THE EXHIBITIONARY COMPLEX: AN INQUIRY INTO THE ROLE OF THE MODERN ART EXHIBITION

A Thesis

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the degree Master of Fine Arts in the Graduate School of The Ohio State University

by

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1997

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Exhibitions have become the medium through which most art becomes known. Constantly reshaped by artists and curators, the exhibition has become a prominent and diverse part of contemporary culture. The exhibitionary complex; an inquiry into the role of the modern art exhibition presents reflections around which I might begin to conceptualize an early history of the public exhibition of modern art. I am interested in the role of displaying objects, artifacts and works of art both within and outside the museum context, their public presentation: in other words the making of an exhibition. This inquiry is highly selective, partially because I chose examples according to my own interests, emerging from my work and can therefore not be read as an argument of what exhibitions should be.

I will highlight some issues and stretch questions across the time span of more than a century to find interesting relationships. These reflections mark out the emergence of new discourses surrounding the exhibition and illustrate the urgency of the debates centered and fostered by exhibitions today. As for example, with art criticism -that comes along the public exhibition of art. There is a tension over the appropriate role, over the proper function and audiences in the exhibition, and over the desirability of shows being taken to signify something more than an occasion for looking at art.
The text is grouped within sections which focus on the history of the exhibition, forms of staging and spectacle, and questions of spectatorship, curatorship and impact on the artistic production. Most of the examples begin in the time period of the 1960's and involve temporary art exhibitions rather than museum collections. I will discuss exhibitions in settings inside and outside of the traditional gallery, as well as innovative work in extending cultural debates within the museum.

The conclusion consists of a formulation of my own work and ideas. I think what I am advocating is a way of working that results in spaces with a certain heterogeneity, where you are not tied to one set of rules and one set of experience. For me the experience of art needs to part from the static framework of the exhibition, and open to space and time beyond the exhibition site. I think the paradox here, is that it shifts the emphasis to the 'here and now' of the exhibition.
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FIELDS OF STUDY

Major Field: Art
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

What's important to consider in writing about the development of modern art exhibitions? As yet there's no comprehensive empirical history of this form, that has dominated the public presentation of art in the modern age after 1750. Exhibitions have become the medium through which most art becomes known. Not only have the number and range increased dramatically in recent years but also permanent collections are being shown in temporary exhibitions. Exhibitions of modern art establish and administer the cultural meanings of art: part spectacle, part socio-historical event, part structuring device. Yet despite the growing importance of exhibitions, their histories, their structures and their socio-political implications are only now beginning to be written about and theorized. It is interesting to me to think about why and how such a history might be written. These questions clearly spring up from my own work, as I am wondering how I can challenge the white art space without displaying frontal or institutional criticism. They also relate to the new discourses surrounding the exhibition today, that illustrate the urgency of the debates centered on and fostered by exhibitions. Since 1990 new variations in exhibition practice have emerged in the art world, in which artists try to repossess institutional art
spaces, rebelling against presentation formats which project a piece of art as a shape outlined against a white screen, or recontextualize works in different historical or cultural settings.

Mega forms, blockbuster, retrospective: collections of complete works or compilations which inaugurate or consolidate a discipline. Exhibitions are selective and exclusive due to biases of the organizers and the actual perceived constraints of space, finance and availability of works.

Most discussions of the meaning of exhibitions of contemporary art minimize the importance of the location and type of architectural space in which the exhibition is held. It is assumed that listing the venue at the top of an article or review as part of a title or header or referring briefly to location as an aside in initial or closing paragraphs is sufficient to convey the significance of the space and its relation to what is being shown. Unless the exhibition is site-specific, exhibition spaces tend to separate container from contained. Adrian Piper's determination to find new locations for her performances points to a recurring cycle in the presentation of art. Avant-garde artists in the sixties and seventies lacked sufficiently sympathetic public museums or commercial art galleries, and were also dissatisfied with the context they provided. They therefore sought something other. They created new types of exhibitions and they colonized redundant spaces in a cycle of frustration, energetic independence and, over a number of years even institutionalization.

During the 1980's, when the history of exhibitions of 19th century French art began to be written, much attention was given to universal exhibitions.
Examples are the Crystal Palace exhibition of 1851 in London, England and ultimately the Expositions Universelles in Paris, France of 1878, 1889 and 1900 that in their turn dwarfed everything which happened in England.¹ These provided a story in a nutshell for the large exhibitions then so dominant in the art world, seemingly revelatory of how exhibitions could turn into merely entertaining spectacles. In the 1980’s exhibitions were also a focus for historians exploring the relations of art and capitalism through the workings of the market, so phenomenally on the rise during this decade. Historians looked at exhibitions as promotional sites and at museums as holding out the promise of a refuge of commodification.

Art criticism came alongside the public art exhibition in the eighteenth century. Now, in the development of the modern art world there are considerable tensions over the appropriate role of criticism, over the proper functions and audiences for exhibitions, and over the desirability of shows being taken to signify something more than an occasion for looking at art. (Art as commercial, individual or critical engagement).

The history of museums is a problematic area of study and many of the problems are specific to the field. As with all such work, the survival of primary sources has been a fairly arbitrary affair and apparently museum curators have not always been the best archivists of their own business. The views and experiences of visitors are rarely to be found in the records, nor is there likely to

be much evidence of opinions other than those of the director of the museum's board. Therefore "the exhibitionary complex; an inquiry into the role of the modern art exhibition", as I will present in this paper, is highly subjective. To be more exact, first of all because I selected issues and examples according to my own interest, emerging in my work, but also to present an idea of the variety of gallery and museum gestures that took place and that can't be ignored by artists operating in the nineties. This inquiry is rather selective for the second reason that the art exhibition is a cultural construct that is collectively produced and considered by all those professionals who work in art schools, universities, museums, publishing houses, and any other place where modern art is taught, exhibited or interpreted; this world is enormously fragmented and often does not succeed in arriving to a simple or clear agreement about a history of modern art. In the work that has been done, contemporary critical concerns seemed to have played a major role. Questions about the relationship between the modern art exhibition and its historical variant -how they have exploited, denied or confounded the view that art, and the experience of art, properly belong to a public arena- spring up.

In this thesis it's not my goal to be able to track the extensive form of the exhibition and it's impact across the modern period, but more to attend to the continuities and ruptures in habits that may not relate directly to political, marketing or spectacularizing developments. Instead I will bring to view a more

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expansive field, composed from the uneven or incomplete development of practices across this period. I will also try to show that despite the progress of the last decade, customs of presentation changed, but rarely dramatically and never pervasively.
The history that I am concerned with is one that can be taken to begin in the late 17th and 18th centuries with the exhibition of works for the “public”. These centuries were also when the modern usage of the word 'exhibition' developed. According to the definition of the word in the Oxford English Dictionary, a definition accompanied by a quotation from 1797, to exhibit means: “to show publicly for the purposes of amusement or instruction, or in a competition; to make a show of....” Late 17th century definitions of the French verb *exposer* similarly specify the act of putting something on public view, though not exclusively for art, it did refer generally to showing publicly. The first dimension of the history of modern art exhibitions unfolds directly from this beginning, and has to do with how exhibitions have exploited, denied or confused the view that art, and the experience of art, properly belong to a public arena. So precisely the intention to institutionalize the showing of art to the “public”, seems to turn the history of art’s display into the history of the modern

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3 *Dictionnaire universel d' Antoine Furetiere*, The Hague and Rotterdam, 1690; rpt., Paris, 1984
art exhibition. The most notable institution of such practice was the Salon in Paris, France, first established on a regular basis in 1737.

