

**Parallel Processing: Conceptual Art in the Age of Revolt**

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## **Abstract**

This dissertation investigates Conceptual artists and their practices ranging from John Latham in 1966 to Hans Haacke in the early 1970s, with a particular focus on the link with educational institutions, student protest movements, and a desire for autonomy found in all three. It is through an analysis of the relationship between Conceptual art and the various notions of autonomy that result in a different way of understanding Conceptual art. Instead of perceiving Conceptual art as merely reflecting the social context of an administered society, or conversely of artist-intellectuals critiquing institutions, I highlight that often these two modes existed simultaneously to create a sense of being bound and free at the same time. The neutrality and distance of early Conceptual works from the more politically engaged protest movements is reassessed as a radical disengagement that operated as a model for artist and viewer to self-question their presuppositions of existing norms through a set of relations with the work. In effect, working as a cultural site of radical possibility that offered an alternative to the world in its current form, and simultaneously heightening the awareness of the provisional nature of any given viewpoint. Likewise, I analyze how later Conceptual works that negatively highlighted the extent that social and institutional systems supported the status quo, which, while important at the time, may have unintentionally set contemporary art on a path towards functionalization that ironically has led to less autonomy rather than more autonomy. The philosophical approach I have taken using Theodor Adorno's theories has allowed for not only uncovering the desire for autonomy, but how this desire helped explain the very contradictions within artistic practices that were attempting to navigate uncharted waters. The quest for autonomy highlights Conceptual artists re-imagining themselves as intellectually engaged artists through which their do-it-

yourself approach to education produced truly new forms of art instead of just recreating past traditions. The contradictions detailed in these practices focus what was both resisted and subsumed by social and economic circumstances, as well as their potential and pitfalls.

## **Preface**

This dissertation incorporates solely authored analysis. Additionally, there is testimony gathered in interview. Accordingly the study was reviewed and approved by the UBC Behavioural Research Ethics Board in the Offices of Research Services at the University of British Columbia. The Certificate Number for approval of the study is H14-02987. Figure 1 is reprinted with permission of the John Latham Foundation. Figures 2, 4, 20 and 21, are reprinted permission of the Museum of Modern Art. Figures 3, 5, 11, and 12 are reprinted permission of Christos Dikeakos. Figure 6 is reprinted permission of Ian Wallace. Figures 7, 8, 9 and 10 are reprinted permission of Jeff Wall. Figure 14 is reprinted permission of Charlotte Townsend-Gault. Figures 15, 16, and 17 are reprinted permission of John Baldessari. Figure 18 is reprinted permission of the Whitney Museum of America Art.



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## **Dedication**

For Arden.

## Chapter 1: Introduction

“... it is more a state of mind, of openness and investigation, concerning what might constitute an artistic act. It’s accessibility and production by all.”<sup>1</sup>

During the Sixties numerous student, worker and citizen movements challenged the authority of governments and institutions in a wave of protests that spanned the globe. These movements demonstrated a desire to throw off what were perceived as oppressive institutional and social constraints that had begun to lose their legitimacy. The bankrupt doctrines of dominant groups, whether it was support for the Vietnam War or the benefits of unlimited consumerism, had all developed glaring gaps in their justifications. These deficiencies were particularly apparent to the young, who for the first time were receiving a higher education in an unprecedented scale. This massification of intellectual competencies had manifold consequences in the Sixties, not the least of which was the use of these competencies to advocate for dramatic change from restrictive social and political norms. Conceptual art, arguably the most important artistic movement in the second half of the twentieth century, likewise emerged in the late Sixties during this era of great social unrest. Yet many Conceptual art practices at first glance seem remarkably timid in comparison to the explosive situations taking place in the streets. Conceptual art was defined by Lucy Lippard as being “work in which the idea is paramount and the material form is secondary, lightweight, ephemeral, cheap, unpretentious and/or ‘dematerialized.’”<sup>2</sup> My definition is

<sup>1</sup> Seth Siegelaub quoted in *Artists Talk*, ed. Peggy Gale (Halifax: The Press of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, 2004), vii.

<sup>2</sup> Lucy Lippard, *Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), vii.

similarly one in which Conceptual art is known as an exploration of the nature of artwork where ideas are privileged, visuality is downplayed and the unique art object is called into question. Works often included non-art objects such as maps, charts, photographs, and a frequent use of text. Examples such as Lawrence Weiner's *Statements*, 1968, or Robert Barry's *Inert Gas; Helium*, 1969, question what art is and how it is perceived, but appear to be neutral matter-of-fact representations of information far removed from the force of the era's protests. This apparent dichotomy raises a number of questions that will form the core of this dissertation. The first question is whether or not Conceptual art practices were in fact disconnected from the protest movements' political/ethical imperatives? Student movements largely originated at educational institutions, but education was also the target of the protests' critiques, in which case what role did educational institutions have in the imaginative spark that allowed the critiques and questions of the movements to be asked in the first place? Similarly, how were Conceptual art practices informed by educational institutions? If the massification of intellectual competencies is somehow implicated in a growing mutual social consciousness, what is its relationship to the personal growth of self-consciousness promoted in educational institutions? Can an enlivened self-consciousness achieved through a personal quest for autonomy be considered a collective and redemptive process? On the other hand, does this space of self-consciousness and self-determination fall into the bourgeois rubric of independence, freedom, and rationality that serves the interests of elites? Since the focus of Conceptual art moves from the art object to the idea, the very mind-stuff of the viewer becomes the object and with it the need to elaborate the self of self-consciousness. These issues are all related in one way or another to various inflections of the notion of autonomy and consequently the key question of this dissertation is how these terms get played out to create different meanings in Conceptual art practices.



Conceptual artists and their practices that are explored in this dissertation, ranging from John Latham in 1966 to Hans Haacke in the early 1970s, illustrate a link with educational institutions, student protest movements, and the quest for autonomy. It is through the analysis of the relationship between Conceptual art and the various notions of autonomy that lead to a different way of looking at Conceptual art. Instead of perceiving Conceptual art as merely reflecting the social context of an “administered society,” or conversely of artist-intellectuals critiquing institutions, I explain that often these two modes existed simultaneously to create a sense in which Conceptual art was both bound and free at the same time. Additionally, I illustrate how the neutrality and distance of some early Conceptual works from the more directly politically engaged protest movements can alternatively be seen as a radical disengagement that operated as a model for both the artist and viewer to self-question their presuppositions of existing norms through a set of relations with the work. Conceptual art’s non-art appearance can be said to have failed to satisfy the existing representational regime, resulting in attention being given to the differences between art and the world. Fundamentally, working as a cultural site of radical possibility that offered an alternative to the world in its current form, and simultaneously heightening the awareness of the provisional nature of any given worldview. Likewise, I discuss how later Conceptual works that negatively emphasized the extent to which social and institutional systems supported the status quo, while important at the time, may have unintentionally set contemporary art on a path towards functionalization that ironically has led to less autonomy rather than more autonomy. Since traces of Conceptual art can still be found in the most innovative forms of contemporary art, the goal of this dissertation is to re-evaluate how Conceptual art operated in its social context, how it was inextricably linked to the era’s desire for

autonomy, and to see what lessons can be gleaned from its short life span that are of value for our present condition.

The time frame for Conceptual art that this dissertation takes up is the one established by Lucy Lippard in her *Six Years: The dematerialization of the art object from 1966 to 1972* book. This has become the default boundary that art historians have used for Conceptual art.<sup>3</sup> Lippard's date range accurately reflects the formative years of Conceptual art practices and, as outlined in Chapter 5, beginning with Hans Haacke's work such as *Shapolsky et al. Manhattan Real Estate Holdings, a Real-Time Social System, as of May 1, 1971*, 1971, Conceptual art begins to transition into something different, into more socially engaged artistic practices. Conceptual art from 1966 to 1972 managed to break the hierarchies of painting and sculpture by expanding the horizon of what could be considered art making, and in the process enabled different social approaches. What was originally largely a boy's club, Conceptual practices paradoxically opened up a way of making art that was later taken up and furthered into social and feminist concerns by women artist such as Martha Rosler, Barbara Kruger and Mary Kelly, to name a few. The major difference is that the works after 1972 were more ends oriented rather being means oriented as they were prior to 1972. This assertion is roughly analogous to Joseph Kosuth's distinction between analytic and synthetic propositions in which forms of art that depend for their validity by the "infinite space of the human condition" (the outside world) are synthetic propositions, while "forms of art most clearly referable only to art" are analytical propositions.<sup>4</sup> Thus works after 1972 take on a more synthetic aspect of explicitly engaging the social as opposed to the

<sup>3</sup> Benjamin Buchloh uses 1962-1969 in his "Aesthetic of Administration" essay, however, Lippard's date range makes more sense for the reasons given above.

<sup>4</sup> Joseph Kosuth, "Art After Philosophy," in Alexander Alberro and Blake Stimson, eds. *Conceptual Art: A Critical Anthology* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1999), 166-167.

analytic forms of those prior to 1972. This dissertation's goal is not to dispute the time frame and borders, rather it is to investigate the link between Conceptual art and educational institutions, student protest movements, and a desire for autonomy within this historical time frame that distinguished a certain way of making art. To extend the analysis past 1972 would require a broader set of circumstances and practices that are well beyond its scope. The key is that Conceptual art between 1966 and 1972 transformed fine art and was responsible for enabling the different approaches that followed, and which are still resonating in contemporary art today.

As the 1999 catalogue *Global Conceptualism: Points of Origin, 1950s-1980s* from the exhibition at Queens Museum of Art, New York, recounts, there were many areas of the world where Conceptual art was being made outside of North America such as Latin America, Japan, Australia, Eastern Europe, etc. This dissertation focuses on the Anglo-American countries of the United Kingdom, Canada and the United States for a number of reasons. First, the three art schools with Conceptual art programs I investigate – Coventry College of Art, Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, and the California Institute of the Arts – are in those countries and provide examples of the issues and the extent to which established art institutions were able to embrace Conceptual art as a form of pedagogy. There were certainly other Conceptual artists in other countries teaching in art schools, but the institutions they taught in did not take up Conceptual art in the same manner. Furthermore, the freedom and autonomy that art schools had was quite different from the art programs in universities, which had a different set of academic constraints to deal with. Chapter 2 outlines how art schools in the UK became centres of discussion and a driving force behind Sixties culture and how they were the “real universities of

the 60s.”<sup>5</sup> The freedom to experiment was fostered by the fact that these programs were allowed to autonomously exist without the same kind of academic scrutiny that universities had, they were more or less expected to do crazy artistic things. Of course there were differences between the art schools in different countries, as well as differences within countries such as those between schools on the west coast and the east coast of North America. The ability to establish radical programs at art schools was easier with fewer bureaucratic procedures, but their longevity varied from circumstance to circumstance as outlined in the following chapters.

Other reasons for focusing on Anglo-American countries are because there was a significant travelling of ideas and artists between the Anglo-American countries I explore. The examples provided in the dissertation include the Art & Language group, which had members on both sides of the Atlantic, the intellectual feud between John Latham and Clement Greenberg, the interest in London by Canadian artists Jeff Wall and Ian Wallace, and the visiting of numerous Conceptual artists to both Nova Scotia College of Art and Design and the California Institute of the Arts. In fact, the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design and the California Institute of the Arts were often thought of as sister colleges; exchanging not only ideas but on occasion faculty.<sup>6</sup> The ease with which this kind of cross-fertilization occurred between these countries, augmented by a common language and not too dissimilar cultures, created a situation where an interweaving of ideas becomes readily apparent.

Likewise the examples of student protest movements I provide are also mainly in the Anglo-American context to keep the link to the schools and artists I analyze more germane. This is not

<sup>5</sup> Jonathon Green, *Days in the Life: Voices from the English Underground 1961-1971* (London: Heinemann, 1988), 32.

<sup>6</sup> Conversation with Gary Neil Kennedy, former president of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, November 19, 2012.

to say that Anglo-American students and artists did not monitor the protests movements abroad. The events of May 1968 in Paris were particularly influential and closely tracked by many, as were the writings of the Situationist International and other French thinkers. For example, Chapter 4 looks at the insightful debate in a 1969 issue of the student publication *Radical America* on Marxist French philosopher Louis Althusser's writings. Additionally, while protests over the Vietnam War occurred all over the globe, the War was a particularly intense issue in the United States because of the draft, which consequently managed to unite students and artists around a common cause.

The demand for autonomy during the Sixties among student groups and workers articulated in this dissertation was fed primarily by a widespread desire for self-regulation and freedom from the stifling control of societal constraints. Frederic Jameson thematizes the Sixties as “a more classically Hegelian process of coming to self-consciousness of subject peoples,” where blacks, students, and Third World peoples are the “new subjects of history” fighting for the right to speak in a new collective voice.<sup>7</sup> No longer relying on the traditional intermediaries of “liberals and First World intellectuals” who had previously spoken on their behalf.<sup>8</sup> Similarly, Conceptual artists were also struggling to wrestle control over their work and its discourses from the authority of art institutions and critics by taking charge of and redefining those practices and discourses. While in a different register, a similar anti-hierarchical ethos and desire for change that was present in the protest movements can also be seen manifesting itself in Conceptual art practices. Conceptual art's emphasis on ideas rather than on materials was part of its rejection of the dominant means of art making at the time – painting and sculpture – and the attempt to

<sup>7</sup> Frederic Jameson. “Periodizing the 60s,” in *The Ideologies of Theory* (London: Verso, 2008), 486.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

establish new criteria for what art can be. Autonomy for Conceptual artists such as the Art & Language group meant a form of collective authorship of an extended conversation in which discussion and shared learning shaped their investigations. The discursive nature of many Conceptual art works actively engaged an autonomous process of inquiry that was at its roots a very social and communal process. Although few works had explicit political messages, Conceptual artists were producing works they believed had no home in the tainted world of capitalist markets, and thus there was also a perception by some Conceptual artists that they could actively transform the world through the specificity of art and the models that it provided.<sup>9</sup> By stressing ideas and not objects, Conceptual art countered the dominant view of the world that could only be related to through money and material possessions.

The ideas of self-regulation and ‘making one’s own rules’ are central to the notion of autonomy, which has been one of the central themes of individual self-consciousness throughout modernity. At its core, autonomy has a meaning analogous to self-rule and the ability to make rationally informed decisions in order to achieve independence with respect to one’s beliefs, thoughts, and choices. The notion of autonomy frequently comes up in student anti-hierarchical and participatory democracy movements, as well as in *autogestion*, *autonomia*, and worker self-management movements during this period. Simultaneously, there was an understood link to education as Henri Lefebvre argues when he stated: “Autogestion implies educating society. It presumes a new social practice at all levels.”<sup>10</sup> Among these very different movements there was a recognition that liberal democracy and corporate capitalism had become synonymous, and that

<sup>9</sup> Lawrence Weiner quoted in MOMA Video Recording of Museum Related events, 2008-228d, "From the specific to the general: Publications of Seth Sieglaub."

<sup>10</sup> Henri Lefebvre, *The Explosion: Marxism and the French Revolution* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1969), 78.

they conceal their ideology of technocratic control under a veil of objective neutrality and an outward gesture of goodwill for all. The protest movements in large part believed that if change was going to happen it was not going to happen according to the norms of representational democracy, it could only happen through an extra-parliamentary process and an antinomian ethos by everyone and anyone instead of the few that ruled. A strong influence, directly or indirectly, of anarchist thought can be seen in the movements that championed decentralization, self-governing, and social action.<sup>11</sup> Thus in the protest movements there was the sense that the centralized impersonal authority of the state needed to be broken down in order to transform society, as was the necessity to strengthen social bonds and reinforce community relationships. It is important to note that most of these groups were not interested in taking power, but rather there was a belief in self-organization at the grassroots and personal level, along with a conviction that the necessary voluntary arrangement would necessarily follow. It was more about a refusal to participate in the post-industrial capitalist system than to acquire control of it. In a similar fashion, Conceptual artists thought that they could achieve an autonomous stance from the then purveyors of taste in the art market that was in the hands of the ‘Vietnam crowd’ as Lucy Lippard called them.<sup>12</sup> Furthermore, it can be seen as a type of refusal to participate in the

<sup>11</sup> There were, of course, many different kinds of anarchism, and the U.S., Britain, and Canada all had their own historical anarchist trajectories. However, the protest movements were generally aligned with the kind of anarchism that was championed by 19<sup>th</sup> century Russian anarchist Peter Kropotkin, whose notion of mutual aid instead of individual competition became one of the key concepts of his and others’ anarchism. See: Peter Kropotkin, *Memoirs of a Revolutionist* (Montreal: Black Rose Books, 1989). Popular writers in the Sixties such as Paul Goodman whose anarchist essay “The May Pamphlet” or Herbert Read’s *Poetry and Anarchism* espoused a type of freedom that could only be achieved through cooperation and community, rather than extreme individualism: Herbert Read, *Poetry and Anarchism* (London: Freedom Press, 1947); Paul Goodman, “The May Pamphlet,” in *Drawing the Line: The Political Essays of Paul Goodman*, ed. Taylor Stoehr (New York: Free Life Editions, 1977).

<sup>12</sup> Lucy Lippard, *Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), xiv.

mainstream art system or to make the large canvases that the art market was demanding. Both the protest movements and Conceptual artists were actively adopting different communal social practices in order to try to change the existing order of things. This youthful generation, with their strength in numbers, took on the role of stepping outside the world and questioning it, which is in contrast to our current corporate dominated world that claims we have reached the end of history and there is no need to waste time on thinking how to change it.

Although there has been some recent interest in the notion of autonomy in artistic circles as exemplified by *The Autonomy Project*,<sup>13</sup> the word ‘autonomy’ since the Sixties has largely become a pejorative code for liberal humanism. Autonomy has always been a key concept for liberal democracies from their very beginnings. Implicated in the meaning of autonomy is an emphasis on individual freedom that is not restricted by external constraints, thus notions of autonomy such as self-determination and an individual’s ability to make his or her own choices also operate as foundational beliefs in liberal ideologies. Canadian political scientist C.B. Macpherson has pointed out that deeply imbedded in the English seventeenth-century foundations of liberal democracies is what he called a possessive individualism, which is the notion that “man is free and human by virtue of his sole proprietorship of his own person, and that human society is essentially a series of market relations.”<sup>14</sup> Through his analysis of the writings of Thomas Hobbes and John Locke, Macpherson identifies a pattern that an individual’s humanity in a possessive market society depends on its freedom from anything but self-

<sup>13</sup> *The Autonomy Project* (2011), <http://theautonomyproject.org/about> (accessed July 21, 2015).

<sup>14</sup> C.B. Macpherson, *The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism: Hobbes to Locke* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1962), 270.



interested contractual relations with others.<sup>15</sup> Liberal democratic ideologies have retained these basic ties to the idea that personal choice and individualism depend on free markets. The rhetoric of individual and human values for this type of autonomy in Western liberal societies masked the rationality of endless economic expansion, while at the same time providing fuel for both a competitive individualism in the workplace and stimulating atomistic consumer behavior.

The different inflections of the word autonomy can be confusing since they often refer to the same concepts of freedom from control, but politically come from very different perspectives. Autonomy is a notion that is inevitably political and one that has been championed by both the Left and the Right, by everyone from Milton Freedman to Theodor Adorno, so it is important to highlight the differences between these approaches. Those on the Right praise the idea of autonomy that is based on the notion of an individual's freedom from control and their ability to make their own choices, which does not seem that different from those on the Left. However, the Right's version is tied to the idea of free markets, with a stress on private self-interests of an egotistical individual. The Right's position confines individuals' informed choices to commodities in the consumer marketplace and treat political life as something that is wholly in the service of private interest. Those on the Left also view autonomy as related to individuals, but the emphasis is an individual who can make informed choices through a process of self-actualization within a community where a collective political life becomes a day to day concern.

In an attempt to clarify these different meanings I will refer to the version celebrated by the Right as the autonomy of individualism or egoistic individualism. This is in contrast to the autonomy used in relation to the protest movements, which I am going to call collectivist

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 272.

autonomy and will be my default use of the term. Although collectivist autonomy is also related to individuals, and freedom from coercive control is an important aspect, the stress shifts to an individual whose self-actualization is in conjunction with the community that he or she is part of. It is a meaning that is akin to what can be found in a variety of sources ranging from nineteenth-century anarchist writings such as those of Peter Kropotkin to the progressive educators of the Sixties such as Paul Goodman, Ivan Illich and Paulo Freire.<sup>16</sup> This version of autonomy is not strictly a private personal process, but a process that can only happen as part of the give and take within a community. Consequently, the true sense of a collectivist autonomy is analogous to the idea that instead of negotiating thousands of contracts individually with those others whom we happen to meet, we can plan our social structure together in equal partnership. While this may sound excessively utopian, it was a common thread of thought during the Sixties, and the idea of autonomy as a shared responsibility has a long philosophical history that will be highlighted throughout the dissertation. This is not to say that this dissertation is resuscitating a notion of an unconditioned human will, rather it attempts to rethink the relationship between social determination and self-determination in a way that questions what opportunities, however limited, are available to resist subsumption into dominant forms of communication. The objective of this dissertation is to understand how this shared desire for autonomy was instrumental in helping Conceptual artists re-skill themselves through discursive learning processes to produce more cognitively focused work. As such it is a more epistemological study of the relationship between learning and art making. The more traditional Marxist reading of

<sup>16</sup> Peter Kropotkin, *Anarchism: Its Philosophy and Ideal* (London: J. Turner, 1897). Paul Goodman, *Growing up Absurd: Problems of Youth in the Organized Society* (New York: Vintage Books, 1960). Ivan Illich, *Deschooling Society* (New York: Marion Boyars, 1996). Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Continuum, 2000).

class and labour is not the main concern. It has been argued that the demographic changes and the dramatic increase in post secondary educational enrolment during the Sixties created a brand new “student class” consisting of a broader mix of economic backgrounds that worked to level the traditional definitions of class.<sup>17</sup> Art schools in particular, both in Britain and in North America, had a greater mix of working-class students than universities.<sup>18</sup> Nevertheless, class relations were still very much a concern for British Conceptual artists such as Art & Language, whereas in the United States things were more complicated by the lingering McCarthy era anti-communism and the divisions over the Vietnam War. It was difficult for students and artists who were largely anti-war to have solidarity with the working class that was patriotically behind the war effort. Labour is looked at in this dissertation primarily as a reskilling transformation of artistic labour, for both working-class and middle-class Conceptual artists, from a craft base to an intellectual one and the changing work place of the studio to the art school/academy.

In addition to the individualist and collectivist versions of autonomy, the notion of autonomy in an art context has yet another inflection. The idea of artistic autonomy, in particular critic Clement Greenberg’s notion of artistic autonomy as a “distance from society” is one that came under fire from Conceptual artists in the Sixties. In his essay *Avant-Garde and Kitsch*,<sup>19</sup> Greenberg closely follows the eighteenth-century German Romantic tradition of understanding artistic activity as an activity that not only differed from all others but was also removed from the context of everyday life. His idea of artistic autonomy was very much in keeping with Immanuel

<sup>17</sup> Arthur Marwick, *The Sixties: Cultural Revolution in Britain, France, Italy, and the United States, c.1958-c.1974* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 309.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 56

<sup>19</sup> Clement Greenberg and John O’Brian, *The Collected Essays and Criticism: Perceptions and Judgements, 1939-1944, Volume 1* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993) 5-22.

Kant's concept of a realm of non-purposive creation and disinterested pleasure where art is contrasted to life in a society that is increasingly tied to rationally definable goals and the maximization of profit in all aspects of life. German Idealists such as Friedrich Von Schiller in his essay "Letters Upon the Aesthetic Education of Man," 1794, argued that because art renounces all direct intervention in reality and is removed from all contexts of practical life, it is best suited to restore the totality of human potentialities.<sup>20</sup> Schiller claimed that civilization had destroyed the unity of senses and of reason that had existed among the Greeks and it is only art that can put back together the "torn" halves of man.<sup>21</sup> For Greenberg this kind of advanced intellectual conscience of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was absorbed by artists and poets, and subsequently resulted in the birth of the avant-garde. Artists needed to be free of society's contamination in order to create art in a pure and uninhibited way. Once the avant-garde had emigrated from bourgeois society to bohemia and succeeded in "detaching" itself from society and capitalism, Greenberg claims "it proceeded to turn around and repudiate revolutionary as well as bourgeois politics."<sup>22</sup> It was the avant-garde's most important function to keep culture moving "in the midst of ideological confusion and violence," and as a result the avant-garde artist tries to "imitate God by creating something valid solely on its own terms [i.e. pure] ... independent of meanings, similar or originals."<sup>23</sup> In Greenberg's version of artistic autonomy, modern art abandons the former utopian and political purpose of German Idealism to put back the torn halves of man, leaving behind only modern art's isolation from politics, its self-referentiality, and a preoccupation with its own formal competencies and medium. For

<sup>20</sup> Friedrich Von Schiller, "Letters Upon the Aesthetic Education of Man," in *Literary and philosophical essays: French, German and Italian*, 42 (New York: The Harvard Classics, 1919).

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 10

<sup>22</sup> Greenberg, Volume 1, 7.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 8.

Conceptual artists the idea of using the formal properties of a medium and their sensual impact as the basis of judging the value of a work of art was in effect siding with privilege and exclusion. This was seen as being complicit with art's institutions and in turn supporting wealthy capitalists and imperialist governments. It was this way of thinking about autonomous art, its isolation from everything that is not art or what is essential to each discipline's medium, that Conceptual artists found to be increasingly irrelevant.

Despite this aversion by Conceptual artists to the classical notion of autonomous art, or art-for-art's sake, there is yet another version of artistic autonomy that this dissertation takes up. Frankfurt School theorist Theodor Adorno uses autonomy in a negative sense. To a certain extent Adorno inherits the eighteenth-century tradition of *l'art pour l'art* in that he believes that autonomous art lacks a direct social purpose, which as described above in its Modernist incantation is usually associated with the belief that art is separate sphere of activity from the normal social world and is governed by its own rules. However, at the same time he insists that art still functions as a commodity in society. This negative usage is because he believes that if art serves only itself, as Greenberg and the Idealist suggest, then it has lost its governing social purpose and as a result has increasingly become problematic for modern art. Autonomous artworks, in Adorno's definition, have what may be called a social situation but no direct social function. He argues that: "insofar as a social function may be predicated of works of art, it is the function of having no function."<sup>24</sup> This dichotomy between autonomy and commodification is central to Adorno's theory of art and it is the dialectical relation that he calls the "double character of art – something that severs itself from empirical reality and thereby from society's

<sup>24</sup> Theodor Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 227.

functional context and yet is at the same time part of empirical reality and society's functional context."<sup>25</sup> Autonomous art's critical role arises through its ability to create its own inner logic, which does not refer to anything external. Thus Adorno's version of autonomy is transformed from a bourgeois ideology by acquiring an important critical function in which autonomous artworks are plenipotentiaries of things that are no longer distorted by exchange, profit, and the false needs of a degraded humanity. The notion of the "double character of art" is particularly useful in assessing Conceptual art because it allows for a line of inquiry that gets past the 'bureaucratic' appearance of works and instead looks at the way its inner logic works. Using Adorno's theory of autonomous art offers an alternative path for disclosing new forms of meaning in Conceptual art works.

Amongst these various versions of autonomy there is a curious general agreement that education plays a crucial role. Those who have written extensively about autonomy believe that autonomy is only achievable through a long process of maturation and education. Herbert Read the art critic and anarchist whose educational theories were highly regarded in the Sixties placed special importance on education since he saw it as a place where social change could be initiated while waiting for the general transformation of society. Read viewed the idea of changing society through education rather than political means as his most important contribution to anarchist theory.<sup>26</sup> The social upheavals in the Sixties spawned a considerable amount of debate with regards to education and the type of education that was necessary for its new circumstances. These debates can be largely broken down into a division between a conservative form of education that stressed a kind of status quo indoctrination with an emphasis on an alignment with

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 252.

<sup>26</sup> Carissa Honeywell, *A British Anarchist Tradition* (New York: Continuum, 2011), 63.

business and national interests, while on the other hand there was the progressive school of education that focused its commitment on the more idealistic generation of students with independent minds. Progressive educators all emphasize teacher-student dialogue versus enculturation, and often recommended non-institutional settings for education.

The rapid postwar growth of industries that depended on technological innovation increased the need for engineers, scientists, managers and workers with a higher level of education than ever before. As a result, Western industrialized governments found themselves investing heavily in the type of education that was necessary to help these industries thrive and be competitive around the world. Large amounts of money were pumped into research universities, where for example, in the United States the federal funding of university research doubled from 1955 to 1959 and then grew almost six times over by 1968.<sup>27</sup> Higher education and academic research grew into substantial industries forcing universities to restructure themselves into the image of modern corporations. Science, technology, and even the arts became strategic resources to be mobilized for a nation's competitive advantage. Intellectual activity was given a prominent place in the new scientific-technological state in which the production of knowledge came to be seen as something that could be manufactured along industrial lines. Education was no longer merely the transmission of cultural heritage, but an important factor of production and decisive growth. Scientism likewise invaded academia with the rise of structuralism in the Sixties intellectual climate. Invoking the higher authority of science, structuralism placed an emphasis on relations between phenomena that imply a degree of objectivity, determination and lawfulness, and which are more important than the phenomena themselves. Structuralists' mobilized scientific

<sup>27</sup> Howard Brick, *Age of Contradiction: American Thought and Culture in the Sixties* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998), 8.

arguments to make the claim that observable phenomenon and social subjects are governed by objective laws of which they may not be fully conscious. Many of the concepts central to structuralism were first developed in connection with the modern study of language, linguistics and anthropology. Consequently, its link to Conceptual artists' interest in text and photography will be explored throughout the dissertation.

Despite the large investments made by governments, student dissatisfaction with educational institutions in the Sixties was widespread as there was a growing sense of the irrelevancy of the curriculums. Wholesale attacks on established schools signaled a crisis in legitimacy in higher education and led to the creation by students of alternative schools and "free" universities to address the situation. Conceptual artists took up experimenting with educational aspects, however, they were at the same time becoming increasingly tied to traditional educational institutions themselves. By the late Sixties many Conceptual artists now held degrees from universities, often MFAs (Master of Fine Arts), and as a result were often employed by universities since it was one of the few options of steady income available to them (there essentially was no market for their art). Even the few Conceptual artists that did not have higher educational degrees participated in visiting artist or other university or college programs, symposiums and exhibitions. A professionalization of art education played a role in encouraging philosophical, theoretical, and interdisciplinary approaches that Conceptual art adopted and in some ways appear to mimic the intellectual inquiries found in other academic disciplines of higher education. Educational institutions provided Conceptual artists with not only employment, but also an intellectual community and galleries in which to present their alternative practices.

With regard to the relevant literature on Conceptual art, Benjamin Buchloh's text from 1989, "Conceptual Art 1962-1969: From the Aesthetic of Administration to the Critique of



Institutions,” remains one of the most influential texts on the subject. Buchloh traces the rise of Conceptual art from the early Sixties with artists such as Ad Reinhardt, Rauschenberg, and Robert Morris, through Minimalist artists such as Donald Judd and Sol LeWitt to Conceptual artists such as Robert Barry, Joseph Kosuth, Lawrence Weiner, and Hans Haacke. His art historical analysis describes a progression from the elements of late Abstract Expressionist art, Pop Art and Minimalism (curiously only a small reference to Fluxus) to Conceptual art. One of his most important insights was to make the analogy between the “aesthetic of administration” in Conceptual art and the social identity of the new middle class formed in the postwar era as one merely administering labour and production rather than producing.<sup>28</sup> However, Buchloh is ambivalent on how this came about, questioning whether artists were mimicking the logic of administration or whether it “merely inscribed itself into the inescapable logic of a totally administered world, as Adorno’s notorious term identified it.”<sup>29</sup> He raises a number of questions that are crucial to this dissertation such as when he asks of Sol LeWitt’s description of the artist as an office clerk: “Inevitably the question arises how such restrictive definitions of the artist as a cataloguing clerk can be reconciled with the subversive and radical implication of Conceptual Art.”<sup>30</sup> A page further Buchloh adds: “... from its inception Conceptual Art was distinguished by its acute sense of discursive and institutional limitation, its self-imposed restrictions, its lack of totalizing vision, its critical devotion to the factual conditions of artistic production and reception without aspiring to overcome the mere facticity of these conditions.”<sup>31</sup> He attributes this condition to a fusion of disenchantment with grand political narratives together with an acting of

<sup>28</sup> Benjamin Buchloh, “Conceptual Art 1962-1969: From the Aesthetic of Administration to the Critique of Institutions,” *October*, Vol.55 (Winter, 1990): 105-143.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 129.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 140.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 141.

the most advanced and radical forms of critical artistic reflection.<sup>32</sup> The question of how to reconcile these two characteristics of Conceptual art, its radical claims and its acceptance of factual conditions, is something that Buchloh does not come to terms with. It is odd that while Buchloh is a devotee of Adorno he does not use, as I will in Chapter 5, Adorno's theories to work through these contradictions. In contrast, I show how Adorno offers a way to suggest that Conceptual art is both bound and free at the same time, and that in some cases the facticity is precisely what allowed the works to critically overcome their conditions. In the end he chooses to conclude that Conceptual art conformed to the commercial logic of advertising and marketing, while claiming it terminated the last remnants of traditional aesthetic experience. Ultimately, for Buchloh, Conceptual art did not abolish the object status of art and its effects were only short-lived.<sup>33</sup> This of course is debatable since aspects of Conceptual art practices to this day remain crucially important to many fine art projects around the globe. Nevertheless, Buchloh's correctly argues that Conceptual art practices, through its "auto-critical investigations" opened up the possibility to turn that criticality back on and expose the social institutions from which the logic of administration emanated. This form of institutional critique is particularly evident in the work of Daniel Burin and Hans Haacke. While I am in agreement with Buchloh here I detail as to how this is accomplished and I place an emphasis on education and educational institutions in my explanation, a topic on which Buchloh is silent.

Like Buchloh, Alexander Alberro looks at the fundamental changes in capitalist society as a catalyst for Conceptual art. In his *Conceptual art and the Politics of Publicity*, 2003, Alberro describes a post-industrial consumer society in which "providing services and manipulating

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 143.

information became the heart of this new economic paradigm.”<sup>34</sup> While he does not address the bureaucratic impulse that Buchloh describes, Alberro identifies the two general objectives of Conceptual art as first; the demystification of the image of the artist, no longer an idealized bohemian, but now a business like professional.<sup>35</sup> Second, he claims that there was a critical impulse in Conceptual art that was directed at the “institutional containment of art.” However, the problem with Alberro’s claim of Conceptual art’s critique of institutions and conditions that arose at the time of the Art Workers Coalition (AWC) is that he uses examples from artists such as Lawrence Weiner, Robert Barry and Joseph Kosuth instead of Hans Haacke. Haacke, who Alberro does not even mention, is more responsible than any other artist for initiating the focus on institutional critique. Alberro’s examples of critique from Weiner, Barry and Kosuth use what I term as an indirect critique in Chapter 4, in other words a less politicized form of critique than what emerged from the AWC. In his more recent essay “Reconsidering Conceptual Art, 1966-1977,” he finally recognizes Hans Haacke’s importance to artists that followed him in the early to mid-1970s and their continued critique of institutional structures such as John Knight, Louise Lawler, Martha Rosler and Mary Kelly. Alberro concludes by rightly pointing out that the influence of Conceptual art can be “found in almost all ambitious contemporary art,” an issue whose legacy poses both problems and possibilities that I also elaborate on in the conclusion.

Blake Stimson’s essay “The Promise of Conceptual Art” looks at Conceptual Art through the lens of ’68 activism.<sup>36</sup> He analyses the aesthetic radicalism of Conceptual art and its political and social ambitions, but concludes that Conceptual art distanced itself from the political movements

<sup>34</sup> Alexander Alberro, *Conceptual art and the Politics of Publicity* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2003), 3.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 100.

<sup>36</sup> Blake Stimson, “The Promise of Conceptual Art,” in *Conceptual Art: A Critical Anthology*, eds. Alexander Alberro and Blake Stimson, (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1999), XXXIX.

of the Sixties. Conversely what I will show is that Conceptual artists' demand for autonomy was politically in sync with those same movements, initially in an indirect way and eventually with artists such as Haacke in an explicit way. However, Stimson is correct in his assessment that the promise of Conceptual art was in a sense lost once artists turned to exhibiting in the large museum shows of 1970, and that the possibility for creating new social functions and audiences was subsumed as I elaborate in the conclusion.

John Roberts' work has touched on Conceptual art in a number of ways with books such as *The Intangibilities of Form: Skill and Deskilling in Art After the Readymade*, and *The Impossible Document: Photography and Conceptual Art in Britain, 1966 – 1976*. In *The Intangibilities of Form* he traces the history of the readymade from Duchamp through to contemporary art. In the process he claims that deskilling in art is not the same as deskilling in productive labour.<sup>37</sup> Instead of thinking of Conceptual art as being deskilled, he suggests that there was a reskilling from the traditional eye-hand relations of craft based artistic skills to a new intellectual and technical base.<sup>38</sup> He bases much of his analysis of Conceptual art on the British Art & Language (A&L) group, who he argues saw themselves as artists-as-thinkers, and whose research model of collaboration was an exemplary way of opening up the space of learning in art. Questions A&L raise such as what should artists know, and what kinds of knowledge is art capable of producing, are the result of their shared research model and collaborative learning processes. Roberts claims that artistic skill in Conceptual art is radically decoupled from the pictorialism of the postwar

<sup>37</sup> John Roberts, *The Intangibilities of Form: Skill and Deskilling in Art After the Readymade* (London: Verso, 2007), 87.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 89.

neo-avant-garde and in favour of intellectualized non-artistic competences and skills.<sup>39</sup> My own arguments are in some ways parallel to Roberts', I too focus on an intellectualization in Conceptual art, but I more specifically trace the social circumstances of the link between the desire and need for learning, education, autonomy and Conceptual art.

Roberts' essay "Conceptual Art and Imageless Truth," looks at Friedrich Hegel's notion of imageless truth and how it relates to Conceptual art. According to Roberts, Hegel's idea of the self-development of thought is best seen as a process of imageless truth, or what can be seen as the thought process which is the dialectical outcome of Spirit that cannot be expressed in descriptive form. For Roberts, "Hegel's rejection of sense experience and understanding as the foundation of truth lies, therefore, in a positive reversal of the picture-theory of consciousness."<sup>40</sup> The connection to Conceptual art is made through its rejection of visuality and the fact that, according to Roberts, Conceptual art is the first avant-garde art to bring philosophical consciousness in practice to modern art as a way to a more theoretical way to work through perceived artistic problems and intractabilities.<sup>41</sup> Again, much of Roberts' analysis is based on A&L and the use of philosophy as a means of creating a more demanding and expanded dialogue. However, not all Conceptual art is based on the model of A&L and thus Roberts overlooks the diversity of many different practices. In Chapter 4 I too invoke Hegel, but in a very different way to Roberts. I use Hegel's notion of autonomy, or the education of the self, as part of the dissertation's on-going investigation of autonomy and how the education of the self played

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 217.

<sup>40</sup> John Roberts, "Conceptual Art and Imageless Truth," in *Conceptual Art: Theory, Myth, and Practice*, edited by Michael Corris (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 306.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 308.

a key role in Conceptual art. In addition, I use examples of how Conceptual artists themselves used or were influenced by Hegelian writings in their various projects.

Howard Singerman's *Art Subjects: Making Artists in the American University* is recognized as one of the definitive texts on art education in North America. He outlines the history and study of art education from the nineteenth century through to the end of the twentieth century. One of Singerman's overriding interests is how the American university fashioned the identity of the artist and their practices.<sup>42</sup> He makes a compelling case for how university art programs worked to professionalize artists in order to conform to the university's challenge to produce knowledge, to guarantee its members' the status of experts, and to separate them from the world of amateurs grounded in manual skills. The university's crucial role as both "patron and scene" during the sixties and seventies is asserted by Singerman in his description of the visiting artist programs whereby art departments would provide equipment, salary, lecture opportunities and a place to exhibit.<sup>43</sup> Artists, especially those producing non-commercially viable work such as many of the early Conceptual artists, could in this way be "supported by a network of grants, alternative spaces and universities."<sup>44</sup> As far as the link between art education and Conceptual art, Singerman has only a few pages on the subject in which he argues that Conceptual art practices recall the university with its demand for expertise, the urge "toward specialization and separate technical languages."<sup>45</sup> He repeats Donald Kuspit's description of Joseph Kosuth's work by claiming that Conceptual art had the "look of thought," and Buchloh's claims of Conceptual practices administering and ordering information. His implication is the Conceptual art is akin to

<sup>42</sup> Howard Singerman, *Art Subjects: Making Artists in the American University*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 5.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid, 156.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid, 157.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.,167.

what he calls “readymade knowledge” or a kind of artistic stylization that presents information that merely mirrors university systems. While he makes crucial points about how university education potentially influenced Conceptual art practices, his analysis is brief and does not get into the depth of those practices nor does it deal with the other non-academic social circumstances in which they developed.

Judith Adler’s *Artists in Offices*, 1979, also explores an educational setting with an investigation of the California Institute of the Arts between 1970 and 1972. Adler uses CalArts as a case study for the expansion of the arts in higher education in America and the fact that artists were increasingly finding themselves working as employees of large bureaucratic organizations.<sup>46</sup> Her central argument is that this new work setting, by offering an alternative form of patronage, simultaneously provided new possibilities and imposed its own set of constraints.<sup>47</sup> Adler believes that paying attention to the work system within which artistic production is embedded is the best way to understand the kind of work that they produce. She makes the case that expanding art departments in the Sixties made universities the rivals of old cultural capitals as centres of artistic production, especially for experimental and innovative work. Adler covers the early ‘utopian’ years of CalArts and the radical aesthetic ideals that many artists brought with them to the institution, through to its subsequent retrenchment. Adler describes how these artists tried to work within the institution, but she rarely describes the kind of work that they produced while working there. Thus without a direct connection between the work environment and the art produced, her arguments about art are more general than specific. In Chapter 5 of this dissertation, I also look at this period at CalArts; however, I focus on the

<sup>46</sup> Judith Adler, *Artists in Offices* (New Brunswick: Transaction Books, 1979), XIV.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

Critical Studies program at CalArts, which attempted to introduce a radical form of academic pedagogy to an art school. Adler, for the most part, ignores this program in her study.

Jacque Rancière has recently gained considerable prominence in the art world with his writing on aesthetics in books such as *The Politics of Aesthetics*, 2004, and *The Emancipated Spectator*, 2009. His *The Ignorant Schoolmaster: Five Lessons in Intellectual Emancipation*, first published in 1987, has become a must read for contemporary artists interested in education. However, I do not take up Rancière's work on education since it was written well past the time period I am exploring and have instead chosen to reference Paul Goodman, Ivan Illich, Herbert Read and Paulo Freire, who were all debated at the time and had anarchist leanings more in tune with the protest movements. Additionally, Rancière's work on aesthetics is also not referenced as I focus on Adorno who wrote what Rancière writes about before Rancière did and makes a more compelling argument.

While not academic texts, the original inspiration for this dissertation came from several art projects about education and art by Ian Wallace. His *At Work*, 1983, was a solo exhibition at the Or Gallery in Vancouver in which he exhibited himself sitting at a table, visible only through the gallery front window, reading *The Concept of Irony* by Soren Kierkegaard. Conceivably to satirize himself as an intellectual-cum-artist, for me it focused attention on the fact that not only could artists be considered intellectuals, but it was something that had become the most interesting aspect of what it meant to be an artist. The other project was *The Idea of The University*, 1990, exhibited at the University of British Columbia Fine Arts Gallery. Wallace claims in the exhibition catalogue that it was his attempt to create an image of discussion



associated with his efforts to construct an intellectual life as a form of art practice.<sup>48</sup> The exhibition offered him what he argues was an opportunity to reflect on his identification as an intellectual but also “on the relation of the community of intellectuals who comprise the humanities disciplines in the university, to the community of artists who find themselves perhaps unknowingly playing the part of intellectuals in their education as artists in the context of the university.”<sup>49</sup> He thus touches on the importance of the university environment in shaping a new mode of artistic production that would only later be taken up by academics. I do not explore these works by Wallace in the dissertation as they are outside of its time frame, but they are examples of the way in which Conceptual art practices continue to have an afterlife in contemporary art.

The dissertation chapters are arranged in the following manner: Chapter 2 introduces the subject of Conceptual art and education with an investigation of John Latham’s 1966 *Still and Chew* event. The event was an example of the exuberantly rebellious behavior in and outside the art world during the mid-Sixties. It captures an anti-hierarchical mood, while at the same time encapsulating an intersection of art, science, education, criticism, and a kind of non-rational rationality that was incomprehensible to institutions. It was a gesture of defiance against pedagogy and criticism, and the traditions of art that those two cornerstones favored. As background to the event, the tumultuous changes that British art schools were going through in the Sixties forms the foundation for a discussion of how artist training was being transformed. As with most Western industrialized nations, the British government was interested in using education to achieve an advantage for the production of its goods and services. One of the efforts

<sup>48</sup> Ian Wallace, *The Idea of the University*, (Vancouver: UBC Fine Arts Gallery, 1990), 27.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

to accomplish this was the ‘upgrading’ of art schools to university status in order to help generate more graduates that could become managers in the highly competitive consumer goods sector. This effort introduced a more academic curriculum to art schools and had wide ranging effects for both schools and artists, but not always going according to the intentions of the master plan. Some of these unintended consequences were that students decided to use their newfound intellectual skills to challenge the very social structures that they were being molded to promote, and likewise Conceptual artists began to use their new academic skills to change the way art was being produced and thought about.

Chapters 3,4 and 5 are arranged according to a number of historical tropes of autonomy as a framework to work through the various paradoxes of the time and the relationship to Conceptual art practices. Chapter 3 is called “Autonomy as Self-Regulation” and is structured around the Kantian notion of making one’s own laws, or in the case of Conceptual art, the making of one’s own rules. From a social and political perspective, it investigates a 1960’s student movement manifesto called the Port Huron Statement, one of the defining documents of the U.S. student protest movement, and its self-regulatory focus. A variety of artists who use rules as part of their practice are looked at such as Sol LeWitt, Douglas Huebler, Vito Acconci, N.E. Thing Co., Robert Barry, Jan Dibbets, and Donald Burgy. Each chapter will also include an investigation of a particular educational institution and the relationship between pedagogy and Conceptual art. Chapter 3 looks at the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design’s Project Class and the instructions sent to the course by different Conceptual artists.

Chapter 4 is called “Self-Re-Education” and follows a Hegelian notion of autonomy that acknowledges the educative role of reason and the practical ability to formulate courses of action on the basis of rationality for self-enhancement. It explores what artist Ian Burn claimed was one

of the important traditions of Conceptual art, which was that it is analogous to a process of what he called “self-re-education” by artists developing a more critically informed understanding of their own situation. The Art & Language (A&L) group and as well as artists Christos Dikeakos, Ian Wallace and Jeff Wall, are investigated to look at how artists adopted a more intellectually rigorous form of art practice and their relationship to scholarship and theoretical grounding.

Chapter 5 is called “Autonomy as Mimesis” and explores Theodor Adorno’s conception of autonomous art as a form of mimesis to investigate the work of John Baldessari and Hans Haacke. The distinction between autonomy as an individualistic pursuit versus a collective process is examined through the artists’ work with a specific emphasis on the role educational processes play in autonomous positions. Additionally, the California Institute of the Arts provides an example of an educational institute attempting to incorporate the progressive aspects of Sixties pedagogy in a school funded by conservative capital and thus a poignant background to the critique of institutions that was being developed by some Conceptual artists.

The goal of the study is to look at the Anglo-American social context of Conceptual art in the late Sixties and early 1970s by focusing on education, student movements and a common demand of autonomy found in all three. With this in mind, the primary purpose of the dissertation is to take a different approach from the major literature on Conceptual art which casts Conceptual art as either mirroring the new administrative function of the emergent class of service sector, or conversely of being a form of institutional critique. While I do not deny either of these approaches, neither one is an adequate explanation on its own. My approach is to look at social and intellectual circumstances of the new production modes of Conceptual artists in which both the administrative functions and critique can be seen as being influenced by the same source – the university/academy. I do not review much of the good art historical work of others that

trace the rise of Conceptual art chronologically from Pop, Fluxus and Minimalism, not to minimize the importance of this chronology and set of precedents, but in order to concentrate on the theoretical discourse of autonomy that has not been previously elaborated on. Throughout the dissertation special attention has been paid to the theories of Theodor Adorno, which provide an alternative framework for evaluating Conceptual art through its historical situated modes of production, while at the same time providing a theory for how it could be seen to resist those same modes of production. As Chapter 5 highlights, using Adorno's theories in conjunction with Conceptual art is not without its problems. Nevertheless, Adorno's work helps to resuscitate and analyze some of the important issues brought up in Conceptual art such as capital and class that have in recent years been foreclosed upon in our exchange driven society. Thus the raising of some of these old questions in new ways becomes more pertinent than ever, offering examples and lessons for resistance to the current dominant techniques of subsumption.

## Chapter 2: Conceptual Art Beginnings

John Latham's *Still and Chew* event, 1966-7, and the context in which it was made for brings out the numerous contradictions of this era that consequently find their way into the Conceptual art practices. The event can be seen as a type of container in which ideas and actions are mixed together into a strange brew that has a particular taste of the Sixties. It touches on the main themes that I wish to explore, in particular that aspect of Conceptual art that deals with the antinomian ethos and anti-hierarchical spirit based on an ethics of refusal and the desire for self-regulation and autonomy from the repressiveness of everything that preceded it. In it are the seeds of much of what Conceptual art would wrestle with in the future: the rejection of the dominant art forms of painting and sculpture, the establishment of new criteria for what art can be, the marginalization of the traditional visual elements of art, the stress on a more cognitive experience, and the production of work that was believed to have no home in the tainted world of markets, art or otherwise. It showed a willingness to look for inspiration in other disciplines like science and philosophy, and a collective approach for artists working together and mutually educating themselves. Additionally, *Still and Chew's* context at St. Martin's places it within the effort of government and industry to define what education should be, what it should produce, and the unintended consequences that the realization of these goals culminated in various art school occupations during 1968. Conceptual art's tethered relationship with educational institutions becomes a source of both content and critique, and thus plays a role in shaping how it evolves.

The *Still and Chew* event was staged in Latham's London home in August 1966. Latham organized it with the help of Barry Flanagan who was then a sculpture student at St. Martin's

School of Art where Latham was employed as a part-time tutor.<sup>50</sup> The guests, mainly Latham's students, chewed about a third of the pages from a copy of Clement Greenberg's *Art and Culture* borrowed from the school's library. They chewed the pages until they were soggy and then spat them into a cauldron. Latham immersed the resulting mess in a liquid mixture of thirty per cent sulfuric acid where it was eventually converted into a sugary solution and neutralized with the addition of sodium bicarbonate. At a later date some form of yeast was introduced to it and it was left for months to ferment. When in May 1967 Latham received an overdue notice marked 'very urgent' from the school's library, he distilled the liquid and injected it into a glass container that resembled a 19<sup>th</sup> century pharmacy vial, which was often colloquially known as a 'torpedo' bottle or even sometimes called 'bombs.' He labeled it "the essence of Greenberg" and returned it to the library (fig. 1). As a result of his actions he was dismissed from his position at St. Martin's.<sup>51</sup>

A few years after his dismissal from St. Martin's, in 1969 Latham put together the 'essence of Greenberg' vial along with other bottles of liquid used in the process, Greenberg's book, letters and documents relating to the event, and placed them into a black leather attaché case. The assemblage was acquired by the Museum of Modern Art, New York, in 1970 and became entitled *Art and Culture*, (fig. 2) where it was classified as sculpture in the museums database. Thus the assemblage went through another transformation as it entered the museum institution,

<sup>50</sup> This description of the *Still and Chew* event is taken from Lucy Lippard's *Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object*, which appears to be what all other subsequent descriptions I have found are based on.

<sup>51</sup> Latham's biographer, John A. Walker, claims that Latham was dismissed, however, it is not clear whether or not he was just not re-hired as a tutor.

Greenberg's title gained in prominence and a traditional form of art classification (sculpture) triumphed over its Conceptual origins.

The background to the *Still and Chew* event was the fact that Greenberg's book was highly regarded and widely read by St. Martin's students. St. Martin's ran an 'Advanced Sculpture Course' under the leadership of Anthony Caro who had shifted away from his mentor, Henry Moore, and came under the influence of Greenberg and American sculptor David Smith on a trip to the United States in 1959. Caro initially ran the course as an evening experimental class that was an unaccredited vocational course, in order to allow for maximum artistic freedom. The idea was to not be restricted by the new National Diploma academic and institutional requirements. The course was informed by Greenberg's modernist conception of sculpture as an autonomous entity, created for display by a solitary artist. Caro became a favorite of Greenberg, and he in turn invited Greenberg and his protégé Michael Fried to run several visiting seminars. Greenberg in a letter to the head of the sculpture department, Frank Martin, praised the course by writing: "No other art school manifests a spirit nearly so invigorating and at the same time mature; no other art school demands as much of its students."<sup>52</sup> St. Martin's became what Paul Wood called a "bridgehead for the dissemination of American modernist ideas."<sup>53</sup> Charles Harrison, who was employed at the time as a "day-a-week temporary" like Latham at St. Martin's, claimed: "In those days Greenberg's work was treated within the sculpture department as an unquestionable repository of the very authority and value by which the department's own

<sup>52</sup> Hester R. Westly, "Constructed or Constructive? Teaching Methods of St. Martin's Sculpture Department," in *The History of British Art: 1870-Now*, edited by Chris Stephens, 190 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008).

<sup>53</sup> Paul Wood, "Between God and the Saucepan: Some Aspects of Art Education in England from the Mid-Nineteenth Century until Today," in *The History of British Art: 1870-Now*, Edited by Chris Stephens, 182 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008).

self-image was supported.”<sup>54</sup> Vancouver artist Tom Burrows, who attended St. Martins at the time, additionally claimed that there was some derision among students towards Caro’s class because it was invitation only and thus considered elitist.<sup>55</sup> For numerous reasons, these issues made Greenberg’s book a prime target for Latham. The first was that Latham found the title extremely pretentious and that Greenberg’s focus on space and form conflicted with his own pseudo-scientific time based theories. However, probably more to the point was the fact that Greenberg had dismissed Latham’s art in a postcard response to Latham in which he described Latham’s work as “being cubist, and patly so.”<sup>56</sup> From the content of the postcard it appears that Latham had written to Greenberg to expound on some of his time based theories, and to which Greenberg responded on the postcard “I’m reluctant to discuss art within the framework of notions like time and space. This is a personal preference, not one I want to impose on other people ... I call art the way I see it ...” Greenberg had been to Britain in 1965 to chair the jury for that year’s *John Moores Liverpool Exhibition*, where according to Latham’s biographer, John Walker, Greenberg had generally dismissed British art as “being in too good taste,” which provoked Latham into making the decision to see if Greenberg “tasted good.”<sup>57</sup>

It is Greenberg’s reviews, such as of David Smith, which was included in *Art and Culture*, is likely to have incited Latham into action. In the review Greenberg calls the English “sculpture renaissance” thin and insipid because it started out as “classical.” He writes: “For ‘classical’ means in this instance a canon of forms and *good taste* taken abjectly from Gonzalez, Picasso,

<sup>54</sup> Charles Harrison, “Burned Books and Sacred Texts,” *Guardian* November 30, 1991.

<sup>55</sup> Tom Burrows conversation with author, July 23, 2015.

<sup>56</sup> Greenberg Postcard, (Folder 178, Box 1, 1963), John Latham Archive, Ligatus Research Centre of the University of the Arts London.

<sup>57</sup> John A. Walker, *John Latham: The incidental person – his art and ideas* (London: Middelsex University Press, 1995), 84.



Matisse, and Miró, and a sculpture that pleases because it never offends.”<sup>58</sup> An interesting side note to the *Still and Chew* event is that a few years later Greenberg wrote an *Artforum* article called “Poetry of Vision” in April 1968 where he reviewed some of Latham’s work. It was before Latham had put together the *Art and Culture* assemblage that was sold to MoMA, however it is hard to believe that Greenberg had not heard of *Still and Chew* through his relationship with Caro, and thus with a rather devilish sense of humor Greenberg wrote: “And Latham’s bas-relief construction of 1965, *Manningtree*, was the first thing of his I had ever seen that transcended mere tastefulness, as if to atone, his other piece in *Rosc*, a clutch of books in drooping canvas, managed to be in bad taste without exactly failing to be tasteful.”<sup>59</sup>

John C. Welchman sums up the *Still and Chew* event as “a gesture of Anglo-American Oedipal cannibalism.”<sup>60</sup> The act of chewing and distilling Greenberg’s text is clearly an act of defiance against the dominant art ideology of the time. It was a ritualistic communal act that employed, consciously or not, religious tropes such as the insertion into the mouth of a holy doctrine and its subsequent magical material transformation. If a rather disparaging 1991 review of Latham’s work by Tim Hilton in the *Manchester Guardian* is to be believed, the students present at the event were too stoned to know or care what book they were actually chewing. Thus drug use adds a further pagan ritualistic air to the event. Collaboration, either between artists or between artists and audience/participants, was beginning to take on a greater role in the arts as part of the growing emphasis on sociality and mutuality. Like many “Happenings” in the Sixties,

<sup>58</sup> Clement Greenberg and John O’Brian, *The Collected Essays and Criticism: Affirmations and Refusals, 1950-1956, Volume 3* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986) 279.

