

FICTITIOUS CRITICISM AT THE CLOSE OF THE 1960s: PARODY, PERFORMATIVITY,  
AND THE POSTMODERN

by

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Bachelor of Arts, 2005  
The University of Texas Arlington  
Arlington, Texas

Submitted to the Faculty  
Graduate Division  
College of Fine Arts  
Texas Christian University  
in partial fulfillment of  
Requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

May 2008

Thesis approved:

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## INTRODUCTION

The fictional subject, or alter ego, has been widely employed throughout modern art history. Perhaps the most well known example of this is artist Marcel Duchamp's creation of his female alter ego, "Rose Sélavy." Duchamp's fictional feminine counterpart also took the form of a pseudonym; Sélavy was known to sign photographs and works of art in the artist's stead. Contemporary artists ranging from Richard Prince to Cindy Sherman have had their part in forming the long and rich tradition of fictional personas in art making.<sup>1</sup> Though on its surface the alter ego is a transparent cover for the artist, a sort of one-liner, an underlying complexity is certainly to be found upon closer examination. Whether the use of an alter ego complicates issues of authorship or offers a witty and humorous outlet for the artist's creative energies, the existence of the fictional subject in art making is challenging for art historians who strive to locate the meaning of works of art. One is never quite certain exactly who or where the artist is in the web of associations and references created by the fictional subject.

Usually associated with artists and their creative practices, the existence of fictional personas also extends to art writing. Correspondingly, the puzzling nature of the fictional subject as found in art making is found, perhaps to a larger degree, in fictitious art writing. This essay examines fictitious criticism as a distinct and heretofore largely ignored phenomenon, which flourished in art writing of the late 1960s and early 1970s. Though the number of cases of fictitious elements within criticism of the period is to date unknown, three cases stand as exemplary of the genre. As this essay will argue, each case employs fictitious criticism to different ends. Though the rationale for using fictional elements in the each of the three cases is

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<sup>1</sup> Nancy Spector, "Nowhere Man," in *Richard Prince* (New York: The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, 2008), 50. Prince and his art dealer, Colin de Land, created the alter ego "John Dogg" for Prince in the 1980s.

not altogether certain, this essay delineates the unique traits of each and describes their importance to art history. The first case to be examined concerns a fictional critic fabricated by real artists: “Arthur R. Rose’s” 1969 interview with the conceptual artists Kosuth, Robert Barry, Doug Huebler, and Lawrence Weiner. The second example of fictitious criticism involves not only a fictional critic, but also that critic’s fictional subject. Here, I will examine art historian Carol Duncan’s creation of the critic “Cheryl Bernstein,” along with Bernstein’s fictional subject, the artist “Hank Heron.” I will also address a subsequent essay, which was a spoof on a real-life criminal event proposed as an artwork. The final case study in this essay centers on a real artist/critic and his fictional subjects: an essay written by artist Robert Morris, in which he reviews of the work of three fictitious artists.

Barring Duncan’s later essay, which was written in 1974, these three cases came into existence within a brief three-year period: 1969 – 1971. This short but intense time-span witnessed a wide range of vibrant social and political upheavals, including the Vietnam War and the riots of May 1968. Though the three cases dealt considered within this essay have all been exposed as creations of Kosuth et al., Duncan, and Morris respectively, for the most part the art world (which in this essay will refer to the web of critics, artists, dealers, and museums in late-sixties Manhattan) did not initially recognize the fictitious nature of these parodies.<sup>2</sup> This essay aims to come to terms with the genre of fictitious criticism and its simultaneous existence with more obvious displays of criticality within the art world during this tumultuous period. As this essay will argue, these three cases of fictitious criticism use parody in distinctive ways. Kosuth et al. employed Rose as a tool to rebuff the claims of critics over their work. Duncan created Bernstein in order to criticize the “difficult” writing of *Artforum* critics; thus Bernstein

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<sup>2</sup> Arthur R. Rose was seen as a sort of Duchampian prank instigated by Kosuth, Bernstein took on a life of her own and Morris’ fictitious essay was added to the impressive roster of the artist’s critical writing.

functioned as a type of institutional critique.<sup>3</sup> Lastly, Morris fabricated his three fictional artists to enhance his ambivalent, contradictory artistic public persona. In each case, art criticism as an institution was questioned; its purpose, direction, and usefulness to art and the critical discourse that surrounds it were examined and critiqued.

Among the preliminary issues addressed in this essay are: the legacy of the critical method of Clement Greenberg and the impact of his notion of historical necessity as it was continued in the writing of his followers; the reclamation of critical autonomy on the part of minimal and conceptual artists through their critical writings; and the function of key paradigms of institutional critique and their similarities to fictitious criticism. In addition, the theory of the performative as proposed by art historian Amelia Jones will be examined in light of fictitious criticism; fictitious criticism will be read as a performative act. I will also speak to the notion that art history and criticism often construct what Jones terms “structures of containment,” for that which threatens their modernist formalist foundation.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, the shift from a modern to a postmodern mode of discourse will be addressed as it relates to fictitious criticism. Using the ideas put forth by Craig Owens’ in his seminal essay “Earthwords,” as well as literary theorist Linda Hutcheon’s work on parody and postmodernism, I will suggest that fictitious criticism functioned as a link in the transition from a modern to a postmodern mode of discourse. Finally, this essay will argue that the complexity of fictitious criticism suggests that the genre offers a rich store of information for, and about, the discipline of art history itself.

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<sup>3</sup> Carol Duncan, interview by author, telephone, 18 January 2008.

<sup>4</sup> Amelia Jones, “Art History / Art Criticism: Performing Meaning,” in *Performing the Body / Performing the Text*, ed. Amelia Jones and Andrew Stephenson (London: Routledge, 1999), 41.

## GREENBERG AND THE FOUNDATIONS OF HISTORICAL NECESSITY

A discussion of fictitious criticism must necessarily look back to the key forces that shaped criticism of the 1960s. Arguably the most influential critic leading up to, and during, this period was Clement Greenberg. Coming to prominence as a major critic in the late-forties and early-fifties, Greenberg brought with him a particular distaste for the conventions of American criticism and its established tradition of a journalistic, poetic sensibility. Greenberg deemed the “inchoate and disorderly” aesthetic responses of art critics “gush,” to be overcome by a more objective and less “literary, anecdotal, or impressionistic” analyses.<sup>5</sup> In order to pull criticism out of its mire, Greenberg proposed the establishment of “a set of reference points that would identify the priorities in critical discourse.”<sup>6</sup> Greenberg sought to codify and standardize critical criteria, supplanting what he saw as a poetic and subjective approach to art criticism.

This task was accomplished through a strict adherence to the self-evident visual construction of works of art. Thus the formal qualities of works of art served as the sole criteria for evaluative judgments. His unwavering commitment to this method of judgment bolstered his influence as a critic, resulting in “a stature and power in American art never before enjoyed by a member of his profession.”<sup>7</sup> Greenberg’s style of writing was free of the poetic sensibility of his immediate successors; the language of his early essays, published in the *Partisan Review*, was “forceful and easy” and “always straightforward.”<sup>8</sup> This lent the critic’s pronouncements the weight of cultural authority.

The notion that the critic has the ability to influence the art of his day through his theories and criticism is not a novel one; indeed, “the father of modern criticism, Denis Diderot,

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<sup>5</sup> Kay Larson, “The Dictatorship of Clement Greenberg,” *Artforum* 25 (Summer 1987): 77.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>7</sup> Bradford R. Collins, “Clement Greenberg and the Search for Abstract Expressionism’s Successor: A Study in the Manipulation of Avant-Garde Consciousness,” *Arts Magazine* 61 (May 1987): 41.

<sup>8</sup> T.J. Clark, “Clement Greenberg’s Theory of Art,” *Critical Inquiry* 9 (September 1982): 141.

conceived of the practice in these terms.”<sup>9</sup> Yet as critic Bradford R. Collins has suggested, following Greenberg’s height of influence in the fifties many began to view his art criticism as “prescriptive.”<sup>10</sup> Critic Barbara Rose suggested that Greenberg’s criticism became a sort of “elegant road map” of art, charting the course of its historical development in an orderly, logical fashion. This is perhaps the most important aspect of the legacy of Greenberg’s criticism: his employment of historical necessity. As he wrote in his 1960 essay “Modernist Painting”:  
“Modernist art develops out of the past without a gap or a break, and wherever it ends up it will never stop being intelligible in terms of the continuity of art.”<sup>11</sup>

Following Greenberg’s heyday as a tastemaker in the 1950s and early 1960s, he retained a level of authority in the art world, but his theory of the “mainstream,” which positioned works of art belonged to a larger flow of “inevitable” artistic progression, began to be viewed as severely limited. Rosalind Krauss, a former follower, broke with him in 1972, and minimal and conceptual artists openly rejected his method of assigning value to their work. As Krauss recollected upon her early involvement with *Artforum*: “I was working within a Greenbergian system that promoted the sense that there was a progression, a certain kind of historical inevitability. You didn’t know *exactly* what the future was going to bring but you had a sense of which way the choo-choo train was going. It seemed to make sense to me, until it failed. Which

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<sup>9</sup> Collins, 42, n.1.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 36.

<sup>11</sup> Clement Greenberg, “Modernist Painting,” in *Art in Theory: 1900-2000, An Anthology of Changing Ideas*, ed. Charles Harrison and Paul Wood (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2003), 778. Originally published in *Forum Lectures* (Voice of America), Washington, DC, 1960.



it did, in a major, crashing way.”<sup>12</sup> Donald Judd declared that Greenberg was “of course wrong about mainstream history or development. It’s too simple . . . .”<sup>13</sup>

A further complaint against Greenberg’s criticism was that it conveyed a sense of arrogant self-assuredness, in part due to its value judgments and reliance upon “taste” in judging the quality of works of art. As artist Joseph Kosuth vehemently proclaimed in his seminal essay entitled “Art After Philosophy, I”: “Above all things, Clement Greenberg is the critic of taste. Behind every one of his decisions is an aesthetic judgment, with those judgments reflecting his taste.”<sup>14</sup> Greenberg’s view, that “Art is, among other things, continuity,” and that “Without the past of art . . . such as thing as Modernist art would be impossible,” had its opponents and detractors. It is the rejection of Greenberg’s philosophy by artists and art writers during the sixties that has important implications for fictitious criticism.

#### THE AUTHORITY OF *ARTFORUM*

*Artforum* the magazine has much to do with perpetuating the legacy of Clement Greenberg’s authoritative writing and notion of historical necessity. Within the relatively small art world of the 1960s, the publication held a great deal of sway and occupied a distinctive position within the changing art world of the decade. *Artforum* made its move from California to New York in 1967, and as Amy Newman states in her definitive oral history of the magazine, “it was the establishment . . . setting the terms according to which art was to be judged.”<sup>15</sup> This

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<sup>12</sup> Amy Newman, *Challenging Art: Artforum 1962-1974* (New York: Soho Press, Inc., 2000), 169.

