

The Haunted Museum:
Institutional Critique
and Publicity*

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Today occasions for
identification have to
be created-the public
sphere has to be “made”,
it is not “there” anymore.

-Jurgen Habermas, The
Structural Transforma-
tion of the Public Sphere



A Gloomy Romance

The 1980s saw not only the elaboration of various critical aesthetic practices, but a resurgence of interest in traditional modes of aesthetic experience and models of artistic subjectivity. This was accompanied by a frankly ideological disavowal of the historical specificity of conditions of cultural production and reception. On the other hand, in the wake of Conceptual art, critics, perhaps especially on the left, were quick to suppose that what has come to be known as institutional critique had failed, because they could see, for instance, cast urinals in elegantly appointed galleries.¹ Indeed, in the shadow of a punctual, linear, somewhat apocalyptic avant-gardism, it becomes very difficult to think about art after the 1960s as anything but always already sold out. Certainly, by the mid-1990s nothing like a movement has emerged even to act out the function of an avant-garde. Criticism finds itself at an impasse, and so, perhaps, do remaining notions of criticality. This might provoke a reflection on the degree to which criticism has, perhaps unwittingly, bound itself even to the various placeholders for an avant-garde. If it is possible to look at contemporary practices without merely cataloguing their critically predetermined failure, then it is necessary to rethink conceptions of the relations between the neo-avant-garde and its predecessors. This essay proposes a project for a reappraisal of neo-avant-garde institutional critique in terms addressing the romance of avant-gardism and criticality.² More is required than to dispute the premise of Peter Bürger's argument in *Theory of the Avant-Garde* that the failure of the historical avant-garde's intention to sublimate art, and the acculturation of its protest against art as art, renders

the gestures of the neo-avant-garde inauthentic.³ Even so, a first step must be to dispense with the romantic notion that the historical avant-garde sought the integration of art and the praxis of life. The claim that the actions—the gestures—of small numbers of typically bourgeois avant-gardists could ever effectively have changed the praxis of life, a claim necessary for their subsequent failure, can no longer be supported. Cultural institutions, including those of art, cannot be considered in isolation. Once this is accepted, so must be the recognition that it was never the function of art to resolve social contradictions. The critics' understanding of historical social contradictions cannot take priority over their registration in works of art, as though, for example, critics had always understood better than the Dadaists what their work was dealing with. On the contrary, our understanding arises in part on the basis of avant-garde struggles to register those contradictions, to make them in some sense public. My contention is that considerations of relations between the neo-avant-garde and the historical avant-garde have neglected what has been the principal medium for those relations, that is, publicity. Publicity is referred to in this context as the medium, not only for art, but for all those practices of intervention in economies of cultural production and reception that go to realize conceptions of the public sphere. Publicity in this sense includes not only the familiar forms of corporate advertising and state propaganda, but such apparently diverse cultural practices as, for example: museum exhibitions; Conceptually based art, to the extent that it interrogates the institutional construction of subjects; academic journals and trade union publications, to the extent that

they constitute reading publics; and political demonstrations by groups including ACTUP, which ideally generate not only internal solidarity but interference patterns in the mass-mediated transmission of information. This is not an exhaustive list, but what these have in common is their potential, however residual or limited, to give rise to debates and opinions in which both conceptions of the public sphere and of collective identifications within and across categories of social difference coalesce. The various forms of publicity are communications frameworks, which provide the conditions for the formation of publics.⁴

The Haunted Museum

The specifically bourgeois public sphere was one of the first objects of Habermas's continuing inquiry into the relations between democracy and mass society. Habermas's critique of the avant-garde and postmodernism in the essay "Modernity—An Incomplete Project" (1980)⁵ is better known in art circles than his more important book, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, though it should be noted that there, too, he is critical of the avant-garde as an institution operated by fully assimilated cultural functionaries. Essentially, the development of the bourgeois public sphere saw the coming together, in Europe in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, of private individuals to form a public, defined by its supposedly disinterested engagement in rational-critical debate. Many of the locations in which this public found itself—cafés, clubs, debating societies, etc.—were private, even exclusive, but this allowed for the conduct of debate, as if among equals. Even though the reading public found its models in the aristocratic behaviors of such settings as salons, the opinion of this public be-

came the ground of democratic, anti-absolutist politics. Most pertinently, Habermas's account of the realization of the bourgeois public sphere produces a moment in which the institution of art is intimately, structurally involved in the construction of the subject of democratic oppositional politics. According to Habermas, the public museum facilitated rational-critical debate, in the form of criticism. The museum "institutionalized the lay judgment on art: discussion became the medium through which people appropriated art." Although it was not necessarily where criticism took place, the museum organized the lay judgment of art that was expressed in criticism.⁶ Effectively, it organized the experience of art. As one of the institutions of the public sphere in the realm of letters, it allowed the subjectivity originating in the interiority of the patriarchal, conjugal family to attain clarity about itself. On the basis of this self-interpretation, bourgeois publicity was legitimated as the ground for the regulation of the broader private realm (including, for instance, private, mercantile contractual relations), which was the purpose of the democratic institutions of the developing political public sphere, where the bourgeoisie could contest the arbitrary exercise of absolutist power. Habermas's view of the bourgeois public sphere as a social formation functioning in opposition to the absolutist state is tightly bound to this model of the new bourgeois subject emerging from the familial interior—"a consciousness functionally adapted to the institutions of the public sphere in the world of letters."⁷ The museum contributed to the self-representation and self-authorization of the new, bourgeois subject of reason. More accurately, this subject, this "fictitious