<sup>59</sup> Clement Greenberg and John O’Brian, *The Collected Essays and Criticism: Modernism with a Vengeance, 1957-1959, Volume 4* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993) 286.

<sup>60</sup> John Welchman, “Object relations: transatlantic exchanges on sculpture and culture, 1945-1975, in *Anglo-American Exchange in Postwar Sculpture, 1945-1975*, ed. Rebecca Peabody, 23 (Los Angeles: J. Paul Getty Museum, 2011).

the communal ritual nature of the event was important because it embodied a shared sense of liberation from existing hierarchies together with an emblematic loss of respect for these same hierarchies. Anything from the 'Establishment' was open game for ridicule and critique, providing a common enemy for which to transgress on the way to reshaping the world.

From an education perspective the *Still and Chew* event takes on a variety of possible meanings. Besides a violation of the accepted doctrine of the day, both of St. Martin's and of America's art and political hegemony, a kind of theatrical performance of student-teacher relationships was enacted. Greenberg's text was fed to the students, although it was voluntary and at a party, it could be said that the special teacher-student relationship guided a force-feeding of the text. However, the students did not fully digest the text, instead they only got a taste of it and then spat it out. Not too unlike a contemporary seminar class where students are given numerous texts to read in order to give them a taste for a particular topic, but the topics are never explored in any real depth, resulting in students being required to spit out the cursorily fed bits in an exam. From a student point of view, it could symbolize that they had no real interest in digesting the text in the first place, happily spitting out the distasteful doctrine as quickly as possible before returning to smoking drugs and partying. The whole process of traditional institutional teaching is lampooned, and even the possibility of actually teaching someone to be an artist within a framework of content, curriculum, and grades is called into question. Latham's own involvement with the London's Anti-University at this time reflects the Sixties interest in alternative 'free' schools as a way of engaging in education and learning without having to adhere to these types of institutional outcomes. The rejection of the Greenberg text, like the rejection of so many texts and doctrines that were being taught in the Sixties is why students were setting up their own schools. These texts were no longer relevant in the minds of students

whose loss of respect for traditional doctrines and the slow pace of change in institutions meant that they had to take matters into their own hands.

The DIY spirit for taking control of one's education and learning has many manifestations in Latham's work. His theories uniting philosophy, science and art into an overarching cosmology are an example of an artist doing research far outside the realm of colour, line and material. The interest Latham displayed for science is part of the larger cultural phenomena of science and scientists having a special status in the postwar Western world. The increased prominence of science and technology in the Sixties was due to the wake of scientific breakthroughs and the exploitation of the resulting new technologies becoming key to economic and political triumph. Artistic involvement with science and technologies has an extensive history in the Sixties: In Britain there was the 'Ground Course' developed by Roy Ascott and based on Norbert Wiener's cybernetic theories, as well as Jasia Reichard's *Cybernetic Serendipity: The Computer and the Arts* exhibition at ICA in 1968. In the US there was *Nine Evenings: Theatre and Engineering*, a festival of technology-enhanced performances by Robert Rauschenberg and engineer Billy Klüver in New York in 1966, which led directly to artist-engineer collaborations at Experiments in Art and Technology Inc. (E.A.T.). A not too dissimilar Art and Technology (A&T) Program at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art was forged under the aegis of Maurice Tuchman, and then there was Jack Burnham's 1970 *Software* exhibition at the Jewish Museum in New York that mixed a wide variety of new computer technologies and Conceptual art. In France there were the crazy mechanical self-destroying sculptures of Jean Tinguely, the electro-magnetic experiments of Vasillakis Takis and the kinetic experiments of GRAV (Groupe de recherche d'art visual – Visual art research group). Finally in Germany there was the ZERO group in which Hans Haacke participated, before his move to the US where he had numerous exhibitions

ranging from his one man show at MIT in 1967 to his participation in the *Information* show at MoMA New York in 1970, and of course many more after this period.

For Latham an interdisciplinary approach was a way of breaking through the artificial barriers that existed in society and to look at the world in a more open manner. It also had a strong relationship to the fascination with science and knowledge in postwar Western societies. Ursula Meyer's 1972 book *Conceptual Art* quotes physicist Robert Oppenheimer's comment that there have been more discoveries in the past few decades than during all the preceding decades.<sup>61</sup> She then cites remarks from another physicist, Werner Heisenberg, on how crossing various fields and disciplines is conducive to discovery. It is noteworthy that she quotes physicists, and by association the atomic bomb, as the paragon of creative discovery. Consequently the notion of interdisciplinary work had the blessing of the high priests of science as a legitimate creative tool for artists to use if they wanted to push art into new directions.

The *Still and Chew* event can be seen as converting an abstract doctrine into a material substance. This reversion of something abstract into a material form takes on an interesting perspective in terms of Theodor Adorno's concept of mimesis, which will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 5. For Adorno, mimesis is "the nonconceptual affinity of the subjectively produced with its unposited other."<sup>62</sup> The nonconceptual aspect of art is crucial for its being able to act as a kind of spokesperson for what Adorno calls the non-identical or the sensuous particularities that are abstracted by rational thought. For Adorno abstract rational thought is decontextualized from its historically bound unity with nature and has thus led to the problems of a contemporary society that is based on a domination of nature rather than peaceful

<sup>61</sup> Ursula Meyer, *Conceptual Art* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1972): xv.

<sup>62</sup> Theodor Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory* (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 54.

reconciliation with it. An artwork for Adorno is not just a product of mimesis; it also requires rationality and the activity of the subject in order to be genuinely imitative. It is through the dialectical combination of mimesis and rationality—through each other—that art is produced, even though the two moments are irreconcilable. This irreconcilability of mimesis and rationality is the enigma of art and at the same time art’s critical function. This is what Adorno’s version of autonomous art refers to, art that creates its own inner logic, stands apart from society in terms of not being subject to the principle of exchange, but at the same time being tied to society through its self-conscious rationality.

From an Adornian point of view, Latham’s *Still and Chew* can be viewed as literally reconciling the abstraction of Greenberg’s *Art and Culture* with its sensuous particulars by physically inserting the pages into the mouth in a process that defies conventional rationality. There is something fitting about this since Greenberg criticized English critic Herbert Read for advocating an education of the senses versus the abstract rationality of production for the use of profit by stating: “For one thing, man was unable to attain to civilization until he could make some sort of mental abstraction from the evidence of the senses. For another, the failures of civilization usually come about because the senses were not sufficiently informed by the mind, and not because civilized men became too rational.”<sup>63</sup> Thus Greenberg’s defense of abstract rationality makes his book an ideal candidate for Latham’s unconventional use of the senses. While the idea of finding out whether Greenberg ‘tasted good’ is in a certain sense a rational act, but its lack of a definable social purpose and its convoluted logic, combined with its mimetic representation of education and science, result in a critique of both a hegemonic doctrine of art

<sup>63</sup> Clement Greenberg and John O’Brian, *The Collected Essays and Criticism: Arrogant Purpose, 1945-1949, Volume 2* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986) 147.

and the institution that perpetuates it. Finally, St. Martin's decision to dismiss Latham over the incident (although there were other tensions between Latham and the school) marks the inability of the institution's instrumental rationality to come to terms with Latham's actions. The critique comes out of the form of the event, the chewing of the doctrine, as opposed to any kind of overt political statement denouncing Greenberg. The hidden contradictions of the art world and educational institutions that support them are revealed as set of conventions that are no longer applicable or relevant.

Still and Chew's communal and ritualistic nature corresponds with the increased sense of mutuality and sociality that was a vital part of social sphere in the Sixties. The values of individualized creativity that Greenberg championed and educational institutions perpetuated with their stress on individual attainment were under attack by artists working collaboratively and interested in a more participatory relationship with the viewer. The authority of the heroic individual artist was consciously being diminished and the notion of an artwork being inscribed in a certain system of image production was given a new currency. Latham's communal chewing was in this stream of collaborative participation as his scientific theories and distillation process put the final product more in line with a type of systemic act rather than a romantic expressionist one.

## **2.1 Art School**

After Latham's dismissal from St. Martin's a number of students protested, but it was to no avail. Nevertheless, getting fired in the mid-Sixties was in all likelihood not a grievous setback. Western European countries were rebuilding their cities and industries after the destruction of the WWII, which resulted in a boom for their economies. While Britain's economic performance did not match that of the US or some of its Western European counterparts like France, between

October 1961 and October 1963 wages in Britain were estimated to have risen by 72 per cent.<sup>64</sup>

There was full employment in the mid Sixties and consumer goods were plentiful. Peter Roberts, one of the interviewees in Jonathan Green's book *Days in the Life: Voices from the English Underground 1961-1971*, claimed that in London "Whenever you wanted to work, there was a job there. You could give up a job just like that – because there was another one round the corner."<sup>65</sup> It can be argued that these economic conditions provided a favorable environment to artistic experimentation and played an important role in encouraging risk. There appeared to be little downside to failure.

Many British counterculture figures that Green interviewed agreed that art schools in Britain were the driving force behind the whole of 60s culture. The art school scene was where all the young bohemians were, they were far more 'happening' places than universities. Art schools acted as laboratories that were making artists, designers and musicians, they were the "real universities of the 60s."<sup>66</sup> Cultural historian Robert Hewison describes art schools as a haven for imaginative people who were otherwise neglected by the educational system.<sup>67</sup> The relative freedom in art schools encouraged a variety of different kinds of experiments. According to Hewison, it gave working class students an escape route from the factory and middle class students entry to bohemia.<sup>68</sup> Historian Arthur Marwick likewise argues that while opportunities for working class children were still limited, art schools offered a way for them to stay in school

<sup>64</sup> Robert Hewison, *Too Much: Art and Society in the Sixties 1960-75* (London: Methuen, 1986), 6.

<sup>65</sup> Jonathon Green, *Days in the Life: Voices from the English Underground 1961-1971* (London: Heinemann, 1988), 49.

<sup>66</sup> Green, *Days in the Life*, 32.

<sup>67</sup> Hewison, 63.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 63.

and possibly proceed to higher education.<sup>69</sup> Marwick also confirms that art colleges in Britain were critical agencies in the evolution and expansion of culture and in particular youth culture. He writes that art colleges in London were centres of discussion where existentialism, Beat philosophy and the deficiencies of ‘the Establishment’ were heatedly debated.<sup>70</sup> To understand the context in which *Still and Chew* was created, a slight diversion into the British art school environment of the Sixties is necessary.

The curriculum at art schools in Britain during the Sixties was undergoing a significant transformation away from traditional craft techniques, although not at the same rate and not in all schools. Sweeping changes in national education were initiated in 1957 and implemented in 1961. According to “Politics of Art Education,” a comprehensive evaluation of art education in Britain edited by Dave Rushton and Paul Wood, published in 1978, a great deal of government educational planning after the Second World War was concerned with securing the advancement of the industrial base of Britain.<sup>71</sup> The orientation of governmental education planning was largely geared towards the creation of a modernized managerial work force to help the regeneration of British private industry. The education focus started to shift outside the traditional leadership institutions of Oxford and Cambridge that were responsible for administrators and civil servants, and instead towards a technological capacity through the so called red-brick universities and technical colleges.<sup>72</sup> There was recognition that the traditional craft based education of the art-school National Diploma in Design (NDD) did not help with the lack of industrial designers and was an impediment to improving production and trade products

<sup>69</sup> Marwick, 57.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 57.

<sup>71</sup> Dave Rushton and Paul Wood, eds., *Politics of Art Education* (London: Studio Trust, 1978), 8.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 8.



for export in a period of intensified international competition. Handicraft courses in bookbinding, mosaic work and tapestry were not seen as useful in the world of industrial mechanization. Not to mention the fact that many of these traditional craft industries like textiles, ceramics and furniture had become progressively automated and were demanding technical knowledge from their designers rather than manual dexterity. The impetus for educational change was pushed forward by Cold War scares of losing a technological race with the Russians and manifested itself in a White Paper in 1956 called *Technical Education*. The report claims that if Britain was to compete not only with Russia, but the United States and other Western countries, new materials and new methods have to be applied by British industry or else they are in danger of being left behind.<sup>73</sup> While the report emphasizes technical education it also stresses that it must not be “too narrowly vocational.” It made certain to emphasize the necessity to be more versatile and liberal so that students could emerge from their education with a “broad outlook” that coincidentally matched the requirements of what at the time were seen as managerial skills.<sup>74</sup> Rushton and Wood see this need for a liberal outlook coming from industry, couched as it is in a rhetoric of the individual and human values, as a process of the enculturation of potential technical managers drawn from skill-oriented students.<sup>75</sup>

From a specific art education point of view, in April 1957 the Minister of Education published a Report of the National Advisory Committee on Art Examinations. It called for new advanced courses of study to be granted to a limited number of selected colleges. The National Advisory Council on Art Education (NACAE), known informally as the Coldstream Council

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 10.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 9.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 10.

after its chairman, Sir William Coldstream, was appointed in 1959.<sup>76</sup> Its first “Coldstream Report” was published in 1960 and proposed a new three-year degree level course called a Diploma in Art and Design (DipAD) to replace the old NDD.<sup>77</sup> On top of the global competitiveness issues, another pressing demand at this time was the acute shortage of teachers due to the exploding numbers of students. Emergency steps had to be taken in 1959 to increase the graduation of teachers by 50%.<sup>78</sup> Thus there was a need for both a more academically inclined teaching force as well as new breed of managers. There was a tension within the council, according to Rushton and Wood, between the demands of industry and those who supported art as high culture, although both sides were united in the attempt to elevate art and design workers within the socio-economic hierarchy.<sup>79</sup> In a government circular quoted by Rushton and Wood, the DipAD course was described as being geared to be equivalent “in quality and standard of achievement to a university course of the same length leading to a first degree.”<sup>80</sup> The notion of manual craft had completely disappeared from the new discourse focusing on study and ‘liberal education.’ There was a clear emphasis in the DipAD accreditation process on advanced level full-time courses at the expense of lower-level vocational courses.<sup>81</sup> The traditional prejudice of universities to privilege the intellectual over the manual had begun to infiltrate art schools for the instrumental purpose of creating generalists and managerial level industrial designers.

<sup>76</sup> Lisa Tickner, *Hornsey 1968: The Art School Revolution* (London: Frances Lincoln Ltd., 2008), 16.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

<sup>78</sup> Rushton and Wood, 12.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

<sup>81</sup> Tickner, 18.

The tension within the council reported by Rushton and Wood is particularly interesting as the supposedly divergent views of high art culture and industry seemingly converged. An Oxford and Cambridge university degree was seen as an upper class tradition for the training ground of a leadership role in public service.<sup>82</sup> It was thought that this kind of broad classical liberal education prepared one with a unique humanistic sensitivity to the world at large and enabled one to make the ‘right’ choices in life. Yet industry adopted this belief that a broad education was good preparation for managers in their future leadership positions. At the same time there was not a great deal of opposition from the Left who interpreted the upper class tradition not as a training for leadership but as mere personal liberation and cultivation that should be extended to all.<sup>83</sup> Consequently there was an unusual consensus between conservative and progressive segments that a liberal humanistic approach to learning-for-learning’s sake was valuable for both enriching one’s life and to provide the right cognitive competence for leadership positions. The 1956 White Paper on *Technical Education* encapsulated the views of liberal education:

Technical education must not be too narrowly vocational, or too confined to one skill or trade. Swift change is the characteristic of our age, so that a main purpose of the technical education of the future must be to teach boys and girls to be adaptable. Versatility has been the main aim of a classical education; technical education should lead to a similar versatility. A place must always be found in technical studies for liberal education ... it is essential if students who are to occupy responsible positions in industry are to emerge from their education with a broad outlook.<sup>84</sup>

<sup>82</sup> Eric Robertson, *The New Polytechnics* (Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1968), 25.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

<sup>84</sup> Rushton and Wood, 9.

This passage outlines the clear prejudice against ‘skill’ as ‘vocational’ and ‘narrow’, versus a broad liberal education that leads to ‘versatility’ and ‘adaptability’ to change. A broad liberal education was transposed from its classical origins to become the new panacea for creative and technological industry in the Sixties.

A subsequent 1964 Coldstream Report made a point of emphasizing the committee’s belief that “it is in the cultural interests of the nation for fine art to be pursued.”<sup>85</sup> The comment makes clear that higher education and the students who graduate were becoming a key measure of both a nation’s status and its industrial growth. One of the driving forces behind the role of fine art in the new DipAD program was the perpetuation of the belief in the importance of stimulating an artistic and creative consciousness in students. Creativity was not only crucial to fine art, but was increasingly recognized as a vital component for industry. Fine art practices were preserved in the goals of the DipAD by arguments such as Robin Darwin’s of the Royal College and a senior member of the Coldstream Council who stated: “The fine arts provide a channel for the finest expression, the most imaginative and emotional thoughts of man. Painting pictures is something different from designing a saucepan – it has an infinite about it, while the other is purely practical; and particularly with the young, it can allow them some sort of touch with God, if you like, which a saucepan can’t.”<sup>86</sup> The basis of art education was believed to be creative work in fine arts, which promoted a liberal notion of individual self-discovery inherited from older university humanities classes. However, creativity was also becoming a concept coveted by industry. Tom Hudson a design teacher at Cardiff School of Art wrote in *Studio International*: “The old artist-based theories of the Bauhaus won’t hold good for a present day creative fine art

<sup>85</sup> Ibid., 12.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., 11.

situation. ... Training on the basis of understanding by doing is too limited and simple-minded. Every creative worker in three dimensions should be able to design for machines he has never seen – much less use.” He goes on to say:

If we were to think of creative processes and not of Fine Arts, and if we look upon these creative processes as being open-ended, then there is no reason why we shouldn't have a powerful creative force operating within the designer's training but not tied to a Fine Art ideology in any limited terms. ... Training should also permit the designer to move into areas which are specifically non-functional, but there is no need for him to do it with a paint brush if he feels more at home with a machine. He should reject hand-skill if he is more usefully creative using his mind.<sup>87</sup>

What Hudson is proposing for design students is essentially to instrumentalize creativity by moving it from a manual craft skill to a university style engineering approach. Historian Howard Brick notes that the Sixties saw the rise of a university model of intellectual life in what he calls the “new Enlightenment.” This new Enlightenment is based on an engineering conception of science that had become the *de facto* model for all disciplines including the arts, whereby research is regarded as objective and usable knowledge for all.<sup>88</sup> The engineering approach as it pertains to art schools can be seen as a shift from learning by doing to learning through an academic schooling process. The old artisan specific and skill-intensive hand manufacturing learned at the bench was being replaced with an engineering knowledge approach of learning in the classroom. Knowledge in the engineering sense was more abstractly general and it could be applied to many tasks and problems as opposed to an artisanal approach that took many years to

<sup>87</sup> Tom Hudson, “Pure and ‘applied art’ – the need for the right balance in education,” *Studio International* (Oct., 1966): 226-228.

<sup>88</sup> Brick, 25.

develop very specific skills. Thus the traditional higher education privileging of intellectual activity over the manual was being clearly emphasized by the new DipAD curriculum.

The seismic changes being proposed for design students also applied to fine art students who had the same academic and written requirements to fulfill and whose studio programs were undergoing similar radical transformations. Victor Willing in a 1966 *Studio International* article titled “What kind of art education” writes that the idea of the artist as craftsman is in decline and “The mystique of the ‘tactful hand’ has been found inadequate – and also unattractive to the artist who thinks.”<sup>89</sup> He goes on to state that the “evolution of art theory in the schools is the most significant new fact in art education.”<sup>90</sup> Once again the emphasis is on intellectual thinking versus manual dexterity.

The shift in focus from an artisanal craft basis for art training to a knowledge based ‘thinking’ one coincides with the revamping of art school curriculum in Britain to achieve degree equivalence with universities. Coincidentally or not, these changes accommodated the university’s mode of privileging academic and intellectual activities over manual ones. Abstract rationalization, writing, and the use of language now occupied a greater part of an art student’s training. There was less time to master the detailed and time consuming work of craftsmanship, and more time spent on talking, writing and ideas. Instead of being measured on manual competencies, students were given academic tests of aptitude and achievement. The application of general principles instead of specific technical competencies focused artistic practices through a new language of ‘experiments,’ ‘research’ and ‘proposals.’ The age-old idea that artists are born instead of made was being overturned and the new curriculum was devised with the belief

<sup>89</sup> Victor Willing, “What Kind of Art Education,” *Studio International* (Sept. 1966), 131.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, 131.

that it was now possible to manufacture the right kind of artist for the new industrial age. Not only manufacture the right kind of artist but also the right kind of art teacher, who was desperately needed to fill growing demographic demands. The unpredictable intensities of the bohemian artist needed to be replaced by the propensities of a scholar. What was needed, more precisely, was an upgraded art teacher that could comfortably fit in with other academic colleagues in a university setting. An art teacher that draws on certifiable knowledge and theoretical language that marks him or her as a member of an exclusive discipline that guarantees its members the status of experts. This notion of a reproducible expertise could then be effectively marketed to recruit prospective students who were dreaming of becoming artists. All of this, from an art practice perspective, only a generation previous would have been thought to be absurd.

## **2.2 Unintended Consequences**

From a government and industry perspective it is evident that the high-level intention was to bring art and design schools out of their 19<sup>th</sup> century craft tradition and into the twentieth century in order to prepare students for a new economy. However, what was the effect at the school level? How were students and teachers in art schools reacting to these proposed and actual changes? One of the best sources of information of what was actual taking place in art schools during the Sixties is a compilation of documents by the students and staff of Hornsey College of Art called *The Hornsey Affair*, which outlined the goings on during the Hornsey College occupation in the spring and summer of 1968.

The Hornsey College occupation occurred during the wave of protests in Paris, Prague, Rome, the London School of Economics and other places around the world against repressive elites that captured the imagination of the young in 1968. Initially a dispute over the control of Student Union funds triggered a twenty-four hour occupation of the school by the students of Hornsey College on 28 May 1968.<sup>91</sup> The occupation had a planned program of films and speakers and escalated into a critique of all aspects of art education. The intense debates spilled over into a duration of six weeks and the production of seventy documents that were compiled and published as *The Hornsey Affair*. The occupation lost momentum by August and the administration reoccupied the school after some vague promises on funding. In the end more than fifty students were not readmitted as a result of their actions and the staff that supported the occupation were not rehired in the fall of 1968.

While it is somewhat hard to imagine today, one of the biggest bones of contention in the discussions at Hornsey was the requirement for 15 per cent of student's time and 20 per cent of the final mark to be devoted to Art History and Complementary Studies for the new DipAD. Lisa Tickner in her book on the Hornsey affair noted that some of the Summerson Council's panelists (set up to monitor national standards for DipAD), on their visits to art colleges, detected "a certain resistance to the whole idea, as if History of Art were some tiresome extraneous discipline."<sup>92</sup> Students showed their opposition to this new written component by quoting the 19<sup>th</sup> century art critic John Ruskin who said "I would no more involve the art schools in the history of art than surgical schools in the history of surgery."<sup>93</sup> On the other hand, people like

<sup>91</sup> Tickner, 13.

<sup>92</sup> Tickner, 48.

<sup>93</sup> Students and Staff of Hornsey College of Art, *Hornsey Affair* (London: Penguin Books, 1969), 96.



designer and noted educator Victor Pevsner claimed that Complementary Studies were necessary because “it occupies the intellect which does not get enough to bite on during studio hours and days.”<sup>94</sup> Lisa Tickner explains that the new requirements led to the hiring of university specialists and the setting up of separate departments, which institutionalized the split between theory and practice, while at the same time creating some tense relations with studio staff.<sup>95</sup> Needless-to-say, it created a situation in which studio staff felt patronized by the assumption that art and design were intellectually undemanding, while on the other hand fostered a feeling that the art history that was being taught was remote from the students’ actual practices.

The *Hornsey Affair* students claimed they did not have a choice as to what form of art history they were taught and that it was irrelevant to what they were interested in. An account of their ‘slide-tests’ describes their subjection to two tiny projected images of “great paintings and buildings, nearly always interminable fifteenth- or sixteenth-century Madonnas.”<sup>96</sup> The kind of connoisseurial art history that was taught is easily recognizable from the student portrayals of having to identify the works, compare them with one another, explain their aesthetic characteristics and then put them into the right slot of “Mannerism, Classicism, etc.” The art history exam effectively became the exit visa to the DipAD program. Art history, despite its remoteness from studio practice, became critical to acquiring the credentials for being “classified by society as an artist.” The desire for a degree accreditation shows a shift from the bohemian days of the 1950s when all you had to do was actually engage in the practice of art to be an artist, to the need in Sixties to have an university level academic degree to certify that you were an

<sup>94</sup> Tickner, 47.

<sup>95</sup> Tickner, 47.

<sup>96</sup> Students and Staff of Hornsey College of Art, 96.

artist. The need and desire for a more rigorously academic institutional stamp was a new reality in the Sixties.

The academic 'General Studies' included art history and 'Complementary Studies,' in which the Coldstream Report had given art schools a wide degree of autonomy to devise their own syllabuses. Hornsey's General Studies were meant to be complementary to the studio area, but many of the university-trained lecturers who were brought in to teach these new academic classes were young and left leaning. They saw it their task to make up for the educational shortcomings of art courses and to initiate a debate imbued with the university traditions of free speech and skepticism.<sup>97</sup> According to the *Hornsey Affair*, the General Studies teachers saw themselves as upstarts in comparison to the aristocratic departments like painting and sculpture.<sup>98</sup> They considered it their responsibility to break down class barriers, stir up the minds of students in order to provoke some self-reflectivity. With this kind of an agenda it was not surprising that many of the General Studies tutors were singled out and blamed for the uprisings at Hornsey, which led to their subsequent dismissals.<sup>99</sup> The students themselves at Hornsey had different and ambivalent attitudes towards General Studies. Some found it welcome and stimulating, a reminder that there was a world outside of art school and a chance to think for themselves about what they were doing.<sup>100</sup> Others found it a strain and a source of confusion, while some saw it as an opportunity to have a 'sleep-in.' Then there were those students and tutors who thought that these studies were irrelevant and there was a certain degree of contempt for the 'intellectuals,'

<sup>97</sup> Tickner, 47.

<sup>98</sup> Students and Staff of Hornsey College of Art, 18.

<sup>99</sup> Many of the General Studies tutors joined the students in the occupation and working in conjunction with them to draw up a set of documents for reform. The Hornsey occupation and its aftermath are well documented in *The Hornsey Affair* and Lisa Tickner's *Hornsey 1968: The Art School Revolution*.

<sup>100</sup> Students and Staff of Hornsey College of Art, 86-87.

and conversely, General Studies tutors complained that the students were hopeless and never read anything. There was a feeling that the unfamiliar teaching style of the General Studies tutors was intimidating and thus the weekly two to three hour sessions, according to some students, were the last places where they would use their brains.<sup>101</sup> Nevertheless, the impact that General Studies had on students proved to be significant.

Graphic designer Pearce Marchbank claims that art schools in the 60s were important cultural centres and were responsible for producing not only painters and designers, but a good many rock stars like “Lennon, Townshend, Clapton ... loads.”<sup>102</sup> He recounts that students were bombarded with much more than a set syllabus, and it was in what he called “Liberal Studies” (i.e. General Studies) that he was turned on by his interesting teachers like A.S. Byatt.<sup>103</sup> Similarly, the students that lead the Hornsey revolt overturned any remnants of the notion of British art students as having an anti-intellectual and anti-revolutionary disposition as well as being disinterested in the general changing social situation. Tom Nairn, the Scottish theorist of nationalism who was a General Studies tutor at the time of the Hornsey occupation, said of the revolt:

[The occupation has] taken the term ‘revolution’ out of its inverted commas, for the first time in recent British history. Thus, a few North London crackpots achieved more than the working-class of this overwhelmingly proletarian country ... not by reasonable demands, but by the technique of take-over ... by the creation of a brief, self-governing community that overthrew authority, and took its life and work into its own hands.<sup>104</sup>

<sup>101</sup> Students and Staff of Hornsey College of Art, 87.

<sup>102</sup> Green, 33.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid., 33.

<sup>104</sup> Tickner, 83.

Protests in Britain were almost non-existent in 1968 compared to France and America, and there was nothing anywhere close to matching the insurrections at art schools. Kim Howells, one of the student leaders at Hornsey, wrote critically and impassionedlly in the *Hornsey Affair* about a new attitude towards art that conflicted with the big-name studio tutors at the college:

They would like to believe that their art is totally unaffected by whatever political system is being imposed upon the mass of the population ... their art thing is a phony product of a phony conditioned mind. It exists as a luxury of the bourgeois élite. It is totally irrelevant to the lives and struggles of the great mass of the population and it is the inheritance of years of acceptance of the myth of the artist as being the lone spirit, free from the mundane pursuits that govern most people's lives, and born radical, the free liberal thinker, sitting up on high creating his works in an attempt to communicate the ideas of a superior mind to the philistine public. I would define him as a reactionary, as an apathetic non-thinker, content to fill his role of being the mysterious man of inspiration by never even attempting to communicate with anyone save that illustrious élite with which he so readily associates himself. But I also know this: he is scared, scared of what he does to an enlightened society, to a society which does not happily sit on its butt-end and accept directives as to what is good culturally and what is not. And I will so welcome that day, for then the culture of the people will be the culture of the people, and not the culture of the decadent bourgeois élite.<sup>105</sup>

A not very subtle critique of Greenberg's views on artistic autonomy can distinctly be heard here. Howells was clearly unhappy with an art system that was complicit with the bourgeois status quo and was interested in a collective and revolutionary cultural practice that was not art as business as usual. Howells was not the only one, other students also wrote in the *Hornsey Affair* of the necessity to change their perception of art:

<sup>105</sup> Students and Staff of Hornsey College of Art, 71.

One day ... we wanted to wake up, to get out of the walls which enclosed us in our dreams. ... Everywhere we went, we saw mirrors of ourselves – everywhere, that is, in our art world – and we had become mirrors of the Bond Street and advertising markets. We, in objectifying our inner dreams, discovered that we were nothing but mirrors. ... We, art students, have been privileged to fabricate a dream reality; we have found that we have been paid to live in it, to keep quiet about it; we refuse to decorate it, and we refuse any longer to decorate your reality, the other side of our prison wall. From now on we will expose your dreams and live your reality.<sup>106</sup>

Hornsey students perceptively questioned the unexamined assumptions about the nature of art practice and just exactly whom the art market was for. They clearly did not want to perpetuate the status quo by being a mirror to society and reflect that in an uncritical way. Instead they engaged in a radically different way of thinking of not only art, but of the willingness to take political action to fight for the things that he believed in. Was it coincidence that the most radical student actions in Britain in 1968 took place at the art school revolts of Hornsey, Guilford and Brighton? It appears that the ambitions of the British Government to raise the standard of education in art schools to help the manufacturing and export trade had contributed to some unintended consequences. By filling the General Studies departments with young university educated social theorists who were more inclined to question commodity capitalism than to encourage it, art schools found themselves on the cutting edge of politics as well as art. The students' new found intellectual appetites had blossomed into a serious and thoughtful reconsideration of their political and artistic selves. An inevitable contradiction arose between the open-endedness of a subject like art and the attempt to instrumentalize it by educational institutions for productive purposes. By providing them with the intellectual tools designed for a modicum of self-reflexivity, instead of becoming ideal managerial material they started

<sup>106</sup> Students and Staff of Hornsey College of Art, 100.

questioning and critiquing the very institutions and practices of art that they were part of. They asked these questions, at least for a brief time, before they grew up and became the ideal managers that they were designed to be. Just as Kim Howells who later became part of the ‘illustrious élite’ as the Minister of State for Education under the Tony Blair Labour government. Ironically, while he was one of the Hornsey student occupation leaders Howells was being watched by MI5 who had a file opened on him, only to become responsible for the secretive Government committee that oversees MI5 in 2008 and reversed his position from the watched to the watcher.

While the introduction of General Studies in art schools was just one of the many educational/cultural changes that were taking place in the Sixties, it certainly had a marked effect on transforming art schools from being places described as being ‘self-absorbed,’ ‘impervious to political and social events,’ and notably ‘anti-intellectual,’ into being critical centres of discussion. It spurred a questioning of the role of art and how it relates to the world at large instead of just a concentration of medium and craft issues. Clearly art students did not want to be unthinking “mirrors of Bond Street.” This awakening of self-reflexivity encouraged through the upgrading of academic requirements, in a contradictory way, also highlighted the inadequacies of the existing and new curriculums in the minds of students. It gave them the confidence in proposing well thought out and innovative alternatives, that in their minds were better solutions for the future. What was particularly interesting about the Hornsey student proposals was their emphasis on interdisciplinary investigation. It was clear that the interdisciplinary focus was meant to integrate artistic practice with the world at large and make it relevant with the concerns of the day. It also expressed the desire for experimentation in a wide variety of disciplines instead of being straightjacketed into a specific craft or medium. The need to specialize in a

specific practice such as painting or sculpture was no longer thought to be necessary and the idea of an artist in general who could use whatever medium fit the task emerged as the favorable model. The contradiction in this process was that the idea of a 'broad outlook' is also very much the same idea that the government and industry were after for the education of their ideal manager.

The key concept of interdisciplinary investigation coincides as an important aspect of Conceptual art. The Hornsey's student occupiers advanced the notion of a 'network system' for art education that emphasized maximum flexibility where there could be specialization or no specialization, with a stress on the creative group embracing both students and staff.<sup>107</sup> All workshop facilities would be available for the use of any student and departmental fiefdoms would be dissolved. In fact the studio itself was becoming a study, a place of research rather than of craft. The goal of art education, according to the students, was no longer in techniques of the past, but in innovative training that was interdisciplinary, problem solving, and carried out in equal partnership between staff and students. They argued that research should be an organic part of art and design education that not only deals with the problems of art but with the education process itself in a critical self-conscious way.<sup>108</sup> There was an urgent need for a curriculum that addressed what was happening in the world outside the studio. The student demands for greater autonomy and meaningful representation was spurred by a belief that they could do a better job of educating themselves. In an paradoxical way, all of the student proposals for interdisciplinary research, problem solving, self-criticality, and rejection of past techniques, were not only emergent themes in Conceptual art but also defined a better educational program for industrial

<sup>107</sup> Students and Staff of Hornsey College of Art, 43.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid., 129.

management development than what either the government or industry had come up with. It was an odd convergence of the stated needs of students, artists, government and industry around the desire for a form of self-actualization based on education and learning. Latham's *Still and Chew* itself ended up as *Art and Culture*, an assemblage in an attaché case—an attaché case that symbolically fluctuates between representations of industry, the academy, and art.<sup>109</sup>

### 2.3 Latham's Underground

Long before *Still and Chew*, books had already played a large role in Latham's work. Between 1964 and 1966 Latham organized a series of public actions or events where he burned and exploded columns of old books in a ritualistic fashion. He called them *Skoob Towers* (books spelled backwards). He treated books as everyday visual thing rather than works of literature. His explanations for these events were that "it was not in any degree a gesture of contempt for books or literature. What it did intend was to put the proposition into mind that perhaps the cultural base had been burnt out."<sup>110</sup> Many of his sculptures and events precluded the book's ability to communicate and enlighten. With some justification students saw these events as a kind of revival of Dada since the idea of making everyday objects like books strange by treating them as things (as opposed to works of literature) was a typical avant-garde strategy. The purpose according to Latham was to "reverse the function and conception and see what you get."<sup>111</sup> However, books are not just things, they embody the idea of enlightenment, and burning them

<sup>109</sup> An additional obvious symbolic relationship is to a Duchampian valise. Marcel Duchamp is referenced a number of times in Conceptual works and will be discussed throughout the dissertation.

<sup>110</sup> Walker, 80.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid., 35.



cannot help to bring to mind the 1933 Nazi book burning of ‘subversive’ books. In fact there is an anti-book and anti-knowledge emphasis in Latham’s work. He was critical of language as a medium of communication and of books as reservoirs of received knowledge. For Latham, books were also a source of error, and words seemed incapable of coming to terms with the horrors of the twentieth century.

Latham believed that the ills of the world are the result of differences in ideology and he sought to create a single theory for the explanation of the universe that would bridge these differences. He wanted to create a theory to combine artistic, philosophical and scientific ideas. Latham’s later theories date back to his association with two scientists, Clive Gregory and Anita Kohsen, in the early 1950s. Gregory and Kohsen were dissatisfied with growing split between science and culture as well as the divisions between different disciplines. They sought to integrate them into a new science called ‘psychophysical cosmology,’ which they hoped could unify mind and matter. Latham was invited to be a founding member of their ‘Institute for the Study of Mental Images’ and they set about creating an overarching theory by identifying common features across disciplines. Gregory and Kohsen became interested in a time based model and wrote: “We have abandoned the language of objects for the language of events ... we have discovered that it is easier to use events as building bricks than particles, waves, fields, sensation, images or ideas.”<sup>112</sup> Latham, in future years continued and extended his interest in the functions of time in art, nature and the origins of the cosmos through his time based theory that he coined as ‘event structure.’ While his theory has a liberal use of a self-invented language and

<sup>112</sup> Walker, 20.

a mix of quasi-scientific thought that borders on mysticism, he can be seen as an artist looking for other forms of cognition to counter traditional thinking.

British Conceptual artist John Stezaker claimed that Latham opposed the connoisseurial attitude to art works and their appeal to the senses and instead saw art works belonging properly to a cognitive realm. Latham emphasized the attribute of newness or shock, according to Stezaker, “as a means to transcend the realities of the present as they are ordinarily conceive.”<sup>113</sup> Latham’s interest in scientific issues and his conception of art as a special form of cognition, set him apart from those like Greenberg who sought to define painting and sculpture as autonomous practices only concerned with matters of space and form. For Latham, art works are not ends in themselves but devices for comprehending and representing the cosmos.

His acceptance of destruction as an artistic method put him in the same club as many anti-establishment artists, even though he was older than most at the time. There were numerous attempts in the mid-Sixties to break down the formal categories of art, which included attacks on the materials of art themselves. A rather literal way of producing works that could not be exploited by market forces was found in ‘auto-destructive’ art. Latham was one of a number of artists who adopted destruction as an artistic technique. Gustav Metzger was a notable practitioner who wrote an auto-destructive manifesto in 1959 and was known for spraying acid on nylon in what Hewison describes as “action painting that disappeared before your eyes.”<sup>114</sup> His destructive practices, not surprisingly, earned Metzger the praise of The Who’s Pete Townsend as his most-admired tutor at art school. Metzger attempted to bring these practices into relation with politics by referencing Vietnamese monks who burnt themselves alive to

<sup>113</sup> Peter Fuller, “John Latham,” *Studio International* 193 (1976): 218-220.

<sup>114</sup> Hewison, 117.

protest the war.<sup>115</sup> He was the prime mover behind the *Destruction in Art Symposium* (DIAS) held in London in 1966 and in New York in 1968. It was a month long symposium of meetings and performances by the proponents of event-art. Metzger was a militant supporter of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament and intended the symposium to have a definite political agenda. Among the participating artists and writers were Günter Brus, Ivor Davies, Al Hansen, Kurt Kren, John Latham, Otto Muehl, Yoko Ono, Ralph Ortiz, Jean Toche, and Robin Page. Some of these artists like Yoko Ono were associated with Fluxus.<sup>116</sup> Both the mainstream and underground press criticized the symposium universally; Peter Brook's *US* called it "embarrassment everywhere; blood and ego-mania."<sup>117</sup> Walker points out that some reporters thought that it was unethical to use destruction to protest against destruction, while others pointed rather unconvincingly to the notion that it was trying to accelerate the self-destructive tendencies of culture so that a new culture might emerge from the ashes of the old.<sup>118</sup>

One of the organizers of DIAS was Roy Ascott who, along with William Green, at Ealing School of Art had developed a course called the 'Ground Course,' which incorporated cybernetics and behaviorism as key aspects. Ascott was influenced by the works of authors writing about cybernetics such as Norbert Wiener, F.H. George and W. Ross Ashby. He sought to apply cybernetics and information theory systematically to art. The curriculum he developed was based on his view that all art is didactic and that the artist's creative and pedagogic activities interacted with each feeding back to one another as in a cybernetic feedback loop.<sup>119</sup> Since he

<sup>115</sup> Ibid., 118.

<sup>116</sup> Walker, 81.

<sup>117</sup> Hewison, 119.

<sup>118</sup> Walker, 81.

<sup>119</sup> Roy Ascott and Edward A. Shanken, *Telematic Embrace : Visionary Theories of Art, Technology, and Consciousness* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 11.

believed that all art is didactic, he felt that “every artist is, in some way, setting out to instruct ... for, by instruction, we mean to give direction, and that is precisely what all great art does ... through [the] culture it informs, art becomes a force for change in society.”<sup>120</sup> He saw his practice and his teaching as interrelated components of a cybernetic system, and had students collaborate together as elements of a system that regulated their artistic behavior.<sup>121</sup> Edward Shanken explains that Ascott’s theoretical work, which included the act and process of writing, could be considered part of his artistic work “if art is taken to be a conceptual process manifested in the behavior of the artist within a system of meaning.”<sup>122</sup> Ascott’s approach to art was thus focused on process and moved away from an emphasis on the art object, much like Latham and Metzger and other artists at this time. However, it also incorporated pedagogy, which was becoming a larger concern for many avant-garde artists in the Sixties. Not surprisingly as they acquired degrees that were geared for teaching art as well as the fact that they often made their living doing so.

Andrew Wilson in an essay on the counterculture in Sixties London claims that a move away from the “object in art did not happen in isolation but across culture.”<sup>123</sup> He sees a common thread running through Metzger’s auto-destructive art, Latham’s event structure, Michael Horovitz’s event-based jazz poetry, Alexander Trocchi’s meta-categorical revolution, as well as R.D. Laing’s anti-psychiatry. Social processes aimed at a re-ordering of dominant cultural norms often accompanied this move away from art objects. The Antiuniversity and other venues such as

<sup>120</sup> Ibid., 35.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid., 35.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid., 11.

<sup>123</sup> Andrew Wilson, “A Poetics of Dissent: Notes on a Developing Counterculture in London in the Early Sixties,” in *Art & the 60s: This was Tomorrow*, eds. Chris Stephens and Katherine Stout (London: Tate, 2004), 111.

the basement of Better Books (run by concrete poet, Bob Cobbing) provided places to explore these new ways of communicating that transcended category boundaries in art. As previously argued, art schools were incorporating these types of changes through the introduction of not only General Studies, but some high-profile specific examples such as the ‘Ground Course’ at Ealing, and an important undergraduate sculpture course conceived by Peter Kardia at St. Martin’s. Kardia’s course was almost an antidote to Caro’s ‘Advanced Sculpture Course’ through the development of a program that examined the definition of both the art object and the creative process. Hester Westley describes the course as a shift from the welding shop to the seminar room. He claims Kardia broadened his students’ sense of identity by emphasizing that an artist is no longer an “isolated individual but a relational and provisional series of perspectives informed and shaped by politics and culture.”<sup>124</sup> Like others in General Studies courses, Kardia aimed to open up the sculptural field to influences from other disciplines including, linguistics, cybernetics, psychology and cultural theory. Some of the artists who Westley argues benefited from Kardia’s course include Gilbert & George, Richard Long, Hamish Fulton, and John Hilliard. It should also be mentioned that Kardia’s course and all the artists listed above associated with St. Martin’s were aware of Latham’s ‘event structures’ and were also in a sense responsive to them in their practices.

Latham’s interest in art’s social function led to the creation of The Art Placement Group (APG), which was founded by Latham and his then-partner Barbara Steveni in 1966, and it continued on until 1989 when it was renamed O+I.<sup>125</sup> The idea was to try and transform the

<sup>124</sup> Westly, 191

<sup>125</sup> Claire Bishop, *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and The Politics of Spectatorship* (London: Verso, 2012), 163.

relation of the artist to society and to see what benefits could come from artists' creative resources that they felt were vastly underutilized by society.<sup>126</sup> According to Steveni and Latham, artists lived in a world shielded from the mundane realities of industry and commerce, and likewise society's leaders did not consult artists in the same way that scientists or economists were consulted. Walker claims that Steveni devised a concept of 'placement' to reverse art's marginal position in society and involve it in decisions that effect everyday life.<sup>127</sup> The notion was to place artists as professionals into different kinds of organizations, whether they were business or government, for a period of time. The hope was that the presence of artist would somehow activate different forms of thinking in those organizations and that the contact would leave both the artist and the organization changed for the better.<sup>128</sup> Claire Bishop argues that it would be tempting to suggest that APG's agenda for their placements was for art to have a positive humanizing effect on business conventions.<sup>129</sup> However, she claims that Steveni maintains that this was not the case and the outcomes were not in any way determined in advance and entirely dependent on the individual artist.<sup>130</sup> An example of one of the placements was Stuart Brisley who chose to work on the shop floor of Hille Furniture factory. He worked to gain the trust of the skeptical factory workers who felt that no one was interested in what they had to say.<sup>131</sup> He began to relay this information to management and one of his contributions was to paint the shop floor polishing machinery in the colors of football teams chosen by the workers. Brisley argues that the placement went on to inform his protest-based performances in the 1970s

<sup>126</sup> Walker, 97.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid., 97.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid., 97.

<sup>129</sup> Bishop, 166.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid., 166.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid., 167.

as well as his work in setting up an Artist's Union in 1972.<sup>132</sup> However, none of the sources on APG mention what effect Brisley's placement had on the workers.

Steveni managed to secure funding for an APG exhibition at the Hayward Gallery titled 'Inno70', but also know as 'Art and Economic' held 2-23 December 1971. Bishop claims that it was the worst attended exhibition in the Hayward's history.<sup>133</sup> The galleries were filled with large photographs showing the various aspects of the placements, along with videotaped interviews and discussions between the artists and business representatives. There was a business report on APG and a table for 'consultation.' The response was particularly harsh from artists and critics alike. One of the common complaints was the corporate appearance of the show, which had the "atmosphere of the boardroom, of 'top-level' managerial meetings."<sup>134</sup> Gustav Metzger was particularly critical of his one-time collaborator and called Latham a "Holy Fool."<sup>135</sup> Metzger was unconvinced by the whole project and thought that it was folly to try steer what Bishop calls two opposed groups, young artists and powerful corporations, into a dialogue together.<sup>136</sup> Metzger characterized the APG idea as "the middle way" and added: "the history of the twentieth century has shown that this always leads to the Right."<sup>137</sup> Brisley also criticized APG's management level approach and argued that it influenced the artist's ability to relate to the shop floor and that the contractual obligations to companies compromised the artist's ability

<sup>132</sup> Ibid., 168.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid., 168.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid., 170

<sup>135</sup> Walker, 100

<sup>136</sup> Bishop, 170

<sup>137</sup> Walker, 100

to critique.<sup>138</sup> However, as Walker points out, APG went on to have many important placements, and after his criticisms Brisley re-joined APG in 1975 to undertake another placement.

Latham's participation in alternative schools and APG is indicative of the thinking of many artists and students during the Sixties. Educational institutions that were steeped in tradition and slow to respond to a rapidly changing world were seen as irrelevant impediments to learning and self-actualization rather than a source for it. Since there was little hope for change in these institutions, artists and students alike took matters into their own hands and created their own schools to explore ways of learning that were not part of the established norms of education. There was a desire to explore other possibilities since the current curriculums were viewed as not working. Education and art were both seen as potential agents of change, and they were too important to be left to institutions that were stuck in the past. Neither artists nor students were afraid to take on new roles to reshape traditional notions of what is important to learn and how artists can contribute to society. Both were driven by the desire to make a better society based on a different set of values from competitive capitalism that was being fostered by government and industry.

## **2.4 What Kind Of Autonomy?**

The trajectory of Latham's *Still and Chew* event has demonstrated a notion of autonomy that is tethered to the various manifestations of breaking free of constraints, both personal and social, that had currency in the Sixties. Raymond Williams noted that the rejection of hierarchies was

<sup>138</sup> Ibid., 100



part of an emergent “loss of respect” for elites, and Régis Debray defined the Sixties as “merely the name that we give ... to a disruption of the Bourgeois dream of an unproblematic production-controlled consumption.”<sup>139</sup> This disruption along with a shared sense of liberation through the search for better alternatives is at the core of what drove a desire for autonomy in the Sixties.

The contradiction between the freedom of the autonomous individual and the role of the broader social realm in determining the individual unfolds within the various notions of autonomy. These contradictions also exist within Conceptual art practices and illuminating them offers a different way of uncovering the meanings around Conceptual art and its historical context in the late Sixties and early 1970s. The next chapter will look at contradictions such as Conceptual art’s fascination with systems, rules and instructions while at the same time desiring to make it’s own rules by standing outside art traditions and markets. Conceptual Art’s interest in expanding the field of art through investigating other disciplines, such as philosophy and science, was a method of making Conceptual art engage with the viewer’s cognitive faculties in an enlivened way and to elicit a form of reading instead of just looking from its audience. Yet this impulse contrasts with Conceptual artists simultaneously finding fault with the very disciplines they sought out to engage. Likewise Conceptual artists were critical of pedagogy, institutions and art criticism, yet they eagerly acquired the institutional stamps of advanced degrees, wrote criticism, and engaged in pedagogy. These contradictory tensions were in a sense part of the larger dialectic of the Sixties and the struggle for autonomy from under the aegis of repressive control. The root of many of these contradictions and how they operated lay in an educational motivation for learning and knowledge, but it was an impetus that tread dangerously close to

<sup>139</sup> Barry Curtis, “A Highly Mobil and Plastic Environ,” in *Art & the 60s: This Was Tomorrow*, eds. Chris Stevens and Katherine Stout (London: Tate Gallery, 2004), 48.

being subsumed by educational institutions whose promise of self-realization often masked their real agendas. It is how these contradictions were interwoven between the world at large and Conceptual art that reveal how and what Conceptual art uncovers about its contexts. What is productive about these contradictions is that they offer a way of looking at Conceptual art as an alternative to a bankrupt dominant culture, even if it is still implicated in and constructed by that culture.

### Chapter 3: Autonomy As Self-Rule

*“Il est interdit d’interdire!”* – May ’68 slogan.

The Conceptual art practices and student movements in the Sixties exemplified a striving to not only break down existing rules and hierarchies, but to also create a new set of rules. The ability to construct your own rules is a basic premise of autonomy and signals an independence of thought. Consequently the trope of autonomy that this chapter investigates is based on this idea of making your own rules. Furthermore, since Immanuel Kant is generally understood to be, if not the inventor of the modern concept of autonomy, then primarily responsible for promoting the notion that our freedom should be understood specifically as autonomy, his views on rule making provide a theoretical base with which to explore the meaning of Conceptual rule making initiatives.

The impetus for creating new rules was the desire to break through the inertia of habit that had been reinforced by what was perceived to be the old rules of repressive elites in government, business and bureaucracies everywhere. Accordingly, Conceptual artists attempted refashion their own practices of art, what a work of art is, and its relationship with the viewer through the use of their own new rules. Many of these matter-of-fact works had the appearance of recording information, yet at the same time they seem to offer no purpose to the information other than the exercise itself. Although they used a new mode of production that was gaining currency, a form of neutral scientism, at the same time these works detached themselves from the utility of the capitalist world exchange through their lack of purpose. As artist Michael Thompson argues,

Conceptual art aimed at “severing the alignment of art with the present social structure.”<sup>140</sup> This echoed Adorno’s claim that by not producing something “socially useful” art criticizes society with the promise of a praxis without capitalism. The ethical demand of attempting to make things that could not be sold was part of the Sixties utopian spirit that was very much in line with the protest movements’ belief in trying to change the world for the better by refusing to participate in the conventions of a society built on the maximization of profit.

In the summer of 1967, Sol LeWitt published a manifesto in *Artforum* called “Paragraphs on Conceptual art” that outlined his thoughts on an emerging practice. The article became significant because of the interest it created and it was one of the first to use the term “Conceptual art” (Fluxus artist Henry Flynt is recognized as the first to use the term “Concept art” in 1961).<sup>141</sup> Although LeWitt is usually categorized as a Minimal artist, he is also considered a transitional figure between Minimalism and Conceptual art.<sup>142</sup> This is evident in “Paragraphs” when he states, “In Conceptual art the idea of the concept is the most important aspect of the work.” Nevertheless, he still allocates a good portion of the “Paragraphs” to the formal considerations of three-dimensional space and physical aspects of a work.<sup>143</sup> The transition that LeWitt is embroiled in is one where the self-expressiveness of Modernism is being replaced with a position that forbids expressiveness. This is made clear when he states: “arbitrary or chance decisions would be kept to a minimum, while caprice, taste and other whimsies would be

<sup>140</sup> Michael Thompson, “Conceptual Art: Category & Action,” *Art-Language* (Volume 1, No. 2, February 1970): 77-83.

<sup>141</sup> Larry Flynt, “Essay: Concept Art,” in *Chance Operations* eds. Lamonte Young and Jackson Mac Low (New York: Heiner Friedrich, 1963).

<sup>142</sup> Buchloh, “Conceptual Art”, 111.

<sup>143</sup> Sol LeWitt, “Paragraphs on Conceptual Art,” in *Conceptual Art: A Critical Anthology*. Cambridge, Eds. Alexander Alberro and Blake Stimson (Mass: MIT Press, 1999), 15.

eliminated from the making of art.”<sup>144</sup> Expressiveness is replaced with a new way of making art where “all of the planning and decisions are made beforehand and the execution is a perfunctory affair. The idea becomes a machine that makes the art.”<sup>145</sup> The goal of this process is to avoid “subjectivity” by using “rules that would govern the solution of the problem,” which in turn eliminate “the arbitrary, the capricious, and the subjective as much as possible.”<sup>146</sup> Despite LeWitt’s insistence that the ideas behind these rules need not be complex and that Conceptual art does not have anything to do with “mathematics, philosophy, or any other mental discipline,” the notion of rules and “a machine that makes art” inevitably conjures up an image of a computer being controlled by a software language made up of instructions. The then recent dominance of the self-expressiveness of Abstract Expressionism was being replaced with the neutral look of science and technology, which was also gaining pride of place in the wider culture. Any of LeWitt’s work from this period such as *Serial Project #1*, 1966, readily gives the viewer the impression of an austere kind of science or engineering project. Thomas McEvilley describes LeWitt and others at this time as distancing themselves from Modernism and transitioning from art’s old alliance with religion (explicit in Romanticism and hidden by the time of Late Modernism) toward a new alliance with science.<sup>147</sup> The laboratory like instruction, McEvilley claims, becomes a “basic element of Conceptual art in its studied displacement from the realm of pseudo-religion to that of pseudo-science.”<sup>148</sup> The increased prominence of science and technology in the postwar era, as described in Chapter 2, manifested itself in various attempts to

<sup>144</sup> Ibid., 13.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid., 12.

<sup>146</sup> Sol Lewitt, “Paragraphs,” 13.

<sup>147</sup> Thomas McEvilley, *The Triumph of Anti-Art: Conceptual and Performance Art in the Formation of Post-Modernism* (New York: McPherson & Company, 2005), 77.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid., 92.

merge art and technology such as Jack Burnham's *Software* exhibition, 1970. Hans Haacke's works between 1963 and 1968 such as *Condensation Cube*, are examples that deal with ideas based on systems theory and have a distinct 'science project' appearance.

There are many examples of Conceptual artists using rules like LeWitt's as part of their practice. Some notable examples include On Kawara's 'date paintings' project started in 1966, which consisted of the date on which the work is made painted on a monochrome background. He assigned a rule that up to three paintings could be made each day, but if a painting is not completed by midnight, it is destroyed. Vito Acconci's worked extensively with rules as in his *Following Piece*, 1969, where he chose a person to follow at random, in any street, in any location, and every day for a given period. He would then follow him or her wherever he or she went until the person entered a private place.<sup>149</sup> In Jack Burnham's *Software* exhibition in 1970, Acconci performed *Room Situation (Proximity)* where his rules were to be present at the exhibition all day and go from room to room standing uncomfortably close to other people in the exhibition. In Ed Ruscha's early self-published book-works like *Twentysix Gasoline Stations*, 1962, he documents all the gasoline stations on Route 66 between Los Angeles and his home in Oklahoma. He never waived from his initial idea or rule for each book and followed the pre-set concept to the end. In *Every Building on Sunset Strip*, 1966, in which he not only documented all the buildings on Sunset Strip but he started a life long process of recording these buildings. To this day, every three years or so Ruscha commissions professional photographer Gary Regester and his brother Paul Ruscha to re-photograph Sunset Boulevard. These re-photographs have never been shown but the hundreds of reels of still photographs have recently been acquired by

<sup>149</sup> Lucy Lippard, *Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object from 1966 to 1972* (Berkeley: University of California Press 1997), 117.

the Getty Research Center.<sup>150</sup> Ruscha's 'dead-pan' way of using the camera as a recording device was adopted by Conceptual artists as a way to not only break the rules of what constituted 'good' photography, but as a way to remove the authorial presence of the artist. Ruscha called these photographs "technical data like industrial photography" as opposed to fine art photography.<sup>151</sup> Since Ruscha's photographs were not accompanied by text, there was no apparent narrative or opinion expressed, instead it had a look of 'neutrality.' The matter of fact appearance of many Conceptual art works has a certain deliberate boredom effect that intentionally sets it apart from the more spectacular individualism of Abstraction Expressionism or the fun of Pop Art.