<sup>13</sup> Donald Judd, “Complaints: Part I,” in *Donald Judd: Complete Writings 1959-1975* (Halifax: The Press of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design; New York: New York University Press, 1975), 198. Originally published in *Studio International* 177, no. 910 (April 1969): 184.

<sup>14</sup> Joseph Kosuth, “Art After Philosophy I,” in *Idea Art*, ed. Gregory Battcock (New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., Inc., 1973), 77. Originally published in *Studio International* 178 & 179 (October and November, 1969): 160 and 134-7, 160-1, 212-13.

<sup>15</sup> Newman, 114.

statement is indicative of the magazine's key role as arbiter of stridently argued critical pronouncements. Several of *Artforum*'s key writers, including Krauss and Michael Fried, were followers of Greenberg, and the latter stated, "He was the only critic we admired."<sup>16</sup> The magazine's editor, Phillip Leider, encouraged modern formalist criticism and fostered an environment that subscribed to Greenberg's notion of historical necessity; this made for rigorous criticism with firm edicts of quality.<sup>17</sup>

In Greenberg's writings, these ambitious, Harvard and Columbia educated critics sensed an assuredness and conviction they aspired to in their own critical writing. As Judd remarked in his 1969 "Complaints of an Art Critic: Part I," "Greenbergers" (as he termed the critic's followers) labored to "preserve the true art . . . the true criticism."<sup>18</sup> The *Artforum* faction remained faithful to Greenberg's conception of criticism as an objective and dispassionate "discipline," one that tapped into (and implicitly molded) the historical development of art. According to Newman, the critics writing for *Artforum* "tried to establish some *defensible* scheme, a schematic of history . . . in that way they could keep track of art history *right as it happened*."<sup>19</sup>

That this new generation of critics was exceedingly erudite is of importance to understanding the weight their criticism held in the late sixties. Critic Irving Sandler underlined

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<sup>16</sup> Newman, 71.

<sup>17</sup> Frances Colpitt, "The Formalist Connection and Other Originary Myths of Conceptual Art," in *Conceptual Art, Theory, and Practice*, ed. Michael Corris (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 28.

<sup>18</sup> Judd, 197.

<sup>19</sup> Newman, 162. Of course, as previously mentioned Krauss did break with Greenberg. Art historians Charles Harrison and Paul Wood posit, "Krauss was increasingly disturbed by the apparent inability of Greenbergian modernism to address what was palpably the most trenchant and interesting art of the day." See *Art in Theory: 1900-2000, An Anthology of Changing Ideas*, ed. Charles Harrison and Paul Wood (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2003), 977. Her 1972 essay entitled "A View of Modernism" evidenced a clear break with Greenbergian critical criteria; here, modernist criticism's tendency for being prescriptive and its firm denial that history is bound by both "sensibility" and "ideology" are called into question. See Rosalind Krauss, "A View of Modernism," *ibid.*, 979. Originally published in *Artforum* 11 (September 1972): 48-51.

this point in stating: “An academic generation of art critics, trained in your most elite schools . . . is a new thing.”<sup>20</sup> Indeed, Fried, Krauss, Rose, and others such as Annette Michelson, brought to art criticism a new sense of rigor and exactitude.<sup>21</sup> Critics such as Michelson, who brought to her colleagues at *Artforum* “all of postwar French culture . . . Bataille and Barthes and Foucault . . .” contributed greatly to the pronounced scholarly tone of this new academic criticism.<sup>22</sup> As Newman suggests, “With the appearance of *Artforum*, a group of passionate, committed, ambitious thinkers imbued with a fervent desire to promulgate a high culture in the United States, introduced a new form of art criticism.”<sup>23</sup> In adapting themselves to the ever-expanding nature of art during the sixties, *Artforum* critics made it their goal to assess, describe, and *theorize* about the newly variegated artistic production. Among these new developments were minimal and conceptual art.

Certainly, as the *Artforum* critics exchanged ideas and forged ahead in their individual development, a sense of the “discipline” of art criticism began to coalesce. The intensive art historical training of these critics was made plainly obvious in their ruminations on minimal and conceptual art. The authority of the critic so firmly established by Greenberg was undeniably continued, and enhanced, by the new critics. Robert Rosenblum notes that criticism at this time “was really a calling, a laser beam of truth into the future, and it had to be taken with the utmost sanctity.”<sup>24</sup> Indeed, *Artforum* became notorious for its demanding essays, which were seen as

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<sup>20</sup> Newman, 167.

<sup>21</sup> All were trained as art historians, having already earned their Ph.D.s or in the process of doing so.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.* The use of French theory, then unknown to American critics, was ushered into criticism by Michelson, who had lived in France and knew first-hand many of the key intellectuals of the period.

<sup>23</sup> Newman, jacket cover.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 172.

being “difficult” for their own sake, leading many to question just what the role of the art critic was.<sup>25</sup>

For these critics, *Artforum* served as a highly visible and prestigious vehicle for the dissemination of their writing, allowing them a forum in which to communicate their “official language” to one another.<sup>26</sup> These art critics were interested in “instilling” in art criticism “the analytic rigor of art historical writing.”<sup>27</sup> The strengthened intellectual “authority” of the critic soon led to accusations within the art world of the new academic critics’ insularity. There was the growing sense that they were writing for each other, and in doing so, making their writing deliberately inaccessible and unclear. Max Kozloff described this style of writing as a sort of “technical language . . . with its inner references . . . to be recognized by fellow insiders.”<sup>28</sup>

#### THE 1960s: ARTISTS’ WRITINGS AND THE AUTHORITY OF THE CRITIC

Concomitant with this pronounced rise of academism and insularity within art criticism was the fact that artists themselves began to write critical essays. This was, in part, a reaction to what was viewed by minimal and conceptual artists as elitist criticism of the period. Artists wanted to speak and write about their own work and wrested power from critics by doing so. Being among the first university trained generation of artists, Sol LeWitt, Robert Smithson, Donald Judd, Robert Morris, Joseph Kosuth, and others wrote clear, compelling essays detailing both their own work and that of their colleagues.<sup>29</sup> This development highlights not only the

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<sup>25</sup> This was a consistent topic of a phone conversation between the author and Duncan, January 18, 2008.

<sup>26</sup> Newman, 1.

<sup>27</sup> Daniel A. Seidel, “Contemporary Art Criticism and the Legacy of Clement Greenberg: Or, How Artwriting Earned Its Good Name,” *Journal of Aesthetic Education* 36 (Winter 2002): 23.

<sup>28</sup> Newman, 177.

<sup>29</sup> Peter Osborne, “Conceptual Art and/as Philosophy,” in *Rewriting Conceptual Art*, ed. Jon Bird and Michael Newman (London: Reaktion Books, 1999), 50-1. As Hal Foster notes, “the discourse of minimalism was dominated by three texts: “Specific Objects” by Donald Judd (1965), “Notes on Sculpture, Parts 1 and 2” by Robert Morris

interest establishing the critical vocabulary for their own work, but also the enmity felt by artists towards the critical establishment as exemplified by much *Artforum* writing.

In order to combat what they felt was authoritarian criticism, artists such as Judd and Morris rejected Greenberg as well as the critics who wrote for *Artforum*.<sup>30</sup> The writing and publishing of their own essays served to express their distaste for *Artforum*'s criticism, as well as hone their own philosophies regarding their work.<sup>31</sup> Artists such as Judd established a new paradigm of the artist as an able and prodigious spokesman for his own work. LeWitt was perhaps the first of the group to verbally concretize artists' antagonism toward what was perceived as snobbery and elitism in art criticism of the period. In his seminal 1967 essay, "Paragraphs on Conceptual Art," he writes of "a secret language that art critics use when communicating with each other through the medium of art magazines."<sup>32</sup>

Just as LeWitt "began to theorize his work in order to counterbalance" what he viewed as "a general critical incompetence," his minimalist colleagues began to engage in highly insightful critical writing, many using their art historical and philosophical training to inform their arguments.<sup>33</sup> Art historian James Meyer claims, "[A]ll of the leading figures associated with minimalism wrote eloquently about their work."<sup>34</sup> It has also been noted that "many Minimal artists, sculptors in particular, devoted a good portion of their time and creative energies to

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(1966), and "Art and Objecthood" by Michael Fried (1967). See Hal Foster, "The Crux of Minimalism," in *Return of the Real* (Cambridge and London: The MIT Press, 1996), 44.

<sup>30</sup> Paradoxically and somewhat ironically (as I will argue is the case with Morris), many important essays written on conceptual and minimal art, by its practitioners, was published in the pages of the magazine.

<sup>31</sup> Osborne, "Conceptual Art and/as Philosophy," 50-1. In his 1969 essay, "Complaints of an Art Critic: Part I," Judd laments *Artforum*'s "numerous vague mediocre articles," asserting that "*Artforum* is probably the best art magazine but it's still depressing that it's gotten so bad, . . . *Artforum*'s failure to evaluate artists and to think about their work is characteristic of the whole situation of current art." See Judd, "Complaints: Part I," 198.

<sup>32</sup> Sol LeWitt, "Paragraphs on Conceptual Art," in *Art in Theory: 1900-2000, An Anthology of Changing Ideas*, ed. Charles Harrison and Paul Wood (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2003), 848. Originally published in *Artforum* 5 (Summer 1967): 79-83.

<sup>33</sup> James Meyer, *Minimalism: Art and Polemics in the Sixties* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2001), 6.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 89.

explaining their ideas, examining broad, theoretical issues normally left to art historians and aestheticians.”<sup>35</sup>

Through a deep engagement with art writing, artists of the mid- to late sixties established the paradigm of the self-possessed, intellectually engaged artist as a force to be reckoned with in the art world. These artists employed wide-ranging approaches to art criticism, as their writing styles and incorporation of theory and philosophy markedly diverse. Yet it is crucial to note that they proposed an alternative approach to writing about art, which anathema to the “insider” mentality of criticism at that time. Such a practice aimed to assert the power and autonomy of the artist at the expense of the hegemony of the critic. Moreover, this wresting of power from critics was essentially a critique of the critic’s traditional function. As this essay will argue, fictitious criticism took this critique of the institution of art criticism to a new level. Before an evaluation of the phenomenon of fictitious art criticism can be undertaken, an examination of several important precursors of institutional critique is in order.

## PARADIGMS OF INSTITUTIONAL CRITIQUE

Institutional critique has deep roots, which have cultivated and nourished fictitious criticism.<sup>36</sup> This practice entails the revelation of a particular institution’s “oppressive conventions and hierarchies” via the adoption of that institution’s very mode of operation.<sup>37</sup> Although critiques of the museum and gallery structure appeared before the 1960s, it was during this decade that a resolute program of criticality became the driving force of the work of

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<sup>35</sup> Frances Colpitt, *Minimal Art: The Critical Perspective* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1990), 101.

<sup>36</sup> It is generally agreed that Benjamin H. D. Buchloh coined the term “institutional critique” in the 1980s.

