff, "The Authoritarian Personality in Modern Art," *Artforum* (May 1974): 44-49.

19. Charles Baudelaire, "The Painter of Modern Life" (1863) in *Baudelaire: Selected Writings on Art and Artists,* ed. P.E. Charvet (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1972), 421.

20. Victor Davis Hanson and John Heath, *Who Killed Homer?* (New York: Free Press Books, 2000), 249.

21. T.J. Clark, "All the Things I Said About Duchamp: A Response to Benjamin Buchloh," in *The Duchamp Effect,* op. cit., 226-227.

22. Donald Kuspit, "Conflicting Logics: Twentieth Century Studies at the Cross-roads," in *Psychoanalysis and Contemporary Thought* (Fall 1999): 538. This restates a well-known point in Kuspit's thought, which has always sought to maintain a high level of criticality without succumbing to institutional – that is, authoritarian – dogma. In "Artist and Critic: Never the Twain Shall Meet," op. cit., 35, Kuspit goes on to explicate the basis of this view by stating that "The only reason for being an art critic rather than a psycho-social critic – a critic of the kind of psychology that exists in a given society – is that art seems a microcosm or alembic of the conflicts and tensions that are constituent of a particular kind of social self. There seems to be no other place where all the forces of the psycho-social creation of selfhood seem so concentrated: where the effort to consciously make a social product leads to as great a revelation of the unconscious as well as conscious forces that go into producing a certain kind of psychosocial being. In the work of art, the reason for being in a particular world is half-consciously and half-unconsciously inscribed – half-openly and half-obscurely revealed. This is the only reason art is special and the only reason for attending to it critically...Art remains one of the activities where a certain dream

of reality and certain kind of self are most subtly articulated. In art the physiognomy of psychosocial dreams is shown with paradoxical subtlety, especially when art is made with high energy and great technical skill." The important point here is that administrativism and the cynical criticisms that serve administrativist imperatives both seek to undermine and/or suppress this kind of artistic condensation and transmutation of experience, denying and/or displacing its identity as psychosocial dream with a pseudorealistic spectacularization of its triviality, be it the semiological triviality of its status as pseudo-historical relic or the triviality of an anti-subjectivist decoration which makes a cynical fetish of the artwork's architectural functionalism. In so doing, they undermine the only reason that art – and by extension, experience itself – requires any critical attention at all: "All the better to administer you, my dear!" As Kuspit has written, "Anybody can be creative and make interesting photographs or objects that would engage somebody or other, but not many people can make works of art that can make one critically conscious of the world...Critical consciousness is consciousness of society and its effect on one in order to survive and hold one's own in it, and develop one's being in all its humanness despite society's inhumanity." Kuspit, *The Cult of the Avant-Garde Artist* (New York and Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 99. A telling by-product of the will-to-administrativism in postmodern art is that, by programmatic if not outrightly intentional default, it tends to blithely and in fact enviously mirror the style and iconography of corporately sponsored mass entertainment, making that entertainment look much better than it actually is in terms of its ability to provide and distribute meaningful symbols of psychic redemption and "legitimate"(?) social critique, however cartoonish those symbols may in fact be. An instructive project would be to test this hypothesis by seriously comparing the real wit, trenchancy, and sophistication of the social and political satires presented in animated television programs such as *The Simpsons, South Park,* or *Dilbert* with the absurdly simplistic sloganism of "socially conscious" artists such as Barbara Kruger, Jenny Holzer, or Robbie Conal.

23. Rosalind E. Krauss, "Post-Structuralism and the Paraliterary," in *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths* (Cambridge, MA: M.I.T. Press, 1985), 295.

24. Benjamin Buchloh, "Introduction," in *Neo-Avant-Garde and Culture Industry* (Cambridge, MA: M.I.T./October Books, 2000), xxi.

25 Dennis Cass, "Let's Go: Silicon Valley," *Harpers* (July 2000): 59.

26. Herbert Marcuse, *The Aesthetic Dimension* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1976), 1.

27. Ibid., 6.

28. Nikita Khrushchev, "Speech to the Secret Session of the 20th Congress of the

Communist Party," (1956) quoted in *The Oxford Dictionary of Modern Quotations,* ed. Tony Augarde (Oxford University Press, 1992), 165. Jean-Paul Sartre responded to the inhumane excess of this statement when he wrote in 1960: "The fact is that dialectical materialism cannot deprive itself much longer of the one privileged meditation which permits it to pass from general and abstract determinations to particular traits of the single individual. Psychoanalysis...is a method which is primarily concerned with establishing the way in which a child lives his family relations inside a given society." Jean-Paul Sartre, *The Search for a Method,* trans. Hazel E. Barnes (New York: Vintage Books, 1963), 61.