Rules are particularly common for Conceptual artists who were using photography as exemplified in Douglas Huebler's "Variable Pieces." In *Variable Piece #34*, 1970, Huebler includes the following statement along with the photographs: "During November, 1970 forty people were photographed at the instant exactly after the photographer said, 'you have a beautiful face.' The forty photographs and this statement join together to constitute the form of this piece."<sup>152</sup> The capturing of the spontaneous reaction of the subjects by the camera eliminated any authorial control of the situation, which simply recorded the event as a piece of information tied to the pre-set rules in the accompanying statement. The chance like nature of the photographs freed the work from any conventional notions of fine art photography. The paradox was that a rational set of rules in effect mediated out rational experience and lead to a spontaneous and authentic interaction with the world at large. The set of rules that according to

<sup>150</sup> Calvin Tomkins, "Ed Ruscha's L.A.: An artist in the right place," *The New Yorker* (July 1, 2013), 54-55.

<sup>151</sup> Lucy Lippard, "Escape Attempts," 28.

<sup>152</sup> Tony Godfrey, *Conceptual Art* (London: Phaidon Press Lt., 1998), 304.

LeWitt determine all the decisions “beforehand” and eliminate the “arbitrary or chance” in this case seem to allow for the release of control. In a sense Huebler’s pre-set rules not only mediate out rationality, but also in an Adornian sense the negation of their aesthetic experience acted as a release from rational understanding. The contradiction is that the use of rules, a type of predetermined system to eliminate chance, is then used to create a work in which the arbitrary comes back through the photographic subject instead of the artist. The autonomy of the work resides in the formal laws of the work itself by taking seemingly objective rules and turning them upside down into their opposite. ‘Objective’ systems and rules were used to create works that instead of dominating managed to rekindle a new relationship between subject and object. The administered world’s codes of scientism are utilized to reveal the human side of what capital represses. The artist and subject give themselves over to the logic of the form and thus the work becomes more like a subject than an object and acquires a larger meaning than individual expression.

Conceptual art works that incorporate rules often take on a look, as noted earlier, of a kind of science project. The works operate with laboratory like rules that incorporate experimental activity that is then documented in the form of a project. LeWitt’s *Serial Project #1* for instance even uses the word “project” in its title along with another key word for Conceptual art – “serial.” There is an on-going time based association with both the idea of a project and the term serial. Many Conceptual art projects involve a process of becoming that implies a certain incompleteness that signals a fundamental change in the status of an art work from a singular object to a more open ended project. As in Huebler’s work, projects often involve a combination of an explanatory text of rules along with a series of photographs that document the research and/or experiment. These works take on the appearance of art documentation rather than what



had previously looked like art, and it is only through the active participation of the viewer's reading and mulling over of the information does the art manifest itself in a reciprocal relation with the work.

Boris Groys's argues that the main activity in contemporary society during the Sixties, whether it was business or culture, was to "formulate a corresponding project in order to present an application for the approval or financing of this project to one or more responsible authorities."<sup>153</sup> Nevertheless, regardless of its purported causal factors, what is certain is that in Conceptual art one of the main objects of interest is in documenting the steps of a project's process. The open-endedness of Conceptual projects often began with a subjective choice of pre-set rules, then an objective mechanical execution of the rules, and finally a series of outcomes that are typically unknown and variable. Projects such as these had significant repercussions on not only what was considered art, but in how it was displayed and received. The unity in a work of art was no longer a singular object, but something that was a series of objects that together formed a distributed unity. In addition, the viewer could not take in the work at a glance but had to read the work in a sequence. The consequences for Greenbergian formalist aesthetics were profound. The expansion of the possible material means of making art into photography, texts, maps, etc., resulted in the irrelevancy of medium specificity. This meant that Greenberg's aesthetic judgements that were "immediate, intuitive, undeliberated, and involuntary" and not modified by subsequent reflection or thought based on medium specificity had become, in a sense, immaterial.<sup>154</sup> Conceptual art projects could not be assessed in an immediate and intuitive

<sup>153</sup> Boris Groys, "The Mimesis of Thinking," in *Open Systems: Rethinking Art c. 1970*, ed. Donna De Salvo (London: Tate Publishing, 2005), 61.

<sup>154</sup> Clement Greenberg, *Volume 4*, 265.

manner, they had to be read and deliberated. These projects helped expose the emptiness of formalist aesthetics based on sedimented traditional norms by demonstrating that meaning was arrived at relationally and contextually regardless of the exact form of materiality.

The work described above by LeWitt, Huebler and On Kawara bears a relationship to structuralism's understanding that artworks are inscribed within a system. Consequently, of particular relevance to Conceptual art is the rise of structuralism and the associated scientism in the Sixties intellectual climate, which often resulted in works that appear to reject authorial control and autonomy's subjective self-transformations. Claude Lévi-Strauss, the structuralist that was foremost in the minds of many Conceptual artists,<sup>155</sup> claims linguistics "presents us with a dialectical and totalizing entity but one outside (or beneath) consciousness and will. Language, an unreflecting totalization, is human reason which has its reasons and of which man knows nothing."<sup>156</sup> Structuralism's implication that relations are governed by laws that one may not be fully conscious of, was therefore useful to Conceptual artists as a way to demarcate the removal of autonomous artistic subjectivity. In order to get from under the conformity of the previous generation's way of doing things, from the kind of individual authorial control exemplified by Abstract expressionism, the systems of Conceptual art made the claim that authorship is freed from self-expression and decision making as it disappeared behind the work's internal logic. As was made evident earlier, Greenberg's notion of artistic autonomy that carried on the nineteenth-century tradition was under attack by Conceptual artists and others that were rejecting the image of the lone artistic individual creating masterpieces in his (typically a he) isolated New York studio. However, Conceptual art's very notion of art as an idea instead of a material object deals

<sup>155</sup> Robert Morris, Dan Graham, and Victor Burgin, among others, quote Lévi-Strauss.

<sup>156</sup> Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1966), 252.

with a relation between knowledge and its object as internal to the consciousness of the subject. In addition, there is the nagging problem with theories like structuralism that although they are devoted to demonstrating how subjects are just the product of symbolic systems or power structures, for which self-determining autonomy is mere illusion, they may themselves be conceived of as a symptom of conformity to the dominant model of technological scientism that emerged after the Second World War. Thus, in a contradictory fashion there was a clash of autonomous goals. On the one hand, structuralist systems can be said to operate autonomously and are thus useful models for Conceptual artists to use in order to limit authorial aspects, yet on the other hand Conceptual artists displayed a different keen sense of autonomy by attempting to redefine what art was by breaking free of existing constraints of mediums and markets. Since Conceptual artists in the Sixties were intent on dismissing Greenberg's aesthetic theories, which were based on his interpretation of Kant, a look at what Kant actually wrote on autonomy versus Greenberg's interpretations may add clarity to these contradictions.

In *Was ist Aufklärung?* Kant describes enlightenment as “man's release from his self-incurred tutelage. Tutelage is man's inability to make use of his understanding without direction from another,” and he claims that the motto of enlightenment is “Have courage to use your own reason.”<sup>157</sup> This kind of proclamation of will is often found in liberal democratic cultures where the term autonomy simplistically suggests the ability to choose, and a right to do so without interference. This idea reverberates in the nineteenth-century notion of art for art's sake as well as Greenberg's aesthetics where artistic autonomy is the negation of dependence. Artistic autonomy becomes another word for freedom. However, even Greenberg's version of artistic

<sup>157</sup> Immanuel Kant, “What is enlightenment,” <http://www.saylor.org/site/wp-content/uploads/2011/02/What-is-Enlightenment.pdf> (accessed October 16, 2013).

autonomy, as discussed in the previous chapter, recognizes the paradox of its freedom from society and its inevitably link to it. He identifies the core issue when he writes: “no culture can develop without a social basis, without a source of stable income and in the case of the avant-garde, this was provided by an elite among the ruling class of that society from which it assumed itself to be cut off, but to which it has always remained attached by an umbilical cord of gold.”<sup>158</sup> The decoupling of art’s source of income from its social function is Greenberg’s way out of the paradox and another way of articulating its distance from the rest of society. The “disinterestedness” of art’s autonomy is something that Greenberg calls “esthetic distance” or art’s detachment from practical reality that “permits you to experience everything at a remove” and is the “prime condition of esthetic experience.”<sup>159</sup> In “Towards a Newer Laocoon” Greenberg claims: “The arts lie safe now, each within its ‘legitimate boundaries ... Purity in art consists in the acceptance, willing acceptance, of the limitations of the medium of the specific art.’”<sup>160</sup> Thus his argument is that if art is to perform at its highest capacity then it should be independent of morality or politics and instead be self-regulating. Kant, on the other hand, never used the term “autonomy of art,” which was something Modernism inherited from German Idealists such as Friedrich Von Schiller. In contrast to Greenberg’s limited medium specific explorations of taste, Kant’s view of fine art was that it engendered a culture of mental powers that could lead to a more expansive cognitive end of autonomous subjectivity and freedom. When Kant writes about fine art as opposed to natural beauty there is a marked emphasis on

<sup>158</sup> Clement Greenberg, *Volume 1*, 11.

<sup>159</sup> Clement Greenberg, “Observations on Esthetic Distance,” in *Homemade Esthetic: Observations on Art and Taste* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 73 - 74.

<sup>160</sup> Clement Greenberg, *Volume 1*, 32.

engaging the mind and arousing a feeling of mental vitality that in some respects is very close to the goals of Conceptual art.<sup>161</sup>

Kant's analysis of autonomy (as distinct from artistic autonomy) is expanded in his *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* where he defines autonomy as "the property of the will by which it is a law unto itself (independent of the objects of volition)."<sup>162</sup> For the will to be truly independent it must be based on a universal law since only a "universal law is based on no interest and consequently can alone among all possible imperatives be unconditioned."<sup>163</sup> Thus the autonomous individual is one who is "subject only to laws which are made by himself and yet are universal."<sup>164</sup> However, how can one make one own laws and still be regulated by universal laws? In addition, how does one know that the laws one gives oneself are truly one's own, versus being under some known or unknown kind of constraint? Kant sees autonomy as a condition that is necessary to achieve and maintain freedom through not only the independence of choices, but also from the domination by other persons and from the domination of one's own inclinations. Autonomy is not simply equated with freedom of the will, but must be understood as the aim that a person with a free will must adopt if he or she is to preserve and promote their freedom of choice. It is something that they ought and can do, it assumes an obligation or a duty, but there is no guarantee they will do.

Autonomy for Kant is thus not just an ideal of self-fulfillment but also a moral ideal. The idea of making one's own laws that are at the same time universal means that the rule of

<sup>161</sup> For a detailed analysis of the difference between Greenberg and Kant's view of fine art see: Diarmuid Costello, "Greenberg's Kant and the Fate of Aesthetics in Contemporary Art Theory," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, Vol. 65, N0.2 (Spring, 2007), 217-228.

<sup>162</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* (New York: Harper & Row, 1956), 108.

<sup>163</sup> Ibid., 99.

<sup>164</sup> Ibid.

autonomy is acting on universalizable principles. In other words, when one gives oneself a law there is a demand to think of oneself in relation to others under a shared law. Self legislated laws that are based on some kind self-interest like greed or political motive would not be autonomous since they are beholden to those inclinations. What is necessary is for individuals to work out for themselves what is right to do and want to do it because it is the right thing based on rational practical principles that imply a moral ideal. The emphasis here is that Kant's autonomy does not describe a person's stand with respect to themselves, but rather with respect to other persons.

Kant's principle of autonomy stressed a replacement of the individual subject by the collective subject which requires a shift in the thinking about autonomy from a subjective viewpoint to one on that embraces all rational others. For Kant, "Only pluralism can be set against egoism, that is, the following way of thinking: to consider oneself and to behave not as containing the whole universe in oneself, but rather as a mere citizen of the world."<sup>165</sup> Lucien Goldmann, the Romanian born French philosopher wrote on Kant during Sixties, and was known for a dialectical Hegelian Marxist interpretation of literature in contrast to the then popular structuralist Marxism of Louis Althusser.<sup>166</sup> Goldmann argues that Kant highlights the fact that "man can attain the totality only in and through the community."<sup>167</sup> In opposition to an egotistical conception of autonomy, the idea of co-legislation merges a universalizable test that is interpreted distributively with the notion of freedom as subject to the law of reason. In Kant's *Critique of Aesthetic Judgement* he defines *sensus communis* as "the idea of a public sense, i.e. a

<sup>165</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Lewis White Beck (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1956), VII, I30.

<sup>166</sup> Louis Althusser will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 4, however it is worth noting that Goldmann considered Althusser's structuralism as a symptom of the dehumanizing ideology of capitalism.

<sup>167</sup> Lucien Goldmann, *Immanuel Kant* (London: NLB, 1971), 187.

critical faculty which in its reflective act take account of the mode of presentation of every one else, in order, as it were, to weigh its judgement with the collective reason of mankind.”<sup>168</sup>

Individuals are thus self-legislators to the extent that they are co-legislators.<sup>169</sup> As opposed to a universal morality that is imposed, for instance by God, the distributed conception of universality gives a person an external marker against which he or she can revise a perspective that is not unchanging and cast in stone. Instead, moral questions arise in context, as do the answers, and thus do not get sedimented into accepted states. A brief summary of Kant’s argument is that the value in seeking to act autonomously is not the privileging of oneself but rather the treating of oneself as an equal among equals. Consequently, this shared understanding of morality curbs our self-regarding tendencies and takes the concerns of others into account.<sup>170</sup> Nevertheless, it is important to remember that autonomy is made possible, not made necessary, by a free will.

Autonomy for Kant is a condition of overcoming our inclinations in our choice of actions, and a condition of co-operation, not domination, with others. It is a condition which is freely chosen but that can also be freely subverted. Kant’s autonomy is something that needs to be developed through a process of maturation and education, which naturally varies from person to person. He recognizes that we are imperfect rational beings, but that we can become better at being good and thus rational with education and cultivation. In terms of moral education Kant again emphasizes a shared understanding when he states: “one ought to cultivate a disposition of reciprocity—agreeableness, tolerance, mutual love, and respect.”<sup>171</sup> It is through this kind of reciprocity, a shared mutual understanding, that one becomes autonomous, and it is something

<sup>168</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Aesthetic Judgement*, trans. J.C. Meredith (Clarendon Press, 1911), 151-3.

<sup>169</sup> Katerina Deligiorgi, *The Scope of Autonomy: Kant and the Morality of Freedom*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 20.

<sup>170</sup> Ibid., 173.

<sup>171</sup> Kant, *Groundwork*, 121.

that needs to be perfected with practice. It is the only way that an individual can achieve its full potential and lead to what for Kant was the emergence of humanity from barbarism.

Kant's version of autonomy suggests a making of one's own rules or laws is at the same time the recognition of others as co-legislators and equals that causes it to take on a greater moral and ethical duty than the mere notion of individual self-improvement. Thus as opposed to Greenberg's version of Kant that leads to an independent and individualized form of art removed from politics and morality, the spirit that certain student movements and Conceptual art practices take up is one of an engagement in collective processes that have ethical undertones and recall a different kind of Kant. It is a Kant who is focused on reciprocity, equality, education and morality through self-legislation versus individualism. This was the kind of Kantian ideas that were necessary to overturn repressive regimes without reconstructing the same kind of power relations. The remainder of this chapter looks at various protest movements and Conceptual art practices and to what extent they can said to be related to a Kantian notion of collective autonomy through a making of one's own rules.

### **3.1 LeWitt's "Paragraphs"**

Sol LeWitt's use of rules in "Paragraphs" for the execution of a work and the elimination of subjectivity appear at first glance to be in harmony with that of structuralism and the techno/managerial science of the Sixties. The very notion of following rules suggests an affinity with a scientific way of thinking as opposed to the immediacy of the unfolding experience often attributed to artistic thinking. Yet, another way of looking at LeWitt's rules is that they are in accord with the ideals of the removal of hierarchies in the protest movements. The application of



his rules was aimed at breaking down a certain way of making art that had become hegemonic and supported by art institutions, which in turn were imbricated with the political establishment. LeWitt's rules were meant to make sure that the kind of expressionist art that was supported by the museum and gallery system could not be made. The idea was that there was no possibility of straying back into the conventional fold if the rules were adhered to. Like the Parisian students in May 1968 who in their call for absolute freedom decried that "it is forbidden to forbid," Conceptual art used rules in a contradictory way to achieve its goal of freedom from control.

While LeWitt's work from this period may have the look of science, he makes a very important distinction in the "paragraphs." He claims that the information is presented for its own sake and makes clear that "this kind of art is not theoretical or illustrative of theories; it is intuitive, it is involved with all types of mental processes and it is purposeless."<sup>172</sup> The work and the rules used to create it imply that it consists of raw information for its own sake, and not because of it having some value or use. Why is he insisting on Conceptual art being "purposeless?" The idea of art for art's sake version of artistic autonomy seems at odds with the rest of the "Paragraphs." Despite the desire to eliminate subjectivity and to plan and design everything before hand, the long-standing tradition of art as being purposeless persists. There is the possibility that LeWitt was just parodying art-for-art's sake, however, in a lecture at The Nova Scotia College of Art and Design (NSCAD) in March 1970 he said:

Yes, our times are politically oriented and I'm sure there's going to be some kind of art that is really political art. I haven't seen any yet and most of it really – I mean, there is no Goya. There has to be a Goya today or something of that sort, to use the social ferment and to make art out of it. I think maybe the camera's a

<sup>172</sup> Sol Lewitt, "Paragraphs," 12.

better vehicle. And cinema is maybe the best to do this because it is a ready-made sort of thing. But who knows? I can't see around the next corner.<sup>173</sup>

Thus any use of art, such as for political goals, does not appear to be on the radar for LeWitt who only suggests that cinema may be a better means for bringing home explicit political goals. The notion of art as being purposeless was still very much ingrained in artist's beliefs.<sup>174</sup> John Cage, who was very influential for many Conceptual artists, described his experimental music as "purposeless play" in a 1957 lecture. Conceptual art's opposition to art for art's sake seems to make its association with purposelessness appear paradoxical, however, the aesthetic experience of purposelessness can also be viewed as a refusal to participate in the functionality of society and the maximization of profit in all aspects of life. Thus it provides Conceptual art an oppositional form of resistance without having to explicitly state a political end.

Theodore Adorno's theories on purposelessness provide a means to illuminate Conceptual art's negative way of looking at the experience of art. To a certain extent Adorno inherits the tradition of art for art's sake in that he believes that autonomous art lacks a direct social purpose, although at the same time he insists that art still functions as a commodity.<sup>175</sup> Adorno follows the historical view that as artists became free of church and court patronage at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup>

<sup>173</sup> Sol Lewitt, "Sol LeWitt: March 1970," in *Artists Talk: 1969-1977*, ed. Peggy Gale, (Halifax: The Press of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, 2004), 43.

<sup>174</sup> Joseph Kosuth writes about the "uselessness" of art in a 1967 gallery "Statement" (New York: Lannis Gallery [Museum of Normal Art]).

<sup>175</sup> Adorno's aesthetic theory merges the Kantian and German Idealist notions of art as autonomous with the Marxian notion of commodity fetish. Marx's critique of commodity fetishism states that the principle of exchange is now the dominant principle of social relations in industrial societies. Art works like other products of labour under capitalism hide the work that has gone into them, thus appearing to have a life of their own and, since they have no instrumental use, they inspire near superstitious reverence. The relation between autonomy and commodity is dynamic, where the two apparently contradictory features stand in a reciprocal relationship. Therefore according to Adorno, art works question a society where all is subject to the principle of exchange. The fetish character of art works is not mere delusion, but a condition of their truth.

century, resulting in their work becoming autonomous, however he additionally argues that their art simultaneously became commodified through the entry into the capitalist market place.

Adorno negatively uses the idea of artistic autonomy, but he claims that if art serves only itself then it has lost its governing social purpose, a situation that is increasingly problematic for art. If it has lost its social purpose then, as Adorno asks at the beginning of *Aesthetic Theory*, what right does it have to exist?<sup>176</sup> Autonomous artworks, for Adorno, have what may be called a social situation but no direct social function. He argues that: “insofar as a social function may be predicated for works of art, it is the function of having no function.”<sup>177</sup> Adorno’s version of autonomous art has the purpose of creating something without purpose, in other words it is a practice that does not serve any other practice or it is an end in itself. In this regard artistic autonomy can be seen as an actual achievement of the market, and its freedom is thus at least in part illusory. This dichotomy between autonomy and commodification is central to Adorno’s theory of art and it is the dialectical relation that he calls the “double character of art – something that severs itself from empirical reality and thereby from society’s functional context and yet is at the same time part of empirical reality and society’s functional context.”<sup>178</sup>

By the standards of a society that privileges instrumentality, something that is useless is a violation of the Enlightenment principle of universal functionality. “By crystallizing in itself as something unique to itself, rather than complying with existing social norms and qualifying as ‘socially useful,’ it criticizes society by merely existing.”<sup>179</sup> For Adorno, art is defined negatively by its relation to what it is not. It is through a refusal of social function that autonomous art

<sup>176</sup> Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 1.

<sup>177</sup> Ibid., 227.

<sup>178</sup> Ibid., 252.

<sup>179</sup> Ibid., 226.

acquires its critical function. By standing apart from society, autonomous art becomes more genuinely critical than explicitly political art. Adorno makes this clear when he states: “What is social in art is its immanent movement against society, not its manifest opinions.” Autonomy is Modernist art’s resource against administered society. This however is a tenuous situation since autonomous art is vulnerable to exploitation or co-option by the capitalist marketplace to which it cedes its autonomy. Precisely because of their standing apart from society that artworks can acquire a certain cachet that makes them worth appropriating, and a work that might function as social critique could also come to be regressive. Art works, Adorno claims, must express themselves as “wounds of society” and the “critical zones of artworks are those where it hurts.” They must become “eloquent with wordless gesture” in order to light the untruth of the social situation.<sup>180</sup> Adorno states in his dialectical fashion that artistic form participates in domination as well as reconciliation. The reason for this is that art needs society’s poison to resist its civilizing repression and to “heal the wound with the spear that inflicted it.”<sup>181</sup> Art recollects what society represses, and what society could become if domination would really turn into reconciliation. However, since art works lack actuality, it is a testimony that is ambiguous and is thus only a promise. Since art pretends reconciliation exists, something that is impossible in the present, art needs to be criticized and even negative towards itself. The most that art can contribute is a model of reconciliatory praxis, to expose the antimony, but never the actualization of emancipation. The significant point for Adorno is that even though the prevailing socio-economic conditions continually thwart utopian possibilities, modern art gives a negative testimony for there being a possibility.

<sup>180</sup> Ibid., 237.

<sup>181</sup> Ibid., 134.

Conceptual art's negativity towards itself as art can best be articulated through its attempt to detach art from the art object. Writing in the second issue of *Art-Language* magazine Michael Thompson describes the central tenet of Conceptual art as "the importance of the non-importance of the art object."<sup>182</sup> What he means is that art objects are still produced, but they are not important as objects. He claims, "It is the art object that connects and aligns art with the social structure and so conceptual art, in detaching art from the art-object, is sloughing off the middle class – is severing the alignment of art with the present social structure."<sup>183</sup> Thompson's conclusion is that Conceptual art, despite its sometime scholastic and neutral appearance, was in fact "a naked bid for power at the very highest level – the wrestling from the groups at present at the top of our social structure, of control over the symbols of society."<sup>184</sup> Notwithstanding Thompson's hyperbole, LeWitt's rules could also be seen as a checklist for making a different kind of art that did not fit the established mold and thus operated in a fashion aimed at dismantling existing social hierarchies.

One of the social hierarchies that LeWitt's rules were clearly aimed at was to free the artist from the control of the art critic. In addition to setting out the rules for a new kind of art, the "paragraphs" disputes the "secret language that art critics use" and thus sets up the artist as the appropriate interpreter of his own work. The Conceptual artist designs a "pre-set" plan of the work, and takes control of her work's discourse from the critic since the artist provides all the necessary information. Conceptual artist Douglas Huebler is quoted as saying: "What I say is part of the art work. I don't look to critics to say things about my work. I tell them what it's

<sup>182</sup> Thompson, "Conceptual Art," 82.

<sup>183</sup> Ibid., 82.

<sup>184</sup> Ibid., 82.

about.”<sup>185</sup> The critic’s role in legitimizing the work and its place in the art institution was in jeopardy of being usurped by the artist since there is nothing more to interpret beyond the informational plan. The artist’s occupation as a romantic individual creator was being substituted by the requirement to criticize via an investigation of different kinds of communicatory systems that often involved participation or collaboration.

The non-importance of the art object is something that New York art dealer and curator, Seth Siegelaub, quickly came to realize by concluding that if Conceptual art was about ideas then “you don’t need a gallery to show ideas.”<sup>186</sup> The notion that Conceptual art could take place anywhere allowed the ephemerality of publications and magazines to become an important alternative form of exhibition space and distribution for the ‘dematerialized’ practices of Conceptual art. There was a recognition of publications as a new kind of artistic medium and distribution form that might circumvent the expertise of the art critic, the exclusivity of the gallery, and therefore transform the reception of art. Siegelaub was among those who pioneered the use of printed publications – booklets, catalogues and magazines – in the display and distribution of Conceptual art. His publications such as the *One Month - March 1969* contained an exhibition that took place solely in a catalogue. Dan Graham and Joseph Kosuth used magazine and newspaper ads as a medium to display and distribute their mostly textual art works that only existed in that format and thus disturbed the notion of taste and rarity by encasing their work in a popular vernacular. Perhaps the most famous direct example of publication writing as Conceptual art is the editorial introduction to the first issue of *Art-Language* where the editors

<sup>185</sup> Douglas Huebler, quoted in Charles Harrison, “On Exhibitions and the World at large: Seth Siegelaub in Conversation with Charles Harrison,” *Studio International* 178, n0. 917 (December 1969): 202-3, 203.

<sup>186</sup> Alberro, *Conceptual art and the Politics of Publicity*, 16.

muse, “Suppose the following hypothesis is advanced: that this editorial, in itself an attempt to evince some outlines as to what ‘Conceptual art’ is, is held out as a ‘Conceptual art’ work.”<sup>187</sup>

The text of written theory, a most non-visual practice, is held up as a possible work of visual art that dispenses with the art object and if it is art, it is disguised inside what is normally considered a non-art context. The norms of what signal a work of art, and the institutions that validate them, are missing from these practices and thus confound the habits of their being recognized as art.

By producing work that was not recognized as art, Conceptual artists believed that they were circumventing the rules of the conventional art world. If one of the traditional norms was the sale of art objects and their use as status symbols for the rich and powerful, then the elimination of their exchange value was believed to collapse this hierarchy. It displayed an ethical demand that mirrored those of the student protest movements and the New Left to collectively as artists attempt to change the world for the better by eliminating the control of the ruling class and turn the conversation about art from possession to the art itself. It can be read as an appropriation of the New Left ideals for artistic purposes. Jan Dibbets displayed this attitude when he stated” Sell my work? To sell isn’t part of the art. Maybe there will be people idiotic enough to buy what they could make themselves. So much the worse for them.”<sup>188</sup> Seth Seigelaub echoed this sentiment when he said: “There was also the underlying desire and attempt to avoid this commercialization of artistic production, a resistance nourished, for the most part, by the historic context: the Vietnam War and subsequent questioning of the American way of life. This was certainly the more seriously sustained attempt to date to avoid the fatality of the art object as

<sup>187</sup> Terry Atkinson, “Introduction,” *Art-Language: The Journal of conceptual art* (Volume 1 Number 1, May 1969): 1-10.

<sup>188</sup> Lippard, “Escape Attempts,” 28.

commodity.”<sup>189</sup> The elimination of expressive individual styles through the use of non-art forms attacked the cherished notions of artistic genius, originality, and style that had been the mainstays of ruling class art and, at least temporarily, made items unsalable. Non-art objects like photographs, maps, and documents were thought to be visual representations that could not be integrated into the ‘regime’ of the commercial and institutional art world order. Of course, it was only a matter of time before the art market caught up and Conceptual artworks became saleable. What was underestimated was that the art market, like the larger capitalist market in general, thrives on novelty and change, which Conceptual art provided in all its aspects.<sup>190</sup>

### 3.2 The Port Huron Statement

In Western industrialized countries economic growth had become determined by the ability to assure technical progress and organize the entire economy.<sup>191</sup> Driven by economic and Cold War pressures, not only was there a massive growth in higher education research linked to government and corporate institutions, but there was also a coming into prominence of private, extra-academic research institutions devoted to providing information and consultation to public

<sup>189</sup> Charles Harrison, “Conceptual Art, the aesthetic and the end(s) of art,” in *Themes in Contemporary Art*, ed. Paul Wood (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 61.

<sup>190</sup> An example of how the art market’s commercial logic appropriated Conceptual art into its commodified realm is Dan Graham’s *Homes for America* magazine piece. The form of the work that has become privileged in institutions and art history books is the ‘original’ paste-up produced for the December 1966 issue of *Arts Magazine*, or the revised paste-up produced for exhibition after 1970. The actual ‘original’ in *Arts Magazine* is rarely documented or displayed. The magazine work was meant to displace the modern art space from its primal gallery location back into social space, however, over time the two most individual forms of the work that are limited in number became more valued than the ‘original’ work that existed in the thousands.

<sup>191</sup> Alain Touraine, *The May Movement: Revolt and Reform* (New York: Random House, 1971), p. 29.



policy makers.<sup>192</sup> ‘Think tanks’ such as the RAND Corporation and the Hudson Institute were spun off from weapons development that used engineering, mathematical and economic analysis for Robert McNamara’s Defense Department. The Kennedy and Johnson administrations sought the advice of these ‘think tanks’ as a way to bring about a more ‘rational’ means of evaluating policy initiatives.<sup>193</sup> The political technocracy or government by elites that emerged in the 1950s and carried on into the Sixties were often viewed as being preferable to the perils of democratic participation, which was seen as being irrational and untrustworthy. This kind of justification of the social hierarchies hid the fact that the specialized knowledge, as Henri Lefebvre has argued, was actually being transmitted in an authoritarian manner and managed bureaucratically.<sup>194</sup> It was the complacency towards centralized technocratic bureaucracy that the student and protest movement in the Sixties sought to counter. Theirs was an attempt to wrest control of their lives from the elites through grassroots political engagement and to restore confidence in basic democratic principles.

Typical of how many young people felt, Denis Hayes, who organized the first Earth Day in 1970, said that during the mid Sixties he was profoundly depressed by the many ways in which his situation was falling short of the American Dream that he was taught about in his youth.<sup>195</sup> His was an example of the contradiction between what established elites were advocating and what people were actually experiencing in their day-to-day lives. The recognition of this contradiction is what helped open up a gap in the possibilities of what could be thought, and

<sup>192</sup> Brick, 9.

<sup>193</sup> Ibid., 9.

<sup>194</sup> Henri Lefebvre, *The Explosion: Marxism and the French Revolution* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1969), 145

<sup>195</sup> Denis Hayes in *Earth Days*, Documentary, directed by Robert Stone (Robert Stone Productions, 2009).

allowed questions to be asked of conventional social and institutional practices that spurred an impetus for change.

The most important student movement organization in the United States in the Sixties was the Students for Democratic Society (SDS). It emerged from the student wing of the old League for Industrial Democracy (LID) founded in 1905, which was kind of a think tank for the Socialist Party and financed by trade unions. However, by the late 1950s LID had largely degenerated into a kind of pensioner's organization and the SDS was down to only three chapters from its original seventy.<sup>196</sup> Nevertheless, the SDS chapter at the University of Michigan had some very talented members in Al Haber and Tom Hayden. In 1962 Hayden wrote a draft manifesto and submitted it for collective revision at the SDS conference in the summer of 1962, which took place in Port Huron, Michigan, a summer camp run by the United Auto Workers.<sup>197</sup> It became known as the Port Huron Statement (PHS) and was the defining document of the Sixties student movements.

The PHS is a wide ranging critique of social, political, and economic development in the United States. It summarizes the dysfunctional political system and criticizes the military-industrial complex, the insanity of the Cold War, and the simplistic U.S. foreign policy of anti-communism and colonialism. The document delineates the poverty of vision of those in control and the increasing motivation of the "people of this generation" to take action to eradicate the ills of the present moment. What was particularly insightful about the PHS is that Hayden and the SDSers' involvement in the civil rights movement gave them a very different perspective on the economic prosperity of the early Sixties. While many were touting a new affluent society and a rise in prosperity for all classes, the PHS is sensitive to those in the margins who were not

<sup>196</sup> Paul Berman, *A Tale of Two Utopias* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1996), 42.

<sup>197</sup> *Ibid.*, 45.

participating in the prosperity. SDSers had first hand experience with African Americans in the Deep South and their difficult conditions of poverty that seemed remote from the increasing prosperity in white middle-class and working-class America. In addition to critiquing racism, discrimination and politics for the conditions of African Americans, the PHS places a good deal of emphasis on the adverse effects of technological innovation. Automation and technology were seen as replacing workers and increasing “structural unemployment” rather than “mere leisure for all and greater achievement of needs for all people in the world – a crisis instead of economic utopia.” The recognition of displacements by the PHS is something that often gets lost in the histories of this period. The PHS accurately points out that the “have-nots” and the “publicly disinherited groups” were being driven “further from opportunity as the high-technology society demands better education to get into the production mainstream.” Many of the new occupations driven by technological innovation depended on formal education in a way that had not been true of older manual forms of work. The conundrum is articulated by pointing out that those who are trapped in the rut of poverty are most often unable to overcome the collection of forces working against them.

The aspect of the PHS that is particularly relevant to this dissertation is its focus on participatory democracy. The PHS bemoans the fact that American values such as freedom and equality for each individual, and government of, by, and for the people have been eroded and lost through a growing complacency. The activism of the SDS was awakened, according to the PHS, by the recognition of the paradox that these described values were not being adhered to by governments that were engaged in discriminatory and oppressive policies towards their own people, and were endangering all of humanity in the Cold War race. It sets out a goal of overturning the pervasive feeling that there were no alternatives, the emptiness caused by the

press of complexity, and the fact that “each individual sees apathy in his fellows perpetuates the common reluctance to organize for change.”<sup>198</sup> Dominant institutions are called to account for blunting the minds of potential critics, and the entrenchment of these institutions is seen as being sufficient to dissipate the energies of protest and reform, thus limiting expectations. The PHS recognizes that material improvements in society since the Second World War have worked to weaken the case for further change. The contentment amidst prosperity is called a “glaze above deeply felt anxieties” about peoples role in the new world. Nevertheless, these anxieties also, according to the PHS, create a “yearning” or “spark” for change and a search for “truly democratic alternatives” to the present for a “worthy and fulfilling human enterprise.” It was on this basis that the PHS was put forth, “as an effort rooted in the ancient, still unfulfilled conception of man attaining determining influence over his circumstances of life.” Thus a mix of humanism, liberalism and socialism was the PHS’s solution to revitalizing democracy.

The PHS articulates a view that many have an “unrealized potential for self-cultivation, self-direction, self-understanding and creativity.” The goal of “man and society should be human independence,” but it is careful to add that this “kind of independence does not mean egoistic individualism.” Human relationships involving “fraternity and honesty” are noted as a fundamental condition of future survival and to overcome the distances between both individuals and countries. The key wording in the PHS is:

As a social system we seek the establishment of a democracy of individual participation, governed by two central aims: that the individual share in those social decisions determining quality and direction of his life; that society be

<sup>198</sup> “Port Huron Statement of the Students for a Democratic Society, 1962,” <http://coursesa.matrix.msu.edu/~hst306/documents/huron.html> (accessed June 5, 2015).

organized to encourage independence in men and provide the media for their common participation.<sup>199</sup>

The notion of self-government at a grassroots level resonates clearly in the PHS and underscores that the notion of democracy for the SDS was an activity not merely an arrangement. Instead of a democracy preferred by the political establishment, which restricted constituents to casting a vote once every four years, the PHS advocated that the thrust of decision making of any social consequence was to be carried out by “public groupings.” The question of democracy became more pressing than merely a way to govern; it was seen as a social system where people enjoyed more personal autonomy and a chance to participate in decision-making processes. Politics becomes the art of collectively creating an acceptable pattern of social relations and bringing people out of isolation and into community. Throughout the PHS there is a consistent emphasis on individual and personal commitment but always with the communal “we” as in “we as individuals take the responsibility for encounter and resolution.” A reconstitution of the self, in conjunction with others, will then lead to a reconstitution of society. This notion of fulfilling unrealized individual potential as well as collectively determining decisions instead of being implemented from above is similar to the Kantian notion of autonomy and self-rule. These same kind of ideas were also being proposed in other student movements elsewhere.

Student movements in France, particularly towards the end of the Sixties, similarly called for self-representation in the form of direct democracy, particularly in factories and workplaces where it was known as *autogestion*. The French looked to the third-world in what Kristen Ross argues was the recognition that through their wars of liberation beginning in the late 1950s, the

<sup>199</sup> Ibid.

colonized had emerged as a new figuration of the people in a political sense.<sup>200</sup> For many on the left in France it was Maoism that provided the means to make the transition, to shift the focus from the colonial peasant militant back to the worker at home, and thus to acknowledge that “Vietnam is in our factories.”<sup>201</sup> French Maoists imported revolutionary practices developed in a peasant society for use in the factories of late modern France and thus the rise in popularity of the idea of self-rule through “workers councils.” *Autogestion* was an emancipation strategy that advocated for self-determination and self-administration through the transformation of social decision making mechanisms, while allowing for self-realization to escape the bondage of blocked individuality through the dependence on hierarchically organized bureaucracies that governed all aspects of life in modern society. Elsewhere in Europe, movements with similar demands for autonomy were found in the *Workerism* (*Operaismo*) of Italy, and in Germany where student leader Rudi Dutschke advocated a re-creating the worker councils of the Paris Commune of 1871.<sup>202</sup> The common factor in these movements was an interrelated dual process of self-realization through self-determination along with a collective sense of self-governing.<sup>203</sup>

What separated the old left from the New Left was that the old left was associated with political parties and trade union affiliations. By the Sixties the old left could be described as

<sup>200</sup> Kristen Ross, *May '68 and its Afterlives*, (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2002), 10.

<sup>201</sup> Ibid., 11.

<sup>202</sup> Berman, 48.

<sup>203</sup> Certainly there were differences between the different student movements on either side of the Atlantic, but there were also similarities that united them around what was to be called the New Left. The intellectual currents with which the New Left became known were associated with such leading social thinkers as C. Wright Mills, Herbert Marcuse, E.P. Thomson, Raymond Williams and Cornelius Castoriadis. This emerging transnational New Left and their ideas were inseparable from the publications by which they were distributed. In Britain there was E.P. Thomson's *Reasoner* and the suitably named *New Left Review* of Stuart Hall, Charles Taylor and others. In France there was *Arguments*, *L'Internationale Situationniste*, and Castoriadis's *Socialisme ou Barbarie*. While in the U.S. *Liberation* and *Monthly Review* performed similar roles, and in Italy there were many publications such as *Quanderni Rossi* and *Classe Operaia*.

almost entirely tied into established politics of parliamentary maneuvers. For the New Left, it was evident that social change was not going to come about through parliamentary party politics, it would only happen through individual commitment and collective volunteerism. The old left's continued identification with party politics and all of its compromises and unholy alliances provided fodder for a dramatic shift in thinking for those in the left. As a result the New Left looked for other alternatives and found more positive developments such as the Cuban Revolution and other struggles in the Third-World, which to them appeared to be better models than those of the industrialized West or East. Writers such as Castoriadis were redefining socialism as the struggle of people to gain control over their activities through *autogestion* or self-management in order to shake off the paralyzing legacy of traditional concepts and inherited modes of thought. The contradictory actions of the old left were found to be wanting and the New Left took it upon itself to make its own rules for a new era and a new generation.

The shift in emphasis to that of the notion of alienation rather than exploitation is evident in the PHS right from the very beginning of the document with phrases that outline student life as “feeling the press of complexity upon the emptiness of life” and “deep-felt anxieties about their role in the new world.” Alienation is connected to disenfranchisement brought on by a technologically rationalized society and is remedied in the PHS by individual liberation through participatory democracy. Its ideas on alienation appear to be informed by thinkers such as Herbert Marcuse, R.D. Laing and the existentialism of Jean-Paul Sartre. Marcuse's *Eros and Civilization*, first published in English in 1956, in particular explores this notion of alienation. Marcuse begins with Freud's argument from *Civilization and its Discontents* that the sublimation of sex produces the energy for progress, and that progress is the substitution of guilt for happiness. Marcuse revises Freud by suggesting that “the irreconcilable conflict is not between

work (reality principle) and Eros (pleasure principle), but between alienated labour (performance principle) and Eros.”<sup>204</sup> Thus Marcuse believes that the problems of society stem from “surplus repression” produced by specific historical institutions and that a socialist society has the possibility of enabling “non-alienated libidinal work” and a “non-repressive civilization based on non-repressive sublimation.”<sup>205</sup>

Marcuse went on to write *The One Dimensional Man* in 1964, which became one of the most celebrated books of the student and counter-culture movements in the Sixties. It incorporates his analysis of human oppression from *Eros and Civilization* by claiming that advanced industrial nations are substituting alienated consumer gratifications for real happiness: “we may distinguish both true and false needs. ‘False’ are those which are superimposed upon the individual by particular social interests in his repression: the needs which perpetuate toil, aggressiveness, misery, and injustice.”<sup>206</sup> The idea that false needs are interjected onto the inner dimension of individuals also implies that somewhere in the individual unconscious is the reality of an “inner freedom.” It thus designates a “private space” in which man may become and remain “himself.”<sup>207</sup> For Marcuse, it is through the redefinition of “individual needs” that a “new historical subject” will emerge as an oppositional consciousness and out of which a new society could be built. Among sixties radicals it was assumed that any meaningful change would have to be accompanied, if not preceded, by a change in the nature of subjectivity or in other words a change in consciousness. Consciousness was also a main concern of R.D Laing’s 1967 book *The*

<sup>204</sup> Herbert Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization: A philosophical Inquiry into Freud* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1955), 47.

<sup>205</sup> Ibid., 47.

<sup>206</sup> Herbert Marcuse, *One Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1964), 4-5.

<sup>207</sup> Ibid., 10.



*Politics of Experience*, which was another highly influential source for student and counterculture movements. While Laing was coming from a clinical analysis of mental illness versus Marcuse's New Left Marxist critique of capitalism, they both believed that only a liberated conscious from the constraints of alienation could bring about revolutionary social change. Laing argues, "Humanity is estranged from its authentic possibilities."<sup>208</sup> He writes of a split in our experience between the inner and outer worlds that echoes his earlier work in *The Divided Self*, 1960. Thus for Laing, as for Marcuse, the word "authentic" brings to mind a Sartrean existential alienation where the life world of a technocratic and dominating society is substituted for an authentic world from which individuals are divorced, but have the possibility of retrieving through a change in consciousness.

Similar notions of authenticity and commitment are clearly evident in the PHS when it states that "men have unrealized potential for self-cultivation, self-direction, self-understanding, and creativity." In the PHS, as in Marcuse and Laing, there is a certain humanistic, Romantic and Modernist view of a heroic struggle for selfhood by an individual against a resistant and hostile world. However, the PHS often articulates mutuality in this struggle that is a call to action in a more immediately collective way than what is found in Marcuse and Laing. The "we" in the PHS is a stress on fraternity, common participation, and voluntary associations that are not private searches but collective in the sense that the self is magnified through participating in a community. The limitations of an individual to make a difference against the oppressive technocratic regime is transcended by being a part of something bigger and better. The pertinent ethical question embedded in the PHS is how ought we to live together?

<sup>208</sup> R.D. Laing, *The Politics of Experience* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1967), xiv.

The collective “we” is an aspect of Conceptual art that is important to collaborative practices such as those of A&L, which I will cover in more detail in chapter 4. However, the very fact that many Conceptual works often included text and photographs point to a desire to collaborate indirectly through the work in which the audience recreates the artists steps in the photo and textual narrative as in Acconci’s *Following Piece*, 1969. The many examples of rules in Conceptual works in this chapter, is of course a form of collaboration in which artists elicit participation with their audiences to achieve a collective stance.

### **3.3 Project Class**

Since the projects demanded a new kind of reading and cognitive awareness from the viewer, it stands to reason that many of the first exhibitions dedicated to Conceptual art were held at colleges and art schools such as those organized by Seth Siegelaub in 1968 at Bradford Junior College in Massachusetts and Windham College in Putney, Vermont. The Nova Scotia College of Art and Design is an example of an art school that transitioned from craft based art into an internationally renowned school that was at the forefront of Conceptual art practices between 1967 and 1973. The artists who came to the school during this time included Joseph Kosuth, Lawrence Weiner, Daniel Buren, Douglas Huebler, Dan Graham, Vito Acconci, N.E. Thing Co., Joseph Beuys, among others. The Project Class at NSCAD was the epicenter of Conceptual practices run by David Askevold between 1969 and 1972, and which coincided with the formative years of Conceptual art. The genesis of the idea behind the class was originally to invite artists to come to the school for a period of time and work with students while Askevold’s

role was to be a coordinator of the program and an instructor in between artist visits.<sup>209</sup> Rather than discussing artists' work in a vacuum, the intent was to give students the opportunity to interact and socialize directly with artists, many of whom were young and in the early stages of their careers when information in print was not available. However, because of the school's modest financing, the program was thought to be too expensive to be carried out in this fashion. The compromise that Askevold came up with was to interface with the artists by telephone and mail instead of in person and this became the rationale for the course. However, in the end many of the artists came to visit in person anyway. They participated in not only the Project Class but also Garry Kennedy's Art Now seminar on contemporary art, gave lectures to the school at large, and exhibiting their work at the College galleries.

The Project Class was structured so that students could work on their individual projects concurrently with other projects and according to Askevold: "The artist was the author, students could be considered apprentices, and my role was to monitor the process."<sup>210</sup> Most of the students at the time were working with text, performance as well as film and video, which were just introduced into the College in 1970. Askevold claimed that the class set out to question the premises and assumptions of art making procedures such as what are the sources of one's ideas and how they are being addressed.<sup>211</sup>

The projects that were submitted by artists varied from very open-ended ones that left the decisions largely up to the students to others that had more specific instructions. However, aside

<sup>209</sup> David Askevold, "The Project Class," in *Conceptual Art: The NSCAD Connection 1967 – 1973* (Halifax: Anna Leonowens Gallery, 2001), 38.

<sup>210</sup> Ibid., 38.

<sup>211</sup> Ibid., 38.

from several that needed the use of a camera, none of the projects mentioned any requirement to use a known or traditional form of art making. For instance, details of Sol LeWitt's project were:

1. A work that uses the idea of error.
2. A work that uses the idea of incompleteness.
3. A work that uses the idea of infinity.
4. A work that uses the idea of completeness.
5. A work that uses the idea of stupidity.
6. A work that is subversive.
7. A work that is not original.

These could be done in any form chosen by the student. Please ask your students not to do more than two of the above.<sup>212</sup>

The exploration of ideas was more important than any emphasis on execution or technique.

Similarly Lawrence Weiner's project *Removals Halfway between the Equator and the North Pole*, 1969, called for "The extent of and documentation (if any) of the removals is completely in the domain of the students." The "if any" almost suggesting that it doesn't necessarily have to be carried out, much like Weiner's 1968 statement piece:

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

The art resides in the construction of the idea, so a physical object is not strictly necessary. Mel Bochner's *Phenomenology of a Room*, 1969, project involved the measuring of a classroom by

<sup>212</sup> Garry Neill Kennedy, *The Last Art College: Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, 1968-1978* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2012), 11.

the students in every possible way they could think of, but added that “It doesn’t matter to me what the specific details are or how they are presented.” Douglas Huebler’s *Variable Piece #5*, 1969, project called for a collaborative project of ten students to fabricate a myth, which turned out to be Askevold’s favorite when the students created a fictitious “Haliburton Art School.”<sup>213</sup> Other projects had more specific instructions as in Robert Smithson’s *Mud Flow* in which he called for “1000 tons of mud dumped from a dump truck over a rocky or stony cliff.” Dan Graham and Lucy Lippard also gave more detailed instructions for taking a series of photographs, but the photographs were only for documenting ideas in a matter of fact way as opposed to encouraging a fine photography approach.

What is evident from these projects is the breath of cross disciplinary ideas that the artists imported from their own Conceptual art practices – ranging from phenomenology to anthropology (myth), linguistics and cybernetics – that showed a focus on the changing discourse of what art could be. The question that seems pertinent at this time is how these instructions or rules from the artists enabled the students to make (or not make) their own rules about art. Askevold’s description of the project class process as “The artist was the author, students could be considered apprentices,” is problematic in that it seems to perpetuate a hierarchy, not to mention that it goes counter to Conceptual art’s attempts to undermine conventional notions of authorship. Notwithstanding, the projects themselves appear to be attempts by the artists to encourage new and different aspects of art’s possibilities and concentrate on the generation of ideas as art rather than on creating objects. As in Weiner’s case, the making of something seems to be almost unnecessary. Rather than an artist/apprentice

<sup>213</sup> Askevold, 38.

relationship, these projects appeared to work in a different manner. By carrying out instructions to create the piece, students participated in the creation of the work and thus something of the artist's creative experience was communicated to the participants. There is reciprocal flow in this kind of participation as opposed to the usual flow in a master/apprentice relationship. The artists proposed works and the participants engaged their minds and bodies in making decisions in how to execute the works as the process crossed back and forth across those social boundaries. The artists gave the students a glimpse into their way of thinking about art through the students' own interpretation of the instructions. The use of rules to break rules resulted in both a different form of pedagogy and learning. The teacher/student relationship was thus a more collaborative one versus the traditional hierarchical one and consequently, to use Kantian terminology, the students self-legislated their own rules to the extent that they were co-legislators of the work in a parliament that included the artists.

What took place in the Project Class embodied almost all the demands made by the Hornsey students during the Hornsey Revolt, detailed in Chapter 1. The artist projects questioned the role of art and how it relates to the world at large instead of focusing on medium and craft issues; they emphasized interdisciplinary investigation; and they were carried out in a way that appeared to emphasize a more equal partnership between students and artist/teachers. The connecting of student's real life to learning in art was important in terms of the ability for students to create connections and apprehend existing social situations versus compliance with oppressive systems or just learning what others are saying. This attitude was diametrically opposed to the situation in British art schools described in the previous chapter where, for instance, art students at St. Martins were required to punch a time clock and were hounded if they did not put in enough

hours at school.<sup>214</sup> The interdisciplinary approach presented opportunities to explore diverse ways of knowing in which the students could use to make meaning of their life experiences and to broaden understanding of others' realities. This was not a process of transferring information about making objects from teacher to student, but about a kind of making one's own way in the world through art. Conceptual art opened the possibilities for art education to be revamped in a way that was not previously imaginable with conventional practices that were based on repeatable formal techniques versus ideas.

### **3.4 More Rules**

N.E. Thing Co., the husband and wife team of Iain and Ingrid Baxter, excelled at not only breaking rules, but also ridiculing existing art world rules. N.E. Thing Co. was a legally formed company that attended business trade fairs and supported pee-wee hockey teams at a time when most artists wanted nothing to do with corporations. Additionally, the art works N.E. Thing Co. produced were anything but traditional and encompassing everything from a variety of constructed objects made with vinyl or vacuum-packed forms, to photographs, installations, and a myriad of lookalike business documents, maps and telexes. I will concentrate on two types of documents they produced called Aesthetically Claimed Things (*ACT*) and Aesthetically Rejected Things (*ART*) that use the kind of forms that Conceptual art has largely become associated with: language, photography, and documents.

<sup>214</sup> Author's conversation with Tom Burrows (July 23, 2015) who attended St. Martins post-graduate sculpture program 1967-68.

*ACT* and *ART* were issued sometimes as official looking documents complete with a corporate seal, and other times just as photographs with the seal and felt pen writing on it. The certificates appeared to mimic the authority of bureaucratic art institutions that were the purveyors of taste in deciding what was art and what was not art. The N.E. Thing Co. approach that was partly humorous, partly ironic, and partly serious, Aesthetically Claimed Things were non-art things, while Aesthetically Rejected Things were established art world things. *ART* rejected the work of artists such as Robert Smithson's non-sites in *ART #16*, and Ellsworth Kelly (*ART # 11*) in addition to a number of *Artforum* covers. On the other hand, *ACTs* were often photographs of local Canadian industrial landscapes or clear-cuts that would normally not be of very much interest. *ACTs* were infused with issues that the Baxters felt were important such as the environment, economic exploitation and waste, consumerism and geo-political borders. N.E. Thing Co. was fundamentally rejecting the authority of the New York art establishment to set the rules for what was art and what was not, and in turn assumed that authority for itself.

N.E. Thing Co.'s "Position Statement" from 1971 claims that "The role of an 'ARTIST' in society today is constructed by a series of negative structures" which act to propel artists into the "fringes of the sources of power and its servants, the media."<sup>215</sup> It argues the necessity to free artists from these constraints by developing a financial base, as N.E. Thing Co. did by turning itself into a business organization to generate funds in order to support and accomplish the projects it wishes to conceive. It argues that the object was not "personal profit" but to develop a structure whereby it "products, functions and power can change directly the value systems of

<sup>215</sup> N.E. Thing Co., "Position Statement," in *You are now in the middle of N.E. Thing Co. Landscape: works by Iain and Ingrid Baxter, 1965-1971*, curated by Nancy Shaw and William Wood (Vancouver: UBC Fine Arts Gallery, 1993), 43.



society.”<sup>216</sup> In “Some Thoughts re: Communications and Concepts” N.E. Thing Co. claims that its structure was conceived to operate both inside the art community and outside it.<sup>217</sup> It states that businesses have perfected the interest of “pushing information around” in a way that results in profit and goods flow. N.E. Thing Co. calls this “Practical Information” and what artists do is with their sense of play and pureness of vision take this practical information and handle it sensitively and end up with “*Sensitivity Information*.”<sup>218</sup> Thus N.E. Thing Co. operated as a kind of artistic think tank that processed *Visually Sensitive Information (VSI)* and communicated it in a variety of forms.

On the one hand, it is possible to view N.E. Thing Co.’s dissemination of *VSI* and its proclamations of *ART* and *ACT* as breaking up the norms of what is expected in art works and make the rarified judgements determined in art centres like New York look ridiculous. The work implies that one does not have to accept judgements from afar and it is possible to infuse art practices with local concerns and real life situations that have meaning for specific geographic publics. By traversing these boundaries of norms they were, as Nancy Shaw points out, able to call attention to the “hidden interdependence of corporate, artistic and domestic spheres.”<sup>219</sup> The power of prestigious art institutions from New York and other art centres is challenged and provides an example or model for others, inside and outside the art world, to confront all kinds of unexamined traditions. N.E. Thing Co. criticized art world norms by refocusing attention on

<sup>216</sup> Ibid., 43.

<sup>217</sup> Ibid., 43

<sup>218</sup> N.E. Thing Co., “Some Thought re: Communications and Concepts,” in *You are now in the middle of N.E. Thing Co. Landscape: works by Iain and Ingrid Baxter, 1965-1971*, curated by Nancy Shaw and William Wood (Vancouver: UBC Fine Arts Gallery, 1993), 42.

<sup>219</sup> Nancy Shaw, “Siting the Banal: The Expanded Landscapes of the N.E. Thing Co.,” in *You are now in the middle of N.E. Thing Co. Landscape: works by Iain and Ingrid Baxter, 1965-1971*, curated by Nancy Shaw and William Wood (Vancouver: UBC Fine Arts Gallery, 1993), 33.

everyday scenes, which displayed a commitment to realizing a vision of inclusiveness to make an end run around the social inequities of those norms. On the other hand, by mimicking the aesthetic judgement making power of art institutions and of a corporation's generating and disseminating of information, N.E. Thing Co. perpetuated those same hierarchies by assuming that power for itself. Making judgements, packaging those judgements as *VSI* and pushing them out as information to be consumed replicates the think tank or consulting company rather than complicating those structures. The one way flow of information from the artists to the viewer also replicates the Modernist tradition of artistic genius where the decisions are made by the artists and presented to the uninitiated audience for their enlightenment. The result is rather ambiguous where there is a push and pull between perpetuating power structures and criticizing them.

N.E. Thing Co.'s practice (even the name) has been called Duchampian by Thierry de Duve and indeed their *ACT* and *ART* certificates can be characterized as nomination acts reminiscent of Marcel Duchamp's strategies and readymades. It is interesting to note that the only 'thing' that was classified ambiguously as both *ACT* and *ART* by N.E. Thing Co. was the document - *Marcel Duchamp's Total Art Production Except His Total Readymade Production*. Presumably it was *ART* because it was from the art world, but *ACT* because it had a non-art quality. Along with N.E. Thing Co. While Conceptual artists such as Kosuth credit Duchamp as an influence on their work, others such as Daniel Buren were quite critical of Duchamp. In a March 1968 interview with Georges Boudaille, Buren said:

Let's clarify an important point right away: Duchamp is not anti-art. He belongs to the art of extolling the consumer society. Reassuring art. Putting a shovel in a gallery or museum signified "this shovel has become art." ... it is a problem that touches on the ethics and function of the artist: he assumes the right to have this supra-human calling that allows him to say to others, 'everything that I touch with

my hand is transformed to art.’ ... The artist assumes the right to show you what you can see for yourself, what you could obviously see much more clearly without his intervention.<sup>220</sup>

Buren’s target was the Modernist ideologies of aesthetic autonomy and individual expression. The Duchampian choice of everyday objects as works of art once again gives the artist special powers of genius and the association with bourgeois creative freedom, which in turn implies that the mere existence of creative acts means freedom exists. While Buren’s critique was multifaceted, it was very much an attack on the ideology of art that was associated with a Sixties reading of Duchamp and centered on a false image of freedom that art represents in capitalist society.<sup>221</sup>

N.E. Thing Co. and other conceptual artists that mimicked the bureaucratic functions of contemporary society can be said to have used those forms to turn attention back to questions of what it was that constituted art. However, as Benjamin Buchloh detailed in his essay “Conceptual Art 1962-1969: From the Aesthetic of Administration to the Critique of Institutions” these works were often devoted “to the factual conditions of artistic production and

<sup>220</sup> Georges Boudaille, “Interview with Daniel Buren: Art is no longer justifiable or setting the record straight,” in *Conceptual Art: A Critical Anthology*. Cambridge, Eds. Alexander Alberro and Blake Stimson (Mass: MIT Press, 1999), 67.

