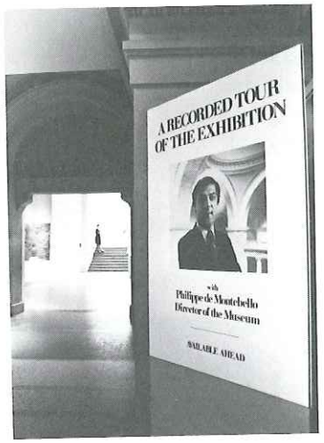


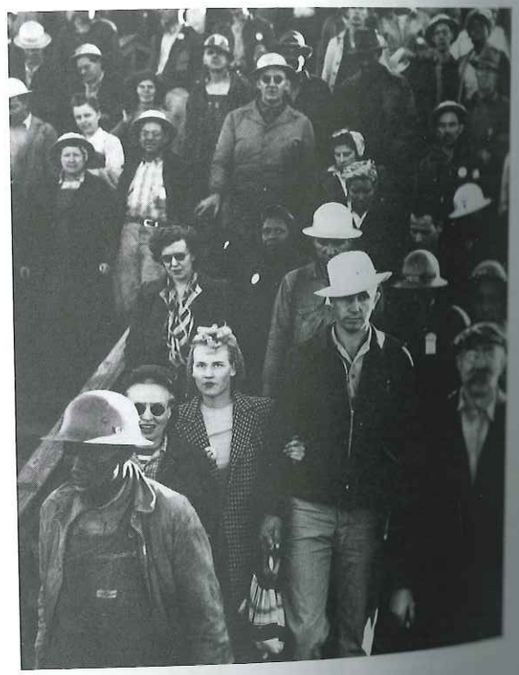

(Above) Exhibition signage at The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. (Photo: Louise Lawler): (Top) Installation of photographs in the photography galleries of The Museum of Modern Art, New York. (Photo: Louise

# Lookers, Buyers, Dealers, and Makers: Thoughts on Audience

MARTHA ROSLER

## Prelude

*The purpose of this article is to encircle rather than to define the question of audience. It is discursive rather than strictly theoretical. The analytic entity "audience" is meaningful only in relation to the rest of the art system of which it is a part, and as part of the society to which it belongs. This is not to say that the question of audience must disappear in a welter of other considerations, but rather that there are certain relationships that must be scrutinized if anything interesting is to be learned.*

*Photography has made what seems to be its final Sisyphean push up the hill into the high art world, and therefore the photography audience must be considered in terms of its changing relation to the art-world system that has engulfed it. The most important distinctions among members of the art audience are those of social class, the weightiest determinant of one's relation to culture. In the mediating role played by the market in the relationship between artist and audience, the network of class relations similarly determines the relation between those who merely visit cultural artifacts and those who are in a position to buy them.*

*Historical determinants of the artist's present position in the art system include the loss of direct patronage with the decline of the European aristocracy and artists' resulting entry into free-market status. One ideological consequence of modernity was Romanticism and its outgrowths, which are a major source of current attitudes about the artist's proper response to the public. Unconcern with audience has become a necessary feature of art producers' professed attitudes and a central element of the ruling ideology of Western art set out by its critical discourse. If producers attempt to change their relationship to people outside the given "art world," they must become more precise in assessing what art can do and what they want their art to do. This is particularly central to overtly political art.*

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*After wrestling with these questions artists must still figure out how to reach an audience. Here a discussion of art-world institutions is appropriate. As photography enters the high art world of shows, sales, and criticism, people involved in its production, publicization, and distribution must struggle with its changed cultural meaning.*

## Some Features of the Audience

It seems appropriate to begin a discussion of "audience" by taking note of the fact that there is anything to discuss. There are societies, after all, in which the social positioning of (what we call) art is not in question. But segmentation is apparent in the culture of late capitalism, where the myths and realities of social life can be seen to diverge and where there is an unacknowledged struggle between social classes over who determines "truth." In our society the contradictions between the claims made for art and the actualities of its production and distribution are abundantly clear. While cultural myth actively claims that art is a human universal—transcending its historical moment and the other conditions of its making, and above all the class of its makers and patrons—and that it is the highest expression of spiritual and metaphysical truth, high art is patently exclusionary in its appeal, culturally relative in its concerns, and indissolubly wedded to big money and "upper class" life in general.

*See* **Tables 1, 2, 3,** *pp. 314-317*

A mere statistical survey of high-culture consumership will delineate the audience and outline its income level, types of occupation, and attitudes toward the ownership of "culture," serving quite nicely to show how limited the audience really is to definable segments of the educated bourgeoisie,[1] and a minimally sophisticated opinion poll will suggest how excluded and intimidated lower-class people feel.[2] There are, however, no *explanations* in the brute facts of income and class; only a theory of culture can account for the composition of the audience. Further, there is a subjective, ideologically determined element in the very meaning of the idea of art that is essential to people's relations to the various forms of art in their culture. The truth is that like all forms of connoisseurship, the social value of high art depends *absolutely* on the existence of a distinction between a high culture and a low culture.[3] Although it is part of the logic of domination that ideological accounts of the meaning of high culture proclaim it as the self-evident, the natural, the *only* real culture of civilized persons, its distinctive features are distinguishable only against the backdrop of the rest of culture. What is obscured is the *acquired* nature of the attitudes necessary for partaking in that culture, the *complexity* of the conditions under which one may acquire them, and the *restrictedness* of access to the means for doing so.

It can be meaningfully claimed that virtually the entire society is part of the art audience, but in making that claim we should be aware of what we are saying. The widest audience is made up of onlookers—people *outside* the group generally meant by the term "audience." They know of high culture mostly through rumor and report. The vast majority of people in the traditional working class are in this group, as are people in most office, technical, and service jobs; they were probably taught the "value" of high art in school and retain a certain churchly feeling[4] about art but have little real relation to it. Yet their knowledge of the bare lineaments of high culture plays a part in underlining the seeming naturalness of class distinctions—that is, in maintaining capitalist social order—for the transcendental lofiness that is attributed to art artifacts seems attached as well to those who "understand" and own them, the *actual* audience. It helps keep people in their place to know that they intrinsically do not qualify to participate in high culture.

As to who does own high culture: Everyone knows who they are, those men in white ties and tuxes, those women in floor-length furs, the Rockefellers, the Whitneys, the Kennedys, Russian ballet dancers, the international jet set, the Beautiful People, the men who run the world of high finance, government, and giant corporations, and their wives and daughters. They are very good at sniffing the wind, and every time a cultural practice is developed that tries to outrun them and their ability to turn everything into money, they manage to buy it out sooner or later and turn it into investments. In their own cultural arena they are, by definition, unbeatable.

Between the people who own and define the meaning of art as high culture and those who are intimidated by it are those who actively cultivate an "appreciation" of art as evidence of elevated sensibilities. The new "professional and managerial class," sometimes called the new petty bourgeoisie, is marked by strong consciousness of its advantages vis-à-vis the wage-enslaved working class and is just as strongly marked by its aspirations toward the cultural privileges of its class superiors, the big bourgeoisie. Although the dimensions of independence that once characterized this class position have been dramatically reduced, the professional and managerial class is still inclined to count its blessings when it compares itself with the working class, and it clings to its cultural pretensions as proof of its unfetteredness in relation to the workaday world.

## The Market as Mediator Between Artist and Audience

It is useful to make a further distinction among members of the actual audience for high culture—that between the audience simple and the market, a smallish subset of that audience. Such a distinction was of little meaning in Western societies when patronage relations existed between the dominant classes and artists, for then buyers closely controlled art production; there was no other audience for secular works until late in the eighteenth century. But artists

1. Hans Haacke's surveys at various locations indicated that the audience for contemporary work seems to be made up of a very high percentage of people who are occupationally involved in art—museum and gallery professionals, artists, art teachers, art students, critics and art historians. See Haacke, *Framing and Being Framed* (Halifax: The Press of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, 1975).

2. Pierre Bourdieu and Alain Darbel, *L'Amour de l'art: Les musées d'art européens et leur public* (Paris: Les Éditions de minuit, 1969).

3. There is a dynamic between high and low culture, as well, in which elements under-

**Table 1. National Endowment Budget, 1978 and 1979[a]**

| Category | 1978 | 1979 | Change[b] |
|---|---|---|---|
| Architecture | $ 4,018,268 | $ 3,718,000 | −8% |
| Dance | 6,939,231 | 7,783,700 | +11 |
| Exhibition Arts | 7,201,210 | 8,005,000 | +11 |
| Folk Arts | 1,532,428 | 2,376,500 | +36 |
| Literature | 3,772,800 | 4,000,070 | +6 |
| Media Arts | 8,077,281 | 8,412,400 | +4 |
| Museum Aid | 11,501,155 | 11,377,000 | −2 |
| Music | 14,642,364 | 12,570,000 | −15[c] |
| Opera | 4,074,320 | 4,774,000 | +15 |
| Theater | 6,577,686 | 7,098,300 | +8 |
| Visual Arts | 4,884,750 | 4,533,000 | −8 |
| Education | 5,074,172 | 5,559,000 | +9 |
| Federal-State Partnership | 18,946,060 | 22,678,500 | +17 |
| Intergovernmental Activities | – | 1,250,000 | |
| Special Projects | 2,973,002 | 3,369,000 | +12 |

SOURCE: Adapted from "NEA to Ask $200M for FY 1980 . . .," *Art Workers News* (New York, January 1979): 1, 11.

