invisible labor: an art/work reader
compiled for the art and labor study group
SUMMER 2014
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action
MANIFESTO

MAINTENANCE ART

Proposal for an exhibition “CARE”

[Signature]

I. IDEAS

A. The Death Instinct and the Life Instinct.

The Death Instinct: Separation, inhospitality, Avanti, Ganese, or even the sensation of death—our own, our children, our society, our species, our survival systems and operations, equilibrium.

The Life Instinct: Promotion, the world, the urban, the industrial, the maintenance and "CARE" of the species, survival systems and operations, equilibrium.

B. Two basic systems: Development and Maintenance. The survival of every organism, after the revolution, will be to pick up the package on Monday morning.

Development: Pure individual creation, the new, the changing, progress, advance, excitement, light, and fear.

Maintenance: Keep the dead in, the pure individual creation, preserve the new, sustain the change, protect progress, defend and protect the advance, render the excellent, repeat, repeat, repeat.

II. MAINTENANCE ART

MAINTENANCE ART

C. Maintenance is a drag. steals all the fun out of life.

The work of art is an object that is in maintenance jobs that maintain the housekeeper’s job and keep the home fire burning.

D. Maintenance is a direct feedback system with maps.

MAINTENANCE ART

E. Maintenance is a direct feedback system with maps. with the contemporary museum grows, keep the home fire burning.

Development systems are parallel feedback systems with maps.

F. Maintenance is a direct feedback system with maps. with the contemporary museum grows, keep the home fire burning.

G. Maintenance is a direct feedback system with maps.

Development systems are parallel feedback systems with maps.

H. Maintenance is a direct feedback system with maps.

Development systems are parallel feedback systems with maps.

I. Maintenance is a direct feedback system with maps.

Development systems are parallel feedback systems with maps.

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Y. Maintenance is a direct feedback system with maps.

Development systems are parallel feedback systems with maps.

Z. Maintenance is a direct feedback system with maps.

Development systems are parallel feedback systems with maps.
MANIFESTO

FOR MAINTENANCE ART 1969!

Proposal for an exhibition “CARE”

MIERLE LADERMAN UKELES

I. IDEAS

A. The Death Instinct and the Life Instinct:

The Death Instinct: separation; individuality; Avant-Garde par excellence; to follow one’s own path to death—do your own thing; dynamic change.

The Life Instinct: unification; the eternal return; the perpetuation and MAINTENANCE of the species; survival systems and operations; equilibrium.

B. Two basic systems: Development and Maintenance. The sourball of every revolution: after the revolution, who’s going to pick up the garbage on Monday morning?

Development: pure individual creation; the new; change; progress; advance; excitement; flight or fleeing.

Maintenance: keep the dust off the pure individual creation; preserve the new; sustain the change; protect progress; defend and prolong the advance; renew the excitement; repeat the flight;
show your work—show it again
keep the contemporaryartmuseum groovy
keep the home fires burning

Development systems are partial feedback systems with major room for change.
Maintenance systems are direct feedback systems with little room for alteration.

C. Maintenance is a drag; it takes all the fucking time (lit.)
The mind boggles and chafes at the boredom.
The culture confers lousy status on maintenance jobs = minimum wages, housewives = no pay.
clean you desk, wash the dishes, clean the floor,
wash your clothes, wash your toes, change the baby’s diaper, finish the report, correct the typos, mend the fence, keep the customer happy, throw out the stinking garbage, watch out don’t put things in your nose, what shall I wear, I have no sox, pay your bills, don’t litter, save string, wash your hair, change the sheets, go to the store, I’m out of perfume, say it again—he doesn’t understand, seal it again—it leaks, go to work, this art is dusty, clear the table, call him again, flush the toilet, stay young.

D. Art:

Everything I say is Art is Art. Everything I do is Art is Art. “We have no Art, we try to do everything well.” (Balinese saying).

Avant-garde art, which claims utter development, is infected by strains of maintenance ideas, maintenance activities, and maintenance materials.
Conceptual & Process art, especially, claim pure development and change, yet employ almost purely maintenance processes.

E. The exhibition of Maintenance Art, “CARE,” would zero in on pure maintenance, exhibit it as contemporary art, and yield, by utter opposition, clarity of issues.
II. THE MAINTENANCE ART EXHIBITION: “CARE”

Three parts: Personal, General, and Earth Maintenance.

A. Part One: Personal

I am an artist. I am a woman. I am a wife. I am a mother. (Random order).

I do a hell of a lot of washing, cleaning, cooking, renewing, supporting, preserving, etc. Also, (up to now separately I "do" Art.

Now, I will simply do these maintenance everyday things, and flush them up to consciousness, exhibit them, as Art. I will live in the museum and I customarily do at home with my husband and my baby, for the duration of the exhibition. (Right? or if you don’t want me around at night I would come in every day) and do all these things as public Art activities: I will sweep and wax the floors, dust everything, wash the walls (i.e. “floor paintings, dust works, soap-sculpture, wall-paintings”) cook, invite people to eat, make agglomerations and dispositions of all functional refuse.

The exhibition area might look “empty” of art, but it will be maintained in full public view.

MY WORKING WILL BE THE WORK

B. Part Two: General

Everyone does a hell of a lot of noodling maintenance work. The general part of the exhibition would consist of interviews of two kinds.

1. Previous individual interviews, typed and exhibited.

Interviewees come from, say, 50 different classes and kinds of occupations that run a gamut from maintenance “man,” maid, sanitation “man,” mail “man,” union “man,” construction worker, librarian, grocerystore “man,” nurse, doctor, teacher,
museum director, baseball player, sales"man," child, criminal, bank president, mayor, moviestar, artist, etc., about:"

-what you think maintenance is;
-how you feel about spending whatever parts of your life you spend on maintenance activities;
-what is the relationship between maintenance and freedom;
-what is the relationship between maintenance and life’s dreams.

2. Interview Room—for spectators at the Exhibition:

A room of desks and chairs where professional (?) interviewers will interview the spectators at the exhibition along same questions as typed interviews. The responses should be personal.

These interviews are taped and replayed throughout the exhibition area.

C. Part Three: Earth Maintenance

Everyday, containers of the following kinds of refuse will be delivered to the Museum:

-the contents of one sanitation truck;
-a container of polluted air;
-a container of polluted Hudson River;
-a container of ravaged land.

Once at the exhibition, each container will be serviced:

purified, de-polluted, rehabilitated, recycled, and conserved by various technical (and / or pseudo-technical) procedures either by myself or scientists.

These servicing procedures are repeated throughout the duration of the exhibition.
W.A.G.E. (WORKING ARTISTS AND THE GREATER ECONOMY) WORKS TO DRAW ATTENTION TO ECONOMIC INEQUALITIES THAT EXIST IN THE ARTS, AND TO RESOLVE THEM.

W.A.G.E. HAS BEEN FORMED BECAUSE WE, AS VISUAL + PERFORMANCE ARTISTS AND INDEPENDENT CURATORS, PROVIDE A WORK FORCE.

W.A.G.E. RECOGNIZES THE ORGANIZED IRRESPONSIBILITY OF THE ART MARKET AND ITS SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONS, AND DEMANDS AN END OF THE REFUSAL TO PAY FEES FOR THE WORK WE'RE ASKED TO PROVIDE: PREPARATION, INSTALLATION, PRESENTATION, CONSULTATION, EXHIBITION AND REPRODUCTION.


W.A.G.E. BELIEVES THAT THE PROMISE OF EXPOSURE IS A LIABILITY IN A SYSTEM THAT DENIES THE VALUE OF OUR LABOR.

AS AN UNPAID LABOR FORCE WITHIN A ROBUST ART MARKET FROM WHICH OTHERS PROFIT GREATLY, W.A.G.E. RECOGNIZES AN INHERENT EXPLOITATION AND DEMANDS COMPENSATION.

W.A.G.E. CALLS FOR AN ADDRESS OF THE ECONOMIC INEQUALITIES THAT ARE PREVALENT, AND PROACTIVELY PREVENTING THE ART WORKER'S ABILITY TO SURVIVE WITHIN THE GREATER ECONOMY.

W.A.G.E. ADVOCATES FOR DEVELOPING AN ENVIRONMENT OF MUTUAL RESPECT BETWEEN ARTIST AND INSTITUTION.

W.A.G.E. DEMANDS PAYMENT FOR MAKING THE WORLD MORE INTERESTING.
The Art Workers’ Coalition was an organization of artists formed in 1969 to demand artists’ rights, museum reform, representation of women and artists of color in museums, and for museums to take a moral stance on the Vietnam War. As we consider artists’ stake in the current Occupy Wall Street movements, the Art Workers’ Coalition provides necessary historical context. Copied below is the Art Workers’ Coalition’s Statement of Demands made in November 1970 in New York City. How relevant are these demands today? What would you change? What new demands are necessary?

WITH REGARDS TO ART MUSEUMS IN GENERAL THE ART WORKERS’ COALITION MAKES THE FOLLOWING DEMANDS:

1. The Board of Trustees of all museums should be made up of one-third museum staff, one-third patrons, and one-third artists, if it is to continue to act as the policy-making body of the museum. All means should be explored in the interest of a more open-minded and democratic museum. Art works are a cultural heritage that belongs to the people. No minority has the right to control them; therefore, a board of trustees chosen on a financial basis must be eliminated.

2. Admission to all museums should be free at all times, and they should be open evenings to accommodate working people.

3. All museums should decentralize to the extent that their activities and services enter Black, Puerto Rican, and all other communities. They should support events with which these communities can identify and control. They should convert existing structures all over the city into relatively cheap, flexible branch-museums or cultural centres that could not carry the stigma of catering only to the wealthier sections of society.

4. A section of all museums under the direction of Black and Puerto Rican artists should be devoted to showing the accomplishments of Black and Puerto Rican artists, particularly in those cities where these (or other) minorities are well represented.

5. Museums should encourage female artists to overcome centuries of damage done to the image of the female as an artist by establishing equal representation of the sexes in exhibitions, museum purchases, and on selection committees.

6. At least one museum in each city should maintain an up-to-date registry of all artists in their area, that is available to the public.

7. Museum staffs should take positions publicly and use their political influence in matters concerning the welfare of artists, such as rent control for artists’ housing, legislation for artists’ rights, and whatever else may apply specifically to artists in their area. In particular, museums, as central institutions, should be aroused by the crisis threatening man’s survival and should make their own demands to the government that ecological problems be put on par with war and space efforts.
8. Exhibition programs should give special attention to works by artists not represented by a commercial
gallery. Museums should also sponsor the production and exhibition of such works outside their own
premises.

9. Artists should retain a disposition over the destiny of their work, whether or not it is owned by them,
to ensure that it cannot be altered, destroyed, or exhibited without their consent.

UNTIL SUCH TIME AS A MINIMUM INCOME IS GUARANTEED FOR ALL PEOPLE, THE ECONOMIC POSITION
OF ARTISTS SHOULD BE IMPROVED IN THE FOLLOWING WAYS:

1. Rental fees should be paid to artists or their heirs for all work exhibited where admissions are
charged, whether or not the work is owned by the artist.

2. A percentage of the profit realized on the re-sale of an artist’s work should revert to the artist or his
heirs.

3. A trust fund should be set up from a tax levied on the sales of the work of dead artists. This fund
would provide stipends, health insurance, help for artists’ dependents, and other social benefits.
Contributions to a Resistant Visual Culture Glossary

by Nato Thompson

It is apparent that the current art historical language is collapsing rather quickly. In the wake of this collapse, I am hoping that The Journal of Aesthetics and Protest can be a vehicle for developing a more resistant, useful set of terms. Not simply because creating something new is always fun, but to be frank, given the current political climate, it is important that we get our shit together.

At the suggestion of the wonderful editors, I would like to say a few things about why on earth a glossary of resistant visual culture should matter. Initially I figured such a thing was obvious, but come to think of it, it isn’t obvious at all. Resistant visual culture is not about art or traditional activism. It is a method for building a real, living culture. As opposed to a vocation or sentimental pursuit, I think of this field as a way to productively communicate amongst those who are dedicated to social change. It is not about further investigating art history nor about tactics for getting into galleries. If this sounds naively vague that is on purpose. I don’t think we need to be specific and I believe that even a simple analysis of capital and control should be enough to bind a lot of disparate people together. These terms are methods for finding more effective ways to do this.

What follows are a series of terms that I have found many “rads” using. I introduce them in the hopes they lead to more productive discussions.

A. Visual Culture
B. Criticality (Ambiguity)
C. Resistance/Tactics/Strategies
D. Infrastructures of Resonance
E. Material Consequences
F. Legitimation

Visual Culture/vízhooel•kúlcher

Visual Culture is the study of the hypervisuality of contemporary everyday life and its genealogies. Given the ‘weaponizing’ of the visual during the recent Iraq War and the ongoing—and televised—iconoclasm of certain terrorist groups, I don’t think there’s any danger of it becoming a complacent field in the near future!

-Nicholas Mirzoeff

Increasingly I hear the term visual culture used to describe the visual landscape. As opposed to the term “art” (which has connotations of a static field of study), the term visual culture implicitly suggests that vision is a socially constructed phenomenon. This small shift is an important semiotic maneuver because it allows us to consider the broad and increasing spectrum of visibility including television, film, advertising, fashion, urbanity, various cultural affinities, etc. as source material for visual strategies. In this regard, aesthetics must be positioned within a field of gender, race, class, and sexuality. Instead of discussing whether aesthetics are “good” or “bad”, we can critique projects based on their position and reception. What type of transformative effect do these projects have? The question is not “is it art”, but more importantly, “what does it do?”

Criticality/kritikelitee

What does it mean to ask, “What does a project do?” That is to say, what effects are we interested in producing? There are plenty of answers to this, but I suspect from the position of protest or politics, we would ask that it reposition the viewer’s relationship to power. It should produce “criticality”. To use the language of Bertolt Brecht, “We need a type of theatre which not only releases the feelings, insights and impulses possible within the particular historical field of human relations in which the action takes place, but employs and encourages those thoughts and feelings which help transform the field itself.” Of course,
the methods to achieve this vary greatly and their effectiveness are not at all agreed on. I do not want to give the misleading impression that the question of what a project does is an easy one to answer. In fact, it is the total lack of classically defined utility that tends to be the signpost for most things arty. We must be careful about the methods we use to answer this question. Ambiguity can still retain utility, but it must enlist the support of imagination, pedagogy, and desire. However, asking what a project does is a good place to begin a discussion of aesthetics and a debate on these grounds can be illuminating.

What inevitably accompanies this shift in emphasis toward the transformation of the viewer is the shift toward radical education. That is to say, once we begin to discuss the role of aesthetics as it applies to a relationship of pedagogy, then it makes sense to look into the theoretical foundations of schools of thought that have been researching this for a long time. Radical education has antecedents in the writings of Brazilian educator Paolo Freire and the more recent writings of Henry Giroux. I do not actually know that much about this material, but I suspect that in considering whether a project produces criticality, this line of flight could prove instructive.

**Strategies/tactics**/strátijeez•táktiks
strategies/strátijeez/ n. pl. 1. the calculation (or manipulation) of power relationships that become possible as soon as a subject with will and power (a business, an army, a city, a scientific institution) can be isolated.

tactics/táktiks/ n. pl. 1. operates in isolated actions, blow by blow. It takes advantage of “opportunities and depends on them, being without any base where it could stockpile its winnings build up its own position, and plan raids.” “In short, the tactic is the art of the weak.”

The borrowed terms above are from the writings of Michelle De Certeau and they tend to come up quite frequently. With a whole genre now calling itself “tactical media” and many radicals using this language, it is instructive to look at them a little more carefully. Tactics, as the definition states above, are a sort of trespassing, and in the theory of De Certeau they are ways for people to develop meaning in the face of an overwhelmingly pre-determined situation. Strategies are the work of those in power. For radicals it should be of no surprise that they are constantly considering their work in the light of tactics. They are forever trespassing, and using the dominant landscape as a necessary dancing partner. However, for those like De Certeau and many Gilles Deleuze-inspired anarchists, tactics seem to suffice. The problem with accepting this sensibility is that it can lead to fairly privileged forms of resistance, like slacking at work or taking a meandering walk home. I am a fan of these more benign tactics, but not convinced they lead to anything but personal therapy.

Strategies are of course, rarely discussed and if they are, you can guarantee that someone will accuse the person of both hubris and attempting to produce dangerous ideologies. The idea of a revolutionary agenda or an attempt to gain a chunk of the dominant landscape never appears viable or promising. And so, tactics remain the de facto game in town. However, to use an example of someone operating in the field of strategies, the filmmaker Michael Moore has most assuredly broken out of the tactics category. His films win academy awards; his books are on the New York Times best seller’s list. The same goes for Noam Chomsky. I mention them because I think their desire and ability to operate in the field of strategies has been effective and instructive.

Of course, not everyone can operate in the realm of strategies. The point of this section on tactics and strategies is to demonstrate that the dependence on these two terms seems to create a barren but much needed middle ground. Instead of a polarizing dichotomy, maybe it would be more useful to consider these terms as the two poles of resistant aesthetics. That is to say that a project vacillates in its relationship to power from tactics to strategies. While owning the dominant system may feel impossible, it feels more than a little slackerish to depend on defeat.

**Infrastructures of Resonance**/infrestrukcherz•ov•rézenens
infrastructure/infrestrukcher/ n. 1. the basic, underlying framework or features of a system of organization. 2. the fundamental facilities serving a country, city or area, as transportation and communication systems, power plants, and roads. 3. the military installations of a country.
In framing questions of aesthetics and politics, it is important that we consider the networked web in which they are operating. That is to say, we cannot detach the position within power that a particular project possesses. No project, in and of itself, will possess all the attributes necessary to make an all-encompassing political statement and/or action. Effectiveness requires a sort of content triage which, when viewed alone, can be complicit with some sort of ineptitude.

Take for example Mathew Barney, whose work I actually enjoy. It's bizarre, sensual, imaginative, and surreal. However, the fact that the Guggenheim places Barney’s Cremaster series on a pedestal as their magnum opus and that reviewers at the New York Times praise Barney as the greatest artist of his generation, strikes me as all too convenient. It is at this point that I smell a rat. For, of course, content-less slippery open-ended material can too easily be consumed by those in power. The work’s inability to resist and its complicity with the conservative tendencies that support the work, make it unpalatable.

While the convenience that comes to artists who want to avoid direct content must be considered, this should not mean dismissal. For we then fall into that old political trap of demanding purely utilitarian forms of visual representation. We should have the right to a qualified beauty without necessarily falling prey to the vultures in power that make money, and prestige off it.

This conundrum rears its head continually. It is particularly acute for a generation growing up during the rise of the culture industry where seductive images abound and we do not possess adequate tools for weeding through them. This crisis in seduction is acute in other media as well: film, television, and music. As a paranoiac generation we are continually asking: who is benefiting from my pleasure?

For the readers of the JAP, this conspiracy theory of pleasure will find its most painful and damaging problems in the questions of Radial Chic. We are all too aware that there is a potential war of convenience, jealousy, ego, and efficacy raging for those who utilize the aesthetics of radicality to gain for themselves. As an example, I would like to bring up the work of artist Gregory Green. Green produces bombs, and pirate radio stations. A self-avowed anarchist, he rose to fame throughout the 90s as a radical gadget maker. Of course, no one believes his politics goes any further than his production of objects for his gallery and museum exhibitions. To quote a friend, Josh MacPhee, at length:

*I am getting really sick and tired of seeing "radical" artists repackage old-school tactical materials, gut them of any utility, then hold them up as god's gift to activists. A good example of this is the continual reformation of the pirate radio as a radical art object. Gag me. I'm sick and tired of seeing valuable transmitting equipment sit in a nice shiny new box or backpack in a gallery, when folks like the Campesino Radio Project in Chicago have spent the last 3 or 4 years smuggling transmitters into a good half dozen contested areas in Latin America (Chiapas, Peru, indigenous communities in Ecuador, etc) and setting up radio stations that people actually use in struggles to carve out autonomy and justice in their daily lives.*

These suspicions of intent can find their ultimate source of antagonism with those closest to us when we see their social capital increase with their use of our most treasured, radical, forms of resistance. Such antagonisms have destroyed many collectives (like Group Material) and have severed ties within networks. This, in fact, is worthy of a separate essay of its own, but for the purposes of this essay, I would like to bring it full circle and suggest that we consider these problems in light of an infrastructure of resonance.

Infrastructures of resonance are about audience. It is, if one could attempt to measure such a thing, the network of resonance and affiliations a project has. It is something we naturally do, although many times we are more paranoid than analytical. We naturally include a project’s relationship to power when we look at it. For example, when we see a project at the Guggenheim Museum, many of us are immediately suspicious of the projects allegiances and affiliations. Or when we see a television show, we are quite suspicious of the corporate powers and advertising dollars that rake in the cash off our momentary pleasure. We sense an infrastructure in place that further legitimates and perpetuates power. However, if we were to see a project at a community anarchist space, we position that project within a very different infrastructure of resonance. We may excuse its content-less-ness because, of course, we are assured that there is a commitment to radical change elsewhere in that infrastructure. Meaning becomes compensated through its connection to an infrastructure. The infrastructure provides a chorus of intentions that
facilitate a more robust interpretative model. To take cue from the sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, we must understand the various discursive regimes that set up a particular project.

Perceiving an infrastructure of resonance depends on what position one holds. To go back to the example of Gregory Green and his radical chic bombs, to the average art viewer, this radicalness reads on the same infrastructure of resonance that a project by Indymedia does. The average art viewer at a museum does not differentiate the outside radical commitments of a project’s producers because, of course, how are they supposed to know this type of insider gossip. When radical artists complain to me that so-and-so artist isn’t really down and is only making money off of their radical chic (like Gregory Green), I wonder what the tactics of this complaint are. On a pedagogical level, the effectiveness of Green’s projects are about as effective as most other radical art projects in a museum. On another level, there are those that lambaste any project that comes into a museum because, of course, they suspect it is in cahoots with power. I suspect this is why people prefer “content” in art, because then these networks are disclosed in the work itself. But of course, in the age of Sheppard Fairy and his “Obey” campaign, we are even suspicious of this.

It appears that the problem is more with display models that do not reveal these infrastructures. It is a model of trying to close off projects from their relationships to meaning networks. And it is an important one to consider. I put the notion of infrastructures of resonance out there as a lens to think about display strategies and critical readings. How to interpret work should include its relationship to power.

As a last note on this topic, I would like to propose that the art rads out there (if you are reading this, then this probably means you) develop a more cohesive radical infrastructure. The JAP’s are a good addition to this emerging network. What a real infrastructure could do is provide a cohesive, real world system to assist radical projects. It could allow some autonomy from the ever so common problem of interpreting work in the mixed field of power. This could be as simple as venues circulating exhibitions, writers providing critical analysis of contemporary radical aesthetics and communities participating in radical politics for social justice. It is something that is desperately needed and would have real material consequences.

**Material Consequences**

It is a word I use in a specific context. I use this term when I am thinking in more overtly agit-prop projects. The question is, “How do I situate this project in a productive situation, a political situation, and a discursive situation. Or, more tactically, how can I position this project as closely to a site of instability in power as possible such that the project has real effects.”

-Trevor Paglen

We are trying to find our footing after reeling from the tools of post-modernism. While deconstructing most monster narratives has been critical, long-term strategies are showing themselves as necessary (to rehash the discussion in tactics and strategies). In trying to ascertain the difference between post-modern relativism and intransigent modernism, we are developing language to call people’s bluffs. One of these bluff-calling terms is “material consequences.” What are the material consequences of a project? How does it translate into radical action? How does it assist in the broadening of social justice?

These are difficult questions and ones that will never find easy answers. For example, any radical visual project will still have a difficult time winding its way back to material consequences. If we don’t understand how power works, then how are we to gauge whether a project has material consequences?

I don’t know. But that doesn’t mean that we shouldn’t consider a project’s relationship to its material consequences as best we can. It is a sort of foil that allows us to weed out certain, frivolous cultural studies practices that somehow legitimate projects like deconstructing sitcoms as somehow resistant.

**Legitimation**

I work at a museum called MASS MoCA. It’s a complicated position for me as I struggle with many political needs and pragmatic constraints. However, I do see the role museums play in the infrastructure of visual culture. They act as a legitimating entity. If we think of knowledge as an infrastructure, with different material agents affecting the way in which knowledge is produced and interpreted, then we can begin to
understand the de-facto roles that institutions play within that. In an infrastructure of resonance, a legitimizing agent adds significant weight to the information being interpreted. In a world bombarded with information, we give significant weight to certain filters that we believe have somehow properly sifted through this material and given us the stuff we want. Of course, what is legitimating for one group of people may not be for another. This is obviously the case with the previous example of the Guggenheim and MASS MoCA itself for that matter.

Legitimation is not simply reserved for museums of course. It can come from famous individuals: “Noam Chomsky says, “check out this book!” It can come from friends, “Hey, check out this band.” It can come from magazines, “The JAP gave a favorable review of this conference.” It can come from CNN. And on and on. You get the point. As you might have guessed, some institutions have a larger radius of resonance for their legitimating function than others. And some, outside of those networks, still depend on that dominant system for their own legitimation.”

It would be all too easy to dismiss legitimation as some sort of name-dropping conspiracy, but it has material consequences. I hope it is clear that I am not advocating legitimation from the outside so much as simply saying, “This is how things tend to work. What are we going to do with it?” We can create our own sources of legitimation, we can utilize the ones that exist, or we can attack from both ends of the spectrum. In the end, legitimation can act as a hall pass to larger arrays of social power. The more legitimate, among whatever constituency, the more one increases their radius of resonance. Once again, I like to think of Michael Moore and Noam Chomsky as effectively manipulating their legitimation. (You may not agree with my choice of fabulous legitimators and that is fine. I am simply attempting to find contemporary examples to demonstrate a point.)

Centers for legitimation already exist within the disparate radical infrastructure. Academics like Gayatri Spivak, the recently deceased Edward Said, Saskia Sassen, Angela Davis, Judith Butler are all living vectors of legitimation. In the field of aesthetics and protest, of course, the legitimation begins to shrink quickly. Leftist magazines like The Nation continue to hold up entirely conservative art as a testament to the cultural status of their readership. On thearty side, one can either choose from the spotty coverage of magazines like Art Papers or be buried in masturbatory academia like Critical Inquiry or October. Of course, there are more scrappy spaces and journals that are in cahoots with these projects and going through them is an essay in itself. While micro-cinemas and punk bands appear to have more concrete infrastructures, radical visual culture appears to depend too often on either the dominant system or is isolated in separated pockets across the globe. Tightening these networks and providing our own self-legitimating sectors is critical in providing a radical culture.

Conclusion
I hope these terms might prove to be constructive. I notice that many of the words are developed in order to manage the tensions between an overtly dominant modernism and an all too relativist post-modernism. They also are attempts to position visual resistance within a framework conducive to the rise of the information economy. Using a more specific vocabulary allows us to avoid the boring pitfalls of “is it art?” or “is it political?”. By avoiding these traps to some degree, hopefully we can move towards developing a radical culture that can actually bust apart the dominance of capital and control.
ART AND CULTURE ARE PART OF THE COMMONS. ART IS THE INHERITANCE OF ALL PEOPLE. ART IS NOT A LUXERY ITEM.

A few ways in which museums serve the 1% rather than the 99%:

Museums allow a conflict of interest on their boards. The MoMA board of trustees shares two members with Sotheby’s board - a leading speculative in high-end art markets. To fairly serve the public, museums should be separate from the art-market. Dakis Jannou, a New Museum board member, showed his private collection in the museum, a blatant conflict of interest.

Museums function as tax shelters for the mega-rich. 100% of the market value of artwork given to a museum is tax deductible. Private museums, such as Ronald S. Lauder’s Neue Galerie, create easy ways for the wealthy to have their tax cake and eat it, too. When art collectors influence “market value” you have a corruption problem.

Museums abuse labor. There are very few unions in museums. Museum guards are underpaid and often mistreated. Administrative offices abound with unpaid intern labor. Increasingly, new museums abroad, such as the Guggenheim Dubai, rely on exploiting labor to build signature showplaces.

Museums promote a cult of celebrity and the commodification of art, which limits the range and potential of culture and expression. Driven by the corporate media and the incredible wealth disparity of our times, the international art market is another investment playground for the 1%.

Museums don’t follow “progressive stack” (a strategy from Occupy Wall Street that empowers underrepresented voices to be heard). Museums began as a means to display the stolen spoils of colonialism. This legacy of racism, patriarchy and exploitation permeates many museums, and is one reason why one finds so little race, gender, and class diversity in the art canon.

Museums must be held accountable to their mission to serve the public. The taxes of the 99% support cultural institutions, yet we have no voice in the decision making process. Museums, dependent on large donations, allow the 1% and corporations to wield enormous influence over art and culture. They have the authority to define what is art, and what is not, what is culture, and what is not. Like our government, which no longer represents the people, museums have sold out to the highest bidder.

It’s time to take them back.

Occupy Museums!

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Occupy Museums!
THE ART

WE CALL ON ALL CULTURAL WORKERS TO PUT DOWN THEIR TOOLS AND CEASE TO MAKE, DISTRIBUTE, SELL, EXHIBIT, OR DISCUSS THEIR WORK FROM 1 JANUARY 1990 TO 1 JANUARY 1993. WE CALL FOR ALL GALLERIES, MUSEUMS, AGENCIES, "ALTERNATIVE" SPACES, PERIODICALS, THEATERS, ART SCHOOLS, ETC., TO CEASE ALL OPERATIONS FOR THE SAME PERIOD.

WHEN THE PRAXIS group declared their intention to organize an Art Strike for the three-year period 1990-1993, they fully intended that this proposal (inception should create at least as much as it resolved.

The importance of the Art Strike lies not in its feasibility but in the fact that the political challenge of the status quo can be actively and aggressively challenged. Simply making this challenge go a considerable way in discrediting and undermining the hegemonic position within contemporary culture, and in the ability of an international and popular form of knowledge is largely dependent upon its status remaining unquestioned.

Some issues with which the Art Strike is concerned include this series of problems centered on the question of "Identity." By focusing attention on this question, the social and administrative practices an individual must pass through before such an identity becomes generally recognized, the organization and the social apparatus which not only the state but the whole society seems to be able to make a common and preliminary policy to solve these problems. The Art Strike has, for example, a question of educational reform, which is central in the present situation.

Imagine a world in which art is not forbidden! Art could be free from censorship, television would dominate, and there would be no more restrictions on artistic expression. In this society, the Art Strike would be a force for change, pushing the boundaries of what is possible and what is acceptable. It would be a movement that would challenge the status quo, demanding a world where art is not limited by the constraints of tradition and convention.

Artists engaged in political struggle act in two key areas: the use of their art for direct social change, and the support of political movements. Art that does not have a political agenda is likely to be seen as irrelevant or trivial.
During martial law in Poland, artists refused to exhibit their work in state galleries, leaving the art galleries without an official culture. For months the art galleries were empty. Eventually some mediocre artists were dis- covered who were prepared to tolerate the official art and its spirit; and their work was shown. The Polish intelligentsia immediately organized an effective boycott of openings, denying the art an audience and the bureaucracy any credibility.


It is not a matter of realizing the Art Strike, or even building on the Festival of Fulfillment. What that hitherto could only be an art strike memory, or an illusion, dreamt and preserved unconsciously. The Art Strike will force the closing of galleries, "modern" art museums, agencies, "alternative" art spaces, periodicals, theaters, art schools, etc.—all the educational, distributional, and critical mechanisms by which art both as an ideology and as a commodity is propagated.

SM: It must be hard to convince artists or anyone else that going on strike is a good idea.

WE: Well, the Art Strike is not a good idea. It's a bad idea from the point of view of anyone trying to make a career out of art. It's a bad idea from many perspectives, and that does make things a bit more difficult, even though our organization as an Art Strike are completely different from Gustav Metzger's. We're addressing a far broader range of issues than Metzger and unlike him we don't necessarily think the mechanics of a strike to operate in the same way within the realm of culture as they would in the economic sphere. Rather than attempting to disrupt and destroy institutions which effect production and distribution of art products, the 1990 Art Strike is principally focused on the role of the artist—from the art world onto his or her identity, on how that identity affects the artist's ability to engage with the surrounding culture.

SM: So, Art Strike is a bad idea and it's not really what it says it is. It's not really a strike against the gallery system or the commodity system.

KE: We've had endless discussions about the appropriateness of the term "strike," about its efficacy in this situation. At some time we tried to change the name to "Refusal of Creativity" but this phrase just didn't catch on. We found that people responded to the term. "Art Strike" seems to bring together ideas from what are traditionally considered to be two autonomous realities—the economic and the cultural. In the syphilis paradigm, when economics has had an influence on our thinking, the strike is ultimately the means of revolution—far more is at issue than a simple beauty-wages increase. As far as we're concerned, the Art Strike is a strike. It's a denial of a product and a denial of labor. Like the syndrome of the master strike, the issues being discussed range from the destruction of all that is regarded as art.

SM: I doubt if the 1985 strike will be remembered. Because they have lost their value of our culture. It can only be a quotation of history, a substitute for something that has ceased to exist.

THE STRIKE (1985)

In 1985, when the PRAKIS group declared their intention to organize an Art Strike for the period of 1990—1993, it resolved the question of whether members of this group should do with their time for the five-year period leading up to the strike. This period has been characterized by an ongoing struggle against the received culture of the ruling society (and has been physically manifested in the adoption of multiple identities such as Karen Eileen and the organization of events such as the Festival of Fulfillment). What the organization of the Art Strike left unresolved was how members of PRAKIS and their supporters should use their time over the period of the strike. Thus, the strike was positioned in a clear opposition to closure—for every "problem" it has "resolved" at least one new "problem" has been "created."
Open Letter to Labor Servicing the Culture Industry
I’ve worked as an art handler in New York, both as a freelancer and on the payroll with benefits. The two modes of handling art both share the constant threat of losing one’s job if any mistakes are made or if any hesitation to accommodate what is requested—or more often expected—is revealed. Freelancing is less and more stressful. Freelancing allows for a lifestyle where literally 10–14 hour days (like many others, I’ve done 16ers, some overnigh ters) can be packed into a week during an exhibition change, with weeks off to “focus on one’s own work.” Constantly flirting with poverty, as most freelancers are, a seemingly large chunk of money is obtained that vanishes rather quickly after coping with the realities of New York rent. A pattern emerges after freelancing for a while where the free time is often spent worrying and networking for the next job. Cultures develop over a period of time amongst crews. They get to know each other and the people who staff the gallery full time, but when the gig is over, so is the connection to the gallery or the museum. God forbid a freelancer come down with the flu or something worse; if you don’t work, you don’t get paid. The freelancer also has to be always accommodating and ready to work when the phone rings. If not, the phone may not ring again. Freelancers are constantly juggling the phone ringing too much, overbooking and having to say no; or more often, the phone doesn’t ring enough. Freelancers expend a lot of time and energy (labor) in a constant hustle when they are not presently working. A certain degree of satisfaction and camaraderie can come from working on a crew to pull off an insanely large installation under pressure in a short period of time, but at the end of the day, in spite of his/her specialized skill, in spite of the fact that most hold MFAs (that they’ve taken on a lifetime of debt for), the freelance art handler is the lowest rung on the ladder of the art world, barely worthy of eye contact.

The next lowest rung is probably the gallery attendant, or rather, the receptionist at the front desk. They have the thankless tasks of answering phones, sitting at the front desk, on display themselves, dealing with the public all day, tolerating lechy tailored old men wearing too much cologne, and taking whatever kind of abuse the director gives them for whatever reason he or she feels a whim to dole out. In all of the galleries I’ve worked for and most I visit, women usually hold this job. Obviously, I can’t speak from experience but only by what I’ve observed. Leaving Chelsea one night this past February, I overheard a conversation between two receptionists from a gallery on my street sharing a smoke. One woman was talking about how a friend of hers had to quit another gallery without giving notice because she couldn’t deal with the abuse she was getting, and how she was under constant scrutiny about how she was dressed. The other woman said, “Yeah, it’s usually not like that here, but sometimes it is. I’m really not looking forward to the Armory.” I can’t count
how many times I’ve heard some version of that conversation in New York. Both of these women, like most I’m aware of who work reception in New York galleries, were attractive and dressed very well. Most likely at about 17.9% APR. I’ve rarely worked more than a few weeks in a gallery without seeing a receptionist brought to tears by the abuse of a director. Many of these receptionists hold Master’s degrees in art history. They tend to make salaries in the mid 30’s with dental and health benefits. They are all one forgotten phone message or bad outfit away from getting on someone’s last nerve and either having their shitty job become a total living hell or simply taken away.

Debatable for that same low spot on the ladder as the receptionist, is the full-time art handler. The full-time art handler actually has quite a lot of administrative responsibility as well as the physical tasks of hanging and installing art, patching and painting walls, changing light bulbs and tubes, trouble shooting electronic equipment, emptying trash, sweeping the floor, and cleaning trash from the front of the gallery in the morning. The art handler also has to manage the crates. They have to be opened and have their contents inspected. Theoretically, if a damaged work is received from a truck and the driver has left before the crate has been opened and inspected, the art handler is responsible for the damage. The contents of the crates, the art works, have to be entered into the database, and the status of the works—sold, on site, or in storage—has to be accurately maintained. The lines between registrar and art handler get blurred with these tasks. In most large galleries, there are viewing rooms where installations and hangings have to be made at very short notice when a director arranges a meeting with a collector to view something from the inventory. It’s all quite high pressure, and when the pressure dies down, there are plenty of menial janitorial tasks to make sure no one should become idle. Full-time art handlers also usually have MFAs. They tend to make in the mid 30’s to low 40’s with health and dental benefits. They’re all a misplaced crate, a damaged work, a dead light bulb, or a dealer’s forgetting to take his Welbutrin for a few days away from being fired.

There are also warehouses and museums, which depend on such workers to carry out their business. Some museums are—or at least they have been—mindful to hire more equal amounts of men and women to conduct the exhibition changes. Breaks and lunches are scheduled at a consistent time. Overtime is presented as an option to take, but there are no benefits. I’ve worked with guys who have done this long enough to go grey; some have limps or other ailments. The skills they have are a very specialized form of labor developed over a significant period of time. They’ve built a career out of working show change to show change. There is no 401k or any
other type of safety net waiting for these folks. And what about the receptionist? How long can she go on sitting behind the desk? It seems she either finds some way to move up to an assistant director position, or she goes back to school or back to wherever she came from.

And then there are the TAs and the adjuncts. Earning more “cultural capital” within the realm of the arts than those working in the institutions of exhibition and sale but obscenely lower wages. I was a TA in an Ivy League institution and made 9 bucks an hour. I got very lucky and landed a year-long visiting assistant professor gig at a private university right out of school for an academic year and earned just over 5 grand a semester. I taught in a really fantastic sculpture program at a state university and earned under $1,900 dollars for each semester. While I was teaching, I would juggle freelance work to survive. I also would make a point to stay late on days of my classes to make time for every student. I would conduct independent study courses with some, primarily out of my love for the work but also in an attempt to gain more experience to better position myself for the elusive tenure-track job. I do have a few colleagues who have somehow managed to secure a tenure-track position complete with benefits, but most who continue to adjunct are constantly hustling, juggling other jobs, and constantly looking beyond the semester they are working in, trying to sniff out the next job and vying for it against enormous competition.

In art school, primarily during the course of my undergraduate work, I got two messages regarding the professional life outside of school.

One was a Romantic sort of ideal about staying focused on my work. Just keep my head down, keep cranking it out, no matter what life hands me (in spite of financial need or the need for medical care), just keep working and I would find myself able to support myself autonomously. Basically I would learn how to shit gold. On the other hand, I was told I would probably be hungry a lot, that it would be difficult for a long, long time, that there are no teaching jobs (which is mostly true), and that I better develop some skills I could live on. Graduate school was presented as a must-do for an artist but also as the place where one would “figure it all out.” When I got to graduate school, I did make a lot of work at the time. Some of it I felt good about, but there was no guidance or real discussion as to how to survive once we got out. By the end of the first year, I was noticing a hyper-awareness as to who was getting “picked up” by which gallery and who was showing in what group show. While no one would admit it at the time (many of my friends have since fessed up to it), it created a greater sense of neurotic competition and anxiety. By the end of my second year of graduate school, expressions of disappointment over awards were being vocalized (along with sentiments bordering on despair) of not knowing what to do to
survive and still have the time and means to focus on one’s work. It was around this
time that I became aware of and started participating in attempting to organize for
GESO (Graduate Employees and Student Organization), which aimed to organize
all of the graduate students of the university and secure a union contract. While
there were strikes and walkouts, the union was ultimately, narrowly voted down
and did not secure a contract for graduate student/employees to be able to bargain
collectively for better pay, benefits and a real position, as it was the graduate stu-
dents who were taking on the largest teaching loads, outside of the school of art. I
started imagining what a labor union in the art world, and greater culture industry
might look like (as it does in the film, television, and theater industries) as I was be-
ing organized and attempting to organize other students around the vision of what
a university with unionized graduate employees might look like.

I left school and came to New York—along with pretty much everyone else from
my program and every other MFA program on the east coast—and hunkered down
to figure out how to survive. The thought of a union for artists and/or art workers
quickly faded. When I would score jobs, I would just feel grateful to be working
(no matter how insane or abusive the person or organization I was working for) at
a rate of 15 to 20 bucks an hour. The people I worked next to were
all in the same boat I was. I landed what I thought was a nice job as a
gallery attendant/security guard for a small private collection. Three
days a week, 24 dollars an hour. At first it was great; no one ever came
in, allowing me plenty of time for reading, writing, and working in
my sketchbook. After about six months of no one coming in, the managing director
decided it would be a good idea for us to start cleaning and moving books and boxes
around in the basement storage, just to keep us busy. I missed being able to read,
but I didn’t mind pushing a broom around or scrubbing elevator doors because the
pay seemed good and it was only three days a week. The menial tasks became more
frequent, and the director grew more and more erratic, condescending, and ma-
nipulative. I felt hooked on the job because, while it was deadly boring—as was the
collection—and the managing director was becoming a full-blown psychotic, I was
just getting by on three days a week. My co-workers were all a decade or so older
than I, and they had been in New York for a long time. There was always shared
bitching between us about how boring the job was or what an unjust prick the di-
rector had become (he’d taken to reminding each and everyone of us we’d be fired
if mistakes were made), but my coworkers kept repeating that there were very few
opportunities this good for artists, and most places were “so much worse” (which
I’d found to be at least partly true). There were two people I worked with whom I
liked and learned from a lot; one got out after just over a year, the other ended up
sticking around another three after my three years. There was, after all no better job for an artist in New York.

And the truth is, when I would talk to my other peers about what I did for my rent money, it was often met with a reaction of jealousy. “Dude, you should never quit that job!” While it was true that the hourly wage was close to double what some people I knew were making, when I would talk about the job over beers or whatever with friends, I wouldn’t talk about the parts where I was scrubbing a freight elevator door that was never used. I never talked about how I didn’t have health insurance, and how one trip to the ER put me in more serious debt. I wouldn’t talk about having to sweep up condoms in front of the building in the morning or washing the windows, and I never talked about what a moody, constantly insulting prick I was taking orders from. The prick that held my ability to pay rent over my head. He made the half-joke of “You’ll get fired” all the time. In spite of my being able to make rent in only three days a week, I was still scrambling all the time. I had a studio but rarely had the money to make the work I wanted to, so I still had to hustle for freelance work to get my own work done. In 2006, an opportunity to do a residency and teach in Europe for a few months came up, and I took it. While there, I was treated well financially speaking, but I also was treated with basic respect that I had not found since trying to make a living in New York. That gave me some perspective.

