John Miller

THE SYSTEM OF (ART) OBJECTS AND THE SELF-MADE MAN

Sometimes, life imitates art. Fluxus and Conceptual Art, in their drive toward self-determination, initiated methods and procedures that anticipate how individuals interact within a burgeoning information economy. This, however, is not limited to direct patterns of consumption and communication; it carries over to how people fundamentally construe themselves as subjects within such a system. To the extent that these assumptions are unreflected or unconscious, they are ideological. Since about 1990, the rise of personal computers coupled with the mandate of universal online access has created the social obligation (typically presented as an opportunity) to represent and to promote one's own interests as information to be disseminated. This, in turn, doubles back on assumptions about public and private spaces and how one engages them, whether computers predominate or not. What once counted as an artistic intervention has become standard operating procedure

From the very outset, Fluxus and Conceptual Art understood themselves in terms of networks. Rather than accepting the given – and comparatively old-fashioned – gallery/museum structure of the art world, both movements attempted either to take over parts of that structure for themselves or to renounce it altogether. These tactics presume three things: i) that the conventional art world functions as a system, apparatus or institution, ii) that self-determination in the production and distribution of art works yields a greater degree of autonomy, thus legitimacy and iii) that the autonomy of any particular artist or artwork ultimately remains relative to the art world as a whole. Paradoxically, given these three conditions, the conventional art world ultimately reintegrates alternative efforts to circumvent conventional means of presenting and distributing art as a kind of self-regulating feedback.

Insofar as self-determination concerns handling the dissemination and distribution of artworks, it approximates self-promotion. In his account of first-generation conceptual art in New York, Alexander Alberro contends that a "politics of publicity" goverened how Seth Siegelaub promoted the work of Douglas Huebler, Lawrence Wiener, Robert Barry and Joseph Kosuth. Alberro noted that, after closing his first enterprise, a conventional gallery, Siegelaub launched an operation much more akin to an advertising agency. Because Siegelaub business no longer resembled a retail operation, many took this to be a renunciation of the market. Alberro argues, however, that rather than going outside market relations, conceptualism's "deeper logic of informaticization" matched what emerged as capital's most advanced form at that time.

If the informaticization of conceptual art constituted a prestige form of capital, then the claim of obviating the art object to avoid commodification becomes spurious. For most, the phrase "art object" typically designates a material thing, e.g., a painting or a sculpture. In this text, however, I would like to brush this designation against the grain, to conflate it with what would ordinarily be presumed to be its opposite: subjectivity or a certain subjectification understood through Marx's observation that under capitalism

people and things trade places. Now, one might go so far as to say people and information trade places. As such, the normative term art object fails to convey the production of discourse that structures contemporary art and makes it intelligible. Such discourse is what is really at stake in contemporary art, namely the *object of the artwork*, not the art object per se. The object of the artwork ultimately pertains to the interpolation of the viewer's subjectivity. Although conceptual art made this status explicit, this aim is not restricted to conceptualism. It is a general condition of contemporary art.

The object of the artwork derives from the framing of art as an institutional discourse. If considered in terms of the broad dichotomy Peter Bürger draws between sacred and secular art, during the Middle Ages and Renaissance art was not yet an institution unto itself. It was produced under the aegis of the church. What counts in sacred art is not the subjectivity of the viewer, but the subjectivity of the worshipper – or the worshipper as a subject of the church. Secular art breaks away from the church to become an institution in its own right. It becomes autonomous. The subjectivity of the viewer comes into its own vis-à-vis the system of the art institution. The seemingly autonomous subjectivity of the viewer is a reciprocal effect of the autonomy of art as institutional discourse. How secular art models subjectivity may be explicit (Seurat's *Sunday Afternoon on the Island of La Grand Jatte*) or implicit (Tony Conrad's *The Flicker*).