[a] Data furnished by the National Endowment for the Arts, Office of the Northeast Regional Coordinator. The columns do not add up to the total figures supplied; presumably, administrative costs account for the difference.

[b] 1979 showed a 20 percent increase over 1978–from $121 million to $149.6 million–and about a 60 percent increase over 1977's budget of $94 million.

[c] Drop reflects money taken out of Music category for establishing Opera-Music/Theater category.

NOTE: The *Art Workers News* article clarified that the NEA was *expected* to *request* between $180 and $200 million, and the latter figure, if accepted, would mean a 34 percent increase over the 1979 budget of $149.6 million. "A spokesman . . . said that the Endowment expects at least a modest increase . . . though declined to speculate on the chances of receiving the full amount requested." The Carter administration had earlier asked government agencies to limit increases to 7 percent. (The 1979 budget increase of 20 percent in 1978 was 1 percent *below* that proposed by Carter.)

Note the sizes of music, media and museum allocations and the grants to states, and compare the relatively small amount available in total to all visual arts producers and critics. Symphony, Opera, and Dance lobbies are reputedly very powerful.

**Table 2. Museum Attendance and Educational Attainment[a]**

| Educational Level Attained | Percentage of Each Category Who Visit Museums | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Greece | Poland | France | Holland |
| Less than primary | 0.02 | 0.12 | 0.15 | — |
| Primary education | 0.30 | 1.50 | 0.45 | 0.50 |
| Secondary education | 10.5 | 10.4 | 10 | 20 |
| Post-secondary education | 11.5 | 11.7 | 12.5 | 17.3 |

SOURCE: Adapted from John Berger et. al., *Ways of Seeing* (London and Harmondsworth: BBC and Penguin, 1972), p. 24; data originally drawn from Pierre Bourdieu and Alain Darbel, *L'Amour de l'art* (Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1969), Appendix 5, Table 4.

[a] The data, drawn from European surveys conducted over 10 years ago, can only be suggestive with respect to the United States, but it seems clear that having completed a secondary education (a higher level of education in the societies studied than in the United States) predisposes a person to attend art museums. Taking the opposite tack–querying art audiences about educational background–Hans Haacke polled visitors to the John Weber Gallery in Manhattan's Soho (art district) in 1972. Of about 820 people responding, 80 percent were in or had graduated from college (84% of artists, 77% of others with a professional art interest, and 73% of those without such interest). Of 4,547 replies to Haacke's query at the Milwaukee Art Center in 1971, 39 percent of people with a professional interest in art and 59 percent of those without were in or had graduated from college. See Hans Haacke, *Framing and Being Framed* (Halifax and New York: The Press of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design and New York University Press, 1975).

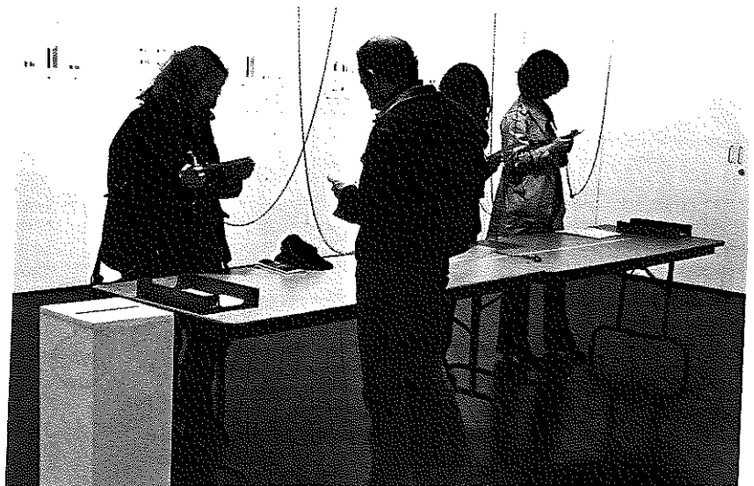


**Table 3. Occupation and Attitudes to the Museum[a]**

| Of the places listed below, which does a museum remind you of most? | Manual Workers | Skilled and White Collar Workers | Professional and upper Managerial |
|---|---|---|---|
| Church | 66% | 45% | 30.2% |
| Library | 9 | 34 | 28 |
| Lecture Hall | – | 4 | 4.5 |
| Department Store or entrance hall in public building | – | 7 | 2 |
| Church and library | 9 | 2 | 4.5 |
| Church and lecture hall | 4 | 2 | – |
| Library and lecture hall | – | – | 2 |
| None of these | 4 | 2 | 19.5 |
| No reply | 8 | 4 | 9 |
| | 100 ($n=53$) | 100($n=98$) | 100 ($n=99$) |

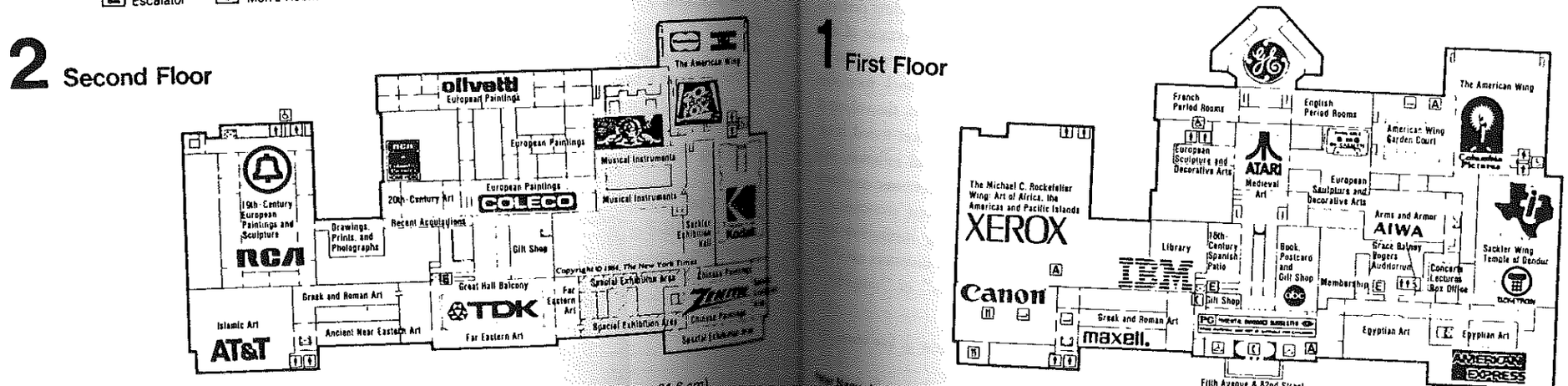
SOURCE: Adapted from John Berger et. al., *Ways of Seeing* (London and Harmondsworth: BBC and Penguin, 1972), p. 24; data originally drawn from Pierre Bourdieu and Alain Darbel, *L'Amour de l'art* (Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1969), Appendix 4, Table 8.

[a] Presumably in France. The occupational categories given do not reflect clearcut class divisions, to my way of thinking, except that "manual workers" clearly represent the traditional working class.

When Hans Haacke polled visitors to the John Weber Gallery in Soho (see Table 2 for a complete reference) in 1973, he asked about their *parents'* estimated "socioeconomic background" (offering a vague set of categories having more relation to income than to social class). Of the 1,324 replies, 3 percent chose "poverty"; 18 percent, "lower middle income"; 34 percent, "upper middle income"; 4 percent, "wealthy"; 11 percent gave no answer (65% reported their own 1972 gross income as under $10,000.) In the 1973 poll and in one Haacke carried out in the same circumstances in 1972 (858 replies), the following responses were obtained with respect to occupation (46% reported an annual gross income under $10,000):

| **1972** | |
|---|---|
| artists | 30% |
| professional, technical, and kindred workers (including art professionals other than dealers) | 28 |
| managers, officials, proprietors (including dealers) | 4 |
| clerical workers | b |
| salesworkers | 0 |
| craftsmen and foremen | 1 |
| operatives | b |
| housewives | 3 |
| students | 19 |
| others | 2 |
| none | 1 |
| no answer | 6 |

[b] under 1 percent



developed a rhetoric of productive emancipation as patronage declined and they entered into a condition approximating the competitive free market—of which I'll say more later. Once again, ideological accounts tend to obscure the contours of both audience and market, suggesting that Everyone may choose to belong to either or both, equipped with the right inclinations. The meaning of art (roughly, its "use value") is held to transcend or even contradict its material existence, and discussions of the economics of art (its exchange relations) are confined to professional seminars and business journals (and there is a formulaic ending for such discussions that is meant to rescue them from philistinism: taste is the ultimate judge, buy only what you *like*). The actual effects of the market have thus been made mysterious. But we can trace some of the parameters.