Just looking at auction results alone will tell you there is an enormous amount of money that moves in the art world. The figures have nearly recovered from the recent crash, and the fairs are churning along at a robust pace. In spite of those large amounts of money that do move around, it takes most artists years to get access to it through their own work. Very few get to a point in their lives where they are able to fully support their lives with their own work, and most have to augment their practice through a series of jobs, flexible skills, and schedules. The adjunct jobs are hard to get, and when they are obtained, there’s never enough money with them to live on. The tenure-track job is quite rare, and usually parallels the development of one’s own work. An artist is usually supporting him/herself with their own work, and that contributes a great deal to what makes an artist eligible for a tenure-track job. Most artists and most art scholars usually have to spend some years in the industry that services the art world—that of the art handler, the receptionist, the crater, the warehouse worker, or the adjunct. Some stay there. Though most who take these jobs are very educated, at least with master’s degrees, there is an expectation that the jobs are temporary. The artist or scholar believes that he or she is in a transition and won’t be at the job or in the state of needing a job for very long. Generations of artists and scholars coming to New York and other cities in
droves with the same belief has set up an ideal situation for gallerists, warehouses, and academic art and art history departments who need labor but don’t want to invest in it like businesses in other industries do. They know there are plenty of smart, skilled workers here and plenty more coming right behind them. The reality of needing a job for most artists is not something they are inherently proud of. Artists in need of a job are on their own. As it stands right now, the collective trait amongst artists and scholars in the industry which services the art world is a shared low self-esteem with regards to what work is done to survive.

No one who has developed a career out of being an art handler or a receptionist sought out to do that. It just sort of happens. Whether or not someone is just passing through those jobs on to the next thing or they sprout roots into those jobs, there is no reason the conditions of those jobs should not be much better than they are. Much better meaning a basic standard of respect, in the form of rules against abuse. Better in the form of decent wages, and overtime presented as an option with the guarantee of increased compensation. And better in the form of healthcare, vacation time, and some sort of pension.

These improved conditions don’t and won’t just suddenly happen. They need to be fought for and secured through the formation of a union. It’s high time art-workers—especially art handlers and receptionists—unionize. It seems there is currently an attempt by TAs and adjuncts to unionize which comes and goes, but a lot more consistent, even militant, effort should be put into that, as well. Art workers are among the few remaining sources of educated indentured servants in America. But you’re renting your labor; they don’t own you. You should be treated with respect. The abuse you—many of you with advanced degrees—endure is considered “paying your dues.” That bullshit comes out of the collective low self-esteem for the work you do that allows things to keep moving in and out the door—the work that, if it were suddenly halted, would bring everything to a stop. Galleries could not operate without their administrators and laborers. Some recognize this, but most don’t. They need to be reminded. I’ve felt the fear of needing to endure the shit in order to survive and I know it’s not easy to make happen, but having a union-secured contract protects against the requirement for long hours, verbal and other forms of abuse, being fired without proven just cause, and benefits for those who don’t get them.

Galleries seem to think that their administrative staff and art handlers are insignificant and easily replaced. This is largely because it’s true. Art workers have no structure in place to protect themselves. Unionizing art-workers and adjuncts seems almost impossible. It’s a steep enough hill that it’s constantly tempting to revert to
apathy and cynicism before we even start. It’s important to keep in mind that the
notion of a 40 hour week, weekends, health and dental benefits, elimination of child
labor, women’s rights, the establishment of auto workers unions, garment-workers
unions, plumbers unions, carpenters unions, all looked like impossible hills to climb
as well.

Why is working in the realms of “culture” and academia so undervalued? Not only
by the institutions that hire, but also by the good, committed workers themselves
who will step on each other for the next available job? It’s equally worth organizing
adjuncts as it is art-workers. The work doesn’t get done without us. Some institu-
tions know this and act on it. When workers in any field collectivize and strategize
to confront management, management listens and attempts to compromise. This is
just the first step, that often rewards it’s participants with euphoria. It gets more
difficult after that, but a necessary step to make. It is worthwhile to at least imagine
what labor unions for art workers and adjuncts might look like. It’s worthwhile to
imagine how good things could possibly be, as there are more than enough examples
to point to as examples of what is bad.

What if there was a union for gallery receptionists? Perhaps if there
were a dress code, it would be made explicit in a contract and not
enforced through passive aggressive cues and insults. There could be
a budget for the clothes the gallery wanted its receptionists to dress
in. Terms of what was expected from the receptionists would be made
explicit, and they wouldn’t be expected to anticipate what was needed to be done.
What if, instead of hiring whomever for an exhibition change, a gallery had to con-
tact the union for a team of men and women to execute that change under specified
terms that included the scope of the work, how many hours would be expected
per shift, what the terms of (optional) overtime would be, while these freelancers
enjoyed benefits? Adjuncts and TAs who carry out most of the university’s work
of teaching undergraduates would be able to negotiate class sizes, compensation,
health benefits, as well as time and space for research.

Since I have been working in the art world, the subject of an art workers union
very rarely comes up, and when it does, it’s usually in the form of a joke, like “Can
we take a union break?” or it’s met with utter ridicule. The difficulty, even perhaps
improbability, of forming a union is perceived as impossibility, and a silly delusion.
Everyone needs the job they have. Everyone had to hustle and struggle to get it, and
they’re all aware of how many people are hustling and struggling, waiting to move
into their spot. A union will not come about in a form of being granted to art work-
ers. It will have to be developed, as will the solidarity amongst those who are doing
the work. There is the Freelancers Union, which has nice ads on the subway, but no one I’ve ever worked with in the art world has been a member. They have an interesting website, and appear to be an organization with mostly potential at the moment. That is one model in fact, which can be looked to and built upon, but perhaps another organization can be formed specifically for art workers. Just imagine if everyone who serviced the art world organized and suddenly and abruptly refused to work in the days leading up to Miami. What if everyone refused to move crates, refused to show up and answer phones, hang work, and patch and paint walls? It’s really worthwhile to consider what that might look like, what solidarity required to make such a strike a serious one, and how you would ensure your own protection and that of your fellow worker. The skills you have, which they depend on in a very real way, become a powerful weapon when they are withheld, or threatened to be withheld, collectively, in solidarity.

It’s definitely easier to remain disengaged, keep your head down, and bide your time. The truth is, you’re juggling these jobs in order to get to your own work. It is your own work, after all, that is going to allow you to produce yourself and allow you to make the kind of life you want for yourself. Or maybe it won’t. And what if it doesn’t? How long can you keep scraping by as an adjunct having to hustle other jobs to make rent and get to your own work? How long can you keep humping crates off of a back of a truck? How long can you sit on display at a desk answering phones? Just in case it doesn’t work out, are you going to take on another $40,000 in debt for another degree?

We all run the risk of mortifying ourselves discussing such matters; I think I’m running that risk here, now. I don’t know where to begin, apart from starting a conversation. I just think the desires many of us share for some sense of being our own masters are very well understood, exploited and taken advantage of. I sense that most of us realize this but just don’t want to say anything about it. I think our refusal to say anything about it, our refusal to organize and do anything about it is actually quite conservative—a survival reflex in response to the equally conservative impulses of a corporate ethos which adheres to the fluctuations of the market. I’m just finding this to be tiresome, and I hope if you do also, you’ll start talking about it more, thinking about what might be done to make it better, thinking about what “better” might look like, imagining how good things could possibly become real.

—written by a member of arts & labor shows
Open Letter to Artists

I participated in an audition on November 7th for performance artist Marina Abramović’s production for the annual gala of the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles. I auditioned because I wanted to participate in the project of an artist whose work I have followed with interest for many years and because it was affiliated with MOCA, an institution that I have a connection with as a Los Angeles-based artist. Out of approximately eight hundred applicants, I was one of two hundred selected to audition. Ultimately, I was offered the role of one of six nude females to re-enact Abramović’s signature work, Nude with Skeleton (2002), at the center of tables with seats priced at up to $100,000 each. For reasons I detail here—reasons which I strongly believe need to be made public—I turned it down.

I am writing to address three main points: One, to add my voice to the discourse around this event as an artist who was critical of the experience and decided to walk away, a voice which I feel has been absent thus far in the LA Times and New York Times coverage; Two, to clarify my identity as the informant about the conditions being asked of artists and make clear why I chose, up till now, to be anonymous in regards to my email to Yvonne Rainer; And three, to prompt a shift of thinking of cultural workers to consider, when either accepting or rejecting work of any kind, the short- and long-term impact of our personal choices on the entire field. Each point is to support my overriding interest in organizing and forming a union that secures labor standards and fair wages for fine and performing artists in Los Angeles and beyond.

I refused to participate as a performer because what I anticipated would be a few hours of creative labor, a meal, and the chance to network with like-minded colleagues turned out to be an unfairly remunerated job. I was expected to lie naked and speechless on a slowly rotating table, starting from before guests arrived and lasting until after they left (a total of nearly four hours. I was expected to ignore (by staying in what Abramović refers to as “performance mode”) any potential physical or verbal harassment while performing. I was expected to commit to fifteen hours of rehearsal time, and sign a Non-Disclosure Agreement stating that if I spoke to anyone about what happened in the audition I was liable for being sued by Bounce Events, Marketing, Inc., the event’s producer, for a sum of $1 million dollars plus attorney fees.

I was to be paid $150. During the audition, there was no mention of safeguards, signs, or signals for performers in distress, and when I asked about what protection would be provided I was told it could not be guaranteed. What I experienced as an auditionee for this work was extremely problematic, exploitative, and potentially abusive.

I am a professional dancer and choreographer with 16 years of experience working in the United States, Canada and Europe, and I hold a Master of Fine Arts degree in Dance from the University of California, Los Angeles. As a professional artist working towards earning a middle class living in Los Angeles, I am outraged that there are no official or even unofficial standard practice measures for working conditions, compensation, and benefits for artists and performers, or for relations between creator, performer, presenting venue and production company in regard to such highly respected and professionalized individuals and institutions such as Abramović and MOCA. In Europe I produced over a dozen performance works involving
casts up to 15 to 20 artists. When I hired dancers, I was obliged to follow a national union pay scale agreement based on each artist’s number of years of experience. In Canada, where I recently performed a work by another artist, I was paid $350 for one performance that lasted 15 minutes, not including rehearsal time that was supported by another fee for up to 35 hours, in accordance with the standards set by CARFAC (Canadian Artists Representation/Le Front Des Artistes Canadiens) established in 1968.

If my call for labor standards for artists seems out of bounds, think of the Screen Actors Guild (SAG, established 1933), the American Federation of Musicians (AFM, founded 1896), or the umbrella organization the Associated Actors and Artistes of America (the 4A’s, founded in 1919), which hold the film, theater and music industries to regulatory and best practice standards for commercial working artists and entertainers. If there is any group of cultural workers that deserves basic standards of labor, it is us performers working in museums, whose medium is our own bodies and deserve humane treatment and respect. Artists of all disciplines deserve fair and equal treatment and can organize if we care enough to put the effort into it. I would rather be the face of the outspoken artist then the silenced, slowly rotating head (or, worse, “centerpiece”) at the table. I want a voice, loud and clear.

 Abramović’s call for artists was, as the LA Times quoted, for “strong, silent types.” I am certainly strong but I am not comfortable with silence in this situation. I refuse to be a silent artist regarding issues that affect my livelihood and the culture of my practice. There are issues too important to be silenced and I just happen to be the one to speak out, to break that silence. I spoke out in response to ethics, not artistic material or content, and I know that I am not the only one who feels the way I do.

I rejected the offer to work with Abramović and MOCA—to participate in perpetuating unethical, exploitative and discriminatory labor practices—with my community in mind. It has moved me to work towards the establishment of ethical standards, labor rights and equal pay for artists, especially dancers, who tend to be some of the lowest paid artists.

The time has come for artists in Los Angeles and elsewhere to unite, organize, and work toward changing the degenerate discrepancies between the wealthy and powerful funders of art and the artists, mainly poor, who are at its service and are expected to provide so-called avant-garde, prescient content or “entertainment,” as is increasingly the case—what is nonetheless merchandise in the service of money. We must do this not because of what happened at MOCA but in response to a greater need (painfully demonstrated by the events at MOCA) for equity and justice for cultural workers.

I am not judging my colleagues who accepted their roles in this work and I, too, am vulnerable to the cult of charisma surrounding celebrity artists. I am judging, rather, the current social, cultural, and economic conditions that have rendered the exploitation of cultural workers commonplace, natural, and even horrifically banal, whether it’s perpetrated by entities such as MOCA and Abramović or self-imposed by the artists themselves.

I want to suggest another mode of thinking: When we, as artists, accept or reject work, when we participate in the making of a work, even (or perhaps especially) when it is not our own, we contribute to the establishment of standards and precedents for our cohort and all who will come after us.
To conclude, I am grateful to Rainer for utilizing her position (without a request from me) of cultural authority and respect to make these issues public for the sake of launching a debate that has been overlooked for too long. Jeffrey Deitch, Director of MOCA, was quoted in the LA Times as saying, in response to receiving my anonymous email and Rainer’s letter, “Art is about dialogue.” While I agree, Deitch’s idea of dialogue here is only a palliative. It obscures a situation of injustice in which both artist and institution have proven irresponsible in their unwillingness to recognize that art is not immune to ethical standards. Let’s have a new discourse that begins on this thought.

Sara Wookey
reflection
ART WORKERS

RADICAL PRACTICE IN THE VIETNAM WAR ERA

Julia Bryan-Wilson

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA PRESS
BERKELEY LOS ANGELES LONDON
And babies?

And babies.
From Artists to Art Workers

Coalition Politics

It all started with a kidnapping. On January 3, 1969, artist Vassilakis Takis marched into New York’s Museum of Modern Art, unplugged his kinetic piece Telesculpture (1960), and retreated to the MoMA garden with the piece in hand. Although the museum owned the work, it was not, in the artist’s mind, his best or most representative work, and he had not agreed to show it in their exhibition The Machine as Seen at the End of the Mechanical Age. Takis’s protest of its inclusion without his permission became the catalyst for a wider movement. Takis, who had witnessed firsthand the student/worker revolt in Paris in May 1968, tied his individual discontent to a larger, shared perception of artists’ collective disenfranchisement with respect to art museums. He issued a flyer announcing his action as “the first in a series of acts against the stagnant policies of art museums all over the world. Let us unite, artists with scientists, students with workers, to change these anachronistic situations into information centres for all artistic activities.” The statement calls for cross-class solidarity as it envisions revitalizing the institutional spaces of art viewing. Takis’s reclamation subjected the ostensible neutrality of the art institution to scrutiny, a scrutiny that would continue in many artists’ actions over the next few years. How does art circulate in a capitalist market system, and what rights do artists have over their work once it enters the museum?

Friends and supporters quickly rallied around Takis, including fellow artists affili-
ated with the Howard Wise Gallery such as Wen-Ying Tsai, Tom Lloyd, Len Lye, Farman, and Hans Haacke. Many of these artists, including Takis, pursued technologically oriented art—hence, perhaps, the urgent need to unite “artists with scientists.” Other concerned artists and critics soon joined the cause, including Carl Andre, John Perreault, Irving Petlin (who was central to the organizing efforts of the Los Angeles Peace Tower in 1966), Rosmarie Castoro, Max Kozloff, Lucy Lippard, and Willoughby Sharp. Together, they adopted a group name—the Art Workers’ Coalition (AWC). Within a few months, the AWC was busy telegraphing the need for comprehensive changes throughout the New York art world.

The name Art Workers’ Coalition drew upon several precedents. For one, it echoed the venerable Art Workers Guild, established in England in 1884 as an outgrowth of William Morris’s Arts and Crafts movement, which had sought to reinvigorate handcrafting as a part of an explicitly socialist project to dealienate labor. Despite the similarity in name, the two groups had little in common; many artists in the AWC emphasized their lack of conventional craftsmanship, either by making conceptual art or by having their minimal sculptures made by professional fabricators. A more immediate precedent was found in the Black Emergency Cultural Coalition, formed in 1968 in New York to protest the Metropolitan Museum of Art’s Harlem on My Mind show. This group, whose members had some overlap with the AWC, had recently employed the language of the coalition (and the use of the term emergency would later feed into the Emergency Cultural Government of 1970, discussed in Chapter 3). The AWC positioned itself not as a guild, association, committee, or ensemble but as a provisional coalition of disparate individuals. With that moniker, it thrust artistic labor and a tendentious and tenuous collectivity to the center of its identity.

This book is not a chronological history of the AWC; instead, I focus specifically on how, though it has been seen primarily as a vehicle for artists’ antiwar organizing and struggles against racism and sexism, this group critically transformed the meaning of art work in the late 1960s and early 1970s. (Ironically, racism and sexism would become insurmountable internal problems leading to the demise of the coalition.) There are competing accounts of this organization, and I provide only a brief outline of its salient activities here. Its narrative is especially complicated given the many inconsistencies that attend the term art worker—not least, artists’ incompatible moves to identity with and distance themselves from “the workers,” a category itself under great pressure at this time. Primary among the AWC’s ambitions was the public redefinition of artists and critics as workers: these art workers asserted that their practices were located within specific social relations, subject to economic
imperatives and exacting psychic costs. In some cases, artists took this literally and asserted that their practices were governed by the power differentials (and exploitation) inherent to the rules of employment within the capitalist West. For others, the recognition that art was work had more metaphoric weight and was a move of empowerment rather than degradation; work signified serious, valuable effort. (Like so many aspects of “work,” these differences were informed by gender.)

As much as it means to signal synthesis or hybridity, I argue that the term art worker would present an intractable conflict in that it connected art to work while also removing artists from labor’s specific class formations.

After Takis’s kidnapping of his sculpture, the AWC issued a preliminary list of demands, many of which emphasized concerns about artists’ rights to control their work, including “copyrights, reproduction rights, exhibition rights, and maintenance responsibilities.” (Haacke collaborated with Lloyd and Andre to draft this communiqué.) The artists also requested a conversation with the director of MoMA to discuss museum reform; when that failed to happen, they held their own meeting on April 10, 1969, at the School of Visual Arts, extending an invitation to many categories of art workers beyond visual artists, including “photographers, painters, sculptors . . . museum workers . . . choreographers, composers, critics and writers” (Fig. 3). This early document, with its old-fashioned cartoon figure, its two small, clip-art pointing hands, and its use of outdated fonts to mimic the look of a circus flyer, is reminiscent of the work of Fluxus. Though Fluxus might have offered a recent, local precedent for collective artistic activity in New York, within a few months

such a deliberately anachronistic aesthetic would largely disappear, to be replaced by posters and placards that largely used only text and resonated with the minimal and conceptual practices of many in the coalition. This flyer’s faux-naïf design indicates that the stark, language-based look later favored by the AWC had not yet developed.

Several hundred attended the meeting, and over seventy speakers read statements, which addressed artists’ rights along with the Vietnam War, racism, and sexism. Transcripts of the speeches read at the meeting—the “Open Public Hearing on the Subject: What Should Be the Program of the Art Workers Regarding Museum Reform, and to Establish the Program of an Open Art Workers’ Coalition”—varied in tone, from mild reforms such as having artists serve on museum boards, to suggestions for overhauling the art press, to revolutionary demands to dissolve all private property. Institutional inclusion and access were consistent themes, as some artists called for Black and Puerto Rican representation in museums and others repudiated the corrupt market system. While many spoke of the potential power of artists coming together for a common cause, gushing sentiments of solidarity did not pour forth from every quarter. Feminist artist Anita Steckel castigated the critics in the meeting for not reviewing her shows. She ending her rant by turning on her fellow art workers: “J’accuse, baby!”

Although the AWC had no aesthetic agenda and included artists who worked in a range of styles, from Leon Golub’s figurative paintings to Haacke’s systems art to Andre’s minimal sculpture, the notion of the art worker offered artists an up-to-date, politically relevant model of identity. It enflamed New York artists as they organized for change in the art world and in the wider public sphere. The diverse participants at the open hearing included Andre, Robert Barry, Gregory Battcock, Selma Brody, Frederick Castle, Mark di Suvero, Hollis Frampton, Dan Graham, Alex Gross, Haacke, Robert Hot, Joseph Kosuth, Sol LeWitt, Lippard, Tom Lloyd, Barnett Newman, Lil Picard, Faith Ringgold, Theresa Schwarz, Seth Siegelaub, Gene Swenson, and Jean Toche (this is by no means a comprehensive list). Many were prominent minimalists and conceptualists (including Andre, Barry, Graham, Haacke, Kosuth, and LeWitt) and their curatorial and critical champions (Battcock, Lippard, Siegelaub). Several speeches at the open hearing, such as the one by Graham, emphasized that conceptualism might be one way out of the relentless marketing of art, and questions about autonomy, decommodification, and authorship raised by minimalism and conceptualism fed the antiestablishment ethos of the AWC.

Through the AWC, artists asked basic questions about their working conditions, in particular the uses and misuses of their artworks that they claimed rights over even
when the objects were no longer under their material ownership. Art’s very mobility leaves it open to multiple reframings; some artists sought to thwart the potentially less-than-ideal circumstances of reception by ceasing to make objects (or “products”) or by creating only site-specific installations. Artists sought guarantees that might allay their fears about losing control of their works, financially and otherwise. In 1971 AWC member Siegelaub, along with Robert Projansky, formulated an artists’ rights contract, still used by a few artists, most notably Haacke, granting artists some financial protection in the reselling of their work. With the contract, “The Artist’s Reserved Rights Transfer and Sale Agreement,” art was increasingly folded into the category of intellectual property.

In addition, art workers increasingly understood the social and political, not just economic, value of their art. They became aware of how their art circulated, its symbolic and ideological “use” that challenged previous claims of its autonomy. Many art workers felt that as image makers in a time of war dominated by images they might have something unique to offer the antiwar movement. John Perreault, in his statement for the open hearing, said, “We cannot merely follow the techniques of the New Left or the students. These may offer inspiration, but as artists we are in a position to provide new examples for other groups by developing more effective methods of protest.” Some became frustrated by the AWC’s lack of interest in these “more effective” protests and formed action-based splinter groups and committees, such as the Guerrilla Art Action Group (GAAG), the Art Strike, the Emergency Cultural Government, and Women Artists in Revolution (all discussed in the chapters that follow).

The open hearing was more than an airing of grievances about museum reform. One of the most extreme, idiosyncratic statements came from Lee Lozano: “For me there can be no at revolution that is separate from a science revolution, a political revolution, an education revolution, a drug revolution, a sex revolution, or a personal revolution. I cannot consider a program of museum reforms without equal attention to gallery reforms and art magazine reforms which would eliminate stables of artists and writers. I will not call myself an art worker but rather an art dreamer and I will participate only in a total revolution simultaneously personal and public.” Read as a foreshadowing of her General Strike Piece, which announced her total withdrawal from the art world, this brief paragraph lays out a vision of a revolution so total that it encompasses almost every sphere of life, and it echoes the feminist calls to erase the distinction between the personal and the political. It also highlights an uneasy dynamic of the AWC and its offshoots, which, though they included many of the ris-
ing stars of an increasingly consolidating art industry and art press—Andre, Morris, Haacke, and Lippard among them—also envisioned the eradication of that industry. Lozano’s denunciation of the term *art worker* in favor of *art dreamer* signals a model of individual rather than collective transformation; she soon followed through with her promise and abandoned art making altogether.

Those at the open hearing adopted a platform of thirteen demands, circulated as a point of debate, revision, and departure during the next few years. The demands—including planks about greater racial and gender diversity within museums—demonstrate how the question of artists’ rights and control over their work in the institution moved rapidly into other activist concerns. From the original issue of museum display, the AWC moved to taking on the war and became the primary anti–Vietnam War outlet for New York artists. The leap between these two issues was not all that great, as artists became concerned with how art was used for ideological and economic ends within a larger political system in which museums served a central role. Disgust with the museum “system” was at the very heart of the AWC, and art institutions were a logical target in artists’ eyes, especially because of their powerful boards of trustees that had members like the Rockefellers. (David and Nelson Rockefeller both served on the MoMA board of trustees; Nelson was at the time the Republican governor of New York State.) The artists and writers of the AWC felt they were waging not only local battles about artists’ rights but battles of global significance. As action artist Jean Toche said succinctly, “To fight for control of the museums is also to be against the war.”

The AWC insistence on “democratizing” museums took several forms. For one, the group called for greater transparency and a larger voice in museum policies such as exhibition schedules and acquisitions. They also wanted to extend the public’s access to the museum and demanded free admission for all. To that end, conceptual-
ist Kosuth designed a forged AWC “annual pass” to MoMA in order to subvert the usual procedures of paid museum admissions (Fig. 4). Drawing on his skills as a word-based artist, Kosuth mimicked the look of a museum pass and emblazoned it with an official-looking stamp reading “Art Workers Coalition” where an individual’s name would usually go, affirming the collective identity of the group. This hijacked pass turned the bureaucracy against itself, appropriating the pass to assert art workers’ declared right to free entry. Mirroring Kosuth’s own linguistic, word-focused art, the card demonstrates that while conceptual art is sometimes cast as unconcerned with functionality, artists in the AWC used their conceptual toolbox to hammer out activist, interventionist objects.

Many of the AWC protests and activities focused on the art world’s racist exclusions. Some agitated for a special Martin Luther King Jr. wing of MoMA, to be dedicated to Black and Puerto Rican artists; others advocated the decentralization of art institutions, calling for branches in Harlem and elsewhere. In one photograph of such a protest in 1970, Lloyd’s son holds a toy gun as a picketer behind him wields a sign that reads, “Racist MoMA!” (Fig. 5). Although softened by his smile and the small scale of the fake gun, the child’s stance recalls images of the militant branch of the Black Power movement, the Black Panthers, a reminder that the politics of racial inclusion had serious stakes and was viewed at the time as connected to revo-
olutionary possibilities. Many photos of AWC protests include family members; these intergenerational demonstrations indicate that it was a training ground not only for artists, writers, and museum workers but for their children, though, as the chapter on Lippard details, the “work” of parenting was not always acknowledged as such.

The AWC was decidedly anarchic in its organization—it had no elected leaders and no set agendas, just meetings on Monday nights generally held at alternative spaces. Ideologically it was also all over the map. Was it merely “middle-class trade unionist”? Or was it subversive, with the potential to “make or break the museum and the entire art world”? Some in the AWC felt that museums should “use their political influence in matters concerning the welfare of artists, such as rent control for artists’ housing, legislation for artists’ rights.” They idealistically proposed a system of universal wages for all artists, to be paid out of a fund generated by the resale value of the art of dead artists. Many within the group believed that by demolishing the art market they would help inaugurate total revolution. As art critic Gene Swenson cried in 1970, “Institutions have already begun to tremble at our mild demands, our thirteen points. Let the state wither away. We have only begun.” Recognizable in these complex, contradictory claims are both a reformist and a revolutionary drive. These factions inevitably came into conflict with each other.

Over the next two years, AWC members undertook many protests, including parades, vigils, and performances urging museums to take a public stand on the Vietnam War. In 1969 they asked MoMA to co-sponsor an antiwar poster that would become the iconic image of the New York art Left in this era (Plate 2). This poster was developed by a subcommittee of the AWC after the U.S. massacre of civilians at My Lai was revealed. It reproduces Ron Haeberle’s photograph of dead women and children on a dirt road with a superimposed, blood-red text, typed in the classic newspaper font—“Q: And babies? A: And babies”—a snippet drawn from a television interview by Mike Wallace with the army officer Paul Meadlo. The poster appropriates two forms of journalistic coverage, documentary photography and televisual utterance, to graphically illustrate the war’s casual attitude to the loss of life.

In the end, the museum did not support the poster financially or otherwise, and the AWC printed and distributed it without their assistance. (Though careful to use a union printing shop, the art workers were rudely reminded of their political distance from other types of workers when many in the shop were openly hostile to the project.) The incident with MoMA disheartened many within the AWC who felt that the museum had yielded to board members’ political pressure, in particular the objections of CBS president William S. Paley. As the most important museum for con-
temporary art and as a former employer of many art workers who had worked there as pages, clerks, and guards (including LeWitt and Lippard), the one “closest to [their] hearts,” the MoMA became the primary target for antiwar actions. In January 1970, art workers held a protest in front of Picasso’s Guernica. Members of the action-oriented AWC offshoot GAAG clustered together in front of the painting holding the poster, drawing parallels between U.S. crimes like My Lai and the bombing of innocents during the Spanish Civil War while also sharpening the distinction between the large, painted mural and the freely given protest posters (Fig. 6). The two artists in the center of this photograph—Lloyd and Toche—hold the poster nearly flush against the surface of the painting, stretched between their extended arms. It hovers just above the fist of the fallen soldier—the same figure that appeared in the Peace Tower—and the artists’ hands, gripping the corners of the paper, echo its grasping clutch.

While the demonstration claims that the Vietnam war crime grimly reflects Guernica’s carnage, the poster’s visual relationship to the painting is one of inversion rather than symmetry. Picasso’s muted palette of gray shades emphasizes a shardlike fragmentation of the bodies, some of which hurl across the space to flee the destruction. Its jumble of broken and upright figures stands in contrast to the full-color yet tragically inert, dead villagers depicted in the photograph. In addition to wielding their posters, the protesters placed funeral wreaths under the painting, and Joyce Kozloff
sat down on the ground, holding her eight-month-old baby in her arms; his live body was meant to vivify the dead children in the poster. In the wake of their disappointment to have MoMA co-sponsor the And Babies poster, the AWC unsuccessfully petitioned Picasso to remove Guernica from MoMA until the Vietnam War ended. This use of the painting as both a metaphoric and a literal backdrop says much about the art workers’ strained relationship to the politics and aesthetics of the historic, modernist avant-garde. The term avant-garde, viewed as antiquated and irrelevant, had largely fallen into disrepute among U.S. leftist artists by the late 1960s. Picasso’s failure to heed the art workers’ boycott all but confirmed such a devaluation; as art historian Paul Wood has observed, by 1970 the integrity and prestige associated with avant-garde status had all but evaporated.

While conducting antiestablishment protests, the AWC also went through conventional channels to secure its goals. In 1969 it received a $17,000 grant from the Rockefeller Brothers Fund and the New York State Council of the Arts “for research activities in order to establish Community Cultural Centers in eight black and Spanish speaking and poor sectors of greater New York.” The grant was refused, yet the irony of seeking Rockefeller money—associated with companies manufacturing military munitions and with Gov. Rockefeller’s prowar views—is striking, and this recourse to such grant money was deemed unsavory, as demonstrated by an AWC-designed flyer featured a hand-drawn, fake bill—“One Blood Dollar”—that substituted an image of Rockefeller in the place of George Washington (Fig. 7). “Not valid for Black, Puerto Rican, or Female Artists,” and “All power to the museums!” read its disclaimers; the bill is signed by Henry Geldzahler (curator at the Metropolitan Museum) and Paley (chief of CBS and MoMA trustee). The collusion between state and cultural power is summed up in this satire, and it illustrates the AWC’s persistent complaints about art museums: their exclusionary practices, their corporate affiliations, and their elitist management. Although the “blood dollar” caricature is itself part of a long lineage of older forms of activist art such as political cartooning, one persistent claim of this book is that art workers’ protest documents such as posters, placards, and flyers were frequently in dialogue with their evolving aesthetic forms.

By 1971 applying for Rockefeller’s money was unthinkable, and museum boards were further cast as the art worker’s enemy. An AWC flyer issued in the wake of the Attica prison riots of 1971, which ended with a bloody attack by the New York state police, expressed the artists’ anger: “We demand that the butcher of Attica resign as a trustee from the Museum of Modern Art. It is a mockery that Rockefeller supports the arts. It is intolerable that Rockefeller uses the art of the 20th century to gild his
prison.” A poster for a demonstration was more succinct and pointed to the governor’s power in both state policy and the museum: “At Attica and at the Modern, Rockefeller calls the shots” (Plate 3). The black and white text is placed on a dark ground splattered with bloody red bullet wounds. With its almost abstract-expressionist use of paint, this poster mimics a gestural brush stroke to drive its point home. It seems to ask: What better visual language than repurposed action painting is there to address, and attack, MoMA, the very temple of such painting’s sanctification?

Along with its anti-institutional and antiwar demonstrations, the AWC had a significant proto-union component that should not be discounted; members voted to form a union on September 23, 1970.26 In lieu of support from private monies such as the Rockefellers, art workers were at a loss for how best to generate the wages they agitated for. Their somewhat untenable ideas on this matter were not lost on skeptical commentators. When the AWC demanded subsidies for universal employment, Hilton Kramer queried, “From what untainted sources should the necessary funds be drawn? The Federal Government, which is conducting the war in Vietnam?”27 This question had no satisfactory answer, though some looked seriously to artist’s guilds in countries such as Holland and Denmark as models. As art critic and AWC member Alex Gross wrote, “It may be that a free-wheeling undogmatic artists’ union of the type that has existed in Holland for the last 25 years may provide a few optimistic answers for the future.”28 Many tensions accompanied this drive, not only because the underlying convictions of AWC were notoriously heterogeneous, but also given the New Left’s contentious, sometimes strained, relationship with union labor.

Further, the AWC emerged in a distinct political and economic climate: art workers saw their organizing as countering the corrupt free-market capitalism of the United States. The international artists’ unions (which also existed in many eastern
European countries like Poland) that interested Gross, however, flourished in socialist climates or under the aegis of state-funded arts programs that provided wages for artists. Some members of the AWC at the time who called for unionizing poorly understood these structural differences, and it is doubtful that they would have been interested in adhering to the requirements that can come with such state support. Still, others, such as Swenson, with his desire for the state to “wither away,” advocated for the full-scale transformation of the United States toward such socialism. The formation of a progressive artists’ union seemed to many to potentially herald—if not actively catalyze—that change.

Paradoxically, it was primarily those artists who did not “work” in the conventional sense—minimalists, whose work was made in factories; performance/action artists, who did not make objects; and conceptualists, whose work was dematerialized and did not evidence traditional skills—who gestured toward affiliation with blue-collar workers. As my case studies demonstrate, this tension shadowed the identity of the AWC throughout its history. Some in the coalition sought to align themselves with union labor and demonstrated for artist/worker solidarity—as in the March 18, 1970, protest supporting the postal workers’ strike, which included GAAG co-founder Toche and Gross (Fig. 8).29 Toche, an emissary from the community of art workers, holds a flyer that places the words “Support Postal Workers Strike” next to an image of J. M. Flagg’s 1917 poster of Uncle Sam, shorn from its familiar context of military recruitment. According to Toche, such a public protest was central to his larger project to move the AWC away from its art world focus into the realm of “on the street” labor politics; his invitation for the postal workers to join the art workers’ museum demonstrations, was not, however, reciprocated.30

Toche’s and Gross’s show of support was somewhat unusual, as many art workers, and U.S. leftists more generally, were in the process of abandoning long-held ideas about the revolutionary potential of workers. Influenced by thinkers like C. Wright Mills and Herbert Marcuse, Tom Hayden’s “Port Huron Statement” of 1962 (the seminal manifesto of the New Left) bemoans “indifferent” rank-and-file unionists and the “quiescent labor movement.”31 Both Mills and Marcuse urged the Left away from its union roots; Marcuse, for his part, saw organized labor sharing “the same stabilizing, counterrevolutionary needs of the middle classes.”32 The working class, seduced by what Marcuse termed “one-dimensional society,” which “delivers the goods, guns and butter, napalm and color TV,” had turned into a conservative force seeking to preserve its materialistic way of life.33 Marcuse was chastised for his “crabby elitism” when it came to blue-collar labor; many labor historians insisted that work-
ers were not “one-dimensional” but “varied, dynamic, contradictory.” Hayden, like many in the New Left, recognized the importance of coalitions of students and labor and saw great promise for reinvigorating the labor movement if it could become responsive to the needs of black workers.

Still, in 1969 Carl Oglesby, then president of Students for a Democratic Society, wrote, “‘You are nothing without the workers,’ advises a grand old revolutionary warhorse who won the colors in the anti-fascist resistance . . . [who] cannot fathom why his sons should now say, ‘who precisely are they?’” Who were the workers? Oglesby answers his own question, saying, “The composition of the work force has been significantly altered by the massive assimilation of industry and technology. Students and workers are from now on one and the same. . . . The factory of the postindustrial state is the multiversity. Students are now the working class.” In fact, leftist art workers often turned to students as their models; in 1970 Lawrence Alloway noted that the AWC was “in spirit closer to student protest than to earlier artists’ commitment to communism.” In resonance with this trend, some art workers distanced themselves from blue-collar labor by embracing “deskilled” art or turning to scholarly methods such as data gathering.

The AWC dissolved after less than three years, partly because of its inability to recognize structural inequalities—including racism and sexism—in its own organization. “By the end of 1971,” wrote Lippard, “the AWC had died quietly of exhaustion, back-

**FIGURE 8** Jean Toche (left) and Alex Gross (right) supporting the New York postal worker strike, March 18, 1970. Photograph © Jan van Raay.
lash, internal divisions . . . and neglect by the women, who had turned to our own interests.”

Haacke further reflected back on the short-lived nature of the AWC, proclaiming that the individualistic nature of Western art making was at odds with collective organizing. He commented on the group’s pronounced, and fatal, lack of “coherence of ideas”: “What one wants, the other objects to strenuously; e.g. one wants to destroy museums, the other wants to reform them or to use the museums as they are for his own artistic ends, and the third simply wants a piece of the pie.” Haacke’s retrospective clarity about the conflicting nature of the AWC with regard to privilege, status, and access to power maps several of its major fault lines.

The AWC’s significance extended beyond its short life span, as it brought together a disparate group of artists to rethink the role of the institution and the autonomy of art in a time of social crisis. It advocated for a host of causes, some of which have persisted, including the artists’ rights contract and the institution of museum free days. (First started in February 1970, the free day was a direct result of the art workers’ agitations.) In addition, the AWC validated artists’, critics’, and curators’ claim to the label worker; in doing so, it provided momentum for the drive to unionize museum staff. In 1971 the MoMA staff voted to form the Professional and Administrative Staff Association (PASTA), redirecting some of the organizational energies that were waning within the AWC. However, as Andrea Fraser has noted, if the AWC helped clarify these art workers’ need for a union, it also signaled the beginning of a new trend toward the professionalization of art.

Art versus Work

How is the making of a sculpture any different from the making of some other kind of commodity? At the heart of this question lies several critical issues: the division of labor under capitalism, the importance of skill or technē, the psychic rewards of making, the weight of aesthetic judgments, and the perpetually unfixed nature of the artist’s professional status since roughly the fifteenth century. The history of Western art is marked by the unstable distinction between artistic, “creative” production and the economics of “true” labor. The social value of making art has been in flux since the Renaissance, when the “author” of a work as a concept was born. The transition of art making from a mere manual occupation to an inspired vocation has been the subject of much literature, including Michael Baxandall’s key work on the separation of art from craft in the Renaissance and artists’ assumption of a specialized
class position. Objects such as paintings were no longer the products of anonymous craftsmen but the singular creations of named individuals, and artists’ earnings began to rise along with their status.

In the 1960s art workers theorized how modes of human making are affected by specific economic strictures, the aestheticization of experience, and the production of sensibilities. What makes the coherence of the phrase art worker challenging—even oxymoronic—is that under capitalism art also functions as the “outside,” or other, to labor: a nonutilitarian, nonproductive activity against which mundane work is defined, a leisure-time pursuit of self-expression, or a utopian alternative to the deadening effects of capitalism. While his writings on the matter vary over time and are by no means unified, Karl Marx’s contributions to this subject have been among the most influential. He makes many explicit connections between artistic making and labor, writing, for instance, “A writer is a productive laborer in so far as he produces ideas, but in so far as he enriches the publisher who publishes his works, he is a wage-laborer for the capitalist.”

Because of the erosion of patronage models, the artist is often more subjected to the tastes of the market and its deadening effects than other wage laborers are. This casts art not as “play” or nonwork but as another part of the capitalist division of labor. Yet Marx holds out the hope for expression or production beyond the market that might be unalienated, if still requiring skill: “Really free labor, the composing of music for example, is at the same time damned serious and demands the greatest effort.”

Drawing on Marx’s theoretical work, and prompted by a desire to make art legitimate, necessary, and meaningful, artists in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries tried to erode the distinction between art and labor by insisting that their actions, and the products of those actions, were indeed work. These efforts were often specifically socialist, even as their products ranged from high-priced luxury goods (as in the utopian craftsmanship model of William Morris) to laboratory experiments and functional design (as in the productivist art undertaken in the wake of the 1917 Russian Revolution). The Mexican muralists of the 1920s identified themselves as workers, founding the Revolutionary Union of Technical Workers, Painters, and Sculptors in 1922 and attempting to create new iconographies that would be legible to the working class.

In the 1920s and 1930s in the United States, artists formed revolutionary cultural organizations in attempts to “forge links between them and the proletariat,” as An-
drew Hemingway has phrased it. Hemingway’s nuanced account provides documentation of the ideological, economic, and social factors that led to the formation of the Artists’ Union in 1933. Having taken part in the state-funded projects of the Works Progress Administration, the artists in the Artists’ Union were literally wage laborers, and on that ground they agitated for workers’ rights and demanded better pay (Fig. 9). “Every artist an organized artist,” proclaimed the posters at a 1935 rally, featuring their signature logo in which an upraised fist wielding a paintbrush is reminiscent of the Soviet hammer and sickle. The Artists’ Union produced a newsletter (the Art Front), went on strike, and organized themselves like the industrial unions that were increasingly influential. In 1938 they voted to affiliate with the CIO. The New York branch was especially militant, demanding employment of all artists by the federal government. Taking their cues from the sit-down strikes and picket lines in the Midwest, the New York Artists’ Union held violent demonstrations to protest the steady dismantling of WPA funding by the local administrator Colonel Brehon Somervell, who “had a profound conviction that to create ‘pictures’ was not ‘work.’”

Artists in the late 1960s and early 1970s—working under distinctly different economic conditions—looked back to the 1930s as the moment of the most ardent championing of art and/as labor in the U.S. context. Robert Morris recollects a widespread interest in the Artists’ Union’s organizing efforts, citing Francis O’Connor’s recently published book Federal Support for the Visual Arts: The New Deal and Now (1969), which was circulated in the AWC. O’Connor used this study to make recommendations

to the National Endowment for the Arts regarding federal funding; lauding the WPA, the report promoted state support for the arts and countered the prevailing wisdom that such a system would necessarily impose formal restrictions on artists. Encouraged by these findings, some AWC artists supported a wage system for artists, even as the artists proved difficult to organize in any systematic way. As Lippard admitted, “Advocates of a tighter structure, of a real dues-paying union, have reason but not reality on their side.” Some art workers worried that governmental oversight would rob aesthetic production of its transgressive status. While admiring the Artists’ Union for its solidarity and collective energy, Jim Hurrell, in an article for the Artworkers Newsletter entitled “What Happened to the Artist’s Union of the 1930s?” declared that the New Deal state’s “sterile prerequisites” had defanged the art (even though, in fact, the WPA artists experienced some degree of artistic freedom in their projects). Few artists in the 1960s and 1970s wanted to return to making socialist realist works under the auspices of the state; instead they sought new forms of oppositional art that were in concert with, yet not subsumed under, their politics.