29. As Donald Kuspit has written: "The artist-re-educator argues that it (i.e., the world) can be changed into a higher world...The artist-re-educator takes his place among the twentieth-century's revolutionaries, visionaries who propose to destroy the given world – which no doubt has its miseries and problems – to proclaim a brave, new one, which, of course has trouble arriving, leaving us living in the wreck of the old world" (Kuspit, "The Good Enough Artist: Beyond the Mainstream Avant-Garde Artist," (1990) in *Signs of Psyche in Modern and Post-Modern Art* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 292). The conflicted motives of the world-re-educator artist are further analyzed by Kuspit in his "The Geometrical Cure: Mondrian and Malevich" in *The Cult of the Avant-Garde Artist,* 40-52. We can learn much from Kuspit's characterization of the psychodynamic undercurrents of the high modernist geometrical idealism as it is found of the work of Kasimir Malevich: "Malevich's insular geometry seems to lay down the Procrustean law to the spectator. It is the cult object of the self-proclaimed leader, a coercive fetish, a geometrical bludgeon compelling obedience...Malevich's one-dimensional total geometry, with its rigid perfection, is the ideal metaphor for the narcissist's hermetic self-containment. Narcissism is a hollow universality" (Ibid., 51-52). I would assert that postmodern administrativism should be read as a logical extension of Malevich's "hollow universality," i.e. the hypocritical low-water mark of the avant-gardist embrace of art as "revolution by other means" – that is, revolution by passive-aggressive inculcation of the tropes of loss-of-impulse-control and narcissistic hyper-objectification of the self into the social sphere, "naturalizing" its lack of autonymic functionality into something resembling a virtue. By pointing to this extension, special emphasis is given to the insuffi-ciently commented upon fact that the *agency* for this invidious project of naturalization has shifted from the realm of the artist-theoretician to that of the techno-bureaucratic *administrator-theoretician,* which now views the work of artists as supporting efforts that can only gain social coherence when they are administered into social consciousness. Needless to say, this is a significant shift: significant because the real point to such efforts is to valorize and encourage a perverse infantilism that can be counted on to sustain a protracted dependence upon (and malleable identification with) the simulated specter of the institutional parent, owned and operated by administrativist protocols in the manner of a business.

30. Arthur Danto, "The Art World Revisited," in *Beyond the Brillo Box: The Visual Arts in Post-Historical Perspective* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 46. For the early basis of Danto's version of an "Institutional Theory of Art," see Arthur Danto, "The Art World," *Journal of Philosophy* (October 18, 1964), 573-589. Also note the effort that Danto puts into distancing his version of the ITA from the "creative misunderstanding" of it that has been advanced by George Dickie, who is less concerned about the art world's "discourses of reasons" than he is about the holding of power to designate from within that discourse. "Dickie's Theory implies a kind of empowering elite and is a distant relative of the Non-Cognitive Theory of moral language." (*Art World Revisited,* 38). Dickie has subsequently disavowed the significance of the distinction: "Certainly, in many of his remarks Danto is not concerned with what is required for something to be a work of art, but rather just with what is required for someone to realize that a certain kind of thing can be a work of art." George Dickie, "A Tale of Two Art Worlds," in *Danto and His Critics,* ed. Mark Rollins (Oxford, U.K: Blackwell Books, 1993), 75.

31. Danto, "The Art World Revisited," 41.

32. Danto, "Learning to Live with Pluralism," in *Beyond the Brillo Box*, 220.

33. Danto, *The Philosophical Disenfranchisement of Art* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), xiii.

34. Ibid., 85.

35. Ibid., 84.

36. Danto, "Anselm Kiefer," *The Nation,* January 2, 1989, 26-27.

37. Danto, *The Philosophical Disenfranchisement of Art,* 5.

38. Danto, "The Age of Innocence," *The Nation,* July 4, 2002, 48.

39. Ibid., 50.

40. Danto, "Censorship and Subsidy in the Arts," in *Beyond the Brillo* Box, 176-177.

41. See George Dickie, "A Tale of Two Art Worlds," in *Danto and His Critics*, 73-78. "I do not see how this (i.e. an inferential criticism based on Danto's idea of a discourse of reasons) could be right because the existence of works of art seems independent of the existence of critics. On the other hand, the existence of critics certainly seems to be dependent on the existence of works of art" (Dickie 78).