<sup>221</sup> Art historian Sami Siegelbaum points out that Buren’s position on Duchamp was similar to a group of artists at the Parisian Salon de la Jeune Peinture in the mid-Sixties who created a disparaging cartoonish painting of Duchamp called *Live and let die, or The Tragic End of Marcel Duchamp*, 1965.<sup>221</sup> Artists Gilles Aillaud, Eduardo Arroyo, and Antonio Recalcati made the work along with an anti-Duchamp manifesto that argued against the ‘magical freedom’ to bestow artistic meaning on found objects. Their concern was that culture makes the artist live in an illusion of freedom by granting him or her a privileged status. In effect, artists are placed in positions where they can do no harm, and they produce art that functions like a safety valve within the mechanisms of bourgeois society. However, the problem with the Jeune Peinture reading of Duchamp is that it looks at his work from the perspective of the Sixties instead of the context in which it was made in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. It is a problematic reading of Duchamp, but my point is that the argument of art representing a false image of freedom is a claim that can also be leveled at some Conceptual art practices. See: Sami Siegelbaum, “The Riddle of May ’68: Collectivity and Protest in the Salon de la Jeune Peinture,” *Oxford Art Journal* 35.1 (2012): 53-73.

reception without aspiring to overcome the mere facticity of these conditions.”<sup>222</sup> While Buchloh’s statement has merit, he is overly disappointed that Conceptual artists did not have the same utopian vision of the ‘20s avant-garde when it came to “political master-narratives.” It is fair to say that Conceptual artworks did not display many “political master-narratives,” however this does not mean that they did not have purposes of a political or social type. The problem is not so much that Conceptual art works take on a bureaucratic style that Buchloh calls the “logic of late capitalism,” since, as Adorno argues, artistic form participates in domination as well as reconciliation in that art needs society’s poison to resist its civilizing repression and to “heal the wound with the spear that inflicted it.”<sup>223</sup> The problem lies more with the fact that certain Conceptual art works merely present information for display in which their concepts are held up as objects to be appreciated in the same manner as traditional Modernist art objects. Thus while appearing to be breaking the rules of Modernism, they in fact operated in the same manner. N.E. Thing Co.’s *ART* and *ACT* represent documents that are just one example of Conceptual art judgements presented as objects to be viewed in a traditional Modernist sense in the form of statements of facts and thus perpetuate the same authority and managerial power structures of institutions they parody. While this is a problem with certain Conceptual works, there were other practices that attempted to break out of the realm of the object in a way that offer not only examples of bypassing hierarchical rules but also a different way to participate with viewers. Once again, the emphasis is that not all Conceptual art practices operated in the same manner.

Robert Barry is a Conceptual artist who often ‘dematerialized’ his work to such an extent that there was little else for an audience to do than use their imaginations to complete the work. For

<sup>222</sup> Buchloh, “Conceptual Art 1962-1969,” 141.

<sup>223</sup> Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 134.

instance his *Closed Gallery Piece*, 1969, which read “for the exhibition the gallery will be closed” on the gallery door, or his various ‘energy’ works such as *Ultrasonic Wave Piece*, 1968, displayed little and required the viewer to ‘conceptualize’ the piece. One of Barry’s works that is explicitly meant to encourage thought and is linked to the student protest movements is the *Marcuse Piece* first shown in 1970. The installation entailed nothing other than the empty space of the gallery with a quote from Herbert Marcuse’s *An Essay on Liberation* on the wall reading “A place to which we can come and for a while ‘be free to think about what we are going to do.’” Acting in a similar fashion as the *Closed Gallery Piece*, the empty gallery confounds the expectations of the audience in that there is no visually impressive art work to be seen, and in its place the *Marcuse Piece* makes a demand of the viewer to “be free and think about what we are going to do.” Text in conceptual art works was often used as a way to disrupt art’s auratic spectacular presence, and in this case the text completely replaces it. Barry’s work often involved the invisible or something that could not be beheld in the traditional sense. These works enacted a type of refusal of a conventional art display that is analogous to the protest movement’s refusal to accept the norms of a repressive and authoritarian society. The *Marcuse Piece* opens the grounds for inquiry in a way that the emotional spectacle of Abstract Expressionism foreclosed, and it is consistent with Conceptual art practices of presenting information in a non-art fashion that suspend the customary rules of display and reception. In fact, the piece works in a very Marcusian fashion since it echoes Marcuse’s belief that individual artistic experiences can induce a revolutionary estrangement from everyday life. The distancing from ‘normality’ liberates individuals from oppressive social relations and nurtures a tendency to political critique. According to Marcuse, art induces a kind of transcendence of immediate reality that shatters established social relations and opens a new dimension of experience where: “Art is committed

to that perception of the world that alienates individuals from their functional existence and performance in society – it is committed to an emancipation of sensibility, imagination, and reason in all spheres of subjectivity and objectivity.”<sup>224</sup> However, the *Marcuse Piece* can be seen as Barry using the authority of philosophy to establish his right to nomination. Barry uses his ‘special’ artistic powers to nominate the Marcuse quote in order to demand attention and thinking from the viewer. Peter Osborne argues: “Without this critical supplement [philosophy], their [Conceptual artists’] nominations are unlikely to have been able to sustain their claim to legitimation.” While the empty gallery space and quote produce the possibilities for critical inquiry, it is still an attempt to steer the viewer in a particular direction, i.e. Marcuse’s New Left agenda for a better world, as opposed to enabling the viewer to come to an autonomous conclusion on their own.

Douglas Huebler’s *Location Piece #13* (fig. 3) is an example of a work that directly links Conceptual art to student protest movements. It is a project where Huebler gives himself the rule of being a reporter for the *Haverhill Gazette* to cover a Haverhill contingent at a peace march in Washington. Jeff Wall argues that the structure, or what this chapter calls rule following, common to many of Huebler’s *Location Pieces* was a parody of a photojournalism “assignment” or “project.”<sup>225</sup> In these works everything that is interesting in terms of visual and narrative aspects of journalism is removed and the viewer is left to ponder the rules that went into its making. However, in this piece, a page from the *Haverhill Gazette* containing the article Huebler wrote for the Gazette is included in the work along with his photographic documentation of the

<sup>224</sup> Herbert Marcuse, *The Aesthetic Dimension: Toward a Critique of Marxist Aesthetics* (New York: Beacon Press, 1979), 9.

<sup>225</sup> Jeff Wall, “Marks of Indifference,” in *Reconsidering the Object of Art: 1965-1975*, Eds. Ann Goldstein and Anne Rorimer (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1995), 257.

Haverhill contingent. Together the text and images disclose the kinds of legal structures that the U.S. government employed in order to foil attempts at dissent and protest that would have otherwise been concealed and left unreported by the mainstream press. Huebler's presentation of the piece in a very documentary format blurred the line between art and non-art, almost as if his art was trying to be non-art. The neutral copying device type of photographs fundamentally ends up expressing without expressing something. In the process, new demands are made on the audience, where the viewer is required to be intellectually attentive to the seriality of the photographs that elicit a type of physical interactivity identified with reading in addition to the actual reading of the newspaper. These kinds of Conceptual art works signaled a shift in reception to a practice of art requiring a space that required a different way for thinking and talking about art.

There are many other examples of Conceptual artists incorporating the notion of audiences using their cognitive faculties to realize the artwork instead of merely viewing it. Jan Dibbets created some forty works between 1967 and 1969 called *Perspective Corrections* of which a particularly effective one is *Perspective Correction (My Studio I, I-Square on Wall)*, 1969 (fig. 4). It is an example of a work that makes the viewer aware of the operations of their consciousness as he or she tries to make sense of the conflicting aspects of perspective that are not expected. The photograph of the wall of Dibbets's studio contains a drawn square that appears to be pushing out of the picture plane in a different perspective from the rest of the photographic space of the studio. The veracity of a photograph is questioned in a thoughtful way in that what one sees in the photograph is not what has been photographed. The traditional rules of perspective of an image that viewers have become accustomed to as a norm are put into doubt. Thomas McEvilley describes the viewing process as: "One corrects the corrected perspective and

then recorrects it again. Here the mental processes are the material or medium.”<sup>226</sup> The workings of the mind and its reflexive processes become the material, so to speak, of the artwork. In a sense consciousness itself, or subjectivity, is the true object of the artwork, and as a result the object as ‘Other’ is eliminated.<sup>227</sup> Dibbets’s aesthetic disruptions manage to achieve dissociation or distancing of the work from conventional assumptions and instead conjure up a new platform where the viewer, the artwork, and the artist, collaborate together to complete the project in the viewer’s mind.

Works such as Donald Burgy’s *Name Idea #1*, 1969, builds on the idea of eliminating the material art object, but also connects the artist and the audience in an active reciprocal manner. Burgy lays out a number of textual instructions for the viewer and the art work is in essence created by the viewer interacting with the instructions or rules in the piece below:

### **Name Idea #1**

Observe something as it changes in time.  
Record its names.  
Observe something as it changes in scale.  
Record its names.  
Observe something as it changes in a hierarchy.  
Record its names.  
Observe something as it changes in differentiation.  
Record its names.  
Observe something as it changes under different emotions.  
Record its names.  
Observe something as it changes in different languages.  
Record its names.  
Observe something which never changes.  
Record its names.

<sup>226</sup> McEvelley, 97.

<sup>227</sup> Ibid., 95



*Name Idea #1* involves viewing, thinking and recording, all the aspects that an artist would normally go through in the creation of a work. The piece is not a mere presentation of information flowing from artist to viewer, but rather an example of interactivity between the two that is achieved without direct collaboration. This reciprocal performative gesture is similar to what was described in the NSCAD Project Class where artists sent in their instructions to students. Burgy's piece works similarly to attempt to activate the viewer into becoming a co-legislator of the work with the artist.

### **3.5 Rules To Learn By**

Not all Conceptual artists thought that they could change the world through art, but some believed that art could provide an alternative model for change or at least in generating ideas for the possibility of change. The student movements' focus on participatory democracy and egalitarian notions is something that surfaces in Conceptual art practices time and time again. This is seen in the choices of materials for display such as photography, maps, newspapers, and documents, which were meant to bring a popular vernacular that was more accessible into the art world. Artists discussed in this chapter such as Huebler and N.E. Thing Co. used photographs of everyday places as lines of social communication. The use of these non-art materials gave the semblance that anyone can be an artist and disturbed the Greenbergian idea of taste and rarity by infusing a democratic appeal. The removal of unexamined questions of good taste from art helped artists to not only control the discourse over their artwork, but to diminish the influence

of the art critic (or so it was thought) by eliminating anything of aesthetic value to judge. Furthermore, there was the additional attempt to shift the relationship with the audience away from viewing to active reading and cognitive engagement. These collections of rules that were broken and new rules that were created worked to transform what art practices and the engagement with them meant. The goals behind the rule making echo New Left beliefs that they would expose the limits of individuals' options in their lives and open new dimensions of thought to lead to the liberation from false consciousness. However, one can argue that art has had a long tradition of rule breaking and that the breaking down of barriers is just a routine part of art making. Art, at least since the time of Courbet, has periodically been about breaking the rules, finding alternative forms and venues of display, and going places that you could not go in other disciplines and institutions.

Certainly many Conceptual art practices owe a debt to historical avant-garde movements such as Dadaism, Constructivism and Surrealism. Conceptual art pays homage to the avant-garde by reopening questions of the idea of non-art to a new set of historical demands and conditions. The difference that I would like to emphasize is that certain Conceptual art works contain a kind of necessity or moral obligation that infers a collective practice, which resonates with Kant's notion of autonomy and a shared obligation to be co-legislators. The necessity to break the old rules of art was required because it was felt that if one was just engaging in a tradition, then one is not questioning tradition but rather conforming to it and Conceptual artists deemed it obligatory to develop a more informed inquiry into their own situation. The result was a more actively subjective and self-liberating role for artists that encouraged efforts to uncover and attempt to break free of the structural causes of oppressive influences. All the while learning to think for themselves, and constructing their own rules rather than living out the rules imposed by

others. Conceptual art started to move fine art practice from a mode of aesthetic production to a cognitive practice and a relationship between the viewer and the artwork into a space of cognitive attentiveness. The display of Conceptual art took on an appearance that was closer to conversation, learning, reading and writing than with objects to be looked at. If a gallery space was used for displaying Conceptual art it was often transformed into, while not exactly a classroom environment, something resembling a learning experience where the viewer was encouraged to play a more active and discursive role in the realization of the work. Although it has been pointed out by philosophers such as Peter Osborne that many of the philosophical explorations by Conceptual artists were in fact misguided, what was being learnt was of less importance than the fact that learning was taking place.<sup>228</sup> Conceivably it could be described as a form of mental hygiene that nevertheless had the potential to become a learning process through a performance of self-questioning, which in turn worked to eliminate art as a category of special expertise. The creation of new rules through the elimination of old rules in Conceptual art practices demanded a thought process of inquiry from the spectator that broke with what was until then the traditional way of beholding an art object. Sharing a collective moment of mental participation meant that there was reciprocity in the flow between artist and viewer. The presentation of information versus opinion often meant that it was up to the audience to create meaning and thus the work was self-generating in the sense that there was no prescribed meaning so much as the expectation that the viewers' independence of thought, their autonomous creativity, would create it. It was about breaking through the inertia of habit and freedom from the constraints of everyday rational experience. Instead of artistic autonomy being a property of

<sup>228</sup> Peter Osborne, "Conceptual Art and/as Philosophy," in *Rewriting Conceptual Art*, eds. Michael Newman and Jon Bird (London: Reaktion, 1999).

the artist, autonomy became the resistance property of the entire project, which included the artist, the work and the audience; all being equals among equals. The degree to which this kind of collective process of inquiry was realized in Conceptual art, of course, varied from work to work. As Adorno claims, the very creation of a work of art is a challenge to the instrumentalization of society, however, to move beyond mere irrationality, an artwork's criticality is objectified in its ability to provide imaginative solutions to abolish hierarchies. Conceptual art's practices described in this chapter illustrated different approaches, some succeeded in flattening the hierarchical relationship between the artist, artwork and spectator, while others continued to use something closer to a more traditional Modernist approach.

## Chapter 4: Autonomy As Self-Re-Education

*“Go beyond beyond beyond your teachers.”*<sup>229</sup>

In the late Sixties, along with the rejection of the art of frames and pedestals, Conceptual artists came to the realization that to move art in a different direction required the knowledge and use of a radically different set of practices. What is clear in the generational change that took place in the Sixties, at least in part spurred by the massification of intellectual competencies through education, was the desire to develop a language of protest in order to find alternative explanations with which to transgress the existing boundaries of stratified political and social norms. In order to accomplish this, artists felt the need to take responsibility for their own education with ideas that quickly transcended national borders through interpersonal contact in a new era of transatlantic mobility, as well as through channels such as magazines, artist publications, and scholarly writings. In these exchanges, ideas were transformed and reinterpreted to new ends on both sides of the Atlantic, but major themes such as the dismantling of hierarchies and the abolition of structures of dependency through new models of co-operation formed a core of beliefs for an alternative artistic sphere. One example of a reformulation of how artists viewed education came from England where Terry Atkinson and Michael Baldwin of the Art & Language group (A&L) taught the now famous Art Theory course at the Coventry College of Art in which the aim was to allow art students to attain a studio degree by studying theory versus painting or sculpture. Figuring out what was teachable as art and theorizing in their own

<sup>229</sup> Ian Wallace letter to Tom Burrows (who was studying at St. Martins in London) dated December 1968, Ian Wallace Archive.

art projects became two sides of the same coin for A&L. Writing retrospectively in 1981, another one-time member of the A&L group, Ian Burn, explains that Conceptual art was analogous to a process of “self-re-education” by artists to develop a more critically informed understanding of their own situation. This learning process was a recognition of what Burn called a more “actively subjective and self-liberating role” for artists.<sup>230</sup> Reading, writing, discursiveness and language became part of new toolset that artists both adopted and were being exposed to in art schools that were increasingly converting to university academic standards throughout Western industrial nations. From a rather different trajectory, another example of artistic education came from the University of British Columbia (UBC), which had all the prerequisite university academic standards but no official studio program.<sup>231</sup> It was there that emerging Conceptual artists studying art history displayed their work and curatorial originality in a few of the most innovative Conceptual art exhibitions in Canada. Thus this chapter’s examples meet at a kind of intersection from opposite directions, one is of artists adopting a more rigorously intellectual form of language based art practices, and the other of academically grounded art historians engaging in art, publishing and curatorial practices. Despite the significant differences, both examples arrived at a place where self-education was a crucial aspect of continuing on as artists without unthinkingly propping up existing traditions, and providing an example of how art can potentially challenge the validity of widely held beliefs.

The first two chapters introduced often conflicted tensions between the different definitions of autonomy and how Conceptual art practices could be said to have incorporated inflections of

<sup>230</sup> Ian Burn, “the ‘sixties: crisis and aftermath (or the memoirs of an ex-conceptual artist),” in *Conceptual Art: A Critical Anthology*, Eds. Alexander Alberro and Blake Stimson (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1999), 404.

<sup>231</sup> The BFA program was only initiated in 1971.

either individual or collective versions of autonomy. Chapter 2 explored the Kantian trope of autonomy meaning “making one’s own rules” while this chapter will focus on Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel’s notion of autonomy as a process of self-actualization through the educative role of reason. As such, Hegel’s version of autonomy is viewed as a way to focus on Conceptual artist’s use of learning, educational processes, and institutions to create alternative practices that attempt to question dominant cultural and social values.

The very idea of self-education or the education of the self has its contemporary philosophical roots in Hegel’s version of autonomy as an activity to be attained by the creative and transformative actions of the subject. Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Spirit* was written as an introduction for students to his *Science of Logic* and is often viewed as a kind of *bildungsroman*, or novel of education. The reader goes through a series of consciousness educating scenarios and setbacks from which he or she follows and learns from. The setbacks illustrate a learning process in which the knowledge of the inadequacy of previous experiences is integrated into and becomes an aspect of subsequent experiences. In *Phenomenology* Hegel explains: “The course of experience contains a moment in virtue of which it does not seem to agree with what is ordinarily understood by experience. This is the moment of transition from the first object and knowledge of it, to the other object, which experience is said to be about ... Herewith a new pattern of consciousness comes on the scene as well, for which the essence is something different from what it was at the preceding stage.”<sup>232</sup> Hegel shows that knowledge is not simply subjective, at every stage of the *Phenomenology* objective facts are encountered in reality that frustrate claims to absolute knowing. As one continues to incorporate these results into the

<sup>232</sup> Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 55-56.

revised claims, they become more and more comprehensive. The cumulative experience of consciousness is a material accumulation of what is already the acquired property of the universal spirit or history, and thus education consists in overcoming the standpoint of consciousness and in seeing that one is both substance and subject of this process.

Analogous to a Hegelian education of the self, below, A&L and the UBC artists Christos Dikeakos, Jeff Wall, and Ian Wallace are looked at in order to elucidate how they sought to develop a more critically informed understanding of their situation in the world. The protest movements of the Sixties reaction to the injustices of the time woke up a belief in the possibility for change. In an interview speaking about his interests in 1970, Jeff Wall stated:

We were really bored with subjectivist, abstract, expressionist, existentialist, romantic art, for any number of reasons, as I said. People were fascinated by the new, they were fascinated by the media, and all those kinds of things that would lead one to a sense that there was a utopian content inside of these newer art forms, and a hope that they really would be beyond “bourgeois art” – and Pollock, for example, seemed more and more like “bourgeois art.” ... My reading was, of course, a reaction to political life at the time, and the kinds of political decisions people were making – political decisions not in the normal or surface sense, but ones that had to do with how you imagined being an artist.<sup>233</sup>

An education of consciousness was not a luxury but deemed to be an obligation for discovering new values and ideals. The process of self-education was used to transition the norms of experience into a different register that dialectically questioned these norms and helped recover the relation between human beings and the world in Conceptual art. In contrast to the Kantian universal imperative discussed in Chapter 2, Hegel’s autonomous subjectivity is anchored in

<sup>233</sup> Jeff Wall, “Representation, Suspicions, and Critical Transparency: An Interview with Jeff Wall by T.J. Clark, Claude Gintz, Serge Guilbaut, and Anne Wagner” in *Jeff Wall: Selected Essays and Interviews* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 2007), 205.



praxis, action, and experience in the world. For Hegel the development of self-consciousness towards the unity of the world and self is the process of history itself. What will be evident is that for the artists in this chapter the raw phenomena of the world contained the social economy of the world, or as Herbert Marcuse writing on the young Karl Marx's views on the mystifying character of economic conditions argues: "economic realities exhibit their own inherent negativity."<sup>234</sup> The road to autonomous self-actualization for both the A&L members and the UBC art historians practicing as self-taught artists was to create their own curriculum through their choice of theoretical and philosophical readings. They operated in a somewhat similar way to how Joseph Kosuth envisioned art schools ought to when he claimed: "The most important role, if not the only role, now of the art school is to consider the courses as books, and run the school as a library. The students are old enough to explore the books and read at their own pace."<sup>235</sup> A kind of autodidacticism flourished in the practices of both these groups of artists. Jeff Wall has claimed, "Conceptual art's intellectualism was engendered by young, aspiring artists for whom critical writing was an important practice of self-definition."<sup>236</sup> It was a consequence of not only the rejection formal art educational boundaries, but certainly in the case of A&L there was an association with the history of working class self-education and political learning circles that were part of the working class movements since the early nineteenth century.<sup>237</sup> For these artists, a necessity had become evident to develop an autonomous self-consciousness in

<sup>234</sup> Herbert Marcuse, *Reason and Revolution: Hegel and the Rise of Social Theory* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd., 1941): 282.

<sup>235</sup> Joseph Kosuth, "Art, Education and Linguistic Change," in *Art after Philosophy and After: Collected Writings, 1966-1990* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1991), 45.

<sup>236</sup> Jeff Wall, "'Marks of Indifference,'" 254.

<sup>237</sup> Howard Slater, "Some Notes on Political Conceptual Art," *Break/Flow* (2000), <http://www.infopool.org.uk/hs.htm> (accessed January 23, 2014).

order to get past the business as usual art making that occluded the essence of reality, and to find a new way to reveal meaning about the world in which they lived.

In this way a dialectic was set up between the normative views of what art was supposed to be and the interruption of these views by Conceptual artists in an attempt to demystify those beliefs. The kind of notions of art that the projects in this chapter are opposed to are best exemplified by a report authored by a panel convened in 1965 by the Rockefeller Brothers Fund, which stressed the arts' utility as a means for the proper consumption of leisure time. It claims that art is a vehicle for satisfying the "spiritual hunger" left unmet by society's political and economic institutions, and a device for structuring meaning in an otherwise "baffling world." The argument concludes by stating: "the use of leisure can be both an individual and community problem if it is not channeled into constructive and satisfying ranges of activity such as the arts afford."<sup>238</sup> The underlying idea was that the consumption of the arts should be encouraged because it had a mitigating effect on disenchantment. In other words, the report falsely gave art the role of reconciling the "baffling" social world and that of the alienated individual in it. Instead of questioning the condition of the disenchantment it promoted art as a way to sooth it. Thus the major dialectical question of this chapter becomes whether the Conceptual art practices explored below can function in a way that is educative in the sense that challenges established ways of thinking and encourages reflection on the social realm in an active way? Does it oppose the dominant belief that art's role was a passive form of non-reflective leisure to function as a release valve for the alienation of modern societies?

<sup>238</sup> Michael Useem, "Government Patronage of Science and Art in America," *American Behavioral Scientist* 19 (1976): 785-804.

#### 4.1 Pictures Against Picturing<sup>239</sup>

Initially it may seem odd to discuss UBC artists Christos Dikeakos, Jeff Wall, and Ian Wallace in their student and early career days in the same chapter with the canonical A&L group, especially when the UBC artists were only interested in Conceptual art for a very short period of time. However, as mentioned above, their respective projects come to a point of convergence from opposite directions: one from studio to theory and the other from theory (art history) to studio. There are certainly other connections such as the fact that Ian Wallace owned the first three copies of the *Art-Language Journal* published by A&L at the time, signaling a familiarity with A&L at UBC.<sup>240</sup> There was also a strong awareness of what was happening in London for these British Columbians as it was seen not only as an international art centre but also as a place to go for further art training, as did Wallace's friend, artist Tom Burrows, who went to St. Martins and with whom Ian corresponded while Burrows was in London. Additionally, immediately after the period discussed in this chapter, both Wallace and Wall left Vancouver for London. While in very different geographical locations, and from different backgrounds, both groups arrive at similar artistic initiatives. In one of his letters to Tom Burrows, Wallace perhaps sums up the changing art world and Conceptual practices best when he states: "... it doesn't matter where you are in space only where you are in your head."<sup>241</sup> Wallace's comment functions to elaborate on a more global Conceptualism movement and the

<sup>239</sup> Mel Bochner, quoted in Tony Godfrey, *Conceptual Art* (Phaidon, 1998), 111.

<sup>240</sup> Author's conversation with Ian Wallace, 10/08/2014.

<sup>241</sup> Ian Wallace archive, Letter to Tom Burrows dated December 1968, Ian Wallace Archive.

fact that Conceptual art can be made anywhere, not just New York or London, and that where you are in your head is far more important than where you are physically.

The UBC artists all had diverse practices and only a few years after this period all went on in different directions to have important careers; Christos Dikeakos to make photographic works focused on a critique of urban history, Ian Wallace developed his unique combinatory works of painting and photography, and Jeff Wall went to the Courtauld Institute of Art to become an academic, only to return to photographic work almost decade later. Yet despite their differences there was a mutual interest in making art in a new way in the late Sixties that posed questions of not only art but of how art can introduce a new relationship to the surrounding social reality. It was during this period between 1968 to 1970 a number of remarkable Conceptual art exhibitions took place in Vancouver that were largely centred around the University of British Columbia where Jeff Wall, Christos Dikeakos and Ian Wallace, as well as Iain Baxter, all attended, taught, or both. Of these exhibitions Lucy Lippard's *955,000* at the Vancouver Art Gallery (a portion of which took place at UBC), January 13 to February 8, 1970, is the most well known.<sup>242</sup> However, there were a number of other shows that signaled a shift in the conception of what constituted art. There was a strong emphasis in the work, which looked more like textual information about art rather than art itself, of a negation of all the precious beliefs of what art stood for in Modernity. These shows included *Piles* by N.E. Thing Co. and *Random Sample, N=42* by Arnold Rockman,

<sup>242</sup> A Conceptual art exhibition in the Vancouver area that did not take place at UBC, but is important to note, is Seth Siegelaub's *Simon Fraser Exhibition* at Simon Fraser University between May 19 and June 19, 1969. The exhibition was the catalogue and the participating artists were: Terry Atkinson and Michael Baldwin, Robert Barry, Jan Dibbets, Douglas Huebler, Stephen Kaltenbach, Joseth Josuth, Sol LeWitt, N.E. Thing Co. Ltd., and Lawrence Weiner.

*The Photo Show*<sup>243</sup> (fig. 5) curated by Christos Dikeakos and Illyas Pagonis, and the *Four Artists* exhibition including Tom Burrows, Duane Lunden, Ian Wallace, and Jeff Wall, curated by Alvin Balkind.<sup>244</sup> *The Photo Show* was one of the first exhibitions of Conceptual art that focused entirely on photography. This was in contrast to the more famous so-called groundbreaking exhibitions in Europe that preceded *The Photo Show* in 1969 such as Wim Berran's *Op Losse Schroeven* at the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam and Harold Szeemann's *When attitudes Become Forms* at the Kunsthalle Bern, both of which had very little photography. The European exhibitions claimed to show the 'new' art of the time, but were still largely focusing on the kind of sculptural materialism of Arte Povera and the last throes of Post-Minimalism that Robert Morris termed "Anti-Form." On the other hand, the UBC exhibitions moved almost entirely into photography and text, demonstrating a greater relation to mass media culture of the time as well as being part of the growing importance of photography to fine art practices. The photography in these exhibitions generally had the appearance of a strategy that used the camera, as Ed Ruscha once explained, for "getting information and bringing it back," or what Douglas Huebler termed a "dumb copying device." There was a considerable effort to negate any kind of mediation by artistic expression through the use of rules that were believed to allow the camera apparatus to record the raw data of the world with a minimum of preconceived notions. The result was a new reading of the pictorial that was not an endorsement of some sort of pre-Modernist version of realism, but rather a way to reunite with social appearances brought back from the world outside

<sup>243</sup> *The Photo Show* exhibition was originally called *New Attitudes in Photography* (perhaps as a nod or foil to Szeemann's *When attitudes Become Forms*), but the name never stuck and it has been referred to as *The Photo Show* ever since.

<sup>244</sup> Catalogues from exhibitions at the UBC Fine Art Gallery, SFU and Jeff Wall's *Landscape Manual* are in the Kynaston McShine *Information* Exhibition Archives at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, illustrating their importance to McShine's curatorial research for the subsequent *Information* Exhibition held in July – September 1970.

the artist's imagination. Thus there is a combination of subjectively created rules that are carried out in a mechanically objective way to create an artistic work (the photograph) that at the same time infuses the real of the outside world into the hermetically sealed realm of art. Likewise, the photographic work of Dikeakos, Wall and Wallace could be said to be use the real of the world, as revealed by the operation of the camera, in their processes to question art, as opposed to aestheticizing or making the world look beautiful. There was a focus in this work on negating and attempting to achieve a presuppositionlessness that has a curious similarity to Hegel's notion of "appearances," which both veil and unveil what is genuinely important and subsequently make it reflection's role to uncover what is hidden yet visible.<sup>245</sup> In other words, the denoted reality of the photograph does not simply ground or support the material reality but enables photography to become something else, a form of critique that confronts clichés and conventions that are otherwise accepted normal cultural connotations. Consequently, a certain amount of interest in Hegel by these artists and students at UBC in the late Sixties shows up in a number of ways.

Christos Dikeakos's personal archive contains a number of relevant books from his UBC days such as *Hegel on Art: An interpretation of Hegel's Aesthetics* by Jack Kaminsky as well as a number of books by Herbert Marcuse, which will be discussed in more detail below. The Hegel book, according to Dikeakos, was passed around between himself and fellow students Dennis Wheeler and Jeff Wall.<sup>246</sup> The serious interest in Hegel also manifested itself a few years later in 1970/71 when Dikeakos taught several art history classes at UBC and invited Ian Wallace to give a seminar on Hegel's *Phenomenology*. During this period from 1969/70 there were two projects

<sup>245</sup> See page 136 below for a more detailed discussion of perceived reality versus essence.

<sup>246</sup> Conversation with the author, January 9, 2014.

in particular by Jeff Wall that unmistakably display an engagement with Hegelian ideas and language. The first is a relatively unknown article his student days titled “Meaningness” from the *Free Media Bulletin*. The second being Wall’s more famous *Landscape Manual* published in 1970 as part of the *Four Artists* exhibition at the UBC Fine Arts Gallery, and later included both in MoMA’s *Information* exhibition and the *Art In The Mind* show at Oberlin College, 1970.<sup>247</sup>

The *Free Media Bulletin* (fig. 6), edited by UBC students Duane Lunden, Jeff Wall, and Ian Wallace in 1969, contained a collection of artist projects and republished articles such as Ad Reinhardt’s “The Next Revolution In Art,” Alexander Trocchi’s on the “A Revolutionary Proposal: Invisible Insurrection of a Million Minds,” Antonin Artaud’s “Revolt Against Poetry,” and Richard Huelsenbeck’s “Dada Lives!” Also included was an article called “Hostile Art” by Jean Toche, artist and co-founder in 1969 of Guerrilla Art Action Group, which expounded on the necessity for an education of consciousness by stating: “By so exploring and extending the limits of our sensibility and the comprehension of ourselves, we will be able to discover new values and ideals – so necessary in our present times, if we want to survive.” The passage captures the spirit of self-actualization as a process for liberation and autonomy in which the alternative artist publication functioned to not only provide a method of circumventing the art world roles of critics and gallery spaces, but to also create a community of readers to share ideas with.

Wall’s “Meaningness” article in the *Free Media Bulletin* (fig. 7 & 8) is an exploration in text and photographs of meaning from the mundane reality of a studio. Wall quotes from authors such as William Burroughs but the language used by Wall in the article is an extremely realistic

<sup>247</sup> Neither “Meaningness” nor *The Landscape Manual* was included in Wall’s *Catalogue Raisonné*.

form of description of ordinary objects on a desk and in a studio. The photographs that accompany the text are equally commonplace, matter-of-fact, and appear to be a record of what was described in the room without much thought given to composition, technique or aesthetic interest. The text itself discusses the aim of art and literature to attain meaning. It describes a search for meaning versus “non-meaning,” or “meaningness” versus “meaninglessness,” in the world of representations by an “individual-self” in face of a world of “not-self.” The use of these terms of negation and opposites is indicative of a Hegelian dialectic where differences emerge from details and develop into contradictory moments. It is reflective of a Hegelian idea that contradictory moments develop from a continuous process of thought, but they are not simply related negatively as opposites, each is also the result of the other and each is conditioned by the other. Every stage develops through contradictions towards a new beginning and so on, until a conclusion is reached that includes all conceptual determination or the absolute idea where all is collapsed into a new single thought. Wall’s interpretation in “Meaningness” uses related language when he states:

It must be understood that the concept of ‘Meaninglessness’ makes sense at all only in direct relationship to a particular concept of Meaning, or Meaningfulness. ... Meaningfulness has been seen as the concept of absolute affirmation, absolute life, the total exclusion of disorder, meaninglessness, denial. The concept of any absolute, so deeply desired by dualistic, rationalistic thought, immediately brings into existence the concept of its opposite or negation, by the same process which brought the original concept – the concept apparently without a possible negation – into existence in the first place.<sup>248</sup>

<sup>248</sup> Jeff Wall, “Meaningness,” in *Free Media Bulletin*, eds. Duane Lunden, Jeff Wall, and Ian Wallace (Vancouver: 212-5600 Dalhousie Rd, 1969).



Wall's explanation bears a striking resemblance to Hegel's language of negation, while at the same time stressing the notion of the camera being a tool for accessing reality. He writes: "The camera does not take good or bad pictures it never takes a picture at all it receives a picture. ... The Photographs are the externals rendered as images for the sake of transmission ..." <sup>249</sup> There is an attempt to bypass mediation through the immediacy of the camera, but there is also a recognition that there is an additional step for deriving meaning when he states: "Meaningness is the condition which 'stands behind' Meaning and Non-Meaning, showing how they are inextricably related ..." <sup>250</sup> This is analogous to what Hegel writes in the *Logic of Science* where he explains that even pre-conscious experience comes on the scene fully dressed, so to speak, and already contains a judgement. Immediate qualities for Hegel are transient and inessential, requiring the move to something more substantial underlying it. He writes of a reciprocal relationship between essence and what Hegel terms as *show* (sometimes also translated as *shine*, meaning a perceived reality) where essence is understood to be other than the surface being, however this being both veils and unveils what is genuinely important. <sup>251</sup> It is reflection's role to dissolve that surface *show* so that thought can reach what is veiled. Negatives mark the whole process where the starting point is the inessential surface *show*, then reflection dissolves this and the result is other than the original given. Each stage is defined by what it is not, and to grasp what is really unmediated, reflection not only dissolves the immediate surface *show*, but also cancels the effects of its own mediating activity. The paradox is that each function requires the

<sup>249</sup> Wall, "Meaningness."

<sup>250</sup> Ibid.

<sup>251</sup> George Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *The Science of Logic*, Translated by George Di Giovanni (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 342.

other, reflection is required to derive the underlying essence and at the same time reflection requires the “real immediate” to understand its own persistent determinations.

The engagement with Hegel continues in Wall’s *Landscape Manual* (Fig. 9 & 10), but this time the reality *show* experienced is that of what he calls a “defeatured” Vancouver landscape. There is a nod here to the semiotically constructed photo practice of Dan Graham and Ed Ruscha, both of whom participated in the 1969 Student Union Building Gallery *Photo Show*. Likewise N.E. Thing Co.’s *A Portfolio of Piles*, 1968, provided a local example of a new kind of unconventional urban photography. More importantly is the homage here to Robert Smithson’s photographic *dérive* “A Tour of the Monuments of Passaic, New Jersey” and to Smithson’s mentioning of Tony Smith’s account of a night ride on the unfinished New Jersey Turnpike. Smithson and Smith both describe an experience with an artificial manmade landscape reality that ‘could not’ be called art, which nevertheless liberated in their minds the notion of what kind of constructions could be called art. Passaic’s mundane urban reality of industrial pipes spewing waste into the river is transformed into a “Fountain Monument” for Smithson as the new kind of readymade. Smithson’s own relationship with Vancouver took place during late 1969 and early 1970 when he came to execute his *Glue Pour* piece (December 1969), which was photographed by Dikeakos and others for inclusion into Lippard’s *955,000* exhibition. Writing on Smithson’s *Glue Pour*, Dikeakos describes how Smithson preferred to use his Kodak Instamatic 400 camera “due to its generic and ‘objective’ replication of reality” and that “he was not interested in dramatic camera angles that would interfere with the replication of straightforward reality.”<sup>252</sup>

<sup>252</sup> Christos Dikeakos, “Glue Pour and the Viscosity of Fluvial Flows as Evidenced in Bottle-Gum Glue Pour Jan. 8. 70 9:30 to 11:30,” in *Robert Smithson in Vancouver: A Fragment of a Greater Fragmentation*, ed. Grant Arnold (Vancouver: Vancouver Art Gallery, 2004), 42.

The *Landscape Manual* itself takes on the form that is similar to an inexpensive City Lights' poetry and literature publication such as William Burroughs's *APO-33 Bulletin* (fig. 11), which Wall mentions in "Meaningness." Besides the borrowing of the formal appearance of a poetry publication, the importance of poetry to the Vancouver and the UBC artistic climate is noteworthy. UBC Fine Art Gallery's *Concrete Poetry* exhibition in 1969 investigated the global concrete poetry movement in which poets were coincidentally exploring visuality at a time when Conceptual artists were beginning to explore text. Ian Wallace contributed an essay to the *Concrete Poetry* catalogue titled "Literature – Transparent and Opaque" where he praised Concrete poetry's ability to bring an openness to meaning in contrast to conventional literature, which Wallace claimed had lost its power to challenge the imagination. Both Dikeakos and Wallace claim poetry as a major influence on their work<sup>253</sup> and thus bear a kinship with other Conceptual artists such as Vito Acconci, Robert Barry, and Dan Graham who were all poets at one time.

It is also worth noting here that Hegel regarded poetry as the highest form of artistic expression. Poetry for Hegel, more so than painting or music, was art that had finally freed itself of external appearances and came closest to philosophy in what he called the "prose of thought."<sup>254</sup> The more intellectual discipline of philosophy had superseded art, for Hegel, because it can best deal with the nature and explication of the Idea. Of course, Hegel famously wrote that art is " ... on the side of its highest destiny, a thing of the past."<sup>255</sup> The passage of this notion of philosophy eclipsing art in Kaminsky's book on Hegel's aesthetics in Dikeakos's

<sup>253</sup> Conversation with author, September 18, 2013.

<sup>254</sup> George Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Introductory Lectures on Aesthetics*, (New York: Penguin Books, 1993), 96.

<sup>255</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

archive is duly underlined. The increasing predominance of the idea above the sensible form in Hegel's privileging of philosophy and poetry has an interesting parallel to Conceptual works that explore text and philosophy, and if Conceptual art were to be described as the "prose of thought" it would make for a remarkably good fit.

Another page that is underlined in the Kaminsky book describes Hegel's attempt at defining an indeterminate state as being of the "first order" and describing it as "pure vacuity," "nothing" and "featurelessness." In the *Landscape Manual* the action of driving around the edges of Vancouver and taking uncomposed pictures of the defeatured nothingness of the suburban landscape, nevertheless still resulted in pictures of something. The something in the nothing was the social and the political ramifications of alienation in an expanding urbanism that crept back through these photographs taken in an attempt to get at the immediacy of the reality *show*. About mid-way through *Landscape Manual* Wall writes that the photos provided proof of what he called a first-order experience because he was no longer "capable of first-order experiences under any circumstances: [since] everything immediately became language – immediately became abstractions."<sup>256</sup> This idea directly relates to the Hegelian insistence that experience already contains pre-judgement. Ian Wallace elaborates his interpretation of the *Landscape Manual* in equally Hegelian terms in a 2005 article "Street Photos 1970" where he states: "I understood it [Landscape Manual] as the melancholic expression of an occluded social critique, in which the 'meaninglessness' of these voided spaces suggested a blocked or withheld reconciliation with the blindly-driven energies of the historical moment. This expressive, almost 'symbolist' dimension could be slid underneath the protective cover of the factual and impassive

<sup>256</sup> Jeff Wall, *Landscape Manual*, (Vancouver: University of British Columbia, 1970), 30.

specificity of the photograph and the self-evident presence of the everyday.”<sup>257</sup> Here photography acts in a similar fashion to the Hegelian notion that appearance discloses and conceals essence at one and the same time. If appearance did not conceal essence it would be mere illusion, if it did not reveal it, it would not be appearance. Its actuality consists in the fact that it can always transform an unrealized possibility into actuality. For Hegel, actuality already includes its own possibilities and potentialities, they are not distinct from it, and they are already there.

Christos Dikeakos’s project called the *Instant Photo Series* from 1969-70 was subsequently published in a booklet called *Instant Photo Information* (fig. 12) and exhibited in the *B.C. ALMANAC(H) C-B* exhibition, 1970.<sup>258</sup> The booklet contained a series of photographs that were made by Dikeakos in which he gave himself the task of driving a car while taking photographs. The rule of driving and taking photographs necessitated a spontaneity that by definition broke almost all the rules of traditional photographic technique and composition, not to mention an additional element of danger. As in Wall’s *Landscape Manual*, the car itself for Dikeakos becomes an apparatus along with the camera, and the two are utilized together to produce the final result. The point was not to capture a ‘decisive moment’ but to document real life situations with a minimum of preconceived notions and to display raw information rather than aesthetic judgements. This raises one of the many contradictions of Conceptual art, it was invested in an

<sup>257</sup> Ian Wallace, “Street Photos 1970,” in *Unfinished Business: Photographing Vancouver Streets 1955 to 1985*, Ed. Bill Jeffries (Burnaby: West Coast Line & Presentation House Gallery, 2005), 217.

<sup>258</sup> The *B.C. ALMANAC* publication was largely the initiative of Michael de Courcy. The publication contained photographic images from a variety of different artists and photographers that, on the one hand, can be considered critical of the conservative norms of bourgeois living by celebrating images of alternative lifestyles. On the other hand, the images mostly exoticize Vancouver West Coast alternative living as one big hippie nudist camp and register more as escapist than critical. Dikeados’s *Instant Photo Series* stands out as a completely different initiative that focuses on social criticality versus celebration.

attack of the primacy of the visual yet many Conceptual artists were using photography, a medium that is exclusively visual. Wallace describes the impetus behind both Wall and Dikeakos's photographs as an attempt to avoid "the conventional clichés of the self-consciously artistic, exotic and picturesque by mimicking the clichés of the most ordinary and unartistic photographic genres."<sup>259</sup> Much like Huebler's claim that he did not want to interpret or express anything but rather he would "prefer simply to state the existence of things in terms of time and/or place."<sup>260</sup> In fact its snapshot style of the photography disturbed the idea of taste and rarity by infusing the notion that anyone could take that picture. It was about negating unexamined notions of good taste rather than advancing a fine art photographic practice. Dikeakos in his Smithsonian essay describes the interest in Vancouver by himself, Jeff Wall and Ian Wallace for a "type of scanning of the urban and suburban environment [which] was thought to be the best way to provide photographs with a sense of open observation and indeterminate certainty. To participate in the scanning methodology one had to be observant, open and, at the same time, disinterested."<sup>261</sup> Here again we find Dikeakos referring in Hegelian language to an "indeterminate certainty." His photographs operated in a fashion that reconnected with the physical world in a way that had been lost in the previous artistic generation's commitment to abstraction.

The same *Free Media Bulletin* in which "Meaningness" appeared also contained an essay by Ian Wallace titled "A Literature of Images." In the essay Wallace continues the shared sensibility already expressed by Wall and Dikeakos with respect to indeterminacy when he writes: "I am

<sup>259</sup> Ian Wallace, "Street Photos," 212.

<sup>260</sup> Meyer, 137.

<sup>261</sup> Christo Dikeakos, "*Glue Pour*," 42.

only interested in the fact of the image, as an intersection point in my consciousness. Not narrative, logic or even loose ‘poetic’ association, but a catalogue, list, index (re Duchamp’s index of images) of images which defines our consciousness of the environment as a fact, and thus of our consciousness as a fact.”<sup>262</sup> Again the Hegelian undertones are unmistakable in this quest for what Wallace further on in the essay calls “unadulterated, first-hand” knowledge. Wallace’s *Street Photos* of 1970 were conceived at this time and like the photographs of Wall and Dikeakos, Wallace’s “Literature of Images” consisted of a photographic appropriation of the everyday phenomena of the city and suburbs, which he claims provided an endless source of Duchampian “readymades.”<sup>263</sup> Looking back on these photos, Wallace describes them in a way that could almost be mistaken for a passage written by Hegel when he claims: “The work of art is the transformation of an idea into an aesthetic object that can be reflected on and is able to reproduce itself as language, and consequently develop historically. I consider the making of each work to be a re-enactment of this primary event of meaning-formation. By reflecting on the formal or aesthetic synthesis of a series of specific and objective images drawn from within, the infinity of events that constitutes the ‘plenum of reality,’ an understanding could arise from this self-consciousness. Photography was the most direct means of this imaging of the world ...”<sup>264</sup> These photographic strategies for Wallace were a way of in his terms “objectifying consciousness” in which photography could engage the world and make conceptual understanding concrete. The “plenum of reality” brought back by photography’s recognizable

<sup>262</sup> Ian Wallace, “Literature of Images,” in *Free Media Bulletin*, eds. Duane Lunde, Jeff Wall, and Ian Wallace (Vancouver: 212-5600 Dalhousie Rd, 1969).

<sup>263</sup> Ian Wallace, “Street Photos,” 213.

<sup>264</sup> *Ibid.*, 215.

immediacy of the objective world could then function as a platform for critical reflection on that reality.<sup>265</sup>

Photography was the tool that Dikeakos, Wall and Wallace used to access reality and to then reflect on what was brought back from the perceived immediacy of its information. The neutral copying device style of photographs fundamentally ends up expressing without expressing something. The reuniting with social appearances – in particular photographs of the ‘street’ and their charged meaning in the protest era of the Sixties – reconfirmed art as a social and historical engagement that functioned to clear the way for new types of artistic practices in the future.

Without getting into a prolonged debate that it warrants, as mentioned in Chapter 2, there is a certain kinship between Conceptual art and the art of the original avant-garde, and in particular that of Dada. A relationship that can best be described as a kind of ‘constellation’ or what Walter Benjamin articulated as a co-presence of different historical times and the accumulation of fragments that can never be completely integrated or made whole.<sup>266</sup> Conceptual artists were certainly conscious of Dada, as the inclusion of Richard Huelsenbeck’s “Dada Lives!” in the *Free Media Bulletin* attests to.<sup>267</sup> The goals of Dada to attack the status quo of bourgeois capitalist society, its resistance of discipline and control, its embrace of new materials and methods, and its geographically diffuse area networked together by publications, letters and postcards as a means of sharing ideas, initially appear to be remarkably similar to those of

<sup>265</sup> Ibid., 216.

<sup>266</sup> Walter Benjamin, “On the Concept of History,” in *Walter Benjamin, Selected Writings, Vol. 2, 1938-1940* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 1999), 396.

<sup>267</sup> Jeff Wall at this time at UBC was writing his master’s dissertation on Dada in Berlin.



Conceptual art.<sup>268</sup> While both sought to attack the status of art in bourgeois society and the disjuncture of art and the praxis of life, Dada art was also committed to usher in a new social order by integrating art into the praxis of life by seeking to re-enmesh the practice of art into wider projects to transform the world. For the most part, especially in the early years of Conceptual art in the Sixties, an explicitly direct political statement such as Huelsenbeck's claiming "Dada is a German Bolshevist affair" is largely absent.<sup>269</sup> In fact in Huelsenbeck's "Dada Lives!" he makes the claim that "Dada is perpetual, revolutionary 'pathos' aimed at rationalistic bourgeois art. In itself it is not an artistic movement." As with Dada, there was a re-engagement with what is encountered in everyday reality in Conceptual art in a way that did not offer an escape from the conditions of modern life, but there was little in the way of anti-art attempts to collapse art into life as was found in, for example, the French Situationist International's writings of the Sixties.<sup>270</sup> As seen with the artists in this chapter, they chose to continue to make what they considered to be art as opposed to stop making art and practicing life in an aesthetic way. Nevertheless, as with Dadaists who sought to turn the aesthetic innovations of collage into weapons of revolution, Conceptual art practices can be seen as a way of rehearsing a new social order through aesthetic activities. I liken this idea to Walter Benjamin's attempt to defend Surrealist art practices as being revolutionary.

<sup>268</sup> See Bürger, Peter. *Theory of the Avant-Garde*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984; Bridget Doherty, "The Work of Art and the Problem of Politics in Berlin Dada," *October*, Vol. 105 (Summer, 2003), 73-92; and Dafydd Jones, *Dada 1916 in Theory: Practices of Critical Resistance* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2014).

<sup>269</sup> Richard Huelsenbeck, *En Avant Dada: Die Geschichte des Dadaismus* (120; reprint, Hamburg: Edition Nautilus, 1984), 39.

<sup>270</sup> Despite the generalized characterization of Dada as being anti-art, as was personified in a 1920 photograph of George Grosz and John Heartfield holding up a placard proclaiming "Art is Dead" (ca. 480-470 B.C. *Musée du Louvre, Paris*), Dada artists were still making objects for display. On the other hand, Situationists such as Guy Debord were mostly intent on living life in an aesthetic way without the need to display 'works' in galleries.

Benjamin's "Surrealism: the Last Snapshot of the European Intelligentsia" essay looks at Andre Breton's seemingly non-political attention to the margins of every day through such things as the "factory buildings," "earliest photos," and other outmoded objects.<sup>271</sup> Yet it is in this attention to details that Benjamin perceives a relationship to a revolutionary experience through which the objects "bring the immense forces of 'atmosphere' concealed in these things to the point of explosion."<sup>272</sup> Similarly in Benjamin's "Little History of Photography" he describes Eugène Atget's photographs of empty Parisian streets as a "forerunner" of Surrealist photography. Atget's photographs "disinfected" the stuffy atmosphere of early portrait photography, according to Benjamin, by countering the emptiness of the images with the surplus of detail in them.<sup>273</sup> He states:

They are not lonely, merely without mood; the city in these pictures looks cleared out, like a lodging that has not yet found a new tenant. It is in these achievements that Surrealist photography sets the scene for a salutary estrangement between man and his surroundings. It gives free play to the politically educated eye, under whose gaze all intimacies are sacrificed to the illumination of detail.<sup>274</sup>

As a result, I would like to suggest that Atget's photographs of the city and the de-populated urban photos of the UBC artists operate similarly and introduce what Dana MacFarlane calls a new relationship to material reality itself.<sup>275</sup> The surplus of detail and the attention to different features of the city from the norm, for Benjamin, are capable of being transformed into

<sup>271</sup> Walter Benjamin, "Surrealism: The Last Snapshot of the European Intelligentsia," in *Walter Benjamin, Selected Writings, Vol.2, Part 1, 1927-1930* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 1999), 208.

<sup>272</sup> *Ibid.*, 208.

<sup>273</sup> Walter Benjamin, "Little History of Photography," in *Walter Benjamin, Selected Writings, Vol.2, Part 2, 1931-1934* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 1999), 518.

<sup>274</sup> *Ibid.*, 519.

<sup>275</sup> Dana McFarland, "Atget, Benjamin and Surrealism," *History of Photography*, Vol. 34, Num. 1 (February 2010), 17-28.

revolutionary notions. In this way a kind of Hegelian externalization of subjectivity occurs where the viewer takes an active possession of the objective details in the photographs that enable an ability to re-present the city to another end. In Hegelian terms this development is only possible through a dialectic in which the opposite of subject is the “otherness” of the object. Once the Hegelian subjective spirit is externalized through ‘objective’ external objects, which exist separately from individual consciousness, spirit is no longer “*for-itself*” but “*in-itself*” as it becomes embodied in an objective order that exceeds all individual consciousness. Consequently, spirit returns to “*in-itself*” enriched by the externalization.<sup>276</sup> Thus the photographs perform a kind of indirect critique through this process of externalization. The dialectical contradictions the photographs conjure up can be seen to have the potential capability of revolutionizing perception, which is essential to the opposition of the commodity form, the cynicism and violence of politics in the Sixties, and a reminder of the non-desire to consume and dominate.

The description given here may appear to be transforming these artists into a group of manifesto publishing Young Hegelians, whereas their interests and influences at the time were in fact far more diverse. However, in lieu of a more nuanced analysis, Ian Wallace gives the best one sentence description of the intellectual climate for the artistically inclined at UBC in the late Sixties when he wrote: “In my teaching at the time, modernist poetry, Marxism, systems theory, structuralism, art history, modernist art criticism, Marshal McLuhanism, the Russian Avant-Garde, minimalist and conceptual art, avant-garde cinema, the student movement, early Marxist feminism and the concerns of everyday life were blended together into a very impure mix of

<sup>276</sup> Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Sections 80 – 86 of the *Introduction*.

diverse and often incompatible philosophies.”<sup>277</sup> Clearly there was a kind of melting pot of competing tensions and where the Hegelian interests were only one aspect. Nevertheless, both Wallace and Wall many years later continued their interest in Hegel. Wall in a 1988 essay “Into the Forest: Two Sketches for Studies of Rodney Graham’s Work”<sup>278</sup> uses the notion of “bad infinity” from Hegel’s *Science of Logic* in his analysis of Graham’s work. Wallace in his 1990 essay “The Idea of the University” uses the word “motility,” meaning a kind of thought as movement or an active subject, which is a Hegelian term that he takes up from Herbert Marcuse’s *Habilitationsschrift* dissertation on Hegel titled *Hegel’s Ontology and the Theory of Historicity*, 1932.

Marcuse himself came to Vancouver in March of 1969 (fig. 13) at the invitation of radical professors from Simon Fraser University’s (SFU) Political Science, Sociology, and Anthropology Department (PSA) in the aftermath of both the November 1968 takeover by students of SFU’s Administration Building and PSA’s own on-going disputes with SFU’s administration over tenure and greater academic autonomy. According to Jerry Zaslove, one of the SFU professors who invited Marcuse, the Marcuse who spoke to the students at SFU was the “Marcuse of the critique of the bourgeois family, the liberationist and the quasi-Anarchist.”<sup>279</sup> Fundamentally telling the students what they wanted to hear, Marcuse stressed that guilt applies more to those who tolerate society rather than those who refuse to be accessories to the crime of silence.<sup>280</sup> As to be expected, Marcuse’s books were highly popular with student protestors in the

<sup>277</sup> Ian Wallace, *The Idea of the University*, (Vancouver: UBC Fine Arts Gallery, 1990), 26.

<sup>278</sup> Jeff Wall, “Into the Forest: Two Sketches for Studies of Rodney Graham’s Work,” in *Jeff Wall: Selected Essays and Interviews* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 2007), 87.

<sup>279</sup> Conversation with author 09/14/2014, and email 09/15/2014.

<sup>280</sup> Letter from Marcuse to Jerry Zaslove dated April 7, 1969, text of which was provided by Jerry Zaslove.

Sixties and he was probably more responsible than anyone else for introducing Marx and Hegel to new readers.

## 4.2 A Marcusian Moment

The interest in Hegel by artists and students alike can be partially explained as a by-product of an interest in the writings of Karl Marx. The desire in the Sixties to look for alternatives inevitably lead many to Marx, whose writings were still widely believed to be the only serious language of revolt. Consequently a nineteenth-century Marxist language, in conjunction with the language of fashionable Third World countryside revolts, served as the *lingua franca* of the entire protest movement. Yet, what was at stake for many of the protest movements was less about revolution than who had the authority to make decisions, and thus while the language of Marxism was used as an alternative language of resistance, it often expressed masked libertarian demands and a utopian vision of a new society instead of a revolutionary takeover of political and economic control. It was perhaps this shifting perspective that led many away from the 'old' Marx of Lenin and Stalin, to the more recently made available and formerly unpublished writings of a young Marx that had previously received little attention such as *The German Ideology* and the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*. With these texts it was suddenly possible to be a Marxist without the baggage of traditional Communist parties and to instead focus on the dehumanizing alienation of industrial society, and how to change the world by liberating consciousness. These issues had a more contemporary resonance and helped reignite a strong form of critique with which to confront new models of technological social control that arose in the Sixties.

