Looking at this, I notice that.

by

Håvard Pedersen

Diploma di Fotografia, Istituto Europeo di Design, Milano, 2007

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE

REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

MASTER OF APPLIED ARTS

in

Visual Art

EMILY CARR UNIVERSITY OF ART + DESIGN

2009

Abstract

An artwork is made based on a personal hypothesis resting on the existing knowledge of the artist. This knowledge, whether from a case study within a theme the artist is researching or from his or her general understanding/reception of the world where he/she is working, will inevitably cause the artwork to be of a personal and subjective matter, regardless of the proposition or matter discussed in the work itself. With this in mind, the idea of an auto analysis of one's work seems somewhat unproductive as one enters the analysis or critique of one's work with the same knowledge or moral as the work was initially based. With this in mind my intention with this text was to create a paper that would be an opportunity to demonstrate something about my work and its context, rather than demonstrating my knowledge. By leaving the raw material of my sources as untouched as possible I hoped with this approach to present a process that would embody the sensation of my work, rather than the singular reading the rewriting and customization of the sources that a more formal paper would dictate. The footnotes, more informal in their structure than a conventional text, gave me the opportunity to more freely propose the plausible and temporal truths I am searching while escaping the traditional role of the author. The fragmented form of the paper also better reflected the conceptual aspects of my own practice, where the gaps of knowledge and unconnected dots inevitably are exposed just as openly as they are in this text.

Table of Contents

List of Illustrations

Introduction

When Maurizio Cattelan was asked what significance he gave to his practice of sending curator and friend Massimiliano Gioni in his place for public appearances and interviews, he answered that "people need more doubts and fewer certainties,"[1] proposing that his role as the author was uninteresting and that the input of others could have an equal importance to his work. In his book, *Post-production* (2001), Nicolas Bourriaud compares the contemporary artist with the practice of DJing or computer programming, proposing that the remixer of today (or, more correctly, of 2001) has become more important than the instrumentalist; it is in its use of forms, the ability to inhabit an open network and in the logic of how samples are linked and arranged that the artist should now be critiqued.[2] The sensibility described by Bourriaud has since been widely acknowledged and critiqued and the terms he proposed (*Relational Aesthetics*, or the more recent *Altermodern*) are well established in contemporary discourse. Bourriaud's proposal is maybe the most successful in the manner of its presentation; a pragmatic and uncomplex theoretical approach, relying on plausible truth and temporary solutions (much like an economical analysis based on probable scenarios) rather than Modernism's greater truths (metanarratives) or the deconstructed hopelessness that succeeded it after its unavoidable failure.

---

1 Giancarlo Politi and the readers of *Flash Art*, "Killing me Softly – A Conversation With Maurizio Cattelan," *Flash Art* (International Edition) v.37 (July/September 2004): 91.

2 Nicolas Bourriaud, *Postproduction*, 2nd ed. (Lukas & Sternberg, 2005), 31-39.

When I began this paper, it seemed clear that the program would accept subjective texts of creative writing, giving me the possibility to write whatever paper I wanted (even one that hardly consisted of my own words) as long as it did not consist of grandiose and incorrect arguments that could be broken down and proven wrong. The paper could be critiqued as uninteresting or uninformed (and sometimes rightly so), but one could not claim that it was not a thesis paper, suitable within the requirements set. Faced with this situation, my intention was to create a paper that would be an opportunity to demonstrate something about my work and its context, rather than demonstrating my knowledge.

Writing about your own work will not contribute to your work itself, but only to an external understanding of it. Reading, on the other hand, will contribute. An artwork is made based on a personal hypothesis resting on the existing knowledge of the artist. This knowledge, whether from a case study within a theme the artist is researching or from his or her general understanding/reception of the world where she/he is working, will inevitably cause the artwork to be of a personal and subjective nature, regardless of the proposition or matter discussed in the work itself. With this in mind, the idea of an auto analysis of work seems somewhat unproductive as one enters that analysis with the same knowledge or moral as the work was created with.

I wanted my paper to demonstrate what I have read and how I have been informed, so the reader will understand my work better. These considerations have left me with

two alternatives for a productive paper: The first, and maybe the more conventional path, would be to discuss what one's work has in common, the thread through one's work. The second, and the one I have chosen, would be to write a paper that demonstrates this aforementioned base of knowledge from which an artist's work materializes. In making this work, each exhibition is an experiment, a test where one does not know the result because the viewer—an unknown factor before the work is done—is essential to its existence. It is also problematic to impose a value judgment on whether an artwork is successful or not, because of the field's lack of ground rules; I would argue that good work is the work that challenges the few rules that do exist.

The theoretical discourse found within an institution unavoidably lags behind the art of its time, and the preconditions of what art is shift often. I have often found myself in situations where the critique of art is done using outdated analytic (primarily modernist) models in opposition to newer (primarily post-modern) models, and I will argue that the traditional structure of a paper of this form (myself, as author, analyzing my own work) to be of this nature as I would argue that an artwork that can be pragmatically explained is nothing more than that explanation. I have concluded that the paper, as in my graduate work, should be a sensation of my art practice, not the explanation of it.

I find Relational Aesthetics to be a direct response to the earlier post-modern work of the eighties. The contributions by Bourriaud and Cattelan I have presented might

be read as examples of a natural progression[3] from the endgame tendencies explored by artists and art critics of the eighties, such as the American writer and critic Fredric Jameson or the artist Ashley Bickerton. I realize the structure of my paper, though initially inspired by F.R. David's *Book of Intentions*, owes to their work as well (especially that of Jameson, a writer I continue to admire and strive to understand), though the grasp of what these structures represent is not the subject of this text. The subject I am investigating is the plausible and temporal truths about the nature of my process of making art.

My intention with this paper is to clarify my work. My own work, as this text suggests, is most successful when looked upon as invitations for conversation; small gestures created without a conclusion in mind. It is the threads of investigation I have followed during my time here in Vancouver and the coincidences and contradictions I have met in this research that interest me, and it is this process that the following pages will ideally reflect. I have tried to construct a pragmatic text, filled with practical examples from a thematic and personal look into historical and contemporary art. My hope is that by connecting these dots I can clarify my own practice, and supply the reader with a framework for how my art can be read.

3 Indeed, progression in this matter can be compared to the non-existent opportunity cost in economic theory; the situation where there is nothing to lose by investing.

Several Identified Connections

The story goes that when the film was first shown, the audience was so overwhelmed by the moving image of a life-sized train coming directly at them that people screamed and ran to the back of the room. Hellmuth Karasek in the German magazine *Der Spiegel* wrote that the film "had a particularly lasting impact; yes, it caused fear, terror, even panic.[1]

Wikipedia[2]

Both Duchamp and Benjamin arrived at similar conclusions through widely divergent approaches–the modern artist could not afford to ignore the implications of technological advances which were being introduced at a startling rate: photography, electricity, radio, film, the automobile, aviation and telephones were gradually becoming everyday features within the changing modern landscape. The development of abstract painting was seen as an important stage in the ”modernization” of art, but the unresolved issues of representation and originality were not prominently addressed by many of the abstract movements that flourished between the two world wars: synthetic cubism, neo-plasticism, constructivism, the Bauhaus, or synchronism. Only the surrealists, with their mock-academic concern for technique, and their manipulation of subconscious archetypes, seemed to question art’s casual relationship to both natural and man-made worlds.

Dan Cameron[3]

1 The urban legend associated with the Lumière brothers’ first showing of L'arrivée d'un train en gare de La Ciotat in Paris in 1895.

2 Wikipedia contributors, “L'Arrivée d'un train en gare de La Ciotat,” http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=L%27Arriv%C3%A9e_d%27un_train_en_gare_de_La_Ciotat

3 Dan Cameron, “Art And Its Double – A New York Perspective,” Flash Art (International Edition) no. 134 (May 1987): 58.

Pierre Cabanne: What determined your choice of readymades?
Marcel Duchamp: That depended on the object. In general, I had to be aware of its "look". It's very difficult to choose an object, because, at the end of fifteen days, you begin to like it or to hate it. You have to approach something with an indifference, as if you had no aesthetic emotion. The choice of readymades is always based on visual indifference and, at the same time, on the total absence of good or bad taste.
PC: What is taste for you?
MD: A habit. The repetition of something already accepted. If you start something over several times, it becomes taste. Good or bad, it's the same thing, its still taste.
PC: What have you done to escape taste?
MD: Mechanical drawing. It upholds no taste, since it is outside all pictorial convention.[4]

Conversation between Marcel Duchamp and Pierre Cabanne[5]

I feel I come out of the Duchampian tradition: Duchamp showed the ready-made with indifference to it, but my personal development has been to maintain the integrity of the object. Where the assemblages of surrealism manipulated the objects' integrity, I maintain that integrity. For example, the *Equilibrium Tanks* maintain the purity of a commercial tank, distilled water, and a basketball. They are put together, so it is a form of assemblage, but these objects are not completely intermixed or melded together. I do not, however, rule out transforming the object's content. I'm very interested in transforming its content in order to reveal certain personality traits that have always been within that object, but just have not chosen to show their face to date. I would like to offer up a term that has had vital currency in the process of my own thinking: contingency[6]. I think that through this procession of contingencies, discourses are being pulled together into the object itself, promoting an awareness of the fact that all meanings are contingent upon some other meaning, where meanings are appropriated for their relationship to external forces, the larger social schema in which they're involved.

Jeff Koons[7]

---

4 If Duchamp's statement about taste being a product of repetition is to be taken seriously, any formal critique of an artwork seems to be obsolete. Also, his solution of using mechanical drawing, also seems a transient solution, as repeated works by mechanical drawing (a stylistic choice), would sooner or later end up being conventional itself, like we see in the use of neon or vinyl today.

