

**Panel Three: Recognizing and Reconciving the Collective**

**“The Man Full of Content; Agamben’s Happy Consciousness”**

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**ABSTRACT**

*Agamben, in agreement with Nietzsche’s criticism of Kant’s moment of “disinterestedness”, had argued that Kant’s conviction had effectuated the split between the spectator and the artist. Responding to its implications in his book *The Man Without Content*, Agamben had proposed a retrieval or recovery of poiesis over the dialectical process of advancing aesthetics (Agamben, 102-3). Rather than attempt at a retrieval of poiesis, this essay will proceed with the dialectic of Agamben’s ‘man without content’ to show the possibility of a synthesis that unites the bifurcation between the spectator – who is the critic or the man of taste – from the artist, who is the genius, to become a person in the activity of a work of art, coalescing spectatorship and artistry through the exercise of collectorship. As a collector, this new personage is at once a spectator and an artist: the dialectical combination of the Kantian split dissolving the old distinction. My investigation will also examine how the collector proceeds according to Agamben’s account of Nietzsche’s concepts on nihilism, the will to power and the eternal recurrence. I will finally argue that the new critic and artist, as a collector, rather than being a ‘man without content’, would instead find him or herself through collectorship as a ‘man of superabundance’, pregnant with possibilities and content, as one ‘contented’ with the abundance of collection.*

Beyond being a virtuoso musician, one of the most significant intellectual concerns that had preoccupied Glenn Gould was on the separation that relates the artist to his or her public (Gould, 1974). Gould had sought to address and dissolve the hierarchical implications established through the terms “artist” and “public”, by reducing the relationship between them to that of zero-to-one (Gould, 1974). This disappearance of the artist through the anonymity of operating in secrecy will also then abandon all the false and imposed sense of “public” responsibility abided by the artist, along with the servile dependence in the role of the public towards them in what is otherwise known as the demands of the market (Gould, 1974).

Such a stance could be taken through at least two orientations: on the one hand, Gould’s reference to the anonymity of the artist operating in secret could be argued to lead to a more exaggerated separation between the artist and the public. This is evident as the idealisation of the activity of the artist “for art’s own sake” even though this ‘exception’ can only be maintained as *a-part* from the public. Alternatively, the secrecy of the artist could also lead to the dissolution of the status of the artist as an autocratic figure and this was what Gould had hoped for. He had hoped for a reformed aesthetic experience where the liberty of the ‘public’ could be exercised in a more enthusiastic and inclusive manner, unhampered by the frameworks of categories such as “artist” and “public”.

Addressing a similar challenge, Agamben opens his book *The Man Without Content* with Nietzsche’s criticism of the Kantian aesthetic theory that had prescribed the key predicates of beauty accountable for the abyss separating the position of spectatorship from the process of creation (Agamben, 1; Nietzsche, *GM* 1967, 104-5). Nietzsche identified these as impersonality and universality (Nietzsche, *GM* 1967, 104-5). This Kantian problem of the split between spectator and artist, as Agamben later elaborates in his fifth chapter “*Les jugements sur la*

*poésie ont plus de valeur que la poésie*”, is more appropriately termed in the Kantian vernacular as the problem of *disinterestedness* in the aesthetic appreciation of beauty (Agamben, 40-46; Kant, 37-43, §1 & 5)<sup>1</sup>.

Kant’s attempt to universalize the aesthetic judgement of beauty has led him to predicate the appreciation of beauty according to four essential characteristics. In the first moment: “*Taste* is the faculty of judging of an object or a method of representing it by an *entirely disinterested* satisfaction or dissatisfaction. The object of such satisfaction is called beautiful.” (§5), in the second moment: “The *beautiful* is that which pleases universally without [requiring] a concept.” (§9); in the third moment: “*Beauty* is the form of the purposiveness of an object, so far as this is perceived in it without any representation of a purpose.” (§17), and in the fourth and final moment: “The beautiful is that which without any concept is cognized as the object of a universal satisfaction.” (§22).<sup>2</sup> As Nietzsche then elucidates, these characteristics, albeit intended to honour art, had instead unwittingly privileged the honour of knowledge by advancing the aesthetic problem of the consideration of art and the beautiful from the standpoint of impersonality and universality, i.e. purely from the preferred viewpoint of the philosopher (spectator) rather than that of the artist (creator), and thereby unconsciously introducing the “spectator” into the concept of the “beautiful” (Nietzsche, *GM* 1967, 103-5).<sup>3</sup>

The consequence of a disinterested pleasure towards art then removes one’s direct interaction and encounter with it by creating the split in appreciation between the position of the disinterested spectator and the more “interesting” point of view of the artist, as Nietzsche wilfully quips, recalling the example of Pygmalion (Nietzsche, *GM*, 104). This emergence of the spectator as a passive partner is eventually succeeded by the modern critic, i.e. the man of taste, for whom the principal task of the reflection on art had become a detached appreciation, free from desire, in what Kant calls: “an entirely disinterested satisfaction, or, dissatisfaction” (Kant, 45). Given such instances, the characteristic of disinterestedness would then yield a distance from, rather than an infusion into, the appreciation of the artwork and its process of creation. The experience of art then takes on the *analysis* of the work through spectatorship, which is a progressively removed and intellectualized activity *honouring knowledge*, rather than the assimilation into the creative spirit of art that conjoins the experience of the artist with the spiritual and aesthetic experience of the patron. The ramifications of this distancing then becomes the negation of the work of art and its maker, where the artwork and the artist, failing to connect with the infused experience of its patron who chooses to *spectare*, i.e. chooses to remove him or herself from the artwork and the artist, becomes *the other*:

The non-artist, however, can only *spectare*, that is, transform himself into a less and less necessary and more and more passive partner, for whom the work of art is merely an occasion to practice his good taste. Our modern aesthetic education has accustomed us to finding this attitude normal and to resenting any intrusion into the artist's work as an unwarranted violation of his freedom. (Agamben, 15)

Emerging through spectatorship, the man of taste, as Agamben observed, also brought about the twilight of the aesthetic sensibility belonging to the period of the commissioned work of Raphael or Michelangelo, when the involvement and partnerships between patrons and artists were essential in the creation of the masterpiece (Agamben, 13-5). The birth of the spectator and the modern critic from the splitting (negation) of such partnership eventually began to dominate the creative act of art with the judgement of taste and, as a result, exhaust the integrity of the content of the work of art. Since the judgement of taste through spectatorship is itself a process of

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<sup>1</sup> For Nietzsche’s explication on Kant’s concept of “disinterestedness”, see *Beyond Good and Evil*, trans. Walter Kaufmann, New York: Vintage, 1989, §320.

<sup>2</sup> For a summary of these four characteristics, see Agamben pg 42. For the more elaborate Kantian description, see Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, trans. J. H. Bernard, New York: Hafner, 1951, §5: pg. 45, §6: pg. 45, §9: pg. 54, §17: pg. 73 and §22: pg. 77.

<sup>3</sup> Arguably, Kant had stated that aesthetic appreciation or judgement is not one owing to concepts and cognitive judgement, and therefore not to knowledge (Kant, *CJ*, 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> & 4<sup>th</sup> moments, esp. §1, 5 & 6). Nietzsche’s criticism is not here pointedly addressing Kant’s specific point about how cognition factors into aesthetic judgement, but rather the general project of Kant’s aesthetics that claims: “that is beautiful, which gives us pleasure *without interest*”, a stance already “lack[ing] any refined first-hand experience” and that envisages the aesthetic problem from the point of view of the philosopher (the spectator), rather than the artist (the creator) (Nietzsche, *GM*, 104).

removal from the content that it spectates, which is itself the act of negation, the content of art effectively also becomes an empty content: a content removed, i.e. without content.

As the split that distances the position of spectatorship from the creative process of the work of art increases, the emergence of the spectator and the critic, by means of distinguishing or positioning themselves from the artist and the work of art, also becomes increasingly defined. But since the essential definition and existence of the critic is inextricably dependent on that which he exercises his taste upon, which is the work of art and the artist (and this is probably what Gould meant by the “servile dependency” of the public), through this distancing, the very principle of the definition and existence of the critic is also what is most at stake and most *alien* to him. His essence, Agamben writes, “is in that which, by definition, does not belong to him” and the spectator/critic is himself the most *radical split* (Agamben, 24). Through this radical split, the critic or the spectator is the principle of alienation; he is forged by the act of the negation of the content (the distancing of oneself from the artwork) and it is this act that defines his own content (which is achieved through his exercise of taste, and that is possible only through spectatorship, in other words, through the negation of the artwork). This implies that the essence of the man of taste is ‘defined’ by the process of negation, such that the personage of the critic or spectator is himself the manifestation of negation, alienated and nihilistic.