The success of the salon had been many decades in the making. Its actual origins lay in the later seventeenth century, but these had not been particularly auspicious. The academy's initial efforts at public exhibition of pictures were held first in its own meeting rooms and later in the open arcades of the adjoining Palais Royal. The official responsible for its permanent re-establishment was the Finance Minister Philibert Orry. The Salon, in his conception, would be like an annual audit of artistic productivity, to make known the progress achieved in the arts nurtured by The Academy, by bringing to light the work of its most distinguished members in the diverse genres, thereby submitting themselves to the judgment of the greatest possible number of informed persons. In other words: quality in art had to depend on public scrutiny. An interesting side effect of this decision was that the new 'rough' audience and the official consensus, propelled painting away from privatized, sensual values of the Rococo style toward the revival of an elevated and moralizing classicism.

Of course painting and sculpture had previously been displayed in a variety of fashions and for a variety of social groups, The Salon was its first and regularly repeated, open, and free display of contemporary art in Europe to be offered in a completely secular setting and for the purpose of primarily aesthetic

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response in large numbers of people. There was in this arrangement, however, an inherent tension between the part and the whole: the institution was collective in character, yet the experience it was meant to promote was an intimate and private one. As Thomas Crow argues there is an important difference and tension between the notion of the experience of art as individual and private versus the very form of the exhibition itself which allowed for an artistic public sphere.\(^5\) The public is both everywhere and nowhere in particular. The audience is the concrete manifestation of the public, but never identical with it. A public appears with a shape and a will, via the various claims made to represent it; and when sufficient numbers of an audience come to believe in one or another of these representations, the public can become an important art-historical factor.

The story of art's (painting) public space properly begins at that point where the dependence of the artist on the dictates of any individual or circumscribed elite begins to be contested. The French nineteenth century critic Carmontelle really believes in the new public role for art, as he writes:

"The Salon opens and the crowd presses through the entrance; how it's diversity and turbulence disturbs the spectator! This person here, moved by vanity, wants only to be the first to give his opinion; that one there, moved by boredom, searches only for a new spectacle. Here is one who treats pictures as simple items of commerce and concerns himself only to estimate the prices they

will fetch; another hopes only that they will provide material for his idle chat.

The amateur examines then with a passionate troubled eye; the painter's eye is penetrating but jealous; the vulgarian's is comical but stupid. The inferior class of people, accustomed to adjusting its tastes to those of its masters, wants to hear a titled person before rendering its opinion. And wherever one looks, countless young clerks, merchants, and shop assistants in whom unchanging, tedious daily labor has inevitably extinguished all feeling for beauty: here nevertheless are the men whom every artist has endeavored to please.⁶

According to Thomas Crow, nowhere in the extensive nineteenth century literature on the Salon you find will this gap bridged; the difference between a public evoked in abstract terms and an actual audience whose behavior can only be characterized as a collection of vagrant, individual responses.⁷

As a form, the temporary exhibition typically involved putting together unfamiliar objects in a provisional context. The exhibition form separated the sites of the presentation and reception from those of production and those of use and ownership as well. It offered instead a unique field for comparative contextualization, that is often claiming to make visible for it's audience some

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more consequential entity than it's own provisional nature and limited contents: for example at the Salon the state of contemporary art in France is shown; or at an artist's retrospective, the high points of a life time of creating are on display.

The development of the art museum (on the other hand) was interwoven with the process of state formalism, it was part of a cultural process through which superordinate classes organized their dominance over subordinate classes. The development of museums was a process whereby European national bourgeoises expropriated aristocratic treasures and projected myths of national identity, 19th century museum buildings therefore functioned as extensions of power.

Besides the acquisition, documentation and showing of artifacts, one of the initial (technical) functions of the museum or gallery is preservation. The museum generally buys, preserves, collects in order to exhibit, while the gallery does all that in view of resale. This function of preservation carries out the idealistic nature of art since it claims that art is (could be) eternal. In fact nothing is more readily preserved than a work of art. This idea, among others, dominated the 19th century, when public museums were created approximately as they are still known today.

Since the beginning of the century museums and exhibitions had become so much a part of everyday life that they were closely linked with politics and answerable to a new factor in public life in the age of democracy: opinion. In more publications Thomas Crow has written how art since its period
of flourish during the French Salon at the end of the 18th century got tied in with all kinds of other issues that can be considered secondary to art in the first instance: art criticism, institutions, political aspects, commercial aspects, the public opinion and mass culture. He argues that the fine arts are visual just until a certain level, from there they reach out to many other aspects.\(^8\) Charles Baudelaire comments on the Salon of 1845:

"We have no friends -that is a great thing- and no enemies....... the lies and the shameless favoritism of newspaper criticism, which is sometimes silly, sometimes violent, but never independent, has inspired the bourgeois with a disgust for those useful handbooks which go by the name of Salon-reviews".\(^9\)


CHAPTER 3

THE ART EXHIBITION AS REPRESENTATION

By 1900 an inept balance between entertainment and higher culture had more or less institutionalized itself into the fabric of exhibition policy. Most major museums were engaging more and more frequently in the making of purely temporary exhibitions besides their main function of display and conservation of their main collection. Few people would visit an exhibition, unless entertainment was offered and yet education had to be a prominent element if the event were to receive official patronage and achieve the necessary cultural standing. In 1699, for the first time, the display was accompanied by an explicit statement of its educational and discursive intentions. This small guidebook (the livret) that was on sale to visitors, stated the aim of the academicians, which was “to renew the former custom of exhibiting their works to the public in order to receive its judgment and to foster that worthy competition so necessary to the progress of the fine arts”.

Closely related to these issues is that of how exhibitions have functioned to represent some totality or entity greater than themselves, or a ‘history’ of the

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notions that have governed inclusion, exclusion and value. A range of developments in the early 20th century, for instance the beginning of historized museum installations (El Lissitzky) brought a new self-consciousness of how the relationship of viewer and object could or should be mediated through presentation. Before then, ‘exhibition installation’ seems not to have existed, as such, as a subject.

Two of the most innovative exhibition formats went on to become fathers of twentieth century modernism:

1. the monographic or retrospective show, quite common by 1900,
2. the art movement show, less common but already familiar by the 1890’s.¹¹

Among the wide range of nineteenth century exhibition types, others have only recently come back into their own. A once notable event was the combination of thematic show and charitable / political cause, also there were specialized exhibitions in Paris that invited readings of their contents in terms of ethnic, national or gendered characteristics. Seen from this perspective, the culturally specific show, so popular during the 1980’s, appears not to be such a post-modern creation. “Amid the signs for watercolorists, independent artists and animal painters, there are announcements for exhibitions of women artists, Russian painters and Scandinavian artists”.¹²


¹²For women's exhibitions at this line, see Tamar Garb, 'revising the revisionists', Art journal, 48 (Spring 1989), pp. 62-seventies.
Plate 1: Revue comique, 1880's by Draner, Photograph courtesy of the Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris
Another relatively new phenomenon is the art blockbuster: an exhibition that aims for maximum coverage and maximum publicity to attract maximum public attendance, that can be related to the Expositions Universelles in Paris of 1878, 1889 and 1900 as an example of how exhibitions could turn into merely entertaining spectacles. With its purpose of money, as a trade for education and entertainment, the art blockbuster generates a vast machinery of public relations, media hype and consumerism. A Max Ernst exhibition in Paris 1966, for instance, got no more than five thousand visitors.\(^1\) Nowadays it seems there are hundreds of thousands of visitors for any exhibition, whatever the subject, whatever the works, whatever the seriousness, whatever the quality of the exhibition. So I am also speaking about the art exhibition here as a social phenomenon, maybe even more so than an aesthetic one.

