

Matthew Barney exhibition poster located inside an air terminal in Europe.

# SOME CALL IT ART

## From Imaginary Autonomy to Autonomous Collectivity

*Isn't it rather, all things considered, that I remain suspended on this question, whose answer I tirelessly seek in the other's face: what am I worth?*

—Balzac

This paper is a response to certain questions that I will paraphrase as follows: What is the social value of art? Is it symbolic, or is art's signification something to manipulate, a strategy for other, more practical, even political ends? Does it matter if what we do is called "art" or if we call ourselves artists as long as we have some effect on society? If I identify myself as an artist, do I automatically share a set of unique social and economic concerns with artists elsewhere? Who are "we" artists? Do these questions relate to the Austrian art experience at the turn of the century, or is this a debate specific to the United States? Granted that if the writings surrounding my text seem more qualified than I am to debate this last question perhaps it is because we continue to believe that despite the current globalization

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This essay was first presented as a paper at the conference "Dürfen die das?" organized by Stella Rollig and Eva Stürm for the OK Center for Contemporary Art in Linz, Austria in March of 2000. The organizers later published a version of the text in their book *Duerfen Die Das?: Kunst als sozialer Raum: Art/Education/Cultural Work/Communities* (Verlag Turia & Kant, Wein, Austria, 2002). Pages 161 to 184. In addition, the short version is available on the website of the European Institute for Progressive Cultural Policies EIPCP at: [http://www.eipcp.net/diskurs/d07/text/sholette\\_en.html](http://www.eipcp.net/diskurs/d07/text/sholette_en.html)



Cover of leading industry trade-journal from 1999 for the first issue dedicated to recuperating the rag-tag “East Village” art scene of the 1980s for the market.

of markets there still exists specific cultural effects brought about by local history and national identity. Yet, writing as an interloper, and from the position of an artist living and working within the particular urban context of Chicago and New York City, I will attempt to explain why I am ambivalent about the category of art and the appellation artist. Furthermore, I want to propose in a cautious way, that this outsider’s story may soon become a familiar one to you in Austria. If this suggestion of future congruity reflects the arrogance of an American speaking to you abroad, it may indeed be this same immodest inclination, backed by a command economy of unprecedented proportions, that is at the troubled heart of this

essay and its theme: the changing status of the artist within the present social and economic circumstances.

## 1. Some Call It Art

Western culture has, at least since the enlightenment, defined the artist as set apart from the rest of society. The best known version of this artistic autonomy is the constitution of the solitary genius. Today, that imaginary realm of independence is increasingly visible as an ideological construction. Yet, like other myths, including those of nationalism and race, the manifest falsity of artistic autonomy remains operative within specific circles as a mechanism of control. (As Slavoj Žižek quips, the subject of ideology knows very well, but... 1) The target of this control is artistic production and it includes the administration of the artist herself, a practice that dates back at least as far as Plato’s writings about the ideal republic. One part of this paper will selectively sketch a history of this regulatory logic as it appears in the writings of Plato, Kant, Hegel, Marx and their successors before concluding with the question if it is possible, perhaps even necessary, to retool the discredited idea of artistic autonomy, not as a means of withdrawing once more into a closed-off aesthetic sovereignty, but instead as a model for sedition, intervention and ultimately political transformation that reaches beyond the realm of art itself. However, if such a redemption is conceivable, it will first require a final, emptying-out of the ideology of artistic autonomy. That task raises another set of questions. How and for whom is this evident fiction useful? Perhaps this is more clearly stated in terms of when is the term art invoked and in whose presence? It is an inquiry that can not be addressed without taking into account the social and economic changes taking place at both the local and in-

ternational level that are in turn directly affecting the actual practices of artists themselves. For, on one hand, it is this transformation of the production of art itself and on the other hand the changing recognition of what culture is by the multitude, that has virtually eclipsed art's symbolic status at the turn of the century.

My argument is that the battle waged over art's symbolic value and against its strategic and activist application, is already lost. Consider the term cultural capital employed by Pierre Bourdieu.<sup>2</sup> It is a phrase that appears to "save face" for some sort of sophisticated artistic practice, and yet implicitly acknowledges the triumph of the marketplace over every aspect of life.<sup>3</sup> All of this leaves the problem of deciding what is art and who can identify themselves as an artist in a precarious state that is both curious and of little importance. It is curious because it is bound up with a certain history of (Western) aesthetics and notions of civic culture including ideas of individuality and social autonomy. It is also of importance to artists and those who are invested in reproducing the cultural capital known as "fine art". However, at the same time it is a bit late to be concerned with this designation because for all practical purposes that which has been called art today lies "in state" within museums, or in its most animated form, as electrons circulating within the writing programs of truculent art historians. This is not the case simply because art is a relatively specialized slice of the overall leisure and entertainment industry<sup>4</sup>. Nor is it the result of internal artistic debates as revealed by the increasingly popular term "community-based" or "new genre" public art in which artists are encouraged to venture into local communities and work with homeless people, "at risk" youth, and even assist in crime prevention, a point I return to below.<sup>5</sup> In each of these cases art still remains a privileged (if sidelined) activity, that is carried out by a specialist practitioner. Instead, the current crisis of artistic autonomy stems, at least in the U.S. context, from two relatively prosaic circumstances. One of these is the growing privatization of the art industry in the post cold-war, global economy. The other factor is the increasing conspicuousness of non-professional or informal, creative activity in general. Before examining these issues in more depth let me sketch a portrait of the so-called "new" economy and the working artist in the United States today.

## 2. Back in the U.S.A.

Despite the so-called "boom" years of the 1980s or the purported "new" economy of the 1990s, most working people today are financially worse off than their counterparts of the 1960s who enjoyed far more evenly distributed income levels, lower housing costs, and strong welfare support systems.<sup>6</sup> According to economist Doug Henwood "Overwork is at least as characteristic of the labor market now as is underwork. Nearly twice as many people hold down multiple jobs as are involuntarily limited to part-time work (7.8 million vs. 4.3 million) - and well over half the multiply employed hold at least one full-time

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job.” 7 Furthermore, Henwood argues that “We see plenty of wage polarization, a disappearance of middle-income jobs, the loss of fringe benefits, longer hours, speedup, and rising stress ..” 8

What has brought about this polarization? Art Historian Chin-tao Wu is not alone when she argues that the Reagan and Thatcher regimes initiated a “fundamental political transformation” that affected all aspects of contemporary society, including art practice.

Postwar social democratic consensus of welfare-state capitalism in Britain, and to a lesser degree in America... was replaced by an aggressive advocacy of the so-called free market economy...This transformation called on every corner of society to endorse a philosophy of “limited government, deregulation, privatization and enterprise culture. 9

One key strategy of this shift included the undermining or outright elimination of social welfare programs. By taking away the so-called safety net while increasing unemployment, workers were forced to compete with each other and with overseas labor while intensifying productivity. Longer work hours and multiple job holdings now extend the work-week beyond the forty hour limit once fought and died over by working class movements in the nineteenth century. Again, Henwood points out that “Since 1969, full-time employees in the United States have increased by a full workday the hours they put in each week, and in the past two decades, the number of people working over 50 hours a week has increased by a third.” 10 The cumulative effect of this move towards privatization and what might be described as neo-proletariatization is today bearing fruit in the self-proclaimed liberal-centralist economies of Bill Clinton and Tony Blair. However, while the working class in the United States is enjoying an unprecedented absence of unemployment as well as rising wages, in the mean time the lack of health care for over 42 million Americans, an overall indebtedness to credit providers and an immense and growing gap between the income of average workers and the wealthy managerial class also reveals the potentially disastrous side-effects of this so-called economic miracle. 11 As theoreticians Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt argue, this structural disparity, as well as the imperative to control dissent against the world market, are part of an emerging global system they term “Empire” which is

...characterized by the close proximity of extremely unequal populations, which creates a situation of permanent social danger and requires the powerful apparatuses of the new society of control to ensure separation and guarantee the new management of space.” 12