identity” of property owner and human being pure and simple,⁸ was itself an interlinked process of self-representation and self-authorization. That is, it was intimately bound to its cultural self-representation as a public. Central to Habermas’s project (for this remains the case in his later work) is a procedural model of the subject of carefully delineated rational-critical communicative exchanges. This model describes the subject of the museum, considered as an institution of bourgeois publicity. Ultimately, what is at stake for Habermas is the possibility of realizing a normative conception of the public sphere, one that might allow for rational-critical exchange across a range of social difference. By now, however, it is a familiar criticism of Habermas that his model of the bourgeois public sphere rests on an idealized abstraction from the actually existing political cultures of Western Europe in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, and that his procedural subject is both gendered (male) and disembodied.⁹ These problems stem from the unresolved relation between normative and empirical elements in Habermas’s account. The gendering of the procedural subject is signaled by the patriarchal character of the conjugal family. Given a significant a priori power differentiation, women nonetheless played a constitutive role in the development of a reading public and therefore of the public sphere in the world of letters but, according to Habermas, because of the patriarchal organization of property relations were not able to cross over into the political realm. Habermas himself has recently recognized that the exclusion of women from the political public sphere had “structuring significance.”¹⁰ Similarly, because of his em-

phasis on the forms of communication he saw as the historical background to modern public communication, Habermas largely ignored the existence of competing forms of publicity-plebeian or proletarian-grounded in different communicative practices.¹¹ He has allowed that his own account might have been different if he had admitted competing publicities and considered “the dynamics of those processes of communication ... excluded from the dominant public sphere.”¹² As Geoff Eley argues, “Habermas’s idea works best as the organizing category of a specifically liberal view of the transition to the modern world and of the ideal bases on which political and intellectual life should be conducted.” But the public sphere “in its classical liberal/bourgeois guise was partial and narrowly based ... and was constituted from a field of conflict, contested meanings, and exclusion.”¹³ In the history of the public art museum such contestation is evident from the start. For Habermas the museum was one of the institutions embodying a form of publicity that functioned to challenge the “representative” publicity of royal collections (in order to realize a conception of publicness opposed to the secret politics of absolutism). Representative publicity refers here to the way royal collections served to impress upon the court, visitors to the court, and of course “the people” the magnificence of the absolutist ruler. In fact, however, in its development out of royal collections, the public art museum took form as an institution of the bourgeois state, but one that defined a hybrid form of publicity, haunted, as it were, by representative publicity. The Louvre provides a model for the modern, public art museum. A full account of its development would require a very

complex bureaucratic history,¹⁴ but the central point is that while “the transformation of the old royal palace into the Museum of the French Revolutionary government,” so that it opened on August 10, 1793, to commemorate “the anniversary of the fall of the tyranny,” that government largely took over an idea that had been debated internally and publicly, by Diderot among others, since 1744, as well as specific plans formulated in the royal administration since 1774.¹⁵ The transformation of the Louvre by the Revolution met different requirements, in thematic terms (as publicity for the bourgeois democratic state, rather than the absolute rule of the king), than would have satisfied royal policy. Nevertheless, the Revolutionary government maintained the broad function of the institution as planned by the royal administration. This sketch suggests, first, that the debates that took place in the period 1744 to 1774 (before plans based on them were actually implemented) about the idea of a public art museum that did not yet exist, may be considered in terms of the rational-critical debate of bourgeois publicity and the self-representation and self-authorization of a Habermasian subject. Second, however, the actual museum in which imperial treasures were from 1793 “ceremonially displayed as public property”¹⁶ might have symbolized the rise of bourgeois democracy, but it also represented, paradoxically but precisely, the merging of the subjectivity of the bourgeois and the monarch. The museum purported to represent the new civic body to itself, but this was still a matter, essentially, of the state granting identity. Representative publicity elaborates the body of the monarch, while bourgeois public-

involved in representation.”²⁰ Counter to a strictly Habermasian account, the example of the museum thus suggests that representative and bourgeois forms of publicity were never clearly separable. At least in the case of the museum, their developments have been intertwined. Further, if the museum can be accounted for, in terms derived from Habermas’s own, as having always institutionalized a hybrid form of publicity, then Habermas’s linear narrative of the decay of the bourgeois public sphere may be subject to a more complex temporal scheme.²¹ The question remains, however, of whether or not it is possible to conceive of any sphere in which the relations between different forms of publicity might be played out, precisely, in public, in which the different models of the public sphere that contradictory forms of publicity project could be subjected to rational-critical analysis, rather than rationalist domination or mass media spectacularization. This is to some extent the function that Habermas assigns to the bourgeois public sphere in reviewing his own formulation thirty years later: bourgeois publicness ... is articulated in discourses that provided areas of common ground not only for the labor movement but also for the excluded other, that is, the feminist movement. Contact with these movements in turn transformed these discourses and the structures of the public sphere itself from within.²² The Returns of the Avant-Garde On this theoretical ground, I want to turn to the relations between historical and neo-avant-gardes. In the moment of the blockbuster show, the museum clearly takes its place within an at least partly refeudalized spectacle culture. It is necessary to disturb the way in which we have come to