One of the legacies of Marx’s thought is his assertion that art is a mode of skilled production—a form of work—much like any other and as such is open to categories of analysis that attend to its production, distribution, and consumption. Within this rubric even purportedly “autonomous” abstraction practiced by artists of the 1940s and 1950s came under scrutiny by the art workers. As early as 1965, Barbara Rose stated that “art as a form of free expression is seen as a weapon in the Cold War.” The Left, haunted by the specter of Stalinism, had seen abstraction as one way out of doctrinaire socialist realism. By the early 1970s, however, in no small part because of the efforts of Max Kozloff, an AWC member, artists had become acutely aware of how avant-garde art in the United States had been made to serve state power abroad. According to these accounts, abstract expressionist artists, who, for some, embodied the romantic ideal of working free from the pressures of the market, had, however unwittingly, been marketed and sold as part of an ideological program in which the American government trumpeted artists’ freedom to create works seemingly unrelated to politics, in distinction to Soviet socialist realism. The Cold War era’s volatile entanglements of abstract form, ideology, and politics cast a lingering shadow on artists in the late 1960s, and some pursued “difficult” artistic practices that were consciously removed from “expression.” As witnesses to the morphing of culture into what Theodore Adorno termed “the culture industry,” art workers understood how their efforts could become caught up in regimes of commodification as well as in the larger machine of the military-industrial complex.
talization, some sought to assert art’s “unsaleability and functionlessness,” to quote Rose’s assessment of the radical promise of minimal art, while at the same time organizing as workers to puzzle through their shared role in protest culture.\(^58\)

Thus the Vietnam War–era generation of leftist artists were influenced by numerous factors, including a rejection of previous forms of artistic labor within the United States. They were also aware—if unevenly—of contemporary international developments, not least the climate of radicalism of May 1968. As Guy Debord wrote about the Situationist International: “An international association of Situationists can be seen as a union of workers in an advanced sector of culture, or more precisely as a union of all those who claim the right to a task now impeded by social conditions; hence as an attempt at an organization of professional revolutionaries in culture.”\(^59\)

Debord drew upon Marx’s conceptions of how art is itself productive, for he understood aesthetics as formative to the education of the senses—art, that is, helps creates social subjects. In fact, relatively recent translations of relevant texts by Marx emphasized the psychic effects of alienated labor, self-estrangement, and negation—useful concepts to apply to the psychologically dense act of producing art.\(^60\) One writer in 1973 provides a summary of Marx’s notions that circulated at the time: “The similarity between art and labor lies in their shared relationship to the human essence; that is, they are both creative activities by means of which man produces objects that express him, that speak for and about him. Therefore, there is no radical opposition between art and work.”\(^61\)

As T. J. Clark noted in 1973, within the fine arts, “for many reasons, there are very few images of work.”\(^62\) In the late 1960s and early 1970s, representations of work were increasingly interesting to art historians like Clark. More to the point, the question of how artistic making might be understood as a category of labor was, when Clark was writing in the early 1970s, just beginning to be thought through with rigor via the new field of social art history.\(^63\) Much of the art examined in this book does not provide easy visual proof that the artist “works” and is instead somewhat resistant to such imaging, either because the labor in question is performed by other hands or because it is primarily mental. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, that is, many laboring artistic bodies were displaced: they yielded to the body of the viewer or to the body of the installer, or they were somewhat effaced in a move toward intellectual work.

In the 1960s and early 1970s, the publication of English editions of texts by Antonio Gramsci, the influence of Debord, the importation of Frankfurt School writers such as Adorno and Marcuse, and the appearance of contemporary writings by Louis
Althusser (both in French and in translation) also drove a reevaluation of how art and labor might be considered together. Marcuse in particular exerted considerable influence on art workers. In his early writings, he fostered a utopian conception of how work might function. He believed that once erotic energies were no longer sublimated, work would be transformed into play, and play itself would be productive: “If work were accompanied by a reactivation of pre-genital polymorphous eroticism, it would tend to become gratifying in itself without losing its work content.” Moreover, in the late 1960s Marcuse turned his attention to artistic making and often explicitly connected it to his ideas about work. In books such as An Essay on Liberation and Counterrevolution and Revolt, he saw the merging of art and work as the ultimate aim of any revolution.

The class mobility conferred on artists makes for a complex story, and artists’ identification with, dependency on, and estrangement from the bourgeoisie are longstanding issues—for Renaissance art historians as well as for theorists of modern art. The artist’s ambiguous class position raises a series of questions about both art and work: How can art be a profession if there is no employer? To count as “work,” need the effort involved be paid? Need it be, as Harry Braverman has defined it in 1974, “intelligent and purposive”? What, then, does this mean for artists whose work goes, intentionally or not, unseen or unsold? Or is work simply, as Studs Terkel put it in 1972, “what people do all day”? Is “work” an activity, or is it a spatial designation, a place or site? And how does the art itself function—how does it produce meanings, representations, and social relations? What mode of production is art making, and how does it mediate between the political economy of exchanged goods and, to use Jean Baudrillard’s phrase, the “political economy of the sign”? That is, how does art, as an object and a system of signification, circulate as both commodity and sign?

Precisely these questions were at stake for artists in the 1960s and 1970s, along with others: How might art operate in and upon the public sphere, and how might it serve as a kind of political activity? What was new about the conception of the art worker was not only the turn away from an explicitly unified aesthetic but also the art workers’ almost single-minded focus on the art museum as their primary antagonist. Because artists in this period did not receive wages from a socialized state or a government program in any systematic way, they viewed the museum as the primary gatekeeper of power, prestige, and value.

By calling themselves art workers, artists in the late 1960s meant to move away from taints of amateurism (or unproductive play) and to place themselves in the larger arena of political activity. This is the connotation summoned by the British political
theorist Carole Pateman in the definition of work she offers in her 1970 book *Participation and Democratic Theory*:

By “work” we mean not just the activity that provides for most people the major determinant of their status in the world, or the occupation that the individual follows full time and that provides him with his livelihood, but we refer also to activities that are carried on in co-operation with others, that are “public” and intimately related to the wider society and its (economic) needs; thus we refer to activities that, potentially, involve the individual in decisions about collective affairs, the affairs of the enterprise and of the community, in a way that leisure-time activities usually do not.\(^\text{70}\)

Art is often understood as an essentially solitary, individual act, but Pateman’s term provides one way to configure a broader terminology for artistic identity; it also suggests that “leisure-time activities” are usually—but not always—opposed to art. Pateman’s definition of work is useful, especially as it encompasses questions of the public and of the collective.

While *labor* and *work*, as near-synonyms, are used somewhat interchangeably, it is important to recognize that they are not exact equivalents. Instructive evidence of the distinctions between the terms that operated in the late 1960s and early 1970s can be found in mainstream and scholarly texts on employment, trends in the workplace, managerial styles, and human production, from sociological studies, government reports, and congressional testimonies to trade paperbacks and business handbooks. In these texts *work* and *labor* are by no means transposable. *Work* refers to jobs and occupations in the broadest sense; *labor* designates organized labor or union politics. Two books from the era illustrate the point: one, titled *Work in America*, is a governmental report assessing employment trends, productivity, and worker satisfaction; the other, titled *Labor in America*, brings together conference papers regarding the challenges of unionization and the possibilities of raising class consciousness.\(^\text{71}\)

As Raymond William notes, *work* stands in for general doing or making, as well as all forms of paid employment, while *labor* is more explicitly affiliated with the organization of employment under capitalism. As “a term for a commodity and a class,” *labor* denotes both the aggregate body of workers as a unit and “the economic abstraction of an activity.”\(^\text{72}\) Williams further comments on the slightly outmoded and highly specialized nature of labor; the phrase *art worker*, meant to signal class affiliations even as those affiliations were frequently disavowed, thus activated a much wider sphere of activity than *art laborer* and was used to encompass current concerns such as process and fabrication.
U.S. Labor in the Late 1960s and Early 1970s

Artists were developing into art workers within a specific historical context. The late sixties and early seventies witnessed widespread uncertainty about the value of work in an emerging information-based economy, including feminist calls for pay equity and an intensification of strikes unprecedented since the 1930s. The very definitions of work and labor in the Vietnam War era were undergoing massive shifts that called their contours relentlessly into question. Labor was being stretched to encompass more and more territory (as feminists defined household chores as work, and new categories of laborers organized, such as Chicano farmworkers). By the late 1960s, moreover, attitudes toward work were changing as many young people dismissed, scorned, and otherwise devalued regular wage labor.\(^73\)

More substantive changes being wrought in global and national economies forced a reevaluation of what it meant to work, what work should look like, and who counted as a worker. From 1962 to 1969, real wages (after taxes and adjusted for inflation) dropped significantly.\(^74\) In addition, work became increasingly hard to find, as rising inflation due to the cost of the war swelled unemployment rates, especially among blacks in urban areas. Work in the United States is marked by stark gender and race inequalities. The unemployment rate in the mid-1960s for blacks was double that of whites; education levels were also lower, and proportionally twice as many blacks worked in low-paying manual or service jobs.

Nationally, agitation against labor conditions reached a boiling point at this time. In 1972 General Motors workers in Lordstown, Ohio, went on strike for twenty-two days, not to protest low wages or increase benefits, but to insist that working in factories was fundamentally inhumane. The workers objected to the punishing pace of the assembly line, GM’s push for “industrial speed-up,” and the constant monitoring and regimentation that characterized the Taylorized shop floor. In other words, they rebelled against industrial work itself. As Gary Bryner, the Lordstown union president said in 1972, “There are symptoms of the alienated worker in our plant. The absentee rate, as you said, has gone continually higher. Turnover rate is enormous. . . . [The worker] has become alienated to the point where he casts off the leadership of his union, his Government. He is disassociated with the whole establishment. That is going to lead to chaos.”\(^75\) The alarmist tone suggests that alienation at work undermines a worker’s obedience not only to factory managers and union leaders but also to the state, leading to an unraveling of society. Bryner was careful to note that this alienation stemmed from the systemic problem with factories and un-
just conditions of labor rather than from individual workers’ declining work ethic. Discontent in the workplace led to a great wave of strikes known as the Vietnam War–era “Labor Revolt.” Strike activity reached a peak unseen since the 1940s, climaxing in a dramatic number of shutdowns from 1970 to 1972. Labor historians have traced this wave of strikes to low wages and to “a widespread increase in strike-proneness” as a more strident workforce became more willing to engage in extreme actions.

Even outside organized labor, dissatisfaction with work was widespread enough to prompt a Senate subcommittee hearing in 1972 dedicated to the perceived crisis of “worker alienation.” This remarkable deployment of the Marxist concept of alienation within official U.S. governmental discourse demonstrates how widespread the language of alienation was at this time. The crisis—the threat the union leader called a brewing “chaos”—seemed all the more dangerous as it sent ripples out beyond the circle of unionized labor. Large numbers of students went on strike to protest the Vietnam War, and groups like the Chicano Moratorium demanded an end to work as usual. The strike and its cousin the moratorium extended the focus of protest from working conditions to demand nothing less than the withdrawal of citizens from the nation. As Marcuse said in 1972, “In spreading wildcat strikes, in the militant strategy of factory occupations, in the attitude and demands of young workers, the protest reveals a rebellion against the whole of working conditions imposed, against the whole performance to which one is condemned” (italics in original).

No longer did industrialization promise an end to the worker’s misery, as some had proclaimed in the immediate post–World War II era. The days of cheerily optimistic tracts such as Industrialism and Industrial Man (1960), which predicted that technology would lead to less work and more leisure for virtually the entire workforce, had passed. By the mid-1960s pessimism began to set in; with real wages declining and unemployment increasing, it was commonplace to assert that as technology took over, alienation in the workplace increased. Books like Bertell Ollman’s Alienation: Fundamental Problems of Marxism (1971) and István Mészáros’s Marx’s Theory of Alienation (1970) sharpened an interest in alienation as the central problem of capitalism.

It is not overstating the case to suggest that the popular attitude toward work in this decade was summed up in the very first sentence of Terkel’s best-selling oral history of 1972, Working: People Talk about What They Do All Day and How They Feel about What They Do: “This book, being about work, is, by its very nature, about violence—to the spirit as well as the body.” Terkel took this bleak assumption as
his starting point; in the United States in 1972, work was violence. The explicit connection between work and violence was also made in 1972 when members of a special task force, formed by Nixon’s secretary of health, education, and welfare, decried the degradation of work in America because of industrial manufacturing processes, the numbing effects of the division of labor under Taylorism, and the exclusion of both blue- and white-collar workers from decision making: “Significant numbers of American workers are dissatisfied with the quality of their working lives. Dull, repetitive, seemingly meaningless tasks, offering little challenge or autonomy, are causing discontent among workers. . . . As a result, the productivity of the worker is low—as measured by absenteeism, turnover rates, wildcat strikes, sabotage, poor-quality products, and a reluctance by workers to commit themselves to their work tasks.”

Even white-collar workers felt the toll of Taylorism as dissatisfaction permeated all levels of employment. To cite the government task force’s report: “The office today, where the work is segmented and authoritarian, is often a factory. For a growing number of jobs, there is little to distinguish them but the color of the worker’s collar: computer keypunch operations and typing pools share much in common with the automobile assembly line.” The report notes that the line between blue- and white-collar workers was porous, a comment that suggests the possibility of an unexpected alliance between different sectors of workers if they recognized their common oppression. The resistance to current conditions of work was waged on multiple fronts, from organized labor to the women’s movement, which, inflected by socialist theories, analyzed the gendering of labor and promoted nothing less than a total restructuring of everyday life. For example, feminists redefined household chores as work—possibly remunerative—and advocated for equal pay for women in the workforce.

At the bodily rather than the psychic level, workplace dangers were being exposed by Ralph Nader, who reported that in 1968 “a total of 14,300 people died in industrial accidents in our country—almost exactly the same as the number of American servicemen who died in Vietnam that year.” Because the working class was disproportionately fighting in the Vietnam War, the parallel with the wartime body count is notable. These juxtaposed statistics signaled that working-class bodies were being treated as expendable, whether they were crushed on the factory floor or gunned down in Southeast Asia.
Postindustrial Professionalization

Just as artists increasingly embraced manufactured objects as part of their work process, such manufacturing was being broadly reconfigured. In addition to being framed by the Vietnam War, the late 1960s and early 1970s initiated economic and cultural changes known in shorthand as postindustrialism. In this time, the composition, tenor, and manufacturing base of work in the United States shifted measurably, as did the international economy. Hallmarks of the changing order include a growing emphasis on technological information and knowledge, the decline of skilled manufacturing jobs, and a transition away from a goods-producing economy to a service economy. This break was noted at the time in texts such as Alain Touraine's *Post-industrial Society, Tomorrow's Social History* (1969) and Daniel Bell's *Coming of Post-industrialism* (1973).

Furthermore, the postindustrial society is characterized by an increasingly complex interweaving of the economic and the cultural. That is, the postindustrial is connected with the postmodern (as a culturally dominant style, a mode of capitalism, and a historical period). Art historians have suggested that the 1960s, in its artistic and political ruptures, represented, as Hal Foster has written, "a paradigm shift towards postmodernist practices." The economic, social, and political crises of the late 1960s and early 1970s were loosely bracketed, in the U.S. context, by the Vietnam War; indeed, Fredric Jameson called Vietnam the "first terrible postmodernist war." At the threshold of this new economic order, and in a time of political turmoil, work—and art—was both ruthlessly redefined and reorganized. In other words, there was a complex interface between the war, postmodern forms, and postindustrial labor conditions.

This turn to postindustrial labor generated further class anxieties for artists. Art workers understood themselves to be a marginal population, underpaid and undervalued—especially if they did not make marketable art. Sometimes, instead of identifying themselves as the downtrodden proletariat, they turned to racial metaphors. Andre in 1976 referred to his position in relation to the museum as "slave practice." This statement is shocking, as artists have privileges, choices, and opportunities that slaves do not; such claims of righteous victimhood and powerlessness verged on the ludicrous. The New York artistic Left was fraught with problematic exclusions with regard to race even as it espoused and attempted inclusiveness. Black artists such as Lloyd, Ringgold, Al Coppedge, and Benny Andrews, as active members of the AWC, made highly visible, widely supported demands for racial equity in museum exhibitions;
it was one of the primary planks of the AWC’s thirteen demands. But comments about
the “enslaved” status of artists indicate that the cross-racial solidarity claimed by the
AWC was itself laced with racism. Ringgold, who was arrested along with GAAG
founders Hendricks and Toche for her participation in the antiwar Flag Show at Judson Church in 1970, later recalled the impressively quick integration of race-related
issues into the AWC’s platform but also denounced the Art Strike of 1970 as a platform
for “superstar white artists.”

Likewise, black scholar Michele Wallace (Ringgold’s daughter) recounts that the Art Strike was her mother’s first and most visible
encounter with the racism of the art world. Dissatisfied with the lack of attention
to racial inequities among art workers, she and Ringgold defected from the AWC and
formed a splinter group, Women Art Students and Artists for Black Artists’ Libera-
tion (WASABAL).

Art workers’ dubious connections with “slaves”—and with the conventional working
class—were made all the more pronounced by the inauguration at this time of
an unprecedented boom market for art. Thomas Crow writes of this paradox: “It will
emerge that the story of art within the new politics of the 1960s is one of consid-
erable ambivalence, as artists attempted to reconcile their stance of opposition with in-
creasing support for their activities in a new and aggressive global marketplace.”

Artists were supported by patrons and institutions as never before, giving them in-
creased opportunities to receive grants, sell their works, and garner press attention.
Harold Rosenberg commented in 1967 that minimalism “reflects the new situation
of art as an activity that, having left the rebellious semi-underworld of bohemia, has
become a profession taught at universities, supported by the public, discussed in the
press, and encouraged by the government.”

In other words, in the 1960s occupational prestige for artists increased greatly. One
factor in this, as Howard Singerman has documented in his Art Subjects: Making Artists
in the American University, was the large number of artists receiving formal training
in universities, which legitimized art making as a field of study and emphasized artists’
“employable” skills. Brian Wallis posits that another factor in this professionaliza-
tion was the formation, in 1965, of the National Endowment for the Arts, which ac-
tively encouraged artists to “market” themselves and offered seminars on “the busi-
ness of being an artist.”

The NEA began granting awards to individual artists in 1967 and quickly became a source of income; included on the list of NEA grant recip-
ients from 1967 and 1968 were Andre, Jo Baer, Dan Flavin, Robert Huot, and Morris.

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, new marketing tools aimed at young artists—
for example, a series of workshops run by the management consultant Calvin J. Good-
man, “The Artist’s Own Business” (Fig. 10)—promised to teach artists and dealers how to “develop new markets, improve their pricing policies, and earn more income through increased art sales.” One seminar promised to address “the artist as an independent businessman.” The cover of Goodman’s promotional brochure makes his agenda clear: on it a tube of Grumbacher oil paint squeezes out a dollar sign. Similarly, The Artist’s Guide to His Market, published in 1970, suggests that artists approach banks and furniture stores and offer to show their work in lobbies and showrooms. (Unsurprisingly, the title reads “his market”—feminist artists were seeking alternatives to a gallery system that mostly excluded them.)

In 1967 Rosenberg commented that “instead of being . . . an act of rebellion, despair or self-indulgence, art is being normalized as a professional activity within society.”101 Diana Crane, in her quantitative account of the explosion of the New York art world from 1940 to 1985, tracks broadening governmental, corporate, and foundation support, as well as growing numbers of individual patrons who were buying larger numbers of artworks. Galleries and dealers increasingly turned a profit, and corporate art collections expanded at an astounding rate, from sixteen founded in 1940–59 to nearly eighty established in 1960–79.102 Using Bureau of the Census statistics, Crane also indicates how the ranks of those who identified themselves as “working artists” swelled considerably (in 1970 that number was six hundred thousand.)103 The number of art dealers in New York more than doubled between 1961 and 1970.104

Simultaneous with the NEA’s boosterism and the explosion of corporate support for art, reports appeared that forecast the end of the gallery system, the collapse of the art market, and the dire economic position of artists. One 1969 report called “The Economic Crisis in the Arts” reported a “glum outlook” for the arts, saying that despite the “myth of a cultural boom” the situation was bleak.105 An article in the Saturday Review in 1970 admitted that despite the much-lauded increase in arts patronage artists still scrambled for money, lived in poor conditions, and had scant resources.106 It cited a report issued by the MacDowell Colony that found that only one in ten painters or sculptors “was able to support himself and his family on what he earned from sales of his work.”107 Lippard finds even that small fraction inflated—“Almost nobody could pay rent from art.”108 As Gross wrote in 1970: “We are on the brink of a genuine state and national emergency situation in the arts. . . . An emergency will have to be declared in Washington and Albany within the next six months if the art world is to survive in any form at all and if thousands of artists are to escape eviction, starvation, or the total annihilation of their profession.”109

It is hard to get a handle on these competing claims—the art market is booming
but most artists are starving—but this contradiction is exactly the point. The art market was (and still is) predicated on a "star system" that elevates only a small number of individuals. Most others struggle to pay the rent, take up adjunct teaching positions, or work day jobs. By the mid-1960s some artists were acknowledged professionals making decent livings, but they nonetheless many felt themselves to be disenfranchised workers who demanded greater control over their working conditions. The rising number of educated artists, it could be argued, raised artists' sense of the value of their artistic labor. Art workers' unionizing efforts ignited precisely when market forces legitimized artists' desire for status and money.

Although the AWC and the Art Strike as organizations effloresced and quickly folded, their legacies—including a complex investment in art as work—endure. The reimagining of artistic labor dramatically altered how art was made and circulated in the United States, as well as how its forms and aesthetics were theorized. Conceptions of artists as workers were not monolithic and were often unpredictably deployed, as the case studies that follow demonstrate. But the major redefinition of artistic identity vis-à-vis class, protest politics, and the art institution was unprecedented in the United States.
Notes

The following abbreviations are used throughout the notes:
AAA Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC
AWC Art Workers’ Coalition
GAAG Guerrilla Art Action Group
GRI Getty Research Institute Library, Los Angeles
MoMA Museum of Modern Art, New York
RMA Robert Morris Archive, Gardiner, New York
TGA Hyman Kreitman Research Centre, Tate Gallery Archive, London

INTRODUCTION

1 Typed flyer signed “An art worker,” June 1969, New York, Lucy Lippard Papers, Museum of Modern Art file, AAA.
3 These feminist interventions—both U.S. based and not—include the writings found in Mary Kelly, Imagine Desire (Writing Art) (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1997), and Martha Rosler, Decoys and Disruptions, Selected Writings, 1975–2001 (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2004).
4 For one clarion call that includes many of the significant feminist scholars working in this vein, see the statement “Transnational Feminist Practices against the War—A Statement,” by Paola Bacchetta, Tina Campt, Inderpal Grewal, Caren Kaplan, Minoo Moallem, and Jennifer Terry, issued in October 2001 and later published in Meridians: Feminism, Race, Transnationalism 2 (2002): 302–8.
5 Francis Frascina has helpfully charted many antiwar art activities of this time in his Art, Politics, and Dissent: Aspects of the Art Left in Sixties America (Manchester: Manchester
Artist Andrea Fraser has written about the AWC in terms of service economies and artistic autonomy; see “What’s Intangible, Transitory, Mediating, Participatory, and Rendered in the Public Sphere, Part II,” in Museum Highlights: The Writings of Andrea Fraser, ed. Alex Alberro (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2005), 55–80. Gregory Sholette has also written extensively about collectivity and new models of work; see his “State of the Union,” Artforum 46 (March 2008): 181–82.


An account of the 1972 formation of British Artists’ Union can be found in John A. Walker, Left Shift: Radical Art in 1970s Britain (London: I. B. Tauris, 2002); for more on Argentine artists’ organizing in the 1960s, see Andrea Giunta, Avant-Garde, Internationalism, and Politics, trans. Peter Kahn (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007). While the membership of the AWC was primarily limited to the New York, the group went on to inspire similarly named organizations in Boston and Atlanta in the late 1970s.

Other regional U.S. histories regarding art and politics have been explored by Patricia Kelly, 1968: Art and Politics in Chicago (Chicago: Depaul University Art Museum, 2008), and Peter Selz, Art of Engagement: Visual Politics in California and Beyond (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006).


Frascina, Art, Politics.

An in-depth account at the 1966 Peace Tower is found in Francis Frascina, “‘There’ and ‘Here,’ ‘Then’ and ‘Now’: The Los Angeles Artist’s Tower of Protest (1966) and Its Legacy,” in his Art, Politics, and Dissent, 57–107.


“Ad Reinhardt: Art as Art,” interview by Jeannie Siegel, broadcast on WBAI, New York, June


24 The challenge of periodization is addressed by Fredric Jameson’s “Periodizing the Sixties,” in *The 60s without Apology*, ed. Sohnya Sayres et al. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 178–209.

32 Joseph Kosuth argues that the collapse of 1960s idealism led to an increasingly critical engagement with the commodity; see his “1975,” *Fox* , no. 2 (1975): 94.

1. FROM ARTISTS TO ART WORKERS


Lippard’s awareness of her critical writing as work, discussed in Chapter 4, is a case in point.


7 Hans Haacke, interview, April 21, 2007.

8 Transcripts of the AWC hearing are printed in AWC, An Open Hearing on the Subject: What Should Be the Program of the Art Workers Regarding Museum Reform and to Establish the Program of an Open Art Workers Coalition (New York: AWC, 1970).

9 Alexander Alberro’s Conceptual Art and the Politics of Publicity (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2003) discusses the artist’s rights contract at length and cogently maps the emergence of conceptual art as intellectual property.

10 Perreault, in AWC, Open Hearing, statement 52.

11 Lozano, in AWC, Open Hearing, statement 38.

12 Lozano, however, rejected any identification with the women’s movement; after leaving the art world altogether, she subsequently moved to Dallas and commenced a project in which she refused to speak to women. For a persuasive reading of this rejection, see Helen Molesworth, “Tune In, Turn On, Drop Out: The Rejection of Lee Lozano,” Art Journal 61 (Winter 2002): 64–73.


14 To some extent, this branching into communities happened without the participation of museums—the Studio Museum of Harlem opened in 1970 with a show featuring Tom Lloyd, an active participant of the AWC. Ralph Ortiz, another artist affiliated with the AWC, was central to the founding of El Museo del Barrio in Spanish Harlem in 1969.


19 These include the AWC’s symbolic funeral procession through the streets of New York carrying banners with the names of Vietnamese and American casualties; Tosun Bayrak’s three-block-long street theater that was a riot of fighting, sex, animals, food, and bodily excretions; and Yayoi Kusama’s naked peace protests in the MoMA sculpture garden. These events are recounted in Lippard, Get the Message? and Martin, Theater.


23 For more on the controversy surrounding the AWC poster, see Frascina, Art, Politics, and Dissent, 160–208, and Amy Schlegel, “My Lai: ‘We Lie, They Die’ or, a Small History of an ‘Atrocious’ Photograph,” Third Text 31 (Summer 1995): 47–66.


25 Lil Picard, “Protest and Rebellion,” typed draft manuscript, 5. Lil Picard Papers, AAA.


33 Ibid., viii.


36 Ibid., 18.


38 Lippard, Get the Message? 24.


40 On the first free day at MoMA the museum tripled its attendance, and, as reported in the New York Times, “the crowd . . . was ‘younger and less white’ than usual, and included many family groups,” “Art Notes,” New York Times, February 11, 1970, 51. The free day still exists today, though for many museums it has been limited to a free evening, often branded by corporate sponsors, as in MoMA’s “Target Free Friday Nights.”
See Therese Schwartz, “AWC Sauces Up MoMA's PASTA,” *New York Element*, November–December 1971, 2–3. PASTA MoMA officially affiliated with Distributive Workers of America, Local 1, Museum Division, in May 1971. Their 1971 strike, which lasted from August 20 to September 3, focused on a wage increase, job security, and a greater voice for staff in policy decisions.


This long-standing theoretical problematic can only be alluded to here; it has been most recently and intelligently mapped by John Roberts, *The Intangibilities of Form: Skill and Deskilling in Art after the Readymade* (London: Verso, 2007).


Robert Morris, interview, May 26, 2006. His marked concern circa 1970 with labor history
stands in contrast to his previously disengaged attitudes, as when in 1968 he claimed to have no interest in politics; Robert Morris, interview by Paul Cummings, March 10, 1968, AAA.

61 Adolfo Sánchez Vázquez, Art and Society: Essays in Marxist Aesthetics (London: Merlin Press, 1973), 63. A further way to map artistic labor in a Marxian vein is to understand art objects as paradigmatic fetishes. Although they lack an instrumental use, they accrue surplus value and as such are ur-commodities that circulate smoothly in market economies.
63 While writers such as Max Raphael, Arnold Hauser, and Meyer Schapiro practiced versions of Marxist art history before the 1960s, social art history as a movement was consolidated with the publication of works such as T. J. Clark, “On the Social History of Art,” in Image of the People, 9–20, and his “Conditions of Artistic Creation,” Times Literary Supplement, May 24, 1974, 561–62. See Max Raphael, The Demands of Art (London: Routledge, 1968); Arnold Hauser, The Social History of Art, trans. Stanley Goodman (New York: Vintage Books,


Raymond Williams, “Work,” in *Key words: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976), 284; see also his “Labour” entry, 145–48.

See, for instance, the various commentaries that decry the younger generation’s lack of a work ethic in the glossy coffee-table book *200 Years of Work in America: Bicentennial Issue*, *Think: The IBM Magazine*, No. 3, July 1976 (New York: IBM, 1976).


Details about the frenzy of strikes in 1970 are in Chapter 3.


U.S. Senate Subcommittee, *Worker Alienation*.

Marcuse, *Counterrevolution and Revolt*, 21. Marcuse cites several mass media articles that note rising rates of worker absenteeism and sabotage.


Ibid., 38.


Printed postcard sent by Andre in 1976, David Bourdon Papers, Andre file, AAA.


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These artists received grants averaging $7,500 each. “Individual Artists Who Have Received Awards from the NEA through November 20, 1968,” Misc. Correspondence file, Lucy Lippard Papers, AAA.


Cited in ibid., 4.


Ibid., 26.

Lippard, phone interview, September 17, 2008.


2. CARL ANDRE’S WORK ETHIC


Untitled, unsigned opinion column, *Western Daily Press*, February 21, 1976, “Tate Bricks” file, TGA.


On April 10 1969, some 300 New York artists and observers thereof filled the amphitheatere of the School of Visual Arts for an 'Opening Hearing on the subject: What Should Be the Program of The Art Workers Regarding Museum Reform, and to Establish the Program of An Open Art Workers' Coalition'.

The last time such a large and various group had got together for non-aesthetic reasons concerned the Artists Tenants Association's threatened left strike in 1961, which did not take place. The hearing was preceded by a list of demands to the Museum of Modern Art and demonstrations supporting them which emphasized artists' rights: legal, legislative and losely political; they were the product of the newly-named Art Workers' Coalition (temporarily and simultaneously the Artists' Coalition). The AWC was conceived on January 3 1969, when the kinetic artist, Takis (Vassilikos), removed a work of art, made by him but owned by the Museum of Modern Art, from the museum's 'Machine' show, on the grounds that an artist had the right to control the exhibition and treatment of his work whether or not he had sold it. Not a revolutionary proposition, except in the art world.

Despite the specific subjects announced for the Open Hearing, taped and later published in the column by the AWC, the real content of the right was the airing of general complaints about the Museum, keynoted by Richard Artschwager's use of his two minutes to set off firecrackers instead of talk. The picture of frustrated violence that emerged from this moosley cross-section of the art community (70 artists, architects, film-makers and critics, a number of them Black, spoke) surprised the establishment at which it was aimed. As well it might, since art world complaints are made loudly, but in the relative privacy of studios and rarely in public. Those who voiced them were immediately accused of opportunism by some of those who remained closeted within the art world, some of the more strident spokesmen for The System, as a result of which the communities can identify and control. They should convert existing structures all over the city into relatively cheap, flexible branch-museums or cultural centers that could not carry the stigma of catering only to the wealthier sections of society.

4. A section of all museums under the direction of Black and Puerto Rican artists should be devoted to showing the accomplishments of Black and Puerto Rican artists, particularly in those cities where these (or other) minorities are well represented.

5. Museums should encourage female artists to overcome centuries of damage done to the image of the female as an artist by establishing equal representation of the sexes in exhibitions, museum purchases and on selection committees.

6. At least one museum in each city should maintain an up-to-date registry of all artists in their area, that is available to the public.

7. Museum staffs should take positions publicly and use their political influence in matters concerning the welfare of artists, such as rent control for artists' housing, legislation for artists' rights and whatever else may apply specifically to artists in their area. In particular, museums, as central institutions, should be aroused by the crisis threatening man's survival and should make their own demands to the government that ecological problems be put on a par with war and space efforts.

8. Exhibition programs should give special attention to works by artists not represented by a commercial gallery. Museums should also sponsor the production and exhibition of such works outside their own premises.

9. Artists should retain a disposition over the destiny of their work, whether or not it is owned by them, to ensure that it cannot be altered, destroyed, or exhibited without their consent.

B. UNTIL SUCH TIME AS A MINIMUM INCOME IS
GUARANTEED FOR ALL PEOPLE. THE ECONOMIC POSITION OF ARTISTS SHOULD BE IMPROVED IN THE FOLLOWING WAYS:

1. Rental fees should be paid to artists or their heirs for all work exhibited where admission fees are charged, whether or not the work is owned by the artist.

2. A percentage of the profit realized on the resale of an artist's work should revert to the artist or his heirs.

3. A trust fund should be set up from a tax levied on the sales of the work of dead artists. This fund would provide stipends, health insurance, help for artists' dependents and other social benefits.

The extent to which each 'member' agrees with each 'demand' fluctuates to the point where structural fluidity of the organization itself is unavoidable. The AWC has as many identities as it has participants at any one time (there are no members or officers and its main manner of fund-raising is a 'Friscow Circle' at meetings, and the number of participants varies as radically as does its radicality, according to the degree of excitement, rage, guilt, generated by any given issue. It has functioned best as an umbrella, as a conscience and complaint bureau incorporating, not without almost blowing in and out of groups and goals that are not only different, but often conflicting. Advocates of a tighter structure, of a real dues-paying union situation, have reason but not reality on their side. Nobody, inside or outside the coalition, has illusions about its efficiency; the difference is that everyone outside thinks it could be done better another way and from the inside that looks impossible.

Don Judd, for instance, has been interested in a union set-up since the Coalition began, but was disgusted with the meetings he visited (and did not, incidentally, try to change or influence them by saying anything about his own ideas, which is too bad, because we could use his blunt, articulate intelligence). In a recent statement on art and politics (Artforum, Sept. 1970) he wrote: 'There should be an artists' organization. It's very odd to have a whole activity that can't help anyone in the same activity, that can't defend itself against the organized crimes, and the corruption of the whole field. Art should have its own money, there could be a self-imposed tax by members on all sales, part from the artist's portion, part from the dealers.' We've discussed this, but need, naturally, the support of a few more artists who have a portion at all, or a dealer. Judd also says that 'unlike the Art Workers, an artists' organization should decide what it wants to do and go after it practically'. Yet he agrees with our first demand and suggests we state that and talk to the museums. We have, and still are. Then he says that these museums 'who refuse without reason can be struck', by whom? Judd and the rest of the art community's silent majority? If all those artists who want a union would get together and take over section B of the Coalition's demands it could comprise another special interest group under the 'umbrella', or as a separate entity. But as long as the AWC's notorious sightseers, now perennial (Smithson, Serra and editor Philip Leider come immediately to mind), many of whom are respected members of the art community and good talkers and would be able to convince a lot of people, as long as they play with themselves in the bar, telling everyone how absurd or mismanaged the AWC is, instead of saying the same things in the public arena (arena it often is, unfortunately), they will be the bane and to some extent the downfall of the Coalition.

If I sound wishful, or over-optimistic, it's because I can't help remembering the beginnings of the Coalition. At the first few open meetings there was a terrific atmosphere of aesthetic and economic mistrust. Eventually basic dislike of organizations, innate snobbery about which artists should or could be associated with, the reluctance to waste time, and revulsion for yelling, rhetoric and opportunism (not unique to the AWC) broke down in favour of common excitement and, finally, even affectionate tolerance for some of the more therapeutically-oriented participants. Nobody thought it was ideal, and nobody had ever seen New York artists come on any other way, either. Despite the heterogeneous composition, during the winter and spring of 1969 the AWC became a community of artists within the larger art community. The honeymoon period centered around plans for the opening hearing and publication of its record and later, around the 'alternatives committee', whose search for alternative structures ran the gamut between a trade union with dental care, a massive takeover of the city's abandoned Hudson River piers for studio and exhibition space (that is now being done by the establishment itself), and an information centre complete with Xerox machine, ending comfortably, if a little vaguely, as a discussion group covering the highest ideals of idealism and philosophical foam, with which New York art is very much at home. The weekly general meetings consisted of about 50 people, sometimes 100; the committees were much smaller. Both were characterized by reversals and arguments and endless bullshit (usually defined as something else talking), naivety, commitment, and lack of knowledge about how to implement it, a high evangelical pitch reached in the bar after meetings, not to mention the endless phone calls that plague a small organization with no efficient communication channels, all backed up by an exact realization that MOMA was, for some inexplicable reason, afraid of us.

This period culminated in internment quarrels surrounding the problem of what to do about the Museum of Modern Art's 'blackmail' of First Generation New York School artists (which I consider one of our most important endeavours), and problems of structure, now that the Coalition was getting big with what sometimes seemed a false pregnancy. These most often concerned the point of view or not the general meetings should have veto power over the hard-working committees or...
opposed to is the present conservative politicization of the Museum... If the men now controlling the Museum of Modern Art are not politically involved, who the hell is?" The AWC did not begin as a political group, but its models were clearly the Black and student movements of the 1960s, and by the time of the Open Hearing it was obvious that non-art issues would assume if not priority, a major rhetorical importance. Though the Black Panthers, the Chicago Seven and other radical causes have been supported; though we have protested by telegram and testimony ecological catastrophes, budget cutbacks to museums, expressways etc., and once gave half the treasury (some £300 from sales of the books) to a Biafran woman who delivered a particularly stirring plea at a meeting, the AWC, like its predecessor and sometime colleague, the Artists and Writers Protest, has concentrated its political energies on Peace, as did the May 1970 Art Strike. On the first Moratorium Day (Oct. 15, 1969) the AWC managed to get the Modern, the Whitney and the Jewish museums and most of the galleries to close, and (with the crucial help of the participating artists) the Metropolitan to postpone the opening of its big painting and sculpture show till a more auspicious date, though the museum itself stayed open and, with the Guggenheim, was picketed.

The bitterest quarrel the AWC has had with the museum (aside from the 'blackmail' issue) was over joint sponsorship of the Song-My massacre protest poster—a ghastly coloured photograph of the event by a Life photographer captioned 'Q: AND BABIES? A: AND BABIES', which was vetoed by the president of the Board of Trustees after an initial, though unexpected, executive staff acceptance of the proposal. We picketed and protested in front of Guernica, published 50,000 posters on our own and distributed them, free, via an informal network of artists and movement people; it has turned up all over the world. Our release read, in part: 'Practically, the outcome is as planned: an artist-sponsored poster protesting the SongMy massacre will receive vast distribution. But the Museum's unprecedented decision to make known, as an institution, its commitment to humanity, has been denied it. Such lack of resolution casts doubts on the strength of the Museum's commitment to art itself, and can only be seen as bitter confirmation of this institution's decadence and/or impotence'. Via this and other experiences we discovered that semi-private institutions are unable to buck their trustees, particularly when the issue is one that presents the trustees with the direct conflict of interest. (As Gregory Battcock said at the Open Hearing: 'The trustees of the museums direct NBC and CBS, the New York Times and the Associated Press, and that greatest cultural travesty of modern times—The Lincoln Center. They own...')

T & T, Ford, General Motors, the great multi-billion dollar foundations, Columbia University, Alcoa, Minnesota Mining, United Fruit and AMK, besides sitting on the boards of each others' museums. The implications of these facts are enormous. Do you realize that it is those art-loving, culturally committed trustees of the Metropolitan and Modern museums who are waging the war in Vietnam?') We also discovered that one thing museum administrators cant seem to realize is that most of the art workers lead triple (for women, often quadruple) lives: making art, earning a living, political or social action, and maybe domesticity too. When the museum official gets fretful about our distrust of long dialogues and our general inefficiency (irresponsible, he calls it), he forgets that he is being paid a salary for 'caring for' work and issues that his opposite number on the picket line produces in return for no financial assurances whatsoever, and that the Coalition itself has to beg time from the 'real' world to get anything done at all.

Certainly it is everybody's individual choice as to how he is going to handle his political burden (though anyone so sheltered as to believe he has no such burden is riding for a shock). The AWC will be powerful only in the art field, where artists have power, and it seems to me that if an artist is more involved in the Peace Movement than artists' rights he should be working directly for the movement. What anyone can do via the AWC for the Panthers or for peace or for Welfare mothers or trees can be done a hundred times better within those organizations specializing in each of those fields. As an artist, however, he can exert his influence on those institutions which depend on him for their life, to make them speak up and influence others. The fact that these institutions are run by people running other areas of the larger world makes artists' actions as artists all the more important. What is said is how few artists will even acknowledge their political burden, how many seem to feel that art, and thus their own
been subjected to blackmail by donating works to MOMA for an 'historical' show just incidentally having from the museums' collection. In the piece we wrote: "Our actions should not be mistaken for those of the community as a whole, but rather as a "conscience" in regard to the existing system. We represent the present membership [of the AWC] and, by default, the passive element in the art community. Anyone who does not speak for himself will be spoken for by us until he does take a position on the various issues... The AWC does not begrudge the success of the artists in this show, to whom we all owe a major aesthetic debt, nor are we judging the aesthetic content of the exhibition. We are all too aware of the conditions in which these artists have existed for years under the present system, and it is this system we would like to change. We have no intention of letting the "watchdog" ghost of Ad Reinhardt lie. In the 1960s large sections of the world's population have realized what Reinhardt realized in the art world long before, that sins of omission and commission, crimes of silence and rhetoric, are equally indefensible."

The crux of the matter is, of course, that no artist, in or out of the AWC, wants to be told anything. No artist, even if they were told anything, would want to forget themselves or to be reminded that he is a pawn of the system. It comes harder to more successful artists than to those who are just beginning. The artist is a person who has chosen a life of "independence" from the conventional structures. He is by nature unequipped for group thinking or action. He has also made certain sacrifices in order to have the advantages of "freedom". However, he prefers to bitch to (and about) his fellow artists about the gallery system, museums' ignorance of art and artists' lives, how critics "use" him, and his art, than to do anything about it. And this is, I suspect, because if he admitted to himself that he was far up against the wall he has been driven, life would be pretty unbearable. The illusion of freedom is of the utmost importance to a person for whom society does nothing else. Even if he is successful (and some of the aesthetically and ethically unhappiest artists in the city, the ones that act like cornered rats when talking to members of the Coalition, are the most successful socially and financially), even then, if he measures his success against his compromises, he is asking for a doomer. It's pleasanter not to be aware of the issues than to feel nothing can be done about them. Ad Reinhardt and Carl Andre, two artists who have had the courage to expose publicly the contradictions inherent in their own situation, have come in for far more mud-slinging than their weaker colleagues who have accepted to wallow in suspicion patronage, than the artist who is content to be waterboy to a critic or mascot to a collector. A list of questions circulated by an artist and glued to doors throughout the city in June, 1969, enraged almost everyone by demanding "Does money manipulate art? Does money manipulate galleries? Do galleries manipulate artists? Do artists manipulate art?... Is art a career ("highway", a running from or to, catering, carrying")? Is a career alluring? Are galleries pimps for alluring artists creating immortality? The real value of the AWC is in its voice rather than its force, its whispers rather than its shouts. It exists both as a threat and as a "place" (in people's heads, and in real space as a clearing house for artists' complaints), its own silent majority is larger than is generally realized. More important than any of our "concrete achievements" is the fact that whether or not we are popular for it, the Coalition has brought up issues that American artists (since the 30's) have failed to confront, together, issues to do with the dignity and value of art and artist in a world that often thinks neither have either. If the American artist looks with increased awareness at his shows, sales, conferences, contracts as an autonomous and independent member, even mover, of his own system, the AWC has made sense. But if aesthetic differences are a barrier even to a successful artist's understanding or working with equally successful colleagues, as artists for artists' rights, maybe there's no ballgame. Maybe artists will have the unique distinction of being the only vocation in the world that can't get together long enough to assure their colleagues of not suffering from their mistakes. Maybe sweetness, light, idealism and personal integrity, conventionally presumed to characterize art, have been bred out of it by this brutal age. Maybe the Coalition is about not thinking so, even if the odds look bad."