Finally it might be worthwhile to examine how and when exhibitions came to be portrayed as historical actors. In the period just before WWI, art exhibitions were promoted as events that would leave in their wakes transformed viewers and revolutionized artists. For example The Armory show in New York and Chicago in 1913, was cast in the role of bringing modernism from foreign countries to their respective cities: "on the evening of February 17, 1913, with four thousand guests milling around in the eighteen improvised rooms within the shell of the 69th Regiment Armory, the exhibition of modern art, more familiarly known as The Armory show, was formally opened to the

public". This sensational exhibition, which included examples of the most advanced movements in European art, was the first of its kind held in the United States and was the result of more than a year's planning and organization by a small group of artists, the Association of American Painters and Sculptors. As far as the press and the public were concerned, the show was a circus, full of freaks and clowns, but also of life and color and an overwhelming success.

Revolutions in art are made by artists through creative activity, but such developments mean nothing until they are exhibited; I think of change in terms of the spectacular displays which bring them to public view, like the Salon de Refuses of 1863, which introduced the era of Impressionism, and the Salon d' Automne of 1905, which established The Fauves. My interpretation in this case might be, that it is quite natural to think of the Armory Show for example, as the turning point of American Art of the 20th century.

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CHAPTER 4

THE VIEWER IN THE ART EXHIBITION

An analysis of spaces and installations, and of the experiences -both social and phenomenological- prepared for the visitor can be made, but it's not until recently that a history of the modern art exhibition, including it's socio-political implications has begun to be written. Work that has been done in North-America and Europe is rather random, for the views and experiences that exhibitions prepared for visitors are rarely to be found in the records of exhibitions spaces.\(^\text{15}\)

One of the observations by the French critic Mercier, in his writing on the 1780 Salon was, that the Salon in a fundamental way belonged to its public. It was not a spectacle for passive unlookers, but an opportunity for active audience participation and judgment.\(^\text{16}\) In its determinations, a broad public would bypass the imposed orders of the event as staged and put that array into an order of its own.


Questions about how physical arrangements and methods of presentation sought to turn visitors into good viewers spring up; whether exhibitions could create through these means viewers in their own image, or arrangements that worked no doubt to suggest who was the socially appropriate viewer, what sort of environment art required, where one should stand, even how one should regard the works. Usually art museums show a history of style, as written by art historians, divided into media, subjects, schools and movements, nationalities, and occasionally by individual artists or patrons. It is alleged that this best 'allows the works to speak for themselves', But to those who lead busy lives outside the confines of full-time art history, it must at times seem as if the intent is deliberately to conceal the several meanings of works of art, by offering hardly any clues to those who are not fortunate or privileged enough to have studied them beforehand. It is doubtful if any but the most knowledgeable visitors to an art museum grasp the thought, scholarship, and several possible meanings of a gallery 'hang' -other than the most obvious, such as an assemblage of paintings by Rembrandt or the impressionists, and as I mentioned scarcely any attempt seems to have been made, to find out if visitors want to, or do, grasp those meanings. For example, would visitors today be that familiar with the historical personages or the stories derived from the old testament, which so often form the subject matter of old master paintings? Would they understand the differences in techniques of oil painting employed before the twentieth century? Do they even know why they are being shown precisely that particular sequence of work?
Deploying methods to regulate 'communication' presupposes an awareness of visitor psychology in equal proportion to a knowledge of the history of art. It implies the need for a reversal of the curator's traditional, even if unspoken, assumption that if visitors do not appear to grasp the meaning of a display, or the nature of a development in style, they must be left on their own until they change their perception. It requires (especially) museums to change their approach and methods in order to accommodate the speeds and styles of learning of today's visitors, because the clock cannot be turned back to the spirit, and the attitudes, of early nineteenth century museum visiting.

The customs that guided arts in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were such things as frames, wall colors, room sizes, sky lights and potted plants; all those items that seem to have rarely been described at the time. Even nowadays, it is as if curators imagine that visitors would arrive in each room with a fresh, stimulated eye and no one to get in the way of their viewing. The outline of the display-to-come might also indicate the organizational principles of the sequence of rooms, and of the hanging, the reasoning behind those principles, and how the rooms will be labeled. The sequence might be interrupted by 'reorientation' rooms, or rooms for rest and discussion in order to alter the pace of the viewing and enable visitors to ask questions (of themselves or of others), to check that they have grasped what the curator intended them to, and if they have not, to catch up on it rather than risk losing the thread entirely. Key points in display could be highlighted, or even isolated in rooms with tiered seating, in
order to allow visitors to contemplate one or more works at their ease, without
interruptions or obstructions. While acknowledging the general shortage of
space to show enough of the museum's holdings, there is an equally pressing
need to recognize and furnish for fatigue, and to offer opportunities for
recollection. Alternatively and especially in the ease of large works, pictures
could be raised from eye-level viewing to a height above visitors' heads, so that
more people could see them unhindered at the same time.

Rather than positing a single notion of a good viewer based on the effects or
categories of presentation, it's probably more productive to consider art
exhibitions as functioning completely in relation to different types of visitors on
the one hand, they set up a field of possibilities, accommodating or soliciting a
range of gazes; on the other hand they provide for some a set of conventions
against which class and gender could be foregrounded, and competency and
it's exclusions displayed.

Here too, would be the place to expect the changes that resulted in new
desires and values in viewing. A surprising example of innovation that has
recently come to light is Jacques-Louis David's use of mirrors in exhibitions,
first in a Louvre apartment in 1799 where a mirror was placed at a distance from
his Sabine women, and again in a Paris apartment in 1824, where the mirror
made his Mars disarmed by Venus seem, at first take, to be suspended in mid
air.17 Dramatizing viewing from near and far, inviting contrasts between surface

270-1.
inspection and disembodied illusionism, serving as a test of compositional clarity, the displays seem to have been designed to introduce a heightened consciousness of the stages of viewing itself.

Other methods to attract the public are for example El Lissitzky's 'installations'. In his description of the functions of the museum display installation, El Lissitzky argues:

"In the large scale international picture exhibitions the visitor feels like being in a zoo, where he is simultaneously attacked by a thousand different beasts. In my exhibition room the objects should not assault the viewer all at the same time. If the viewers were traditionally lulled into passivity while they were passing the pictures, my design should make the individual active. This should be the function of the room".18 The viewer will be physically forced to interact with the objects in the exhibition.