The intellectual current, which became known as the New Left by the mid-Sixties, took up the ‘young’ Marx and distributed its ideas on both sides of the Atlantic through publications such as the *New Left Review*, *Socialism ou Barbarie*, *Liberation* and *Monthly Review*. Among the chief spokesmen of the New Left and the ‘young’ Marx was Herbert Marcuse. His *One Dimensional Man* and *An Essay on Liberation* were among the most widely read books by students and artists alike during the Sixties. Marcuse’s engagement with the early work of Marx started as soon as they became available in Germany in 1932. He, along with other members of the Frankfurt school such as Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, folded the new Marx material into their existing theories that were built on the ideas of Georg Lukács and Antonio Gramsci. Their interpretations were brought over to the United State during their exile in the 1940s and published in English.

This interest in the ‘young’ Marx meant that there was also a revision in the understanding of how Marx viewed Hegel, especially through essays in the *1844 Manuscripts* such as the “Critique of Hegelian Dialectic and Philosophy as a Whole” and “Hegel’s Construction of The Phenomenology.” The traditional way of thinking about Marx’s interpretation of Hegel usually started with the famous quote from *Capital* where Marx claims that his “dialectical method is, in its foundations, not only different from the Hegelian, but exactly opposite to it.”<sup>281</sup> In the *1844 Manuscripts* Marx writes:

The outstanding achievement of Hegel’s *Phenomenology* and of its final result, the dialectic of negativity as the moving and creative principle – is thus that Hegel conceives the self-creation of the human being [des Menschen] as a process.<sup>282</sup>

<sup>281</sup> Karl Marx, *Capital*, Vol 1. (London: Penguin, (1844) 1976),102.

<sup>282</sup> Karl Marx, “Critique of Hegelian Dialectic and Philosophy as a Whole,” <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1844/manuscripts/hegel.htm> (accessed May 11, 2014).

This “dialectic of negativity” is taken up in Marcuse’s 1941 *Reason and Revolution: Hegel and the Rise of Social Theory*, the first Hegelian Marxist book to appear in English. Marcuse’s important contribution to Hegelian scholarship is the appreciation of the centrality to Marx of Hegel’s concept of negativity.<sup>283</sup> In *Reason and Revolution* Marcuse writes: “For Marx, as for Hegel, the dialectic takes note of the fact that the negation inherent in reality is ‘the moving and creative principle.’ The dialectic is the dialectic of negativity.”<sup>284</sup> This is because Marcuse believes that for Marx the mystifying character of economic conditions appear as affirmation yet are in fact a complete negation of humanity when he writes:

The mode of labor perverts all human faculties, accumulation of wealth intensifies poverty, and technological progress leads to ‘the rule of dead matter over the human world.’ Objective facts come alive and enter an indictment of society. Economic realities exhibit their own inherent negativity.<sup>285</sup>

The focus on Hegel’s negativity is what was so new and original about Marcuse’s emphasis. This was especially true when compared to traditional scholars that had instead stressed Hegel’s notions of reconciliation and mediation. Marcuse analyses dialectical thought as starting with the experience of a world that is unfree, where “man and nature exist in condition of alienation, exist as ‘other than they are.’”<sup>286</sup> Freedom, on the other hand, is the innermost dynamic of existence and is thus essentially negative in that “existence is both alienation and the process by which the

<sup>283</sup> Anderson, Kevin. “On Hegel and the Rise of Social Theory: A Critical Appreciation of Herbert Marcuse’s *Reason and Revolution*, Fifty Years Later,” *Sociological Theory* 11:3 (November 1993): 243-267.

<sup>284</sup> Marcuse, Herbert. *Reason and Revolution: Hegel and the Rise of Social Theory*, (Boston: Beacon Press, [1941] 1960), 282.

<sup>285</sup> *Ibid.*, 281-282.

<sup>286</sup> Marcuse, *Reason*, ix.

subject comes to itself in comprehending and mastering alienation.”<sup>287</sup> Dialectical thought is believed by Marcuse to be negative in itself and functions to break down the self-assurance of common sense and undermine the power and language of facts in order to explode the established state of affairs. It is easy to see how attractive this text could be to students and artists wanting to radically change the world. The popularity of Marcuse’s writing not only introduced Marx for the first time to many student readers, but also spurred an interest in Hegel. However, Marcuse was not the only writer to renew an attention to Hegel.

In France important Hegelian scholars such as Alexandre Kojève and Jean Hyppolite influenced an entire generation of French philosophers and theorists from the 1930s to the Sixties.<sup>288</sup> However, it is important to highlight the fact that there was disagreement among academics during the Sixties on interpreting both Hegel and Marx and it was Louis Althusser’s work that was very much in opposition to that of Marcuse’s. Since Althusser had considerable influence with student protesters in France, and some of that influence found its way to the U.S.,

<sup>287</sup> Ibid.

<sup>288</sup> The writing of Alexandre Kojève, one of the most influential Hegelian scholars in the twentieth century, made its way into North America in a rather round about way. Kojève was a Russian aristocrat and nephew of Wassily Kandinsky who fled Russia when the Bolsheviks came to power and first settled in Germany where he studied philosophy and then moved to Paris where he taught. Despite his background he considered himself a Communist, in his words “a strict Stalinist.” During the 1930s he conducted a seminar on Hegel’s *The Phenomenology of Spirit* at the Sorbonne that was attended by a remarkable list of brilliant students such as Jacques Lacan, George Bataille, Raymond Queneau, André Breton, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, and Raymond Aron. His lectures remained hugely popular and influential through the Sixties and other French philosophers such as Jacques Derrida acknowledged his influence. Kojève’s version of Hegel was a highly edited one where he anthropomorphised the dialectics of class struggle and a vision of the end of history into an ultimate synthesis of reconciliation beyond any contradiction. While Kojève’s reputation was high with French left-wing intellectuals, strangely this same reputation came to America via conservative thinkers such as Leo Strauss (a personal friend of Kojève) and Allan Bloom at the University of Chicago. Bloom brought Kojève’s *Lectures the Phenomenology of Spirit* to America in 1968, the same year that Kojève died. Perhaps it should not be too surprising that Kojève’s totalitarian-like interpretation of Hegel could be re-interpreted in a Right-wing fashion. Bloom’s one time student, Francis Fukuyama, circulated Kojève’s emphasis of Hegel’s end of history during his time employed in the Reagan and Bush administration State Departments and eventually published his own *The End of History and the Last Man* in 1992.



it is useful to briefly examining it. Althusser claimed that his was a ‘scientific’ interpretation of the works of Marx and as such in his book *For Marx* he separates Marx’s thought into what he famously called the “epistemological divide” between the “ideological” period of the ‘young’ humanistic Marx and the scientific period of the ‘mature’ Marx after 1857.<sup>289</sup> According to Althusser, if the ideological Humanistic Marxism of the early Marx were to be accepted by Scientific Marxists it would mean that they would “cut themselves off from all knowledge.”<sup>290</sup> Althusser’s project was to purge the young Marx while retaining the science of the later Marx. For Althusser’s structuralist Marxism the ‘young’ Marx’s analysis of the alienated worker was not conducted using the appropriate social categories of a materialist conception of history, such as production relations and class struggle. Thus according to Althusser’s the ‘young’ Marx had not yet become Marx. As for Hegel, on whom Althusser also taught a seminar, he hyperbolically wrote:

One phantom is more especially crucial than any other today: the shade of Hegel. To drive this phantom back into the night we need a little more light on Marx, or what is the same things, a little more Marxist light on Hegel himself. We can then escape from the ambiguities and confusions of the ‘inversion’.<sup>291</sup>

His view of needing to drive Hegel back into the night was common among structuralists who were interested transforming social disciplines into sciences and stemming the tide of humanism. This contrast between structuralism and humanism can be seen appearing in Conceptual art practices such as those of the Vancouver artists in this chapter who appear to actually adopt both positions. Their photographs while driving are analogous to an application of a system or a

<sup>289</sup> Louis Althusser, *For Marx* (Vintage Books, 1970), 34.

<sup>290</sup> Ibid., 223.

<sup>291</sup> Ibid., 116.

structuralist methodology, but the end result depends on chance and is thus indeterminate. Therefore they used a structured system to achieve an unstructured result, demonstrating a subjective artistic initiative to turn systems into an object of study and repurpose it for a new experimental way of making art.

While Althusser had a significant student following in France, his exposure in North America was far more limited in comparison to Marcuse. However, North American students were aware of him as evidenced in the 1969 issue of *Radical America (RA)* that dedicates nearly half of its eighty pages to debates about Althusser's writings. Counter to the conservative rhetoric describing student movements in the Sixties as being mindless and hopelessly romantic, publications such as *RA* are a reminder of their scholarly and educational initiatives. In fact, the cited *RA* issue with debates on Althusser casts a very different perspective on the self-initiated engagement with education by students. It is worthwhile noting that the *RA* journal was connected to the SDS's Radical Education Project (REP). *RA* was launched in 1967 when there was a great interest by student movements to take control of their own education. It was during this period in the mid Sixties when numerous "Free Universities" sprang up, inspired by books such as Paul Goodman's *The Community of Scholars*, 1962, and SDS's Port Huron Statement, as a blue print for more accountable education. There were numerous examples of alternative off-campus initiatives in the mid to late Sixties including the Free University of Berkeley, the Free University of New York, London Free School, Free University of Berlin, Vancouver Free University, etc. REP was initially started in 1966 in an effort to "visualize and stimulate a

‘movement turn toward education.’<sup>292</sup> Part of the rationale for the REP was some of the fallout from SDS’s enthusiastic student organizers rushing into community organizing action projects for which they were often ill prepared. SDS founder Al Haber became convinced that there was a need to raise the political consciousness of students and a need for an internal education program. The REP published tens of thousands of pamphlets, facilitated lectures, and organized conferences and study groups. Students began to find that educational work had become a satisfying way to combine scholarly talents and political objectives. REP published a variety of articles on “the black colony, labor, political economy, imperialism and the third world.”<sup>293</sup> While *RA* was always independent of the SDS and REP, it began with close association. It provided a more scholarly venue for New Left opinion and theory, and became what Paul Berman termed “the closest thing to a theoretical journal the Students for a Democratic Society ever had.”<sup>294</sup> The seriousness with which these publication initiatives were taken displays a need of the protest movements to have a firm theoretical foundation for their work to counter conservative mainstream propaganda.

#### **4.3 “But what if a picture is a thousand words?”<sup>295</sup>**

For both A&L and the UBC artists discussed in this chapter there was a desire to find a new way to make art that was not a continuation of what had in their minds become a hegemonic form of art imbricated in the repressiveness of those in power. They still wanted to be artists and

<sup>292</sup> John McMillian, “Love Letters to the Future: REP, Radical America, and New Left History,” *Radical History Review*, 77 (2000): 20-59.

<sup>293</sup> Ibid., 31.

<sup>294</sup> Ibid., 40.

<sup>295</sup> Donald Davidson, “What Metaphors Mean,” in *On Metaphor*, Ed. Sheldon Sacks (Chicago, 1979), 45.

make art, but they did not want to submit to the established norms of the practice that propped up existing elites. This necessitated a way to learn to circumvent the beliefs and values of Modernism present in dominant culture and espoused in the formal medium specific art criticism of Clement Greenberg and Michael Fried, which Conceptual artists such as the A&L members were set on countering. To accomplish this meant that Conceptual artists needed to re-educate themselves and to re-formulate a different way of making and thinking about art. It was through language and philosophy for Art & Language and through photography and philosophy for the UBC artists that a different toolset presented itself to relearn the process of making art.

The A&L initial members, which was formed in 1968, included Terry Atkinson, David Bainbridge, Michael Baldwin and Harold Hurrell. Atkinson and Bainbridge were both teaching in art schools at the time, while Baldwin had collaborated with Atkinson, and Hurrell had worked with Bainbridge on various projects. Histories of A&L such as those by Charles Harrison summarize the early years of the group, which I will not repeat here.<sup>296</sup> Instead my interest lies in what Linda Morris has pointed out as a major influence on A&L's theories and practices, that being the practical considerations of art teaching.<sup>297</sup> Art teaching took place in the form of verbal language and the theory of art in the form of written language. Thus a collaborative discursive conversation about art became the hallmark of A&L's practice along with the publication of their concerns in the *Art-Language (A-L)* journal beginning in May 1969 (fig. 14). The publication explored philosophical and theoretical related themes that were of interest to A&L. It is important to also note that there was a considerable amount of cross-pollination from the other

<sup>296</sup> Charles Harrison, *Essays on Art & Language*, (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1999) and Charles Harrison and Fred Orton, *A Provisional History of Art & Language*, (Paris: Editions E. Fabre, 1982).

<sup>297</sup> Linda Morris, *Beuys Art Language NSCAD*, unpublished Royal College of Art Thesis, 1971-73.

side of the Atlantic. In addition to the A&L members who resided in New York, there were contributions from other American artists such as Sol LeWitt, Dan Graham, and Lawrence Weiner.

A&L's own history of their early development states that in separate individual exhibitions<sup>298</sup> their various members sought to move away from what they described as the "Minimalist ready-made context of art."<sup>299</sup> They claimed that this search for alternatives led to an emphasis on theory and constructs versus only material aspects. The emphasis was on what they termed a critical attitude toward the fact that their work "constituted knowledge" or had an "adequacy simply as knowledge." The text became a medium of expression of thought; the art was not in the documents in a literary way but in the 'ideas.' The text as artwork was part of the refusal to make art as the continuation of tradition and instead was aimed at puncturing art's auratic presence and disrupting its purely visual self-sufficiency. Recognizing that they were on the edge of what could be considered art, they made the decision to regard questions like "But is it still artwork?" as irrelevant.<sup>300</sup> A&L in the Sixties came to the conclusion that since "art objects now depended upon a framework of supporting institutions ... what was required was not so much 'works' as work on the circumstances of work"<sup>301</sup> There was a desire to "go-on" as artists but "going-on," as Harrison claims, "seemed to entail a search for critical and conceptual material to

<sup>298</sup> "Mirror Piece" by Michael Baldwin, 1965. Baldwin and Atkinson's "Air-conditioning Show" and "Air Show," 1966. David Bainbridge and Harold Hurrell, "Hardware Show," 1967, at the Architectural Association.

<sup>299</sup> Art & Language, *A short Introduction on the Work*, Statement accompanying "Exhibition of Lectures: The Art & Language Press," Dain Gallery, New York, 1971.

<sup>300</sup> Ibid.

<sup>301</sup> Michael Baldwin, Charles Harrison, and Mel Ramsden, "Memories of the Medicine Show," *Art-Language* New Series, no. 2 (June 1997): 34.

go on with” and there was no knowing for sure where this material was to be found, if at all.<sup>302</sup>

Working and talking together became a way to construct a discursive space with which to establish where the material was to be found and the discursive space soon became that very material. For Harrison the “very formation of Art & Language in 1968 could be seen as symptomatic of dissent from prevailing stereotypes of artistic personality and of the individual artistic career.”<sup>303</sup> The way to “go-on” included a different way of being an artist as well as an alternative way of making art.

A&L turned the studio into a kind of dialogical research space where reading, writing and group conversation took place instead of painting and sculpture. They engaged in a form of collective authorship of an extended conversation in which discussion and shared learning shaped their investigations. Between 1968 and 1982, according to A&L, up to fifty people were associated with the group. Much of the effort in the early work was in redefining the place out of which art could be authored.<sup>304</sup> Individual statements were subjected to scrutiny and the messy conflicts and confusions associated with learning and critical debates formed the collectivity of their work. It was through theory and thinking about language that the problems facing art took shape and allowed A&L to resist what they believed were the constraining norms of Modernism.

*A-L* journal published theoretical, philosophical and aesthetic articles by members of A&L and it functioned as a site of the group’s collective communication, and served as their vehicle for the dialog and disagreements that took place in their conversations. In Harrison’s *Provisional History* he describes a typical lack of consensus within the group for publishing *A-L*, while Terry

<sup>302</sup> Charles Harrison, *Essays on Art & Language* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1999): 18.

<sup>303</sup> Ibid., 91.

<sup>304</sup> John Roberts, *The Intangibilities of Form*, 129.

Atkinson saw it as a kind of alternative to the gallery system where the essays could be considered art and it would thus be another means for an art career. The journal in essence presented critical discourse as art. It was in the first issue's well known introduction that Atkinson mused "... this editorial, in itself an attempt to evince some outlines as to what 'conceptual art' is, is held out as a 'conceptual art' work." On the other hand, Michael Baldwin saw it as a way to publish discursive research, which was free of traditional editorial control.

The densely printed roman typeface of the *A-L* journal together with its un-illustrated black and white content, and digest-size made a formal statement that was antithetical to the kind of glossy publication like *Artforum* that typified the art world. *A-L*'s displacement of the modern art space by placing 'works' in a circulating journal was in some ways related to other textual works by Conceptual artists such as Dan Graham, Robert Smithson, and Joseph Kosuth.<sup>305</sup> The primary gallery location of the art world was reverted through a circulating journal back into a kind of social space. However, the enterprise was then reverted back into the gallery space when in 1972 the entire contents of the journal up to that point, as well as unpublished submission, were arranged in filling cabinets and exhibited as the *Art-Language Index 01* at Documenta 5. The *Index* also coincided with the fact that the Art Theory course at Coventry was terminated in 1971 and those teaching it were now unemployed. It marked a new form of economic survival for the 'first generation' A&L members in what Harrison called the "waning market strength of Conceptual Art and by demand for its relics."<sup>306</sup> Some of the details of this economic shift were: Daniel Templon, a Parisian art-dealer paid Atkinson and Baldwin a retainer for a period of time,

<sup>305</sup> Joseph Kosuth was the New York editor of *A-L* for a period time, but his relationship with A&L was always at a remove. He preferred to keep his individual identity as an artist rather than submerge it into the collective.

<sup>306</sup> Harrison, *Essays*, 112.

in 1972 Swiss art dealer Bruno Bischofberger bought a large number of early works (“scraps of paper”) for cash, as well as interest from Italian art-dealer Gian Enzo Sperone who had strong connections to the Sonnabend and Castelli galleries in New York.<sup>307</sup> On the other hand, Morris suggests that the use of galleries claimed by A&L as a means to “finance research.” Nevertheless, it is clear that the art world’s reach, as always, was commodifying the un-commodifiable.

*Index 01* for Harrison could be thought of as a kind of outcome of the Coventry Art Theory course. It was a consequence of the work that took place in the course and at the same time a consequence of the suppression of the course and the subsequent need to find a different public forum.<sup>308</sup> The Art Theory course had its origins in the shared conversational practice of A&L and came about in September of 1969 when both Baldwin and Atkinson were teaching at the Coventry College of Art. The course fell within the context of a changing art school curriculum in the UK that was reviewed in Chapter 2. It brought the kind of theory that was starting to be introduced with Complementary Studies in the new National Diploma in Art and Design instituted in 1963. However, instead of being an addition to studio classes like Complementary Studies, the Art Theory course was essentially a theory based class that was designed to be akin to studio work as a main area of study and not subordinated to studio as Complementary Studies were.<sup>309</sup> The rationale behind the course, according to Morris, was that the theoretical

<sup>307</sup> Harrison, *A Provisional History*, 27.

<sup>308</sup> Charles Harrison, “Conceptual Art, the aesthetic and the end(s) of art,” in *Themes in Contemporary Art*, Eds. Gill Perry and Paul Wood (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 78.

<sup>309</sup> David Rushton, Kevin Lole and Philip Pilkington, “Some Concerns In Fine Art Education,” *Studio International*, vol 182, nos 937 (October 1971).



background of an artist is not the same as that of an art historian, and the theory must come from an artist's work so that they could function intellectually as well as practically.<sup>310</sup>

The structure of the course was divided into five sections:<sup>311</sup>

1. Art Theory
2. Audio Visual
3. Epistemology
4. Romanticism
5. Technos

Students had the option of combining the course with their normal studio work or to pursue it full-time throughout their period at Coventry. The Art Theory section focused on a discussion from Duchamp to the then present day. However, discussion was based on the theoretical background of art works rather than the “superficial end results.”<sup>312</sup> The Audio Visual section was the practical section used as a means of recording and reproducing extensions of ideas that emerged from the Art Theory sections. Discussion ensued at each stage of the construction phase, eventually leading to a conversation on media and information. The Epistemology section attempted to make the students analyze the meaning of language in areas of the theories they were using and the language to define them. The questioning of knowledge was core to all the sections but the Epistemology section discussed the nature of questioning as a separate subject in its own right in order to develop the student's ability to argue, prove and reject. The Technos section was broken into two parts; the first looked at the link between materials and the ideas carried in those materials, or the way ideas are conditioned by the form of their representation.

<sup>310</sup> Morris, *Beuys Art Language*.

<sup>311</sup> The course description is a summary from Linda Morris's *Beuys Art Language NSCAD*.

<sup>312</sup> Morris, *Beuys Art Language*.

The second part discussed the development of art in terms of materials available to it, especially the then recent interest in new visual media such as photography, film and video.

The central component of the course according to Harrison was the Romanticism section. Contrary to its name it was not an art-historical survey of the Romantic Movement. Instead, it was designed to deal with the mythology of art in an analytical way as opposed to the Romanticist way that privileged individualism, originality and personal expression. Harrison claims that the Romanticism reference was to Hegel's notion of the end of art and to the "objective humour" that he saw as the defining feature of the late Romanticism.<sup>313</sup> Harrison takes this to mean something along the lines of ironic reflection, which indicates the contingency at the heart of the apparently profound in art and thus speaks to a more "fully conscious view of culture and history."<sup>314</sup> The approach was to question and examine the system of beliefs and practices behind modern art. The most crucial question was of just what kind of work counted as artwork? An interrogation of why a student wanted to do (a) rather than (b) or (c) involved a rational questioning of their attitudes toward their work. This of course opened the door for the consideration of art making outside of strictly working with materials in the studio, but a matter of theoretical inquiry through reading, writing, and/or conversational exchange.

The content of the course developed out of "the need to sort out what was teachable in respect of art," but at the same time "became practically indistinguishable with A&L from the project of theorizing art itself."<sup>315</sup> Drawing no distinction between their activity as artists and their activity as teachers enabled them to qualify teaching and education through self-

<sup>313</sup> Harrison, "Conceptual Art," 76.

<sup>314</sup> Ibid., 77.

<sup>315</sup> Harrison, *A Provisional History*, 26.

criticism.<sup>316</sup> The course marked an important shift in what could be understood as art and art education by promoting language as the alternative main medium of studio practice. This was in part a result of the A&L members and students' interest in philosophers, in particular linguistic philosophers such as Ludwig Wittgenstein and the whole school of the ordinary language philosophers such as A. J. Ayer and J. L. Austin, in addition to a Marxist political position.<sup>317</sup> Both from a teaching and an artistic perspective, discussion took on the aspect of an inquiry. The attempt was to refuse to "hang around passively" and to recover an agency (or from the perspective of this dissertation – an autonomy) that A&L claimed had been "removed by the culture of the post-Duchampian object."<sup>318</sup> For A&L the art object was dematerialized by the virtuality of the text, in reference to either the journal or their text based works such as *Index* or the *Blurring Handbook*, 1973, and in the process managed to bring back the dialectical reality of social life.<sup>319</sup>

With the demise of the Theory Course and as work began on the Documenta *Index*, the group's work moved to a more complex collaborative process. It expanded to include former Coventry students David Rushton and Philip Pilkington who had published a similar looking publication to *A-L* called *Analytical Art*, and Charles Harrison who became U.K. editor of *A-L* from 1972 until 1976. In 1971 A&L merged with the New York based Society for Theoretical Art and Analysis (as well as its journal *Art Press*) formed in 1969 by Ian Burn, Mel Ramsden, and Roger Cutforth. Its activities became divided between England and New York, with other

<sup>316</sup> Morris, *Beuys Art Language*.

<sup>317</sup> Morris, *Beuys Art Language*.

<sup>318</sup> Art & Language, "Voices Off: Reflections on Conceptual Art," *Critical Inquiry*, 33(1) (2006): 113-135.

<sup>319</sup> *Ibid.*, 130.

New York members including Michael Corris, Preston Heller, Andrew Menard and Terry Smith, all adding to the complexity of the collaboration. A&L's own description of how the dialectical nature of their texts emerged from their discursive roots is worth quoting at length:

As the discursivity of the text increased, so the remaining sense of it as readymade-by-description-or-ostension weakened still further. Similarly, as the text ceased to function as a form that usurped the place of painting on the gallery wall, in the manner of one of Kosuth's definitions, so the legacy of the containing frame also diminished. As both effects weakened, so did the power of those formal constraints on the length of the text that characterized the supposedly definitive postminimal genres of conceptual art as they were established in New York between 1967 and 1969. It was our experience at this point that the lack of formal constraint on the extent of the text allowed the mechanisms internal to its discursive production to take over. What drove the discourse in practice was no longer the need to produce the brief illusions of transparency but those recursive and dialogical processes by which the discourse itself was pursued and continued.<sup>320</sup>

The implication of the passage is that the lack of formal constraints on the extent of the text allowed the mechanisms internal to its discursive production to take over. Since there were no explicit limits to the extent of the text, and since it became subject to what A&L termed the social modes of argumentation, growth and change, the reality of social conditions were not merely its external determinants but its internally constructive principles as well. Meaning the conversational 'noise' contained and revealed the dialectical reality of social life that was obscured in the dominant ways of thinking about art. Their work, and the Art Theory course, took on the character of an extended conversation in which discussion, argument and shared learning shaped the outcome of their research interests in a way that they felt was not constrained by aesthetics or academic norms. The important thing for the A&L members was to keep on

<sup>320</sup> Ibid., 133.

talking to each other and to scrutinize what was said; it was their way of getting out of the ideological pre-conditioned bind of what was believed to be a work of art and thus their response to “going-on.”

The question of how to “go-on” as well as whether to “not-go-on” seemed ever present in their work that was at the margins of what could be considered art. Since their efforts were so close to the edge of not being art it seemed only natural that some members periodically went over that edge and decided for various reasons to not continue making art, as did Bainbridge and Hurrel, and later Australian member Ian Burn. The point was not to just make text that was interesting, but to make text that was problematic. The *Index* and *Blurting* pieces constantly ask this of the reader: “how do I go-on?” and “do I in fact want to go-on?” A&L considered their *Blurting Handbook* as a kind of “teaching machine” that compelled exploration.<sup>321</sup> This is stated rather implicitly in blurt 108 “CONVERSATION Art & Language conversation can be described as a learning situation,” which has links to other blurts ranging from “Collaboration” and “Knowledge” to “Education.”<sup>322</sup> The concern was with what constituted “going-on” and not about describing “going-on.”<sup>323</sup> The reader of the blurts has to make choices on which connections to follow, there are no determined pathways, and then he or she must deal with the implication of those choices. The reader is thus faced with the same problem as the A&L members faced in their traversing of the textual terrain by contending with their own “how-to-go-on.” As opposed to Greenberg’s or Fried’s notion of beholding an artwork as an experience in

<sup>321</sup> Art & Language, *Blurting In A&L: an index ...* (Halifax: Nova Scotia College of Art, 1973), 3.

<sup>322</sup> The blurts or passages are arranged alphabetically and numbered in the handbook. At the end of each of the Blurts there is a list of other possible numbered Blurts that the reader can branch off to. In a way it resembles a textual precursor to the Internet hyperlink.

<sup>323</sup> The New York contingent of A&L (at this time (Ian Burn, Michael Corris, Preston Heller, Andrew Menard, Mel Ramsden and Terry Smith) met weekly and circulated memos or blurts among each other, which were responded and commented on by the others.

and of itself, which A&L felt lead to nothing, the texts presumed a conversational exchange in the active self-generated engagement of a reader who explored text. In the end the text is concerned with developing a learning environment in terms of discovering context and plotting courses of events. Although written a few years later, and in the New York A&L group's splinter publication called *The Fox*, Karl Beveridge's essay "A Forum on *Artforum*" captures the spirit of what A&L's collaborative conversations on both sides of the Atlantic were hoping to achieve. In it he states, "A community is the only means by which we can overcome our vacant subjectivity and begin to deal with the larger world. Such communities, based initially on professional groupings, could thus form the basis for the destruction of the present art world; its institutions and authorities."<sup>324</sup> The small conversational community thus was believed to become a site of refusal and critical resistance. It was not that conversation and spoken language was where philosophical disputes were settled so much as the fact that it was a collaborative effort at inquiry where individual statements were subjected to scrutiny and inquiry, leading to a collective product of learning instead of an individual expression of originality.

Harrison's claim that the Romanticism Section of the Art Theory course was a reference to the Hegelian notion of 'objective humour' is somewhat mistaken. Hegel's *Aesthetics* never mentions 'objective humour' but it does have a section titled "Subjective Humour." Regardless of this error, the gist of Harrison's interpretation holds true. In his *Aesthetics* Hegel criticizes the hollowness of all forms of modern Romantic subjectivity as being "merely subjective." For Hegel true beauty in art must satisfy the infinite inwardness of the subject by being both objective and yet concretize an infinite richness. The Romantic consciousness was not properly

<sup>324</sup> Karl Beveridge, "A Forum on *Artforum*," *The Fox*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (1975): 138-140.

anchored in substantial objectivity and thus generated a “bad infinity” of infinite restlessness. Hegel states that: “Everything genuinely and independently real becomes only a *show*, not true and genuine on its own account or through itself, but a mere appearance due to the ego in whose power and caprice and at whose free disposal it remains.”<sup>325</sup> Through the inwardness of the ego where “nothing has value in its real and actual nature,” the result for Hegel is non-engagement of the actual that becomes only an escapist endeavor. This is precisely the kind of subjective escapism rooted in the individualism and originality of the artist that A&L wanted to avoid through their collaborative text based work.

In A&L’s practice and teaching during the late Sixties and early 1970s there is a core commitment to the relations between learning and conversation as a collective enterprise. Just as Hegel no longer viewed autonomy as an act of individual self-legislation, A&L can be seen as promoting a process of self-actualization of the collective subject. For both Hegel and A&L there is a bond between critique and a Hegelian kind of autonomy, or between the self-reflection of reason and autonomy. A&L’s emphasis on learning and conversation incorporates all the messy arguments, dissatisfactions, qualifications and self-questioning involved in critique and debate. It recalls Hegel’s *Phenomenology* in which learning is a temporal process of becoming where discourse and actions produce conflicts and unintended results from the initial intentions. What distinguishes Hegel’s phenomenological critique from mere skepticism is that the inadequacies of experience are viewed as a learning process in which knowledge of the previous experiences subsequently get re-incorporated into revised claims, and so on as they become more and more comprehensive. Thus autonomy for Hegel must be understood as a kind of social achievement in

<sup>325</sup> Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art*, Volume 1 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), 65.

time, a result of opposition and contention, and how persons attempt to overcome these contentions and become reconciled to their social world. Autonomy for Hegel is not freedom from external constraint but a collectively achieved state he calls “being with self in an other.”<sup>326</sup> Likewise A&L’s collective authorship decentered the individual artistic subject and yet at the same time the conversational space provided a shared learning environment for individual autonomy through the group’s discursive activity.

Hegel’s *Phenomenology* maintained that the goal of critique is to further the autonomy of the subject, where autonomy is a process of self-actualization in history attained by the creative and transformative activity of the subject. The individual achieves autonomy of what is already the acquired property of what Hegel calls the universal spirit. Hegel claims:

This past existence has already become an acquired possession of the universal spirit; it constitutes the substance of the individual, that is, his inorganic nature. – In this respect, the formative education of the individual regarded from his own point of view consists in his acquiring what thus lies at hand, in his living off that inorganic nature and in his taking possession of it for himself. Likewise, this is nothing but the universal spirit itself, that is, substance giving itself its self-consciousness, that is, its coming-to-be and its reflective turn into itself.<sup>327</sup>

The past property of the universal Spirit, in a sense, suggests that the world-historical activity of humans has transformed externality and has created history out of nature. What Hegel means is that it is through the very dynamic of learning through experience and its antimonies that human thinking begins to match the world. Human reason has been educated over history by its experiences in the world and society so that it has come to embody the patterns and structures of reality. For Hegel, the truth of the object is not unknowable as with Kant, but can be found in the

<sup>326</sup> Hegel, *Phenomenology*, 216.

<sup>327</sup> Ibid., 16.



discourse about it. Hegel's repeated claim is that the content of discourse is generated by its form, meaning that language that is thought to be descriptive is in fact already reflective and contains judgments about how the object is apprehended.

#### **4.4 Going-On**

A&L and UBC artists Dikeakos, Wall and Wallace sought to formulate their particular way of “going-on” as artists through a process analogous to a kind of Hegelian education of the self in order to find some new ground with which to continue. The emphasis shifted to explication instead of decoration. To step into the terra incognita of an art practice negated of frames or pedestals led to a critical incorporation of social parameters rather than just unthinkingly carrying on with a tradition. The Coventry Art Theory course acted as a lab for A&L's own practice as did the teaching of art history for Wallace and Dikeakos at UBC where they incorporated contemporary art into their courses at a time when their colleagues were taking more historical and connoisseurial approaches.<sup>328</sup> There was a self-educational initiative that required a rewriting of the rules. In both these cases, whether it was because of their engagement with educational institutions or not, a visual beholding of an art object was replaced with a type of reading and cognitive engagement that took on a strong temporal aspect. The reading was literal with their alternative publications, but even when the street photographs of Dikeakos and Wallace were displayed in an exhibition format, each individual photograph was very much dependent on being linked to the whole of the series, just as they also operated to link the

<sup>328</sup> Christos Dikeakos archive of course materials.

disparate subject positions of the audience into a community of readers. Likewise for A&L the discursive learning environment of the group was reciprocated by the audience's exploration of the journals, handbooks and *Index* installations in a temporal manner. Looking was replaced by reading where it was reflection's role, as Hegel argued, to dissolve the surface *show* so that thought could reach what is veiled.

The social situation in the work of A&L and the UBC artists becomes apparent through reflecting back on what was created through the new set of procedural rules. The new rules created a form with which a process was allowed to begin to break through the old rules that had sedimented the ways of thinking about art. There was something more to this work than just mere novelty and the seemingly never-ending requirement of newness that is mandated by a commodity driven art world. A genuine attempt was being made to dialectically engage with the reality of social life. The task for art in these works became similar to what A&L's favorite philosopher, Ludwig Wittgenstein, claimed was the task of philosophy: "... not to advance any kind of theory ... [to solve problems] not by giving new information, but by arranging what we have always known."<sup>329</sup> In other words, the task was to refamiliarize us with our surroundings and whereabouts. It was not something that could be directly planned, or necessarily be planned, but something that came out of a process. The result was that a different way of thinking was forced on the audience since the work did not automatically represent what was expected. In a sense the expected was dialectically negated. The very idea of "going-on" with a process that cannot predict outcome, both for the artists and the audience, punctures expectation and thus closes down some of the precious beliefs of functionality and the productive discipline born of

<sup>329</sup> Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1963), 47.

the predictability of science and technology that modern capitalism promises. The dialectic was created through a crisis of expectation rather than any kind of direct political messaging. The UBC artists managed to do this through the use of photography to ground social reality, while A&L used discursiveness and conversational ‘noise’ to let the reality of the social come forward. What was hidden initially is eventually revealed through the crisis created in expectation and reflecting back on what that crisis brought forward. The aspect of experimentation in these projects incorporated trial and error, of looking for new ways of “going-on,” which lead to a re-education of the self for the artist and a re-education of the audience to accept, or not to accept, what appeared to be non-art as art. The active self-generating engagement of the audience as a means to become makers of meaning for themselves, linked their learning experience with that of the artists. This mutuality in the small community of artists and viewers was believed to be a way to break through the established state of affairs and to raise the possibility of asking different questions.

The effectiveness of any of these works to actually offer any kind of real resistance to the dominant form of norms is, as always, debatable and difficult to measure. The reaction of many popular press reviewers to Conceptual art exhibitions in the late Sixties and early 1970s was rather hostile such as the *London Sunday Times* description of the *Index* installation at Documenta as “a Stalinist Reading-Room.”<sup>330</sup> In fact, reviewers’ use of language such as austere, elitist, and remote were quite common, which contradicts the claim that Conceptual art was somehow more democratic by trying to reach a wider audience through their work and publication projects. The argument often made is that the rejection of craft based work in the

<sup>330</sup> *The Sunday Times*, 2 July 1972.

form of frames and pedestals led to Conceptual art's increase in demanding and specialized forms of production and consumption that were in fact obscured from the culture of most peoples' day-to-day lives and thus more elitist than what it replaced.<sup>331</sup> Perhaps Jan Dibbets comment was more realistic in its assessment when he claimed that: "what was important was making art that astounded other artists since there was no market for it."<sup>332</sup> While Conceptual art never really had the potential to be popular in a consumerist sense, I think for those who took the time to engage the work reviewed in this chapter with an open mind found that the claims of a self-generating process of making meaning are valid. While the work was demanding, it was not necessarily obscure and could be accessed with a little effort, after all the point was to make people think. The idea of thinking as being elitist and undemocratic falls into a right wing populist rubric that attempts to persuade people to accept the current situation instead of reflecting on it and potentially discovering the types of contradictions that Conceptual art practices were making visible. In addition, what these projects allowed artists to do is to recognize the possibilities of taking control of not just what kind of work they were making, but to expand an understanding of what art is and how it is received. Circumventing the role of the critic and the gallery space was important way of challenging the existing state of affairs. The publications provided an alternative vehicle to network ideas between artist communities as demonstrated by the cross pollination of articles and exchanges between artists in North America and Europe. In Gwen Allen's writing about artist publications in the Sixties she suggests that they sought to not only remedy the "socio-economic disparities of the art world, but also to

<sup>331</sup> Andrea Fraser, "Autonomy and Its Contradictions," *Open* No. 23 (2012): 106-115.

<sup>332</sup> Seth Siegelaub, *The Context of Art/The Art of Context* (Trieste: Navado Press, 2002), 92.

redress its geographical asymmetries.”<sup>333</sup> The importance of these experimental practices of negation was that they created a crisis, regardless of how temporary, in which numerous questions about widely held beliefs and their validity were raised. The crisis, or dialectic created by the contradictions in the various works, can be said to work in a Hegelian externalization of subjectivity that enables the ability to represent reality in a different way. This is precisely how historian Jae Emerling describes certain photographic art practices as having the ability to pierce existing discourses and to disturb normalized power.<sup>334</sup> Instead of offering a release valve, these practices offered a potential example of how art can affect reality and be a model for others on how to go about doing it, no matter how infinitesimal the audience was.

<sup>333</sup> Gwen L. Allen, “The Catalogue as an Exhibition Space in the Sixties and 1970s,” in *When Attitudes Become Form: Bern 1960/Venice 2013*, Ed. Germano Celant (Milan: Fondazione Prada, 2013): 510.

<sup>334</sup> Jae Emerling, *Photography: History and Theory* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 9.

## Chapter 5: Autonomy As Mimesis

The culmination of numerous large-scale anti-Vietnam War protests in the U.S. and around the globe in 1970 created a situation where it was morally and ethically impossible to ignore the explosive political climate. Artists became increasingly politicized by taking on a greater activist role in highly publicized protests such as Robert Morris's closing of his solo exhibition at the Whitney Museum to boycott corporate-sponsored art. In a show of solidarity artists formed the Art Workers Coalition (AWC) as an attempt to wrestle power from institutions and collectors, while at the same time asking basic questions about their working conditions and the uses and misuses of their artworks. This was coterminous with when Conceptual art came into the main stream by being included in a number of important exhibitions such as the Kynaston McShine's *Information* exhibition at MoMA, Jack Burnham's *Software* show at the Jewish Museum, both in New York, and Lucy Lippard's *Numbers* exhibitions that focused exclusively on Conceptual art in various cities. Student protest movements reached a heightened level of activity and turned violent on both sides of the barricades with killings at Kent State and Jackson State, Florida, the Berkeley Park gassing of student protesters, as well as the extremism of the Weathermen. The radicality of the Sixties found its way into art education with the opening of the California Institute of the Arts (CalArts), an art school that promised to incorporate all the utopian demands that the Hornsey School occupiers in Chapter 2 could only dream of. Yet despite all this activity, a few short years later in the 1970s the student protest movements were dead, Conceptual art's formative years were over, the Vietnam War ended, the mythical "loose" early years of CalArts were curtailed by fiscal constraints, and the prosperity of the Sixties had crumbled into an oil embargo led recession. The turmoil of this time period are captured in the way Conceptual art began to transform itself from its supposed position of neutrality into a more explicitly political

proposition that was best exemplified in the work of Hans Haacke.<sup>335</sup> Built with a new set of tools, Haacke's art was based on a critique whose methods managed to reveal the fiction of the Idealist notion of autonomy espoused by institutions, while at the same time exemplary of a different kind of autonomy that meant giving oneself one's own laws as the capacity for critical judgment.

The previous two chapters looked at different inflections of the notion of autonomy prevalent in the Sixties and traces of which found their way into Conceptual art practices. Ideas of autonomy as self-regulation and the making of one's own laws operated as a means of refusing to be indoctrinated by the demands of existing repressive systems and to seek out a different way of doing things through alternative learning processes. This chapter looks at the work of two Conceptual artists, John Baldessari and Hans Haacke, and to the extent that they were successful in countering the pressure of conformity and the dominating structural constraints of the time. As in the previous chapters, there is a distinction between autonomy as an individualistic pursuit and autonomy as a collective process. These distinctions are examined through the artists' work with a specific emphasis on the role educational processes play in autonomous positions through the use of the tools of critique and how that critique manifested itself in their art. From an artistic perspective, the term autonomy is once again investigated as a point of contention between the traditional Idealist definition of art occupying a separate realm, still being insisted upon by various art institutions of the time, and alternatively, Theodor Adorno's version of autonomous art as mimesis that incorporates the historical situation it finds itself in while at the same time

<sup>335</sup> The politicization of Conceptual art that I refer to is in the Anglo-American context, which is the focus of this dissertation. Conceptual practices elsewhere in the world, such as Hélio Oiticica's in Latin America, were politicized to a greater degree from their very beginnings.

resisting subsumption to those dominant forms. Using Adorno's theories in conjunction with Conceptual art is clearly not without its problems. However, since Adorno's dialectical approach involves an argument that society's poison is immanent in art and yet offers a resistance to it, a different perspective is provided with which to assess Conceptual art's contradictions. What may appear to be merely mirroring social and economic structures in Conceptual art can turn out to be a method of repurposing those same structures in order to displace the current reality into a new configuration that illuminates the illusion behind which those structures hide. This is not to say that all Conceptual art works operated in this way, a fact that will be highlighted in the differences between Baldessari and Haacke's work. It is important to also note that neither Baldessari nor Haacke claim Adorno as an influence for their art. Adorno's theories will be looked at only as a way to assess how these artists' work created meaning in their specific contexts. Additionally, CalArts provides an example of the transformations education was going through as a result of the tumultuous protests against institutions in the 1960. CalArts's attempts to encourage critique by mixing two divergent theories, that of the Herbert Marcuse and Marshall McLuhan, ran up against not only the reality of an exchange driven economy, but the same Idealist notions of art that Hans Haacke likewise encountered at the Guggenheim Museum. However, in contrast to CalArts inability to resist dominant forces of exchange, Hans Haacke as an artist who adopted an autonomous position, built on critique, was able to provide a model that would help to both transform Conceptual art and to bring about its end as a 'purposeless' activity.

While there were many protests in the late 1960 for various social movements, whether they were for Black Power, women's liberation, or gay rights, the path towards the politicization of art, particularly in the U.S., was largely driven by the escalation of the war in Vietnam. President



Richard Nixon's decision to bomb Cambodia as part of the ongoing war effort and the media reports of atrocities such as the My Lai massacre resulted in widespread outrage. The resistance to the war had become so great that by 1970 in some states only half the draftees enlisted.<sup>336</sup> Nixon's response to the growing number of protests was to ask for the support of "the great silent majority" of Americans in his November 3, 1969 address to the nation on the War in Vietnam. The phrase "silent majority" became charged with the implication that if you are silent then you supported the war. The result was that more and more artists did not want to be part of this silent majority, either in their protests or in their art.

The path to the politicization of art by 1970 had a number of significant precedents during the Sixties, and while not specifically related to Conceptual art they are an important part of the build up towards this transition. Four years before Nixon's "Silent Majority" speech, on June 27, 1965 a full page add was taken out in *The New York Times* titled "End Your Silence." It was signed by five hundred artists from all media and read: "We the undersigned ... artists of the United States, feel we must protest the power being exercised in our names and those of all American people. We can not remain silent about a foreign policy grown more inhuman with each passing day." It was the first public statement from the artistic community against the war in Southeast Asia and was very similar to the kinds of protests other professional groups (teachers, scientists, etc.) were undertaking. A year later, the 1966 California Peace Tower took a different approach with its combination of a fifty-eight-foot steel tetrahedron Tower sculpture by Mark di Suvero accompanied by a hundred foot long by ten foot high billboard filled with two-foot square paintings by hundreds of different artists. The Los Angeles Artists Protest Committee

<sup>336</sup> David Steigerwald, *The Sixties and the End of America* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995), 108.

wanted to use their art to draw attention to their protests by making a visible statement against the war organized it. Its location on an elevated rented strip of land between Hollywood and Los Angeles made it a site visible for miles around. Thousands came to see it every night and the Tower attracted attention all over the world.<sup>337</sup>

Not long afterwards, in 1967, an event called the “Angry Arts Week” in New York was a major artist-organized protest with art. In January a group of artists and critics such as Leon Golub, Irving Petlin (who was instrumental in organizing the Tower), Max Kozloff and Barbara Rose sent a letter to as many artists as they knew proposing a week-long Anti-War Happening using painting, sculpture, film, dance and poetry. It was staged at the Leob Student Center gallery, New York University, where the visual art component became known as the Collage of Indignation, a linked sequence of twenty ten-feet by 6-feet imaged canvases. Some of the artists represented were Roy Lichtenstein, Ad Reinhart, Karel Appel, Richard Serra, Alice Neel, and Leon Golub. What was interesting about the Collage was that many of the artists departed from their usual styles and concentrated on slogans and word art. Artists resorted to text in order to express their political values at the same time that Conceptual art’s text based works were just emerging, perhaps in recognition that a different type of form was needed to deal with political content. In a 1971 *Art in America* article, Therese Schartze’s explanation of the Collage’s word painting was that it “seemed to say: a show of art-as-protest isn’t possible any more; the next step is words on paper or canvas.” The Collage spawned a heated discourse on the role of art in protests with even Max Kozloff, who was one of the organizers, writing an ambivalent review in *The Nation*: “There is nothing like a national crisis—and the war in Vietnam is a crisis raised to

<sup>337</sup> Therese Schwartz, “The Politicalization of the Avant-Garde,” *Art In America* (Nov-Dec, 1972): 97-105.

the pitch of horror—to make aesthetic pursuits look pitifully insignificant ... We are in a time when the public that is aware of art assimilates all *avant-garde* hypotheses into an apparatus of mild titillation.”<sup>338</sup> While praising the collective action and solidarity of the artists, Kozloff slipped into an aesthetic quality argument and claimed:

Striving to elicit disgust against a vast outer evil, the artists only riveted distaste upon their own work ... Instead of illustrating, or alluding to the destructiveness of our country’s military-industrial complex, it had obtusely and painfully acted it out ... when I impose, at least in part, aesthetic criteria upon a phenomenon which may be only nominally art ... I am afraid that it is not a question of direct appeal with which we are dealing, but a kind of visual expletive, a blurting forth at any cost to obtain emotional relief.”<sup>339</sup>

Conversely, Leon Golub writing in *Arts Magazine* explained, “Today art is largely autonomous and concerned with perfectibility. Anger cannot easily burst through such channels.”<sup>340</sup> Golub perceived the Collage as “The effort of the artist to get at a primitive enough, violent enough facing of this war—the artist striving to rough-up his attitude, to spit, to let go. And as action, spontaneous and casual, the Collage became a carrier of indignation harking back to street art, graffiti, burlesque, the carnival, the dance of death.”<sup>341</sup> Thus for Golub, the importance of the Collage was that its oppositional practices inverted existing evaluative criteria and acted to challenge existing discourses and power structures, something that was similarly core to Conceptual art practices.

<sup>338</sup> Max Kozloff, “... A Collage of Indignation,” *The Nation* (Feb 20, 1967): 248-251.

<sup>339</sup> Ibid.

<sup>340</sup> Leon Golub, “The Artist as an Angry Artist: The Obsession with Napalm,” *Arts Magazine* (April 1967): 48-49.

<sup>341</sup> Golub, 48.

A particular dynamic was being played out at this time in which many of the old guard Abstract Expressionist artists were articulating a division between protests in the street and protests in art. After the heavy handed clashes in Chicago with the police at the 1968 Democratic Party Convention, a boycott of exhibiting in Chicago was proposed and supported by about fifty artists including, Barnett Newman, Robert Motherwell, Mark Rothko and others. As a result, Claus Oldenburg postponed his show at Richard Feigen's Chicago gallery, which activated Feigen to try and organize a protest show to fill the vacancy. Artists such as Helen Frankenthaler, Adolph Gottlieb and Robert Motherwell sent work to the protest show, but in their usual style. Motherwell said, "There is a certain kind of art which I belong to. It can no more make a direct political comment than chamber music can. But by exhibiting with these artist who can, and with the theme of the exhibit, we are showing our support."<sup>342</sup> After the show Adolph Gottlieb claimed "I think a boycott is self-defeating ... but I don't think the 'Richard J. Daley' show was effective either, I doubt if any show of socialist-realist propaganda work ever is. That kind of art is about the worst kind of propaganda there is ... Artists have no political strength. It's nice that they think they do, and that make such protests, but they are always ineffective."<sup>343</sup> Gottlieb raised the specter of Soviet-realism with respect to protest art, in essence claiming that if art has a political message then it has something foreign, communist, and anti-American about it. Ad Reinhardt, while not engaging in Gottlieb's Cold War hysterics, was also reticent about mixing art and politics. In a radio interview he argued:

I think an artist should participate in any protests against war – as a human being. There's no way they can participate as an artist without being almost fraudulent or self-mocking about what they're doing ... There are no effective painting or

<sup>342</sup> Therese Schwartz, "Politicization of the Avant-garde, II," *Art in America* (1971):70-79.

<sup>343</sup> Schwartz, "Politicization of the Avant-garde, II," 72.

objects that one can make against the war. There's been a complete exhaustion of images. A broken doll with red paint poured over it or a piece of barbed wire may seem to be a symbol or something like that, but that's not the realm of the fine artist anyway.<sup>344</sup>

The reluctance of the old guard artists and critics to accept a direct political role for art was similarly prevalent in institutions, and marked a growing divergence between their attitudes and that of younger artists.

Despite the values of old guard artists and institutions, artist/student protests were held around the world in 1968 at the Venice Biennale, the Milan Triennial, the Kassel Documenta, and the Instituto Torcuato di Tella in Buenos Aires. Increasingly artists started having high profile run-ins with institutions. In 1969, Vassilakis Takis removed his sculpture from an exhibition at MoMA curated by Pontus Hulten called *The Machine at the End of the Mechanical Age*. Takis claimed that the Museum had not consulted him and that the work no longer represented his current practice. The incident highlighted the lack of consultation with artists by art institutions and led to the formation of the Art Workers' Coalition (AWC) whose aim was for artists to collectively apply pressure on the city's museums for more open and inclusive policies. In February 1971, for the Sixth Guggenheim International Exhibition, a ten-meter painted acrylic textile work by Daniel Buren, suspended from the ceiling in the centre of the museum, was taken down, ostensibly because it obscured some of the other artists work. These and other clashes illustrated the growing friction between artists' practices and conservative institutional behavior.

Shortly after the Takis incident at MoMA, on January 28, 1969, Takis and a group of artists that would become the AWC, which now included Hans Haacke and critic Gregory Battcock,

<sup>344</sup> Ad Rienhart, quoted in: Francis Francina, *Art, Politics and Dissent* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999), 81-2.

submitted a list of thirteen demands to Bates Lowry, the Director of MoMA. The demands included: public hearings, setting up a section of the Museum for Black, Spanish and other communities, a committee of artists with curatorial responsibilities, and grievance handling mechanisms.<sup>345</sup> When Lowry ended up sidestepping the demands, a “Speak-Out” or Open Hearing was organized with the help of Joseph Kosuth at the School of Visual Arts.<sup>346</sup> Many Conceptual artists attended the event, Dan Graham gave a presentation and others including Hans Haacke, Lawrence Weiner, Lucy Lippard and Seth Seigelaub were there. Even the arch-conservative critic Hilton Kramer in a half-praising article on May 4, 1969, in the *New York Times* claimed that the AWC raised “albeit incoherently ... a way of thinking about the production and consumption of works of art that would radically modify, if not actually displace, current established practices, with their heavy reliance on big money and false prestige,” although he was later less enthusiastic about the AWC. The Open Hearing aired a great deal more than the specific MoMA issues and the content moved towards general complaints about “The System.” As the AWC gained traction it revised its original demands by June to be applied to all Museums. These new demands included that at least one-third of all museum Board of Trustees be made up of artists; admissions to museums should be free and open in evenings to accommodate working people; equal representations of sexes and encourage female artists; until a time when minimum income is guaranteed for all people rental fees should be paid to artists; a percentage of re-sale profit should revert to the artist; and a trust fund should be set up from a tax levied on the sales of the work of dead artists for artists health insurance and other social

<sup>345</sup> Schwartz, “Politicization of the Avant-garde, II,” 75.

<sup>346</sup> Kosuth was very active initially in the AWC and at one time used his Conceptual art text-making skills to produce fake MoMA passes stamped with “Art Worker’s Coalition” to subvert the paid museum admissions procedures.

benefits.<sup>347</sup> AWC committees explored alternatives such as a trade union structure complete with dental care, the use of abandoned Hudson River piers for studio and exhibition space, as well as an information center with a Xerox machine.<sup>348</sup> It was during this organizing fervor that the New York City Art Strike broke out.

On May 13, in New York artists in the Jewish Museum group exhibition called *Using Walls* voted to close the show to protest the U.S. government's escalating war in Southeast Asia and the violence on campuses.<sup>349</sup> Robert Morris was participating in the show and decided to end his Whitney Museum show several weeks early. Morris declared himself "on strike" against the art system and sent a notice to the Whitney stating, "This act of closing ... a cultural institution is intended to underscore the need I and others feel to shift priorities at this time from making and viewing to unified action within the art community against the intensifying conditions of repression, war and racism in this country."<sup>350</sup> He was elected chairman of an offshoot of the AWC called the New York Art Strike Against Racism, War and Repression. However, the use of symbolic language like "strikes" and "workers" made an inevitable association with the working-class proletariat that became problematic for the AWC. At the same time that artists and students were protesting against the War in Vietnam numerous so-called hard-hat riots broke out. On May 8, 1970, pro-war construction workers wearing hard-hats lashed out at the students and then proceeded to City Hall where they forced officials to raise the American flag that had been at half-mast honoring the four students shot dead by the National Guard at Kent State only a few

<sup>347</sup> Lucy Lippard, "The Art Workers Coalition: Not a History," *Studio International* (November 1970): 171-174.

<sup>348</sup> *Ibid.*, 173.

<sup>349</sup> Julia Bryan-Wilson, *Art Workers: Radical Practice in the Vietnam War Era* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), 113.

<sup>350</sup> *Ibid.*

days before.<sup>351</sup> Ironically the construction workers were dealing with the frustration of a work slowdown, which was in part caused by the policies of Richard Nixon that they supported. After the hard-hat riots in May, Morris commented in the *New York Post* that, “Museums are our campuses.”<sup>352</sup> He was tellingly making an association with student protests rather than with the working class. Artists had come to the same conclusion that the Frankfurt School and the New Left had years before, being that the working class was in fact counterrevolutionary. Therese Schwartz likewise made this connection between AWC protests and student protests: “The readiness of such a large group of artists to involve themselves in a protest against the museum system was undoubtedly provoked and heightened by the recent student demonstrations for change in the university system. The antiwar sentiment felt by many – if not most – of those who participated in the Speak-Out may also have provided a cohesive element ...”<sup>353</sup> It was during this same week of May 8, 1970, that student walkouts virtually shutdown 80 percent of the universities in the U.S.

The political activation of artists spawned a considerable debate in the art press at this time. There was the aforementioned Therese Schwartz four part series “The Politicization of the Avant-Garde” in *Art in America*, Barbara Rose’s two part series “The Politics of Art” in *ArtForum*, and a questionnaire sent to various artists called “The Artist and Politics: A Symposium” was also published in *ArtForum*. The question read:

A growing number of artists have begun to feel the need to respond to the deepening political crisis in America. Among these artists, however, there are serious differences concerning their relations to direct political actions. Many feel

<sup>351</sup> Ibid., 110.

<sup>352</sup> Quoted in Ralph Blumenfeld, “Daily Closeup: Show Mustn’t Go On,” *New York Post*, June 4, 1970, 53.

<sup>353</sup> Therese Schwartz, “The Politicization of the Avant-Garde IV,” *Art in America* (1974): 80-84.



that the political implication of their work constitute the most profound political action they can take. Others, not denying this, continue to feel the need for an immediate, direct political commitment. Still others feel that their work is devoid of political meaning and that their political lives are unrelated to their art. What is your position regarding the kinds of political action that should be taken by artists?<sup>354</sup>

The question itself accurately summarizes the different positions elaborated in the responses from artists. Donald Judd claimed, “Art may change things a little, but not much ...”, while Ed Ruscha stated, “I don’t think an artist can do much for any cause by using his art as a weapon.” In a similar fashion, Lawrence Weiner wrote:

The major problem remains the same: the old esthetic workhorse of content and intent. Art as it becomes useful, even to the extent of entering the culture, becomes for me no longer Art but History. History being perhaps the viable tool of Politics. All Art as it becomes known becomes Political regardless of the intent of the Artist. ... So-called Art whose original intent and most often content is political or social does not concern me as an Artist. They are for me only varied forms of sociological propaganda; albeit sometimes extremely creative advertising.