Tomorrow night (September 21) there is a meeting of the AWC, the Art Strike, SoHo Artists Association and an artists' housing group, the first of a season, the first of the AWC's third season, the first season after 2000 artists gathered to protest Cambodia and Kent State and Augustus and Jackson and formed the Art Strike, the first of a season that promises to be low on the kind of social (as in socializing) stimulation generated by moneyed institutions. A lot of people know that their time this year might be best spent in studio and in the streets. You have to be pretty far above it all to stay alive. At the same time the majority of the art world is afraid to take its bullshit out of the bar and into the streets, afraid of losing the toehold it got last year on the next rung of the ladder, but at the same time afraid that the ladder will have been burned, toppled, or blown sky high just as they get near the top (and there's no fury like that of a man who hates himself for compromising and is having the fruits of his ass-kissing taken from him too). Not a nice situation, but one that will, inside the AWC or outside, have to be dealt with one way or another, now.
Political Art Documentation/Distribution (PAD/D)

Political Art Documentation/Distribution was active from 1980 through 1988. Based in New York, they helped to create and consequently served a global network of makers and organizers of activist art. The group originated when writer and activist Lucy Lippard issued a call to document political artwork. At the time, Lippard wrote about political art for the Village Voice. Her writing helped to create attention for political art within the art world, and she was a critical voice in the growing awareness of socially-engaged work.

An enormous amount of political work was being made in the late 1970s, but it often did not enjoy the same attention and visibility within the art world as more commercial, gallery, and museum-based output. Today, political art can be found in museums, as easily as on a street corner or mass rally, and yet even now a substantial amount of political art from the 1980s still has not received a great deal of attention. PAD/D formed initially with the purpose of documenting this political and engaged work. As some of the group's members and interests shifted, PAD/D began self-initiated actions and campaigns.

Gregory Sholette, a member of PAD/D, and often a de facto historian of the group's activities, has written about what he calls the "dark matter" of the art world. "Dark matter" is the vast amount of artistic and cultural activity that remains largely invisible or in the background, but nonetheless is absolutely necessary to prop up that tiny percentage of artwork that gets broader critical attention and enjoys commercial success. It wasn't until we examined PAD/D's vast archive, housed at the library of the Museum of Modern Art in New York, that we were able to get a deep sense of what Greg might be talking about. The PAD/D archives are enormous: posters, publications, fliers, postcards, photographs, ephemera, correspondence and documentation of political artistic work collected from Iran to Texas. Group archivists, including Barbara Moore and Mimi Smith, spent nearly fourteen years working on the archives, continuing well after the group folded. It is a dense, rich resource that is waiting to be fully explored by later generations of artists, historians, activists and those interested in the "dark matter" of the art universe.

PAD/D had a number of core members and became large enough that several smaller committees were established to manage the group's activities. Most PAD/D members also worked with other political and art groups. Some members had recently started their own groups when PAD/D was born, but
Gregory Sholette and Janet Koenig

Temporary Services (TS): I know that PAD/D began as a call for people to come together and make an archive of politically engaged artwork, but at the first meeting it changed. Can you describe how you all came together in the first place, and what happened in the course of that meeting?

Gregory Sholette (GS): The first PAD/D meeting on February 24th, 1980, was initially a continuation of meetings that had been taking place at Printed Matter, then located on Lispenard Street at the southern edge of SoHo, on the first Sunday of every month. I think they even called it “First Sunday”. People would show up and talk about their work. It was an exchange of ideas. So there had already been this structure in place with people who were beginning to get to know each other, among them Tim Rollins and Julie Ault (who had already formed Group Material within the same time frame), along with veterans of other collectives, like Lucy Lippard, and others who went back to previous generations of activism. A lot of people knew each other from previous art groups and activist groups, such as Art Workers Coalition [AWC], Artist Meeting for Cultural Change [AMCC], et cetera. But I don’t know if everyone was activist-oriented. Some people were there just to present their art. This first meeting that I attended was the one where PAD/D was founded. I came to the meeting with another young artist named Richard Meyer. We’d both been involved in an intensive, weekend-long, community-based anti-nuke and disarmament art festival on the Lower East Side called Artists For Survival.

Parts of that event took place at many venues including theaters and even the local public library branch. We had a connection to one of those venues, a not-for-profit group called Seven Loaves, as in the Biblical seven loaves of bread, which was based in El Bohio – a former school house on the east side of Tompkins Square Park. El Bohio had been virtually taken over (I mean legally) by a group of Nuyorican activists called Charas. They had negotiated with the city for the building. So Richard and I said to these people at Printed Matter, “Maybe we can get a space at El Bohio. They rent spaces.” And sure enough, that’s where PAD/D ended up for about a year and a half before moving to the A.J. Muste building at Bleecker and Lafayette Streets, where the War Resisters League is located.

What really started the group off was a request by Lucy Lippard to help her archive the mounds of documentation she was receiving about socially-engaged art. It was overwhelming her. To her surprise and chagrin, people actually wanted to do more than operate as an archive. They wanted to start a full-blown group. Lucy had already helped start several groups, the Heresies collective, among others. So this was not her intention, although she was swept up by the enthusiasm as were we all. Clive Philpot, the director of the Museum of Modern Art’s library, was also at the meeting, and it was he who christened the new group when he proposed, “Why don’t we call this PAD?” for “Political Art Documentation.”

Janet Koenig (JK): The first few meetings in El Bohio were sort of work meetings to deal with the archiving of posters. And of course that was dull work. [Laughter] And people started drifting out or wanting to do other things.

GS: Janet’s point is well taken, because it wasn’t too long afterwards that people, I think, began to feel like, “...why should we be doing all of the doggy work?” You know? “This is boring.” And so that’s when this idea of “…let’s also be producers” happened. Group Material had already started to create exhibitions and do other public actions, so there was a model at hand to suggest we should be doing something like this too.

TS: How did you make decisions? Did you have to reach some sort of consensus, did you vote, or what was the process?

GS: I don’t remember it being very structured at all. My sense was that it was fairly open and that
anyone who wanted to speak had a turn to speak up. I don't remember someone acting as a facilitator; it was just people speaking out.

JK: I seem to remember from AMCC that there was a definite procedure—the meetings were huge in that previous group. There would be like 30 people there. This was in 1979. People realized there were always a few people that were dominating the discussion. So that brought about the procedure where everyone had to speak and we had to go around the room. There would be a different chairperson every meeting. That was an attempt to make it more democratic. I think that kind of carried through to PAD/D.

GS: The immediate predecessor to both Group Material and PAD/D was AMCC. In an historical sense, it fits in between AWC from the late 1960s and the emerging art groups of the 1980s. There are definitely connections because the same people appear again and again.

As time went on, PAD/D became very structured—a lot more structured even than AMCC, to the point where there were elaborate flow charts about how you submitted a proposal to the group. There were numerous subcommittees, and the question came up about how could a given subcommittees' proposals get support from the whole group? You had to submit the proposal through a process. If it wasn't selected, then it would go into this other process where maybe you could bring it back one more time.

There was a steering committee—which I was on—acting as the über committee to try to keep track of everything else that was going on. Within one year there was a newsletter being produced. There were regular public events called Second Sundays where people would come to speak about what they were working on. Second Sundays took place at a different location, often at Franklin Furnace in SoHo. There was something called Red Letter Days, which was a calendar of events that we put out sort of around Left culture issues. There was a reading group, which later became the Not For Sale Anti-Gentrification Committee. There were probably two or three other committees as well. All of these things had to somehow be coordinated—at least that's how we looked at it. It wasn't super-hierarchical, but it was pretty darn hierarchical by comparison to any group today.

JK: It was no longer terribly democratic, at that point, at least to my mind. “Democratic centralism” is nearly an oxymoron.

GS: Well, it had a very structured notion of democracy...

TS: That raises some really interesting questions. You clearly founded PAD/D to deal with the material and the ambitions of the organization. I'm curious about the language that you developed. Do you recall how you talked about this with other people, how you talked about this structure, how you talked about what you were doing?

GS: I think that, in general, we did inherit some of the structure from previous groups, including AMCC. The model was a kind of Leninism with pastel shades. [Laughter] But as much as artists try to be disciplined in a radical revolutionary sense, it is not very sustainable. But there was an element of organized self-control there, definitely. One of the reasons for that was Jerry Kearns, who had come from a group that Amiri Baraka had founded called The Anti-Imperialist Cultural League. It was very much a Leninist-Maoist style, 1970s splinter group from the New Left/SDS era.

TS: Greg, in an essay that you wrote about the history of PAD/D, you mentioned that Lucy Lippard made a plea not to form another organization, but just to be a resource. Were there a lot of organizations or collectives that were being formed at that time?

GS: Lucy told me that she had not wanted to form a group and I was surprised by that. Others might recall differently, but to me it was like, “Oh yeah, great, let's start a group.” There was a lot going on, it seemed like, an awful lot going on. Members of other collectives such as Group Material, Paper Tiger Television, and Carnival Knowledge overlapped with PAD/D. Some of us showed in Group Material’s Tenth Street gallery space and they in turn would become involved in our projects. It seemed to me that the idea of forming groups and collectives was really in the air.

JK: There was another collective with Arlene Goldbard.

GS: NAPNOC (Neighborhood Arts Programs National Organizing Committee), which later became Alliance for Cultural Democracy (ACD). ACD may still have some pieces, some remnants,
somewhere. ACD was intended to be a national organization that would support various forms of local arts and cultural activity. It wasn’t necessarily political per se, I mean not in the ideological sense that PAD/D was, but it was a form of localized activism. At a certain point the NAP-NOC/ACD model began to have quite an influence on PAD/D, which tugged us away from this more centralized organizational structure that we had been working with, or at least away from the political vanguardist model that you could feel in the group from about 1981 on. This broadened PAD/D’s practice and was positive in my opinion.

I think the ambition of PAD/D was to galvanize groups like ACD, Group Material, and dozens of other groups around the country, into a coalition that would really, literally, become a counter-institutional structure. Or at least this was clearly and explicitly the intention at one point. There was something that was called the February 26th Movement that was launched in 1982, a huge event that took place in the Bread and Roses Auditorium.

I chaired one session of this weekend-long event. There were dozens of panels and people coming from all over. There was a lot of enthusiasm, but it never really took off, for all kinds of reasons, probably most of them having to do with the difficulties of organizing people at a time when the left was in decline. But a lot of people did come together and had conversations, and some of them were very art-oriented and others were neighborhood, community, local activist discussions.

TS: What were some of the reasons, in your opinion, that The February 26th Movement didn’t function—that things didn’t get built up into a larger social movement?

GS: This was before the internet and before e-mail. So technically it was complicated to produce an alternative network. There are probably a lot of other factors. But one of the reasons that I’m not as clear here is because this was the point where Janet and I and others started a reading group, which became the PAD/D reading group. And there was always a bit of tension between the reading group and the larger group. At one point we were actually accused of trying to create a faction.

JK: Now why was that? A similar thing happened earlier with AMCC and its subcommittee, the Catalogue Committee, which went on to produce The Anti-Catalog. The Anti-Catalog was published in 1977 by a group of fifteen artists and two art historians (mostly from AMCC) as a protest to the Whitney Museum’s bicentennial exhibition. Drawn entirely from the private collection of John Rockefeller III, the Whitney exhibition was made up primarily of white male artists. The Catalogue Committee paid for the publication out of its own pocket with little help from the much larger AMCC.

GS: Some of us felt that we didn’t have enough theory. We didn’t feel like PAD/D had really thought through these issues of art and society very deeply. And so we tried to be the more intellectual part of the organization. I circulated my first essay, which was a critique of PAD/D, misspellings and all. Something to the affect of “Fear of Formalism” or “If I See One More Painting of Ronald Reagan as a Vampire I’m Going go back to Landscape Art.” [A long period of laughter] And I made copies of this thing and handed it out at the February 26th event. In retrospect, I should have realized that maybe that wasn’t the right way to do it. But I did this, thinking: “Okay, we really need to think through what is political art.”

JK: That’s how Greg and I met: when he said he was going to open up this reading group.

GS: And that’s kinda how the reading group got started. It was actually started by Jim Murray. At the time, he was editor of Cultural Correspondence, a very important journal founded by Paul Buhle that was connected to the left-leaning American Surrealist Movement. So the reading group spun out of a critique of PAD/D and therefore got off to this somewhat splinterly start. I mean we never thought of ourselves as a faction, but we really did want to think through these issues intellectually. Thus there was a certain amount of separation that took place.

TS: How did you deal with the conflict? How would you resolve things when they exploded?

GS: Nothing ever exploded. Nothing ever got to that stage. Maybe individuals had issues with other individuals, but that was about it. There was a very strict structure within the group for dealing with problems. At that time, Lucy Lippard and Jerry Kearns were involved in steering the group (I was on the
steering committee partly because I was the treasurer for many years), and I think, at a certain point, they realized, “Okay, these people that are doing a lot of reading are like a resource for the group.” I think that’s the way they began to perceive it with the hope we would feed things back into the organization.

There were people in the reading group who were not part of PAD/D, and this gets complicated because to officially become a member of PAD/D you had to go to X number of meetings and belong to at least one committee and do a certain amount of work in that committee.

The reason for this rule was that, so often, the group would come up with an idea and suddenly one person comes, for the first time, to a meeting and everything changes. And so we realized that we had to have some way of limiting that disruption.

And there was actually a voting structure, to go back to your earlier question. I believe it was majority vote. It might have been 75%, but I think it was a simple majority.

**TS:** And that was a really effective way of making decisions? Did it work better than other things?

**GS:** It worked better than consensus, which was probably, more or less, the model that we were operating with during the first year or so.

**TS:** Did the initial call to come together and archive all of this work maybe help form the structure in some way, or influence peoples’ expectations about how it was structured?

**JK:** I would have to say no, but...

**GS:** I don’t think the structure that I was talking about—I agree with Janet—came out of the archival aspect. I think for some people, plugging in as an archivist or a documentarian or whatever gave them a good, structured entry to the group. But they weren’t as involved in the decision making of the entire collective. Again, I think the group structure really was inherited from these earlier, more left-wing organizations.

**JK:** Yeah. I would say that the people who did the archive work were fairly separate from the rest of the group...

**GS:** They were fairly autonomous. They were doing this simultaneously with the group doing all of these other things. But there was almost no discussion of like, “Well, what goes in the archive; what doesn’t?” It wasn’t a central part of the group, despite the name.

**JK:** Similarly, there was not that much interaction between the Not For Sale group and the rest of PAD/D. We had very little support.

**GS:** Not For Sale, the reading group, transformed itself into a committee that actually did anti-gentrification work. It kind of mutated. But, like the reading group, it remained almost virtually autonomous from PAD/D, except that we did get some money from them, and we kept them abreast of what we were doing.

**TS:** That’s really interesting, given the intense structure that you built.

**GS:** Yeah, and that’s probably where this tension came up that we were creating a “faction” or whatever. Because we were fairly autonomous. But it never went beyond that suggestion, you know, like there was no trial. Which there might have been if we had been in the Situationists or Surrealists.

**TS:** So, what about the social networks that made this all possible? You were all working together, talking together, going to each others’ things... Did it affect the social networks behind PAD/D to have separate activities starting to form within PAD/D? What was the dynamic that formed given previous social situations and how the group changed?

**GS:** I think, in terms of social structure, we really met more as a group with some business to do than we did as a group of people who were hanging out and were friends, let alone tight. We weren’t really a social group in that sense. There were generally good relations between people, but it was business. We would get together, and sometimes people left, because we would have meetings that were all business. You know, whatever finances there were, “Do we make a vote on this? Are we gonna just go with this?” And for a bunch of artists that can just become incredibly oppressive.

**TS:** How did PAD turn into PAD/D?

**GS:** Probably between early 1981 and spring. We added this notion of Distribution. If you distrib-
ute work in different ways, then it actually creates this alternative network.

**JK:** Right, so it was definitely trying to be an alternative to the pull of the art world.

**GS:** Yeah. More recently, if I’m not mistaken, Jerry Kearns said he saw PAD/D as much more art world oriented than the work he had been doing prior to that with Amiri Baraka, which admittedly was much more heavy duty political from my perspective. However, if you read the mission statement that PAD/D printed, it was like, “We don’t really want to have anything to do with the art world.” You know, “We want our separate sphere.” And I think this is where I find this interesting difference between PAD/D on the one hand and Group Material on the other. Because I think that Group Material conceived of its mission as rekindling an avant-garde that had ossified within the art world. By contrast, PAD/D, more influenced by New Left politics than by avant-gardism, was saying, “Well, we just don’t want to have anything to do with the official art world.”

**TS:** Maybe we can talk about Up Front and the decision to publish it. Why was that a necessary part of your activities? How did it fit into the mission of PAD/D at that time?

**GS:** My only accurate recollection, and again this is a bit foggy, is that the idea was to have a newsletter that would be able to distribute the material in the archives. I think that was the initial impetus behind the newsletter. Keith Christensen coordinated the look of the group’s first publication, which was initially called First Issue—later changed to Upfront with issue number three, for obvious reasons. The first First Issue, whose editorial “Waking Up in New York” outlined PAD/D’s mission, was printed exactly a year after the group was founded. But remember, there was no internet. So the aim was to take material out of the archives, copy it and distribute it via the newsletter as a type of information or archival distribution activism. Over the years, the archive pages, as I recall, came and went in different issues. And I think there was some vote at one point that we should always have something from the archive in there, but it didn’t necessarily happen.

Remember, again, that Lucy Lippard was the arts writer for the Village Voice. So while the PAD/D newsletter didn’t have a lot of visibility in the art world, by contrast her weekly art column did. Thus the whole idea of politicized, social art was starting to get play that it would never have had otherwise. Sure, prior to 1980, people were doing this kind of work, but nobody was getting any recognition from the art world whatsoever. And I really do credit her, in a lot of ways, with having helped expose this work and making it something that people had to take seriously in the art world. And at the same time, to some degree PAD/D in less direct ways, and Group Material perhaps more overtly, did alter the art world landscape in favor of “political art”. In some sense you can say that we were victims of our own success because by the end of the 1980s, everybody wanted to do political art. However, it had lost its connection to activism and to broader political issues. This was the moment when MoMA’s print curator Deborah Wye organized the large survey exhibition entitled Committed to Print in 1988—which was an excellent show—but it was, in a way...

**JK:** A retrospective or a kind epitaph.

**TS:** I remember looking at slides with you, Greg, a few years ago, of these gatherings at street corners where you’d declare a street corner a gallery or you’d use the names of prominent institutions and people would come and put up their work (stencils, posters, flyers, a range of things, even paintings). Was that a PAD/D activity or was that just something that was happening...

**GS:** Well it didn’t quite work that way. The read-
ing group that we had started, that then became a committee, was dealing with the issue of gentrification in 1982. We decided to call ourselves the Not For Sale committee, meaning that the neighborhood, the Lower East Side, is not for sale. So we staged an exhibition at El Bohio in 1983 where we built an installation space, temporarily, and invited people to come and put work up about the neighborhood. And it ranged from people who were just part of the East Village art scene doing their crazy stuff, to people who had, like, crocheted things, to people who openly made anti-gentrification projects. It was really all over the place.

But when Grace Glueck of the New York Times reported on our exhibition by linking it to the neo-bohemian East Village art scene, we became alarmed. Janet even coined this very funny term “Off, Off West Broadway”—because West Broadway was the center of SoHo at the time. So we decided, the following year (1984) to do a new project called Art for the Evicted. We chose four street corners. We staked them out and decided which ones to use. It was possible then to post things on the walls because so many buildings were abandoned and they were just covered with flyers anyway—so we had those as spaces. These were in between the commercial gallery scene that had emerged, the so-called East Village scene. We called on artists specifically to do work about either the scene itself, from a critical point of view, or gentrification. And to submit twenty copies of whatever they were doing, and we would, over the course of time, post them and re-post them until they ran out, in those four locations.

Then we gave each one of those four locations its own mock moniker: one was the “Leona Helmsley Gallery” before she was in jail, “The Guggenheim Downtown” before there was a Guggenheim downtown, “Discount Salon”, and “Another Gallery.” We created logos for each one, and put those on the poster.

**TS:** Were there precedents for doing this kind of stuff, had people been working in public in this way?

**GS:** Well, the one show that was probably the most immediate precedent was PAD/D’s Death and Taxes, because it took place in different locations around the city and not in an art gallery.

**JK:** But our experience with the El Bohio show was that we thought that the public would come in, that the community would come in. But the community did not come in... to that space. The community just didn't feel that it was their space. We didn't want to have that happen again, so we decided to bring the gallery outdoors.

**TS:** How long were you doing the outdoor gal-
Sculptures within the gallery district?

**GS:** Maybe three, four months total, essentially until we ran out of duplicate posters to wheat-paste.

**TS:** What's the legacy of PAD/D? How would you characterize the impact that PAD/D had on these ways of working?

**GS:** PAD/D hasn't had a direct impact on art or activists. You can see the ideas generated by PAD/D kind of reiterated, often unknowingly, by younger people. And it goes back to the notion of dark matter that you mentioned before. PAD/D is part of an underground or shadow archive that circulates informally.

But certainly the more structured nature of the organization didn't carry over. You don't find groups today that resemble PAD/D in any way, shape or form—in terms of having committees and having ways that you have to tender a proposal and having voting—that just doesn't happen anymore. And, I think that that tells you something about the current period of political culture: that PAD/D was very much keyed into a particular kind of political moment that came out of the late 1960s.

**TS:** In a way PAD/D did have an impact—or still can. The archive in MoMA is this massive thing waiting to be reinvested with energy. That you did the work you did at all is so important. The collection is amazing. I saw posters from Denmark in the archive. I don't know why I thought this, but I initially thought, "Oh, the PAD/D archive will just be really New York-centric," and I found really quickly that there was just so much stuff that it was difficult to even find the New York stuff in there, just because there was such an incredible amount of stuff coming from everywhere.

I think MoMA is just really an excellent place to have this archive, because they really have the resources and wherewithal to actually maintain something that's completely antithetical to just how horribly corporate that place has become.

**BM:** Well, it was fourteen years of volunteer work. I've said to Mimi many times I think that that's what I'll be remembered by—of all the things I've done professionally or whatever. That's one of the things I'm proudest of, actually.

**TS:** Can you describe the process of creating the PAD/D archive?

**BM:** PAD/D was about this networking between people who were doing something that, at that time, was not in the mainstream as it has sort of gotten to be. And there was this necessity to document this and I think you have to go back to the context of the times. I've been involved in archives all my professional life and if you have that mindset you basically have the attitude that this is something that is not likely to be preserved automatically—that it's under the radar and also ... nowadays everything is so over-documented [laughs] that you have to go back to a time when we didn't have the extensive technology that we have now—nothing digital—and I'm still a great believer in archiving by paper anyway. I think the original ephemera says a lot more than the reproductions in any form.

So the idea of an archive was put forth and nobody really knew quite how it would take form. And there were numerous meetings that had false starts, and I got the feeling that it needed some direction and several of us started working on it and I just don't remember how it came about that I suggested the format it would take. I had already been accustomed to using 3” x 5” cards in various cataloguing capacities. I'm not trained as a librarian at all. And my philosophy particularly about this kind of archive is that you can't put it into a pre-existing system if you want the broad general public to use it and you don't have the resources... for example, putting it into something like the Dewey Decimal System or some professional library system would have taken a course of training for every single person who
wanted to work on it, and would have required financial and technical means that we wouldn't have had at our disposal. We had to have something that could be created by people without training and then accessible in a similar way.

Anyway, Mimi and I were working on it and other people at various times were working on it. But people got filtered out of it, because actually there are not too many people who can sit there for hours and hours—particularly hand writing those cards [laughter] and are of the mindset to see the goal through to the end. We had a lot of dedicated people—Carol Waag, Kate Linker, and other names that escape me. First of all, being interested in the material is a very important place to start. It keeps you committed if it seems like drudgery—it never seems like drudgery to me, because I found in my experience as a book dealer... you know I had been a rare book dealer. I no longer am. My experience with archiving in general and my book business has been that when I delegate the cataloguing to another person, I don't ever examine the book as thoroughly as I would have if I did the cataloguing. So it's a self-educating thing. All these things, under the circumstances, have to be taken into account. You're starting off with a psychologically supportive environment but with no materials, no anything...

So the willingness to stick with it under those circumstances and to be interested in it and realize how much you're learning from it was very important to me, and probably to Mimi, I'm sure. But also Mimi and I ended up making a little social thing out of it. We became fast friends—we hadn't known each other before. We would have lunch and be working for several hours and we'd meet every single week and it became something to look forward to.

**TS:** And so the rest of PAD/D—were they very supportive of these activities?

**BM:** Of course. As and I say, there was a whole contingent of various people passing through the archives helping us. We remained the constant. It wasn't just that people lost interest or considered it boring, by any means. Peoples' lives change, they move away or they have projects elsewhere or whatever, but we were the core, obviously and I think that consistency was a big help. But the system was so easy—if you look at those cards you'll see different people's handwriting. It was this very basic system of recording who was the creator, the author, and if there was a title and any publishing or other information that was visible, and we made up these categories. We sort of kept adding to these categories as we went along. We had something there that was in a category we hadn't had before so we added a category. It constantly evolved over the years. And the interesting thing, when you are talking about cataloguing, is that terminology changes over the years too. When we started there were no words for HIV and AIDS, and I think you'll find differing things and... sometimes we'd start with broad categories and narrow them down and make subsets of things. I can't think of specific examples now but I know with women's issues and feminist things there were discussions about terminologies. abortion rights, or whatever. And I suspect that if I went and looked at it now that some of these categories might not be the most appropriate way to deal with it in our current situation, because the terminology has maybe changed several times now.

**TS:** What were your hopes for the archive in going through this whole process? You must have been giving this a lot of thought—did you?

**BM:** Not in the way you are saying. To me it was enough to make the archive. That was, for me, definitely a goal. I know that I personally never dreamed that it would end up in the MoMA library. I mean that was really an extraordinary development. One hopes it will be of use but one didn't know the lifespan of PAD/D itself and we also had this series of very makeshift offices and we were going every couple years to a new place before we finally ended up in the War Resisters League building at 339 Lafayette Street. Anyway, I'm trying to think of my mindset back then and I don't remember any lofty goals.

**TS:** Were you continuing to do the archive after PAD/D shifted and stopped its activities and people mutated into other organizations?

**BM:** PAD/D lasted from 1980-1988 and I've always felt that it was like a victim of its own success because one of its initial purposes was to make people aware of this kind of artistic thinking, and by 1988 this kind of work was getting into the mainstream and we have a lot of very socially conscious art these days, right?

**TS:** Yeah, yeah. It laid the groundwork for younger people. I've had these conversations with Greg Sholette about how alien and unac-
ceptable it was to be working in these ways and to have peer support for it.

BM: Yes, the thing was that political art has become something different but it’s still there and it’s very badly needed more than ever.

TS: When did you finish the archives and then when did they go into MoMA’s collection?

BM: You have it in reverse order. It went into MoMA’s collection in 1990 or so and Mimi and I worked for four years within the museum library. We had to fine tune it. By the time that PAD/D lost its last office and the organization dissolved we just had piles of stuff that hadn’t been catalogued yet and so we needed to continue.

TS: So it’s a closed archive now—nothing’s really being added to it?

BM: It went into Special Collections. That was partly due to the fact that we were not within their cataloguing system. And then they obviously could not be expected to carry on the catalog. They cannot be expected to carry on parallel cataloguing systems—they have their own system. So it went into that segment of the library with its own sub-cataloguing system being retained—although it was put on a computer. They said they would keep accepting things but they’d put them into their own system. Which basically I think means their artist files—unless they are books or something. But they do have these wonderful artist files.

TS: Were there any challenges you faced cataloging and archiving the work of people working in groups versus people working as individual artists? Were there certain things you were confronted with in terms of systems you developed?

BM: Constantly, and as I said, we kept fine tuning it every time we came into a situation like that—a new cross-referencing category, a subject, a group of artists. But a group of artists—let’s say like ACT UP. ACT UP is what you’re cataloguing under as the group, on its own collectively. I don’t know if you noticed but I think in every ACT UP case—we didn’t have all of the posters—we had a nice selection. But we had gotten the names of the individuals and we put them in parentheses. The system being that if you had information that wasn’t visible on the item itself you put it in parentheses. So I believe that it says ACT UP and then lists the artists for that poster if we’d know their names, but then we also wrote the names in pencil on the back of the poster itself. The idea was to get this background information whenever possible when it was pertinent and not visible. Because it was accessible to us then. Going back now and trying to reconstruct it would be a lot more work.

TS: That would be really hard. I can’t even imagine.

BM: Well people have done that—particularly for organizations like ACT UP. I’ve seen names of people at various times. But being that they had rotating people on their graphics committee, or whatever it was called, who did a particular poster could vary.

TS: Because we are thinking of this book as a resource for people—people wanting to work in groups, people wanting to collaborate, people wanting to document their work and make historical records—do you have any advice that you can give to collaborative groups that are concerned with preserving their work and making something similar to the PAD/D archive?

BM: That feeds into something that I’ve seen a lot of today, which is that people get very involved in technology, and I think you have to remember that if we are going to have this technology, it’s also going to cost money, and they think they are going to need funding. And I think if you’re really serious about this you have to work with what you have. If you have the technical means, that’s wonderful. Use whatever you do have. One thing I see with funding that has always disturbed me is that people too often say that they can’t do a project unless they get the funding. And I think if you’re really serious about your work as an artist, or in politics or whatever it is, you find the means. And if it’s primitive, so what? I mean, we did the most primitive thing possible. Even without the digital technology, there probably are other technologies that would have been more sophisticated that we didn't have access to. But why obsess about that? Why retrain yourself? Work with what you have. If you have lousy handwriting and you can’t stand the idea of writing the stuff out, then keep a decent paper file system with folders marked. Any logical system. We have the alphabet we can work with... whatever!
[Laughter] You can go back to the most primitive thing—alphabetization.

**TS:** The example of the file cards is really great. The PAD/D archive is just unbelievable. I just wasn't prepared for what was actually there, and it's really effective, it's really gorgeous and it's really important. And really low tech—which is great. For all of the digital crap we have, holding the press release for the first Group Material show, or seeing original flyers, or handwritten notes on the back of postcards for invitations to shows is just really fortifying and really connects you in a way that you can't through art history or learning from a really removed or detached place.

What do you think is the legacy of PAD/D but also of this archival work that you and Mimi did?

**BM:** Well, first of all the archive is not just the history of this work; it's the history of PAD/D itself. This is a double archive. I've not only been involved with archives all my professional life, I've been involved in more alternative means—my whole orientation as a book dealer was alternative means of producing art. I never carried things about figurative sculpture. I carried everything from performance materials to artist books to conceptual works.

It's very interesting to me how, being that I've been involved in this stuff for over forty years—when you think about the broader thing not just PAD/D—there's a lot of the broader thing that was PADD itself. This is a double archive. I've not only been involved with archives all my professional life, I've been involved in more alternative means—my whole orientation as a book dealer was alternative means of producing art. I never carried things about figurative sculpture. I carried everything from performance materials to artist books to conceptual works.

And how eventually, no matter how subversive you are, 90% of the time, somebody will find a way of marketing it. So the legacy of PAD/D is a testament that some people were working in a different way, but...I relate it to all these other things.

That brings up another thing: Mimi and I had broad discretion—since we were the archive workers basically—in what we defined as suitable for the archive as well as how we presented it. And we came to a decision that almost anything could be included, including some slightly right wing material. In other words, an archive is not a qualitative thing. You don't make judgments, and if you are defining “socially conscious”, they never said everything had to be “liberally socially conscious.” [Loud laughter] Also I remember somebody sent us their woodcuts of cats, and we said “Well, we’ll draw the line at pictures of cats.” [More laughter] You know an archive is a collective record of something and it has to be as all-inclusive as possible. So we didn't make judgments about the art and we got some very interesting things in as a result.

When we moved into this room at the War Resisters League building and had our best offices and our final offices there for many years, we inherited that office from the Iranian Students Organization. I don't know if you had it in Chicago, but they stood on New York street corners wearing black and white striped prison garb with documentation and posters of what the Shah had done in Iran. And this had been their office. And if you remember the Shah was overthrown in 1979—the hostage crisis and all of that. Anyway, we inherited their offices and there were these posters on the wall that were in I guess Farsi, which were incredibly graphic, but we had no idea what they said, and they were mostly these photographs of people’s heads or busts. They were obviously political, without us knowing really what they were. And rather than coming into an office and clearing everything out, we ripped them off the wall and put them into the archive. [Laughter] And then years later, Shirin Neshat who is now famous, but at the time she was working at the Storefront for Art and Architecture, and one of the members who worked with us on the archive knew her and got her to translate them. So we added the translations to the 3” X 5” cards several years later.

**TS:** One last question—could you talk about the breadth of the archive? I was originally thinking it would be really New York-centric and I was blown away by what was actually there.

**BM:** A lot of this had to do with Lucy Lippard’s travels, and of course other people were traveling also. So once we had this strong group of people committed to this like Greg and Lucy and a lot of others, whenever anybody went any place—giving a lecture or doing an exhibition or curating or being in an exhibition—they brought back materials or made connections: the networking concept was essential. Of course there was no internet, but things spread by mail. You know I was affiliated with Fluxus. People talk about mail art but it goes beyond mail art. The 60s was when the concept of making these international connections began, either because people traveled here or Americans traveled abroad. You still got the word out somehow, maybe not to millions of people like we do now with the internet but word would spread when it was something interesting.
The archive consisted of material outside the conventional political arena—Mimi and I were setting these parameters—and it was also of course PAD/D’s own archive of itself, but when we decided what subjects to include, we decided that subversive artistic strategies, even if they didn't deal with national issues, were in themselves political. So there is a little collection of mail art in there and things like that.

**Jerry Kearns**

**TS:** Can you tell me how you got involved with PAD/D?

**Jerry Kearns (JK):** I remember PAD/D began taking form about a year before I joined. I think it was in the spring of 1980 when I saw a leaflet stapled to a pole somewhere in SoHo. It referred to an artists’ meeting to talk about social issues and art at the Printed Matter bookstore on Lispenard Street. I hadn’t been paying much attention to the art world and was surprised to see the leaflet.

When I came to the city in 1975, one of the first activities I got involved with was an artists’ protest at the Whitney Museum against a show called 200 Years of American Art. AMCC was leading a series of demonstrations at the museum to protest the exhibition. It was the Rockefeller family collection and it was practically devoid of women and people of color. A friend told me about these AMCC-hosted public meetings, every other Sunday evening, at Artists’ Space on Wooster Street. I began to go and sup-
ported the protests. By the mid 1970s, the American Left was in shock and disarray. From 1968 to 1973, the state had carried out a number of assassinations and other forms of repression that effectively buried the rebellions of the 1960s. The New York art world had begun to protest the Vietnam War in 1969 or 1970, but the professional art world is something like the Loch Ness monster. Heads peer above the surface in times of prolonged crisis, then quickly sink back to swim in calmer waters. [Laughter]

In the AMCC, there was a small collective known as The Fox. They had published several journals of Left cultural theory, which were influenced by the British collective, Art & Language. It is my memory that following the Rockefeller demonstrations they pushed for a more street-oriented community involvement than the larger membership of AMCC could tolerate and that this led to a split within the organization.

Soon a small group of us left the AMCC to form a group we called The Red Herring. Our goal was to become involved more directly with cultural activism as part of direct political action. We saw the need to become part of community-based political organizations in the city. We wanted to directly use our art as a political tool in support of progressive social causes. The Red Herring began publishing a journal called MainTrend. I think there were five issues.

We heard of the poet and writer Amiri Baraka’s activities in Newark and around the Lower East Side. He and his wife Amina were central to a number of Left cultural activities—plays, poetry readings, and musical events. Through checking their work out we discovered the NuYorican Cafe and the Puerto Rican cultural Left, and some leftist Asian groups. With several of those people we initiated The Anti-Imperialist Cultural Union and embarked on a couple of years working together. We worked on various Left newspapers, organized a variety of cultural events around inner city issues: housing, jobs, education, community parks, et cetera. Working together was fascinating and very difficult. We were a mixture of contradictions. Several people were quite chewed up in the process. Ultimately, the centralized cult-like quality of the leadership blew the group apart. 

JK: You could really feel the passing of the 1960s. There were a few refugees from the mainstream art world looking for a connection to “reality”. Various factions from black, Asian and Latino nationalist groups were already out there in “reality”. They were trying to reach from their respective isolation of past politics and build a broad based movement of progressive politics. No one really knew what they were doing. I used to call us paperback revolutionaries, because everybody was reading Marx, Lenin, and Mao-paperbacks.

I think the art Leftists were trying to make a clear statement of intention. We were disaffected with the direction of mainstream culture and fine art, and wanted to join our art directly with change-oriented politics. There was an emerging scene of academic Leftism in art, such as that of the AMCC leadership, and we wanted to distinguish our efforts from those “petite bourgeois” art world professionals. We wanted to put more on the line, risk more, and join the action in the streets. Those groups in the mid-to-late 1970s Lower East Side scene, including Artists for Survival, EL Bohio, COLAB, Group Material, and others were part of what informed PAD/D’s beginnings.

In addition to a variety of publishing efforts, we organized events in public schools, union halls, churches, community spaces, bars, and so forth. I think these activities expressed a process that PAD/D, Group Material and other groups elaborated upon. We developed an art festival format, which included as many art forms as possible. Poetry, music, photography, painting, sculpture, theater, were all frequently part of our activities. Merging entertainment with art and education, we placed an emphasis on the event rather than the object as art—and on the group rather than the individual as the center of production. It was a politicized extension of performance and process art. It was not unlike some of the things going on in Germany—with people like Joseph Beuys—at the time. After a year or so of those activities a small number of us became more directly involved in social protest movements and political action.

In the late 1970s, police brutality in minority neighborhoods became a flashpoint issue in New York City. Over several years a number of questionable beatings and deaths occurred as the NYPD behaved like an invading army in the Black and Latino communities. In the summer of 1978, an unarmed black teenager was shot in the back and killed by the police in Crown Heights,
Brooklyn. A long simmering social protest movement immediately jumped into the headlines when a march of several thousand came across the Brooklyn Bridge to City Hall.

The Reverend Dr. Herbert Daughtry, minister of The House of The Lord Church, on Atlantic Avenue, emerged as the most visible spokesperson for a diverse community-based movement. The coalition quickly spread to include elements from electoral politics to the most radical of progressive organizations in the city. We soon caught wind of the Sunday evening community meetings held at the House of The Lord Church and began to attend. Our five or six white faces really stuck out in a sea of Black, Latino, and Asian politicos.

By the end of the first summer we had been accepted by the coalition and formed the base of a support committee of liberals and radicals who worked with the Black United Front (BUF) for the next two or three years. The committee was comprised of lawyers, union organizers, teachers, artists, and so forth. I worked on a number of publications, fundraising posters, photographic documentation, calendars, and the like. One of my assignments was to photograph demonstrations in order to gather evidence of police brutality at these events. Another was to photograph victims of brutality from the neighborhoods for use in court cases the BUF began to bring against the police. I felt like I had achieved my goal of making art in the heat of political change. It was an exciting time.

In the fall of 1979, a group of Puerto Rican activists from the Bronx brought a new struggle to the meetings and asked for people to work with them. They were opposing the making of a Hollywood film in their neighborhood. Paul Newman and Ed Asner were starring in a new cop movie titled Fort Apache, The Bronx. At the time, NYC Mayor Ed Koch and various real estate elements in the city were working together to empty the South Bronx. A series of suspicious building fires had been gutting the community. Social services and businesses were closing everyday. The activists saw the film as perpetuating the same criminal stereotypes that made the destruction of the community acceptable in the daily press. The situation particularly interested me because it was so clearly a cultural issue. I began going to the South Bronx to oppose the film.

**TS:** So how did this committee against the film form? How did anybody get wind of the film being made? Did somebody see a script that got everybody riled up?

**JK:** Exactly, somebody got a script. Then location scouts and pre-production teams began to descend on the South Bronx. They ran into the remnants of The Young Lords Party, a Black Panther-like organization from the 1960s that did a lot of organizing in the community throughout the 1960s into the 1970s. Richie Perez, who had been a member of the party and the editor of their newspaper was active in various community organizations in the late 1970s. His and several other community organizations formed The Committee Against Fort Apache, The Bronx. Perez, Panama Alba, and others in the committee were sophisticated media manipulators from their Young Lords history. They had connections in the New York press and TV media and used them brilliantly to oppose the film. Early on the producers responded to quiet the uproar by hiring a number of neighborhood people for menial jobs on the film. Among them were activists who spied on the shooting schedule, and passed information on to the committee. We always knew what they were planning and were generally there waiting for them each day. They couldn't figure out how we knew so much about them.

I think the national publicity raised by our opposition to the film played a big role in helping to turn the declining situation around in the South Bronx. We put the neighborhood on the national media map. Reagan even stopped there to be photographed when running for President. He was photographed in front of a giant stenciled “DECAY” on an abandoned building by artist John Feckner. Soon money and social services began to come back to the neighborhood. It is now a much-revitalized place with a new generation of artists piling in for reasonable rents. It was about that time that I saw the PAD/D leaflet in SoHo. I thought, “Wow, artists organizing again...that's interesting.” I had been reading Lucy Lippard in the Village Voice, and recognized her name, so I sent her a letter telling her of my work with The BUF and with The Committee Against Fort Apache, The Bronx. As it turned out she had heard of what we were doing and a letter from her passed mine in the mail. [Laughter] She said, “Come to these meetings.” I did, in the fall of 1980.

As I recall those first months that I was involved, we met on the first Sunday of each month at Printed Matter bookstore and talked. I don't remember specifically but I'm sure people
wrote discussion papers and the like. There were a number of opinions about what kind of organization PAD/D should be, what it should try to do, and so forth. It is my experience that unless a group comes together around a specific issue, and the necessary action seems obvious, a long period of discussion seems to be required to get on the same page.

**TS:** So it was still a pretty unformed thing when you got there?

**JK:** That's my memory: lengthy, interesting crowded gatherings, with people showing slides of their work, presenting discussion papers and the like. People wanted some kind of active group. I think we next moved to public events at Printed Matter and Franklin Furnace with the help of Lucy and Martha Wilson. There was a performance art series, Lucy curated window art, and we attempted to reach out to other artists inviting them to participate in these and other events, exhibitions, and publications.

The wars in Central America heated up, in El Salvador and Nicaragua for example, and became the focus of a great deal of work and a nationwide exhibition campaign with numerous venues in NYC organized by PAD/D working in coalition with other artists, poets, writers, and a variety of groups, both cultural and political.