The paintings and sculptures on display in these new types of exhibition spaces were no longer presented as manifestations of supreme aesthetic truth and universal validity, but as particular objects of historical study, with which the viewer had to actively engage in order to generate and exchange of reading and meaning. This program of the transformation of the optical mode of perception toward a tactile mode, from the bourgeois practice of anti-social contemplation of aesthetic constructs to the revolutionary practice of active

participation and distraction, was shortly thereafter elaborated theoretically in Benjamin's famous essay: The work of Art in the age of mechanical reproduction.\textsuperscript{19} Works of art are received and valued on different planes. Two polar types stand out: with one, the accent is on the cult value; with the other, on the exhibition value of the work. When the absolute emphasis is on the exhibition value, the work of art becomes a creation with an entirely new function.

The contingency of this act upon institutional settlement and the viewers particularized interest is constantly emphasized in Lissitzky's installations and design details: the movable wall panels that reveal or obscure individual paintings according to the choice of the viewer, the display walls with the highly structured relief surfaces that change color, according to the viewer's position, from white through gray black. This thus underlines in a very concrete manner the constant shifting of viewing conditions and their dependence on external circumstances.

During the course of time, the work of art as object was gradually erased by the increasing use of the convention of the exhibition as a form of aesthetic experience whether empty or full, labyrinth or stall, the exhibition site was incorporated by the artist leaving the viewer incapable of grasping anything

beyond the experience that had been proposed. The exhibition exhausted itself in contemplation. All that remained was the memory of a moment lived.

Toward the end of the fifties a novel aesthetic experience appeared as a substitute for an ambulatory contemplation of autonomous objects, severed from any context and cumulatively mounted: situating the spectator. Viewers faced with Yves Klein's void, Arman's 'fullness' and the environments of Jannis Kounellis, Gino de Dominicis and Blinky Palermo, no longer came to visit; they came to live an experience from which it would be difficult to remain distance.
AFFECT ON THE ARTISTIC PRODUCTION

The one subject of a hundred years of modern art is the awareness of art itself, of art preoccupied with its own process and means, with its own identity and distinction, art concerned with its own unique statement. In the nineteenth century many display practices could still seem extensions of other conventions in social life, not specialized installations like El Lissitzky, that were itself to be foregrounded. Through most of the nineteenth century, the international exhibition culture remained firmly committed to the idea that the first responsibility of a public exhibition was to enlighten and to improve its visitors morally, socially and politically. In the twentieth century, the principle rival to this idea, the aesthetic museum, would come to dominate. The experiences of the contemporary viewers can therefore not be the same as 19th century viewers.

An exhibition limits both the curator and the public to a spatial environment in which a form of visual conceptualization becomes the prime interpretive activity. They succeed best by providing a dynamic forum for the exchange of ideas, if the installations and subsequently the perspective on the thematic are transient. The point is that not museum directors and curators lack the interest or imagination to do anything different (although that may be true),
but rather that they are all required to program their galleries within a cultural contrast - one that is never fully of their making but for which they will be held responsible by their superiors in the museum, by the views of other art world professionals and by the variously informed, often conservative publics they serve.20

This brings me to some of the initial thoughts for this paper. As I am curious if, and how exhibition forms and demands have affected artistic production, and in what ways did modern art internalize exhibition schedules and formats into its own production? How might works have been made to anticipate the less objective conditions of their own reception? Some of these conditions I've already touched upon, in discussing the public and private, commercial and critical dimensions of the modern exhibition and its claims to represent a significant entity greater than itself.

Art works have to rely on themselves, and fear the confrontation with other pieces that are as radical. They are more than ever dependent on institutions like galleries and museums; they need a context that is created only for them. In the liminal space of the museum everything - and sometimes anything - may become art, including fire extinguishers, thermostats, outlets, etc, which when isolated on a wall and looked at through the aesthetisizing lens of the museum space, can appear, if only for a mistaken moment, every bit as

interesting as some of the intended-as-art works on display, which in any case
do not always look very different.

I will start with the idea of the museum or the exhibition space as a
format, in various ways different artists have made their own conclusions about
this. There is for example the artist as founder of museums, which is not foreign
to the history of modernism. Charles Baudelaire for instance was working on a
project on “lost museums and museums to be founded” in 1861 - 1863.21

A historical background for the contemporary artist’s concern for ‘space’
and for the conditions of reception can be established with El Lissitzky’s
demonstration rooms. El Lissitzky’s First Demonstration Room was
commissioned by the “International Art Exhibition” in Dresden in 1926 for the
display of the “new constructive art” and his second demonstration room,
commissioned by the director of the Hannover museum in 1926, was installed
in 1928. In both projects Lissitzky changes programmatically the conventions of
viewing by changing the conventions of institutional display. He did this in a
manner that he perceived to be consequential and consistent with the demands
and new definition of spatial, pictorial and architectural codes as they were
inherently given with post-cubist art production itself. Lissitzky developed an
approach to exhibition design that sought to problematize the role of the
spectator, to create ‘by means of design’ an active participation rather than a
passive viewing: “Space: that which is not looked at through a key hole, not

21Benjamin Buchloh, ‘The museum fictions of Marcel Broodhaers’, in A. A. Bronson, Peggy
through an open door. Space does not exist for the eye only: it is not a picture; one wants to live in it.  

Marcel Duchamp's boîte en valise reveals his anticipation of the final destination that his oeuvre would reach in the immanent process of acculturation: the museum. With his work Duchamp changes the role of artist as creator into that of the collector and conservator, who is concerned with the displacement and transport, the evaluation and institutionalization, the display and maintenance of a work of art. This change of the artist's role into that of the collector is consistent with Duchamp's original definition of the artist as a flaneur who -as it seems- randomly selects with a gesture of divine disinterest, objects from the totality of technical reproduction and singles them out as the ready-made. 

Marcel Broodhaers's works were also directed toward a consideration of the museum. A good example is a larger enterprise undertaken by Broodhaers during 1968 - 1972 under the general heading of "Musee d'Art Moderne", Departement des Aigles. Hoping to provoke critical thought about how art is represented in public, Broodhaers reversed the normal practice of participating

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in a museum exhibition by actually organizing one himself. Rather than simply placing examples of his "own" work on display in the museum, as is customary, he followed the curatorial procedure of borrowing objects from elsewhere and grouping them to illustrate a particular theme or subject. The subject of his exhibition was the eagle as it has been known or represented from prehistoric times to the present. The exhibited works belonged to all categories of media and included painting, sculpture, drawings, prints, and decorative arts from ancient to modern times, as well as representations of the eagle in non art contexts. Ironically a number, but not all, of these items from contemporary popular or commercial culture belonged to the artist's own "Collection Departement des Aigles", and not to an officially established public or private collection. All exhibited items came with a statement that declared: Ceci n'est pas un objet d'art / This is not an art work. If objects long acknowledged to be art were not, then what were they doing in a museum, whether in Broodhaers's fictional museum or in those that owned them? One had to wonder if, and deny that, the artist in fact possessed the power to determine whether these were or were not works of art and whether language alone could support such an edict.