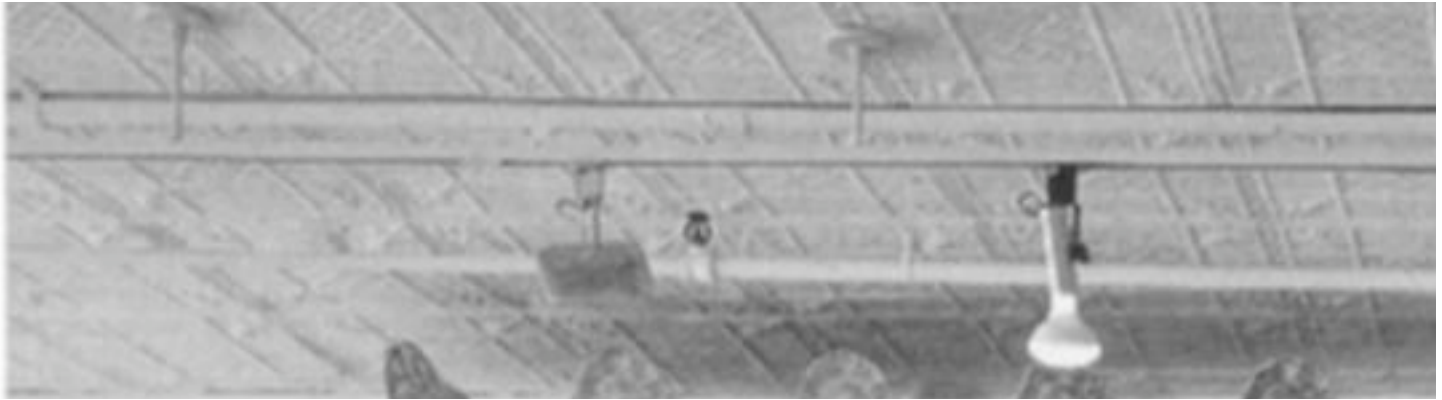


think of the relations between museum and public in order to argue for the introduction of the term publicity into how we think of the relations between historical and neo-avant-gardes, and, as we will see, conventions and institutions. The question, after Habermas, is whether it might be possible or productive to think of the art of institutional critique that reflects on the museum as reconfiguring the historical moment described here in relation to the early history of the Louvre, however fleeting or idealized it might have been—the moment in which the museum was, if always in a partial manner, an institution of critical publicity. This requires, in turn, an extension of a dominant account of the development of institutional critique that situates the neo-avant-garde's first decentering of the subject of art in Minimalism's phenomenological inquiries into conditions of perception.²³ The neo-avant-garde's concerns expand outward, in Conceptual art and post-Conceptual institutional critique, from an initial engagement with the immediate relations between subject and object, viewer and art work, through the broader constraints and conditions of that relationship. This entails an engagement that begins to turn the space of the museum itself into an object located in a social and ideological network (an object of inquiry, one term in an expansive set of social relations). But despite the democratizing grounds on which it analyzed and sought to dispense with aesthetic mastery, in largely maintaining the abstraction of content that was crucial to the high modernism valorized by the museum, Conceptual art also maintained the disembodiment of its own subject. It is precisely this to which much institutional critique responds, insofar as it insists on legibili-

ty's constitutive requirement is the supposedly democratic disembodiment of the new subjects of universal reason. But in the interpretation of the Louvre sketched here, bourgeois publicity, at least in the specific instance of the public art museum, is unable to separate itself from representative publicity even at its inception. This preempts and reverses the terms of the liberal philosophical critique of bourgeois publicity. (John Stuart Mill and Alexis de Tocqueville sought the augmentation of bourgeois publicity with elements of representative publicity so as to protect it from the "tyranny of an unenlightened public opinion.")⁷ And it complicates elements of Habermas's own continuation of that critique. For Habermas, the bourgeois public sphere gradually gives way to the mutual infiltration of public and private realms, particularly the appropriation by the state of what were formerly functions of the family. This accompanies the continuation of the commodification of culture that had been a precondition for rational-critical debate by setting cultural products in circulation, so that they became available for private discussion. Habermas argues that the commodification of the content of culture is central to the shift from an active, educated or trained culture-debating public to a passive, unenlightened culture-consuming public.¹⁸ It is only this shift into mass culture that gives rise to a degree of refeudalization of the public sphere, so that publicity comes to be "generated from above ... in order to create an aura of goodwill for certain positions."¹⁹ Now, when public authority itself must compete for publicity, "publicity imitates the kind of aura proper to the personal prestige and supernatural authority once bestowed by the kind of publicity in-

ty.²⁴ For the subject of the museum, as an institution of the bourgeois public sphere, remains both male and abstract (or universal). The function of the canonical "master" is to guarantee this. Conceptual art dismantled the expressive gesture as the foundation of mastery without sufficiently reflecting on its own conception of the public sphere (which is why, after all, stripes have come to equal "Buren," and a Rolodex can look like "classic" Conceptual art).²⁵ Hence, in the context of thinking about practices, such as Daniel Buren's and Hans Haacke's, that reflect on the function of the principal social institution—and principal form of publicity—of art, the museum, it is necessary to begin to map relations between the historical avant-garde and the neo-avant-garde onto relations between the museum of the historical bourgeois public sphere and the not entirely dissimilar museum of the structurally transformed public sphere of late capital. The narrative of the development of institutional critique must be situated within a broader account of the public sphere. One effect of this is to suggest that institutional critique has been prematurely buried. There are two interwoven strands within different institutionally critical practices and their historical antecedents. While the same historical figures may appear in both, what is important is not the trajectories taken by individual artists, but how implications in their work may be seen, passed through different theoretical and political matrices, taken up in later work. The first strand of institutional critique takes as its task the material analysis of the perceptual protocols the museum uses to disguise or naturalize what is in fact the historical bourgeois subject. The principal historical figure here is Marcel