Pop Art thematically concerns serial production in mass culture. The pop impulse corresponded to a stepping up of the subjectifying *affect* of the artwork. In turn, this affect pertains to surplus forms of consumption reliant on taste. Andy Warhol's Campbell's Soup cans clearly emblematize serialization through an iconography that is standardized, machine-made and repetitive. Less overtly, Warhol's oeuvre also registers an intensified systemization of art-as-institution. Warhol's *Screen Tests*, for example, are not just simply film portraits; by volatilizing unscripted, real time they pointedly confront individuals with an apparatus (movie camera) that captures both their deliberate postures and their inadvertent tics. And, as Isabelle Graw recently argued, the *Screen Tests* ultimately rehearse a form of bio-power, namely a technology of power that individuates and subjectifies persons as types. Here, the camera-as-apparatus serves as a metonymic stand-in for the institution of art.

In stark contrast to Pop, Fluxus and Conceptual Art resist melding with serial production, typically by withholding, eliminating or ephemeralizing the ostensible product… or, conversely, by treating detritus or ephemera as products. Although this might suggest an absolute opposition between Pop Art and Fluxus, this was not always so, as Claes Oldenburg's *Store* demonstrates. Both Fluxus and Conceptual Art generally attempt to resist subsumption by the institution of art by asserting literal or symbolic forms of autonomy. Sometimes, the point of a Fluxus or conceptualist work is reduced solely to an assertion of autonomy. George Maciunas' Flux Boxes, for example, purport to be self-contained entities, capable for operating outside the gallery/museum nexus. As Maciunas increasingly brought his graphic design skills to bear on the production and packaging of Flux Boxes, they also began to function as advertising. Moreover, as many Fluxus works tended to revel in the sheer repetition of the word Fluxus, a certain tautological potential became increasingly manifest. Mail Art, closely aligned with

Fluxus, took this promotional tendency and fed it through an explicit network, namely the global postal system.

Dematerialization, a term coined by Lucy Lippard, characterizes an early, idealist version of Conceptual Art. Dematerialization promised to distinguish artworks from commodities. Yet, if eliminating the palpable art object was supposed to defeat the art market, it obviously failed. The art market proved it could function just as well as a market for information as it could for painting and sculpture. In a letter to Lippard and John Chandler, Art & Language challenged dematerialism's essential fallacy by pointing out that many so-called dematerialized works, such as Robert Barry's *Inert Gas Series*, simply resort to unconventional (in Barry's case, invisible) materials that inescapably remain materials nonetheless. As such, dematerialization served more to mark a polemical sensibility than as a literal description of the form of the artwork. Seth Siegelaub's *Copy Book,* better known as *The Xerox Book*, suggests how this might apply. Produced in 1968, when the photocopier was still a new technology, *The Xerox Book* underscored a printing technique that was less rigid than photo offset, i.e., more spontaneous and more flexible. Promising liberation from older, more rigid production constraints, *The Xerox Book* was meant to seem less reified, thus "dematerialized," as it were. Ironically, since the cost of doing an entire edition by photo copier proved to be prohibitive, Siegelaub used photo offset litho to reproduce the look of Xeroxed pages.

For its part, Art & Language initiated a form of critical dialog as art. Moreover, by participating regularly in these dialogs, the art historian Charles Harrison helped Art & Language in effect to author its own history. Here, the impetus was to wrest power from established authorities as a kind of self-determination. In "Art After Philosophy," Joseph Kosuth claimed that art is essentially a purely tautological, analytical proposition, divorced from all esthetic experience. Kosuth wanted art, as a discipline, to attain an intellectual status akin to that of the pure sciences. Kosuth, however, imagined art as an utterly self-referential discourse that, unlike science, could become absolutely hermetic. If Kosuth's goal was to establish art as an absolutely autonomous field of inquiry, one must ask, "In relation to what?"

This schematic overview of Pop, Fluxus and Conceptual Art suggests a range of tactical positions staked against an institution of art whose reach was becoming increasingly global and increasingly elastic. These positions all assert various degrees of literal or symbolic autonomy – except in the case of Pop which, by enacting an utter collapse into the market, sometimes flaunted a fundamental heteronomy. If artists can claim autonomy by controlling the presentation and reception of their work, increased control may reduce the work's capacity to function as an open social process. Self-reflexivity can give way to narcissism.