Contrarily, the artist who is the dialectical counterpart of the critic/spectator, in finding himself corresponding to his other, i.e. the critic; -- in other words, in finding the content of his art, which is also the activity of the creation of himself, in the negation or nothingness of the critic whose intended function was to give the artwork meaning, but whose function has otherwise lapsed into nihilism, -- discovers his work and himself as inessential. Since meaning and significance have failed to express the *particularity of the essence* of the content, and have escaped (been negated from) and transformed it into the inessential, the artist now finds his worth not in the *essence* of the particular content which is now lost, but in the *non-essence*: the *inessential absolute* realm of the pure creative spirit, viz. as pure content, or as abstract content.<sup>4</sup> Given that abstract content is merely an ‘inessence’ rather than an actualized essence of a particular single moment, thing, or content, the artist has become the man without content (Agamben, 54). He has to finally *supercede* and *overcome* himself so as to become actualized (Agamben, 54):

The artist is the man without content, who has no other identity than a perpetual emerging out of the nothingness of expression and no other ground than this incomprehensible station on this side of himself. (Agamben, 55)

The position of the man of taste in negation, as nihilism or a perversion (negation) of content, along with the position of the artist, the man of genius, as a man without content, have been ‘exhaustively’ discussed throughout Agamben’s book. The significance of this process of negation is so vital that two whole chapters: *The Man of Taste and the Dialectic of the Split* and *A Self-Annihilating Nothing*, have been respectively devoted to addressing this peculiar moment in the development of the figure of the critic and the artist. In a sentence stated in the latter chapter, Agamben pointedly indicated the precise direction that this dialectical process is heading, which is towards ‘the event in which Hegel had already seen the most essential trait of unhappy consciousness, the event announced by Nietzsche’s madman: “God is dead”’ (Agamben, 57). Here Agamben is heralding the destiny of the process of negation with the terminology of Hegel and Nietzsche. In the former, the moment of negation, like the example of scepticism explicated by Hegel in his *Phenomenology of Spirit*, would lead to the unhappy

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<sup>4</sup> “What the artist experiences in the work of art is, in fact, that artistic subjectivity is *absolute essence* [i.e. absolute or pure content in contrast to that of the critic], for which all subject matter is indifferent; however, the pure creative-formal principle, split from any content [because pure content is just, to borrow the Hegelian term, the *notion* of a content; it is abstract and not a thing in the sense of an actualized form], is the absolute abstract inessence [the pure essence of content, in its purity, is inessence], which annihilates and dissolves every content in its continuous effort to transcend and actualize itself. If the artist now seeks his certainty in a particular content or faith, he is lying, because he knows that pure artistic subjectivity is the essence of everything; but if he seeks his reality in pure artistic subjectivity, he finds himself in the paradoxical condition of having to find his own essence precisely in the inessential, his content in what is mere form. His condition, then, is that of a radical split; and, outside of this split, everything is a lie.” (Agamben, 54, Emphasis and everything in parenthesis added).

consciousness.<sup>5</sup> This is comparable to the Nietzschean moment of the death of God, which is nihilism. Just as taste has become perverted through negation, where “good taste is essentially made of bad taste” (Agamben, 17) and where:

Good taste does not simply have a tendency to pervert itself into its opposite; it is, in some way, the very principle of any perversion, and its appearance in consciousness seems to coincide with the beginning of a process of reversal of all values and all contents (Agamben, 22)<sup>6</sup>,

Art has also become “the pure potentiality of negation, [whereby] nihilism reigns in its essence” (Agamben, 57).

The pivotal point of my argument, which will attempt to proceed with the dialectical process so far presented, continues from the moment of negation that Agamben had illuminated. Agamben had painstakingly elaborated the finer distinctions of Nietzsche’s concept of nihilism. Based on the premise that “The ‘value’ of art, then, cannot be appreciated unless one starts from the ‘devaluation of all values’”, Nietzsche had contrived of two opposing meanings of this process of devaluation, which are essentially nihilism.<sup>7</sup> Active devaluation, or active nihilism, corresponds to “an increased power of spirit” (Nietzsche, *WP* 1967, 17), or what Agamben more succinctly calls “vital enrichment” (Agamben, 86). Passive nihilism on the other hand is the destructive decline and the impoverishment of life (Nietzsche, *WP* 1967, 17; Agamben, 86). The former is charged with superabundance, in what Nietzsche attributed as the Dionysian “overflowing energy” that is “pregnant with future”.<sup>8</sup> Passive nihilism, however, is one suffering a lack precipitating the need to destroy and enact vengeance upon life through a tyrannical will that struggles in a tormented compulsion (Nietzsche, *WP* 1974, pp 329-31).

The perversion of taste achieved through the critic’s process of negation exhibits the form of passive nihilism. Its slavish inclination to distort and pervert all content and the principle of creation belonging to the genius is a negation that confiscates rather than furnishes through abundance. As to exactly which type of negation or nihilism the man of genius belongs to, this remains ambiguous.<sup>9</sup> Up till this point, if one were to observe the entirety of the ‘progress’ of nihilism in aesthetics, what can certainly be said about this process of devaluation addressed by Agamben and exemplified by him through his metaphor of the *failure of the fundamental architectural problem of the house ravaged by fire* (Agamben, pg 6 & 115), is that this *destruction of aesthetics* through the process of negation: this nihilism, is a failure tending towards passive nihilism.

Agamben may not himself be too confident about the future of the recovery from the moment of negation. In envisaging the loss of the poetic status of man and the obscurity of the original structure of the work of art, he writes:

Whether and when art will again have the task of taking the original measure of man on earth is not, therefore, a subject on which one can make predictions; neither can we say whether *poiesis* will recover its proper status beyond the interminable twilight that covers the *terra aesthetica*.”

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<sup>5</sup> Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel. *Phenomenology of Spirit*, edited by J. N. Findlay, Arnold V. Miller. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977. Chapter B: Self-Consciousness, sub-heading: B. Freedom of self-consciousness: Stoicism, Scepticism, and the Unhappy Consciousness. Pp 119-139.

<sup>6</sup> See also Agamben, 48, third paragraph.

<sup>7</sup> For a fuller elaboration, see Nietzsche’s *The Will to Power*, trans. Walter Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale, New York: Random House, 1967, pg 9 no. 2 and pg 17 no. 22.

<sup>8</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science: With a Prelude in Rhymes and an Appendix of Songs*, trans. Walter Kaufmann, New York: Vintage, 1974. Aphorism 370, pp 329-331.

<sup>9</sup> It might seem commonsensical to jump into a seemingly conclusive associative parallelization between the binary opposition between critic and artist, and that of passive and active nihilism. I am, however, sceptical and not quite ready to make that leap for one main reason, which is that the artist, although generally acclaimed as creative, might not necessary create creative content. An artwork can be the expression of the depraved or passive nihilism of the artist, in which case, the expression of the work may themselves be dangerously destructive. Indeed, like a virus, they may be even more destructive than the mere affliction of a vengeful hurt precisely because it possesses the ability to propagate more destruction. A virus or an infection, despite its propagation, is however never considered creative in anyway.

(Agamben, 102-3)

In concluding the chapter, he notes, with a suggestively eschatological proclamation, that “The only thing we can say is that art will not simply be able to leap beyond its shadow to climb over its destiny” (Agamben, 103) which altogether presents a very bleak future for the project of aesthetics. Yet Agamben does also provide clues that point towards a hopeful renewal. His description of the collector (Agamben, 104-6), the *Wunderkammer* or *The Cabinet of Wonders* (28-39), Nietzsche’s will to power and eternal recurrence (90-3), all indicate the *potentiality* out of the predicament of ‘the man without content’. But despite these indications, this process of recovery is not altogether emphasized or elaborated upon in any unitary coherence as a dialectical moment of synthesis which *proceeds* towards the destiny of recovery (as opposed to the previously mentioned destiny towards negation, which is the nihilistic self-annihilating nothingness).

