FREEDOM

by

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Title of Thesis/Project/Extended Essay

Freedom

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Abstract

Freedom consists of a wide range of activities, principally in the form of a text and a set of ideas that are 'enacted' in a gallery exhibition. The text, based on theoretical research and employing various kinds of writing, develops a vocabulary and a way of working. This research is then situated within a process-based, two week gallery show involving impromptu installations, performances, interactions and other activities.

Responding to what I see as depletion of our ability to imagine a reality different than what has already been established, both in art and society, I revisit the optimism of Fluxus artist Robert Filliou. His work and ideas provide a provocation and inspiration for this project, in order to develop ways of reconsidering productivity and value. My research includes Post-Marxist assessments of productivity, contemporary ideas of authorship, and concepts related to authenticity. In different ways these address a series of impasses that seemingly engulf art making and leftist politics. In particular, the impasses connected to 'the western emancipatory project': how to be within the full knowledge of historical determinations and still capable of creating change, how to aspire to something beyond merely being a knowing victim, without being naive or escapist?

My intention is to not repeat the familiar scenes of ersatz liberation, especially as played-out by 'Neo-Dada' activities, nor to present these contradictions as an object for analytical study. Rather, *Freedom* attempts to animate these contractions in the production of simulations that resemble Filliou's work. The project seeks to work with humour and ambivalence in order to create dialogue, to overlay sincerity and irony as a way to open up possibilities.

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Introduction

Freedom. How can one respond to such a word? Is this some kind of comedy, a utopian celebration? How can one live and make art and not engage with the concept of freedom, and yet, the concept seems either exhausted or part of the problem. To engage with 'freedom' at this historical moment is to encounter a whole set of ambivalences involving the limits of sincerity and the limits of irony. To open up our relation to 'freedom' is to look at how we ascribe value. How to be ironic without being entirely ironic, how to be sincere while being self-aware, that is, while being doubled. The exhibition and this text is about the trials of wanting to make an authentic gesture, why I would 'still' want to, and a consideration of the larger socio-political issues involved. This project is in response to a sense of powerlessness resulting from the belief that art is either only capable of reinforcing the status quo, or art isn't capable of having an meaningful effect in the world, and that this powerlessness is caught in the ambivalence around the word freedom. To look at it positively, art (and other overwhelming words like creativity, freedom, etc.) is in a quandary, and addressing this situation can be constitutive and generate change.

Robert Filliou, a French Fluxus artist and key figure in my art making (he is discussed at various points in this text), had no hesitancy of using words like freedom, and many other over-arching words. He has a continual presence in this project – some times as inspiration and at other times as a defining contrast. He did, however, decide to replace the concept of art with 'Permanent Creation'. This was a re-proposal of art, with an emphasis on creativity as a source of social transformation, and an attempt to side-step power relations and capitalist demands on production that diminish the potential of creativity. My interest in Filliou is a test case of the limits of sincerity and irony. How serious can I be asserting my own version of Permanent Creation?

The notion of freedom I address in this project is not limited to the afore mentioned set of ambivalences, but also involves ideas of emancipation in relation to productivity. As well, *Freedom* has an orientation toward a contradictory dynamic Ernesto Laclau has identified within the concept of emancipation. With respect to productivity, the project

explores the utopic impulse of art as creativity freed from the constraints of capitalism and art world professionalism. *Freedom* also has a critical relation with the idea of production itself, and the totalizing of experience in productivist terms. With respect to Laclau's observation, *Freedom* engages two fundamental matrices within the concept of emancipation. The first of these is a radical discontinuity between the identity to be emancipated and what opposes this emancipation. This is not an internal differentiation but an absolute chasm between an oppressive system and an emancipated condition. The radical break sought by the historical avant-garde would be an example of this aspect of emancipation. The other matrix that comprises emancipation is the notion of a radical foundation which includes *both* an oppressive order and emancipation, where there is a continuity between the two states, and emancipation is a question of converting or completing that which is yet to be emancipated. Laclau sees these two lines of thought as logically incompatible yet they require each other. These fundamental matrices, radical discontinuity and continuity, are logically contradictory, yet, because the social terrain is not structured logically, the concept of emancipation continues to have social affectivity. In fact, possibilities for reworked ideas of liberation are generated in a negotiation between these incompatibilities. This dynamic is engaged indirectly in *Freedom,* underlying much of the ideas and forms of the project.

This document is comprised of two parts. The first part looks at the afore mentioned ambivalence in three sections: production, authorship (the relation between the artist and the work of art) and authenticity. There is also a series of aphorisms as part of this introduction that will broach topics and ideas expanded upon in the three sections. The discussions draw on the discourse of contemporary art, philosophy and to a lesser extent writing. This document has a range of different styles and forms of writing that both discuss and enact the condition of ambivalence I am examining in this project. The second part of this document is an assessment of the exhibition *Freedom*, which took place at the Western Front from Oct 24 — Nov 8, 2003.

The sections in Part 1 are a pretext for the exhibition rather than a contextualization of my artwork. Writing them was a way of generating a set of terms and an attitude for the exhibition. Writing, thinking and 'making art' are fully imbricated in my practice. I want to avoid the dichotomy of "that was the art and this is a discussion of it." The

word 'contextualize' is indicative of this separation: "the encircling of a space where all the pieces fit as if—at least the ones that matter to academic studies—they could at some point all be present, all there to allow the correct reading"[1] My approach to this document is not a context for my work but a pretext. I don't want this document to present my practice as an object of study with the hope of producing information, but rather, as a provocation for thought and action.

Freedom, both as a document and an exhibition, is an amassing of conceptual layers, provisional constructions, theories and images. It is in the form of constellations or clustering, at times it functions as a carefully constructed mess.

Aphorisms

That into this
The difficulty is to re-enter something which you and everyone else has long since ceased to be excited about it. The toil of getting back into it (the text, the place, the idea, *the time*). To get back into that time is to make it this time. To reanimate it like so many times before, to activate the language and reactivate and see that it's all so inadequate and flawed, and then to rearticulate. Or perhaps we finally relent in the difficulty of re-entering, and end up doing something else.

Front
The work is a front, an alibi or excuse, a stand-in for an impossible work. Just filler or a diversion, so we can do something else. Now that the requirement for a work has been taken care of, the work beside the work can occur.

If
If this society continues in a conservative direction for another ten years, what will it be like? What will we have to do then? To understand this statement as neither a leftist conspiracy nor an inevitability. Why wait till then?

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[1] Negri , Antonio. *Marx Beyond Marx*. South Hadley: Bergin & Garvey Publishers, 1984, p. xxxi.

Burning

"Burning our illusions all night long"—the spectacle of demystification and/or an erotics of disillusionment? (a Bob Marley lyric understood somewhat outside of its original intention.)

Seriously

...as preface to sentence implying that irony etc. is now to cease. (OED)

Barn mind

Although I didn't grow up on a farm, we nevertheless had a barn. My parents bought a cheap house in the country and it came with a run down, half-completed barn. The barn was my father's partially completed 'dream project' (that turned into my dream of partial completion). He made ad hoc reinforcements to the structure, and filled the barn with 'stuff'. What is that stuff? That's where it gets complicated. It's predominantly aborted projects: a strange accumulation of books, various solar heating prototypes and other 'inventions', boxes of photographs and frames, left-over farming implements from the previous owner, an old badminton court, entire decades... .The barn is in guise of storage, but that is just a pretence for a useless structure, a cover for something that is hard to define. Within the barn, my father built smaller, funny structures—room-like, loft-like, with a botched sky-light. It is comparable to a giant attic, an attic as big as a half-completed barn. Yet it really isn't comparable to any spaces I know, rural or urban. I've always had a mega-art fantasy of emptying out the contents of the barn in some large art museum, but that would also be a betrayal. It is a giant ready-made that can never be moved. But can it be emulated? That's my question. To dismantle it would be to destroy it. One can use it to make an infinite number of similes, but it can't really be conveyed. It 'generates representation but is unrepresentable', that kind of thing. Of anything that I know, it would make the most perfect fire and be such a disturbing loss.

'A giant mess' would be the easiest way to describe this edifice, but it isn't true because there is the imprint of a weird intelligence, a dumping ground or refuge with carefully ordered sections—not that I understand the ordering system. Anarchic but not entropic, the best comparison I could make would be to a notebook. The barn is the form of something unfinished, a grail for those who want to learn how life is always in a permanent state of incompletion. It's not finished or realized as much as 'done', in a

final state of abundant incompletion. Intention is in everything—it is a question of acknowledging this. Don't try too hard to make something meaningful, you'll only make it worse; and this is anything but apathy, rather, it is the only way to make a change in the world. We make art not to give something form but to help us recognize it, ecological in this respect. In this way, there is and isn't anything to do as an artist.

Barn work (notes)

It isn't what form is the barn, rather what is in the form of the barn. Barn is where form crosses over into belief, and defines a type of work. "In the name of the barn". Everything that has ever happened and been encoded or otherwise intriguing enough to persist. Barn understood as my present understanding of work—as related to but different from 'effort' 'intention' or 'production'. Although, one cannot really avoid those things, one can mistake them for work. Eventually will I stop calling it work, or art and call it 'barn'? This is permanent creation. Every work is only something that could give rise to something else, and so forth, means without end. *Freedom* exhibition as Filliou barn. A study in clutter intelligence.

Given

Given enough time, this document would eventually resemble a Gertrude Stein text. Some people say language is a trap, but I think only obtuse forms of language are traps. And conventional prose, for me, can easily become a sluggish, marshalling of language. My ideal is write in as associative and fluid as thought processes. Writing prose is disorienting, at best, as the quirks and limits of grammar run through other restrictions of language. This 'enjambment' of non-syntactical limits running through syntactical ones always occurs in prose, but the prose writer is obliged to hide this to the best of her or his ability. In this way prose is stranger than poetry, and Stein's texts are exquisite explorations of the strangeness of prose.

Napping in the 70's

Whatever emancipation or 'utopic impulses' might mean, they are inevitably connected to the concept of learning, to the relation between education as an experience and its institutional manifestations. In elementary school, circa 1976, we had a quiet-time after lunch and before afternoon classes. I imagine this was the result of 70's educational research from some big university in the states. It was a puzzlingly implementation, in

the form of constraint, of what could have originally been a radical idea. It always seemed odd, none of us ever really got why we did it. Education as seen from the point of view of folding your arms on the cool surface of a desk, and laying down your head to block out the mid-day light.

Tourists
Freedom isn't just another word for nothing left to lose, it's schtick for the tourist — the German's are serious, Jamaican's happy, and all of us are free. Only, the tourists are continually visiting, in fact, they never leave. It's only our inner-tourist that keeps this freedom going. Should we finally enter into an off-season, when the tourists and the never-ending perfect summer days all disappear, do we all just go back to our jobs?

My now
Maybe *Freedom* looked like the 80's more than anything else—my 'now' is a mistaken 70's that appears like the 80's? Neither now nor then.

Quotes
"Isn't art a remarkable thing?"[2] Is the idea to lose the quotes or inflate them? Are the quotes a hedged bet or the best part?

Form and...
If the demand of production generates anxiety, the form the production takes must be rethought. In this way anxiety is used an index, and disarmed production anxiety becomes a generator of form.

"It takes 3-4 years to change a culture"
I over-heard an executive-type say this, and he said it with power. The 'culture' he referred to is a corporate or organizational structure. The idea is that the best way to run something is not by a system of constraints, or a strong will and charisma; the best way is to create a values, expectations, behaviour codes that people internalize, that is, a culture; and if this is successfully installed (in 3-4 years) then everything will follow

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[2] Filliou, Robert. *Teaching and Learning as Performance Arts*. Verlag Gebr. Konig: New York, 1970, p. 30.

from there. The organization will then be intrinsically conducted in the correct manner, because it is issuing from a culture, in spite of ourselves. This is a practical example of contemporary 'repression', perhaps an updated style of fascism. So if it is true, that all it takes is 3-4 years to change a culture, could it be changed into something truly subversive?

Work-around

It seems even experienced technicians never really know why computer operating systems freeze, or understand all the quirks in the way applications fail. Problems are solved in the digital realm by reinitializing and reinstalling, or by finding 'work-arounds'. These aren't solutions so much as ways of continuing. They are 'in lieu of' a solution, the problem is just left in place and another way of functioning is discovered. Perhaps when we say work, we really mean work-around. They can be just another way of saying 'liberal compromise' or they can be unsettling and lead to a questioning of an existing system. Personally, I hate a work-around which isn't play. A work-around as a model for being, not just in lieu of solution, but in lieu of everything. Not working, not not working— working around. I'm a work-around version of Robert Filliou.

Nudge

How to address the question: could art once again be revolutionary, or is it only ever a harmless liberal compromise? Whenever confronted with a liberal vs. revolutionary, reject the proposition altogether (with the realization that this rejection might just function as meta-liberal, or meta-revolutionary continuation of the proposition). The set up of this 'choice' is hardly the result of rational assessment, and it is no way an innocent presentation of a dilemma. It's just a set-up, as most either/or assessments are, and is designed to be an inscrutable way of prolonging a system of domination— inscrutable in that it covers up an inflexible situation in the very form of a choice.

Riddle

I remember I used to write with both hands as a kid, but I reached that fateful day when I had to choose — to formalize whether I would be left or right handed. "I choose left" I remember it was very much a decision — I had to pick one. Sometimes I felt that it was incredibly arbitrary and so was a very difficult decision in that way (arbitrary — either its so easy because it doesn't matter, or it is a painful decisions because there is

no ground yet something is riding on it), and sometimes I recall that I secretly felt I was more right-handed, but deliberately choose left to see what would happen, as a little experiment. This experiment has been going on ever since. Choosing the wrong choice as a dissolution of an overall formation.

Wreck allegory

At first, that is, for Baudelaire at the beginning of capitalism as we know it, the vastness of the sky was a mystery for those no longer capable of ambition and curiosity, now it is a curiosity or a business idea, for those no longer capable of mystery. But who would want to take the high road and accuse someone of having lost mystery?

For those no longer. For those about to. Give me something or give me something else.

As Baudelaire's genius fed off the melancholia of the early modern capitalist metropolis, so the contemporary author's half-life buzz is sustained by gaps in global capital domination, that maintain what's in-between the gaps. here, under the sun with excessive measures of ultra-violet bruising, with the stink of dope and sea-doo exhaust, one comes up with atopic aspirations: strategic dyslexic dialectic, to dream of the opposite idea of Ikea, to form of a dense encapsulation of what went on before as an ointment, to make an instrumentalized Gerry Gilbert.

Yes it hasn't opened to the vastness of the sky for centuries and who would really want it to anyway? But the vastness didn't vanish, it became all the more inconceivable and irrelevant, beyond a dream, so to speak. That kind of beach.

Key words (to be replaced)

Of course 'utopia' is a terrible word, revolution too; but as an impulse not as the blue print for the future, as an adjective and not a noun, they're indispensable. If we can't develop new concepts, understandings, models then all the left can ever do is react to oppressive forces. When being able to imagine a better situation is considered a luxury or 'idealistic' then what kind of realism are we left with? This is what the end of history means. Improvements to working conditions, true equality, more meaningful life—what

we have is all we'll ever get. It's over, it cannot be improved upon. Even the strongest resistance without an ability to imagine a different condition, will at best only preserve the status quo. That fact that it is almost impossible to imagine a better situation is one of the most troubling things I can think of. "It is now easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism." (Jameson) From a very pragmatic point of view, our only recourse is to a utopic impulse. But of course, its not a question of closing your eyes really hard and trying to envision a crystal palace. You realize conditions have to change in order for you to even begin to imagine something else. *But even the demand to conceive of an alternative, to imagine the possibility of imaging, can trigger change.* Reconceiving utopia as an impulse not a plan, for me, is another way of saying art and politics as the same thing—to make art in a different way is impossible, given the present definition of the art/dissemination system, but more over, given the present social order. So in order change the way art making necessitates changing social conditions; and to attempt to alter the situation (politics) is to alter the types of possible meaning (aesthetics). Art and politics are the same, no matter if one challenges prevailing attitudes or reinforces them: to not make art in a certain way is to reproduce and reinforce the prevailing power.

