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CATTELAN AT THE WHITNEY BIENNIAL 2004: Nothing To Work With

Cattelan is part clown, part sage—a cunning instigator clothed as comic idiot savant. I don't trust him. Nobody should, as fostering mistrust of authorial authenticity, and of art systems in general, is part of his restless and willful conceptual project.

-Jenny Liu "Trouble in Paradise"

Trust me, I'm lying.

– Maurizio Cattelan *Blown Away*

I visited the Whitney Biennial a couple of months after it opened and the place was still packed. It was Friday, and the line wrapped around the block. It moved fast though; it seemed they weren't refusing anyone, filling the museum to capacity. I followed the customary method of "doing" the biennial taking the elevator to the *fourth floor, and spiraling my way down through the galleries and stairs. I had examined two whole floors of art before encountering Maurizio Cattelan's hijinx.*

After trudging through the above floors and viewing hundreds of pieces of art (or perhaps because of having done so). My curiosity was piqued when I saw the wall label for Cattelan's work. He has developed a reputation for playing the provocateur, as a meta-art star. Among the international set of artists who have made their careers in the biennial circuit, Cattelan provides a much-needed comic relief.

The label on the wall bore the following inscription:

Maurizio Cattelan "Kitakyushu 2000 – New York 2004," 2004
Body, clothes, table, chair.
life-size
Gift of the artist; courtesy of Marian Goodman Gallery, New York and CCA, Japan.

I looked around the room. As far as I could tell, every other piece had been accounted for with its own wall text. Cattelan's label was mounted on the end of a wall partition, where a curator might situate it if the sculpture were in the middle of the room. But I couldn't find a thing.

Maurizio Cattelan's sculpture has never fit comfortably on a pedestal. It would be fair to say that it also maintains a contentious relationship to wall, floors, and ceilings. He has produced life-sized wax figures and animals which stand directly on gallery floors, as if they had just walked inside and frozen. In one piece from 1997, a taxidermied ostrich buries its head under the hardwood floor of the gallery. In The Boijmans Museum in Holland, a wax likeness of Cattelan emerged into a gallery of historic paintings via a hole dug in the floor. His face peeked out of the top like graffiti Kilroy who had just tunneled his way inside.

Back at the Whitney, I looked up, for the ceiling is high. Cattelan has been known to dangle objects from the ceiling; a taxidermied horse swinging like a piñata from a chain as in *The Ballad of Trotsky* (1996)[1] would have been immediately apparent. He has also made subtler works like *Tourists* (1997) for the Venice Biennale where he taxidermied hundreds of pigeons that had previously occupied the pavilion, disbursing them throughout the exhibit on the overhead sprinkler poles. Other projects have involved almost completely emptying the gallery space, such as the installation at Migros Museum Für Gegenwartskunst in Zurich. There, he emptied the entire museum, to display only a wardrobe in the back on which hung a four-foot high wax effigy of himself clad in a felt Joseph Beuys suit. At La Consortium in Dijon, he left

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1 Installed at the Galleria Massimo De Carlo in Milan.

five rooms empty and dug a grave-sized hole in the sixth. In another work, he simply opened a window, and hung a rope made of bed sheets knotted together out the side of the building[2].

But there were four other artist's works in the room at the Whitney, and there were no windows or visible means of escape. What on earth could "life-size" on the label mean? Perhaps one of the spectators with me in the crowded gallery was a sculpture, some uncanny polychrome waxwork statue that had gone unnoticed.

I began to suspect with a strange mix of disappointment and mounting excitement, that he had done nothing at all. A physical sensation came over me like enthusiasm, akin to shock. As in a car accident, time seemed to slow down. Had this been cinema, the camera would have slid into slow motion, the soundtrack would have been stretched out and dropped several octaves, as I turned around and panned the room. Nothing.

This was one of the most visited art shows in the United States, and Cattelan, it turns out, had presented nothing but a wall label (and that was probably done courtesy of the curators). By this action alone, The Whitney Biennial had been captured in something like "real-time." Having shifted my perspective searching

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[2] *Untitled* (1992) Made for the Castllo di Rivara, near Turin,. The night before the opening he "ran away" from the gallery.

for something that wasn't there caused my whole perspective to shift—something that no other work in the show had asked of me. I had to confront my own expectations and reconcile with the lack before me. From the new perspectice, I saw the biennial as a series of crowded rooms full of people in search of the remarkable. I immediately began to doubt myself. This was a great prank, but could it be true? In a show this crowded, it is possible that the piece just got damaged and had to be removed for repairs. The label sounded really specific. Otherwise why mention a body, and clothes, and a table?

I leaned over to ask the nearby security guard who was watching me, bemused by my slow reactions and the fact that I was reading and re-reading the wall label. He was looking a little too jolly; I began to think he was making fun of me. The joke was on me too, in a way, equally implicating everyone, for I was standing in the middle of Cattelan's piece. I asked him quite seriously, "has the Cattelan… been removed?"

He grinned, shook his head, and then tapped the side of it. "It's for the mind."

Where did they get this guy? Was he part of the piece? Cattelan has made art using museum security guards before. In *Dynamo Secession* (1997), installed at Weiner Secession in Vienna, the lighting for the gallery was powered by a bicycle-driven generator pedaled by two museum guards. Again in 2002, Cattelan displayed two life-sized wax figures of New York City Police Officers, *Frankie and Jamie,* leaning them upside-down against the wall like brooms. *Was the guard a hired actor, performing the piece by following instructions Cattelan had scripted? Had he been told to say this mystifying line to those who asked? The boundaries were becoming very thin around me. Having seen so much art in one day, I was wondering what wasn't art. Maybe I was just overwhelmed.*

A docent entered into the space, loudly and unquestioningly reporting the artist's own opinions of their own work, and generally glossing over any more complex points in order to move on to the next room without losing the flagging attention of her exhausted audience. It was from this word of mouth that I learned Maurizio Cattelan had apparently buried his piece under the floor.

This information immediately made the twenty-some-odd people listening, and myself, look at the floor… which was made of old stained and scuffed wood, showing absolutely no evidence at all of any tampering. I didn't believe her for a second, and neither did anyone else. We were on the second floor, and under us was that spectacular lobby ceiling and all those mercury-filled light bulbs. There was no sign that anyone had "dug" a hole anywhere. The tour guide looked a little desperate, not wanting to contradict what The Artist had said. I got the feeling she did not like to describe this *piece. She was losing her audience; several eyebrows rose in disbelieving stares. She attempted a recovery by making it unclear about under which floor the piece was buried, reassuring her audience, "The curators and the artist all swear that Cattelan has buried the piece." She asked us to believe, despite her own doubt. Curator Chrissy Iles insists that the sculpture is buried "within the walls,"[3] while Roberta Smith's article in The New York Times only confuses the issue by reporting that the sculpture is buried "beneath the museum's lobby,"[4] yet under the lobby's stone floor lie the bathrooms, gift shop, café, and restaurant.*

The most substantial element of any Cattelan work is its capacity to generate rumors. To try to hunt down some historical truth here would be to volunteer as the butt of the joke. That the curators should choose the 2nd floor to place the label may imply that the piece haunts the entire building. The reported burial equates the museum with a mausoleum, assuming that we are to believe the curator's word, if not Cattelan's, that there is anything at all buried at the Whitney where no one can see it. Perhaps the genesis of the piece lay in seeing if he could get the curators to lie for him bold-facedly. If all we have is a lie, does that have any substance? If we are to assume that the piece is called into existence in the space adjacent to the label as a ghost of a piece, an immaterial

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[3] Calvin Tomkins, "The Prankster," *New Yorker*, pg 89.

[4] Roberta Smith, "Why Attack Art? Its Role Is To Be Helpful" *The New York Times.*

and metaphysical entity that we are to somehow grapple with aesthetically; it poses a number of more interesting material questions:

If it is buried somewhere, is it a permanent piece?
How can a biennial entry be a "gift" (as the label states)?
Will it get a permanent label somewhere?
Can one do a permanent piece in a biennial without overstepping the defining parameters of the show?
This particular label in question was made of matt-board, as temporary stuff as the museum wall it was mounted on. How does one conserve such a work?
Can it travel?
Does it increase the value of the museum's collections, the museum building, or the land on which it is supposedly buried?
As a metaphysical entity, can it be stolen?

The last question may sound farfetched, but Cattelan's earlier work occasionally suggests a preoccupation with larceny. When stuck without any satisfying ideas in 1992, the night before a show in Italy, he reported his sculpture stolen to the police.Apparently the bureaucrats didn't think to doubt him when he described the *Untitled* piece as invisible. They wrote up a report, which Cattelan then framed as the piece for the show. He had persuaded the law to acknowledge the work's existence by reporting its *absence*, which, in turn, produced something. Cattelan has said that he would like to rob a bank, though he never has. Perhaps, just so we would doubt him, he displayed, as a sculptural found object, a cracked safe from a robbery in which 157 million lire (about US $100,000.00) had been stolen (titled *157.000.000*, also in 1992). In 1996, Cattelan, with a van and five curator henchmen broke into the Gallery Bloom and stole an entire show by artist Carston Holler. The next day Cattelan displayed the loot as his own work in the neighboring De Appel Center for Contemporary Art in Amsterdam, under the title *Another Fucking Readymade.*[5] Having ripped off other artists and galleries, he has also dabbled in ripping off the viewer; in 1993 when he was first invited to the Venice Biennale, he rented out his space to an advertising company who set up a perfume counter in the middle of the show. Cattelan has been invited back to Venice to participate in five more Biennales.

Another Fucking Readymade was done last minute, under the similar reported constraints as the 2004 Biennial piece. The Whitney curators had balked, and refused to show the sculpture that Cattelan had proposed: a life-size, life-like sculpture of a boy hanging by his neck from a flagpole in front of the museum.[6] Finding himself without a viable alternative, Cattelan's response

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[5] While he did have to return all of the stolen artwork, in the process he became friends with the proprietors of the robbed gallery. They eventually asked him if he wanted to show with them.

[6] Described by Roberta Smith "Why Attack Art?" also in Calvin Tomkins, "The Prankster."

was to bury a former piece. Meanwhile, a third, and altogether unrelated piece is printed in the catalogue.[7]

Cattelan has publicly called the burial a failure,[8] but his continued discussion of it and the refused proposal lives on to generate rumors, which get dutifully reported in the press. He effectively and conceptually documents the piece that didn't happen as well as the one that did. Neither of which did he have to lift a finger to produce. His doubting the success of the one that did happen makes us ask what the difference is between refusing to participate and participating in the manner that he did. And using the catalogue and website to document a third piece gives him the chance to deliver yet another—completing the ensemble as a fitting three piece suite.

It is curious that there is no direct mention of *Kitakyushu 2000—New York 2004* in the Biennial's catalogue or website. The book page dedicated to him displays an unrelated piece; *Betsy (2002)* a sculpture of a dignified-looking old lady wearing a skirt and matching jacket squatting in a half-sized refrigerator.[9] The blurb makes no mention of his proposal or his represented piece in the

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[7] Debra Singer,, Shamin M. Momin, Chrissie Iles, *Whitney Biennial 2004 : Whitney Museum of American Art.* New York: BK & Acces, 2004.
[8] see Calvin Tomkins "The Prankster" pg 89.
[9] The website also displays a picture of *Betsy* (2002). http://www.whitney.org/biennial (accessed March 20, 2005)

show. The website divides all the Biennial artists into genre. The curators chose to include Cattelan under the “Sculpture” category but not under the list of people working with “Conceptual Ideas.”

The piece supposedly buried at the Whitney, first made for the Project Gallery at the Center for Contemporary Art (CCA) in Kitakyushu, Japan, is not so invisible as it would first seem. Another ghost of it exists, the one in the machine. The CCA website archive displays three small photos of the piece from when Cattelan was in residence there in 2000: A male figure, possibly a self portrait, is collapsed, face buried in a plate of spaghetti, seated at the head of a long white table. One arm hangs limp at his side, while the other lays flat on the table, curved around his head. CCA captions these photos with the following text: “Cattelan tried to give a strong, even commercial appeal to those feelings of depression we are all familiar with: it's like trying to make sadness look sexy."[10] When he chose to bury the piece, he admitted that he “had never been quite happy with it.”[11] A picture of the piece was reprinted in the July - September issue of *Flash Art*, but given a different label than the Whitney piece: “Untitled, 2000. Life-size

[10] See webpage for Center for Contemporary Art Kitakyushu http://www.cca-kitakyushu.org/english/project/cattelan_project.shtml (accessed March 20, 2005)

[11] Roberta Smith “Why Attack Art?”

figure, table, chair, pasta plate. Installation at CAA Kitakyushu, Japan."[12]

Kitakyushu 2000 -- New York 2004 is close to a *gesamtkunstwerk*. The work may give you nothing materially, but it does so in such a meticulous and calculating manner that the experience of it manages to incorporate everything of the context: the museum, the show, the land the museum sits on, the temporality of the show, the walls, floors, and ceilings, the labels and the text printed on them, the other art in the show, the security guards protecting the work, and the docents showing it off, the history of similar events in his own oeuvre, and that of others, and finally, the viewers and, ultimately, their experience as they recognize the work (or miss it) entirely. Yet, rather than *manufacturing* a total artwork, he has enframed the totality just as it is, appropriating the present state, as well as taking credit for the service of noticing and pointing it out, like a beautiful sunset or a cloud formation.

The work can even be seen as still in progress. If the goal of the action is to generate rumors, who is to say when it is complete? If new rumors are being generated about it, the piece lives on to be rebuilt embellished in the imaginations of those who perpetuate the buzz. If Cattelan were to wish for a superpower, I imagine that he would like to be the butterfly whose lazy fluttering wings are said to

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[12] *Flash Art* (#237 July-September 2004) pg 95.

be capable of starting a hurricane half way across the world. Except, unlike the butterfly's anonymity, Cattelan enjoys tremendous respect from those who have weathered his storm, not the least of which are the institutions like the Whitney who are complicit in condoning and consolidating his token acts of insubordination perhaps as an inoculation against more severe attacks.