<sup>37</sup> Maurice Berger, *Labyrinths: Robert Morris, Minimalism, and the 1960s* (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1989), 120.

conceptual artists such as Daniel Buren, Michael Asher, and Hans Haacke.<sup>38</sup> Indeed, as critic and art historian Benjamin H. D. Buchloh argues, these artists made it their chief aim to examine “the framework that determines the reading of conventional artistic signs.”<sup>39</sup> In doing so, these artists’ works functioned as a critique of art institutions by foregrounding the inadequacies, biases, and deeply entrenched power structures of these institutions. The supposed neutrality of the gallery and museum was called into question by the exposure of their fundamental commercial basis and role as arbiter of value and merit; these artists viewed the art institution as an authoritarian bastion of high culture.<sup>40</sup>

To examine how fictitious criticism functions as a critique of criticism, three unique examples of institutional critique will be examined: first, Haacke’s critique of the Museum of Modern Art in his work, *MOMA Poll* (1970), which was included in the museum’s 1971 exhibition, *Information*; second, artist Elaine de Kooning’s early parody of artist Ad Reinhardt in the 1957 essay, “Mr. Pure Paints a Picture;” and lastly, art dealer Seth Siegelau’s inherent critique of the traditional gallery system through the rejection of his own commercial gallery and

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<sup>38</sup> As art historian Kirsi Peltomäki explains, these three artists in particular “were pivotal to the formation of what gradually became known as ‘institutional critique’ – an investigation of the material and sociopolitical conditions of contemporary artistic practice.” See Kirsi Peltomäki, “Affect and Spectatorial Agency: Viewing Institutional Critique in the 1970s,” *Art Journal* 66 (Winter 2007): 38-9.

<sup>39</sup> Benjamin Buchloh, “Allegorical Procedures: Appropriation and Montage in Contemporary Art,” in *Art After Conceptual Art and After*, ed. Alexander Alberro and Sabeth Buchmann (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006), 33. While Buren installed his signature-striped banners in galleries and museums throughout the world in order to call attention to painting’s oppressive conventions, Asher explored the often-invisible commercial function of such institutions by literally exposing their infrastructures. Asher’s well known 1971 exhibition at Claire Copley Gallery, Los Angeles, where the artist removed the wall dividing the gallery space and office space, is a good example. The removal exposed the usually hidden commercial foundations of the gallery to the viewer.

<sup>40</sup> Significantly, artists involved with the critique of art institutions relied upon the very conventions established and followed by the gallery and museum to make their critical points. Only through speaking the “language” of the institution could a true critique of that institution be realized. This allowed the critique to issue from *within* the bounds of the institution, making it all the more potent. In order to implement their critiques, Asher, Buren, and Haacke relied upon the participation of museum and gallery visitors, who were participants in the myth of the sanctity and purity of these cultural institutions. As patrons of the gallery or museum, viewers were both complicit with the museum’s power structure (as “believing” patrons), while at the same time critical (through taking part in the critique and exposing the sociopolitical interests of the institution). Without the viewer (or, as we will see, the reader) the critique is incomplete.

subsequent formation of a wholly non-traditional “gallery” space. Far more examples of institutional critique occur, but these three instances elucidate the genre of fictitious criticism in several key ways. As Haacke’s *MoMA Poll* acts as a paradigm of the subversive critique of the art institution, it also evidences a sentiment held by many artists in the late sixties: the rejection of authoritarianism within the art world. De Kooning’s obviously tongue-in-cheek jab at Reinhardt is an early prototype of a critique expressed through the vehicle of art criticism. Finally, Siegelau acted as a dealer and advocate for Kosuth, Barry, Huebler, and Weiner, who were implicated in Siegelau’s egalitarian political views by close association.<sup>41</sup>

Haacke’s interventions in the museum site have deep ties to the tumultuous state of affairs within the art world during the late sixties, and his work is generally viewed as an earlier paradigm of institutional critique. He was but one of the many supporters, activists, and campaigners for economic, social, and political reform during the Vietnam War, Kent State shootings, and especially the riots of 1968. As Buchloh argues, “His work is based on the idea that cultural production and reception have become increasingly subjected to relations and interests of power operating outside the producer’s control . . . . Haacke sees the aesthetic construct as constituted primarily by the political associations of high cultural *institutions* as well as by the ideological uses of high cultural representations.”<sup>42</sup> It is this very “high cultural institution” that Haacke exposed as ideologically corrupt in his contribution to MoMA curator Kynaston McShine’s 1970 exhibition, *Information*.

Viewed by Haacke as his “first really political work,” the *MoMA Poll* consisted of two transparent plastic, official looking ballot boxes in which viewers were asked to place their responses to the question: “Would the fact that Governor Rockefeller has not denounced

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<sup>41</sup> Siegelau’s critique of the traditional commercial gallery system also has ties to Kosuth et al.’s practices as conceptual artists.

<sup>42</sup> Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, *Neo-Avant-Garde and the Culture Industry* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2000), 207.



President Nixon's Indochina policy be a reason for you not to vote for him in November?"<sup>43</sup>

"Yes" votes were to be placed in the box to the viewer's left, "no" votes in the box to the right.

This question called attention not only to Nelson Rockefeller's political affiliations; it also highlighted the Museum's involvement in political affairs due to its deep ties to the socially prestigious and politically active Rockefeller family. Those who were more than merely occasional visitors to the museum would most likely have been aware of Rockefeller's powerful position as its former president and chairman of the board. In addition, the Rockefeller family had a large part in the founding and continued operations of the Museum.<sup>44</sup>

By calling attention to the implications of Rockefeller's political policies for the museum, Haacke exposed the institution's politically neutral position as a cultural establishment, solely concerned with edifying and enriching the lives of its patrons, as a myth. Through working within the parameters of the museum exhibition format, Haacke was able to reveal the ideological and political underpinnings of the museum. As Rosalyn Deutsche explains, "The question, mounted on the museum wall, not only interrogated spectators about their own political leanings but encouraged them to interrogate, in turn, modernist assumptions about the museum's status as a neutral arena."<sup>45</sup> Haacke's poll acted not as a conventional aesthetic object presented for the viewer's contemplation, but also as a signifier of the carefully concealed political interests of the museum, so often presented to the public as an impartial keeper of cultural values and refined standards.

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<sup>43</sup> Rosalyn Deutsche, et al., *Hans Haacke: Unfinished Business*, ed. Brian Wallis (New York: The New Museum of Contemporary Art; Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1986), 86.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 86. Rockefeller was up for reelection the year of the exhibition and his political involvements had important implications for the Museum.

<sup>45</sup> Rosalyn Deutsche, "Property Values: Hans Haacke, Real Estate, and the Museum," in *Hans Haacke: Unfinished Business*, ed. Brian Wallis (New York: The New Museum of Contemporary Art), 26.

My second example of the critique of institutions, Elaine de Kooning's essay, "Pure Paints a Picture," appeared in the June 1957 issue of *Art News* magazine.<sup>46</sup> De Kooning's choice of the name "Pure" made reference to artist Ad Reinhardt. Reinhardt, termed the "black monk" of painting due to his severely reductive all-black canvases, was notorious for his aim to eradicate any pictorial illusion or expression from his paintings. De Kooning used her art column as a vehicle for parody and delivered an obvious and thoroughly amusing spoof of Reinhardt. De Kooning's essay reads not so much as an explicit critique of art criticism, but a critique of a specific and well-known artist's radical painting philosophy. De Kooning's essay carries an undeniable tone of jovial sarcasm, evident when she informs the reader that Adolf M. Pure believes in using "simple no-color, or black . . . His shelves are lined with tubes of color he never touches."<sup>47</sup> Moreover, in a clear reference to Reinhardt's insistence that his paintings harbored no hidden ideas, de Kooning reported that Pure sleeps a full sixteen hours a night, so as to remain in an unconscious state as much as possible. She wittily claimed, "Otherwise ideas might creep into his work and ideas are harder to get rid of than roaches once they get a foothold."<sup>48</sup>

De Kooning's humorous essay is intended as a lampoon of Reinhardt. Her essay demonstrates that art criticism can successfully diverge from its traditional functioning as reportage, or as a method of dissemination for the critic's qualitative judgments. De Kooning's early piece of quasi-fictitious criticism, as "Mr. Pure" was a fabrication of her imagination based on a real artist, was an important precedent for the occurrence of fictitious criticism in the late sixties. Particularly noteworthy here is the comical tone of her essay, with its evidently ridiculous

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<sup>46</sup> This article appeared in *Art News* 56 (May 1957): 57, 86-7. As part of a monthly series that featured the words "Paints a Picture" in its title, such as "Diebenkorn Paints a Picture," and it was up to each month's essayist to provide the name of his or her subject as the preface to this header.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., Reinhardt's full first name was Adolf.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

exaggerations and farcical claims. De Kooning's article provides an early example of criticism being used as a vehicle for parody.

The gallery practices of Siegelauub comprise yet another form of critique. Though the dealer had maintained a traditional gallery called Seth Siegelauub Contemporary Art, he closed his storefront in the spring of 1966 to pursue a more atypical practice. After owning this conventional gallery, one where clients came to purchase works of art for their homes and offices, Siegelauub began to focus his efforts upon a small group of artists working in a conceptual vein: Barry, Kosuth, Huebler, and Weiner. The artists that Siegelauub represented in his new "gallery" space used *ideas* as their materials rather than traditional media such as paint, bronze, wood, clay, and so forth. Their departure from artistic convention allowed Siegelauub the opportunity to present the work in a fittingly novel and alternative format.

Siegelauub's new gallery practices were utilized in his first collaboration with Barry, Kosuth, Huebler, and Weiner, the "January 5-31, 1969" exhibition. His hosting the exhibition in a rented office space in Manhattan for the period of one month emphasized Siegelauub's deviation from the conventional gallery structure and appearance. Within the exhibition space sat a couch, a coffee table, and a catalogue.<sup>49</sup> Through this catalogue, Siegelauub highlighted the novelty of the new art. As Robert C. Morgan explained, "By using the catalogue as the central focus of the exhibition, Siegelauub reduced the artists' works to a series of descriptive statements" or "primary information."<sup>50</sup> Visitors to the so-called "January" exhibition entered this minimally furnished room to find an absence of traditional works of art. As Siegelauub famously stated, "You don't need a gallery to show ideas."<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Robert C. Morgan, *Art into Ideas: Essays on Conceptual Art* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 39.

<sup>50</sup> Morgan, *Art into Ideas*, 38.

<sup>51</sup> Alexander Alberro and Patricia Norvell, ed., *Recording Conceptual Art* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 38.