1980-86 was intensely active. We maintained a core membership of twenty or so, sometimes growing to much larger numbers as we moved forward with major projects. Lucy Lippard and I were working collaboratively, as a team, during this period. We traveled around the country, frequently speaking at universities and various alternative cultural spaces. During those trips we began to explore the possibility of a building a national network of progressive culture. At one point PAD/D called a national convention or conference in NYC. It was held at the Health and Hospital Workers Union headquarters on 43rd Street. Groups came from around the country. Our main thing was building networks beyond the art world. If you're always just relating to the art world, that's a problem. Don't try to make everybody a "political artist". Organize people as people. One of the things that you have to offer artists and cultural people is a venue for expression. We made it a central issue that we would create venues in the communities of the city. PAD/D was the fringe art world reaching out into the community and we facilitated a community perspective back toward the art world. Although we didn't receive much credit in the mainstream, I think we and the other groups of the late 1970s were fuel for the political art boom of the late 1980s and early 1990s.

Building a national network proved too much for our resources. There are complex problems when working in concert with organized political groups whether they're left or right or whatever. Their agenda is political and culture is a potentially mercurial voice, one they want to control and manipulate for their purposes. We stood for an independent cultural movement, one that worked with organized political groups not for them. We wanted our own power based within progressive political change movements. We didn't have the resources to carry that forward.

**TS:** Could you talk about the nuts and bolts of how PAD/D functioned, how they made decisions, how they got things done, how you resolved conflict?

**JK:** I recall that we tried to make PAD/D democratic; decisions were open to the membership and made by them. We used simple majority voting procedures. We tried to make power transparent within the group. But we also tried to avoid the endless group therapy sessions that consensus decision making often leads to.

The importance of Lucy Lippard cannot be overstated. Without her, there would have not been a PAD/D. Her leadership was very much a leadership of doing. Everyone was involved in numerous activities and projects. But Lucy was omnipresent. A number of us were 24/7 on the job for years, but Lucy more than anyone gave the process a rudder. She displayed a tireless determination that flowed through the whole enterprise. She was also a highly respected emissary to the Women's movement, the Native American movement, and to mainstream art.

Initially, while we were working out organizational procedures, Lucy and I, along with several others, were generally accepted as leaders. There was a mix of age and experience in PAD/D that gave that period a natural sort of hierarchy. Soon we organized. Basically, people would present ideas or projects and, if they could get others...
to participate, things went forward. Artists from outside PAD/D could also present project ideas to the group. Project members would update the general meeting on their various projects as they progressed. Other members or artists outside the group might join to help complete a given project. We frequently brought outside artists aboard on specific projects. This gave people a way to work with us without joining the core membership. That proved to be a useful method. We had a little centralized money and that was given to support PAD/D projects. There were a significant number of more or less independent projects that went forward under the PAD/D umbrella.

There were an evolving number of practical committees to get things done. They came and went according to specific projects. There were a number of smaller meetings continually reporting back to the whole. There was a kind of central or steering committee. But the people on it understood that we were advisory—not a top down sort of thing. A number of us had been through those top down organizations and knew the traps pretty well. I think PAD/D worked well for about eight years because of this bottom up organizational plan. That way, members were working on projects that had individual meaning to them. There was less discord in PAD/D than any group I’d worked in to that point.

The core membership of PAD/D was made up of people who wanted to work collectively to accomplish something meaningful outside the winner-take-all mentality of the New York art scene. There was a belief that art could serve some broader social purpose than the commercial scene allowed. There was a shared desire to re-picture the world around us. We were into sharing imagery, information, and ideas for a common purpose. We tried to organize PAD/D to best do those things within the scope of our resources.

**TS:** Yeah, that makes a lot of sense

**JK:** I think we were pretty good at finding ways for artists to work socially with their creative talents. Some groups I had worked with like the Black United Front were top-down organizations. They had specific things they were trying to accomplish, and an agenda for long term goals of Black participation in New York politics, so they just assigned people. “You be here, you watch that, you do this.” That kind of centralized leadership doesn't work well with educated creative types who aren't there to earn a living from the boss.

PAD/D members were college-educated people, most with masters degrees, and career ambitions. It was a tricky business for radical members of the professional class—part of the intelligentsia—to organize and employ those talents for social change.

**TS:** Were there precedents for what PAD/D was doing that you were aware of or that people would know about?

**JK:** Well several among the membership brought the 1960s with them, that’s for sure. The painful lessons of the split between left politicos and the counter culture flower power people were not so far in the past. The anti-war, civil rights, and feminist movements of that period were still fresh. There was a growing understanding of the awesome power of the media and mass imagery as a source of social control, and consequently artists of my generation began to see imagery as a political battlefield as important as any other. I think we understood that we were undertaking an image war and that we wanted to oppose the ceaseless flow of lies moving through the daily media. Much of the ensuing history of art since then bares witness to that understanding.

**TS:** What’s your assessment of the legacy of PAD/D?

**JK:** Beyond the archive, I don't really know what it is. I do know that the mainstream embrace of “political art” in the 1980s and 1990s did not acknowledge the contributions of PAD/D, or many of the other groups of that period. And more recent surveys of that period haven't included our activities. Most of mainstream art history takes structure in the recognition of individual achievements which reinforce the market perspective of the system. PAD/D did not do that. We did not fit that agenda. In the past few years several young historians have stopped by for interviews, but I doubt that young artists now working in a social manner know of PAD/D. The internet changes things a lot. Perhaps a new kind of collectivity will emerge. I think it is already happening. It too is outside the mainstream of contemporary art.
“Your secure - no escaping he whispers. He leans forward and plants a brief chaste kiss leaving me reeling – my insides clenching at the thrilling unexpected touch of his lips. “I like this harness,” he whispers…”

50 Shades of Red: Enterprise Culture and Social Practice Art, a Love Story?
Gregory Sholette – March 4, 2014

Imagine a communal body defined solely by aesthetic criteria, indifferent to marketing specialists and cool hunters, something resembling a desiring collective – a machine whose solidarity emerges from a constantly materializing sensual interaction with everyday life. The very possibility of such a cooperative being haunts our bedraggled capitalist present, not because it represents what is utterly unthinkable, but because the socialization of labor by capital has made it so palpable.

What is Social Practice Art? Who gets to define it? And why?

A recent New York Times article sought to answer at least some of these questions. Entitled “Outside the Citadel, Social Practice Art is Intended to Nurture” the reporter puzzled over how institutions can teach contemporary art that blurs the lines between “object making, performance, political activism, community organizing, environmentalism and investigative journalism.” In doing so he states this work allegedly pushes contemporary art close to the breaking point. The piece goes on to say that although leading museums have largely ignored so-called social practice art by contrast many smaller art institutions,

see it as a new frontier for a movement whose roots stretch back to the 1960s but has picked up fervor through Occupy Wall Street and the rise of social activism among young artists.

Of course this is not the first time art with an explicitly socially agenda has engaged flourished on the margins of the art world only to gradually, or rather I should say

selectively, turn up first in small and then increasingly more established cultural institutions until some few individuals come to represent its all but inevitable passing from the scene. This is not to disparage those whose works are canonized under the heading “political art,” “committed art,” “socially concerned art,” and so forth. Rather it is to raise a red flag regarding the direction the newly minted “social practice” is already beginning to take. Two questions to bear in mind regarding this moment is not only who benefits from the codification of a given activity, and of course also who loses, but under what conditions and on whose terms does this process of classification proceed. It would be remarkable in other words if social practice art were uniquely capable of writing its own contract of usage by institutional power. If one is to wear a harness in other words, it should come at a price.

Let’s just say that…

It starts like this. The initially turbulent reemergence of political art, activist art, interventionist art, collectivized art, socially engaged/relational/participatory/dialogical art. Some see it as a return of concerns dating back to the early years of the avant-garde, others as the resurgence of 1968, which has in many ways grown just as distant as the turn of the last Century I supposed. Still others perceive it as little more than an artistic genre, or a concept useful for organizing the next exhibition, or perhaps freshening-up this or that tired museum collection. But even in my lifetime I recall the late 1980s when “political art” unexpectedly became hip. It was featured in the Museum of Modern Art’s exhibition Committed To Print in 1988, the Dia Art Foundation’s projects with Martha Rosler and Group Material in Soho at about the same time, and a few year later at the Whitney Biennial of 1993 which was described by some as a pleasureless return to cultural Stalinism, although to many of us on the Left it was seen as an anemic attempt to symbolically represent the politicization of artists starting roughly in the late 1960s but continuing into the early 1980s (and probably it is not a coincidence that some of this work from the 1993 Whitney Biennial was recently on view at the New Museum downtown).

But we know this kind of cultural turbulence “from below” is not aimed at establishing yet another aesthetic category. And we know its resurgence is not simply a case of mere repetition, at least not in any familiar sense of that word. The shift is more fundamental. The dark matter of the art world is rising, for better and for worse.
Still, it’s complicated.
Thanks to an ever more accessible technology for manufacturing, documenting, distributing, as well as pilfering, revamping, and fictionalizing information, a previously obscured realm of cultural productivity has begun to brighten, materialize, and sometimes even cohere into thickening networks of exchange that bristle with a desire for independence not only from prevailing market forces, but also from mainstream art institutions. We might describe this shift as the sudden unblocking of what Alexander Kluge and Oscar Negt called a counter public sphere: the defensive production of fantasy generated in response to the alienating conditions of capitalism. Or we could refer to this process as the illumination of a previously shadowed realm of informal, everyday imagination from “below,” a phenomenon I sometimes describe as art’s missing mass or “dark matter.” Still, this visualization not only exposes pent-up desires, it also releases less savory forms of anger and resentment all the while throwing a light on the actual socialized conditions of labor, conditions that have become essential for all forms of artistic production today. And this inescapable visualization of social production comes at a moment when the usual precariousness of artists had reached a new level of intensity.

As is widely known even professional artists – that is to say those with credentials such as BFA or MFA – typically work two or three non-art related jobs in order to maintain a modest level of income. On top of this are increasingly unaffordable health care expenses and reasonable studio space rental has been pushed to the far-off urban margins by gentrification. Add to this is a scarcity not only of full-time teaching positions, but also part time adjunct work. Sociologist Pierre-Michel Menger writing before the recent global economic crisis reported that poverty rates amongst artists in the United States were “higher than those for all other professional and technical workers.” Since 2008 this extreme precariousness amongst artists is less and confined to the United States.

Compounding this bleak situation is the ever-greater waves of graduating artists from schools and universities who augment an already over-saturated industry with a glut of artists described by Carol Duncan in 1984 as “the normal condition of the art market.” Shortly before the global financial collapse a 2005 Rand Corporation study found that,

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The number of artists in the visual arts has been increasing (as it has in the other arts disciplines), and their backgrounds have become more diverse. At the same time, however, the hierarchy among artists, always evident, appears to have become increasingly stratified, as has their earnings prospects. At the top are the few “superstar” artists whose work is sold internationally for hundreds of thousands and occasionally millions of dollars.”

**In a nutshell: Risk Rules!**

Nevertheless the appearance of social production within the world of high culture has unsettled the gatekeepers of the artistic canon. They eyeball it, cautiously, hoping it is nothing but a short-lived detour from business as usual. Their greatest concern is not how to manage some deeply subversive or radical content, instead it is the very appearance of this social production itself that is disturbing because it directs our attention towards an ellipsis within the dominant cultural narrative: a point of uncertainty in a story where no such doubt is supposed to exist. It raises questions. Where did all these artists come from? Who is producing them? What role do they play in the reproduction of the art world? What are we – museums, art historians, foundations- supposed to do with all this shit?

When patience wears thin and strategic acts of evasion fail the mainstream art world devises ways of filtering out the less manageable elements of this challenging tumult, all the while dropping a trail of breadcrumbs to attract those bits they believe they can safely work with. These crumbs lead into museums and academic programs and guide certain artists towards whatever miniscule pots of public funding have not been completely eliminated by the culture wars. It is a process of seduction and discipline that reads like a scenario ripe for pulp fiction. The harness is tailor made. It’s a work of art.

**Performing Social Practice**

I have to be honest and confess that this process of seduction and discipline is not some abstract thing. There is in fact a social practice curriculum that I am involved with developing at Queens College. This is where I teach and how I pay the bills. Ours is just

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one of a handful of such initiatives in the United States along with California College of Art in San Francisco, Portland State, and Otis Institute (although others are rumored to be in the works). These programs differ somewhat in their specific emphasis but taken together they cover every shade of socially engaged art including guerrilla architecture, urban interventions, community-based-public art, interdisciplinary design, post-studio research, green “sustainable” culture, and so forth. And because networked cultural production is not bound to traditional institutional spaces, social practice art appears free to engage with, and in turn be engaged by many potential suitors who range from political activists to representatives of the so-called creative industries - that new economic engine, which neoliberals claim will save post-industrial capitalism. Does the delight of watching high culture placed into serving progressive social transformation curdle when it ultimately benefits neoliberal enterprise culture? The art critic Ben Davis has asserted as much when he insists that,

what appears at one juncture to be radically opposed to the values of art under capitalism often later appears to have represented a development intrinsic to its future development, for the simple reason that without changing the underlying fact of capitalism, you cannot prevent innovations in art from eventually being given a capitalist articulation.  

By contrast theorist John Roberts writes, “art today is subsumed under general social technique as a condition of art’s increasing absorption into these new cognitive relations of production. The result is that the inexorable conceptualization of art since the 1960s has found a ready home within the new relations of production.”  

In other words the very dynamic processes of capital itself are forcing a previously hidden social production into view, all the while attempting to bring it under control. Roberts more nuanced and emphatically Marxist interpretation of historical forces grasps what Davis does not. Yes, under capitalism, everything solid melts into air, but this process of continuous destruction inextricably opens up new possibilities for exposing and challenging the system whose disciplinary mechanisms have become so apparent in the aftermath of the global financial meltdown.  

The determination of culture by capital is not a straight line of cause and effect, a lesson even capitalists

5 Ben Davis, “A critique of social practice art: What does it mean to be a political artist?” International Socialist Review #90 http://isreview.org/issue/90/critique-social-practice-art  
7 If this dialectic were not intrinsic to capital then how would a Marx or Luxemburg or a Trotsky formulate a anti-capitalist theory of resistance from within such a totalizing ideological regime?
embrace today judging by their celebration of thinking “outside the box” in the post-industrial workplace, a mode of “subversive” consciousness attributed rightly or wrongly to artists.

Nevertheless with this increasing visibility of artistic forms of labor emerge new possibilities and risks. On the positive side we are experiencing a moment in which artistic production is once again at the center of a struggle over definitions and possibilities not only about what constitutes a genuine avant-garde practice, but also about the very nature of labor, democracy, and political agency. But before getting carried away consider the fact that artists are seldom willing or able to demand the terms of their own disciplinary enclosure, which is a fancy way of saying their own institutionalization. Still, the very fact that our conditions of social labor have been rubbed so terribly raw it is time we artists, along with all those “creatives” who drank the cool-aid of the “new economy,” consider the terms of our contract. Occupy Wall Street was clearly one phase of this reconsideration as a generation asserted “We prefer not to.” The performance was interrupted by force. This time. What new barricades are called for next time?

Once again, imagine a communal body defined solely by aesthetic criteria, indifferent to marketing specialists and cool hunters, something resembling a desiring collective—a machine whose solidarity resists appropriation by way of a constantly materializing sensual interaction with life. The very possibility of such a cooperative being haunts us today not because it is utterly unthinkable, but because the socialization of labor by capital has brought it so close. Meanwhile, the system’s recent collapse makes us desperate. It puts everything and everyone at risk. Nurturing solutions are hard to resist and to some degree necessary. Flirtation with power is unavoidable. And yet notwithstanding whatever sort of love affair we once had with capitalism the time has come to break it off.

“This is a nondisclosure agreement.” He shrugs and has the grace to look a little embarrassed. “My lawyer insists on it.” He hands it to me. I’m completely bemused. “If you’re going for option two, debasement, you’ll need to sign this.”

8 “Fifty Shades of Grey” ibid
In August and September I facilitated a class focused on labor issues within the arts. Specifically, we looked at how and when artists receive or don’t receive payment for their work, and the broader implications of compensating artists. We looked at examples in the US going as far back as the 1850s, but focused most of our attention on recent
history and contemporary practices. And because there was such a great mix of students in the class working across fields, as expected, I ended up learning quite a bit myself during the class. Below are five of the things I took away from the class, though there were many others as well.

1) Stop focusing so much on the international visual arts market.

Okay, maybe I didn’t learn this in the class, per se, as it’s a huge pet peeve of mine. However, in putting together the syllabus for the class it was reinforced for me how much of the writing on this subject spends most of its time focused almost exclusively on the international visual arts market. What do I mean by that? It focuses on the buying and selling of work by a relatively small group of art stars in the visual arts, artists who are often represented by blue chip or top-tier galleries of the kind that frequently participate in art fairs and resale markets. Or it focuses on artists who are given opportunities at the most prominent arts institutions nationally and globally.

Following on that point, it’s interesting to notice that some of the most prominent arts and labor discussions (i.e. those getting coverage in major arts and non-arts publications) in the past year or so have been happening because visual arts institutions that traditionally focused primarily on painting, sculpture, and conceptual art have been...
presenting more performance, dance, and theater, along with the amorphous category of social practice, which often requires contributions from people who are not the primary artist(s) and are typically not credited or compensated for those contributions. So, while these discussions are focused primarily on top-tier institutions and artists, what’s generating the discussion is the fact that they are moving outside of the traditional realm of the visual arts.

Among these debates are Marina Abramović’s use of performers as human centerpieces during the 2011 gala of LA’s MOCA; discussions around MoMA’s payment/terms for performers in Abramović’s much-visited 2010 The Artist is Present exhibit; and the paid commissioning for the 2012 Whitney Biennial of dance works and residencies by Sarah Michelson and Michael Clark (payment did not cover all the costs for the performance/performers, and Clark chose to use many untrained volunteers in his work), whereas the visual artists participating in the Biennial were generally not paid anything (OWS Arts & Labor group called for an end to the Biennial given the many labor concerns that came up during its 2012 iteration). And just in the past couple weeks, artist Suzanne Lacy’s performance piece, Between the Door and the Street, commissioned by Creative Time and the Brooklyn Museum, which incorporated literally hundreds of volunteers talking about feminism, including labor issues and the disparity of pay for women and people of color, sparked further discussion about arts and labor, led by a small group of those volunteers who wrote an open letter on the issue of compensation.

Also, as an example of why focusing only on the top tier institutions and artists gives a false picture of reality, it’s worth taking a second look at the 2010 survey of artists by W.A.G.E. It did find that 58% of the visual and performing artists surveyed were paid nothing. However, among those that were paid, it was those showing in small to medium sized institutions that were more likely to have received fees than those presenting in large institution. Which is to say, payment doesn’t seem to have a correlation to the size of an institution’s budget, and many smaller, less prominent organizations are finding ways to pay artists, so it’s worth looking at how they manage it in order to give everyone else examples to follow.

Plus, there are long histories of labor struggles and successful organizing among artists in other fields of the arts—i.e. actors, screenwriters, musicians, composers, etc. Having
a wider view of how labor is and isn’t compensated across fields of the arts can provide
an array of tested methods and ideas for approaching the issue.

And lastly, not all artists desire to work in a market context. In other words, not
everybody wants to have their work treated as something that can be bought or sold
through a capitalist lens. Looking at everything through the frame of the international
visual arts market places everything in a context of buying and selling that is anathema
to many artists. Those who strive to present alternate economies, such as barter
networks, time banks, and solidarity economies, often resist the tendency to separate
out every task according to its market value. And some artists simply don’t sell their
work, they give it away, lend it, or choose to offer it at no charge. While the labor
discussion is important, placing dollar amounts on every contribution to every work is
the opposite extreme of an utter lack of compensation, and I would argue neither
extreme is viable or good for the arts.

2) A lot of work we do is illegally treated as contract work.
I learned this thanks to one of the appendices in the Dancers Forum Compact — a perfect example of learning lessons in one field of the arts that resonant elsewhere. On the very last page of that document, Ivan Sygoda, Founding Director of the artistic management organization Pentacle, writes about the thorny issue of whether a dancer is an employee of the choreographer or presenting organization, or an independent contractor. Why does it matter? If you’re an employee, you MUST be paid at least minimum wage and be provided with things like workers compensation and unemployment insurance.

So, what is the difference? As Sygoda describes it, the distinction hinges on “control,” i.e. whether or not the person hiring you calls most of the shots, specifically when, where, and how you work. Here’s how he puts it: “The government insists that
choreographers employ dancers because they tell the dancers when and where to show up, what to wear, what steps to dance." I followed up on this with Dr. Cynthia Estlund, a scholar and expert on labor law currently working at NYU, and she recommended this page on the US Department of Labor’s website as a resource for people wondering if their work can legally be called contract work. The page has a lot of bureaucratic language I’m not about to try to translate, but it raises immediate concerns far beyond the realm of the arts.

Similar to the legal challenges to unpaid internships there’s potential for employees being illegally classified as independent contractors to mount large and transformative challenges to the conditions of their employment. Someone close to me has been employed for over a year at a film distribution company in a full-time job that regularly demands well over 40 hours a week, but who is paid as a “contract” employee, with no benefits whatsoever, nor any overtime pay. Similarly, Sara Horowitz, the founder of the Freelance Union, regularly touts the story of being hired as a contractor by a law firm as a pivotal moment in her life, eventually leading her to found the Freelancers Union. But knowing that many instances of employers trying to get away with classifying workers as freelancers instead of employees could be illegal, questions come up about how readily we should be embracing the mantle of freelancer, not just in the arts.

On the flip side, if every choreographer had to pay every dancer minimum wage and benefits for every performance ever, I can assure you many choreographers would simply have to stop making work and many dancers would not have any chance of performing, ever. If you look only at choreographers who make work at top institutions, sure they should be paying their dancers. But elsewhere voluntary labor, bartered labor, and social exchanges are crucial to the arts. A vast amount of the art made in this country never stands a chance of garnering financial support, because the reality is that there are millions of people making art in the US. Only a sliver of those people use the term “artist” when referring to their work, many happily consider themselves hobbyists and amateurs, and of those who do consider themselves artists or even professional artists, only a sliver of those people stand a chance of getting institutional or philanthropic funding for their work given how few opportunities there are for such funding in an arts field that is flush with practitioners of every age and career stage.

Again all payment or no payment at all are extremes that don’t reflect the diversity of ways that people make and support their art. So while illegal contract work is clearly an
issue our society has to deal with, forcing everyone to be an employee every time doesn’t seem tenable.

3) **Success and failure narratives are too limiting when it comes to whether an organizing effort made a difference.**

Actually, I learned this lesson listening scholar and curator [Yasmin Ramirez speak about the Puerto Rican Art Workers Coalition](https://www.libraryofcongress.gov) last year. But it came up again a couple of times in class. People love to declare that an effort to organize around labor issues succeeded or failed, but the point is that the act of organizing itself matters tremendously, and ripple effects can extend far beyond the end of a coalition or a specific action. Ramirez’ point in the lecture she gave was that superficial narratives that say that the Art Workers Coalition (AWC) started and stopped quickly, miss out on a richer and more complex narrative that captures all the ways that many people involved
in those efforts. Specifically, Ramirez was interested in the fact that Black and Puerto Rican artists did not simply walk away from the fights that the AWC took on, but continued fighting for things like more equitable representation of artists and employees of color in museums, community-based arts programming, and the formation of new institutions focused on work by artists of color. Organizing efforts, even short-lived or relatively small ones can radicalize people in ways that they carry with them far beyond the boundaries of that effort, and inform not only their decisions about how they work in the world, but also how they interact with other workers. Ripple effects matter.

4) Don’t assume you have to start from scratch when dealing with labor issues.
Re-imagining the world seems like everyone’s favorite marketing slogan and pass-time these days. And starting from scratch is great in some instances. But the reality is that most of the time it’s not only impossible to start from scratch, it’s undesirable, as you can end up walking down well-trod paths. Beyond finding that a lot of writing about arts and labor focused on the visual arts marketplace, I also found that few writers mention the past at all in their writing on the topic, save to throw in mini-lessons or interpretations of historical theories, particularly those of Karl Marx (I often prefer Arendt on labor, if we’re going for historical theory).

There are numerous artists’ unions in this country, many of which have been around since the early 1900s. There have been countless organizing efforts outside of traditional unions as well. Which is to say, labor struggles have been going on for quite some time in this country, so it’s worth looking at those examples, along with existing labor laws (see lesson #2), in order to have more solid ground to stand on. As any book on the avant-garde will tell you, everything old is new again all the time, so borrowing existing models, legislative ideas, or forming relationships/solidarity with existing groups is worth looking into.

A couple examples of groups having a look beyond the immediate moment are OWS Arts & Labor, who have done a number of teach-ins on non-arts labor organizing and historical efforts. Also, the group of NYC performing artists working together as the Brooklyn Commune, have been doing some research beyond current practices in that field.
And, P.S., visual artists, I know you love making art about labor issues, but once in a while organizing is a good thing too.

5) The economy is not a monolith.
It’s frequently the case that you’ll see discussions in the media and in academia on economics where the theories at play operate under the assumption that certain behaviors or trends are universal. There are even researchers who work to link our individual economic attitudes and practices to our biology—in other words, we use money a certain way because we are literally programmed by the makeup of our bodies to behave that way.

But there’s really compelling and strong evidence that it is never safe to treat economic behavior as universal, and therefore, it is never safe to operate under the assumption that the way one economy functions is the same as how another economy functions. And it’s also a mistake to think that we’re only participating in one economy at any given time in our lives.
Example one: Americans are weird. A few years ago three psychologists at the University of British Columbia decided to test out some of the claims that people behaved the same when it comes to money across multiple cultures or societies. So, they traveled around the world and used classic economic experiments like the Prisoner's Dilemma and other similar games to see how people would play them outside of the US and Europe. Basically, the answer was immediately clear—not only do people not think of money and economics in the same way, most people don’t behave the way many classic economic theories say they ought to. Why? In the abstract for their paper, “The Weirdest People in the World,” scientists Joseph Heinrich, Steven J. Heine, and Ara Norenzayan say, “The comparative findings suggest that members of Western, educated, industrialized, rich, and democratic societies, including young children, are among the least representative populations one could find for generalizing about humans.” They go on to say, “we need to be less cavalier in addressing questions of human nature on the basis of data drawn from this particularly thin, and rather unusual, slice of humanity.” The mind quickly starts to think about all the other ways that we need to be less cavalier in generalizing, not just about economics. (Read this great recent write-up of their study.)

Example two: Simultaneous economies. Another paper that really intrigued me and reinforced how mistaken it is to argue or believe that there is a singular, monolithic economy, is by Jenny Cameron and J.K. Gibson-Graham, titled “Feminizing the Economy: Metaphors, Strategies, Politics” (please let go of whatever part of you may cringe reading that title, it’s a good paper). Essentially, they are attempting to take next steps following earlier feminist thinking about the economy that pushed for traditionally unpaid labor like child-care and cleaning to be treated just like other forms of labor that are compensated, such as office work. What the authors of this paper argue is not that we shouldn’t acknowledge the work being done by all people in all realms, or that there aren’t real disparities in the way different groups of people are paid and treated as workers, but rather that placing every type of labor in a capitalist framework ignores the fact we actually are simultaneously working in multiple economies at the same time. More simply, in my day-to-day life, I choose to volunteer, I also cook and clean for myself, I give gifts to friends and family, and I am paid for some of the work other that I do (in fact I’m paid in different ways and at different levels). Each of those things is a form of labor, but each of them is basically operating in a separate economy. Forcing
them all into a capitalist framework where a specific monetary value is assigned to each task actually would change my relationship to that labor and to the people involved in it, in many instances to the detriment of those relationships. As they put it in the paper, “In the diverse economy we cannot easily read off credits and debits but are forced to inquire into the specific conditions of any economic activity before we can advocate or oppose it.”

There was much more that we covered and that I learned from the class, but these were among the things that resonated most frequently for me during our discussions. Hopefully some of this is of use to those of you out there concerned with these issues.

http://hyperallergic.com/91236/five-things-i-learned-while-teaching-a-class-on-arts-and-labor/
THE VIEW FROM HERE

A report from The Brooklyn Commune Project on the state of the performing arts from the perspective of artists
It’s Not You, It’s The System

They’ll tell you that it is your fault; that artists who struggle financially are failing to make their work efficiently, or to market it effectively, or that it just doesn’t appeal to a broad enough audience. They’ll tell you that artists are bad with money, unprofessional and insufficiently entrepreneurial. None of this is true.

They’ll tell you that because you get psychological gratification for making your art, that your labor is not “work” and you should be grateful to labor without compensation, to entirely self-fund the creation of your projects and provide your products and services for free to institutions that receive money (and tax exemption) expressly to produce and present your art to the public, for the public good. They are wrong. You’re not crazy. It’s not you, it’s the system.

MORE ARTISTS, LESS MONEY

The past thirty years have seen an exponential increase in the number of self-identified artists working in an ever-widening field of creative expression. But while creative output is at an all time high, established, formal structures for supporting individual artists have stagnated or even diminished. Here are some facts and figures:

• The $146 million budget of the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) represents just 0.012% (about one one-hundredth of one percent) of federal discretionary spending. In arts-friendly New York City, the budget for the Department of Cultural Affairs is only 0.25% of the entire NYC budget.

• 55% of foundation funding for the arts goes to the 2% of arts organization with budgets exceeding $5 million. The effect of this is to allocate billions of dollars to serve a mostly wealthy, white (and shrinking) audience. At the same time, non-white populations have grown in every region of the country since 2000, more than a third of the country is comprised of people of color and in four states white people are no longer the majority.

• Only 5% of all charitable giving in the United States goes to the arts.

• The number of individuals who dedicate themselves to art making, without even expecting a living wage in return, outnumbers those whose art practice generates their primary income by 20 or 30 to 1, according to a 2001 study by the RAND Corporation. There is every reason to believe that proportion has increased greatly over the past decade.

• Technology has given rise to innumerable new “methods, techniques, and materials … for conveying emotional states and ideas....” These “new forms of self-expression” exist across multiple platforms and in multiple, new contexts, fundamentally “altering the sources and reach of creative expression.” (How Art Works, a publication of the NEA)
Economics 101

In 1966 two economists at Princeton, William J. Baumol and William G. Bowen, published a groundbreaking study called *Performing Arts: The Economic Dilemma*. They identified the problem and gave it a name: Baumol’s Cost Disease. It is quite simple to explain.

Basically, there are two different kinds of economies: manufacturing economies that use machines to make products and an economy of live performance (or, more recently, a human economy) that absolutely depends upon the live interaction of humans with one another.

In a traditional market-driven manufacturing economy, technological innovation leads to increased productivity that decreases prices and raises wages. But in an economy of live performance—and in education, healthcare and other services that depend upon live human interaction—no amount of technological innovation can increase productivity. As Baumol and Bowen put it:

“Human ingenuity has devised ways to reduce the labor necessary to produce an automobile, but no one has yet succeeded in decreasing the human labor expended at a live performance of a 45 minute Schubert quartet much below a total of three man-hours.”

Humans cost more than machines and since productivity can’t be increased through technological innovation without significant loss of quality, the cost of making art goes up. Since the cost of making art goes up and the costs can’t be passed along to the consumer (without driving ticket prices through the roof) this work requires subsidy through government funding and philanthropy. This funding is premised on the idea of “the public good.”
It’s All Good

**A PUBLIC GOOD** is something that has public value but cannot “pass the market test”.

The concept of **public goods** refers to things like clean air in Los Angeles, which almost no single individual could be convinced to pay for, but that everybody desires and from which everybody benefits. Even if the performed arts are fundamentally unsustainable in a pure market economy, they might still be deemed valuable to the general public.

In these instances, when the market cannot deliver what is in our common interest, government and philanthropy—both of which are mechanisms designed to allocate capital towards the public good—must intercede.

**THE PUBLIC GOOD** refers to the overall welfare and wellbeing of the general public. It implies a collective ethical notion of “the good” for “the public” and is the basic conceptual underpinning of our democratic form of government.

**THE PUBLIC GOOD IN AMERICAN HISTORY**

In 1776 John Adams wrote, “There must be a positive passion for the public good, the public interest... and this public passion must be superior to all private passions.” For the first 150 years of American History, we mostly expanded the public realm even as we also dramatically increased our standard of living. In the past 40 years we have seen a passion for “privatization”.

Word Nerds will appreciate that the word “private” is derived from the Latin word privare, which means, “To deprive, to take, to rob” or “to divide or tear apart.” In 1775 a “privateer” was a synonym for a pirate.
Performing the Public

In the 2012 report titled *How Art Works*, The National Endowment for the Arts proposed the following benefits to society of the arts:

**Benefit of Art to Society and Communities**, which refers to “the role that art plays as an agent of cultural vitality, a contributor to sense of place and sense of belonging, a vehicle for transfer of values and ideals, and a promoter of political dialogue.

**Benefit of Art to Individuals**, which refers to the cognitive, emotional, behavioral, and physiological effects that arts participation can produce in individuals, including transformations in thinking, social skills, and character development over time.

Live performance is a social process; it is the creation of temporary communities sharing transformative experiences. It is in this way that the performing artist serves as social sculptor, cultivator and steward of dynamic and ever-shifting social ecologies. While an individual artist may or may not be explicitly concerned with the public good, the effect of a vibrant, sustainable arts ecology is to create a public good for the public good.
Performing Democracy

Participatory democracy in an increasingly complex society requires individuals to see themselves as citizens. Widespread participation in the arts should be seen as democracy in action:

“We generally take it as an article of faith that it is undesirable for anyone to be kept from achieving as much as [he or she] can through the abilities with which [he or she] is endowed. It is, therefore, widely agreed that no market test need support the flow of public funds devoted to the opening of opportunities to the impecunious.” (Performing Arts: The Economic Dilemma, pp. 378-379)

The performing arts are necessarily performed live: by, in front of, and with other people. They are inherently social arts and provide a necessary opportunity for citizens to develop the skills of socialization and communication required by a healthy democracy. In an age of ubiquitous “connectivity” where human interactions are increasingly mediated by technology, the performed arts offers us the opportunity to practice “intentional liveness”: to be in community together and preserve the depth, nuance and meaning derived from negotiating the complexity of direct social interaction with others.

In a nation where many diverse communities co-exist—sometimes tendentiously, sometimes at deliberate distance—cultural activities, and the performing arts specifically, can uniquely serve as meeting place, a site for the formation of a shared communal identity as “the public”. The performing arts may serve as a microcosm of democratic society, where individual free expression meets public space, a space both literal and metaphorical for the convergence of the individual citizen and the collective body politic. Thus the performing arts are an essential public good for the development of citizens and the creation and maintenance of a “public”.

Then Why Are Artists Always Broke? (And Why Is It Worse Now?)

In a manufacturing economy where technological innovation leads to increased productivity, the economy expands by becoming more efficient, prices go down and wages increase (theoretically). But in an economy of live performance where the performers’ labor “constitute[s] the end product which the audience purchases”, there is no way to produce performed art more efficiently without fundamentally changing its content, or without seriously compromising its quality. Thus wages stagnate (in fact they decrease, for all practical purposes).

So why do artists even do this at all?

“If performers frequently are dedicated individuals who are willing to work under economic conditions which would be considered appalling in other activities, the performing arts are relatively insensitive to general wage trends, especially in the short run. Even in the long run, earnings in the performing arts may lag behind wages in occupations which provide less in the way of psychic income. Whereas most unskilled workers, for example, are likely to regard the hourly wage as their primary reward for working, the typical performer presumably receives, in addition, considerable pleasure and personal satisfaction from his work. The important point is that, as the general level of real income increases over time, people may well feel that they are better able to afford to pursue careers which offer relatively lower money incomes but larger psychic incomes.” (Performing Arts: The Economic Dilemma, p.169)
According to The NEA's 2012 publication How Art Works, the human impulse to create and express is, “the primary motive that powers the system.” The human impulse to create and express is so strong that people will withstand significant hardship to pursue it.

In 1966 when Baumol and Bowen proposed that, “as the general level of real income increases over time, people may well feel that they are better able to afford to pursue careers which offer relatively lower money incomes but larger psychic incomes”, the relative affluence of Post-WWII America was near its height and afforded a wider swath of the population the opportunity to choose psychic income over financial income.

But real income in the United Status has not increased in nearly 40 years. Thus while the demand for the arts—understood widely—remains constant, and the need for the social value of the arts increases, in 2013 the divergence between psychic income and real income has become a bridge too far for many Americans. Yet the existing system does not acknowledge this divergence.

As public sector arts funding has greatly diminished and foundations direct the bulk of their grant making activities towards large organizations, artists are not only left to fend for themselves, but are increasingly responsible for bearing the costs of cultural production themselves. This, apparently, was also true in 1966:

“...Arts organizations in financial difficulty have often managed to shift part of their financial burden back to the performers and to the managements, who also are often very poorly paid by commercial standards. The levels of income in this broad field must be considered remarkably low by any standards, and particularly so in light of the heavy investment often made by the artists in their education, training, and equipment.” (Performing Arts: The Economic Dilemma, p.169)
But whereas an arts organization in financial difficulty in 1966 might be able to shift that financial burden with less negative effect, the material conditions of the American people have changed considerably in the intervening years.

According to The Wall Street Journal, “apart from brief lapses, like in the late 1990s, wages have been falling for a generation.” In fact, measuring “on an inflation-adjusted basis, wages peaked in 1973, fully 40 years ago.”

The choice to “pursue careers which offer relatively lower money incomes but larger psychic incomes” is becoming less viable for a significant swath of the population, and for those who do choose a career in the arts, the negative economic impact on their quality of life is significantly higher than it was 40 years ago.

As the income gap in America has grown, the viability of a life in the arts has become increasingly elusive, available especially to those of independent means, to the exclusion of everybody else. As the income gap widens, so too does the culture gap, until “the arts” are now perceived as a luxury commodity for the very wealthy, not an essential public good. Self-identifying as an artist has become the domain of a privileged few, even as arts participation, when defined widely, has increased.

Not only is it unrealistic to expect to make a living as an artist in the current system, it is similarly unrealistic to expect to get paid for the art you create. In fact, as an artist you are likely to subsidize your art entirely on your own. So is there a more sustainable system?

*And what would it look like?*
A Vision for the Future

If the “not-for-profit” system for arts funding America is dysfunctional and possibly moribund, then we need to begin asking ourselves whether the benefits of this system outweigh the liabilities. Perhaps a new, more sustainable model lies outside the nonprofit economy, or it is predicated on a dramatic and fundamental shift in the relationship between artists and the institutions who fund and support their art.

A lot has changed since 1966. Then, as now, we must identify a value proposition to the performing arts that exists outside traditional notions of a market economy comprised of goods and services.

According to the standard economics, technological innovation in manufacturing economies leads to increased productivity, decreased costs and increased wages, but in that context live performance consistently fails the “market test.” Fortunately, the past decade has seen the emergence of a New Economy, an Economy of Ideas, where the performing arts can provide tangible value as laboratory for innovation and creativity.

It is here that economic impact and public good converge, as the NEA report goes on to say:

Our capacity to innovate and to express ideas, and its links to forms and outlets for expression, also point up a core liberty within our society: freedom of expression. This freedom requires certain individual and community level attitudes that are facilitated by the arts: for example, the courage to express oneself and a tolerance of new ideas and vehicles for creative expression. The system map implies a link between arts participation and our ability, opportunity, and likelihood to express ourselves freely.

The benefits of these broader societal impacts spill over to creative problem solving as it applies to a whole range of other endeavors, from the sciences to design and mass media. Regarded this way, the broader societal impacts of the arts are both greater in scope and more difficult to track directly back to the arts as classically defined.
The late 1990’s were characterized by the emergence of a new economy, the result of the transition from a manufacturing-based economy to a service-based economy. The “new economy” of the dotcom era lost its luster in the wake of 9/11 and, later, the financial crisis of 2008. But global social and economic changes, coupled with the rise of social media, gave rise to the “new economy movement”, described by political economist Gar Alperovitz as “a far-ranging coming together of organizations, projects, activists, theorists and ordinary citizens committed to rebuilding the American political-economic system from the ground up.”

One facet of the new economy movement is the idea of a human economy that is made and remade by people’s actions as social beings. As we wrote earlier, the performing arts are by definition social arts. They require the live presence of human beings in close proximity to other human beings. They foster interaction, they have the potential to educate, enlighten and promote discourse; what’s more, the role of public space, such as those required by performed arts, is to foster social interaction, an effect of which is to build a sense of community and mutual investment of individuals in the collective whole.

When regarded in this context, the performed arts—understood widely and embracing a wide array of practices—can be seen as existing at the intersection of Creative Expression, New Economics, Public Life and Social Innovation Design. Performing Artists are creators of social objects, transformative experiences and builders of community. The future is ours!

*What it will look like, friends, is up to you.*
THE BROOKLYN COMMUNE PROJECT

is a grassroots initiative organized by Culturebot.org and The Invisible Dog Art Center to educate, activate and unify performing artists of all disciplines to work together towards a more equitable, just and sustainable arts ecology in America.

To read the full report and for a more complete description of the activities of the Brooklyn Commune Project, please visit

www.brooklyncommune.org
(UN)DOING (UN)COMPENSATION

Caroline Woolard

In March, 2014, Open Engagement asked: How many uncompensated people labor on the piece? What follows is an attempt to reframe the question, and the debate, around (un)compensation.

Within a neoliberal economy that supports the debt-backed-professionalization of artists and activists, I question the relationship between overproduction and underpayment. What are the conditions that make overproduction desirable? When did monetary payment for art and activism become necessary? While artists and activists demand payment for work, we must also articulate our relationship to payment systems: market sales, state-support, philanthropy, and solidarity economies that center on livelihood. Acknowledging the diverse economies that I circulate in, I hope this writing points towards the internal contradictions that make professionalized, debtor artists and activists in the United States (including me) hussle for cash while engaging in projects on scales that cannot possibly compensate all participants equitably.

As most people reading this already know, the labor behind many works of art is veiled by a myth of individual genius. Although contemporary artworks that circulate in museums, galleries, and biennials are mostly produced by unpaid interns, underpaid artists’ assistants, seasonally-employed shop technicians, and far-flung contractors hired by artists’ project managers, narratives that celebrate individual charisma and “the artist’s touch” continue to permeate wall labels and art discourse alike.

Many artist-collectives, by sharing labor and decision making power, counteract the alienation that often occurs with an hourly wage and a drive towards efficiency in rapid production. To make labor visible, for Artists Experiment at MoMA in 2013, I proposed an ongoing event where artists, interns, assistants, and craftspeople would stand beside the works of art that they labored on, telling visitors about the process of producing each work, as well as the forms of compensation received by each person. This proposal, submitted as one of six options for Artists Experiment project at MoMA, was not chosen.

LIVELIHOOD OVER WAGES

While I believe that the labor involved in the production of any work of art is integral to the meaning of the piece, the question (“How many uncompensated people labor on the piece?”) assumes that monetary compensation is the only form of compensation that artists aspire towards and value. We know that many people labor on every piece, but what is (un)compensation? What conditions make monetary compensation necessary or desirable for artists, and how might we understand, destabilize, and change these conditions?