Cattelan's interventions are often criticized for being more like pranks than serious works. There is an undeniable sense of humor at work here, ribbing the institutions of display for taking themselves so seriously. At the same time, Cattelan spouts revolutionary-sounding rhetoric with a tone of seriousness akin to the moral position of the Dadaist absurdists in protesting the inhumanity of war:

> Today sensationalism has replaced the critic's knowledge of reality; the laws of the market are stronger than the efforts to fight against singular thought. We live in the empire of marketing, spectacle, and seduction, so one of the roles of the artists and curators is to deconstruct these strategies, to resist their logic, to use them, and/or find new means of activism against them.[13]

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[13] Maurizio Cattelan, in an "I Want To Be Famous—Strategies For Successful Living; interview with Barbara Casavecchia" 1999. From *Maurizio Cattelan* Phaidon Monograph 163. Originally appeared in "Blown Away Blown to

Despite the claim of activism as his goal, it is hard to pin down any didactic meaning, beyond provoking a discussion about whether his actions have any meaning at all. But such an assumption cannot be so quickly made; behind the image of the activist, may just be a capable image maker. The work is effectively tailored to media that promotes it; his actions are fairly easy to describe in one-liners, anecdotes, and rumors, and his objects are photogenic, reproducing well in magazine-sized photos or onscreen computer JPEGs. Leaving aside for a moment the message, is media the means, or the end?

Benjamin Buchloh wrote that conceptual art liquidated the last remnants of traditional aesthetic experience, including the framing conditions that even pop and minimalism could not escape: those of production. He argues that these sensibilities replaced the aesthetic of the studio product with that of the factory product. Conceptual art took on this framework of production. “In that process, it succeeded in purging itself entirely of imaginary and bodily experience, of all physical substance and the space of memory, to the same extent that it effaced all residues of representation and style, of individuality and skill.” According to Buchloh, at its height, this non-retinal art (Duchamp’s term) had become “the ultimate subject of a legal definition and the result of

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Pieces,” *Material* No. 2 (Migros Museum: Zurich), November 1999 as an interview with Jens Hoffman and Massimilaino Gioni.

institutional validation," and thus became a discourse on power rather than taste.[14]

While I would tend to agree with him on the latter statement about power being more the subject of the work than a discourse on taste, I strongly disagree that non-retinal art has no bodily experience. My experience at the Whitney museum was visceral. It could not have been felt by reading about the piece or seeing it represented in a photograph. *What kind of image would it cast?* My memories of Cattelan's reputation, confirmed by encounters with his work and its representations in the past, combined with the Whitney's architecture and history, conspired to form a context for which I had projected expectations of what would be waiting for me to see or not to see. This phenomenological process echoes how convictions and belief systems are formed. Cattelan's work frustrated these expectations, forcing me to consider that mine may have been wrong to begin with.

The experience I had appreciating Cattelan's work at the Whitney Biennial 2004 was durational rather than conceptual. The term "duration" as coined by turn of the century philosopher Henri Bergson refers specifically to a period of time measured by experience rather than by technology, in which a conflation of

[14] Benjamin Buchloh, "Conceptual Art 1962-1969: from the Aesthetic of Administration to the Critique of Institutions." *October* 55, (Winter 1990), 117.

sensation must occur. The vertigo I felt trying to imagine the boundaries of his work was transformational, being at best described with the cinematic comparison to slow motion; time momentarily liberated from its regularity. The experience of this epiphany is as impossible to recreate in *gestalt* through any technological means, as it would be to step into the same river twice.[15]

Recording the experience of an invisable piece of visual art is like trying to record a silent composition. Consider any of the attempts to make audio recordings of John Cage's *4'33"* (1952), a concert piece (and a score) in which the pianist is given stage directions to open the keyboard cover, hold his or her fingers over specific keys, but not to play a sound. The piece concludes (in four minutes and thirty three seconds) by closing the keyboard cover. James Tenney performed *4'33"* in an outdoor venue at the Schindler House in June 2002, sponsored by The Society for the Activation of Social Space through Art and Sound (SASSAS). SASSAS released an audio CD recording, dutifully mixed, if not misguided, from

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[15] See V.S. Ramachandran and Sandra Blakeslee, *Phantoms in the Brain; Probing the Mysteries of the Human Mind* (New York: Quill William Morrow) 1998, Particularly Ron James' Photograph on page 239. What at first appears as a jumble of spots eventually can be seen as a high contrast image of a dalmation sniffing the sun dappled ground. Once this has been seen, "Neurons in the temporal lobes become altered permanently after the initial brief exposure—once you have 'seen' the dog" preventing one to ever see the image again as a random collection of splotches. It is an irreversable comprehension.

microphones set to simulate the best seat in the courtyard. Depending upon the user-controlled volume settings on consumers' playback devices, birds can be heard chirping, the audience shifts and coughs, and an omnipresent highway, always audible in Los Angeles drones on. These sounds preserved on CD or digital file can be taken far out of context, repeated, or worse yet, shortened to the thirty-second mp3 "sample clip" available for free download on the SoundNet website.[16] An only slightly less hilarious treatment of this piece exists on The Magnetic Fields first CD: *The Wayward Bus / Distant Plastic Trees* (1991), on which is recorded four minutes and thirty-three seconds of digital silence, so that no matter how high the volume is set upon playback, no remainder of any "original" exists.

Cage and Cattelan push conventional boundaries to the point where a question of genre may be in order. I am unprepared to look at their work as incidents of, say, comedy, or dance (which is not to say that it could not be done). To do so would be to argue within an entirely new framework, one that ushers in an altogether different set of expectations. Such a project has been taken up by David Davies book, "Art as Performance." Davies identifies the key problem of a lack of adequate notation in dance. He builds on the thesis from Nelson Goodman's 1976 book *Languages of Art.* If for

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[16] Society for the Activation of Social Space Throught Sound http://www.soundNet.org/recordings/soundCd2/tracks.shtml (accessed on March 20, 2005)

no other reason than the fact that the curators of the Whitney Biennial 2004 do not include comedy and dance as suitable categories for their artists to be sorted into (as opposed to the listed categories of sound, net art, or film[17]), I shall leave this question of Cattelan's genre unanswered.

While Cattelan incorporates the institutional frame around his work to include the architecture and site, it is unclear just where these transitions occur. The viewer's position becomes activated, problematized and unstable. Unsure if one stands *inside or outside* the piece, establishing critical distance becomes awkward. Cattelan further confuses the issue by working closely with teams of curators and critics, sometimes sending them to represent him. Many newspaper reporters have actually interviewed Massimiliano Gioni thinking that they were interviewing Cattelan. Gioni, for instance is rumored to have accepted an honorary doctorate in sociology that Yale University bestowed on Cattelan.[18] How can we speak about this type of action: is it art, politics, academics or a prank? Certainly there is the same spirit of insubordination being practiced at every level of display, but there is also something self-defeating at work, verging on the iconoclastic in his dismantling all forms of representation until one doubts everything the man says and does.

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[17] For a complete listing of sorted themes and mediums see http://www.whitney.org/biennial/flash/poplg.php (accessed March 20 2005)
[18] Dodie Kazanjian "The Lying Game" *Vogue* (February 2001 v191) 272.

Two

SYMPATHY FOR THE DUCHAMP
The Grail Quest For The Lost Fountain

Thinking about Cattelan's enframing the Whitney Biennial 2004, brings to mind another case of the thing-that-wasn't-there: Marcel Duchamp's *Fountain* (1917) and the extenuating circumstances surrounding it. *Fountain* (1917) secured Duchamp's eternal notoriety in art history. It was just named the number one most influential piece of modern art—ever—in a survey of over 500 artists, curators, critics and dealers conducted by Gordon's, sponsor of the Turner Prize.[19] There are several circumstances shared by Cattelan's Whitney piece and *Fountain* (1917), with regard to display, censorship, construction, exhibition and reception. Duchamp's work helped form the historical precedent within which reception to *Kitakyushu 2000-New York 2004* is framed.

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[19] Charlotte Higgins, "Work of Art That Inspired A Movement… A Urinal," *The Guardian* (December 2, 2004)

Duchamp's practice frequently challenged the frame of art. One of the important issues of his day was the relationship between the concept of originality versus industrial production. By introducing the idea of the "readymade," in 1913, Duchamp expanded the frame around the art object to include its supports: the pedestal, the art exhibit, and most critically, someone there to point to the art object and call it art. The latter, a particular form of attention, may be the most important element in how Duchamp's work operated. It required a specific type of controversial reception, facilitated through various media.

Readymades were unexceptionally common objects, mass produced, and banal: a comb, a hatrack, a bottle rack—unmanipulated in any way except for occasional ambiguous phrases written directly on them, such as the snow shovel from 1915 on the handle of which is inscribed "In advance of a broken arm." *Fountain* (1917) is a store-bought urinal with the name "R. Mutt" inscribed on the side. The urinal was set sideways on a pedestal, and submitted for entry into the exhibit of New York's Society of Independent Artists. This particular art institution, as a frame, was key to Duchamp's choice of the object. He chose something that would deliberately appall the organizers of the show. He defended the choice and further provoked reproach in his magazine *The Blind Man* with the statement “The only works of art America has given are her plumbing and her bridges.”[20]

Duchamp’s appropriation of an industrially produced multiple as an art work brought to the forefront issues of artistic creation, originality, and the ethics of outsourcing as it relates to art practice. The painter Elizabeth Ernst once told me, when criticized for hiring assistants to build her supports, “My god, if I have to make everything I work with as an artist, all I would have is shit and pee!” Even this strategy has been explored in Italy by Piero Manzoni, who canned his feces and sold it as *Merda d’artista* (1961). This avenue continues to be explored via works such as Wim Delvoye’s *Cloaca* (2000), a machine that produces synthetic human-looking feces, or the results of Noritoshi Hirakawa’s dietary practice that produces human feces with the qualities of sanitary machine-made products.[21] We are likely to see continued probing into this fertile area as long as human beings shall be consumers.

Marcel Duchamp had been censored by the French Société des Artistes Indépendants in 1912, who prevented from exhibiting the cubist painting *Nude Descending Staircase* (1912), which was

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[20] *The Blind Man* No 2 Ed. Henri-Pierre Roche, Beatrice Wood, and Marcel Duchamp (New York May 1917), 5.

[21] Hirakawa’s movements, displayed at The Wrong Gallery Booth in the Frieze Art Fair 2004, will be examined in greater detail in the next section.

declared too radical for public consumption at the moment.[22] In the following year, the painting was exhibited in New York at the Armory Show where it was met with much fanfare and critical outrage. Through this experience, Duchamp began to develop a reputation for harnessing controversial attention. He joined The New York Society of Independent Artists ostensibly to push at the boundaries of what would be considered acceptable to American standards with regard to art works.

Independent artists were organizing large exhibits all across Europe, in France, Germany, England, and Italy. Following his rejection from the Paris show, and still galled by the French Independents' hypocrisy, Duchamp was elected to be one of the few European Directors in the New York Society of Independent Artists as a major organizer; the overall layout of the show was his idea—alphabetical order by artist's name, beginning arbitrarily with the letter "R." The 1917 show, to be held at the Grand Central Palace, was to be the largest art exhibition ever to have taken place in New York City, twice the size of the 1913 Armory Show, and open to all exhibitors who were willing to pay the six-dollar fee. Twelve hundred artists from thirty-eight states would display over Twenty-five hundred works. Judgment was to be suspended with

[22] "In 1912 his colleagues at the French Indépendents Jean Metzinger and Albert Gleizes leaned on Duchamp's brothers to ask him to withdraw the painting before the Salon des Indépendents opened." Camfield, William. *Marcel Duchamp Fountain* (Houston Fine Arts Press; The Menil Collection, 1989.) 20.

regard to what would or would not be displayed.[23] One announcement read:

> The program of the Society of Independent Artists, which is practically self-explanatory, has been taken over from the Société des Artistes Indépendants of Paris. The latter society has done more for the advance of French art than any other institution of its period. The reason for this success is to be found in the principal adopted at it's founding in 1884 and never changed: "No Jury, No Prizes." There are no requirements for admission to the American Society save the acceptance of its principles and the payment of the initiation fee of one dollar and the annual dues of five dollars. All exhibitors are thus members and all have a vote for the directors and on the decisions made by the society at its annual meetings.[24]

Jury or no jury, Duchamp had been judged and rejected in France, and was willing to test this professed openness advertised by the American Society. In the catalogue of the show, Duchamp was listed as having contributed a painting called *Tulip Hysteria Co-*

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[23] Francis Naumann, "The Big Show", *Artforum 17,* (New York; Feb, 1979) 34-39.

[24] Announcement entitled "The society of Independent Artists, Inc.," undated, in the Archives of the Société Anonyme, The Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, New Haven Ct. Quoted in William A Camfield, *Marcel Duchamp Fountain* Houston Fine Art Press, The Menil Collection, 1989.

ordinating,[25] but there is no record of any such painting ever having existed. *Fountain* was a last minute, spur-of-the-moment inspiration. He was recorded in conversation saying that he had purchased the manufactured urinal from the showroom of J. L. Mott Iron Works in New Jersey in April, just days before the opening.[26]

Since The Independents aspired to democratic structure, Duchamp's gesture uncovered a problem inherent in determining aesthetic consensus within a democracy. If we are to accept that anything anyone declares to be art *is* art, then exactly what meaning is there in the declaration? By what criteria can we judge the good work from the bad? Most crucially: can art even exist in a democracy, as called for by the Independent's bylaws, without some form of group judgment, either personal or institutional?

One anonymous review from *The New York Herald,* titled "His Art Too Crude For The Independents," declared: "The *Fountain* may be a very useful object in its place, but its place is not an art exhibition, and it is, by no definition, a work of art."[27] To this day

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[25] Perhaps it is with reference to *Tulip Hysteria Co-ordinating* that Cattelan chose to include *Betsy (2002)* in the Whitney's Catalogue and website.
[26] Arturo Schwarz, *The Complete Works of Marcel Duchamp* (New York: 1970), 466.
[27] *The New York Herald* April 14, 1917 cited by William Camfield, *Marcel Duchamp Fountain* (Houston Fine Arts Press; The Menil Collection, 1989.) 26-7.

the debate rages on. David Robbins recently argued that Duchamp would be better seen within the context of *concrete comedy*, a genre he defines as "comic actions that explicitly recognize, engage, or activate context." Robbins continues, "Use of context as a material is a possibility derived from the example of Marcel Duchamp. The concrete output of Marcel Broodthaers, Andy Kaufman, Maurizio Cattelan and others fall into this category."[28] According to Robbins, many young people working in this mode today "…insist on introducing their stuff into the art context (there are few other places for it to go), where, too frequently, it is dismissed (not incorrectly) as inferior art when it might be celebrated instead as superior comedy." Robbins concludes, "Monty Python and Mark Rothko were up to different things." and finally, "Concrete Comedy is comedy, not art."[29]

Shedding the light of a new genre would perhaps help one to better appreciate the comic value of such work. But to remove it entirely from the context it engages, that is, of art, would be to destroy it. Robbins himself admits: "The comic object is not separable from the theatricalized moment that produced it, and which it necessarily reflects."[30] Duchamp's *Fountain* cannot be disassociated from the Society of Independent Artists, likewise

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[28] David Robbins, "Concrete Comedy: A Primer." *Artforum* (New York: Nov. 2004): 250.
[29] Robbins, "Concrete Comedy", 256.
[30] Ibid, 208.