Perhaps the most discernible point of the book denoting a hint of recovery is in Agamben’s description of Nietzsche’s will to power, that is tied to the idea of the eternal recurrence and the *Übermensch* (92-3). For Nietzsche:

Art is the eternal self-generation of the will to power. As such, it detaches itself both from the activity of the artist and from the sensibility of the spectator to posit itself as the fundamental trait of universal becoming. (Agamben, 93)

Art, as the will to power, has in this way *negated the negation* inherent within the split between the spectator and the artist; it ceases to conform to the dichotomy that splits into either the activity of the artist or the sensibility of the spectator, and in the activity of the creative self-generation, it assumes the *rhythm* or *flow* of a universal becoming, i.e. the eternal recurrence. Art, as the negation of the negation of the Kantian split, is essentially nihilism, but it is an *active nihilism* in response to, viz. in negation of, the *passive nihilism* that has provoked the Kantian split and precipitated the dominance of the man of taste over the genius or the artist. Since art was for Nietzsche the “highest task of man” and since the essence of the universal (or eternal) becoming, as art, is homogeneous with the essence of man (Agamben, 92-3), the art of man or *man as the work of art* is where the dialectical split becomes synthesized and is overcome. The active man, or, the man in activity, as the man of the will to power, in overcoming and emerging out of the moment of negation brings the dialectical progression into the next stage. He is the *Übermensch*.

Coming full *circle* from the moment of the dominance of the man of taste that is the moment of passive nihilism, to the active negation of negation that is active nihilism through the will to power, this new man emerges through the activity of *collectorship*. The collector is at once neither simply an artist, since he does not create the work of art in the same sense that the Kantian genius does, nor a spectator, since his activity of collection is one developed through an interestedness and is very involved. At the same time, through the breakdown of the split, the collector is also at once the synthesis of both such that his activity of collecting is the creative or self-generating activity of genius, which concomitantly engages with the judgement of taste and critical appraisal, albeit none of these in its exclusivity. The collector pro-duces (Praxis & Poiesis, opus & operari) him/herself and his/her world through collection, and, like the microcosm of the *Wunderkammer*, the collector *exhibits* the *superabundance* of the *content* s/he had collected. S/he is the man of abundant content, pregnant with possibilities through the activity of his/her will to power, content-ful(l) and contented.

Having ‘transcended’ the Kantian division that had imposed the abyss i.e. the split, the actualization of the dialectical synthesis of the artist and critic as collector, in its abundance, is not only the collecting of a single (or dirempted) membership of things, but is also the collecting of taste, of artworks, of all the wonders of the world, of knowledge as well as of sensibilities.<sup>10</sup> Through this exercise the Nietzschean will to power is put into actualization as the dialectical synthesis, re-pro-ducing (poiesis) itself in the rhythm of eternal recurrence. Through this rhythm, renewal and repair begins.

In his concluding passage of the book, Agamben shares the prospect of recovery by again alluding to the metaphor of the failed project of the burnt house. He writes:

According to the principle by which it is only in the burning house that the fundamental architectural problem becomes visible for the first time, art, at the furthest point of its destiny,

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<sup>10</sup> See: the Pitt-Rivers Museum in Oxford for an example of a *Cabinet of Wonders*.

makes visible its original project. (Agamben, 115)

Indeed, art, and man (as art), takes on the project, but there is no necessity of a completely burnt house such that only the architectural frameworks or its foundation remain, because collectorship will eventually find itself out of (transcend/overcome) the dialectical moment of negation (that is, by negating the negation) into a synthesis of the moments. And even if the complete destruction, symbolized through the figuration of the utter destruction of the house ravaged by fire, is necessary, i.e. even if passive nihilism and its destructive negation has to culminate as a necessary moment of the failure of the project, reconstruction can only begin firstly through the *collection* of the debris, the rubble of historical moments negated and yet ossified by the *crucible* that survives the trials precisely through its non-survivability, viz, through its *complete* renewal. In either case, it is the collector, in superabundance and *full of content*, who would emerge and champion the “self-generation of the will to power” (Agamben, 93), testifying to the *transcendence* or the *overcoming* of the preceding moment of negation, thus pushing onward and proceeding with the dialectical progression into the future.

## **“Street Art as Collective Curation”**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*This paper will look at street art as an example of an art form that involves what I call “collective curation”. By this term I refer to both the fact of installation that accompanies the creation of street art, namely the curatorial decision made by the street artist about the location and timing of their art, and, the collaborative nature of this decision.*

*This approach to the aesthetic however is one that is unaccounted for in the writings of the institutional theorists. Institutional theory, as seen in the writings of Danto, Dickie, Becker et al, takes a seemingly unambiguous and static approach to the question of art whereby something is art if it is conferred the status art by an art world or art institution.*

*With street art gaining evermore institutional acceptance it is important to understand what the terms of this acceptance are.*

*Street art, in proposing collective approaches to exhibiting, challenges standard practices of the operation of the contemporary art world. Such alternative practice is visible when we consider the role of the curator. By combining the role of the artist and the curator into one, that is, the creator of exhibitions, street art, like installation art revolutionises our understanding of what art and an art institution can be.*

### **Introduction**

This paper will look at street art as an example of an art form that involves what I call “collective curation”. By this term I refer to both the fact of installation that accompanies the creation of street art, namely the curatorial decision made by the street artist about the location and timing of their art, and, the collaborative nature of this decision. In short, a collective form of curation is central to the creative process in street art. While street artists can ostensibly work as individuals, as well as part of an explicit collective, this curatorial feature of street art ensures that the collective (understood in a variety of ways) is essential to the operation of street art. This variety includes the necessary engagement with the built and natural environment, the public, institutions, and the work of other street artists’ etcetera for the piece to work.

Street art, in proposing collective approaches to exhibiting, challenges standard practices of the operation of the contemporary art world. Such alternative practice is visible when we consider the role of the curator. By combining the role of the artist and the curator into one, that is, the creator of exhibitions, street art, like installation art revolutionises our understanding of what art and an art institution can be. No doubt this new agent in the contemporary art world can be seen as the antithesis of the collective ideal. Certainly the experience of institutional recognition achieved by many street artists has been one of a trade off between some sort of censorship and career payoff. Usually this involves the hardening of the role of artist/curator into one specialised individual or institutional position. It is in this context that the continuation of the traditional art world to place restrictions on collective engagement, for example in terms of the display of street art in a gallery, makes sense.

Nonetheless these interactive aspects of the collective, such as embodied engagement remain a measure for the freedom to dissent and further creation in relation to the aesthetic of street art. It is on these terms that I will focus on street art as “collective curation” that challenges the traditional operation of the art world.

### **Classical account of the art world-the institutional theory of art**

Initially defined by Arthur Danto, the concept of the “art world” is characterized like so: “to see something as art requires something the eye cannot decry-an atmosphere of artistic theory, a knowledge of the history of art; an artworld.” (Danto, 1964, p580) Institutional theory thus takes a seemingly unambiguous and static approach to the question of art whereby something is art if it is conferred the status art by an art world or art institution. Steven Davies offers a useful definition of this approach to art. “To be an artwork, an

artefact must be appropriately placed within a web of practices, roles, and frameworks that comprise an informally organised institution, the art world.” (Davies, 2006, p38)

Therefore, the logic of institutional theory runs as follows: Art institutions confer art status by naming and framing artefacts (and by extension related practices). This practice is exemplified by the mantra “look but do not touch.” Furthermore, the institutional classification that occurs in the practice of the art world is responsible for what is excluded as much as what is included.

Rubbish, metaphorically speaking, as that which is no longer an economic good and also not art, as the lowest category of object, is disqualified from the gallery. Both classifications, namely art and rubbish, derive in a sense from the same historical and institutional activity. Thus in defining what counts as an object of art, institutions are equally responsible for the creation of rubbish ‘as much as’ they are responsible for the creation of quality. It can consequently be observed that the traditional aesthetics of the art institution establishes a political dynamic, which draws a clear distinction between outside and inside. For example location within the art world is confirmed by presence in the gallery, whereas identity as an aesthetic artefact is established through the use of the frame.