5 Pierre Cabanne, *Dialogues with Marcel Duchamp* (Pierre Belfond, 1967), 48.

6 Koons' comprehension of contingency in this case seems to regard only the visual impact of an artwork, though these notions appear related to the unknown outcome of my ongoing work RMS Farewell (working title). Consisting of a mostly one way correspondence between a collecting agency and myself, the work discuss a dispute over 59.59 CAD "brokerage fee" RMS claims that I never paid to UPS. I responded their hostile claim with an invitation to discuss the matter further trough a more civilized written correspondence, an opportunity the have yet to respond to. When the situation occurred I quickly realized that it could be treated as an artwork, though the outcome of the work was yet to be established. The unknown outcome intentionally left to be largely based on contingency, is thereby creating the tension keeping the work alive.

7 Peter Nagy, "Flash Art Panel: From Criticism to Complicity," *Flash Art* (International Edition) no.129 (Summer 1986): 48.

Form is most often defined as an outline contrasting with a content. But modernist aesthetics talks about “formal beauty” by referring to a sort of (con)fusion between style and content, and an inventive compatibility of the former with the latter. We judge a work through its plastic or visual form. The most common criticism to do with new artistic practices consists, moreover, in denying them any “formal effectiveness”, or in singling out their shortcomings in the “formal resolution”. In observing contemporary artistic practices, we ought to talk of “formations”[8] rather than “forms”. Unlike an object that is closed in on itself by the intervention of a style and a signature, present-day art shows that form only exists in the encounter and in the dynamic relationship enjoyed by an artistic proposition with other formations, artistic or otherwise.[9]

Nicolas Bourriaud[10]

Cubism, Futurism and Suprematism were not understood. These artists cast aside the robes of the past, came out into modern life, and found new beauty.
And I say:
That no torture-chambers of the academies will withstand the days to come.
Forms move and are born, and we are forever making new discoveries.[11]
And what we discover must not be concealed.
An it is absurd to force our age into the old forms of a bygone age.
The void of the past cannot contain the gigantic constructions and movement of our life.

Kazimir Malevich[12]

---

8 Bourriaud’s proposal to talk about formations rather than forms seems connected to what Jameson refers to as the disappearance of the individual subject and his claims that everything in our social life seems to have become “cultural”. Read together, Bourriaud’s conclusion that one needs to critique an artwork on its function within the constructed formations of society seems a logical one.

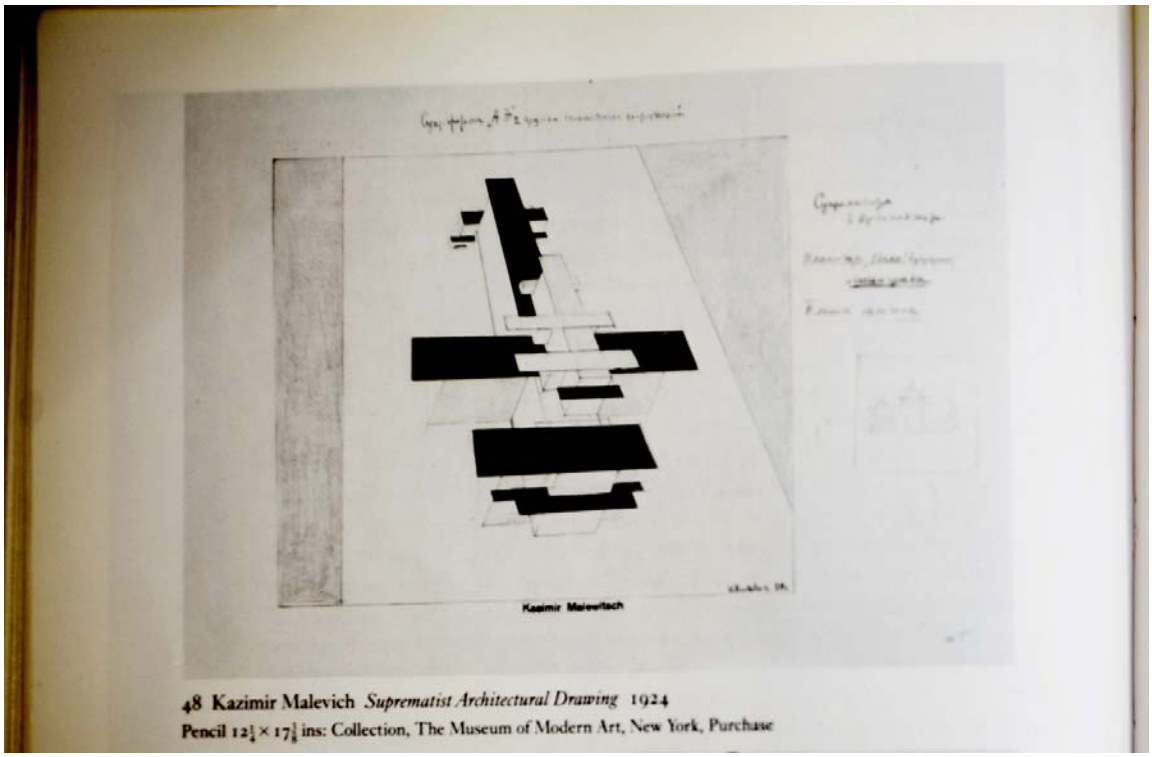
9 In this way, looking at artwork as proposals for solutions, I found that art struggles with some of the same problematics as those within financial analysis. Faulty assumptions make faulty constructions. Any economics-for-dummies textbook will tell you that a perfectly free market is something of an unreachable utopia in itself (with some exceptions, like speculation in currency or electricity), the theory remains at the base of most financial analysis. The most evident example of how praxis differs from this theory is the notion of the fully informed consumer, a precondition the enormous advertising industry does its best to diminish and the sheer size of the globalized marketplace makes impossible to monitor. Secondly, there is the precondition that none of the producers can dictate price by virtue of their sheer size (the likes of OPEC, Safeway, and IKEA comes to mind) and, thirdly, there is an assumption that the consumer is flexible to change between producers (be that electricity companies or cell phone providers) in a heartbeat. It is clear by these conditions that uncritical use of initial assumptions in an analysis, is akin to building a house with the help of a defective meter stick where the measurements are off. As I touched upon in the introduction of this paper, agreeing on these preconditions (though it might be an impossible task) seems crucial for an constructive conversation.

10 Nicolas Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics* (Les Presse Du Reel,France, 1998), 21

11 Here Malevich draws a similar conclusion to that of Duchamp, though his proposal for a solution differs greatly. Malevich’s revolutionary rhetoric is comparable to that which can be seen in many of his contemporaries and in the movements to come, a manifesto proposing that the avant-garde move further into the unknown. I would argue that Duchamp, on the contrary, proposed to move sideways, questioning the exhibition context in which the artwork is shown. In this way, it can be argued that Duchamp could be considered as a postmodern artist.

Every piece is a test, and it needs to be confronted, criticized, destroyed and rebuilt,[13] I tend to avoid my own opinions,[14] and just trust the others

Maurizio Cattelan[15]



48 Kazimir Malevich *Suprematist Architectural Drawing* 1924
Pencil $12\frac{1}{4} \times 17\frac{1}{8}$ ins: Collection, The Museum of Modern Art, New York, Purchase

Figure 1

"There's a disease out there — artists want to become architects, and architects want to become artists — which I think I may have started"

Dan Graham[16]

The model for a monument for the Third International seems to have been erected on altogether four occasions. The first model stood in the previous mosaic workshop in the then discontinued Academy of Art at the Vasilievsky Ostrov; it was erected in the course of 1920 and the exhibition in November of the same year. Tatlin was assisted by two pupils from the "Free Studios", I. Meyerzon and T. M.

---

12 Robert Hughes, The Shock of The New: The Hundred-Year History of Modern Art Its Rise, Its Dazzling Achievement, It's Fall, 2nd ed. (McGraw-Hill Humanities/Social Sciences/Languages, 1990), 82

13 It is in these conditions art seems to makes most sense. Cattelan's statement seems parallel to Groys' on how art is only art when contemporary, and once the exhibition is over, it moves into the archive and becomes a point of reference in history. It is this notion I worked with when making the "no.0108 (Susie)", first exhibited in January 2009, in which I intended to make an artwork designed to realize its inevitable destination in the archive.

14 Cattelan's strategy of avoiding his own opinions is reminiscent of Duchamp's use of mechanical drawing; both artists question the role of the artist-as-author. On a side note, Cattelan also publishes his own magazine, Permanent Food, that consists purely of "stolen" photographs published without copyright permission.

15 Designboom, "Maurizio Cattelan," http://www.designboom.com/eng/interview/cattelan.html

16 Lyla Kilston and Quinn Latimer, "Pioneering artist and architect Dan Graham gets his first US retrospective," Modern Painters, (February 2009): 14

Shapiro. This model is known from two photographs, while a further two photographs stem from the actual erection of the model: three of these pictures are included in Punin's book about Tatlin. Together with two previous drawings, at least one of which was on display in November 1920, they are the only documents providing any information on the first version. The model was re-erected in Moscow in December 1920 on the occasion of the English Soviet Congress. Apart from Meyerzon and Shapiro, Pavel Vinogradov also worked together with Tatlin on this occasion. This version is not known by any photographs, but a number of descriptions are extant. It seems in its essentials to have resembled the first.