Cattelan's *Kitakyushu 2000-New York 2004* from the place of the Whitney Museum of American Art, and the time of the 2004 Biennial. Embedded as these works are in their contexts of densely concentrated amounts of art, in these theatricalized moments which the works necessarily reflect, how can they be dismissed as "not art"?

The more interesting question to me concerns how far one is willing to expand the frame of art. I see *Fountain* (1917) as a prank, but nevertheless a prank as art, one that ushers in many new materials to the discussion of what is to be considered art. This may explain why defenders of medium-specificity routinely attempt to dismiss Duchamp for one reason or another. Controversy becomes a material to stir up, manipulate and control. The audacity of the artist, reception of critics and public, and the exhibiting institution itself become subjects of the artwork rather than the inverse. For Duchamp, the frame included the architecture of the Grand Central Palace, without which such an exhibition like the 1917 show would never have been possible. *Fountain* was one of the first pieces to directly address the hidden framework of curation, turning the tables to make of it yet another new material. At the very least, curation became a subject. The context became more interesting to the discussion surrounding *Fountain* than the object, the urinal, itself. Without an understanding of the Independents and their bylaws, it would be easy to miss this aspect of the work altogether.

One of the supreme ironies of *Fountain* (1917), arguably one of the most pivotal icons in Art History, is that it was never actually exhibited. The object was either removed or hidden from view during the opening. Several conflicting rumors exist; that it was hidden behind a screen, that Walter Bellows, one of the most outraged Society Members, smashed it. Another report claims that it was "surreptitiously stolen."[31] The most credible story is that it was removed at Duchamp's request to the Little Galleries of the Photo-Secession at 291 Fifth Avenue run by Alfred Steiglitz and Edward Steichen, where the only two photographic images of it were taken (one frontal and one rear view). From there, the fixture vanished entirely.

Duchamp's choice of Steiglitz to photograph the work was calculated as well. Probably the most celebrated photographer working in New York at the time, Alfred Steiglitz was engaged in his own struggle to escape the stigma of his medium. The Photo Secessionists were attempting to elevate the camera image to an equal plane as that of painting and sculpture. Steiglitz's photographic trace of *Fountain* (1917) began to take on a life of its own. It was reprinted in *The Blind Man,* underscored with the

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[31] From a letter of Katherine S. Dreier, an artist and activist member of the Society of Independents, to Duchamp, April 13, 1917. The letter implores Duchamp to not resign from the Society over the issue of the Fountain. Cited in Camfield, 31.

caption, “The Exhibit refused by the Independents.” Reprinting this work and disseminating it by means of a periodical made the magazine into an extension of the context for exhibiting a work that could not be seen in any gallery. This activated the magazine, transforming its function into a framing device, one that incorporated institutional strategies into its language. Any re-surfacing of the object *Fountain*, or photographs of the work taken from different angles & lighting schemes seen today stem from the multiple sculptures Duchamp had made from blueprints drawn from the Steiglitz photos: a miniature in 1938, and three full sized editions, produced in 1950, 1963, and 1964. The original was lost, overwhelmed and overshadowed by the much more interesting pageantry of its surrounding circumstances. The only evidence of any original was the photograph, the penultimate framing device. The last word being of course, the label.

Lest I neglect the most obvious feature of *Fountain* (1917), one that most of Cattelan’s work shares, and Robbins correctly recognized, despite misinterpreting it as a bug: the work is funny as hell. Still funny, almost a century later! It is this very humor, this comic relief that prevents an overcrowded art world from the tendency to take itself far too seriously. The lugubrious alternative would be to argue that humor has no place in art, forbidding direct visceral enjoyment as an aspect of the experience art has to offer and forever distancing the beholder to a remote position concerned only with issues of taste.

Three

HONEY, I SHRUNK THE GALLERY
The Four "W"s Of Wrong

Jonathan Swift invented the world of Liliput, a mythical Island on which everything is diminutive. Maurizio Cattelan seems to borrow this emblematic satirist's perspective in tinkering with the scale of his projects: he has had manufactured astonishingly detailed mouse-sized elevators set into gallery walls, at foot level. He has made various self-portraits, always smaller than life, such as *Mini-me* (1999) a sheepish twenty-four inch statue that sits hunched on a bookshelf. For the catalogue of his show at The Los Angeles Museum Of Contemporary Art, he shrank his Phaidon monograph to one-quarter size.

The manipulation of scale goes to the gargantuan as well, making Lilliputians of the viewer. In *Felix* (2001), his incredible shrinking ray has been inverted and turned on the skeleton of a housecat, blowing it up to dinosaur proportions, sixty feet tall. Or *Stadium* (1991) in which he elongated a Foosball table to accommodate 22 players. During the exhibition, an entire professional Italian Soccer team played a rival North African team, on Lilliputian scale. But by far the most interesting shrinking that Cattelan has performed, with the help of two co-conspirators, has been that of the gallery itself into what Jörg Heiser calls a “meta-venue.”[32]

[32] Jörg Heiser “This is Jörg Heiser on Tino Sehgal,” *Frieze* (Issue 82 April 2004), 62-63.

What Is The Wrong Gallery?
Being Wrong Headed

The Wrong Gallery, conceived by Cattelan with partners in crime Massimiliano Gioni and Ali Subotnick, opened in October 2002 as the smallest exhibition space in New York. The “gallery” space is merely a vestibule two-and-a-half-feet deep behind a glass door, which is always locked. Almost too small to be called a vestibule, it is more like the space between a screen door and a front door: an area particularly suffering from the over insistence on flatness. Because of its awkward scale The Wrong Galley manages to exist in three different dimensions simultaneously: as an object, a frame, and an institution.

Only slightly larger than an average adult, typical doorway size, it is about as roomy as a coffin. As an object it functions as an effigy of a gallery on which artists, curators, and even landlords can vent their collective spleen.[33] It is a container scaled more like a box than a room. If you could enter into the gallery you wouldn’t want

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[33] The Wrong Gallery sponsored “The Landlord’s Show” Guest curated by the building owner Ali Yaghoubi, and their neighboring galleries, Anton Kern and Andrew Kreps. From October 5 to November 8th 2003.

to stay long. One performer, Daniel Squire, stuck it out for an entire evening's performance, squirming about in the narrow space like giant fly trapped between two windows.

As a frame, The Wrong Gallery literally functions as a display case, exhibiting works by artists who usually, but not always, respond to the confines of the gallery; the limits are difficult to ignore. Elizabeth Payton's show included only one painting; no more could fit in the space. In another exhibit over a dozen artists' (very small) works were curated into a group show. Whether showcasing the limitations of the space or pretending to ignore them, The Wrong Gallery provides, if no other service to its all-star cast of artists, framing, albeit limited. New York has many shop and display windows regularly filled with art, which can only be seen from the street. The Wrong Gallery shows engage the setting of its neighborhood location and pull this framework into the content of the work shown, making separation between the work and its location a challenge, if not impossible. In this way, all the shows there are forced to be openly collaborative.

As an institution, The Wrong Gallery claims to take on all of the responsibilities of any gallery or museum, except, of course, the selling of artwork, focusing instead on promotion and exhibition. In 2003 and 2004, it participated in London's Frieze Art Fair, both times presenting performance-oriented works which commented on the market about them.

Noritoshi Hirakawa's 2004 installation was presented in a barren white cube booth. Each morning he parked a pile of his own shit on the floor; feces that had somehow been made completely odorless due to a special diet.[34] A magenta print on the wall of a human sphincter completed the piece, *The Homecoming of Navel Strings* (2004).

In 2003, The Wrong Gallery hosted the work of Tino Sehgal, also in a vacant cubicle at the fair. Instead of being occupied by the customary thong-clad gallerinas, a precocious boy and girl, both about eight years old gestured to the empty walls, and eerily engaged visitors. "So… What do you think this is about?" and, "We are only documenting works which are not installed at the fair," they explained. Eventually they called the piece into being with a verbal label, declaring the performative, "Tino Sehgal, *This Is About*, (2003), courtesy of Jan Mot. This is an edition of six." They even droned the price, "It is 6,000 dollars or 8,500 euros." If anyone tried to photograph the kids, they fell to the floor and yelled: "We don't think it is appropriate to take pictures of our work!"

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[34] As reported by Pamela Robertson Pierce, "Friezing Hot" *NY Arts*, Jan-Feb 2005

The Wrong Gallery boasts one official publication to date: The Wrong Times—composed entirely of interviews with artists shown in the gallery's first fifteen months. This is not an expensive coffee table gift book, but printed on cheap newsprint to hand out for free (much like the way Warhol would give away copies of *Interview* at its inception). The transcribed dialogues document work at the gallery, augmenting and extending each installation. For instance the interview with Paul McCarthy and Jason Rhoads is appropriate to their work, a copied-and-pasted deliberately sloppy mess from an email correspondence complete with Microsoft ads, where it gradually becomes clear that they can't possibly schedule a time to meet. Tino Sehgal, as the children from *This Is About* attest, is adamantly opposed to any photographic representation of his work. To further drive the point home, his interview, supposedly with Jens Hoffman consists of three blank columns.[35]

Lawrence Weiner refused to be framed by The Wrong Gallery. When he was asked to contribute a piece to the Chelsea venue, he stenciled the words "Give and Get" and "Have and Take" on the sidewalk outside the front of the door. In his Wrong Times interview Weiner divulges strong opinions with regard to the frame:

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[35] In fact the interview is headlined, "Tino Sehgal interviewed by Jens Hoffman" and then followed by the command to turn to page 22, after doing so one finds the three blank collumns in the back. The Wrong Times, 17 & 22.

> Lawrence Weiner: I mean, can you tell a person not to put a frame around a work? It's a hard thing to do.
>
> Ali Subotnick: A lot of artists demand that though.
>
> LW: Okay, they can demand all they want, but why not figure out some way that you don't have to get into telling people what not to do? That is another part about designing your own work. Each person designs work that suits their morals. I just choose not to spend my life telling people what to do or not to do. I want to give them the materials to do the right thing. People are not as stupid as everyone thinks. [36]

Tino Sehgal may have opposite views from Cattelan in terms of how to create a media presence, but the two would seem to agree in terms of politics. The Wrong Gallery did manage to get a few words out of Sehgal when they interviewed him for their end page column "El Topo," in the European design magazine *Domus*. His statement is worth quoting at length, as it reflects the perspective of a younger generation artist,[37] revealing similar opinions to those expressed by Lawrence Weiner if not somewhat more tactfully stated.

> Tino Sehgal: I think that making art is the most efficient way of being involved in a discourse of long term politics, and

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[36] Ibid, 6.

[37] Tino Seghel is only 28, born in 1976

> values especially in the field with which I am concerned, that of production. Visual art has always mirrored the dominant mode of production: the transformation of nature into supply goods in order to decrease supply shortage and to diminish the threat of nature, both, of course, to enhance the quality of life. The appearance of excess supply as well as the ‘endangering of nature’ by mankind in the last century questions these basic premises and thus the configuration of this model. I consider communism and capitalism as two versions of the same model of how to organize society which basically only differ in their ideas about distribution. My point is that the objecthood of visual art is deeply embedded in this model while dance, song and spoken work—like other traditional artistic media—could be a paradigm for another kind of model which would be concerned with presence instead of eternity, transformation of acts instead of transformation of material, simultaneity and production/deproduction instead of economic growth. Practically speaking, and since this magazine is for design, I would, for example, be curious to know if there could be an economy around the design of behavior, just as there is around the design of objects. Or maybe not even necessarily an economy, but simply a practice that is consciously concerned with the fashion of behavior, attitudes, gestures, and speech.[38]

Sehgal plays with the two almost contradictory meanings of *economy*: one meaning thrift and the other referring to a

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[38] Tino Seghel, “El Topo” *Domus* (867, February 2004)

networked system of distributions. Using the former definition connoting thrift, “economic growth” becomes a self-negating oxymoron.

The Wrong Gallery is nothing if not economy-sized: down to the invitations shrunk to the size of business cards to be passed out postage-free by hand, in the social sphere of the art world. Its budget is non-existent, as are the direct profits, making it eligible for museum grants and public art funds. While there may not be any fiscal transactions taking place, both artists and gallery benefit from the unaccountable accumulation of value in terms of cultural capital via currency and exposure, the means through which attention, not money is paid, collected, and accrued.

Where Is The Wrong Gallery?
In The Wrong Place

Prestigiously located at 516-A1/2 West Twentieth Street (west of Tenth Avenue), The Wrong Gallery sits in the heart of Chelsea, New York's downtown gallery district.[39] New York City is known to have the highest concentration of artists anywhere in the United States. In terms of global sales, the US accounts for slightly under half of all art sold, with Europe responsible for about half the remainder, and England taking up about half of Europe's share.[40] It would be safe to say that Chelsea could be considered the art world's ground zero.

The outside door to The Wrong Gallery is exactly the same as the door to its neighbor, The Andrew Kreps Gallery, barely one foot to the left. The doors are so close that they share the same steel riot barrier that pulls down like a window shade when the galleries are "closed." Kreps is a commercial gallery which keeps regular hours,

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[39] The Wrong Gallery and neighbor Andrew Kreps moved to new locations in September 2005, The Door to the Wrong Gallery is being shipped to the Tate Museum.

[40] Stallabrass, *Art Incorporated,* pg 5.

Tuesday through Saturday, 10-6. New bricks painted white surround both doors, offset from the older scarred grey bricks on the rest of the building. This threshold used to be a loading dock, when the neighborhood was a meatpacking district. Four-foot high steel posts rise out of the sidewalk just before the doors, a remnant fortification to prevent delivery trucks from backing into the building.

The doors themselves are mostly glass, framed in raw unpainted aluminum with “D” shaped handles on both sides of the door, so it is unclear whether to pull the door or push to budge it. In the case of The Wrong Gallery, these handles allow neither action, as long as the space is locked. Just barely visible through the glass is the outline of a door on the back wall, frameless, with hidden hinges, designed to be inconspicuous. It does however, have a shiny brass-plated doorknob, betraying its presence and purpose. Rather than leading to a smoke-filled back room where high stakes deals are negotiated, this door leads to the building’s basement, filled with cobwebbed industrial machinery: the grimy furnace and boiler.