If we, as artists and activists, knew that our needs for survival and beyond would be met by the government or our communities, would we labor differently? Proponents of a “guaranteed basic income,” provided by the government, hope that socially necessary tasks like childcare and domestic work might be understood as valuable. If all people had a basic income, would we (artists) still sell our labor? If the United States were a country where all people were supported with a basic income, or, if I lived in an intentional community where we pooled money and shared domestic labor (like the seventy-five person strong community called Ganas in Staten Island), I know I would still aspire to refine my craft, create beauty, build community, take risks, speak truth, tell forgotten histories, learn about the desires and needs of my neighbors, and receive recognition for this labor.
SHORT TERM PRACTICES

So, while I struggle to create and support spaces where childcare, food, learning, and organizing are possible without dollar-per-hour payment, compensation as the only form of value, and where livelihood is honored over paid work, I attempt to educate myself about the conditions I work within while redistributing money and labor in some group projects I work on. If we acknowledge that hundreds of people labor for every project, what forms of compensation can we accept, and when? Here are seven ways in which I attempt to navigate inequity within institutions and collective projects:

1. The Institution vs. Me
Before I agree to a project, I go to [http://www.guidestar.org/](http://www.guidestar.org/) to discover the salaries of the organizational directors, curators, and staff I am working with. For example, I see that the director of the Queens Museum, Tom Finkelpearl, was paid $143,288 in 2012, and the director of the Museum of Modern Art, Glenn D. Lowry, was paid $710,691 with a bonus of $338,215 in 2012. Further, I go to [http://littlesis.org/](http://littlesis.org/) to see how board members of the organization affiliate politically. This often gives me insights into the internal power dynamics at play in the organization, as well as the kinds of request for payment that might be possible. For example, The Swedish Artists’ National Organization asks that “for every exhibition in a public art institution an exhibition fee shall be paid. The artist shall be temporarily hired as staff and receive at least two months’ salary at 25,000kr (US $3,743). The employer shall pay employers’ fees and taxes…. The salary is not negotiable downwards.” See Alison Gerber’s “Payment for Services: From Market to Professional Logics of Valuation in Contemporary Artmaking” for more on W.A.G.E. and other groups doing good work on institutional payment requirements.

2. Diverse Economies Wall Labels
When OurGoods.org participated in Living as Form, we documented the labor and forms of payment that circulated in the production of our project, hanging this wall text beside the didactic wall text that Creative Time produced about our project. For Exchange Cafe at MoMA, I am producing a video and publication that reflects upon the 100 people who labored on the work. For example, after a long negotiation, MoMA’s Education Department agreed to hire formerly incarcerated people as educators for Exchange Cafe, and to hire a worker cooperative run by formerly incarcerated people for catering. This contract continues today.

3. Cash for Projects, not Airfare
When a gallery in Tel Aviv asked Trade School New York to participate in a show there, raising $2,000 for airfare and lodging, we asked them to save carbon and celebrity, taking the money for our existing work and doing a remote lecture instead of travelling. This allowed us to avoid the drama of individual representation and representation over local work, to turn the institution’s interest in our work towards project funding. Kate Rich has made a decade-long project by redirecting airfare and hotel funds towards her work on the Feral Trade Network.

4. Background Check
In some groups I’m in, we have open discussions about what we each need in order to continue working on any project. This takes a long time, and can only happen if building trust and open communication are possible. In some groups, members will need cultural capital in order to stay in the country, or press visibility in order to get a visa. In other groups, members will need to get paid in order to make time to participate in the project, while others will be able to volunteer because they need to make less money to survive. I aim to make transparent my class background (and race, age, sexual orientation, and ability) so that I can acknowledge spaces that are familiar and comfortable to me, as well as the “cushions” I work from. For more information about class and privilege, start here (and for people with wealth, read Classified).
5. Percentage of Payment
After thinking through the backgrounds and interests of members in a group, I often follow the worker cooperative model: equal member participation, and distribution based on percentage of work. After supporting founders who must cultivate new leaders and share institutional memory with a “founding fee” or an incentive to stay with the organization past the founding years, everyone gets paid based on a percentage of work. So, if I work 100 hours and you work 10, and we make $1000, you should get paid 10% of any money that comes in, after the founder’s incentive is paid out. For more on worker cooperative structures, look to Arizmendi Bakery for ideas, as well as cooperative start-up timebanking models.

6. Internships
I accept barter and mentorships, not unpaid internships. No student should pay for school credits to work as an intern, because no one should pay to go to work. I believe that unpaid internships can be valuable if an intern wants to understand the working process of an artist, collective, or institution, and the artist, collective, or institution is able to provide time for this learning. Artists who work within specific crafts will be able to take on unpaid apprentices, training interns in skillsets with the intention to employ them within a craft tradition. Project-based artists, however, can teach research and writing skills, but not much else, as each project employs a new craft tradition and the technical skills any intern might learn are rarely repeated enough to model an apprenticeship process. An internship should be understood as a relationship that is a barter: an equal exchange of labor for clearly articulated learning, recommendations, relationships, or access to resources. Great work is being done on intern rights by Art and Labor in New York and the Carrot Workers Collective in London.

7. The Revolution Will not Be Funded
In case you think that nonprofits will save the world, or that art/activism seeking to engage many participants or a popular movement can support all participants equitably, you should read The Revolution Will Not Be Funded. There is no easy “alternative” to for-benefit, or commoning work, but there are diverse economies that we can navigate with principles. I’ve written about some options that give me hope here. If you prefer to control the conditions in which you sell your labor, a worker cooperative might be the best model for you. If you prefer to work for the public good, a state-supported arts sector is what you should advocate for locally at your community board, or learn how to lobby for, nationally.

POLITICAL ECONOMY OF ART
If visitors engage with a work for a day at most, but the work of art takes thousands of hours to research, develop, produce, document, and disseminate in writing, talks, and art world lore, I believe that the production of any work of art, but especially socio-politically engaged work, should be integral to the meaning of the piece. I’m tired of work about sustainability, democracy, or social transformation that is not produced within sustainable, democratic, or transformative systems. “How many uncompensated people labor on the piece?” will change when our livelihoods are supported. It might become: What if humble participation in community was as valuable as the production of new projects? What forms of community and institutional recognition do we each need and desire, and why? Could we do less, and do it really well?

References:
Payment for Services: From Market to Professional Logics of Valuation in Contemporary Artmaking
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Classified
The Revolution Will Not Be Funded
Solidarity Art Worlds
Worker Cooperatives

timebanking for worker cooperatives

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http://littlesis.org/

Group References:
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Feral Trade Network
Exchange Cafe at MoMA
Art and Labor
Carrot Workers Collective
Americans for the Arts

Further Reading:
http://www.artpractical.com/feature/standard_deviation/
http://www.communityeconomies.org/Home/Key-Ideas
http://www.artandwork.us/
http://bfamfaphd.com/#read
http://solidaritynyc.org/#/resources/resource-library

About the Author:
Caroline Woolard graduated from the only tuition-free art school in the country (Cooper Union, BFA 2006) with a strong commitment to the solidarity economy movement and conceptual art. In 2009, Woolard co-founded three systems for cultural production: a studio space, a barter network, and Trade School. These experimental systems of mutual aid inform and enable her short term projects, including: Exchange Cafe for Artists Experiment at the Museum of Modern Art (2013), The Economy of We at The University of Massachusetts Amherst (2012), and a Barricade to Bed toolkit for a cyberfeminist event at Eyebeam Art and Technology Center (2013). Woolard is currently a resident in the Queens Museum Studio Program, a lecturer at Cooper Union and The New School, a coordinator for Trade School, and a member of the New York City Community Land Initiative and To Be Determined, groups working for a network of community land trust in New York City. More information, events, and talks are available at: http://carolinewoolard.com/

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UNPAID
Housework
Volunteer
Self-provisioning
Slave labor

NON MARKET
Household sharing
Gift giving
Hunting, fishing, gathering
Theft, piracy, poaching

OPEN ACCESS
Atmosphere
International Waters
Open source IP
Outer Space

NON-CAPITALIST
Worker cooperatives
Solo proprietors
Community enterprise
Feudal
Slave

NON MARKET
Sweat equity
Family lending
Donations
Interest-free loans

Diverse Economies, Community Economies Collective
Solidarity Art Worlds

by Caroline Woolard

I cannot describe the future for you because I am writing this alone. In Solidarity Art Worlds, no one person will understand what we currently mean by “alternative” or “my ideas.” Solidarity Art Worlds grow from collective spaces of listening, not from immediate reactions to coercion and individual accumulation. Solidarity Art Worlds are not just small alternatives to inevitable structures of greed, hoarding, and isolation. Solidarity Art Worlds emerge as we share authority and sense our collective power. I find hope and strength when I engage with Third Root community health center, the Rock Dove healing collective, the open source computer engineers at Eyebeam and NYCResistor, the readings at Bluestockings, and the ongoing work at Ganas, Fourth Arts Block, Interference Archive, Black Women’s Blueprint, TimeBanksNYC, Picture the Homeless, The Foundry Theater, WOW Cafe, The Church of Stop Shopping, OurGoods.org, Milk Not Jails, INDIGNación, 596Acres, Callen-Lorde, O4O, CUNY’s Public Science Project, Brooklyn Cooperative Credit Union, the Park Slope Food Co-op, and Black Urban Growers.

Solidarity Art Worlds exist in places where people acknowledge each other with care and dignity, linking common struggles so that the next generations can work towards a world without structural violence, without worrying that solidarity, cooperation, redistribution, or guaranteed housing, universal health care, and education are alternative. I experience Solidarity Art Worlds when a wide range of struggles, desires, and needs are discussed. Without these spaces, I cannot dream of a better world. With two week timelines from invitation to publication, the Rail will seldom hear collective contributions. I cannot describe the future for you because I am writing this alone. One statement cannot communicate the lived experience of collective analysis, action, and collaboration. I cannot describe the future for you because I am writing this alone.

The declaration below, from organizers and advocates affiliated with the Alternative Economics Working Group of Occupy Wall Street, sets forth a foundation that I feel applies to Solidarity Art Worlds:

As we organize to resist, subordinate, and displace corporate power and a self-destructive economic system, we hold in our hearts a vision for an economy based on justice, ecological sustainability, cooperation, and democracy. We look to sites of creation and imagination, where we are forging new systems of exchange which prefigure a society that puts people and the planet before profit and growth.

We use direct democracy and cooperation to clothe, feed, heal, nurture, celebrate, educate, and challenge each other. We do all of this not to profit individually, but to meet the human needs of our community. Our internal economies are the antithesis of the greed and oppression we have been taught to expect from each other and acknowledges and addresses the myriad injustices that people bear everyday. Together we are moving beyond “jobs,” something someone gives you or takes from you, towards shared livelihoods that increase our collective economic security.

As we create new spaces, new relationships, and new systems, we acknowledge the existence of a solidarity economy outside of our occupations. The concept of a solidarity economy emerged from the global South, as
economia solidária, to describe economic practices and models which advance values of democracy, mutualism, cooperation, ecological sustainability, justice, and reciprocity. These economic practices include:

**Creation: Ideas and Resources**
- the commons: ecological and intellectual
- free and open source software and technology
- community land trusts
- skill shares
- free schools

**Production: How things are made**
- worker co-operatives
- producer co-operatives
- non-profit artisan collectives
- self-employment
- labor unions
- democratic employee stock ownership programs
- local self-reliance

**Transfer and Exchange: The Way We Share Goods and Services**
- barter networks
- freeganism
- sliding scale pricing
- time banks
- gifts
- clothing swaps
- tool shares
- community currencies
- fair trade
- community supported agriculture
- community supported kitchens
- consumer (usually food) co-operatives
- housing co-operatives and collectives
- intentional communities
- self-provisioning
- non-profit buying clubs

**Surplus Allocation: The Way We Create Economic Security**
- credit unions and community development credit unions
- co-operative loan funds
- rotating savings and credit associations
- mutual aid societies
- co-operative banks
- community development banks
While we must continue to experiment and refine ways of creating local self-reliance, we also acknowledge that without supporting the existing alternatives, and bringing them into our communities, we continue to uphold the very economic power that is destroying our communities and our planet. Likewise we recognize we must challenge and transform the existing forms of economic power to create room for more just forms of economic activity to take root and grow. In other words, we need a complete transformation of the dominant economic system.

Let’s assert our economic power through exercising our right to move our money credit and create restorative systems of exchange to replace extractive corporations. We can also learn about the alternatives that already exist in our communities, and where none exist, we can form them in the spirit of direct democracy! Together, we can create a world free of greed and oppression. Each day our very existence proves the possibility of other, more just and cooperative, economies.

I want to thank the Alternative Economies Working Group for creating such an inspiring document. As I struggle to avoid the busy lifestyle of workaholic Cultural Capitalists, where artists make time for careers rather than friendships, for work rather than healing, I openly struggle as a member of TradeSchool.coop to share authority and information. I am dedicated to sharing the resources I have: I open my studio space to friends during the day, and I have committed the $30,000 I received as a Fellow at Eyebeam: Art and Technology Center to a collective house. I’m currently seeking a dedicated group of people who want to organize a low income community land trust with spaces that do not allow for speculation on land. When I bind my livelihood together with artists and activists, I find the emotional and financial support to dream. I am excited to see more Solidarity Art Worlds, more collective projects, and longer timeframes so that I can open the Rail and read statements of collective struggle and desire.

CONTRIBUTOR
Caroline Woolard

CAROLINE WOOLARD is a Brooklyn-based artist, collaborator, and co-founder of OurGoods.org and Trade School coop, two barter economies for cultural producers.

RECOMMENDED ARTICLES

Notes From a Future
by Mary Mattingly

FEB 2013 | ARTSEEN Notes From a Future, after an unstoppable progression towards one art world extreme and a necessary alternative.

IN CONVERSATION

ANGELIC WORKING
GENESIS BREYER P-ORRIDGE with Jarrett Earnest
SEPT 2013 | ART Genesis Breyer P-Orridge pioneered
Recently I received an email from a student in Ireland. He had discovered an interview in which I discussed an old project that sounded extremely similar to something he had been working on for a year and was about to exhibit. This discovery sent him into a “mini-crisis” and he wrote to see if I might share my thoughts on the situation.

I sent this student printed materials from my work, as I strongly feel that artists who are doing similar work should make an effort to know each other, share knowledge and perhaps even work together. There is no reason why two variations of the same idea can’t happily co-exist. So much of the way that the art world is structured favors competition. Grants are competitive. Art schools stage student competitions. Students compete for funding. Hundreds compete for a single art school teaching position. Professors compete with other professors. Artists compete with artists – stealing ideas instead of sharing them, or using copyright laws to guard against thoughtful re-use. Artists compete for shows in a limited number of exhibition spaces instead of finding their own ways to exhibit outside of these competitive venues. Artists conceal opportunities from their friends as a way of getting an edge up on the capital-driven competition. Gallerists compete with other gallerists and curators compete with curators. Artists who sell their work compete for the attention of a limited number of collectors. Collectors compete with other collectors to acquire the work of artists.

This is a treadmill made from decomposing shit that is so devoid of nutrients that even its compost won’t allow anything fresh to grow. We need something better to run on. Some artists are bypassing competitive approaches in their practice, suggesting possibilities for a different cultural climate. Since the 1960’s, numerous artists have made works that take the form of strategies, proposals, gestures and instructions. While these works are not usually presented as invitations for others to reinterpret, making variations in a similar spirit still has the potential to yield rewarding results. Ideas are not necessarily used up just because they have entered the art historical canon (and many good projects remain unfamiliar to most audiences). This older soil remains fertile for new plantings.

More art projects could be created with the built-in understanding that they can be freely re-made or given a new twist by others in the future – like classical music compositions that still get played two hundred years after the composer died. Take the example of the late composer John Cage’s three movement composition “4’33””. It was first performed by David Tudor in 1952. This work has since been given many reinterpretations over the years by artists as diverse as Frank Zappa, The BBC Symphony Orchestra and The Melvins. The work finds new meaning with different performers, contexts, times and places. Redundancies, repetitions and overlaps are often neglected because they complicate the bigger picture and show art to be the much larger social mess that it really is. We don’t have to run away from repetitions.

Since 2001, the Philadelphia-based collaborative group Basekamp has been doing lectures, discussions, events and project planning around the theme of redundancy in the visual arts. Late last year they co-organized an event series titled “Making Room for Redundancy” with Lars Fischer (no relation to the author). They have been
dreaming up and building models for terminals where the viewer could enter an idea and see all of the overlapping permutations of how it has been explored before. Basekamp recently gave a lecture titled simply “I am a Collaborative Artist” at the Infest: Artist-Run Culture conference in Vancouver. For artists who are open to working with others, such conferences can be a good place to strengthen or develop new friendships, fueling new collaborations or broader inclusion in pre-existing projects.

Another mutually-supportive practice: the French artist Céline Duval enjoys a prolific collaboration with the German artist Hans-Peter Feldmann, who is about thirty years her senior. This began when Céline contacted him wanting to help with raw material for his work and now they publish books together. They collaborate on equal footing despite large differences in age, experience and success in the art world. The viewer must untangle the mingling voices in these co-authored works, ask questions, or just accept the hybrid and enjoy the resulting complexity.

Making participatory artworks can open up your practice and build a loose community in the process. Since 1997, Chicago-based artist Melinda Fries has been running the website ausgang.com. Ausgang is essentially an artwork in web form that contains the work of various contributors (many of whom are not artists). Melinda creates categories that are of personal interest (examples: “Living Situations”, “Things In The Road”, “Bus Stories”). Contributors then flesh out these themes by submitting stories, images, or projects that are suitable for the web. The site is updated seasonally. Melinda’s project is enriched and expanded by others and the contributors get a platform for their work that will be seen by many viewers. The people who participate often send out emails promoting the site and their contributions that are included. The site is not a flimsy catch-all for anything and everything. Melinda functions as an editor, but she allows a very broad range of ways for one to participate. In the interest of disclosure, I contribute to ausgang.com regularly, but perhaps you should too?

While there is a joy in finding people with shared affinities, establishing communication and friendships with artists who have shared interests and ideas is not a retreat from the challenge of making tough critical art. Who better to kick your ass a little than your collaborators? The disposable, vague, or one-liner qualities in so much recent art reveals a lack of sufficient peer-to-peer ass-kicking. Collaborative projects by their nature insist on constant feedback and criticism.

Arguing against competition is not necessarily a vote in favor of an idealized world of shiny happy people holding hands - some of the most productive collaborations can have a lot of tension and disagreement. The fascinating documentary “Some Kind of Monster” shows Metallica band members and co-founders James Hetfield and Lars Ulrich in exchanges that are sometimes so lacking in civility that at one point Ulrich is reduced to getting in Hetfield’s face and screaming: “FUUUUCCCKKK!!!” In an additional scene on the DVD, Ulrich admits: “I’m afraid of changing what has worked. Twenty years of hatred sold one hundred million records.” One of the great tempestuous working relationships in film history was that of director Werner Herzog and actor Klaus Kinski. In Herzog’s documentary “My Best Fiend”, Kinski’s behavior on the set during one film was so angering that the director seriously contemplated murdering him. When Klaus Kinski wrote his autobiography, he reportedly gave Herzog advance notice that he was going to trash the director in the book because he felt that attacking his friend would lead to increased sales. The two even collaborated in their mutual infuriation with each other but clearly, and more importantly, they pushed each other to perform better and make more ambitious and passionate films.

How can we build a stronger network among people with shared interests and values? In a recent talk that we hosted at Mess Hall in Chicago, curator Nato Thompson brought up the impressive and widespread networks that the hardcore punk music scene has crafted, where a band has a place to play and crash in nearly every major town. This is something he longs to see happen for experimental art and cultural practices in every part of the U.S. - particularly those areas that are culturally under-served. An audience member noted, however, that part of what enabled the hardcore punk scene to do this so effectively is that there is a shared language that is easier to understand. People seem able to grasp the terms and aesthetics more easily. Music can circulate quickly and simply. It often has a bracing, visceral and emotional power; heady forms of art and critical theory are generally a little less catchy. You could listen to eight hardcore songs in the time it takes to read this essay.

Some online communities show promise. For the past couple years I’ve been frequenting a particularly hyperactive online music discussion group for obscure loud rock. The number of times the distant feel of the Internet breaks out into the real world on some of these sites is uncountable. When people attend concerts together often the next morning one person will write about it and another will post the photos they took and it all gets shared with thousands who couldn’t be there. I’ve been offered places to stay in numerous cities based purely on my taste in music, received un-requested packages of CDs and have been loaned books through the mail. A band had their van and equipment stolen, so one forum member named Foetuscide quickly set up a Paypal account that people could donate to. When Foetuscide
was left homeless by Hurricane Katrina, people started sending her money at the PayPal account she originally created for the band. There has been endless support for a board member named EvilFanny who had to undergo brain surgery. A discussion thread about the merits of old Slayer and Celtic Frost records can happily share space with a thread where EvilFanny asks other board members if they know anything about going on Long Term Disability.

While these big online communities are messy and filled with more than their share of knuckle-draggers, sexists, homophobes and right wing morons, the generosity of participants can be breathtaking. The challenge for artists who want to build supportive networks like this is to find communication strategies that can help them connect to each other with the passion that music fans across the globe excel at. We need to make our emails to strangers whose art and ideas we care about resonate with that obsessive nerdy excitement that music geeks generate in their sleep. Art blogs are popping up all over Chicago but I have yet to see any become a truly action packed, socially dynamic online community where artists, curators, viewers, writers and every other kind of participant mixes it up and generates ideas that take real hold in the world. One of the oldest Chicago-centric discussion forums, Othergroup.net, sometimes goes for a month without a single post.

In order for critical and experimental art networks to become stronger, and for audiences to grow, artists need to expand the range of ways we operate. When artists work with others, they complicate their practice and these collaborations often enrich everything they do. They organize shows and events that include other artists, write about other people’s work and assist people with their creative endeavors. There is no reason why more artists – including those who have comparatively solitary studio practices, can’t cultivate those skills in order to work more effectively with other people.

In the process, they learn to write, organize, publish, curate, educate and do anything else necessary to bolster support and dialogue for the ideas they value. More than anything, they learn to take the initiative and build something larger than themselves. In the 1970’s, 80’s and early 90’s, artists could do this work on the government’s dime at NEA-funded not-for-profit Alternative spaces. Now that the money is gone and most of those spaces are no longer in existence, new methodologies need to be worked out. We need each other more than ever.

Working with others not only opens the individual artist to the resources, skills, criticisms, and ideas of their collaborator(s), but also frequently to those of the collaborator’s peer group or network. This inevitably creates a larger audience for the finished work and sows the seeds for future collaborations with an even greater variety of people. Creating opportunities for others always results in more personal opportunities. When it becomes clear that you operate from a place of generosity, people become more generous with you -- sometimes offering things like free use of equipment, huge discounts on printing and even free use of a storefront in Rogers Park (the location and arrangement that has kept Mess Hall going for over two years now). This approach may not result in a vacation home in Malibu or the opportunity to snort lines of coke off of prostitutes’ asses with Jörg Immendorf, but is that really the reason you became an artist in the first place?

Working toward a global network where one creates opportunities and, in turn, can respond to limitless opportunities without the pressure to compete, allows for a more generous, diverse and open art practice. In these ways, one can break the isolation of being alone, defending a head-full of secret studio realizations that some kid in Ireland has probably already figured out anyway.

Note: In the spirit of this essay, a number of collaborators provided feedback. Thanks to: Brett Bloom, Melinda Fries, Terence Hannum, Brennan McGaffey, Scott Rigby and Dan S. Wang.
theory
DARK ART

Art and Politics in the Age of Enterprise Culture

GREGORY SHOLLETTE
5

GLUT, OVERPRODUCTION, REDUNDANCY!

What is neoliberalism? A programme for destroying collective structures which may impede the pure market logic.

Pierre Bourdieu

Glut

The glut of art and artists is “the normal condition of the art market,” Carol Duncan commented in 1983. More than 20 years later a 2005 Rand Corporation study of visual artists in the United States updated her observations, describing an even more unsettling picture of the art world. Its key finding was that although the number of artists had greatly increased in recent decades, the hierarchy among artists, “always evident, appears to have become increasingly stratified, as has their earnings prospects.” The report goes on to add that although a few “superstars” at the top of this economic pyramid “sell their work for hundreds of thousands and occasionally millions of dollars, the vast majority of visual artists often struggle to make a living from the sale of their work and typically earn a substantial portion of their income from non-arts employment.”

Certainly, if post-modernism has taught us anything is it not that individual authorship should be viewed with intellectual suspicion? Why, then, more than 40 years after Barthes’ legendary essay “Death of the Author,” does the Rand Corporation report reveal increasing art world disparities based on the success of “a few”? Several important questions flow from these observations. First, if the oversupply of artistic labor is an enduring and commonplace feature of artistic production, then the art world must inevitably draw some specific, material benefit from this redundant workforce. Second, the fact that inequality between artist producers has become increasingly evident in recent years suggests that processes of deregulation and privatization within the broader enterprise economy directly affect the working conditions of artists. What possible consequences would result from a mutiny within the global art factory? That is to say, if this inert surfeit of cultural production were to mobilize itself in opposition to the exclusionary mechanisms of the art market? First it would need to awake to the fact that its seemingly natural condition of underdevelopment is contingent, constructed, and that its invisible status renders the efforts of most artists no different from that of the joyful labor of the hobbyist, amateur,
or Sunday painter. We appear to be far from witnessing some general art strike today. Still, conditions for unprecedented self-organization are readily available to artists as an increasing number of professional cultural producers turn to social networking sites, online art galleries, and individual webpages as a way of directly distributing images and information about their work. It is a trend that follows the actions of informal artists who have joined such DIY exhibition platforms as deviantART and Elfwood in the millions over the past decade. What would it take to politicize this dark mass of redundant cultural production and what might this politics look like? One thing is clear: thus far, in spite of a burgeoning wave of newly minted talent fresh from art schools and universities with direct access to the means of self-representation, the familiar, pyramidal structure of the high culture industry has not only been unfazed, it appears to have become more entrenched than ever before. Of even greater concern is the degree to which this business as usual appears to be de-politicizing the longstanding role of the artist as a force of independent social criticism.

In her breakthrough study of the visual arts during the rise of neoliberal enterprise culture, art historian Chin-tao Wu concludes that corporate intervention into the world of art has radically altered the way museums, government cultural programs, and other public institutions operate. The shift towards privatization also affects the content of art, as well as the working conditions of artists. Corporations are not known for their support of controversial political work for example, and the exaggerated differences between a few successful artists and all others reported by Rand appears to reflect the ultra-competitive rules of business, as opposed to the collaborative networking of culture. Wu does not dismiss the longstanding involvement artists have always had with capitalist markets; she does however suggest a qualitative shift has occurred in the current neoliberal economy. As complicated and controversial as public arts funding was prior to the 1980s, by enclosing culture within their private business interests global corporations have since “reframed the space and redefined discourse on contemporary art.” What then to make of the fact that an increasing number of individuals now identify themselves as “artists” in such an entrepreneurial environment? Is it possible that this enterprise culture has so de-radicalized artists that something approaching an historic compromise or détente is taking shape whereby artists gain improved social legitimacy within the neoliberal economy while capital gains a profitable cultural paradigm in which to promote a new work ethic of creativity and personal risk-taking? Far from merely an academic question the possibility of an historic collaboration between art and capital holds out serious consequences for anyone who believes artistic production should retain some degree of autonomy from the market, or that cultural work is more than just instrumental labor, or most urgently of all that it is the historic mission of art to fearlessly engage in social dissent.
Overproduction

That the art world is awash in surplus labor is not a startling insight. Tens of thousands of individuals now have undergraduate or graduate degrees in fine art. Their webpages complete with project descriptions, résumés, contact information, and blogs are spread across the World Wide Web like leaves after a storm. A few commercial entities have begun indexing these sites for a fee, however it is The Saatchi Gallery that has developed the most comprehensive online art platform providing artists with free digital space for their work (jpgs and videos), but also investing in the future of this lucrative industry by appealing directly to art students. According to information on the site some 120,000 artists and art students use their services worldwide. Saatchi takes no commissions for any sales made through its website, and boasts that since launching the platform in 2006 some 130 million dollars in transactions have taken place. The number is difficult to believe. As far as can be ascertained, cyberspace has yet to launch the career of any previously unknown artist into stardom. Most serious Internet sales appear to be backed by the legitimating collateral of a respected art dealer and physical gallery space. One noteworthy alternative model of autonomous online repre-

Artists have historically self-organized in response to their own precariousness; a recent example is Art Work, a newspaper and accompanying website published by Temporary Services with writings about the effects of the current economic collapse on artists’ working conditions. The newspaper is available online and from Half Letter Press in Chicago and has been distributed for free in over a dozen cities around the world since September 2009; see www.artandwork.us/tag/temporary-services. Images courtesy Temporary Services.
sentation is Justseeds.org, a cooperative web platform made up of left-leaning artists from Canada, Mexico, and across the United States (although primarily from the west coast and Midwest). Thematically focused on issues of social justice and anarchist history, Just Seeds artists produce “traditional” graphic works—silk-screen posters, spray painted stencils, even linoleum block prints. The pieces are displayed as digital images on the website and sell for modest prices, often between 10 and 75 dollars. As if illustrating the long-tail theory of retailing in which numerous specialized interests form a proportionally larger consumer base than that of mainstream buyers, Just Seeds’ tiny sales add up to at least enough to sustain both the website and provide a partial income stream for participants.7 Despite the simplicity of this model, made all the more effortless thanks to the Internet, such cooperation is still rare among contemporary artists. Instead, the growing army of surplus art producers apparently prefer to survive by helping to reproduce the familiar hierarchies of the art world, the same symbolic and fiscal economic system that guarantees most of them will fail.7

Some redundant cultural workers are employed by the mega-studios of successful artists. Inside these art factories they might sand and polish resin-cast sculptures or even paint entire canvases, often doing so for little more than the minimum wage.8 A growing number of these “art extras” operate out of cultural Bantustans surrounding the invisible municipality of the mainstream global art world. In the 1990s New York City’s art center shifted away from the downtown scene in SoHo to its present location in “Chelsea” on Manhattan’s West Side. But unlike the SoHo that was initially colonized by artists in the 1960s, Chelsea, according to sociologists David Halle and Elisabeth Tiso, represents “the triumph of the commercial gallery system as a mode of showing and distributing art.”9 Practically speaking, few artists can afford to live or work anywhere near this exhibition machinery. Affordable studio space has migrated outwards, away from where the established gatekeeper galleries, museums, curators, and critics are concentrated. The actual production of art has come to resemble a form of outsourced manufacturing or “just in time” creativity. The structural partitioning of the culture industry is not limited to New York City. German sociologist Melanie Fasche points out that while 50 percent of the artworks ultimately shown at Documenta 12 and the 2007 Venice Biennale were produced in Berlin, very little of this work is actually exhibited in Berlin itself. The city has become a “production site” for the manufacture of contemporary art that is shown elsewhere. Along similar lines, French sociologist Alain Quemin’s research into France’s participation in the global art world came as a shock to that nation’s cultural elite when he reported that despite the flow of artists and art institutions between an increasing number of global museums and art biennials around the globe, the majority of artists and the capital (actual and cultural) associated with contemporary art remain concentrated in the US, the UK, and Germany.10 Which
is to say that even as art production appears increasingly distributed in time and space, the processes of cultural valorization remain tied to New York, London, and Berlin. Meanwhile, the majority of professionally trained artists go on reproducing this state of affairs, despite their guaranteed exile from its inner circle.

If the art world still typically represents itself as a top-down process with the cream rising and the dross settling, it effectively functions the other way around, from the bottom-up. For what the Rand Corporation does not report, or cannot acknowledge, is that unlike other professions the art industry must ghettoize the majority of its qualified participants in order to generate artistic value. But this dark surplus creativity does not function to lower artistic labor costs or the price of artistic goods, as in Marx’s classic formula. Rather, the army of under and semi-employed cultural workers performs a price-enhancing role, though only with regard to a limited number of artworks by a select group of artists whose labor is in turn lavishly rewarded. All the while, as we have seen, these many “invisibles” help reproduce the art world through their purchase of art supplies, journal subscriptions, museum memberships, teaching assignments, but also their informal conversation and gossip, which reasserts the status of leading art brands at openings, on blog sites, at parties, and so forth. Furthermore, as Marcelo Expósito points out, this upwardly distributed art factory system does not extract value on a limited basis as do traditional forms of employment, but does so intensively, continuously, by requiring nonstop forms of “self-educating, training or testing, preparation, production, and so on,” all of which are carried out without remuneration.11 The majority of art world participants are in fact being groomed for failure through a managed system of political (small “p”) underdevelopment. Only those who believe that talent (like noble birth) inevitably determines one’s individual fortune would describe this as natural. And yet that is typically how the art market is described, as a natural economy in which truly gifted artists are rewarded. What would be necessary to see this the other way around? For one thing it might mean that those who exceptionally succeed become a sort of footnote to a broader social intelligence or collective talent. Furthermore, the closer the art world gets to some sort of full employment, the more it would incorporate a mass larger than its own ideological construction. That would appear to be a logical impossibility, unless a very different art world was imagined, with a very different dispensation of artistic “real estate.”

The Grammar of Art Worlds

Sociologist Howard S. Becker famously used the plural term art worlds to describe the multiple inputs that make possible the production of any work of art (a painting, sculpture, novel, or concert). In the visual, plastic arts this multiplicity includes canvas and paintbrush manufacturers, as well as critics and museum
administrators. Becker insisted that such art worlds have soft and frequently contested boundaries that sometimes allow acts of aesthetic innovation to upset and displace cultural norms and hierarchies. From the vantage point of the early 1980s, when Becker devised his famed formula, he was looking back at a period of substantial public beneficence on the arts in the United States, fueled in large part by an ideological conflict with the Soviet Union and its allies. Federal arts funding peaked in the late 1970s, but not before giving birth to a cluster of artistic institutions that in some cases sought to disengage, or openly contest, the world of art and commerce. Artist Martha Rosler explains that ample government funding in the 1960s and 1970s not only helped spread cultural equality amongst artists, but also expanded cultural support to many smaller American cities wherein prospered “active art scenes that were not oriented toward making (a lot of) money from art.” In New York City a series of “alternative” exhibition spaces emerged including 112 Greene Street, Artists Space, and The Kitchen. While these spaces indeed functioned somewhat autonomously from the established art world they did so largely because of steady funding by the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA), as Julie Ault has shown. Once the Cold War ended, so did a great deal of public support for this non-market-oriented experimentation. Which is why the art dealer who bluntly explained to Rosler that your either on or off the artworld’s “table” was not exaggerating, but was nonetheless speaking from a decidedly post-1980s perspective.

Today, more than 20 years after the collapse of “actually existing socialism,” and some 30 years after the rise of ultra-free-market capitalism, the art world is inundated with participants yet increasingly devoid of Becker’s pluralistic “s.” Despite a proliferation of international biennials, national museums, gatekeeper galleries, not-for-profit spaces, and commercial art fairs the same acknowledged art luminaries and their proven goods tend to be circulated at all levels of the system. Paradoxically, the contemporary art world is at once more global and yet less varied, more visibly diversified and yet neither porous nor malleable in its aesthetic range. Certainly no single artistic style rules this scene, or, to employ a term popular amongst some younger artists, no single artistic brand holds market supremacy. On the contrary, contemporary art appears indiscriminate in appetite; a maw perpetually opened in uninterrupted consumption as vats of chemicals, butchered animals, dirty mattresses, mass produced commodities, disposable packing tape, cast-off pieces of cardboard, even acts of coitus enter the art world through its specialized showrooms in New York, Los Angeles, London, Berlin, Paris (and, minus the sex, also now in Beijing, Shanghai, Dubai, and Abu Dhabi). Animal, vegetable, mineral: like a steady flock of coarse penitents, the more profane in outer appearance, the greater the artistic yield. For there seems to be one constant leveling everything entering this global cultural matrix: faith
In the institutional art world’s ability to drag some aesthetic meaning out like a confession from any object, person, or situation.

In this sense, the contemporary art factory deconstructs and reconstructs the world in its own image and for its own ends much as capital has from the start. In both instances—contemporary art and global financial systems—the level of complexity, number of transactions, and volume of participants makes it all but impossible to disentangle physical products and forces of production (labor plus technology) from regulatory, legal, and discursive practices. In addition, the material and symbolic sides of these economies appear to endlessly amplify each other. Think of the way neoliberal “financialization” entangles material goods, from shoes to genes, seeds, or plumbing supplies, with such intangibles as electromagnetic fields, exotic financial instruments, and intellectual property rights. This is perhaps why someone who collects contemporary art, but who also teaches marketing to MBA students, can confidently assert that the art dealer brand “often becomes a substitute for, and certainly is a reinforcement of, aesthetic judgment.”

From this perspective, an era known for its “toxic business assets” is logically epitomized by Damien Hirst’s sculpture *The Physical Impossibility of Death in the Mind of Someone Living* (1991), a chemically embalmed stuffed shark. And, not surprisingly, the same knotting-together of art and commerce leads some to despair.

Art historian Julian Stallabrass skeptically describes the world of contemporary art as *Art Incorporated*; artist Andrea Fraser caustically insists “It’s Art When I Say It’s Art”; and historian Chin-tao Wu insists that “while contemporary art, especially in its avant-garde manifestations, is generally assumed to be in rebellion against the system, it actually acquires a seductive commercial appeal within it.” But what if we could set principles aside for a moment? After all, Stallabrass and Wu seem to be applying what some might describe as outmoded ethical standards more in keeping with nineteenth- and twentieth-century notions of “high” art as something exemplary and noble. What if we could re-imagine the conflict pitting producers against proprietors by lifting this age-old struggle out of its moorings in an outmoded essentialist language and reconfiguring it as a horizontal network of scripts and textual articulations? In other words, if we stop expecting art to be a qualitative measure of a civilization’s or an artist’s deeper spirit or truth, then such aesthetic and ethical complications should disappear.

Unlike Becker’s bottom-up interpretation of art-making as a collective process, sociologist Olav Velthuis is concerned with the fluid world of art prices at the other end. But top becomes a bottom of sorts as overlapping “cultural constellations” establish aesthetic values through a web of discursive networks made up of gossip, price-setting games, and the exchange of monetary and informational “gifts” between art dealers, collectors, and artist-producers. Becker’s *art world* is reborn as a symbolic economy in which all players—gallery owners, patrons,
and artists—now allegedly share “the same business culture.”20 Perhaps it’s not a coincidence that this description of artistic enterprise culture resembles the ineffable flow of derivatives, puts and calls, and “dark liquidity” that also make up the financialized neoliberal economy.

Velthuis begins by challenging Pierre Bourdieu’s concept of cultural capital. According to Velthuis, Bourdieu understood art as an economy of symbolic goods that nevertheless ultimately serves to enhance the actual, material wealth of a group or individual.21 Thus, “real” capital is always concealed within (or exchangeable for) what Bourdieu famously called cultural capital. This “economistic” tendency, writes Velthuis, incorrectly emphasizes old notions such as the forces of production, exchange, accumulation, and the sort of antagonisms between producers and owners (artists and dealers) that hint at an art world version of class politics. Perhaps it is also no coincidence that Velthuis’ description of the contemporary art world as a messy, interconnected discursive field closely resembles Laclau and Mouffe’s radically de-centered field of political antagonism?22 But the art world is even less antagonistic than this because its many players “visit the same or similar shows, are interested in each other’s gossip and rumors and read the same arts magazines.”23 And what begins as an analysis of how art is priced morphs into a comment on artistic value in general. Even more unequivocally than the author of the $12 Million Stuffed Shark, Velthuis declares that the sort of detached aesthetic judgment once called for by Immanuel Kant can never be disentangled from the instrumentality of the global art market. Instead, he insists, when it comes to establishing an artwork’s worth, “value and price seem to be entangled in an ongoing dialectic,” and that artistic quality “is avoided explicitly as a direct determinant of price.”24 Why would anyone seek some mysterious underlying cause and effect for how artistic value comes and goes, rises or falls? We need only look to the language games (expressed in prices) displayed by the market’s social players to discover these answers already exist. The sociologist of prices concludes with a twist on a familiar post-structuralist maxim: there is nothing outside the market.

Velthuis is certainly correct to point out that it is impossible to fully, meaningfully disentangle contemporary art practices from art discourse; both involve production that is always already social, plastic, and unfixed. He is also right to imply that this model is universal, or nearly so. Even those artists who claim to care nothing about the “art world” in New York, London, Berlin, and so forth, or those artists who produce “community-based” projects and installations in small cities and towns, or those who operate collectively at the outermost spatial and geographical regions of the market, still inadvertently play a role within this world. No matter how obscure or seemingly radical one’s creative activity may be there is an avaricious interest at work within the art world’s restricted economy, a hunger not only for the new, but for everything. And this
Desire is enhanced today by a prosthesis made up of technologies and protocols such as the Internet, html, various graphic interfaces, email, cell phones and cheap, print-on-demand (POD) publications. You can be sure that at any given moment an essay is being written, a paper delivered, a conference planned, an exhibition curated in which all but the darkest corners of this entangled cultural universe are included, however briefly, or superficially. Velthuis most likely gets this, and yet his particular post-modern interpretation prevents him from drawing the obvious political conclusion: that what he calls prices are dependent upon an inherent asymmetry of productive forces in which most artists are transformed into a precarious culture proletariat, gleaning and extracting what value can be wrested from the material and symbolic economy of the actually existing art world. By not challenging the processes through which cultural values are produced, circulated, and accumulated, or seeking to ask by whom and for whom these values (or prices or scripts) are established, the sociologist winds up offering little more than a cheerful bromide for coming to terms with neoliberalism and what appears to be a “natural” situation whose new “Social Darwinian” playbook we are all supposed to accept and happily comply with.

This “naturalized” system of asymmetrical risks and benefits is eerily similar to the theory of desired rates of unemployment proposed by ultra-free-market guru Milton Friedman. Post-depression era efforts at creating full-employment, Friedman argued, led to greater bargaining power amongst workers, which in turn inflated wages and ultimately also the price of all commodities, not just labor. As a result, conservative free market policy makers in the late 1970s and 1980s promoted increasing unemployment through industry deregulation, directly opposing the managed approach to capitalism associated with John Maynard Keynes. But this calculated unemployment inevitably led to increased precariousness amongst workers. It is, insists the Midnight Notes Collective, a disciplinary mechanism aimed not just at stopping the economic redistribution of wealth, but at halting the re-appropriation of social capital underway in the 1960s and 1970s by labor, women, people of color and other minorities. If we compare this system of social discipline in the economy at large with the more limited sphere of the art world some curious similarities emerge. Contrary to the oft-cited canard that artists are too individualistic to work together, we find in the United States alone a substantial history of non-governmental guilds, unions, associations, and collectives organized by artists. Efforts to provide greater employment for art workers in the 1930s, through the Work Progress Administration (WPA), or in the 1960s and 1970s, through the NEA, CETA (Comprehensive Employment and Training Act) and Artist in Residency (AIR) programs, led again and again to acts of organized, often militant confrontation in which artists actually demanded even greater autonomy and social security. Their demands included better pay and greater job security from Federally funded programs associated with the WPA, and
the Harlem Artists Guild of 1935 also tackled the issue of race-based discrimination in the government’s hiring of artists. Some of these artist-led organizations were wholly independent, others initiated by the Communist Party USA. Although difficult to trace, the organizational tactics developed by the political left during the 1920s and 1930s appear to have had some influence on the thinking of artists groups in the late 1960s and 1970s and perhaps later.

Since then, in the age of neoliberal enterprise culture that has followed the Reagan/Thatcher “revolution,” we find a tremendous lowering of expectations amongst artists and a cooling down of efforts at collective action. Significantly, this trend towards passivity appears about to change once again in the wake of the current economic collapse. Nevertheless, precariousness, or simply “precarity,” has become the “new normal” for workers in the current “jobless recovery.”