42. See Richard Wollheim, "Danto's Gallery of Indiscernibles," in *Danto and His Critics*, 28-38. "Thought experiments of the kind that Danto is so gifted in designing show us very effectively that a certain assumption can be transgressed in a particular case. They do so because they get us to envisage in a peepshow-like fashion the actual transgression. However, by the same token, in virtue of their stubbornly perceptual character, they have no power to show us the other side of the matter. They have no power to show us that the assumption cannot be universally transgressed, in the very respect in which the thought experiment shows that it can be transgressed in an on-off way. It is for this reason that I said that Danto thinks that his thought-experiments are more conclusive than they possibly could be" (Wollheim 34).

43. Eleanor Heartney, "High Priest or Media Flak: The Art Critic in the Age of Hype," in *Critical Condition: American Art at the Crossroads* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 65-66.

44. Jeremy Gilbert-Rolfe, quoted in Van Proyen, "Where's the Beef," 60.

45. Jed Perl, "Born Under Saturn," in *Eyewitness: Report from an Art World in Crisis* (New York: Athenaeum, 2001), 89.

46. Jed Perl, "Painting is a Woman," in *Eyewitness: Report from an Art World in Crisis*, 216.

47. Jed Perl, "Artists and Audiences," in *Eyewitness: Report from an Art World in Crisis*, 25.

48. Dave Hickey, "Unbreak My Heart, An Overture," in *Air Guitar: Essays on Art and Democracy* (Los Angeles, Art Issues Press, 1997), 9.

49. See "Enter the Dragon: On the Vernacular of Beauty" in *Enter the Dragon: Four Essays on Beauty* (Los Angeles, Art Issues Press, 1993). On page 11, Hickey states: "Beauty was the agency that caused visual pleasure in the beholder." He later gave this grand generality some shape when he stated "For more than four centuries subsequent to the rise of easel painting, images *argued* for things – for doctrines, rights, privileges, ideologies, territories and reputa-tions. For the duration of this period, a loose, protean collection of tropes and figures signifying "beauty" functioned as the *pathos* that recommended the *logos* and the *ethos* of visual argumentation to our attention" (Hickey 17-18). "Now it seems, that lost generosity, like Banquo's ghost, is doomed to haunt our discourse about contemporary art – no longer required to recommend images to our attention or to insinuate them into our vernacular – and no longer welcome to try...One must suspect, I think, that we are being denied any direct appeal to beauty, for much the same reason that Caravaggio's supplicants were denied appeal to the Virgin: to sustain the jobs of bureaucrats...The priests of the new church are not so generous. Beauty in their domain is altogether elsewhere, and

we are left counting the beads and muttering the texts of academic sincerity" (Hickey 20-21). Moving back in the direction of generality, he later stated that "Beauty is the optimum bodily experience of the world, during which we become aware, in a positive way, of our out-of-awareness cultural responses to the world. Ugliness is its contrapositive, making us aware of our bodily dread, so the difference between them is moot...Without one or the other, however, or some commingling of both, there is no 'experience of art' for me. I must add the caveat that I am not much interested in works of art that simply assert the status quo, that portray what we all agree is beautiful beautifully, or vice versa." Quoted in Mark Van Proyen, "A Conversation with Dave Hickey, Critic" in *Artweek* (April 1996): 13.

50. See Robert Hughes, *The Culture of Complaint* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1993) which was published just prior to Elizabeth Sussman's infamous "Politically Correct" Biennial at the Whitney Museum. For an earlier challenge to the institutional orthodoxy of the "politically correct," see Donald Kuspit, "Art and the Moral Imperative," *New Art Examiner* (January 1991): 18-25 and "The Good Enough Artist," (1990) in *Signs of Psyche in Modern and Post Modern Art* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 293, 298: "What originally represented an attempt to articulate, in an artistic way that seemed appropriate to the modern world, a universal existential problem, has become an avant-garde mandate," leading to the conclusion that "Avant-Gardism, as a doctrine, is a form of madness." (see "The Good Enough Artist," 293+ 298). At the 77th Annual Meeting of the College Art Association held in San Francisco in February of 1989, there was a session devoted to the idea of a Moral Imperative in Art featuring papers given by Amy Baker Sandback, John Baldessari, Luis Camnitzer, Suzi Gablick, Jeff Koons, and Robert Storr. These papers were published in *Art Criticism* 7:1 (Spring 1991): 3-41. For an interesting precedent to Hickey's theory of beauty, see Kenneth Baker, "A Use for Beauty," *Artforum* (January 1984): 65-66. Following William S. Wilson's reading of Northrop Frye's idea of art as "the transfer of imaginative energy," Baker writes, "The beauty of a work of art proves itself as an increase in the available *reality,* in the enlarged area of experience that can become common ground when people try conversationally to reach agreement about what qualifies a work as 'beautiful'" (Baker 65). "Beauty in works of art is rarely a matter of style. It is not present in the same sense as art objects are since it interacts with our attention and our words in ways that objects themselves do not. The beauty of a work of art is a responsibility passed from artist to spectators through a medium. The artist does not have to strive for beauty to find it manifest in his or her work, for it is not a matter of decoration, design, or technique. It is a matter of getting things right, whatever that happens to involve" (Baker 66).