Certainly the very rich collectors (including corporate ones) are still the constant substructural support of the art world. Big collectors, now including photo collectors, aside from keeping the cash flowing, have a great deal of leverage with museum and gallery directors and curators and often are trustees or board members of museums and granting agencies. They also donate (or sell) contemporary works to museums, securing windfall tax savings and driving up the monetary value of their other holdings by the same artists. In photography, what is now cast in relief is the ability of collectors to engineer the historiography of the medium to suit their financial advantage. These are clear-cut influences of market on audience at large.

There are, however, many people below the high bourgeoisie who buy art for decoration, entertainment, and status—and very much because of art's investment value. Their influence is not formative, yet they constitute a vital layer of the market. This market segment is far more subject to the fluctuations in capitalist economies than is big money, though both are affected by boom-and-bust cycles.

## Art World Attitudes

As capitalist economies experience downward swings, changes occur in buying patterns that bring about specifiable changes in what the audience at large gets to see. For example, dealers have lately supported (by means of shows and even artists' salaries) certain types of trendy art, including performance, which sell little or not at all but which get reviewed because of their art-world currency and which therefore enhance the dealer's reputation for patronage and knowledgeability. Bread and butter comes from back-room sales of, say, American Impressionist paintings. When money is tight, the volume of investment declines and investors fall back further on market-tested items, usually historical material. This, as well as the general fiscal inflation, may cause dealers to decrease support to nonsellers.[5] But when economic conditions are uncertain over a longer term and investors worry about economic and governmental stability—as now—many investors, including institutions with millions of dollars to invest, put their money in art. Small investors avoid the stock market and savings accounts and buy "collectibles" or "tangibles."

5. Except on the part of the limited-life dealerships that exist to lose money and therefore provide tax shelters.

Tangibles encompass gems, gold (notoriously, the *krugerrand*), real estate, old luggage, and objets d'art: vases, antiques, classy craft items such as silver and ceramics, and old art by dead artists—lately including "vintage" photo prints. People unconcerned with art discourse can be comfortable with such work, especially when, thanks to the effects of the big collectors, brand-name paintings and sculpture seem far too pricey. Thus, the level of safe, purely investment, buying may rise dramatically while patronage buying diminishes.[7] With the falling dollar, investors from other countries find tried-and-true U.S. art and collectibles to be good buys, thus also enlarging the market for those items —and skewing it toward *their* particular favorites, such as Photo Realist paintings. (At the same time, countries such as Britain that are in worse financial shape are experiencing an outflow of old-master paintings to high bidders from everywhere else.)

As dealers concentrate on work that sells and decrease their support of the less salable, museums and noncommercial galleries also show it less. Artists then make less of it, though the newer sorts of institutional funding—teaching jobs and government grants—keep a shrunken volume of nonselling work in production and circulation, at least in the short run. The balance begins to tip toward ideologically safe work. At any time, the nonbuying audience seems to have a negligible effect on what kind of contemporary art gets supported and produced and therefore on what it gets to see. Popular response no doubt has somewhat more effect on the planning for cultural-artifact museum shows, such as the King Tut and People's Republic exhibits, providing a convenient support for any move that granting agencies and corporate sponsors make toward these pseudo-populist projects and away from exhibits of contemporary work.

So far I've talked about the actual audience as relatively homogeneous and as beyond the artist's power to determine. But artists may want to reach a different audience from the usual high-culture-consuming public or different audiences at different times. The idea of discriminating among publics is rare in art conversation (though hardly so in marketing), with historical underpinnings. A certain lack of concern with audience took hold with the Romantic movement in early nineteenth-century Europe, an unconcern which was linked to the loss of secure patronage from the declining aristocracy and the state. The

objects with the tantalizing combination of imaginary and real ownership: imaginary company with the very rich, the hint of solid investment bound to rise in value.

7. To underline this point: Investment in art has been discussed increasingly often in business and other magazines addressing people with money, especially in light of the stock market's "October massacre" of 1978. In "The Art Market: Investors Beware," in the *Atlantic Monthly* for January 1979. Deborah Trustman addresses the market's incredible boom: "Art is big business. Sotheby Parke Bernet, the international auction house, . . . announced sales [in America] of $112 million for . . . 1977-78, an increase of $32 million over the previous year. . . . More Americans have become wary of inflation and have begun putting more capital into works of art." Cl

new conception of the artist was of someone whose production cannot be rationally directed toward any particular audience. In one version the artist is a visionary whose springs of creativity, such as Genius and Inspiration (or, in mid-twentieth-century America, internal psychic forces), lie beyond his conscious control and whose audience is "himself."[8] Alternatively, the artist is a kind of scientist, motivated to perform "investigations," "explorations," or "experiments" to discover objective facts or capabilities of, variously, art, taste, perception, the medium itself, and so on, for presentation to similarly invested peers. Production clearly predominated, and marketing was treated as a necessary accommodation to vulgar reality.

A revolt against the canons of high-art production of the earlier, aristocratic order helped clear the way for artists to choose their subjects and styles more freely. But artists, as a class now petty bourgeois, "naturally" tended toward a range of subjects and treatments that was more in tune with the outlook of the new bourgeois audience-market than with that of any other class. Yet artists' marginality in that class, and their new estrangement from government elites, contributed to a struggle against the wholesale adoption of the bourgeois world view and against the increasing commodification of culture. Although the new mythology of art denied the centrality of the market, questions of showing and sales remained of great importance, even if successive waves of artists tried to answer them with rejection. The language of liberation began to be heard at just the historical moment in which all social relations were on the verge of domination by market relations. The various bohemian-avant-gardist trends in nineteenth- and twentieth-century art have constituted a series of rejections and repatriations with respect to bourgeois culture, a series united by their initial contempt for the market and the bourgeois audience at large. The art movements of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries often were part of a larger oppositional culture (and sometimes related to more direct political practice). That was true of a number of versions of "modernism," as most post-cubist art came to be called. Yet, for the most restricted versions of formalist modernism, such as that propounded by the American critic Clement Greenberg at mid-century, there can be no recoverable relation between the work of art and its context other than that composed of similar objects within the aesthetic tradition and the answering faculty of taste.

In the United States, the dominant high-art discourse from, say, the 1940s on has distorted the history of all forms of oppositional culture, whether explicitly part of a revolutionary project or not, into one grand form-conscious trend, with a relentless inattention to the formative influences of larger society and, thus, of the audience. Artists with working-class audiences or who otherwise showed solidarity with revolutionary and proletarian struggles (or, indeed, their opposites, those who produced for the flourishing Academic or "bourgeois realist" market) are neutralized in this history. At most it concedes that (passing over the strident thirties in America, against which this history constitutes a reaction) art and politics were fruitfully linked only in revolutionary France and the Soviet Union, and then but briefly, in the transient, euphorically anarchic moment of liberation.

The proscription against a clear-eyed interest in the audience is part of an elaborated discourse on the nature of art that was developed in the period of consolidation of industrial capitalism. Resting on the philosophy of Immanuel Kant, the eighteenth-century German idealist philosopher, modernism has built its house on the base of "artistic freedom" from the audience-market and used as its architect the faculty of taste. "Taste" is the construct Kant used (in *The Critique of Judgment*) to distinguish the response to art from all other human responses, including appetite and sexual desire, morality, and religious sentiments. In the Kantian tradition, the aesthetic has no object or effect other than the satisfaction of taste, and all other concerns are excluded as contaminants. For the present topic, the signal issue is the impossibility of a sense of responsibility to any audience, a ban that was related to the Romantic figure of the artist as utterly alone, perhaps a rebel, unassimilable within bourgeois social order, and, finally, uncomfortable in his own existence. In the folklore of advanced capitalism this figure lies behind the unsympathetic mass-culture view of the average artist as a kook and a misfit, or at best a lucky (because financially successful) fraud, reinforcing the confinement of a positive relation to high art to the socially elite, specialized audience.

The protocols of taste involve a curious attitude toward judgment; judgment becomes a kind of noncalculated, innate response to the work, almost a resonance with it. Normal standards of judgment about the *meaning* of what one sees before one's eyes are negated, and in particular the referential ties between the work and the world—especially the social world—are broken. The signal system itself becomes the proper subject of conversation. Mass audiences know that there is a restricted body of knowledge that must be used to interpret the codes of art at the same time that they recognize their outsider status. One is left confronting a void of permissible responses out of which the exit line is often an apologetic and self-derogating "I don't know anything about art but I know what I [don't] like." For the art-world audience, the *knowledge* that informs their taste recedes into unimportance compared with the compliment to their inborn "sensibilities" (taste) that an appreciation of high art offers.

Modernist American critics with the power to define a discourse and an art practice, such as Clement Greenberg, posited an opposition between bourgeois high culture and a more widely comprehensible culture as that between avant-garde and kitsch and imagined avant-gardism to be magically revolutionary through a liberation of imagination without any need to change social structures; others, like Harold Rosenberg, derided the value of art informed by "Community Criticism," instead favoring idiosyncrasy and *un*willed art; and scores and hundreds of critical hacks have emulated, embellished, and popularized these dogmas.[9] Informing this critical line was a militant anti-Stalinist reaction against thirties' art-world progressivism.