In an interview with artist and critic Ursula Meyer, Siegelauub stated, “My interest in art transcends the present establishment’s limited art-collector scope of communications . . . . For me, power is not recorded in dollars and cents.”<sup>52</sup> Siegelauub continued to explain that he was interested in “reaching a lot of people quickly, not just a circumspect small art audience.”<sup>53</sup> Siegelauub’s effort to operate outside of this “small art audience,” primarily one made up of collectors, museum professionals, artists, and critics, echoed the sentiment expressed by artists such as LeWitt, Judd, Morris, and Kosuth, who openly denounced the insularity of art criticism in the late sixties. Through his rejection of the traditional commercial gallery system, Siegelauub participated in a critique of that system. This sensibility is critical in assessing Kosuth, Barry, Huebler, and Weiner’s use of Rose as a fictional interviewer, as Siegelauub most likely had an influential role in the realization of the Rose interviews.<sup>54</sup>

A general understanding Siegelauub and Kosuth’s leftist political sympathies is important in examining their critical interventions in the art world. The political fabric of the arts community during the period was exemplified by the activities of the Art Workers’ Coalition (AWC), which was inextricably linked to the civil rights and “student movements of the 1960s.”<sup>55</sup> According to Lippard, those artists who did not speak against the system were seen as being complicit with it; thus they were “content to be a water boy to a critic or a mascot to a

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<sup>52</sup> Lucy R. Lippard, *Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object from 1966-1972* (New York: Praeger, 1973), 126.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 126.

<sup>54</sup> Morgan, *Art Into Ideas*, 43, n.5. Siegelauub’s advocacy for artists was also expressed by drafting *The Artists’ Reserved Rights Transfer Sales Agreement*. This was a document intended to protect artists from what he viewed as the inequality of the art market. Siegelauub intended to level the disparities in economic and social power of the art world’s ruling class (collectors, patrons, galleries, and museums) and the artists themselves. See Hans Ulrich Obrist, “Interview with Seth Siegelauub,” *E-Flux*, [www.e-flux.com/projects/do\\_it/notes/interview/i001\\_text.html](http://www.e-flux.com/projects/do_it/notes/interview/i001_text.html), accessed 14 November 2007.

<sup>55</sup> Lucy R. Lippard, “The Art Workers’ Coalition,” in *Idea Art*, ed. Gregory Battcock (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1973), 110.

collector.”<sup>56</sup> This indictment of inactivity, or worse, apathy, offers a vantage point from which to view the Rose interviews. As the organizer of the “January” exhibition, Siegelaub was complicit in hatching of the idea for this group interview facilitated by a fictional critic.

According to art critic and historian Robert C. Morgan, Siegelaub assisted each of the four artists with the drafting and answering of their own questions for the cloaked self-interviews. Furthermore, both Kosuth and Siegelaub were visibly active in the AWC, which worked to topple the inequitable power structures of the art world, such as museums, galleries, and art magazines. It appears a connection existed between Kosuth and Siegelaub’s political activities and the art practices of the conceptual artists. In linking the work of those artists he represented with the larger cause of groups such as the AWC, Siegelaub viewed conceptual art “an art whose spirit, ideas, and practices were linked with the broad social issues of the time.”<sup>57</sup> Subsequently, the fictional critic employed by Kosuth et al. can be linked to this rejection of entrenched modes of codifying, assessing, and disseminating art. Rose can be viewed as having functioned as a relatively transparent, tongue-in-cheek parody of the critic as tastemaker and arbiter of meaning for art works.

#### ARTHUR R. ROSE: A REBUFF OF THE CRITICAL ESTABLISHMENT

Just as minimal and conceptual artists openly denounced the snobbery and elitism of much art criticism through their own writing, a 1969 set of interviews with “Arthur R. Rose” also questioned the critical establishment through parody. Kosuth et al. aimed to rebuff critical claims upon their work with the creation of a fictional critic. Rose first appeared in an unpublished critical essay by Kosuth, intended as a review of an outdoor exhibition organized by Siegelaub

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 115.

<sup>57</sup> Seth Siegelaub and Joseph Kosuth, “Seth Siegelaub and Joseph Kosuth reply to Benjamin Buchloh on Conceptual Art,” *October* no.57 (Summer 1991): 155.

on the campus of Windham College in Vermont. Rose was employed as a pseudonym for Kosuth as he discussed the work of the three artists featured in the show: Carl Andre, Weiner, and Barry.<sup>58</sup> Though this was an essay that remained unknown to the general public, it is likely that Kosuth penned it with the intention of publishing it.<sup>59</sup>

Art historian Alexander Alberro claims Siegelaub “persuaded” Kosuth to “write a review of the Windham College show.”<sup>60</sup> Yet Siegelaub had arranged for Dan Graham, conceptual artist and critic who also ran a gallery, to act as moderator for the Windham College show’s symposium in April of 1968. Graham was an established presence in the art world, having written regularly for well-known arts periodicals and could have easily written a review of the show;<sup>61</sup> Arthur R. Rose was not necessary. In his explanation of Rose’s genesis, Alberro claims that Kosuth used the pseudonym in order to fashion a sophisticated public persona. He paints a picture of the young Kosuth as both “alert to the art scene” and “a skilled advocate of his own work who acutely understood the value of public relations and self-promotion.”<sup>62</sup>

Though this assessment may be somewhat accurate, it seems a simplistic explanation for the artist’s use of “Rose.” Kosuth, like Siegelaub, was interested in the manner in which works of art were disseminated to the broader public; he “tended to emphasize the internalization of criticism by the artists as a means to reflect upon the propositional aspect of one’s work . . . once the proposition was clearly achieved, further criticism – that is criticism external to the artist’s

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<sup>58</sup> Alexander Alberro, *Conceptual Art and the Politics of Publicity* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2003), 45.

<sup>59</sup> Alberro came across this fact during his research at the Seth Siegelaub’s personal archives, Box 5, File 111; Teaneck, New Jersey and Amsterdam.

<sup>60</sup> Alberro, 26.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 177, n.42. Graham also contributed a catalogue essay for an exhibition of fellow artist Dan Flavin’s work.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

proposition – could only prove ancillary, irrelevant, or mute.”<sup>63</sup> Perhaps Rose was Kosuth’s means of effectively garnering power from the critical establishment.

Rose’s public debut took the form of interviews with the artists featured in Siegelau’s January 5-31, 1969 show, and was intended as a form of publicity for this so-called “January” exhibition. Entitled “Four Interviews with Barry, Huebler, Kosuth, and Weiner,” they served as publicity for the exhibition and were first published in the February edition of *Arts Magazine* of the same year.<sup>64</sup> According to Barry, Kosuth and Siegelau could not secure a reputable critic to conduct the interviews.<sup>65</sup> As a remedy the artists appropriated Kosuth’s pseudonym, transforming Rose into a fictitious critic, and conducted their own self-interviews. Morgan suggests that Siegelau assisted the four artists with “developing questions and answers” for their self-interviews. Each artist posed those questions that allowed him to best elucidate his art to the public.<sup>66</sup> In explicating their new conceptual mode of working and unique philosophies on art, the Rose interviews allowed for the early tenants of conceptual art to be hashed out by the artists themselves. Kosuth made clear his agenda: “Formalist critics . . . do not question the nature of art . . . . Being an artist now means to question the nature of art.”<sup>67</sup> Seen in relation to the wide dissatisfaction with art institutions during the late sixties, this session of interviews can be regarded as a form of institutional critique.

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<sup>63</sup> Robert C. Morgan, “The Making of Wit: Joseph Kosuth and the Freudian Palimpsest,” *Arts Magazine* 62 (January 1988): 51.

<sup>64</sup> Given the amount of time it took for submitted material to be published in the magazine (several months), the interviews must have been planned and written in considerable advance of the show.

<sup>65</sup> Morgan, “The Situation of Conceptual Art: The ‘January Show’ and After,” *Arts Magazine* 63 (February 1989): 47.

<sup>66</sup> Morgan, “The Situation,” 43, n.5.

<sup>67</sup> Kosuth, “Art After Philosophy: I,” 79.

These artists' taking control over their own work through Rose is similar to the British collective Art & Language's denial of critical speculation regarding their work.<sup>68</sup> The fictitious critic, Rose allowed the artists to parody the function of criticism and its claims to "understand" the new art.<sup>69</sup> One of Art & Language's "typical procedures was to propose a model which pursued the implications of some current avant-garde works or proposals, and then to subject this to logical and speculative examination."<sup>70</sup> Through this process, "new conceptual objects were generated which were intentionally resistant to normal critical procedures."<sup>71</sup> This practice effectively disenfranchised the critic in order to enfranchise the reader.<sup>72</sup> The critic as a "middleman" between the artist and the viewer was no longer relevant.<sup>73</sup> Art and Language, like Kosuth et al., deliberately eschewed critical attention in order to prioritize the voice of the artist over that of the critic.<sup>74</sup>

Traditionally, the interview acts as a framing device, fostering in readers the expectation that a reliable critic is posing objective questions to a subject – such a format is felt to be fundamentally concerned with getting to the heart of what the artist and his art are "all about."

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<sup>68</sup> The artists Terry Atkinson, Michael Baldwin, David Bainbridge, and Howard Hurrell came together as a group in 1968. The name "Art & Language" was later given to the group's journal, *Art-Language*; Atkinson et al. first published this journal in May of 1969. Both essays by the four editors of the journal, as well as contributions by American conceptual artists, among them LeWitt and Weiner, were included in this initial issue. Art & Language used the medium of language in their work; "The 'publication' of their activities was conceived as a form of art practice." See Osborne, "Conceptual Art and/as Philosophy," 63.

<sup>69</sup> Gregory Battcock aptly stated: "the revolution in perception will necessarily be accompanied by a revolution in all communicative processes, including art and its criticism." See *Idea Art*, 9.

<sup>70</sup> Atkinson and Baldwin, "Air Show," in *Art in Theory: 1900-2000, An Anthology of Changing Ideas*, ed. Charles Harrison and Paul Wood (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2003), 868.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> The aim of these artists was to create work that reconceived the "Greenbergian account according to which modernism entails progressive specialization within individual media." Charles Harrison, *Conceptual Art and Painting* (Cambridge and London: The MIT Press, 2001), 23. Harrison also explained that the aim of these artists was to delineate their positions as artists and to "achieve social control over the meaning of their work." Ibid., 49-50.

<sup>73</sup> Colpitt, "The Formalist Connection," 31.

<sup>74</sup> The notion that artists viewed the critic as ill suited to speak on behalf of their work was succinctly expressed in Huebler's statement: "What I say is part of the artwork. I don't look to critics to say things about my work. I tell them what it's about." See Siegelau, "On Exhibitions and the World at Large: A Conversation with Seth Siegelau," in *Idea Art*, ed. Gregory Battcock (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1973), 171, n.1.



During the sixties critics such as Bruce Glaser and Gene Swenson, interviewing the minimal and pop artists respectively, allowed these artists to speak for themselves. Rather than attempting interpretations of the work, Glaser and Swenson served to illuminate the artists' working methods and philosophies. Glaser's 1966 interview with Judd, Flavin, and Frank Stella, titled "New Nihilism or New Art," has been lauded as "one of the most famous documents of minimal discourse."<sup>75</sup> James Meyer declares, "The interview clarified, as never before, the stakes of the new work."<sup>76</sup> Interviews served as a valuable means with which these artists' clarified their theories and processes, much in the same manner of their critical essays.