In 1917 Duchamp had raised a common, non art urinal to the status of sculpture, by entering it into an art exhibition as an object of his authorial choice. Broodhaers explicitly refered to Duchamp but using exactly the opposite tactics, demonstrated by means of his exhibition that what supported Duchamp's original move was the authority of the museum or exhibition context. It demonstrated the way in which the museum is able to accord an illusive
wholeness to works, and actual fragments, from other periods and cultures that have been taken from their original historical and physical settings. By means of his explicitly fictional museum, Broodhaers examined the unspoken fictions surrounding art that empower the museum to consecrate its contents. Broodhaers pointed to the mythic proportions that art can assume when separated from the original conditions of its creation. Broodhaers's work called the museum into question insofar as such institutions accord autonomous value on art works, emphasizing qualities such as uniqueness, antiquity, originality, or authenticity, but obscure the socio-economic realities that account for their "worth" in the contemporary culture.

In April of 1929, Kandinsky publishes a theoretical piece praising "the naked wall" as a primary element in art:

"The naked wall......! The ideal wall, on which there is nothing, which supports nothing, on which there are hung no paintings, on which one sees nothing. The egocentric wall, which lives "in and of itself", which affirms itself, the chaste wall. The romantic wall. I too love the naked wall.... Whoever can truly be affected by the naked wall, with the intensity of lived experience, is prepared in the best fashion to truly experience a pictorial work. The two-dimensional wall, perfectly smooth, vertical, proportioned, “mute”, sublime, which says yes to itself, limited to and radiating toward the external world, is an almost primary "element".25

The precise awareness of the "artistic" function of the wall is relevant in terms of the history of modernist museology. The purist assumption is, from the 1920's on, the matrix for the archetypal image of the modern and contemporary exhibition hall. The environmental circumstances for exhibiting art today cannot be other than the "ideal white cube", this assemblage of naked walls, whose splendor and impact prevail over any body of works calms all extra-artistic doubts. The "ideal" gallery creates an aseptic container full of visual cotton fluff, in which the visitor and collector can perceive art as uncontaminated and virgin material, and arranged, therefore, to their own desires. For many contemporary artists this "ideal" has become a condition for their work: to know the architecture without having seen it is to accept working a priori.....or white: ideal.

The ideal gallery subtracts from the artwork all clues that interfere with the fact that it is art..... The outside world must not come in, so windows are usually sealed off. Walls are painted white. The ceiling becomes the source of light. The wooden floor is polished so that you can click along clinically, or carpeted so that you pad soundlessly resting the feet while the eyes have the wall. The art is free, to take on it's own "life". Brian O'Doherty identified this hermetism in 1976 as the "white cube" phenomenon, a neutral area which can thus be filled subjectively, and where the works of art can be constantly rearranged to form new ensembles. The gallery's implicit content comments on the 'art' within, to which it is contextual, and it comments on the wider context -street, city, money,

26 Ibid., p. 381.
business- that contains it. In his famous book “Inside the white cube”, Brian O’Doherty writes about how the gallery gradually was infiltrated with consciousness: its walls became ground, its floor a pedestal, its corners vortices, its ceiling a frozen sky, or in other words, the white cube became art in potency. No gallery, then or now, was actually the white cube that he described. The spaces were not cubic, a point made by the Wide White Space’s name (Brussels, Belgium), the ceilings were cluttered with track lighting and with a few exceptions such as MUHKA (Museum of Contemporary Art, Antwerp, Belgium), floors were not white. Yet “the white cube” persists as an idea.

Here I would like to mention some relatively small and individual events which according to my opinion had a great influence on the later (contemporary) generation of artists, one of these role-model events was Yves Klein’s The Void, at Gallery Iris Clert in Paris, 1958. The outside walls of the gallery were painted blue, inside he had removed all the furniture, painted the walls white, whitened one showcase which contained no object. He arrived (in his famous photograph) in free-fall from a second floor window. The implications for the gallery space were profound. While offering itself as a site and subject, the gallery primarily hosted a transcendent gesture. It sounds logical that Klein’s gesture provoked a response. The same gallery, Iris Clert’s, in October 1960 was filled with Arman’s Le Plein, an accumulation of garbage, waste, that could be seen pressing against the widow and the door. For the first time in the brief history of gallery gestures, the visitor was outside the gallery.
Inside, the gallery and its contents, were now as inseparable as pedestal and artwork.

This conceptualization of the gallery reached its ‘final’ point. In December 1969, in the Art & Project bulletin, no 17, Robert Barry wrote, “During the exhibition the gallery will be closed”. This idea had been realized at the Galleria Sperone, Turin, December 1969, with the title; “For the exhibition the gallery will be closed”. Here Barry’s work projects the mind beyond the visible.

An abundance of whole gallery gestures came in a rush at the end of the sixties and continued sporadically through the seventies. In 1969 there were Kounellis’s horses in Galleria l’Attico in Rome; a gesture to literalize life or nature within the gallery. Gino de Dominicis displayed in that same space the signs of the zodiac -a live bull, a lion, a young virgin, and two dead fish-, (Rome, 1970) and in Konrad Fischer’s gallery Blinky Palermo installed beige murals having the contours of the stairwell of the adjacent space (Dusseldorf, 1970). These projects questioned the vitality of the official art space by hooking up to the world outside.

Another project was Les Levine’s white sight at the Fischbach gallery in January 1969. On entering the gallery, the spectator, deprived of color and shadow by two high-intensity monochromatic sodium vapor lights, attempted to recreate the space. Other viewers became visual hints, points of reference from which to read the space. The audience thus became an artifact. Without sight, the audience turned back on itself, in an attempt to develop its own content. This
intensified experience of being alone in any empty white gallery, in which the act of looking, coached by expectation, becomes a kind of instant artifact.

The idealization of such gestures, in terms of scale and richness of readings, occurred in Chicago in 1969. The subject was not the gallery but the institution that possesses not one, but many galleries: the museum. Christo suggested wrapping the museum inside and out. The museum, the container, became itself contained.

All these gestures recognize the gallery as an emptiness, gravid with the content art once had. Coping with an idealized place that had pre-empted art's transforming refinements, gave rise to a variety of strategies. To some of the gestures already mentioned - the growth of irony, the comedies of assigning value to the useless, "de-creation" - should be added destruction. I can't think of an artist that trashed a museum, although alternative (to the museum) spaces took a beating. Various methods were used to reduce the placelessness and timelessness of the gallery, or the gallery itself could be removed and relocated to another place.

At last I want to mention artists like Dan Graham, Daniel Buren and Michael Asher that have been occupied with similar subject matter throughout their work.

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As early as 1965 Dan Graham perceived the contradictory nature of artwork's claim to autonomy compared with it's reliance on the invisible, but nonetheless real, socio-economic systems of support. From works of this date, which appeared in magazines, to his recent architectural “Pavilion / sculptures”, Graham has sought to resolve the contradictions inherent by and inherent in the socially isolated object in space. Figurative (1965), one of a number of Graham's magazine works, appeared in Harper's Bazaar in 1968, instead of being shown in an art gallery or museum.

Since 1968, Daniel Buren has directed his concerns away from the framing edge of the canvas field in order to examine and expose the work of art's connection with its external surroundings. The placement of striped material regulates the form and the meaning of each of Buren's works. Works by Buren participate in the given, non-art reality while at the same time commenting on the authority of the museum or gallery whose delegated exhibition spaces they often bypass. In his work, he articulates the function of the museum and of the studio, and discusses the role of architecture in art.