The question that Weiner raised of the usefulness or purposefulness of art is related to how the dynamic of Conceptual art was changing in and around 1970. The process towards the politicization of art outlined above shows that it was increasingly difficult for many artists to merely make their art revolutionary within an art internal sense, given the moral, ethical and political crisis around them.

The social circumstances had changed significantly since Sol Lewitt’s “Paragraphs on Conceptual Art” from *Artforum* in 1967 where he claimed that Conceptual art “is not theoretical or illustrative of theories; it is intuitive, it is involved with all types of mental processes and it is

<sup>354</sup> “The Artist and Politics: A Symposium,” *ArtForum*, 9:1 (September 1970): 35-39

purposeless.” This idea of art being purposeless, as discussed in Chapter 3, at first appears to be a remnant from the nineteenth-century’s art-for-art’s sake notion that is at odds with Conceptual art’s own confrontation with authorship and self-expression. Chapter 3 explained that the aesthetic experience of purposelessness could also be viewed as a refusal to participate in the ‘purposeful’ functionality of society and the maximization of profit in all aspects of life. Thus purposelessness did provide Conceptual art with an oppositional form of resistance without necessarily having to explicitly state a political end, as it was a revolt against the identities being imposed on art and artists by oppressive social forces. However, by the early 1970s other artists such as Robert Smithson claimed that Conceptual art had made ideas into fetishes by isolating them from their material surroundings and therefore capitulated to the ideological function of art for the bourgeoisie by divorcing art from life.<sup>355</sup> For Smithson, Conceptual art was not art-for-art’s sake but production for production’s sake, and thus assuming it was valuable for its own sake while dispensing with the interests of the audience or any consideration for whether the particular concepts produced served specific social needs or functions. The question of serving specific a social need is of course the crux of the matter and the fundamental point of inquiry for this chapter. It is my contention that this adoption of critique by Conceptual artists like Hans Haacke transformed the last vestiges of Modernism into Contemporaneity by overturning the proposition for the purposelessness of art and helped turn it into an ends oriented process versus a means oriented one.

Adorno’s writings address both the issue of purposelessness and whether art should serve specific social needs. However, one of the problems with his version of artistic autonomy is that

<sup>355</sup> Robert Smithson, “Production for Production’s Sake,” in *Conceptual Art: A Critical Anthology*, eds. Alexander Alberro and Blake Stimson, (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1999): 284-5.

it almost exclusively uses examples of Modernist works. Consequently, to use Adorno's theories to interrogate Conceptual art may seem somewhat counterintuitive, especially when Conceptual art practices were thought to be in direct opposition to those of Modernism. From a general perspective, Conceptual art was characterized as dematerializing the art object and concerned with severing art from the art object by privileging ideas versus the visual, while Adorno's theory is deeply entwined with the primacy of the object and the experience of its sensuous materiality. There was a focus in Conceptual art on communicating information at a basic and minimal level, empty of messages and artistic taste. By purging the traditional aesthetic content of art, forbidding artistic expression, eliminating the division between image and text, doing all the planning ahead of time, Conceptual art practices wanted to make the execution a "perfunctory affair." This is in contrast to Adorno's emphasis on the "unintentional" processes of artistic practice. Some Conceptual art came to resemble science and ratio, or everything that Adorno's aesthetics wanted to displace. Yet at the same time there are some remarkable similarities: both promoted a refusal of carrying on as "business as usual" and sought to undermine the conventional understanding of art as an affirmation of the ruling class. While Conceptual artists claimed to downplay the visual, they still produced objects and in some cases the objects managed to unintentionally dictate meaning with their form in the same way as Adorno claimed autonomous art did. For all the claims of dematerializing the art object, Conceptual practices primarily produced material objects. Both were against artistic expression, both highly privileged experience in the art making and viewing processes, and as already mentioned, both espoused a purposelessness in art (at least Conceptual art did in the beginning). The purposelessness of some Conceptual works like Vito Acconci taking a photograph every time he blinked while waking down a street (*Photographic Situation: "Shut-Eye"; "The Camera*

*Eye*"; "*Eye-Opener*"; "*Eyewitness*," 1969) or Douglas Huebler doing the same every time he heard a bird (*Duration Piece #5*, 1969), despite having a laid out rational plan, produced projects that were riddles of perplexing ambiguity. They represent interventions into the logic of an intentional assertion of meaning and mirror Sol LeWitt's *Sentences on Conceptual art* where he states "irrational thoughts should be followed absolutely and rationally" or that "Conceptual Artists are mystics rather than rationalists. They leap to conclusions that logic cannot reach."<sup>356</sup> This is not far from Adorno's claim that an artwork's nondiscursive logic is illogical to the criteria of instrumental rationality. Furthermore, Conceptual art sought to achieve a sort of autonomy by producing works that they believed could not be "easily bought and sold by the art market," similar to one of Adorno's key points that true autonomous art acts as a kind of reminder of a collective memory of a world outside of exchange and demonstrate this through a slight displacement of the current reality. A number of commentators such as Thomas McEvilly, Peter Osborne, and Jeff Wall all mention the Frankfurt School as an influence on Conceptual artists and the impulse to make artworks that tried to circumvent traditional channels of commodification.<sup>357</sup> While not without its problems, Adorno's theories of autonomous art offer illuminating alternatives with which to assess how Conceptual art struggled to challenge traditional notions of art, how it operated in society, what kind of critique was being used, and how a particular kind of critique became the cornerstone of future practices.

<sup>356</sup> Sol LeWitt, "Sentences on Conceptual Art," in Alexander Alberro and Blake Stimson, *Conceptual Art: A Critical Anthology* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1999), 106.

<sup>357</sup> The references to the Frankfurt School's influence are most likely directed at Herbert Marcuse's more accessible writing, however, it is not that far of a stretch to suggest that Marcuse's best-known works are a popularization of what is found in Adorno's theories.

## 5.1 “I will not make any more boring art.”<sup>358</sup>

John Baldessari’s works dating from 1966 – 69 explore his motivation to move beyond traditional painting and conventional ways of approaching art and thus provide an example of an artist transitioning from a Modernist approach to a Conceptual one. None of his works from this period make any references to the Vietnam War or the various peace movements and are not engaged in the struggles that were gripping the rest of the U.S. Consequently can his work be considered either radical or political given its other concerns?

After his first solo show fell through in 1965, when the gallery he was to exhibit in went bankrupt, he stated: “I gave up all hope of showing and thought, ‘What the hell? Since nobody cares, why do I have to cosmeticize everything by translating it into painting? Why can’t I use straight information? Straight photography?’”<sup>359</sup> Baldessari resigned himself to the fact that he would earn a living by teaching and make art only as a sideline. This was a similar situation to other Conceptual artists such as Hans Haacke and Robert Barry who claimed there was no market for their work, consequently they taught for living while making art because they were compelled to do so.<sup>360</sup> Thus, to a certain extent, their art production operated outside the world of exchange and it took on an autotelic position. Baldessari had no hope to make money from his art so he was released from the dreariness of utility, and because no one cared, he could do things for their own sake. For Adorno, it is this aspect of art’s impracticality that allows it to remember

<sup>358</sup> Text from John Baldessari’s *Punishment Piece*, 1971, Mezzanine Gallery, Nova Scotia College of Art and Design.

<sup>359</sup> Hunter Drohojowska-Philp, *Rebels in Paradise: The Los Angeles Scene and the Sixties*, (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2011), 217.

<sup>360</sup> “Hans Haacke: Talking Art.” *Tate Video*, 23 June 2007, <http://www.tate.org.uk/context-comment/video/hans-haacke-talking-art>. Also, “From the Specific to the General: Publications of Seth Sieglaub.” *Museum of Modern Art Archive video recording* (2008-228).

what capital represses, that not everything is exchange value, and in the process reveals the limits and contradictions produced immanently by capitalism.<sup>361</sup> Meg Cranston, a onetime studio assistant of Baldessari's, claims that he admired writers such as William Carlos Williams, Wallace Stevens and Raymond Carver, partly because they had to work for a living.<sup>362</sup> Much like the Vancouver artists in the last chapter who lived in a city that was far from world art centres and lacked a strong contemporary art tradition, Baldessari lived in the suburban outpost of National City, not far from the Mexican border. By not being tied to a strong art tradition, a certain liberation was provided for as a license to experiment. Instead of painting expressively, he switched in 1966 to producing text and photo works on canvas. He was looking for other ways of thinking, and started to consider that straight information could serve as well as a painting itself.<sup>363</sup> These works encompassed many of the fundamental aspects of Conceptual art such as the orientation toward language and communication, a reduction of statements to simple propositions, questioning the conventions of art, a denial of authorship, and using previous forms to create new forms.

In what has become called his *National City* series of paintings from 1966-69, works such as *Pure Beauty* (fig. 15) and *Clement Greenberg* are just plain text on canvas. Baldessari hired a sign painter to paint the text on the canvases with instructions to not make beautiful calligraphy; he just wanted information as opposed to anything decorative.<sup>364</sup> The purpose of this simple form of language was to communicate in a way that most people normally communicate and

<sup>361</sup> Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 53-55

<sup>362</sup> Meg Cranston and Hans Ulrich Obrist, eds., *More than you wanted to know about John Baldessari Volume 2* (Zurich: JRP/Ringier Kunstverlag AG, 2013), 20.

<sup>363</sup> Cranston, *More than you wanted to know Volume 2*, 104.

<sup>364</sup> Hans Ulrich Obrist, *John Baldessari* (Köln: Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König, 2009), 23.

understand. He adopted a newspaper method of getting down to the basics and to communicate information, not art in the conventional sense.<sup>365</sup> Baldessari felt that painting had run its course and wanted to use language to “cut to the chase and be as direct as possible.”<sup>366</sup> Like other Conceptual artists, Baldessari claimed semiotics and, in particular, Claude Lévi-Strauss’s structuralism as a source for his contrasting of language and image.<sup>367</sup> Yet the focus is decidedly more light-hearted than the serious kind of language based works from artists such as Joseph Kosuth and Lawrence Weiner.<sup>368</sup> Instead of a heady investigation of semiotics, Baldessari’s investment in language has more to do with a democratic impulse than an academic one. He wrote, “Art is Communication – it includes all,” and of all art forms writing is the cheapest and most available to everyone.<sup>369</sup> The basic, easily understandable text that he used meant that anyone could grasp it, as opposed to the private language of abstract expressionism or the hidden meanings in the iconography of classical painting. However, as Kosuth has disparagingly pointed out, there is a striking resemblance of Baldessari’s ideas in his work to Pop art. Kosuth argues that Baldessari’s “Pop paintings ... are ‘conceptual’ cartoons of actual conceptual art.”<sup>370</sup> Using understandable text had a similar democratic ethos to Pop art’s use of popular imagery, which was extensively explored by Andy Warhol and others. The fact that Baldessari was also using

<sup>365</sup> Cranston, *More than you wanted to know Volume 2*, 104.

<sup>366</sup> *Ibid.*, 104.

<sup>367</sup> Jessica Morgan, “Choosing (A game for Two Curators),” in *Pure Beauty*, eds. Jessica Morgan and Leslie Jones (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 2010), 21.

<sup>368</sup> Joseph Kosuth was very irritated when his exhibition in Los Angeles at Gallery 669 opened simultaneously with Baldessari’s show at Molly Barnes Gallery in 1968, and was reviewed together by Jane Livingston as both voiding meaning from art. Leslie Jones, “Art Lesson: A Narrative Chronology of John Baldessari’s Life and Work,” in *Pure Beauty*, eds. Jessica Morgan and Leslie Jones (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 2010), 49.

<sup>369</sup> Cranston, *More than you wanted to know Volume 2*, 26.

<sup>370</sup> Joseph Kosuth, “Art After Philosophy,” in *Conceptual Art: A Critical Anthology*, eds. Alexander Alberro and Blake Stimson, (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1999).

canvas and paint, when other Conceptual artists were shunning them, created a certain ambiguity in the work. He was in a sense repurposing those traditional materials, but the baggage of the history of painting came with it and therefore it was not a clean break from the materials of Modernism the way it was in other Conceptual art practices.

Nevertheless, Baldessari did critique traditional ideas of art, and it came in a direct and deadpan fashion. For example, in *Clement Greenberg*, which quotes Greenberg's notion that esthetic judgments are involuntary, Baldessari adds in brackets the suggestion that perhaps the judgments are not then reported honestly. Other works disclose the pedantic sounding language of critics such as in *For Barbara Rose* and *Voluble Luminist Painting for Max Kozloff*. Then there is Baldessari's *Pure Beauty*, (fig. 15), which of course shows nothing of the sort. These are critiques of conventional visual aesthetics through straightforward text. Images are replaced with language that in an irreverent way refuses to go along with either the tradition they are meant to elaborate on, or the notions of celebrated art critics. In fact, a painting like *Terms Most Useful In Describing Creative Works of Art*, lists words like "enchantment," "arouse" and "exalt," which elicit the exact opposite of their meaning when there is no image to refer to. The established frameworks of art are questioned to an extent that the resulting art is close to a negation of art. One text that Baldessari composed but never painted sums up how these text paintings function: "This painting should be read and not looked at."<sup>371</sup> Words have been substituted for images, and language is used not as a visual element but as something to read. The visual art convention of looking is replaced with reading, and the suspect 'immediate' aesthetic judgment is replaced with a cognitive attentiveness. Although he does not break with traditional materials of painting, the

<sup>371</sup> Cranston, *More than you wanted to know Volume 1*, 58.



norms of what viewers expect are sidestepped, suddenly they are using different faculties, and they are put in the position of questioning, “is this art” or “why is this art?”

In conjunction with the text paintings Baldessari produced phototext paintings in the *National City* series. As with the language in his text paintings, he used photography in a very direct and basic way. In a similar manner to Dikeakos and Wall’s photography in the last chapter, Baldessari would drive around his neighborhood in a VW bus and take pictures with an old Rolleiflex camera out the window without looking.<sup>372</sup> It was a way of making visual notes, where the point was the images and not about making perfect prints. He describes his technique, as taking photographs to “violate then current photographic norms,”<sup>373</sup> and elsewhere he writes that he took photographs “like a real estate agent”<sup>374</sup> Once again he wanted to communicate in the vernacular of the realm where photography was something that was available to most people and something that they understood from newspapers and magazines. Photography allowed him to quickly implement his ideas and eliminate the impulse he felt was in painting to try and make things look better than they are. This line of thought is similar to the one Rosalind Kraus expands on when she claims that the indexicality of the photograph, its causal connection to things photographed, interrupts the “aesthetic intention” associated with art.<sup>375</sup> He took photos of things that were traditionally not believed to be worthy of art. The phototext paintings are actually photoemulsions on canvases along with sign painter text. His DIY experimentation with photoemulsion resulted in the works with a very rough unprofessional look. Photography was

<sup>372</sup> Cranston, *More than you wanted to know Volume 2*, 227.

<sup>373</sup> Cranston, *More than you wanted to know Volume 1*, 55.

<sup>374</sup> *John Baldessari - This is Not That (Art Documentary)*, Produced by Jan Schmidt-Garre (Arthaus Musik, 2010), DVD.

<sup>375</sup> Rosalind Kraus, *The Originality of the Avant-garde and Other Modernist Myths* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1985), 211.

appealing, according to Baldessari, because he felt that the history of art and the history of photography were still separate things in the Sixties, and he thought that he could “translate photography into painting to make it art.”<sup>376</sup> Photography could thus be used in works to question the traditions and norms of art as well as the validity of those assumptions.<sup>377</sup> It was in this series that he produced works that had the appearance of snapshots such as *Looking East on 4<sup>th</sup> and C Chula Vista, Calif.*, and *Wrong* (fig. 16). Not only were these canvases far from enthralling or sublime, they were almost antagonistically ordinary. Baldessari has written about what he thought was a valuable insight from Adorno’s term “late style” which Baldessari argues is not about maturity but more “‘Why should I care,’ about harmony and good taste.”<sup>378</sup> Adorno writes that the late works of Michelangelo, Rembrandt, and Beethoven are antiharmonic in an exemplary way by the suspension of aesthetic harmony altogether.<sup>379</sup> It is through the emancipation from this ideal that Adorno claims the truth content of art is able to develop. Although most Conceptual artists were quite young in the late Sixties, Adorno’s “late style” notion is applicable to them in that as “dissonance is the truth of harmony” for Adorno, the practice of questioning the conventions of art for Conceptual artists brings about a greater clarity what art’s truths are. The irreverent attitude of “Why should I care” resonates in the anti-hierarchical spirit of the time where everything was being questioned.

*Wrong* is probably the most well known and most banal of these *National City* works. The photo is of Baldessari standing in front of a palm tree in front of a suburban house in which the tree appears to be coming out of his head. The work stands out as a refusal to obey the laws of

<sup>376</sup> Cranston, *More than you wanted to know Volume 2*, 227.

<sup>377</sup> “John Baldessari, Studio visit.” YouTube video, 5:20. Posted April 17, 2012, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fsvwR1ih0mk>.

<sup>378</sup> Cranston, *More than you wanted to know Volume 2*, 199.

<sup>379</sup> Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 110.

composition and photography, or of anything in an aesthetically beautiful way. There is a certain liberating ludic joy in seeing a work that lets go of all these things. What is so wrong becomes so right, what cannot in anyway be conceived as art becomes art. What in any way cannot be conceived as purposeful or having utility is transformed into a joyous remembrance of what is possible when utility and purpose are cast aside. It becomes a work that acts as an inspiration for the viewer to forget the rules that they have been taught and do the exact opposite, just for the hell of it, and see what happens.

Adorno claims that art anticipates and recalls the human purposes of production that instrumental rationality represses. Whereas the concepts and judgments of discursive rationality usually conceal and suppress the true nature of reality, art's non-discursive logic permits illogical connections that enable artworks to arrange society's diverse elements in a way that differs from the world of domination and exchange. Artworks are reconstellations rather than copies of social reality, "art must distil any and all elements ... from the immutable mass of things, transforming them all."<sup>380</sup> Art is in a sense is of this world but not completely of it. For Adorno the praxis of art is its "refusal to play along," in which by abstaining from praxis, art becomes the schema of social praxis and thus "every authentic artwork is internally revolutionary."<sup>381</sup> In this way artworks remember what is forgotten and acknowledges what has been lost in conceptual codification. Likewise in Baldessari's *Wrong*, the rationality of following tried and true rules for the functionality of making 'good' image is refused and instead resuscitates the forgotten

<sup>380</sup> Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 311.

<sup>381</sup> Ibid., 228.

pleasure of doing things for their own sake instead of abiding to the demands of the “means-ends rationality of utility.”<sup>382</sup>

Baldessari’s questioning of conventions is in tune with Adorno’s claims that all art is oppositional since “rather than complying with existing social norms and qualifying as ‘socially useful,’ it criticizes society by merely existing.”<sup>383</sup> This is of course different from the kind of nineteenth-century art-for-art’s sake works that positioned themselves at a remove from a despised reality. For Adorno the art-for-art’s sake works are ideological constructs in that they fail to engage reality and thereby give a false impression that the world outside art is as well rounded as the art works themselves. To this end, art-for-art’s sake works mystify reality into a reality as seen and desired by the ruling class. In contrast, Adorno’s version of autonomous art is the social antithesis to society and whose significance is its dysfunctional function, how it functions to resist the “means-ends rationality of utility,” which is also an apt way of describing these works by Baldessari.

Nevertheless, one of the problems that critics of Adorno, such as his own doctoral student Hans-Jürgen Krahel, argue that Adorno’s theories result in a certain political quietism. A fact that stems from his notion of emancipation, which the critics claim had ceased to be a public project and instead became a private experience of liberation. Krahel has charged, “Adorno was not able to translate his private compassion for the wretched of this earth into a ... theory for the liberation of the oppressed.”<sup>384</sup> An example of this would be that, for Adorno, liberation can happen by listening to Schoenberg’s music, which he argues creates a “shudder” in the listener

<sup>382</sup> Ibid., 227.

<sup>383</sup> Ibid., 226.

<sup>384</sup> Nigel Gibson and Andrew Rubin, “Adorno and the Autonomous Intellectual,” in in *Adorno a Critical Reader*, eds. Nigel Gibson and Andrew Rubin (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), 13.

from the refusal to hear music in the traditional way and thus becomes a form of critique by failing to honor music's dominant modes.<sup>385</sup> Although Schoenberg's work can be said to be about breaking through the inertia of habit, the ability to convert this notion to a model of freedom from the constraints of everyday rational experience assumes a great deal about the makeup of the listener, their predispositions, and their capacities for reflecting on the work. Likewise, did viewers in Southern California of Baldessari's *National City* paintings convert his overturning of conventions into useful models for other walks of life?

Baldessari's commissioning of others to paint his paintings results in further contradictions and ambiguities. The commissioning a sign painter and the use of photography act to suppress any overt signs of authorial presence in the works and undermine the fundamental assumptions of what constitutes a unique work of art by a singular individual. While the works were still paintings, in a round about way Baldessari could make the claim that he was not painting anymore, as a Conceptual artist he was generating the idea and then getting others to do the menial work for him. The addition of photography brings with it the notion that a mechanical device does most of the work along with presenting recognizable aspects of a public social reality that effectively negates the idea of an artist's private world. Baldessari takes the denial of authorship to its logical conclusion in his *Commissioned Paintings* from 1969 (fig. 17). He commissioned a number of 'Sunday' painters, which he had sought out at amateur art exhibits, to paint the photographic slides he made from another project he was working on with his friend, George Nicolaidis. The slides were of Nicolaidis walking around and pointing his finger at

<sup>385</sup> Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 22.

things he found interesting.<sup>386</sup> Baldessari was curious about the whole process of choosing and selecting and asked each painter to choose one slide from the project to render as faithfully as possible on a canvas. Upon completion each painting was taken to the sign painter and the artist name was added as: “A painting by...” Baldessari explained that a statement by abstract painter Al Held who claimed, “All Conceptual art is just pointing at things,” inspired the project. It was not only a critique of Held’s statement through deadpan depiction, but it could also be seen as a critique of the idea that an artwork is always pointing beyond itself. In this case the pointing is just rendered as pure information and remains in the artwork, literally pointing at itself.

In the *Commissioned Paintings*, while Baldessari’s authorial presence is suppressed, his artistic authority is reformulated by organizing others to do the work for him. Since this was not a ‘collaboration’ with either the sign painter or the ‘Sunday’ painters, Baldessari entered the world of domination and exchange by becoming a producer who owns the means of production and exploits others for profit (or the potential for profit). On the other hand, it could be argued that Baldessari was making visible the domination of labour that is so often hidden in artworks, such as in many of the manufactured Minimalist artworks that only credit the artist and not the producers of the work. Adorno’s perspective, like Smithson’s, recognizes that art works are fetishes, but for Adorno their position is that of defetishizing fetishes. Since art works belong to a society where exchange is the dominant principle of social relationships, they, like other products under capitalist conditions, hide the labour that has gone into them and appear to have a life of their own. This appearance gives them the fetish like illusion of somehow being detached from the conditions of economic production. However, for Adorno the fetish character of art

<sup>386</sup> Hugh Davies and Andrea Hales “Interview with John Baldessari,” in *John Baldessari: National City*, eds. Hugh M. Davies and Andrea Hales, (San Diego: Museum of Contemporary Art, 1996), 97.

works is not mere delusion, it is a condition of their truth. Their detachment or autonomy has social origins, and while art works may follow an independent route, that route comes from the surrounding society. Thus in Adorno's dialectical fashion he claims that artistic form participates in domination at the same time as resisting it. In order to resist domination, Adorno argues artworks "must assimilate themselves to the comportment of domination in order to produce something qualitatively distinct from the world of domination."<sup>387</sup> Therefore, in one sense Baldessari's *Commissioned Paintings* are both participating in domination and at the same time resisting it by making it visible and laying bare the conditions of capitalism that are normally hidden in the art world. Yet despite revealing the economic conditions of art production, the overriding issue with Baldessari's *Commissioned Paintings* remains that instead of producing "something qualitatively distinct from the world of domination" there is more of a reproduction of domination than a questioning of it. Instead of generating an Adornian mimetic impulse as an assimilation of the self to the other, or of mutually recognizing each other, it gives priority to one over the other. The power of thought, the conceiving of the idea, is privileged over the power of manual dexterity required to materially transform the idea. The sign painter and the 'Sunday' painters are not treated as collaborative equals, but are effectively used to show that the idea is more worthy than manual work. As Buchloh has argued, this could be seen as mirroring the administering labor and production of the postwar middle class that shifted from manual labour to white collar labour.<sup>388</sup> Furthermore, it is representative of the ideals of university education that perpetuate the problematic legacy of Greek philosophy where contemplation unencumbered by manual labour is the goal of human conduct. The artist's idea of commissioning the

<sup>387</sup> Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 289.

<sup>388</sup> Buchloh, "Conceptual Art," 128.

*Commissioned Paintings* dominates those who are commissioned to manually produce it and are in a sense made to appear lesser or even pathetic in relation to the artist who now possesses the power of the idea. The same irreverent attitude of “Why should I care” that was previously aimed at traditional art hierarchies is now aimed at less deserving others, resulting in domination being perpetuated more than it is questioned.

None of Baldessari’s work described here gives any indication of the type of turmoil and crisis that has been happening socially and politically in the U.S. No mention of the Vietnam War or of the artists’ protests in California such as the Peace Tower. Nevertheless, 1970 turned out to be a significant breakout year for Baldessari; he was in two important group shows: *Information* exhibition at MoMA and *Software* at the Jewish Museum. In the *Software* show he exhibited his *Cremation Piece*, 1970, which consisted of a commemorative plaque in front of a wall containing the ashes of all his accumulated paintings (prior to 1968) that were cremated in a mortuary. It was a defining moment of his transition as a Conceptual artist and as he stated in the catalogue: “Will a Phoenix rise from the ashes? ... I don’t know, but I feel better.” That same year Baldessari had his first solo show at Richard Feigen Gallery in New York, and he moved to L.A. to begin teaching at the brand new California Institute of the Arts (CalArts).

## **5.2 Disneyland**

Walt Disney’s dream for a school that would provide an endless number of graduates for his entertainment empire was started before his death in 1966 and was left to his family successors to see to fruition. Disney’s ideas and interpretation of the transformations during the Sixties are summarized in his claim: “The remarkable thing that’s taking place in almost every field of



endeavor is an accelerating rate of dynamic growth and change. The arts, which have historically symbolized the advance of human progress, must match this growth if they are going to maintain their value in, and influence on, society.”<sup>389</sup> It was almost as if he sensed that the changes in society were outpacing the changes in the art and he wanted to create a school that could be equally dynamic. His mission statement for the school was:

What we must have, then, is a completely new approach to training in the arts – entirely new educational concept which will properly prepare artists and give them the vital tools so necessary for working in, and drawing from, every field of creativity and performance. There is an urgent need for a professional school which will not only give its students thorough training in a specific field but will also allow the widest possible range of artistic growth and expression. To meet this need is exactly why California Institute of the Arts has been created, and why we all believe so strongly in its importance.<sup>390</sup>

From this early description, what is already noticeable is the notion of a radical interdisciplinary function in the arts. Herbert Blau, the founding provost and dean of the theatre program at CalArts, used a theatrical metaphor to describe the CalArts: “The institute is close to total theatre ... The vision of totality being a spirit which dominates the sensibility of the arts, the task is to restore a unitary vision to the arts and to reality itself.”<sup>391</sup> Blau’s addition of “to reality itself” to Disney’s vision signaled that the initial administrators and faculty were interested in not just setting up a new model for training in the arts, but a new form of society.

CalArts was truly one of the contradictions of the age, an art school that appeared to encompass all the aspirations of artists and students alike from the Sixties; a multidisciplinary emphasis, a focus on new media, and a heavy investment in social issues and critical studies.

<sup>389</sup> “California Institute of the Arts: Prologue to a Community” *Arts in Society* (Fall-Winter, 1970): 8.

<sup>390</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>391</sup> Judith E. Alder, *Artists in Offices: An Ethnography of an Academic Art Scene* (New Brunswick: Transaction Books, 1979), 72.

Yet, it was financed by a single corporate donor tied to the entertainment business and initially included a board of trustees whose chairman, H.R. Haldeman, went on to be President Nixon's Chief of Staff. Despite its patrons, Blau described the school as being designed for "a radical educational program that favoured independent artistic work over rigid curricula, collegial relationships among a diverse community of artists over hierarchies of teacher and student, and continuous interaction and cross-pollination among the different branches of the arts over the self-containment of each discipline."<sup>392</sup> At least that was the original party line.

When a new CalArts first opened its doors in 1970 at a temporary location in a converted girls school, Villa Cabrini, and then one year later in a multimillion-dollar facility at Valencia on ranchland north of Los Angeles owned by the Disneys, it was considered the most radical educational experiment in America. Situated on 300 acres it included extensive studios and equipment for music, film, TV, dance, theatre, as well as workshops, stages, galleries and several libraries. The initial administrative team included Herbert Blau, Robert Corrigan, former dean of the School of Arts at New York University, as president, Paul Brach from the University of California San Diego as Dean of Art, and Maurice Stein as Dean of Critical Studies. Just as in a Hollywood blockbuster movie, a star-studded faculty cast was soon brought in to bolster demand, including Allan Kaprow, Mel Powell, John Baldessari, Ravi Shankar, Nam June Paik, Miriam Shapiro, and shortly after, Max Kozloff, Judy Chicago and Michael Asher. According to Baldessari, CalArts wanted to mimic the defunct Black Mountain College in North Carolina, with its interdisciplinary character, openness, and emphasis on bringing in well-known artists

<sup>392</sup> Kathy Sauber, "After an honorary degree, Hebert Blau reviews a busy career," *UWToday*, <http://www.washington.edu/news/2008/05/29/after-an-honorary-degree-herbert-blau-reviews-a-busy-career/> (Accessed January 21, 2015).

and designers.<sup>393</sup> Although the deans had many different views on what the school should be, an updated version of Black Mountain was a utopian vision they all could agree on. However, as David Antin has retrospectively pointed out, “it seems completely implausible for a multimillion-dollar professional school to model itself after a small penniless experimental college with a small number of students trying to work out their identities communally.”<sup>394</sup> Regardless of its improbability, the academic program instituted in the first two years after the institute opened in 1970 responded to a radical critique of education while whole heartedly buying into the Romantic belief of the liberating power of art. There was no fixed curriculum at this time and students were free to do whatever interested them on a given day – once again a light year of separation from the punch clock at St. Martin’s School of Art. Blau advocated “no information in advance of need,” the dean of music Mel Powell called for “as many curricula as students,” and Maurice Stein argued for doing away with courses altogether, because “courses really get nobody anywhere.”<sup>395</sup> A large part of the rhetoric from the faculty in these early years was as much on creating a “community” as it was on any specific educational or artistic goals.

It is fitting that an experimental art school should have emerged in California where there was a long tradition of educational experiments such as the Free Speech movement at Berkeley in 1964 from which the subsequent Free University movement sprang up. The fierce pursuit of justice in the unjust realm of Ronald Reagan was particularly strong in California campuses, ranging from the student strike at San Francisco State University in 1969, the Berkeley People’s Park confrontation, and the University of California San Diego anti-Vietnam protests. These

<sup>393</sup> Robert Hertz, *Jack Goldstein and the CalArts Mafia*, (Ojai: Minneola Press, 2003), location 902.

<sup>394</sup> David Antin, *I never knew what time it was*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 120.

<sup>395</sup> “Prologue to a Community,” 24.

protests all vividly revealed the violence of the state that was ordinarily concealed beneath the surface of a freedom and democracy-espousing Governor. In addition to student protests, California was the centre of the counter-culture, whose 1967 'Summer of Love' in the Haight-Ashbury district of San Francisco exemplified the movement. Music, drugs, sexual liberation, communal living, and eastern religions became part of the search for alternatives by a generation grown weary of repressive social mores and burgeoning consumerism.

The journal *Arts in Society* dedicated an entire issue, Fall-Winter 1970, to CalArts, calling it "California Institute of the Arts: Prologue to a Community." The faculty and staff of CalArts were given a free reign of the journal for the issue because the editors thought that it was important story to be told with "full creative latitude." In the editors' opinion, CalArts was a "moment of destiny for the arts in the university." They go on to explain:

The evidence is every day mounting that universities have recklessly indulged their scientific and technological endeavors to the detriment of their humanistic concerns. How else can one account for their heavy-footed response to devastating social change? A radical shift in priorities is long overdue, and that shift must come in the immediate future if society is ever to control the monstrous technologies which now threaten even existence itself. ... Certainly in the brave new institutions of tomorrow the arts must provide the very cutting edge of leadership, etching in bold lines those human concerns from which all other positions must emanate.

The editors tone, as those of Blau's statement above, attempt to restore a special role for the artist as the savior of the human race and thus, by extension, the importance of their training. Robert Corrigan's guiding statement for the institution further expresses this same sentiment:

The need to stretch the limits, the boundaries, of the human imagination is greater right now than it has ever been before in history. And it is for this reason that I believe the arts are not just valuable in the broad cultural sense that they enhance and shape the quality of the life we lead but that they are essential to our survival as a human race.

I have often described the artist as the seismograph of his age. He is the rabbit in the submarine or the canary in the coal mine. And what he creates is an act of discovery, an act of discovery which simultaneously reveals and reflects the reality of the present moment. But on this occasion I should like to describe him somewhat differently: I want to think of the artist as a maker of maps. ... it has always been the artist's unique function to provide the maps to these unknown areas of the spirit's life. The artist is an explorer, and through his explorations, he brings us into direct touch with the naked landscape. ... without his commitment to chart the landscape that we all must travel, we are certain to get lost, if not be destroyed, as we move across the many new frontiers which we must conquer if we are to survive.<sup>396</sup>

The tenor of the statement is decidedly Marcusean on one hand, with its emphasis on art as a kind of preparation for a new human subject for a better world and as the last language capable of critical communication, which bear a close resemblance to Marcuse's essay "Art as a Form of Reality."<sup>397</sup> While on the other hand, the mapping metaphor of charting the unknown is a McLuhanesque tribute to art acting as an early warning system in which he argues for art's "enabling us to discover social and psychic targets in lots of time to prepare to cope with them."<sup>398</sup> This somewhat unlikely combination of Marcuse and McLuhan was precisely what Maurice Stein had used at Brandeis University, before coming to CalArts, to design what he called a *Blueprint for Counter Education*.

Stein was a sociologist known for his educational innovations and helped found the graduate program at Brandeis University where he began experimenting with a teaching concept that eventually became the *Blueprint*. As founding dean of Critical Studies at CalArts he introduced the *Blueprint* to the CalArts community and published the resulting booklet and charts in a box

<sup>396</sup> "Prologue to a Community", Bulletin No. 1.

<sup>397</sup> Herbert Marcuse, "Art as a form of Reality," *New Left Review* I/74 (July-August 1972): 51-58.

<sup>398</sup> Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*, (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1964), X.

that was to serve as a pedagogical plan for the new school. The *Blueprint* consisted of three large wall sized collage-like charts and a booklet, aptly called “Shooting Script,” with an introduction and a kind of visual bibliography of selected books, as well as listings of magazines, journals and alternative publications. Stein and his assistant, Larry Miller, selected the work of Herbert Marcuse and Marshall McLuhan as the central organizing position for what they termed “all post-modern radical thought.”<sup>399</sup> Stein proposed that the “proper application” of the theories espoused by Marcuse and McLuhan would “yield counter-positions and counter-statements for all realms of culture.” McLuhan’s use of unlikely combinations of aesthetic and political methodologies, combined with Marcuse’s framework of discerning the repressive forces in a one-dimensional society, for Stein, promote the willingness to breakdown traditional conceptions of the boundaries of artistic design and political processes. While teaching students to work with the charts, Stein and Miller claimed that the students’ reflective attention to complex visual spaces was often highly attenuated and encouraged a visual wandering that would allow students to make their own connections. Their suggestion was to position the three charts all around the viewer, the second chart directly in front and the first and third on either side, to create a totally immersive environment. This second chart consists of a left-right orientation that moves from a “Modernism as Meditative Environment” to “Post Modernism as participatory environment.” The Modernism side lists many Modernist masters such as Beckett, Kafka, Joyce, Steiglitz, Stravinsky, Picasso, etc., and on the top left it identifies some structural problems with the existing university process where professionalization and bureaucratization work to restrict the imagination. On the Post Modern side there is an eclectic mix of names such as Roland Barthes,

<sup>399</sup> Maurice Stein and Larry Miller, “Shooting Script” in *Blueprint for Counter Education*, Maurice Stein and Larry Miller (New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1970).

Jean Luc Godard, John Cage, Allen Ginsberg, Claus Oldenberg, as well as texts such as “Frankfurt Institute,” “Free University,” “Cabaret Voltaire,” “Black Mountain,” “Little Magazines,” “Leninist Cell,” and so on. The charts appear to act as giant reading lists and language connections that encourage students to make their own selections of people, processes and themes that they are inclined towards. It endorses learning about the positive aspects of Modernism and to turn some of those aspects back on themselves in order to move forward to Post Modernism such as in the chart’s suggestion of “Adopting Cubist space or collage but abandoning easel painting for environmental art.” Nevertheless, not everyone at CalArts was enthusiastic about this approach.

A discussion between the deans regarding the charts was published in the *Arts and Society* issue and illustrated the skepticism towards the *Blueprint*. In the discussion Blau points out that the charts are tendentious while claiming that they are not, and despite the fact that there is a great deal to select from they still promote a particular selection. It was the selections that caused a great deal of debate. Blau disputed the quality of the people singled out in certain areas and Paul Brach claimed that the choices in his field, art, were so bad that he questioned how he could trust the choices in other fields. In response, Larry Miller claimed that if someone were using the charts properly, then the first step would be to identify the names of interest and go out to the nearest chapter of Progressive Labor and buy the books. The idea was to make your own selections and connections with the start the charts gave you.

By the time the new facility had opened, the school had already gone through the original twenty million dollar gift and the administrators discovered that the Disney heirs were reluctant to go on endlessly funding the school. In the *Arts and Society* issue Corrigan naively tried to explain that the relationship between the board of trustees and the school was merely a rubber-

stamping process where the trustees do not make policies. However, on top of what the trustees saw as profligate spending, Stein's proposed hiring of Herbert Marcuse as a faculty member in Critical Studies quickly forced a tipping point. There was speculation that the board was afraid that Marcuse would be a threat to fundraising efforts and that the Disney heirs would be saddled with all the bills.<sup>400</sup> Just to keep the buildings functioning alone cost one million dollars per year.<sup>401</sup> Board chairman Harrison Price in a 1972 interview posed the question, "What's a new school, supposedly good at art, doing playing around with Marcuse?"<sup>402</sup> Marcuse was never hired, instead Stein was fired after one semester by Corrigan, and Corrigan and Blau themselves were gone by the end of 1972, with Corrigan replaced by William S. Lund, a Disney son-in-law.

Despite this example of how large the problem is of attempting to change the values of institutions that are situated in highly individualistic and capitalist societies, artists began in earnest to attempt to transform the institutions they were associated with. The CalArts is an instance of the difficulty of change, and Board chairman Price's questioning of Marcuse's hiring exemplifies the era's institutional thinking about art as still occupying an 'autonomous' realm that was somehow divorced from politics. It was precisely this attitude that Hans Haacke ran into at the Guggenheim Museum.

<sup>400</sup> Janet Sarbanes, "A Community of artists: Radical Pedagogy at CalArts, 1969-72," *East of Borneo* (June 5, 2014): Accessed January 15, 2015. <http://www.eastofborneo.org/articles/a-community-of-artists-radical-pedagogy-at-calarts-1969-72>.

<sup>401</sup> Herbert Gold, Walt Disney Present: Adventures in Collegeland!" *Atlantic Monthly* (November 1972): 49-55.

<sup>402</sup> Earl Gottschalk, "Animating Disney's Dream," *Saturday Review* (January 29, 1972): 33-35.



### 5.3 Purposefulness Regained

As described at the beginning of the chapter, for several years prior to Haacke's proposed 1971 one-man exhibition at the Guggenheim Museum in New York, artists had a number of high profile run-ins with institutions and at the same time Haacke had just become a very active member of the AWC. What unfolded at the Guggenheim can almost be seen as an inevitable collision between the growing politicization of an artist and the conservative intransigence of an institution. Of all the clashes between artists and institutions during this time, the incident that arguably creating the most controversy and the one with the most wide reaching consequences was the cancellation of Haacke's exhibition.

Haacke's proposed one-man exhibition at the Guggenheim Museum in 1971 was to devote three separate exhibits to physical, biological, and social systems. It was originally conceived to juxtapose inorganic systems such as condensation cubes, biological systems like ant colonies, and social systems exemplified by low-income housing units.<sup>403</sup> The Museum's Director, Thomas Messer, canceled the exhibition at the last minute after failing to reach a compromise with Haacke over two works, *Shapolski et al. Manhattan Real Estate Holdings* (fig. 18), and *Sol Goldman and Alex DiLorenzo Manhattan Real Estate Holdings* (both 1971).

Haacke's real estate pieces were conceived to display a massive amount of factual data. The works documented the holdings and activities of two separate real estate groups, one provided data on the types of buildings owned by the association of Sol Goldman and Alex DiLorenzo, while the other catalogued the properties of the Shapolsky organization. Haacke's choice of

<sup>403</sup> Leo Steinberg, "Some of Hans Haacke's Works Considered as Fine Art," in *Hans Haacke: Unfinished Business*, ed. Brian Wallis (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1987), 8.

holdings for the works was not arbitrary; his goal was to reveal the degree to which large-scale real estate interests dominated New York's landscape.<sup>404</sup> Haacke closely researched the publicly recorded deeds and mortgage agreements for the Shapolsky properties and discovered 142 different properties owned by the group, which were held by approximately seventy different corporations.<sup>405</sup> Each of the properties was photographed by Haacke and displayed along with a sheet of text containing the location, description, ownership, date acquired, mortgage statistics, mortgage holder, and assessed land value. Additionally, charts displayed the various corporate ownerships of the properties on the left hand side and the mortgagees on the right hand side, with lines connecting the two that trace the exchange of properties, mortgages and their transaction dates. The charts clearly outline how the low-income housing units were owned by the same family and how the maze-like organization under different corporations was ostensibly set up to conceal the extent of the ownership in order to hide the owners from being personally liable for repairs to buildings.

According to Messer, the real estate works were problematic because they would "name and thereby publicly expose, individuals and companies whom" Haacke considers to be at fault.<sup>406</sup> A liability issue from the point of view of the Guggenheim Foundation's council was the initial reason that Messer claimed for not going ahead with the exhibition. In a letter to Haacke he explains:

From a legal point of view it appears very doubtful that your findings could be so verified as to be unassailable if a libel suit were directed against the Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation. Verification of your charge would be beyond our

<sup>404</sup> Rosalyn Deutsche, "Property Values: Hans Haacke, Real Estate, and the Museum," in *Hans Haacke: Unfinished Business* (Cambridge: M.I.T. Press, 1986), 29.

<sup>405</sup> Ibid., 30.

<sup>406</sup> Ibid.

capacity while, on the other hand, unchecked acceptance of your allegations could have consequences that we are not prepared to risk.

Considered from the vantage point of the Museum's purpose and function, a muckraking venture under the auspices of The Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation also raises serious questions.<sup>407</sup>

On hearing that the exhibition was cancelled due to his citing an actual person's name, Haacke offered a compromise to the Guggenheim by replacing the name of the real landlord, Harry Shapolsky, with a fictional name, "Harvey Schwartz."<sup>408</sup> However, replacing the name of what was already uncomfortably close to a stereotypical Jewish landlord exposé with a generic Jewish name was no doubt problematic for a museum whose founder was Jewish. For Messer, this "disguise" was only a mockery and it was not accepted. For his part, Haacke insisted that the works contained "no evaluative comment" and were "legally unassailable."<sup>409</sup>

The liability issue aside, the real point of contention lies in Messer's second reason for the cancellation. Messer claims that the Guggenheim's Charter holds to the pursuit of "esthetic and educational objectives that are self-sufficient and without ulterior motive." A kind of empirical impossibility that allows the institution to decide what it wants to accept and reject. He goes on to state:

On those grounds, the trustees have established policies that exclude active engagement toward social and political ends. It is well understood, in this connection, that art may have social and political consequences but these, we believe, are furthered by indirection and by the generalized, exemplary force that works of art may exert upon the environment, not, as you propose, by using political means to achieve political ends, no matter how desirable these may appear to be in themselves. We maintain, in other words, that while art cannot be

<sup>407</sup> Ibid.

<sup>408</sup> Steinberg, 16.

<sup>409</sup> Diane Waldman, "Gurgles Around the Guggenheim," *Studio International* (June 1971), 246-250.

arbitrarily confined, our institutional role is limited. Consequently, we function within such limits, leaving to others, areas which we consider outside our professional competence.<sup>410</sup>

In a response to a letter from Haacke in *Studio International*, Messer appears to contradict the statement above when he writes: “I have not maintained anywhere that Mr. Haacke’s pieces advocate a political cause. I have maintained that they pointed to alleged social malpractices and that they attempted public exposure of individuals the artist believed to be at fault. The objection to possible libel was not removed by thinly disguising particular identities.” Yet in the often-quoted guest editorial in the summer 1971 edition of *Art’s Magazine*, Messer claims:

To the degree to which an artist deliberately pursues aims that lie beyond art, his very concentration upon ulterior ends stands in conflict with the intrinsic nature of the work as an end in itself. The conclusion is that the sense of inappropriateness that was felt from the start toward Haacke’s “social system” exhibit was due to an aesthetic weakness which interacted with a forcing of art boundaries. The tensions within this contradiction in the work itself transferred itself from it onto the museum environment and beyond it into society at large. Eventually, the choice was between the acceptance of or rejection of an alien substance that had entered the art museum organism.

... Haacke’s work implicates certain individuals from the safety of its museum sanctuary. Protected by the armor of art, the work reaches out into the sociopolitical environment where it affects not the large conscience of humanity, but the mundane interest of particular parties. Upon the predictable reaction of society the work, turned weapon, would recede into its immune “art-self” to seek shelter within the museum’s temporary custody.<sup>411</sup>

To summarize Messer’s argument, the Guggenheim policies restrict the showing of art that pursues active social or political engagement, for these aims lie beyond art’s boundaries and if

<sup>410</sup> Thomas Messer, Letter to Hans Haacke quoted in Jack Burnham, “Hans Haacke’s Cancelled Show at the Guggenheim,” *Artforum* (June 1971): 67-71.

<sup>411</sup> Thomas Messer, “Guest Editorial,” *Arts Magazine* (June, 1971): 4-5.

the Guggenheim were to allow it, then it would have to accept “an alien substance” into the art museum organism. Art may have political effect or content in an “indirect” or “general” way, but not in the specific identification of individuals and issues the way Haacke did. Messer is fundamentally advocating a divide between the private sanctity of the art museum and the messiness of the outside world. The Museum’s sanctuary was deemed to be an inappropriate place to be invaded with questions of real-estate investments. Messer invokes another religious metaphor, the right to asylum, by claiming that Haacke was attempting to seek shelter in the museum from libelous prosecution. As with CalArts Board Chairman Price’s demand of “What’s a new school, supposedly good at art, doing playing around with Marcuse?” Messer perpetuated the old idealist myth of the autonomy of art and culture from society at large, which demarcated artificial borders for art that served the interests of the Museum and gave it an excuse to fundamentally exclude artists or art it was ideologically opposed to. Messer’s argument follows the idealist belief that art is distinct from the political/social/economic realm, and the museum is therefore a neutral and apolitical institution. The insistence on an “indirect” or “general” content in art effectively neutralizes and depoliticizes work and thus allows the Museum to keep the boundary between art and society intact. Nevertheless, there is certainly something more than the mythical demarcation between art and society that Haacke crossed to provoke this kind of reaction – something about the specificity of the details and its presentation that became an unacceptable irritant to the Museum.

Haacke was in the process of transitioning his practice from earlier works such as *Condensation Cube*, 1965, which explored biological and physical systems to social systems such the various audience poll works he began at the Howard Wise Gallery in 1969 and then at the MoMA *Information* exhibition in 1970. Luke Skrebowski has called this a shift from “an

affirmative technophilia to a critical technophobia motivated by a political reaction against the war machinery being deployed by the US government in Vietnam.”<sup>412</sup> However, Haacke never totally gave up on biological and physical systems, he combined these natural systems with the social in certain contemporary and future works such as *Norbert: All Systems Go*, 1970, *Ten Turtles Set Free*, 1970, and *Rhine-water Purification Plant*, 1972, which will be discussed further below. Rather than a clean break in his practice with the past as Baldessari did, it was more of a merging of science and social systems. Haacke’s interest in systems theory, according to his friend and a key proponent of systems thinking in the Sixties, Jack Burnham, owes a debt to the founder of General Systems Theory, the biologist, Ludwig von Bertalanffy. Briefly, in systems theory a system is a set of elements integrated with one another to such an extent that they form a recognizable and coherent whole. A system is thus not limited to biology and can be any collection of components that by virtue of its organization and function becomes meaningful (recognizable as a structure) in its own right.<sup>413</sup> Systems analysis became popular in the Sixties for use in fields such as computer programing, and it has a long history of being tied to military purposes, from Norbert Weiner’s radar experiments in WWII to Robert McNamara’s use of systems analysis for modern warfare strategizing during the Kennedy administration. As Michael Corris argues, “systems analysis ... became part of the lingua franca of the Sixties.”<sup>414</sup> Its use in art, “systems aesthetics” as Burnham called it, appeared to fit well with Conceptual art practices as system aesthetics necessitated the dissolution of the specificity of traditional art mediums and objects. Burnham claimed systems thinking replaced art objects with “organizing quantities of

<sup>412</sup> Luke Skrebowski, “All Systems Go: Recovering Hans Haacke’s Systems Art,” *Grey Room* 30 (Winter 2008), 54-83.

<sup>413</sup> Francis Halsall, *Systems of Art: Art, History and Systems Theory* (New York: Peter Lang, 2008), 11.

<sup>414</sup> Michael Corris, ed., *Conceptual Art: Theory, Myth, and Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 189.

energy and information. Seen another way, it is a refocusing of aesthetic awareness – based on future scientific-technological evolution – on matter-energy information exchanges and away from the invention of solid artefacts.”<sup>415</sup> Burnham was strongly influenced by Marcuse’s writing, and in Burnham’s theories we again see this mix of Marcusean utopianism and scientific systems analysis, which is not dissimilar to the mixing of Marcuse and McLuhan by Stein. For Burnham, New Left politics mixed with media, communications and technology was a different way to make sense of the changing world.

Haacke’s own explanation of his method in the catalogue for the *Conceptual Art and Conceptual Aspects* exhibition, 1970, was “to think in terms of systems, the production of systems, the interference with and the exposure of existing systems,” where “systems can be physical, biological or social; they can be man-made, naturally existing, or a combination of any of the above.”<sup>416</sup> Later in his career he added that systems could be used against systems in order to produce “a critique of the dominant systems of beliefs while employing the very mechanisms of that system.”<sup>417</sup> With systems theory, Haacke took a suspiciously positivistic scientific development from outside art’s traditional structure that was used primarily for furthering control and domination by corporate and political elites, and repurposed it into a form of critique of those same uses.

From a biographical perspective, Burnham, like Skrebowski, claims that Haacke was politicized by the immorality of the Vietnam War. In numerous interviews Haacke mentions the

<sup>415</sup> Jack Burnham, *Beyond Modern Sculpture: The Effects of Science and Technology on the Sculpture of this Century* (New York: G. Brasiller, 1968), 11.

<sup>416</sup> Donald Karshan, ed., *Conceptual Art and Conceptual Aspects* (New York: The New York Cultural Center, 1970), 32.

<sup>417</sup> Hans Haacke, “The Agent,” in *Hans Haacke*, ed. Jon Bird, Walter Grasskamp and Molly Nesbit (London: Phaidon, 2004), 107.

war as the prime motivating factor behind the protest movements, inside and outside the art world.<sup>418</sup> The following is an excerpt from a letter Haacke wrote to Burnham dated April 10, 1968:

Last week's murder of Dr. King came as a great shock. Linda [his wife] and I were gloomy for days and still have not quite recovered. The event pressed something into focus that I have known for long but never realized so bitterly and helplessly, namely, that what we are doing, the production and the talk about sculpture, has no relation to the urgent problems of our society. Whoever believes that art can make life more humane is utterly naïve ... Art is utterly unsuited as a political tool ... All of a sudden it bugs me. I am also asking myself, why the hell am I working in this field at all. Again the answer is never at hand that is credible, but it did not particularly disturb me. I still have no answer, but I am no longer comfortable.<sup>419</sup>

As discussed in previous chapters, the contradictions that emerged in society during the Sixties, the gap between what dominant institutions were espousing and the reality of their deeds and actions, created a crisis of experience could be seen as the catalyst for change. The momentum of the anti-war protests and the call for artists to end their silence provided impetus and pressure to take on a more socially responsible line of inquiry. As one of its founding members, Haacke, along with other New York artists, was actively involved in the workings of the AWC. Lucy Lippard emphasized the importance of the AWC for her own politicization when she wrote about her experiences in the AWC: "In the next two or more years I learned more about the relationship of art and artist to social structures than I had in college, graduate school and ten years in the art world altogether. Like many others, I could never again pretend ignorance (or

<sup>418</sup> "Hans Haacke: Talking Art." *Tate Video*, 23 June 2007, <http://www.tate.org.uk/context-comment/video/hans-haacke-talking-art>.

<sup>419</sup> Jack Burnham, "Steps in the Formulation of Real-Time Political Art," in *Framing and Being Framed*, Hans Haacke, Howard S. Becker and John Walton (Halifax: The Press of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, 1975), 130.



innocence) of the way art is manipulated by greed, money and power.”<sup>420</sup> Haacke’s statement at the AWC Open-Hearing concerned itself with the museum as the location of power and he called for a decentralization of the Museum’s activities into all areas of the city in order to open it up to other communities.<sup>421</sup> He was also one of the few artists to adopt the Artists Rights Transfer and Sale Agreement developed by Seth Siegelaub and lawyer Bob Projansky to allow an artist’s participation in the seller’s profit of their work. A contract that he still uses and still infuriates potential buyers of his work.<sup>422</sup> Kynaston McShine’s catalogue essay for MoMA’s *Information* exhibition sums up the situation that artists found themselves in 1970:

The material presented by artists is considerably varied, and also spirited, if not rebellious – which is not very surprising, considering the general social, political, and economic crises that are almost universal phenomena of 1970. If you are an artist in Brazil, you know of at least one friend who is being tortured; if you are one in Argentina, you probably have had a neighbor who has been in jail for having long hair, or for not being ‘dressed’ properly; and if you are living in the United States, you may fear that you will be shot at, either in the universities, in your bed, or more formally in Indochina. It may seem too inappropriate, if not absurd, to get up in the morning, walk into a room and apply dabs of paint from a little tube to a square of canvas. What can you as a young artist do that seems relevant and meaningful?<sup>423</sup>

Haacke’s shift to social systems, and in particular the polling works, has often been linked to the Frankfurt School, but this time it is Jürgen Habermas rather than Marcuse or Adorno. Both Benjamin Buchloh and Rosalyn Deutsche argue that Haacke, post 1969, adopts Habermasian notions of communicative action’s capability to increase his “audience’s capacity for public life

<sup>420</sup> Lucy Lippard, *Get The Message? A Decade of Art For Social Change* (New York: E.P. Dutton, Inc., 1984), 3.

<sup>421</sup> Bryan-Wilson, 183.

<sup>422</sup> Maria Eichhorn, “Interview with Hans Haacke” in *Maria Eichhorn: The Artist Contract*, Gerti Fietzek, ed. (Köln: Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König, 2009), 69.

<sup>423</sup> Kynaston McShine, “Essay,” *Information Catalogue* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1970), 138.

and encouraging the appearance of a public sphere.”<sup>424</sup> Haacke’s own comments reflect Habermasian views on the public sphere when he asserts: “One should never leave politics to the politicians” or “A democratic society must promote critical thinking, including a constant critique of itself. Without it, democracy will not survive.” In contrast to his 1968 letter to Burnham, by at least 1977 Haacke started to believe that works of art had the potential to shape the audience’s “view of the world and of themselves and may lead them to act upon that understanding.”<sup>425</sup> Deutsche claims that Haacke’s polling works “set down the condition for the audience to transform itself into a different kind of public, one composed of desubjugated subjects, practicing the art of critique.”<sup>426</sup> Likewise, Fredric Jameson sees Haacke’s work as a way of “using the dead and conventionalized shells of museum-going and art appreciation for the unexpected purpose of transmitting outright political lessons.”<sup>427</sup> Thus Haacke’s work can be said to subordinate art to the more practical ends of pedagogy in order to create what Buchloh calls the “necessary condition for the dialectics of democratic, egalitarian social relations and individual autonomous subjecthood.”<sup>428</sup> Conceptual art, rather than being an end in itself, instead of being “purposeless” as LeWitt claimed, had now adopted the role to become a vehicle for the education of citizenship in a democratic society.

Despite the fact that both Buchloh and Jameson are staunch supporters/interpreters of Adorno’s theories, they both place Haacke’s political shift as not only Habermasian, but

<sup>424</sup> Roselyn Deutsche, “The Art of Not Being Governed Quite So Much,” in *Hans Haacke: For Real*, eds. Matthias Flügge and Robert Fleck (Berlin: Akademie der Künste, 2006), 62.