Figure 2

A new model of the tower figured at the World Exhibition of Industrial and Decorative Art in Paris 1925. Tatlin himself does not appear to have been in Paris on this occasion. The exhibition archives in the Soviet Union can thus contain important material on this version, which at present can be seen only in a strongly touched-up reproduction in the exhibition catalogue. To judge from this photograph, this model was more like the two original drafts. It was exhibited in the Salle octogonale in the Louvre. In an interview with the architect Mel'nikov, written by the Danish author and critic Broby-Johansen, it is reported to have been four meters high.

All traces of the tower then suddenly come to an end.[17] Tatlin's assistant, T. M. Shapiro, could (in 1967) only report that as far as he knew the tower had not come back from Paris. It figures nonetheless in a guidebook to the "War and Art" exhibition held in Leningrad in 1930, where the second version is said to have been exhibited. In 1932, Tatlin showed photographs of the tower, but no model.[18]

Troels Andersen[19]

Architecture is, however, of all the arts that closest constitutively to the economic, with which, in the form of commissions and land values, it has a virtually

17 When dealing with a proposal that was never realized, there might be an opportunity for the authority of the object/original to be ignored without any loss of content. Though, paradoxically enough, when architecture makes it to the gallery wall, it is usually the more conceptual drawings, such as sketches and presentation views of the final project that is considered art; the proposal itself thus becomes the original.

18 The excerpt is taken from a text regarding the reconstruction of the model of Tatlin's Tower (or The Monument to the Third International) at the Moderna Museet in Stockholm, Sweden

19 Vladimir Evgrafovich Tatlin and Troels Andersen, Vladimir Tatlin. (Moderna Museet, Stockholm, July-September, 1968), 23

unmediated relationship:[20] it will therefore not be surprising to find the extraordinary flowering of the new postmodern architecture grounded in the patronage of multinational businesses, whose expansion and development is strictly contemporaneous with it.

Fredric Jameson[21]

It remains the most influential non-existent object of the twentieth century, and one of the most paradoxical—an unworkable, probably unbuildable metaphor of practicality.

Tatlin's Utopianism pervaded the work of other Russian artists; it was one of the traits of the post-Revolutionary ferment and Tatlin's tower was not its least realistic product – other architects were thinking of cities on springs and wings. (With hindsight, one can perhaps see that unachievable projects were the right monuments to an ideal. Because they were not built, they could not be destroyed.)

Robert Hughes on Tatlin's Tower[22]

I've never approved or liked anything about Marcel Duchamp. You have to choose between Duchamp and Mondrian.[23]

Ad Reinhardt on Marcel Duchamp[24]

Numerous other evidences could be cited to show that Reinhardt is neither a Minimal nor a Conceptual artist (I am temporarily holding in abeyance the issue of the mystical interpretation), but I will rest my case. Yet one might still wonder why I have devoted so much space to defining what he is *not* rather than what he *is*. In doing so, I am deliberately following Reinhardt's instructions: "The only way to say what an artist-as-artist is to say what an artist-as-artist is not", "the one struggle in art is the struggle of artists against artists", and finally, and more important, "you can only make absolute statements negatively." [25] The only way to say what

---

20 It is this relationship that makes architecture an interesting reference: because of its opportunistic nature, contemporary architecture usually embodies the social structure of its time, and thus becomes the visual avant-garde of mirroring the society surrounding it.

21 Michael Hardt and Kathi Weeks, eds., *The Jameson Reader* (Wiley-Blackwell, 2000), 192

22 Robert Hughes, *The Shock of The New: The Hundred-Year History of Modern Art Its Rise, Its Dazzling Achievement, It's Fall*, 2nd ed. (McGraw-Hill Humanities/Social Sciences/Languages, 1990), 92

23 I would argue that Reinhardt was wrong in making this statement. Mondrian, not unlike Malevich, was dealing with denunciation for similar reasons as Duchamp. Though I agree that their results differ greatly, I find that they can be combined, when seen in relation to how Barbara Rose presents minimalism in her "ABC Art". My recent work drums (a loudspeaker playing a looped sound sample of the silence between Justin Timberlake's pronunciation of the word "drums" and the beat following it in his first single "Like I Love You" combined with a turned off strobe LED light source) is an attempt to do just that by making a work minimal in content, rather than minimal in physical form. As I had read "ABC Art" after I had finished the work, it presented me with a situation where an external context coincidentally transgresses into an artwork after the work is done.

24 "Skowhegan lecture (1967)," quoted in Lucy Lippard, *Ad Reinhardt*. (Harry N. Abrams. New York. 1981): 82

25 In this sense, Reinhardt, as with many of his contemporaries, proposes that art, like science, is searching for absolutes. By applying Karl Popper's "Black Swan"-theory to his art practice Reinhardt thus validates the academic discourse he himself is taking part in (not unlike a scientific paradigm), rather than representing a break from it.

Reinhardt's art is (that is, to make an absolute statement) is to say what it is not. Although my strategy (borrowing Reinhardt's own) might seem a bit coy, it is the only possible – it is entirely programmed by the exigencies of Reinhardt's art itself.

Yve-Alain Bois on Ad Reinhardt's art[26]

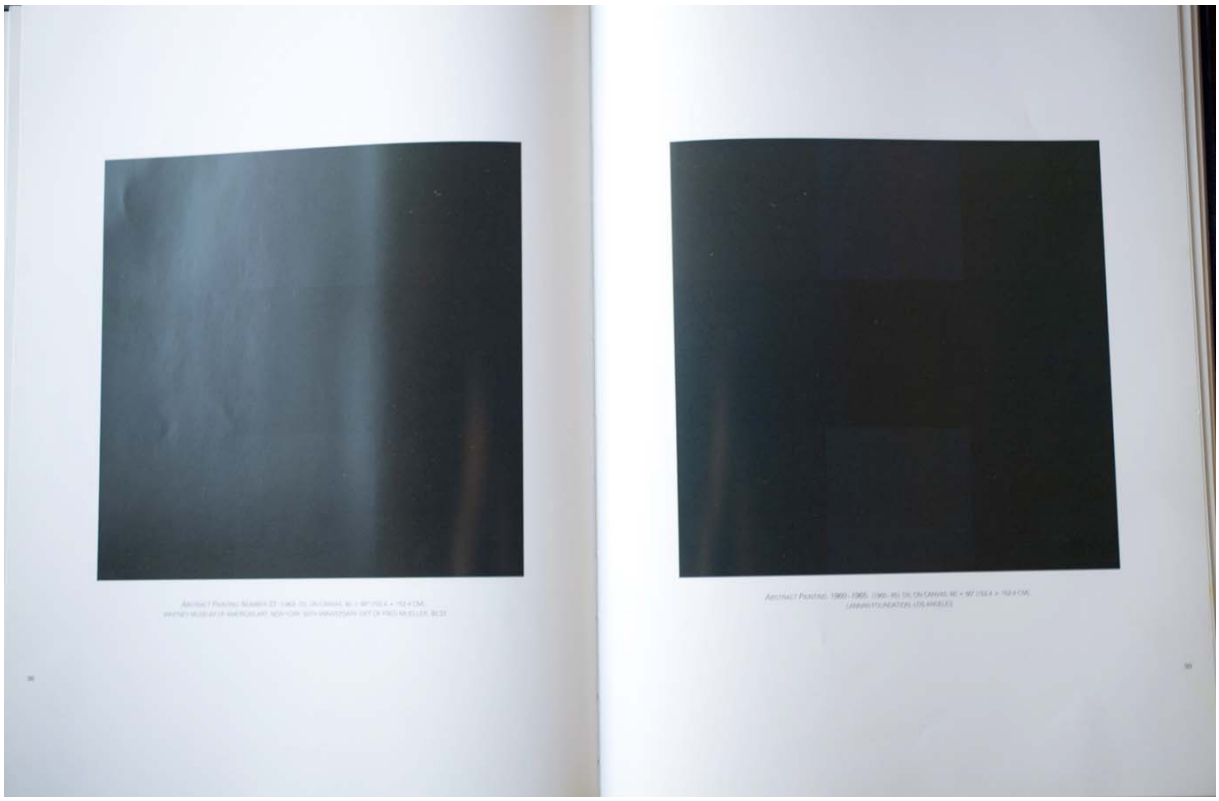


Figure 3

26 Yve-Alain Bois and William Rubin, *AD REINHARDT* (The Museum of Modern Art, Museum of Contemporary Art & Rizzoli International Publications, 1991), 13

In addressing the natural world I felt compelled to bring in culture's relationship to it. I believe the physical artwork itself[27] should embody contradiction and conflict. This is how it differs from science.

Ashley Bickerton[28]

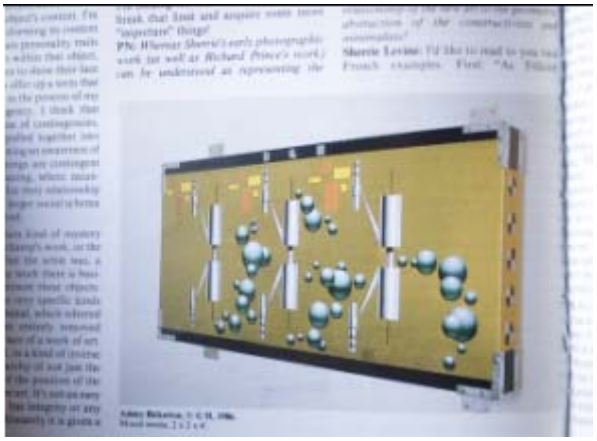


Figure 4

When the serious is tinted with humor, it makes a nicer color.