In 1979, in The Chicago Art Institute, Michael Asher moved the statue of Washington from the main entrance of the museum, inside the building into the institute's eighteenth century French gallery. The figure of Washington, deprived of it’s heroic stature, served as a reminder of the traditional, spatially isolated sculpture - the monument - now a stimulus for a new work of art. This simple remapping of the museum's holdings had the effect of instantaneously altering the nature of the sculpture.
CONCEPTUAL ART

Much of the art of the late sixties and seventies, reductive and often language-based, questioned the roles of museum, dealer, collector, public, often rejecting the object centered assumptions of construction and sale of works and the attendant requirements of exhibition/collection, power and hierarchy. Art was to be based on ideas, not things, being of the intellect rather than of the senses.

Yet "things" have most certainly not been left behind. Instead, the issues and concepts have themselves become market facts in many cases, and have further complicated an already contentious issue.

Many of the exhibitions and publications associated with Conceptual Art granted artists an unprecedented degree of control over the presentation and distribution of their work. As artists mailed, telexed, telegraphed, or telephoned their work, as they submitted texts and photographic documentation, as they performed actions inside and outside of the museum, and as their photocopies, photographs, postcards, verbal messages, and other unorthodox materials were accepted for installation or inclusion they redefined the notion of art and threatened the boundaries that separated it from other systems of information.
distribution. Conceptual artists also challenged the role of the critic by providing their own explanations and interpretations of their work as part of their total artistic output. While the more utopian aspects of the movement (the refusal of commodification, the commitment to more inexpensive and democratic modes of distribution, and the elimination of uniqueness and genius as the arbitrary facades of quality)²⁸ may have been largely non-supportive, many of these ideas and strategies of Conceptual Art have infiltrated to varying degrees much of the art produced today.

Among the more significant developments associated with conceptual art, attempts were made by some exhibition organizers to create display situations that would convey the subversive or radical nature of this new art. As artists began to question just what art was, and what it could or should be in the midst of the social and political crises of the mid-to-late 1960's they rejected traditional categories of artistic production in favor of work that could be less easily commodified within the institutions of the art world, more democratic in its accessibility to a broadly conceived audience, and ultimately tied less to notions of preciousness, uniqueness and genius.

Seth Siegelaub organized numerous exhibitions that were among the first to emphasize ideas rather than objects. Siegelaub had directed a conventional art gallery from 1964 to 1966. In 1968, however, he began to set

up situations that responded directly to the linguistic, documentary, and
dematerialized work being produced by Robert Barry, Douglas Huebler, Joseph
Kosuth and Lawrence Weiner—the artists with whom he is most closely
associated. No longer attached to a specific gallery, Siegelaub found exhibition
spaces when he needed them, as he did for “January 5-31, 1969”. This
exhibition consisted of (the ideas communicated in) the catalog; the physical
presence (of the work) was supplementary to the catalog.

Siegelaub also published catalogs that functioned as exhibitions, such
as Douglas Huebler: November 1968, in which the artist’s works—typewritten
statements, maps, and photographs—appeared in catalog form alone. Similarly
Lawrence Weiner’s statements (1968) eliminated the need for an exhibition
altogether since there was nothing that necessarily needed to be displayed
beyond the texts printed in the book.

Lucy Lippard’s extensive connections to Conceptual Art include her role
as an organizer of exhibitions and catalogs. In 1969 she organized a traveling
exhibition whose title changed according to the population of the city in which it
was held; in Seattle it was known as 557, 087 and in Vancouver as 995, 000.
Art works were located both inside the museums and in a wide radius beyond
them; some were constructed or set up by Lippard and her staff based on
instructions received from the artists. The catalog consisted of randomly
arranged four x six inch index cards, forty-six of which were designed by the
artists. Replacing the traditional critical essays are twenty cards containing
quotations and texts by various philosophers, theorists, and others.
Lippard's effort to annul the often authoritarian and hierarchical organizing principles of exhibition and catalogues was perceived by one critic as a projection of her own aesthetic sensibility, compelling him to state that “there is a total style to the show, a style so pervasive as to invite that Lucy Lippard is in fact the artist and that her medium is other artists”\(^{29}\). The tactic of conflating curator and artist, owes something to Andy Warhol. If business is the highest art, then the curator, as the maker or breaker of careers, becomes a mega-artist.

In addition to redefining the concept of the exhibition, curators, critics, and artists themselves developed strategies, for presenting and distributing work that bypassed the museum altogether. In this regard, art periodicals provided an especially important forum. ‘Aspen’ was a multi media magazine contained in a box whose contents were realized in a media that suited the theme of each issue, two of which could conceivably function as Conceptual Art exhibitions. Several other periodicals (like Avalanche) founded during the period were designed specifically to present conceptually oriented art.

\(^{29}\)Peter Plagens, ‘557,087’,Artforum 8 (Nov. 1969), pp. 64.
SITE -AND EVENT- SPECIFIC WORK

Event-specificity is linked with the increasement of pragmatic habits developed through contact with works (minimal, post-minimal, site-specific) requiring the spectator to move literally in space itself, but also to displace the very notion of "spectator". So it appears to me that the installation, especially in its theoretical formulation, is an inescapable junction in the flight from museum to city and the 'broadening' of the spectator through tourism. Site-specific art challenges the nature of the frame of the exhibition itself. Through the confrontation of the known and the perceived, through the sudden valorization of the experience (and length of the experience), minimal art encouraged a new pragmatic. In doing so, it modified the conventions of pleasure for the spectator.

The arrival of site-specificity in turn refashioned the notion of the journey by no longer confining the art experience in the abstract gallery space. For, in its first phase of experimentation, the site-specific work (where a place's physical qualities or forces determine the artistic gesture) turned the viewer away from the established circuit of art institutions. The journey itself became one of the conditions of aesthetic pleasure or interest.
Many site-specific works play on a disconnection between a public and industrial space and its transformation into a private, even intimate space: the studio becomes the work or at least the site, if not pretext, for the exhibition. Abandoned office blocks, public buildings, or monuments of industrial archeology are often the urban counterpart of the deserts sought by earth artists. Through this, a new form of domestic tourism has been invented, or I could speak of renewed ties with the modern tradition of the flaneur and his fascination with the strangeness of the city.\textsuperscript{30} As the map substitutes for the picture, the city replaces the museum. The spectators can profit from a tour through town allowing them to aesthetisize the everyday experience of light in situ, in ‘real life’. There’s no further need of artistic intervention; here the city becomes the conclusive referent, the real scene, with no other explanation than the contextual framing of the event.

Walter Benjamin sees the arcade as the classical form of the ‘interior’, which is how the flaneur sees the street, the department store is the form of the ‘interior’s’ decay. The bazaar is the last hangout of the flaneur. If in the beginning the street had become an interior for him, now this interior turned into a street, and he roamed through the labyrinth of merchandise as he had once roamed through the labyrinth of the city.\textsuperscript{31}


\textsuperscript{31}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 172.
Jan Hoet, curator of Chambres d’amis and Documenta IX, commented on the flight from the museum to the “interior” with his project “Chambres d’amis”. The group show “Chambres d’amis” (Gent, Belgium, 1985), taught the museum a great deal about itself and not only in a parodical way. One of the ways that the museum learned to question its code, is via its confrontation with the quite palpable everyday reality, and via its infiltration into places and corners which are essentially strange to the museum. The museum’s authority has been blurred and upset by the project of site-specificity. But there is yet more to it. The museum is slowly finding out how it is reappearing in all the places where it propagated. As if the museum is only now discovering for the first time that its space -a space which usually simply exists- is developing all over town, in all its aspects.