To claim autonomy is to claim legitimacy by renouncing the status quo. Autonomous art is legitimate art. Heteronomous art is compromised art. Yet autonomous art is not self-legitimating. The institution of art is what ultimately legitimates the seemingly autonomous artwork. The sociologist Howard Becker captures this curious state of affairs with the term maverick:

Mavericks… orient themselves to the world of canonical and conventional art

> *They change some of its conventions and more or less unwittingly accept the rest…. Because maverick work shares so much with conventional work, we see that maverickness is not inherent in the work but rather in the relation between it and a conventional art world.*[i]

Fluxus artists especially sought to disavow their relationship to the institution of art by romantically casting their convention-breaking as crossing over from art into life. Hal Foster, for one, points out that such an opposition is too totalizing. Everyday life is not a limitless void waiting to be filled but instead a distinct sphere structured by arrays of institutions and apparatuses. When Allan Kaprow, for example, withdrew his Happenings from the gallery/museum nexus, he essentially transferred them to academia. At this time, the art market and academia were assumed to be diametrically opposed. Now they clearly form a unified system. Not surprisingly, Kaprow's estate came to be represented by one of the most powerful contemporary art galleries: Hauser & Wirth. Becker argues that exactly such shifts mark the integration of maverick forces:

> *Because the maverick becomes conventional, and not because life offers us so many intermediate cases, we cannot draw a firm line between the innovating integrated professional and the maverick.*[ii]

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The depths of shame were plumbed when computing, marketing, design, advertising, all the communications disciplines, seized upon the word 'concept' itself: this is our business, we are the creative people, we are conceptual!.... *It is profoundly depressing to learn that 'concept' now designates a service and computer engineering society.*

Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari[iii]

In 1979, after authorities arrested club owner Steve Rubell for tax evasion and closed down Studio 54,[iv] former Yippie Jerry Rubin began to regularly rent the premises for networking events. Rubin formed Business Networking Salons, Inc. specifically to create and market social networks.[v] Participants received written invitations and paid an $8.00 entrance fee to attend specially organized events. Rubin, in fact, coined the term "networking" to designate the process of building up social and business contacts, a process that in fact entails a co-mingling of social and business interests.

Business Networking Salons, Inc. established Rubin as a pioneer of so-called yuppie culture. In fact, he later toured the United States debating fellow former Yippie Abbie Hoffman. The tour was billed as "The Yippie and the Yuppie." Yippie stood for Youth International Party, a façade-like name for an informal, activist, anti-war group of the late 1960s. They sometimes referred to themselves as Groucho Marxists.[vi] In 1968 they organized a "Festival of Life" to protest the 1968 Democratic National Convention. This sparked a violent police riot, now seen as a turning point in opposition to the Viet Nam War. As pranksters, the Yippies knew how to create maximum media impact with a minimum of means. For example, on August 24, 1967, Hoffman and a group of

protesters brought trading on the New York Stock Exchange to a halt by throwing fistfuls of dollars from the gallery to the traders below. The traders dropped everything and began scrambling for bills worth far less than the transactions they were handling.[vii] Kaprow cited Hoffman's intervention as an exemplary Happening and Hoffman, in fact, considered many of his interventions to be artworks. Despite his shifting politics, Rubin's idea of exploiting networks remained consistent. Not surprisingly, he was an early investor in Apple Computer.[viii]

To some extent, Rubin's Business Networking Salons, Inc. anticipates the emergence of popular networking sites such as Facebook or MySpace in the early 2000s. To participate in these sites is to celebrate and to internalize the fundamental ideology of networking in general. Warhol's best known quip, "Everyone will be world famous for fifteen minutes," clearly foresees this tendency, while the sites themselves take what Warhol said to heart. Networks inevitably promise a more democratic distribution of goods and a more democratic access to power… or fame, as the case might be. Most, however typically yield greater degrees of monopolization. Bill Gates' vision of frictionless capitalism and absolute market transparency is a case in point. Against the broad reach of monopolies like Microsoft or Google, the individual reciprocally feels compelled to market him- or herself on a topical level. Notably, Facebook and MySpace do not profit from the services they offer. Those are free. What matters is the advertising portal.