Pragmatic

To assert something outside of the values of capital is often deemed as fundamentally idealistic, romantic; yet the terms of the market, the values of an exploitative system, are caught up in so many myths and other irrationalities. Working with the fatalism of 'there is nothing we can do, it's the market' is taken as real and the domain of pragmatism. So something is 'realistic' only to the extent it makes contact with exploitation? The assumptions of pragmatism and idealism must be challenged at every turn.

Ends

I went through a dropped out period in my life, or at least, a time when I *tried* to be dropped out. It was an 'accursed part' of my life—unusable, inexplicable, and now I am in the blessed share, the part I can share? In all the mixed feelings I have about it I now, I realize how it was a rigidly determined and sustained effort to be outside of work. This means I am a failed drop-out. In many ways it was a deliberate exposure to desperation and invisibility. I was *committed* to being unproductive, within the

contradiction of having the primary meaning of this period as a project, a task, however strange. Now I have 'dropped in', I work hard at being an artist, and define myself in this work. I live under the sign of production—'I'm trying to do something with my life', make something count. But is this a mistake, or was the other the mistake? One phase mirrors the other. And the irony here is that I am committed to being active as an artist, to an art career, but the meaning of this project is to undermine the instrumentality of living one's life through the terms of a production, to not be a task.

dropout — doing nothing as a kind of work

artist — work as a kind of doing nothing

Explicitly wary / warily explicit

It is not enough to work in a certain way, but to be explicit about it.

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Yet being explicit can pressure what we produce to fulfill predetermined criteria, so one must be wary of being explicit

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Yet it is not enough to simply be wary of being explicit, one must be explicitly wary of being explicit.

.

and so on...

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A saving grace? or a rhetorical infinite regression that is in the end a slight of hand that avoids commitment because it is an infinite regression so it avoids ever getting to the end? Whether it is or isn't depends on intentions and situations.

Begin with

These aphorism are from the over-flow of the sections to follow; they are both waste and something invaluable. And this overflow has been blown back so it can function as an introduction. This seems to be an aim of my artwork: displaced, indispensable waste functioning as a precusor.

An education in the arts (Partial fulfillment)

I made work

I made making the work the work

I made wanting to make the work the work

I made nothing

I made making nothing the work

I make wanting to make nothing the work

The real world

What happens if I say now what Roy Kiyooka said in the early 70's: *artists are necessary, the real world would cease to exist without artist to see it.* To say this is to test the present, to know why this can't be asserted as such, and why it has to be reformulated. And to reformulate it is, in fact, to see the real world?

Freedom and utopia

They are unwieldy signifiers, at times fashionable to the point of banality and other times awkwardly lacking in currency. There is a tendency for me to blur grand concepts like these together, along with other related signifiers such as, 'revolutionary' 'radical' and the idea of art itself. I must admit I am attracted to 'ultimate' words like these, they are what I call 'ambitious signifiers' in that they promise everything and are seemingly inextricable from fundamental/overwhelming questions of meaning and life. Even within specific contexts these signifiers have such lofty signified's that they always seem to produce multiple meanings or excesses of meaning. I am fascinated by these words although I seldom use them. One reason for this is the down side of multiple signification, that is, how easily this signification is exploited by contemporary capitalism. These words end up with a kind of 'impoverished fullness'—they can mean almost anything (an easy anything, a bad anything). Break-throughs in television technology, the intense emotions promised in car advertisements and the power of human dignity are freely conflated.

And yet there is another version of a multiple signification—what Ernesto Laclau refers to as a constituting ambiguity of the empty signifier. The term ('revolution' or 'utopia') occupies the role of a constituting lack, a 'rich emptiness' which a particular situation or struggle attempts to define or to fill. The empty signifiers play a role of an 'impossible'

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which the possible, the concrete attempts to fulfill. As Laclau says "politics is possible because the constitutive impossibility of society can only represent itself through the production of empty signifiers."[3] In this light, the empty signifier is the utopian itself. Accordingly, utopian art doesn't consist in the production of a blue print, marvelous images of a future or a new language per se, but rather in the production of key empty signifiers capable of engaging with a particular context and facilitating a constituting ambiguity.

My graduating project treats the early 70's not so much as a historical moment, but rather as a temporal empty signifier. I suspend what ever this period was or wasn't in favour conceiving of this point in time as a 'wish target'. The ideas and particular art forms of the time are erased and used to signify something else —yet like a palimpsest, it is impossible to entirely erase. The idea is for this point in time to function as a constituting horizon, and in this way I will attempt the trick of turning a past into the future. Access to this type of past is achieved by messing with the conditional part of the past conditional tense: 'what could it have been like' is tied to the question 'what could it be like now'. The exhibition can be conceived of as an experimental past tense.

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[3] Laclau, Ernesto. *Emancipation(s)*. New York: Verso, 1996, p44.

Production

"In the late fifties and sixties when I was asked what I was doing, nobody was interested in what we were doing at that time, I used to say "Oh I'm not in a hurry, I'm working for the year 2000 when maybe some of these ideas and concepts we are working with now will be useful." But of late I have come to say that I consider myself as working for the year 3000."
Robert Filliou[4]

"'Ideology' is perhaps the fact that each person does what he or she is 'supposed to do' ...ideology is just another name for work."
Jacque Ranciere[5]

"I am out of place, sick, furious, dull, upset; I hoped to lie in the sun, I hoped for infinite walks, rests, trips, adventures, wanderings [des bohemienneries]."
Arthur Rimbaud[6]

My assumption has been that work, and an overall compulsion to be productive, is an overt or ambient oppressive force that pervades all areas of the social and our selves. But what do I mean by 'work'? This section involves a constellation of ideas that comprise my understanding of production and possible alternatives, and this opens up larger issues about the relation of emancipation and production—emancipation through radical conceptions of production (freed labour) or freedom from production. This section is comprised of a series of reflections on production, subtitled *Means and ends*; an essay *Non-work: alternatives to production;* and a closing consideration *Busy.*

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[4]from "Gong Show", in *Robert Fillliou*, Sprengel-Museum, Hannover, 1984, p.190.

[5]Ross, Kristin. *The Emergence of Social Space: Rimaud and the Paris Commune*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988, p 47.

[6] Ibid, p. 55.

Means and ends

I am preoccupied by a meaningful refusal of work. Such a refusal would imply there is something beyond or other than work and leisure—so what is this? I consider leisure, even in its excessive or experimental configurations, a concept defined entirely in reference to work and therefore obliged to reinforce the productive order. What are the possibilities of a qualitatively different kind of activity that is other than leisure, sleep, or a disguised version of work? In day-to-day life I am continuously reminded that we live we live under the sign of production. Jean Baudrillard's phrase "the impossibility of wasting one's time" implies that everything that occurs in our lives is within work. "When the time of life becomes the time of production"[7] how would free time or leisure ever be possible? "The search for true leisure"—can something come out of this absurdity? Is there a politics in this? Can 'free time' really be something more than a fantasy used to sell vacations or artist's lofts? Coming to terms with the viability of something outside the economy is another way of saying 'my art practice'.

Process art could mean...

Spiritual or refined sentiments are not the spoils of victory, but internal to a transformative struggle (to paraphrase Walter Benjamin from *On the Concept of History*) and they manifest themselves in the form of "courage, humor, cunning and fortitude"[8]; so to emancipation in relation to production is not a reward that occurs in the privileged moment after all the tedious work has been taken care of, but qualities within a process of altering what we know of as production—the intelligence, diligence and imagination involved in transforming a given notion and system of production.

Dubious productions

This writing is caught in (though not necessarily 'caught up in') the irony of questioning production within a production, and a realm of production—an art career, a master's thesis. Blind spots impedes my view of the concept when I am within its compulsion.

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[7] Negri, Antonio. *Time for Revolution*. Continuum: New York, 2003, p. 42.

[8] Benjamin, Walter, "*On the Concept of Histor*" in *Selected Writings: 1927-1934*. Harvard: Cambridge, 1999, p. 143.

For me there is always something dubious about production, like you've been suckered in—make something, make something of yourself. But what is production? It is hard for me to define it because it is so ubiquitous and fundamental, so close to being synonymous with life as we know it in this society. An attempted a personal definition of production: to transform something (I suppose something raw or raw-er—a resource or a part of yourself) by entering it into an attribution of valuable. The difficulty of getting it to enter into this attribution requires over-coming a resistance, and this over-coming requires effort. This is the work in work, and as we bring something into a value, we also transform ourselves into value, this is the reward for work.

So if production is transforming something so it can count, so I can receive value; the question for what and for whom? And then I am attracted to the deep romanticism of statements like: "action isn't life; it's merely a way of ruining a kind of strength, a means of destroying nerves." (Rimbaud, *Delire II*)[9] Ascending a little, I assert that the role of the artist is to call into question how creativity has been construed and misconstrued in various configurations of production, to do what's missing from work. The question "what is work?" is inseparable from doing work. I am aware that however critical or dubious I might be of production, I have chosen to engage with these terms and to consider it as a major part of my artistic project. To be 'against work' is still to be a productivist. Alas, I am a productivist drawn to non-production. This is my provisional definition of being an artist.

Process as drift
I place an emphasis on work as a 'how' not a 'what', that is, art as a process. But how can we know 'how'? This is the bind of 'process art'—as soon as you convey or signify a process, it is a product. In this light, the product is a signifier of a process. Therefore if I want to take away the emphasis on art as product, I have to escape or interfere with the signifier. A fundamental characteristic related to productivity involves bringing an activity or thing into a system of value, so it can be appraised and 'made use of'—signifaction as product-ivizing experience. But some experiences can be seen as

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[9] Rimbaud, Arthur. *Complete Works, Selected Letters*, ed. Fowlie, Wallace. The University of Chicago: Chicago, 1966, p. 193.

evading signification—'the ineffable'—that which exceeds transference; and this is emancipated production? But again, how to convey this to others?.

By way of a partial resolution, I am drawn to an inadvertent drift or an indifference to a task within production; a blank spot within what is read as the ostensible product. Related to Michel De Certeau's notion of a tactic, this could be described as an interest in deliberately falling below signification, within a signification. I engage this condition of drift in my artwork by generating lee spaces, or in substitution dynamics where the 'in lieu of' takes place; a para-production occurring within the haze of a production. This is an attempt to work between or beside the dictates of ideologies. This could be a an abstract form of laziness. In the way laziness often hides a different type of activity not subordinated to necessities or demands for a particular meaning, what occurs in 'filler space' or in 'junk' beside a more conventional looking artwork doesn't event read as something on first glance, but actually has a hidden, qualitatively different type of activity. *Freedom* was a festival of this particular form of drift.

The instrumentalization of
non-instrumentality

The concept of instrumentality is central to my critique of production. Any activity or idea, in a sense, becomes work when it is related to in an instrumental way. A simple definition of instrumentality is to relate to things, others and our selves as a tool, as a means that can produce a desired end. The term comes from pragmatist philosophers, such as John Dewy, and is based on "the notion that ideas, concepts, theories and the like cannot be evaluated in terms of truth and falsehood, but only in terms of their effectiveness or ineffectiveness as instruments in a given process of inquiry."[10] For me the term, particularly 'instrumental reason', is derived from the Frankfurt school's[11] critique of the capitalist notion of progress, and how reason "lapsed back into a new form of myth."[12] In an essay by Horkheimer (here paraphrased by Susan Buck-Morss),

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[10] Belton, Robert. *Words of Art,* <http://www.arts.ouc.bc.ca/fina/glossary/gloshome.html>. Accessed: 12 Dec. 2003.

[11] "A German movement in sociology, philosophy and cultural criticism from late 1920's till the 1960's know for applying Marist analysis to cultural experience." from Edgar, Andrew and Sedgwick, Peter (eds.). *Key Concepts in Cultural Theory.* Routledge: New York, 1999.

[12] Buck-Morss, Susan. *The origin of negative dialectics.* New York : Free Press, 1977, p. 173.

instrumental reason is described as the tool for a "pseudo reconciliation of subject and object, consciousness and society; it was the means for achieving goals, the value of which it could not provide the criterion to judge."[13] So the significant effects of instrumentality are that we relate to people and things as a tools, as a means; and that the emphasis is on the extent of the effect, not the meaning of this change.

There is an incredible potential in non-instrumental ways of working or acting. Attempting a non-instrumental relation with the world promises to open up the problematics of how we relate to the world, and the possibility of restoring dignity to our actions by seeing them as something unto themselves, a question of inherent value and not mere effect. But there is the following concern: however I might configure my approach to art to include versions of non-instrumentality, I am within the larger context of art as a part of an experimental, or experimental-looking sector of the economy developing 'subversive' visual strategies. Non-instrumental, creative activities have a particularly significant potential to an economy increasingly based on the production of appearances. But art not only yields advancements in visual language, but also experimental forms of work. The sophistication of the post-industrial economy has a place for what exceeds or falls below production, within production, as a *managed means without ends*. This raises the specter that to develop radical approaches to art making is to really to contribute to the latest way of harnessing creativity and thought, in other words, a possible instrumentalization of non-instrumentality.

The economy is dematerializing like art did—service, culture, education and intellectual work replace the mine and the blast furnace as the source of economic clout, so the theory goes. The power of the post-industrial economy now lies in soft production. Within this logic, the softer the more powerful, and creativity is the softest of them all. It's softer than soft-ware, but a softness that cuts any which way.

Creativity is a silky lining of a bladder-like organ, an inexhaustible cilia or a smooth muscle that appears to work without working, that is, total efficiency and this is the goal

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[13] Ibid., p. 173.

of contemporary capital, at least from the point of view of the stock-holder. Activity so good it could be confused or fused with the organic. Making money like sleep or doing nothing, yet performing, delivering. So the inclination to critique how labour is exploited and find new, incredible forms of production is always close to merely expanding the horizon of production.

Non-work: alternatives to production

I am not suggesting that I have found an alternative mode of production, that was subsequently exhibited in my graduate show; rather I develop a process for identifying the constraints of production and possible alternatives. I have my hopes and tropes for 'free work' as I discussed in the earlier in this section (Process as drift), involving an emphasis on process, and for a free-er work in a drift within the ostensible work. I also have an ideal (perhaps a version of the Filliou Ideal): to engender a continual improvising that lessens the distinctions between art and 'the rest of it', and reconceiving the preparation/exhibition split within art. In this way art can avoid being merely the successful translation of intentions with impressive production values. The ideal is for there to be 'no getting ready' as you are always there.

As a way of contextualizing my own ideas and hopes, I would now like to make a brief overview of various theories of production and emancipated labour. I will begin with a fragmentary account of Robert Filliou's Permanent Creation, and then look at 'play' as a similarity between Filliou idealism and Jean Baudrillard nihilism. I will then shift the discussion to look at alternatives to production derived from Marxist thought beginning with Baudrillard's critique of the classical Marxist envisioning of unalienated labour, and Baudrillard's concept of seduction (as a counter-production); I will then examine Autonomist Marxist ideas, including Antonio Negri on time and production, and Hardt and Negri's concept of the immeasurable.