51. Hickey, *Enter the Dragon*, 14.

52. Ibid., 16.

53. Ibid.

54. Minou Roufail, "The Poetry of Commerce," in *The Baffler* (Spring 2001): 46-47. Roufail's analysis was substantiated by Hickey himself when he confessed "If you have been a critic as long as I have…it is very important to be what they call 'Bankable.' Which means if you look at the people that you have written about, it is important that their prices go up. In other words, your not going to spend all of your time writing about some bumpkin who carves tree stumps in Seattle. It doesn't matter, the word's not out there, people are not talking about it," quoted in "Dave Hickey with Sari Carel," *Zing Magazine* 14 (Winter 2001): 181 at http//www.zingmagazine.com/zing14/hickey/o9.html (accessed April 2004).

55. Quoted in Van Proyen, "Interview with Dave Hickey, Critic," 13-14.

56. Dave Hickey, "The Real Michelangelo," *Art Issues* (January/February 1998): 13.

57. Hickey, "Dealers," in *Air Guitar,* 111.

58. Hickey, "A Rhinestone as Big as the Ritz," in *Air Guitar,* 52.

59. Hickey, "The Real Michelangelo," 13.

60. Dave Hickey, "Moving Pictures," *Bookforum* (Summer 2001): 7.

61. Raphael Rubenstein, "A Quiet Crisis," in *Art in America* (March 2003): 43.

62. Holland Cotter, quoted in Rubenstein, 39.

63. Ibid., 40. Rubenstein cites a report released from Columbia University's National Arts Journalism Program that surveyed 169 art critics working in various newspapers. Its "startling revelation" was that 75 percent of the critics surveyed felt that "rendering a personal judgment" was the least important part of their jobs, while 91 percent felt that the most important part was to "educate the public about art and why it matters." To tease out the implications of this revelation, Rubenstein quotes Michael Fried's personal reminiscence about why he stopped writing about contemporary art in the 1970s, indicating how long the circumstances of the report have been in effect: "what might be called evaluative criticism no longer mattered as it previously had. No longer was it read with the same interest, no longer could the critic imagine that his or her words might intervene in the contemporary situation in which, perhaps delusively (sic) I had sometimes imagined my words intervening in it. No longer were there critical reputations to be made by distinguishing the best art of one's time from the rest" (Rubenstein 45).
    In 2003, James Elkins addressed similar issues from a similar perspective

when he published a short but insightful book titled *What Happened to Art Criticism?* (University of Chicago/Prickly Paradigm Press, 2003). Its conclusion took the form of an envoi advancing the need for art criticism to measure itself against three standards. The first is the enactment of "ambitious judgment... writing in the imaginary presence of generations of artworks, art critics and art historians"; the second is "Reflection about judgment itself" casting art criticism as "a forum for the concept and operation of judgment, not merely a place where judgments are asserted"; while the third is that it be "Criticism important enough to count as history, and vice versa," essentially meaning that journalistic and academic modes of art criticism and art history seek out polemic grounds that are common (Elkins 83-86).

The import and necessity of these mandates was made clear in a round table discussion titled "The Present State of Art Criticism" recorded in the 100th issue of *October* (Spring 2002): 200-228. In that forum, participants George Baker, Rosalind Kraus, Benjamin Buchloh, Andrea Fraser, David Joselit, James Meyer, Robert Storr, Hal Foster, and Helen Molesworth debated how criticism could be "maintained as a mode of judgment that carried weight" (Joselit 203) in a context of an art world where media buzz had displaced discourse. Most of the remarks made on this subject whipped the dead horse of conceptual art in its then-current cryogenic guise of "institutional critique," but the only moment of cogent argument to emerge from the conversation came from Storr:" If criticism is not being taken seriously, part of the fault may be that the things being said, or at least the language and style that are used to say them, are no longer effective or useful" (Joselit 203). Other participants took umbrage at this assertion, predictably bemoaning the omnipresence of the market as their preferred excuse for the adamant self-imposition of critical ineffectuality. On this score, a statement by Buchloh is particularly revealing: "I would rather look at a cultural landscape that is as desiccated as it is in actuality, rather than one that is falsely comforting" (Ibid., 224). Here, the implicit position is that all effort made in the direction of aesthetic habilitation is in service to false consciousness, but the willful bifurcation of habilitation and "true" consciousness cries out for other alternatives of the type that are never openly discussed in the pages of *October*, leading to the paucity of "critical judgments that can carry the weight" sought by the aforementioned discussants.