Vis-a-vis networking, online dating brings public and private space into a radical interpenetration. Because it involves publicizing otherwise intimate information, because it so explicitly casts sexual relations as a form of commodity exchange, and because it subjects these terms to an ironclad pragmatism, it carries an intense degree of symbolic violence. The process of self-identification in personal ads is inherently repressive insofar as it situates the advertiser in an invidious social hierarchy. (In roughly inverse fashion, the object of art production is to transform or to model the viewer's subjectivity.) As a kind of managerial administration of beauty (the promise of happiness), online dating presents potential personal advertisers with challenges similar to those that face artists seeking to negotiate the hierarchy of the art world. The corpus of personal ads on any given site constitutes a set of power relations that anyone using the site must navigate. This indeed is the *conceptual* space that Deleuze and Guattari condemn. Confronted with the omnipotence of such a system, some advertisers, desperate to distinguish themselves, invoke the rubric of the "self-made man." Here is one such example, taken from a Los Angeles Craigslist posting:

Why I'm the Benefactor for you. - 46 (Encino)

Date: 2010-05-29, 6:03PM PDT

Reply To This Post

I have noticed a lot of successful men here on CL offering generous compensation for romantic companionship. Some, I'm sure are legitimate while others are Johns faking to be a true Benefactor or the guys are mis-representing themselves by sending pics 10+

years old and so fourth. Yes, I have had a so-called sugar daddy relationship and the concept does have a great deal of merit. I am exactly who I say I am w/ recent photos and if we're right for each other, then I'm the one for you.

IF THESE ARE THE FACTS:

1. Your job doesn't pay enough for you to get what you want and need.

2. You're frustrated in fulfilling your potential--personally, professionally, and/or in your schooling.

3. You're not dating anyone special and YOU'RE SINGLE.

4. You're an Intelligent, attractive, physically fit & sexy woman between the ages of 26-38.

THIS IS THE SOLUTION:

An on-going arrangement with a benefactor who is a friend, a gentleman and a mentor all in one.

ME:

-Successful, Self-Made Man

-Home in up-scale neighborhood of Valley.

-Tall

-Handsome

-Kind

-Humble

-Very intelligent, Creative and Cultivated

-Generous

-NOT MARRIED

The fact is, I'm very busy with my work, which limits my ability to have a full-fledged relationship. I've come to realize that it's unfair to lead-on women with the expectation that we'll have such a relationship, when I know I can't be all they want. Believe me, most women have very idealized expectations and don't realize there is a price to pay for success. Look at all the sad marriages among the rich.

YOU:

-Beautiful, elegant, classy and sexy, perhaps buxom

-Not a pro

-Well mannered and intelligent

-Sexually creative & adventurous, not uptight

-Both drug and disease free

-Caucasian or Latin ONLY (and don't email me asking why).

You love to laugh, learn and explore. You are not demanding, pretentious or dominating. You are not about money, but enjoy (or want) the finer things in life that money can bring or perhaps simply need to relieve some acute financial stress. You love to please your man, are somewhat submissive in the bedroom and again: 100% disease-free and in good health.

YOU WILL RECEIVE:

- Full financial security (I won't insult you by naming a figure. Once again, I ask that you NOT be a professional)

-Fun, adventure, romance and carnal pleasure.

-If all goes well, use of condo

The "Benefactor from Encino" commands an objective assessment of basic facts: "I say exactly who I am" while others are "Johns faking to be a true benefactor." He offers to pay his potential partner, but insists that she not be a "pro," i.e., a prostitute. Nonetheless, the terms of exchange are money for youth and beauty. The incursion of money into this equation recalls Baudelaire's formulation of the writer as prostitute. As such, one might read the ad as an allegory of the art market: the subjective allure of beauty versus the objective disenchantment of money. The Benefactor from Encino's tautologically "self-made" status is mythic; he is the author of his own destiny: past, present and future. Nonetheless, vis-à-vis the subsumption of social life by capital, the ad is an epiphenomenon. Just as Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt have called for the multitude to bridge the gap between virtuality and possibility, so such an ad renounces the possible for the sake of the virtual.