The purpose of this paper is not to catalogue what is contained within the gallery or outside the gallery but to understand the operations of the distinction itself and specifically how the terms of this distinction are subject to re-evaluation. It is my thesis that the “collective curation” mentioned above counts as an example of a challenge to the operation of, and our understanding of, the art world.

The idea of change, however, is not contradictory to the basis of the institutional theory of art, namely the reductive point that ‘art is what counts as art’. Specifically the content of the institutions of the art world are subject to the politics of the art world and the decisions of the curators therein employed. In fact Danto can be seen to begin from this realization when he considers the acceptance of the readymade as art. However a more significant type of change in relation to the art world has not been theorised in terms of the institutional theory of art. And that is the politics of the changing art world itself, not just its contents but its operation.

### **Installation art as “Collective Curation”**

This challenge to the operation and conception of the art world is best seen when we consider the changing nature of the art exhibition. Installation art (and by extension street art) is a case of such dynamism because it disrupts the usual distinctions of the art world by forcing the issue of immateriality as a concern when it comes to defining art. The significance of this can be seen in the central role that the idea of that the artefact itself was allotted in the definitions of the art world cited above.

Essential to the notion of installation art is the distinction between installation art itself and the installation *of* art. Put simply, in the installation of art, the arrangement is secondary to the works contained therein. Herein lies an implied distinction between materiality and immateriality. For example the *Mona Lisa* can be seen to possess the same aesthetic qualities when it is hung in the National Gallery in Washington as it does in the Louvre in Paris. Idealised here, is the role of the curator as arbitrator of taste, operating devoid of ideology and practicing a sort of neutral hanging of artefacts. Whereas, in the case of installation art, it is the positioning of the work that is central to its essence and how it is to be interpreted.

In Bishop’s words: “Installation art presupposes an *embodied* viewer” (Bishop, 2005, p6). By embodied viewer Bishop is referring to the phenomenological subject posited in the writings of Husserl and Merleau-Ponty *et al.* Briefly, for phenomenologist’s the subject and the object is but an artificial division. It is also a division that we see replicated in the institutional accounts above. Embodied perception, however is where both the object and the perceiver co-exist. In positing a certain immaterial, ambiguous and might I say collective quality, something beyond mere material qualities is made central to the operation of the piece as art. The issue could be put like this: the work is instinctive insofar as it is interactive. It is this reliance on the embodied viewer which is seen to be the grounds on which installation art can supersede the economy and distinctions of the art world. It is in this context that the use of actual rubbish as art makes sense because it is precisely because of the disqualification of rubbish from the gallery that artists have been keen to engage it as an artistic material.

I am taking it as given that such an account equally applies to graffiti/street art. Here the work is equally instinctive insofar as it is open to embodied perception. Moreover as it is illegal and is also seen to break with the culture industry. In both cases the ambiguity of the status as art of graffiti and installation as art is also at play. Furthermore when the installation of art and installation are combined the aesthetic itself is grounded in the collective.

I maintain however, that instead of superseding the art world, the institutional ambiguity inherent in graffiti and installation art is better understood as developing as well as disrupting the operation (and distinctions) of the art world. Like graffiti, the prospect of installation art has seen a recent flourishing in the

idea of what an exhibition can be. Here we find an ever increased emphasis on site-specificity, trans-nationality, trans-disciplinarity, intersectionality, temporality etcetera. Exhibitions are increasingly *ad hoc* projects that are valued for their ability to move across boundaries, these being physical or theoretical. And it is in this context that the issue of the collective is best understood.

In the words of Robert Hughes: "In America the *Mona Lisa* turned into its own facsimile" (*The Mona Lisa Curse*). The possibility of a neutral hanging or installation of art should be considered as naïve. It is only when the institutional fame is contested, as in the case in the "collective curation" of installation art and graffiti, that something approaching politics is visible.

Installation art, like graffiti, may be considered not only as overcoming the simple installation of an artefact to be looked at but also as a kind of *avant-garde* exhibition. As such, while they embrace an ambiguous alternative status in relation to the art world, they remain institutional by proposing new ways of exhibiting. An example of this is what I call *The Graffiti Gallery* at the baths in Blackrock, Co. Dublin. Here we see an exhibition that operates with a blurring of the distinction between installation art and the installation of art. In addition, this work(s) opens up a whole new range of possibilities when it comes to orientating one's body and engaging ones instincts in relation to the work that are usually forbidden in a gallery setting. It also demonstrates an exhibition where the creation and the curation of the work is the result of collective and interdependent action.

It should be clear that *The Graffiti Gallery* is a radical departure not because it operates outside the traditional operation of the art world but rather because it proposes an alternative mode of exhibition, and, in doing so, an alternative type of art institution.

The institution suggested here is one that finds a certain degree of resonance in websites such as <http://www.woostercollective.com> where the focus is on the showcasing of interactive, ephemeral and collective forms of art in a method that approaches the "collective curation" seen in street art.

### **The experience of the institutionalization of street art**

In advancing an institutional aesthetic centred on the role of the collective exhibition we have to allow the altering of one principle of institutional theory, namely the identification of activities of embodied experience instead of artefacts themselves as art. By recognising exhibition as the unit of meaning in the art world as opposed to the artefact as the unit of meaning we can include those practices that challenge the artefact centred operation of the art world.

The overcoming of the distinction between what is exhibited and the way it is exhibited as essential, is perhaps easier to view when we consider the agents of each. The installation of art is the work of the curator. Installation art however, claims some degree of artistic creation or generation. As such, contemporary practice (installation art and graffiti/street art) points to a merging of these notions in the example of the artist as curator and curator as artist.

The curator operates within the institutional framework of the art institution and by extension the capitalist system.

In practice we can see that the curating of installation art and graffiti does not exist beyond the capitalist infrastructure that marks the institutionalised art world. Rather it currently operates an *avant-garde*. And like all *avant-gardes*, it becomes, in time, the dominant mode of artistic appreciation. Such structural change to the art world can be seen in the way the artist can now engage the immaterial in their work for economic reasons.

Maurizio Lazzarato has developed the concept of immaterial labour (albeit not in relation to the art world) which he defines as "the labour that produces the informational and cultural content of the commodity." (Lazzarato, 1996, p132) While the informational aspect refers to a new, digitised nature of labour and specifically to the way the average industrial worker has become intellectualised by their new interface based activities, the cultural aspect refers to "the kinds of activities involved in defining and fixing cultural and artistic standards, fashions, tastes, consumer norms, and more strategically, public opinion." (Lazzarato, 1996, p132) In other words, the labour of the curator is an economic labour even if it does not produce a material output. Here we can see that in the context of this economic model, exhibitions are the commodity that frames the identity and the meaning of art. Exhibitions enable the trade of such labour.

This collective identity of curator/artist is the new agent in the contemporary art world. Whereas artists traditionally traded in terms of artefacts, this new person operates where the exhibition is the unit of artistic meaning. It is worth asking what kind of artistic unit the exhibition is. The exhibition is both the installation of art and a piece of installation art. That the exhibition itself would be an example of the installation of art is clear, but that the installation of art would be an instance of art only makes sense when one considers the possibility of installation art. The traditional installation of art may ostensibly lack the

embodied viewer, but on the scale of an exhibition it, like installation art, presupposes such an embodied viewer. The singular that is superseded in installation art is the artefact. This in the end is but the inauguration of a more sophisticated market economy, one whereby the artefact is simply delayed.

**Conclusion: a new political construction of the aesthetic.**

In disruption, we should not classify the “collective curation” seen in street art and installation art as being independent from the art world economy but rather as a political challenge to the operational development of the art world. Installation is, after all, a category of the art world, just as the movement from graffiti as vandalism (or, in other words, rubbish or non-art) to graffiti as street art (or simply art) is a reversal art world categories or values. In other words, to incorporate graffiti as street art (or art) is to reverse the existing definitions of art. In short, disruption accommodated is but a part of the institutional game and a common stage in the recognition of *avant-garde* practices in the history of the art world. Perhaps the degree of success of the interactive and collective exhibition is simply the challenging of the notion of what an exhibition can be.