Artists, especially sculptors, painters, and crafts people, are in an even poorer state than most working people in the United States, especially when compared to other specialized professionals. While the

overall artist population has grown considerably (doubling between 1970 and 1990<sup>13</sup>) and while some 164 programs offering graduate and undergraduate art degrees became available in 1980, the actual median income of visual artists today remains concentrated in the 10,000 to 20,000 dollar range, not enough to even afford housing in cities like New York, Chicago, or San Francisco.<sup>14</sup> In addition, the rate of unemployment for artists during the past few decades has averaged about twice that of other professional workers.<sup>15</sup> Since approximately half earned less than \$3000 from their art and a quarter earned only \$500 from art sales in 1990, not surprisingly, most have little choice but to work several jobs, often in an all-together different field, in order to maintain a close to living wage.<sup>16</sup> The “drop-out” rate among artists is also high and unlike in other professions carries a financial reward. According to an unpublished study, one third of those who graduated from a major U.S. art school in 1963 had given up making art by 1981 and were actually earning more money than those who continued being artists.<sup>17</sup> At the same time it is a mistake to picture the contemporary artist as a bohemian or social outcast. While U.S. artist’s economic situation is far less secure they remain strong participants in civic society. For one thing, they are better educated than most other specialized professionals and over eighty percent of artists surveyed in a 1999 study by Columbia University voted in local, state and federal elections. Seventy five percent of these people were registered Democrats and those earning less than thirty thousand dollars reported performing one to four hours of community service each week during the previous two years.<sup>18</sup> All of which points to a reality gap between the image of the autonomous artist and the actual, working conditions of artists themselves. Could it be that from this same discontinuity the symbolic and strategic potential of art is generated? Would this be the place to begin a reconditioning of artistic autonomy? Before speculating further there is still more bad news to present regarding the U.S. working environment for contemporary artists.

As difficult as it has always been to be a practicing artist in the U.S., artists today must also contend with the withering of public support and an increasing dependency on private money. In practical terms this means learning how to market oneself. While museums and other support structures for artists claim cultural autonomy from capital, as Chin-tao Wu points out the new corporate enterprise culture only appears to be at odds with the institutions of art.

“Indeed multinational museums and multinational corporations have become in many ways inseparable bed-fellows. Despite the fact their proclaimed aims and purposes may be worlds apart, they share an insatiable appetite for improving their share of a competitive global market, their ambition involves them in physical expansion and the occupation of space in other countries. It also involves making aggressive deals in an open marketplace and maneuvering capital (money and/or art) across different borders.”<sup>19</sup>



Thomas Krens brought a corporate management style to the directorship of the Guggenheim Museum.

Perhaps this new global cultural hegemony is best summarized by one of its own: the director of the Guggenheim Museum chain Thomas Krens who, without a trace of self-doubt boasts of the museum's corporate alliance stating, "We have put this program of global partners in place, where we have long-term associations with institutions like Deutsche Bank and Hugo Boss and Samsung.." If the museums and palaces of high culture have appeared in the past as a shelter for civic life, set apart from the vulgarities of capitalism, less than two decades later the effect of the massive economic restructuring that started in the 1980s is evinced by the increasingly eager and unashamed embrace not only of corporate money but also of corporate values. This open display of affection for the private sector flows not only from artists and museum administrators, but also from institutions of public education, civic welfare, even criminal incarceration. Nor is this condition of privatization likely to remain localized within the United States or Great Britain. As the entrepreneurial model gradually replaces museums as well as state and civic institutions of every kind, the aura of artistic autonomy can not help but collapse. According to cultural critic Masao Miyoshi, under pressure from the totalizing influence of trans-corporate capitalism:

...museums, exhibitions, and theatrical performances will be swiftly appropriated by tourism and other forms of commercialism. No matter how subversive at the beginning, variants will be appropriated aggressively by branches of consumerism. 20

Even if Miyoshi's bleak prophecy is not our collective future, the effect of corporate hegemony has already forced into view a confrontation between the symbolic position and actual practices of art, at least this is true in the United States. It is most apparent when one looks at changes in the institution that occupies the symbolic center of American high culture: The National Endowment for the Arts. Recently the National Endowment or NEA has been involved in heavy campaigning to regain the support of the United States Congress and the populace at large. It has approached this by attempting to prove that art is not a purely symbolic or autonomous activity, but is instead a kind of labor that contributes to the overall well-being of society in direct ways including public education and community service. A recent document entitled the American Canvas Report sponsored by the NEA supplies the blueprint for a post-cold war approach to public patronage in which artists and art's agencies are encouraged to venture into:

a broad range of community-based activities. In 1996, fully two-thirds of the 50 largest LAAs [local arts agencies] addressed five or more of the [following] issues: Community Development Issues, Cultural/Racial Awareness, Youth at Risk, Economic Development, Crime Prevention, Illiteracy, AIDS, Environment, Substance Abuse, Housing, Teen

Pregnancy and, Homelessness.<sup>21</sup>

If the death of artistic autonomy has given birth to the artist as social worker, the consequences of cultural utilitarianism in a capitalist economy are just as predictable. Let me again quote from the NEA American Canvas Report which celebrates this shift in the most un-selfcritical language.

While there are no one-size-fits-all models for the integration of the arts into community life, two areas in particular - urban revitalization and cultural tourism -- are especially popular right now, and both were the subject of much attention at the American Canvas forums. In many respects, of course, revitalization and tourism are simply two sides of the same coin: as cities become more "livable" and more attractive, they'll prove increasingly alluring to tourists, whose expenditures, in turn, will help revitalize cities. As mutually reinforcing pieces of the same puzzle, moreover, both urban revitalization and cultural tourism invite the participation of arts organizations. The arts can come to these particular "tables," in other words, confident that they won't be turned away.<sup>22</sup>

Here is a new, post-public, post-cold-war artistic pragmatism. It accepts the need to "translate" the value of the arts into more general civic, social and educational terms that will in turn be more readily understood, by the general public and by their elected officials alike. As Terry Eagleton has argued:

Art itself may thus be an increasingly marginal pursuit, but aesthetics is not. Indeed one might risk the rather exaggerated formulation that aesthetics is born at the moment of art's effective demise as a political force, flourishes on the corpse of its social relevance. Though artistic production itself plays less and less of a significant role in the social order (Marx reminds us that the bourgeoisie have absolutely no time for it), what it is able to bequeath to that order, as it were, is a certain ideological model which may help it out of its mess -- the mess which has marginalized pleasure and the body, reified reason, and struck morality entirely empty.<sup>23</sup>

Yet such phenomena as gentrification and the displacement of low income residents that accompanies the movement of artists into cities is apparently a social problem not even on the NEA radar screen. Meanwhile, cultural tourism and community-based art practice must be thought of as a local consequence of the move towards a privatized and global economy. While the remnants of public, civic culture aim to make art appear useful to local economies and tourism, how long can the idea of artistic autonomy and its celebration of individual freedom,



Artist Laurie Parsons installation, "Arrangement."

even in its current, transparently bankrupt form, remain useful to the de-territorialized needs of global capital? In other words, what position can artists expect to hold, symbolically and economically, in the coming, transnational corporate hegemony?

Indeed, rather than presenting artistic freedom and autonomy as a colorful (if imaginary) life-style choice for the overstressed and over worked professional (consider the way lawyers, brokers and psychiatrists rush to buy "lofts" in gentrified art ghettos), perhaps it is the actual productive constitution of the contemporary artist that, in terms of Hardt and Negri's thesis, serves as the very prototype of a new global subject. Far more than most other workers, artists are in fact trained - or train themselves - to adapt to changing and unstable economic conditions. Consider the way the artist is at once highly specialized, yet infinitely re-trainable, willing to volunteer enormous time and labor to generate cultural capital (that is typically accumulated by others), while in theory remaining subversive towards institutional power, even if seldom is the artist willing to subvert the power that most affects her: the art industry itself.

### 3. When Is It Art?

Privatization and the "new" economy also have other, more immediate consequences for artists who continue to think of themselves as autonomous producers making work for galleries and museums. For one thing, expanded work schedules (in those other paid jobs that support one's artistic career) simply allow less time for making art. This might be seen reflected even in the choice of materials contemporary artists employ. Think of easel painting, modeling in clay or casting in bronze. During the early twentieth century these were overpowered by more

direct methods of art making such as collage, photography, steel welding and assemblage. As life (and production) speeds up, time consuming methods are broken down or eliminated. Today, even these relatively instantaneous techniques for producing art require quantities of time beyond the means of most artists. For many the computer combined with graphic applications are the art studio of our day. This is especially true in such hot real estate markets as New York City. Nor is it unlikely to be a coincidence that when it does come to large-scale installations that grace international biennials and kunst-

Tony Feher installation in a New York gallery.



halles, production demands armies of assistants and professional art fabricators.