Robert Filliou
The artist Robert Filliou is a key figure in this project, and in my understanding of

production. Filliou began his 'art career' at age 37, after being an economist involved in the American restructuring of the Korean economy following the Korean War.[14]

Permanent Creation

Filliou saw everything he did as an aspect of what he called Permanent Creation "Permanent creation is the one thing that interest me."[15] I think of Filliou's Permanent Creation as a replacement for the term 'art'. Art can henceforth be retired and we can refocus on creative activities. "The familiar concepts of art, anti-art, non-art have become meaningless."[16] Anti-art is understood as placing an emphasis on the dissemination and distribution of the works resulting from creativeness, and non-art is not even caring if one's work is circulated. Permanent creation is a shared creativeness, a social creativity that seeks to avoid being merely a circulated work. Various Buddhist concepts are a significant part to Filliou's ideas of Permanent Creation, but, as I am focusing on these ideas in relation to visual art discourse and Marxist term, I am choosing to omit them from this discussion. I believe it is inappropriate to define Permanent Creation in a definitive way, so here is a series of 'conceptual tools' (that my *Freedom* project has an affinity with) which partially comprise Permanent Creation:

l'autrism

"The relative secret of permanent creation: what ever you do, do something else. Whatever you think, think something else." This is a disavowal of a particular intention, starting again and not worried that it will dissipate. One's relation to ideas, forms and activities is held at bay with continual realization that it can be otherwise.

Principles of equivalence

An infinite play of freedom and constraint involving a model for creative activity structured by the categories of well made, badly made or not made. The activity is equivalent in any of these forms. The concept extends infinitely—for one set of

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[14] Filliou, Robert. *Teaching and Learning as Performance Arts*, p.8.

[15] from a transcription of *Porta Filliou* that appears in *Robert Filliou: from the Political Economy to the Poetical Economy*, Belkin: Vancouver, 1997.

[16] *Filliou, Robert. Teaching and Learning as Performance Arts, p. 66.*

equivalences could in fact be 'a well-made' part of another equivalence, which itself is within another equivalence. The Principles of equivalence, like the concept of l'autrism demand a revaluation of competency. If competency is 'well made', this is but one possible permeation of a creation. It is a release: it is equivalent whether a work can be well made, poorly made or not made. And so identity can not rest on any one of the terms.

The secret of absolute permanent creation:
Le Filliou ideal
(action poem)
not deciding
not choosing
not wanting
not owning
aware of self
wide awake
SITTING QUITELY
DOING NOTHING[17]

Celebrate stair-case wit
Filliou describes 'stair-case wit' as the phenomena of suddenly remembering what you should have said, just as you're leaving (the date, the interview, the party, etc). You're out the door, down the hall, on the steps and you realize. Filliou is interested in this space, and I like to see his work and life occurring in this zone. Not really like an outside or margin, more like a gap or transition space between two more official or identifiable zones (someone's home and your own, a public place and a private, etc). His 'art' occurred between his work as an economist and being a successful career artist. Drop-out into the gap. Filliou was very interested in 'gaps'—between where you are and where you'd like to go. He saw these absences as something to be worked with and celebrated—inverting sites of anxiety as places of celebration and creativity.

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[17] Ibid., p. 95

To the non-arriviste

Filliou dedicates *Teaching and Learning as Performance Arts* (a key Filliou text and something of a meta-text to *Freedom*) to the *non-arriviste*, to those who never really arrive as a professional, or get to a secure place in the existing social order—drop-outs or good-for-nothings. Filliou privileges those who refuse ambition—the good-for-nothing or *bon-a-rien* because only people, things, situations, etc. that are acutely useless can experience innocence and imagination, that is, values outside of capitalism.

Filliou considered himself a 'drop-out'. Even though he had conversations with John Cage and Joseph Beuys, and participated internationally in art exhibition—so what did he mean? He means he couldn't get a real job if his life depended upon it, and he didn't see his art work as substitute career. He described himself as having a non-career. The experience of poverty was engrained in his art and life. Contending with it seems almost seems to function as a method.

Research on research

Research, I proposed, is not the privilege of those who know—on the contrary it is the domain of those who don't know. Every time we turn of attention to something we do not know—we are doing research.

Baudrillard and Filliou

I have to be freed from freedom itself. And this is possible only in play, in that more subtle freedom of play, the arbitrary rules of which paradoxically free me, whereas in reality I am kept in chains by my own will. - Baudrillard from *The Impossible Exchange*

I hate work which isn't play. - Filliou

Baudrillard is the pre-eminent critic of both production (something I want to 'critique') *and* liberation (something I feel we can never dismiss, and are compelled to rework). Comparing Robert Filliou's and Jean Baudrillard's ideas triggers my own ambivalence around issues of production. There is something rather comical about these figures and using them together as my way into all these serious issues. This humour is perhaps a conversion of my own ambivalence around issues of production. Filliou was

a self-declared 'Zen clown' and Baudrillard can be described as an undeclared bitter romantic belletrist jester. At first I thought there was a humour due to differences between them, but now I think there are many similarities. The significance in this pairing lies in the connection between extreme idealism (Filliou), and nihilism (Baudrillard). To consider radical possibilities, to be idealistic, is to look at all existing ones as somehow a sham on what they purport. Yet to perform a radical repudiation of all imposed values and meaning is to be a nihilist. I tend to read Baudrillard to accentuate utopian tendencies, and see his tropes as an inverted idealism at work, and see the nihilism at play in Filliou. In this way I am saying that idealism can become nihilism, and vice versa. This nihilism/idealism 'oscillation' is something that I identify with, and underlies this document and the exhibition *Freedom*. It can be described as either ambivalence or play.

Both figures, while astute observers of life, avoid a conceit involved in realism. They generate a commentary but not a discourse that claims to represent the world. Related to this, both attempt to avoid systematic thought by practicing philosophy in a play way. Charges of inconsistencies and contradiction would be an inappropriate way of critically assessing their work. Both can be seen as romantic, which is the fate of anyone rejecting 'the real' in favour of the unaccountable, or the 'reversible'—meaning or value that can't be fixed. Both are French thinkers, coming out of a post-war preoccupation with leisure (Barthes, deCerteau would be two other notables), and they are both oriented to an economic analysis of society (Filliou was an economist, Baudrillard studies the economy). A last commonality is that they both rejected Marxism, although they seemed to be defined by this rejection and continued to carry on a dialogue with Marxist influenced concepts, and so can be considered as inadvertent post-Marxists.

Baudrillard on production
As someone drawn to exploring the liberational potential of art, am I sabotaging my project by engaging Baudrillard's writing, with its reputation of cynicism? The critiques Baudrillard makes of Marxist liberation aren't fatal (ending all potential of the concepts) so much as they are fundamental interrogations, and therefore helpful as a way to rearticulate emancipatory concepts. Baudrillard's critique of Marxism is affirmative "in

the sense in which it creates a space for unexpected, unorthodox, new and creative readings of Marxist concepts." [18]

There are two points made by Baudrillard in relation to production that I will examine:
1. Key aspects of Marxist emancipation—unalienated labour and qualitative value— are actually within and not opposed to the fundamental anthropological assumption of market values. And within this, Marxism occupies the role of a necessary, a phantasm of liberation.
2. The dream of unalienated labour is specific only to an era of alienation—but "we are no longer in the drama of alienation but in the ecstasy of communication." And within the post-alienation climate, production is to be understood primarily as making visible, that is, production as communication.

From *Mirrors of Production* (1970), a work early in his career (which, from the point of view of *Freedom*, is a kind of bookend to Filliou's *Teaching and Learning as Performance Arts*), Baudrillard makes a rather devastating critique of Marxism by claiming that it makes the same fundamental anthropological assumption as capitalism: that man is defined by production. Baudrillard views Marxism and capitalism, both products of the same 18th century bourgeois thought, as sharing an anthropological assumption. Accordingly, the human is defined by the productive potential for every man to "transform his environment into ends useful for the individual or the society"[19] In fact, for Marx our incredible capacity for productivity is what differentiates us from animals. "The liberation of productive forces is confused with the liberation of man: is this a revolutionary formula or that of the political economy itself?"

To continue on how Marxist concepts are fully implicated into Capital, the qualitative, incommensurable nature of use value is only illusory. For Marx, the usefulness of a thing is grounded in "inherent and natural properties"[20] that make it qualitatively

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[18] Barbour, Charles. "re Baudrillard", email to author, 6 June 2003.

[19] Baudrillard, Jean. *Selected Writings,* ed. Poster, Mark. Stanford University Press: Standford, 1988, p. 102.

[20] Edgar, Andrew and Sedgwick, Peter (eds.). *Key Concepts in Cultural Theory.* Routledge: New York, 1999.

distinctive, and define it in opposition to exchange value (a thing understood as a commodity). Baudrillard assess the use/exchange division as adhering to the interdependent logic of the sign, and thus the qualitative ('use value' in terms of things, and an equivalent of 'use value' as it applies to human labour and temporal experience) occupies the role of the referent; but as in the operation of language, where meaning is not generated by the referent but by a relational system of signifiers, value is produced by the play of exchange signifiers and only alludes to a presumed concreteness of the signified. "[Exchange value] foments the concrete as its ideological ectoplasm, its phantasm of origin and transcendence. In this sense need, use value and the referent 'do not exist.' They are only concepts produced and projected into a generic dimension by the development...of exchange value."[21]

What has this got to do with art and my interest in non-work? By loosing the ground of the qualitative, be that of labour or things, Marxist liberation can no longer look to a realm of pure, unquantifiable labour outside of exchange value. According to this semiotic deconstruction of classical Marxist terms, unalienated labour doesn't exist as an autonomous potential, but rather, as a phantasm which serves as the foundation of a capitalist economy. In this way Marxist liberation "assists the cunning of capital" by convincing men that they are alienated by the sale of their labour and ought to seek unalienated labour. Marxism, according to Baudrillard is fundamentally predicated on a productivist concept of life, yet still maintains the evasion of production through the goal of emancipated labour. "Wishing itself beyond labour but *in its continuation*, the sphere of play is always merely the aesthetic sublimation of labour's constraints."[22] And this acts as "censoring the much more radical hypothesis"[23] that the 'inalienable' power of creating value by our labour might itself be a source of alienation. This is basically saying Marxism is a kind of opium of the masses because it offers a false possibility of freedom in the utopia of unalienated labour. The pursuit of this freedom keeps us from addressing our deeper alienation, secured in the fundamental assessment of human life as productive. By conceiving of emancipation as

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[21] Baudrillard, Jean. *Selected Writings,* ed. Poster, Mark. Stanford University Press: Standford, 1988. p.103.

[22] Ibid., p. 109.

[23] Ibid., p.104.

unrestrained productivity, we can never leave the realm of production, an intrinsically alienated condition for Baudrillard.

Moving on to the second aspect of Baudrillard's thought in relation to issues of production, Baudrillard is intriguing to consider because he rejects, or attempts to reject, the idea that we are alienated. The idea that we are cast-out or removed from our true potential is intrinsic to almost every Western notion of oppression and emancipation. According to Baudrillard, for the past two hundred years we have been within 'the drama of alienation', not just specific to Marxist thought, but to various projects that comprise Liberalism. We have come to define the self and society within the condition that we are 'alienated' from ourselves due to an exploitive or instrumental relation with the world. And the notion of alienation, however dire, implies the possibility of unalienated life, freedom. Yet within Baudrillard's thinking, the drama of our alienation is no longer applicable, and we are now free, but for the worse. Previous ideas of work (alienated or otherwise) were specific to a universe composed of subjects and objects, and defined by their relations, by a real that objects and our connection with them, promised. For Baudrillard, the depth, drama and subject/object divisions that an alienation/liberation split is predicated on no longer apply. Now we couldn't even be alienated if we wanted to be. There is only a nostalgia for alienation. We experience life without the secret or the spectacle of our own alienation, where the drag of work and the production of ourselves must be understood in a different way—a part of the never-ending obscene production of the hyper-real, that is, the ecstasy of communication. We don't relate to objects in an instrumental way because the real is no longer predicated on this distinction.

Shifting from a theorizing of production/labour in relation to Marxist concepts, Baudrillard's Seduction (1979) focuses on production as a quest for the real. And for Baudrillard, this is done primarily by forcing things into the visible. In a liberal-capitalist society, to produce something is similar to how one 'produces' a document in a court of law, or an actor might 'produce' an object on stage for the spectators to note: "From the discourse of labour to the discourse of sex, from the discourse of productive forces to that of drives, one finds the same ultimatum, that of pro-duction in the literal sense

of the term. It's original meaning, in fact, was not to fabricate, but to render visible or make appear."[24] Production is not a question of making (building, creating, bringing into existence) as much as it is making visible (shifted into the light or line of slight), and this makes it real. Production is "a forced materialization", the essential mechanism of "occidental realistics", and all the compulsions to instantiate and instrumentalize stem from here. "Everything is to be produced, everything is to be legible, everything is to become real, visible, accountable, everything is to be transcribed in relations of force, systems of concepts or measurable energy; everything is to be said, accumulated, indexed and recorded."[25] In this way 'reality' is built upon these bids to convert life into irreversible instances and energy. The ideal of this conversion is that once something is legible and accountable, it is somehow fixed, and we can grant it meaning and reality.

Autonomist Marxism

I find Baudrillard's critique of the Marxist ideal of unalienated labour compelling, but it is levelled at a 150 year old theory after all—all other Victorian theories seem inadequate by contemporary standards, but that shouldn't end the discourse. For post-Marxist such as Laclau or the Autonomists, such as Antonio Negri, the problematics of classical Marxism are in fact a generative horizon.

The Autonomists were an Italian Marxist movement developed in response to both orthodox communism and post-May 68 reconstitution of power. The Autonomists developed during the 1970's as both a theoretical and political movement, with alleged participation in terrorism. Gramsci, Negri and De la Costa being notable Autonomist theorists. Central to the autonomist tradition is the idea of Marxism as a critique immanent to capitalism. Attempting a thorough going materialism it has tried to avoid appeals to transcendent ideas. In this sense autonomist Marxism is a philosophy of pragmatics. It's a reading of Marx that: "Self-consciously and unilaterally structures its approach to determine the meaning and relevance of every concept to the immediate development of working class struggle. It... eschews all detached interpretation and

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[24] Baudrillard, Jean. *Seduction*. New World Perspectives: Montreal, 1990, p. 34.
[25] Ibid., p. 35.

abstract theorizing in favour of grasping concepts only within the concrete totality of struggle whose determinations they designate."[26]

Many of their theories begin with ideas similar to Baudrillard. Overall there is an ambivalence: we've won, the world has shifted, but now the victory becomes the modes of the new oppression. We're 'free'—traditional ways of quantifying labour have been challenged, no more god or metaphysics. Now it is human innovation and 'bio-power'; and the problem, according to Negri and Hardt, is who controls the terms that construct the contingent values that we live with? This is in keeping with what I think of as 'rightwing contingency' wherein forms of social control are maintained not by essentialist claims but through the language of historical constructions and context specific meaning. One of the central thesis of Negri and Hardt's 2000 book *Empire* is that domination now occurs through postmodern forms as opposed to metaphysical or classic ones of the British or Roman Empire.

Time

Antonio Negri, in his 1980 essay *The Constitution of Time,* begins with an idea similar to Baudrillard's deconstruction of use value as autonomous from exchange value. According to Negri, qualitative time—real time which is exploited and quantified within capitalist production—cannot be maintained as pure time which we can experience through liberation of our productive capacities. It is inseparable from measured time. "When the time of life becomes the time of production—who measures whom?"[27] Qualitative time is the source of measured time, or measured time allows the qualitative?. The interdependence of qualitative and quantitative time are indicative of a subsumption of life by the terms of the market. There isn't an outside, real time we can hearken to, yet this dominating 'time of production' is unstable. With neither an outside real time, nor a stable imposed time, there is only a continual volatility that threatens to exposes the inadequacies of capital and this gives rise to a constitutive antagonism. Through this antagonism, and not a linear utopian path, Negri envisions the emergence of communism.

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[26] Cleaver, 2000 p. 30.

[27] Negri, Antonio. *Time for Revolution.,* 2003, p29.