Marcel Duchamp[29]

A work of art when placed in a gallery loses its charge, and becomes a portable object or surface disengaged from the outside world. A vacant white room with lights is still a submission to the neutral.[30] Works of art seen in such spaces seem to be going through a kind of aesthetic convalescence. They are looked upon as so many inanimate invalids, waiting for critics to pronounce them curable or incurable. The function of the warden-curator is to separate art from the rest of society. Next comes integration. Once the work of art is totally neutralized, ineffective, abstracted, safe, and politically lobotomized it is ready to be consumed

---

27 What Bickerton proposes seems similar to what is proposed by the physical outcome as seen in Gareth Moore's drywall-photographs.

28 Richard Armstrong et al., *Mind over Matter: Concept and Object* (Whitney Museum of American Art, 1990),

29 Jens Hoffman, "Andreas Slominski: Adventures," *Flash Art* (International Edition) v.36 (May/June 2003): 134.

30 By now it is a given that when a urinal is shown within the context of a white cube it means something other than when it is hanging in a washroom. It is because of this that Boris Groys (complimentary to the gesture of Duchamp) argues that the institution of art is indeed needed; it is only within the exhibition context that art is free from other external contexts and thereby freely comparable to its own traditions. In other words it is the meeting place between the contemporary and its history. Though Smithson's argument is a valid one, the breaking down of the exhibition context would evidently bring the urinal back to being urinated in. One might argue that the institution (conservative by definition) refuses art's entrance to real life, though one can easily argue, and indeed I will do so now, that the fall of high modernism (which Smithson unfortunately never lived to experience) has made it possible for real life to enter the institution.

by society. All is reduced to visual fodder and transportable merchandise. Innovations are allowed only if they support this kind of confinement.

Robert Smithson[31]

In order for the tourists to fully appreciate the place, the city had laid on what can best be described as a novelty street train. The train, which was in fact a disguised truck pulling decorated trailers, would wind its way through the narrow streets taking visitors on a guided tour of the city. Coincidentally, at night the train was parked close to the exhibition venue. This was convenient; after evenings out in the city bars, the organizers would often catch a ride back to the gallery sitting drunkenly in the carriages of the novelty street train, grinning and waving at the passers-by. As the exhibition approached, arrangements were made for the opening night. The dinner was to be held in a city centre restaurant. Someone suggested that the street train should be employed to transport visiting international art people from the exhibition to the dinner. The idea of using the street train was vetoed by the director of the space on the grounds that she was worried that sub-Disney forms of transport might make Rudi Fuchs, Jan Hoet, Jack Lang and others look foolish. Within the world of international art curating, a certain protocol exists.[32] For all the creativity and change that surround contemporary art exhibitions, there is an equal amount of stasis and sense of responsibility.

Liam Gillick[33]

In art history Stella marked an absolute point when he broke down the art process: the stretcher defined the image, the image defined the stretcher. What you saw was what you got, becoming an absolute, final, endgame equation. What Stella left undone was the fact that this object was catalogued and indexed into art history – his paintings became logos essentially for the corporation Stella. But he left out the backside, the placement, the value, the recognition and the objectness as it existed outside of that point of authentic/aesthetic reckoning on the gallery wall. I wanted to address this and take it to its logical, or illogical if you like[34], extreme: what that

---

31 Paul F. Fabozzi, *Artists, Critics, Context: Readings in and Around American Art since 1945* (Prentice Hall, 2001), 248

32 Though the exhibition in question happened close to twenty years ago, it seems that this protocol is still at least partly intact and is clearly contradictive to the nature of art, where innovative ideas and alternative solutions seem to be the norm. This contradiction is often clearest when looking at the production of exhibition catalogues, let's say of Thomas Hirshhorn's work, often a beautiful object in itself, though the art that the book is designed to depict consists of cardboard and scotch tape (as in the case of Thomas Hirshhorn). Formal decisions made to challenge the commercial systems which art inevitably takes part in can be seen in local artist Gareth Moore's choice to mount several of his photographs on drywall, forcing the artwork to disappear over time.

33 Liam Gillick, *Liam Gillick: Proxemics Selected Essays, 1988-2006* (JRP/Ringier, 2006), 77-78

34 This is a classic rhetoric move to set up an unattackable statement. During my childhood I had a cousin that grew up close to my grandmother's house in the countryside of Southern Norway. He was two years my senior, but shy and without siblings. Thus, when I was visiting, I was usually in charge of what and how we played together, which suited me fine. Though when we grew older I noticed that my cousin sometimes would come up with suggestions of activities, only to dismiss his own proposal in a following sentence with laughter and claiming that it was a joke, even though the proposal was plausible and as a joke it did not work.

object is, how it operates, how one contemplates exactly what it is one is dealing with in all of its facets.

Ashley Bickerton[35]

When Flavin works come to auction today, important factors affecting their price are the presence and condition of original parts. Sculptures with original bulbs or fixtures go for more than those with obvious restorations or, horrors, new materials. “To use an analogy, it's a lot like the vintage furniture market,” said the lawyer whose purchase Mr. Morse[36] vetted. "Have you ever been in a shop full of over-restored antiques? There are certainly people who like that kind of thing, but it’s not a sophisticated taste."

It was, however, how the artist preferred his work. "When he started to see that the work wasn't being adequately cared for," Mr. Morse recalled, “he'd say, ‘That needs to be replaced,’ and that would be replaced.” But today, despite Flavin's preferences, the estate recommends repairing rust spots or chipped enamel, rather than replacing the entire fixture.

“This is the influence of the marketplace,” Tiffany Bell acknowledged. Or as Mr. Morse put it, it’s “one of Flavin's myriad contradictions.”

One factor in valuing a Flavin, however, dwarfs all others: the certificate that accompanied its production. <..>

When Ms. Bell asked Flavin directly in 1982, “Are you interested in obtaining a kind of permanence for your work through Dia?,” Flavin responded: “One has no choice but to accept the fact of temporary art. Permanence just defies everything. I used to say that I did my certificates on a pulp paper because therefore I knew they would disintegrate. I would like to leave a will and testament to declare everything void at my death, and it's not unrealistic. I mean it, because only I know the work as it ought to be. All posthumous interpretations are less. I know this. So I would rather see it all disappear into the wind. Take it all away. It's electric current with a switch – dubious.” Of course, in the 14 years after he said that, Flavin worked –often with Dia – to ensure that his art and legacy would continue into the future.

Newspaper article about dealing with Dan Flavin’s work after his death[37]

Today’s fight for modernity lies in being waged in the same terms as yesterday’s, barring the fact that the avant-garde has stopped patrolling like some scout, the troop having come to a cautious standstill around a bivouac of certainties. Art was intended to prepare and announce a future world: today it is modeling possible universes.

The ambition of artists who include their practice within the slipstream of historical modernity is to repeat neither its forms nor its claims, and even less assign to art the same functions as it. Their task is akin to the one that Jean-

---

35 Shaun Caley, “Ashley Bickerton – A Revealing Exposé of The Application of Art,” *Flash Art* (International Edition) no. 143 (November/December 1988), 79

36 Steve Morse worked as Flavin’s shop manager from 1991-96, and is today responsible for supervising the exhibiting, preservation and authentication of Flavin’s work.

37 Greg Allen, “The Dark Side of Success,” *The New York Times*, January 2, 2005, http://www.nytimes.com/2005/01/02/arts/design/02alle.html (accessed March 5, 2009)

Francois Lyotard allocated to post-modern architecture, which "is condemned to create a series of minor modifications in a space whose modernity it inherits, and abandon an overall reconstruction of the space inhabited by humankind."[38] What is more, Lyotard seems to half-bemoan this state of affairs: he defines it negatively, by using the term "condemned". And what, on the other hand, if this "condemnation" represented the historical chance whereby most of the art world's known to us managed to spread their wings, over the past ten years or so? This "chance" can be summed up in just a few words: *learning to inhabit the world in a better way,*[39] instead of trying to construct it based on a preconceived idea of historical evolution.

Nicolas Bourriaud[40]

Stylization presupposes style: that is, it presupposes that the sum total of stylistic devices that it reproduces did at one time possess a direct an unmediated intentionality and expressed an ultimate semantic authority. Only discourses of the first type can be the object of stylization. Stylization forces another person's referential (artistically referential) intention to serve its own purposes, that is, its new intentions. The stylizer uses another's discourse precisely as other, and in so doing casts a slight shadow of objectification over it. To be sure, the discourse does not become an object. After all, what is important to the stylizer is the sum total of devices associated with the other's speech precisely as an expression of a particular point of view. He works with someone else's point of view. Therefore a certain shadow of objectification falls precisely on that very point of view, and consequently it becomes conditional. The objectified speech of a character is never conditional. A character always speaks in earnest. The author's attitude does not penetrate inside his speech— the author observes it from without.

Conditional discourse is always double-voiced discourse. Only that which was at one time unconditional, in earnest, can become conditional. The original direct and unconditional meaning now serves new purposes, which take possession of it from within and render it conditional. This is what distinguishes stylization from imitation. Imitation does not render a form conditional, for it takes the imitated material seriously, makes it its own, directly appropriates to itself someone else's discourse. <..>

The situation is different with parody. Here, as in stylization, the author again speaks in someone else's discourse, but in contrast to stylization parody introduces into that discourse a semantic intention that is directly opposed to the original one. The second voice, once having made its home in the other's discourse, clashes

---

38 When Liam Gillick appropriates corporate interior design and jargon in his installations, the only minor modification is the change of intent, which changes the work from its initial state to a critique of itself by the use of irony. When Santiago Sierra tattoos prostitutes or pays illegal workers to perform meaningless gestures, his work is mirroring society the way mirrored facades of corporate buildings mirror their surroundings. Although similar, the two approaches differ in what Mikhail Bakhtin refers to as parody (Gillick) and stylization (Sierra). Another artist exploring the area between the two is Janice Kerbel, most notably in her work Bird Island, a functioning website describing a fictitious island paradise for the intention of real estate marketing.