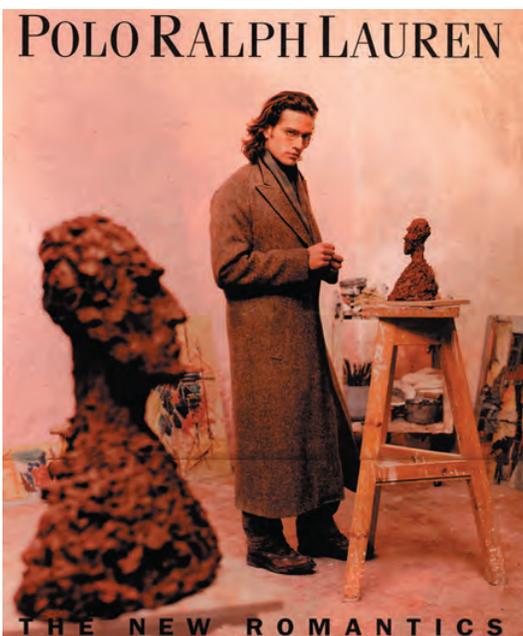
The late artist and art historian Ian Burn described this post-war art practice as a “de-skilling” of artistic craft. Together with critic Lucy R. Lippard, Burn argues that in the 1960s conceptual art did away with artistic proficiency as a means of avoiding the commodification of art. According to Lippard the process culminated in the total disappearance of the art object.<sup>24</sup> This process of de-skilling has produced a generation of contemporary artists that serve as aesthetic service providers.<sup>25</sup> While those who still do produce objects typically pay skilled crafts people to execute their ideas. Perhaps the clearest example of this shift is visible not so much in the work of any particular artist, but in the changing operation of many contemporary art spaces. A case in point is The Renaissance Center in Chicago. Its director, Suzanne Getz, seldom displays work that has already been fabricated but instead scouts out a promising young artist who is then directly contracted to produce a new work specifically for the Renaissance Center itself. Getz and her staff then raise the needed capital for the artist’s project, primarily from private donors and after the work is executed and displayed it is typically donated to another institution that has a permanent collection. The Renaissance Center has recently established a special capital fund explicitly for the commissioning of such work. Getz herself perceives the role of the kunstahalle as undergoing a fundamental change from primarily an exhibition venue to a site of both the display and production of art.<sup>26</sup> Such practices raise important questions regarding the growing inter-dependence of private foundations, collectors, art fabricators and movers, museums, and project spaces like the Renaissance Center. It is possible to see in this vertical integration of art production a corollary to the de-regulation of the banking industry that allows for banks to act as brokerage firms, credit card providers, financial managers and real estate merchants. Capital is saved, invested, speculated on, used to purchase assets and liquidated again, never traveling outside the circulatory route of a given fiscal institution. Like a Hollywood film studio, Getz role is that of the producer, while the artist is hired to conceive and direct the project.

Granted, the majority of people who identity themselves as artists are not fortunate enough to be offered such commissions. Yet here too the effects of de-skilling and the diminishment of time and space on artistic production can be seen. This might help explain the emergence of what art historian Brandon Taylor refers to as “slack art”, which he describes as the use of ephemeral materials, vapid performances and home video that not only avoids major investments of labor (their own or others) and materials but thumbs its nose at the over-produced art of the late 1980s (such as Koons, Holzer, or Longo).<sup>27</sup> Part of my closing argument depends upon seeing the way this “slack art” is, with a very slight shift of context, indistinguishable from informal practices among people who do not identify as artists. How, for instance, is an arrange-

ment of products purchased through a retail catalog or borrowed from someone's attic any different from the work of Jason Rhodes, Laurie Parsons or Sylvie Fleury? The old argument that context is everything no longer satisfies. If Marcel Duchamp's readymades provoked controversy by working against a normalized artistic tradition inside the museum, in the dissipated, post, post-modern world such subversion in the art world has become interchangeable with sanctioned cultural activity in general, both high and popular, even including the very legacy of subversive art itself. Upholding the special category of art under such conditions is perhaps at the same time more heroic and more desperate than it was even during the hiatus of the classical avant-garde. Conversely, when a prestigious museum like the Guggenheim sports motorcycles and Armani suits, is it really so far-fetched to suggest that this is an inevitable response to the practical and theoretical impossibility of holding the line between the fine arts and other forms of artistic-like production either inside or outside the museum?

Let me conclude this section on the "ontology" of art with another way artists have survived in the free-market economy. That is by working as graphic designers. The publicity-machine that drives consumer culture has always required a great deal of visual skilled labor, even if it is repetitive and uninspired in nature. For every Marcel Breuer or Olivetti there is an army of lesser artisans who perceive graphic design not as a profession but as a kind of menial toil that is nevertheless still preferable to demolition and sheet-rocking or waiting on tables. Graduates of fine art programs are employed laying-out innumerable retail catalogs, book covers, movie posters, liquor ads, travel brochures; if trained in media they produce television commercials and industrial films. With the expansion of on-line shopping the demand for Web Site design is accelerating this process of artists-as-designer even more rapidly.

New York Times Magazine  
advertisement.



Working in the graphic design industry today means learning to operate digital technology. This fact is reflected by the phenomenal growth in communications and design training at national art schools and the governmental push to get High School and grammar school students "plugged-in" to new technologies. 28 As the borders that once separated national economies implodes the demand for design, packaging, and commodity labeling explodes. In other words, the more markets grow, the more advertising is needed and with it more jobs for producing and processing what is lately referred to as visual culture. While visual culture is by definition pervasive and lacking an obvious center, in terms of production and complexion it is tied to those places where artists coexist with information and graphics technology, with the economic refugees from

other countries, and with the regulators of big capital. In other words visual culture may be found everywhere but it is dependent on the cultural matrixes of the global city. And today the global city is home to the ideal consumer of this cosmopolitan visual culture: the highly educated, cosmopolitan professional.

#### **4 Into the Glamour Zone**

Every major urban center that is linked to the new transnational economy is also host to a local franchise of retail and service establishments offering leisure commodities, designer clothing, art objects/object d'arts and gourmet food. According to sociologist Saskia Sassen each global city's "glamour zone" is now growing.<sup>29</sup> Along with this new aura of cosmopolitanism comes an increasing demand for the ever more sophisticated packaging of commodities and services. While the mass production of undistinguished graphic design may not have altogether disappeared, the visual literacy of young consumers raised on MTV and the Internet is simply re-writing the rules for publicity. Visual puns, ironic copy, advertising campaigns that use no words and rely on a corporate logo all appeal to a consumer sensibility that increasingly excludes the visually illiterate. Wearing clothes that display the Nike "swoop" or the letters DKNY, sends a signal to other specialized consumers that like them you know what is stylish. The fact that many of these logos have become ubiquitous symbols of contemporary culture- and after all isn't that the point of a well-designed logo-- has not diminished their clique-effect. Often the more expensive and exclusive the products appeal, the more its brand identification circulates among people who claim to have specialized tastes. Here then is where the artist and the art industry enter the story. Consider Thomas Krens again sounding here like a marketing expert devising a new perfume label when he states, "Seduction - that's the business I am in...I'm a professional séducteur."<sup>30</sup> On one hand the mutual attraction of, for example, art and couture indicates that specialized markets are defined by similar demographics. On the other hand this conspicuous high culture "branding" is more evidence that label recognition is what remains today of art's symbolic value, a point I will return to shortly.

As individuals trained in the fine arts gravitate to urban areas they most often reside in low-income, industrial areas or immigrant neighborhoods where housing is more affordable and the local culture provides a certain life-style that is required for a "serious" artist to "come of age". Artists and intellectuals, minorities and immigrants, drop-outs and subcultures intersect providing a site for "avant-garde" culture including couture and food to the fine arts, and design. The Left-Bank of Paris in the 1940s and 1950s, New York City's Greenwich Village in the 1950s and 1960s East Village in the 1970s and early 1980s have all served this function. Today the cross-over between these sites and the larger market for brand-name services and goods is omnipresent. One example is fashion photography in which graffiti-covered walls serve

as a backdrop for Armani and Vercecci clothing. The gritty urban artist is a sign or label that speaks of creativity and romantic individuality both necessary myths for an economy that appears ever more homogenized and claustrophobic.