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Adrian Piper describes her work as "an act of communication that politically catalyzes its viewers," adding "…I try to construct a concrete, immediate and personal relationship between me and the viewer that locates us within the network of political cause and effect."[ix] While Piper explicitly casts herself as "an art object," especially in her performance work, she distinguishes her approach from autobiographical art. As such, her auto-objectification has played out as a public process, performed in both city streets and print publications. Her break with gallery/museum space came in 1970 in an untitled performance at Max's Kansas City, a downtown New York night club favored by artists and musician's at the time. There she appeared blindfolded with earplugs and heavy rubber gloves. Using relatively modest means, her goal was to minimize her sensory interaction with those around her. Restricting one's ability to sense and to react

is one way to approximate object status, but the point was to create tension within an explicit social context. Against the political foment of 1970 – which included the U.S. bombing of Cambodia, student killings at Jackson State and Kent State Universities and the emergence of the Women's Movement, the museum context seemed impotent to Piper. Even so, Max's Kansas City, as a prime artist hangout, was not so far removed from the art institutions that Piper believed had insulated themselves from the political questions of the day. Subsequent developments in Piper's work would make it clear that the "self-othering" she enacted concerned racism within mainstream society. Less obvious is that the performer-as-art-object captures a condition that Mary Kelly argued is key to performance: that the individual as the owner of his or her own labor power defines one's subjecthood in capitalist political economy. Thus, through a process of self-objectification, Piper exploited personal material as a means of articulating this condition. In her *Mythic Being* series of works, she published diary entries in the New York weekly paper, *The Village Voice.* These excerpts she repeated like a mantra until the words lost their meaning. At this stage, this quasi-mantra became a device that in effect could drive a wedge between herself and her surroundings. While repeating it, she would assume the guise of a black, Hispanic man. Piper construed taking on this persona as temporarily annihilating her own character. *The Mythic Being* culminated with a staged mugging in Central Park.

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Guglielmo Achille Cavellini was a well known mail artist and art collector. He produced a large number of self-portraits, many of which took the form of commemorative posters and postage stamps. One of his best known – and most widely distributed – works was a round sticker that featured the artist's name as well as his birth date and projected death date: 1914 – 2014. Cavellini, however, did not realize his goal of a one-hundred-year lifespan; he died in 1990. While much of Cavellini's work was autobiographical, much of that autobiography was fictional. He once declared: "The biography of an artist is frequently written after his death, imperfectly and incompletely. Since I don't want any such biography to be written about me, I've decided to write my own."[x] He also coined the term *autostoricizzazione* (self-historicization), which in his case included deliberate exaggerations and falsehoods.[xi] The Cavellini Archive Foundation website adds: "This term [marks]… a watershed between [Cavellini's] potential vocation and the actual attempt at the affirmation of himself in the system of art."[xii]

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The Romanian artist Andre Cadere is best known for his *Barres de bois rond* (Round Wooden Bars) which he produced between 1970-78. These works were mobile, body-based objects. Cadere could carry them like staffs and display them by simply leaning them against a wall. Thus, he designed a kind of work that could easily occupy a range of informal and official, open and restricted spaces. Just by propping a bar against the wall, he could add his own work to shows of other artists. Mark Godfrey observes, "Cadere was one of the first artists to realize that objects were inseparable from market and institutional contexts: half of his focus was on the systems of distribution in the art

world."[xiii] His infiltration of exhibitions, famously documenta 5 in 1972, exposed latent power relations in the presentation and reception of artworks through the processes of inclusion and exclusion.