The glass door to the sidewalk sports black vinyl lettering about six inches high spelling out “The Wrong Gallery,” in a trendy sans serif, all caps – the same size and font used by its neighbor, Andrew Kreps. It is the only advertising indicating the gallery exists, aside from the current business card/invitation taped to the side wall where one might ordinarily expect to find a doorbell. Centered directly on the glass door, the vinyl lettering superimposes itself on anything shown behind. Artwork viewed through it looks "cancelled," like pictures of money or legal documents with "VOID" or "COPY" stamped across the front to thwart counterfeiting. Sometimes the lettering appears at the bottom of the door like a caption, underwriting the work. In at least three different shows, the text has appeared backwards, indicating the viewer's position is already inside The Wrong Gallery, looking out. Worse, the fact that the door remains locked means we are all trapped inside here. This simple inversion is both funny and menacing, suggesting a final synthesis of the art/life dialectic, reserving only a few cubic feet of inaccessible empty space independent of the all-consuming totality.

Viewing the world as a readymade reiterates Italian dadist Piero Manzoni's *Homage to Galileo*, *Base of the World,* (1961): a steel block outdoors at the Herning Kunstmuseum, with its title *Socle du Monde* embossed upside down. This inversion does not suggest, apocalyptically, that the division between art and life has failed, or irreversibly collapsed. Instead it proposes that perhaps, for just a second, we contemplate just how far it is permissible to expand the frame of art. Such absurdist work activates the viewer, forcing consideration of how far and to what degree one is willing to let their leg be pulled by any form of cultural proposition.

Who Is The Wrong Gallery?
With The Wrong Crowd

When asked if The Wrong Gallery is Maurizio Cattelan's own work, Cattelan denied any credit, replying, "No, it's just a gallery. It's not about me, it's a place to show art, to see something new or unexpected. And it's a way to keep things going, and to be excited about something. More importantly I am not doing it alone. Massimo Gioni and Ali Subotnick are working on it, as much as I am. So it's a group effort, or maybe just a brand, and nobody should even know who hides behind it."[41]

The same team of Gioni, Subotnick and Cattelan has worked together to produce the magazine *Charley*, which has been published, to date, in three annual issues. They also contribute an end-page column in *Domus Magazine* consisting of a mock-Proust interview with different artists each month, often people who have shown at The Wrong Gallery, and who then respond to the same list of five questions. The team has collaborated to write articles for

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[41] Maurizio Cattelan and Helen Kontova, "The Wrong Gallery" *Flash Art* (January-February 2003), 45.

Artforum, Parkett and *Flash Art.* They were selected to curate the Fourth Berlin Biennial to open in March 2006.

Massimo Gioni has been the US editor for *Flash Art* from 2000-2004. He currently is the artistic director of the Nicola Trussardi Foundation in Milan, which funds major artists' projects with capital earned in the fashion industry. Cattelan has received funding from the Trussardi Foundation as well as conspicuous amounts of coverage in *Flash Art*. When Vanessa Beecroft questioned if *Flash Art* may have given Cattelan a little too much space, Cattelan readily concedes, "Probably, yes. I deserve at most a one-room apartment. Instead *Flash Art* gave me a loft. But sooner or later eviction will come."[42] The Wrong Gallery may be small but it is hardly modest.

Ali Subotnick is editorial assistant editor to *Parkett*, which devoted one third of its 2000 issue (#59) to Cattelan. She has curated the 2004 MFA show at Columbia, and published an article in *Parkett* 69 with Massimiliano Gioni titled "The Economy of Attention; Art and Radical Thinking in Times of Strategic Consensus," which, without mentioning his name, positions Maurizio Cattelan's work, issues, and strategies as the next inevitable step.[43] Insomuch as there is a spokesperson for The Wrong Gallery, it was Subotnick

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[42] Maurizio Cattelan, Giancarlo Politi "Killing Me Softly," 94.

[43] I believe it was Robert Morris who said once in an interview with a critic, "Call me the next inevitable step, and I'll kiss your ass and buy a new car."

who responded when I wrote to the email address thewronggallery@aol.com.

Together these three act as a team, merging together to form a force with the power to consolidate funding sources, art creation, and publicity into an effective and entertaining *ménage à trois* that might never have been possible in the days prior to government deregulation of the media. Before Reaganomics of the 1980s, it was illegal to own or control more than one form of media (newspaper, television, radio etc.). The dissolution of the Fairness Doctrine[44] formerly enforced by the Federal Communications Commission allowed mergers to form within these industries permitting unprecedented hegemonic power in determining content of the so-called "public" media. The partnership enjoyed by Cattelan, Gioni and Subotnick walks a fine line between critically

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[44] "The policy of the United States Federal Communications Commission that became known as the 'Fairness Doctrine' is an attempt to ensure that all coverage of controversial issues by a broadcast station be balanced and fair. The FCC took the view, in 1949, that station licensees were 'public trustees,' and as such had an obligation to afford reasonable opportunity for discussion of contrasting points of view on controversial issues of public importance. The Commission later held that stations were also obligated to actively seek out issues of importance to their community and air programming that addressed those issues. With the deregulation sweep of the Reagan Administration during the 1980s, the Commission dissolved the fairness doctrine."
Val E. Limburg, "Fairness Doctrine: U.S. Broadcasting Policy"
http://www.museum.tv/archives/etv/F/htmlF/fairnessdoct/fairnessdoct.htm
(accessed March 20 2004)

commenting on such base corruption, and profiting fabulously from it. It remains the judgment of the activated viewer to decide when the project ceases to be viable.

Why The Wrong Gallery?
At The Wrong Times

> The artworld's continual circulation of information and services has become a primary source of profit in itself. If one were to measure the monetary volume passing through the support system – the museum donations, building programs, travel and tourism, publishing, salaries, and fees to curators and consultants, property gains in gallery districts, shipping and insurance, facilitation of business transactions in other sectors – the actual costs of works of contemporary art would be small in comparison.
>
> -Thomas Crow, *Modern Art in the Common Culture*

> A no-profit, no-budget enterprise, The Wrong Gallery doesn't play any role in the market: The Wrong Gallery does not buy or sell: The Wrong Gallery does not represent any artist.
>
> -From "Acknowledgements," *The Wrong Times*

The Wrong Gallery denies playing any part in the art market, because it does not sell artwork. This may be true, but it does profit from its location in the center of a thriving art support system—Chelsea, New York—which includes its gallery host and neighbors. They have printed The Wrong Times, and solicited publicity by participating in the artfair circuit to produce work in and around the Frieze Art Fair in London which involves, if nothing else, the ancillary tourism businesses.

The support system Thomas Crow refers to sustains itself by providing services needed by galleries, whether they sell anything or not. The actual exchange of contemporary art objects might not even be required for these supplimentary art service industries to prosper, so long as the bulk of their profit is generated by the frequent shifting of inventory and its display. These industries construe an administrative framework into which art objects are interchangeably dropped. This supporting framework buffers the art, protecting it, in the process adding value by separating it from the quotidian. There is always the danger, however, that the framework can come to overwhelm the object, perhaps replacing it entirely. These fears were voiced by Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer who cautioned against an all too stable system: The Culture Industry.[45] The interests of these support businesses apply indirect pressure on the artist to produce a standardized product that can be easily consumed, distributed, and traded, especially a product that will operate in the exchange market (which Crow suggest lies a mere thirty blocks uptown) without incurring

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[45] Theodore Adorno and Max Horkheimer. "The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception," *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 1944. online at: http://www.marxists.org/reference/subject/philosophy/works/ge/adorno.htm (accessed Jan 20 2004)

prohibitive investment risk. Responding to Adorno, Crow argues that institutional critique, in the form of installation rather than commodity art, attempted to recuperate the space of the gallery by sabotage, intentionally misusing the entrenched institutions. He laments that the rebellion was short-lived, only to become assimilated by poseurs:

> Installation art ceded what subversive potential it had possessed to the degree that it has lately become the main attraction in the venues of art tourism for the wealthy and well-placed, from Documenta to Biennale to SoHo and points in between. And having sampled the event and the satisfying social interchange it occasions, the collector turns to the artist's dealer for a suitably portable souvenir.[46]

Thus the installation event became dependent for support on its production of accessory by-products. The goal of the installation is to accrue enough attention, like capital, to add value to its souvenirs. Crow continues:

> In order to understand how anti-commodity art helped entrench a commercial apparatus of distribution, it is essential to grasp that the market in contemporary art – the 'downtown' market – is, to a great extent, an economy of services more than goods. A primary value that the well-placed client receives from a gallery and its stable of artists is

[46] Crow, *Modern Art in the Common Culture,* 82.

> *participation, insider status and recognition* [my italics]. Look ready to buy and the velvet rope is lifted; the first reward is separation from the common visitors out front. A few purchases from stock may lead to the chance to buy the sort of piece that is held in reserve for privileged clients. Along the way, there is the acquired sense of access: introductions to the artists, flattering chat with the gallery owner, who may be a celebrity him/herself. Other entrepreneurs, the freelance art consultants, offer yet greater degrees of intimacy and even a sense of power with their services: studio visits to the artists who are just about to take off, the promise that one might build a truly 'important' collection, that one's decisions will begin to be taken into account in the way artist's reputations are made.[47]

The Wrong Gallery may not visibly and directly turn a financial profit, but it redeems itself by turning a profit in a very different economy: the economy of attention.[48] According to Crow, the service economy of the downtown art scene is based more on transactions of attention than money. What else is participation, insider status, and recognition if not exchanges of attention? Participation is attention being paid to the right people or things. Insider status indicates one is receiving attention from the right people. Recognition is a quality of attention.

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[47] Ibid, 81.

[48] More on this in the following chapter, "The Wrong Kind Of Attention."

In order to attract attention, the work must have attractive qualities to begin with. As Duchamp's *Fountain* proved, controversy may attract more attention than approval. Controversy is built into Cattelan's work although, of course, he denies it: "Scandals are just incidents, side effects. I work with images trying to reflect reality's schizophrenia: who tries to impose its own interpretation to my work as the only possible makes the scandal."[49] [*sic*] Nevertheless, incidents of vandalism are reoccurring. Concurrent with the 2004 Whitney Biennial, Cattelan installed *Untitled* (2004) in Italy, a sculpture consisting of three life-like barefoot boys hanging with their necks in nooses from the oldest tree in the public square, XXIV Maggio, one of the most vital zones of Milan. Less than 36 hours after the opening, two of the boys were cut down by an outraged (and apparently drunk) local man who said that the artwork scared his nephews. Even more frightening is the fact that in doing so, the boys' vigilante fell five feet, concussing his head on the *Milanese Renaissance Monument* set at the base of the tree. Needless to say, Cattelan made the most of the controversy.

Massimiliano Gioni, having helped fund the project through the Nicola Trussardi foundation, brought extra attention to both Cattelan and Trussardi by wearing his third hat as the US Editor of *Flash Art*. A photograph of Cattelan's hanging boys graced the

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[49] Maurizio Cattelan interviewed online at *Designboom*, http://www.designboom.com/contemporary/cattelan.html (accessed March 20 2004)

cover of the July-September issue (2004), and within were reprinted a number of articles from the Milanese press, weighing in with comments on the piece, thus ensuring that it received maximum exposure. It reads like a scrapbook assembled by proud parent.

Another example of Cattelan's provocation can be found in his sculpture *La Nona Ora* [The Ninth Hour] (1999, depicting Pope John Paul II felled by a large meteor. It was constructed for the group show, "Apocalypse; Beauty and Horror in Contemporary Art" at the Royal Academy in London where it was shown without incident (but not without controversy). When the work traveled to Poland at the Zacheta Gallery, two members of Parliament, Halina Nowina-Konopka and Witold Tomczak, removed the basketball-sized wax meteor, and attempted to prop up the pope statue to a standing pose. The vandals reportedly used the opportunity to voice anti-Semitic views against the show's curator, adding only more fuel to the fire.[50] Needless to say, this provoked much commentary from the local and international media, who might have ignored the piece, had it not been met with such a volatile and spectacular response. At auction, the reassembled *La Nona Ora* has fetched well over two million US dollars.

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[50] Warren Niesluchowski, Jerzy Maslanka and Tomasz Kitlinski, "Polish Passions Damage Two Works" *Art in America* (March 2001 v89 i3), 160.

Cattelan perforates the gallery and the boundaries which separate the art object from its audience. Pawel Althamer most explicitly echoes this strategy in her show at The Wrong Gallery, from April 8- April 29, 2003. The artist set up a flower arrangement on a curtain behind the glass door. Two Polish immigrants were hired by the artist to smash the window, break in, and destroy the installation. The same two were then hired to rebuild it just as it was, only to repeat the cycle of destruction and reconstruction over the course of the month. The Wrong Times proudly credits, “Generous support for this project was made possible from the Polish Cultural Institute.” Althamer’s show completely fits into Cattelan’s oeuvre expressed by The Wrong Gallery. It must have been cause for additional glee with Cattelan to exact revenge on the self-appointed Polish arbiters of culture, not only to have them pay for repeatedly rebuilding his gallery, but also to perpetuate the controversy surrounding *La Nona Ora,* in a continuing attention-generating action which further promotes his fame.

Four

Manufacturing Dissent
Consensus As Mass Deception

When Maurizio Cattelan blanketed London overnight with black and white posters printed with huge Arabic writing, he activated the British fear that some grassroots al Qaeda terrorist network was organizing for God-only-knows-what, a fear fostered by the lack of cultural exchange and ignorance of the language native to the country which England, at the time, was invading. The few capable of reading Arabic recognized the script as a love poem.[51]

Cattelan has stated in a typically provocative remark, "I am not really interested in individuals. I'm interested in mass fears and hysteria,"[52] as if terrorism were the site on which is fought the last stand for a collective public culture. Many media and technology critics such as Paul Virilio, Neil Postman, and Noam Chomsky would agree that stories and representations of disasters so

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[51] This was Cattelan's contribution to "The State Of Play" Show at the Serpentine Gallery in London, March 2004.

[52] Maurizio Cattelan, Giancarlo Politi "Killing Me Softly" *Flash Art,* 92.

favored by the news media are key to forming shared consensual values. In taking his work outside of the safety of the museum and art gallery context, Cattelan engages in a mode of display somewhere between activism and terrorism, exposing through demonstration inherent cultural racism and prejudice within the permissive umbrella of fine art and self-promotion.