This blurring of commercial design and fashion with the world of the artist also operates in reverse and has strongly undermined artists' claims of "critical" or distanced judgment. The stridently anti-capitalist outlook of previous generations - whether based in Greenbergian autonomy of the 1950s or the counter-culture politics of the 1960s - is difficult to support when so much in the art world depends on corporate finance. Concurrently, at the level of artistic practice, a very small gap separates the production of so-called fine art and commercial, visual culture. Simply from a practical perspective, the increasing throng of artists skilled in digital technology would be hard pressed to draw an absolute line between the kind of artistic labor done for money and that done for one's art. Nor does the world of contemporary art - from glossy industry magazines to international exhibition venues to art critics resuscitating the idea of beauty - offer much guidance for preventing commercial art and the fine art tradition from becoming superimposed onto each other. While some of this digital production does continue in the critical tradition of art, and here I am thinking of the Internet group RTMark, a new ethos appears to be emerging among some digital practitioners that merges the marketing and entrepreneurial business skills of business with critical theory and neo-avant-garde practice. All of this puts a new spin on the classical avant-garde call to transform art into life. Indeed, how could the dadaists and productivists have anticipated that life at the turn of the next century would be integrated at every level into a totalizing ideology of business and commerce? If the historian Peter Bürger decried that after the Second World War the avant-garde had become institutionalized, today, the post, post-modernist tendency as it is emerging within new media once again claims to revive the utopianism of the early avant-garde, but now with one crucial difference: this time around avant-garde practice must also be a viable business enterprise. 31

All of this means that the typically conflicted relationship alternative spaces during the 1970s and early 1980s had with the market is gone. 32 Under the influence of the anti-establishment counter-culture of the late 1960s the artist-run, alternative space movement was openly hostile to a business mentality. One could even say that in many respects it was this antithesis towards applying professional management skills that set these non-commercial spaces apart from more established museums far more so than any openly professed, oppositional ideology. 33 Today, in the post-public funding environment artists are actively encouraged to market themselves, to understand their customer, and even to be mobile in terms of what they produce. 34 Given the increasingly site-specific and often ephemeral nature of contemporary art, what is sold, if not an object, is better described as a promise or

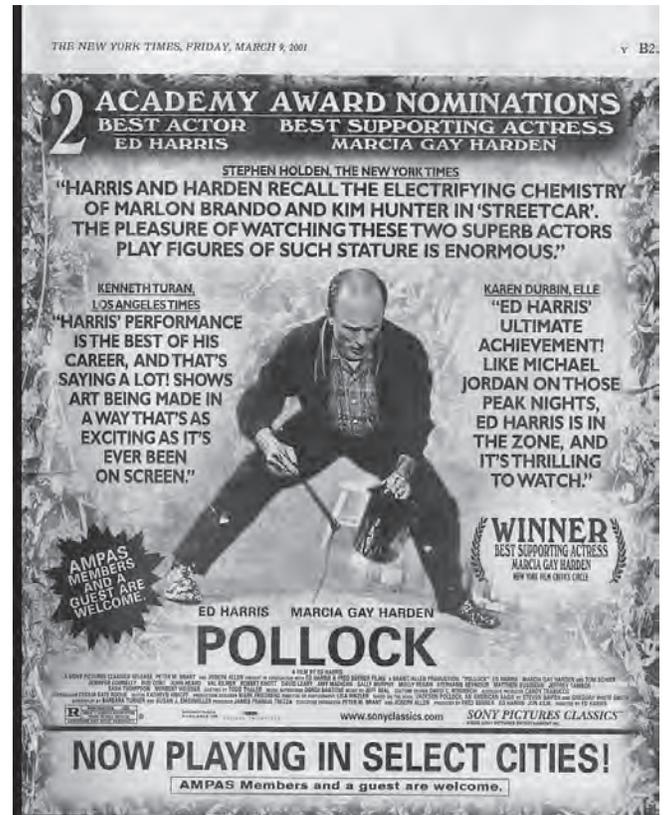
contract. The buyer receives a form of aesthetic association or contagion from the artist. Not unlike designer couture, the contract extends proof of artistic value to the buyer. Once again it is possible to see how this contract can be circulated in the same manner as a corporate logo within the global, cultural market. Yet one remaining challenge remains. How such a “label” can be authenticated once set adrift from the artist and put into circulation? 35 This however simply begs the question. If it is not a hand-made, singular object then what is it that the artist sells and is it all that different from commercial, visual culture? To get at this problem it is necessary to produce an abbreviated history of artistic autonomy.

## 5. Imagined Autonomies

The special categorization of the arts as a human activity that transcends the material world depends upon an a priori separation between nature and culture. While the fine arts—painting, music, poetry, sculpture—are made by humans, they are not merely technology (tools, useful things, even some kinds of architecture) or science (mental tools for understanding the world), but rather art is mysteriously bonded to a transcendent realm of metaphysics. Yet how can art be both extra-worldly and still a product of human beings? Through that singular person known as the genius. According to Kant (\*Critique of Aesthetic Judgement) the genius provides:

...the talent (natural endowment) which gives rule to art. Since talent, as an innate productive faculty of the artist, belongs itself to nature, we may put it this way: Genius is the innate mental aptitude (ingenium) through which nature gives rule to art. 36

Unlike Plato who would cast out the poets and painters from his Republic because they are capable of making deceitful copies of the ideal and true, Kant, defender of reason and the enlightenment, offers artists a passage back into civic society. However, Kant’s redemption is also qualified. He too fears the power of the artist to dissemble the truth through the mere gratification of the senses. Cleverly, the philosopher advances the State’s control of artists by ingeniously aligning aesthetic autonomy with the very foundations of the State itself. Artists will be trusted only in so far as they “inspire an aesthetic response and ultimately ennoble what is morally good in the citizen.” 37 Therefore for Kant, the genius may indeed deploy artifice, yet she is nevertheless useful once drawn into the orbit of reason and enlightened society.



Ed Harris portrays the tragic life of artist Jackson Pollock.

The disinterested freedom of the artist that Kant celebrates and Plato feared is now incorporated directly into the process of enlightenment. Between Kant and Plato the discipline known today as arts administration is first articulated.<sup>38</sup>

Meanwhile, Kant's aesthetic philosophy also ranks the arts according to their proximity to his concept of finality and self-reflection as formulated by the ideal of disinterested beauty. The more an artistic category is useful - either as a practical technology or a means of intellectual understanding-the less elevated it is in Kant's hierarchy of artistic types. Kant simply eliminates the practical arts and crafts from serious consideration and then ranks the fine arts starting with poetry because it "It expands the mind by giving freedom to the imagination...".<sup>39</sup> The more distant and autonomous an artistic form is from the baser realm of utility and matter, the higher its aesthetic status.

Perhaps the most influential art critic and theoretician of the post-war period, Clement Greenberg, made use of Kant's theory of disinterested aesthetics to articulate and ground his version of modernism. Recent scholarship has also uncovered historic alliances between Greenberg's promotion of a modernist concept of autonomy and the cold war politics of the United States. Moreover, one of Greenberg's best know essays entitled *Modernist Painting* first appeared as a pamphlet published in 1960 by the Voice of America.<sup>40</sup> In this virtually canonical text, Greenberg describes Kant as "the first real Modernist." According to Greenberg it was Kant who initiated the process of self-criticism which in turn constitutes the essence of Modernist art. If Kant "used logic to establish the limits of logic" and "withdrew much from its old jurisdiction" what was left was "all the more secure."<sup>41</sup> This same stripping-down process of purification and self-reflection is what Greenberg believed essential to modernist painting as exemplified by New Yorker's William DeKooning and Jackson Pollock. The resulting art object affirms its own conditionality and celebrates its freedom from representation rejecting any association with literature or illusory space. Yet, if the "common" viewer perceived the abstract canvases of Pollock and DeKooning as subversive of social order, Greenberg assured us that such work "never meant anything like a break with the past."<sup>42</sup> Rather, it established a continuation (despite some partial unraveling of traditions) of Western traditions that stretch as far back as paleolithic times. Greenberg's aesthetic axioms proved especially useful to post-war capitalism because unlike the official culture or Stalinism or Maoism, modernism in Greenberg's Kantian revision offered the intellectual an aura of complete freedom from all social constraints. Meanwhile, the premium this thinking placed on individuality can not be overestimated. Greenberg's recasting of the Kantian genius and the philosophy of disinterested taste are the perfect corollary for the liberal democratic state at the apex of the cold war era. Yet Greenberg was not interested in populist democracy but promoted an idea of art that was itself a complete evasion of low-brow and popular culture. Autonomy

from kitsch and commercial art was in Greenberg's terms the only possible salvation for authentic artistic imagination under capitalism.