<sup>425</sup> Hans Haacke, “The Agent,” in *Hans Haacke: For Real*, eds. Matthias Flügge and Robert Fleck (Berlin: Akademie der Künste, 2006), 272.

<sup>426</sup> Deutsche, “The Art of Not Being Governed,” 71.

<sup>427</sup> Fredric Jameson, “Hans Haacke and the Cultural Logic of Postmodernism,” in *Hans Haacke: Unfinished Business*, ed. Brian Wallis (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1987), 45.

<sup>428</sup> Benjamin Buchloh, “Hans Haacke: from Factographic Sculpture to Counter-Monument,” in *Hans Haacke: For Real*, eds. Matthias Flügge and Robert Fleck (Berlin: Akademie der Künste, 2006), 50.

decidedly anti-Adornian. Jameson, in his article “Hans Haacke and the Cultural Logic of Postmodernism,” argues that “The limits of the theories of the Frankfurt School for us today are drawn by their desperate attempt to resecure a diminished, but even more intense and utopian, place for some last surviving ‘authentic’ – noncommodified and ‘high modernist’ – artistic production, an attempt whose historical failure the emergence of postmodernism signals in a more than symptomatic way.”<sup>429</sup> While Buchloh directly attacks Adorno’s criticism of political pedagogy in “committed” works such as those by Bertold Brecht and Jean-Paul Sartre. In Buchloh’s “Hans Haacke: Memory and Instrumental Reason,” he quotes from Adorno’s essay “Commitment” and argues that Adorno’s version of autonomous art was

... Historically still dependent upon the modernist model of critical negation and refusal – a model which originated with Mallarmé’s Symbolist hermeticism ... his [Adorno’s] argument is not historically informed by the actual transformation of esthetic practice that took place within the 20<sup>th</sup> century itself. In particular, Adorno ignores the fact that the concept of autotelic purity was actually dismantled early in the century – first, in the esthetics of Duchamp and Dadaism after 1913, but even more so in the wake of Constructivist abstraction and Productivist esthetics in the Soviet Union between 1919 and 1925.<sup>430</sup>

It is certainly the case that the avant-garde at the turn of the twentieth century attempted to dismantle “autotelic purity,” but it was far from being a *fait accompli*. Autotelic purity remained strong throughout the century in Surrealism, Abstract Expressionism, Pop, Fluxus,<sup>431</sup> and in the beginnings of Conceptual art as exemplified in Sol LeWitt’s *Statements*. Why else would the Guggenheim’s Charter state that it holds to the pursuit of “esthetic and educational objectives

<sup>429</sup> Jameson, “Hans Haacke and the Cultural Logic of Postmodernism,” 41.

<sup>430</sup> Benjamin Buchloh, “Hans Haacke: Memory and Instrumental Reason,” *Art In America* (February, 1988): 100.

<sup>431</sup> Walter De-Maria’s project called *Boxes for Meaningless Work*, 1960, is a wonderful Fluxus example of purposelessness where he builds two small boxes, fills one, and suggests to the audience that they empty the contents into the other, and back and forth, as long as they like.

that are self-sufficient and without ulterior motive?” Or that Messer’s argument should be based on the fact that a work of art is “an end in itself?” Instead, it is my contention that it is really only at the time of Hans Haacke’s turn that autotelic purity becomes dismantled in earnest. It is certainly true that Adorno had argued against explicitly political work, however, it is useful to re-examine this position in more detail to see if it is as straight forward as his critics make out, or whether it is more nuanced and can help reassess Haacke’s work.

Adorno’s examples of the legitimate representatives of what he calls autonomous or “authentic” art works are largely synonymous with twentieth-century High-Modernist works as opposed to either the mass art of the culture industry or the original avant-garde. Adorno’s aversion to Dadaist art stems from the fact that while Dada artists rejected art, they were unable to shake free of it. For Adorno, attempts to do away with art are misguided because society would not be better off unless it had already attained a utopia whose possibility is only suggested in works such as Samuel Beckett’s *Endgame*.<sup>432</sup> As a result, Adorno’s Modernist champions include Schoenberg in music, Kafka and Joyce in literature, Mallarmé in poetry, Beckett in theatre, Kandinsky and Pollock in painting and Giacometti in sculpture. Yet despite the fact that his examples of autonomous art are all Modernist, reflecting his own bourgeois prejudices, his theory is more accommodating. Adorno claims that autonomous art works are de-aestheticized or “ugly” so as to contest the counterfeit reconciliation of affirmative mass art, in which fulfillment in art acts as a substitute for the lack of fulfillment in life. De-aestheticization is a consequence of art’s use of new and advanced techniques in both production and reception that act to destroy

<sup>432</sup> Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 220.

the traditional aesthetic standards of beauty, harmony, symmetry, etc.<sup>433</sup> The following quote from *Aesthetic Theory*, while it refers to “modernism” could be as easily applied to Conceptual art and Haacke’s work:

The substantive element of artistic modernism draws its power from the fact that the most advanced procedures of material production and organization are not limited to the sphere in which they originate. In a manner scarcely analyzed yet by sociology, they radiate out into areas of life far removed from them, deep into the zones of subjective experience, which does not notice this and guards the sanctity of its reserves. Art is modern when, by its mode of experience and as the expression of the crisis of experience, it absorbs what industrialization has developed under the given relations of production. This involves a negative canon, a set of prohibitions against what the modern has disavowed in experience and technique; and such determinate negation is virtually the canon of what is to be done.<sup>434</sup>

As Jay Bernstein writing on Adorno points out, what has been previously conceived as art “fails to be non-identical because the works of the past become past by becoming discursively saturated; to become an element of the tradition is to become known, cognized, subsumed.”<sup>435</sup> In other words, the rejection of tradition is part of the battle with cognition for a different kind of cognition. Consequently, Adorno’s theory is far more forward thinking than his examples, and proves to be, compatible with Conceptual art with its insistence on both a process of change in the materials of artistic production, and the incorporation of the most advanced relations of socioeconomic structures.

The radicality of art in Adorno’s work does not simply reside in the terms of opposition or critique; instead it goes beyond these notions and requires a rethinking of both the aesthetic and

<sup>433</sup> Ibid., 20.

<sup>434</sup> Ibid., 34.

<sup>435</sup> J.M. Bernstein, *Fate of Art: Aesthetic Alienation from Kant to Derrida and Adorno*, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992), 198.

the social.<sup>436</sup> The suggestion that art is oppositional by promoting a Leftist utopian ideology or critiquing existing social relations is for Adorno just a distortion and betrayal of art's autonomous force, it is not where radicality lies. Art is not political in any easy sense and art's radicality should not be confused with art's political function, instead Adorno claims it should break open a different disposition of relations. Art's political relevance for Adorno lies in its refusal to be political. This means that art is neither political nor apolitical, but politically otherwise, other than how society would like to define the meaning of political.<sup>437</sup> The political relevance of art is in its aesthetic force, which when it is opened up within an artwork manages to transform the social context in which it is released. One of Adorno's strongest examples of this aesthetic force is in his analysis of Beckett's plays:

At ground zero, however, where Beckett's plays unfold like forces in infinitesimal physics, a second world of images springs forth, both sad and rich, the concentrate of historical experiences that otherwise, in their immediacy, fail to articulate the essential: the evisceration of subject and reality. This shabby, damaged world of images is the negative imprint of the administered world. To this extent Beckett is realistic.<sup>438</sup>

This "second world of images" that is opened up by art fundamentally allows history to recommence. For Adorno "Artworks bear expression not where they communicate the subject, but rather where they reverberate with the protohistory of subjectivity ... this is the affinity of the artwork to the subject and it endures because this protohistory survives in the subject and recommences in every moment of history."<sup>439</sup> There is a kind of collective remembrance in artworks that is made manifest through the subject's idiosyncratic impulses. Thus the aesthetic

<sup>436</sup> For a more extensive discussion of Adorno and art's radicality see Krzysztof Ziarek's "Radical Art" in *Adorno a Critical Reader*, eds. Nigel Gibson and Andrew Rubin (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002).

<sup>437</sup> Ziarek, "Radical Art," 349.

<sup>438</sup> Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 31.

<sup>439</sup> *Ibid.*, 112-113.

world made present in an autonomous work of art enacts this recommencement of history and has a force with which it “lets the reality around art to begin again.”<sup>440</sup>

Haacke’s *Shapolsky et al. Manhattan Real-Estate Holdings* employs a very specific language of advanced Western industrial nations. It is a product of intensive research, in which research itself becomes the dominant medium of the work. Benjamin Buchloh has argued that this type of work is reflective of the shift in labour from production to administration that came into its own in the Sixties.<sup>441</sup> However, the problem with the term “administration” is that it bears with it the tone of a Weberian late nineteenth century administrative society, rather than a technologically advanced computer wielding society of the late Sixties and early 1970s. Haacke’s work is far more than administration – instead of some paper shuffling process it is closer to the kind of intensive systems analysis that the Rand Corporation might have undertaken. It is more reflective of the work in an American research university, which began to flourish during the postwar era, built on massive state-military involvement, its cult of science, and gradually supplanted broader cultural aims as the dominant preoccupation of academic life. Haacke is one of the first artists to embark on an extensive, time consuming, and detailed research project of this kind. What today has become *de rigueur* for engaged artists, Haacke pioneered in 1971.

Haacke’s works are exemplary of Adorno’s claim that “artistic modernism draws its power from the fact that the most advanced procedures of material production and organization are not limited to the sphere in which they originate.” Haacke repurposes systems theories from outside art’s traditional structure. He uses the language of statistics, charts and photographs – all supposed truth telling apparatuses of the administered world – against the economic imperatives

<sup>440</sup> Ziarek, 353.

<sup>441</sup> Buchloh, “Conceptual Art,” 128.

that they would normally support in order to show the falseness of the system. In addition to the by now standard reading Haacke's goal of using statistics to demystify art's relation to social space as a nascent form of institutional critique, as Alberro, Buchloh and Deutsche argue, I am suggesting that Haacke's aesthetization of the data can be seen as demystifying the empirical reality of the low-income buildings and removing the disguise of their place in the apparent naturalness of an exchange driven society. Instead of just being a critique of the institution and the kind of art that can be displayed, it is undeniably a critique of the injustice and domination of an exchange driven society. The overwhelming nature of the information displayed, creates a kind of overloading that was present in Haacke's previous *News* piece, exhibited at *Prospect 69* and *Software*, which installed a teletype machine connected to a wire service and spewed out mounds of paper with the latest news on it. The form of the display in *Shapolsky et al* forces the viewer to move in close to read the text and thus the materiality of the data creates an immersive space in which the viewer is surrounded by a seriality of statistics and photographs that go on and on. Haacke's display is meant to be read as well as looked, which puts it in a different register than a statistical sublime that other Conceptual artists occasionally indulged in such as with Robert Barry's *One Million Dots*, 1971, or On Kawara's *One Million Years*, 1969. By being dropped right into the middle of a research project the viewer becomes a collaborator of Haacke's, in a sense standing side by side with the artist and cognitively recreating his research steps by moving through the gallery. The form is not the same as reading a bound research report, instead it is an aesthetized display of the empirical data of the low-income buildings reconstructed according to the work's own law. The massive amount of research and data demand a certain form of display for an art gallery, and through that production process what is immanent in the material comes forth in the work without the necessity of an accompanying



explanatory narrative. The logic of the form is enough to allow the viewer to step outside of their normal perception of the world and to aesthetically rearrange their experience into a new cognitive understanding of the empirical reality of low-income housing. It is not just a matter of turning the art space into a site for critical inquiry, but into a site as an active learning experience of a different kind of cognition. In the same way that Haacke gives himself over to the data of his research, the viewer gives himself/herself over to the artwork, immersing themselves in the particularity of the data and discovering what Walter Benjamin called the social structure in a particular configuration.<sup>442</sup> In this way Haacke serves the intrinsic logic of the material with his intellectual research skills rather than treating the work as a mere object to be mastered. Under those circumstances the work exceeds the author's mere intention, obeying the compulsion of the work itself, and has a wider reaching validity rather than an individual expression. Haacke uses the very quantitative tools that make profit and exploitation possible to negate the veneer of its naturalness. The positivist discourse of the prevailing technological rationality is replaced by an aesthetic rationality, and as Adorno argues, it is with this aesthetic force that the artwork manages to transform the social context in which it is released.

The real estate works transformed their social context to such an extent that the exhibition was cancelled, and potential viewers (other than Messer) had to wait until 1972 when the real estate works were first exhibited at Galleria Françoise Lambert, in Milan. Leo Steinberg drives the point home that Haacke was breaking the rules of the game in what Steinberg calls a "sin of ingratitude."<sup>443</sup> Haacke was biting the hand that fed him by pointing out that the sources of wealth are often "wrung from the poor." However, I believe that it was not so much the political

<sup>442</sup> Walter Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, (London: Verso, 1998), 46.

<sup>443</sup> Steinberg, 12.

content of the work that created the crisis; after all, the story of the rich exploiting the poor is a topic already addressed by works in the Guggenheim's own collection and by itself should not have hit such a nerve at the Museum. Nor was it merely the documenting of the ownership and control of the urban space that Rosalyn Deutsche claims.<sup>444</sup> What was so disturbing, objectionable, and fear inducing to the Guggenheim was the form of the presentation that used publically accessible data in such a meticulously researched and statistically precise format. The seeming incontestability of statistical truths was using the same methodology as capitalist financiers and was far more dangerous than the metaphorical form of general truths Messer's "exemplary works of art" evoked. Even though the Shapolski's had no association with the Guggenheim or the art world, the real estate works would have immediately raised the concern of all wealthy patrons as to what their own publically accessible data would look like in this kind of display.<sup>445</sup> The bringing to light of what is normally hidden behind the benefactor's goodwill would almost always negate the prestige gained from the act of donating. Consequently it was this fear of losing funding from wealthy patrons who did not want their sources of wealth interrogated, the same fear of losing patrons that the potential hiring of Marcuse caused at CalArts, that was likely the primary motivating factor for the cancellation. Like CalArts, the Guggenheim Museum required a massive amount of private support to keep its doors open. However, Haacke was not biting the hand that fed him since he taught at Cooper Union for a living. Once again, like Baldessari, Haacke's art production operated outside the world of

<sup>444</sup> Rosalyn Deutsche, "Property Values: Hans Haacke, Real Estate, and the Museum," in *Hans Haacke: Unfinished Business* (New York: New Museum of Contemporary Art, 1986), 29.

<sup>445</sup> Harry Shapolsky is sometimes written about as if he were a Guggenheim trustee, which he was not. This was most likely caused by confusing the real estate works with Haacke's later *Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum Board of Trustees*, 1974, piece that was an investigation of the business dealings of the trustees.

exchange in the sense that he was not dependent on it. On more than one occasion Haacke has explained that there was no market for his work in the late Sixties,<sup>446</sup> yet he continued to make art for its own sake and no doubt his alternative source of income had a part to play in his refusal to compromise with the Museum.

To be able to break through the logic of exchange, Susan Buck-Morss argues that Adorno believed that aesthetic experience is a more adequate form of cognition than either rationalist or existentialist idealism because in it subject and object, reason and sensual experience, are interrelated without either pole gaining the upper hand.<sup>447</sup> In other words it provides a model for dialectical and materialist cognition. Adorno's aim was not to aestheticize philosophy or politics, but rather to rekindle the dialectical relationship between subject and object as the correct basis for all human activities. Both philosophy and art for Adorno had a moral-pedagogic function, which Buck-Morss claims was in the service of politics, not as manipulative propaganda, but as teaching by example. This is one of the keys to Adorno's aesthetic theory, the idea that art can demonstrate through an experiential sense, instead of a didactic sense, a different way. Again using Beckett as an example, Adorno explains that Beckett's works arouse a fear that is experienced by the audience which "existentialism merely talks about."<sup>448</sup> The "officially committed works look like pantomime,"<sup>449</sup> unlike Beckett's, which operate to awaken the audience from their complacency and undermine their preconceived understanding of things. For both the artist working with their material, and the audience before it, authentic autonomous art

<sup>446</sup> "Hans Haacke: Talking Art." *Tate Video*.

<sup>447</sup> Susan Buck-Morss, *The Origin of Negative Dialectics: Theodor Adorno, Walter Benjamin, and the Frankfurt Institute* (New York: The Free Press, 1977), 123.

<sup>448</sup> Theodor Adorno, "Commitment," *The New Left Review* Vol 87 (1974): 86.

<sup>449</sup> *Ibid.*, 86.

offers the chance for the individual to get rid of oneself and encounter the other in a way that is freed of instrumental views and without fear. For Adorno, it is the logic of the material, not the opinions of the artist, which contains a criteria outside the market that became a possible model of reconciliation. Haacke vividly brings the essence of what Adorno meant by reconciliation to light in a work from this period called the *Rhine-water Purification Plant*, 1972 (fig. 19).

The Sixties environmental movement started in earnest with Rachel Carson's 1962 book, *Silent Spring*, and continued to play a large part in protest and counter culture movements during the Sixties. Environmentalism was a key issue for some Conceptual artists such as Robert Kinmont, and was at least present in a peripheral fashion for others as in some of the many mapping projects such as Baldessari's *California Map Project*, 1971. Haacke's interest in physical and biological systems made the environment an obvious point of departure for him. The *Rhine-water Purification Plant* work was exhibited in a one-person show at the Museum Haus Lange, Krefeld, West Germany. The installation consisted of large glass bottles of dark polluted Rhine water that was pumped into an elevated basin where the injection of chemicals caused the pollutants to settle.<sup>450</sup> This partially purified water was then flowed through a charcoal and sand filter and eventually dropped into a large basin with goldfish. The overflow from the basin was then carried through a hose into the garden. At the time of the installation, the city of Krefeld was annually dumping over forty-two million cubic meters of untreated household and industrial sewage in the Rhine. The Krefeld sewage statistics were documented in an accompanying work, *Krefeld Sewage Triptych*, 1972, also in the same exhibition. This kind of attempt to reconcile civilization and nature is also at the heart of Adorno's theories.

<sup>450</sup> Brian Wallis, ed., *Hans Haacke: Unfinished Business* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1987), 106.

In the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Adorno and Max Horkheimer lay blame for what they view as a “false” society on the domination of nature. The fundamental argument underlying the entire project is that the domination of the external world during the Enlightenment led to control of the subject’s internal nature and ultimately of the social world as well. Right from the beginning the domination of nature was tied to social hierarchy and control. Instrumental rationality contained the seeds of a new form of dehumanization, which erased the memory of a state where nature was not yet dominated by means and ends reason. Consequently, instead of liberating humankind, bourgeois society’s drive to legitimate capitalist competition ends up with a mastery that is also a submission. In his essay “On Subject and Object” Adorno states: “Once radically separated from the object [nature], subject reduces the object to itself, subject swallows object, forgetting how much it is object itself.”<sup>451</sup> A society that pursues progress at all costs results in anything which is “other,” human or nonhuman, being dominated and exploited. The domination of nature was allowed to progress once the subject’s embeddedness in nature was transcended and then forgotten. When the subject comes to perceive itself as absolute and its other, nature, as something to be dominated, this logic ultimately comes back to haunt the subject who forgets that he too is part of nature and is victimized by his own methods of domination.

Adorno argues for the preponderance of the object in artworks as being irreducible to its merely constructive and subjective origins. Similarly, despite the rhetoric of dematerialization in the history of Conceptual art, some of the most compelling artworks cited in this dissertation, from Latham’s *Still and Chew* to A&L’s *Index* to Haacke’s *Rhine-water Purification Plant*, have all had material components that added a sensual non-cognitive aspect to their display. In what

<sup>451</sup> Theodor Adorno, “Subject and Object,” in *Critical Models: Interventions and Catchwords* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 246.

Adorno terms the mimetic moment there is an intrinsically utopian affirmation in the artwork's sensuous appearance that acts as a preserved memory of what has been forgotten and thus also a prefiguration of a possible restoration of that condition in the future. Haacke's *Rhine-water Purification Plant* installation materially illustrates this notion through its transformation of black polluted sludge in glass containers into clear life sustaining water, first for the goldfish and then the garden. The rationality that produced the industrial sludge has the potential to be overturned and the crystal clear water basin filled with goldfish acts as a pristine example of a still possible pre-historical oneness with nature. This collective memory of what a world could be like outside of domination is demonstrated through only a slight displacement of the current reality, illustrating a utopia that is not only possible, but not that far out of reach.

Adorno reformulates the feeling of guilt for what we have done to the world into a longing for what has been lost in terms of contradiction. In this spirit of contradiction, it is worthwhile to note that the water in Haacke's work is purified through a scientific process, and while for Adorno scientific and bureaucratic rationalism are, in their claim to totality, irrational in themselves, the meaning of the deficit caused by the disenchantment of the world is also a rationality deficit.<sup>452</sup> For Adorno, it is only through an expanded conception of reason and cognitive life can meaning be restored, or to put it another way, via more Enlightenment not less. Adorno's dialectics begins by understanding instrumental rationality from its opposite side or from a kind of reverse angle. Contradictions are signs that reason has failed, something, as Jay Bernstein writes, "has slipped through the unifying net," which means that contradictions testify

<sup>452</sup> Adorno, "Subject and Object," 4.

to antagonisms between what is demanded of things and the things themselves.<sup>453</sup> What slips through the net is the nonidentical along with its covering concept and it is only with the recognition of this contradiction can the search for better accounts for why it exists begin. Thus the point of thinking in contradictions is not just negative, it is to create a cognition that ceases to dominate and leads to a reconciliation between humans and nature, and humans and humans. Adorno considered his lifelong task as a philosopher: “to use the strength of the subject to break through the fallacy of constitutive subjectivity.”<sup>454</sup> A negative dialectic offers the possibility of possibility. If there is more to an item than what its covering concept claims, then there must be more possibilities than what a totalizing system dictates.

This process of dialectical contradiction illuminates Adorno’s insistence that society is immanent to art and that art needs society’s poison to resist its civilizing repression in order to “heal the wound with the spear that inflicted it.”<sup>455</sup> The empirical reality that systems analysis used by Haacke brings forth is absorbed into what Adorno would call the autonomous dimension of artistic form, where art’s use of new and advanced techniques act to remedy the deficiencies of empirical reality and thereby provide them with new life. Contradictions that crop up in Conceptual art time and time again can be assessed in this way. The use of highly rational positivistic systems, whether it is systems theory, semiotics or structuralism, which appear in various forms in Conceptual art, are often combined with radical antihierarchical gestures aimed at overturning established modes of thought. For instance, Haacke’s mode of production for the real estate works is similar to that of an academic in an advanced research university or a

<sup>453</sup> J.M. Bernstein, “Negative Dialectic as Fate: Adorno and Hegel,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Adorno*, ed. Tom Huhn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 36.

<sup>454</sup> Theodor Adorno, *Negative Dialectics* (New York: Continuum, 2007), XX.

<sup>455</sup> Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 134.

knowledge worker doing intensive data analysis. In taking on the work like an academic researcher, structurally his production process incorporates the aspects of those functions, whether they are textual, data or scientific. In turn those processes bring with them the socio-economic codes in which they were created, and thus Conceptual works often look as if they are merely mirroring the administered world. However, in works such as Haacke's, a dialectical contradiction is created through the use of the administered world's codes that are repurposed to reveal what capital represses and overturns what they were created for in the first place. They work in a similar fashion to Adorno's belief that his version of autonomous art can rekindle a new relationship between the subject and the object as a corrective model for other human activities, a kind of teaching by example as Buck-Morss claims.

Conceptual art in the late Sixties was rarely explicitly political, however, instead the politics often lay in an example of refusal. The refusal to acquiesce to what art institutions and society wanted art to be, such as in Baldessari's *Wrong*, can be said to activate a questioning of hierarchies and norms. However, as stated earlier, it is not exactly clear how breaking with habits and traditions alone can automatically be synonymous with critique. There is a difference between works that were just oppositional, anti for the sake of being anti to show a fashionable kind of rebelliousness, and those that broaden the sphere of cognition outside the narrow confines of what constitutes art. As Adorno suggests, there must be something more than opposition in the artwork for criticality to emerge. In the last chapter I argued that the work of A&L and Vancouver artists Dikeakos, Wall, and Wallace not only resisted the norms of traditional art, but did so through the social situations brought into their work. For instance, through the photographic works the audience was encouraged to re-engage differently with the reality of their own social and political lives. Works like those in the last chapter and of Hans



Haacke in this chapter, instead of being personal and individualistic artistic statements, offer an example of artistic autonomy belonging to a larger whole that becomes part of the collective consciousness of the artist, the work and the audience.

Haacke, in his quest for an answer of what is to be done with an art that he claimed was “utterly unsuited as a political tool,” started incorporating an intellectual and educational process of inquiry that he believed could lead to self-knowledge, to reconciling the contradictions in that which dominant powers wanted individuals to believe. It was a process very much in the classical spirit of encouraging the development of autonomous individuals through knowledge and learning as a collective and redemptive process. It was not purposeless in the production for productions sake sense, but neither was it pedantic dogmatic indoctrination, instead it was a process of learning through the experience of the work and reflecting upon it. His artworks, from the polling works to the *Rhine-water Purification Plant*, all aimed at resetting the viewer’s experience of the world anew through a slight displacement of the existing relationship between the subject and the world it thought it knew. Resulting in the armor around the forgotten memories of different alternatives to be temporarily reactivated and released from the instrumental views of corporate and political elites. Haacke accomplished this by incorporating what Adorno would call the most advanced techniques in production and reception, the use of the advanced methods of research previously reserved for research universities and think tanks, but using these given relations of production in his artworks to rearrange society’s diverse elements in a way that differed from the world of domination and exchange. The specificity of the research that employed the truth telling statistical analysis of capitalism is what made it so fear inducing to the Guggenheim Museum.

It could be argued, conversely, that Haacke's art is what Adorno would call the promotion of a Leftist agenda by merely critiquing existing social relations, which is more like social commentary that other disciplines would engage in rather than the special kind of force that is immanent in the riddle-like character of Adorno's version of autonomous art. While his work may have borrowed other disciplines, unlike those other disciplines that refuse "to step out of the perimeter of their elements,"<sup>456</sup> Haacke's artwork rearranges those elements into new configurations. There is no doubt that Haacke's work from this time period managed to not only illuminate the borders that art institutions unilaterally enforced, but led gradually to the adoption of critique as a staple of artistic discourse. Critique became a goal and an end rather than something that came out of the process in an unintentional manner. The given social situation and the methods of production had changed and with it came representations of text, photography and complex arguments of university-educated artists as intellectuals, such that it was no longer possible for advanced art to claim to operate in a purposeless manner. Text and photography gave artists the ability to articulate a more complex argument and a different way to compete with the new media spectacles of "man on the moon."<sup>457</sup> Although Conceptual art's production techniques that may have had the semblance of research projects from other disciplines, nevertheless, they operated outside the mandate of exchange and thus contained the possibility to negate instrumental views without fear. While, on the other hand, CalArts was an example of an institution dependent on large amounts of capital for its survival and as a result was unable to continue its radical education program unencumbered. Haacke as an artist not

<sup>456</sup> Theodor Adorno, "The Actuality of Philosophy" *Telos* No. 31 (March 20, 1977), 120-133.

<sup>457</sup> McShine, 138.

indebted to make a living from the art world was able to provide a model of resistance to the forces of exchange that institutions by default are incapable of.

All of this was, of course, short lived, and as mentioned at the beginning of the chapter, critique became institutionalized almost at the moment it started to gain currency. For instance, AWC's protests against institutions were quickly muted when curator Kynaston McShine incorporated those same artists and their ideas into the 1970 *Information* exhibition at MoMA. It was difficult to protest against an institution when you were in their show. McShine's catalogue essay for the *Information* show quoted above asks in a time of crisis "What can you as a young artist do that seems relevant and meaningful?" Thus making critique a concern of the institution and allowing it to structure the conversation based on the institution's priorities while making it seem that it is addressing the concerns of artists. As critique developed into a standard kit for engaged artists in the 1970s, gradually institutions became more accommodating of it, even if it critiqued their own institution. Eventually critique developed into a mandatory element of exhibitions and was appropriated by marketing campaigns to promote the very organizations that resisted it in the beginning. Just as Conceptual art was initially believed to be unmonetizable but quickly became monetizable in the 1970s, so too did critique. It was a turn of events that is remarkably similar to the arguments of Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello in their book *The New Spirit of Capitalism*.<sup>458</sup> The authors explain that when corporations in the 1970s began to co-opt what they term as "artistic critique" of the Sixties (freer life from constraints and domination as well as demands for self-management), capitalism deprived the reasons for discontent and many

<sup>458</sup> Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello, *The New Spirit of Capitalism* (London: Verso, 2007).

who had been voicing this criticism had become satisfied. What was initially considered “alien” was eventually beneficially converted into normality.

## Chapter 6: Conclusion

The use of history, Benjamin Nelson used to say, is to rescue from oblivion the lost causes of the past. History is especially important when those lost causes haunt us in the present as unfinished business.<sup>459</sup>

The unfinished business of Conceptual art, or its legacy as Alexander Alberro argues, is that it can now be “found in almost all ambitious contemporary art.”<sup>460</sup> It is precisely this legacy and presence of Conceptual art in contemporary art that calls for its continued re-assessment. Throughout this dissertation the progress of Conceptual art has been traced in parallel with various currents of education and student movements in order to uncover a common and persistent desire for autonomy found in the social circumstances of the Sixties. While discourses on Conceptual art mostly outline its rejection of both the autonomy of art and the autonomous art object, what I have shown is that instead of abandoning autonomy, Conceptual art practices were attempting to regain a degree of autonomy in a different sense. The quest for autonomy, to make one’s own rules, started Conceptual artists on a path from a form of refusal in which a model of critique arose out of Conceptual art’s radical disengagement from conventional norms to one where it took on new aspects of intellectual research to activate social and political engagement. While critique was important for fine art at the time in order to move past sedimented idealist notions; by moving from purposelessness to goal oriented rationality, it inevitably managed to help open up art to instrumental reason and market thinking. Initially the purposeful rationality

<sup>459</sup> Paul Goodman, *Growing up Absurd: Problems of Youth in the Organized Society* (New York: Vintage Books, 1960), 216.

<sup>460</sup> Alberro, *Conceptual art and the Politics of Publicity*, 3.

of Conceptualism's institutional critique used the administered world's own rationality against itself to demystify the naturalness of an exchange driven society's propaganda. Nevertheless, Conceptual art's purposeful instrumentalization has over time contributed to a functionalization of art and the current unprecedented commercial logic of ubiquitous biennales and art fairs. In an ironic way the quest for autonomy, for more freedom, in both art and in the greater social realm, has led to less freedom rather than more freedom. The criticality of Conceptual art that was initially liberatory in its self-actualizing promise has started in contemporary art to resemble the rationality of any other discipline as it became more professionalized in institutions. Thus by a historical twist of fate, in today's state of (un)freedom, a situation not dissimilar to what was faced by Conceptual artists in the Sixties, the importance of looking at the lessons of Conceptual art's short life is that it may help reassess our current actuality.

This dissertation's focus on analyzing the desire for autonomy has illustrated a deeper understanding of Conceptual art practices than previous academic discussions that merely view those practices as formal artistic exercises, as a mirror of a changing society, or as a political critique of sedimented artistic institutions. Instead my investigation of autonomy has shown how all of these factors are in play, often at the same time, and often in a directly contradictory manner. Conceptual artists developed practices designed to take back control of the art that they were producing by incorporated non-art aspects of photography and text from media, or philosophy and semiotics from academia, in order to investigate what it means to create art. They used alternative forms of display to get around the domination of the existing art institutions and developed new publics for their art. Challenging Benjamin Buchloh's assessment of Conceptual art as being tautological, positivistic, conforming to the commercial logic of advertising, and erasing the domain of high art, I argue there are examples of Conceptual art that not only reflect

Buchloh's claims, but also act to counter those assessments at the same time. I have illustrated how Conceptual art can be conceived of as both bound and free, not just merely inscribing "itself into the inescapable logic of a totally administered world"<sup>461</sup> as Buchloh claims, but as simultaneously resisting those same forces.

Likewise, not all Conceptual art practices are based on institutional critique as Alberro suggests, and do not have the same level or even the same kind of critique. A discussion of the notions of autonomy has shown that while educational institutions and changing ideas of art education were important factors, they are not sufficient explanations on their own. The more philosophical approach I have deployed using Adorno's aesthetic theory has allowed for not only uncovering the desire for autonomy, but how this desire helped explain the very contradictions within artistic practices that were attempting to navigate uncharted waters. By dethroning painting and sculpture in the hierarchy of the arts, Conceptual art practices reintegrated art into a wider cultural field of discourse, which Modernism had increasingly abstracted. The quest for autonomy has highlighted Conceptual artists re-imagining themselves as intellectually engaged artists through which their do-it-yourself approach to education produced truly new forms of art instead of just re-enacting past traditions.

By traversing through the various tropes of autonomy in the dissertation's chapters, I have brought attention to how Conceptual art practices struggled with the same kinds of preoccupations that governed student protest movements and notions of liberation in the Sixties. My analysis of the desire for autonomy has shown it to be a vital part of social sphere of the Sixties. Among students and artists alike there was a considerable amount of interest in the ideas

<sup>461</sup> Buchloh, "Conceptual Art," 129.

of self-actualization that were not part of a strictly private process but something that could only be achieved through being part of a community. The values of individualized creativity that critic Clement Greenberg championed and educational institutions perpetuated with their stress on individual attainment came under attack from all sides. I point out how the asking of questions in the Sixties was in part encouraged by the massification of intellectual competencies through education, originally planned by Western nation states to foster a population of problem solving managers for technology centric sectors, unintentionally contributed to fuel an anti-hierarchical and antinomial spirit of the time. These new intellectual competencies helped many to come to the realization that the freedoms their governing institutions championed were in fact false, restrictive and exclusionary rather than democratic and just. Precisely for this reason the demand for autonomy among student groups and artists was fed by a desire for self-regulation and freedom from the stifling control of societal constraints and the centralized impersonal authority of the state. The newfound intellectual appetites of young people blossomed into a serious and thoughtful reconsideration of their political and artistic selves. By providing students with the intellectual tools designed for self-reflexivity, rather than being molded into technocrats there were those who started questioning and critiquing the very institutions that they were part of. My contention is that the dichotomy between what established elites were advocating and what people were actually experiencing in their day-to-day lives created a crisis of expectation that helped open up a gap in the possibilities of what could be thought and done.

From an intellectual perspective, the emergence of structuralism in the Sixties as the new dominant academic discourse is particularly relevant for both Conceptual art and the student protest movements. With artists such as Hans Haacke, Joseph Kosuth, Laurence Weiner, and Dan Graham, a structuralist examination of the framework that determines the reading of signs is



encountered. As seen in Chapter 3's analysis of Conceptual artists' use of rules, these practices could be understood as an individual act of art production being regulated by a 'system,' and thus following a certain general rule from the beginning. However, as I have argued, Conceptual artist's exploration of the very conventions of artistic signs and their structuring principles activated more autonomy rather than less. Adrian Piper advances a similar claim in her argument that Conceptual art practices that analyzed the concept of art as the content of the work of art have the same deep philosophical status as, for example, Marx's economic analysis of neoclassical economics.<sup>462</sup> In both cases the tools of the discipline are used to examine and criticize the content, form, or practice of the discipline itself. For Piper, this kind of art making results in "the necessity for reflection on one's own circumstances, and the status and meaning of one's practice as an artist. This leads to a very different picture of the artist as a responsible agent, as a social agent effecting political change in the world."<sup>463</sup> Artistic subjectivity survived by making the system itself an object of intellectual interest and experience.

The student protest movements likewise looked more towards the nineteenth-century's humanism that championed the self rather than structuralism's declaration of its 'death.' The many pithy aphorisms of the time attest to this such as the famous graffito on a Sorbonne wall in 1968 that read: "Structures don't go into the streets," or the often used quip that student protesters "Threw a stone into the future, and it landed in the nineteenth-century." SDS's Port Huron Statement strongly articulated the ideas of the self with the premise that many have an "unrealized potential for self-cultivation, self-direction, self-understanding and creativity," and

<sup>462</sup> Adrian Piper, "Ian Burn's Conceptualism," in *Conceptual Art: Theory, Myth, and Practice* ed. by Michael Corris (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004): 342-358.

<sup>463</sup> *Ibid.*, 358.

the goal of “man and society should be human independence ... that does not mean egoistic individualism.”<sup>464</sup> A strong emphasis in direct democracy and self-organization in a collective sense in SDS’s literature highlighted the fact that the self was seen to be something to be magnified through participating in a community. A collective autonomy was stressed whereby the limitations of the individual to make a difference against the oppressive technocratic regime were to be overcome by being part of something bigger and better. Individuality was thus to be completed and not submerged by collectivity. Similarly in the artistic realm, for instance, the lessons Lucy Lippard learned through the AWC led her to claim: “For the first time in my life I understood how much a community’s social responsibility depended on the individual, and how much the individual’s fate depended on collective action.”<sup>465</sup> The SDS’s work clearly outlined the generational change that took place in the Sixties and its demand for the development of a language of protest in order to find alternative explanations with which to transgress the existing boundaries of stratified political and social norms. While the impetus for change often came from student led organizations, the subversive potential of these movements were such that they created something of a “chain reaction of refusal” that incorporated a much wider social field of generations and interests.<sup>466</sup> Environmental, urban, organic, feminist, gay, etc., movements all started to ask questions and everything became open for critique. Importantly, these were collective actions in which the individual self was magnified through participating in a community. Once again the emphasis was on a collective autonomy aimed at changing

<sup>464</sup> “Port Huron Statement.”

<sup>465</sup> Lucy Lippard, *Get The Message? A Decade of Art For Social Change* (New York: E.P. Dutton, Inc., 1984), 4.

<sup>466</sup> Jean-Frankon Narot quoted in Kristen Ross, *May '68 and its Afterlives*, (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2002), 207.

oppressive social structures rather than merely empowering the private self-interest of individuals. The student protest movements certainly inspired artists who then introduced activism to art institutions, as indicated when Robert Morris stated: “Museums are our campuses.”<sup>467</sup> The politicization of the artistic avant-garde not coincidentally came to the forefront through a multiplicity of artist protest actions in 1970 at the height of the student anti-war movement. This was one of those eras in history in which new possibilities occurred because the limiting conditions had become malleable. Adorno’s question of whether a good life could be conducted in a bad one was answered affirmatively with the attempt of many to re-craft themselves with and for another and to participate in the remaking of social conditions.<sup>468</sup>

As with the student protest movements in the Sixties, I have illustrated Conceptual artists’ impetus for change through what could be called a classical definition of autonomy, whether it was a search for freedom from restrictive social conventions or the ability to recraft the current reality. More often than not, the demand for more say in the rules that governed them and the possibilities of self-organization were fuelled by knowledge and learning. The so-called intellectual nature of some Conceptual works coincided with the increased stature of knowledge and education in Sixties society both as a means for self-actualization and as a new form of social mobility. Knowledge and education were prerequisites for acquiring jobs in knowledge-based industries that had become the drivers of new economies. The emerging post-industrial society was making higher education the building block for position and privilege in society, and in a somewhat contradictory fashion, artists themselves played along with the rules by starting in

<sup>467</sup> Quoted in Ralph Blumenfeld, “Daily Closeup: Show Mustn’t Go On,” *New York Post*, June 4, 1970, 53.

<sup>468</sup> “Wrong life cannot be lived rightly.” Theodor Adorno, *Minima Moralia: Reflections From Damaged Life* (London: Verso, 1978), 39.

large numbers to acquire graduate degrees. Artists increasingly found themselves in the professionalism of the academy versus the margins of bohemia. Conceptual artists such as Haacke supported themselves by teaching, and not coincidentally their practices started to resemble educational encounters as they transitioned away from the Modernist emphasis on medium and materials. A shift that is marked by a practice of art that demanded a space of cognitive attentiveness and a more practical domain for thinking and talking about art. With early Conceptual works there was an exploration of different fields such as philosophy, semiotics and structuralism as a way to signal not only a refusal to make art in a traditional way, but to make it a cognitive exercise to activate a thinking process. The university/academy work place training of these artists played its part in shaping the way Conceptual art evolved.

While both art and education were thought of as emancipatory processes for liberation and autonomy, both were also participating in institutional practices that can alternatively be seen as perpetuating the status quo. Despite the fact that they were questioning art norms, some Conceptual art works resembled the fetishization of science, technology, knowledge and the positivism of dominant forms of culture more than a critique of it. Whether they are Joseph Kosuth's dictionary definition photostats from 1967 (fig. 20), Robert Barry's *One Million Dots*, 1968 (fig. 21), or N.E. Thing Co.'s telex works from the late Sixties, all of which make artistic use of a kind of scientism without raising any questions about their underlying social consequences. On the other hand, these works can be looked at as examples of pure purposeless information that stretched and questioned preconceived notions of art and indirectly the functionalism of an exchange driven society. This was the initial form of what I termed as indirect critique in Conceptual art that was a type of resistance where both the artist and audience expose themselves to the limits of the historical scheme of things, the existing epistemological

and ontological horizons, and engage in a self-questioning assessment of existing norms through the works themselves. Conceptual art was not merely new in the sense of a new Steven King novel, but new in a way that posed a threat to what had previously constituted ideas of art. Thus the criticality in the work came primarily through internal artistic means and the unrecognizability of the work as art brought about a crisis in the habits that govern recognition and thus called into question the normative horizon in which the recognition takes place. It is my contention that when a work fails to satisfy existing modes of representation, in the process calling attention to the differences between art and the world, it becomes educative in the sense that it not only challenges established ways of thinking but encourages the viewers' reflection on alternatives to the world in its current form. The question, as always, is whether this potential for comprehension was realized, and by whom? If only by other artists who understood this art, in other words, the already initiated, then the liberating effect was limited and its elitist labeling is warranted. Thus despite the claims of Conceptual art being a more democratic form of art, in many cases the art produced was not accessible to the general audience and as Jan Dibbets claimed, it was just "for other artists" and for those university gallery audiences who understood it. While it can be said that claims of Conceptual art's accessibility and democratization are overstated, on the other hand, the point was to get people to think, a notion that is never exceedingly popular.

The growing political and ethical crisis of the late Sixties hastened ensuing debates about an appropriate and relevant response from artists. Perhaps this was due to a recognition of the limits of its initial indirect kind of critique in addition to the sudden spotlight that Conceptual art found itself under in 1970 by its inclusion in major exhibitions and the ensuing criticism. A shift occurred in practices from works that operated just as a refusal of art world traditions by

displaying pure information to one that was simultaneously a refusal and a more explicit exploration of knowledge processes inside and outside the art world. Once knowledge of Conceptual art's resistance to the forces of the art market gained currency, it naturally became an object of interest and was quickly absorbed by the large mainstream shows in 1970. When Conceptual art was adopted by the 'tainted' art world of big museums its role of resistance had become subsumed and alternatives to keep it subversive needed to be found. As I point out, A&L's text works, Vancouver artists' Dikeakos, Wall and Wallace's urban photographs and especially Hans Haacke's real estate works, not only continued to produce a crisis of expectation, but in varying degrees negatively highlighted the extent to which naturalized social systems supported the status quo. Their engagement with the social was more direct than just merely presenting pure information and hoping that the audience would indirectly comprehend it. In addition to turning the most fundamental received laws of artistic activity upside down, as with earlier Conceptual artworks, these works also set forth a negative attitude toward society. My contention is that instead of being an affirmation of society that an audience could identify with, the radical critique in these works came through a formal negativity that operated to heighten the comprehension of viewers' own social consciousness within the consciousness of the aesthetic form. Through this process where the artist and audience give themselves over to the logic of the form, the work becomes more like a subject than an object and acquires a larger meaning than individual expression.

This dissertation has shown that the rise of Conceptual art was interwoven with the kinds of changes that were happening in the social and academic worlds. As Howard Singerman and Judith Adler have correctly claimed, postwar artistic training was designed to expose artists to theoretical, written and verbal discourse as distinct from manual craftsmanship resulting in a

decline in the teaching of traditional techniques.<sup>469</sup> Although they played their part, neither the decline in traditional techniques nor the shift in the means of artistic production towards the mode of a research university/academy are by themselves satisfactory explanations for the rise of Conceptual art without emphasizing the social circumstances of the quest for autonomy. As indicated in my assessment, when Haacke adopted a new mode of production for the real estate works, he took the form of an intellectual in an advanced research university or think tank knowledge worker with an educative purpose of self-understanding in mind. He started incorporating an intellectual and educational process of inquiry because he believed it could lead to a form of autonomous self-knowledge and to resist the naturalization of dominant powers. Haacke took the standard Conceptual art practice of placing text on a gallery wall to a new level in order to effectively articulate a complex argument. His production process incorporated the aspects of a university/academy's research functions, and those processes in turn brought with them the socio-economic codes in which they were created. I have shown how Adorno's theories help to bring into focus how critique in Haacke's work repurposed the administered world's codes revealing what those same codes usually hide. Incorporating what Adorno would call the most advanced techniques in production and reception, Haacke used these given relations of production in his artworks to rearrange society's diverse elements in a way that differed from the world of domination and exchange. It was a model very much in the classical spirit of encouraging the development of autonomous individuals through a kind of teaching by example where knowledge and learning are collective and redemptive processes. It was neither production for production's sake nor dogmatic indoctrination; instead it was a process of learning though the

<sup>469</sup> Singerman, *Art Subjects*, 173.

experience of the work and reflecting upon it. No longer purposeless, Haacke's form of critique became both a goal and an end.

What enabled this kind of critique were Conceptual art's production techniques that had a certain semblance of research projects from other disciplines. However, while Haacke's critique acquired purpose, unlike other disciplines, at the same time, it still operated outside the mandate of exchange and thus contained the possibility to negate its instrumental views without fear. I illustrate that during the late Sixties and early 1970s Conceptual art's lack of remunerative value was one of the reasons for its ability to develop its own form of criticality.<sup>470</sup> This is not to suggest that Conceptual artists were completely free of the domination of exchange and capital, art is as much a product of social relations as anything else. However, the distance from dependence on art making for a living offered Conceptual artists the opportunity for a slight displacement of that reality, and for a brief period of time they were able to follow a different form of logic from that of social necessity. They were able to resist what in Adorno's argument was the Enlightenment's vision of the rational development of individual autonomy that became the disciplinary control of social relations under the governance of an instrumental and practical reason. A reason that demands optimal efficiency in the management of economic capital where everything is converted into private property and in which the more individuals adjust to these repressive necessities of self-preservation, the less consciousness retains a critical drive for

<sup>470</sup> It is important to note that not many artists at this time were making a living from selling art, and most were in some way involved with teaching. Thus there was a certain distance maintained from the exchange driven aspects of the art world. The task for these artists became to elaborate a different kind of knowledge and to identify those practices that were still innovative enough to resist subsumption from those that prop up domination. For others, politicization meant abandoning art altogether and focusing directly on activism. Instead of trying to destabilize the line between art and life, some artists decided that they could do the most good in real life as Ian Burn did when he returned to Australia in 1977 to work with labour unions.



freedom. The relative prosperity of the Sixties helped create an atmosphere in which the fear of losing the necessities of self-preservation were reduced and contributed to an experimental ethos that allowed for an exploration of intellectual curiosity.

Alternatively, it can be argued that as soon as Conceptual art started to adopt a model of purposeful educative critique it obviously lost its original flirtations with purposelessness and it began to transform itself into something else. The austerity and rigor of Conceptual art was placed aside and Conceptualism rapidly became an accepted mode of practice with a greater focus on social issues rather than questions about the internal functioning of art. This model of educative critique in Conceptual art became known as institutional critique and while it served an important initial role in breaking through the manipulative propaganda of institutions, eventually institutional critique in Haacke's work and others became restricted to the narrow business of the art world itself.

Clearly, the negative side of this equation for autonomous self-transformation is that by incorporating the university/academy techniques of production and ideology artists eventually integrated themselves into the existing order by accepting a pragmatic cultural function of academic professionalism and acclimatizing themselves into the dominant social distribution of labour. While critical thinking gleaned from the university/academy contributed to the determination for autonomy, over time the professionalism that came along with this new mode of production also brought back social necessity to art making by aligning the artist to the institution. To this end, the university/academy's work system within which artistic production became embedded, *pace* Singerman and Alder's arguments, and grew to be more important for art after Conceptual art than during its initial rise. This is because instead of being a place of freedom for artists outside the realm of exchange, the autonomous world of the academy became

increasingly integrated into the world of exchange.<sup>471</sup> Additionally, criticality when applied as a goal is just another mode of understanding that dominant groups in society privileged as the only legitimate mode of understanding. The danger, as Louis Althusser pointed out in his “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses,” is that educational institutions have replaced religion as the dominant ideological apparatuses in mature capitalism.<sup>472</sup> Likewise for Michel Foucault, University teaching was nothing other than the renewal and reproduction of the values of bourgeois society. Foucault’s comment of modernist literature no longer being inherently subversive could equally be applied to visual art when he stated that the literary avant-garde were all assimilated by the university and “today’s Baudelaires are professors at the Sorbonne.” The new preoccupation of artists, who were also teachers, became institutional school knowledges and the preconditions of the socially affirmative character of “university systems.”<sup>473</sup> What at the time for Conceptual artists looked like an alternative form of knowledge production eventually began to be subsumed into those dominant forms of presenting knowledge and it has eventually become difficult to distinguish art from any other discipline. Similarly, the numerous educational experiments during the Sixties and early 1970s spurred by critique, like those of Coventry and CalArts in this dissertation, were initially innovative but too radical for the conservative powers that held the purse strings. It was only later, to borrow a line of argumentation from Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello’s *The New Spirit of Capitalism*,<sup>474</sup> that this radicality was beneficially converted into marketing strategies for institutions to help sell their

<sup>471</sup> Gerald Raunig, *Factories of Knowledge: Industries of Creativity*, (London: semiotext(e), 2013), 38.

<sup>472</sup> Louis Althusser, “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses: Notes Towards an Investigation,” (1970), <https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/althusser/1970/ideology.htm> (accessed June 6, 2015).

<sup>473</sup> Michel Foucault, “Un problème m’intéresse depuis longtemps, c’est celui du système pénal,” in *Dits et écrits*, 2:206–208.

<sup>474</sup> Boltanski and Chiapello, 419.

programs. Consequently, artistic research in a university elevated what were initially artistic outsiders up to the point that they became an indispensable part of the university and the institutional process. The functionalization of artistic labour in the university became part of a broadened economization of knowledge work and has contributed to the proliferation of the new flexible ‘autonomous’ creative worker and the current state of precarity of part-time work. Education instead of being a mode of fulfilling self-transformation has been turned into a life-long obligation to meet the dictates of a flexible labour market.

Art has become functionalized through institutional critique, as Peter Osborne has recently written, by turning what he calls political functionalism inward, and in so doing affirming the critical value of the art institution and helping it survive its own critique.<sup>475</sup> In a counter intuitive way, the presence of critique within the institution negates the practical function of critique. Autonomy for Osborn has become functionalized into a new kind of affirmative culture where the endless global art biennales have turned any remaining traces of art’s autonomy into regional development programs. It has become precisely what Herbert Marcuse argued against when he wrote that art should “no longer serve as a stimulus of business.”<sup>476</sup> While an analysis of the state of contemporary art is outside the scope of this dissertation, it is suffice to say that the critique developed in Conceptual art was initially important for fine art to move past the idealist notions of art and to focus on a legibility of art’s relation to social conditions. However, over time the critique that Conceptual art initiated has lapsed into a largely purposeful and affirmative notion. Every attempt in contemporary art to break out of the confines of the art world and turn toward social life resorts to the same kind of moral necessity of political opposition found in the Sixties

<sup>475</sup> Peter Osborne, *Anywhere Or Not At All: Philosophy of Contemporary Art* (London: Verso, 2013), 159.

<sup>476</sup> Herbert Marcuse, “Art as a form of Reality,” *New Left Review* I/74 (July-August 1972): 51-58.

protest movements. Nevertheless, the effectiveness of contemporary art to elicit any kind of change is questionable since it is seen by today's elites as only the ruminations of Leftist hobbyists who do not pose any kind of serious threat. Current artistic projects that continue to see social struggle as a moral necessity only evoke nostalgia for the political stances of the Sixties that are no longer possible. A situation Jameson refers to as stemming from cultural workers' own guilt at their elitist activity, which they attempt to solve through "radical acts of destruction, the trashing of 'respectable' forms of culture first of all, and ultimately the disavowal of all forms of cultural production."<sup>477</sup> The denunciation of art world elites has resulted in an avant-garde of the righteous whose moral high ground is often disconnected from the social problems that are at the centre of their critiques. The move towards activism in art is understandable, given how little critique has accomplished over the last fifty years, but the questions Adorno asked in the Sixties of the student movements are once again relevant. When he criticized the student protests of his university, he claimed that their activism was a way of justifying one's position versus any evaluation of its effectiveness. While Adorno sympathized with the overall goal of their movement to achieve a more just and humane society, he saw many of the protests as wallowing in actionism for the sake of actionism that merely expressed "industriousness" and "busyness" while being unable to provide a genuine theory for the liberation of the oppressed.<sup>478</sup> Can the same question be asked of contemporary art's functionalism? If art has a defined purpose and function then it falls right into the trap of

<sup>477</sup> Fredric Jameson, "Hans Haacke and the Cultural Logic of Postmodernism," in *Hans Haacke: Unfinished Business*, ed. Brian Wallis (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1987), 45.

<sup>478</sup> Theodor Adorno, "Marginalia to Theory and Praxis," in *Critical Models: Interventions and Catchwords* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 268-269.

corporate economic measurements of efficiency and productivity that precondition a no-win situation for art.

The creeping corporatism of the intervening decades has placed art and educational institutions under increased scrutiny to not only justify their funding, but in some case their very existence. High profile examples in 2015 of this no-win situation for art are evidenced by examples such as Amsterdam's De Appel Arts Center decision to go to court to dissolve its director Lorenzo Benedetti's contract after only a year with no severance. The institution's board argued that Benedetti was unable to devise and carry out a strategy plan for De Appel.<sup>479</sup> However, according to Benedetti, the museum's board placed too much focus on the financial and administrative aspects of the job, and had no insight into the other components of his position that were in his opinion "the essence and the focus of its activities."<sup>480</sup> In protest, the entire team of tutors at the De Appel Curatorial Program including Charles Esche, Elena Filipovic, Chus Martinez and Beatrix Ruf withdrew from the program until the board resigns. As seen in Chapter 5 with MoMA and CalArts, institutional boards have always had an overriding interest in funding, however, it now demonstrates the increasingly ideological shift that financial, rather than artistic concerns, are believed by boards to be the top priorities of directors and even curators.

Fine art studio programs are particularly vulnerable to calls for financial justification as seen by recent developments at the University of Southern California's Roski School of Fine Arts. The administration at USC Roski embarked on a drastic restructuring and reduction of funding

<sup>479</sup> Hili Perlson, "Judge Terminates Contract of De Appel Director Lorenzo Benedetti," *artnet news* Thursday, December 3, 2015, [https://news.artnet.com/people/court-ends-lorenzo-benedetti-contract-376121?utm\\_campaign=artnetnews&utm\\_source=120315daily&utm\\_medium=email](https://news.artnet.com/people/court-ends-lorenzo-benedetti-contract-376121?utm_campaign=artnetnews&utm_source=120315daily&utm_medium=email)

<sup>480</sup> Ibid.

for the school's high profile graduate school, which ultimately led to the resignation of tenured faculty and the dropping out of the entire MFA class of 2016. An October 2015 *ArtForum* article titled "Class Dismissed" featured a roundtable discussion of the situation at Roski with former faculty and students.<sup>481</sup> It outlined the loss of a dedicated faculty's ten-year effort to develop a low faculty-to-student ration of 1:3 for an unprecedented learning environment and, through the means of providing two years of teaching assistantships for each student, a fully funded MFA program. According to Frances Stark, a faculty member before she resigned, the new dean (Erica Muhl) was primarily responsible for restructuring the program. Muhl's appointment coincided with a \$70 million gift from Jimmy Iovine and Andre Young (a.k.a. the rapper Dr. Dre) to create a new school called the U.S.C. Jimmy Iovine and Andre Young Academy for Art, Technology and the Business of Innovation.<sup>482</sup> The new school's four-year undergraduate program was designed to "empower the next generation of disruptive inventors and professional thought leaders across a multitude of global industries."<sup>483</sup> Course offerings now include, among others, "Innovators Forum," "Innovators Roundtable," and "Disruptive Innovation," all of which are much less about art and more about the business of creativity. Stark claims that Muhl had "zero background in contemporary fine art, design, or art history. She is not conversant in these fields at all. ... She told the graduate students: 'The future of art is Mark Zuckerberg.'"<sup>484</sup> The new dean and administration quickly dismantled the program by removing core MFA faculty and taking away the students' funding.<sup>485</sup>

<sup>481</sup> Sarah Lehrer-Graiwer, "Class Dismissed: A roundtable on Art School, USC, and Cooper Union," *Artforum* (October 2015): 244-255.

<sup>482</sup> *Ibid.*, 252.

<sup>483</sup> Roger White, "A few Good Reasons to Drop Out of Art School," *New Yorker* May 22, 2015.

<sup>484</sup> Lehrer-Graiwer, 252.

<sup>485</sup> *Ibid.*, 251.