Generally, interviews grant the artist and reader an access to inspirations and the decision-making process usually enjoyed by the critic. The ostensibly objective format of the interview allowed the critic to assume the role of listener and audience. Yet the format of the interview, where the critic poses carefully crafted questions to the artist, also positions the interviewer as a mediator between the artist and the reader. The backing of a critic through a formal interview bestows an added boost of critical legitimacy to artist's statements. It is this very assumption that allowed Kosuth et al. to utilize the interview as a comment on the convention of a relying upon the critic to back one's statements about one's art. Rose can be viewed as a parody of the meaning making function of the critic.

Rose made a third and final appearance in an interview entitled, "The Return of Arthur R. Rose."<sup>77</sup> Intended to mark the twentieth anniversary of the original Rose interviews, this set of interviews involved the same four artists, yet in a markedly different tone. Published in Morgan's *Art into Ideas*, these interviews made clear that each artist had moved beyond the concerns that

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<sup>75</sup> Meyer, 87.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

<sup>77</sup> Robert C. Morgan, "The Return of Arthur R. Rose," in *Art into Ideas: Essays on Conceptual Art* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 42-60; also published with an essay by Morgan and the original interviews as "The Situation of Conceptual Art: The 'January Show' and After," *Arts Magazine* 63 (February 1989): 40-50.

had motivated the first interview. While Barry and Huebler distanced themselves from their earlier involvement in conceptual art as a movement, Kosuth continued to examine the philosophical foundations of the work of art. Weiner exhibited his fundamental disinterest in the interview project by re-submitting his 1969 interview. Barry, Huebler, and Kosuth offer a humorous rendition of the original interview and make plain Rose's fictitious nature. When asked by Rose what he thought about the 1969 interview, Kosuth responded: "That interview was an act of agit-prop art theory on my part . . . a rough-cut theoretical base."<sup>78</sup> Barry ends his interview with Rose with the assertion: "You're a post-Duchampian confection, a convenience thought up twenty years ago by Seth Siegelaub and Joseph Kosuth because they couldn't get a real critic to interview us."<sup>79</sup>

It is perhaps this statement concerning Rose that sums up the fictional critic's importance for the group. Each artist's response to Rose in this second round of interviews suggests that the fictional interviewer was not only a solution to their lack of a critic to conduct an interview for the "January" show. Rose functioned as a humorous reference to previous artists such as Duchamp, as well as a defense of the claims of the critic. In "Art After Philosophy and After," Kosuth maintained that artists have a "responsibility to . . . defend [the meaning of their work] against the theoretical encroachment of others."<sup>80</sup> By interviewing themselves, these artists were involved in an activity that can be seen as a critique of an institution that was then under much scrutiny by the artists.

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<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 53.

<sup>79</sup> Morgan, "The Situation," 47.

<sup>80</sup> Joseph Kosuth. *Art After Philosophy and After: Collected Writings, 1966-1990*. Gabriele Guercio, ed. (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1991), 240.

## BERNSTEIN, PARODY, AND THE UNFIXED SUBJECT

The second case of fictitious criticism that appeared in the late sixties takes the form of a fictional critic writing about the work of an equally fictional artist. In her seminal essay, “The Fake as More,” New York critic Cheryl Bernstein writes eloquently of the work of an unknown artist who was instrumental in establishing a new breed of conceptualism based on the unknown and yet unnamed technique of appropriation.<sup>81</sup> In her essay, Bernstein reviews the work of artist Hank Herron, a forward thinking painter who is supposed to have recreated a good portion of Frank Stella’s oeuvre within a one-year time span. After introducing the conceptual framework for Herron’s project, Bernstein knits dense and sophisticated references to the German ontological philosopher, Martin Heidegger, as well as to Ludwig Wittgenstein and Maurice Merleau-Ponty.

In this brief yet titillating review, Bernstein established a solid intellectual support for her subject and his work. As the reader progresses through the text, the premise of Bernstein’s argument is made crystal clear: Herron’s replicas delineate “a new phenomenon in art: the denial of originality.”<sup>82</sup> Bernstein argues that Herron’s work is “surface, narrow, and most especially, tragic, for one is forcefully reminded at every turn that it represents the ontological predicament of our time, indeed of every living being: inauthentic experience.”<sup>83</sup>

Bernstein’s critical insights into Herron’s work were true to the flavor of critical writing of the day and went undetected on the art world’s radar as a case of parody. Bernstein the critic and her essay were the brainchild of art historian Carol Duncan and her then husband, Andrew

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<sup>81</sup> Cheryl Bernstein, “The Fake as More,” in *Idea Art*, ed. Gregory Battcock (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., Inc., 1973), 41-45.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 41.

<sup>83</sup> Bernstein, “The Fake,” 45.

Duncan.<sup>84</sup> As Duncan recounts, over an evening at home and a bottle of wine, the Duncans created Bernstein as a jab to the “high-end” critical establishment exemplified by *Artforum*.<sup>85</sup> In the spirit of the parody, Bernstein’s essay was freely circulated among the couple’s friends and colleagues. Bernstein’s public “debut,” however, would have to wait for more than a decade.

Duncan had no serious intention of publishing the parody until approached by editor and critic Gregory Battcock, author of anthologies such as *Minimal Art*, *The New Art*, and *The New American Cinema*, to name a few. Battcock had heard of “The Fake as More” through the grapevine and was in need of additional content for his 1973 book, *Idea Art*. Well known for the fiendish pace of his anthology publications and appetite for promoting the latest happenings in art, Battcock was especially interested in fictitious entries for his newest anthology. According to Duncan, Battcock saw value in and was delighted by the genre of fictitious criticism.

Although none of Battcock’s previous anthologies included examples of fictitious criticism, *Idea Art* included Bernstein’s essay as well as the aforementioned Arthur R. Rose interviews. Battcock’s interest in fictional entries suggests that he believed them to offer the critical scene an absent, yet provocative element. In his introduction to the anthology Battcock states that the text presents “the student and educator with some of the original and important theoretical documents that helped set the direction of the new artistic emphasis.”<sup>86</sup> Here Battcock plainly asserts the importance and authority of his critical anthology. Thus, the entries within were legitimized.

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<sup>84</sup> Carol Duncan, interview by author, telephone, 18 January 2008.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

<sup>86</sup> Battcock, *Idea Art*, 8.

In preparation for publication in Battcock's 1973 *Idea Art*, Duncan "beefed up" Bernstein's essay and penned a plausible biography for the precocious critic.<sup>87</sup> Born in Roslyn, New York, Bernstein reportedly received her MA in art history from Hunter College.<sup>88</sup> With a monograph on Félicien Rops entitled *The Tragedy of Misconception* in progress, Bernstein exhibited all of the necessary ingredients for a successful and convincing critical authority. That "The Fake as More," or Bernstein herself, would ever be understood as authentic criticism by her readers was never a consideration for Duncan. The young art historian firmly believed that far too many clues had been planted within the essay for anyone to ever take it, or its author, seriously. Duncan fully anticipated that the reader of "The Fake as More" would quickly sight these planted clues, taking the whole affair as a jab at the pretentiously theoretical criticism she saw as a blight on the art world. Yet precisely the opposite occurred. Bernstein's fictitious nature went widely overlooked in the art world, with artists and critics alike incorporating her lofty pronouncements of "non-originality" into their lexicons.

Following the publication of *Idea Art*, Duncan decided to remain silent regarding her fictitious progeny. This "failed parody" had indeed become a "successful fake," or hoax.<sup>89</sup> In 1977, an effort to readdress the acceptance of Bernstein by the art community, Duncan wrote a second essay. Duncan's expressed aim was to rectify Bernstein's mistaken identity with this second creation entitled "Performance as News: Notes on an Intermedia Guerilla Art Group." Here, Duncan exploited a real-life event: the 1974 kidnapping by the Symbionese Liberation Army (SLA) of California heiress Patty Hearst. In this outlandish essay, Bernstein argued that the guerilla group's taking Hearst hostage constituted an exciting, unprecedented development in

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<sup>87</sup> Carol Duncan, interview by author, telephone, 18 January 2008.

<sup>88</sup> Bernstein, "The Fake," 41.

<sup>89</sup> Carol Duncan, interview by author, telephone, 18 January 2008

the realm of performance art. Again, Bernstein's text is peppered with references to the real world; philosophers such as Roland Barthes and artists such as Marcel Duchamp, Allan Kaprow, Chris Burden, and Vito Acconci are woven throughout the smartly written and expertly argued text. The overarching thesis of the essay was that the SLA's performance piece, which commenced with the kidnapping of Hearst, was a brilliant example of performance art due to its complete immersion in *real* life. The SLA's piece was so successful, in fact, that one could scarcely discern its status as art. This is an admirable quality that Bernstein refers to as its groundbreaking "un-art design."<sup>90</sup>

In choosing this highly sensational event as the subject of her parody, Duncan was certain that the readers of "Performance as News" would immediately realize the farce. Among the clues planted by Duncan to tip off the reader that the essay was a parody was that the SLA's bank robbery was actually a "video segment" that "used the concept of planned chance," an obvious nod to artist John Cage.<sup>91</sup> Bernstein asserted, "the SLA chose the disguise of militant political group at the very moment when such militancy was demodé, ripe for un-artistic appropriation."<sup>92</sup> Such appropriation was said to refer to pop art, "whose iconography of cheap ads and comic book graphics was equally antithetical to serious art."<sup>93</sup> In addition, Bernstein claimed that the FBI's posting of "wanted" posters for the kidnappers was a means of disseminating and documenting the performance.<sup>94</sup> Although this second essay made progressively more outlandish claims, not the least of which was that Hearst's operation while in prison was indebted to Burden

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<sup>90</sup> Cheryl Bernstein, "Performance as News," in *The Aesthetics of Power: Essays in Critical Art History*, ed. Carol Duncan (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 221.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid., 221-2.

and Acconci's earlier use of their own bodies in their performance work, the art world failed to recognize "Performance as News" as satire.<sup>95</sup>

Ironically, this essay was included in the published compilation of papers presented at a conference held at the University of Wisconsin at Milwaukee in 1977. Hosted by Michel Benamou and Charles Caramello, the conference was suitably entitled "Performance in Postmodern Culture." Duncan read a paper at the conference, which had no relation to her project of Bernstein. Afterward, Duncan suggested to Benamou "that he publish Bernstein's piece instead of" her own.<sup>96</sup> According to Duncan, Benamou "loved the idea" but unfortunately "died suddenly of a heart attack" (the two were not connected).<sup>97</sup> Following Benamou's death, Caramello continued Benamou's project of publishing Bernstein's paper in the conference catalogue in lieu of Duncan's paper. As Duncan explains, "he loved the idea also."<sup>98</sup>

Through her inclusion in the Milwaukee conference's catalogue, Bernstein was snugly situated in academia where theoretically dense essays gave "Performance as News" a polish of scholarly integrity. Similarly to her first essay's inclusion in Battcock's *Idea Art*, Benamou and Caramello were privy to Bernstein's fictional status. Nevertheless, her second publication did not serve to expose Bernstein as a fictitious proposition. "Performance as News" was taken not as a humorous and imaginative parody of the art world, but as a thoughtful and insightful reflection on the newest development in the genre of performance art. Like Battcock, Benamou and Caramello played a sizable role in the legitimization of Bernstein.