9. From a randomly selected book and

## The Concerns of Art

How might artists and other cultural workers abrogate the gospel of genius, isolation, and formalist concerns? Once we even think to pose the question of how to construct an audience, we are confronted by questions that intervene.[10] We must, for example, ask ourselves what the point of our art is (despite the injunction against this). For instance: to entertain, amuse, divert, confuse, defuse, inculcate, educate, edify, mystify, beautify, satisfy, tickle the sensibilities, alienate, make strange, terrorize, socialize. Some of these are incidental to other art-world purposes, such as turning a profit, getting grants, or making a reputation.

All art, from the crassest mass-media production to the most esoteric art-world practice, has a political existence, or, more accurately, an ideological existence. It either challenges or supports (tacitly perhaps) the dominant myths a culture calls Truth. There was a dry period in the United States, from about the Second World War through the McCarthy period to the mid-sixties, during which the art world slammed shut to socially invested work.[11] But after the cultural heresies of the sixties, art with a conscious political orientation was able to breach the neutralist cultural monolith. Theories of culture, as opposed to mere ideologies and journalistic promotion, have captured attention and are useful in developing an informed art practice.

Following a taxonomy of politicized art developed during the brief period of Soviet cultural experimentation, we may categorize art according to its intentions: to agitate about immediate issues, such as particular strikes, health hazards, tenants' struggles; to propagandize about more general questions, such as personal liberties, institutionalized violence against women, right-wing insurgency; or broad theoretical education, such as the meaning of inflation, the structure of the economy, the strategies of cultural forms. The words "agitation" and "propaganda" evoke a familiar negative response in us, having already been used to discredit earlier appearances of socially engaged art. They call up pictures of clenched-fist posters, yet it should go without saying that only crude works of agitation and propaganda are crude, and only those that offend our ideological precepts are dismissed out of hand. Propagandistic and agitational works from earlier periods are often recuperated for the ruling ideology; photography provides unending examples in the wholesale legitimation of past photographic practice. State-propagandist enterprises theoretically should be most objectionable but in reality may be the most easily recuperated; it is those propagandizing *against* the state that are the least acceptable. The gigantic state-propagandist Farm Security Administration corpus, or, to choose a less momentous but more recent example, the courthouse survey, are readily recovered for art—usually in dismembered form, *auteur* by *auteur*.

The theoretical, which is most similar to the art-theoretical modernist project, has the greatest snob appeal and is most easily assimilable into high culture. It is notoriously prone to turn back on itself and vanish into form-conscious academicism. Yet there are fundamental theoretical issues that should be brought up before a mass audience; even making the point in one's art that ideology is rooted in real social relations is to deal with theory, the theory of culture.

The audiences for each type of work depend not on the category but on the content, including the form. The "audience," then, is a shifting entity whose composition depends not only on who is out there but on whom you want to reach with a particular type of work, and why. There is an enforced passivity in art-world artists' relation to the audience, however, built into the structure of the art world.

## Art World Institutions and Supports

The "art world" (revealing term!) includes the producers of high art, a segment of its regular consumers and supporters, the institutions that bring the consumers and work together, including specialized publications and physical spaces, and the people who run them. Since the art world is fundamentally a set of relations, it also encompasses all the transactions, personal and social, between the sets of participants. The gallery system remains basic to the art world. The conception of the gallery is tailored to the still pervasively modernist view of high art: The gallery is a space apart from any concern other than Art, just as art's only rightful milieu is Art. The gallery is a secular temple of Art, just as the art within it is the secular replacement for religion. The invisible motto above the gallery door reads, "Abandon worldly concerns (except if you're buying), ye who enter here." The paradigm is one in which work is made apart from an audience and in which a space is then secured, at the sufferance of an intermediary, where the audience may "visit" the work (and where the few may appropriate it physically). This sequential network paradigm of artist/artwork/gallery/audience severs any sense of responsibility or commitment to an audience, and political artists must seriously question whether it isn't against their interests to perpetuate it.

The art journals—they are actually trade magazines—a main arena for art discourse, have played the utterly vital role of unifying information (and therefore have helped nail the coffin lid shut on true "regionalism," which could not persist in the face of internationalized communication and marketing). Both the front and the back of the book—both criticism and reviews—are essential. In the early seventies the major attention

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Yet while these factors can have considerable effect on momentary prices and popularity, they have never had much effect on the real artist. Rembrandt and Cézanne are famous for their disdain of social pressures . . . sculptor David Hare has remarked, 'It is a classical complaint that the artist is forced into certain actions by society. The artist need not be so forced, unless it is his desire to be so for motives outside art.'" (John P. Sedgwick, Jr., *Discovering Modern Art: The Intelligent Layman's Guide to Painting from Impressionism to Pop* [New York: Random House, 1966], p. 199.)

10. There are as always plenty of people who have their markets well staked out. It remains to be seen who the *pompier* photographers will be, beyond the predictable panderers like David Hamilton and Helmut Newton.

11. "The art of Ben Shahn or Leonard Baskin may have a quicker and easier appeal, but in time it seems to have less 'content'—that is, less meaningful experience—than the paintings of Mark Rothko or Clyfford Still, which at first glance might look almost empty

close, and too often covertly monetary. I will pass lightly over the fact that the field of art criticism and reviewing is peppered with puff pieces written by people on the dole from dealers, a fact too well known to be belabored, and which may be more widespread in Europe than in America. But journals patently live on their advertising—gallery advertising. The "new" *Artforum* of 1975-1976, which lionized photography and began a hesitant but injudiciously trumpeted foray into cultural criticism, was slammed by the art world powers-that-be (who literally seemed to fear a Marxian takeover of the editorial policy), and was immediately faced with the danger of destruction by the withdrawal of gallery advertising. Dealers felt that reviews, which are what bring the buyers, were becoming sparse and sloppy and that in any case the journal was jeopardizing its imperiously aesthetic vantage point. Exit the editors.

In addition to commercial galleries there are other places where art is exhibited. There are the museums of course, but such institutions as large corporations, schools, and even some unions run noncommercial galleries as well. These galleries typically play only a small part in those organizations; their reasons for existing are ideological. Large corporations consciously avoid controversial work, wanting to appear as patrons of Art-in-general, not as promoters of this or that trend; they want to brand the work rather than have it brand them: this is not patronage but sales and hype.[12] The audience that corporate galleries attract is much like the general gallery-going public, though it may include the more marginal members. The ticket of entry remains some previous inculcation in the social import of high art.

State and municipally funded art museums play an intermediate role. Having a democratic mandate, they cater to the broadest audiences they can safely attract but have special slots for each level of culture. In the disquiet of the sixties, many museums opened token "community oriented" galleries to show melanges of local work, mass culture, ethnic heritage, and folk-art remnants. But the "Harlem on My Mind" fiasco of Thomas P. F. Hoving's tenure at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York demonstrates what trouble high-culture denizens can cause themselves when they attempt large-scale interpretations of minority culture.

Museums of modern art address a more restricted audience than municipal ones. New York's Museum of Modern Art, a project of the Rockefeller family and the Kremlin of modernism, is the prototype in terms of its architecture, its ideology, and the social group it addresses.[13] Its domination extends to contemporary photography and its putative antecedents as well, thanks to the efforts of John Szarkowski, curator of photography.

Museums and noncommercial galleries are under the Damoclean sword of censorship in the form of dismissal of curators and directors or reduced monetary support from donors or board members with conservative tastes. As I suggested earlier, the cultural climate for the showing of "advanced" (thus, low market value) work disappears in times of economic constriction. As donations from individuals diminish, the bureaucratization of art proceeds.[14] Museums are generally conceded to be in some trouble, and many have even opened boutiques selling copies and cultural artifacts within their walls; these thriving businesses create rips in the seamless ideology of museology, and have upset many art-world observers. The December 6, 1976, issue of *Newsweek* reported that: "*New York Times* art critic Hilton Kramer has accused them of destroying the 'sacred hush' that should pervade museums by distracting patrons with 'counterfeit materials.' "[15] The advancing bureaucratization in its corporate-sponsorship form is ominous, for here audience taste may have its strongest negative influence. Corporate sponsors want their names to reach the widest museum-going audience and, as in their own galleries, wish to support only sure winners, art that poses the least challenge to entrenched ideology. Corporations sponsor exhibitions of the most heavily commodified art and that which is most acceptable to mass culture.[16]

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12. The invention of minimal art in the sixties proved fortunate; having no generally intelligible meaning and looking remarkably like nothing other than stray bits of modular architecture, it has sold very well to big companies as appropriate decoration for corporate offices and lobbies, which reflect the same Bauhaus-derived sensibilities. It seems as though there ought to be appropriately lofty photographs to serve where smaller work is deemed inappropriate. Minor White style of weak-kneed surrealism, say, might be the right choice.