64. Clement Greenberg, "How Art Writing Earns its Bad Name," (1962) in *Clement Greenberg: The Collected Essays and Criticism,* vol. 4, ed. John O' Brian (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 136-138.

65. Ibid., 142.

66. Carter Ratcliff, "Dramitis Personae, part 1: Dim Views, Dire Warnings, Art-World Cassandras," *Art in America* (September 1985): 9.

67. Ibid., 9.

## Chapter 4: Mutation Mutandas: Miming for Meaning

1.  Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 134.

2. Martin Heidegger, "The Age of the World Picture," in *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essay,* ed. and trans. William Lovitt (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1977), 129.

3. G.W.F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Mind* (1807), quoted in A. Kojéve, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*, trans. J.H. Nichols, Jr. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1936), 6.

4. Julian Spalding, *The Eclipse of Art* (Munich and London: Prestel Verlag, 2003), 57.

5. Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920), trans. James Strachy (New York: Norton, 1961), 16.

6. "Scurraphobia," (literally "fear of clowns") is a term of my own coinage, and is to be differentiated from the more commonplace clinical term "coulrophobia" in that the latter designates a literal terror of clowns understood as figures of menace, while the former designates a fear of becoming a clown. Note that the Latin term *Scurra* (i.e., "buffoon") carries with it the implication of being in bound service to a wealthy individual.

7. For a succinct account of the modern mortifications of the subject, see Peter Sloterdijk, *Critique of Cynical Reason* (1983) trans. Michael Eldred (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 143-147.

8. Paul Virilio, "Perspectives of Real Time," in Norman Rosenthal and Christos Joachimides, *Metropolis* (Berlin: Martin Gropius Bau, 1991; exhibition catalogue), 59.

9. Harold Rosenberg, "Toward an Unanxious Profession," in *The Anxious Object* (New York: Collier Books, 1964), 13.

10. Adrian Stokes, "Carving and Modeling," (from *Color and Form*, 1950) in *The Image in Form: Selected Writings of Adrian Stokes*, ed. Richard Wollheim (New York: Harper and Row, 1972), 47. Stokes's distinction reflects the two competing theories of the metaphysics of vision that are implicated in the Latin terms *Lux* and *Lumina*. As Martin Jay has written: "Light could be understood according to the model of geometric rays that Greek optics had privileged, those straight lines studied by catoptrics (the science of reflection) or dioptrics (the science of refraction). Here, perfect linear form was seen as the essence of illumination, and it existed whether perceived by the human eye or not. Light in this sense became known as *lumina*. An alternative notion of light, known as

*lux,* emphasized instead the actual experience of human sight. Here, color, shadow, and movement was accounted as important as form and outline, if not more so. In the history of painting, as well as optics, these two models of light vied for prominence." Martin Jay, *Downcast Eyes: The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-Century French Thought* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 29.

11. Barnett Newman, "The Sublime is Now" (1948) in *Issues in Abstract Expressionism: The Artist-Run Periodicals,* ed. Ann Eden Gibson (Ann Arbor, MI: UMI Research Press, 1974), 164.

12. Ibid., 165.

13. Craig Owens, "Earthwords" (1979) in *Beyond Recognition: Representation, Power and Culture*, ed. Scott Byson, et. al. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 41.

14. F.T. Marinetti, "The Founding and Manifesto of Futurism" (1909) in *Marinetti: Selected Writings*, trans. and ed. R.W. Flint (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1971), 41.

15. Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Sublime and the Beautiful* (1757), (London: Penguin Books, 1998), 165.

16. Jeremy Gilbert-Rolfe, "The Visible Post-Human in the Technological Sublime," in *Beauty and the Contemporary Sublime* (New York: Allworth/SVA Press, 1999), 125-127. In a later remark, Gilbert-Rolfe elaborated by stating that "the techno-sublime is sublime in the way that nature used to be: It is ungraspable because of its uncontrollable immensity...and also that it is a matter of mathematical extension, pure ratio...while the techno-sublime may simulate the natural sublime – which survives, displaced but not replaced – it substitutes a heteronymous subject for the autonomous one inherited from the eighteenth century...We have fulfilled Heidegger's nightmare of a technology that pretends to be useful but instead takes over, replacing the world it was supposed to facilitate with quite another." (Jeremy Gilbert-Rolfe, "I'm Not Sure it is Sticky," in *The Sticky Sublime*, ed. Bill Beckley (New York: Allworth/SVA Press, 2001), 84-85.

17. Larry Rinder, quoted in Saul Anton, et. al., "Net Gains: A Roundtable on New-Media Art," *Artforum* (March 2001): 124-125.