**“Collective Interpretation and Re-Contextualization: Meaning’s Permanent Vacation”**

**Katherine Graham**

**Stony Brook University**

**Tim Graham**

**School of the Art Institute of Chicago**

**ABSTRACT**

Hello. We are a brother and sister collaborative team. One’s background is in philosophy, the other’s is in fine art. We are very interested in the theme of Stony Brook Manhattan’s 2010 Conference “Collectively” and the questions and concerns surrounding it and would like to propose two artworks for consideration for inclusion in the conference. Specifically, we propose to show and discuss two recent video works which we feel highlight various ways proliferating information technologies complicate what it means to partake of a collective, as well as ways in which technology facilitates new forms of artistic collaboration that challenge both the notion of a single producer (whether that be a collaborative, collective or single author) and the idea of final and unchangeable works. (More on this to come.)

Descriptions of the videos and our proposed method of presentation are as follows:

“Become Humble” 3:22, 2009

This work consist of clips from Andy Goldsworthy’s videos “Grizedale” (1987) and “Rivers and Tides” (2001) combined with an edited voiceover of Werner Herzog from Les Blank’s documentary film “Burden of Dreams” (1982) which chronicles the making of Herzog’s own film “Fitzcaraldo.” The combination of the Goldsworthy clips with the Herzog dialogue create the impression of a typical nature video with voiceover narration, however it quickly becomes evident that the narrator is not in anyway optimistically regarding nature, even as the character in the video appears to be positively immersed in the environment. The video was composed entirely by piecing together video clips others had posted on YouTube, where the finished product now resides. The creation of this work was therefore facilitated by both the overt and implicit collective aspects of YouTube, which thrives due to both people’s initiative in uploading original content as well as in manipulating existing content, or in other words, in people’s interest in YouTube’s unique collective potential. Once the content is there for the viewing, it is also there for the reinterpreting and reworking. YouTube allows for new forms of collaboration which can traverse time, geography, and personages in ways never before possible. But this also raises serious questions of authorship and agency, as in the end, this model allows that people inevitably participate in collaborations with others without any intent to do so. “Become Humble” involves a collaboration between Goldsworthy, Herzog, us, the internet, and the viewer. And while the narration and the images appear to fit seamlessly together, they don’t. Thus the viewer is left to question the authenticity of the video both in terms of its materiality and its overall message, while on the other hand the video also stands as its own unique statement. We see this lack of resolution in collaboration reflecting the complex conditions of digital material and the way in which in our current situation, where anything on the internet can be downloaded and manipulated, there are no finished products and collective manipulation is the name of the game.

“Close Encounters with Monochrome” 0:56, 2009

This video combines modernist monochrome painting, minimalist sculpture, and the iconic communication music from “Close Encounters of the Third Kind,” all downloaded from the internet (the still

images from Google image searches and the music from a YouTube clip). The final effect is a call and response of modernist painting and minimal sculpture, the paintings take on the higher tones of the humans attempting to communicate as the sculptures take on the low tones of the alien craft’s responses. The photos of the artworks were culled from the internet’s endless collection of images and placed in a new relation to each other, then reinstated back on the internet in video form. In their new constellation, the paintings and sculptures communicate directly with one another, participating in an active art historical dialogue, while also communicating with the viewer. In this way, the manner in which we form a community of consumers and producers around access to and manipulation of internet content raises questions of what the notions of collaboration and collective participation mean today.

We view the notion of collectivity as implicit in all our internet based works, which are both produced from and resides on the World Wide Web. Therefore, we propose to show and discuss these two specific videos, elaborating on the themes introduced above as well as discussing the work of various philosophers whose work we feel relates to these themes, from Wittgenstein’s idea of an open concept and emphasis on the role of context and meaning as use, to Benjamin’s writings on art’s lost ‘aura’ after the introduction of its mechanical reproduction, questioning, for example, how internet based works both express and challenge these notions in relation to their complexly collective nature.

Video links:

"Become Humble"

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MuaHVGybxaw>

"Close Encounters With Monochrome"

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3t3EYOMgnD4>

**“Amending Museums’ Biases Against Working Collectively and Exhibiting Artist Collectives”**

Sue Spaid

Temple University

Introduction: Museums’ Twin Biases

This paper investigates and explains numerous points concerning collective work framed within the context of museums, where a collective’s potential members include an artist working alongside other artists, museum staff, museum visitors, community members and/or non-art experts. Before explaining why museums must overcome their *bias against working collectively and exhibiting collectives*, this paper: 1) discerns *communal* efforts from *collective* efforts, 2) argues that collective efforts include the museum staff’s assisting the artist(s) to create the work or assisting visitors to engage the work, 3) describes and explains the recent shift from artist “groups” to “collectives,” 4) distinguishes working collectively from working collaboratively, communally and interactively, 5) articulates museums’ resistance to artist collectives, given museums’ individualistic orientation and imperialist proclivities, and 6) demonstrates how *working collectively* and *exhibiting collectives* multiplies efficiency/productivity/flexibility.

While the term “collective” is historically affiliated with anti-capitalist policies, it more generally refers to “control and ownership of the means of production and distribution by the workers involved.”<sup>1</sup> The aughties witnessed a rise in artists, curators and residencies modeled more as think tanks, research institutes, bureaus and businesses, elucidating the trend from informal groups of like-minded artists to participants positioning themselves as a unified collective.<sup>2</sup> Even collecting museums have opted to work *collectively* as a way to share resources associated with acquiring, executing and promoting commissions.<sup>3</sup> The best known case, The Three M

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<sup>1</sup> *Webster’s II New Riverside Dictionary* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1984), p. 281

<sup>2</sup> See the Addendum for a chronological list of artist collectives. Collective curatorial approaches include De Appel’s curatorial school (NE), Office for Cognitive Urbanism (AU), Manifesta European Biennial, Raqs Media Collective (IN), U-Turn Quadrennial (DK), Eleventh Istanbul Biennial (2009) curated by Croatia curatorial collective What, How and For Whom, and the ubiquitous trio of Maurizio Cattelan (*permanent food* editor (1995 to 2007), 6<sup>th</sup> Caribbean Biennial co-curator and artist), Massimiliano Gioni (co-curator Manifesta 5 and New Museum curator) and Ali Subotnick (Hammer Museum curator), who collectively curated both the Wrong Gallery (2002-2009) and the 4<sup>th</sup> Berlin Biennial, and edited the journal *Charley* (2001-7). Older international exhibitions (Documenta, Venice Biennale, São Paulo Biennial) employ a single artistic director rather than curatorial teams. Ongoing artist-initiated residencies focused on collective practices include the Polygon project (France), Banff Centre’s recent “Polymath Breakthrough” (Canada), Cittadellarte-Pistoletto Foundation (Italy), De Appel’s curatorial school (Netherlands), the land foundation (Thailand) and Mildred’s Lane (USA).

<sup>3</sup> The Three M Project is a partnership between the New Museum, New York City; the MCA, Chicago and the Hammer Museum, Los Angeles, which has presented new works by Aernout Mik, Fiona Tan, Jeremy Deller, Daria Martin, Mathias Poledna and *Urban China*. Regarding their mission: “In 2004, The Three M Project was conceived ... to jointly commission, exhibit, and acquire important works of contemporary art by artists whose work has not yet received significant recognition. All three museums share a collaborative vision and entrepreneurial spirit, and the belief that ambitious projects on a national scale can be produced through efficiency, knowledge, and resource sharing.” [http://www.newmuseum.org/assets/general/pressreleases/2008.12.19Urban\\_China\\_Press\\_Release-4.pdf](http://www.newmuseum.org/assets/general/pressreleases/2008.12.19Urban_China_Press_Release-4.pdf)<sup>3</sup> *Webster’s II New Riverside Dictionary* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1984), p. 281

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Project share funding, yet curatorial practices remain discrete, as each museum selects and organizes exhibitions that travel to the other two institutions.<sup>4</sup>

Museums are either collecting or non-collecting institutions. The former consider their primary duties to be the acquisition of new artworks and the care, display and ongoing research of existing objects. Temporary “traveling” exhibitions are viewed as supporting these goals, since they encourage repeat visits, generate added income, inspire scholarship and lure new members, thus fostering future patrons. Non-collecting museums are typically, though not always committed to exhibiting new art. They are often *expected*, however reluctantly, to help artists produce works never before experienced, transforming the museum into a laboratory, whose consequences are entirely unpredictable. Indicative of the controversy surrounding museum commissions, *New York Times* art critic Ken Johnson recently lamented this additional duty:

In recent years, museums have been getting into commissioning artists to create new works. It is a controversial practice. Some critics think that museums have enough to do just sorting out *what already exists* [italics my emphasis]. Curators may argue that they are in the best position of identifying promising artists and to make possible the creation of important works that might otherwise never be realized. The problem is that you cannot know for sure what you’re going to get.<sup>5</sup>

The *Bias Against Working Collectively* concerns museums’ reluctance to commission new works for fear patrons, critics and the public will object to the unforeseeable artwork’s questionable quality. As the title of Johnson’s article, “From China, Iraq and Beyond, but Is It Art?” indicates, commissioning works is a risky business practice, since the output may *fail* to be considered art!