One of our strongest fears—indeed one so strong that it acts to hold society together—is the fear of exclusion by consensual agreement. Slavoj Zizek writes in his post 9-11 book *Welcome To The Desert Of The Real*, that one of the essential preconditions for any society's happiness is the ability to blame an "other" for all that is wrong with the world. God forbid that one should fall from grace and become such an other. And yet it is hybridity with the other that is essential for any evolutionary (or otherwise) growth in living culture. Howard Bloom, in his book *Global Brain* divides individuals in all societies, biological and cultural into two roles: diversity generators and conformity enforcers.[53] The latter are the representatives of the conservative masses who tend to excommunicate the former in favor of maintenance of the status quo. But it is only the innovation of the diversity generators, and the cautious adoption of their behavior by the latter, which can save mass culture from stagnation, or worse, despotism. This role

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[53] Howard Bloom, Global Brain; The Evolution Of The Mass Mind From The Big Bang To The 21st Century. New York:John Wiley & Sons, 2001

as diversity generator leading the march of progress has long been the bailiwick of the avant-garde artist in relation to mass culture, espoused most notably by critics like Clement Greenberg and Theodore Adorno. With the contemporary international explosion of global free trade, unrestrained by oppositional Marxist critique, fine art and its expression in international art fairs and biennials has largely abandoned its post at the avant-garde, and in so doing, has been embraced as an increasingly popular culture industry.

Julian Stallabrass, the apologist for many young British artists, argues in *Art Incorporated* that fine art's function in a global economy faces a contradiction; art must continually distance itself from mass culture in order to maintain and propagate an image of freedom; freedom, presumably, from conformity. Ironically, in the process, conventions are made of all that pop culture is *not*. Here we see the celebration of the darker side; boredom, disappointment, perversion, and obscurity all become salient virtues. When this "otherness" becomes conventional, it begs the question of such an image of freedom: freedom from what exactly? Lane Relyea explains that an arts education offers the individual the freedom to make one's own decisions: "The work done by artists is privileged and humane because artists retain a larger degree of responsibility in the decision making (for which the downside is usually zero monetary compensation and subhuman living conditions)."[54] Stallabrass points out that artists share this privilege and freedom by means of careful distributions: "The wealthy buy themselves participation in this free zone through ownership and patronage, and they are buying something genuinely valuable; the state (through museums) ensures that a wider public can inhale at least for a while the scent of freedom that works of art emit."[55]

Ali Subotnick and Massimiliano Gioni, Cattelan's partners in numerous projects propose in their statement, "The Economy Of Attention," that the global expansion of the art market has necessitated the attraction of larger audiences, "This attitude has resulted in a paradoxical situation, in which all the actors of the contemporary art game claim to be at once radical and innovative, and yet they aspire to being widely known, appreciated, and universally understood." Rather than waiting until after death for their genius to be recognized, today's diversity generators are professionalized and demanding assimilation almost immediately upon entering the market.

Gioni and Subotnick recognize that a paradigm shift has taken place in the values of both contemporary artists and their specific audiences:

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[54] Lane Relyea, "Theory and Painting," *Flash Art* 239, (Nov-Dec 2004) 64.
[55] Julian Stallabrass, *Art Incorporated: The Story of Contemporary Art,* (New York; Oxford University Press, 2004) 4.

> Consensus has become the new parameter by which decisions are made and actions evaluated. More importantly, consensus is no longer analyzed: it's rather constructed, built and then presented as an undifferentiated, frontal entity—an extreme marketing tool. Not only has contemporary art finally turned into a culture industry, which – for better or for worse – can now compete with, and be compared to, other adjacent forms of infotainment such as the publishing and film industries; it has also incorporated the strategies of marketing and consensus making into its language.[56]

In 1913, even before Duchamp printed his own magazines, Picasso and Braque were pasting newspaper clippings onto canvas incorporating the strategies of marketing and consensus into their own language. The assertion that contemporary art has turned into a culture industry on a par with Hollywood is far more alarming—and debatable—especially to those accustomed to and invested in the former structure of a meritocracy in which a few arbiters of taste wielded the power to make or break an artist's (and hence an aesthetic's) career. This shift draws attention away from the aristocracy of taste arbiters: critics, collectors and curators, and toward a larger audience; the attendees of block-buster shows where reaction is counted by consensus. Still, the question remains whether art can maintain anything like a

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[56] Ali Subotnick and Massimiliano Gioni, "The Economy Of Attention; Art And Radical Thinking In Times Of Strategic Consensus," *Parkett 69*, 2003,165.

critical distance from the mass culture industry in order to generate the necessary diversity, under increasing demands to attract larger audiences.

John Seabrook noticed a similar shift happening in the magazine *The New Yorker* with the changing of the guard from old school editor Mr. Shawn[57] to the former *Vanity Fair* editor Tina Brown:

> Tina Brown's arrival at *The New Yorker* was a part of a larger change in American Society, the end of a particular kind of cultural life and the beginning of another kind. The old aristocracy of high culture was dying, and a new, more democratic but also commercial elite was being born—a meritocracy of taste. The old cultural arbiters, whose job it was to decide what was "good" in the sense of "valuable" were being replaced by a new type of arbiter, whose skill was to define "good" in terms of "popular." This vast change in our civilization made itself felt in virtually every museum, library, university, publishing house, magazine, newspaper, and TV station in the country.[58]

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[57] Seabrook stresses as emblematic that few people knew Mr. Shawn's first name was William whereas "Tina" was always on a first name basis with everyone but strangers.

[58] John Seabrook, *Nobrow: The Culture of Marketing and the Marketing of Culture,* New York: Random House, 2000. 25 & 26.

Using *The New Yorker* as a thermometer of the times may not be the most accurate indicator; it is not the first place one might look for reportage of, say, diverse trends in youth culture, but nevertheless Seabrook is accurate in noticing the emigrational shift in the definition of the value "good". Instead of being arbitrated by a few elite experts, "good" became modified by, and increasingly defined and assessed in terms of popularity.

Hal Foster points out that the neo-liberal formula for the old *New Yorker* was to teach distaste for lowbrow culture and appreciation for the highbrow to their presumably middlebrow subscribers—essentially to enforce conformity. This formula failed amid the Reagan/Thatcher years when cultural marketing expanded exponentially in keeping with corporate mergers.[59] The middle class buyers of *The New Yorker* eventually began to resent the condescension, which attempted to teach a disdain for their own culture. As nationwide malls anchored by such stores as Saks Fifth Avenue and Bloomingdales sprawled across America, New York lost its status as the only available source for propagating highbrow trends. To keep from losing money, *The New Yorker* had to capitulate to the demands of a larger mass culture audience or perish. Tina Brown instigated many changes, including bringing

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[59] Hal Foster, *Design and Crime (and other diatribes)* New York: Verso, 2002 especially the chapter "Brow Beaten," 4.

advertisers into board meetings to help decide on the magazine's content. Photographs were introduced for the first time to update the aesthetic to the glossy look. At one point, Brown went so far as to invite Rosanne Barr to be a guest editor for an issue. This proved to be the last straw for several long-time *New Yorker* writers, who immediately resigned.

It is not insignificant that Maurizio Cattelan, when recently profiled in a *New Yorker* article, gets more attention as a personality rather than for his work. Cattelan has been interviewed in other popular lifestyle magazines outside the limited art world, such as *Vogue* and *W* – his strategy being that in order to distinguish himself as a star artist, mass consensus had to be established. "Being famous inside the art world—that's a real achievement? It's like one thousand people! Nobody stops you on the street."[60]

Cattelan has always straddled the fence separating the elite of the art world from the audience of mass culture. Complex layers of meaning and a stingy rate of material production, combined with prolific public relations and a savvy business acumen have resulted in a ubiquitous media presence, making his work visible to popular audiences without risking becoming common or affordable. Having had no formal art schooling in a field overpopulated with post-

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[60] Maurizio Cattelan, quoted by Calvin Tomkins, "The Prankster" *The New Yorker.* (October 4, 2004) 89.

graduate pedigrees, he stands with one foot "outside" among the masses, while the other is firmly planted in the top 100 most powerful people in the artworld.[61] An investigation into the dissaearance of a "public" art or trust haunts most of his projects. Often they can only be fully appreciated in conjunction with some specialized insider knowledge or rumor.

The image of fame Cattelan wishes to foster is highly codified; more like that of a brand or an avatar – a facile corporate identity within electronic media. Rather than affecting an attitude to augment the sculpture, his sculptural works are like accessories which announce a general attitude. The sculptures are tokens, ancillary incidents of marketing. Big Shwag. Being physically recognized as an individual does not hold as high a priority as managing the clout of his name and image. For many years he has sent Massimiliano Gioni in his place to conduct interviews and accept awards—as Maurizio Cattelan – explaining the substitution to be just another practice of post-studio delegation. His own command of English is not so polished; he bluntly states, "I do not know how to talk in public, so someone else can go and do it better."[62] He prefers to employ a craftsperson skilled at the job to optimize his communications, rather than taking on the responsibility of learning how to represent himself. This sounds like

[61] As reported in *ArtReview* "Power100" index November 2004.
[62] Cattlean & Politi, "Killing Me Softly," *Flash Art,* 91.

the logic of corporate pop bands organized by the likes of Malcolm McLaren, who used to argue that it was easier to teach a beautiful and popular blonde boy to look as if he is playing guitar that it is to teach a good guitar player how to look beautiful, popular or blonde.

Incidentally, the artist's doppelganger was made famous by Warhol, who sent out clones to make appearances at several different parties and clubs at the same time. Warhol, however, had to stop the practice when he was scrutinized by tax auditors beginning in 1972 (an ordeal he was to endure every single year until his death). The auditors accused Warhol of deducting his friends' social expenses on his taxes. Warhol made his revenge by dictating the exhaustive *Andy Warhol Diaries* chronicling all his movements and every expense no matter how small: lunches, cab fares, even payphone dimes. *The Andy Warhol Diaries* are not so much a balance sheet of financial expenses as they are a catalogue of those famous people to whom he paid attention and those people he made famous simply by paying attention to them. Undoubtedly, the most interesting part of the over 800-page tome is the index, which reads like a social register of the New York art world for the decade 1976-1986.

Taking another cue from Warhol, together with The Wrong Gallery co-directors Gioni and Subotnick, Cattelan offers an inspired directory in *Artforum*'s "Best of 2004" issue. Traditionally, artworld personalities critically reel off their favorite annual top ten. “Everybody Was There; The Wrong Guide To New York In 2004,” use its two-page spread to list over four hundred of its “favorite” shows, under blasé categories like “Didn’t See But Heard It Was Good,” and, “Long Time No See,” or “So Bad It’s Good.”[63] To accommodate this generosity, the type size had to be shrunk to a squinty six-points. One can easily imagine that vanity would force most of the artists and galleries mentioned (as well as those few poor souls who were excluded) into a ridiculous pose, hunched over with magnifying glass in hand, combing through the entire thing for a glimpse of their own name. Just as eagerly, the index of *The Andy Warhol Diaries* was scoured on its posthumous publication by everyone still alive who might have been mentioned.

Andy Warhol as a society figure has had a tremendous influence on Cattelan. When asked in an interview if he had any favorite artists, Cattelan replied, “Names change continuously; it is impossible to make charts. Warhol is the name that comes back more often, but in his hands even dying seemed chic.”[64] What Cattelan admires most in Warhol is his ability to manage his own image, “What I like about Warhol is that you can think about him as

[63] Maurizio Cattelan, Massimiliano Gioni, Ali Subotnick, “Everybody Was There; The Wrong Guide To New York In 2004,” *Artforum* (December 2004), 182-3.
[64] Cattelan & Politi, “Killing Me Softly,” *Flash Art,* 92.

a great artist and also as a great PR man. He had the best show in town."[65]

Warhol flirted with disaster by bringing art as close to mass culture and advertising as it could go at the time without being subsumed by it. He amplified this tension with continual threats to withdraw his fragile finger from the leaky dam that holds back the tide of the culture industry and protects high, fine, and pop art from corruption of the masses. Warhol situated himself as a superhero at the center of attention, to whom all were in some way indebted. It is this side of Warhol, who circulated among wealthy and powerful celebrities, always promising to include them in a movie or magazine article, that Cattelan emulates, not the tireless "would-be machine" that generated the quantities of silk-screened yardage for which he is most often celebrated today.

Warhol's empire was located centrally at the New York "Factory," a loft where the beautiful people came to him. Today's beautiful people are cosmopolitan, an international globetrotting community colonizing, gentrifying, and celebrating the unrestrained growth of global capitalism. Biennials and Artfairs form the arena where Maurizio Cattelan has made his reputation, answering the artworld and its need for a charismatic cynosure to pose as its savior from

[65] Maurizio Cattelan cited in Dodie Kazanjian, "The Lying Game." *Vogue*, (Feb 2001 v191 i2) 276.

the onslaught of corporate culture. His work operates by deliberately manipulating the attention of the viewer, sometimes hijacking it entirely.

Together with Jens Hoffman, Cattelan curated "The 6th International Caribbean Biennial" in 1999. *Blown Away* (the official title) was to be a dress rehearsal of sorts for the institutional shenanigans later manifest in The Wrong Gallery. Ten top international art stars were brought together for a week at a spa resort on St. Kitts.[66] Full-page ads were run in *Artforum, Frieze* and *Flash Art*. Enticing press releases were issued to reporters. What the organizers and press failed to mention in any of the propaganda is that there was to be no exhibition of any art. The gang mostly hung out and partied, portraying a convincing impression that it may not, after all, be so lonely at the top. A catalogue was published, more like a scrapbook, or fashion magazine, chock full of snapshots of the smug well-to-do mingling. The introduction pulled no punches, declaring outright:

> Biennials celebrate the coming of a new economy: the economy based not on the scarcity of materials, but rather on the unavoidable scarcity of human attention, the kind of

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[66] Included in the roster were Vanessa Beecroft, Olafur Eliasson, Douglas Gordon, Mariko Mori, Chris Ofili, Gabriel Orozco, Elizabeth Peyton, Pipilotti Rist, Tobias Rehberger, and Rirkrit Tiravanija.

> attention that comes from audiences. This is the economy that has helped give rise to cyberspace.[67]

The colonization of cyberspace and the residual effect it has had on both image making and cultural literacy is fundamental not only to Cattelan's approach, but also to the theory of an economy of attention (which I will attend to with the theories of Michael Goldhaber in chapter six). First, it is important to establish the difference between the aesthetics of an art that reflects the entrenched industrial, factory-style market versus more ephemeral entertainment-based media-production economy emerging currently. The stakes are distinctly separate. Andy Warhol may have been one of the few artists who managed to achieve success occupying both realms, producing an exhaustive amount of work in his "factory", as well as marketing and managing with savoir-faire recognizable branding of his conceptual image.