In my recent interview with Duncan, she expressed her view that art criticism during the late sixties and early seventies was composed of a "single dialogue," void of opposing voices to

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<sup>95</sup> Ibid., 221.

<sup>96</sup> This information was clarified in an email from Duncan to the author on 8 April 2008.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

counteract its weighty pronouncements. Simply put, the “high end” criticism of *Artforum* represented the “last word” in a monolithic machine of critical appraisal.<sup>99</sup> Not only was there no dialectic in existence to challenge this status quo, it seems there was also not space for of parody. As previously discussed, this state of affairs is largely attributable to the lingering legacy of Greenbergian formalist criticism, in which art history was used to justify evaluations of current art. Duncan’s construction of Bernstein and her writings aimed to call attention to the circularity of this critical system. Indeed, Duncan claimed to be “a little horrified” at the art world’s failure to differentiate between her obvious parodies and their intended target.<sup>100</sup>

It was not until the 1986 exhibition organized by Boston’s Institute of Contemporary Art, entitled *Endgame: Reference and Simulation in Recent Painting and Sculpture*, that Bernstein’s identity was exposed to the art world. In his catalogue essay for the exhibition, titled “The Return of Hank Harron,” Thomas Crow revealing Bernstein (and Herron) as fakes when he referring to her as a “thought experiment” whose “status as parody” was widely misunderstood.<sup>101</sup> In his essay concerning appropriation based art of the 1980s, Crow claimed that “what is striking is that a knowing, imaginary send-up of sixties modernism has come true in art that is now being taken very seriously, indeed.”<sup>102</sup> In short, it appears that Crow was chiefly concerned with Bernstein’s essay as it related to art practices of the eighties, *not* to modernist art criticism of the sixties and seventies.

In my interview with Duncan, she made it clear that Crow used information given to him in confidence to expose Herron (and Bernstein in the process). In the course of Crow’s formulation of a framework in which to view the appropriation based work included in

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<sup>99</sup> Carol Duncan, interview by author, telephone, 18 January 2008.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid.

<sup>101</sup> Thomas Crow, “The Return of Hank Harron” in *Endgame: Reference and Simulation in Recent Painting and Sculpture* (Boston: Institute of Contemporary Art, 1986), 12.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid., 12.



*Endgame*, the full value of Bernstein's existence as it relates to art criticism was overlooked. Crow did maintain that "The Fake as More" functioned similarly to "the average encomium in *Artforum*," yet managed to completely overlook that the essay was meant as a parody of the magazine itself.<sup>103</sup> Though it was not Crow's intention to grapple with the wider implications of Bernstein and fictitious criticism, I believe that this instance points to a need for the genre to be addressed beyond the designation of *mere* fakery. I am suggesting that as Duncan's critique of the navel-gazing syndrome so prevalent in criticism of the late sixties,<sup>104</sup> Bernstein offers an oppositional voice; she creates a true dialectical space.

The case of Bernstein, however, is not without irony; a paradox exists here. Duncan wrote both essays with the expectation that the reader would identify them as parodies; yet she remained silent when this did not occur. It appears that she became uninterested in calling attention to the parody and allowed it to morph into a hoax. Perhaps pointing out the parody would have amounted to a sort of handholding of the art world, which runs counter to Duncan's project of parody. If the parody went undetected it was precisely because the art world was ill equipped to recognize its faults as Duncan mirrored them in Bernstein.

Literary theorist Linda Hutcheon refers to this ironic gesture or position as a fundamental component of parody. She argues that parody "may indeed be complicitous with the values it inscribes as well as subverts, but the subversion is still there."<sup>105</sup> As we have seen with Bernstein, parody brings with it the chance that its intentions may be misunderstood.<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> Ibid., 15.

<sup>104</sup> This is a theme that ran throughout the author's interview with Duncan.

<sup>105</sup> Linda Hutcheon, *The Politics of Postmodernism*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), 102.

<sup>106</sup> The existence of parody in writing is, of course, very well established and embraced by disciplines such as literary studies. Though there are far too many instances to name or discuss here, there is an instance of parodic writing that exists in an entirely different field and is worth noting here. In the Spring/Summer issue of 1996, the well-respected physics journal *Social Text* published an essay by the New York University physicist Allan Sokal titled "Transgressing the Boundaries: Towards a Transformative Hermeneutics of Quantum Gravity." Sokal's text

"Parody," according to Hutcheon, "is doubly coded in political terms: it both legitimizes and subverts that which it parodies."<sup>107</sup> Through such misapprehension, Bernstein became "authentic" for critics and art historians through the transformative process of initial acceptance and subsequent legitimization. Ultimately, Duncan gave up on Bernstein, stating that "when parody and criticism are indistinguishable, it's time to quit."<sup>108</sup>

The notion of authenticity, that someone or something is genuine, begins its descent down a sort of slippery slope once the object or person in question is released into the world: particularly the art world. As Duncan prepared Bernstein for her initial debut in Battcock's anthology, then again for Bernstein's second appearance at the University of Milwaukee conference, she was certain that the ridiculousness of her proposals would be immediately apparent to her audience. Yet once placed in the realm of academia, she found her fictional proposals took on lives of their own. Duncan asserts, "Bernstein and Herron were easily assimilated to art world concerns of the day and (as I gradually learned) in certain university art departments even became required reading for students."<sup>109</sup> By mimicking the discipline of art criticism in order to call attention to its faults and inequities, she inadvertently reiterated and confirmed the values of its practitioners and followers. In Bernstein, critics and art historians saw themselves and were flattered by their mirror image.

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was sufficiently scholarly, peppered with "difficult" rubric and appropriately scholastic vocabulary. Quite unique to Sokal's essay, however, was the fact that it was written and submitted to the journal as a hoax. According to Sokal, his aim in doing so was to pose the question: "would a leading journal of cultural studies publish an article liberally salted with nonsense if (a) it sounded good and (b) it flattered the editors' ideological preconceptions?" Indeed, Sokal's essay fulfilled both requirements and was voraciously consumed by and quickly absorbed into the physics community. The physics establishment supported Sokal's nonsensical and ridiculous statements; the "machine" of academia appropriately legitimized his essay. See Allan Sokal, "Transgressing the Boundaries: Towards a Transformative Hermeneutics of Quantum Gravity," in *Social Text* (Spring/Summer 1996): 214-252.

<sup>107</sup> Hutcheon, 97.

<sup>108</sup> Duncan, 214.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid., 213.

As noted, Hutcheon views this duplicitous quality as a hallmark of parody, which is in turn a central facet of postmodernism.<sup>110</sup> Hutcheon argues that parody signals postmodernism and works to undermine entrenched modernist belief systems. In her book *The Politics of Postmodernism*, Hutcheon asserts that parody works in postmodernism to evaluate “unacknowledged assumptions about closure, distance . . . and the apolitical nature of representation.”<sup>111</sup> These beliefs, specifically the Greenbergian notion of historical necessity and the mainstream, were carried on in the writing of his followers. It is precisely this modernist insularity that Bernstein aimed to topple.

#### ROBERT MORRIS AND CRITICISM AS IRONIC SUBVERSION

The final of this essay’s three cases of fictitious criticism is Robert Morris’ 1971 article, “The Art of Existence: Three Extravisual Artists, Works in Process,”<sup>112</sup> which was published in the January 1971 issue of *Artforum*. The fact that Morris was a regular contributor to the magazine and that “The Art of Existence” resembled any other spread gave readers no reason to doubt Morris’ sincere intentions. Morris astutely wrote on the work of three young artists: Marvin Blaine, Jason Taub, and Robert Dayton. “The Art of Existence” read as a legitimate article on cutting-edge work.<sup>113</sup> Its format was conventional, complete with Morris’ name printed prominently at the start of the essay, and photographs and detailed drawings of the three subjects’ work. There was little to tip off the reader that Morris article was in fact a parody. Each

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<sup>110</sup> Hutcheon’s section in *The Politics of Postmodernism* entitled “Double Coded Politics” was especially helpful in understanding how parody operates in fictitious criticism. See pages 97-102.

<sup>111</sup> Hutcheon, 95.

<sup>112</sup> Robert Morris, “The Art of Existence: Three Extra-Visual Artists, Works in Process,” in *Continuous Project Altered Daily* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1993). Originally published in *Artforum* 11 (January 1971): 28-33.

<sup>113</sup> Above the bold typeface of the article’s title were situated two generously sized installation photographs from recent Bruce Nauman and Michael Asher exhibitions, which added to its credibility. In my interview with Carol Duncan, she noted that the inclusion of references to his colleagues made Morris’ article sufficiently “art worldly and engaging” to be taken as real.

of these fictitious subjects offered, according to Morris, a novel solution to “studio and factory generated commodity art.”<sup>114</sup>

The first artist examined in Morris’ essay is Blaine, a student at Oberlin College in Ohio. Blaine’s practice of utilizing the earth as an art material, through incising slits in the landscape, is reminiscent of earlier earthwork artists such as Smithson. As Morris described his experience of viewing the equinox sunrise from the inside of Blaine’s slit in a hillside, he padded his anecdote with comments regarding Blaine’s remote, hardened personality. Being very much opposed to the label of “artist,” Blaine was described as a jaded yet somewhat willing participant in the art world, though he bitterly claimed that artists themselves were constantly “getting bought and sold.”<sup>115</sup> In addition to his first hand account of Blaine’s work, Morris also offered several of his own diagrams in order to familiarize the reader with Blaine’s project.

The second artist of Morris profiled, Jason Taub, attempted to harness the power of electromagnetic energy as an artistic medium. A twenty-seven year old artist from San Diego, Taub was said to have come to the field of art through his work as a scientific researcher at Cornell University. Morris explained: “Unlike Blaine, Taub feels that what he is doing is very explicitly art.”<sup>116</sup> In addition to a lucid account of his experience with Taub’s work, Morris also provided readers with a diagram drawn by the young artist and a page from his sketchbook.<sup>117</sup> Again, by weaving references to real artists seamlessly throughout the essay, Morris makes his essay credible for the reader. An example of this is when Morris writes that Taub admired the

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<sup>114</sup> Morris, 95.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid., 104.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid., 109.