Indeed in Chambres d’Amis, many of the artists’ selected propositions seemed favorable to museification. It was as if a domestic transplant was the most effective, because the most literal way of revealing that the private apartment is already the museum. In this respect Daniel Buren’s “room” is maybe the most critical: refusing to leave the museum, he undertook to reconstruct, full-size, the guest room,( the chambre d’ami) he had chosen in the city and removed from the circuit. In the heart of the museum, like a lining, he built what constituted the implicit model of the museum. In this way he pointed out that we can leave the museum via the “interior” only so long as we recognize that that’s how we got into it in the first place.
To conclude this part, I like to mention the exhibition ‘Allocations’, that was situated in the public space of a ‘world wonder park’: the 1992 World Horticultural Exhibition Floriade, The Hague - Zoetermeer, The Netherlands. The Floriade is like a theme park. This information and recreational exhibition site acquaints visitors with the world of horticultural production, distribution and consumption. The flower and fruit of centuries of productive cultivation of nature are carefully staged in clearly organized, designed surroundings. In the accompanying catalog one of the editors states:

“A Floriade like this seems to satisfy all conditions for considering the problems of the work of art in it’s (public) environment and also seems to provide an excellent opportunity for contextual commentary”.32 Commodity, sign, appropriation, context, media- in this time just about any meaningful, because ambiguous, relationship between a cultural object and it’s ritual environment is up for grabs.

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Between the sixties and the nineties there has been a paradigm shift in the types of spaces used for exhibitions of contemporary art which can be characterized as a move away from domestic structures to buildings associated with commerce and industry. The preferred place of exhibitions of contemporary art is no longer the house or apartment turned into a gallery, but a former factory or warehouse, a change announced by Warhol's designation of his 1963 production and semi-public viewing space as the factory and epitomized in 1994 with the location of the Andy Warhol Museum in a former warehouse. This shift in desired exhibition space corresponds to the emphasis placed on process rather than product in the making of art in the sixties and nineties when increasingly art was defined and described as work.

The defining qualities of contemporary art - diversity, the context aesthetic, art about the possibility of art - govern the forms of its presentation in exhibitions. These have become many layered experiences that can no longer afford to limit themselves to a single category of art. They embody the awareness that any presentation of art creates an interpretive framework within
which the art itself is perceived. Exhibitions create discourses and dialogues. They point to the agreements and disagreements between different artistic formulations. Exhibitions are also highly relevant to the media transmission that nowadays controls the public experience of art; for they, by contrast, afford the experience of art on the spot, 'Here and now'. Not only does the discourse of the exhibition itself relate to each visitor's individual manner of reading the work; at the same time the exhibition promotes art's tendency to pursue 'immediacy of experience'. Radical concentration on the individual work, and associative connections between works, set in train a dynamic process that continues beyond the confines of the exhibition itself.

Since the beginning of the 1980's, the phenomenon of the thematic art show made its re-entrance. The thematic exhibition can be seen as a further development from retrospectives dating back even before The Armory Show in 1913, but closely related to the larger retrospectives of the late sixties, like Documenta and the Venice Biennale.

After the dominance in the late sixties and seventies of movements like Conceptual Art and Performance Art, that have very little object orientation, a new need for 'decoration' occurred. At the same time, in this period of great diversity it seemed more and more impossible to speak of any dominant style in art. The aspect of 'confrontation' in itself, became a theme for art exhibitions. Curators tried to make carefully balanced shows, juxtaposing different works of art taken from various contexts, to create a new atmosphere for dialogue. The play of de- and recontextualization grew to enormous proportions; the thematic
exhibition became an important art-context in itself, in which individual pieces could be shown in a new interesting relation, manifesting itself on various playgrounds, using a collage-type of technique. Curator Mayer Vaisman stated: "For me it's like this: you have a text and you have the images, and you make your collage".33

Some of these exhibitions can be composed from the viewpoint of the play with history, balance, and the new. Group shows had titles like: NEW DIRECTIONS, THE ANTIQUE FUTURE, THE BEAUTY OF CIRCUMSTANCE, TODAY, THE NEW, WHAT IT IS, AS FOUND.

In the following summary will become clear that with those particular titles, a characteristic of the present-day art climate is named, the indistinctness, the mix of categories and plural interpretations; past, present and future can be combined together. The end of time became a theme: TIME AFTER TIME, ART AFTER MODERNISM, POST GRAFFITI, POST CONTEMPORARY ART, UTOPIA POST UTOPIA.

Then there's spiritualism: THE SUBLIME, THE SPIRITUAL IN ART, SPIRITUAL AMERICA, and on the other hand it's denial: THE IRRONIC SUBLIME, FAKE, INTOXICATION, NOTHING SACRED.

Exhibitions dealt with power, oppression, sex and politics: THE NEW POVERTY, CONSTITUTION, LIBERTY AND JUSTICE, ECSTASY, SEX, THE NEW CAPITOL.

Shows had poetic titles in the traditional way: TO THE HAPPY FEW, STILL LIFE WITH TRANSACTION, THE EUROPEAN ICEBERG, WALK OUT TO THE WINTER.

Oppositions became clear: THE IMAGE OF ABSTRACTION VERSUS ABSTRACTION IN

QUESTION, TRUE PICTURES VERSUS FICTION VERSUS FAKE, THE INSIDE & THE OUTSIDE, UTOPIA DYSTOPIA, SIMILIA DISSIMILIA, COMPLEXITY AND CONTRADICTION.

Exhibitions can lead to extremes: OFF WHITE, MODERN SLEEP, SPATIAL DISPLACEMENT, 25000 SCULPTORS FROM ACROSS THE USA, DISINFORMATION. At the end of the list, the final play, the collective sense of pessimism, the doubt that seems to be one of the basic frames of mind of a lot of contemporary artists. "We were never happy. We are artists". 34 Show titles are: FINAL LOVE, POP APOCALYPSE, ROMANCE AND CATASTROPHE, THE END OF THE WORLD, TROUBLE IN PARADISE, THE SUCCESS OF FAILURE. 35

In these few examples of thematic exhibitions, an arbitrariness in terms of content seems obvious, as much as the idea of uniting works by individual artists in one exhibition (title) seems problematic to me. In most of these group exhibitions, the works are all shifting in their context. Again, in the case of thematic exhibitions questions about curatorship are raised: when the artwork itself isn't a statement, an exhibition is, or, I might want to suggest here that the curator becomes author.