18. Howard Litwak, quoted in D.C. Denison, "Museums Use New Technology to Attract Visitors," *San Francisco Chronicle*, June 30, 2003, section C, page1.

19. Olia Lialina, "Rhizome Raw: Cheap Art," http://www. rhizome.org (accessed January 19, 1998).

20. Erik Davis, *Technosis: Myth, Magic, and Mysticism in the Age of Information*. (New York: Three Rivers Press, 1998), 3-4.

21. Ibid., 5.

22. Ibid., 2.

23. Allan Kaprow, "The Education of The Un-Artist, Part 1" (1971) in *The Blurring of Art and Life,* ed. Jeff Kelley (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 108.

24. Melanie Klein, "Notes on Some Schizoid Mechanisms" (1946) in *The Selected Melanie Klein*, ed. Juliet Mitchell (New York: Macmillan Free Press, 1986), 188.

25. Arthur Kroker and Michael A. Weinstein, *Data Trash: The Theory of the Virtual Class* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995), 7. This statement invites the kind of examination that Sigmund Freud called for at the conclusion of *Civilization and its Discontents*: "In an individual neurosis, we take as our starting point the contrast that distinguishes the patient from his environment, which is assumed to be 'normal.' For a group all of whose members are affected by one and the same disorder no such background could exist; it would have to be found elsewhere. And as regards the therapeutic application of our knowledge, what would be the use of the most correct analysis of social neuroses, since no one possesses authority to impose such a therapy on the group? But in spite of all of these difficulties, we may expect that one day someone will venture to embark upon a pathology of cultural communities." (Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and its Discontents* (1930), trans. James Strachy (New York: Norton, 1961), 91.

26. Donna J. Haraway, "A Cyborg Manifesto" (1985) in *Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 172-173. In the same essay, Haraway provides a telling chart of transitions in the form of two lists – one representing "the comfortable old hierarchical dominations" and the second dubbed "the informatics of domination" (Haraway 161-162). Presumably the second is thought to represent the preferable alternative that substantiates the optimism of statements such as this one made by Roy Ascott in 1989: "Computer networking responds to our deep psychological desire for transcendence – to reach the immaterial, the spiritual – the wish to be out of body, out of mind, to exceed the limitations of time and space, a kind of biotechnological theology." Quoted in Aaron Betsky, "The Age of the Recursive" in *01010*, op. cit., 43.

27. *Capitalist Realism* is a commonplace shorthand term for the early works of Richter and Lueg, predicated on their inclusion in a 1963 exhibition titled "Demonstration in Support of Capitalist Realism" at a Düsseldorf department store. It also refers to the early work of Sigmar Polke, who may or may not have

been included in that initial exhibition. An early note by Richter stating that "Life communicates itself to us through convention and through the parlour games and laws of social life" indicates some commonality with Andy Warhol. See Gerhard Richter, "Notes 1964-65" in The *Daily Practice of Painting*, trans. David Britt (London: Thames and Hudson, 1995), 31.

28. See "The Tuymans Effect," *Artforum* (November 2004): 165-167.

29. Stokes, op. cit., 48-49.

30. Review statements made by Richard Vine and Lane Relyea, quoted in Barry Schwabsky, "Picturehood is Powerful," *Art in America* (December, 1997): 81-83.

31. Dave Hickey, "Prom Night in Flatland," in *The Invisible Dragon: Four Essays on Beauty* (Los Angeles: Art Issues Press, 1993), 40.

32. Ruth Weisberg, "Twentieth Century Rhetoric: Enforcing Originality and Distancing the Past," in *The Ancient Art of Emulation: Studies in Artistic Originality and Tradition from the Present to Classical Antiquity*, ed. Elain K. Gazda (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2002), 45. Weisberg's remark echoes a similar point made by W.J.T. Mitchell: "Now that art history is awake, at least to the linguistic turn, what will it do? The predictable alternatives are already flooding the learned journals in the form of discoveries that the visual arts are 'sign systems' informed by 'conventions,' that paintings, photographs, sculptural objects, and architectural monuments are fraught with 'textuality' and 'discourse.' A more interesting alternative, however, is suggested by the very resistance of the visual arts to the linguistic turn. If a pictorial turn is indeed occurring in the human sciences, art history could very well find its theoretical marginality transformed into a position of intellectual centrality, in the form of a challenge to offer an account of its principal theoretical object – visual representation – that will be useable by other disciplines in the human sciences...A broad, interdisciplinary critique will be required, one that takes into account parallel efforts such as the long struggle of film studies to come up with an adequate mediation of linguistic and imagistic models for cinema, and to situate the film medium in the larger context of visual culture." W.J.T. Mitchell, *Picture Theory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 14-15. Mitchell further clarifies this point by writing, "Whatever the pictorial turn is, then, it should be clear that it is not a return to naïve mimesis, copy or correspondence theories of representation, or a renewed metaphysics of pictorial 'presence': it is rather a post-linguistic, postsemiotic rediscovery of the picture as a complex interplay between visuality, apparatus, institutions, discourse, bodies and figurality" (Mitchell 16). For his own part, Donald Kuspit contributed to the discourse about a new pictorial turn when he advanced the idea that a "New Old Masterism" had renewed currency in a decade dominated by an excess of artistic spectacle: "New Old Master Art is at once aesthetically