13. For one instigation of the ideological role of the museum, see Carol Duncan and Alan Wallach, "Ritual and Ideology at the Museum," in *Proceedings of the Conference on Marxism and Art* (Los Angeles, January 1978). For a more extensive treatment by the same

14. On a panel about funding at the 1979 meeting of the College Art Association held in Washington, D.C., some of the human meaning of art emerged. On the panel were a representative of Exxon, Robert Kingsley (now dead), needled by Hans Haacke in his work *On Social Grease* for calling art a "social lubricant" necessary for the maintenance of business executives in big cities; someone from the Rockefeller Foundation; someone from the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA); someone from a state granting agency; and a gallery director at a huge California state university. The Exxon and Rockefeller men suavely offered facts, figures, and descriptions of their expanding underwriting of art. The woman from NEA was positive but cautious; the federal art budget wasn't running much ahead of inflation. The audience shared her pleasure over the fact that President Carter's budgetary stringency hadn't affected the arts, and everyone refrained from mentioning what *did* feel that ax: social services and aid to cities. But the gallery director acidly sketched a picture of slashes in state and local art budgets, of canceled shows, of museum and gallery closings, of abrupt firings. The session encapsulated the workings of the fiscal crisis, in which federal control may be consolidated at the expense of state and local control and in which the public sector—with municipalities like New York and Cleveland experiencing the crisis most acutely—must cede a wide range of funding, services, and jobs to the "private" sector. For a powerful analysis of the more general relationship between the State and the private sector in advanced capitalist society, see James O'Connor, *The Fiscal Crisis of the State* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1973).

15. Think of the uproar over the traitorous project of simulacrum production that *Newsweek* headlined as "Rocky's Art Clones" (October 16, 1978). *Fortune* had it as their cover story, captioning the cover photo "Nelson Rockefeller, Salesman" (October 23, 1978).

16. The largest corporate sponsors include giant conglomerates and multinationals, among them Xerox, Mobil, Exxon, Rothmans, and Philip Morris, for whom patronage is part of a campaign to counter negative publicity by constructing a corporate "personality,"

Perhaps only the few union-run and community spaces, especially those of and for "third world" communities regularly draw audiences that are solidly working class. In many cases the art shown is art made within the community (which of course is also true of the art world "community"), and the work has some chance of being topical or even polemical. Of all gallery situations it may be here that radical, oppositional work has the best likelihood of realization. Although junior-college and library galleries may also take chances, most are more likely to show work that reveals a missionary intention to bring a warmed-over high art down to the viewers.

In general the gallery system helps keep art directed toward the making of products, toward individual authorship, toward a consistency of media and style, and toward a generalized content. In the art world of the mid-sixties, there was a wholesale rejection of the tiny but hegemonic New York gallery system. Work using social imagery of various kinds—though generally avoiding social partisanship was reduced. Some artists attempted to contradict the commodity status of art by making work that seemed unsalable or that was multiply reproducible. Some began doing "performance" art.[17] But in the succeeding years, the scores of new commercial galleries that opened, and the older ones that reoriented themselves (later opening outposts in Soho, and so on), to cash in on the boom in the art market provided potent reminders of how closely art has remained tied to commodity production.

Efforts to bypass the gallery system included the formation of militantly insurgent artists' cooperative galleries especially by women; the increasing use of electronic and print media, which can be distributed by artists themselves; and the emergence of "alternative spaces" for showing work. The formation of cooperatives was spurred by feminists' resolve to reach audiences both outside and within the art world, despite their exclusion from established institutions, evidenced by the minuscule gallery and museum quotas for women. More importantly, they meant to shake the profoundly male-supremacist orthodoxies of the art world. Cooperatives avoid the domination of an intermediary but often require a prohibitive amount of time and money; and some are simply alternate routes to glory—and the same old audience. As to electronic and print media, they can be quite expensive and are also now well along in the process of commodification. Although these moves have by now been absorbed in varying degrees, their potential isn't exhausted.

So-called alternative spaces embodied a reaction against curatorial hierarchies, often a contempt for the glamorous upper reaches of the audience, and, outside New York, sometimes a rejection of New York domination. Begun as a democratized way of circulating work and ideas among a smaller rather than a larger audience (producers rather than shoppers or browsers—they are sometimes called "artists' spaces"), they pose no inherent challenge to art-world ideologies and have already undergone a fair degree of institutionalization, having been adapted to provide a funnel for government grant money. Those run by artists tend to have a more-or-less explicit though enervated

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to art, here not merely for "image building" but also in attempting to manage productivity and workers' satisfaction.

In 1974, when massive corporate monetary incursions into art had become a subject of talk, a pair of articles by Marylin Bender appeared side by side in the Sunday *New York Times* (October 20, 1974): "Business Aids the Arts. . . . And Itself" and "Blending Automation and Aesthetics." The first ties the rise of corporate spending to the severe effects of the bearish market on the portfolios of arts foundations and museums during a period of rapidly rising profits in certain industries. The second describes Philip Morris' new plant in Richmond, Virginia, designed around Pop art. It provides, among other lessons, a textbook example of how a shift in audiences immediately destroys irony. The loss of the art-world frame (which had occurred long before 1974, with the reincorporation of postmodern, pop imagery in its new, validated form back into mass culture) meant an airlessness between the visual artifact and its representation, a collapse that destroyed the whispered *critique* of mass culture apprehended by high-art audiences and replaced it with adulatory monumentalization. Oversize graphics as art were, at the Philip Morris plant—"the world's biggest and most highly automated cigarette factory"—strategically placed to contradict the utilitarian character of the jobs done within; to drown out symbolically workers' alienation and its psychological manifestations; to argue the existence of a shared cultural unity between owners, managers and workers; and to slap a veneer of civilized decor over material issues of health and safety, monetary demands, and the desire for self-determination. Bender writes, "The plant represents a striving for maximum aesthetic return to help attain such mundane business objectives as increasing productivity and edging out competitors in a tight labor market."

To quote Robert W. Sarnoff, collector of contemporary art, vice chairman of the Business Committee for the Arts, council member of the Cooper-Hewitt Museum, former trustee of the Whitney Museum of American Art and currently of the John F. Kennedy Library Corporation, as well as former chairman of the board and past chief executive officer of both NBC and RCA, who has numbered among his positions directorships of the New York Stock Exchange, the American Home Products Corporation, the Planning Research Foundation, the American Arbitration Association, and the Roper Public Service Opinion Research Center, and executive positions at Cowles Publications, and directorships of Manufacturers Hanover Trust, Random House, Banquet Foods, and Hertz; who is a board member of the Institute of Judicial Administration and of several colleges and universities including Harvard and UCLA; and who has many other business and cultural affiliations speaking in Toronto in an interview broadcast in March, 1979: "The history of Western civilization is that business has been patron and sponsor of the arts. What's happening in our country is that it's a new phenomenon. Business is *beginning* to be a major support of the arts, particularly over the past decade, and it's taking the place of the individual patron because, frankly, of size and cost. . . ."

The force of pop-as-art-form is summarized in the 15-story "pop obelisk" designed by Ivan Chermayeff of Chermayeff & Geismar Associates) converting the plant's smoke-

17. The rejection was of art's commodity status and its consequent vulnerability to market domination far more than of the ideology of art as a specialized entity within culture. Formalism moved away from the stress on composition and transcendence symbolized by Bauhaus aesthetics to the formalism of the Duchampian art-as-idea. There was little overt politicization of the idea of art or much attention to the role of art within class society. And except for a sector of the organized feminists, few artists really went after audiences with less art education. Finally, the fact that the formation of true *work collectives* or collaborations was hardly ever seriously considered reveals much about the retention of auteurship.

It can be argued that the turn away from commodity production was an inevitable further move into the "twentieth century," since handicrafts had long been superseded in the culture at large by industrial objects and im-

anarchic philosophy but, contradictorily rest on state support. They often serve as testing ground for dealers and generate publicity that may lead to sales. They can be manipulated, by clever dealers and others playing on the issue of artistic freedom, into showing work too controversial for a more mainstream gallery.[18] But again, fiscal conservatism is taking its toll on alternative spaces (a number of which have perpetrated astounding overexpenditures with small results), which may become less brave as they also become less numerous and hungrier.

## The Assimilation of Photography

The late sixties and early seventies were the high period of the insurgency efforts I just described, which were fueled by a largely antiwar, antiracist, and feminist rebelliousness. That was also the moment in which photography entered the art world. Conceptual and pop artists who wanted to avoid the deadening preciousness and finish of high art and who were moving toward a narrative literalism brought photography and video into the galleries; for pop artists, photography was a form of quotation from mass culture, no more intrinsically respectable than comic books. Conceptual artists, moving away from "object making," also were attracted by the anonymity and negative valuation attaching to these media. But, never far behind, dealers learned to capitalize on the unsellable by inventing the category "documentation," which relies most heavily on photography and written material.

In the early seventies the lack of an established new style, the skyrocketing prices of traditional art objects, the weakening of the stranglehold of the modernist critics, and the consequent faltering of the commercial galleries helped direct attention toward photography as art form. On a more basic level of society we can seek explanation in the restructuring of culture in this period of advanced capitalism into a more homogeneous version of "the society of the spectacle,"[19] a process accelerated by the increasing importance of electronic media (in which all traditional art is represented rather than seen) and the consequent devaluation of craft skills, forms of high social status into celebrityhood, or "stardom." All collapse and dominant cultural forms are increasingly able to absorb all instances of oppositional culture after a brief moment and convert them into mere stylistic mannerisms, thus recuperating them for the market and the celebration of the what-is. In the enterprise of celebration–promotion–of increasing importance in the art world from the time of the abstract expressionists onward and now central to the social meaning of art–the role of photography is fundamental.