<sup>117</sup> Criqui claims that only the “slightly credulous (or distracted) reader, who at this point still thinks he article to be reportage, certainly begins to have doubts with the entry on the scene of Taub.” Taub’s use of radio waves as an artistic medium was in fact very believable, considering that Barry had introduced radio waves as a legitimate form of art several years before the publication of Morris’ article. See Jean-Pierre Criqui, “On Robert Morris and the Issue of Writing: A Note Full of Holes,” in *Robert Morris: The Mind/Body Problem* (New York: The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, 1994), 83.

work of Michael Asher, but found it ‘too estheticized, like all California art.’<sup>118</sup> This discourse between the real and the fictitious serves to legitimize the fictitious characters, bestowing upon them a certain authenticity.<sup>119</sup>

Lastly, Morris presents the reader with the work of Sacramento native, Robert Dayton, a young artist who was rendered blind due to an accident involving a failed experiment with acid. After loosing his vision, the “menacing” Dayton reportedly began to experiment with anesthetic gases in attempts to regain his sight.<sup>120</sup> Conceiving of a complex series of gas chambers, Dayton’s art aimed to understand how varying gases affected the viewer/participant. Alongside a seemingly authentic recollection of his afternoon spent with Dayton visiting each chamber, Morris included believable diagrams of the chambers so as to make the work real for the reader. “The Art of Existence” ends with a summation of Morris’ time spent with each of the three artists, claiming that he was most interested in the fact that “these artists have found an open area in which to work at a time when there is a sense of art having become closed down and constrained.”<sup>121</sup>

Art historian Jean-Pierre Criqui asserts that with the introduction of Dayton, “the text descends into a level of pure farce.”<sup>122</sup> Criqui argues that the projects described in Morris’ article have as their “most striking feature” a resemblance to the artist’s own work.<sup>123</sup> Criqui also identifies multiple similarities between the works depicted in the article and Morris’ own work, both prior and posterior to the article’s publication. He asserts that this is evidence that the

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<sup>118</sup> Ibid., 109.

<sup>119</sup> This correlation between fictitious elements and real world individuals is similar to Duncan’s use of actual events in her fictitious essays.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid., 114.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid., 116.

<sup>122</sup> Criqui, 84.

<sup>123</sup> This seems to be a common understanding of “The Art of Existence.” See also Thomas Crow’s “Yo Morris [critical reception of the work of Robert Morris]” *Artforum* 32 (Summer 1994): 82-3+.

“imaginary artists” are “a group of aliases, or heteronyms” for the artist.<sup>124</sup> Another explanation for “The Art of Existence” is that Morris was interested in a rejection of artistic originality, following the legacy of Duchamp.<sup>125</sup> Maurice Berger has claimed that, like Duchamp, Morris blasted the “private and expressive role” of the artist.<sup>126</sup> He also asserted that “Morris himself was unsympathetic to the modernist obsession with temperament,” therefore the artist “parodied the critical fixation on creative and personal expression by devising an elaborate field of ‘biographical’ information about a group of fictitious artists.”<sup>127</sup>

Though this may be in part an explanation for Morris’ creation of fictional subjects, this reliance on Duchamp as the sole inspiration for Morris’ parody is somewhat limiting. It effectively reduces Morris’ fictitious article to an exercise in channeling Duchamp’s irreverence for serious, high art without pause to consider what else might be at play. Perhaps there is more to Morris’ writing fictitious criticism than this.<sup>128</sup>

Morris was not only active as an artist and writer throughout the sixties, but also involved in the rejection of late-modernist critics Greenberg and Fried. Like others discussed in this essay, Morris was dissatisfied with the authoritarian bent of these critics’ writings, and wresting control of his work from the critical establishment was an important part of the artist’s activity as a writer. With his influential series of essays, “Notes on Sculpture, I – IV” Morris instituted the critical terminology to be used in addressing his work. According to British critic Lawrence

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<sup>124</sup> Criqui, 84.

<sup>125</sup> Bird has argued that “The Art of Existence” is Morris’ “most Duchampian text.” See Jon Bird, “Minding the Body: Robert Morris’ 1971 Tate Gallery Retrospective,” in *Rewriting Conceptual Art*, ed. Michael Newman and Jon Bird (London: Reaktion Books, 1999), 106.

<sup>126</sup> Berger, 86.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*, 86.

<sup>128</sup> Considering Morris supposed commitment to opposing the “iron triangle,” it is ironic that Morris published this essay, and many others, in *Artforum*. This contradiction is, in part, what makes “The Art of Existence” so interesting and multidimensional.

Alloway, Morris “was not telling the reader what his work meant, but providing the theoretical framework for its justification.”<sup>129</sup>

Morris’ rejection of the establishment, whether in criticism or the power structures of the art world, is well known and documented in the literature on the artist. As the sixties came to an end, Morris was increasingly displeased with what he termed the “iron triangle,” the triumvirate of the museum, the gallery, and the media.<sup>130</sup> One art historian has described Morris’ practice as “sharing many of the general concerns” of conceptual art, such as “a theoretically informed discourse . . . and forms of institutional critique.”<sup>131</sup>

Also recognized for his interventions in the political arena, Morris was instrumental in leading a crowd of demonstrators to the steps of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in May of 1970, protesting the war in Vietnam and the domestic violence that was increasingly prevalent at the time.<sup>132</sup> For Morris, the museum, along with the gallery and the media, was one of three authoritarian bodies that comprised the “iron triangle;” he viewed them as not only “the central forces of the art world,” but also bastions “of repression and seclusion.”<sup>133</sup> Morris and his sympathetic colleagues regarded these “iron triangle” as a force to be challenged and overthrown.<sup>134</sup> Berger has argued that Morris felt “antipathy toward art world *institutions* and . . . frustration with artists who tended to distance themselves from efforts to change the system.”<sup>135</sup>

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<sup>129</sup> Lawrence Alloway, “Artists as Writers: Part Two: The Realm of Language,” *Artforum* 12 (April 1974): 31.

<sup>130</sup> Berger, 109.

<sup>131</sup> Bird, 105.

<sup>132</sup> This violence was exemplified by the police shootings of student anti-war demonstrators at Kent State. Morris requested that his exhibition at the Whitney be closed early to protest the war; information taken from the artist’s exhibition file at the Whitney Museum of American Art Archives, New York, NY. Accessed by the author 9 January 2008.

<sup>133</sup> Bird, 109.

<sup>134</sup> In a handwritten abstract for an unpublished book on art and politics, Morris asserted that these three institutions “wield power over artists while maintaining a symbiotic dependence on them.” See Berger, 110.

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*, 111.

Through his critical writings and involvement with the AWC, Morris shared with Siegelau and Kosuth a commitment to challenging art institutions and their conventions. Yet this public persona of Morris as a renegade whose goal it is to subvert authority and convention is often regarded as just that: an illusory creation of the artist. Widely acknowledged as a continually changing his style and approach, Morris has often been charged with artistic opportunism.<sup>136</sup> Perhaps this quality can be understood as the artist's refusal to subscribe to the art world's requirements for authenticity, uniqueness, and innovation. Morris does not appear to be concerned with feeding this modernist myth of originality and artistic "genius," but with exposing the power of the museum, gallery, and art media.<sup>137</sup> Or does he?

Though Morris was outspoken in political demonstrations against the "iron triangle" during the late sixties, he has consistently enjoyed the support of these institutions. This creates a rather complex contradiction; I would argue that Morris' fictitious criticism adds to the paradox that is Robert Morris. Though it has been compellingly argued by art historians such as Jon Bird that Morris was invested in making "explicit the legitimizing function of the institution," I believe there is another layer to the function of the "The Art of Existence," Morris' use of fictitious criticism serves to augment his carefully crafted persona of a politically involved, ever shifting, and ever-elusive artistic maverick.<sup>138</sup>

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<sup>136</sup> Morris is often accused of jumping from style to style without any interest in establishing a consistent, stable approach to art making. Crow refers to the artist as "a challenge to conventional notions of an autograph style." See Crow, "Yo Morris," 82.

<sup>137</sup> Berger, 109.

<sup>138</sup> Bird, 101. Morris' oeuvre is full of examples of the artist overtly rejecting the authority of the gallery, museum, and even art history. A few examples of this criticality are: *21:3* (1964), where Morris parodied Erwin Panofsky's canonic art historical text, *Studies in Iconology*; his "Peripatetic Artists Guild" advertisement (1967), where the artist offered his services at a blue-collar daily wage of \$25.00/hour and ostensibly criticized the notion of the artist as "genius"; and Morris' 1971 exhibition at the Tate, London where he turned the museum's galleries into an interactive, "playground" environment for museum visitors. This installation is considered to be a critical gesture on Morris' part, as it rejected the normally staid atmosphere of the museum. Of course, these activities contradict his sustained reliance upon academia and museums for patronage and support. For more on Morris' various works, see Berger, *Labyrinths: Robert Morris, Minimalism, and the 1960s* and the Guggenheim's *Robert Morris: The*



## PERFORMATIVITY AND THE POSTMODERN

The three cases of fictitious criticism examined in this essay employ parody to different ends. Kosuth et al. used self-interviews to parody the role of the interviewer/critic as arbiter of meaning over their work. As such, Rose operates analogously to the disenfranchisement of the critic as carried out by the British collective, Art & Language. Duncan employed Bernstein as a parody of “high-end” criticism of the late sixties and early seventies. Finally, Morris used parody, and a strong dose of irony, to enhance his complex, ambiguous artistic persona, adding to his cultivated aura of mystery.

Once the fictional nature of the parody is revealed, there is the attendant reflex to bury the embarrassment undoubtedly felt from taking “fakes” so seriously. Here I would like to offer an analogy: between art history’s tendency to conceal references to its acceptance of fictitious criticism and the common Rolodex. This proposition is indebted to Jones’s argument that “works that open up the performative dimension of meaning production” are quickly shut down by art historians who see them as threatening.<sup>139</sup> Within this theoretical Rolodex are categories, separated by dividers, which are arranged in an analogous fashion to moral philosopher Harry Frankfurt’s proposal of a “continuum of misrepresentation.”<sup>140</sup> Frankfurt’s continuum theory aims to locate both mere “humbug” and outright “lying” on a scale in order to assess the nature of both, allowing for the effective visualization of various degrees of misrepresentation. In Frankfurt’s estimation, “humbug” is located on the left side of the continuum, since it is

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*Mind/Body Problem*. In addition, Richard J. Williams has clearly discussed the ambivalence of the artist’s relation to a humanist notion of authorship. See Williams, “The Rotting Sack of Humanism: Robert Morris and Authorship,” *Conceptual Art, Theory, and Practice*, ed. Michael Corris (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 169-186.

<sup>139</sup> Jones, 41.

<sup>140</sup> Harry G. Frankfurt, *On Bullshit* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2005), 10.

seemingly less innocuous than lying; lying, then, is accordingly located on the far right of this scale.

The structure of my Rolodex is based upon a comparable hierarchical scale of intensity, with more obvious, thus “benign,” elements of fictitious criticism filed toward the front. Correspondingly, less apparent, and thus potentially more injurious, instances of the genre are filed towards the back, where they are less easily accessible to art history’s collective memory. It appears that fictional elements of criticism, such as Arthur R. Rose, can rather easily be slipped behind the forwardly situated “lighthearted pun” divider. Examples such as these are relatively easy for the art historical community to laugh off as a joke or gag. Correspondingly, those cases that long convinced, or duped, art historians such as Bernstein and Morris were filed behind the hindmost “they’ve gotten one past us” Rolodex divider.