39 Bourriaud's perhaps overly optimistic reading has been critiqued, most notably by Claire Bishop, principally on the notion that the micro-utopias created by artists such as Rikrit Tiravanija fail to break out from the institutional setting in which they are staged.

40 Nicolas Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics* (Les Presse Du Reel, France, 1998), 13

hostilely with its primordial host and forces him to serve directly opposing aims. Discourse becomes an arena of battle between two voices. In parody, therefore, there cannot be that fusion of voices possible in stylization or in the narration of the narrator (as in Turgenev, for example); the voices are not only isolated from one another, separated by a distance, but are also hostilely opposed. Thus in parody the deliberate palpability of the other's discourse must be particularly sharp and clearly and clearly marked.

Mikhail Bakhtin[41]

Hegel remarks somewhere that all great world-historic facts and personages appear, so to speak, twice. He forgot to add: the first time as tragedy, the second time as farce."

Karl Marx on Louis Bonaparte's coup d'état in 1851[42]

As a result of inadequate preservation efforts, time was not kind to the original, which slowly decomposed until its form changed, its skin grew deeply wrinkled, and the solution in the tank turned murky. (It didn't help that the Saatchi Gallery added bleach to the solution, hastening the decay, staff members at Mr. Hirst's studio said.) In 1993 Mr. Saatchi's curators finally had the shark skinned and stretched the skin over a fiberglass mold. "It didn't look as frightening,'' Mr. Hirst recalled. "You could tell it wasn't real. It had no weight.''[43]

Hirst on renovating his Shark [44]

"So then I made a gesture with my right hand," Wynn said, "and my right elbow hit the picture. It punctured the picture." There was a distinct ripping sound. Wynn turned around and saw, on Marie-Thérèse Walter's left forearm, in the lower-right quadrant of the painting, "a slight puncture, a two-inch tear. We all just stopped. I said, 'I can't believe I just did that. Oh, shit. Oh, man.'"[45]

Collector Steve Wynn after putting his elbow through Picasso's "La Rêve"[46]

---

41 Mikhail Mikhailovich Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* (University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 189-190,193

42 Wikipedia contributors, "The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Napoleon," http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Eighteenth_Brumaire_of_Louis_Napoleon

43 Damien Hirst explaining why he chose to replace the original shark in his signature work *The Physical Impossibility of Death in the Mind of Someone Living*.

44 Carol Vogel, "Swimming with Famous Dead Sharks," *The New York Times*, October 1, 2006, http://www.nytimes.com/2006/10/01/arts/design/01voge.html (accessed March 5, 2009)

45 The incident happened shortly after Wynn had agreed to sell the painting for a then world record of $139 million—a contract that was of course cancelled following the accident. Wynn later sued Lloyd's of London, his insurance company, for failing to pay off a $54 million insurance claim that represented the painting's estimated fall in value, even though the tear was eventually repaired after a $90,000 restoration. The incident suggests that the painting has a higher value as historical artifact than a work of art.

46 Nick Paumgarten, "The $40-million elbow," *The New Yorker*, October 23, 2006. http://www.newyorker.com/archive/2006/10/23/061023ta_talk_paumgarten (accessed March 5, 2009).

It might simply be that once you are aware of an artwork as merely the tangible outcome of more complex actions, it is impossible to reinstate the authority of the object [47] – like trying not to notice the mechanism of breathing once attention has been drawn to it.

Sara O'Reilly[48]


Frage. Und so meine ich, dass die Kunst, die sich
dem musealen Zwang entzieht und mehr mit den
Erwartungen, mit der Erfüllung der Erwartung

durchschossen. Das sind Geschichten, die als Ge
schichten faszinieren und archetypisch sind. Wenn

ANDREAS SLOMINSKI, LATERNE MIT REIFEN, 1996. Linkes Bild: Ausheben der Laterne für das Umlegen des Reifens, -Skulptur. Projekte Münster 1997- / LANTERN WITH TIRE. Left: digging up the lantern to place the tire around it.

104

Figure 5

In 1913, Kazimir Malevich, placing a black square on a white background that he identified as the "void", created the first Supremacist composition. A year later, Marcel Duchamp exhibited as an original work of art a standard metal bottle rack, which he called a "ready-made". For half a century, these two works marked the limit of visual art. Now, however, it appears that a new generation of artists, whom seem not so much inspired as impressed by Malevich and Duchamp (to the extent that they venerate them), are examining in a new context the implications of their

47 O'Reilly's comment seems to me a sober observation of what I would argue is the most common view of how art operates today, thus the practical examples of how the market treats the art object (Flavin, Hirst, Picasso) is clearly paradoxical. O'Reilly's comment also proposes an alternate form of minimalism I feel is rooted in Duchamp rather than Malevich; to use whatever form/object necessary to demonstrate the process without aesthetically improvements. An extreme example of this would be German artist Andreas Slominski's work (the person of which O'Reilly is indeed talking about, though in relation to a different work) at the Skulptur Projekte in the Westphalian city of Münster in 1997. Commissioned to do an artwork for the city, Slominski placed a bicycle tire around one of the city's streetlamps, though instead of renting a lift and threading the bicycle tire on from the top down, which might be seen as the most rational way of completing the work, Slominski, in what may be described as a dada-esque move, insisted on threading it on from underneath. Thus the lamp post was to be uprooted with the help of a digger and work crew, its wires cut off, the tire threaded on, the wires reconnected and the lamp post returned to it's original state (Though there might have been traces from the production as I have only seen reproductions of the work).

48 Sara O'Reilly, "Andreas Slominski: Serpentine Gallery, London," *Art Monthly* no. 287 (June 2005): 24

radical decisions. Often the results are a curious synthesis of the two men's work. That such a synthesis should be not only possible but likely is clear in retrospect. For although superficially Malevich and Duchamp may appear to represent the polarities of twentieth-century art— that is on one hand, the search for the transcendent, universal, absolute, and on the other, the blanket denial of the existence of absolute values – the two have more in common than one might suppose at first.

The inevitability of a logical evolution toward a reductive art was obvious to them already. For Malevich, the poetic Slav, this realization forced a turning inward toward an inspirational mysticism, whereas for Duchamp, the rational Frenchman, it meant a fatigue so enervating that finally the wish to paint at all was killed. The yearnings of Malevich's Slavic soul and the deductions of Duchamp's rationalist mind led both men ultimately to reject and exclude from their work many of the most cherished premises of Western art in favor of an art stripped to its bare, irreducible minimum.

It is important to keep in mind that both Duchamp's and Malevich's decisions were renunciations – on Duchamp's part, of the notion of the uniqueness of the art object and its differentiation from common objects, and on Malevich's part, a renunciation of the notion that art must be complex.[49]

Barbara Rose[50]

Figure 6

It opens with a black silk hat coming to rest on a cobblestone street in an old European town. Graham, as Country Self, picks it up, brushes it off, and puts it on his head. Cut to Graham, as City Self, striding purposefully down a narrow street. Country Self, after pausing at his reflection in a window, continues his stroll. Filming him from behind, the camera drops down to reveal a large target-like patch in his pants seat. Returning to City Self, the next shot features a shoeshine boy brushing the dandy's extravagant red and black shoes. Slowly the camera pans up along his striped trouser leg and stylish plaid jacket before coming to rest on his bored face beneath a black top hat. The shot once again jumps quickly to Country Self, who, ambling along, looks up at the town clock (it's 11:55) and then glances at the church bell tower, perhaps anticipating the strike of midday. The camera breaks from tracking the two to pull back for a wider street view with a horse-drawn carriage and passing pedestrians. As Country Self pauses below a stone statue of a martyr with its decapitated head in his hands, City Self approaches briskly. A series of frames then alternates between the men and the now-audible approaching carriage. After the carriage passes, the country gents

49 The sensibility Rose identifies seems to propose what in hindsight can be described as the parallel beginning of modernism (Malevich) and postmodernism (Duchamp).

50 Barbara Rose, *Autocritique: Essays on Art and Anti-Art, 1963-1987*, 1st ed. (Grove Pr, 1988), 56-57

steps into the street as the dandy follows him; the carriage drivers glance sharply back at them. As the clock's hand sweeps to noon, the dandy's leg swings to meet the bumpkin's derrière. Country Self stumbles and his hat tumbles to the ground. The kick repeats and repeats captured from many angles. The film, which becomes silent at the stroke of twelve, resumes its soundtrack as the clock ticks to the next minute. The loud clopping of hooves returns as the carriage rolls on; the dandy takes a turn down a side street. Immediately afterward the opening shot appears again,[51] with a black silk hat coming to rest on the cobblestones.[52]

Sara Krajewski on Rodney Graham's *Country Self/City Self*[53]

I got interested in the idea of the clown first of all because there is a mask, and it becomes an abstracted idea of a person. And for this reason, because clowns are abstract in some sense, they become very disconcerting. You, I , one, we can't make contact with them. It's hard to make any contact with an idea or an abstraction. Also, when you think about vaudeville clowns or circus clowns, there is a lot of cruelty and meanness. You couldn't get away with that without make-up. People wouldn't put up with it, it's too mean.