The Roski School of Fine Arts became the Roski School of Art and Design. Just as in Chapter 2's description of the British Government's program to refashion British art schools into a useful management training ground for new consumer industries, Roski's new emphasis gives into the idea that the fine arts are a tool that can be used by the high tech economy to help "creativity," "innovation" and "disruption." At least the Coldstream Council report in 1960 still emphasized a liberal humanistic approach to learning-for-learning's sake as something valuable for both enriching one's life and to provide the right cognitive competence for leadership positions, rather than strictly vocational interests. Ignoring their original charters devoted to the advancement of literature, science and art, universities are rededicating themselves to the "advancement of the next Mark Zuckerberg."<sup>486</sup> Instead of a process for a better world, artistic creativity at Roski is now seen as something to be mined for corporate interests, packaged with Silicon Valley buzzwords for marketing purposes to prospective students, and turned into a practice that is commodifiable and exchangeable. Possessive individualism is taken to its logical conclusion where everything is reducible to private interest.

To illustrate the reach of functionalization, even critique has currently become repurposed to support the very institutions that it initially criticized. Amelia Jones, the vice dean of critical-studies at Roski and a once respected academic, wrote the article "Course Corrections" in the December 2015 issue of *Artforum* to 'correct' some of the claims made in the "Class Dismissed" article. In it Jones argues that the MFA program was not "dismantled" under her leadership. Instead, she claims it has been 'improved' by the addition of more rigorous critical-studies

<sup>486</sup> Natasha Singer, "Universities Race to Nurture Start-Up Founders of the Future," Technology, *The New York Times*, December 28, 2015.

courses.<sup>487</sup> Her defense of the removal of funding is that the “old” MFA model of guaranteed teaching assistantships was unfair to her MA students who had to pay full tuition. These and other claims that Jones makes in the article are, point-by-point, refuted by the roundtable members of the “Class Dismissed” article. In their response, also published in the December 2015 *ArtForum*, they assess Jones’s moving of a portion of the 2015-16 MFA TA-ships to her own MA Curatorial Practices students as “fraudulent” and “austerity rhetoric disguised as advocacy.”<sup>488</sup> The responders also argue that Jones’s curriculum changes and her belief that “artmaking and curating are merged practices” fails to understand the different educational needs of MFA students. For them, the MFA program’s history of an artist-driven curriculum was essentially undermined. Jones’s assertions and inaccuracies in defense of the administration are shocking to the responders who see it as an attempt to rewrite history, stifle dissent and deny the facts.<sup>489</sup> It is especially shocking coming from someone in charge of critical-studies and raises the question of just what criticality means anymore.

Thus, on the one side, autonomy today is being circumscribed by economic imperatives and ruled by corporate accounting scrutiny in which art and education funding everywhere is under pressure. On the other, critique has become muted and institutionalized into a form of brand marketing, and art education turned into vocational training. To reassess our current actuality it is worthwhile to look at the language of self-regulation and self-determination that was so important to collective autonomy in the Sixties versus today’s private and individualistic inflections. Conceptual art’s rejection of hierarchies and its focus on a cognitive enlivenment of

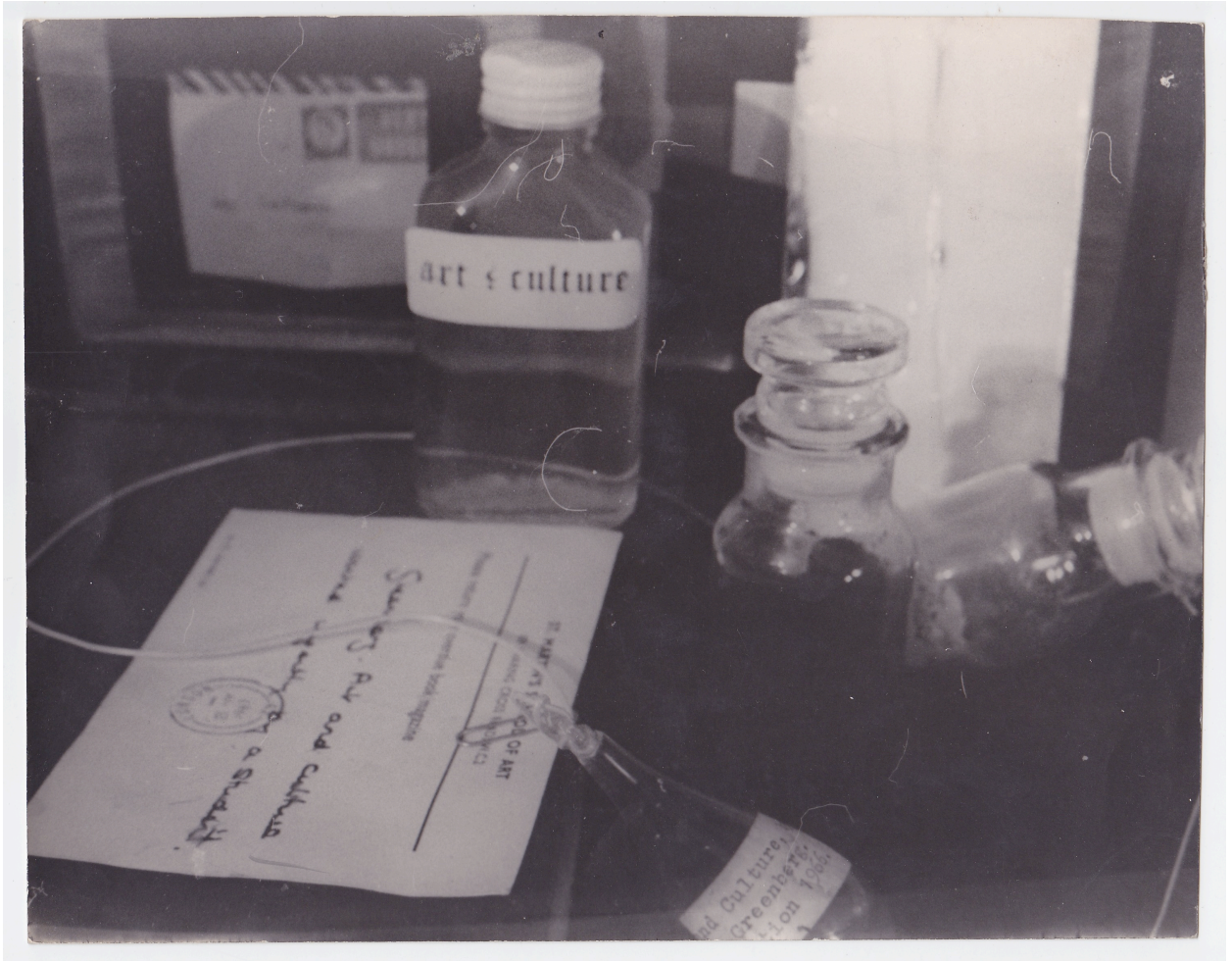
<sup>487</sup> Amelia Jones, “Course Corrections,” *Artforum* (December 2015): 54-56.

<sup>488</sup> “Current and former USC Roski faculty and students respond,” *Artforum*, December 2015.

<sup>489</sup> *Ibid.*, 56.



communal discursive properties enabled fine art to transform itself in new ways and opened a wider realm of socially engaged practices. This dissertation's analysis of the reskilling of Conceptual artists from a craft base to a new intellectual research and learning model is what allowed an infusion of new kinds of knowledges in the art that followed. The practices of the 1970s and beyond of artists such as Hans Haacke, Allan Sekula, Martha Rosler, Louise Lawler, Michael Asher, Mary Kelly, and others, are indebted to the space cleared by earlier Conceptual artists. Thus it seems more pertinent than ever to look back at Conceptual art in the Sixties and Seventies to revisit Conceptual art's examples and lessons of resistance, and its methods of how to use dominant techniques of elites designed to dehumanize the rest of the population against those very same forces. The trick, of course, is not to repeat the same gestures but for artists to find new ways to make the political otherwise.

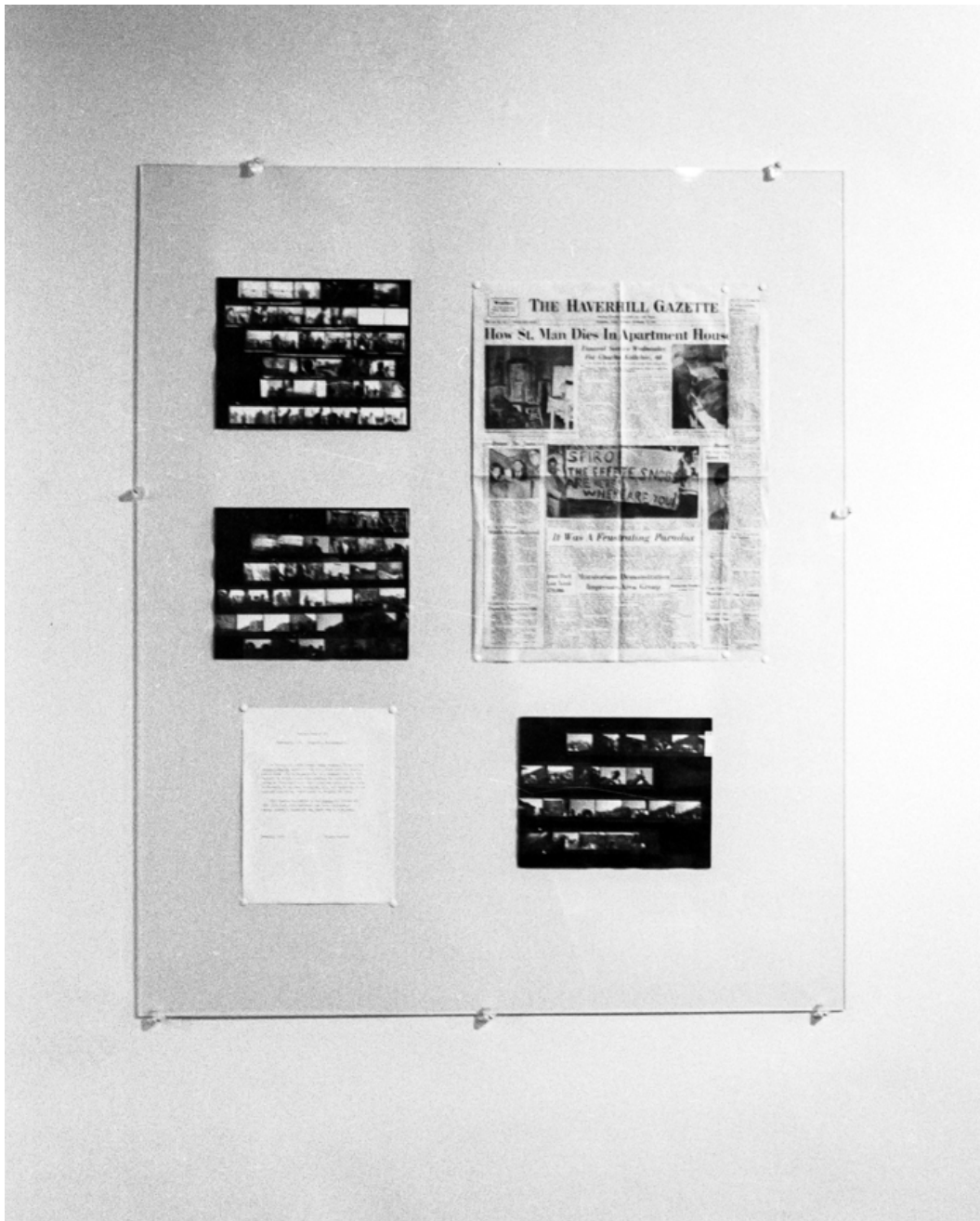


**Figure 1** – *Still and Chew* portfolio contents with overdue notice from St. Martin's School of Art library dated May 1968 with glass 'tear drop' containing essence of Greenberg attached. Courtesy John Latham Foundation.



**Figure 2** – John Latham, *Art and Culture*, 1966-69, assemblage including: a copy of Clement Greenberg's *Art and Culture*, labeled bottles filled with powders and liquids, letters, Photostats, invitation to the event *Still and Chew*, written dismissal from St. Martin's School of art, etc., in a leather case, Museum of Modern Art, Blanchette Hooker Rockefeller Fund.

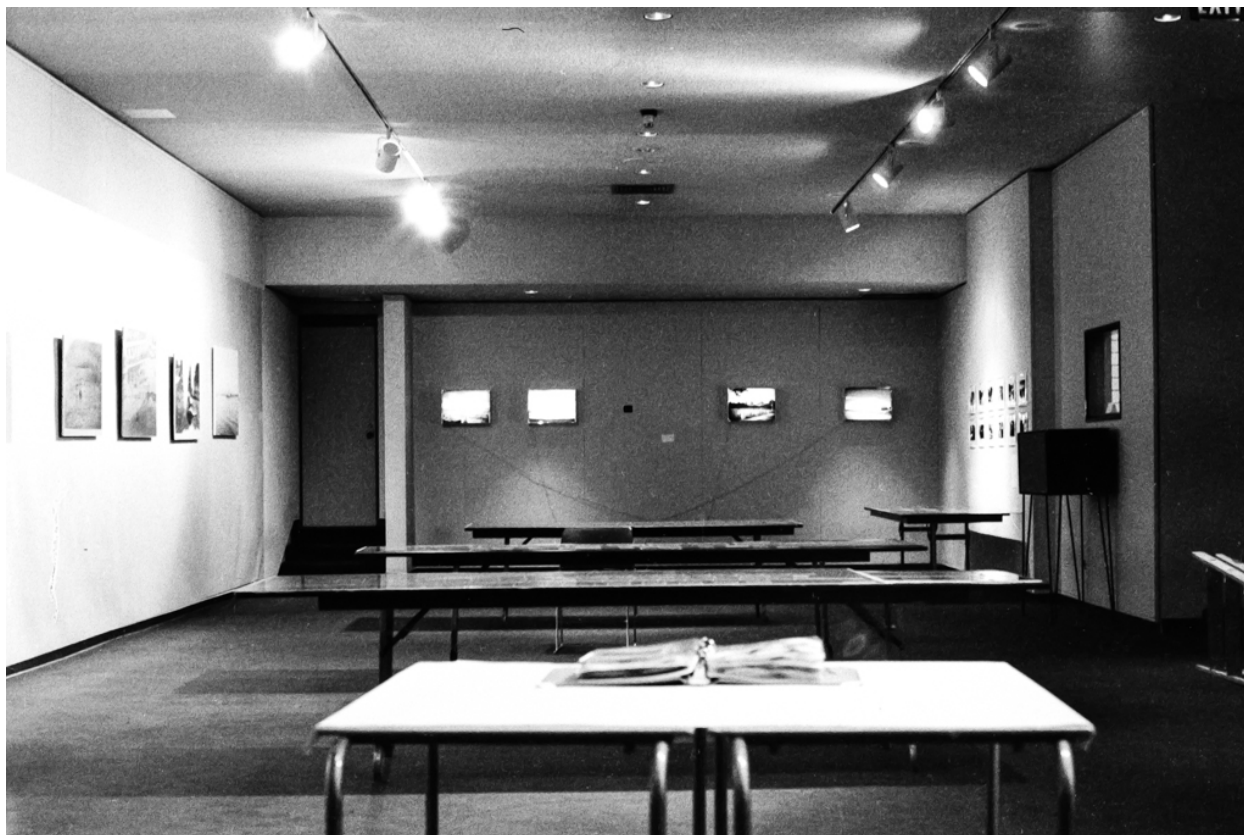




**Figure 3** – Douglas Huebler, *Location Piece #13*, 1969, installation photograph from *The Photo Show*, 1970, Student Union Building Art Gallery University of British Columbia, courtesy collection of Christos Dikeakos.

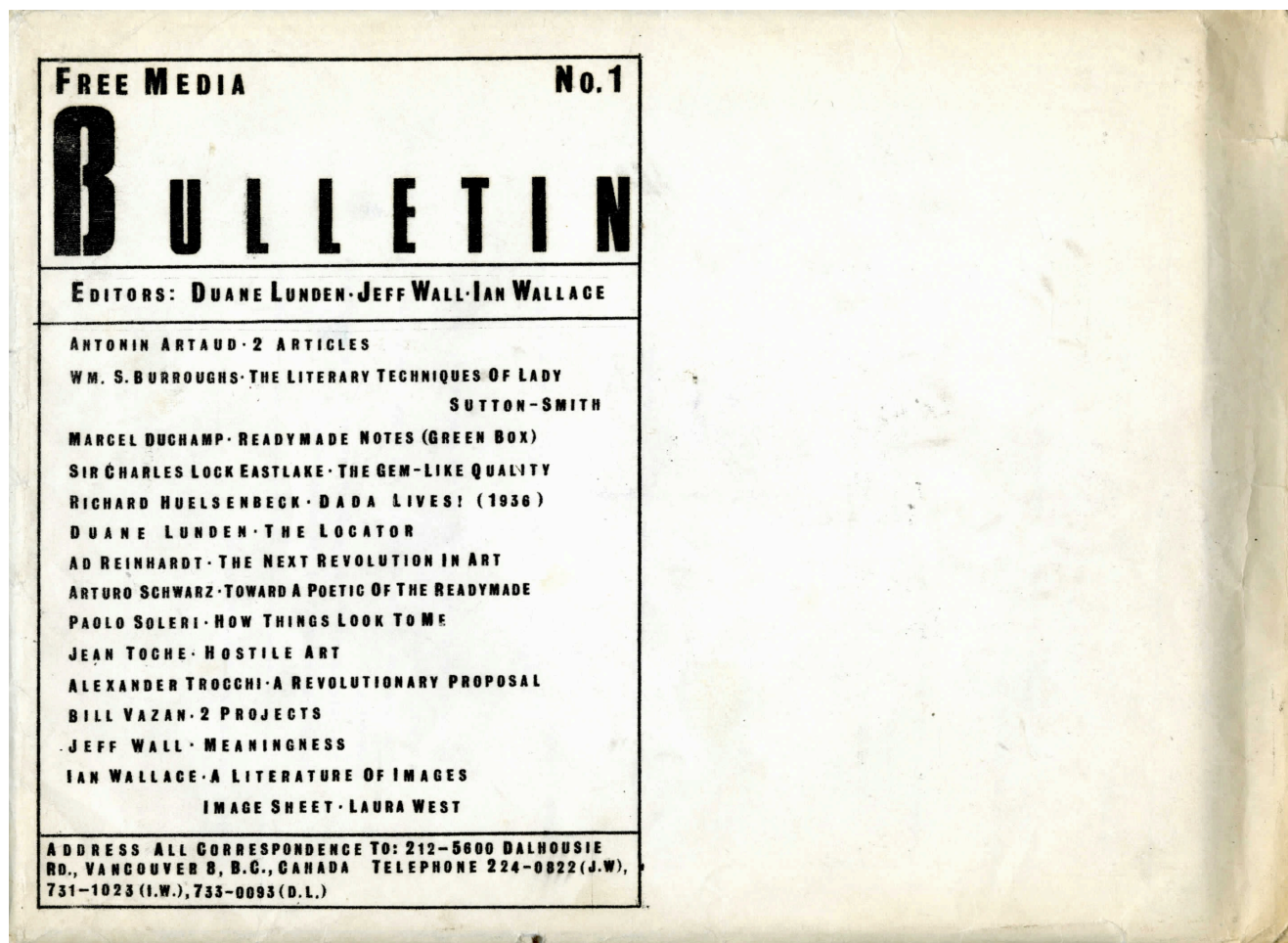


**Figure 4** - Jan Dibbets, *Perspective Correction, My Studio I, 2: Square with 2 Diagonals on Wall*, 1969, Museum of Modern Art.



**Figure 5** - *The Photo Show*, 1970, installation photograph; far centre wall - N.E. Thing Co. lightbox works; far right wall – Jeff Wall; far left wall - Christos Dikeakos; foreground table - binder with photos by Ian Wallace; courtesy collection of Christos Dikeakos.





**Figure 6** - Free Media Bulletin, 1969, courtesy collection of Christos Dikeakos, permission by Ian Wallace, photograph by author.

# MEANINGNESS

JEFF WALL

Photo: studio windows/gauze square  
:chipped paint on the bathroom wall/mirror  
:bedroom window/view of buildings

## INTERSECTION POINTS

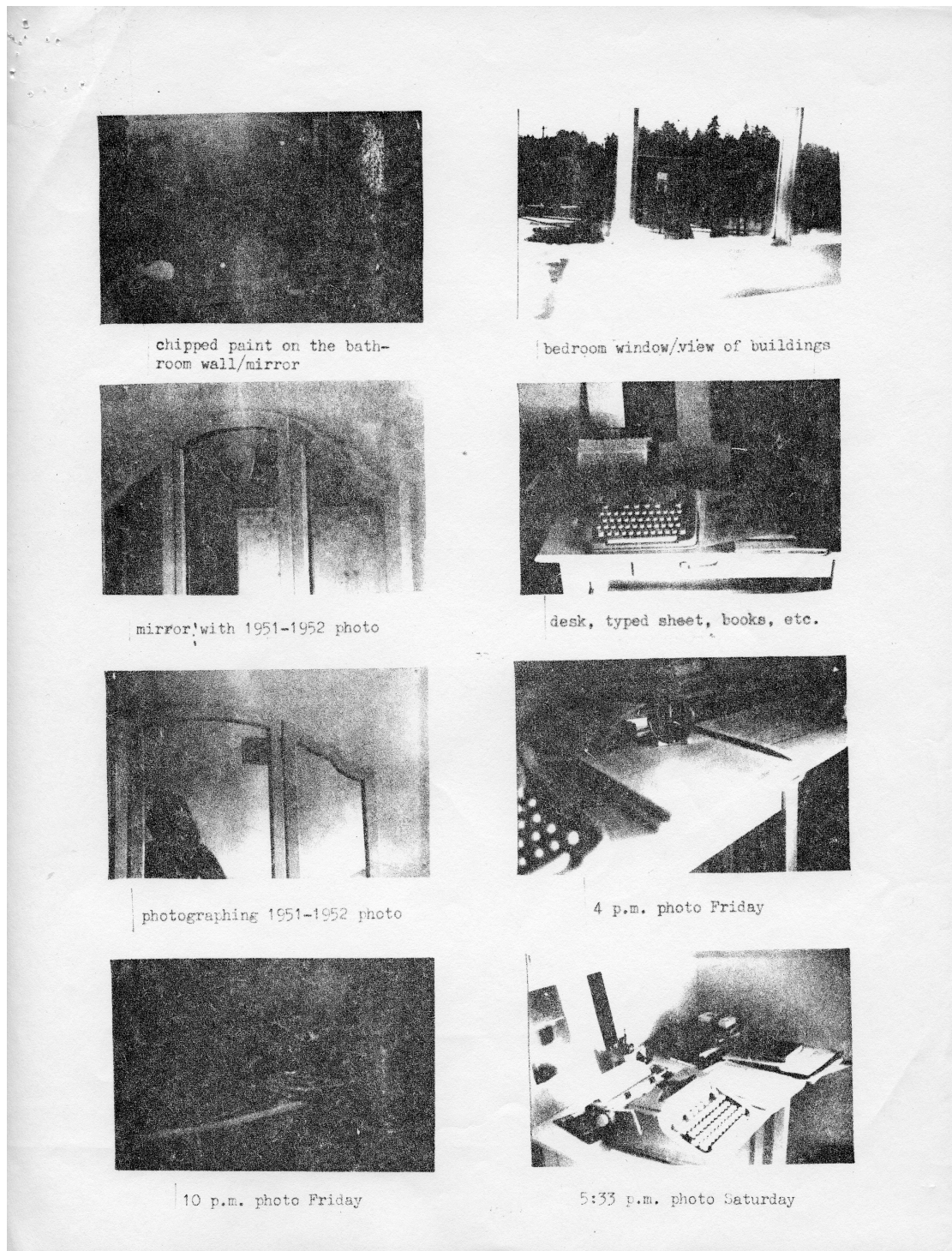
In a continuum nothing can separate itself away and have (therefore) "meaning". (making notes from notes). Objects on table before me: Aquabee notebook, white ballpoint pen, blue ballpoint pen, white felt-tip marker with black cap, roll of Kodak Plus-X film (36 exp.), black leather change purse, high-intensity reading lamp bulb, single 5 x 7" index card (words written on side facing desk: LAP TRIM ON OX CLEAN RAGE WILLING ROSE STREAM WONDER UNDER WOOD WRONG HIT), sheet of contact prints; two blue University of B. C. notebooks, September, 1966 edition of Artforum, B. C. Telephone Co. bill, Imperial Oil credit card, silver-colored key, package of 5 x 7" index cards, pile of six books with package of 3 x 5" index cards on top, Reid-Leica camera in leather case, Hermes 3000 typewriter. While I wrote out the list of objects, several of them shifted position. The eraser on the end of the white ballpoint pen was used to correct a typographical error in the word "single" (single 5 x 7" index card); black leather change purse and high-intensity light bulb were moved to turn over the 5 x 7" index card to read and transcribe the words written on it, the Imperial Oil credit card was turned over in order to identify it. You will notice that the question of meaning both never came up at all, yet was always somehow in our minds throughout this pedantic (literary?) listing of objects.

"Normally", language is devoted to the convergence of meaning, it is a "function" of "meaning" just as "meaning" is a "function" of language. Dry, theoretical, completely logical and analytical language, "expressive" language, descriptive language, poetic language, scientific language etc. are animated toward meaning, exist because of meaning, as meaning exists because of them. "Meaning" is apparently a result in these processes (analysis, poetry, narration). We reach out to grasp meaning. Certainly this is the "aim" of art & literature: the attainment of meaning. /Photo: studio windows-gauze square/Hence the problem of meaninglessness. Meaninglessness can imply two things: non-meaning and anti-meaning. In relation to Meaning, however, the distinction between the two blurs. (Certainly anti-meaning is a "meaningless" term, a contradiction in terms; anti-meaning is meaning.) The mind that searches for meaning, reaches out to grasp meaning (what seems to be meaningful) attempts to deny, to annihilate non-meaning, to prove that existence is in essence ordered, affirmative. The search for the state "meaning" is the search for the affirmation of the world-representation, the individual "Self" in the face of (and thereby by the annihilation of) the "Not-Self". Discovering a meaning in "the world" is to annex part of the Not-Self to the Self in the belief that this part of the Not-Self is "in league" with the Self, that this part of the outside world will never deny the individual Self. This condition is called "Attachment", or sometimes, "Faith". To search for The Ultimate Meaning can be interpreted as to search for the (apparently) unbreakable annexation. The apparently (one, single) unbreakable annexation appears at the top of a hierarchy of subordinate annexations which have become subordinate as they are successively broken. The impetus for the mind to create this hierarchy is in some sense "innate". We understand that it comes with the original recognition of Self: as the outlines of the "I" are understood (by the child), simultaneously the boundaries of the "world" are discovered. Just as "Meaning" does not exist for the infant, it does not exist for the completed man. These two creatures are completely in the world--therefore beyond the relativities of "Meaning".

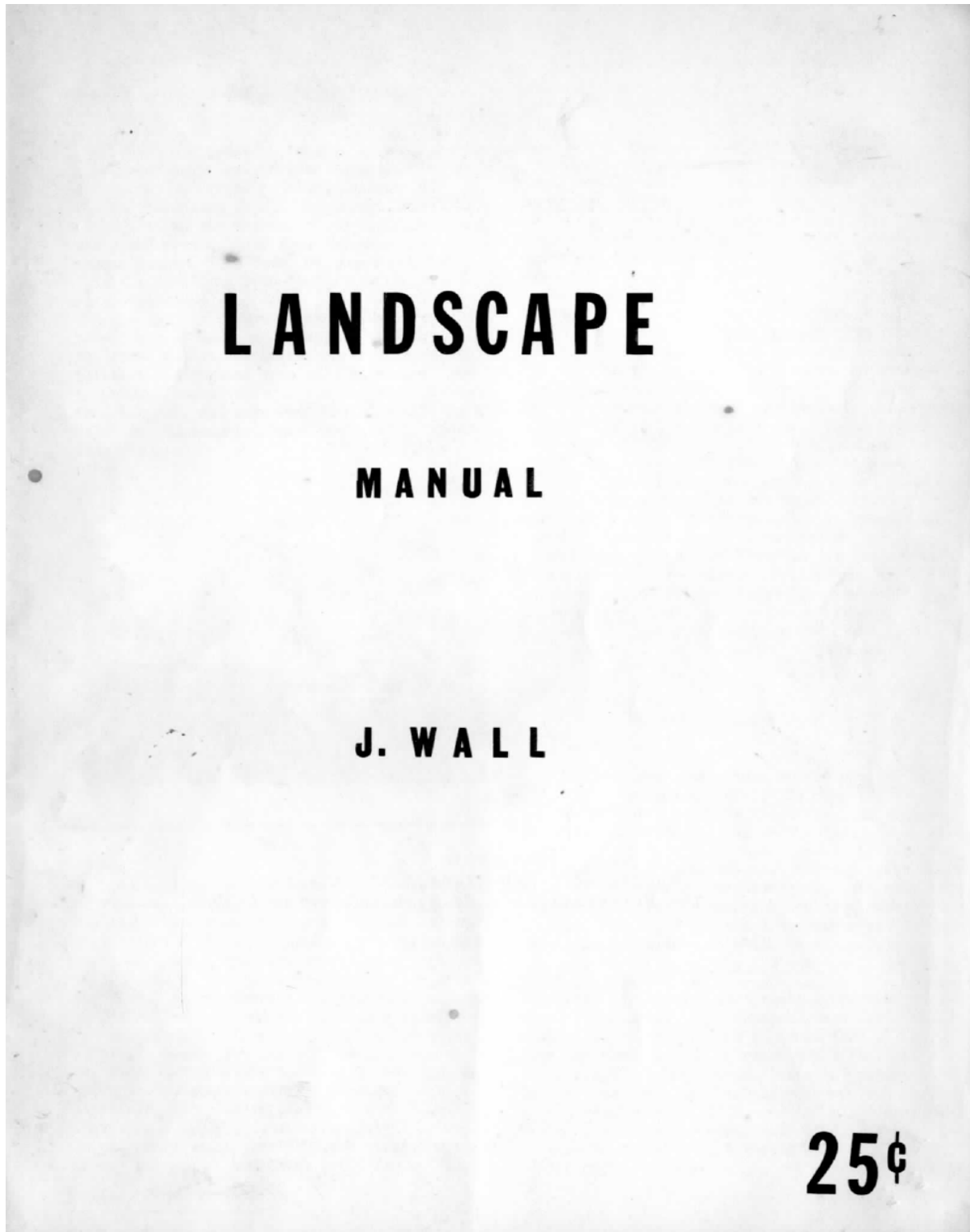
Intersections Thursday, August 21 1969: photo-chipped paint on the bathroom wall-mirror/bus ride/APO-33:"Dear Brion:Today Lady Sutton-Smith presents an entertainment laughing in the dark I call it 'navigational writing'. Plot the course of each day's writing as you would plot the course of a ship your ship right where you are sitting now take frequent bearing from land marks. (soot gray mist across the harbour the Mons Calpe there Day the soccer 'fanatics' got losse in Lima stadium fold sweet ecetera to bed. So trace a formula from time or newweek that gives you a landfall may be good or bad. This is Newsweek May 25, 1964 page 57 Day of the Soccer Fanatics 2.10. So you have all your days dated." (W. S. Burroughs copyright 1966, 1967, 1968)/Intersections Friday morning August 22, 1969: my photo of water with myself reflected from The Index/Burroughs' photo of news clippings behind sheet of glass with photographer reflected p. 17 APO-33./The "search for meaning" is a search for relative affirmation that is as long as only affirmation is admitted as being a possibility for "meaningfulness" the meaning will only be relative that is essentially incomplete. Meaning if one can use the term in this context is in the recognition of the invalidity of complete affirmation or complete annihilation. The situation has nothing to do with either.

Figure 7 - Jeff Wall, "Meaningness," in Free Media Bulletin, 1969, courtesy collection of Christos Dikeakos, permission by Jeff Wall, photograph by author.

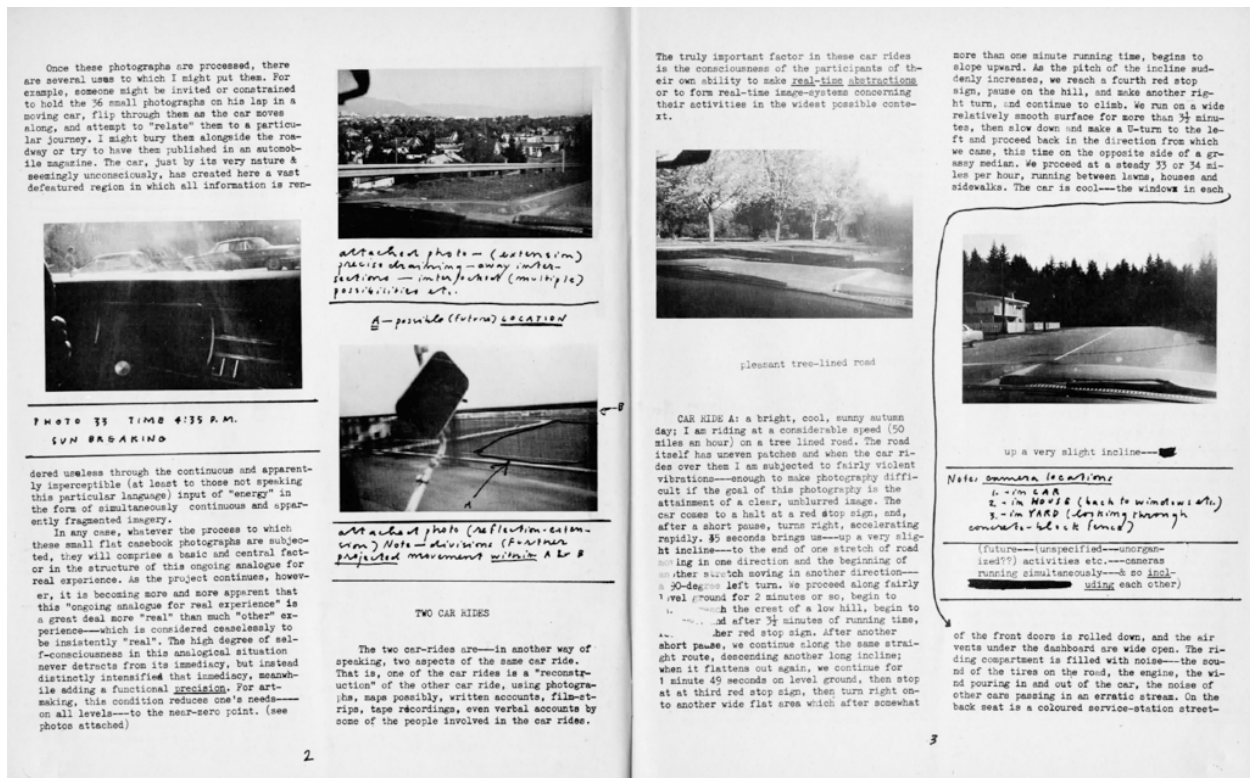




**Figure 8** - Jeff Wall, "Meaningness," in Free Media Bulletin, 1969, courtesy collection of Christos Dikeakos, permission by Jeff Wall, photograph by author.

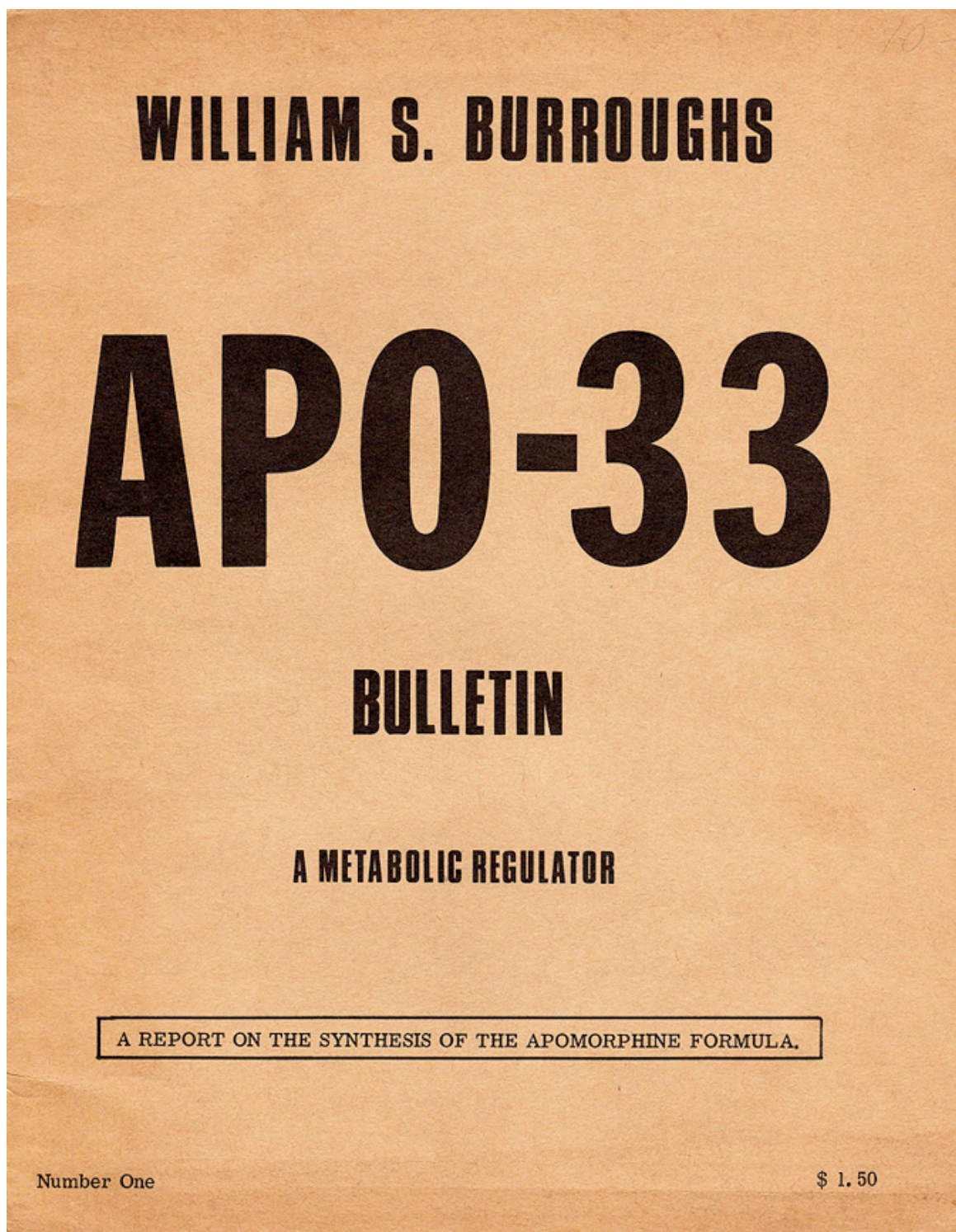


**Figure 9** - Jeff Wall, *Landscape Manual*, 1970, University of British Columbia Fine Arts Gallery Publication, courtesy collection of Christos Dikeakos, permission by Jeff Wall, photograph by author.

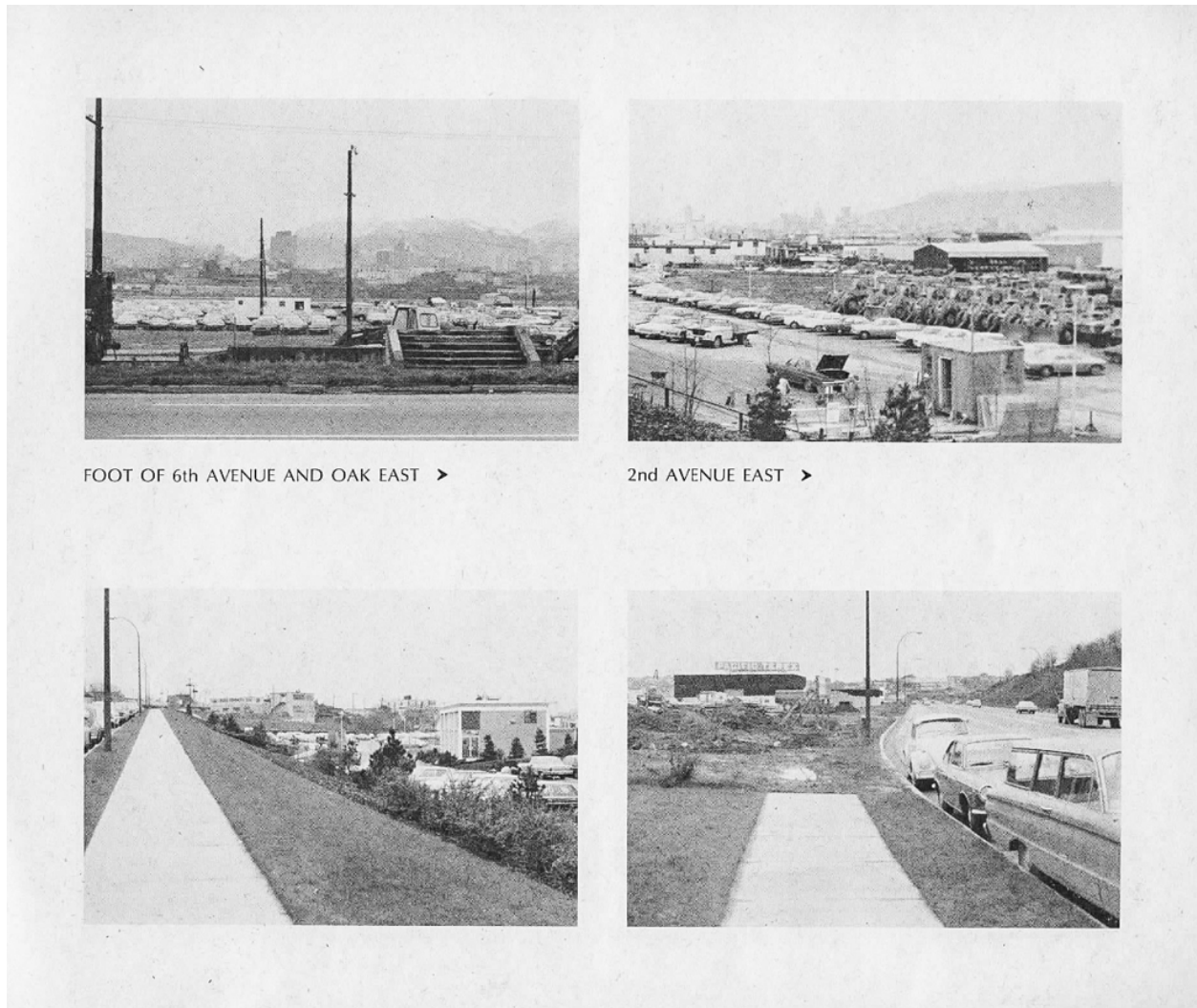


**Figure 10** - Jeff Wall, *Landscape Manual*, 1970, University of British Columbia Fine Arts Gallery Publication, courtesy collection of Christos Dikeakos, permission by Jeff Wall, photograph by author.





**Figure 11** - William Burroughs, *APO-33 Bulletin: A Metabolic Regulator*, 1966, courtesy collection of Christos Dikeakos, photograph by author.



**Figure 12** – Christos Dikeakos, from *Instant Photo Information*, *B.C. ALMANAC(H)* C-B exhibition, 1970, courtesy collection of Christos Dikeakos, photography by author.



**Figure 13** – Herbert Marcuse addressing students at Simon Fraser University on Tuesday, March 25, 1969, (<http://lot.at/urban-subjects/learning-form-vancouver/5>).

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VOLUME I NUMBER I

MAY 1969

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**THIS IS NOT TO BE SNEEZED AT**

# Art-Language

*The Journal of conceptual art*

Edited by Terry Atkinson, David Bainbridge,  
Michael Baldwin, Harold Hurrell

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## NOT SURE

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**Figure 14** – Art & Language, *Art-Language: The Journal of Conceptual Art*, Vol 1 No 1, 1969, courtesy collection of Charlotte Townsend-Gault, photography by author.





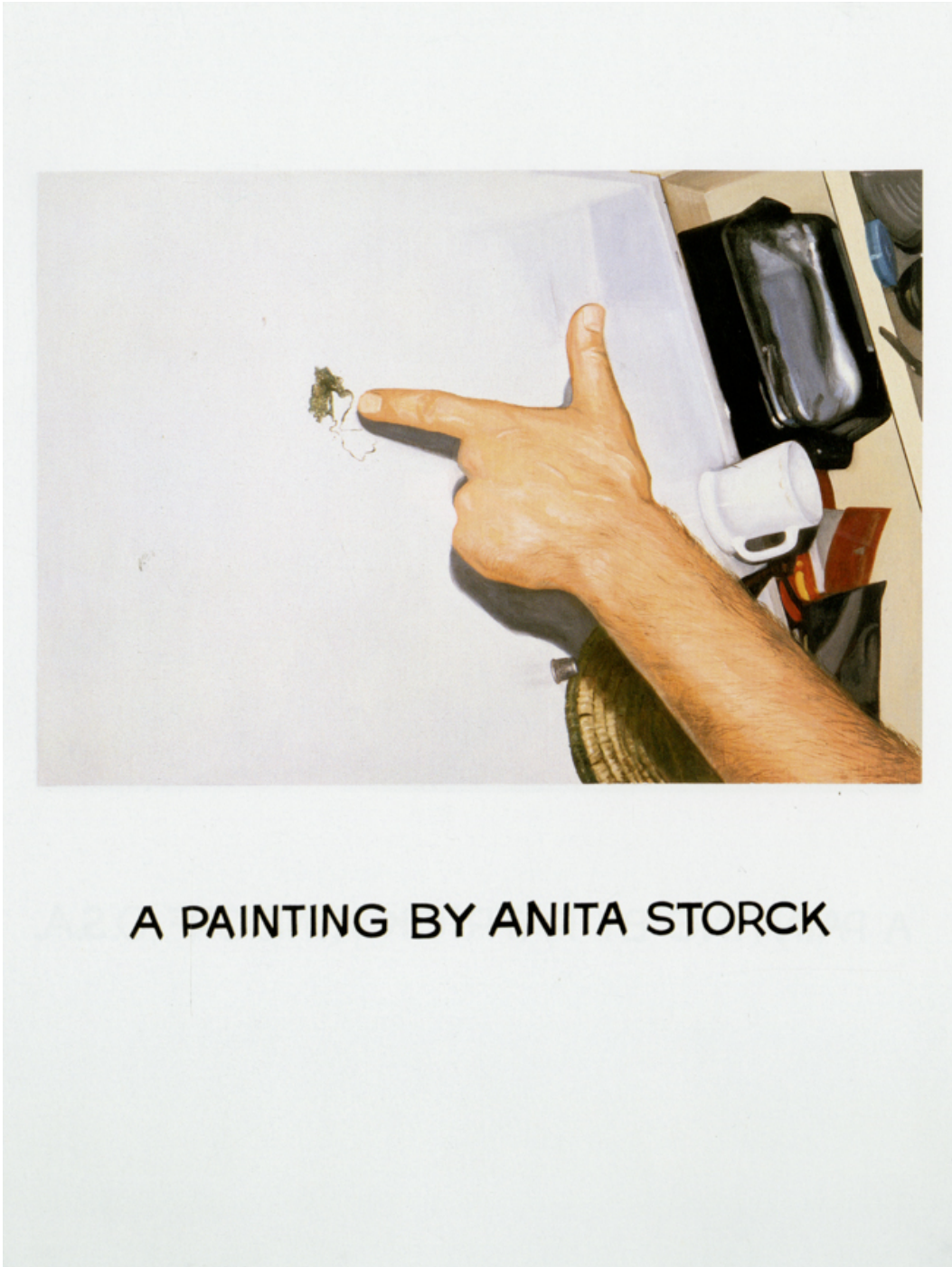
**Figure 15** - John Baldessari, *Pure Beauty*, 1966-1968.





WRONG

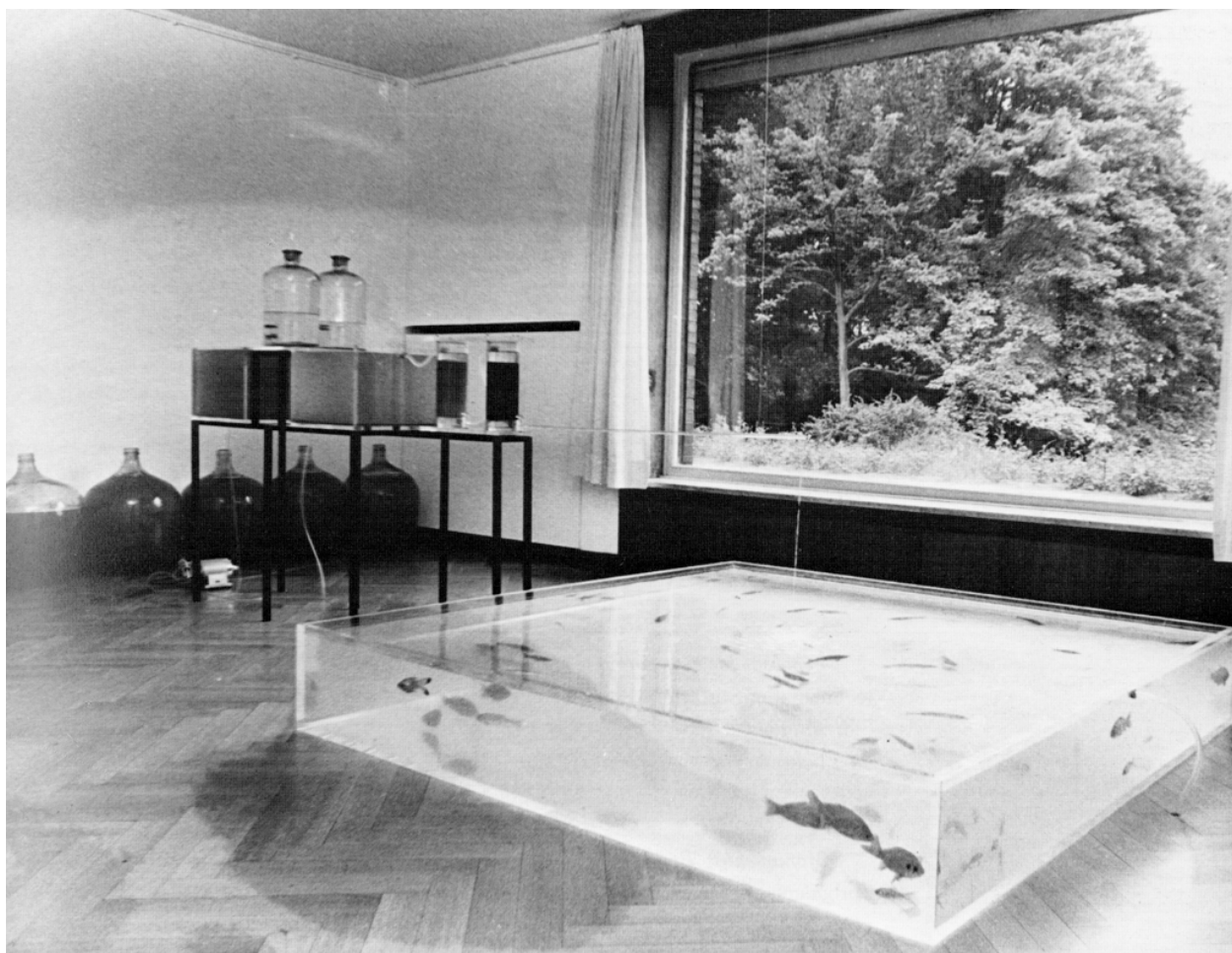
**Figure 16** - John Baldessari, *Wrong*, 1966-1968.



**Figure 17** - John Baldessari, *Commissioned Painting: A Painting by Anita Storck*, 1969.



**Figure 18** - Hans Haacke, (b. 1936), *Shapolsky et al. Manhattan Real Estate Holdings, a Real-Time Social System, as of May 1, 1971*, 1971. Nine photostats, one hundred and forty-two gelatin silver prints, and one hundred and forty-two photocopies, dimensions variable. Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; purchased jointly by the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York with funds from the Director's Discretionary Fund and the Painting and Sculpture Committee, and the Fundació Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona 2007.148a-gg © 2015 Artists Rights Society(ARS), New York/VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn.  
[http://whitney.org/WatchAndListen/Artists?context=Artist&context\\_id=10735&play\\_id=1160](http://whitney.org/WatchAndListen/Artists?context=Artist&context_id=10735&play_id=1160)

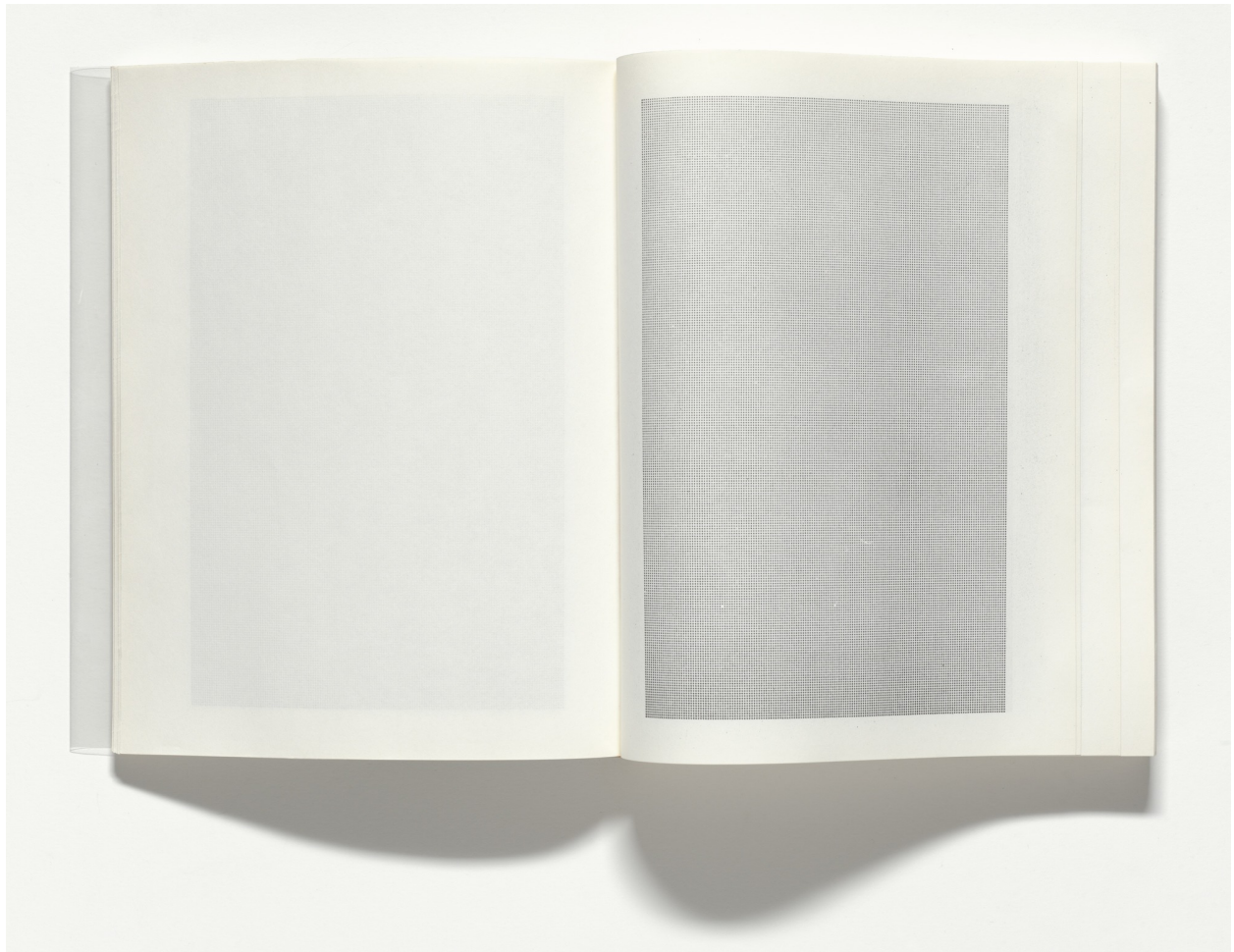


**Figure 19** – Hans Haacke, *Rhine-water Purification Plant*, 1972, <http://changeasart.org/rhinewater-purification-plant-by-hans-haacke/>.



**def·i·ni·tion** (def'ə-nish'ən), *n.* [OFr. *definicion*; L. *definitio* < pp. of *definire*; see DEFINE], 1. a defining or being defined. 2. a statement of what a thing is. 3. a statement or explanation of what a word or phrase means or has meant. 4. a putting or being in clear, sharp outline. 5. the power of a lens to show (an object) in clear, sharp outline. 6. the degree of distinctness of a photograph, etc. 7. in *radio & television*, the degree of accuracy with which sounds or images are reproduced. Abbreviated **def.**

**Figure 20** - Joseph Kosuth, *Titled (Art as Idea as Idea) The Word "Definition,"* 1966-68, Museum of Modern Art.



**Figure 21** - Robert Barry, *25 plates from Untitled (Xerox Book)*, 1968, Museum of Modern Art.

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## **Archives Referenced**

### **Institutional Archives**

John Latham Archive, Ligatus Research Centre of the University of the Arts London.

The Estate of Barry Flanagan, London.

Archives at the Museum of Modern Art in New York.

Archives at the Jewish Museum in New York.

Morris and Helen Belkin Art Gallery Archive, Vancouver.

### **Personal Collections**

Collection of Christos Dikeakos.

Collection of Linda Morris.

Collection of Charlotte Townsend-Gault.

Collection of Ian Wallace.

Collection of Jerry Zaslove.