resonant and visionary. It is an attempt to revive high art in defiance of postart. It returns to the studio, in defiance of the street. Art is again a means of aesthetic transcendence. With no loss of critical consciousness of the world" (Donald Kuspit, *The End of Art* (New York and London: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 183).

33. Donald Kuspit, "In Search of the Visionary Image," in *Idiosyncratic Identities* (New York and London: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 321.

34. Linda Nochlin, "Venice Biennale: What Befits a Woman," *Art in America* (September 2005): 124.

35. For detailed information about the 1937 Entartete Kunst exhibition, see Stephanie Barron, et. al. "'Degenerate Art:' The Fate of the Avant-Garde in Nazi Germany" (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1991; exhibition catalogue).

36. See Benjamin Buchloh, "Beuys: The Twilight of the Idol, Preliminary Notes for a Critique" (1980) in *Neo-Avant-Garde and Culture Industry* (Cambridge, MA: M.I.T./October Books, 2000), 41-61.

37. The term refers to those artists included in the exhibition titled *Funk*, curated by Peter Selz for the University Art Museum in Berkeley in the spring of 1967. Of particular note was the inclusion of two works, one credited to William T. Wiley titled *Slant Step Rhino* (1966), and another by James Melchert titled *Anti-Slant Step* (1966), both based on a linoleum-covered wooden object that was "discovered" by Wiley and Bruce Nauman in a Mill Valley California salvage shop. It was deemed mysterious because it was "neither chair nor ramp," and was an initial inspiration in Nauman's early interest in eccentrically abstract sculpture: "I was trying to make objects that appeared to have a function...but in fact, didn't have any function, and in fact, their design was arbitrary or invented." (Bruce Nauman, quoted in Cynthia Charters, "The Slant Step Saga," in *The Slant Step Revisited* (Davis, CA: University of California at Davis, Richard L. Nelson Gallery, 1983; exhibition catalogue), 9. There was an exhibition titled *The Slant Step Show* at the Berkeley Gallery in San Francisco during the Summer of 1966, including many artists who would later present work in Selz's *Funk* exhibition and also in Lucy Lippard's *Eccentric Abstraction* exhibition at the Fischbach Gallery in New York during the fall of 1966. Interestingly, Charters notes that the original *Slant Step* was stolen (in September of 1966) by Richard Serra from the Berkeley Gallery in San Francisco (later returned). For more information about the *Funk* exhibition, see Peter Selz, "Notes on Funk" (1967) in *Art in a Turbulent Era* (Ann Arbor, MI: UMI Research Press, 1985), 325-330 and James Monte, "'Making it' with Funk," *Artforum* (Summer 1967): 56-59.

38. See Robert Morris, "Notes on Sculpture, Part III: Notes and Non-Sequitors"

*Artforum* (Summer 1967), 24-29. Of particular note is Morris's claim that sculpture was "for want of a better term, that grouping of work which does not present obvious information content of singularity of focus...Elements of various focuses are often in it, but more integrated, relative, and more power-fully organized ways...transparency and translucency of material function in a different way in this respect since they maintain an inner 'core' which is seen through but nevertheless closed off...the difference lies in the kind of order which underlies the forming of the work." It is interesting to note here that Morris had participated in the early performances of Anna Halprin's *San Francisco Dancers' Workshop* before moving to New York in 1959, where he continued to perform in events at the Judson Memorial Church Dance Theater events during the early 1960s. This suggests that a self-consciousness about physical activity was an important factor leading to his later notions pertaining to "the phenomenology of making," mirroring the way that Barney's early athletic experience infuses his own establishing of a relationship between sculpture and physical performance. One also wonders if Morris's own commitment to "performative phenomenology" has anything to do with the omission of his work from the DIA Beacon collection that certifies an authorita-tive version of "who's who" in the pantheon of Minimalist and Post-Minimalist artists. Reading Barney's work as an art historical rescue mission for Morris's work seems to be one of a myriad of subtextual possibilities.