Figure 7

Bruce Nauman[54]

51 Rodney Graham's use of the loop seems to present a stasis, or balance, rather than a form of repetition. Many of his films do not have a start or an ending, his upside-down photographs (or his later drip-paintings) hover between our perception of the world and its opposite; the optical registration of light through the lens of the eye being opposite of what we see as "the right way". In this manner they resemble Carsten Holler's Upside Down Glasses, exhibited for the first time in 2001; glasses that, as the title suggests, turn the world upside down.

52 Graham's work "Country Self/City Self" presents us with the struggle between the intellectual dandy and the naïve, but good, country fool. Though the dandy physically wins an encounter in the street, it is the Country Self that wins the sympathy of the viewer, truly coming out on top.

53 Grant Arnold et al., *Rodney Graham: A Little Thought* (The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, 2004), 33-34

54 Jennifer Higgie, *The Artist's Joke* (The MIT Press, 2007), 82-83

Figure 8

A picture sketched by Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin has fetched a record 37 million rubles ($1.15 million) at a charity auction in his hometown of St Petersburg. The painting of snowfall seen through a window, finished by a professional artist, features a sprawling "Putin" signature and was introduced with the words: "Here is a new artist." It has become the most expensive painting ever sold in Russia, selling for more than the fourth version of Kazimir Malevich's Black Square, which was bought by the Hermitage museum in 2004 for $1 million.[55]

Vladimir Putin becomes the most expensive artist in the history of Russia[56]

Those assigned the status of the fool are no longer restricted or inhibited by custom, propriety or convention.[57] The fool is free from moral strictures and ethical proscriptions.

Faye Ran-Moseley[58]

---

55 When looking at the painting, this episode demonstrates the absolute confirmation of the truism that the valuation of art is still being decided largely by the signature of the author rather than the quality of the work itself. (Though in art's defense the profits went to charity).

56 BBC News, "Putin's record-breaking painting," http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/7836638.stm

57 It is in these terms that the artist resembles the fool the most. Free from moral and ethical prescriptions the artist's role seems to be to contradict current conventions and search out alternate solutions.

58 Faye Ran-Moseley, *The Tragicomic Passion: A History and Analysis of Tragicomedy and Tragicomic Characterization in Drama, Film, and Literature* (Peter Lang Publishing, 1994), 5

The insensible colonization of the present by the nostalgia mode can be observed in Lawrence Kasdan's elegant film *Body Heat*, a distant "affluent society" remake of James M. Cain's *Double Indemnity*, set in a contemporary Florida small town a few hours' drive from Miami. The word *remake* is, however, anachronistic to the degree to which our awareness of the preexistence of other versions (previous films of the novel as well as the novel itself) is now a constitutive and essential part of the film's structure: we are now, in other words, in "intertextuality" as a deliberate, built-in feature of the aesthetic effect and as the operator of a new connotation of "pastness" and pseudohistorical depth, in which the history of aesthetic styles displaces "real" history.

Yet from the outset a whole battery of aesthetic signs begin to distance the officially contemporary image from us in time: the art deco scripting of the credits, for example, serves at once to program the spectator to the appropriate "nostalgia" mode of reception (art deco quotation has much the same function in contemporary architecture, as in Toronto's remarkable Eaton Centre). Meanwhile, a somewhat different play of connotations is activated by complex (but purely formal) allusions to the institution of the star system itself. The protagonist, William Hurt, is one of a new generation of film "stars" whose status is markedly distinct from that of the preceding generation of male superstars, such as Steve McQueen or Jack Nicholson (or even, more distantly, Brando), let alone of earlier moments in the evolution of the institution of the star. The immediately preceding generation projected their various roles through and by way of their well-known off-screen personalities, which often connoted rebellion and non-conformism. The latest generation of starring actors continues to assure the conventional functions of stardom (most notably sexuality) but in the utter absence of "personality" in the older sense, and with something of the anonymity of character acting (which in actors like Hurt reaches virtuoso proportions, yet of a very different kind than the virtuosity of the older Brando or Olivier). This "death of the subject" in the institution of the star now, however, opens up the possibility of a play of historical allusions to much older roles—in this case to those associated with Clark Gable – so that the very style of the acting can now also serve as a "connotator" of the past.

Finally, the setting has been strategically framed, with great ingenuity, to eschew most of the signals that normally convey the contemporaneity of the United States in its multinational era: the small-town setting allows the camera to elude the high-rise landscape of the 1970s and 1980s (even though a key episode in the narrative involves that fatal destruction of older buildings by land speculators), while the object world of the present day- artifacts and appliances, whose styling would at once serve to date the image – is elaborately edited out. Everything in the film, therefore, conspires to blur its official contemporaneity and make it possible for the viewer to receive the narrative as though it were set in some eternal thirties, beyond real historical time.[59] This approach to the present by way of the art

---

59 Of all the "aha" moments I have experienced while reading Jameson's essay "Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism", it is his breakdown of the film Body Heat that coincided most directly with my work. A couple of years ago I was watching *Basic Instinct* with the director's commentary track consisting of director Paul Verhoeven and someone I think was the director of photography conversing and commenting on choices made while making the film back in the early 90s. Their comments varied from the problems involved in the making of a fake Picasso for Catherine Tramell's hall to their run-in with the gay community in San Francisco who were strongly against Verhoeven inclusion of a bi-sexual serial killer as the protagonist of the film. It was Verhoeven's comments on how he had based part of Tramell's character on Kathleen Turner's portrait of ruthless famme fatalle Matty Walker that turned me in the direction of

language of the simulacrum, or of the pastiche of the stereotypical past, endows present reality and the openness of present history with the spell and distance of a glossy mirage. Yet this mesmerizing new aesthetic mode itself emerged as an elaborated symptom of the waning of historicity, of our lived possibility of experiencing history in some active way. It cannot therefore be said to produce this strange occultation of the present by its own formal power, but rather merely to demonstrate, through these inner contradictions, the enormity of a situation in which we seem increasingly incapable of fashioning representations of our own current experience.

Fredric Jameson[60]

Stéphane Ollivier, France: For you, what is the aim of art today?
Maurizio Cattelan: the word "aim" makes me think of shooting a gun. I'm not so interested in targets or aims. I prefer mistakes.

Interview with Maurizio Cattelan[61]

The derivation of the word "fool" is the Latin "follis," meaning a pair of bellows expelling empty air; extended to persons, it implies insubstantial thought, and applied to phenomena, it casts doubt on the "finality" and even the "reality" of fact. Perhaps the prevalence of the fool may be accounted for through its definition as a type of person who is both ridiculous and inferior, one who represents the failure, and consequences of failure, of the individual who does not internalize or function according to given social values and standards.

Faye Ran-Moseley[62]

1. Artistic Originality (ah)
2. Scientific Discovery (aha)
3. Comic Inspiration (ha ha)[63]

"The Three Domains of Creativity" as proposed by Arthur Koestler[64]

I think that we are actually dealing with a gradual shift concerning the relationship between art and the market, and this shift is reflected in the market's increased

---

the 1981 film *Body Heat* (and later the soundtrack). I soon realized that the neo-noir elements that had interested me in *Basic Instinct* (though I did not know that at the time), were stronger in *Body Heat*, and that this earlier film provided a better example of the genre and the remixing of history that the genre represents.

60 Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Duke University Press, 2000), 20-21

61 Giancarlo Politi and the readers of *Flash Art*, "Killing Me Softly – A Conversation With Maurizio Cattelan," *Flash Art* (International Edition) v.37 (July/September 2004): 91

62 Faye Ran-Moseley, *The Tragicomic Passion: A History and Analysis of Tragicomedy and Tragicomic Characterization in Drama, Film, and Literature* (Peter Lang Publishing, 1994), 2

63 Koestler's observation, originally from 1981, seems relevant to my work, though I seem to start off with the part he calls comic inspiration rather than the artistic originality. This process proves to be inconvenient, as I often end up struggling with the originality later on, resulting in the forfeit of the original idea after spending large amounts of time and energy on it.

64 Edgar Arceneaux, *The Alchemy of Comedy... Stupid* (WhiteWalls, 2007), 39

power of definition over what is regarded as a meaningful work of art. In other words, what has changed for artistic production since the '60s and 80s is the very structure of its universe—which has become a mass corporate industry embracing the logic of celebrity culture. For some portions of the art world this was already true in previous decades, I know, but this approach has recently become a strong collective ideal, with relatively few skeptics. In fact, one could argue that the artistic field has changed insofar as it was formerly more polarized and organized around clear-cut enemy camps—the "Pictures" generation set itself against so-called neo-expressionism, for example—whereas now we live in a kind of network capitalism where everybody is forced to cooperate.[65] This might explain why market success has such authority these days. Financial pressures have increased, and economic constraints reach more directly into all aspects of our lives.

Isabelle Graw[66]

The joke teller typically starts a logical chain of events. The punchline then sharply cuts across the chain with a totally unexpected line.[67] The tension developed in the first line is therefore shown to be a put-on, and with its release, the audience laughs.

Edgar Arceneaux[68]

But while comedy is defined in part by its investment in commentary, by its parodic relationship to lived experience[69], the laughter elicited by Dan Quayle's ridiculousness is tinged by the terrifying fact that there is no pun intended: what rivets us is not the ironic distancing of examined lift but the fascinating arrogance of stupidity.