Duchamp, though I will also refer to Alexander Rodchenko; signal subsequent artists include Buren and Marcel Broodthaers. The second strand, while related to the first, nevertheless insists that by means of a more direct address, the museum can be made to function as a site for the production of critical publicity. Historical figures include El Lissitzky and again Rodchenko, and recent artists Haacke and Fred Wilson. A broadly Habermasian framework is particularly useful in considering this second strand.²⁶ It is possible that Rodchenko's monochromes left "the modern status of painting as made-for-exhibition" just as intact as Duchamp's readymade left the museum-gallery nexus.²⁷ Buren, in passing what is only nominally "painting" (alternating white and colored stripes, 8.7cm wide) through every conceivable distribution mechanism, might be seen to elaborate the limitations of Rodchenko's demonstration. Buren, too, saw an end to a representation described in somewhat hallucinatory terms.²⁸ But if his work has become not so much the end of painting, in Douglas Crimp's version of the phrase, as a perpetual ending of painting, then it demonstrates the power of the institution of art to sustain what is perhaps its central category. By now Buren's work may only enact its own surrender to its subjection as painting. Similarly, if in nominating objects as art Duchamp posed an inquiry into art as a category of understanding, there is a transformation of the readymade strategy in Broodthaers's *Musee d'Art Moderne* in its various instantiations between 1968 and 1972. In the 1968 installation "Section XIX^e Siècle," for instance, in Broodthaers's own apartment, the space was taken up with the large



crates used for the transportation of works of art—which themselves only appeared as postcards—reversing the customary, institutional order of consumption of art, so as to literalize, conversely, the production of aesthetic value. The 1972 installation of the “Section des Figures: The Eagle from the Oligocene to the Present” at the Städtische Kunsthalle, Düsseldorf, was an exhibition containing 266 objects representing or otherwise related to eagles, culled from the collections of 43 international museums of various kinds, as well as private collectors and dealers.²⁹ On one hand, this hyperbolized the arbitrary semantics of collection. On the other, it collapsed the positions of artist and curator, that is, of artist and cultural functionary, and replaced the Duchampian readymade with objects whose value was preestablished by their places in museum collections, each labeled “This is not a work of art,” “a formula obtained by the contraction of a concept by Duchamp and an antithetical concept by Magritte.”³⁰ In subjecting what was in a sense an institutional readymade to the flattening, dehistoricizing effects of circulation within museum culture, Broodthaers recognized the nature of the readymade as epistemological gesture. He simultaneously elaborated some of the limitations of that gesture, in terms of its historical inability to fend off its own denaturing in the perhaps inevitable process of institutionalization.³¹ One of the assumptions informing the art of institutional critique seems to be that the conventions of art are produced or at the very least maintained by institutions, particularly the museum, on structurally and often unconsciously ideological grounds, with the effect in turn of maintaining the category of artistic

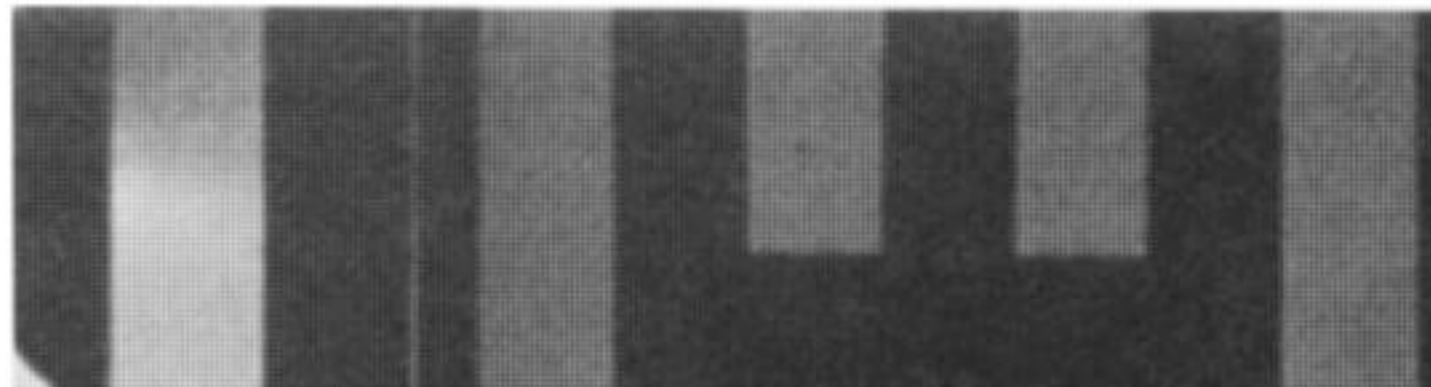
individuality that emblemizes bourgeois subjectivity. This was the gist of Buren’s argument in “Function of the Museum,” that “everything that the museum shows is only considered and produced in view of being set in it.”³² On this assumption, it is the set of relations among conventions and the various local institutions of art, that is, the museum-gallery (and art magazine) complex, criticism, the academy, etc., that constitutes the broader institution of art. But if Duchamp and Rodchenko rattled the bars of conventionality without creating more than localized, temporary institutional crises, and without opening up the broader institution, then these relations need to be rethought.³³ For if it is only the neo-avant-garde that manages to analyze the discursive parameters of the institution of art, then we are still left with something of a failure, at least an “incomplete project,” on the part of the historical avant-garde. Of course, there is a strong temptation to say of Dada, for example (and especially), that it failed. Art and life are still separate, or else art has been subsumed by the institution of art: even John Heartfield has by now, however belatedly, had an exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art. My reservation about this is threefold. First, it requires that we treat artistic avant-gardes as though they were political parties, holding them to the same pragmatic expectations of reform; second, it requires that we read their manifestos not only too literally but selectively (deemphasizing the differences between, and nonsensical aspects of, various Dada manifestos, for instance); third, most importantly, and contradictorily, given what it is claimed that avant-garde “success” would have meant, it actually requires that we see cultural institutions—the