Takashi Murakami is an artist who has developed the industrial strategies of Warhol that Cattelan chooses to de-emphasize. Murakami has established a number of factory-like studios producing hundreds of crisp, super flat, magna inspired paintings and sculptures. In a response to "The Economy Of Attention; Art And Radical Thinking In Times Of Strategic Consensus," Takashi Murakami recognized the direction of Subotnick and Gioni's

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67 Maurizio Cattelan & Jens Hoffman eds. *6Th Caribbean Biennial,* Paris; Les Presses du réel/Janvier, 2001.

argument without needing any prompting: “Think Maurizio Cattelan. His works are humorous, ironic and never fail to tickle the noses of art historians with a few drops of aphrodisiac. He sporadically, but steadily releases works at the rate of a movie director, who produces one film a year. Cattelan’s oeuvre will no doubt continue to entertain art enthusiasts until his death and beyond, just as Marcel Duchamp’s still does.[*sic*]” Murakami praises Cattelan for everything he himself is not; the two seem to have translated Warhol differently. Murakami flatters: “Cattelan knows how to maintain a proper distance from the salons: he is the conscience of the contemporary art world and is an impeccable artist of our time.” Then concedes: “I am Japanese, based in Japan, I do not speak English well, and above all, I do not know how to maintain a proper distance from the contemporary art industry. I unscrupulously create and release works, and there are numerous unsuccessful works sleeping in the back of my warehouse.”[68] The differing translations are due to more than just geographical difference.

Murakami’s post-Warhol direction mimics the Japanese strategy of a mega-corporation such as Sony: establish a multinational network of factories with the goal to improve image resolution.[69]

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[68] Subotnick and Gioni, “The Economy Of Attention” *Parkett* 168.

[69] A point Philip Parreno introduces in a Hans Ulrich Obrist interview, “From the ‘80s and so on Sony and Thompson have been after the issue of image resolution. The point is not to produce images, but to produce images with a

Sony offers a contemporary model, to be sure, nevertheless it is consistent with the old-style industrial factory; shipping hardware as its finished product. Cattelan, on the other hand mimics the much more American strategy used by a corporation such as Tommy Hilfiger, best described by Naomi Klein:

> Tommy Hilfiger is less in the business of manufacturing clothes than he is in the business of signing his name. The company is run entirely through licensing agreements, with Hilfiger commissioning all its products from a group of other companies: Jockey International makes Hilfiger jeans, Oxford Industries make Tommy Shirts, the Stride Rite Corporation makes its footwear. What does Tommy Hilfiger make? Nothing at all.[70]

Cattelan strikes a balance between nothing at all and improved resolution. His primary concern may be brand identity, but there has to be something to photograph, for the press to promote, and this is the primary function of his sculpture works. By producing them at a rate of only one a year, he maintains even yet still more control over what will be printed in the current periodicals. Whereas with the almost endless items produced by Warhol and Murakami, photo documentation is left to the fickle subjectivity of the magazine editor's choice.

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good resolution. This idea was really like a virus." From Hans Ulrich Obrist, *Interviews volume I* (Milan: Edizioni Charta, 2003), 704.

[70] Naomi Klein, *No Logo* (New York: Picador, 2002), 24.

Murakami makes clear that the bottom line for himself is nothing short of artistic immortality, like that achieved by Duchamp, which he sees and covets from Cattelan. His kowtows stick to Cattelan like Jell-O nailed to a tree. It sounds equally sincere.

> My admiration for Cattelan signifies that a thirst for art still lurks in the corner of my immature mind; the spirit of an artist trying to withstand the test of time lies at my core. The credibility of an artist and his or her work is ultimately determined by the artist's frame of mind as an individual, regardless of whether he or she is in the middle of a mass consumer society or in the world of noble contemporary art where the works are valued for their rarity.[71]

Cattelan doesn't seem the least bit interested in producing any*thing* new. Instead, his objects function as props, components in an apparatus that projects an avatar of himself qua brand maker; a sort of "Cattelan-ness" invoking the persona of a peevish modern-day flaneur or jester— carefully witty and outrageous at just the right time, with just the right people, in just the right way. However ineffectual the archetype may be, the flaneur and jester have been traditionally granted the privilege to see the world from a disinterested point of view. With that privilege comes the provisional license to report their observations out loud—provided that they do so in an entertaining and artful manner. Whether Cattelan is dredging up old Italian folktales (with anthropomorphized taxidermied animals), works by Duchamp,

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[71] Takashi Murakami quoted in Subotnick & Gioni, "Economy of Attention" *Parkett,* 168.

Manzoni and Klein, or revisiting dematerialized presentations from the '60s and '70s (as in the Whitney Biennial 2004), or his own private '80s (see *Charley 03*), he recycles rather than innovates, continually announcing that the art environment has re-"new"-ed itself. He can bring these things back now, because we, the audience, and our environment have changed so much (he implies) since such things were considered *au courant*.

Cattelan's trick of conjuring critical temporal distance out of thin air may have been borrowed from Haim Steinbach: a master of the transparent con. It was Steinbach who I first heard, in a lecture at Rhode Island School of Design in 1989, shamelessly conflate the work of *conceptual artists* with the work of *con artists*. Nancy Spector wrote (in 1993) "Steinbach is a present-day Warhol, who unabashedly holds a mirror to our civilization."[72] Steinbach flattered those in the art world by telling them they were so ahead of their times, they could appreciate contemporary pop culture as if it were camp and retro while it was still *de rigueur* to the masses. He effectively constructed a mystique for Wal-Mart would-be landfill, (which already recycled old tropes such as lava lamps—not from hippie days, but manufactured in China in the late 80's, for sale at malls across America) by simply recontextualizing it *á la* Duchamp, on a modernist wedge-shaped shelf in a gallery. This brought fine art closer to the commodity than Warhol ever did, but somehow without the tension. Perhaps it was because Steinbach's work was missing a critic like Arthur Danto expressing apoplexy that "The End Of Art" had come, as he shook his finger

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[72] Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, *Osmosis: Ettore Spalletti and Haim Steinbach,* March 19 - May 9,1993 New York: Rizzoli, 13-23.

at Warhol's *Brill-O Boxes*. Or maybe it was precisely because the art world had not ended, despite Danto's or Donald Kuspit's barking for contemporary work to be labeled with the ridiculously clumsy moniker "post-art". Steinbach's lava lamps just seemed *a propos* to the times. They came into contact with the public having been well-lubricated in the press with balmy reassurance and a sense of surrender that closely mirrored the public reaction of Reaganomics: finally, it is all permitted.

Five

NOTHING TO SAY IT'S ALL OK
The Crisis Is The Criticism

"When a stripper takes off her clothes,
the viewers become her clothes."
-Marshal McLuhan, quoted by Chuck Palahniuk[73]

In a parody of the author photo, *Artforum* photographs The Wrong Gallery trio, Maurizio Cattelan, Massimiliano Gioni and Ali Subotnick apparently naked, literally and figuratively, in bed together[74]. This exposure not only illustrates their relationship to one another and their interface with the rest of the art world, but it also demonstrates a willingness to explore the liberties they will be permitted to take, in exposure of the game at large.

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[73] "The Unexpected Romantic: An Interview with Chuck Palahniuk" By Tamara Straus, AlterNet. posted June 19, 2001. http://www.alternet.org/story/11049/ (accessed March 20 2005)

[74] "Contributors" *Artforum* (December 2004), 10. Also reprinted full color in *Artforum* (October 2005), 230.

If we are to accept Gioni and Subotnick's position from "The Economy Of Attention" that consensus is now taken as an "undifferentiated fact, an extreme marketing tool," entirely constructed and not analyzed, there remains a problem as to what exactly an art writer has left to do. The crisis of art in relation to the mass consumer is accompanied with a crisis in criticism in the face of mass consensus. Gioni and Subotnick's opinion certainly takes a great deal of the risk out of the business of expressing one's own beliefs, offering in its place the supposedly awesome power to upset the polls or ratings. They continue:

> In this context, expressing one's own beliefs is no longer an act of freedom or an exercise in critical analysis: the very moment we express our ideas, we are bound to surrender to the power of statistics. This logic seems to spread invariably to any field of contemporary life. In the blockbuster-oriented culture, quality itself often becomes a function, a Neilson rating, while statistics are used as weapons to ensure a following to either a film or a president.[75]

Sadly, having been relieved of the burden of having to defending one's beliefs, there remains little in the way of opinion for the writer on contemporary art to say.[76] What passes for criticism under this regime is reduced to some mute applause-o-meter gesture,

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[75] Subotnick & Gioni, "The Economy Of Attention," *Parkett 69*, 165

[76] A point mourned lugubriously in the "Round Table: The Present Conditions of Art Criticism" *October* 100, themed "Obsolescence." 200-228.

indicating one of two possible binary responses: thumbs-up or thumbs-down.

Gioni and Subotnick's position cynically asserts both that there is no such thing as an independent critic, and that readers are similarly restrained from making any judgments by thinking on their own. While I don't completely disagree with the former, and may share some misgivings about the latter, taken literally, their claims suggest it would become futile if not impossible to continue reading (or writing) about art as anything other than a foregone conclusion. Particularly in the attention driven economy, one needs to feel that our expressed opinions and judgments be, if not validated, at least counted (however much this method may be overdue for re-examination in democratically ensuring a following to a president). Statistics may be used as weapons, but they are not an abstract power nor do they come from nowhere. Statistics, like images and politicians, are supposed to *represent* – statistics *of what* exactly? Are statistics really reflective of mass opinion, or do they say more about the people who design the polling questions? Can not such surveys and reports through which statistics are collected be fixed into hegemonic expressions of forced choice? Weapons or statistics are like any technology; they hold no power in and of themselves, their danger comes from who is pointing them and in which direction.

This is an argument that Charlton Heston never tires of making in defense of the Constitutional Second Amendment (the right to bear arms). “Weapons don’t kill people; people kill people.” To blame statistics and ratings for the surrender of our First Amendment, (freedom of speech and press) is to deceptively divert attention away from those who may disagree, and let the blame fall on the only means of doing so.

To put their above statements in context, the citations from “The Economy of Attention; Art And Radical Thinking In Times Of Strategic Consensus” were meant as conversation stimulants to which a panel of eight artists, writers, and curators contrubuted reactions. Despite their claims, Subotnick and Gioni provide no logical excuse to curb either critical thinking or its free expression; their tactic is tangent with Cattelan’s, namely to provoke controversy.

Wayne Koestenbaum tackles these larger questions concerning the blunting edge on the sword of criticism in an age of marketing with the essay “Why Bully Literature?”. He describes why a critic, in his case literary, would want to write at all in an attention driven economy. He offers two reasons: money (at worst a kind of slavery) and legitimacy (at best a type of honor), but both seem interdependent. Newspaper and magazine critics write for money and legitimacy. The more of the latter they can accrue, the more of the former can be charged for their writing. The more attention they receive, the more often in the future people will turn their attention to the writer's columns, and the more money advertisers will pay to share the pages of the magazine with them. It would be naïve to deny that this affects not only what kind of work gets written about, but also how it is covered. Academics also write for legitimacy, to secure a position in an academic institution (as well as, presumably, out of passion for their subject matter). Scholars, Koestenbaum says, "also write for cultural capital, or prestige—within the university, within intellectual communities, within disciplines—but to remain valuable, cultural capital must inevitably be turned into money, or into a form of professional status so close to money and so suggestive of possible remunerations, that we might as well bite the bullet and call it money."[77] The goal in such a service-industry model of education is to develop fame within one's discipline, better yet, super-star status as a master at attracting attention.

Koestenbaum's essay is an attempt to cut the crap out of literary criticism, a position comparable to Cattelan's criticality in the art world. "Pretending not to have a price," Koestenbaum warns, "is as toxic as any exercise in ignorance: it protects one from the fresh, if unwelcome, air of genuine thought, which may not at all, in some of its finest forms, resemble thinking."[78]

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[77] Wayne Koestenbaum, "Why Bully Literature?" *The Crisis of Criticism*. Ed. Maurice Berger, (New York: The New Press, 1998) pg 96.
[78] Ibid, 97.

For all of his pranksterism, Cattelan reveals the fundamental structures latent in the artworld, sometimes in the form of vulgar skeletons one might prefer he had left in the closet. In the introduction to the catalogue for *Blown Away*, The 6th International Caribbean Biennial, he announces,

> Biennials are a cynical manipulation of consensus. 'Blown Away' is no exception to this attitude. It works within structures, exposing the mechanism of any show, revealing its skeleton but taking away all the meat and flesh. As with any other show, it is an exploitation of privileges, like virginity once lost; a matter of corruption if you will.[79]

> If Andy Warhol or Haim Steinbach held a mirror up to civilization, Marcel Duchamp and Maurizio Cattelan hold up X-ray Specs through which to view *The Bride Stripped Bare*.

To answer the problem of what there is left for the critic to do, Koestenbaum reveals the function of criticism in the following statement:

> Frankly, I don't know what literary criticism is, except a method for chasing value to its lair; an institutionalized style of hunting down profit, under the guise of there being no

[79] 6th Caribbean Biennial

> profit at stake; a highly aesthetic game that is as much a trade as is the design and marketing of garments; an industry that purports to capture the truth of its prey (but is entirely contained by what it hunts); a parasitic practice of commentary that is to literature what pornography is to sexuality.[80]

Seabrook, Koestenbaum and Cattelan are all interested in chasing value to its lair, with few illusions as to what determines value or how it is measured. Subotnick and Gioni have stated that consensus with regard to value is entirely constructed, presumably through the media. Such an attitude allocates a tremendous amount of power to the press. Popularity and consensus are generated from an accrual of cultural capital defined by the amount of attention given, and translated into status and fame; a Q rating which expresses its power differently than an industrial economy driven by the actual distribution of money and material goods.

Q Scores are the industry standard for measuring familiarity and appeal of performers, characters, sports and sports personalities, broadcast and cable programs as well as company and brand names. Based on the "One of My Favorites" concept, Q Scores claim to summarize the various perceptions and feelings that consumers have, into a single, but revealing, "likeability" measurement.[81] Q Scores may gain something in authority by

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[80] Koestenbaum, 98

[81] for more information see http://www.qscores.com (accessed March 20, 2005)

polling a large audience in order to judge consensus, but can they honestly claim to summarize consumers *perceptions and feelings* by using a few simple multiple choice questions?

Surely this is just a slightly more complex version of the “rule of thumb” mode of criticism, suitable only for Hollywood productions that have already been test screened in the Midwest, prior to release.