This same idea of aesthetic autonomy has in one form or another dominated U.S. culture at least until the late 1970s and early 1980s. Consider the way the United States government supported the idea of artistic autonomy following the Second World War only for as long as it served a specific ideological goal; championing individual freedom under capitalism in opposition to Soviet expansion. As Chairman of the NEA Bill Ivey commented recently, "cold war thinking lay just beneath the cultural policy of the last century."<sup>43</sup> As is well known, this ideological marketing was carried out by the CIA and State Department using the symbolic power of Abstract Expressionism.<sup>44</sup> Today, supporting the unique artistic genius is no longer needed to ward off the chill of communism. Public funding agencies, such as the NEA, struggle to reestablish a rationale for such expenditures even as citizenship is more and more measured by one's participation in the economy as a producer/consumer, rather than by ideological and transcendent beliefs such as nation. In this post-national environment the notion of artistic autonomy, together with art's symbolic value, is bound to be both marginalized and absorbed by global marketing as one more brand for specialized leisure products.

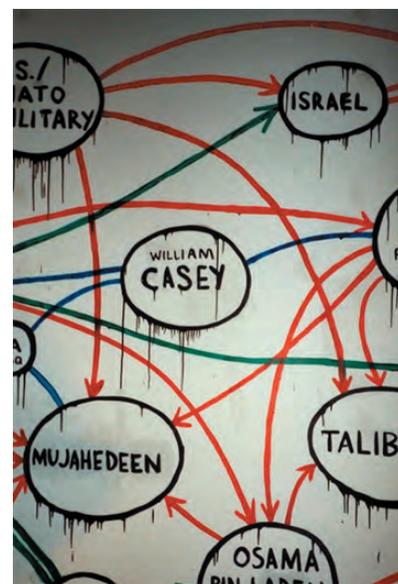
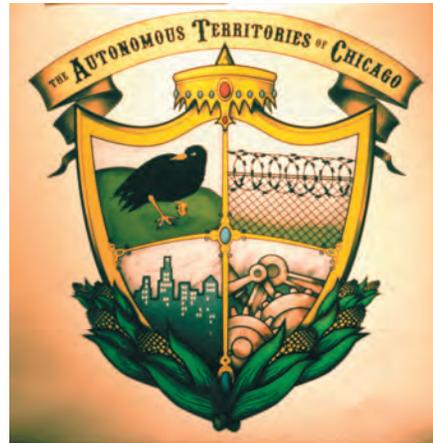
What about that other genealogical branch sprouting from the trunk of the enlightenment? That idea derived from Hegel which views the artist not as separate from, but dependent upon history? As is well known, Hegel understood the progress of artistic forms as a gradual evolution towards self-realization and spiritual perfection, where as his student Karl Marx understood productive, material conditions and class opposition as the driving force for historical change. Both of these ideas in turn influenced the social critic Walter Benjamin who argued in his essay *The Author as Producer* that the artist is socially acceptable only when an ally of the proletariat and a co-conspirator in revolution. Not since Plato, Benjamin asserts, has "The question of the poet's right to exist ... been posed with the same emphasis; but today it poses itself." Benjamin continues with the

...question of the autonomy of the poet: of his freedom to write whatever he pleases. You are not disposed to grant him this autonomy. You believe that the present social situation compels him to decide in whose service he is to place his activity...His decision, taken on the basis of class struggle, is to side with the proletariat. That puts an end to his autonomy.<sup>45</sup>

In a direct attack on the dis-engaged model of Kantian aesthetics, Benjamin calls for artists to produce work that not only forces us think but also assists in organizing the working class in their struggle against capitalist exploitation. His examples of this utilitarian art include newspapers authored by their readers, the epic theater of Bertolt Brecht, and the photomontages of John Heartfield. If Benjamin overturns the Kantian order of art by placing highest value on what is



Artist Josh McPhee producing posters the old fashioned way at the Chicago Autonomous Territories event, Hyde Park, Chicago, 2001.



useful and opposing art that is an end in itself, he also opposes Kant in dismissing the category of the naturally inspired genius. In *The Author as Producer*, Benjamin insists that the artist must actively re-tool (*umfunktionierung*) his or her means of artistic production in the same way that the revolutionary worker seeks to transform the means of production and thus alter social conditions away from capitalist exploitation.

As argued above, this avant-gardist call to drag art out of the museums and into life is visible today, but in all the wrong places. Museums and foundations now claim to nurture art as social activism, multiculturalism drives the cultural tourism industry and what remains of public funding agencies call on artists to end their isolation and become civil servants. If the private sector and corporate supporters do still uphold an idea of artistic autonomy, their altruism comes with a leash preventing artists from overtly challenging the economic foundation of their patronage. Today, if the idea of the intellectual serving the proletariat is politically ludicrous it is in practice a social axiom, while the implosion of artistic autonomy is evident everywhere. Ultimately, the collapse of autonomy would not be so profound or irreversible if not for the changes under way in the post-cold war political economy. As already noted, one of these changes is the privatization of civic life and the disappearance of the nation-state. The other permutation is the generalization of art-like, creative production within the collective arena of mass culture.

## 5 Dispensing With Formalities

In the past such things as home made crafts, amateur photography (and pornography), self-published newsletters, fan-zines and underground comics had little impact beyond their immediate community of producers and users. Today, an ever more accessible and sophisticated technology for manufacturing, copying, documenting and distributing “home-made” or informal art has dramatically ended that isolation. Today one can not escape the spread of this heterogeneous and informal art-like activity. It radiates from homes and offices, schools and

# Our Town

[snip] **A time to worry.** "I've been involved in a number of fields where there's a lay opinion and a scientific opinion," Princeton engineering professor Robert Socolow tells the *New Yorker's* Elizabeth Kolbert. "And, in most of the cases, it's the lay community

that is more exercised, more anxious. If you take an extreme example, it would be nuclear power, where most of the people who work in nuclear science are relatively relaxed about very low levels of radiation. But, in the climate case, the experts—the

people who work with the climate models every day, the people who do ice cores—they are *more* concerned. They're going out of their way to say, "Wake up! This is not a good thing to be doing." —Harold Henderson | [henderson@chicagoreader.com](mailto:henderson@chicagoreader.com)

Mischief

## Fighting Spin With Spin

*Activists and artists hatch a plot to publicize the failings of the CHA's Plan for Transformation.*

By Martha Bayne

If you happened to be outside City Hall on the morning of May 27, you probably didn't look twice at the two yellow-vested guys installing a new advertisement in the JC Decaux bus shelter at Randolph and LaSalle. Not many people did, including the cops who pulled up and idled nearby. But the poster the workers slid swiftly into place didn't tout the merits of Mayor Daley and the Bean. "If the mayor has the energy to raise \$450 million for Millennium Park," read the text, "shouldn't he also be able to raise money for Chicago families in urgent need of affordable housing? Who will hold him accountable for this chaos?" A line at the bottom directed the curious to a Web site: [chicagohousingauthority.net](http://chicagohousingauthority.net).

The poster was part of a guerrilla ad campaign created by a group of artists and activists to draw public attention to the failings of the CHA's Plan for Transformation—the agency's sweeping \$1.6 billion, ten-year plan to demolish the decrepit high-rises that landed the CHA in HUD receivership in 1995 and move as many as 20,000 residents into low-rise, mixed-income buildings and the private market. The bright orange bus-shelter posters—there were 15 in all, bearing five different messages—and hundreds of smaller placards installed on Blue, Green, Orange, and Red Line trains meticulously mimicked the CHA ads that popped up all over town late last year. Those ads, done pro bono by Leo Burnett as part of a PR campaign valued at \$1.5 million, graphically fused the CHA initials with the word *change* to read *CHAnge*. The fake ads bore a similar white-and-gray logo that read *CHAnge*. Early that morning a dozen sleep-



Bus shelter near City Hall with mock ad featuring CHA head Terry Peterson; the one featuring the mayor

looking men and women had gathered at a west-side loft to put their plan, four months in the making, into action. Around a dining room table cluttered with laptops, video monitors, coffee cups, bananas, and a crusty tub of hummus, some fiddled with VCRs and made last-minute changes to the Web site. On the floor others scored posters to the dimensions of the JC Decaux ad panels. Four of the men were kitted out in nondescript blue pants, work boots, and black hoodies and caps. One guy who'd worn a full beard the day before had shaved down to a Ditka-esque mustache.

"We need to go!" he said. "Where's the box? The white box?"  
 "It's at my house," said another man.  
 "That's why I called last night—"  
 "Fuck!"  
 "We'll get it. Here's my keys."  
 "Argh. We need to leave *now*."