34Gilbert and George, "We are never happy, we are artists", Artscibe, Sept. 1987, pp. 34.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION; MY OWN SCENARIO

Since 1990 new variations in exhibition practice have emerged in the art world (in Western Europe), in which artists attempt to repossess institutional art spaces. This practice can be related in terms of ambition to a couple of exhibitions that took place two decades ago, I mentioned Kounellis's horses, de Dominicis's signs of the zodiac and Palermo's murals. In hindsight, these projects can be defined as a warning against automatisms that were to be influential in determining how institutional art space would function (such as those forms of presentation that solely aimed for isolating the art object from the rest of the world). As I discussed the eighties were the years were such automatisms were preserved. There was a flood of presentations in galleries that, since the art works were shown there in 'splendid' isolation, could give free reign to all their commercial desires. Also in the case of museums, there are countless examples of exhibitions in which art has been made subservient to a curator's concept.

There are of course artists who made a career for themselves in the eighties, among them Fischili & Weiss, Mike Kelley, Jan Vercruysse, who took a critical stance in their work of the art world being in the tight grip of the culture
industry. With all these viewpoints in my baggage, I’ve been interested in discussing presentation formats which project a piece of art as a shape outlined against a white screen. Partially through my work, I am trying to develop procedures to bypass these formats, or turn them against themselves. I sense a certain dissatisfaction with a circuit of venues that thrives upon the infinite circulation of art products. Can this flow be stemmed, how can I mark such an exhibition venue, or try to set aside the current regime in institutional spaces for art? I think this is relevant and important because, as I tried to suggest earlier, the rules of that order are internalized by many other artists, especially those starting their career in the second half of the eighties. Rather than asking critical questions, they submitted to the rules of an existing order.

In my own work I am not so concerned with frontal criticism, let alone an ‘in situ’ response. To start with I try to proceed from a certain realism, that means recognizing the limitations that existing conditions entail. I think what I am advocating, is a way of working that results in spaces with a certain heterogeneity, where you’re not tied to one set of rules and one type of experience. For me the experience of art needs to part from the static framework of the show, and open to the space and time beyond the exhibition site. I think the paradox here, is that it shifts the emphasis to the ‘here and now’ of the exhibition.

So the practice I would like to consider is out to challenge the (white) art space. There are pros and cons to be weighed: should I produce something for
this space, or would it be better to leave something out. Here then I am wondering how the experience and thinking about art can be cleaned or ordered.

The work of many artists shows that this can be achieved, but it is essential to get rid of the ballast of the past. Richard Hoeck for example, refers to this necessity when he suggests that artists must be aware of the danger of art.\textsuperscript{36} The condition of the current, global basis of life, has probably led to an altered attitude on the generation of artists which is now emerging, dismantling the myth of the genius from bygone centuries (With this I am not referring to Postmodernism's eclecticism). The creative power of a Duchamp lies on another level, but a box has not always been a Judd, and a watertower not always a Becher. Times are changing in any case, we know more and yet often less. I guess it's easy to become entangled in an admiration of art that flourished in the past, and to be left behind as a result: which scenario can I follow to escape the regime of art?

The works I made in the past two years have had an important effect on my development. A partial loose style and playfulness, helped to develop a language of much greater discipline and formal consistency, which took me beyond the imaginative and diverse ideas of my early sketchbooks and notes. Another observation is that my home looks not unlike many of my works:

rectangles painted on the wall, the way I order and pile the objects in my room and how I work around those ‘existing’ conditions.

Part of the works produced over the past years are most interesting, perhaps, for their reference to the notion of a transition from art to architecture and furniture. I might link these pieces with the principles of minimal art, but at the same time they can also be seen as models, and thus clearly refer to modern architecture such as that of The Stijl; the very architecture that attempted to dissolve the architectural object.

Most of the ‘architectural’ pieces I made -from objects or models to forms that are just outlined and take up space, from the wall paintings to projections onto transparent and opaque surfaces- are always impossible to enter. The accents are always shifting. The viewer is being pulled between the different forms in which the work presents itself: between wall and floor, large and very small, sharp and round, color and absence of color, opaqueness and transparancy, high speed and slow motion, visibility and invisibility, the serious and the funny, excess and lack, continuity and interruption, and the split between meaning and provider of meaning. Inherent to this way of working is the value of immediate experience; something that no photographic reproduction can replace. A respond to this quality is making the work specific to the space in which it is shown: a work that points to the exhibition as a place of aesthetic experience. In that situation, the unregarded object, barely noticed, or rags and pieces can thus become the focus of attention.
When you exhibit alone in a space, as for my thesis show, it is as if I started with a package of air: you come up against walls, doors or windows. In the situation of occupying the same space with a group (as in past critiques) you come up other forms, human forms or traces of human forms. The notion of "I" as first person is very strong. When I had to submit a piece for the graduate group show last year, it seemed as though I changed my point of view, taking the viewpoint of objects on exhibit. Other questions spring up on that basis, not only concerning the space and the context, but particularly the necessity of the objects’ presence, their need to occupy a space together. I understood that all these assembled objects searching for a space, or just taking up space, were finally going to be ‘troublesome’ or provocative for each other. At that point, in terms of the group show, that was the direction I had to take, toward a questioning of this ‘troublesomeness’.

To conclude this chapter I might mention that I really see these redefined operations as the constructive side of the whole project. In my manner of exhibiting, susceptibility sometimes means taking stock. Non-matter (white of walls, openings of windows, light) proves, like the white on a page of a poem, to be as important as matter. They are works, mostly with a humble presence, that exploit subordination in order to conquer the space and transform it into a tactile sense. In this procedure -that of sensitizing the location of the show- art space can function as a body in contact with the outside world. Elaborating a kind of formal language seems not to be enough. In the thesis exhibition I recognize other ‘tricks’ that revolve around doubling, -as with the projections- but also
around sequencing and even researching the idea of after-image. But not just the after image in terms of photography, as visible in the montage of slides, but also in terms of erasing or, to the contrary, of evoking that one image comes before the other image. The same questions I find in the placing of objects (dotted-out forms on the floor) that seem simultaneously to appear and disappear.

I will end with a statement by Daniel Buren, that, in a way, functioned as a starting point for this thesis paper and helped me determine the location of my final show. As with this thesis show, or with any show, it seems important to me to just be invited to do something. It's not really the question of finding spaces that will fit the work or the question of being able to say yes or no. And again, in my work I am not after a strategy that displays institutional or frontal critique. Here there is some sense of what I consider incoherence, which I think is very practical. I believe being an artist in the nineties means that you have to be much more adept, much more open, and maybe much more fluent than artists forty years ago: as an artist you have to be able to change your color.

The architecture in which the work of art is exhibited must be taken into account, under the threat of permanently reducing the work to nothing. It's therefore certainly not the matter of carrying out a work of architecture. Nor is it the matter of choosing an architecture to suit the point one wants to make. All architecture must be able to be used! Few works can lend themselves to the experiment. It is not a problem of architecture on one side and a problem of art
unknown to it on the other. Neither is it a question of art submitting to
architecture, nor of architecture wedding art......exhibitions do not of themselves
change the world. Nor should they have to. But, as a form of public space, they
constitute an arena in which a community may test, examine and imaginatively
live both older truths and possibilities for new ones".37

Plate 2: Dotted-out floor piece

37 Daniel Buren, ‘Function of the exhibition’, in A. A. Bronson, Peggy Gale, ed., Museums by
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Gilbert and George, 'We were never happy, we are artists', *Artscribe*, Sept. 1987.