The Immeasurable

Throughout *Empire* Hardt and Negri describe what I see as a Janus face of the contemporary world—the objectives of various long term projects (a subversive modernity, beginning with renaissance humanism and unfolding over centuries) have succeeded, in a sense, yet integrated networks of global exploitation (Empire) also move through these hard fought principles. Most of these struggles are based on the fight against metaphysics—the imposition of order from above, and against the creative, 'immanent' power of human construction. A specific instance of this is 'the immeasurable'. "In contrast to those who have long claimed that value can be affirmed only in the figure of measure and order, we argue that value and justice can live in and be nourished by an immeasurable world."[28] Immeasurable labour—its sounds incredible, utopian; yet this power is harnessed to the development of global capital which controls and limits its subversive tendencies. Value without measure and order is not utopian, but an everyday reality which can be either emancipatory or oppressive depending on context. The immeasurable involves tropes I would describe_as postmodern: political developments unfold 'outside of every preconsistuted measure', power relationships are constructed anew, 'the indexes of command are defined on the basis of always contingent and purely conventional elements.

Busy

There was time in the 70's

Artists are busy. But it wasn't always so. I've been told by various people that "there was time in the 70's." I accuse them of myth-making, but they tell me the "cost of living was better", you could live on little, and people "made art all the time". Not just art paper-work and art-related work for money, but making art. I think this is due to a time prior to the restructuring of society to maximize corporate profits (both the end of the welfare state and a lowering of real wages), and also when they say "the 70's" they mean, when they were "young and had more time". At one time I thought the definition of an artist was a particular kind of unbusy person, different from just someone doing

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[28] Hardt, Michael and Negri, Antonio. *Empire.* Harvard University Press: Cambridge, 2000, p. 356.

little or avoiding activity. Now the project for me is to attempt reconciliations or productive antagonisms between unbusy-busyness or busy-unbusyness. Artists, and everyone really, is in this particular, epoch defining contradiction of being acutely instrumental so as to open up a few windows of non-instrumentality.

Steve Reinke

"Untitled" (in *I've got to stop talking to myself*):

"I wish there was such a thing as all the time in the world, but instead we have this intolerable situation of having limited time and unlimited work. the tasks at hand just keep piling up. And I am too lazy to go out and get me some Prozac—and after I've gone through that maybe some Lithium or something. After all, I'm on a drug plan now."[29]

Antonio Negri

from the preface to *Savage Anomaly*:

"I was convinced that in prison there would be time. But that was an illusion, simply an illusion. Prison with its daily rhythm, with the transfers and the defence, does not leave any time; prison dissolves time: This is the principle form of punishment in a capitalist society... So this, like all my other works, was drafted...in stolen moments stripped away from the daily routine."[30]

Anyone can work all the time

In a sense anyone can be an artist, but not like Beuys or Fluxus. Anyone can be an artist like anyone can be middleclass or get on TV—you just have to work all it all the time, and even then... Of course no one is forcing you to be that busy, (similar to: no one is making you buy that, watch that, ready that newspaper...) you just have to be willing to accept the price of free time: invisibility. In a time when reality is increasingly defined by representation (entering into a circulation), this is akin to non-existence.

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[29]Reinke, Steve. "Untitled" in *I've got to stop talking to myself* complied by John Marriott, 1999, p. 35.
[30]Negri, Antonio. *Savage Anomaly*, p. 43.

Punishment is making you waste time, or making you feel you are wasting time, and wasting time is now ultimately a question of not being legible by power. But by translating oneself into legibility, in order to avoid wasting, do we enter into neo-alienation?

Dropping-out of the ecstasy of communication

Classical drop-out: Hornby island, dropping acid. But this is connected with the era of alienation. Dropping out not of communication (that's too easy), but of the ecstasy of communication. Find ways of doing this. Could this be the new asceticism?

Authorship

To be caught up in the drama of endings and orginiary moments, that is, to be caught within the myth of being an artist (or the myth of the author), let me say that I made my last 'piece of art' in an exhibition in January, 2000. The work was the end of the line for a certain way of art making for me, and I only realized this after I installed it. I no longer wanted to make a work and then disappear, to become the phantom linked with the name spelled-out in vinyl letters on the gallery wall. I wanted to have encounters with people, as a part of a process of art-making, instead of exhibiting a finished piece. But this opened up the problematics of authorship—I wanted to engage the situation of closing the gap between artist and audience, a self-conscious but sincere attempt to 'cut through' and see if something else could happen in a gallery space. But would I appear as the creative monad from which the work issues, contributing to the myth of the author, rather than being disarming, opening up creativity and critical reflection? Could I be both a phantom attached to the name of the wall, *and* the one walking around in the gallery, and be this phantom 'for the better'? These questions opened up the current phase art-making I am in, and the ground for the exhibition *Freedom*.

The ordeal of making art, moving through institutions, the drama of presenting art, and the complex aftermath are always part of art. In fact they are a meta-art; and I wanted to make this process the actual art. Rather than seeing process as akin to 60's style process art (e.g. early Richard Serra's), it could be seen as a particular installment of the contemporary condition wherein meaning never resides in content but in its generation and circulation. And for me this translates into bringing the art and the artist into close proximity as a sign and study in implication. I don't mean to champion this mode of art making, and in many ways it contributes to opening art up to the cult of personality and the fame status. But I don't believe we can simply opt out and return to autonomy or art as a means of objective study. If art is inevitably brought back to the figure of the artist, then at least this can be done in an deliberate way that uses this situation to engage and not merely impress the audience.

During the exhibition mentioned above, which I am referring to as my last 'piece of art', I would go to the gallery and watch people look at my installation (I was from out of town so no-one would knew I was the artist). At that point I realized I would prefer to talk about the art, in the art, as the art—discuss, share ideas, play with the existing drama and intensity of the white cube. This could be considered performance art, that is, performance as a form of teaching and learning about creativity. My preference for understanding art in this way is influenced by the work of Robert Filliou, specifically his book *Teach and Learning as Performance Arts*.

"[T]his is authored (co-authored, with each reader who wishes it) by a man who believes in trying to close the gap between the artist and his public, and joining them in common creation. No use going on with the 3rd person. I am the man." Robert Filliou[31]

In a way, I am quite ready for my work to be transparent—a straight forward connection between viewer and artist—and this transparency is linked to an antidote to a perceived snobbery in contemporary art. I seek to be disarming in my presence, to counter the role of contemporary art hipster or professional artist. So why not be an authentic author, quite sincere in my presence? I slip, and find myself thinking "play the role of an authentic author", this points to the limits of just how sincere can we be at this point in time. It's not like we can just sit back and think "OK, I'll just say what I mean". Even "I find myself thinking" is a bit much. I assume that the transparency involved in "closing the gap between the artist and his public" has long since been, while not impossible, much more complicated. Although, judging from the above quote by Filliou, he didn't see it as problematic that the art system and or the myth of authorship would impinge on his ability to faithfully be himself and make a connection with others through his art. This certainly wasn't out of ignorance, as he was aware of the complexities of the institution of art; rather, Filliou believed that he could actually be free of this influence. I wonder if an awareness of these complications adds to a sense of impossibility[32]. The critical concerns about the effect of mediation become a self-fulfilling prophecy.

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[31] Filliou, Robert. *Teaching and Learning as Performance Arts*, p.7.
[2] comment by Judy Radul

A provisional way out of the problematics of authorship (the myth of the individual free creator and the way this discourages more subversive forms of creativity) is to *excessively* be the artist. This is both an avoidance of inadvertently just being 'the artist', and to reject attempts to erase the presence of the artist. The exhibition Freedom was an attempt to enact this relation to authorship, to create an unnecessary doubling – the work is there, why would the artist also be there? To exacerbate the relation between art and artist in order to pose the questions: how did this come to be made, what does it mean to make? Foregrounding the artist could be understood as a form of Brechtian distanciation—the author isn't removed, but brought too close to the audience, so we can't see around him or her. A more traditional spectator-art object relation, always haunted by the figure of the artist, is now disturbed by the artist actually being there. The distance required to consume the aesthetic object has been intervened and by a viewer/artist relationship that is psychologically close and intentionally a little 'too personal'.

I place an emphasis on artist rather than art; and the question "what is an artist?" rather than "what is art?". The later question, more privileged in the 60's and 70's, seems like it has lost relevance – because it implies universals or because it has a level of radicality that we are incapable of, or it has simply become a cliché. But "what is art?" can be rearticulated within "what is an artist?" In this way art can be understood as an activity, a complex set of relations that occur in a temporal dimension, thus allowing for more provisionality and difference. I am tempted to think of being an artist almost as a mode of existence, but mostly as a set of behaviours, roles and choices. Perhaps "what is an artist" is really defined by ways of spending time.

I'm fixated on the question because being an artist was such an unlikely thing for me to have 'done with my life'. I had little exposure to art growing up, and no-one in my family would ever do anything so ridiculous. After all that, I'm not about to let art be just another job. I can't let go of the strangeness of this role—I want it to be unlikely (a degree of privation is then required to have this attitude?). If art can't be a radical, autonomous position in society, at least it can be something undefined, a blank spot in an increasingly defined world.

The art writer Howard Singerman has responded to the question "What is an artist?" by saying "Artist are made by troubling over [the definition of artist], by taking it seriously"[33]. Accordingly, we are in turn dependant on the question, and finding a way to take it seriously. One problem in troubling over it is the idea that art doesn't matter any more, it has lost it significance in society (a fear Hal Foster address in *Funeral for the Wrong Corpse*). Why trouble over something so insignificant? Another difficulty in "troubling over it" is the possibility that, in a 'creative economy', almost everyone is an artist. If art gets extended into the terms of 'creative professional', or artists are defined as essentially self-employed small business people, then 'what is an artist' is fully defined as an economic sector, and there is nothing left to trouble over. This means there is one less area in social life for trouble. And so artists are in a position of trying to hang on to trouble or parish? Maintain the strangeness as a way to defend the category of art?

Authors after the death of the author

"Far from artists (or authors for that matter) dying, they appear in rude, if artificially inflated, health." Julian Stallebrass

"Because the concept author still had an assumed male gender it had not, and could not, at present be eliminated." Dona Stanton

"...lessening the figure of the author in favour of that of the artist-cum-operator, may describe the 'mutation' under way." Nicholas Bourriaud

Within the discourse of authorship, the starting point has to involve a consideration that the author died, and the myth/reality of the author seems just as prevalent as ever. Are we in fact in a post-author era? In this section I would like to examine reproposals of authorship, and the question: Is 'post-authorship' a lite version of 'the death of the author'; or, as we are still within a capitalist social order based on ownership and

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[33] Singerman, Howard. *Art Subjects: Making Artists in the American University.* University of California Press: Berkeley, 1999, p. 2.

individual stars, is it a continuation of traditional forms of authorship? I will address these questions by looking at authorship in the context of Feminism, YBA (Young British Artist) art, and close with a look at a few ideas of a post-authorship according to Nicholas Bourriaud and Myung-mi Kim.

Prior to elaboration of contemporary views of authorship, I would like to clarify two points from Barthes' essay *The Death of the Author*. First, the central point of the essay is that author has never existed. The author figure Barthes discusses is not an authentic author, a fixed Cartesian subject who transfers his life experience into writing, but the myth of this authenticity. The death is the death of the myth of author, that is, the loss of a traditional definition.

Exemplifying bourgeois ideology, 'the author' is the false attribution of the meaning of a text to an individual's experience and consciousness. Making writing and the author synonymous is how capital subsumes this area of social life. In this way writing is not a collective, material production but a part of "the prestige of the individual", or as it is more nobly put, "the human person."[34] According to Barthes, the idea that the ultimate meaning of a work is based on the author's intentions, and therefore creating an 'already read' literature with no place for a reader as such, has never been possible. And yet the author still continues to reign—the person and work being united in histories of literature, biographies, interviews and magazines. Both academia (linking *explanations* of the work to the person) and popular culture (detailing the author's tastes and passions) fix this idea writing as the voice of author.

In this way, "[t]he Author when believed in is always conceived of as the past of his own book: book and author stand automatically on a single line divided into a before and an after. The Author is thought to nourish the book."[35] Barthes counters this idea by stating that contrary to the Author representing or depicting his life in the book, the author is a product or side effect of the work. Instead of Proust being the ultimate example of the author translating himself into a work, Barthes sees the author Proust

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[34] Barthes, Roland. "The Death of the Author." *Image, Music, Text.* Ed. and trans. Stephen Heath. New York: Hill, 1977, p. 143.

[35] Ibid., p.145.

as the result of the book. And this forms a general condition: "life never does more than imitate the book, and the book itself is only ever a tissue of signs, an imitation that is lost, infinitely deferred."[36]

The second point I would like to draw attention to is that Barthes 'birth of reader', although it has influenced the commonly understood trope that 'the reader constructs the meaning', is ultimately quite different. To be a little pat, (but I feel it would be an omission to not identify it), the difference between Barthes' reader and contemporary notions of the reader is yet another rehearsal of the classic modern/post-modern split. Informed by (de)constructivist critique of essentialist meaning (as it has been received in an North American academic context), the written text is not stable in meaning in that the reader constructs the meaning in interpreting the text. It is an active task. In creating meaning, the reader's cultural setting is different from the author's. Thus reading is the interaction between people, practices and values. As a result, a literary work does not only reflect life and its author, but also the reader. This reader is historical, specific to cultural, sexual and class. However for Barthes "the reader is without history, biography, psychology; he is *that someone* who holds together in a single field all the traces by which the text is constituted."[37] This contrasts with a contemporary notions of the reader. Accordingly, although the unity of the text does occur with the reader and not author, the reader is not understood as an universal, ahistorical field, but rather someone engaged in forming meaning of the text contingent upon the specifics (income, race, gender) which comprises one's subject position.

Feminist approaches
Related to issues around the politics of reading, Feminist approaches such as Nancy K. Miller (80's American academic feminism) views Barthes' discourse as an impediment. If, according to Barthes, writing is "a neutral where our identity slips away, the negative where all identity is lost'[38], it doesn't really matters who writes. In a similar way—as the reader is really more of a space and process, 'without a history,

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[36]Ibid., p.147.

[37]Ibid., p 148.

[38]Miller, Nancy. *Subject to change : reading feminist writing*. Columbia University Press: New York, 1988, p. 104.

biography, psychology'—it doesn't really matter who reads. According to Miller, Barthes' shift from the death of the author to the birth of the reader, "far from producing a multiplicity of addresses, seems to have reduced the possibility of differentiating among readers altogether." Miller argues that the effect of 'the death of the author' (with its emphasis on writing itself) is to block an examination of the actual situation of writing, specially questions of who becomes a writer; and similarly, Barthes negative conception of readership voids an examination of power dynamics and gender issues in the reception of writing.

The crux of a Miller's criticism of Barthes is that the death of the author *only makes sense if one feels burdened by "too much self, ego, cogito[39]"*, a surplus of authority and identity. Barthes idea of writing undermines the very concept of identity ("to reach that point where only language acts, 'performs', and not 'me'"[40]. But according to Miller this is only specific to those who are already in this position, primarily the white bourgeois male. "[B]ecause the female subject has been juridically excluded from the polis, hence decentred...deinstitutionalized, etc.. her relation to integrity and textuality, desire, authority, displays important structural differences from that universal position."[41]

Writing by women has traditionally been assumed to be nothing other than a direct literal connection between writing and life, what I referred to earlier as 'transparent'. Women's writing was seen as only capable of auto-biography, and this is understood in a pejorative way: As Miller states "women could not transcend, but only record, the concerns of the private self."[42]

In terms of the discourse of the death of the author, although the destabilization of the paternal authority of authorship has been enabling for feminist critics, it has in other ways impeded a critical treatment. "The removal of the author has not so much made room for a revision of the concept of authorship as it has, through a variety of rhetorical

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[39] Ibid., p.143.
[40] Ibid., p.143.
[41] Ibid., p.106.
[42] Ibid., p.132.

moves, repressed and inhibited discussion of any writing identity in favour of the (new) monolith of anonymous textuality or, in Foucault's phrase, 'transcendental anonymity'". Thus we have writing by women being traditionally considered as synonymous with autobiography, in a sense incapable of authorship; and authorship itself, with inherent assumptions gender and race intact, supposedly dispersed. Without the author, we move into a metaphysics of reading, that re-inscribes 'a theological affirmation of [writing's] sacred origin'.[43] So the impact of the demystification of the author resulted only in shifting the myth, while ostensibly erasing the particular, concrete circumstances of writing.