It is still possible that the meaning structure of art has been undergoing reorganization while the market merely faltered briefly and then regained its stride. The late seventies may turn out to have been a revanchist period in which the controlling interests within the audience and market elites regrouped to reestablish the stratification of the audience and its objects, thereby reasserting, for example, the preeminence of painting as artifactual meaning bearer and as tangible investment. In any case, photography's position is neither threatened nor threatening but rather rationalized within the system.

Whatever its causes, the rapid assimilation of photography into high art has occasioned a continuing series of changes in the place of photography within our entire culture as well as in the meaning assigned to photography as a force within art. The interningled "history" of photography and painting, formerly disavowed, is now paraded by both sides, though more so by photography people. The following chance quotation from a review reveals the occasional absurdity of using these media to validate each other with no attention to conditioning factors outside the oeuvre of particular producers: "For all his critical sobriety, [Walker Evans] was one of the fathers of pop art . . . Evans' famous print of a small-town photographic studio . . . looks forward to Andy Warhol's hundreds of Campbell soup cans, each painted in its little niche on the canvas."[20] As photography has moved closer in and farther out and then back again to the charmed circle of high art, it has replicated the ideology and many of the gambits of the more established arts. In the current phase of art-world acceptance, the "history of photography" (old prints) is doing better than present work, a fact that seems unarguably market-determined. Photography is selling well and getting regular critical attention (and therefore art-literate audience attention); art-world interest still tends to be confined to dead photographers, to a few unassailably established living ones, and to those closest to conceptual art. There is little interest, indeed, in the photographic discourse that was craft-oriented or a pale version of abstract expressionism, and a new discourse is being developed that can be better assimilated to art-world discourse. Photo critics are retiring in disgust, outclassed by New York art critics working hard to create, borrowing from this or that European school of literary or cultural criticism, a mystified language of comment and analysis in which to couch their increasingly esoteric accounts of the "essence" of photography.

For most of the art world the acceptance of photography seems tied to a vision of it conceived in terms of the modernism now moribund in the other arts. That is not accidental; it was necessary to the process of its legitimation that photography pick up the torch of formalism and distantiation from real-world concerns, for photography had to reengineer its own high-culture/low-culture split: a central matter for photography, which has penetrated daily life and informed our sense of culture as no form of visual representation has

18. Recently, for example, an alternative space showed nastily sadomasochistic photos by a well-connected and, until recently, little-known photographer who was simultaneously showing photos of flowers at a commercial gallery and a museum in the same area. The show later moved on to an alternative space in another city; his powerful backer is also, coincidentally, a photo collector who is accumulating greater and greater power. This is simply art-world business-as-usual looking a little naked in the context of the still-small worlds of photography and alternative spaces.

19. See Guy Debord, *Society of the Spectacle* (revised English translation, Detroit: Black & Red, 1977), and Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," in *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (New York:

20. Alfred Frankenstein, *San Francisco-Ex*

before. Photographers are very conscious of Szarkowski's controlling influence, as regnant photo czar, in determining whose career shall be advanced and what gets said about contemporary work. Aside from his responsibility for the course of the careers of Arbus, Winogrand, and Friedlander, his recent elevation of William Eggleston from virtually nowhere in order to corner color photography before mass-media photographers like Ernst Haas or postcard artists like Eliot Porter might be slipped into top spot has chagrined many interested observers. The specifics of his influence on discourse affect the most fundamental relations between the work, the photographer, and the world. They include an insistence on the private nature of photographic meaning (its ineffable mysteriousness) and on the disjuncture between the photo itself and the occasion for its making—old-fashioned art-world commonplaces. It can be argued that these elements of an older art-world discourse still dominate most photographic production and sales promotion while the new art-critical enterprise is restricted to art journals and anti-Szarkowskian production.

Concomitantly with the elaboration of the received doctrines of photography, the picture of the quintessential modern (art) photographer as a marginally socialized person has firmed its outlines. It stands in contradistinction to the conception of photojournalists and documentarians as hardbitten, still artisanal, and rational and to that of fashion photographers as sycophantic (except the few with good publicity).

I can recapture my astonishment at Dorothea Lange, in an interview filmed very near her death, describing a forgotten wartime photo she had rediscovered when preparing her retrospective at MoMA (held in 1966). Szarkowski hovers through the film. We see the photo, showing many men and women filling the frame, frozen in the artificial ranks provided by a broad but unseen staircase; they are dressed as workers and seem to be going off shift. The meaning of the photo, Lange says, is not that all those people were united in a common purpose but that each was looking off into a private internal world. There was a terrible appropriateness in this: for someone who had just survived the fifties, the period of the most deeply enforced artistic passivity and withdrawal into a phantasmic universe, so to rethink the meaning of her project as to stand it on its head, converting a tight, utilitarian nationalism into a grossly atomized individualism. There was no gun at Lange's head; the role of cultural commissar was diffused into the multivoiced propagandizers—including Szarkowski. In a fundamental way Lange's account reproduces the changed account of the documentary enterprise itself, from an outward-looking, reportorial, partisan, and collective one to a symbolically expressive, oppositional and solitary one; the lionizing of Robert Frank marks this shift from metonymy to metaphor.

Artistic solipsism has now advanced farther than the Lange narrative suggests, yet the incident baldly represents a turning, within the biography of a single artist, into the psychological interior. The art photographer has taken on the figure of the familiar romantic artist, in this case one bound to the use of *apparatuses* to mediate between himself or herself and the world and whose ultimate concern is simply that self. More and more clearly, the subject of all reseen in terms of its revelatory character not in relation to its iconic subject but in relation to its "real" subject, the producer.

## Levels of Audience and Market for Photography

For most of the art audience and especially for buyers who want investment that will appreciate in value, the *certainty* attaching to elevated sentiments, to the Kantian rhetoric of removal and formal values, to the denial of the relevance of subject and context, offers the reassuring familiarity of a discourse that sounds like art-ten-years-ago, dishing up again the ruling ideas of painting from the late fifties through the sixties. Many photographers produce for this market, and young ones are trained to do so, learning as quickly as young professionals in any field what the road is to success.

So photography penetrated the high-art audience in its moment of hesitation and raised its sights above its previous audience of other, often amateur, photographers. The older, hobby-oriented photo magazines may still concentrate on craft: printing papers, films, lenses, exposure times; but elsewhere the new "semiologic" discourse appears. The new photo journals are being constructed on the model of art journals and the newer, cheaper newspaper-format publications. A great urge for respectability emanates from their very typefaces and layouts. Nevertheless, the smallness and newness of the field is betrayed by the existence of an academic journal calling itself "The History of Photography."

In the realm of production, a theory-inspired approach, referred to as "structuralism," a latter-day minimalist modernism borrowed from small filmmaking, appears in art-photo galleries whereas it could never have entered the photo galleries of an earlier epoch; it has not made it into the controlling commercial dealerships such as New York's Light Gallery or Marlborough Gallery, although the pussy porn of Robert Heinecken is now being marketed by Light. It is usually art audiences and dying-to-be-hip fringes of the photo audience—mostly interested professionals, including curators and critics—that are the audience and potential market for such work.

While art photography was divorcing its old audience and romancing a classier one, the industry was increasing its pursuit for the amateurs.[21] Reports of the new status of photography are disseminated in versions appropriate to ever-widening circles of the audience. The value of the categories of photographic practice, from high art to advertising to family commemorative, is raised, and all the corresponding markets swell in response. Photo exhibitions and art-world attention to photography sell camera and darkroom equipment

21. "For a wild week in December *photokina* packed a dozen halls in Cologne. . . . While commerce reigned supreme in the football-field-sized halls, the aesthetic side of the medium was revealed across the Rhine with photography exhibitions at the city's art museum and at other galleries. The growth of *photokina*, from sleepy trade show to big-time world's fair, reflects the surge in popularity of photography itself. Today photography is a boundless industry with millions of dollars in annual sales. . . . Indeed, it is hard to imagine a more insatiable buying public than that existing in today's photographic marketplace." (John von Hartz, "*Photokina:* World's Fair of Photography," in the "Marketplace" section of Pan-

like painting shows never sold brushes and paint. What accident can there be in the fact that the Museum of Modern Art started promoting color photography just when the industry started pushing *home* color darkroom equipment in a big way? One can imagine the bonanza of one-dimensionality in store for us if photo corporations like Kodak can sponsor prestigious exhibitions of auratic prints from photographic history which will not only serve as terrific p.r. but will also lead to an immediate leap in corporate profits. Perhaps Eastman House can have itself declared a national shrine as well.