Barbara Kruger[70]

The fool selects, organizes, and interprets information about societal structures and values by using contrastive and subversive devices. Folly has become cross-culturally institutionalized because each and every society needs to isolate contrary behavior for criticism and correction; these critiques, in turn, reinforce social ideas and conventions. Fools, paradoxically, are able to use their subversive dialectical

---

65 This consequence is clearly demonstrated by larger group exhibitions at public venues like the Vancouver Art Gallery where a certain amount of prestige is connected to the inclusion of your art work in the show and the curating usually has a looser form because of the sheer number of artists included in the exhibition. This is apparent in an exhibition such as the Vancouver Art Gallery's How Soon is Now. The "problem" arises when this structure is compared to the modernist notions of antagonism as a route for progression, though I personally think cooperation is not necessarily a synonym for agreement.

66 Amy Cappellazzo et al., "Art and Its Markets: A Roundtable Discussion," *Artforum International* v. 46 no. 8 (April 2008): 294

67 The sharp cut of the logical chain of events the punchline represents in the structure of a joke is comparable to what Bickerton describes as the need for art to inhabit contradiction to differ from science.

68 Edgar Arceneaux, *The Alchemy of Comedy... Stupid* (WhiteWalls, 2007), 40

69 If the artist's role is to reflect society, humor's relation to lived experience and commentary makes it a natural choice of technique.

70 Jennifer Higgie, *The Artist's Joke* (The MIT Press, 2007), 108.

nature to create a corrective "poetics of contradiction," deflating ideological pretensions, subverting tradition and exposing the limitations of social convention. <..> The fool is the amphibian individual whose philosophic home base resides in tragic or comic circumstance and whose social existence mirrors both twentieth century order and chaos, humanism and absurdity. He or she will perfectly embody imperfection and absurdity triumph over the absurd. The archetypal fool remains a source of inspiration and renewal. He remains in the vanguard, showing us the way-the right way or the wrong way. He will, however, never tell us which is which. Therein lies the potential for tragedy, comedy, and more often than not, tragicomedy.

Faye Ran-Moseley[71]

Steve Lafreniere: Do you think the big names of the 80's would have thrived if they'd come of age in the 70's?
Ashley Bickerton: It would have been the same faces, just doing whatever was being done back then. In the 70's, we would have all been running around the desert. It's always the same force of will.[72]

Ashley Bickerton in conversation with Steve Lafreniere[73]

It should be pointed out that the carnival sense of the world also knows no period, and is, in fact, hostile to any sort of *conclusive conclusion*: all endings are merely new beginnings; carnival images are reborn again and again.[74] <..> The catharsis that finalizes Dostoevsky's novels might be—of course inadequately and somewhat rationalistically—expressed: *Nothing conclusive has yet taken place in the world, the ultimate word of the world and about the world has not yet been spoken, the world is open and free, everything is still in the future and will always be in the future*.

Mikhail Bakhtin[75]

---

71 Faye Ran-Moseley, *The Tragicomic Passion: A History and Analysis of Tragicomedy and Tragicomic Characterization in Drama, Film, and Literature* (Peter Lang Publishing, 1994), 54-55.

72 The argument seems to reflect the result of artists of certain periods who usually end up being influenced by the same sources (Marx, Benjamin, Wittgenstein, McLuhan, Greenberg, Derrida, Foucault, Deleuze/Guattari, Bourriaud, Groys and Augé are prominent examples).

73 Steve Lafreniere, "Ashley Bickerton talks to Steve Lafreniere," *Artforum International* v. 41 no. 7 (March 2003): 281.

74 The European carnivals represented a welcome break from the hard times of Medieval Europe. When critiquing the writings of Dostoevsky, Bakhtin proposes that carnevalesque culture was linked to the notions of change and renewal, and thus represented the human victory over what Bakhtin refers to as a mystic terror of god, be that authoritarian oligarchies or the wrath and punishment often preached by the Catholic Church during the middle ages. On a more contemporary note, a similar reaction could be observed in the US (and most of the Western World) over the last couple of years of George W. Bush's presidency, when, while maintaining the anger and hopelessness that most people experienced when faced with Bush, people started appreciating the many mistakes and errors that Bush's clumsy nature contributed to mass culture, mostly through emails and online videos.

75 Mikhail Mikhailovich Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* (University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 165-166

Conclusion

My intention with this text was to encapsulate a body of research undertaken during my two years in the Master of Visual Arts program with an arrangement of sources and interests that surround my practice. The fragmented structure places emphasis on the role of the artist-as-editor proposed by Bourriaud, focusing the reader on the formations created by the arrangement of those quotes and excerpts that I have chosen to include. By leaving the raw material (in this case the quotes) as untouched as possible I hoped to present a more honest process than the singular reading the rewriting and customization that a more conventional paper would dictate (usually to strengthen an argument). The footnotes, more informal in their structure than a traditional text, gave me the opportunity to more freely propose the plausible and temporal truths for which I am searching, while escaping the notions of autoanalysis, a structure I find unproductive, or even naïve. With this in mind, the unconventional structure seemed appropriate as a bridge between the paper and my work.

Upon finishing the paper I realized that the significance seemed to materialize in three parallel lines: The structure of the paper, not unlike the postmodern architecture of the building in which I was writing it, reflected my fragmented and nebulous process. Secondly, its subject, the content of the quotes I had chosen to include, reflects more specifically the content and context that I had been dealing with in my work. Finally, the combination of these two demonstrates both my use of the knowledge obtained in

my studies and the acknowledgement and awareness of the gaps lacking in this knowledge.

In hindsight (and I choose this word intentionally), this division illustrates how knowledge becomes production in a shift from looking backwards to looking forward. As I find myself in the closing months of my relatively short period in art school, I realize that my exploration in art history has taken a somewhat reverse chronological direction, starting where it is supposed to end. In these two years, I have started with contemporary writers, then following up on their references to the past by highlighting names or -isms that were unknown to me at the time, and moving back to contemporary time to read the texts again with a fuller understanding. This research is not yet finished, and I suspect that it will continue. In contrast, when making work, by combinations and arrangements of borrowed, stolen, or invented material, I am moving towards the future (though in a fashion comparable to walking foreword while looking backwards), testing and proposing alternative ways and perspectives, no matter how successful or unsuccessful the results might be.

Undoubtedly my work is strongly influenced by the texts that I read, artists I admire, or even the current “force of will” Bickerton suggests in one of the aforementioned quotes. Nonetheless, I find the production of art ultimately to be of an unconscious and personal nature and I have, through trial and error, come to several conclusions: Coincidences, negotiations, and decisions made, often occur based on uncertainty rather than on a logical conclusion. Paradoxically, these notions of uncertainty seem to strengthen the work rather than weaken it. Secondly, the production of an artwork

must be performed on uncertain ground (in either material or subject), assuring a challenge for the frame of limitations reflected upon in the introduction of this text. Thirdly, and this may be the most important circumstance; I find that the presence of honesty (usually backed by bravery or stupidity) seems crucial to the production of a successful work. On the risk of getting too personal, I feel the need to specify that the honesty I am referring to is not to be confused with speaking truth. What I am referring to is an honesty towards oneself and one's own work, a balance quickly corrupted by the conventions of social structure and the general "strive for acceptance" (translated as a young artist's concerns around not getting considered for exhibitions or finding gallery representation). Without the state of clarity and calmness needed to pursue the personal sensations one believes to be right, I find it impossible, or at the least very unlikely, that good work will be produced.

I believe that the artwork I have realized for the graduation exhibition to meet the abovementioned conditions. Born out of my life-long fascination with ships and naval history, the work began as a response to a postcard project realized at the ISCP in New York. A few days prior to receiving the invitation to submit, I had (by coincidence, while reading about the ocean liner *Olympic*), come across a type of camouflage called "Dazzle" or "Razzle Dazzle", which I later followed up with the help of the Vancouver Maritime Museum and the Vancouver Public Library. Originating from the First World War, the design of the camouflage was based on an attempt to confuse rather than conceal (a clear contradiction to the basic definition of camouflage). I found this contradictive nature appropriate to my practice and I was convinced that I could find use for it in my work.

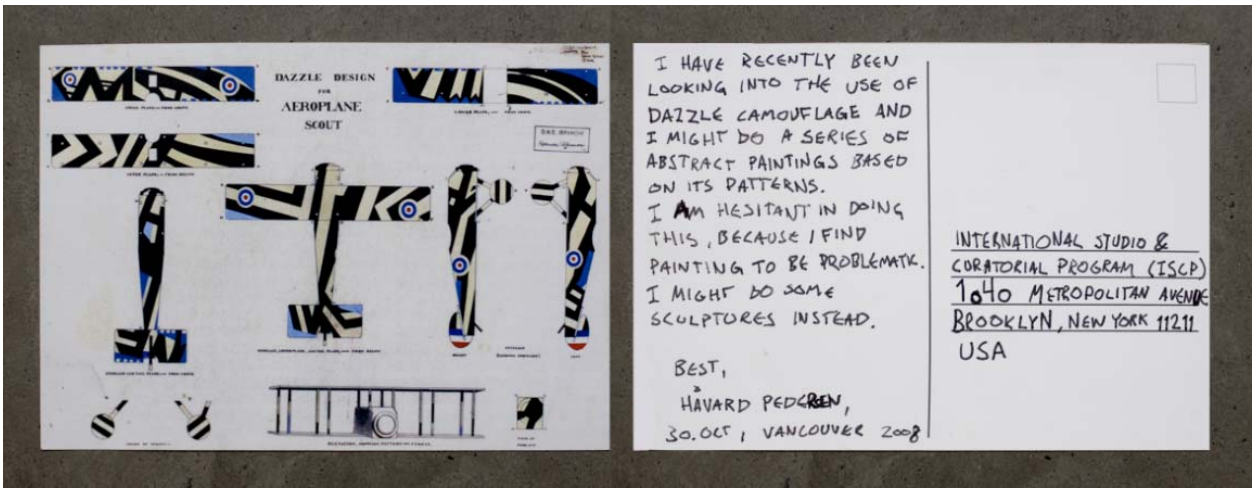


Figure 9

For the graduate exhibition, I had several practical conditions to consider. I knew the work had to be, to borrow the term of American curator Nancy Spector, site-reliant, and that I wanted to address the circus-like nature presented by the exhibition.[1] The gallery will literally be overfilled with conceptually disparate works, and the initial reaction of escaping this, by finding a more solitary space, seemed logical to explore in my work. Though taken as a natural decision for improving my own work, the decision is also of a generous nature, leaving more space for the other participants and thereby improving the totality of the exhibition. The second condition to consider was that the work should somewhat concur with the general subjects of my previous work, a work about my work, rather than being a "one-off". I settled on the idea of confusing one of the top corners of the gallery with the use of dazzle camouflage (in the form of black vinyl foil attached to the gallery walls and ceiling), and thus draw attention to a part of