Barthes' Death of author is a demystification discourse that aims to finally undo the bourgeois myth of the individual author, to destabilize this monad which has kept us from writing. Yet this demystification of the author seems to have produced a myth of *writing*. It can be argued that the death of the author has become a mythical demystification, and I think of the current re-instantiations of author-like figures (related to the feminist concerns I have outlined or the YBA-type artist that I will be discuss) or can be understood as an attempt to demystify the myth of writing. Is this the way generations proceed—a former demystification becomes a prevailing myth, and a subsequent generation endeavors to reveal this, and this in turn becomes the production of yet another generation's myth?

There seems to be a proliferation of these demystification myths in our contemporary intellectual landscape, such as Baudrillard's critique of Marxist emancipation discussed in the Production section of this document. Howard Singerman sees contemporary art's ultimate objective, replacing Modern Art's transcendence of social determination (as Marcuse saw it), as a transcendence of the knowing victim[44]—an exquisite demonstration of our inability to evade art's institutionally determined nature, an exceeding display of our inability to exceed. "The works...thematize their positions and reflect their knowing better, letting those of us know, know that they too are vigilant. They will not be unknowing victims of history or theory, just necessarily, historically,

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[43] Ibid., p. 104.

[44] Singerman, *Art Subjects,* p. 209.

victims."[45] This art seeks to produce an 'outthinking' of all attempts at evasion to such a heightened level that this very outthinking would move beyond our grasp. In this way art is just a game of demonstrating how art can't escape itself (an almost abstract or aesethetized image of its own complicit nature); that is, art as a cultivated knowingness that appears engaged in a 'critical' operation, yet in fact obfuscates concrete situations, and consequently reinforces them. An prime example of this is art referred to as YBA.

YBA and questions authorship

YBA refers to a type of neo-conceptual artwork that developed in London during the 1990's, and was promoted by the art dealer Charles Saatchi. According to the English art critic Julian Stallebrass, in his book *High Art Lite,* YBA art is a study in the close relation between the artists' personalities and the work. This work, and perhaps much of contemporary art in general, is in the contradictory position of employing 'conceptual' approaches premised on an expulsion of the expressive, and an engagement with the historically determined nature of artistic production, yet it is increasingly dependent on the presence of the artist. "[W]hile the means by which that art is pursued are steadily less expressive of the artist's personality, more reliant on conventional ideas than feelings, more an assemblage of ready-made elements than the creation of organic compositions, the personality of the artist, far from shrinking, has greatly expanded, sometimes overshadowing the work... Far from artists (or authors for that matter) dying, they appear in rude, if artificially inflated, health."[46]

This expansion of the artist presence in the work is an example of a resurrection of the author, and with the intense media and critical attention that YBA art has received, is consistent with Barthes observation of the role that both the academic and popular media play in connecting the work with the artists' personae. Although YBA seems to provide a new twist is in the myth of authorship. The YBA type artist doesn't represents a further intensification of the myth of the author so much as a key shift in this myth. Perhaps it is a waste of time to speculate on the empty space left by the author, and

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[45] ibid., p. 210.

[46] Stallebrass, Julian. *High Art Lite: British Art in the 1990's.* Verso: New York, 1999, p. 50.

we should rather look at something more certain—the intensification of the myth of the author. The media (both academic and mass) connects the work and the personae, that is, forms the myth of the author, as Barthes described; however, the difference now is that the author out and out adopts and copies this version of him or her self. The myth of the author is not an effect, but a strategic outcome. The artist (and/or their backers) develops a media presence, which in turn completes the artist . Damien Hirst's courting of publicity was cloaked with an all-knowing irony.

Of course artists and writers have been aware of the commodification of their creativity for quite some time. Walter Benjamin described Baudelaire as "the first poet aware of his originality as commodity"[47]. However, now the knowledge of this author-myth can enter into art-making in a partially calculated way. Stallebrass describes a deliberate manipulation of tabloid media by YBA's to actively construct a myth to surround or extend the work. I think of these as constructed eclipses, wherein the 'artist' overshadows the art and becomes the meta-work. The art itself is an instrument for creating a media personality, and this media presence subsequently informs the production of further artwork. The result, a contemporary version of the Faustian wager, is a mix of both strategically situating oneself in this mechanism, and being manipulated by it to the point that the artist's will and intention becomes inseparable from a media system.

According to Stallebrass, Hirst exemplifies this death (and resurrection) of the author in a particularly clear fashion. In the first stage, the artist expresses universal themes in traditional works of art. This is in the guise of the authentic author, "but those themes are banal and instantly recognizable, like clichés in advertising."[48] The attempt to be an authentic 'classic' author falls down.[49] "Then gradually, the clichés become associated less with their ostensible content and more with the figure of the artist himself, so that cigarettes, for instance, become a sign not of life and death but of Hirst's media

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[47] Benjamin, Walter quoted in Buck-Morss, Susan, *The Origin of Negative Dialectics.* Free Press: New York, 1977.

[48] Stallebrass, Julian, *High Art Life,* p. 31.

[49] I presume it is deliberate, but I'm never certain with Damian Hirst. Did he want to be a transparent author, one who engages work about human themes and faithfully conveys them, but realized he was incapable and resorted to this play of media personae?

profile."[50] Through media the images of the artworks, with their cliché forms of deep human significance, become references or brands for the artist himself. Stallebrass compares Hirst's resurrected author-form to the shark in his work *The physical Impossibility of death...*: "On seeing the shark on display, after years in storage it looked tired, patched up in places, less alive than when it was freshly in its tank. So with the artist: no longer the font of expressive feeling, or a site of conflicting impulses, but rather a media image from which the work is by no means clearly separated."[51]

Thus the author is neither dead nor alive, and this is typical of the way YBA used ambiguity. I understand this cultivation of ambiguity as an art version of neo-liberalism—occupying a clear position is avoided, and this is done ostensibly in order to engage with a multiplicity of ideas and issues in a way that positionality wouldn't permit; but actually this avoidance of a clear position is really opportunism. In terms of authorship, this occurs as an ambiguity between the constructed nature of the author and a presumed authenticity. The ambiguity between the life and death of the author is played out in the name of success. "Any quality of instability or irony, conscious or not, is co-opted into the monad of the artist's presence, instantly branded as an essential part of both the work and the person. It doesn't matter if this confessional work is true life or fiction, honest or ironic."[52] The ultimate figure of the YBA is to be the very blank space left by the death of the author, a kind of cultural black hole which sucks in myth, critical awareness and various death scenes; a void where myth blends with its antidote in opportunistic ambiguity.

Post-author
Implied by Miller, Stallebrass' YBA and Singerman, is a concept of the author/artist that continues, not necessarily intact but as a kind of monad, a more or less coherent individual. The views of Nicholas Bourriaud (art writer and curator know for his theory of art making of the 1990's entitled *Relational Aesthetics*) offers perhaps a more radical accounts of post-authorship.

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[50] Ibid., p. 31.

[51] Ibid., p 32

[52] Ibid., p 34.

To employ authorship suggests that we encounter art (or literature) in terms of author/reader. But I'm not sure to what extent we 'read' art. Even with literature, of course we read words, but the way we received the work is not necessarily a question of encoding the way reading implies—with its classical associations of a coherent subject-object relation, a focused experience of converting the text into meaning. Perhaps 'scanning' or 'parsing' are more appropriate. We don't read as much as make a self-interested copy of a work, or the work is to the reader as a programming language's code is to the operating system which then runs it. I understand Bourriaud as engaging these concerns, and re-envision art-making based other models, specifically though Felix Guattari's ideas (which form the philosophical core of *Relational Aesthetics*). Rather than the structuralists "anthems" of the death of the author, "because the individual doesn't have a monopoly on subjectivity, the model of the author and his alleged disappearance are of no consequence."[53] Subjectivity for Guattari exist in the "association with human groups, socio-economic machines, informational machines."[54] and thus the artist is not a creator or author so much as an operator of these devices.

The question is then what is the fate of this polyphonic subjectivity when exposed to the formational demands of the art institution? The demand of the art market inevitably channels this complex subjectivity into a signature. "The modern western artist is defined first and foremost , as a subject whose signature acts a unifier of states of consciousness"[55], However, Bourriaud, in his reading of Guattari, sees this as a merely an illusion—the artist is actually a "calculated muddle between subjectivity and style." As with subjectivity in general, the demands of the coalesced subject that a signature signifies are merely a territory, among others, which the artist encounters. The work of art itself and a presumed unity of the maker are merely "consensual illusions"—a signature without a subject, as such. Similarly, it appears as though the

[53] Bourriaud, Nicolas. *Relational Aesthetics*. Dijon: Les presse du reel, 1998, p. 93.

[54] Ibid., p. 91.

[55] Ibid., p. 93.

work is reified into a commodified object, however, it's real activities exist as movements of thought.

Authenticity

Perhaps it would be wisest to dispense with authenticity altogether—fake or actual, remodeled or contingent authenticity. As Joshua Glenn said, in an essay entitled *Fake Authenticity*, "Although Italians do open restaurants, there is no such things as an authentic Italian restaurant. Although history, nature, race and class are very much with us, there is no such thing as an authentic past, an authentic outdoors, nor an authentic non-white/middle-class style of life."[56] But I can't just leave the category blank. It is ineluctable. Just like freedom, we're stuck with it. So yet another study in ambivalence, in two parts: the first, an ironic theory of authenticity entitled *the new seriousness* that looks at the possibility of an authentic based on contingent beliefs, artifice and irony; the second, A work-around authentic: double coding and simulation, looks at double-coding and simulation as specific ways of attaining the authentic referred to in the new seriousness.

1. Towards a theory of the new seriousness

The new seriousness is a reworked authenticity that contrasts with the old seriousness' dependency on the absence of all irony. According to classical ideas of authenticity, irony and seriousness cannot coincide without canceling out each other, as in the definition of *seriously*—"as preface to sentence implying that irony etc. is now to cease" (OED). However the approach here is that seriousness and irony, while they are incommensurable on certain levels, are in fact, different modalities or charges of the same term or material, and can occur at the same time resulting in a meaning that is constitutive not definitive.

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[56] Glenn, Joshua. "Fake Authenticity: An Introduction", *Hermenaut*, Issue 15, 2002. <http://www.hermenaut.com>

The received idea of the authentic ("the new seriousness" is an attempt to stir this up), in a rather simple form, is based on an absence of irony and grounded in transcendental human nature. Not only irony, but ultimately all mediation (and from this perspective, representation is always within the domain of the ironic) is purged as we have direct connect with our true essence. This is known as the quest of the authentic self, a concept which began about two centuries ago, according to Charles Taylor, with the German philosopher J.G. von Herder's "ur-Romanctic notion that each of us is called upon to live our lives in an original manner, and to realize a potentiality that is properly our own".[57] Within this aspect of the western imagination, the received ideas of authenticity, freedom, the artist become synonymous.

The received authentic can be distinguished from an anti-foundationalist definition, with no metaphysical ground, only historical and politically determined notions. One with such an attitude could be referred to as an "ironist". Richard Rorty's definition of an ironist is one "who faces up to the contingency of his or her own most central beliefs and desires--someone sufficiently historicist and nominalist to have abandoned the idea that those central beliefs and desires refer back to anything transcendent, he or she would also never buy into that cynical legitimization of the status quo which today goes by the name of irony."[58] Thus Rorty implies that it is important to understand irony apart from sarcasm, which is perhaps nothing but "the flip side of earnestness"[59], or irony as a detachment that allows the speaker to avoid committing to the issues he or she is addressing.

For the ironist, metaphysical beliefs are actually conventions; but we, as a society, are in denial about this. We maintain faith in these received notions of an authenticity based on timeless, transcendental foundations, yet they are ultimately inoperable and inevitably a false-authentic; and what's more, we secretly realize this. As in the inadvertent irony in the headline *The Age of Irony Comes to an End - No longer will we fail to take things seriously*, which appeared in *Time Magazine* immediately after 9/11,

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[57] Ibid.

[58] Rorty, Richard. *Contingency, Irony and Solidarity* quoted in Laclau, Ernesto. Emancipation(s). Verso: New York, 1996.

[59] Glenn, Joshua. "Fake Authenticity: An Introduction".

the very concept of the authentic seems intrinsically ironic. The absurdity of banishing the concept of irony is ironic. Yet ironies like this can't be fully acknowledged, because that would be adverse to how western society understands itself. So irony functions like a dirty truth. Our most esteemed values, and the very concept of authenticity itself are 'tainted' or corrupted by an ambient irony.

In our desire to 'get serious' we inevitably encounter ironic dimensions, which appear to destabilize a hoped for authentic, and as compensation, we generate a faux-authentic—, similar to false-consciousness. This functions as a masking element— that makes it feel like we are serious even when we are not. And this leads us to the basic problem: *authenticity is an attempt to establish a non-ironic outside to secure part of ourselves. Irony is perceived as a threat to real experience. We need to contain the ironic and find a place for serious things to happen, yet this splitting and escaping from irony only opens us to further states of irony.* So what is to be done? The crux of the problem of authenticity, within the concept of the new seriousness, is that irony isn't the impediment to a true authentic, rather, it is the generation of a fake serious or false innocence that leads us to an impasse. The problem isn't so much the lack of an authentic self, as it is the illusion of one.

The new seriousness is comprised of an oscillating field of ions with ironic or serious charges. The current can linger in predominately one, or continually shift from ironic to serious. A flitting, this is the new seriousness. It breaks the irono-serious impasse (a possible contemporary articulations of the mind/body problem) by self-administering 'double coding', a term I will define further on in this text. This means to speak the serious through the dubious, and in many ways we don't have any choice.

The new seriousness can be associated with the crisis of the left—a sense of powerlessness and confusion around how to create social change, and what way to resist corporate domination. For me this is related to a feeling of irrelevance and loss of critical potential in contemporary art. One diagnosis of this condition of futility and powerlessness is that the serious/ironic condition keeps us from real action, makes political resistance impossible. If we don't have recourse to authenticity then what is our basis for action? Without a solid, authentic experience of life how can are make meaning identifications with an idea or political position, how can we make a stand?

Another version of this impasse is rather than having failed in our ability to take decisive positions, we have failed to commit to the ambiguous nature of reality. If we could only avoid this or that identity, the illusion of positionality, and embrace the ambiguous dimension of truth, then we could be free to act. Is commitment or sincerity an identification with a position, a political programme, or is this identification the very thing that blocks commitment, impedes us from 'being ourselves'? And then there is the opportunism of just employing one and then the other as the situation arises. The New Seriousness is the negotiation with these quandaries that enables action. Of course 'one never resolves these questions', but we can reach an understanding, an agreement that maintains the tension or antagonism in the direction of action.

Another way to look at false-innocence of authenticity is with the concept of passive or latent irony. We are now in an era of the 'passively ironic'——there is an inherent irony in the heavily mediated fabric of contemporary life, with virtuality of communication technology, the instability we all feel in our day-to-day language; yet the goal seems to act within a model of authenticity outside of all of this. In colloquial terms, it is the condition of knowing it is bullshit, and yet going along with it anyway. We have radical forms of subjectivity *in spite of ourselves.* Facing the inescapable complexity of world, we desire black and white understandings. We sense this is rather ridiculous, yet this knowledge is only secretly shared, never officially acknowledged. the presidency of George Bush or the false-innocence of the Christian right exemplify this repression of an ironic dimension. They are ironic, but they just don't know it. We can't pick and choose models of subjectivity as we would a pair of shoes we don't have any choice; however we can choose to pretend none of this is happening and deliberately live through a fantasy. Passive irony permits us to secretly realize how complex and contradictory everything is, and yet maintain the present social order.