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On November 12, 2008 Christies New York sold a work by the Japanese artist Yayoi Kusama for $5.1 million, a record price for a living female artist.[xiv] Her trademark motif is polka dots that suggest a kind of obliteration. Kusama lived and worked in New York City from 1956-73. She organized happenings, often involving nudity, in Central Park and at the Brooklyn Bridge to protest the Viet Nam War. Despite its primacy in the art market, Kusama's work is still sometimes categorized as "outsider art" because of its obsessive nature and because Kusama has resided in a mental hospital since the mid-1970s. In 1966, she crashed the Venice Biennale by installing her work "Narcissus Garden" on the lawn of the Italian Pavillion. The work comprised 1,500 mirror balls which Kusama, dressed in a traditional kimono, sold for 1,200 lire each.[xv] The nature of Kusama's intervention in Venice is unclear as to whether she was challenging the Biennale or seeking recognition from it. Later, in 1993, she officially represented Japan in Venice.

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In 1977 Jenny Holzer began writing short statements and slogans under the series title *Truisms*. She first presented these as anonymous posters that grouped often contradictory statements together. These posters first appeared in downtown Manhattan. The nature of the statements varied: some were philosophical; some, sarcastic; some, conventional; and some, eccentric. Examples include: "Money creates taste." "Stupid people shouldn't breed." "Freedom is a luxury, not a necessity." Among other things, the project concerned the authority of signage in public space and the arbitrary relationship of content to that authority. Accordingly, these works made the greatest impact when passersby failed to recognize their artifice, i.e., when they saw the work as a set of sincere assertions instead of a formal artwork. *Truisms* alludes to the heterogeneity of public discourse, but as the series title – akin to comedian Stephen Colbert's "truthiness" – suggests, it falls short of connecting its various sentiments to significant historical or ideological factors. Posing as a political conservative, Colbert once joked, "We're not talking about truth, we're talking about something that seems like truth – the truth we want to exist."[xvi] Clearly, he was ridiculing the primacy of the gut feeling in political discourse. Nonetheless, Holzer's version of selfhood as a provisional attachment to piecemeal opinions and attitudes seriously reflects a certain postmodern fragmentation of public space. Holzer's oeuvre began as a quasi-guerilla activity, informed by the work of Lawrence Wiener and Joseph Kosuth. It gradually morphed into a contemporary form of public art. While a degree of deliberate theatricalization accompanies most artists' claims for autonomy, Holzer's work is highly self-conscious. The eccentricity evinced by *Truisms* is para-quotational.

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"Wherever we are is museum," is the slogan of the Berlin-based art duo Eva and Adele. After the two married in 1991, they shaved their heads and began to make regular public appearances dressed in matched, custom-made clothing. Despite Eva and Adele's claim to have transcended gender for future generations, these garments represent fetishized versions of a clichéd feminity via high heels, lace blouses, vinyl skirts, etc. Pink is their trademark color. Here, it is more the logic of replication than stylization per se that challenges gender repression. Is Eva duplicating Adele – or vice versa? Like Cavellini, their focus is narcissistic; it involves aggressively promoting their self-styled image, either in person or through impersonal media. Renate Puvogel observes that, "There was not a single important event on the art calendar at which Eva and Adele did not make their appearance, whether Documenta in Kassel, the Biennial in Venice, [whether art fairs in all parts of Europe or the Berlin exhibition 'Metropolis'…"[xvii] The predictability of these appearances often exposed a sense of unseemly redundancy latent the events themselves, the redundancy of overdetermined rituals. While the flamboyant couple sometimes draws attention from officially displayed works, unlike Cadere or Kusama, their intervention does not violate institutional rules. Puvogel also notes, however, that their appearances are not restricted to art events but can occur anywhere: "…in the street, in a bar, in a public lavatory…"[xviii] As such, the two claim to have merged art and life.

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At one time, the Venezuelan Rene IATBA (I am the best artist.) was famous for a mural he continuously painted and re-painted on a wall on Wooster Street in New York City's SoHo district during the 1980s. The multi-colored work simply proclaimed in seven-foot high letters, "I am the best artist," followed by Rene's signature. It was a continuous presence for many years. The impetus behind it seems to have been to claim and to occupy first place in an artistic hierarchy – whatever that might mean. Apart from blatant self-promotion and a certain mythic dimension, the goal of "best artist" is almost meaningless especially because the work itself makes no attempt to establish what the criteria for that would be. Rene was territorial about his mural. When it was hit by graffiti, he painted white bars over it "to put the graffiti in jail." Later, he became embroiled in a feud with the French street artist Le Pointre over a site at 92 Greene Street.[xix] Rene enacts a quasi-posthumous historicization on his websites, comparable to Cavellini's approach. The entries presented as notes written by a "Dr. Blank," Rene's therapist, and a "Keith Myeth" after the artist's death.[xx]