The all-thumbs method of registering approval or disapproval reflects the consumer language of critique: does one support cultural activity by purchasing a book, DVD or CD, and adding it to their collection—or not. It is fitting, therefore that the music and movie industry is supported by a discourse of fandom. Deidrich Diedrichsen has noted that the difference between readers of art criticism from the readers of *Consumer Reports* or fan-zines is that nearly all the readers of art criticism have no prospect of owning the works they are reading about.[82] The issues at stake and discussions generated about art are more complex than a “likeability” rating and do not easily translate into the lexicon of spreadsheet analysis. Delivered from concerns about quibbling over price, there remains a great deal of opinion that can be freely expressed in the art press with regard to cultural critique. However, as we have seen with Koestenbaum, advertising may influence the print press in some proportion to a critic’s integrity.

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[82] Diedrich Diedrichsen, “The Boundaries of Art Criticism: Academicism, Visualism, and Fun in Jürgen Bock ed., *From Work To Text; Dialogues on Practise and Criticism in Contemporary Art,* Fundaçaõ Centro Cultural de Belém, Lisbon 2002. Cited from Stallabrass, 171.

So much power is transferred to persuasive media; this supporting apparatus that accompanies any artwork, that one may doubt even the need for an art object to begin with. Advertising, hype, and criticism have metamorphosed into art forms of their own; a Derridian supplement,[83] eventually replacing the things they were born to modify. The lair of value no longer rests in the object of art, but in the quantity of attention lavished upon any behavior deemed artistic. Backed by media coverage from Gioni and Subotnick, as well as New York Times critic Roberta Smith and many others, Cattelan can afford to experiment with the omission of any material objects whatsoever. In so doing, he allows the creators of hype to embroider their prose onto the emperor's new arraignments,[84] as in his project at the Whitney Biennial 2004, the omission of any artwork at all on display at the 6th International Caribbean Biennial, and all but the merest token of flattened symbolic space in which to display work at The Wrong Gallery.

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[83] Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology* (trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak) Baltimore; Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976.

[84] Mea culpa…

Six

FROM THE AESTHETICS OF ADMINISTRATION TO THE WRONG KIND OF ATTENTION

Just as there is a market economy, we have seen the identification of an attention economy. In both, exchanges of value are transacted. The term "attention economy" first came to my attention in 1997, when an article by Michael Goldhaber appeared in *Wired* Magazine.[85] At the time attention was a hot topic. Most of the study being done related specifically to Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD), an epidemic in The United States. Several psychologists hypothesized that new technologies were revolutionizing the way children's developing minds are exposed to information, and that educational institutions were not evolving fast enough to keep up. In the wake of tremendous advances in information and display technology from the previous decade, due to widespread deployment and adoption of the internet, it had become essential not only to reconsider our understanding of the

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[85] Michael Goldhaber, "Attention Shoppers" *Wired 5.12* (December 1997), http://www.wired.com/wired/archive/5.12/es_attention.html (accessed Jan 20, 2005)

reception of information and its display in general, but also specifically to update some of our assumptions about the very nature of attention itself.

Goldhaber conceptualized the problem with a radical idea: through the use of new media technologies, *attention* has become a kind of *property*, one of the last truly limited resources necessary to everyone. Therefore, attention can be a viable basis for a new economy. Attention, he said, can be accrued like capital, and exchanged like currency. This economy, however, is of a distinctly different kind from the industrial economy of material commodities which preceded it. It is governed by an altogether different set of rules which affects not just the movement of goods but also the structure of our cultural institutions, lifestyles, and values.

Economies, like evolution, usually change very slowly; but when they do, they can metamorphose suddenly, in what Darwin's critic Stephen J. Gould, called "punctuated equilibria" – evolution by leaps and bounds. Goldhaber uses the example of the discovery of the New World five hundred years ago as the instigator of change from a feudal to an industrial economy. Today, colonization of cyberspace, in conjunction with the emergence of global capitalism, is again drastically altering the values and economics of everyday transactions, moving us from an industrial to an attention economy.

Under European Feudalism, the economy was based on the idea of “property” in terms of land ownership. Ownership of the land meant control over what happened on it. The people who occupied that land became an extension of the owner’s property. Those who lived on property they did not own were indebted to those who heild the titles to the land. In this way hierarchy was organized, with the landowners being known by their titles such as Duke, Earl, Prince, Lord etc. The peasants provided all the service labor, and in return were politically protected from oppression by other nobility, who were often feared and reputed to be less beneficent dictators, in order to ensure a loyal and adequate labor force. At the height of the Enlightenment, when the New World (America) was organizing its government, European aristocracy assumed that the feudal model would be put in place, but instead, a newer industrial economy took hold, which flourished and eventually migrated back to Europe.

With the coming of the industrial age, property came to be measured in *goods*. Businesses do not need to own the land on which their factories stand, nor take responsibility for those who live or work in them. Value is defined by the inventory of their products, the brick and mortar of their buildings, and the machines necessary for production. Access to raw materials and a labor force are still required, but such resources are not exclusive and therefore forced to compete. The primary responsibility in an industrial business is to the investor, rather than to the peasants or workers. The insubstantive fears of poverty and cultural exclusion maintain order in the service ranks. In the industrial paradigm, wealth is valued in terms of money as opposed to land or title as the most easily transferable standardized material. A successful merchant could even purchase a title from the impoverished aristocracy. The older Feudal order still exists, but it has lost its value; the industrial one has superceded it. Today, the new world being occupied, governed, and organized is cyberspace.[86]

Early new media theorists such as Alan Toffler refer to the current era as the *information age*, emerging out of the older industrial one. But information cannot be the basis for a new economy in the way industrial products have been. For one thing, information, such as that which can be had via new technologies, is unlimited; we are all drowning in it. Secondly, it is free. It costs nothing to copy information at home on re-recordable media. Conversely, in the industrial regime, corporations like General Motors became rich by combining its resources (its factories, its manpower, and its money) to make cars. Each car loaded onto the truck slightly drained the company of its resources.[87] A finite amount of material was transformed into a finite commodity.

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[86] And, increasingly, the former communist blocks recently opening to free trade…

[87] Alvin Toffler and the Third Wave http://www.skypoint.com/members/mfinley/toffler.htm (accessed March 20, 2005)

It is exactly this type of industrial factory that Andy Warhol emulated, churning out paintings as products. But Warhol also anticipated, and some say inaugurated the attention economy, as he recognized the limitations of the industrial one.[88] The art of the appearance, the interview (both his behavior in interviews and publication of the periodical titled *Interview),* and the marketing of the bohemian lifestyle as a team of insiders, one big dysfunctional family, all promoted this transformation charting the map for artists to follow if they really want to attract attention.

Today, the only limited resource (aside from the electronic hardware—soon to be ubiquitous), in contrast to the vast supply of information available on the World Wide Web is that of a viewer's attention. For this reason, Goldhaber suggests that attention is the natural economy of cyberspace. Computers have revolutionized the entertainment and culture industry. What is less obvious is how this affects our reception of artwork within the art world. According to Subotnick and Gioni, contemporary art can now compete and be compared to the culture industry of films and publishing because they all are jockeying for the same limited resource: attention.

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[88] for more on the conceptual side of image management see description of Leo Castelli and Seth Siegelaub's influence on Warhol in Alexander Alberro, *Conceptual Art and the Politics of Publicity*, Canbridge, MIT Press, 2003.

Maurizio Cattelan is playing by the rules applicable to the attention economy in an art world based on the older and more obsolescent industrial economy. A gallery whose main business is selling objects requires not only the space to exhibit them but also storage facilities, an entire industry of art shippers, handlers, dealers, and gallerists. Thomas Crow refers to this as the entrenched commercial apparatus of distribution,[89] a network of businesses supplemental to the artist, with a vested interest in standardizing the artwork as a manageable commodity. By its station as a meta-venue, The Wrong Gallery can forego most of these services and allow its artists temporary freedom from the pressures of commodification. Such emancipation is bound to attract a large amount of attention, both to gallery and artist alike. Which, ultimately, is the desired bottom line.

Cattelan has expanded his enterprise to include the art press as a context, not just with The Wrong Times, but with two periodicals, *Permanent Food* and *Charley*, which compete for shelf space at commercial bookstores and magazine stands as does Warhol's *Interview* (still) and Duchamp's magazines had in their time. Duchamp produced two periodicals: *Blind Man* and the curiously named *Rongwrong,* another more obscure magazine which lasted for only one issue. I asked Ali Subotnick if there was any connection between *Rongwrong* and the naming of The Wrong

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[89] See Crow quotations in "Why The Wrong Gallery?"

Gallery. She replied, "Jeffrey [Deitch] was talking with Maurizio about a show and he said something like (and don't quote me on this) [sorry, Ali] 'so and so is a great artist but he/she's showing with the wrong gallery.' so that gave us the idea for the name. Simple as that. The Duchamp connection we discovered later, so it's pure coincidence."[90]

Permanent Food now in its twelfth edition, was founded in 1995 by Cattelan and Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster, who worked together for only the first few issues. Cattelan seems to assemble an editorial staff out of whoever happens to be around. It consists entirely of reprinted images, sometimes entire pages from other publications, magazines and art catalogues culled from raids on his local megastore. In a *Vogue* interview with Dodie Kazanjian Cattelan "explains" *Permanent Food's* working method:

> For an hour this afternoon, my office will be Barnes and Noble. Oh, *Chérie* why don't you do the next issue? We go to Barnes and Noble, flip through magazines, and when we see an image we buy the magazine. Then we come back here and put together the pages. It's a magazine that is done in 24 hours. Yesterday the girl in St. Mark's Bookshop tells me that Rem Koolhaas came in and bought my magazine.

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[90] from E-mail correspondance, November 3, 2004.

> Yes! I was so depressed before, and after I was depressed again, but at that moment it was like *woooo!*[91]

Charley is produced in a similar style, but each edition (four to date) is more theme-based. The Wrong Gallery Team of Subotnick and Gioni work together with Cattelan to compile its pages. The first edition contains images of the work of 400 emerging artists. *Charley 02* consists of post cards from New York art openings in the season 2001–2002. *Charley 03* contains photographic reproductions of 100 mostly forgotten works by 1980s artists in contradistinction with the two-volume *Artforum* set published at the same time that principally recognized work which had found its way to important collections. The Forthcoming *Charley 04* is rumored to limit itself to pictures of substantial permanent collections from major international museums and art institutions. Flipping through these publications is like watching someone else channel surf, or a visual DJ remix of image juxtapositions. They are contents without a table of contents, indexical without an index. Whichever images caught the team's attention became assimilated. None of the images are reprinted with permission, and Cattelan has yet to be sued.

As a legal entity, The Wrong Gallery maintains its status as a "no-profit" gallery.[92] This is not to be confused with a Non-Profit,

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[91] Maurizio Cattelan quoted by Dodie Kazanjian, "The Lying Game," *Vogue*, (Feb 2001 v191 i2) 272.

501(C)3, tax-exempt organization, which would require writing a charter and having a board, as well as making the case that The Wrong Gallery would provide a significant contribution to benefit the public and/or the neighborhood. By remaining privately controlled and funded, it has exclusive control over any content it delivers.

While it is true that The Wrong Gallery does not sell the work on display and so can declare itself no-profit, it is only the financial art market that it avoids. In the market share for attention, which can often be redeemed elsewhere for money, The Wrong Gallery plays a prominent role. Using the logic of a flagship store, it is tolerable to be a loss leader if one promotes brand identity (however hard it may be to look at its modest means as a flagship store). If the competition amongst displays of artwork is calibrated for value in terms of dollars, then it is true that The Wrong Gallery operates at a financial loss. In the 1980s though, record losses in art sales could be turned into an advantage – art patronage and sponsorship could be used as a means to launder money for corrupt politicians and organized crime.[93] The Wrong Gallery,

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[92] See "Acknowledgements," *The Wrong Times,* (Los Angeles; American Foothills Publishing, 2004), 23., from which is drawn the epigraph to "Why The Wrong Gallery? *At The Wrong Times.*"

[93] "Government curbs on profiting from Real Estate were stepped around by sellers 'buying' a painting on the understanding that it would soon be bought back from them at perhaps ten times the original price." Peter Watson, *from*

however, understands that artwork has always been in competition for something else: attention.

The difficulty with attention as the basis for a new economy is that, unlike money, it is awkward to measure. Websites can count hits, or links, but one can never be certain if anyone actually reads them. Information regarding where attention is focused is valued most highly by advertisers, who statistically analyze every second of television from Superbowl half-time to the late night infomercial, allotting to each a price contingent upon the projected number of expected viewers – actually counted in numbers of “sticky eyeballs”. Likewise each page of a magazine and every billboard is assessed as if it were commercial real estate: valued for their location in relation to their exposure to a circulating and desirable population. The Wrong Gallery may be small, but its high traffic location and well-placed associates guarantee that it is brought to the attention of more important people in the art world than if it were anywhere else. As a parody, it is a product of its environment, and as such is inseparable from it. It may not classify as a business, but instead be more consistent with the analysis of David Robbins’ incidents of “concrete comedy.” This does not in my opinion exclude it from the distinction of art. The Wrong Gallery is inseparable from its environment. As such, and as the product of

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Manet to Manhattan: The Rise of the Modern Art Market, Hutchinson, London 1992, Cited in Stallabrass, 106.

a number of artists collective work, I have no trouble considering The Wrong Gallery and its affects as art pieces.

Curator Francesco Bonami has compared Cattelan's showmanship to the shaman-ship of Joseph Beuys and Andy Warhol, including their alarming physical appearance. Cattelan's Pinocchio-like nose has become a branding tool comparable to Warhol's fright wig and Joseph Beuys' felt hat: "In an unlikely collective amnesia, the artworld will always remember Warhol's synthetic face, Beuys's preacher persona, and Cattelan's foolish gaze."[94] All three have mastered the art of attention gathering via a host of rituals involving performance. Beuys was so serious; his performances provoked viewers' skepticism of the dominant culture in his times. Cattelan is so sarcastic, that he triggers some serious contemplation of the culture in ours. The viewer negotiating between these two extremes has at stake his or her own personal investment of belief. The question of who or what to believe in, and how much, has kept audience attentions riveted from religious preachers to the politicians and entertainment stars of today, who increasingly, seem to be the same people.