A new intelligentsia of photography is now being manufactured in universities to dispense the correct cultural line on the meaning of the events being used to mark the march of photography, and to control the received utterances about current work. There is a mutual legitimation at work here: people are engaged in inventing a body of knowledge the study of which will lead to the status-conferring professional credentialing of persons who will thereby be empowered to grant, by their public utterances and other forms of publicity, a legitimacy to that reified cultural entity "the history of photography" and to specific works within it. As the enterprise of art history (itself invented precisely to validate works for collectors) has amply proven, the effect of this legitimation on the market is direct and immediate.[22]

One may be sure that the pantheon of past greats will continue to be enlarged with new "discoveries," for the exhaustion of the stock of vintage prints seems in sight, and new stocks must be added to keep the market up. One may also be sure that photographers will have to attend parties at which they can meet art and occasionally photo critics, may have to read a few art journals, and will have to learn to control public statements about their work. One may be sure also that the firmer the hold photography gains in the art world, the more regular will be the attack on photography's truth-telling ability and on its instrumentality. Already there is little distinction between Winogrand, Arbus, and Avedon in their relation to a truth above the street. Further, a belief in the truth value of photography will be ever more explicitly assigned to the uncultured, the naive, the philistine and will serve to define them out of the audience of art photography.

I confess to looking at the transformation of photography with a mixture of amusement, frustration, and awe. I have no sentimental longings for the clubby days before the surge of the market swept the photo world away;[23] but I am pained to see the mass-hypnotic behavior of those who thought they lived

22. Dealers and buyers look up artists and works, past and present, to see what if anything has been said about them, for example. A tiny further example of the day-to-day relations within a system: At the recent College Art Association meeting (see note 14), there was a scholarly session called "Atget and Today," two of whose participants were Szarkowski and Alan Trachtenberg, a respected social historian with an interest in turn-of-the-century photography. At the back of the hall a young woman handed out discreetly printed cards announcing "EUGENE ATGET, An exhibition of vintage prints, Reception in honor of the delegates [*sic*] to the College Art Association. . . , Lunn Gallery/Graphics International Ltd.," with address.

23. For precisely this lament see Shelley Rice, "New York: What Price Glory" [illegible]

in a comfortable backwater but now find themselves at the portals of discovery with only a halting knowledge of the language of utopia. I won't forget the theory-terror exhibited at the last meeting of the SPE (my first), or people's fear of offending anyone at all, on the chance that a job, a show, or a critical notice might walk away with them; I both understand and don't understand the pull of fame as it roars near. Artists have had a longer time to learn the game.[24]

There is a sense in which photography, the most reifying of representational forms, verbal or visual, is a sitting duck for the big guns of art. Even in the earlier moments of photography's gallery life, the craft orientation was pervasive; the tradition of single fine prints in white overmats merely replicated the presentational style of paintings and graphics. In Stieglitz's universe art had to be a *propter hoc* motive, not a belated discovery in work originally meant for use. The conversion of photographs that once did "work" into noninstrumental ones marked the next great leap into art. In the historical moment of its utterance, as I tried to show earlier, this insistence on the uselessness of art was meant as a cry of the producers' liberation from the object relations of their product. In an ironic reversal, the denial that the meaning of photographs rests on their rootedness in the stream of social life preserves the photography at the level of object, a mere item of value hanging on a wall.

It requires quite a lot of audience training to transform the relation between a viewer and a photograph to one primarily of mysteriousness, though the gallery dislocation helps. The dual questions of art's instrumentality and of its truth are particularly naked in relation to photography, which can be seen everyday outside the gallery in the act of answering to a utilitarian purpose, in assertions of truth from legal cases to advertising to news reports to home album. This cultural disjunction, made possible by commodity fetishism, accounts for the desperation with which young photographers snatch at the vulgarism that only lies are art and that the truth of photography must therefore be that it is all artful lies, constructions outside the understanding of the common mind. There is an exquisiteness to this hermeneutic, a quiet ecstasy that accompanies the purported lift in understanding that sees beyond the world of appearances through the agency of mere light, magical light, in a leaden culture gone increasingly object-bound. But the art world's sleight of hand consists in substituting another mystificatory veil of meaninglessness for the naive one of transparency.

Let us now imagine a relation between viewer and photographic project

feeling co-opted. From this point on the creative individuals are only the grist for the economic mills. Collectors and potential collectors are now the stars of the show. . . ."

24. This would be the place to point to the outrageous sexism and white-skin privilege of the photo establishment, despite the large number of women involved in photography and the far greater number of nonwhites than we ever get to know about professionally. There is also the further problem that the tokenistic partial incorporation of some of women's photography into art-world photography is used to obscure both the question of *oppositional* practice and the dismal inattention to minority-culture photography. That is, a superficial acceptance of some basic feminist demands is used [illegible]

in which the producer actively shares a community with the audience in a different way from the community she/he shares with other producers. I will not make an argument here for a practice that comes far closer to this understanding of art and its place in the world.[25] As a polar situation we can imagine the disappearance of the idea of audience, and perhaps with the ubiquitous standard of the single producer. In the real world we can maintain the movement toward this pole as a tendency. Imagine the implication of the audience in the *formation* of work: it is just this implication of community that is profoundly embedded in the meaning of art. Its present appearance of disconnectedness is more polemical than real, and it has left producers at the mercy of everyone but their nonpurchasing audience. Arnold Hauser observed that the doctrine of art's uselessness was the result of the fear of the upper classes after the French Revolution that they would lose control of art.

The lie of official culture is that society-invested art is sullied, deficient in its conception, deformed in its gestation, brutalized by the conditions of its birth, and abused in its lifetime. To rescue ourselves from this damaging fiction surely requires a new emancipation from market relations, and it demands a re-thinking of all the facets of the production of art within culture. The leveling effect of money, of commodity relations, so that all photographs are equal regardless of what they depict and in which standards of quality are external to iconographic statement and intent, must be challenged at every turn:

> *[T]o supply a productive apparatus without trying . . . to change it is a highly disputable activity even when the material supplied appears to be of a revolutionary nature. For we are confronted with the fact . . . that the bourgeois apparatus of production and publication is capable of assimilating, indeed, of propagating, an astonishing amount of revolutionary themes without ever seriously putting into question its own continued existence or that of the class which owns it.*[26]

To make this argument is not to call for artists to change masters but to effect a break with preceding practice in a strong and meaningful way. We are in a period in which oppositional practice is regaining its strength and taking on international aspects. We must inventively expand our control over production and showing, and we must simultaneously widen our opportunities to work with and for people outside the audiences for high art, not as annunciatory angels bearing the way of thought of the *haute monde*, but to rupture the false boundaries between ways of thinking about art and ways of actively changing the world.

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25. Instead I refer you to Allan Sekula's "Dismantling Modernism, Reinventing Documentary (Notes on the Politics of Representation)," *Massachusetts Review* 19, no. 4 (Winter 1978): 859-883, which defines an oppositional practice emerging from a conscious break with the late-modernist paradigm.

26. Walter Benjamin, "The Author as Producer," translated by Anna Bostock in *Understanding Brecht* (London: New Left Books, 1973), pp. 93-94. [An alternate transla-

## Postscript

In 1979 I was asked by the editor of *Exposure* magazine, which is published for its members by the Society for Photographic Education, to write something about the audience for photography. Interest in this question was high because photography in the 1970s had greatly expanded its public appearance as a high art and cultural good. It had begun to seem worthy of all kinds of attention, from artists and art students as well as from journalists and their publics, art writers, collectors and investors, curators and museum acquisitions boards, and scholars. More than just a past, present, and future, photography appeared to possess a specific historical presence or "tradition," one that–who knows?–might make it a rival of the other fine arts. What were the limits to photography's command?

Descriptions of its meanings and possibilities offered in art schools and the press were likely to differ from any I might give. Despite the complexities of interpretation and explanation in most other fields, photography's tended to concentrate on the psyche, on the one hand, and on technical change, on the other. Writing on photography was usually belletristic or reductively formalist, a weave of modern shibboleths. The perspective on photographic history would likely see only an upward spiral into aesthetic significance. I did not intend in my article to counter these approaches or propose alternative theories of motivation and intention. Instead, I wanted to open up the question of audience to include some essential factors typically overlooked in such accounts. I wanted to look at some of the institutions and processes governing distribution and helping to direct production–some of the things I thought people using photographic media with some relation to the art world might find interesting, something on the order of a mild sociology and economic report.

What strikes me most strongly now about this essay is its sneaking optimism. I overestimated the power of consistency and memory, both personal and collective, in fashioning behavior, and I underestimated the pressure for cultural change. Things might well have been different if a corporatist like Jimmy Carter had been reelected president in 1980, but the conservative sweep that was the response of the eighties to the worldwide crisis of capital set the tone for a corresponding change in cultural as well as political and social discourses and institutions. It might be interesting to trace some of these changes and their effects on the art world.

Although this essay's prediction of a restored production hierarchy in art and the revalorization of an elite culture for social elites proved correct, I could not have guessed the dimensions of the neoexpressionist juggernaut. Nor did I foresee the degree of incorporation of at least the images of dissidence and difference (often a bedrock of urban ghetto culture) into the newly revitalized art-cash nexus.

Still, this incorporation may make sense during such a period of restratification. After all, Reaganism in triumph meant to usher in a new age, with a totalizing philosophy not only of governance but of existence, and thus a new Chain of Being: a new order of social relations and a new account of their contents. Despite the magnification of a "privilege differential" between rich and poor, all must be symbolically

remnants of the rhetoric of revolution-as-liberation–win acceptance, in a kind of symbolic lottery, into high culture's "style avant-garde."