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In *Official Welcome* (2001), Andrea Fraser enacted, as a monolog, nine exchanges between artists and their sponsors, playing all the various parts. These greetings and thank-you's, formalized and over-polite, are an obligatory – therefore quickly forgotten – byproduct of humdrum institutional existence. Because they mark the exchange of cultural capital for financial capital, however, these are crucial – crucially embarrassed – moments. The sponsor wants public recognition as a benefactor while the artist wants to appear uncompromised by money, thus autonomous. Fraser began with her own thanks, remarks whose artifice and reality were clearly recursive. More sober than what followed, these nonetheless initiated proceedings with the profane spectacle of an artist singing her

own praises – albeit in the guise of a legitimizing authority. Her monolog-as-dialog went on to include many sources, including artists Matthew Barney, Kara Walker, Chris Ofili and Damien Hirst, critics Benjamin Buchloh, Jerry Saltz and Dave Hickey; and celebrities Mel Brooks, Bill Clinton and Dennis Hopper – among others. Toward the end of *Official Welcome*, Fraser took off her clothing in stages, stripping first to a Gucci bra, thong and high heels, then removing those too. As an ideological model, *Official Welcome* invites comparison with Jenny Holzer's *Truisms*. If Holzer attempts to represent conflicting ideologies within a uniform graphic format, Fraser instead examines the limits of autonomy through what might be read as a metaphor for madness: voices in your head. In her performances, by shifting from the docent as the embodiment of the museum to the figure of the artist, Fraser maintains that the institution is no longer a restricted to discrete sites, that it operates most powerfully as a mental paradigm, that is, in our heads.

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Although some of the projects from the eight artists discussed above are recent or ongoing, their assertions of autonomy evince an almost archaeological or nostalgic character. Many are from those whom a Euro-centric, patriarchal art system would be most likely to exclude. Exclusion, of course, would make the demand for autonomy all the more urgent. Even so, by the late 1970s, breaking with the museum/gallery nexus was already clearly a way to gain street credibility. Instead of serving as an alternative to institutions, the street gradually became an institutional proving ground. With the rise of internet technology, Critical Art Ensemble's Steve Kurz contends virtual space has displaced the street as the most significant site of political contestation. Rather than shutting down the system, simply slowing down information flows constitutes a potent form of activist intervention. The transcendence into virtual space, however, is incomplete. Now, the street serves as a dumping ground for the informational residue of re-materialization. Think CD jewel cases and cell phones. Conversely, the desire to network as form of self-determination/self-promotion shows one form of social need that helped precipitate the internet. Mail Art, for example, mostly has morphed into web art. Ironically, this changed the nature of publication as well. The release of a record album was once a cultural event. Now, the release of an MP3 incrementally increases the amount of potential information available in an ongoing flow. The condition of the non-event can be traced back to Marcuse's repressive tolerance, one of the earliest premonitions of the information economy.

Accordingly, the institution of art (which may also be conceptualized as a system or an apparatus) may now be primarily a question of informatics. Via systems esthetics, Jack Burnham pioneered this line of reasoning, observing that the artwork as information:

> *...is a refocusing of aesthetic awareness – based on future scientific-technological evolution – on matter-energy information exchanges and away from the invention of solid artefacts. These new systems prompt us not to look at the skin of objects, but at those meaningful relations within and between their visible boundaries.*[xxi]

Moreover, Burnham drew a parallel between the emergent flexibility and porosity of institutions and information technology:

> *The computer's most profound aesthetic implication is that we are being forced to dismiss the classical view of art and reality which insists that man stand outside of reality in order to observe it, and, in art, requires the presence of the picture frame and the sculpture pedestal. The notion that art can be separated from its everyday environment is a cultural fixation [in other words, a mythic structure] as is the ideal of objectivity in science. It may be that the computer will negate the need for such an illusion by fusing both observer and observed, "inside" and "outside." It has already been observed that the everyday world is rapidly assuming identity with the condition of art.*[xxii]