To reiterate, the new seriousness addresses the contemporary problem of authenticity not as primarily a question of meaning grounded in transcendent categories, but in the false-consciousness condition of trying to maintain a transcendent based experience when in reality it is no longer functional. The problem isn't metaphysics, its the nostalgia for them, and all the duplicitous mental and social apparatus installed to produce this. One of these is what Richard Rorty, the American Deconstructionist philosopher, calls "inherited contingencies". For the ironist, or the practitioner of the

new seriousness, belief in transcendence is actually misunderstood conventions or "inherited contingencies'. It appears as though contemporary received ideas have an ironic dimension – they are unfixed, politically determined effects of difference. The problem is that aren't acknowledged as contingent. I describe this condition as 'passive ironic.'

The new seriousness has the task not of ending irony, but actively receiving it, to make the patterns of irony conscious. But this is an awkward maneuver, similar to Susan Sontage's line "To talk about camp is to betray it". Can ironic dimensions be made deliberate or conscious without loosing their irony? Is this 'the new demystification'? A type of sobriety? It is the antidote to a venom, which when drank in the right amounts can be rather pleasant, but when ingested in an uncontrolled way can kill.

I will draw this introduction of the new serious to a close by raising several cautionary notes, to temper the more heady parts of the theory. First, the notion of an authenticity based on "rejecting received ideas" is very close to the received idea of the authentic; that is, the unique individual rejecting the prevailing ethos, standing out from the herd and creating one's own special place. Perhaps authenticity has always been comprised of a long line of new seriousnesses. And while these new seriousnesses might evade ideological constraints, they end up entering into a mythical space that is fodder for a whole new generation of received ideas. As Joshua Glenn sates: "This kind of authenticity is not easily commodified but serves as the engine for the commodification of dissent, which is to say late capitalism in general."[60]

2. A work-around authentic: double coding and simulation

The work-around solution to authentic: abandoning the idea of 'direct' experience (what would a direct contact ever mean?), this work-around authentic comes by way of mediation or 'coding'. Principally through the assumption, however dubious, that pervious eras and generations somehow had access to what we can't, we deploy reworked versions of their forms or codes as a way to have a access to an

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[60] Ibid

authenticity. An example would be an artist of today feeling that an authentic gesture is impossible, that no matter what we do it will be mannered; and we'd have to go back to Kaprow's Happenings to find an example of an actual authentic gesture. But in fact, perhaps Kaprow's generation sensed that they we're an inauthentic echo of Surrealism, which in turn looked to 19th century figures such as Lautréamont or Rimbaud as authentic, and so. In practice, we experience the authentic through a shifted reiteration of previous forms. To alter a line by Jacque Derrida, the authentic comes to us by *coming back*. I will look at two articulations of this kind of authenticity: Umberto Eco's interpretation of double coding and Brian Masumi's concept of the simulacrum.

Double code

The new seriousness seeks to find a way to say serious things and display the limits of this speech; and the combined effect generates a meaning akin to authenticity. This dynamic is know as double-coding as articulated by Umberto Eco in the *Post-script to The Name of the Rose*:

> The postmodern reply to the modern consists of recognizing that the past, since it cannot really be destroyed, because its destruction leads to silence, must be revisited; but with irony, not innocently. I think of the postmodern attitude as that of a man who loves a very cultivated woman and knows he cannot say to her, 'I love you madly', because he knows that she knows (and that she knows that he knows) that these words have already been written by Barbara Cartland. Still, there is a solution. He can say, "As Barbara Cartland would put it, 'I love you madly'. At this point, having avoided false innocence, having said clearly that it is no longer possible to speak innocently, he will nevertheless have said what he wanted to say to the woman: the 'he loves her madly', but he loves her in an age of lost innocence. If the woman goes along with this, she will have received a declaration of love all the same. Neither of the two speakers will feel innocent, both will have accepted the challenge of the past, of the already said, which cannot be eliminated; both will consciously and with pleasure play the game of irony... But both will have succeeded, once again, in speaking of love.[61]

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[61] Eco, Umberto. *Postscript to The name of the rose.* HBJ: New York, 1983. p. 67.

The term 'double-coding' comes from the post-modern architectural theorist Charles Jenks, referring to the way a building can invoke both 'elite' and 'popular' references simultaneously (for me, this very splitting seems like elitism); however Eco's articulation of the concept is more widely applicable to situations in life, and it appeals not just to two sets of codes (the tedious division of high and low), but to a merging of the codes. I am interested in double-coding as a way to see authenticity not as a quest for unmediated connection with the world, but within coding and articulation. By coding— I am referring to the application of recognized rules that determine the significant parts of experience and how they are to be selected and combined to produce meaning. Double-coding is about the way passion enters into language, and the action of this codification becomes inseparable from passion *per se*. This is consistent with how I approach 'the authentic'—it's not a realm of pure experience, but a way to 'speak serious' through the already written in order to convey the 'deep' sides of human life. In the end it uses a language and checks this language, and yet rather than canceling each other out, the tension results in a complex form of meaning that has dimension of both irony and seriousness.

For me the example isn't Barbara Cartland, Harlequin romance author, but rather Robert Filliou: "As Filliou said 'isn't art a remarkable thing'". And he alternates for me between a cartoon character, a more or less self-described clown, and a complex, serious figure. Robert Filliou spoke of art as something he believed in, a spirit that comprises a fundamental aspect of life. I am uncomfortable with relating to art as a spirit, or even art as something outside of an institutionalized set of practices and circulations, yet I don't believe the concept of art can be contained by institutional or behaviorist terms. Therefore I double-code my way to an authentic experience of art (As Filliou said…). You know that I know about the limitations of saying this, but I can once again speak of art.[62]

Simulacrum

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[62] I suppose we could say "as Umberto Eco said" and open up the realm of triple coding, but I'll leave it as double for now.

Another way to understand a 'double coding effect' is through a version of simulation. We can't start again, and we can't just replicate what went before, so previous forms are simulated--restaged with places for gaps and variations, that is, they are simulated not for reproduction but for difference. We get access to direct 'impassioned' experience *in the guise* of previous generation's forms and language. The fantasy is that only back then was this contact possible, and we get 'it' via 'them', but of course not really them, because we're reconstructing and working in a completely different context, and of course, not really 'it'—because we end up making a simulated 'it'. But this isn't anything new, somehow I think people 'then' were actually involved in a similar dynamic, feeling that authentic contact was no longer possible; and also, could only either bare witness the tragic loss, or made a vicarious contact via yet another previous generation's experience.

A simulacrum is "a copy of a copy whose relation to the model has become so attenuated that it can no longer properly said to be a copy."[63] In contemporary art discourse, the simulacrum is usually understood in a Baudrillardiran sense wherein it is an implosion of meaning. The signs of the real substitute for the real, and signs only refer to other signs and not to an external model. The result is not only a loss of the real but a paralysis in our ability to say anything; we enter into a condition of "syntagmatic slippage" and we are left speechless. We can only "gape in fascination."[64] However there is another version of the simulacrum. Brian Massumi, looking for a way out of either being naive realist or sponge merely absorbing the hyperreal without any ability to act, has synthesized an alternative concept of the simulacrum based on the ideas of Deleuze and Guattari.

This simulacrum is less a copy than a phenomenon of a different nature altogether. "It undermines the distinction between copy and model."[65] A copy is connected to the dynamic of (re)production, and whether it is authentic or fake, it is defined by absence or presence of resemblance to a model. Massumi's idea of simulacrum emphasizes

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[63] Massumi, Brian. "The Simulacrum According to Deleuze and Guattari" in *Copyright 1*, 1987, p. 2.

[64] Ibid., p. 1.

[65] Ibid., p. 2.

the inadequacy of its replication of the original. It looks like the model, but internally is quite different, and this is it's uncaniness—masked difference not resemblance. The problem with traditional ideas of authenticity isn't the failure of being perfectly genuine (a faithful copy) but seeing the inadequacies of the copy as failure. "A copy is made in order to stand in for the model. A simulacrum has a different agenda, it enters different circuits...The thrust of this process is not to become an equivalent of the model but to turn against it and its world in order to open new space for the simulacrum's own mad proliferation...not an implosion but a differentiation." Deleuze uses the example of pop art wherein the multiplied stylized images take on a life of their own.

The resemblance of a simulacrum (to an original) is a means and not an end. Quoting Deleuze and Guattari "A thing, in order for it to become apparent, is forced to simulate structural states of forces that serve it as masks... Resemblance is a beginning masking the advent of a whole new vital dimension." This is the disobedient simulacrum, like the Blade Runner repicants who refuse to die. They generate meaning rather than dispose of it. They are simulated—to be neither faithful, nor mocking.

Both Ecco's double coding and Massumi's simulacrum are ways of relating to previous forms, and this invokes the concept of tradition. In this light tradition can be seen as a simulation of what went before—yet instead of a faithful reproduction or a simulacrum of the past that implodes meaning, tradition can be understood as a copy that has its own life. But for Hal Foster, in the essay *Funeral for the Wrong Corpse* (2002), this fluid reception of the past leads to a troubling provisionality: "Tradition is never a given but always constructed, and always more provisional than it appears. This provisionality has become patent to us, to the point where, if the modernists felt tradition as an oppressive burden, we are likely to feel it as an unbearable lightness of being—even though some us continue to project a weight on it that it no longer has."[66] According to Foster's more pessimistic reading, deconstructions and reworkings of previous forms doesn't result in "the advent of a whole new vital dimension", but a quandary, an aftermath condition. We are, in a sense, stuck with pervious forms yet

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[66] Foster, Hal. *Design and Crime*. Verso: New York, 2002, p. 156.

we are cut off from their gravity, thus we are presented with the danger of loosing any meaningful signification. If the past has no weight than "contemporary art no longer seems contemporary." If art doesn't possess a symbolic weightiness, "it can't function as an index of its time."

A consideration of the exhibition *Freedom*

My graduate project, entitled *Freedom*, was exhibited from October 24th to November 8th, 2003, at the gallery of the Western Front. In this section I will describe the exhibition, look at the relations between this work and other contemporary art, and make a series of reflections that assess the project in relation to the ideas discussed in Part 1.

There are difficulties in accessing and even describing a deliberately open-ended project, that was continually changing during the 2 weeks of the exhibition. What was the exhibition–how it appeared at the closing, at the midway point, the interactions? This closing section is an exercise in stair-case wit (as discussed in the Production section)–I'm out the door, down the hall and it hits me, not how it could have been different, but how it can be different. This isn't regret but a return to flux and expansiveness.

Description (in the form of lists)

The main features that comprised *Freedom:*

- Enacting a process in the gallery involving the continual formation and reformation of impromptu installations. During the exhibition I was in the gallery working on the installation and having interactions with visitors
- The exhibition was advertised on a 11x17 inch poster (see appendix 1). As the work was somewhat unconventional (involving installation, performance and writing) the poster was a way to suggest a context to view the work and establish basic facts—I will be in space working on the show, that it will involve encounters; the poster also introduces Robert Filliou for those not familiar. I think of it as a 2D model of the exhibition.
- The exhibition process began by moving material and objects into the gallery. Material came from my studio, my apartment, and from the basement of the Western Front.

- During the show I shifting and arranging the material into more organized forms, some of which were 'pieces' or impromptu installations.
- Taking down the show at the end of the 2 week exhibition felt like a continuation, similar to all the other activities I had done when the show was up. I created various piles of rubbish from the show and partially arranged them, and then took photographs. This was a partially staged mess—an actual mess, composed in a few key areas—expressly for documentation, and this was the show in a nutshell.
- The following are categories of materials used in the exhibition:
- Art supplies: various kinds of white paper (roles, poster size, letter size), string, duct tape, masking tape,
- Documentation materials: 30 video tapes, slides, slide sheets; as well, the use of ½" video tape as a building material.
- Transparent materials: 3'x2' thick sheet of glass, 4'x6' sheet of Plexiglas, translucent Mylar, cellophane.
- Fragments from previous art projects: (string and notes from *loose an entire decade*, documentation of studio work, arbutus performance, various smaller projects from my MFA work)
- Symbolic objects: child's school desk, pummel horse, fake ceremonial staff, flowers, candles, giant letters a-r-t (70cm high), a toy monkey (in a box that said 'not for children').
- Extensive use of hand written text (as a material). primarily quotations (Filliou, philosophers, poets - examples), my own writing. Much of this text was from Part 1 of thesis. As well, the exhibition involved extensive note writing.

Audio-video gear used:
- A mixture of formats from different decades – I was working with the way different media, even without content, triggers associations with past decades. The physicality of the machine and the grain of the projection evokes a time.
- 1970's: overhead projector, Kodak slide projector, Super 8 projector
- 1980's: large video projector
- 1990's: Kodak slide projector
- Recent: Sony video/data projector

Modes of working or dynamics

I found these modes appropriate for enacting ambivalences because they allow for duplicities and reversals:

- Deliberately start off with a 'conceptual' approach—a structure, a line of inquirery—and then wait for the inevitable break in the rules. The lyrical, subjective and the intuitive enter as mistakes or failures of my own system. These more excessive sides appear inadvertently, as if this is the only way I am comfortable invoking these strains of art making.

- 'Make art with nothing'/ impromptu decision making, spontaneous invention

- Labeling parts of room, things architectural details (entrance), etc.

- Palimpsest effect (partial erasure, erasure as composition): copy quotes on transparent surfaces, erase in a crude ways so as traces of it still remain as a new text is written over top.

- Numerous projection set-ups: 'doubling' wherein a slide is projected and a video camera is zoomed into an area and this image is projected, project the defaults of the equipment (white rectangles or RGB patterns), superimpose several projects, mask out an area of a slide projection and project an image in the darkened area, project near a bright light to eat away the projection. Extensive use of shadows – of objects, place a book on an overhead projector to project darken rectangle, project on to glass sheet leaning on wall with text written on it, a shadow of the text forms on the wall

- Working with partially composed clutter, a mess comprised of careful selected materials, chosen for their associations (within the vocabulary of my art making and more general associations). A play of determination/indeterminate, disparateness and order.

- Interactions: talk/watch/work/other. Depending upon the visitor and how I was feeling I would interact by either chatting about an idea I was thinking about, try to involve the viewers into whatever I was working on, perform working on the show so the viewer was free to walk around and view my activities as another part of the installation, or the 'other' category which involved going for walks or sitting in the fall sun.

Documentation questions

Because this was both a major work and a very ephemeral one, I was preoccupied with questions of how to document the exhibition, and questions about what does it mean to document. In response to this I realized I wanted to avoid documentation as a transparent delivery of 'what happened', or at least disrupt the division between the real work and the document of it. I tried to bring 'the making of the document' into the exhibition, that is, imbricate making the documentation images into the images and activities of the exhibition. As well, I realized that it is more enticing for me to replace 'documentation' with 'image-making', to give it the status of art-making.

- To make the set-ups expressively for photo – installation as a set, not to diminish the activity that occurred during the exhibition.
- Shoot video 'in the spirit' of the work – video tape of me showing the exhibition to my mother, video tape of the exhibition shot by children.
- Video document with a camera connected to a video projector that is incorporated into an element of the exhibition. Creates a doubling of the show, anesthetizes the document, also, creates a blind spot in the documentation: the projection couldn't be documented as it would result in video feed-back, thus the projection of the documentation was an un-doucmentable area of the gallery.

My relation to the Neo-Avantgarde
(ruptures and continuums)

As a way of establishing my present art context, I would like to examine the relation between contemporary art practice and the Neo-avantgarde (of which Filliou is associated with). This is also a way of interrogating fundamental questions around the links between art and social change, and how these links are reconstrued in different historical moments. According to the terms of Peter Bürger, initially stated in his 1974 essay *Theory of the Avant-garde*, and restated in the 1997 essay, *On a Critique of the Neo-avantgarde*, both the historical avant-garde and the neo-avantgarde are based on

transgression. The Neo-avantgarde is differentiated from the historical avant-garde by the trait of seeking to transgress the existing institution of art; as opposed to the historical Avant-garde, which attacked the institution of art for a very different reason: "they did not aim at changing the conditions of artistic production and reception but at releasing creativity bound to institutions for the purpose of re-shaping life."[67] Implied in this analysis is a hypocrisy inherent to the neo-avantgarde of being anti-institutional while seeking institutional validation. As Bürger phrases it: "the avant-garde revolution *by* art becomes a revolution *of* art." According to Bürger, the impulse to transform everyday life by the neo-avant-gardists was really not an attempt to move beyond the bourgeois constraints of art, rather an institutionalizing of transgression within art. Applying this to Filliou, in spite his claims of opening creativity to society at large, we should understand his art activities as fundamentally directed at the art world, and ultimately subscribing to its legitimation.