field of operations of the avant-garde—as separate from other social institutions (as if overturning cultural institutions would accomplish the goal of this or that social or political revolution). The question, instead, is how to rethink these relations without collapsing back onto the argument, made on the left and the right, that both historical and neo-avant-gardes failed because they were never able to extract their own conventions from a binary relation to the museum. According to this argument, the avant-gardes ended up serving the institution they sought to undermine or make obsolete. The simplest rebuttal is to point out that the poles of this argument, service and obsolescence, are too extreme for a measured analysis of the various practices of institutional critique. The best access to this question is via a reconsideration of the function of the museum.³⁴

Institutional Critique and Critical Publicity

In 1938 Rodchenko made his famous (already retroactive) declaration regarding his triptych *Pure Colors: Red, Yellow, Blue* (1921): “I reduced painting to its logical conclusion.... This is the end of painting. These are the primary colors. Every plane is a discrete plane and there will be no more representation.” This may describe painting’s conventionality, and it may not be necessary to attach this description to an implicit critique of the museum, as the emblematic art institution. But Rodchenko’s linking of that description to “the end of painting,” in the Soviet context, may be attached to a critique of a mode of perception that extends beyond the museum, so that in this case avant-garde rhetoric might in fact bypass or reframe the museum. Conventionality might then be positioned in the broad-

er field of publicity, which would inform the museum, rather than the other way around. The museum, that is, would be repositioned as one of a complex array of institutions of publicity. The autonomy of art would be abandoned as a mere postulation, and along with that, its claim to a preeminent cultural-political role. Similarly, the implicit institutional critique of the readymade might be connected to a critique of sublimation, so that its rhetorical gesture would go toward opening up the definition of the public of art, via its references to industrial production, particular kinds of domestic work (which might include consumption), and the translation of nature into culture.³⁵ Rodchenko, more instrumentally inclined in his revolutionary moment than Duchamp, insisted that the institution of art had a role to play in the construction of a public. This is clear not only in the search for a universal language of abstraction, in the forays, however partial, into factory production and the design and manufacture of utilitarian objects, but even in principle in the shift into photography and ultimately factography, however ill-considered and/or ill-used this was, in relation to some of the worst excesses of Stalinism.³⁶ But this insistence is even more clearly the case for Lissitzky’s concerted move into exhibition and environmental design. At first, in the exhibition spaces such as the Room for Constructivist Art (1926), the abandonment of the illusions of permanence and neutrality in the presentation of art works was to disallow the traditional, passive mode of reception. In the exhibition space designs, the Soviet pavilions at international expositions in the late 1920s, the use of photography and



photomontage to structure the environment was a gesture toward jettisoning the pretense of autonomy in favor of the production of public spaces. These were to be structured not in terms of aesthetic imperatives but as literal realizations of the communications framework in which was suspended the new revolutionary public. Perhaps the least of the risks that Lissitzky's exhibition and environmental designs entailed was to be dismissed, after the fact, by the champions of universal cultural patrimony, as "mere" propaganda. More seriously, they ran the risk that their instantiation of a utopian, revolutionary conception of the public sphere would be subsumed by their service to the state. This was especially the case, given the stridency of representative publicity under Stalin (one has only to think of Lissitzky's own photomontage of 1932, *The Current Is Switched On*). Haacke's diagramming of corporate investments in the institution of art, and thus corporate and state interest in the institution of art as publicity, mimes the contemporary, late capitalist version of running that risk. In a range of works including *A Breed Apart* (1978), *The Chocolate M aster* (1981), *Voici A lcan* (1983), *MetroMobiltan*(1985), and *Les must de Rembrandt* (1986), Haacke presents images of those people to whom the interests of art's corporate benefactors cause harm (black South Africans under apartheid, where both Mobil and the Rembrandt Group have extensive investments; immigrant and German workers employed by Peter Ludwig). These are juxtaposed not only with the trappings of corporate support for the arts ("Sponsored by a Gift from Mobil"), but with the museum setting and audience. These