Charlotte (all the participants' names have been changed at their request) says she "was truly horrified" when she first saw one of the Leo Burnett CHA ads in January,

on the bus on her way to a teaching job. It featured a testimonial from a former CHA resident named Latoya Wolfe, a Columbia College student and aspiring novelist described as "determined to defy the Robert Taylor stereotype" and "thrilled" when the first Taylor high-rises came down. Some of Charlotte's students lived in public housing, and she was seeing and hearing quite a different story. The ads, she says, were "really slick." But they "only tell like 2 percent of the experience that people are having with the plan."

Charlotte and the others behind CHAos had all been involved in culture jamming in the past. Many of their public art projects protested gentrification and the privatization of public space. Most hadn't worked together before but they'd been kicking around plans to collaborate. "The majority of our first conversations always came back to these parallel things around privatization and things that are going on around Chicago specifically," says Charlotte. "We were all really interested in what's going on



**ARE TOURISTS MORE IMPORTANT THAN THE POOR?**  
 BY HAROLD HENDERSON, Mayor of Chicago

Mayor Daley is presiding over an unprecedented boom in building for the city. In recent months, thousands of housing units have been built, city hall is under renovation, city hall is under renovation, city hall is under renovation. The city has been blessed by the Mayor Daley's leadership and a great vision of urban renewal. If the city could have the money to raise \$450 million for Millennium Park, shouldn't he also be able to raise money for Chicago families in urgent need of affordable housing? Who will hold him accountable for this chaos?

**THIS IS CHAOS**  
 CHICAGO HOUSING AUTHORITY

For more information visit [www.chicagohousingauthority.net](http://www.chicagohousingauthority.net)

with Renaissance 2010 [the CPS's ten-year plan for the schools] and what's going on with the CTA. It ended up making a lot of sense when this specific thing came up. We felt like we knew how to deal with it."

They decided one good way to fight the CHA's public relations efforts was with more PR, says Mike, the guy with the mustache. "They're spending all this money and resources on this campaign because they feel they need to rewrite the script. That's something that's clearly a weak spot."

Though many of the CHA's original ads were installed in and around existing public housing developments, the consensus among activists is that the campaign was aimed less at making residents feel OK about the relocation process and more toward convincing their future neighbors that public housing residents aren't all drug dealers and gangbangers. "The perception of the wider public is that our residents are not someone they want to be next to," CHA board chair Sharon Gist Gilliam was quoted as saying in the

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**New Free Report Reveals "Back Pain Relief Secrets"**

Chicago, IL - A local doctor's shocking new FREE report reveals the truth about using over-the-counter drugs, and even prescribed drugs, to fix the real cause of your lower back pain: They don't work!

If you've been told you need surgery on your lower back, you must find out the #1 reason most lower back surgeries are ineffective or, at best, only offer short-term pain relief.

Most back pain sufferers have no idea how to eliminate

their pain. Some use heat, others ice. From sleeping on the floor to pillows underneath the legs, back pain relief techniques vary. But thanks to a free report, local back pain sufferers know exactly what to do.

Don't suffer with your pain another day because you don't have to; there is help available!

To get a copy of the FREE "Back Pain Relief Report," call toll-free 1-888-258-2449 and listen to the 24-hour recorded message.

**Are Your HEADACHES**

**Caused by STRESS?**

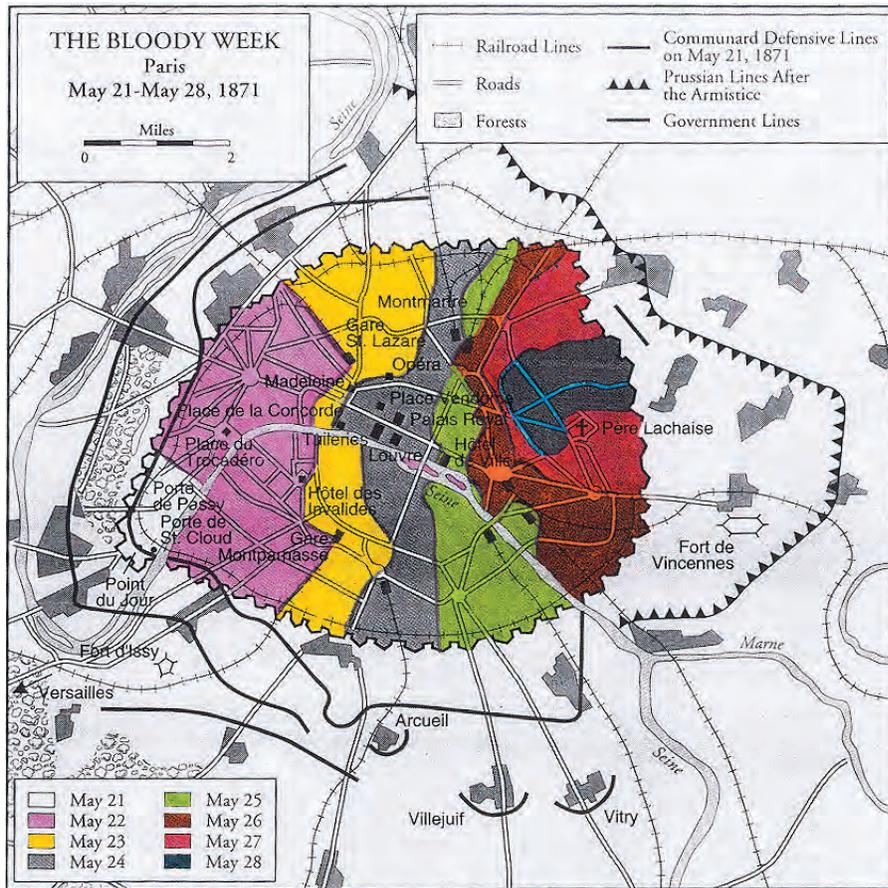
Take a **FREE STRESS & WELLNESS TEST** online at [www.pphcc.com](http://www.pphcc.com)

streets, community centers and in cyberspace. Its contents are typically filled with fantasies drawn from popular entertainment as well as personal trivia and sentimental nostalgia. In form it can range from the whimsical to the banal and from the absurd to the obscene. It is a qualitative shift unique to the last ten years and the increased visibility of amateur and often collectivized cultural production is more than any other factor accelerating the withering of autonomous artistic practice as such.

This generalization of artistic activity, mostly visible within digital form, has sapped the words “art” and “artist” of their previously imagined autonomy. While Joseph Beuys prophesized that his social sculpture would transform everyone into an artist, the ordinary routines of the populace have done more to achieve that goal without professional artists to guide them. Indeed, some of this informal art, if stripped of its context, would be impossible to distinguish from much contemporary art found in museums and galleries. Meanwhile artists ranging from Martha Rosler and RTMark to Mike Kelly and Jason Rhodes recognize the capacity of informal art production and have used it either to critique the art industry in Rosler and RTMark’s case or, deceptively, for proping-up artistic snobbery with low culture in Rhodes and Kelly’s work. (think of Taylor’s “slack art”). 46

Therefor, along-side the passive consumption of commodities and popular entertainment there emerges a different realm in which unofficial and informal cultural capacity is exercised. The more these informal cultural producers become aware of their own capacity for creative and transformative action, the more the privileged space once reserved for “trained” artists recedes. Already, this generalized artistic activity mixes together consumption, production and exchange as it recycles and redistributes, purchases and appropriates. It is evident when people download commercial music for free, duplicate copyrighted images for personal use and in so many ways re-direct or simply loot institutional power. Many of these activities also circulate within un-governed or ungovernable economic zones including flea markets or through the postal system or over the Internet. They vary in form from the criminal to the patriotic to the insipid. Each garner equal space within the expanded and informal cultural sphere. Each increasingly become more visible to each other.