By contrast, the *Bias Against Collectives* concerns museums’ reluctance to present works made by artist collectives. The 2010 Whitney Biennial whose stated purpose is to present the art of the past two years includes only two, Bruce High Quality Foundation and Theaster Gates, from a roster of 55 of artists. Of the 172 projects comprising MOMA’s Project Series (1971-present), only General Idea was selected from hundreds of artist collectives, while five husband-and-wife teams and one pair of brothers also exhibited. As art historian Claire Bishop explains, “collective projects are more difficult to market than works by individual artists, and they’re also less likely to be ‘works’ than social events, publications, workshops, or performances.”<sup>6</sup> It’s worth noting that Manifesta 7 (2008) and U-Turn Quadrennial for Art (2008) featured works/projects by 40 collectives among 169 participating artists/teams and ten collectives out of 55 artists/teams, respectively.

#### Distinguishing Collective from Communal Efforts in relationship to Museum Duties

It’s now forty years since museum curators have requested museum staff to work with artists and visitors to facilitate unpredictable art experiences. When interviewed by *New York Times* art critic Grace Glueck, “Spaces” (1969-1970) curator Jennifer Licht recalled her decision “to ask [artists] for proposals that would make

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the 4<sup>th</sup> Berlin Biennial, and edited the journal *Charley* (2001-7). Older international exhibitions (Documenta, Venice Biennale, São Paulo Biennial) employ a single artistic director rather than curatorial teams. Ongoing artist-initiated residencies focused on collective practices include the Polygon project (France), Banff Centre’s recent “Polymath Breakthrough” (Canada), Cittadellarte-Pistoletto Foundation (Italy), De Appel’s curatorial school (Netherlands), the land foundation (Thailand) and Mildred’s Lane (USA).

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<sup>4</sup> [http://www.finchannel.com/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=29728&Itemid=10](http://www.finchannel.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=29728&Itemid=10)

<sup>5</sup> Ken Johnson, “From China, Iraq and Beyond, but Is It Art?,” *New York Times*, February 19, 2009.

<sup>6</sup> Claire Bishop, “The Social Turn: Collaborations and Its Discontents,” *Artforum*, February 2006.

unaccustomed demands on [MOMA] staff and resources. So in effect, we became responsible not only for exhibiting the artists' works, but for executing them."<sup>7</sup> To underscore the curator's anticipating a need for greater dexterity, Licht wrote Walter Bareiss, MOMA Trustee and Chairman of the Operating Committee, to warn him that "the exhibition will really be a test of the flexibility of our working systems, and will need a strong communal effort from everyone to succeed."<sup>8</sup> Although she employs the word "communal," she must mean "collective," since a museum that functions as an artistic producer spawns a collective (the artist(s) working alongside pertinent staff members) not a community. The museum community includes all museum employees, yet excludes the artist(s). For the purposes of this paper, "collective" means "made by a number of individuals taken or acting as a group," while "communal" means "of, relating to, or belonging to the people of a community."<sup>9</sup>

In describing the museum's added role of "executing" artists' artworks, Licht's mistaken use of "communal" implies that *all* museum employees can be blamed or praised for an artwork's execution. Rather, only the collective, whose particular members produced the work, are accountable. Should an artwork turn out differently than the press release predicted, it would be unfair to fault press department employees for misinforming the public, since they work off texts issued by the curatorial department, often months earlier.

When working *communally*, communal "property" entails both a sense of community membership and ownership of the "general" consequences of staff labor, which includes tasks performed by others. Communities often *jointly own* the products of their labor, such as produce grown on a communal farm. When a museum receives a positive newspaper review, all staffers should share a sense of pride in a job well done. Similarly, museum staffs, whether working collectively or communally, share—one could even say "own"—their labors' consequences, which presents itself in the form of artists' appreciation, pride in work well done, management/board recognition or viewer admiration. The museum community owns its press releases and marketing tools, so poorly written press releases or bad signage reflects badly on *all* members. If the reviewer complains that the work is poorly installed, only members of the collective responsible for exhibiting the work, especially the artist, should feel disapprobation. Unlike communities, members of the collective don't necessarily own the objects of their labor, unless the community and collective are identical. Unless organized otherwise, the artist(s) typically own(s) the objects resulting from other members' paid or volunteer labor.

Last year, Tate Modern invited Robert Morris to recreate his participatory installation *Bodyspacemotionthings* (1971/2009), which originally closed at the Tate Gallery after only four days. Not only did Tate staff help Morris (aged 78) construct this large-scale installation (filling Turbine Hall), which invited viewers to carry objects on their backs, ascend inclines and balance on objects, but museum staff assisted spectators negotiating these situations for three weeks. "Spaces" and Morris' initially unsuccessful installation recall the era when museums were adjusting to new demands made by artists eager to produce anti-elitist works that anyone could engage. During the late 1960s, curators like Licht were responding to powerful artist lobbies such as the Art Workers Coalition, who demanded exhibitions that attend to artists' needs and depart from museums' traditional practices.<sup>10</sup>

Ensuing scuffles between museums and artists (museums were not used to artists constructing art onsite, visitors handling artworks and/or navigating darkened galleries, let alone artists wanting to control how viewers engage their spaces) produced deep-seated scars, still in need of mending. Traditionally, museum curators play the role of morticians, maneuvering dead bodies shipped in caskets only to be resealed in protective crates at exhibition end. Alternatively, PS1 Contemporary Art Center, MOMA's Project Series (>2000) and the Contemporary Arts Center, Cincinnati, *routinely* offer spectators participatory experiences. Other than an *Illy* espresso and Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster's' fantastic audio-corridor, "theanyspacewhatever" (2008), Solomon R. Guggenheim's collectively-organized survey of relational art, offered little non-visual engagement.

In light of the *Bias Against Working Collectively*, the following statements discern museums' *classic* duties from their *collective* ones. Artists' studio members and hired experts are no less a part of the collective than the museum guards and visitors handling the works. As this section demonstrates, *working collectively* requires recruiting members from numerous communities: the museum, non-art experts, the public and the artist's studio.

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<sup>7</sup> Grace Glueck, "Museum Beckoning Space Explorers," *New York Times*, January 2, 1970, p. 34.

<sup>8</sup> Julie Riess, *From Margin to Center* (Boston: MIT Press, 2001), p. 88

<sup>9</sup> *Webster's II*, p. 281 and p. 288.

<sup>10</sup> Riess, pp. 87-88.

**Museums’ Traditional Duties:** Museum *m* typically exhibits artworks that it owns. For each artwork *a* that *m* owns, *m* is responsible for: properly storing or handling, displaying, lighting and labeling *a*; packing, shipping and lending *a*; and archiving, insuring and conserving *a*. For each artwork *b* that *m* borrows, *m* is responsible for properly packing and shipping *b*, insuring *b* and exhibiting *b*, which includes handling, displaying, lighting and labeling *b* to maximize viewer experience.

**Museums’ Collective Duties:** Museum *m* sometimes executes artworks on behalf of or in collaboration with the artist(s).<sup>11</sup> For each artwork *e* that *m* executes, *m* is responsible for funding an agreed-upon proportion, carrying out agreed-upon tasks according to an agreed-upon schedule, which includes acquiring funding, materials, equipment and labor for the production of *e*, in addition to all of its traditional duties. Should *e* be participatory, *m* staff will assist visitors as they experience and negotiate *e*.