juxtapositions, and the disjunctions they signal, serve to demonstrate the exclusivity of the subject of the museum, in a manner that might recall Habermas's account of bourgeois publicity as providing common and reciprocally transformative ground for other discourses. This is an attempt to disturb the way the museum confers identity. The risk is that the mere fact of the appearance of a work like *MetroMobiltan* as an ameliorative function. More precisely, the attempt to gesture toward the possibility of collective identification across social difference (even if it takes the limited, negative form of shared discomfort or embarrassment at the presentation of information which is often, in some sense, already known) does not pretend to close the gap between the viewer (in the Metropolitan Museum, for instance), and the people depicted, so that it still—perhaps necessarily—involves a measure of abstraction.³⁷ This is to say that the subject of critical publicity is also the subject of the contemporary manifestation of representative publicity. Haacke's work demonstrates the continuation of the same hybridity—at the level of the production of subjects—as I have identified at work in the prototypical modern, public art museum, in the workings of the contemporary public art museum. This is true, too, of Fred Wilson's *Mining the Museum* (1992), in which Wilson selected objects from the collection of the Maryland Historical Society and arranged them with new labels or in categories in which they are not typically included (most strikingly, iron slave shackles and a silver service were juxtaposed in a vitrine labeled "Metalwork 1793-1880"). The effect of this was to reveal not so much the exclusion of the material evidence of an alternative

historical account from the collection but the ways in which it had been suppressed in categorization and display. Wilson effectively repeated some of the terms of Broodthaers's procedures, but where Broodthaers had collapsed the positions of artist and curator in order to mime the dehistoricizing effects of the institutionalization even of the readymade, Wilson did so to place objects in contexts from which they had been excluded, thus altering those contexts.³⁸ What is evident both in the literalness of Haacke's presentation of information and in Wilson's material demonstration of the relations between protocols of collection and display and public subject formation is the insistence that the museum is one of the places in which something can be said about the world (with which it is has always been, after all, continuous). Given the structural transformation of the public sphere under the weight of mass media, and the continuing intermeshing of capital and privacy, which as Haacke has so thoroughly demonstrated has very much affected the museum, this insistence might be seen as an unlikely attempt to reclaim an idealized oppositional public space. To clarify the value of this insistence it is useful to make a sharp distinction between Haacke's and Buren's respective analyses of "the logic of administration" and the "conditions of cultural consumption,"³⁹ for Haacke's accepts a risk of adulteration, even compromise, that Buren's in its abstraction refuses. This is the case insofar as the assumption operating in Buren's work is that the institutions of art, and principally the museum, have predetermined not only the form but the content and meaning of art,⁴⁰ so that for Buren it is a foregone conclusion that any attempt to establish a

communicative framework in a relation to the museum, however tense, is necessarily in vain. Hence the outlandish claim that the appropriate response to his work is "total revolution," a claim that at once takes art far too seriously, and not seriously enough.⁴¹ This is not 1968 (perhaps any more than 1968 was), and what is apparently the relative conservatism of Haacke's (Habermasian) practice is what preserves its critical potential. This goes to the difference between a radicality that ends, quite literally, as radical chic, in Buren's decorations for Nina Ricci's Paris boutique (the end of the end of painting?), and a criticality grounded in the notion of a legibility that operates in and through, as well as against, the museum.⁴² Finally, and this is crucial to an understanding of the work of Haacke and Wilson, it is more productive for a contemporary critical endeavor to recognize that the modern museum has always been a space in which were folded together different, often contradictory forms of publicity; forms of publicity that were never autonomous to the institution of art. We must allow for the same kind of continuous negotiation between available forms of publicity as is necessary to comprehend relations between historical and neo-avant-garde practices. In which case, Haacke's and Wilson's insistence about the role of the museum is precisely about performing a rt's function as publicity within a prescribed and always already compromised cultural space, in order to wrest from it a partial and contingent critical publicity, in terms of which a correspondingly mobile and perhaps strategic public might form. As against the grandiose claims that are made for the historical avant-gardes, here is an art of incrementally formed publics, an art of the



little deal.