1 Nancy Spector "Berlin Detours" *Parkett* no.55 (1999): 70

the gallery consistently underused, while attempting to confuse the viewer's perception of it. After these decisions were made, several more needed to be addressed. I had to consider the implications of camouflaging an excerpt of a space rather than an object; I had to consider the difference of a concave field rather then a convex and ultimately I had to consider the camouflaging of a space designed to be exhibited rather than concealed.[2] Finally I had to consider the ultimate historical failure of the "Dazzleflage", as it proved to have no effect other than being an morale boost for the crew and the people inhabiting those ports where the ships where docking, and it was this aspect of the artwork that would ultimately provide me with (to return to the use of the economic term previously mentioned in the introduction of this text) a non-existent opportunity cost, or what can better be described as a some kind of favorable catch-22: If I succeeded in confusing the perception of the corner in a satisfactory manner and if I succeeded in finding a solution within these considered conditions, I will have created a successful work per se. I found the work to have a relation to the practice of abstract painting wherein the formal decisions I made while completing the work were of the highest importance, a consideration I had not encountered in my previous work. In this manner I had set a challenge for myself which I would do my best to solve. Somewhat paradoxically, if I did not succeed with this, then the failure of my work, either conceptually or formally, would coincide with and reflect the failure of my subject matter, thus ultimately, again, leading to the artwork's completion. Both possible outcomes lead to a completion of my intent.

---

2 This consideration was especially complex as the gallery upper wall and ceiling are usually not looked at, and warships are sometimes being used in an exhibition context, as in the case of gunboat diplomacy, displaying military power, and as implied threat.

As I find my practice usually considered in the realm of conceptual art, the abstract gesture of my graduate work seemed problematic. Whenever I found myself in a conversation about the piece, it seemed that the conversation ended with discussion of the conceptual part of the work, even when I insisted that the work was a purely formal gesture. These conversations often left both me and the viewer unsatisfied. The exception to these encounters was my conversations with the abstract painters I invited to discuss some of my earlier studies for the piece, whom all stayed focused on the centre of the work (the abstraction of forms) during the entire conversation, suggesting that the two different contexts (abstract and conceptual) was not combinable. After completing the work in the Charles H. Scott Gallery in 2009, I compared the reception of the work true to the history of its original source. Although the camouflage did not prove to abstract the corner in a significant way, the confrontational design combined with the unexpected placement of the work hopefully provided the gallery-goer with a surprise encounter and caused sensations similar to those had by those surprised by the failed camouflage of the ships of a previous century.

Bibliography

Allen, Greg. “The Dark Side of Success.” *The New York Times*, January 2, 2005. http://www.nytimes.com/2005/01/02/arts/design/02alle.html (accessed March 5, 2009).

Arceneaux, Edgar. *The Alchemy of Comedy... Stupid*. WhiteWalls, 2007.

Armstrong, Richard et al. *Mind over Matter: Concept and Object.* Whitney Museum of American Art, 1990.

Arnold, Grant, Jessica Bradley, Cornelia Butler, Diedrich Diederichsen, Shepherd Steiner, Lynne Cooke, Sara Krajewski, and Rodney Graham. *Rodney Graham: A Little Thought.* The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, 2004.

Bakhtin, Mikhail Mikhailovich. *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics.* University of Minnesota Press, 1984.

BBC News. “Putin’s record-breaking painting.” http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/7836638.stm (accessed March 5, 2009)

Bois, Yve-Alain , and William Rubin. *AD REINHARDT*. The Museum of Modern Art, Museum of Contemporary Art & Rizzoli International Publications, 1991.

Bourriaud, Nicolas. *Postproduction*. 2nd ed. Lukas & Sternberg, 2005.

Bourriaud, Nicolas. *Relational Aesthetics*. Les Presse Du Reel, France, 1998.

Cabanne, Pierre. *Dialogues with Marcel Duchamp*. Pierre Belfond, 1967.

Caley, Shaun. “Ashley Bickerton – A Revealing Exposé of The Application of Art,” Flash Art (International Edition) no. 143 (November/December 1988): 79-81

Cameron, Dan. “Art And Its Double – A New York perspective.” *Flash Art* (International Edition) no. 134 (May 1987): 57-72

Cappellazzo, Amy, Thomas Crow, Donna De Salvo, Isabelle Graw, Tim Griffin, Dakis Joannou, James Meyer, Robert Pincus-Witten and Ai Weiwei. “Art and Its Markets: A Roundtable Discussion.” *Artforum International* v. 46 no. 8 (April 2008): 292-303

Designboom, “Maurizio Cattelan,” http://www.designboom.com/eng/interview/cattelan.html (accessed on March 5, 2009)

Fabozzi, Paul F. *Artists, Critics, Context: Readings in and Around American Art since 1945*. Prentice Hall, 2001.

Gillick, Liam. *Liam Gillick: Proxemics Selected Essays, 1988-2006*. JRP/Ringier, 2006.

Groys, Boris. *Art Power*. MIT Press, 2008.

Hardt, Michael, and Kathi Weeks. *The Jameson Reader*. Wiley-Blackwell, 2000.

Higgie, Jennifer. *The Artist's Joke*. The MIT Press, 2007.

Hoffman, Jens. “Andreas Slominski: Adventures.” *Flash Art* (International Edition) v.36 (May/June 2003): 134-136

Hughes, Robert. *The Shock of The New: The Hundred-Year History of Modern Art Its Rise, Its Dazzling Achievement, Its Fall*. 2nd ed. McGraw-Hill Humanities/Social Sciences/Languages, 1990.

Jameson, Fredric. *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*. Duke University Press, 1991.

Kilston, Lyla, and Quinn Latimer. “Pioneering artist and architect Dan Graham gets his first US retrospective.” *Modern Painters*, (February 2009): 12-17.

Lafreniere, Steve. “Ashley Bickerton talks to Steve Lafreniere.” *Artforum International* v. 41 no. 7 (March 2003): 240-1, 281

Lippard, Lucy R. *Ad Reinhardt*. Harry N Abrams, 1982.

Nagy, Peter. “Flash Art Panel: From Criticism to Complicity.” *Flash Art* (International Edition) no.129 (Summer 1986): 46-49

O’Reilly, Sara. “Andreas Slominski: Serpentine Gallery, London.” *Art Monthly* no. 287 (June 2005): 24-25

Paumgarten, Nick. “The $40-million Elbow.” *The New Yorker*, October 23, 2006. http://www.newyorker.com/archive/2006/10/23/061023ta_talk_paumgarten (accessed March 5, 2009).

Politi, Giancarlo and the readers of Falsh Art. “Killing me Softly – A Conversation With Maurizio Cattelan.” *Flash Art* (International Edition) v.37 (July/September 2004): 90-95

Ran-Moseley, Faye. *The Tragicomic Passion: A History and Analysis of Tragicomedy and Tragicomic Characterization in Drama, Film, and Literature.* Peter Lang Publishing, 1994.

Rose, Barbara. *Autocritique: Essays on Art and Anti-Art, 1963-1987.* 1st ed. Grove Pr, 1988.

Scanlan, Joe. “Dirty: a manifesto.” http://www.galeriechezvalentin.com/fr/ressources/pdf/js_presse.pdf (accessed February 22, 2009)

Spector, Nancy. “Berlin Detours.” *Parkett* 55 (1999): 70-81

Tatlin, Vladimir Evgrafovich, and Troels Andersen. Vladimir Tatlin: Moderna Museet, Stockholm, july-september, 1968, 1968.

Tranøy, Bent Sofus. *Markedets Makt Over Sinnene*. Aschehoug & Co. (W. Nygaard), 2006

Vogel, Carol. “Swimming with Famous Dead Sharks.” *The New York Times*. October 1, 2006. http://www.nytimes.com/2006/10/01/arts/design/01voge.html (accessed March 5, 2009).

Wikipedia contributors. “L'Arrivée d'un train en gare de La Ciotat.” *Wikipedia,* http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=L%27Arriv%C3%A9e_d%27un_train_en_gare_de_La_Ciotat (accessed February 16, 2009).

Wikipedia contributors, “The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Napoleon,” http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Eighteenth_Brumaire_of_Louis_Napoleon (accessed February 16, 2009).

Works Consulted

Benjamin, Walter. *The Arcades Project*. Belknap Press of Harvard University Press. 2002

Tranøy, Bent Sofus. *Markedets Makt Over Sinnene.* Aschehoug & Co. (W. Nygaard), 2006

David, F.R. *Book of Intentions.* de Appel Arts Centre (Amsterdam), 2008

Appendix

Media Documentation: attached CD disc containing visual components in support of thesis