The computer hacker mentality of today is not so far removed from the organized fence cutting tactics of farmers in Nebraska in the 1880s. Culture “Jamming” the system is not so different from the tactics of the Industrial Workers of the World who, at the turn of the century, battled anti-free speech laws in places like San Diego by overloading the local jails with arrested protestors. However, up to now these activities remain divided from each other, their political relationship fragmented and diffused. Yet even the most conservative analysis would find it difficult to ignore the expansion of unregulated and inventive activities made possible by the growing accessibility of communication and



Map of Paris Commune 1871

reproductive technologies. Without dismissing the enormous number of people still laboring in traditional manufacturing and agricultural industries, especially in developing countries, global capital's dependency on communications technology virtually assures the spread of digital networks and information technologies. One of the tasks of activists must be to see to it that the market's cellular and digital circulatory system is infected by the demands of non-technical laborers. Once again, it is less that art is being disseminated down into society from on high, than the social matrix is itself predicated upon a submerged collective creative capacity. As Negri and Hardt explain:

Labor is productive excess with respect to the existing order and the rules of its reproduction. This productive excess is at once the result of a collective force of emancipation and the substance of the new social virtuality of labor's productive and liberatory capacities. 47

Thanks to the exploitative needs of global capital the cost of making visible one's subjective and creative excesses has fallen dramatically. In theory it is a short distance from group visibility to collective autonomy.

## 6. Towards A Provisional, Collective Autonomy?

That a portion of this activity circulates outside official corporate circuits is analogous to the way some practices that are still self-identi-

fied as “art” have organized themselves into collective units of production, distribution, and intervention/disruption that are in certain cases so borderline that art world discourse largely ignores them. This list would include some of all of the work of RTMark, Critical Art Ensemble, Reclaim the Streets (various locations, in both digital and actual spaces,) REPOhistory (the NYC based group co-founded by the author that makes site-specific public art about alternative histories), ABC No Rio (NYC space dedicated to all forms of counter cultural practice from music to graffiti to housing activism), Reverend Billy (also based in NYC, the “reverend” executes anti-corporate performances with his accomplices in Starbucks at the Disney Store and the new Times Square), Ultra-Red (an Los Angeles based group of audio-activists), The Center for Land Use Interpretation (also in LA with projects that produce tours of radioactive and ecologically damaged environments), Ne Pas Plier (French activists using art to focus attention on housing for guest workers), Wochenklausur (Austrian group that stages encounters between elected officials and marginalized peoples), A-Clip (Berlin based media activists), Collectivo Cambalache (originally from Bogota, CC creates alternative exchange economies in public spaces), Temporary Services (disseminates art and information in Chicago streets using newspaper dispensers), Blackstone Bicycle-Works/monk prakeet/Dan Peterman (a recycling, organic garden and art center on Chicago’s South Side), The Stockyard Institute (Jim Dignan works with urban school children in Chicago to produce “gang-proof” armored suits), and the group Ha Ha (Laurie Palmer and John Ploof develop projects on AIDS, ecology and housing in Chicago and elsewhere). These informal, politicized micro-institutions have made art that infiltrates high schools, flea markets, public squares, corporate Web Sites, city streets, housing projects, and local political machines in ways that do not set out to recover a specific meaning or use-value for either art world discourse or private interests. However, in the post-cold war and anti-socialist United States the left has joined the center-liberal establishment in its call for a utilitarian and serviceable art that integrates “the arts into community life.”<sup>48</sup> Under the present circumstances of global capitalism this might indeed seem the only possible outcome if one follows to its logical conclusion the once radical avant-garde mandate to take art into life. If Peter Berger insists that the contemporary neo avant-garde deceptively produces autonomous art in the guise of social engagement and Terry Eagleton counters that today’s avant-garde art simply parodies the radical intentions of its namesake’s once radical agenda, let me suggest that the new, dot.com-gardism actually does operate in a van-guard, productivist mode.<sup>49</sup> Using modern marketing techniques they treat the author as a producer even as their artistic agenda mixes aesthetic play with profiteering. This new entrepreneurial artist has finally closed the gap between an imagined bohemian lifestyle and the rest of society. Under these circumstances what possibility does an older idea of art have to forge a

position that is both accessible and also resistant to the totalizing effects of the global marketplace including the effects of cultural homogeneity, the destruction of private fantasy and local artistic practices, the privatization of the public sphere and the extinction of civic society to name those that directly affect this troubled idea of art? 50

Granted, the dissolution of artistic meaning and art's special status as cultural symbol is all but total in the United States. What remains of artistic autonomy is now a specialized marketing tool of both the high-culture and mass media industries. As such it now openly manifests itself for what it has been for some time - a label for a specific brand of cultural capital called "art". However, the closer this idea of autonomy nears extinction or outright exposure the more interesting becomes the possibility of its rescue. Only when it has hit the floor and gone cold might a version of this archaic idea possibly be infused with new value. Benjamin argued that only a redeemed mankind could hope to win back its entire historical legacy. Our redemption of artistic autonomy therefore would not be a return to the past, especially not the disengaged and heroic individualism of modernism. Nor would it be grounded in either the Kantian ideal of disinterested beauty or the Hegelian or even Marxist notion of an evolving totality. Rather this autonomy would have to recognize the end of the once powerful contradictions between artist and society, nature and culture and individual and collective. This new, critical autonomy would not even be centered on artistic practice *per se*, but would recognize the already present potential for political and economic self-valorization inherent within contemporary social conditions. Instead of asking what is art, it would instead query what is politics? Instead of asking if "they are allowed to do that?", or worry about the uncertain status of art's social capital, this critical autonomy would proceed to activate cells of artistic producers not afraid to utilize and manipulate the entire range of culture making (and culture-thieving) technologies and strategies that are now multiplying within the circulatory system of the global body. The autonomous status of these informal working groups or cells might indeed leverage discursive power from the lingering aura of the Kantian/Greenbergian aesthetic. They could for example borrow the idea of freedom (exemplified by art) for doing politics. What a radical notion! 51 However, they would do so in a utilitarian (thus anti-Kantian) manner not to insure art's usefulness to the liberal, corporate state as much new genre public art appears to do, but as a model of political and economic self-valorization that is applicable for social transformation in the broadest sense. The point is to begin to recognize and bring to light what already exists and to re-direct or retool this so that its practitioners become self-conscious of their already present collectivity, a force potentially independent from what Negri and Hardt term the Empire.<sup>52</sup> Here a final displacement is possible. Politics superimposes itself at all levels as a practical art that is at the same time symbolic. But it does so only if we understand politics as the exploration of ideas, the pleasure of communica-

tion, the exchange of education, the construction of fantasy all within a radically defined social practice of collective, critical autonomy.

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

## NOTES

1 Slavoj Zizek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (London: Verso, 1989), p. 33.

2 Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, trans. Richard Nice (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1984), p. 228.

3 Consider a recent report entitled *Unseen Wealth: Report of the Brookings Task Force on Understanding Intangible Sources of Value* by Margaret Blair and Steven Wallman in which the authors argue that “organizational and human capital, “goodwill” and other intangibles, as well as other items that are not usually viewed as “assets” ... are becoming the real sources of value in corporations.” The authors call on economists to use such “intangibles” for future analysis “as the dominant drivers of economic activity and wealth shift away from manufacturing toward information-based services.”

4 The United States Entertainment business is ranked the 18th largest industry in Fortune Magazines’s Fortune 500 with Time Warner ranked the 128th largest corporation and Disney the 176th in the global top 500. To get a sense of how small the “high” art world is by comparison, contrast the combined annual revenue of \$6,763,989 --based on total sales, receipts and shipments --from museums and historic sites in the U.S. to the nearly ten times larger revenue of \$60,331,549 just for gambling, amusement and recreation spending.

5 *The American Canvas Report* (Washington: National Endowment for the Arts, August 1997).

6 While productivity increased by 20% among workers between 1989 and 1999, the median real wages of men actually fell according to authors Lawrence Michel, Jared Bernstein and John Smitt, in *State of Working American: 2000-20001* (Economic Policy Institute: 2000). Meanwhile, according to Left Business Observer editor Doug Henwood, the incomes of the richest 5% of the population are up by 22% since 1989 with more than half coming in the last 5 years. “The inequality of family incomes in 1998 was at its highest ever since the Census Bureau started publishing annual figures in 1947,” Doug Henwood, “Boom for Whom?,” *Left Business Observer* #93 (Feb. 2000).

7 “How Jobless the Future?,” *Left Business Observer* #75 (Dec. 1996).

8 *Ibid.*

9 Chin-tao Wu, *Privatising Culture: Corporate Art Intervention Since the 1980s*, (London:Verso, forthcoming), p. 10.

10 Henwood, *Left Business Observer* #75, op. cite.

11 “Over 1.4 million new jobs were created in 1992, and the total since the recession trough [1987] is over 12 million new jobs.” Doug Henwood, *ibid.* Meanwhile, some 42 million Americans or 17.8% of the population have no health insurance coverage according to J. Rhodes, E. Brown, and J. Vistnes in *Agency for Health Care Research and Quality Report, 2000*. Americans also carry a total personal debt load today of one half trillion dollars or \$7,564 per household according to a special issue of the *New York Times Magazine* entitled “Spending: How Americans Part With

Money,” October, 15, 2000.