So the question becomes—if the historical avant-garde sought to transform life, and the neo-avantgarde to transform the art world, where are we now? Berger suggests, using the example of Jeff Wall, that it is now time to "transgress institutionalized transgression", that is, the alternative to the neo-avantgarde lies in dropping the side of art that seeks to get beyond art either through a radical transformation of society or through institutional critique. We can once again 'return to the happy business of making art'. The social efficacy of post-avant-garde art lies "in the collective meaning of things has been deposited in the genres... An artist working in a certain genre will thus be able to outline the contours of new experiences."[68] Thus the alternative to the neo-avant garde is a return to the tradition of painting.

Freedom obviously presents quite a different response to avant-gardism than Bürger has described it. I believe that his reading of Avant-gardism (neo or historical) falls prey to an all or nothing response which I wanted to avoid with this exhibition—either total revolution or the acceptance of art as being limited to the traditional function of institutions. This ignores the multitude of social struggles, which Bürger writes off as

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[67] Bürger, Peter. "On a Critique of the Neo-avantgarde" in *Jeff Wall: Photographs*. Verlag der: Buchandlung, 1997, p. 171.

[68] Ibid, p. 175.

mere "bourgeois protest", that neither involve open revolution nor simply proceed through existing channels. Bürger rightly acknowledges the endemic problem of the avant-gardism of failing "to recognize the link between continuity and rupture."[69] But he understands this link, which is characterized as antagonistic, as not between art and society, or an antagonism directed at institutions, but limited merely to disputes on the level of genres within art, such as the antagonism between figuration and abstraction within the discourse of Modern painting. The presence of rupture seems to have been drastically underscored into a question of breeches within technical discourses. The idea of breaks within the institution of art, and links between art and social transformation is dismissed as 'transgressive' which has become so fraught that it can only ever be a game without consequences, merely adolescent.

I agree with Bürger's assessment of the negative effect of the game-like handling of the transgressive in contemporary art, and when this quality dominates, art doesn't fall into the contradictions of neo-avantgarde, but into the more clichéd idea of avant-garde completely aligned with corporate power—'the cutting edge', hipness, art as the development of 'subversive' formal strategy. But without challenges to how art is defined and functions art becomes as a comfortable agreement with the terms of the market and institutions. This post-avant-garde alternative seems to lead to connoisseurship – a specialized language for the wealthy to delight in and speculate upon. If we are to take account of the failings of avant-gardism it is not a question of asserting continuity over rupture, both must be present in an uneasy but constructive tension.

Thus my relation to contemporary art encompasses a wariness of the contradiction of neo-avantgarde as Bürger has described it, yet seeking a form of social efficacy in art beyond a return to institutional preoccupations such as the tradition of painting. *Freedom* was a non-reactionary alternative to professionalized art as it is practiced in Vancouver, and also an avoidance of a contrdiction inherent to institutional critique (breaking from the institution while subscribing to its ligititamation). My alternative involves wanting to go beyond standard institutional function as a way of having a

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[69] Ibid., p. 172.

social effect. For me this results in a conflicted interest in authenticity and authorship, and strategies that are associated with Nicolas Bourriaud's Relational Aesthetics theory of performative contemporary art.

Relational art is a case study in work that has aspects of the neo-avantgarde (specifically an heir to Fluxus participatory activities) yet functions quite differently. To begin with, this work seeks to create liberational spaces, to cross over freely from art into various nodes in society, yet the binary of 'the institution of art' and society or life is voided. Art is one among many social institutions that we encounter. Relational art pursues avantgradist-like social experiments yet without a teleology of how the world should evolve and offering a programme for the rest of society. The objective of this art is to create small scale micro-utopias that are actualized and interdependent with existing social structures. An example, cited by Bourriaud, of the difference between neo-avantgarde and relational art is in the approach to occupying a gallery. Ben slept in One Gallery in London in 1962. This work signified that the arena of art was expanding to include eating and sleeping as art. In comparison, Pierre Joseph, Philippe Parreno and Philippe Perrin also "lived in" a gallery, but this was to turn the gallery into a production workshop jointly managed by the viewer, in accordance with very precise rules of play." (p38) Bourriaud quotes Felix Guattari's line "grass grows from the middle" as exemplifying Relational art's attempt to continue avant-garde-type activity without cutting edge, "not an imaginary of contrast, conflict and rejection, but of negotiation, bonds and co-existence"[70]

A final point I'd like to make in describing my relation to the Neo-avantgarde is on more of a spectral level. The contradictions inherent in this work doesn't seem to have weaken its continued effect on art and the potentials of creativity. It is significant to note that Peter Bürger is now in his third decade of critiquing the Neo-avantgarde. It seems the possibilities of the Neo-avantgarde can neither be dismissed nor actualized at this point in history. The legacy of this movement, which I identify with Filliou, continues as a set of looming provocations, perhaps even temptations, that trigger "deep-rooted insecurities as to what art in the Western world is about", societal

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[70] Ibid., p. 45.

discontent, and provides impulse for transformation. Theodor Adorno, in *The Jargon of Authenticity*, (referring to the legacy of Existentialism) stated: "philosophy which once seemed outmoded is now alive because the moment of its realization has been missed." The presence of the neo-avantgarde continues because it has yet to be realized.

Contemporary work

As much as *Freedom* entered into an active relation with the Neo-avantgarde, it can also be seen in relation to contemporary art. In particular I am thinking of the performed lectures of John Bock, the shrine like, chaotic installation work of Thomas Hirschhorn; and the recent resurgence in drawing as typified by Raymond Petitbon and David Shrigley. Part of this resurgence is the return of a traditional commodity form, something I think Freedom circumvented, but part of a re-newed interest in this kind of art-making involves a desire for a more spontaneous art-making, perhaps a viable alternative to so called 'conceptual' forms that have now become stylized, and have perhaps exhausted their critical potential.

This contemporary work that Freedom can be seen in relation to has qualities such as chaotic or messy appearance, uses humour or 'anarchical-satirical' mode of inquiry, often employs self-parody as a way of addressing the romantic figure of the artist. This work is characterized by a conflicted relation to art as a way to create change, but decidedly avoids a cynical response. There is a desire to 'fathom the world', resulting in a chaotic display provoked by the absurdity of the attempt. Practically speaking, the work I am referring to features extensive use of language, specifically caption-like forms; and a philosophical questioning in spatial and/or performative context.

Thomas Hirschhorn
A Swiss-born artist who's practice involves making displays and shrines and rather comical constructions, made from crappy, everyday materials including plenty of masking tape. The displays are often tributes to thinkers/artist such as Spinoza, Mondrian (I compare this to how Freedom could be a Filliou alter). His work is considered literate or at times 'wordy', as it is incorporates lengthy quotes from philosophy/literature. He has rather grand ambitions for art ("he wants to reclaim the

world, to rescue it") with an awareness of art's limitations.[71] However this doesn't result in futility–he believes an artist must remain committed and courageous.

In terms of subject matter, he makes work about the struggle of democracy, and questions of artistic and social value. Formally the work is a chaotic layering of words, images, cross-references. provisional constructions, and he could "be seen as one of those who believe that doing things badly makes what they do or say more democratic, more 'accessible' "[72]

John Bock

Bock makes installations, again on the chaotic side, which he uses as a staging for 'performed lectures' that are multilingual, associative, and rife with newly coined phrases. These are often video taped and then the staging is then used displayed as an installation. His practice involves a cross of philosophy into theatre and installation art.[73]

David Shrigley

David Shrigley's work is an example of 'the new drawing'. His work exhibits a simplicity of means and reflects that "a good artist can make art out of nothing". This work is all about what I call *the doodle impulse* – within an absent-minded drift, adapting an expression and marks into a ready-made context or physicality. He also work with mess—embracing an inability to draw correctly, foregrounding 'crossing-outs', with then intention that the faults make it charming. "His work is for everyone whose drawings always went wrong or whose sums never added up."[74] There is nevertheless ambition or faith in art as he takes on everything – love hate, self, memory. These grand themes are invoked, yet at the same time the works generally give way to non-sense.

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[71] Searle, Adrian, "Objects of in the world of Shrigley", *The Independent*, 5 November 1998, p. 21.

[72] ibid

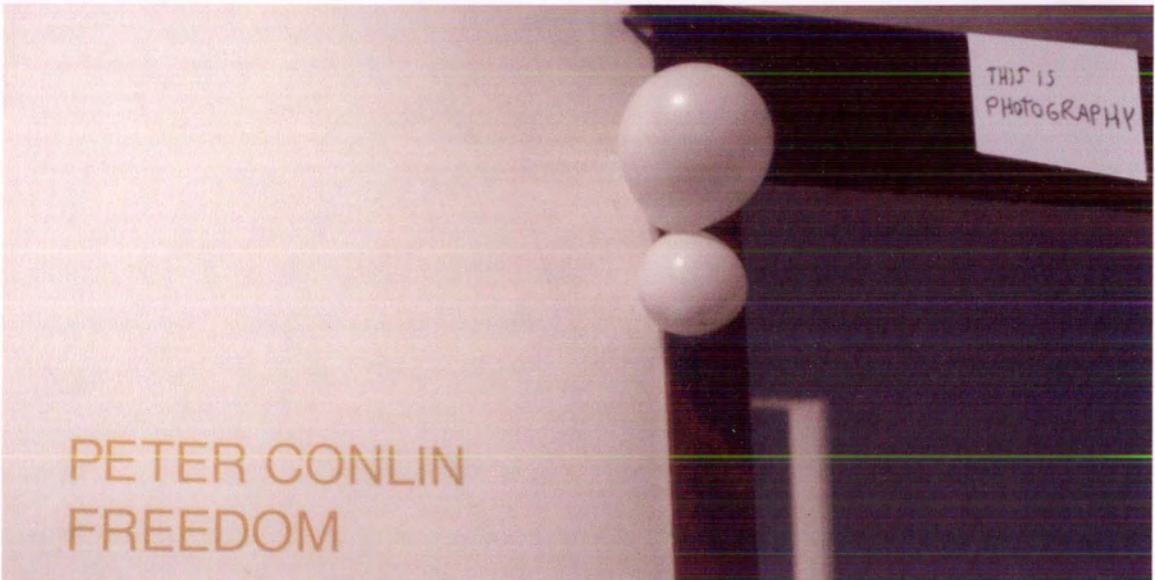[73] *Documenta 11, Plattform 5: Short Guide*, p. 38.

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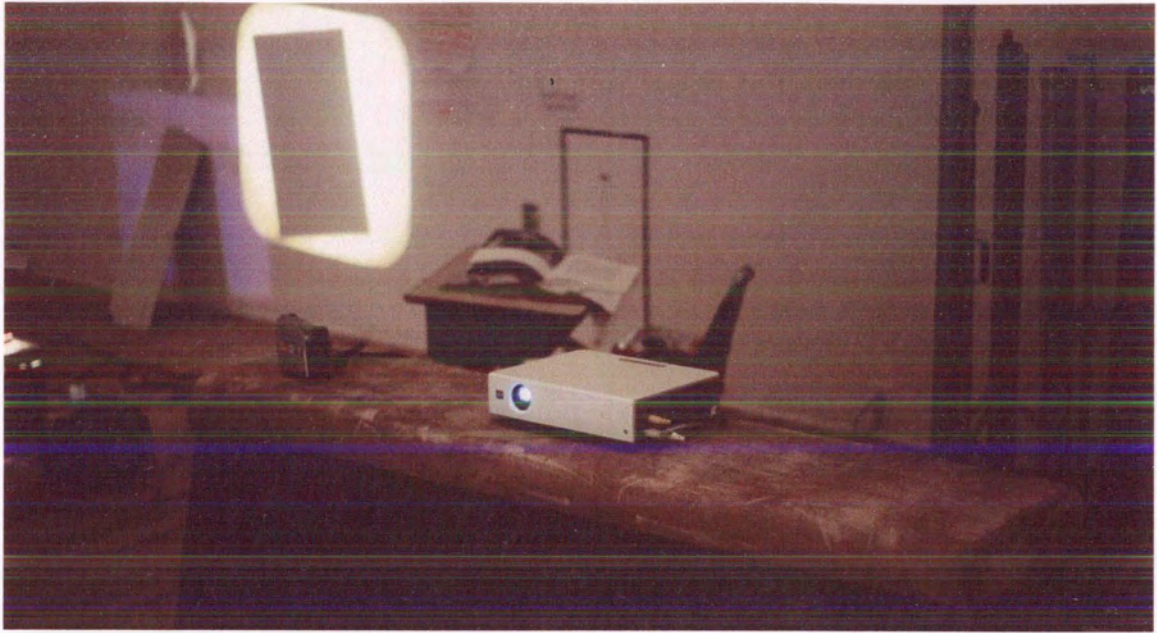
Freedom (details from exhibition)

Freedom (details from exhibition)
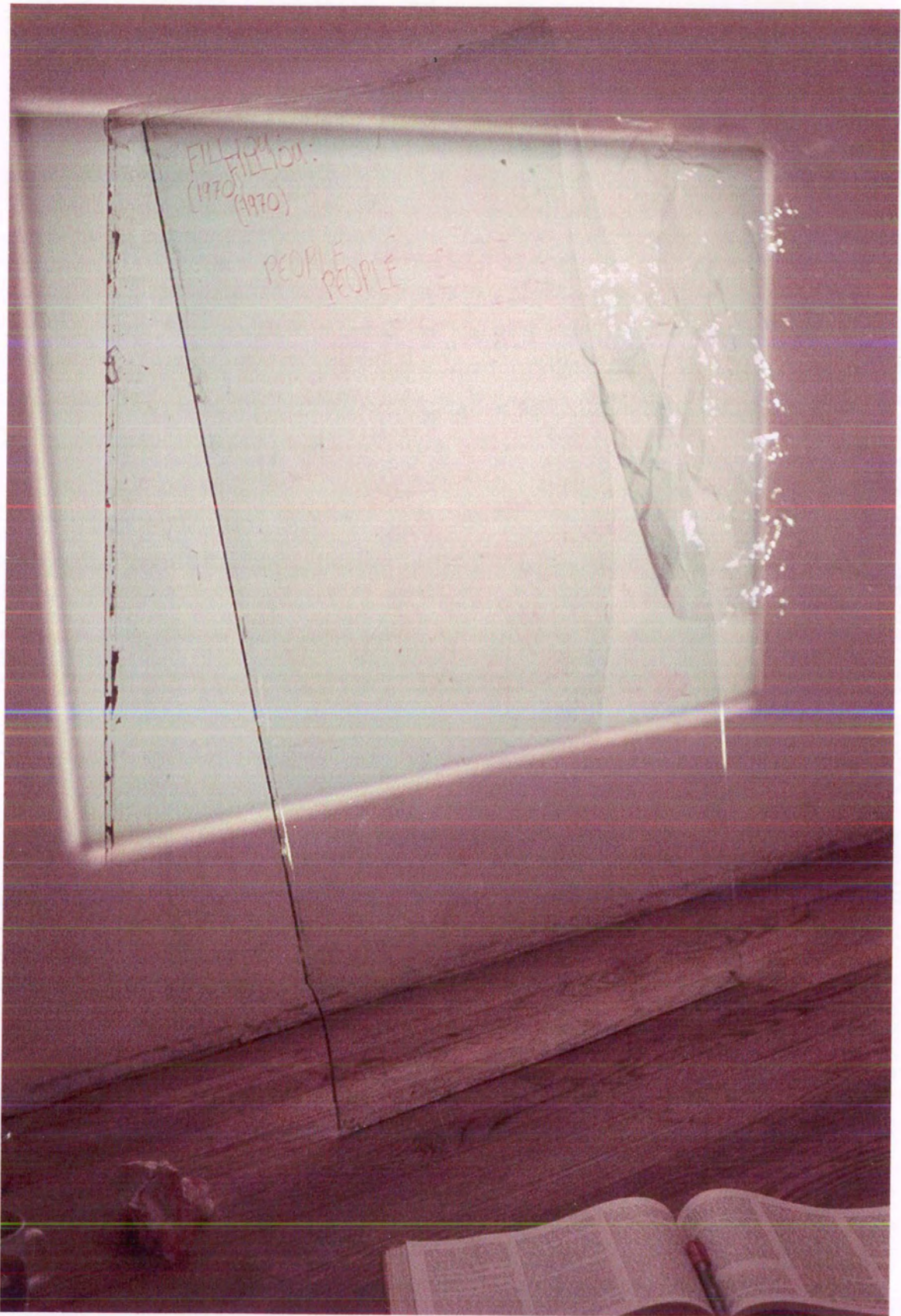

Freedom (details from exhibition)