In order to continue the development of this analogy, it is important to locate just whom or what might be injured through free access to the cases of fictitious criticism I have examined here. Though it is speculative to articulate precisely whom or what is in danger of being upset through the exposure of the contents of this Rolodex, I would like to suggest that it is the collective self-image, or ego, of art history that is in jeopardy. The entire reason, after all, that this provisional Rolodex exists is that art history as a discipline was somewhat bruised by its unsuspecting acceptance of fictitious criticism. Thus the genre was dutifully locked away within the confines of the Rolodex, lessening the blow felt by art critical and historical communities for taking them seriously.

Somewhat surprisingly, with all the interest in artistic alter egos, fictional personas, and the like in contemporary art history, there has been little interest in the investigation of the contents of this Rolodex. The critical establishment has ignored the complexity of the genre that

has parody at its heart. The three cases of fictitious criticism that I have cited were not intended to deceive the art world, but were more interested in inserting parody, and irony, into art criticism. The role of parody in these cases has been glossed over and subsumed by easy, logical, explanations regarding their existence.

An analogous example of art history's lack of critical interest in the aberrant or anomalous is pinpointed in an interview between Jones and art historian Jonathan Harris. When questioned by Harris regarding her abiding interest in the overlooked field of performance art in the late sixties, Jones asserts: "The fact that it hadn't been written about and that it had been excluded was precisely exemplary of the fact that it disturbed these modernist, formalist logic that dominated art history to that point."<sup>141</sup> Jones has identified that art criticism and art history operate in tandem in the active oppression of that which threatens them.<sup>142</sup> Relying on Peggy Phelan's book *Mourning Sex: Performing Public Memories*, Jones asserts, "works that open up the performative dimension of meaning production are 'seen as something that needs control, even policing'".<sup>143</sup> I would argue that fictitious criticism has suffered similar disciplinary censorship.

For Jones, the performative is especially threatening to the modernist logic at the core of much art history.<sup>144</sup> The performative can be defined as those art works that refuse to settle or land on a definite meaning, and is "only ever 'rehearsals,' never final or fixed but always open . . .".<sup>145</sup> As fictitious criticism is allowed to organically commingle with real criticism, it becomes a "real" part of the discourse of art history. The irony and parody inherent within fictitious

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<sup>141</sup> Jonathan Harris, "Amelia Jones Interview with Jonathan Harris," in *Dead History, Live Art?: Spectacle, Subjectivity and Subversion in Visual Culture since the 1960s*. (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2008), 3.

<sup>142</sup> Jones, 39-41.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid., 41. Jones cites Peggy Phelan, *Mourning Sex: Performing Public Memories* (London & New York: Routledge, 1997), 31.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid., 39-41.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid., 41.

criticism, its reception, and its continued existence, allows it to remain forever un-fixed and unsettled. As this paper has suggested, though fictitious criticism has been subsumed by art history's master narrative and placed within the rigid confines of the Rolodex, it continually refuses to offer a pat meaning. Bernstein, and her fictitious colleagues, are multidimensional agents and "mean" different things depending upon their circumstances of time and place; in this sense they are performative acts.

Jones asserts, "judgments aim to secure meaning and value and are thus threatened by the anxious uncertainty put into play by the performative, theatrical dimension of meaning production."<sup>146</sup> This unstable performative element of meaning making, which I have argued is brought into being by the genre of fictitious criticism, can enrich the way contemporary art history is practiced. My aim in this essay is not to unearth Bernstein and her fictitious colleagues only to pigeonhole them within a newly contrived structure of meaning. Instead, I would like to propose that fictitious criticism remains perpetually performative; I believe it is the complexity of the genre, with all of its strange contradictions that allows for fictitious criticism to remain fluid and changing.

This fluidity, which is characteristic of fictitious criticism as a performative entity, is exemplary of postmodernism.<sup>147</sup> Craig Owens's seminal 1967 essay "Earthwords," expertly sites the emergence of a postmodern mode of discourse with the writings of artist Robert Smithson and his colleagues in the late sixties. Here, Owens asserts that Fried's 1967 "Art and Objecthood," which famously laments the "invasion of the static art of sculpture by . . .

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<sup>146</sup> Ibid., 39.

<sup>147</sup> Hutcheon does a thorough job of laying out the various readings and understanding of postmodernism as it is theorized in architecture, literature, philosophy, and the visual arts; she explains that there are as many definitions of "postmodernism" as there are attempts to define its parameters. See the section "Whose Postmodernism?" in *The Politics of Postmodernism* for this explanation, especially pages 10-18.

temporality” actually revealed “the emergence of *discourse*.”<sup>148</sup> This discourse was initiated by the incursion of language into the strict disciplinary boundaries of high modernism. Owens attests that Smithson not only breached the bounds of modernist authority by engaging in writing, he effectively utilized allegory as a means of further disorienting the reader and modernism’s narrow confines.<sup>149</sup> Owens asserts that it is allegory, with its transgression of the bounds between the “verbal and the visual,” which signals a break with modernism and the subsequent emergence of postmodernism.<sup>150</sup> Fictitious criticism also represents a fissure in the smooth veneer of modernist art history and signals what Owens has termed the “non-site,” which is “only a vacant reflection of the site.”<sup>151</sup> The fictional proposals discussed in this essay are just this: non-sites. The meaning of Rose, Bernstein, and the Three Extra-Visual Artists does not reside in them, but in each fresh interpretation of their existence.

Owens asserted “the eruption of language into the aesthetic field in the 1960s would occur with all the force of the return of the repressed.”<sup>152</sup> He also presciently noted that this was “an eruption signaled by, but by no means limited to, the writings of Smithson” and his colleagues “is coincident with, if not the definitive index of, the emergence of postmodernism.”<sup>153</sup> Owen leaves a large window open in saying that the eruption is not *limited* to the writings of these artists. This opening also allows fictitious criticism as a genre to signal the emergence of a postmodern mode of discourse. I rely here on Hutcheon’s assertion that “Parody—often called ironic quotation, pastiche, appropriation, or intertextuality—is usually

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<sup>148</sup> Craig Owens, “Earthwords,” *October* no.10 (Autumn 1979): 126.

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.*, 129.

<sup>150</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid.*, 122.

<sup>152</sup> *Ibid.*, 126.

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid.*

considered central to postmodernism . . .”<sup>154</sup> When placed in the context of Owens’ earlier insight, fictitious criticism can be seen as subverting and destabilizing what Owens terms “the stability of a modernist partitioning of the aesthetic field into discrete areas of specific competence.”<sup>155</sup> Just as the writing of artists in the sixties signaled a shift to a new register of thinking about and making art, so, too, does the parody, irony, and performativity of fictitious criticism signal a shift from modern to postmodern modes of art writing.

## CONCLUSION

This shift to a postmodern mode of discourse, enacted through the tools of parody, irony, and performativity, is what I have located as a valuable aspect of fictitious criticism in its relation to art history. In this essay I have suggested that fictitious criticism can have a profound impact in how art criticism of the late sixties is taught and thought about. Likewise, the genre’s marginalization has important implications for art history; specifically by highlighting the discipline’s filtering of what it deems unimportant and how it, too, acts as a guardian of the serious and authentic in art writing. The three cases of fictitious criticism discussed in this essay, though “untrue” in a sense, serve as a valuable barometer of the state of art criticism and history: both then and now. In the late sixties and the early seventies, fictitious criticism enacted a critique of the institution of art criticism; it was evidence of a backlash against the hegemony of the high seriousness of the critical establishment. Today, the genre offers contemporary art historians the opportunity to recover and examine in a fresh light the rich dialectical field of the art world in late sixties. Fictitious criticism, whose untruth provides a level of authenticity that

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<sup>154</sup> Hutcheon, 89. The entire chapter from which this is taken is extremely helpful to locating the varying degrees and functions of parody in relation to art. See Chapter 4, “The Politics of Parody,” 89-113.

<sup>155</sup> Owens, 126.

would otherwise be inaccessible to us, gives a nuanced and more complete account of the shift from modern to postmodern modes of art making, writing, *and* reading. The utterances of Rose, Bernstein, and Morris' Three Extra-Visual Artists, though "inauthentic" in a sense, offer an opportunity to revisit with fresh eyes the impact of value systems and meaning-making structures that often color how art history is thought, written, and read.

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## VITA

Erin Marie Starr White was born May 23, 1979, in Dallas, Texas. She is the daughter of Elaine Ellinger and the late David Alan Starr. A 1997 graduate of Bishop Lynch High School, Dallas, she received a Bachelor of Arts degree with a minor in English from the University of Texas Arlington in 2005.

She worked as the Program Coordinator for the Dallas Center for Contemporary Art before enrolling for graduate study at Texas Christian University in August of 2006. While working on her master's degree in art history, she also worked as the Curatorial Research Assistant at the Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth. Additionally, she served as teaching assistant to Dr. Frances Colpitt and Dr. Marnin Young, in fall of 2007 and spring of 2008 respectively.

She received Sunkel Graduate Student Tuition Fellowships each semester during the completion of her degree, and was awarded two Sunkel Travel Endowment Awards from the Department of Art and Art History. She also received a Graduate Student Travel Grant from Texas Christian University in March 2008. She used these awards to travel to New York City for research purposes, as well as travel to the Tate Britain in London, where she was a speaker at the Association of Art Historians' 34<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference entitled *Location: The Museum, The Academy and the Studio*.

She is married to Brady Wayne White of Fort Worth. They enjoy traveling and have no children.

## ABSTRACT

This essay evaluates fictitious criticism as a heretofore largely ignored phenomenon that existed in art writing of the late 1960s and early 1970s, examining three exemplary cases: First, a set of 1969 self-interviews conducted by conceptual artists Joseph Kosuth, Robert Barry, Doug Huebler, and Lawrence Weiner. Entitled “Four Interviews with Barry, Huebler, Kosuth, and Weiner,” each artist drafted and responded to his own questions. In lieu of their own names the artists used a previous pseudonym of Kosuth, “Arthur R. Rose,” as an interviewer/critic. It is argued here that the self-interview functioned as the artists’ rebuff of critics’ claims upon their work. Second, the fictional critic Cheryl Bernstein created by art historian Carol Duncan. Bernstein’s two essays, “The Fake as More” (1973), and “Performance as News: Notes on an Intermedia Guerilla Art Group” (1977), are read here not only parodies of real criticism, but as acting (both in the past and present) in a performative manner. The final case examined is artist Robert Morris’s 1971 article, “The Art of Existence: Three Extra-Visual Artists, Works in Process.” Morris’s essay, in which he reviewed of the work of three invented artists, was published in *Artforum*. This essay suggests that Morris’s article has a dual function: it rejects the authority of the critic, as well as augments his carefully crafted artistic persona. Often relegated to the footnotes of art history, these three cases allows for a re-examination of expectations of veracity in criticism, the practice of institutional critique, and the value of fictitious criticism for art history. This essay proposes that fictitious criticism has an important position in the transition from a modern to a postmodern mode of discourse in art writing, and ends with the proposition that the complexity of fictitious criticism, coupled with art history’s lack of attention to the genre, suggests a rich store of information for, and about, the discipline of art history itself.