12 Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt, *Empire*: (Cambridge: Harvard 2000), p. 337.

13 The Number of professional, specialty workers doubled between 1970 and 1990 and the total population of artists more than doubled in that same period with female artists tripling in number according to Joan Jeffri and Robert Greenblatt in *Artists Who Work with Their Hands: Painters, Sculptors, Craft Artists and Artist Printmakers: A Trend Report, 1970-1990*, sponsored by the National Endowment for the Arts Research Division, (Washington: NEA, August 1994), p. 28.

14 Note too that the US poverty level in 1998 for a family of four was \$16,000 (US Dept of Labor) while the median income for painters and craft artists in 1990 was only \$18,187. Compare this to the \$36,942 average for professional workers in other fields. Jeffri & Greenblatt, p. 36.

15 Neil O. Alper and Gregory H. Wassall, *More Than Once In a Blue Moon: Multiple Jobholdings by American Artists*, Research Division Report #40 (Washington: NEA, 2000), p. 97.

16 According to the same NEA report: The most frequent explanation provided by artists for holding multiple jobs was that they needed the additional earnings generated by the second jobs to meet their household’s expenses. This was the same reason most other professionals held a second job. Note that “Visual artists were almost three times as likely, on average, to have worked in the [professional] service industries than other artists (31% versus 11 %).” *Ibid*, pp. 44 - 46.

17 A study of 300 graduates of the School of the Art Institute of Chicago were tracked between 1963 to 1980 by researchers Mihaly Csikszentimihalyi, Jacob W. Getzels and Stephen P. Kahn in *Talent and Achievement* (Chicago:1984, an unpublished report), p. 44.

18 “Information on Artists II,” Research Center for Arts and Culture, 1999, Columbia University p. 8-9. An interesting additional note to this is a recent survey of leading business CEO’s in the U.S. who’s voting record is exactly the opposite! See: Lorraine Woellert et al. “Do CEO’s Vote? Not Always and Not Often” *Business Week* (November 6, 2000).

19 Chin-tao Wu, *op. cite.*, p. 213.

20 Masao Miyoshi, “A Borderless World? From Colonialism to Transnationalism and the Decline of the Nation State,” *Critical Inquiry* #19 (Summer 1993), p.747.

21 American Canvas Report, *op. Cite.*

22 *Ibid.*

23 Terry Eagleton, *The Ideology of the Aesthetic* (Oxford: Basel Blackwell, 1990), p. 368.

24 Ian Burn, “The ‘Sixties: Crisis and Aftermath (Or The Memories of an Ex-Conceptual Artist),” *Art & Text* (Fall 1981), pp. 49-65. Also see Lucy R. Lippard, *Six Years: the Disappearance of the Art Object* (Praeger, 1973).

25 Andrea Fraser, “What’s Intangible, Transitory, Mediating, Participatory, and Rendered in the Public Sphere?” in *October* #80 (Spring 1997), pp. 11-116.

26 From a presentation made by Suzanne Getz for the Arts Administration program at the Art Institute of Chicago, October 8th, 1999.

27 Brandon Taylor , *Avant-Garde and After: Rethinking Art Now* (New York: Abrams,1995), p. 153.

28 According to the National Center for Education, 63 percent of all U.S. public school instructional rooms were connected to the Internet and there was approximately one computer for every six students in the entire system in 1999.

29 Saskia Sassen, *The Global City: New York, London, Tokyo* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1991), pp. 335-337.

30 Joseba Zulaika, "The Seduction of Bilbao," *Architecture* (Dec. 1997), p. 61.

31 Peter Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde* (Minneapolis: 1984).

32 Here too there is tremendous economic pressure on small non-profits to either become market savvy fast or vanish. According to a recent survey by William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, over the next three years landlords in San Francisco will reconfigure one million square feet of studio space for use as dot-com offices while local non-profits can expect a 500% rent-hikes in their next lease.

33 See Gregory Sholette, "How To Best Serve the New Global Art Matrix," *Seite-neingänge: Museumsidee & Ausstellungsweisn*, Roswitha Muttenthaler, Herbert Posch, Eva S. Sturm ed.. (Wein: Turia & Kant, 2000), pp.

146-168.

34 Of course this is not strange to all those artists who produce work specifically for the kind of commercial galleries that serious artists look down their nose at. Yet one should stop to reflect if the existence of these less "weighty" venues does not have a deep and necessary structural relationship with the possibility of making and accumulating cultural capital of every sort.

35 Returning to the fashion industry metaphor, since knock-off products are themselves an underground economy it may be that the field of digital encryption will emerge as the next arena for artistic exploration and industry standardization.

36 Immanuel Kant, "The Critique of Aesthetic Judgement," collected works, (Chicago: William Benton, 1952).

37 Ibid.

38 To be fair, Plato is not above providing for the artist. He does offer a single, acceptable path by which poets can re-enter his Republic. Those poets who offer "hymns to the gods and praises of famous men" shall be the only ones that "ought to be admitted to our State." He also will allow entrance to the poet who defends her craft using lyrical speech. In this way Plato's Republic actually preempts the establishment of an artistic counter-culture at a distance and uncontrolled by the State.

39 Kant, *op. cite*.

40 Clement Greenberg, "Modernist Painting" first published as a pamphlet for the *Voice Of America*, 1960, and reprinted in Gregory Batttcook 's anthology *The New Art* (New York: Dutton, 1966).

41 Ibid.

42 Ibid.

43 Chairman of the National Endowment for the Arts, Bill Ivey speaking at the National Organization of Arts Organizations, Brooklyn, NY, June 2000.

44 Eva Cockroft "Abstract Expressionism, Weapon of the Cold War," *Artforum* (June 1974), pp. 39-41, and Serge Guilbaut, *How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art: Abstract Expressionism, Freedom, and the Cold War* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983).

45 Walter Benjamin, "Author as Producer," *Reflections*, trans. Edmund Jephcott, (New York: Helen and kurt Wolff, 1978).

46 It could be argued that it is precisely this Kantian/Greenbergian tradition that provided the theoretical framework for the self-analysis leading to a more politicized art practice including the work of Hans Haacke, Daniel Burren and later the "institutional critique" of artists like Andrea Fraser and Renee Green. Without dismissing the logic of this claim I have tried to show elsewhere that this approach gives far too little credit to non-art world influences including politics and popular culture on the work of these artists. See Gregory Sholette "News from Nowhere: Activist Art & After," *Third Text #45* (Winter, 1999), pp. 45-56. For a German version of this essay see the book *Kunst, Kultur und Politik in den Großstädten der 90er Jahre*, ed. by Jutta Held.

47 Hardt and Negri, *op. cite.*, p. 357.

48 American Canvas Report, *op. cite.*

49 Terry Eagleton, "Capitalism, Modernism and Postmodernism" in *Against The Grain*, (London: Verso, 1986).

50 To this one might add the establishment of extreme economic inequality, the submission of all human activities to the medium of contract law, the destruction of local as well as global ecologies, the industrialization of the human body and mind, the use of military force to achieve the goals of the ideology of the global market.

51 The School of the Art Institute's student newspaper recently carried an article proclaiming that art was a "major force binding and guiding" a reawakening of political activism in the United States. While there is an old if unwritten history to this affiliation the fact that young people are making these connections in the "heartland" of America is significant. Meanwhile similar links between pirate radio broadcasters, puppeteers, culture-jammers, and direct action groups is apparent in all of the recent protests against the World Trade Organization. Joanne Hinkel, "How Art is Helping Activism" *F Newsmagazine* (October 2000), pp. 14-15.

52 What we need to grasp is how the multitude is organized and redefined as a positive, political power...Empire can only isolate, divide, and segregate...the action of the multitude becomes political primarily when it begins to confront directly and with an adequate consciousness the central repressive operations of Empire. It is a matter of recognizing and engaging the imperial initiatives and not allowing them continually to reestablish order; it is a matter of crossing and breaking down the limits and segmentations that are imposed on the new collective labor power; it is a matter of gathering together these experiences of resistance and wielding them in concert against the nerve centers of imperial command." Negri and Hardt, *op. cite.*, pp. 400-401. See also Sholette, "Counting On Your Collective Silence: Notes on Activist Art as Collaborative Practice," *Afterimage* (November, 1999), pp.18-20.