1. Much of what passed for institutional critique in those galleries was after all little more than the ironized production of commodities, or the production of ironic commodities, but well-performed commodities nonetheless. 2. Gloomy, because conducted in the shade of the melancholy longing for a lost revolution. 3. Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, trans. Michael Shaw (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), p. 53. 4. This project is grounded in a critical reading of early work by Jürgen Habermas, particularly *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, first published in German in 1962, trans. Thomas Burger with Frederick Lawrence (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1989). But my emphasis here is on practices and forms of publicity, in part to counteract the specialization of Öffentlichkeit into its translation as "public sphere." And in suggesting multiple forms of publicity, and competing conceptions of the public sphere, this formulation already draws on the fundamental critique of the level of abstraction and exclusivity in Habermas's scheme, and its neglect of competing communicative practices, made in Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge, *Public Sphere and Experience*, first published in German in 1972, trans. Peter Labanyi et al. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993). See especially "The Public Sphere as the Organization of Collective Experience," pp. 1-53. 5. Jürgen Habermas, "Modernity—An Incomplete Project," trans. Seyla Ben-Habib, in *The Anti-Aesthetic*, ed. Hal Foster (Seattle: Bay Press, 1983). 6. Habermas, *Structural Transformation*, p. 40-41. 7. *Ibid.*, p. 51. 8. *Ibid.*, p. 56. 9. In the end, Conceptual and post-Conceptual art of institutional critique that attempts to reconfigure the museum's potential as a site for critical publicity may participate to some degree in this abstraction of the subject. Nevertheless, given on the one hand the contemporary dominance of mass media, and on the other, the balkanization of identity politics and its tendency to degenerate into a field of clashing particularized claims, a tendency that has not served museums well in the current "culture wars," in which not only the museum but art itself have been able to be characterized as the preserves of "special interests," a necessarily modified Habermasian scheme demands attention. And as I argue elsewhere, we might also look to Performance art, as the dialogical counterpart to institutional critique, for another kind of critique, in which what is performed is the folding together of bourgeois publicity and its irrational and perhaps pathological underside ("Preliminary Observations on Performance Art and the Public Sphere," proceedings of the third annual German Studies Conference at Berkeley, Berkeley Academic Press, forthcoming). 10. Jürgen Habermas, "Further Reflections on the Public Sphere," trans. Thomas Burger, in *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, ed. Craig Calhoun (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1992), p. 428. 11. Here, for example, one might consider, in the first instance, the processes through which labor organized itself (see Negt and Kluge, *Public Sphere and Experience*); or ten examples have been addressed by Geoff Eley, among others (see n. 21, below). 12. Habermas, "Further Reflections," p. 425. Here Habermas appears to address but not explicitly acknowledge Negt and Kluge's critique. 13. Geoff Eley, "Nations, Publics, and Political Cultures: Placing Habermas in the Nineteenth Century," in *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, p. 307. 14. See Germain Bazin, *The Museum Age*, trans. Jane van Nuis Cahill (New York: Universe Books, 1967) and Andrew McClellan, *Inventing the Louvre* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994). 15. Carol Duncan, "Art Museums and the Ritual of Citizenship," in *Exhibiting Cultures*, ed. Ivan Karp and Steven D. Lavine (Washington: Smithsonian Institution, 1991), pp. 88, 93. See also Duncan and Alan Wallach, "The Universal Survey Museum," *Art History*, vol. 3, no. 4 (December 1980) pp. 448-69. 16. Duncan, "Art Museums," p. 93. 17. Habermas, *Structural Transformation*, p. 137. 18. Here it is interesting to consider the very different accounts of the effects on bourgeois interiority and subjectivity of the commodification of culture in Habermas and Walter Benjamin, in, for instance, "Unpacking My Library," trans. Harry Zohn, in *Illuminations* (New York: Schocken Books, 1969); "Paris, Capital of the Nineteenth Century," trans. Edmund Jephcott, in *Reflections* (New York: Schocken Books, 1978); and "Eduard Fuchs, Collector and Historian," trans. Edmund Jephcott and Kingsley Shorter, *One-Way Street and Other Writings* (London: NLB, 1979). While the chronologies of their accounts differ, for both, commodification enables the circulation of cultural goods, private ownership, and the construction of a private interior, but for Benjamin there is always a fundamental instability in the relations between private and public realms—hence, perhaps, the constitutively solitary-alienated bourgeois collector's paradoxical "Sisyphean task of obliterating the commodity-like character of things through his ownership of them" ("Paris, Capital of the Nineteenth Century," p. 155). 19. Habermas, *Structural Transformation*, p. 177. 20. *Ibid.*, p. 195. For a contemporary elaboration of this, see also Michael Warner, "The Mass Public and the Mass Subject," in *Habermas and the Public Sphere*. 21. It is beyond the scope of this essay to trace this historical complexity, but for a more complete genealogy of the institutions of art we might look, for instance, to seventeenth-century Italy for developments of the academy that predate Habermas's account. And as against Habermas's narrative of the degradation of bourgeois publicity, Geoff Eley has begun to detail alternate, proletarian, and collective forms of publicity in the nineteenth century ("Placing Habermas in the Nineteenth Century") and the twentieth, for instance, British "little Moscovs" between the 1920s and World War II, "Red Vienna" between 1918 and 1934, and the phenomenon of "cultural socialism" in Weimar Germany; see "Finding Habermas in the Twentieth Century: Citizenship, Nation and Public Sphere" and "Cultural Socialism, the Public Sphere, and the Mass Form: Popular Culture and the Democratic Project, 1900-1934" (manuscripts). 22. Habermas, "Further Reflections," p. 429. 23. See Benjamin Buchloh, "Conceptual Art 1962-1969: From the Aesthetic of Administration to the Critique of Institutions," October 55 (Winter 1990); Hal Foster, "The Crux of Minimalism," in *Individuals: A Selected History of Contemporary Art 1945-1986*, ed. Howard Singerman (Los Angeles: Museum of Contemporary Art, 1986); and Ian Burn, "The Re-appropriation of Influence," catalog essay from Australian Bien-