But in such a period, in which the fortunes of the rich and acquiescent are tended by the State while everyone else takes her or his chances, those whose dissidence is substantive rather than ornamental will be granted little acceptance and less funding.

The move to the right has skewed rightward the spectrum of public discourse, making the Right's positions the touchstone of debate and common sense and bringing a new respectability to its fringes. The press and the electronic media push the range of Rightist opinion, parading an array of "commentators," characters, think-tank analysts, and advocates of dictators and counterrevolutionaries, military adventurists, and marauders, all for the State's sake. The open elevation of principles of me-firstism and "might makes right" above the rule of law does nothing for the spirit of justice. (Even Jimmy Carter said that life wasn't fair.) Since the late seventies the preferred facial pose for models and some pop celebrities combines a narcissistic pout with a narrow-eyed stare.

In the arts, funders, sponsors, and curators beat a prudent retreat in the face of Hilton Kramer's barrages from the safe haven provided him by the very rich and very right-wing John M. Olin Foundation and the Scaife Family Charitable Trusts. Despite this lone assassin's potential clout with the National Endowments, the outright tampering with those agencies' grant-giving mechanisms is, of course, mainly the work of the Reagan team players who head the Endowments. With their lead, support not only for dissidence but for difference suffers a chill. Curators, investors, and museum boards, who, after all, *are* the rich as well as tending the culture of the rich, grow impatient with the experiments of bohemia and with seemingly egalitarian, sociological, or critical work. Small museums and the remaining "alternative spaces," even if not terrorized by ideological thunder, can hardly afford to back them on their own.

The mass media of course played a vital role in the cycle of change, heralding the appearance of Reaganism with a new coat of paint on the latest model of the gray flannel suit. As the *New York Times* was informing its readers of the jubilation in certain foreign, particularly Latin American, capitals upon Reagan's accession, it was also proclaiming "A New Opulence Triumphs in Capital" and (notoriously) "Living Well Is Still the Best Revenge." The limousines and ball gowns packed away for the duration of down-dressing populism came out of the closets, and ostentatiousness was touted as the pinnacle of tastefulness. Aggressive-looking white folks in cashmere business suits and horn rims became the TV hucksters of choice for drugs, magazines, computers, underwear, and "financial services." Competitiveness in the battle for "fitness" (to better one's chances of survival?) invaded leisure, and executives and executive trainees dressed their babies in pin-striped pajamas and enrolled them at birth in the ivy-league colleges of their choice. Strongly Nordic types in family formation, suddenly debuted in the *Times*' sections and in page-long advertisements for "in" designers like Ralph Lauren. Black faces vanished

hoped to strike it rich–most of them through the purchase of lottery tickets–or dress like the rich. In New York's Harlem, East and West, Ralph Lauren is also "in." Even for the rich, the word "wealthy" is out, and "rich" is in.

For us now, style–sartorial and rhetorical–suffices where reality cannot. The symbolic expressions of political dissidence likely to receive the widest attention during this period of cultural reintegration (however fleeting) will also be those played out in the arena of commodity culture. Sure enough, the most visible and successful in this period have been associated with New York's style avant-garde, with New York's street culture, and with reworkings of mass-media photographic imagery, returned to the marketplace as low-ticket art commodities and wearables. Notwithstanding accompanying claims of subversive intervention, the irony here is that the project of the historical avant-garde, to merge art into life, has been interpreted as the achievement of a status of near-indistinguishability from other designer goods.

The cheerleader optimism that Reagan introduced makes its mark in the art world as a display of energy, of "energetic-ness," in art–heat instead of coolness, perpetual motion in place of stability–as a marker that floats free of content. Upscale and upbeat walk hand in hand. Yet much of the art in question is down-side: images of torment and decay, destruction and apocalypse. (The return of the repressed? Or just the price those on top pay for the constant reminders of life below–and the danger posed by those who live it.) In the East Village galleries the fashionable cynicism that leads graffiti (etc.) artists to claim they are just "ripping off the rich" is less interesting than the petty-bourgeois entrepreneurialism distinguishing them from the bohemianism of the (former) avant-garde.

The market and the press for large-scale, flamboyant expressionism add up to big business. Capital-gains tax laws have been adjusted under Reagan stewardship to favor traditional investments once again; the magic ingredient, "investor confidence," has returned to the stock-and-bond market; inflation is moderating; and the U.S. dollar has–disastrously for the rest of the world, but never mind–reached a new high. As I noted in the article proper, the economic contractions of the seventies were already helping destroy the para-economic counterculture, severely dampening its art-world manifestations and causing art production to retreat to major urban centers, especially New York. These changes helped pave the way for the incorporation I described a bit earlier. The recent new recapitalization in art means an intensive working of these urban centers along with a demand for investments with rapid, high return–as Lower East Side real estate goes, so goes its art, or so dealers and investors hope. With respect to neoexpressionism, from the point of view of the investor all the institutions of the art world have conjoined to create a fully legitimated and therefore safe investment that nevertheless has the necessary appearance of ideological risk and–that most favored intangible of conservative eras–"creativity." The tangibles and collectibles market could not stand up to the economic pressures (let alone the ideological ones) generated by these attractive prospects and the tremendous oversupply of new lower-end (East Village-type) production they have

generating, artist-oriented art, and found a new life as a type of theatrical extravaganza with guaranteed upscale entertainment appeal, a kind of late-twentieth-century avant-garde opera or virtuoso vehicle.

Needless to say, the neoexpressionist revival and the accompanying shelving of the communication model in art have not been good for photography. Photography has come to seem rather lukewarm, to investors and young artists (and art schools) alike. Why fool around at the low end of things when big prices, big reputations, and big investments are in the offing? But photography, although no longer a glamor item, still lives. New lines of production are being pursued, while criticism and museumization also continue. This year (1984) a major study facility was established in Southern California at the J. Paul Getty Museum, best known for its huge budget and its hide-bound conservatism. The new collection is based on those of at least two major collectors, Arnold Crane and Samuel Wagstaff, who have thereby dramatically elevated their influence; and the museum has wooed away the photo curator of New York's Metropolitan Museum, all of which erodes the power of MoMA's John Szarkowski.

In showing and collecting, high-brow aestheticism, from Stieglitz to more contemporary color-field photographers, has gotten more play. The other popular line is also art-derived (for want of a better term), but it stands in sharp contrast to fine-print or other straight photography. This work, which art writers call "appropriation" because it uses media images directly, links representation and power, drawing on media theory and semiotics, and often feminism as well. Ultimately, it is a child of Pop Art, one more sanguine than its parent, perhaps, but still suffering from Pop's deceptive transparency: the immediacy with which its surface offers itself for consumption by a mass audience mutes or liquidates its potential for open criticism. Allegory and aestheticism become attractive or even imperative in times of repression or despair. Here the situation is made more problematic by the felt need to employ mass syntax whereas the apparent readability of the ensuing work almost ensures misunderstanding. Yet this work's ability to engage with social and political issues cannot be overlooked.

It may be that such work stands for mass culture in the broadest sense but does so in the form of mass-media images; another indication of the seeming totality of cultural incorporation, its complete inclusiveness that makes representation in mass-media images seem the lowest-rung requirement for anything meaningful to exist, the one at which the circulation of the copy justifies the existence of the original. In video (aside from traditional documentary) the biggest successes are also scored by work that sticks close to the broadcast image or uses the editing paths and displays the "production values" identifiable in network or corporate logos, commercials, or music television (itself a teasing out of the surrealism basic to other kinds of advertising). The universe presented by the media, with its own focus on the problematic relation of representation to truth, becomes the reference point for practically everything. This ultimately enhances photography's prospects, if not now, then later —but not necessarily for fine-print work. Many formerly straight photographers

graphed" work, acknowledging the self-referentiality of photographic form. The investigation of representation and power and other, more direct politicizations of art have assisted new forms of photo documentary to find audiences both in and outside the art world.

The art world has indeed changed since 1979, when this article was written. But the transitory feel of the social and political scene lends the cultural one a fragile air. Far-Right Reaganism has already receded, leaving behind a dull-as-normal Statism. If "yuppies" are the future, as they and their supporters claim, more change will come. Young urban professionals are, or grow up to be, the professional and managerial (and technical) sectors referred to in the opening sections of this article. As productive labor continues to decline in importance and the middle-class wage to become rarer, these sectors will pull more social and cultural weight. They are not moss-backed conservatives or patriarchal Bible-thumpers, but their buoyant philosophy of entrepreneur-led growth to solve the nation's ills makes them no friend of the poor and even less of the technologically unemployed. Their antimilitarism, profeminism, and what might be called therapeutic environmentalism put them strongly at odds with Administration policies. What their tastes in art will turn out to be remains to be seen, though at present they like photography because it satisfies their taste for technical control and seeming aesthetic neutrality.

This postscript serves as another illustration of how social configurations enfold and constrain art production. What we still need, of course, is even the beginning of a theory of motivation in the production of art.