Ironically, the dissolution of the discrete institution parallels the dissolution of individual autonomy. This is the implication of Hans Haacke's systems work, which Burnham championed. Haacke's now celebrated non-exhibition at the Guggenheim Museum, *Shapolsky et al. Manhattan Real Estate Holdings, A Real Time Social System, as of May 1, 1971,* linked the institutional frame to the logic of global capital. As a landmark of institutional critique, this work problematized the status of artwork, institution and individual. A nascent systemicity also lies in Walter Benjamin critique of the book as an atavistic form of intellectual property. Benjamin imagined that sets of interchangeable file cards could replace work – a notion, in fact, that anticipates computer punch cards. Although Benjamin saw a liberating potential in this transformation, elsewhere he noted the devolution from coherent narrative to information to data. This breakdown corresponds to the instrumentalization of intellectual production. In this vein, Gille Deleuze has famously argued a society of control has replaced the eighteenth-to-twentieth century Foucault had characterized disciplinary. Key to social control is the control of information. According to Deleuze, technology instrumentalizes, not individuals, but dividuals, through automated (and regulated) exchanges."[xxiii] The apparatus regulates the dividual through programs. Thus, the dividual may be automated. The dividual is the object of cybernetics. Heralding the cyborg as the precursor of a new kind of identity, Donna Harraway accordingly misses the logic of cybernetics as a non-identitarian principle. Deleuze distinguished the society of control to Foucault's disciplinary regime:

> *Foucault has brilliantly analyzed the ideal [disciplinary} project of these environments of enclosure, particularly visible within the factory: to concentrate; to distribute in space; to order in time; to compose a productive force within the dimension of space-time whose effect will be greater than the sum of its component forces.*[xxiv]

According to Deleuze, control supercedes discipline. Compared to the goal of composing a productive force, post-dot-com monopolization attempt to harness labor at the level of bio-power, prior to its composition into a social class. Models for this would include Google Earth, CraigsList or Wikipedia, where contributions to the network are uncompensated, yet monetized by the systems' proprietors. Deleuze cites the example of the electronic collar, where variable information can control where one goes at any give

time. Yet this example may be too Orwellian. More powerful is the force of collective auto-surveillance, a force that can be aggregated, again, by a network such as Google Earth. Here, documentation of the Rodney King beating marks a new phase in the relation between collectivized image production and surveillance. The recent battle between Google and the government of China has been cast as a question of free speech, but it might ultimately be a question of political economy.

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[ii] Ibid.
[iii] Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, quoted by Armand Mattelart, "The Fracture: Toward a Critique of Globalism," *Networking the World* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000) p. 119.
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[v] http://www.encyclopedia.com/doc/1G2-3404705612.html
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[vii] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Abbie_Hoffman
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[ix] Adrian Piper, "The Joy of Marginality," *Out of Order, Out of Sight - Volume I: Selected Writings in Meta-Art 1968-1992* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: the MIT Press, 1996) p. 234.
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[xvii] http://www.evaadele.com/HOME.HTM
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[xx] http://www.reneiamthebestartist.com/page7explanation.html
[xxi] Jack Burnham, Beyond Modern Sculpture. The Effects of Science and Technology on the Sculpture of this Century (New York, 1968), pp 369-70, quoted by Matthew Rampley, "Systems Esthetics: Jack Burnham and Others," *Vector [e-zine]*, http://www.virose.pt/vector/b_12/rampley.html.
[xxii] Burnham, 'The Aesthetics of Intelligent Systems,' in E. F. Fry, E. F. ed. 1970. On the Future of Art. New York, quoted by Rampley.

[xxiii] Gilles Deleuze, “Society of Control,” http://www.nadir.org/nadir/archiv/netzkritik/societyofcontrol.html.
[xxiv] http://www.nadir.org/nadir/archiv/netzkritik/societyofcontrol.html