The Precarity this Time

Out of necessity, artists are expert at juggling intermittent bouts of barely profitable creative work with more numerous and routine jobs in construction, standardized graphic design, and other service industries. Artists not only incessantly retrain themselves to satisfy novel working conditions, they establish complex social networks made up of other, semi-employed artists, as well as family members, friends, and on occasion, the patron. These networks circulate material support, as well as a great deal of intangible, informational assistance in the form of opportunities for auditions, exhibitions, publications, technical solutions, even gossip. Supplementing this precarious existence is the occasional monetary gift from a parent or a foundation grant or residency. A small percentage of artists also procure additional income from part-time teaching, although in the United States such positions typically exclude benefits such as health insurance or retirement pay. According to an unpublished study, one third of those who graduated from a major US art school in 1963 had given up making art by 1981 and were actually earning more money than those who continued being artists.26 Visual, plastic artists— painters, sculptors, installation, new media, and performance artists— also benefit from the sporadic sale of artwork, although only a small percentage will ever be able to depend on direct sales in any meaningful way. Instead, for most artists, especially for the majority of visual artists, actual working conditions remain much the same under neoliberalism as they have for centuries. As French Sociologist Pierre-Michel Menger points out, artists as an occupational group tend to be “younger than the general workforce, better educated, and concentrated in a few metropolitan areas.” However, artists also reveal:

higher rates of self-employment, higher rates of unemployment and of several forms of constrained underemployment (non-voluntary part-time work, intermittent work, fewer
hours of work), and are more often multiple jobholders ... artists earn less than workers in their reference occupational category (professional, technical and kindred workers), whose members have comparable human capital characteristics (education, training and age). And they experience larger income variability, and greater wage dispersion.27

Menger insists that studying artists’ careers is useful insofar as it illuminates “how individuals learn to manage the risks of their trade.” In the case of artists this involves the continuous transfer of risk downwards into a “highly flexible and disintegrated organizational setting.” All of which leads the sociologist to depict a Lilliputian version of neoliberalism in which artists operate within a continuous state of oversupply disequilibrium. And yet despite this inherent precariousness and the built-in “income penalty” the market charges for becoming an artist, the number of people claiming that title is on the rise. In the US the population of artists doubled between 1970 and 1990, roughly the same time frame in which deregulation and privatization delivered us the entrepreneurial risk society.

According to the 2005 US Census, nearly 2 million Americans listed “artist” as their primary employment. Another 300,000 claimed it was their second job. This makes the “job” of being an “artist” one of the largest single professions in the nation, just slightly smaller than those employed in the active-duty military. The actual number of “professionally trained” artists in the United States, or in the world for that matter, is difficult to quantify. Perhaps some idea of this mass can be gleaned from the fact that over 150 specialized “art schools” are dedicated solely to turning out artists in the US, and that most other colleges and universities now offer a bachelor or graduate level degree in fine art.28 Likewise, although visual artists are only one portion of creative industry workers typically surveyed by the EU, its cultural sector reportedly employed at least 5.8 million such people in 2004, which is more than the total working population of Greece and Ireland put together.29

At the same time, although the overall number of artists in England has kept pace with other types of labor, employment in the arts has allegedly increased by some 150,000 jobs between 1993 and 2003. An estimated total revenue of between £23 and £29 billion was reportedly generated by the cultural sector in London alone, making art second only to the city’s business sector, according to the Arts Council England in 2004. The growth of artists in Germany is even more astounding. While the majority of the German workforce showed zero growth between 1995 and 2003, the cultural sector grew at a rate of 3.4 percent. As in other post-industrial economies Germany’s workforce is increasingly self-employed, but self-employment among cultural workers is four times that of the rest of the labor force.30 Just as remarkable is the spike in Canada’s artistic population. Between 1991 and 2000 the number of artists in all provinces grew
Editors, and a future editor, of the Journal of Aesthetics & Protest (JOAAP) pose amidst items displayed in an exhibition they organized entitled “Street Signs and Solar Ovens: Socialcraft in Los Angeles” for LA’s Craft and Folk Art Museum in 2006. Much like the editorial outlook of the journal itself, the exhibition highlighted a range of items that fell on the outer margins of formal art practice made by individuals, groups, and artists, including work about foraged foods, seed bombs, radical knitting, pirate radio technology, and sustainable urban culture. Challenging normative ideas of artistic valorization and who is defined as an artist appears to be at the core of JOAAP and many similar, informal collectives. The JOAAP editors are, from left to right: Cara Baldwin, Robby Herbst, Christina Ulke, Marc Herbst, Anselm Herbst. Image courtesy joaap.org

at a rate three times that of the overall Canadian workforce. The authors of the Canadian Council for the Arts report appear genuinely surprised by the fact that some 131,000 Canadians now “spend more time on creating art than on any other occupation.” They go on to suggest that this number is probably too low since many “artists” who drive taxis at night or work civil service jobs during the day are simply invisible.31 Considering the overall reduction in social security since the 1980s, and especially in light of the near-total elimination of direct subsidization to artists in the US at least, one might conclude that the volume of new cultural producers would contract, or remain static. If, as Menger and others maintain, art is the precarious profession par excellence, why then does it appear to be thriving in an environment of deregulation, privatization, and risk?32 Bluntly put, might there be a secret bond between post-Fordist enterprise culture and contemporary art?
One example of an allegedly mutually beneficial partnership between artists and free-marketers is the recent invention of Artists Pension Trust (APT). Created in 2004 by Moti Shniberg (a “new” economy technology entrepreneur), Dan Galai (onetime accomplice of the late economist Milton Friedman, father of Reaganomics), and David A. Ross (former SF MoMA and Whitney Museum of Art director), APT now has offices not only in New York, Los Angeles, London, and Berlin but also in the budding art-market centers of Dubai, Mumbai, Beijing, and Mexico City. The fund’s goal is to collateralize the chronic insecurity of art professionals by enlisting artists—generally those who have already achieved a certain level of market success—to invest some of their work alongside a “community” of select peers, thereby providing “a uniquely diversified, alternative income stream.”\(^{33}\) In theory, only a few APT artists need become cultural superstars to raise the raft beneath the entire “community,” including of course the trust fund’s founders, managers, and curators. Officially, legally, APT is located in the British Virgin Islands (BVI), a Caribbean territory of the UK that provides a legal tax haven for the company’s assets. The mission of APT is to apply “the discipline of financial services and the concept of risk diversification in creating the first investment program specifically dedicated for artists.”\(^{34}\) APT’s model of privately collateralized risk management contrasts sharply with the universalist aspirations of collective security made by several informal artists’ groups in the late 1960s and early 1970s.\(^{35}\) Between 1967 and 1968 the Canadian Artists’ Representation/Le Front des CARFAC (later CAR) organized to demand that commercial galleries respect copyright for all Canadian artists and provide royalties from sales and rental-like fees for exhibiting work. (CAR continues to serve artists today.) Several years later two short-lived London-based organizations briefly expressed concerns about social security for artists. One did so with solemnity, the other sardonically (though not without a kind of critical seriousness). In 1971 Mary Kelly, Kay Fido, Margaret Harrison, and Conrad Atkinson founded the Artists Union and immediately sought to establish resale rights for all British artists.\(^{36}\) But the year before, artists Gustav Metzger, Felipe Ehrenberg, Stuart Brisley, and others led a march on the Tate Gallery under the name of the International Coalition for the Liquidation of Art. Their objective was to debate museum “visitors and staff about the complicity of museums in racism, sexism, war,” as well as demand the “equal representation of women, ethnic minorities, and greater decentralization of culture.”\(^{37}\)

Meanwhile, in Buenos Aires, Argentina, the short-lived Syndicate of Unified Plastic Artists (del Sindicato Único de Artistas Plásticos, or SAUP) sought to enhance artists’ professional status through a highly politicized trade union with ties to the militant Tucumán Arde art project of 1968.\(^{38}\) However, one of
the most militant efforts to garner legal rights for cultural workers began with an international group of artists who resided in New York City. On January 1969, Vassilakis Takis from Greece, Hans Haacke from Germany, Wen-Ying Tsai from China, as well as Tom Lloyd, Willoughby Sharp, and John Perreault from the United States met to establish the Art Workers’ Coalition (AWC). Several hundred people soon joined its open-door meetings, including Carl Andre, Benny Andrews, Gregory Batcock, Lee Lozano, and Lucy Lippard. In many respects, AWC functioned much like a trade union that viewed museums, their boards, and their top administrators as a de facto managerial class, which effectively represented not the public good, but the interests of the commercial art market. It was the artists’ job to reveal this conflict and propose ways of amending it. AWC staged protests outside the Museum of Modern Art, the Metropolitan, and Guggenheim museums. Thirteen demands were formally presented to museums (the following year the list was boiled down to nine). Among the reforms called for was a royalties system in which collectors would pay artists a percentage of profits from the resale of their work, and the demand that museums “should be open on two evenings until midnight and admission should be free at all times.” The one definite lasting accomplishment of the short-lived AWC is free-admission museum hours at museums in New York City, but the group also helped to set in motion the Professional and Administrative Staff Association (PASTA) union at MoMA, and inspired the formulation of The Artist’s Reserved Rights Transfer And Sale Agreement, a legal agreement that provides artists with several post-sale rights including royalty payments if an artwork is resold for a higher price. Before it disbanded in 1971 AWC members marched in support of striking staff at MoMA, called on museums to set aside exhibition space for women, minorities, and artists with no gallery representation, and staged public actions along with sister groups such as Guerrilla Art Action Group (GAAG) to protest US military involvement in Southeast Asia. However, AWC also called for the establishment of an artists’ trust fund to provide artists with social security benefits much along the lines proposed by APT some 40 years later. And yet, this is precisely where AWC and APT most clearly diverge.

The language used by 1960s artists’ groups such as CARFAC, Artists Union, SAUP, and AWC was built around an essential antagonism between artists and cultural labor that takes place in and for the public sphere on one hand, and the production of art commodities and art careers necessary for the art world on the other. As Lucy R. Lippard put it:

As a public and therefore potentially accountable institution, the Museums were targeted in order to make points not only about artists’ rights but also about opposition to the war in Vietnam, to racism and eventually sexism, and about the institutional entanglement of aesthetic with corporate finance and imperialism.
As just noted, one of AWC’s demands was for the establishment of a trust fund that would provide living artists with “stipends, health insurance, help for artists’ dependents and other social benefits.” But the endowment for this trust was to have been levied by taxing the work of dead artists in the collections of major museums. More like a public trust, the AWC fund would need to be accessible to all working artists. In fact, the ambitious programs proposed by the AWC and the other self-organized groups could only have been realized if the majority of cultural producers were willing to participate in any given region. Notably, only CARFAC still operates today, some 40 years later, boasting affiliated organizations in more than half of Canada’s provinces. Perhaps its longevity is possible because solidarity between artists is easier to sustain in a weaker commercial art market where universal social security remains intact? Regardless, the kind of public accountability that makes up Lippard’s premise is exactly what neoliberalism has sought to eviscerate from the public’s collective memory. By contrast, APT functions much like a private, gated community set apart from the broad population of artists. And this exclusivity is not optional. In order to focus attention on a select group of artists APT has no choice but to ignore the security and fair trade interests of the majority of artists. Any investment strategy based on market speculation must concentrate value disproportionately. The prevailing ideology of APT and much neoliberal enterprise culture is concisely summarized in the title of a recent, best-selling business book: *The Winner-Take-All Society.*

Modern Ruins

Shorn from the social safety net, exposed to unmediated market penetration by every demand set forth by capital, beyond the reach of effective political power, the so-called free market economy offers two asymmetrical options: either sell oneself “creatively” at the high end of the market—as an IT systems designer, hedge-fund manager, graphic interface specialist, etc.—or join the ranks of the burgeoning surplus workforce who compete for non-unionized, low-skilled, part-time jobs. Between these two poles very little gradation exists. Creative jobs typically provide exceptional individual rewards in terms of salary and benefits, but also in the way productivity is organized. Deviating from the routines of the factory, so-called “creative” industries offer flexible schedules and non-hierarchical work environments that encourage employees to indulge in non-linear problem solving. Many of these workers are not salaried but “independent” contractors responsible for their own health care and other benefits. For creative laborers, intermittent, project-based employment, working from home, and opening an individual retirement account are signs reflecting superior education and imagination. As long as contracts are maintained and clients are available, such workplace elasticity allows high-end laborers to experience a unique sense
of personal freedom inconceivable within the traditional brick and mortar factory world of yesterday. By contrast, the low-wage service bottom-end of the neoliberal economy is full of unimaginative, repetitive jobs, a world of retail sales cashiers, truck drivers, waiters and waitresses, nursing aides, janitors, and food preparation workers. It was here, as Saskia Sassen and others have shown, where the most robust employment growth in the United States was taking place until the recent economic collapse (and no doubt this is where job growth will first return). But disciplinary mechanisms exist at both extremes. For the majority at the bottom of the labor market flexible employment is not a gift, it is an ever-present and tangible reminder that joblessness is just one paycheck away. For those who lack the capacity, or desire, to produce on demand in an artistic, self-fulfilling manner the penalty is no different from that which befalls the “failed” artist: exile to the precarious abyss of office cubicles, stock rooms, and fixed-wage servitude. Of course there are significant differences in pay grade, social status, and physical mobility between a dishwasher at McDonald’s and a web designer, or between a janitor in an office building and an art professor. Nevertheless, all forms of post-Fordist work are continuously exposed to the disciplinary forces of neoliberalism, including anti-union legislation, the lack of secure social benefits, the use of non-contracted part-time labor, and the corporatization of the academy where part-time instructors dominate the learning environment. The effects of this new “precarity” on the imagination of those it administers have yet to be systematically investigated, but it is not surprising to find that many cultural activists are pessimistic regarding organized politics involving anything larger than informal gatherings of small, cellular groups, a point taken up in Chapter 7. For those at the top of the economy on the other hand, what lies in wait should they fail to be creatively self-motivated is evident all around them: a former executive scans groceries at the supermarket, a discharged securities trader empties ashtrays down the street from the office where he once worked. Globalization, privatization, flexible work schedules, deregulated markets; 30 years of “neoliberal” capitalism has driven most world governments partly or wholly to abandon their previous function as arbitrators between the security of the majority and the profiteering of the corporate sector. The “free market” oriented state that emerged in the late 1970s does not even pretend to offer citizens full, meaningful employment, directly contradicting the promise of security, however illusory, once offered by the post-war Keynesian state. And this has little to do with lack of training or education. “Rather than a skills shortage, millions of American workers have more skills than their jobs require,” insists Uchitelle. The result has been a radical re-distribution of potential risk from the collective level—the community, state, nation, society—downward, towards each increasingly isolated member of the populace. Today, one’s individual sense of “being” seems to exist in a perpetual state of jeopardy. And yet, this impression is
also unreal, involving an unpredictable set of hazards from multiple sources both real and fictive: the inhalation of invisible toxins, a mutated virus, a government conspiracy, genetically manipulated food, sudden acts of violence, an unforeseen terrorist plot. According to one group of sociologists the essence of this indefinite risk-consciousness is not that it is happening, “but that it might be happening.”

Compounding these fears is the sublime spectacle of the modern ruin: a blasted skyscraper, a bomb-flattened metropolis, an exploded hospital, devastated marketplace, or pillaged museum, school, library. Perhaps most devastating of all, a geometrically precise pile of naked men forced to display their utter vulnerability in front of some down-market digital camera. Theorist Allen Feldman describes the sadistic snapshots of prisoners at the Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq as pixilated presentations of a “subjugated and damaged interiority.” Nicholas Mirzoeff insists these widely circulated obscenities provide Western viewers with a “full spectrum

Still from the video project Angry Sandwich People or in a Praise of Dialectics (2006), named after a poem by Bertolt Brecht and staged here in collaboration with local political activists by the Russian artists’ collective Chto Delat? (What is to be Done?). Participants gathered in a St. Petersburg square where they moved in unison and recited Brecht’s poem in a “Soviet mode.” “Who dares say ‘never’? Who’s to blame if oppression remains?” Chto Delat? describes the effect of the reading as resounding “with the depleted pathos of the revolutionary past, a re-collection (Erinnerung) of the very language that new forms of protest aspire to negate.” Visible behind the performers is a fading 1960s mural displaying the words “Proletariat Unite!” Project realized by Tsapya, Nikolay Oleynikov and Dmitry Vilensky. Image courtesy Chto Delat?.
dominance” that ranges from demolished bodies to devastated nations. The result is a vivid display of what philosopher Giorgio Agamben calls “bare life,” human existence that has passed beyond the outermost limits of law, language, and society to become a kind of living, biological ruin, a no-longer-human human.

For the spectator in developed nations, these bodily and metropolitan degradations always appear to be occurring elsewhere, amongst those unfortunates with the least resources who are already only a few steps away from disposability and abjection: so many distant bodies that help mark-off the outermost margins of our world-image; so many dire cities where society and “bare life” incessantly brush up against each other. The essence of this ontological precariousness is summed up not only by the rise of a 7 billion dollar human trafficking industry, but by the expendable form this modern bondage takes on in an age of weakened national governments and individuated risk. “Slaves of the past were worth stealing and worth chasing down if they escaped,” writes activist Kevin Bales:

> Before globalization, people were concerned with “fixed” capital investments, like factories, or lifelong slaves, and long-term planning. The globalized world is more concerned with flexibility than fixed capital, and with processes of production rather than permanence. The same is true of slavery. Slaves are so cheap now that they are not seen as long-term investments, just flexible resources to be used or thrown away as needed.

Given the sweeping integration of the world’s economy Bales notes that we may even be directly “using or profiting from the work of these slaves.” The risk no longer appears entirely elsewhere. A local shipping container reveals a cargo of discarded human sexual slaves; a nearby neighborhood is contaminated with sewage, oil, chemicals; a bank repossesses the home of a friend or family member; the dreaded pink slip is deposited in our office mailbox demarcating termination of employment. Instability moves closer. It insinuates itself into our everyday world. And simultaneously, on a far vaster scale that is often beyond comprehension, it takes on an epic dimension: the Asian monetary failure of 1997; the Argentinian economic collapse of 1999–2002 (a preamble to the current crisis?); the botched US government response to Hurricane Katrina in 2005; and the global financial implosion of 2007–9 whose full effects remain ongoing and unpredictable at the time of writing, although it is clear that a structural adjustment of historical proportions is taking place within global capitalism. Despite a recently elected reform government in the United States headed by Barack Obama still scrambling to contain this latest capitalist “malfunction,” the line has clearly grown too slender between what once separated manageable economic predicaments—workplace redundancy, unemployment, an uninsured illness, student debt, a failed mortgage—and all-out catastrophe—bankruptcy, homelessness, incarceration, or deportation. Suddenly, it is we in the developed world brushing up against bare life. The encounter may be brief, or it may be extended—or it may be interminable.
Without losing sight of the dramatically different levels of risk faced by shantytown dwellers, prisoners, or slaves, as opposed to an increasingly at-risk workforce in the cities and towns of developed countries, it is not too difficult to see how such unremitting precariousness reinforces the day-to-day disciplinary mechanisms of neoliberal, enterprise culture.

We Are the Surplus

Like the deterritorialized flow of finance capital, all that is solid, and all that is intangibly social, has been reduced to a kind of raw material for market speculation and bio-political asset mining. It is the social order itself, and the very notion of governance, along with a longstanding promise of security and happiness, that has become another kind of modern ruin. Even if the MFA (Master of Fine Arts) is the new MBA (Master of Business Arts), as some neoliberal business theorists intone, mumbling the phrase like some magic formula, what exactly does enterprise culture gain from its seemingly tender embrace of artists and creative labor?52 Perhaps, rather than an historic compromise between artistic creativity and the neoliberal economy, what has fixated neoliberalism onto the image of the artist as ideal worker is not so much her imaginative out-of-the-box thinking or restless flexibility as the way the art world as an aggregate economy successfully manages its own excessively surplus labor force, extracting value from a redundant majority of “failed” artists who in turn apparently acquiesce to this disciplinary arrangement. There could be no better formula imaginable for capitalism 2.0 as it moves into the new century. Still, what remains to be seen is how those lost bits and pieces of a ruined society and dreams of collective dissonance might be reanimated through some artistic necromancy by those not yet ready to give in to the disciplinary sirens of enterprise culture.
Chapter 5

4. An excellent example of how to read visual artworks (prior to neoliberalism in this case, not solely in terms of iconicographic or metaphoric imagery, but in relation to specific conditions of production) is Paul B. Jaskot, “Gerhard Richter and Adolf Eichmann,” e-flux journal #15, April 2010, 38–44; and Nikos Papastergladis, “The Zombification of the Other,” Cultural Studies Review, vol. 15, no. 2, 2009, 147–78.
5. Wu, Privatizing Culture, 303.
6. This includes not only visual, plastic artists, but also filmmakers and other media producers together with painters, sculptors, installation and other fine artists.
8. According to reports by several artist friends of the author the going rate for studio fabricators is about 12 dollars an hour in the studio of Jeff Koons, meanwhile the artist Damien Hirst assigns assistants to paint entire canvases that are later sold under his name; see Don Thompson, The $12 Million Stuffed Shark: The Curious Economics of Contemporary Art, Palgrave Macmillan, 2008, 65.

12. There is no question that the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) was established to win over the hearts and minds of cultural workers worldwide in favor of the seemingly uninhibited freedom of expression granted in the West, even if the exact role that agencies such as the CIA and US State Department played in supporting, say, Abstract Expressionists remains controversial ever since the appearance of essays by Max Kozloff and Eva Cockroft in the pages of Artforum magazine in the 1970s. The prominent discussants in this ongoing debate include Serge Guilbaut, Robert Burstow, Michael Kimmelman, and Nancy Jachec.

13. In dollars adjusted for a 2007 constant the NEA’s 1979 budget would be over 400 million dollars, while its allocation in the year 2007 was only about a quarter of that amount ($124,561,844).


15. A number of superstars including Cindy Sherman, Mike Kelly, and Richard Prince moved from these government-supported venues into mainstream market success, thus demonstrating the underlying capitalist logic of the Keynesian liberal welfare state.


18. Thompson, The $12 Million Stuffed Shark, 12.


21. Ibid., 27.

22. See above, pages XX–XX.

23. Velthuis, Talking Prices, 27.

24. Ibid., 178, 126.


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


28. “If all the professional dancers in the United States stood shoulder to shoulder to form a single chorus line, it would stretch from 42nd Street for nearly the entire length of Manhattan. If every artist in America’s workforce banded together, their ranks would be double the size of the United States Army. More Americans identify their primary occupation as artist than as lawyer, doctor, police officer or farm worker”; Sam Roberts, “A 21st-Century Profile: Art for Art’s Sake, and for the US Economy, Too,” New York Times, June 12, 2008; http://www.nytimes.com/2008/06/12/arts/12nea.html?ex=1214193600&en=a8f30b5b62f9f4&ei=5070&emc=eta1; see also the report Artists in


31. See “More artists in Canada, but still making less than most: study,” CBC.CA, October 22, 2004; www.cbc.ca/story/arts/national/2004/10/21/Arts/artjobstudy041021.html

32. Statistics on artistic labor can easily become misleading or contradictory. Some data gatherers use the term artist to include Hollywood screenwriters as well as painters and poets, thus skewing significant differences between these types of cultural labor. And while this book is not intended as an empirical study, nor do I make any claims to being a sociologist, much of this information gathered from the US, UK, Canada and Germany is no doubt applicable to the working conditions of artists in other post-industrial nations.

33. APT website: www.artistpensiontrust.org/homepage.asp

34. APT, Frequently Asked Questions: www.artistpensiontrust.org/faq_page.asp


40. Artist Seth Siegelaub and attorney Robert Projansky penned The Artist’s Reserved Rights Transfer And Sale Agreement in 1971, it has since been used by Hans Haacke and several other artists associated with AWC. For more on this document and its history see: Maria Eichhorn, The Artist’s Contract, Verlag der Buchhandlung/Walther König, Germany, 2009. An online copy of the contract is available at: http://74.125.47.132/search?q=cache:mZdXErfPzpEJ:www.ctrlp-artjournal.org/pdfs/siegelaub.pdf+The+Artist%E2%80%99s+Reserved+Rights+transfer&cd=1&hl=en&ct=clnk&gl=us

41. Lippard, cited in Ault’s Alternative Art New York, 79.

42. The organization’s website is www.carfac.ca


46. Uchitelle, The Disposable American, 66.
NOTES


51. Ibid.


Chapter 6

1. The total sum of monies raised for the defense of Kurtz and Ferrell was about $350,000, of which approximately $241,070 was actually spent. Had the case gone to court instead of being dismissed after four years by Judge Arcara, however, it would have likely cost an estimated half a million dollars. (Note: the author was himself a member of the CAE Defense Fund, and the committee’s usefully informative website remains online as of this writing at www.caedefensefund.org)

2. CAE members included or include Steve Kurtz and his late wife Hope Kurtz together with the artists Steve Barnes, Dorian Burr, Beverly Schlee, and most recently Lucia Sommer (beginning in 2005). The group’s website is www.critical-art.net

3. There is no evidence of prior interest by the government in CAE with this one hypothetical caveat: several years before the FBI investigation of Kurtz, a lecturer at the University of Illinois at Champaign-Urbana baselessly stated that “Critical Art Ensemble paints a picture of cyber-resistance that looks a lot like the descriptions of bin Laden’s alleged network.” Whether this paper (“Electronic jihad” by Heidi Brush) was even noticed by Federal agents is anybody’s guess. It was, however, reported by Kevin Featherly in Newsbytes (now part of the Washington Post) in a piece entitled “US On Verge Of ‘Electronic Martial Law’,” October 16, 2001, and the comparison of CAE to electronic terrorists was circulated over the Internet, among other places at Virus.org, an online IT Security News and Information Portal; http://lists.virus.org/ isn-0110/msg00110.html

4. Details on some of the public cases mentioned above as well as others involving US government censorship or intimidation of citizens, tourists, journalists, academics, and students have been compiled by Matthew Rothschild; see the McCarthyism Watch Updates published by the Progressive magazine available at www.progressive.org/list/mccarthy. For information specifically involving state harassment of cultural workers after September 11, see the Temporary Services website, “Resurgence of the Culture Wars” at www.temporaryservices.org/culture_wars.html; and John Tarleton, “Busted Puppets: Philly Police Arrest Puppetistas, Toss Their Art Into the Trash,” On the Road with John Tarleton, August 3, 2000; www.johntarleton.net/philly_puppets.html

5. CAE are not the only cultural activists attempting to defend plants, seeds, and soil against global agribusiness through artistic interventions. Other practitioners include...
Minimum Definition of Revolutionary Organizations

Since the only purpose of a revolutionary organization is the abolition of all existing classes in a way that does not bring about a new division of society, we consider an organization to be revolutionary if it consistently and effectively works toward the international realization of the absolute power of the workers councils, as prefigured in the experience of the proletarian revolutions of this century.

Such an organization makes an integral critique of the world, or is nothing. By integral critique we mean a comprehensive critique of all geographical areas where various forms of separate socioeconomic powers exist, as well as a comprehensive critique of all aspects of life.

Such an organization sees the beginning and end of its program in the complete decolonization of everyday life. It thus aims not at the masses’ self-management of the existing world, but at its uninterrupted transformation. It embodies the radical critique of political economy, the supersession of the commodity system and of wage labor.

Such an organization refuses to reproduce within itself any of the hierarchical conditions of the dominant world. The only limit to participating in its total democracy is that each member must have recognized and appropriated the coherence of its critique. This coherence must be both in the critical theory as such and in the relation between this theory and practical activity. The organization radically criticizes every ideology as separate power of ideas and as ideas of separate power. It is thus at the same time the negation of any remnants of religion, and of the prevailing social spectacle which, from news media to mass culture, monopolizes communication between people around their unilateral reception of images of their alienated activity. The organization dissolves any “revolutionary ideology,” unmasking it as a sign of the failure of the revolutionary project, as the private property of new specialists of power, as one more fraudulent representation setting itself above real proletarianized life.

Since the ultimate criterion of the modern revolutionary organization is its comprehensiveness, such an organization is ultimately a critique of politics. It must explicitly aim to dissolve itself as a separate organization at its moment of victory.

SITUATIONIST INTERNATIONAL
July 1966

“Définition minimum des organisations révolutionnaires” was adopted by the 7th Conference of the SI (July 1966) and reproduced in Internationale Situationniste #11 (Paris, October 1967). This translation by Ken Knabb is from the Situationist International Anthology (Revised and Expanded Edition, 2006). No copyright.
ART AND THE 99%
From her vantage inside the movement, the author considers how Occupy Wall Street has affected artists.

BY ERIN SICKLER

WHO REALLY RUNS—and most profits from—the current art system? Not 99% of artists and not 99% of the general public, now forced to pay ever-escalating museum admission fees to gaze at contemporary artworks they could never afford. Such hip luxuries are sold to the richest 1% in galleries that many ordinary people find too intimidating to enter. And it’s no secret that the moguls who sit on museum boards are often the same people who contrived the runaway financial speculation which has blighted economic life for the rest of us, in the U.S. and beyond. Clearly, it’s time for people of conscience in the art world to stand up and say, “Enough!” With Occupy Museums, an offshoot of the Occupy Wall Street (OWS) movement that began in New York City on Sept. 17, 2011, the process may have already begun.

In late October, several dozen artists gathered at Zuccotti Park in Lower Manhattan, OWS’s initial encampment. From there, traveling to the Museum of Modern Art, the Frick Collection and the New Museum, they launched the first protest actions of Occupy Museums. Initiated by artist and OWS participant Noah Fischer, Occupy Museums aims to expose the disproportionate role that a handful of board members and fiscal sponsors (the 1%) play in determining the programming, acquisitions and administration of cultural institutions. Taking turns reading from a statement prepared by Fischer, the demonstrators stood outside and repeated the text line by line in a call-and-response system known as the “people’s mic,” a hallmark of OWS’s New York City General Assembly at Zuccotti Park.

“Art for the 99%” is a valid slogan, but if we denounce only the most obvious inequalities in the art world, we risk forgetting how we have all been complicit in the current economic crisis. One error was abandoning our former resistance, our dedication to humane alternatives, and caving in completely to the market-only syndrome. In the 1960s, the Art Workers Coalition challenged the elitism of the city’s major art institutions—a movement covered eloquently in Julia Bryan-Wilson’s book Art Workers: Radical Practice in the Vietnam War Era (2009). The coalition fostered numerous alternative art spaces and practices, often in solidarity with marginalized groups such as women, people of color and the gay community. Over the last decades, however, once-radical organizations have seen their missions diluted by the corporate values of their funding institutions. Government cuts, which we failed to stop, have allowed corporations and wealthy patrons to grow increasingly dominant in the cultural sphere.

Alanna Heiss founded P.S.1 (now MoMA P.S.1) in a former Queens schoolhouse in 1971. Once at the cutting edge of site-specific work, P.S.1 today uses its idiosyncratic spaces as little more than overflow galleries for MoMA. In 1977, after being fired from the Whitney Museum of American Art, Marcia Tucker started the New Museum, a funky place where, for nearly 30 years, shows were inclusive and highly political. But since reopening in its sleek new building on the Bowery in 2007, the New Museum has repeatedly engaged in questionable practices, such as exhibiting the private collection of one of its board members. Smaller venues have fared little better. Under constant pressure from funders to do more with less, they stretch their staffs to the breaking point while relying on the goodwill of artists and independent curators to produce their projects.

The art collective Build the Occupation protesting during the Occupy Halloween Parade, 2011.
Photo Reuters/Andrew Burton.
Meetings typically draw from 20 to 40 people, moderated by a rotating group of facilitators trained in the movement’s consensus-based process. Beyond Occupy Museums and other actions, performances and exhibitions, the most interesting art to come out of OWS may be the occupation itself. In *Distinction* (1979), a thorough study of “taste” in mid-20th-century France, Pierre Bourdieu laments that the primary activity of the largest working group of New York’s OWS, Arts and Culture is the second group. Arts and Culture workers gather together for meet-ings of the OWS Arts and Culture Working Group. Arts and Culture is the second largest working group of New York’s OWS, with over 400 registered participants. Meetings typically draw from 20 to 40 artists and academics today is to reproduce their own privileged cultural status. Peter Bürger, in his *Theory of the Avant-Garde* (1974), contrasts the historical avant-gardes of Europe at the turn of the 20th century—led by artists who were actively involved in reshaping society’s norms—with later forms of modern art such as Abstract Expressionism and Pop art, which merely reframed the idea of revolution as esthetic transformation. These findings continue to be my reality check, preventing me from considering art as some kind of moral good in and of itself. They challenge me to use whatever agency I manage to obtain in ways that empower others. In the days prior to the first Occupy Museums action, I attended an international conference in Montreal about social and solidarity economies. Instead of prioritizing profit above all else, these economies encourage civic institutions to build cultures of mutual support and to adopt practices that encourage economic, social and environmental justice. At the conference, 1,000-plus participants, including businesspeople and government officials, discussed a range of methods to radically alter the world’s way of doing business. I left excited but also deflated, wondering how this type of thinking could ever take root here in the U.S., where divisions are so deep and distrust so entrenched. It would require not only a restructuring of all our institutions but a total reordering of our daily habits of work and life. I often think of artists as Vedic scribes or members of monastic orders who secretly maintain analog technologies, archaic forms of knowledge and alternative ways of being in the world during times when there seems to be no hope, no alternative. With Occupy Wall Street, we see a slight chance to bring these anarchic forms of wisdom back into the world. But as is often the case, we are our own greatest enemies. Torn between our individual ambitions and our desire for the greater good, we have lost our way. This is why achieving changes will take more than simply protesting museum policies, fairly taxing top earners or reinstating the regulations of the Glass-Steagall Act, which curbed speculation and kept investment banks separate from savings banks. It will instead require us to come together to build new economic infrastructures and modes of artistic production that empower us, our local communities and our broader international networks. Right now, as we examine the collusion of power and money, we have an opportunity to look very clearly, and with great compassion, at the ways we have all been co-opted into reproducing inequitable and oppressive economic relations. OWS is not merely an inconvenient truth or a temporary situation, but rather an unpredictable, unfolding movement. I really hope we don’t waste it. ❖

I attended an international conference in Montreal about social and solidarity economies. Instead of prioritizing profit above all else, these economies encourage civic institutions to build cultures of mutual support and to adopt practices that encourage economic, social and environmental justice. At the conference, 1,000-plus participants, including businesspeople and government officials, discussed a range of methods to radically alter the world’s way of doing business. I left excited but also deflated, wondering how this type of thinking could ever take root here in the U.S., where divisions are so deep and distrust so entrenched. It would require not only a restructuring of all our institutions but a total reordering of our daily habits of work and life. I often think of artists as Vedic scribes or members of monastic orders who secretly maintain analog technologies, archaic forms of knowledge and alternative ways of being in the world during times when there seems to be no hope, no alternative. With Occupy Wall Street, we see a slight chance to bring these anarchic forms of wisdom back into the world. But as is often the case, we are our own greatest enemies. Torn between our individual ambitions and our desire for the greater good, we have lost our way. This is why achieving changes will take more than simply protesting museum policies, fairly taxing top earners or reinstating the regulations of the Glass-Steagall Act, which curbed speculation and kept investment banks separate from savings banks. It will instead require us to come together to build new economic infrastructures and modes of artistic production that empower us, our local communities and our broader international networks. Right now, as we examine the collusion of power and money, we have an opportunity to look very clearly, and with great compassion, at the ways we have all been co-opted into reproducing inequitable and oppressive economic relations. OWS is not merely an inconvenient truth or a temporary situation, but rather an unpredictable, unfolding movement. I really hope we don’t waste it. ❖
Occupational Realism

In 1998, California-based artist Ben Kinmont began his longest and most involved conceptual project to date: he opened his own bookselling business. The piece, which is ongoing, is entitled *Sometimes a nicer sculpture is being able to provide a living for your family*, and Kinmont’s use of the word “sculpture” harks back to Joseph Beuys’s notion of “social sculpture” as “how we shape our thoughts into words [...and] how we mold and shape the world we live in” (1993:19). Kinmont specializes in antiquarian books with a focus on gastronomy, and in this capacity attends auctions, participates in bookfairs, works with libraries in need of development, logs his inventory,
negotiates prices, and ships books to private and public collections around the world. *Sometimes a nicer sculpture* is meant to function both as an income-generating bookselling trade and a performance that is legible as such in the art world.

For Kinmont, it is important that his business function as *a business*; it is not enough for him to gesture symbolically towards the world of commerce by, say, printing up ironic letterhead or opening a fake storefront. As a result, he partakes in what I have termed “occupational realism,” in which the realm of waged labor (undertaken to sustain oneself economically) and the realm of art (pursued, presumably, for reasons that might include financial gain, but that also exceed financialization and have aesthetic, personal, and/or political motivations) collapse, becoming indistinct or intentionally inverted. These are performances in which artists enact the normal, obligatory tasks of work under the highly elastic rubric of “art.” Here, the job becomes the art and the art becomes the job.

“Performance as occupation” participates in the rising tide of discourse regarding the interconnection of contingent labor, artistic value, and precarity. Precarity is one name given to the effect of neoliberal economic conditions emergent in the wake of global financial upheaval, recession, and the reorganization of employment to accommodate the spread of service, information, and knowledge work. It designates a pervasively unpredictable terrain of employment within these conditions—work that is without health care benefits or other safety nets, underpaid, part-time, unprotected, short-term, unsustainable, risky. Debates about precarity—and an insistence that artists belong to the newly emerging “precariat”—have been increasingly taken up within contemporary art, as evidenced by exhibitions such as *The Workers: Precarity/Invisibility/Mobility*, which opened in 2011 at the Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art, as well as anthologies like *Critique of Creativity: Precarity, Subjectivity, and Resistance in the “Creative Industries”* (Raunig et al. 2011) and *Are You Working Too Much? Post-Fordism, Precarity, and the Labor of Art* (Aranda et al. 2011). A group of cultural and educational laborers in London organized themselves into the Precarious Workers Brigade, and they have mobilized to protest arts funding cuts in the UK, the economic and power dynamics of unpaid internships, and other issues; their posters ask questions such as “Do you freelance but don’t feel free?”

The ascendance of the term “precarity” connects to research in the last few years by sociologists such as Pascal Gielen, with his consideration of the congruence between artistic practices and post-Fordist economies (Gielen 2010). But this alleged congruence has wider consequences, as it underscores the need to understand artistic occupations temporally. As Pierre-Michel Menger’s 2006 report on artistic employment notes, “the gap is widening” between brief vocations and lifelong careers:

> How do short-term assignments translate into worker flows and careers? From a *labor supply* standpoint, one artist equals one long-term occupational prospect, especially when employment relationships are long-term and careers are well patterned. But the gap is

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1. For more on risk as constitutive of the “new modernity,” see Beck (1992).

2. As this cluster of activity suggests, 2011 was an especially fertile year for conversations about precarity, the recession, and artistic production. See also “Precarity: The People’s Tribunal,” convened at London’s Institute of Contemporary Arts in March 2011, and Hal Foster’s article about Thomas Hirschhorn’s “precarious practice” (2011:28–30).

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widening between the vocational commitment and the way it transforms into a career: self-employment, freelancing and contingent work bring in discontinuity, repeated alternation between work, compensated and non-compensated unemployment, searching and networking activities, and cycling between multiple jobs inside or outside the arts. (Menger 2006:4)

As Menger’s text implies, the temporal mentality of artistic labor (contingent, intermittent, brief) has long resembled what is now called precarity. What happens, however, when artists—who, being popularly imagined as models of precarity avant la lettre as they do not earn steady wages in any conventional sense and have neither a secure employer nor a consistent, stable workplace—redefine art as work out of necessity, motored by a new urgency to “provide a living for your family,” to cite Kinmont?

When I first conceived this essay, I wanted to provisionally define occupational realism as it functions both as a genre or style of performance as well as an attitude towards work that sheds light on the specific class conditions of artistic production and identity. Within economics, to think occupationally means to think variously about professional status or employment; feminism further understands nonremunerative labors such as housework or childcare, traditionally performed by women, as occupations. As I have been writing, and as the Occupy movement has grown around the world, I have been further impelled to rethink how “occupation” in terms of a spatial political strategy might connect to “occupational” practices that specifically interrogate labor and value. If occupational realism stems at least partially from jobs or work undertaken by artists because they “have to” (though the issue of compulsion, need, and choice is unevenly applicable), this form of practice also raises questions about the potential strategic or operational value of precarity: its capacity to redefine social relations, aesthetic and affective production, and class structures.

In addition, the language used to describe the current conditions of precarity draws heavily upon the rhetoric of performance, as performance skates the line between live art and art that is lived. According to theorist Paolo Virno, post-Fordist capitalism, with its emphasis on flexibility, has led to an expansion of “living labor,” such that not only all of our working hours, but our very desires and thoughts have been absorbed into new regimes of work (2004:53). But Virno sees a space of political possibility within what he calls “virtuosity,” which “happens to the artist or performer who, after performing, does not leave a work of art behind” (in Gielen and Lavaert 2009). Within his formulation, artistic performance (which in some Marxist understandings is posited as the paradigmatic outside, alternative, or other to deadening alienated wage labor) as a form of activity that generates surplus value without an end product, has become not a specialized case unique to performers, dancers, musicians, and the like, but has

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3. In her essay in this issue, Shannon Jackson usefully complicates Virno’s definition of “virtuosity” through the lens of theatre, dance, and music as opposed to visual art (Jackson 2012).
turned into the general condition of “servile” waged work. Virno writes: “The affinity between a pianist and a waiter, which Marx had foreseen, finds an unexpected confirmation in the epoch in which all wage labor has something in common with the ‘performing artist’” (2004:68).

Virno sees virtuosity as a way to move beyond narrow considerations of political action, artistic production, and work as existing in separate spheres. For Virno, the virtuoso’s activity “finds its own fulfillment” and must include an audience or “witnesses”, he stipulates that it contain some sort of public or social component (52). Virno relies heavily upon the language of theatre; he discusses the performance, the script, the score, and the audience as he charts an opening out from work to the realms of cultural or creative activity, and finally into the sphere of the political (56). But what about artists who move in the other direction and mine the procedures of labor in the service of their performances? How does occupational realism thematize and make legible the conditions that Virno describes, as well as indicate what Virno overlooks?

2. occupy: to fill up (time or space)

Kinmont’s assertion that his business is his art is hardly exceptional. In one sense, such an assertion is a conceptual art strategy that began in the early 20th century with Marcel Duchamp, in which something (either an object or an idea or a gesture) is appropriated, put into quotes, framed, nominated, or bracketed “as art.” In the wake of this logic, art’s very contours loosened and blurred to accommodate two of its ostensible opposites: “life” and “work.” There is, however, a key distinction between post-Duchampian strategies of nomination and artists who begin to understand that if their activities already resemble art, they might as well name them as such. Here, they do not “decide” to feel or think of their life or work as art, but just the opposite: they start feeling and thinking it before they know it, because of the effects that Virno describes.

Indeed, the art-into-life experiments of the early 1960s—in which virtually any thing or activity could be redefined as art (such as Alison Knowles’s Make a Salad, 1962)—led to a flowering of late-20th-century artists declaring their jobs to be art.4 In 1966 Canadian artist duo Iain and Ingrid Baxter formed N.E. Thing Co. Ltd. (they legally incorporated in 1969), and until 1978 mimed the procedures of business, including printing up business cards, attending conventions, and even sponsoring a junior hockey team. Though the Baxters aimed to be a moneymaking enterprise, their satirical take on the trappings of corporate culture and bureaucracy “did not yield the sustainable economic base, which they envisioned” (Lauder 2010:57–58). Similarly, Gordon Matta-Clark and Carol Goodden’s New York City art project/functioning restaurant Food, opened in 1971, was shuttered after two years because they could not make it a viable business.