nale 1988—From the Southern Cross: A View of World Art c. 1940-1988, reprinted in *Dialogue: Writings in Art History* (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1991). 24. This is also where the critical function of Performance art might be located, insofar as it turned its attention to the actual bodies of artists, from which even the subject of Conceptual art was abstracted, in order to produce a different analysis of the reification of "the artist." 25. In an interview with Andre Parinaud in February 1968, regarding an exhibition of work by himself, Mosset, and Toroni, Buren said, "The color is decided by what they offer me when I buy the cloth. I do not choose.... This is to avoid always making the same canvas—which is not decided in advance either—finding myself after ten years with a magnificent arch-classic oeuvre of a Buren who will have made the same canvas for ten years, and finally, my canvas will have become 'Buren.' ... I can fall into other traps which I haven't yet discovered, but that one I have perceived, so I try to avoid it." Parinaud, "Interview with Daniel Buren," *Galerie des Arts* 50 (February 1968), quoted in Lucy Lippard, *Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object 1966-72* (New York: Praeger, 1973), p. 41. 26. In the context of making an argument in favor of work that functions as what I call critical publicity, the omission of a discussion of John Heartfield's work in AIZ may seem curious. While of course connections can be made between Heartfield's work and the art of institutional critique, in this essay I am specifically interested in strategies that remain in closer dialogue with the museum. 27. Hal Foster, "What's Neo about the Neo-Avant-Garde?" *October* 70 (Fall 1994), p. 19. 28. Buren has also said, "I believe we are the only ones to be able to claim the right of being 'looked at,' in the sense that we are the only ones to present a thing which has no didactic intention, which does not provide 'dreams,' which is not a 'stimulant' [emphasis added] (Parinaud, "Interview"). 29. See Rainer Borgemeister, "Sectioned Figures: The Eagle from the Oligocene to the Present," trans. Chris Cullen, in *Broodthaers: Writings, Interviews, Photographs*, ed. Benjamin Buchloh, October 42 (Fall 1987). 30. Marcel Broodthaers, quoted in Borgemeister, *ibid.*, p. 143. 31. Here the question might be raised whether, in staging the "scandal" of the urinal, Duchamp didn't in fact stage the limits of what the institution would sustain, which is to suggest that perhaps he did begin to explore the discursive parameters of the institution (a suggestion perhaps supported by the nonexhibition of the urinal, so that its first appearance, already after the fact, was in the publication *The Blind Man* in 1917). (See Foster, "What's Neo," n. 35, p. 19.) Or, I would suggest that Benjamin Buchloh's account of the Box in a *Valise* (1936-41) as Duchamp's own attempt to deal with problems of acculturation and institutionalization might give 1936 as the moment in which the ready-made touched on institutional critique, and might also give Duchamp as his own neo-avant-garde. See Benjamin Buchloh, "The Museum Fictions of Marcel Broodthaers," in *Museums by Artists*, ed. A. A. Bronson and Peggy Gale (Toronto: Art Metropole, 1983), p. 45. 32. Daniel Buren, "Function of the Museum," *Artforum*, September 1973, quoted in Bronson and Gale, *ibid.*, p. 58. 33. In "What's Neo about the Neo-Avant-Garde?" Hal Foster argues that it is the neo-avant-garde (here Buren, Haacke) that comprehends the operation of the historical avant-garde (Duchamp, Rodchenko) for the first time as "rhetorical." Foster's critical move, in relation to Peter Burger, is to argue that the avant-garde's attacks on art are "performative, not literal, as Burger would have it. This means that they are waged, necessarily, in relation to art, 'to its languages, institutions, structures of meaning, expectation, and reception.'" Foster observes that particularly in evolutionary or progressivist accounts, modernist history "is often conceived, secretly or otherwise, on the model of the individual subject, indeed, as a subject," which is in part the case for Habermas. Foster proposes that if this analogy is "all but structural to historical studies," then it should at least be worked through according to the most sophisticated model, and in a manifest way. He offers the psychoanalytical model, in which subjective events are only registered through others that recode them (p. 17). The effects of this model are particularly welcome insofar as it allows for a more complex temporal scheme, in which the relations between the neo- and historical avant-gardes are continuously renegotiated. 34. Foster adumbrates this, too, in reflecting on problems in his own thesis, which include "the historical irony that the institution of art, the museum above all else, has changed beyond recognition, a development that demands the continual transformation of its avant-garde critique as well" (p. 20). It is central to my argument, however, that while the museum has changed, it has not changed beyond recognition. 35. See Helen Molesworth, "Bathrooms and Kitchens: Cleaning House with Duchamp," in *Plumbing: Essays in Architecture, Criticism, Modernity*, ed. Nadir Lihiji et al. (Princeton: Architectural Press, forthcoming); and Molly Nesbit, "The Language of Industry," in *The Definitely Unfinished Marcel Duchamp*, ed. Thierry de Duve (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1991). 36. See Benjamin Buchloh, "From Faktura to Factography," *October* 30 (Fall 1984). 37. A crucial question here is whether it is possible to envisage the formation of any kind of public without some degree of abstraction, without, that is, a normative ideal subject. And if it is not, how is normativity to be generated across social difference? This is the broad philosophical and political question that subtends Haacke's work. 38. Mining the Museum attracted large audiences to the Maryland Historical Society and an unusual amount of critical attention. It remains to be seen whether the museum's exhibition practices have been permanently altered in its wake. 39. Buchloh, "Conceptual Art 1962-1969," p. 143. 40. See Alex Alberro, "The Aesthetic Theories of Conceptual Art" (manuscript). 41. In the interview with Parinaud, months before May 1968, Buren said, "Perhaps the only thing that one can do after having seen a canvas like ours is total revolution" (Parinaud, "Interview"). 42. I am indebted to Helen Molesworth for a discussion of a distinction between radicality and criticality, as articulated in Danny Fass's and Joe Kelly's video *Skullfuck* (1991) and especially in Gregg Bordowitz's *Fast Trip, Long Drop* (1994), in which Bordowitz, or rather one of his neo-Brechtian "characters," declares that he doesn't want to be a "radical body," preserving instead the possibility of speaking critically.