39. In November 2005, Marina Abramovic re-enacted a series of seven "classic" performance works originally presented in the 1960s and 70s at the Guggenheim Museum, in a series titled *Seven Easy Pieces*. See Nancy Princenthal, Elizabeth C. Baker, David Ebony, and Leigh Ann Miller, "Back for One Night Only!" *Art in America* (February 2006): 90-93.

40. Richard Wagner, "The Art-Work of the Future" (1849) in *Art in Theory, 1815-1900*, eds. Charles Harrison, Paul Wood, and Jason Gaiger (London: Blackwell Press, 1998), 475-479.

41. Daniel Pinchbeck, "Heat of the Moment" *Artforum* (November 2003): 177.

42. Melanie Klein, "The Psychological Principles of Early Analysis" (1926), in *Love Guilt and Reparation: The Writings of Melanie Klein, Vol. 1* (New York: McMillan Free Press, 1975), 134. In a footnote, Klein elaborates of this statement with an even more instructive one: "It is only by examining the minutest details of the game and their interpretation that the connections are made clear to us and the interpretation becomes effective. The material that the children produce during the analytic hour as they pass from play with their own toys, dramatization in their own person and, again, to playing with water, cutting out paper, or drawing; the manner they choose for their representations – all this a medley of factors, which so often seems confused and meaningless, is seen to be consistent and full of meaning, and the underlying sources and thoughts are revealed if we interpret them just like dreams" (Klein 134).

43. Hakim Bey, *The Temporary Autonomous Zone: Ontological Anarchy, Poetic Terrorism* (Brooklyn: Automedia Press, 1985), 98-102.

44. Larry Harvey, quoted in Geoff Dyer, "A Great Space," *Modern Painters* (Spring 2003): 84.

45. Wagner, op. cit., 477.

46. Allan Kaprow, "Pinpointing Happenings" (1967) in *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life*, ed. Jeff Kelly (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 85-86.

47. For more detailed information about Burning Man, see *Afterburn: Reflections on Burning Man*, eds. Lee Gilmore and Mark Van Proyen (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2006).

48. Anthony Haden-Guest, "In Defense of Burning Man," *Art in America* (June/July 2006): 117.

49. Ibid., 114.

50. The "expressive social realism" of the 1930s has been the subject of a recent and controversial study written by Bram Dijkstra, an outsider to the art historical profession by virtue of his academic background in Comparative Literature. See Bram Dijkstra, *American Expressionism and Social Change* (New York: Abrams, 2003). Dijkstra proclaims that various artistic tendencies grouped around the practice of an expressive social realism were subject to project of historical erasure during the 1940s and 1950s. He postulates that the buying power of corporate collectors coupled with their influence on museum boards served to so aggressively promote abstract painting that social realist works were completely divorced from all market-share and thusly were all but expunged from public view. He writes "Toward the end of the fifties, it became clear to most corporate executives that their companies as well as they person-ally, could have their cake and eat it too by acquiring 'cultural artifacts' that would demonstrate their civic-mindedness while, at the same time, if chosen according to accepted standards of taste, these objects would continue to accrue in value rather than become obsolete. Abstraction as a 'high art' form whose 'inherent' worth could be clearly defined and controlled (as opposed to the fickle variables of taste that ruled representational art) had proven to be extremely well-suited to their needs' (Dijkstra 262). He goes on to illustrate the authoritarian character of those needs by citing a 1959 interview with Adolph Gottlieb conducted by Seldon Rodman, where the former denounces "'social-realist subject matter' in general and the 'illustrator's mentality' of Ben Shahn in particular. 'The average man is not enraged by an image like that as he is by abstraction. Abstraction enrages him because it makes him feel inferior. And he is inferior'" (Dijkstra 263).

51. For a useful and instructive account of the *Convivencia*, see James Carroll, *Constantine's Sword: The Church and the Jews* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2001), 322-332.

## Coda: The 2006 Whitney Biennial

1. Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and its Discontents* (1930), trans. James Strachy (New York: Norton, 1962), 91.

2. Daniel Clowes, *Art School Confidential* (Seattle: Fanatagraphic Books, 2006), 130. This statement was deleted from the shooting script of the 2006 motion picture of the same name directed by Terry Zwigoff.

3. Ellen Dissanayake, *Homo Aestheticus: Where Art Comes From and Why* (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 1991), 26.

4. Ibid., 142.

5. Quoted in Dissanayake, 150.

6. See W.R.D. Fairbairn, "Endopsychic Structures Considered in Terms of Object Relationships" (1944), in *Psychoanalytic Studies of the Personality* (London and New York: Routledge, 1953), 82-136.

7. Wilhelm Worringer, *Abstraction and Empathy* (1908), trans. Michael Bullock, (New York: International Universities Press, 1953), 15.

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