While some artists have pursued a corporate model, others have individually taken on temporary working-class identities. To list only a few: in Linda Mary Montano’s Odd Jobs, 1973, the artist announced her availability to do housework such as light hauling, cleaning cellars, interior painting, or gardening. She did so in part to transform, mentally and affectively, the labor she was already doing to make money. As she wrote, “I liked what I was doing when I called it art” (Montano 1981:n.p.). After finding a nurse’s dress in a thrift store, Montano offered herself up for house calls to sick friends and printed cards that listed her skills and services, including “massage, chicken soup, visits, temperature taking, and forehead holding, etc.” The nurse outfit not only functioned as an apparently visible confirmation of her abilities to perform these tasks, it also lent some credibility to her capacities by acting as an authorizing uniform. Montano’s piece resonates with recent writings by Italian feminist Silvia Federici, who has discussed how debates on precarity have under-theorized the role of women’s reproductive and household

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4. For an intelligent and comprehensive look at a wide range of artists (from Yves Klein to Kinmont) who explicitly engage with the commercial sphere, see Luis Jacob, Commerce by Artists (2011).
Such feminist perspectives are vital, especially since one substantial vein of occupational realism involves women artists such as Marina Abramović, Cosey Fanni Tutti, and Nikki S. Lee “performing” sex work to explore questions of sexualized service (see Bryan-Wilson 2012).

Other examples: Bonnie Sherk flipped hamburger patties during the graveyard shift on weekend stints under the title *Short Order Cook*, 1974, at a San Francisco, California, diner called Andy’s Donuts as part of her extended exploration into gender, labor, and what she referred to as “cultural costumes” (in Bradley 2005:189). In a snapshot documentation of this piece, Sherk is caught in action by the griddle with her floppy white chef’s hat. She also redefined a job she had as a waitress as a performance, entitling it *Waitress*; in such pieces, her customers were by and large not aware that as she was serving food, she was also playing a role as a self-conscious artistic act. The work was made available as a performance to an art audience primarily when photographs such as these circulated in art contexts.

In 1981, artist Tony Labat trained to be a professional boxer in *Fight: A Practical Romance*—a pugilistic piece that, when seen alongside Montano’s domestic housework, raises questions about the performance and exaggeration of gender difference. More recently, in 2000 Bulgarian-born Daniel Bozhkov undertook a performance in which he worked at a Maine Wal-Mart as a “people greeter.” This piece, entitled *Training in Assertive Hospitality*, involved him helping customers navigate the store; between shifts, he also painted a fresco in the Layaway Department. A photo of the artist in uniform shows Bozhkov in one of the aisles of the store, an American flag hanging behind him; his Wal-Mart issued vest is laden with text indicating that he is there to serve, including the question “How may I help YOU?” Bozhkov’s piece demonstrates that occupational realists put their emphasis on mainstream employment structures; such artists might experience, as a side benefit, coming into contact with different communities, but stand at some remove from social art practices in which those interactions are the central focus. Though relational projects also contest the boundaries between art and work, artists whose works com-
prises organic farming, community outreach, or public-policy advocacy use their practice as a way to engage with, produce, and actively envision alternative economies, rather than directly inserting themselves into normative economies, as occupational realists do.

The roster of artists who embody the joint roles of performer/worker does not include the many artists who investigate the realm of wage labor by employing workers in the space of the art institution, such as Oscar Bony. For his project *Familia Obrera*, 1968 (Working Class Family), Bony paid a blue-collar worker, machinist Luis Ricardo Rodríguez, along with his wife and their 10-year-old son, twice Rodríguez’s normal hourly wage to sit on a pedestal during an art exhibition at the Instituto Di Tella in Buenos Aires (Cullen 2008:90). By contrast, occupational realists insist on *doing the work themselves*, standing bodily in the space of labor. Hence they are also distinct from artists like Santiago Sierra, whose performances involve hiring workers to carry out menial tasks, sometimes within the space of the art institution. Sierra presents workers as objects to be watched, and this spectacularization frequently removes workers from their usual labor (at least for the duration of the art event). By contrast, occupational realists like Kinmont, Sherk, or Bozhkov do art as they work, within the normal contexts and spaces of work, and they work as they do art; this precise overlap, simultaneity, and multiplicity is crucial.

If most occupational realists are uninterested in putting their labor within the context of traditional museum or gallery display, they are equally uninterested in what could be called theatricality, if we use the basic definition of theatricality to mean “of or for the stage.” Other meanings of theatricality—that which is marked by pretense, extravagant exhibitionism, or artificial emotion—further highlight what these artists are intentionally *not* doing. In fact, they often do not want their customers or colleagues to witness or acknowledge what they do as art—they want to vocationally “pass.” Kinmont speculates that few of his customers are aware that his bookselling is also an art project—and if they are aware, they are prone to take him less seriously as a dealer. That is, though Virno’s idea of the virtuoso demands an audience, that audience is here complicated and fractured—there is a “work” audience which need not or should not know that one of its workers has a value-added position as an artist, and then there is the “art” audience.

Oakland-based artist Sean Fletcher commenced *Becoming a Life Insurance Salesman as a Work of Art* (1996–2002) after he realized he could not survive on his art practice alone and had to take a salaried job. As a relic from his performance illustrates, he signed, dated, and numbered the back of some of his business cards, remaking them into a “limited edition” artwork. Fletcher was fired when his bosses discovered that he was curating small shows in his office after hours, thus violating some of the protocol of the business world by taking up space during non-work hours, and inviting people into the office who had “no business” being there. These performances tell us something about the temporality of precarity: unlike a weekend inhabitation, or a permanent condition, jobs exist for unpredictable time spans before people rotate away, move on, are laid off, quit. Occupational realism as a performance mode unfolds in similarly
vague registers of time—a few years here, a few years there, so that its durational aspect hovers between the brief or temporary and the lifelong. Fletcher’s project demonstrates that both the art performance and life insurance position demand that he present himself as a coherent product to be trusted and valued. As “self-branding” has become a prevalent ideology of contemporary life, artists who make themselves and their business into their art unmask how the emphasis on self-marketing and entrepreneurialism long known to artists now pressures many neoliberal subjects.

Some occupational realism echoes classic ethnographic or investigative reporting techniques in which scholars or reporters become embedded among their observational subjects. In fact, Barbara Ehrenreich’s bestselling book from 2001, *Nickel and Dimed: On (Not) Getting By in America*, in which she spent three months doing unskilled labor in order to determine conditions of living on a low wage, took up precisely the same sorts of jobs as some of the artists just mentioned (food service like Sherk, cleaning houses like Montano, working at Wal-Mart like Bozhkov). As Ehrenreich discovered, the idea that she was “deceiving” anyone quickly unraveled: “There’s no way, for example, to pretend to be a waitress: the food either gets to the table or it doesn’t. People knew me as a waitress, a cleaning person, a nursing home aide, or a retail clerk not because I acted like one, but because that’s what I was, at least for the time I was with them” (2001:9). Yes and no: Ehrenreich assumes intimate knowledge about low-wage life in a very brief amount of time but never turned to these jobs, as many do, out of true desperation. She follows the long tradition of journalistic exposés about the deprivations of working-class life (think of Nellie Bly going undercover in a Pittsburgh factory in the late 19th century). Ehrenreich insists that she is not a “blue collar wannabe” but establishes rules of approach, somewhat like a sociologist, before plunging in to “get her hands dirty” (4).

Ehrenreich was castigated by some critics for the overlay of elitism and arrogance in her project. This is one major bone of contention with occupational realism, too, in its least nuanced iterations: it taps into longstanding downwardly mobile pretensions among educated, leftist artists and writers alike, pretensions that veer close to class condescension. As one review of *Nickel and Dimed* stated:
The presumptions within cross-class narratives need to be made similarly apparent: that only someone outside of the experience of economic subjection can accurately document the physical and psychological trauma of that process; that only someone with economic privilege can call upon the sociological methodology necessary to name economic pain. (Schocket 2003:49)

However, some artists who take on the role of low-wage worker as art, like Montano, are less interested in narrating economic pain than in transforming a range of “experiences”—always admittedly limited or partial—in art. This is a persistent claim of self-aware class difference: I know that what I’m doing right now is just a job, a job that occupies some of my time, but I have some other identity that validates me. Educated artists might choose to be blue-collar workers with little training, but that directional flow is usually one way, for when untrained workers decide to be artists, they are often considered “outsiders”—like janitor Henry Darger, whose work is labeled as “outsider art” to mark his distance from the usual classed routes of artistic training.

The privileges of re-employment are reserved for elite mobility, in which, for example, a Wall Street broker decides to reskill as a baker, a downwardly mobile shift that is belied by the cultural capital it trades in and is correspondingly narrated as laden with intangible psychic rewards, the rewards of doing “personally gratifying” labor. One such narrative, in which a University of Chicago PhD became a mechanic and extolled the virtues of his newfound honest labor, was told by Matthew Crawford in his (like Ehrenreich’s, bestselling) book Shop Class as Soulcraft: An Inquiry into the Value of Work (2009). Others further down the class ladder, however, may not have such choices available to them—a laid-off mechanic cannot move easily into more upwardly mobile realms of employment. Contingency—which was lauded in the 1990s as a potentially radical or productive mode of thinking about art and identity formation—has curdled into the grim uncertainties of precarity.

The class-based friction felt by Ehrenreich’s critics does not accompany every project of occupational realism, especially those in which an artist becomes a knowledge worker or businessman. In Kinmont’s Sometimes a nicer sculpture, for instance, the class shift from artist-as-information-peddler to specialized bookseller does not seem so dramatic, or so fantastical. Kinmont absorbs into his business his interest in archives and the production of knowledge, and then rotates his bookselling knowledge back into art again, a cycle tinged with the masculine imperative to be the family breadwinner.

Figure 6. Sean Fletcher, Becoming a Life Insurance Salesman as a Work of Art, 1996–2002. A signed business card, part of six-year-long performance. (Courtesy of Sean Fletcher)
When the distinctions between art and work are eroded, does the capacity for art to critique the regimes of work likewise evaporate? Such an erasure might seem, rather, to serve neoliberal paradigms, in which all hours of the day are subsumed under the rubric of productivity. As Virno notes, the distinction between being at work and being off work (at home in domestic space or elsewhere in leisure time), has shifted into the more arbitrary differences between “remunerated life and non-remunerated life” (2004:103). (As any freelancer knows, if you are never officially on the clock, then you never feel totally off the clock, either.)

It has been argued that, within the dotcom boom of the late 1990s, artistic work with its variable hours and its adaptable working conditions became a model for “creative” informational work like software development, and thus the critical or even antagonistic aspects of art were subsumed into byproducts of what Richard Florida trumpeted as the lifestyle-as-product of the “creative class” (2002). The optimistically heralded professionalization of art—as in Daniel Pink’s proclamation that the Master of Fine Arts degree “is the new MBA”—signaled not only that (some) artists stood to make a lot of money doing design or content work, but that professionals were being redefined as artists (2005:54). And what is for sale or highly valued in this new professional creative class is something akin to professional style. At the cusp of the post-industrial turn, C. Wright Mills noted that what is on offer with the professionalization of work has become a matter of attitude and affect—what he calls marketable personality (1951:241).

Importantly, “occupational realism” as a phrase has other meanings that resonate beyond the art world, notably emerging in education, behavioral psychology, and sociology in the mid-1950s to discuss the structuration of class mobility and the relative lack of ease of moving from one class position to another in the United States. This research, proliferating within academic departments of social work, education, and counseling for the last few decades, discusses the discrepancy between levels of aspiration in adolescents or first-time job seekers and their “actual” potential to achieve those aspirations (see Coffee 1957; Stokes 1977; Paap 1997). Within this context, occupational realism means, to put it simplistically, how much someone’s planned-for job matches his/her eventual employment, how realistic one is about one’s eventual occupation. To desire to be a plumber when one “grows up,” and to be enrolled in a vocational program in which one would acquire plumbing skills is to have a firm sense of occupational realism. To desire to be a world-famous astronaut when one is an economically disadvantaged student with bad grades and test scores (which themselves gauge and measure class status) is to express a low degree of occupational realism. In other words, how closely do your fantasies hew to your already-determined class station, to your access to cultural capital, to the role you are expected to play? According to these studies, for certain subjects (especially those that are low income, nonwhite, and/or female), if those fantasies are mismatched, quality of life plummets when they enter the workforce (Thomas 1976). To imagine a life other than the one you were handed is, in these studies, to set yourself up for failure; it is better to aspire down than to aspire up.

Taking into account the strictures on class mobility, these studies emphasize that within the US, movement out of one class and into another is infrequent and exceptional. They also emphasize that the adult’s question to the child, “What do you want to be?” is not only fundamentally about identity (the molding of selfhood into the shapes disciplined by work) but also about forecasting and projecting into the future—a future that is marked by labor structuration along lines of class, race, and gender, and increasingly considered precarious. One influential study from 1966, based on a national survey of children and teenagers in the US, The Adolescent Experience, found strong gender-based differences between the boys and girls they studied in terms of wishes for their future selves: “Girls do not show the same level of clear and active realism in regards to mobility. The girl’s future must in some sense remain ambiguous—it depends so much on sexual realization and being chosen in marriage” (Douvan and Adelson 1966:78). This striking passage brings up complex, and painful, questions of volition and agency, not least as it relates to gender. We must account for the discrepant meanings of “occupational realism” here: for artists, it is about an educated choice to redefine remunerated labor within
the value structure of art. The educational/vocational usage of “occupational realism,” which describes the necessity of being realistic about class limitations, demonstrates that “job choice” is for some only illusory, and for others an obvious mark of privilege.

3. occupy: to seize possession of and maintain control over

In 2005, South Korean–born artist Bohyun Yoon circulated a postcard on which he declared his upcoming performance piece, Two Year Soldier Project. As he explains, “As a male Korean citizen, I have to serve in the military for two years. At the time, I thought of myself as an artist, so I ‘disguised’ myself as a soldier for two years” (Yoon 2011a). Compulsory military service, national obligation, and creative authorial intent collide as the artist declares himself to be “undercover,” a double agent in his own mind. Within this piece, he might appear to all observers to be embodying the position of soldier, but his self-identification as an artist—one who was physically and logistically unable to make material objects for a designated amount of time—also distinctly imbues his military actions with extra value because he executes them as an artistic performance.

That he embodies this work of soldiering differently (at a critical remove, perhaps, or conversely, with fiercer concentration?) is somewhat implied, yet we would have no sense of this difference if it were not for the postcard announcement’s photograph of him wearing a handmade transparent vinyl camouflage outfit, a glass helmet, and holding a blown-glass gun, an outfit that he obviously did not don when actually on duty. “No opening reception, not open to the public” states the text on the back of the postcard. The formal declaration of this artistic “disguise” presumably fell away once he enlisted and, sans glass accessories, was indistinguishable from the others with whom he trained and worked.

The bohemian déclassé drag of some artists (such as Sherk) as they dipped in and out of the working-class labor force is distinct from the literal demands made upon Yoon. His status change was beyond his control: his decision to reinvent his military service as part and parcel of his art was in response to his lack of choice. Yoon has an MFA and was trained in the glass department of the Rhode Island School of Design; he wanted to stay in the United States after he graduated but in order to extend his visa, he had to return to South Korea and carry out his conscripted military service. On his postcard (which was circulated to a US audience in advance of his enlistment), Yoon shows himself at-the-ready, facing the viewer with his gun in hand, a parodic stance made absurd by his transparent outfit that produces the opposite effect intended by camouflage, as it renders him more visible, more vulnerable, more open, and more at risk. His hand-blown glass gun and glass helmet, in addition to being nonfunctional, are likewise fragile and might shatter with impact.

The glass helmet is the only material artifact from Yoon’s two-year piece, aside from the postcard, journal entries, and the two-year gap from 2005 to 2007 evident on his CV, which otherwise shows a busy itineraries of group and solo exhibitions. During this period he was engaged in his all-consuming performance without access to his own art-making tools or materials. Interestingly, however, during his active service in the military, Yoon primarily worked as a graphic designer—the same sort of job he might have had if he was supporting himself as an artist invested in material forms of art making. At the same time, this graphic design work was done under the scrutiny of the military with the constraints of their harsh schedule, and he endured a significant amount of militaristic mental training.

Yoon’s two-year piece also summons the idea of occupation as militaristically conquered space—though for him, the space of occupation was not land, but his own head. He is now working to minimize or work through the experience, to expel from his mind the procedures of the training. He has described himself while in the military as both occupied and preoccupied: distracted by his soldiering from his normal thoughts. It is a preoccupation that now requires
undoing; since he left the military, Yoon has focused his art on interrogating systems of social control.

As a performance, Two Year Soldier Piece asks: What is the work here, where is it manifested, how does it become legible, and what are the mechanisms of its materialization? Two Year Soldier Project (whose after-effects continue to resonate through Yoon’s art and thinking) insists upon the non-identity between the worker and the job, opening up a space between being and doing. In the above discussion, I mentioned vocational “passing,” but perhaps that is not the right phrase with regards to occupational realism. For the idea of passing presumes one stable identity, permanency, or authenticity against which drag is thrown into relief. What Yoon’s performance makes clear or renders transparent is that, under precarious conditions, one switches between radically different positions and/or occupations, performing differently according to shifting circumstances.

Still, I use the contested word realism to signal that performances of this sort are not just “acts” (though they are suffused with potential irony). At the same time, neither are they about unmediated access to anything that might be called “real”—itself always fugitive, phantasmatic,
and illusory. Within theatre history, realism signifies a range of practices that began in the 19th century in opposition to the romantic dramas popular at the time, including naturalism, which often depicted bodies at work and/or at leisure in extended mediations upon the two (see Styan 1981). Within art history, Realism refers to a school of painting that originated in France in the 19th century. It was championed by Gustave Courbet and was understood as a politicized reaction to the 1848 Revolution, in which artists felt they were charged with showing the structures of social and political relations with all their ambiguities, including “class conflict and expropriation” (Clark 1973:116). Courbet was not the first artist to depict labor or laboring bodies—but he meaningfully placed peasant labor next to his own labor as an artist, thereby producing resonate homologies. Occupational realism, which began in the late 1960s and early 1970s along with postindustrial economic changes, likewise reveals ambiguous, difficult, and unresolvable conflicts about class, including professionalization, waged work, and volition.

Beyond theatre or art historical notions of Realism as a critical style, these artists are “realists” in the sense that they are insistent about the overlap between realms of art and work. Artists like Kinmont or Yoon or Fletcher effectively function as booksellers or soldiers or life insurance salesmen. They perform their duties within the actual sites of bookselling and soldiering and salesmanship. In addition, they are employed within the discourses of state-enforced, economically prescribed self-identifications, in which everything from census forms to visa applications ask us to name our occupation (meaning business, or legitimate wage work) with a singular word or phrase. What position do you fill? What space do you regularly occupy? These artists undermine the singular grammar demanded by these questions, as they perform roles as both artists and as wage earners. For artists whose employment becomes their art, their lives are dually occupied, toggling across the slash: bookseller/artist, artist/military man. Yet for Yoon, who did not have the privileges associated with educated white males with US citizenship in a time without a military draft, the question of “choice” proves much more volatile.

4. occupy: to engage or employ the attention of

Within capitalism, art has long figured as a special type of production. It is also understood to catalyze a special type of sensory orientation; doing something “as art” is meant to increase attention or awareness on the part of the doer. In Montano’s Odd Jobs, she took on work not only as a way to generate money but also to shift her own affective stance towards activities which otherwise seemed onerous, boring, or laborious. In a related vein, Mierle Laderman Ukeles in 1976 asked 300 maintenance workers in a building in New York to reconsider their work as art for one hour a day, in her piece I Make Maintenance Art One Hour Every Day. She gave out buttons emblazoned with the title for the participants to wear and documented workers as they went about their business in an effort to destabilize the distinctions between dignified art-making and presumably rote, even numbing tasks such as sweeping or vacuuming. Ukeles did not dictate how her newly nominated artists would go about their “maintenance art,” and there was a range of responses (from amusement to suspicion that she was working for the US Department of Immigration). In the end, the piece attempted to unsettle ideas that art exists in a sphere separate from non-commodity-producing service work.

What does it mean to be at work but not occupied—that is, not fully devoting one’s attentions to the task at hand? Is this partial focus assumed to be the condition of most contemporary work? How might art also speak to this space of mental elsewhereness? The idea that “art is a calling,” demanding full presence, increasingly does not hold up, as plenty of art is outsourced to others, is made during states of boredom, or even explicitly thematizes distraction, and much “work” is performed with vigilant, intense, or reverent focus. In the past few years, when I have mentioned the likes of Ukeles, Yoon, or Fletcher in my classes, my students want

5. For more on Ukeles, see Molesworth (2000) and Jackson (2011).
to know how these differently interpellated workers felt about what they were doing, as if in response to some pervasive desire for art to be personally transformative. Did the attitudes of the maintenance crew change in the wake of Ukeles’s intervention? Did Yoon or Fletcher have a different mental or emotional relationship to training for war or selling insurance because they had been designated “performances”?

My students have been frustrated by their lack of access to the thought-processes involved, especially irritated at how Yoon and Fletcher have corrupted what is romanticized as an activity apart from the sphere of work — art — and turned it into a form of toil that seems to offer no emotive surplus, no aesthetic dimension, no moral lesson. This frustration points to the stubborn residue that clings to authorially invested artistic activity; the intent of the artist still carries disproportional significance. When precarious work — flexible, contingent, part-time — closely resembles artistic labor, at least outwardly, does the main distinction between art and work remain an internal thought process, a feeling, an attitude? How “committed” are these artists to inhabiting their roles, how much control or manipulation of their emotional life do they exercise? Their performances succeed, in part, to the degree that they disappear, at least to us witnesses, into the contours of their labor. There is no way to measure how the free-floating frame of “performance” might have an impact on the “work” these artists did: they had no script to follow, no character to play, no narrative to trace.

But the ultimately unknowable interiorities of Ukeles, Yoon, and Fletcher are of less concern than the question of uncertain valuation. These performances insist that there might be some separation of intent from activity, some division of labor in which the activity’s registration as art remains distinct from that of work — that is, in the realm of affect. What is more, the actions of these artists are granted an extra sheen of value; the added component of artistic labor, however immaterial, implies that the self-reflexive performer might have a different level of awareness about their work than does the ordinary worker. For his part, Fletcher always considered himself fully both an artist and a salesman. He did his job during the day, but was also preoccupied with his after-hours art career. For Yoon, during his two years, even when in uniform, his answer to the question “What do you do?” varied depending on who was asking (Yoon 2011b). These definitions and identifications are messy, partial, and contingent.

Hito Steyerl’s recent take on art and labor places occupations in opposition to waged work: “An occupation keeps people busy instead of giving them paid labor” (Steyerl 2011). But for some artists, occupations are routes into artistic value and meaning, as well as to remuneration. I asked Kinmont if he feels differently doing his bookselling job knowing that it is art. He is a perfect case study since he had worked as a bookseller previous to Sometimes a nicer sculpture, but in that previous employment he had not considered the work an art piece. He responded:

I think I do, absolutely, think about it differently. It has to do with how you chose to define art. For me, art is about an awareness of the creation of meaning. Deciding that it is art is a tool or a device by which to see how it is meaningful to me. It helps me align my priorities. Sometimes it is still drudgery or tedious — the backbreaking, dirty, boring work of packing up books — but it is also meaningful to me to work in the area of cultural preservation and to contribute to my family. (Kinmont 2011)

Crucial here, again, is the fact that attentiveness trumps Duchampian nomination; this is not a one-time act, but an ongoing process of consideration paid to conditions that already exist. Kinmont has described this as a relatively taxing method of working, akin to bilingualism, since the languages and codes of one value structure are so different from the other and he finds himself constantly translating from one to another.
5. occupy: to seize possession of and maintain control over

“This IS MY OCCUPATION,” reads a sign held aloft at an Occupy Wall Street demonstration in fall 2011 — bringing together in one terse phrase multiple definitions of employment, work, claiming territory, political strategy, and affective absorption. In 1953, art critic Clement Greenberg wrote an essay in which he considered the crisis of culture and speculated about its future, given the rapid economic changes around him in the postwar context:

The only solution that I can conceive of under these conditions is to shift its center of gravity away from leisure and place it squarely in the middle of work. Am I suggesting something whose outcome could no longer be called culture, since it would not depend on leisure? I am suggesting something whose outcome I cannot imagine. (1961:32)

Greenberg’s prophecy rings true as the unimaginable relocation of culture to work continues to unfold in the 21st century. Certainly what I am calling occupational realism will shift in relation to this new focus on occupation and intention — as with Greenberg, I find myself at a loss to imagine what exactly that might look like. But let me conclude by offering some thoughts based on my historical understanding of a time when art also went to work.

If we are witnessing a whole-scale economic shift whose only known contour is its very unmappability, its instability and uncertainty, in which workers of all kinds, diverse in their class status and in their various degrees of cultural capital, survive on the barest of margins, with no sense of security or futurity, then it could be that artists engaged in occupational realism prefigured the collapsing categories of work, performance, and art in precarious times. The Occupy movement has spawned several artists’ groups interested in foregrounding their own underpaid and undervalued labor as art workers, including an Arts and Labor contingent of Occupy Wall Street and an artists’ bloc at Occupy San Francisco. Many in these groups are reclaiming the phrase “art worker”—a term that has been deployed at various moments in the history of the avantgarde, beginning with Russian constructivism, the 1930s Artists’ Union that emerged when artists were employed through the US Works Progress Administration, and the Art Workers’ Coalition, founded in 1969 in New York City. Those affiliated with the AWC called themselves “art workers,” a term I used for the title of my 2009 book Art Workers: Radical Practice in the Vietnam War Era as a historical nod to these artists’ own self-descriptors. By no means did I take it as an untroubled term. It had uneven currency within its own moment, as my book elaborates, and was fraught with ambivalence, failure, and contradiction (Bryan-Wilson 2009).

So I am curious, if not vaguely mystified, by how the category of the “art worker” is being resurrected. Does its most recent resurfacing mean that artists are interested in reclaiming the phrase with all of its blind spots and fault lines? What the Occupy movement’s canny focus on the “99%” has offered us is a way of finding alliances without recourse to categories such as “the working class.” The Occupy movement has made clear that “workers” are no longer a coherent category, and hence to organize around any single notion of employment, given its instabilities and multiplicities, makes little sense. A slogan that declares “artists are the 99%” speaks to the economic conditions of most artists, who often piece together part-time work to pay the rent, teach in adjunct positions, have mountains of student debt from their art degree, and lack health insurance.

But I want to think hard about what the phrase “art worker” means, its inconsistencies and its elisions. Is the reemergence of the term “art worker” a recognition of the pervasive blurring of art into labor, or is it an overly simplistic conflation of artist and worker, yoking those two together unproblematically? If we can admit there is no such thing as one kind of “worker,” then we need to account for the fact that who we call “artists” are likewise not a coherent category. We must keep in our focus the global art industry that maintains its connections to and
is integrally part of the 1%. We need to parse distinctions that threaten to collapse: not all art is work, not all work is art, and the class distinctions embedded within these terms still matter. Cultural production is a specialized, or as Hans Abbing calls it, “exceptional” form of work, one that has ties to markets, alternative or gift economies, and affective labor (Abbing 2002). We should not erase distinctions or lose a sense of nuance in order to call for solidarity. Instead, we should theorize the complexities of art that span dematerialized performance as well as object-making.

As an anonymous open letter to the Art Workers’ Coalition in 1969 phrased it:

The word “workers” in the name [of the AWC] is a hopeful sign [...]. Suppose however that the AWC were to declare something like “all power to the workers.” In saying this they would not need to be repeating the old slogans of art in the service of the revolution which seems to have produced neither good art nor any revolution at all. Rather they might be saying that art belongs to all who can grasp it and draw energy from it. What this means in practical terms I don’t know... The cry “all power to the workers” means just that, “all power to all workers.” It does not mean that the oyster dredgers control blue points and the artists control acrylics. It means that energy glows as evenly as possible from each segment of society to all others; and when that happens the moral equivalent to privilege will have been found. (Smithsonian Institute 1969)

Though this letter strikes a hopeful note, the AWC never managed to bridge its concerns with the inequalities outside of the art world. The Art Workers’ Coalition, in its lifespan from 1969–1971, did accomplish many things, including an incisive institutional critique that helped illuminate connections between artistic industries, the military, and corporations. They agitated for more oversight in the art world in a time, then as now, with vast inequalities and a star system that rewards some and not others. But the AWC should function less as a triumphant moment than as a cautionary tale: it fell apart in part because it did not offer a sustainable analysis of the co-articulation of race, class, and gender. The art workers circa 1970 were never fully able to recognize this key fact: artists often have, and use, many class-based privileges that many other workers do not have, not the least of which is access to cultural capital.

How have these precarious times changed how we conceive of both art and work? If we take our cue from Virno, we might speculate that our notion of performance has undergone vast transformations that bleed from the cultural to the economic. Yet the contingencies upon which the idea of “artist” or “performer” rests have always in part been based on class privilege, an aspect that is underexplored in Virno. I might go so far as to say that “artists” are not “workers,” which is precisely what makes occupational realism legible as a form of practice — there is a gap between these nonidentical categories wide enough that their bridging feels surprising. If art were already work, or work were already art, these projects that redefine art as work and vice versa would simply fail to register as inversions, as conceptual frames, or as critiques. For many people, working and struggling to survive financially makes creating art less possible; at the same time, work contains within it the possibilities to envision new sorts of relations. As Kathi Weeks puts it, “Work is not only a site of exploitation, domination, and antagonism, but also where we might find the power to create alternatives on the basis of subordinated knowledges, resistant subjectivities, and emergent models of organization” (2011:29). Potentially, the freshly minted art workers of the Occupy movement will not fixate on getting a bigger piece of the art-market pie, and instead will continue to instigate a robust, subtle, and complex analysis of economic conditions attuned to larger struggles against inequality. This is a moment to talk openly about privilege, debt, economic justice, and art as a space of imaginative possibility that has the potential to transform how we think about work, and performance.

6. Gregory Sholette (2011) has also written extensively on the "dark matter" and unacknowledged labor that motors the art industry.
References


A SELECTION OF ANONYMOUS COMMENTS FROM THE W.A.G.E. SURVEY:

> Artists deserve a fair, not just a fraction…
>
> As an artist I considered all costs for travel, production, installation, etc. (either as a fraction or percentage) and the organization (grants or fund) had to pay the full amount until they paid the account…
>
> As a printmaker and artist, I have been paid by grants and organizations that have paid me a fixed amount for a piece or fraction of a piece. They have also paid for my travel and my travel expenses. I have never been paid a fraction of any cost for my work.
>
> I negotiated approximately for a 50% commission which still has not been paid. I believe that is fair and in line with the amount I pay for my work.
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>
> I negotiated approximately for a 50% commission which still has not been paid. I believe that is fair and in line with the amount I pay for my work.

**シンセラス**: なぜ、これにカーテンがついてるの？
**ミル**: よくわからないですね。おそらく、クイズの準備をしているからです。
**シンセラス**: それは、何のためにですか？
**ミル**: それは、クイズの準備をしているからです。

**Anecdote**: During a recent W.A.G.E. meeting with a group of professional artists, it was revealed that many people have made $100,000 in 2013 from the age of 12. The group said, "it is impossible for us to do this without the support of the W.A.G.E."

**Conclusion**: The premise of using a percentage of an artist’s work for a fee is not sustainable. It results in an artist working for free, which is not fair.艺术家的 inserts should be paid for their work. Artists should not be working for free, which is not sustainable.
Did you receive any form of payment, compensation or reimbursement for your participation in the exhibition, including the coverage of any expenses?

**ANY PAYMENT**

- **Yes**: 41.8%
- **No**: 58.4%

**EXHIBITION EXPENSES**

- Shipping and travel expenses were paid for by the organization:
  - Yes: 26.6%
  - No: 73.4%
- Partially paid: 52.9%

**ARTIST FEE**

Separate from any shipping, installation or travel expense coverage, how much was the artist fee or honorarium you received?

**PERFORMANCE, LECTURE, OR SCREENING EXPENSES**

- How much of the travel expenses you incurred to attend the performance, such as props, sets, or makeup, were covered?
  - Yes: 23.1%
  - No: 76.9%
- Partially covered: 29.3%

**STUDIOS FOUNDATION (NARS)**

- **Total**: 144 respondents
- **Partial**: 20.5%
- **No Pay**: 62.5%

**OTHER SML - MED**

- **Total**: 577 respondents
- **Partial**: 20.5%
- **No Pay**: 62.5%

**LARGE GROUP (>6 PEOPLE)**

- **Total**: 22.7%
- **No Pay**: 80.0%
- **Partial**: 66.7%

**EXHIBITION: ARTISTS FEE BY NUMBER OF ARTISTS**

- **Small Group**: 2-5 people
  - **Full Pay**: 36.8%
  - **Partially Covered**: 22.5%
  - **No Pay**: 22.2%

- **Large Group**: >6 people
  - **Full Pay**: 33.3%
  - **Partially Covered**: 37.2%
  - **No Pay**: 26.7

**TRAVEL**

- If you traveled to New York City from out of town, how much of your travel expenses were covered?
  - Yes: 40.6%
  - No: 59.4%
Galleries
3% of sales

Auction Houses
5% of sales

Government Funding

Private Donations

Fund for Living Wage for Artists

Pool of all eligible, practicing Artists (degree certified & self-taught)

application & portfolio review

Elected Application Review Committee (Artists, Curators, Critics, Art Educators, Dealers)

3% of sales

Members ("certified" Artists)

monthly paycheck
A MANUAL FOR THE IMMATERIAL WORKER

The Way We Work Now.

GENERAL SERVICE INSTRUCTIONS.
CONVERSION.
MAINTENANCE.

JULY, 2011.

PREPARED IN THE OFFICE OF BUREAU FOR OPEN CULTURE.
JAMES VOORHIES, Director.

Bureau for Open Culture is a critical and research-based practice that takes the form of a contemporary arts institution to interrogate and re-imagine from within the way we engage with art.
A MANUAL FOR THE IMMATURAL WORKER

The time clock is a device for the material worker. It ticks away, minute by minute, hour by hour over the course of each and every day. In the olden days the work completed was equal to the material proof at the end of eight hours. Today, the immaterial worker does not have the same symbiotic relationship with the time clock. The time clock for the immaterial worker is irrelevant because they work continually. And they work on what is most expected of them: the constant flow of ideas. Their time is not measured in concrete things. It is measured in immaterial content. Their level of production is gauged by the ongoing reiteration of presence. A very difficult thing to do that is. The service instructions are not as explicit as they are for the material worker. The immaterial worker should know that they are part of a workforce in continual flux, especially geographically, often without a defined work site or city or an actual work community. There is indeed a community and it’s a networked community that is always reformulating, redefining itself due to its lack of permanent presence. Immaterial workers are just alienated strangers connected by digital technologies until they make it otherwise. The in-
structions they receive should inform them that part of their work is to create more work, create their work, even though there is already a surplus of labor itself. This is due to the fact that subjectivities are an infinitely reproducible form, which the construction of identity relies upon. We must reproduce what we think is so significantly and purely our own. We all want to believe that we are free from the products of capital. Yet the instability of the immaterial worker’s presence, of their daily relation to time, makes the necessity for material things crucial to the ownership and control of the everyday.

The general service instructions make clear that digital technologies have completely changed the relationship between intellectual work and work work. This is not to say digital technologies have replaced material labor. We know well that the world still makes things—we type, drive, eat, sleep and travel with those things—every day. But, digital technologies have allowed the content of making those things to become work; the idea ultimately produces the something we consume. Digital technologies are closely associated with communications and language. And, that is immaterial through and through, meaning content that does not manifest in something concrete but content that is consumed within the networked sphere that produces it.

Information technology and production of ideas then are part of a new Fordist production line, or what is called the post-Fordist model. The time clock does not stop for the post-Fordist assembly line worker. It goes on and on because unlike the wage laborer, who finishes work after eight hours, the post-Fordist worker has social time to add into their workday, to their workflow. The transformation from a Fordist to post-Fordist production model is when the symbolic value—design and aesthetics—of a good surpasses or equals its use value. We don’t need a new car because the car we have no longer works. As Pascal Gielen tells us, we buy that new car because it is a symbol of how we want to be perceived, the style and identity we want to construct. In post-Fordism the workplace is no longer just the office or factory. It now includes personal life: dinner parties, opening receptions, weekend hikes, coffee breaks and after-hour drinks. It includes places like the airport and home. Because, of course, in this new factory society technology stays right there with the immaterial worker everywhere and every step of the way, as they move through space or remain on their couch. We are told this is the ultimate freedom, the freedom never to leave the comfort of one’s own home to work. Yet the electronic sounds that indicate new email are constant and, thus, they require regular maintenance—even at home. Playing Whack-a-Mole with the email. A combination of the technology, the social and the physical collide into a totality that makes the life of the immaterial worker fully consumed by work. The baggage is light for this worker. They can work anywhere because their production line tools are the screen, the phone, the keyboard and of course the mind, don’t forget the ideas. The work they do, however, is intangible and the production line continual, unchanging without any real evidence of the time that has ticked away from morning, afternoon, evening, to night and dawn again. All that is solid melts into air.
In the age of the immaterial worker, labor is fully the product of capital. At the onset of capital there existed the possibility of the industrial or the material worker to challenge capital’s influence because work was strictly delineated by time, location and task. Class, or difference, was well defined by way of labor and capital, language. The subsumption of labor by capital is now complete. Labor is no longer associated with a “working class” or wage day, a time clock. Capital’s grip is tighter than ever on everyone because it is now fused with the social. The deterritorialized character of the work site and the invasive role of the Internet for immaterial workers are factors that contribute to this rigid hold. Even the farmer no longer simply plows the fields and plants the seeds. Because the rural is in service to the city and by extension operating under the sway of capital, the original mode of agricultural production is not dissimilar to that of industrial manufacture. The farmer, long considered a manual worker par excellence, must have specialized knowledge of pesticides, weather forecasting technologies, hormone sciences, marketing, fertilizers and legal and government tax and subsidies. All are integral to the daily production of food. Indeed, farming obviously produces something useful—food. But the farmer has post-Fordist tendencies because the symbolic and marketing and design and communication and knowledge-producing associated with organic agriculture, for example, shows all the symptoms of a conversion from material to immaterial labor. Local farmers have a brand, they communicate with the public by email, websites and newsletters. Their CSA programs are orchestrated in a retail model with fruit and veggies and dairy arranged...
in a seductive way for the consumer. It all appeals to the consumer who expects the experience as much as the product. One wants to see and pet the chickens and get to know the sources from where their fresh eggs and vegetables come. They want to see the strawberry patch growing on the side of the hill. The material or Fordist manufacturing system, not just aligned with the industrial laborer, but also agricultural production, is learning the tricks of the trade for how to become a good immaterial industry. The product is a concrete something, of course, but the experience constructed through ideas and content is part of the lifestyle associated with what is consumed today. The immaterial labor is beholden to this form of consumption.

Conversion is based on technology, communication and the social. Whereas the material worker exchanged its labor and time with capital, the immaterial worker is now perpetually fueling capital because their work is connected to the social, to lifestyle and experience. Lifestyle is a consumer product. There is a surplus labor because, as Marx predicted in *The Grundisse*, labor appears no longer as labor itself but as the full development of activity and that activity is social. The conversion of material to immaterial labor helps to fulfill that development. The time clock is essential to the conversion. Whereas the time clock delineated the part of life where work and non-work were clear and thus labor and non-labor and what was in service to capital or not, the dissolution of the time clock or work day for the immaterial worker means that capital has converted all of life to labor.
The immaterial worker is on the front lines of production, facing the public, and keeping everything flowing with ease. Maintenance is constant, so as to stop moving means one stops making, stops thinking, stops living, stops breathing. Sounds dramatic, but it’s just the facts. Like Theodor Adorno told us would eventually happen, the masses have become an appendage of the machinery and the immaterial workers are inextricably tied to the culture they make, a culture that is in itself a commodity. The work becomes the labor of inventing and re-inventing labor and looming is the awareness of unrealized potential because the mind does not stop producing.

The immaterial worker is subordinate to a precarious existence. They acknowledge and acquiesce to the hustle—or work—they must perform in order to find time to work. The work they do is not always the work they do because they are searching for some hidden strata of time, a layer of free moments that allow them to get to the point of their working existence. A regular maintenance of this condition requires the periodic replenishment or tapping into the writing, sculpting, designing and drawing, for example, that is at the core of their immaterial production pool. The precarity in this existence rests in the fact the immaterial laborer is required to use their content, their ideas, their education and their mobility for a wide array of other consumer points of contact with the public, from teaching higher education to corporate design to cultural production. Precarity, therefore, is the basis of the maintenance and the crisis is one of context. Our meanings and potential use values are structured by the perpetual
flux of context and that context shifts within the sway of capital and the consumption of subjectivities. Precarity they say is accompanied by freedom. But, is it really freedom? Immaterial workers have been tricked into believing that flexible work hours and mobility means time from the work site and the eight-hour workday. A freelance, immaterial worker has the chance to choose when and where they want to work. But, the maintenance of this life means they are always working to find work, worrying about finding work, producing content and ideas on spec, in hopes of one day placing those ideas, selling that content, fueling their freedom for the labor they do when not working. It’s a tricky existence, this precarity, this immaterial laboring. This ossification of the subjectivity.

Chantal Mouffe and Ernesto Laclau remind us that the commodification of existence itself is by no means a new late-capitalist strategy. Since the onset of Fordism with the rise of consumer interests in the late 1960s, all inter- and intrapersonal relations are outcomes of market production valuation. Everything we do, everything we are is co-opted by the machine of cultural industry. Everything is a commodity, a fetish to be aggrandized by way of degrees of longing, as nothing is sacred or safe from the rapacious, late-capitalist consumer. And nothing says it better than the final scene of Jean-Luc Godard’s 1967 film 2 or 3 Things I Know About Her. There she is, the main character—housewife-cum-prostitute Juliette Janson. She lives in the Parisian suburbs. She’s finished her day’s work hustling the streets of central Paris to buy the very things and attain the very lifestyle that fashion magazines and television and radio say she should have. Our good immaterial worker Juliette has produced all day long nothing of material proof. She is a whore. But her existence, her body, her being, has labored. What it is that Juliette does each day is a mystery to her comatose husband Robert. As husband and wife ready for bed, reading and chatting about the day and what is in store for tomorrow, our awareness of Juliette’s boredom reveals itself even more. We know she feels the grip and wants to resist the complacency of this precarious existence against a time clock that is not unlike that of the immaterial worker, a time clock guised as freedom that constantly grazes on the bios, human life. And so the immaterial worker is the whore of the late-capitalist consumer world, always on call—available 24-hours a day. The close of the night for Juliette means just the beginning of tomorrow, another day of the same fucking thing. The tedium. The boredom. The lack of knowing what else to do besides work. Produce. It all makes maintenance for the immaterial worker a difficult thing to pursue.

Robert: Well, we got there.
Juliette Janson: Where?
Robert: Home.
Juliette Janson: So what now?
Robert: We go to bed. What’s up with you?
Juliette Janson: And then?
Robert: We wake up.
Juliette Janson: And then?
Robert: Same again. We’ll wake up, we’ll eat.
Juliette Janson: And then?
Robert: I don’t know. Die.
Juliette Janson: And then?
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Bureau for Open Culture, 2011
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