Attention has always been involved in human interactions, but Goldhaber suggests that in a globalized media culture, attention is

[94] Francesco Bonami, "Every Artist Can Be A Man; The Silence of Beuys Is Understandable." *Parkett 59,* 2000. Pg 61.

finally more important even than money. In “Attention Shoppers,” he outlined his vision of a time when money would become secondary or possibly obsolete in the new economy based on a currency of attention. Already we spend more time thinking about where to direct our attention then we do about what to do with our money. In Goldhaber’s system, money becomes only one mode in a myriad of ways to pay attention, as a form of sponsorship, or as a tribute to a star.

To a great extent, the art market still reflects the industrial economy. Most galleries resemble showrooms of products manufactured by highly skilled craftspeople. When artworks are distributable in standardized units such as prints and photographs, CDs or DVDs, their reproduction is artificially limited by either small editions or large scale output, maintaining the dealers’ and collectors’ authority to set prices. The distinction of rarity alone is no longer valid to separate fine art from mass culture. Industrial production involved standardized trades of standardized goods, including labor; even jobs were standardized within the factories. Without such standardization, exchange rates in terms of pricing could not be consensually agreed upon for anything from a gallon of milk to a barrel of oil. Money, the ultimate standardized unit,[95] is exchanged for a type of property: material objects such as cars,

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[95]Jean-Joseh Goux “Marx and the Inscription of Labor,” *Tel Quel 33,* 1968 Reprinted in *The Tel Quel Reader* (Ed. Patrick Ffrench and Roland Francois Lack) London, Routledge. 1989.

food, and printed books. This standardization has structured dichotomies defining contemporary lifestyles of the past, between home/work, work/leisure, and production/consumption. It is impossible to ignore that recent computer technology has dissolved these dichotomies.

More than ever, people are telecommuting from their home offices, via computers that are always on and cell phones that have no "off" button. French theorist Sylvere Lotringer commented recently, "Americans cannot seem to stop working: not content to merely watch a film, they feel obligated to supervise the entertainment industry."[96] Our lifestyle has changed drastically with the advent of the cybernetic media industry and, so consequently must this industry's culture.

The industrial revolution which gave rise to modernism was obsessed with the "new." Inventors, manufacturers, and dealers who created or midwifed the "new" were rewarded with money and fame. The new became the ultimate scarce material, despite its being found – and advertised – nearly everywhere... billed as scarce (to drive up its desirability) but in reality, always readily available (from the right people), for a dear price.[97] Money and

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[96] Class notes from a lecture on Antonin Artaud, 2003.

[97] This holds true from the snake oil of P.T. Barnum to the modernist furniture sales of "Design Within Reach." Dave Hickey calls it a "big, beautiful art market." See *Air Guitar*, Los Angeles: Art Issues Press,1997. 61-72.

fame were awarded to the stoic mavericks of the modernist era who were expected to responsibly submit, honor, and bear the burden of proof as litigated by the book; innovation is policed by patents; manufacture is exclusively awarded by contract; distribution is guaranteed via certificates of authenticity. Without such proof, it is difficult to assert that any object is incontrovertibly genuine, "new," and not a cheap imitation. It is exactly this regulation of power that Benjamin Buchloh refers to when he suggests that art has become the subject of a legal definition. Frustrated by the power struggle for legitimacy, an economy based on the scarcity of human attention unabashedly developed into a star system, obsessed with hyped, recombinant and timely entertainments, sustainably designed to endure only as long as their novelty has currency.

Today, what America exports most is information, be it software or media entertainment. Hollywood films track their earnings in an index that may be more telling than its critics' columns. Even more valuable than the amount of money this export generates is the amount of international attention which is paid to such entertainments, for success in the industry guarantees future profits.

This export does not require the railroads, highways and shipping lanes, or manual labor necessary for the distribution of an industrial culture, making obsolete much of the entrenched apparatus of distribution. By means of the Internet, most media can be downloaded or duplicated at home, on the same machines used to view them. Microsoft does not have to drain any more resources to sell ten thousand software licenses than they do for a hundred. Software companies trade in a third type of property: intellectual property. Attempts have been made to police and control intellectual property as if it were a limited resource such as gold, oil, or GM trucks based upon a mistaken assumption that the difference between information and material is a difference of degree rather than a difference in kind. Such a mistake leads to the legal confusion which has made chaos of copyright law in all areas of media, particularly the publishing industry.

Publishers used to be the liberating distributors of information, a means of getting writing to the people. The role of a publisher today has taken a 180-degree turn, like the firemen in Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451*, who don't extinguish, but rather set fires. Today a contract with a print publisher can mean actually limiting its distribution: the work must not be available in full on the internet, or Xeroxed without sending royalties to the publisher and author who possess rights to the work's future earnings (making would-be convicts of almost all of academia). If information were a limited resource like material, this would make sense, but there is nothing tangible that prevents duplication of copywritten material. Xeroxing does not deplete the value of the original; indeed it may actually increase its value. The more people who can freely access a text, even a fragment of it, the more attention it will receive. The more attention it receives, the more likely people will be to buy the full version. If text were available in only one format, the printed book, then the material of the bound, printed-paper page could become the basis for an industrial economy. With computers, content has been liberated from the paper page, as copy machines had formerly freed the written page from the book. Perhaps it is for this reason, or because of his critique of money accrual as a goal, Goldhaber – who continues to offer his research and papers online – has not published a print book since 1986[98]. Goldhaber seems to have abandoned the idea of print publishing for the pursuit of distinction on the web and the conference lecture circuit.

With the magazines *Permanent Food* and *Charley,* Cattelan, already successful in an institutional milieu, can work Goldhaber's formula backwards, cannibalizing and re-publishing that which has already made itself famous within the print media. While Cattelan has not really taken advantage of the typical new media arts aesthetic, as in digital display technology or cyberspace, his working method would not be possible without such technologies.

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98 His work can be read for free at www.well.com/users/mgoldh/

Maurizio Cattelan denies being a conceptual artist, or any other type of artist at all, preferring instead the title “art worker.”[99] His profile fits that of a new type of international biennial star; the post-studio delegate who threatens to reinvigorate and inhabit an oral culture with aspirations to attain nothing short of mythology. As the camera and the photograph served Duchamp, the cell phone and rumor are to Cattelan. As for the “frame”, in this paradigm, its part of speech has shifted from the defined noun to the active verb. His task at hand thus fundamentally reduced in essence; Cattelan needs only to phone it in.

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[99] A term coined first by Dan Graham who opened the Art Workers’ Coalition on April 10 1969, by delivering the paper ”An Open Hearing on the Subject: What Should Be The Program of the Art Workers Regarding Museum Reform and to Establish the Program of an Open Art Workers’ Coalition” reprinted in Alberro & Stimson, *Conceptual Art: A critical Anthology*, Cambridge, MIT Press, 1999, 92.

THE WRONG CONCLUSION:
Nothing To Be Done

> The most important thing in art is the frame. It tells you where the art ends, and the real world begins.
>
> -Frank Zappa, *The Real Frank Zappa Book*

Maurizio Cattelan's artistic practice seems to be more a business of framing than anything else. He specializes in the type of frame which always mediates an inside from an outside. Cattelan's frame is elastic—expanding outward and contracting inward in order to encompass and display a broad definition of the work of art and its constituent materials. Cattelan's frame periodically ruptures as a container of the visual, to become a subject in and of itself, extending his artistic control to influence the larger contexts of galleries, museums, collections, criticism and curation. The boundaries he draws are themselves framed within an economy of attention, rather than a material-based industrial economy. Attention has become Cattelan's primary plastic medium which he manipulates in both quality and quantity (one of the functions of the work being to attract the right amount of attention from the right kind of people). Cattelan utilizes collaboration, disappointment, controversy, rumors and humor as tools to prepare his audience's reception, and to divide the artworld's insiders from the outsiders. This critical distinction, between inside and outside, governs value within an economy of attention. This elusive value may be redeemable in material worth, but it differs significantly from the more concrete aesthetic values traditionally generated by means of more tangible artistic materials.

The economy of attention trades in an immaterial form of value comprising belief, conviction, and consensus, which can accrue like financial credit, as in Pierre Bourdieu's concept of "cultural capital" outlined in his essay, "The Aesthetic Sense as the Sense of Distinction." The art *work*, specifically the labor itself, is mostly administrative, as defined by Benjamin Buchloh's essay on conceptual art, "From the Aesthetic of Administration to the Critique of Institutions." Maurizio Cattelan doesn't actually make anything, instead outsourcing all skilled labor (such as the sculpting of materials) to qualified craftspeople.

While Cattelan may be perhaps best known for his more photogenic discrete sculptural objects, wax figures and taxidermied animals, his "immaterial" works such as the Whitney Project and his involvement with the Wrong Gallery makes a subject of their complete inextricability from their contexts. The same framing principal holds true for his more substantive figures.

Looking closely at these foundational pieces explains the mechanics of his presentation. Essentially, his naked PR.

Yves Klein brought the term “immaterial” to significance, prior to any talk of the “dematerialization of the art object. In 1959, Klein began to market his *Zones of Immaterial Pictorial Sensibility*, which took the form of receipts for imaginary territories, priced at 20, 40, 80 and 160 grams of pure gold. When a *Zone* was purchased, Klein handed over a certificate, took the gold and ceremoniously threw half of it into the river Seine in front of the buyer and other witnesses (the rest he kept). A Hollywood writer who bought a top-of-the-range 160-gram *Immaterial Zone* reported that “no other experience in art” equaled “the depth of feeling” he had experienced at the sale ceremony.[100] The unexpected pay-off is that the receipt for that *Immaterial Zone* constituted a shrewd investment, the certificate has appreciated faster than the actual gold.

Much like Yves Klein’s sales of *Zones* Cattelan’s entry in the 2004 Whitney Biennial celebrates the “value-added” aspect granted by the context. Liberated from any material commodity, such work is anchored instead to an experience, and enframed by means of a conceptual device, be it wall label, narrative, or rumor. Rather than

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[100] Martin Gayford “Luxury Goods: Absolutely priceless” *The Spectator,* May 15, 2004. http://www.spectator.co.uk/newdesign/article.php?issue=2004-05-15&id=4608 (accessed Jan 20, 2005).

leading, as Buchloh's title would suggest, to the attempted subversive ends practiced by the artists who performed institutional critique, Cattelan's practice uses the conceptual strategy of administrative work as art to openly develop a vital synergy which compliments the power held by more materialist art institutions who host his work. Critics like Thomas Crow argued that institutional critique did far more to strengthen institutions than subvert them.[101] If Cattelan retains criticality, it is by operating according to a different set of rules from these institutions, that of an attention-driven economy rather than the traditional material-based industrial one.

Maurizio Cattelan's tangling with Art's frame is really an inquiry into two important subjects in the United States: Freedom and power. But this pair of aborted transitives is banal, meaningless and inert without prepositional objects towards which they are set in motion.

Freedom *from what*?
And the power *to do what*?

If Cattelan's work at The Whitney Biennial 2004 shows his reaction to being framed within a dominant American institution, his involvement with The Wrong Gallery puts him on the other side of

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[101] See in particular Thomas Crow, *Modern Art in the Common Culture*, especially Chapter 4, "The Return of Hank Herron: Simulated Abstraction and the Service Economy of Art," 69-85.

the looking glass. As co-director of the smallest gallery in New York, Cattelan attracts and wields a surprising amount of power (at least in the art world) for the gallery continually restates the question posed by many intellectuals and even a few members of news media: should there be any limits to freedom—, our most fundamental, if vague, value in America. In his own words:

> Art has this task. It has to become a catalyst for different opinions, a mirror of our paranoias. Mostly, it surprised me that an artwork could open a confrontation on freedom of expression. We are living in a moment where rights are taken for granted and often forgotten. Occasionally, it is useful to stop and discuss them. I don't think I have done anything more provocative or ruthless than what I see around me every day.[102]

Even if one does not trust his sincerity, or suspects Cattelan's subjects are less dear to him than his own pursuit of attention, as Koestenbaum reminds us, this would be a fairly widespread condition that afflicts not only artists (or art workers), but writers, critics and educators. To Goldhaber, the condition is a new universal paradigm, an unavoidable singularity to which we are all subject. To secure attention, Cattelan's practice has been filled

[102] Maurizio Cattelan, Giancarlo Politi (& the readers of Flash Art), "Killing Me Softly; A Conversation with Maurizio Cattelan," *Flash Art,* (July-September 2004), 93-4. This article was composed of questions e-mailed to *Flash Art's* Website by readers and Cattelan's responses, edited by Politi.

with outrageous antics designed to attract attention, under the justification that doing so activates reflection on the part of the viewers. Through a close examination of my experience within his installation at the Whitney Biennial, and through a journalistic approach to The Wrong Gallery, I see Cattelan's frame working a little like a cowboy's lasso to capture, reign in and enthrall the viewer's attention. In times of decadence (the Baroque and Rococo; the present), the facts of an excessive frame can have a tendency to overwhelm its subject altogether.

In an attempt to avoid the oppression of an interfering frame upstaging the subject, much contemporary art excludes the physical apparatus; it has become conventional for installations of large photographs to be mounted in galleries and museums on aluminum panels invisibly hovering a few inches off the walls with no "frame" around them *per se*. A likewise conceit has all but done a way with the pedestal in sculpture. Nevertheless, the abolishment of these supporting materials only serves to foreground the ubiquity of a more conceptual frame generated in the airspace of an increasing professionalized institutional art world context. Although less visible or tangible than traditional frames (and consequently less accessible and more difficult to criticize), this context has surrendered none of the power to subdue the most obdurate subjects, nor has it abandoned its function to steer the proclivities of art viewers.

Whether figuratively framed or unframed, all images are composed to include some things and exclude others. Especially in the case with wartime photography, the frame can function to quarantine disturbing images. It acts as a powerful distancing device separating the viewer from the subject. Its worst effect can be to foster sympathy- a saccharine narcotic which renders the subject helpless and the viewer guiltless. Susan Sontag has advised that the only remedy for the ensuing viewer apathy is to resist mediating attempts to divorce the images which affect us from our legitimate reactions to them.[103] Such an approach requires the dissolution of an exclusionary frame, inviting the viewer to take action by mapping one's own comfort on the same page as another's struggle.

If there is any conclusion to draw from Cattelan's antics, it is that his frame is flexible, permeable, and subjective. In asking questions of freedom and power, the work surrenders to its context leaving any conclusions subjective, and suspicious. The Frame is still an inescapable inevitability in art, be it as thick as concrete, or as thin as a membrane. Context however heady, on its own is not enough to produce art. To complete his work Maurizio Cattelan frames the viewer as the ultimate subject.

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[103] See, in particular, *Regarding The Pain of Others*, *On Photography,* and *Against Interpretation.*

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