### Distinguishing Collective from Group Efforts in relationship to Artist Duties

As the Addendum illustrates, the trend of artists working as groups is hardly new. Even the practice of working collaboratively with non-art specialists has a forty-five year history. Experiments in Art and Technology (E.A.T.), begun in 1966, paired artists such as Robert Rauschenberg and Robert Whitman with engineers such as Billy Klüver and Fred Waldhauer to make all sorts of works.<sup>12</sup> Art historian/curator Anne Collins Goodyear emphasizes how “Rauschenberg expressed his pride in the practical ramifications of E.A.T.’s collaborations in an interview conducted twenty years after the establishment of E.A.T.: ‘Something like nineteen brand-new patents that were direct results of Nine Evenings of Theater and Engineering went to the credit of the engineers of the respective companies. . . . The technology that went into *Soundings* contributed to a cure for deafness that is almost perfect now’.”<sup>13</sup> Sixty-three artists, engineers and scientists (including Klüver, pianist David Tudor and artists Robert Breer and Whitman) contributed to the design of the Pepsi Pavilion presented at Expo ’70 in Osaka, Japan, while The U.S. Pavilion featured the exhibition “New Art: Art and Technology,” organized by Maurice Tuchman to include eight kinetic works, such as Claus Oldenberg’s inflatable *Icebag*.

When tapped for Expo ’70, Tuchman had been working since 1967 on “Art and Technology” (1971) for the Los Angeles County Museum of Art. This exhibition, which secured artist residencies with corporations, presented 16 completed projects by artist/scientist teams. Tuchman initially invited 76 artists, though he secured only 23 corporate partnerships, of which 16 worked out.<sup>14</sup> “Art and Technology” brought Newton Harrison and physicist Richard Feynman together to create *Notations on the Ecosystem of the Western Salt Works (with the inclusion of Brine Shrimp)*, which entailed growing Brine Shrimp *Artemia* and the algae *Dunaliella* in four massive tanks, and inspired Helen and Newton Harrison’s *Survival Series* (1970-1973).<sup>15</sup> According to Goodyear, the anti-war movement and widespread protests against government policies aimed at supporting American business interests, during and after the Vietnam War, further dissuaded artists from pursuing further collaborations with scientists.<sup>16</sup>

Eschewing collaborations, artists retreated to an earlier model, whereby they worked as a group to promote exhibitions, events and theories. For the most part, they worked independently, though group efforts began popping up in the eighties, especially since groups prove better equipped to tackle issues that require numbers of artists working together, rather than working separately. Using the notion of collective described earlier, the following statements differentiate artist group duties from collective ones.

<sup>11</sup> Although commission sounds kinder than executes, it implies that the artist produces it independently.

<sup>12</sup> <http://www.zakros.com/projects/eat/index.html>

<sup>13</sup> Anne Collins Goodyear, “Gyorgy Kepes, Billy Klüver, and American Art of the 1960s: Defining Attitudes Toward Science and Technology,” *Science in Context* (2004), 17:4, 628.

<sup>14</sup> Anne Collins Goodyear, “From Technophilia to Technophobia: The Impact of the Vietnam War on the Reception of ‘Art and Technology’,” *Leonardo* (April 2008), 41:2

<sup>15</sup> The Harrisons’ *Survival Series* introduced self-sufficient farming techniques to grow catfish, beans, berries, cucumbers, oranges and avocados inside museums. Sue Spaid, *Ecovention: Current Art to Transform Ecology* (Cincinnati: Contemporary Arts Center, 2002), pp. 33-34.

<sup>16</sup> Goodyear’s article, “From Technophilia to Technophobia: The Impact of the Vietnam War on the Reception of ‘Art and Technology’” tells the complete story.

**Artist Group Duties** Group members *gm* control and take ownership of the means of production and distribution of ideas, artworks and programs made by individuals acting as a group. Members own individually-produced artworks. Ex. Group Material or Colab

**Artist Collective Duties** Collective members *cm* control and take ownership of the means of production and distribution of ideas, artworks and programs made by individuals acting as a group. The output cannot be divided, though *cm* may agree to partition, sell or donate it.<sup>17</sup>

Given these definitions, Fluxus operated both as an artist group and as an artist collective, though it's little known how much *all* members contributed to Fluxkits, etc.

As already mentioned, the recent trend toward collectives is due to artists wanting to function more like think tanks, research institutes, businesses and bureaus who are available to institutions (museums, art centers, businesses, communities, cities, architects, etc) to consult on public projects, perform public interventions, create commercially available products, do design work or engage communities. Given the artworld's current obsession with "all things social," there is no shortage of texts, exhibitions, projects and residencies concerning collective conspiracies.<sup>18</sup> While most "collective experts" consider artist collectives some form of social practice, collectives are rather like old-fashioned marriages!<sup>19</sup> As small-scale eco-political systems, artist collectives provide workable mechanisms for ownership, distribution, decision making, delegating tasks and resource management to affect the greatest possible outcome. Consider that Critical Art Ensemble (1987-present), a collective comprised of "five tactical media practitioners of various specializations including computer graphics and web design, film/video, photography, text art, book art, and performance" has not only published six different books, translated into 18 languages, but seven museums worldwide have exhibited their work.<sup>20</sup> Emphasizing productivity above all, the 3Cs: Counter-Cartographies Collective website continues, "We mutually exchange skills and knowledges among us: from dissertation writing tips to map software use, from driving lessons to daycare assets."<sup>21</sup> Collective members get way more done *working collectively* than individually!

Bishop remarks that the "expanded field of relational practices currently goes by a variety of names: socially engaged art, community-based art, experimental communities, dialogic art, littoral art, participatory, interventionist, research-based or collaborative art."<sup>22</sup> She neither distinguishes these practices, nor does she seem

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<sup>17</sup> For an alternative viewpoint, check out [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Artist\\_collective](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Artist_collective).

<sup>18</sup> Texts by "collective experts" include: George Baker "Introduction to 'Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics'" (*October*, 2004), Claire Bishop, "The Social Turn: Collaboration and its Discontents" (*Artforum*, 2006); Claire Bishop, "Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics" (*October*, 2004); Claire Bishop, *Participation* (2006, MIT Press); Nicolas Bourriaud, *Esthétique Relationnelle* (1998); Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Multitudes: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire* (2005); Grant Kester, *Art, Activism and Oppositionality* (1998); Grant Kester *Conversation Pieces: Community and Communication in Modern Art* (2004); Lucy Lippard, *Lure of the Local: Senses of Place in a Multicentered Society* (New York: The New Press, 1997), Miwon Kwon, *One Place After Another: Site-Specific Art and Locational Identity* (2002); French journal *Multitudes* (2000, <http://multitudes.samizdat.net/-Multitudes-Infos-une-liste->); Ted Purves' *What We Want is Free: Generosity and Exchange in Recent Art* (2005) and Steven Wright "Spy Art: Infiltrating the Real" (*Afterimage*, Sept-October 2006).

<sup>19</sup> Texts by "collective experts" include: George Baker "Introduction to 'Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics'" (*October*, 2004), Claire Bishop, "The Social Turn: Collaboration and its Discontents" (*Artforum*, 2006); Claire Bishop, "Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics" (*October*, 2004); Claire Bishop, *Participation* (2006, MIT Press); Nicolas Bourriaud, *Esthétique Relationnelle* (1998); Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Multitudes: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire* (2005); Grant Kester, *Art, Activism and Oppositionality* (1998); Grant Kester *Conversation Pieces: Community and Communication in Modern Art* (2004); Lucy Lippard, *Lure of the Local: Senses of Place in a Multicentered Society* (New York: The New Press, 1997), Miwon Kwon, *One Place After Another: Site-Specific Art and Locational Identity* (2002); French journal *Multitudes* (2000, <http://multitudes.samizdat.net/-Multitudes-Infos-une-liste->); Ted Purves' *What We Want is Free: Generosity and Exchange in Recent Art* (2005) and Steven Wright "Spy Art: Infiltrating the Real" (*Afterimage*, Sept-October 2006).