Freedom (details from exhibition)

Post Freedom reflections

Form as

In some ways *Freedom* seemed formless, in other ways extremely engaged with form. By 'form' I am referring to issues related to the composition of the various installations and activities that comprised the installations, and the principles that organized these displays and their overall formal relations. The exhibition was a place where forms got played-out, ran their course, developed-changed-dissolved. *Freedom* was a continual generation and secession of forms. However the aim was not form as solution (to a problem or resolution of a contradiction) or as a frozen contradiction, but rather, form as an *umwelt*– a fabric of experience, an activated condition, a contradiction come to life. I am deriving this (with a generous amount of latitude) from Negri's idea of the inadequacies of temporal models referred to in the Production section. According to Negri, an ability to formulate time is synonymous with a subsumption of life into the terms of productivity. If you want to exploit life as a means of production, you must first impose formal models on time—time is conquered by the imposition of spatial forms. However, time presents incredible problems of formulation. It resists the impositions of models and causes a crisis in mechanism of control and exploitation. Negri posits the ideal of time as a fabric of experience, without a spatialized form, can give rise to a constitutive antagonism which could then transform social order. Formalism, here understood as an aspect of bourgeois ideology, responded to the crisis (the way time resists models) with something of a compromise—the attempt to impose form on time, inevitably a spatializing of time, is a recognized as a contradiction; and then this very contradiction is deployed in temporal models. The crisis time presents to formal impositions is contained within a contraction, or as Negri refers to it, a frozen contradiction. The problem time present to dominate power ability to formalize is not experienced, but solved. So long as antagonism is managed within a formal contradiction, and not contradiction as experience, the domination of production over the time can be maintained.

Freedom (details from exhibition)

Replacement freedom

At times during the exhibition I felt like I was divesting myself of ideas. By externalizing the drive to make something visually interesting, there is the hope that I could be relived of it. Baudrillard has suggested that artificial intelligence has been created to excuse ourselves of the project of thought. We can't come to terms with its perversity, so we form the virtual to be free of it. In this way, the exhibition was a playing-out of an art compulsion through the creation of an artificial art intelligence. According to this scenario, *Freedom* was an attempt to replace myself by means of an external recreation of my preoccupations. I realize this isn't exactly celebratory, and this is a part of the conflicted nature of this show—partially made by a joy of creativity and partially contending with creativity as we know it—constrained within the traditional forms of the individual author.

Wreckage or tribute?

Freedom triggered a "hey its just like the 60's" response from some viewers, as if the show was based on nostalgia for a time I had never known. I found this reading of *Freedom* disturbing, and I attempted to use this doubt as a material in the exhibition. This was a part of a strategy of making art to include a dimension of uncertainty, that can respond to a problem and present this response process. Another reading of *Freedom* was not as nostalgia but as contrived wreckage of emancipatory projects; signifying exhaustion, futility and a morbid fascination of displaying them in a crashed and burnt state. This point of view was also similarly worked back into the exhibition.

Authentically conflicted

I can see why freedom looked like it did, decidedly not a celebration, but towards one. As in various sections in this document, an alternative is posed, which then enters into various cycles where it is esteemed, problematized, and sometimes repaired and other times abandoned. This process or ordeal is then presented to the view/reader.
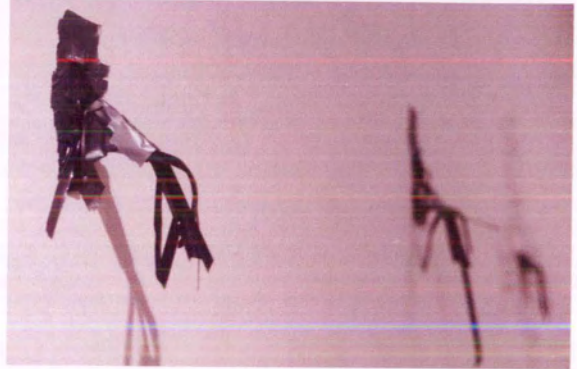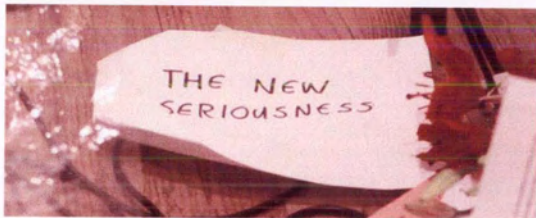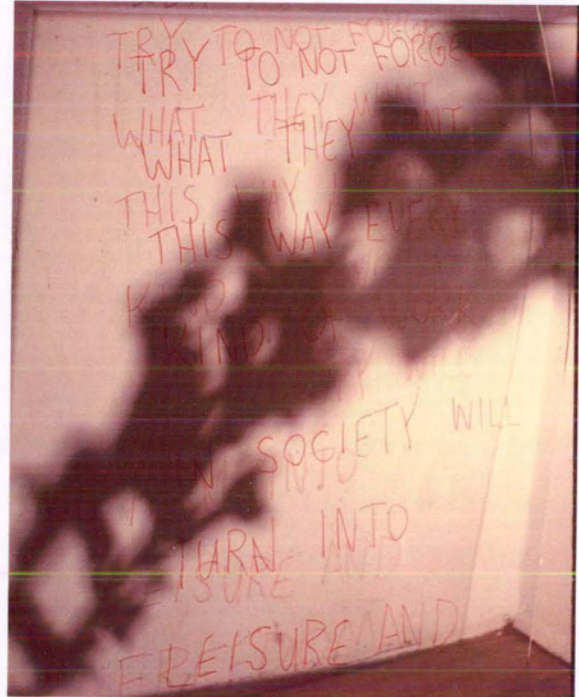
Freedom (details from exhibition)
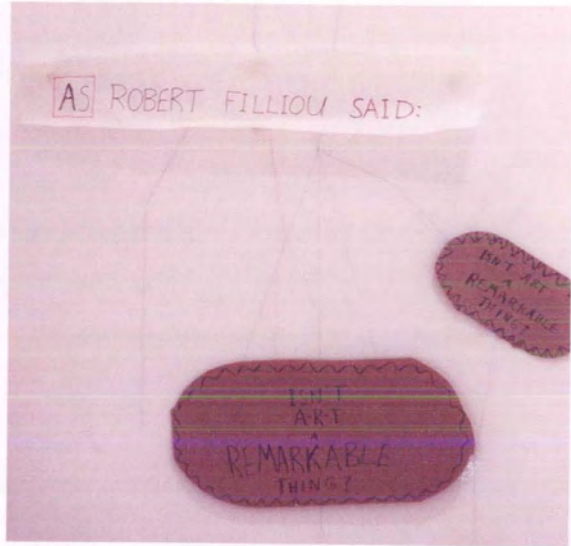
Freedom (details from exhibition)

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(details from exhibition)

Freedom (details from exhibition)

Freedom (details from exhibition)

The joy of art

Some people were surprised by the exhibition's formal and material play, that is, it seemed more 'aesthetic' than other projects I've done. If this is true, it is because I have a suspicion of the currency of formal play and the authority and trappings of aesthetic objects; yet because the set-ups I made were so temporary and disposable, I didn't feel I had to worry about the fetishized quality of object making. I actually felt freed to work in this way as I knew none of it would be saved, except as photos.

Is *Freedom* repeatable?

Is *freedom* repeatable, in either in whole or in part? The response is that it is more a matter of continuation than repetition. It is a process that could be applied in other contexts, and at least for the moment, it is a process that is almost synonymous with my art practice.

The slacker and the good-for-nothing

The exhibition raised questions about the relation between the *bon-a-rien* (Filliou), a proclivity towards a looseness, and a slacker approach. With Filliou, a refusal of production values is an ethos, part of an attitude which he devoted his life to, yet at what point can this become a 'look'? When does this looseness turns into an asethetization of a refusal, and become a signature style that reinforces the artist-as-individual-genius?

Only *more so...*

Not chaotic enough, more mess, more gratuitous, more fearless, more self-engrossed, more layers and associative clutter...If the show was really about hedging your bets, then still more hedged...Was it undecidable or merely indecisive...

Hedge

By framing the show as being deliberately incomplete, I ran the risk of it being seen as a hedged bet—it was incomplete so I avoid the risk of committing to a particular belief or concept. That risk aside, how do you access work that attempts to be 'abundantly incomplete'? To what extent was it abundant or incomplete.
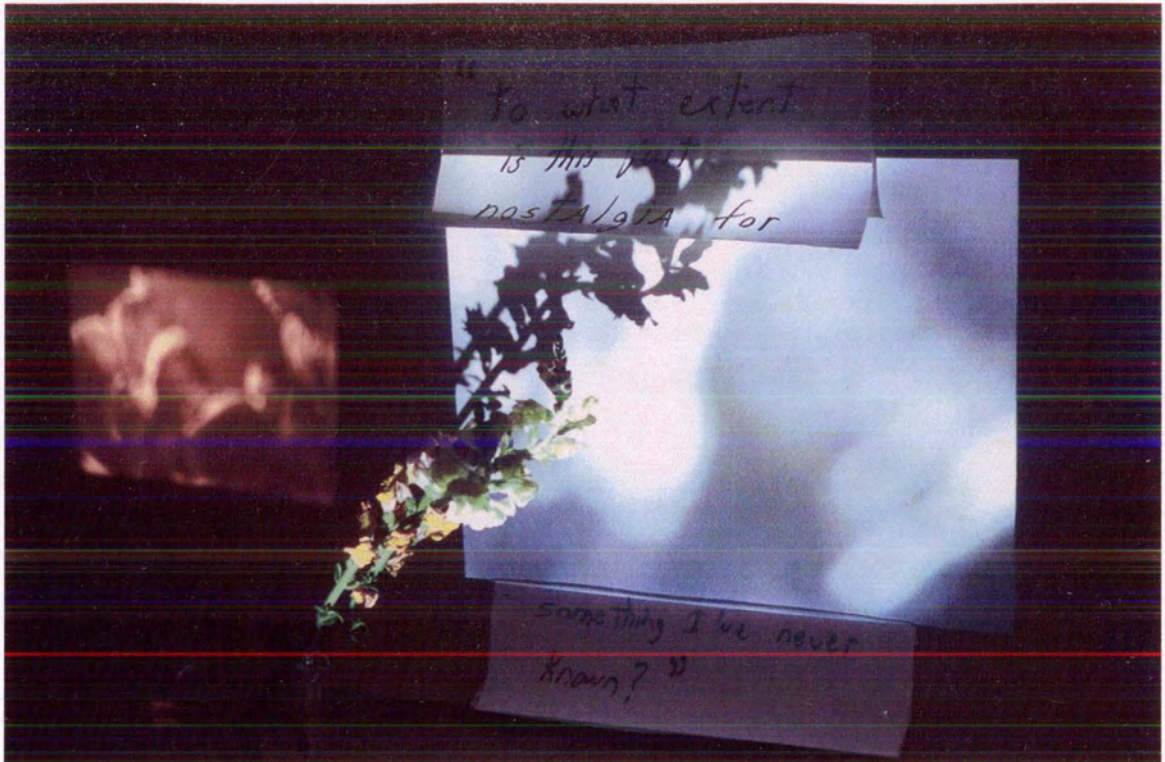
Freedom (details from exhibition)

Freedom (details from exhibition)

Artist trouble

In the authorship section I pointed out the importance of the question *What is an artist?* and referenced Howard Singerman's response—"Artists are made by troubling over it, by taking it seriously". To follow this line of inquiry, we are consequently dependant on finding a way to take it seriously. But the over-riding question, especially as it was explored in the Authenticity section, is how serious can we be these days, as an artist or in general? By my own rationale, if seriousness isn't possible than I lose the category of artist. *Freedom* was a troubling over the question of 'what is an artist?', and taking it on with the new seriousness. I believe a restatement of Singerman's proposition is required: "Artists are made by engaging with what it means to take art seriously."

Freedom (details from exhibition)

Appendix

The poster for the exhibition *Freedom.*

(do solemnly swear) I   THIS IS NON-PRODUCTION - A CRITIQUE   of PRODUCTIVITY, SERIOUSLY, ~~MORE THAN CRITICAL~~ →OTHER we have to
Peter Conlin will be in the gallery during the show, 'researching' a set of concerns, figuring out what is to be done. i invite you to visit and have encounters and small adventures. this is about the   figure this out
process of the process of what leads to action, of what leads to art, as art.

THE BEGINNING

THE BEGINNING

THE BEGINNING.   Robert Fillion said "isn't art remarkable", but I wouldn't want to say this - why?   what happens if I say "Artists are necessary, the real world would cease to   THE POINT IS

ABUNDANTLY   Perhaps I would, but I can't. I can say some kinds of art can be remarkable, but   exist without artists to see it." (Roy Kiyooka, 1973) to say this now is to   NOT MERELY RESTORE

COMPLETE   that doesn't really 'do it' does it? Fillion was a French artist active in   test the present? By saying it a gap opens, and you know why is it   THE WELFARE

INFINITIES.   the 60's/70's and visited   can't be asserted, as such. to rearticulate it, is in fact, to see the   STATE — NOT THAT

YES, OK, I'll say it: THE POINT IS TO APPRECIATE LIFE. BUT WHAT   the Western Front. He   real world.   I KNOW.

I DON'T KNOW WHAT IT   DOES THIS MEAN, AND WHY IS IT SO HARD,   believed art   I DON'T KNOW HOW THIS SHOW   IS QUOTING AN ESCAPE, (JUST?) IT GETS YOU SOMEWHERE

WILL BE   SO DIFFICULT THESE DAYS?   could create   WILL GO. BUT I CAN'T BE WORRIED — THAT IS THE WORK

a revolutionary

set of values.

to replace

the values

of capitalism

But he was also

A joker, a very

playful thinker, and

this was all apart of

what he meant by different

values.

I'm interested in utopian as an impulse, not an outcome. Curiosity and

imagination can never be diminished in Art.   to what extent

we can even imagine something other than what we have. People

FREEDOM

have misunderstood no anxiety It is

understood in the era or rule of safety.

SHOULD THIS BE ANONYMOUS?   the   In art, the cult of safety

PETER CONLIN. WESTERN FRONT   has merged with the cult of

POST-AUTHOR   **GALLERY, OCT 24- NOV 8**   genius- perhaps they were

opening oct 22 opening oct 24. opening nov 8   always the same thing
8PM   8PM   8PM

Western Front Exhibitions Programme

oh! Helvetica... why have you...

grace a fillion

This is an invitation for a performance by Robert Filliou, from *Teaching and Learning as Performance Arts*, 1970. The instructions that appeared on this diagram have been erased. erased

FLUXUS WILL BE SEEN AS THE MOST IMPORTANT PART OF 20cent UNFLUXUS

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