<sup>20</sup> <http://www.critical-art.net/>

<sup>21</sup> <http://www.countercartographies.org/about-us-mainmenu-28>

<sup>22</sup> Bishop, 2006.

to take their differences seriously, since they’re all merely alternative ways of describing *social practices*. Working off my earlier definition of *working collectively*, which joins artists, museum staff, non-art experts and the public, collective practices can be further articulated as either intra-disciplinary (artist-artist or artist-curator), participatory (artist-audience), interdisciplinary (artist-non artist specialist) or community-oriented (artist-non artist non-specialist). Such methods provide artists the opportunity to further develop methods for working collaboratively across integrated fields (intra- and interdisciplinary work); *interactively* with audiences desiring participatory experiences and *communally* on non-art community projects. While these sub-divisions may feel like new terms invented for this occasion, these particular modes of working already have viable histories, which I would articulate were there more space available. Collectives are becoming increasingly specialized affairs, no different in distinction than site-specific, site-relational, site-adapted, site-significant or site-inspired *practices* identified decades ago.

#### Working Collectively so as to Activate the Museum’s Collective Duties

Despite the absence of a sufficiently critical essay describing museums’ tendencies to colonize artists on the occasion of their first museum survey, it goes without saying that most of the key players (curators, gallerists and writers) who first champion artists get erased from public memory by the time museum curators arrive on the scene. Indicative of their remedial collective skills, museum curators notoriously edit artists’ résumés to include whatever exhibitions and articles bolster their project’s image, slimming texts by eliminating the formative years, when what happened matters most. Were curators far more careful in their analysis and characterization of artists’ early careers, more might be known about artist groups and collectives, since artists are more inclined to join collectives after grad school. Unfortunately, museum curators feel free to cut and paste as they like, constructing whatever narrative fits their brief. Artists are apparently helpless to safeguard names of those who proved once indispensable from the curator’s delete bar.

For well over one-hundred years, museum curators have cobbled and merged articles and reviews to explain artists’ oeuvre to their publics. I mention this not because I want to disparage present museological imperatives, but because it is indicative of an informational tension that exists between curators’ “after-the-fact” accounts (often 30 years later) of what happened and accounts created by those (now 30 years older), who lived through said events. Museums take a huge risk to mount a first survey of an artist’s work and must raise a great deal of cash and expend invaluable staff time to gather information, locate appropriate works and assemble them all under one roof. Needless to say, the curator has a lot riding on the survey’s success, so how he/she frames the artist’s work is of huge importance to everyone involved. While organizing surveys is a noble pursuit (if I had my druthers I would do so full time), I reject the current policy of colonizing the artist, so as to cleanse the artist’s records of his/her messy past, while restoring his/her glory for the museum’s admiring public.

So why do museum curators think such paternalism is appropriate? The answer is twofold- artists act *autonomously* when making art and museums earn *authority* when presenting exhibitions. *Working collectively* means sharing responsibility, leaving neither partner *sovereign*. Because museums wholeheartedly identify with their role as advocates of artists whom their publics perceive as especially *free*, it’s no wonder there’s so much resistance to *working collectively* and *exhibiting collectives*. So long as museums promote the dubious premises of autonomous artists, personal expression or original vision, it’s nearly impossible for museums to reveal the delicate truth that museums and artists frequently *work collectively*. When one considers how upset Joe public gets when he/she learns that some artist didn’t make his/her art, one realizes this issue’s sensitivity.

While collecting museums are typically the more traditional and resistant to change, even *non-collecting* museums prove reluctant to exhibit works produced by artist collectives, preferring to cite individual names, sometimes even forcing group liaisons to take credit for collective work.<sup>23</sup> Despite the wide-ranging impact of the

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<sup>23</sup> Ocean Earth member Peter Fend has complained numerous times about this injustice. Most notably, the Smart Museum’s 2000 exhibition included collective works presented as “Ecologies: Mark Dion, Peter Fend, Dan Peterman,” though its 2008 exhibition “Beyond Green,” also curated by Stephanie Smith, cited six collectives among its 13 participants. Similarly, Matt Coolidge often represents CLUI, whose projects are carried out all over by scores of associates. Museums treat two-person teams with the same last names like one artist: Bernd and Hilla Becher (1959-2007), Anne et Patrick Poirier (since 1971) and Newton and Helen Harrison (1972-1993) (the

## Panel Three: Recognizing and Reconceiving the Collective

Addendum's collectives, collective work is far more likely to appear in books, *frieze*, *artforum*, *Flash Art* or *artUS* than in museum exhibitions.

Rather than continue to perpetuate the myth of the autonomous artist, museums must ramp up collective enterprises, if only to reap the advantages that have made many younger artists incredibly productive, despite their limited access to cash and material resources. Collective action engenders flexible/efficient/productive alternatives to working alone (four hands work faster than two). While several collectives are specifically organized around the principle of escaping identities, so as to fly below the radar as collective expert Stephen Wright describes it, museums hardly risk diminishing *brand* identity, let alone power, by *working collectively* or *exhibiting collectives*. Public surveys routinely peg museums as the nation's most trusted institutions. Museums had better comply before some radical collective steals their identity in exchange for a show!

### ADDENDUM

#### Incomplete List of Artist Groups and Collectives (decade initiated) (color-coded TBA)

JP/TH UK/AU US/CA/MX IT/CH DE/AU/PL NE/BE/DE FR VE/AR/BR

#### Thirties

Abstraction-Création

#### Forties

COBRA

MADI

Arte Concreto-Invencion

#### Fifties

YAM Fest Gruppo T

Zero Group

LI Grupo Ruptura

Gutai IG

Gruppo N

Effekt Group

NUL

SI

The Bechers

GRAV

Equipo 57

Nouveau Réalisme

#### Sixties

SPACE Fluxus

Fluxus

Fluxus

Hi-Red Center Anonima Group

APG USCO

Art & Language Pula

Ant Farm

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Harrison Studio since 1993). It gets trickier when differently-named teams such as Kate Ericson and Mel Ziegler (1985-1995) or Alloro & Calzadillo are included in group shows, since museum audiences expect single, not multiple names.

General Idea  
Royal Chicano Air Force  
**Seventies** The Harrisons Fischle & Weiss Anne et Patrick Poirier  
Yellow House General Idea  
“Art and Technology”  
Colab  
La Raza Graphics  
**Eighties** Ocean Earth relax IRWIN Information Fiction Publicité  
Critical Art Ensemble  
ARC group Gran Fury  
Brixton Haha  
REPOhistory  
Tim Rollins and KOS  
Culture Clash  
Kate Ericson and Mel Ziegler  
Sapphire & Crystals  
Cacophony Society  
Guerilla Girls  
United Congress  
  
**Nineties** CLUI Vedova Mazzei Atelier van Lieshout  
land foundation The Yes Men WochenKlausur N55  
Luna Nera Bernadette Corporation Gelitin Superflex  
RTS Hirsch Farm Project Elmgren&Dragset  
Bureau of Inverse Technology  
Nine Mile Run Greenway Project  
Red Herring Harrison Studio  
Janet Cardiff/George Bures Miller  
Futurefarmers 0100101110101101.org  
Temporary Services  
Royal Art Lodge Steiner/Lenzlinger  
Art Club 2000 L/B  
61<sup>st</sup> and Blackstone Kroesos Foundation  
Tercerunquinto  
FLOOD  
Torolab  
RTMark  
Art.net  
SITO  
Experimental Skeleton  
The Stockyard Institute  
Allora & Calzadilla  
Type A  
Chenoweth/Berman  
Justseeds  
The Atlas Group  
**Aughties** Experimental Station Famed UQBAR Fdn Claire Fontaine  
Salon People Powered Teufelsgroup Parfyme  
Temescal Amity Works M-City Nina Beier&Marie Lund  
Future Farmers -fabrics interseason  
3 Rivers 2<sup>nd</sup> Nature Burghard Bosch&Fjord  
Free Soil Zimmerfrei NMP State of Sabotage  
Mischiefs Makers JAM Social Art Praxis xurban-collective

Panel Three: Recognizing and Reconceiving the Collective

Learning Group ETOY Corp  
fieldfaring Brave New Alps  
Sundown Salon Rimini Protokoll  
Habitat for Artists AKassen  
Paper Rad Candida TV  
Reena Spaulings FluchtKunst  
Free Walking  
Lighting for Urban Rooftop Environments  
Philadelphia Institute for Advanced Study  
Mess Hall  
3Cs: Counter-Cartographies Collective  
Institute for Applied Autonomy  
Nsumi  
PFFR